

ISN'T THE BIBLE JUST A BOOK OF MYTHS AND FAIRY TALES? WASN'T IT WRITTEN BY MERE MEN? AND ISN'T IT TOO OLD TO BE RELIABLE? PART 2

SERMON FOR SUNDAY, August 21, 2011

Welcome to the third installment of LifeLine. Last week was an introduction, this week, it's all about whether or not you can trust it. Last week I equipped you to answer the critics who say that the Bible was just written by mere men.

By showing that the Bible demonstrates that it was in fact written by men, and those men were inspired by God to write what they wrote. So when a critic claims that the Bible isn't true because it was just written by men, they are discounting the fact that the men were inspired by God. To counter this criticism, simply ask on what grounds do they disagree that God did in fact inspire the writers. The critic's answer will show that he considers himself to be transcendent in time and space. That he was somehow present at the time of the writing of the Bible documents and that he was able to determine that these men were not inspired by God to author the Biblical documents. This criticism is nothing more than a bias, and is not based on any research, fact or evidence at all.

Today, let me help you with a couple other criticisms...First...how did the individual books of the Bible get chosen? The word "Canon"; Greek – kanon; standard, rule, measurement, law. Start with the Old Testament...which books "measured up". The OT documents are comprised of Law, History, Poetry and Prophecy. A simple answer to this is that by the time of Christ, the collection of OT books was well secured by the Jewish leadership through very strict and stringent procedures for keeping the books together and keeping them preserved.

We know that as early as 300BC the copies of the Old Testament documents were in the collection that they are now. But who made these decisions? The Torah, or the Jewish law, was recorded in the first books of the Bible. This section was first to be accepted as inspired. Then came the history of God's people, poetry, general advice books, and the prophetic writings. If you know anything about Biblical Jewish history, you know that this group, much like us, have had their more rebellious moments against God.

The portion of the Bible that we commonly call the Old Testament was completed in the days of Ezra the Priest and Governor Nehemiah, about 420bc. Ezra was sent by King Artaxerxes of Persia to Jerusalem in 457bc with the temple scrolls and other treasures which had been kept in Babylon since the days of Nebuchadnezzar (Ezra 7:14). Ezra came back to teach Scripture to the people (v. 10) and to institute religious reform for people who were on the verge of losing their very identity and absorbing the syncretistic paganism of their neighbors.

THE NEW TESTAMENT

LUKE 1:1-4 *¹Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, ²just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. ³Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you... ⁴so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.*

The original New Testament Church had John and the original apostles who knew what the teachings of the true Church should be since they, plus Paul, were taught directly by Christ. Furthermore, this also is consistent with scriptural record that Peter, Paul, and John all had some role in the canonization before they died to insure that there would not be disputes over the books for true Christians.

The majority of the New Testament was written in Asia Minor, the Northwest bank of the Mediterranean sea. As early as 110AD, Polycarp, a disciple of the Apostle John wrote a letter that clearly includes the language of all 4 gospels, Acts, Paul's letters. It is logical that God would have the entire New Testament in place before the death of the last of the original apostles...John. Jesus started the Christian church, handed it off to the apostles. By 95AD all the books in the New Testament had been written, mostly by John, Paul and Peter. You've heard some of the last words of the Bible before...

REVELATION 22:18-19 *¹⁸I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. ¹⁹And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.*

And while I realize that this could have easily been just talking about the book of Revelation... It remains to be one of the final words written down by any Bible writer. Almost as if the last words summed up the whole thing. Matthew Henry describes this as placing a fence around all of Scripture. John says a word about other books written...last words of his gospel.

John 21:25 *Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.*

Basically saying that many other books are being written, but there are only a few that will be considered. You will hear a lot about different councils (Nicea, Trent, Carthag). Some say that at these councils the bible books were chosen. Truth is, a lot of politics were played at these early Roman Catholic councils. By the time these councils were being held in Nicaea...Asia Minor...the New Testament would have been set.

WHAT BOOKS DIDN'T MAKE IT THROUGH THE FENCE?

There were a lot of books that were written that didn't make it in to the NT; Shepherd of Hermas, Gospel of Peter, Gospel of Philip, Gospel of Thomas. These give cute stories of Jesus, one of Jesus as a 5 year old forming birds out of clay and making them come to life but the next chapter shows him cursing

a friend of his that won't play with him, and bumping into another child and making him die...um....yeah, no. The main reason books didn't make it is due to deception in authorship and inconsistent content. The main reason the books that did make it did? Trustworthy authorship. Trustworthy and consistent content. The New Testament has basically been consistent since about 130AD.

Next...what about contradictions? This one I'll answer real quick with a very popular example. In Matthew 8 a story is told of a Roman centurion. The story goes that the Centurion heard of Jesus and went to him personally.

Matthew 8:5 "...the centurion came to him asking for help..."

Jesus responded to the request and helped the Centurion out of a jam. But in Luke...

Luke 7:3, 6 "...the centurion sent elders of the Jews..." "...the centurion sent his friends..."

A Ha! Critics will say... The Bible can't get its stories straight, was it the Centurion that went, or his friends?

This criticism is founded upon a modern, Westernized way of thinking. In Greek thought, there wasn't a distinction between the Centurion personally being involved and the ones that he would send on his behalf. The leader or his delegation were considered exactly the same. It's his authority, whether he is physically present or not. His face and name is on the whole story.

In the ancient world it was perfectly understood and accepted that actions were often attributed to people when in fact they occurred through their subordinates or emissaries...in this case the elders of the Jewish people, and the friends of the soldier. There are many instances just like this one that are quickly explained, not with fancy speak or double talk...but with a simple understanding of the norms and cultures of the days in which the Bible was written.

Last week we talked about the reliability of the OT...now the NT.

MANUSCRIPTS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

This will really blow you away...the New Testament is King when it comes to reliability. We have a specific number of copies that range from 100AD to 1450AD, when printing was invented in Germany. The more copies that you have that agree with each other, especially ones from different geographical areas, the more you can cross-check them to figure out what the original document was like. Their agreement is traced back genealogically, like a family tree, representing the descent of the manuscripts.

If I wrote an essay, and then had many people hand copy it, there would be slight mistakes made with each copy. However, using the bibliographic test you could easily get back to the original. Why? Because they would all have different mistakes! THINK OF A TREE...one trunk, many different branches. Trunk represents original, branches represent copies of the original. Their agreement traces you back to

what the original was like. If they were all different, you'd know they weren't based on anything original.

How does the New Testament compare to other ancient writings? Our copies of the New Testament date within a couple generations of the originals, whereas in the case of other ancient texts, maybe 5, 8 or 10 centuries of time elapsed between the original and the earliest surviving copy.

Plato's (Greek philosopher, mathematician) writings...we have 7 copies, with a gap of 1300 years from the time of the original to the first copy!

[The most significant to come to light are the Chester Beatty Biblical Papyri, discovered in 1930. 1 contains portions of the four gospels and the book of Acts. 2 contain large portions of 8 letters of Paul, plus portions of Hebrews, dating to about the year 200. 3 has a larger section of the book of Revelation, dating from the third century.]

Here's a contest to see which ancient documents are the most reliable...

- 4th Place- Aristotle, Greek philosopher, student of Plato. 1400 years between original and copy, 49 existing copies
- 3rd Place – Sophocles, ancient Greek playwright. 1400 years between original and copy, 193 existing copies
- 2nd Place - Homer's Iliad, Greek writing about the struggle between the King Agamemnon and warrior Achilles. 1000 years between original and copy, 643 existing copies.
- 1st Place - The New Testament. Less than 100 years between originals and copies, 5600 existing Greek copies + 19,000 existing Latin, Coptic, Syriac and Aramaic copies. A total of 24,000 existing copies

CAN WE TRUST CONTENT?

Consider the map in the back of the bible. Most of the cities mentioned are alive and well today. The people groups mentioned are verified by other history sources.

Historicity: Acts correctly records the first 30 years of the Christian church. Within an accurate presentation of the historic facts of current lands, governments, leaders, landmarks, many of which have been verified through archeology.

Sanitation: In 1845 Dr Ignaz in Vienna determined the reasons for so many mothers that were dying after childbirth. The doctors assisting with the births still had germs on their hands from surgeries and other patients they had just been assisting. And even when they did start washing their hands, they did it in bowls of standing water. It just so happens...2300 years before doctors figured this out, Leviticus 15 says this

Leviticus 15:13 "...bathe yourself in running water to be clean..."

More?

I believe in Evolution... not in matter and not in truth but in scientific thought. Matter doesn't evolve. True, there may be variations within a species but c'mon, call them what they are. They are variations. There is no record, no fossil, no scientific data proving any transitions from species to species. The fossil record doesn't lie. Truth doesn't evolve. What is true now has always been true. God doesn't change.

Proof of the Evolution of Scientific Thought about Evolution

The Big Bang idea started with a Belgian astronomer, Georges Edward Lemaitre. He thought the original exploding mass to be "no more than a few light-years in diameter." 2 light years is 12,000,000,000,000 miles in diameter. In 1965 it was reduced to 275 million miles, in 1972 71 million miles, in 1974, 54 thousand miles. In 1983 a trillionth the diameter of a proton.

"...the observable universe could have evolved from an infinitesimal region. It's then tempting to go one step further and speculate that the entire universe evolved from literally nothing." Scientific American, May 1984, p 128

I believe in something else... GENESIS 1:1

Genesis 1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

How incredible is it that today's scientific community would say, 20 BYA nothing exploded and created everything. 4.6 BYA the earth was molten mass and began to cool, it rained on the rocks for millions and millions of years, turned into soup. 3 BYA Soup came alive.

Ask me where the universe came from, I'll say, "God", and when you ask me where he came from, and I say "I don't know", you'll call my view religious, derived from faith, and not science. Ask an evolutionary scientist where the matter came from, where the laws came from, where the energy came from, and he'll say, "I don't know."...and they will call that Science. Don't be fooled...they're both religious, requiring faith. As for me, I find my faith to be well grounded, well tested, well proven.

This Book is Truth and Life. It's the best guide you'll ever find.

PSALM 119:105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.

It's not going anywhere.

ISAIAH 40:8 The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever

Read It! Ask Questions About It! Learn From It! The truth in here will set you free.

The best thing this book has to offer to you is Jesus Christ. He came to live a perfect life in your place because He knew you couldn't do it by yourself. He died in your place to take the punishment for your

sins. If you trust in Him to save you, He will forgive you of your sins allow you to go to Heaven when you die. And in the mean time, He will offer you a life of true fulfillment, confidence and peace.