

Addressing Doubts about the Bible

Campus Ministry Winter Retreat

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Retreat webpage:¹ www.worldvieweyes.org/retreat2015.html
WITH ANSWERS

Introduction

A. This session's primary focus: Why should we trust the Bible's claims?

1. The Bible's INTERNAL witness (e.g. its claims about itself; its overall coherence; its uniqueness; the trustworthiness of its authors; its fulfilled prophecies; its personal and social power).
2. The Bible's EXTERNAL witness (e.g. the confirmations of its accuracy and authenticity through ancient testimony, historical analysis, and archaeological discoveries; the plausibility of the professed origin of its books and their selection authoritative books [the "canon"]; and the reliability of its transmission through time).

I. The Bible's Character and Claims

A. **God's revelation** was given in a variety of ways (e.g. prophets, burning bush, urim & thummim; dreams; visions). Note Deut 10:2; Ex 20:1; Lev 1:1; Josh 1:8; Neh 13:1; Heb 1:1.

B. God's revelation was **incarnate in Jesus Christ** (Jn 1:1,14,18; Col 1:15; Heb 1:1-3)

C. A portion of God's revelation was preserved in **scripture**.

1. **Moses** wrote the words of God (Ex 17:14; 24:3-4; 34:27; Deut 31:24-26).
2. Many references to "**scripture**" (e.g. Lk 4:21; Jn 2:22; Jn 5:39; Jn 10:35; Acts 1:16; Rom 9:17; 1 Tim 4:13; 2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:20; 3:14-16).
3. Scripture viewed as **authoritative**: "It is written" (e.g. Matt 4:4,7,10)
4. Scripture offers **eyewitness testimony** along with God's "**inspiration**" (Jn 20:30-31; 1 Jn 1:3; 2 Pet 1:16-21; 2 Tim 3:14-17).

II. Prominent Skeptic Claims about the Bible

A. The Bible is an error-filled collection of **purely-human** writings.

B. The **Pentateuch** (first five books) is a product of different editors from four source traditions, not Moses (who presumably lived around 1450 BC or perhaps 1250 BC):

1. **J** (Yahwist source) written c. 950 BC.
2. **E** (Elohist source) written c. 850 BC.
3. **D** (Deuteronomist source) written c. 600 BC in Jerusalem during religious reform.
4. **P** (Priestly source) written c. 500 BC by Jewish priests in Babylonian exile.

C. There are **no genuine predictive prophecies**. "Prophecies" written *after* the event.

D. The New Testament **Gospels** (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John):

1. Are filled with inconsistencies and are **unreliable** as accounts of the life of a historical Jesus.
2. The early church retroactively concocted a "divine" portrait of Jesus: **Jesus is a legend**. The real "historical Jesus" was very different from the church's "Christ of faith."²

¹ The retreat webpage provides access to more complete outlines and links to audio and slides.

² The Jesus Seminar, a group of more liberal scholars, published *The Five Gospels: What Did Jesus Really Say? The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (1996). Based on their votes, they determined that over one-half of the Gospel statements attributed to Jesus were NOT actually statements of Jesus. Only about 20% of the Jesus-Gospel statements were

3. The early church used the **mystery religions** to construct their view of Jesus and Christianity.
- E. **Other ancient “Gospels”** were written about Jesus that were illegitimately suppressed by the early church (e.g. The Gospel of Thomas, The Gospel of Peter, The Gospel of Mary).³
- F. Since no *original* New Testament documents exist, the **available copies** have been substantially altered and are **unreliable**.

III. The Bible’s Historical Framework (See the chart on “The Bible’s Historical Framework” and Paul’s concise history in Acts 13:15-41)

A. Old Testament Era.

B. New Testament Era.

C. **Summary** characteristics: Bible covers about 1600 years; 66 books; about 40 authors; 3 languages; many literary styles; yet a unified message of God’s salvation.

IV. Dates of Earliest New Testament Books (see chart on “Early New Testament Timeline”)

A. Paul’s message

1. Early interaction with other apostles
2. **Galatians**: Written AD48-50

Gal 1:1 Paul, an apostle (not *sent* from men nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead),...

3. **I Corinthians** (esp. note ch. 15): Written AD54-56 in Ephesus (I Cor 16:8).

1 Cor 15: Now I make known to you, brethren, **the gospel** which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, ²by **which also you are saved**, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. ³For **I delivered to you** as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴and that He was buried, and that **He was raised** on the third day according to the Scriptures,

1 Cor 15: ⁵and that **He appeared to Cephas**, then **to the twelve**. ⁶After that He appeared **to more than five hundred brethren at one time**, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; ⁷then He appeared **to James**, then **to all the apostles**; ⁸and last of all, as to one untimely born, **He appeared to me** also. ⁹For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

4. **I Thessalonians** (esp. 1:9-10; 4:13-14): Written AD50-52

1 Thess. 1: ⁹For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, ¹⁰and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *that is* Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.

B. The Gospels of Mark and Luke.

Lk 1:1-4 ¹Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, ²just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, ³it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write *it* out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; ⁴so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.

1. Neither Mark nor Luke were Jesus’ chosen apostles.
2. Mark and Luke were close associates of Jesus’ apostles.

regarded as something Jesus undoubtedly or probably said. A key figure in this group is John Dominic Crossan who frequently appears on TV episodes dealing with Jesus and early Christianity. He taught at DePaul University for many years.
³ Another widely published and prominent TV personality who emphasizes this point is Bart Ehrman, professor at the University of North Carolina. Especially note his *Lost Scriptures: Books that Did Not Make It into the New Testament* (2005), *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who changed the bible and Why* (2007), and *Forged: Writing in the Name of God—Why the Bible’s Authors Are Not Who We Think They Are* (2012).

- a. **Irenaeus**, disciple of Polycarp who was a disciple of John, says that Mark was “a disciple and interpreter of Peter.”
- b. **Papias** (died c. 155), an associate of Polycarp who was a disciple of John, says that Mark “had become the interpreter of Peter.”
- c. **Eusebius** (263-339) claims that Clement (c. 150-215) and Papias say that Mark was a “follower of Peter” and that Mark’s gospel “obtained the sanction of his [Peter’s] authority” (*Ecclesiastical History*, Book 2, Ch. 15).

V. Comparative Evidence of Ancient Document Copies

- A. Comparisons of ancient texts and their earliest copies.⁴
- B. Significant early papyri and manuscripts of biblical material.

VI. Some New Testament Connections with Other Ancient Writers⁵

- A. **Early non-Christian witnesses:** Josephus, Jewish historian (AD37-100); Tacitus, Roman historian (AD55-117); Seutonius, Roman historian and Hadrian’s court official (c. AD69-122).
- B. Some literary intersections
- C. **Early NT citations and references**
 - 1. Clement of Rome, bishop in Rome (92-101): Cites from Matthew, John, and I Corinthians.
 - 2. Ignatius (c. 110): Referred to six of Paul’s epistles.
 - 3. Polycarp (69-155), disciple of apostle John, quotes from all four Gospels, Acts, and many Pauline epistles.

D. Contrasts with another “Gospel”: *The Gospel of Thomas*

“Other” Gospel Materials	Book(s)	Date of Origin	Comments
<i>Gospel of Thomas</i> (discovered as part of Nag Hammadi writings in 1945)	114 “hidden” sayings of Jesus.	The Jesus Seminar’s <i>Five Gospels</i> (1993) claims AD 50. Elaine Pagels claims AD 80-90. BUT ... (see the Comments column)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 52 texts dating from c. 350. • Earliest references are from Hippolytus (170-236) and Origen (185-254) (<i>New Dictionary of Christian Apologetics</i> 290) • Thomas shows awareness of 14-15 NT books; The <i>Epistles of Ignatius</i> (110) does not show awareness of even half the NT. • Thomas quotes from Gospel of John, which was probably not written until the mid-90s. • Thomas follows distinctive forms of the <i>Diatessaron</i> of Tatian not written until AD160+. • Thomas the person is referred to as “Judas Thomas”—a designation used only in the Syrian church, which suggests that it was not written in the 1st century Palestinian church. (See Strobel, <i>Case for Real Jesus</i>, 36-38)

VII. Archaeological Artifact Connections to the Bible⁶

- A. **Old Testament** examples
 - 1. **Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III** (cf. 2 Kings 9-10).

⁴ This type of information is provided in many apologetics texts, including *The New Dictionary of Christian Apologetics* and Lee Strobel’s *The Case for the Real Jesus*.

⁵ See Paul Barnett, *Is the New Testament Reliable?* (InterVarsity Press, 1992), 159-162.

⁶ For a concise but helpful survey, see Doug Powell, *Holman QuickSource Guide to Christian Apologetics* (2006), pp.162-163, 194-199. Helpful websites include: <http://bibleandarchaeology.blogspot.com>; <http://www.biblicalarchaeology.org>; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_artifacts_significant_to_the_Bible.

2. **The Moabite Stone** or Mesha Stele (cf. 2 Kings 3:4-5).
3. **Tel Dan Inscription** (reference to “king of Israel” and “king of the House of David”).
4. **Sennacherib’s Prism** (cf. 2 Kings 18-19; 2 Chronicles 32; Isa 36-37).
5. **The Cyrus Cylinder** (cf. Ezra 1:1-3; 6:3; 2 Chron 3:23; Isa 44:28).

- B. **New Testament** examples (also note the historical literary connections presented above)
1. **The Pilate Stone** (cf. Lk 3:1 -- Pilate, a judge in Jesus’ trials, who ruled AD26-36).
 2. **The Pool of Bethesda** (cf. John 5:1-5 “²Now there is in Jerusalem by the sheep gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew Bethesda, having five porticoes”)
 3. **Caiaphas Ossuary** (“Miriam daughter of Jeshua son of Caiaphus, priest of Maaziah from Beth Imri”)

Important Biblical Reminders

- A. John 20:30-31
- B. 2 Timothy 3:14-17