

APOLOGETICS—

Why Do We Believe The Bible?¹

Why do we believe the Bible? Good question. We are all (ALL) indoctrinated in one way or another. As a child, I believed that which was taught to me. All children are subject to the teachings of that which is presented to them; they do not have a choice. So then, as we grow up we carry with us our upbringing, and it has a hand in shaping us (as does our environment--political, social, economic, etc). HOWEVER, the Holy Spirit is in the world today for one primary reason-- to breathe life into that which is dead (which would be all people born in this world). He can only speak that which is of God and He moves over ruined creations ready to impart life/light/breath. So all, ALL, people have been, are being, will be subjected to this. But, each person must allow Him to move. How does that happen? *By answering Him.*

But the Spirit must act in accord with God's Word because He is God's Word...and He is God; God chose to reveal Himself in a certain way to a certain group--ultimately culminating in the person of Jesus Christ who is the Word, the Spirit, God Himself. We cannot separate God the Almighty from the Spirit or the Son. So if God chose to reveal Himself in human form, how can we (any people group) reject that and expect to be accepted by God? Sorry God, I want to know you but not how You choose to show Yourself--I want to know You my own way? (He's the Creator, we're the creation, check Romans 9.) So that leaves the undeniable conclusion that we all influence *each other* and we are therefore SO accountable to being the messenger that God expects us to be. I also imagine that a whole lot of judgments will fall on the heads of those leaders who led the multitudes astray. But really, why do we choose to believe the Bible? Because of course my whole argument here comes from the writings we hold to be "God-breathed"...so why believe any of it? Why isn't the Quran a justifiably equal re: the Word of God?

Here's my argument--

The manuscripts (the originals) were written over a span of 1600 years, by over 40 different authors, numerous different places (prison, wilderness, palace, etc), in three different languages on over 3 different continents. The Bible as we now know it speaks to hundreds of controversial issues *and yet speaks with harmony and continuity on each*. Thousands of individuals have tried to silence it over the years; thousands have tried to discredit it, all to no avail.

Consider this: there are two tests that are given works of antiquity (anything written before the printing press) to decide reliability—

1. the number of manuscripts
2. the time between the original manuscript and the first copy. (The longer the time span, the more opportunity that corruption could have entered the text).

Regarding #1, the New Testament is in first place, with over 24,000 manuscripts (second place is Homer's The Iliad with only 643. And no one ever disputes the reliability of The Iliad, whether it remains true to its original author's intent!).

Regarding #2, the New Testament comes in first place with as little as 50 years to as much as 250 years between the copy and the originals in the earliest manuscripts (second place again is The Iliad, which is at 500 years.) The rest of the works of antiquity range from 750 to 1600 years. So if the NT is unreliable in its authenticity, then throw out every other work produced.

Now considering the OT: here's the rules that were kept when the copies were being made of the originals--(the NT had a ton of copies because they were trying to get as many copies as possible into as many hands as possible--not

¹ Much of this information was taken from a pamphlet entitled "Knowing The Facts Behind The Faith," written by David McAllister, Founder and Senior Pastor/Teacher at Tucson Community Church. While I do not adhere to many of his teachings, this particular pamphlet offers some undisputed apologetic facts concerning the Scriptures.

true with the OT, as "ordinary" people were not allowed to have copies- only religious rulers and priests. For this reason, they would authorize very few reproductions.)

- A synagogue roll must be written on the skins of clean animals.
- They must be prepared for the particular use of the synagogue by a Jew.
- These must be fastened together with strings from clean animals.
- Every skin must contain a certain number of columns, equal throughout the entire book (codex).
- The length of each column must not extend less than 48 or more than 60 lines, and the breadth must consist of 30 letters.
- The whole copy must be first lined; and if three words be written without a line, it is worthless.
- The ink should be black, neither red, green, nor any others color, and be prepared according to a definite recipe.
- An authentic copy must be the exemplar, from which the transcriber ought not in the least deviate.
- No word or letter, not even a yod, must be written from memory, the scribe not having looked at the codex before him.
- Between every consonant the space of a hair or thread must intervene.
- Between every parashah, or section, the breadth of nine consonants.
- Between every book, three lines.
- The fifth book of Moses must terminate exactly with a line; but the rest need not do so.
- Besides this, the copyist must sit in full Jewish dress.
- The copyist must wash his whole body before beginning.
- The copyist must begin to write the name of God with a pen newly dipped in ink.
- And should a king address him while writing that name, he must take no notice of him.

Manuscripts not following these rules were immediately burned. They believed in this quality control system so much that the new manuscripts were given equal authority with the original immediately.

So, did all of this work? Here's some proof: in 1947 a Bedouin shepherd boy was looking for his lost goat and stumbled upon a cave high up on a cliff on the west side of the Dead Sea (about 8 miles south of Jericho). Inside he found large jars containing scrolls, in excellent condition because the jars were well sealed. The date of these scrolls was determined to be A.D. 68. These manuscripts predated the present ones by 1,000 years in some cases. And guess what? Comparing the most recent manuscripts with the ones found in the cave, it was found that the methods did indeed work as there was very very little deviation. Example—of the 166 words in Isaiah 53, there was only one word in question between the two examples (this was the word "light" which in Hebrew is only 3 letters. The deviation did not alter the text, however). So, after 1,000 years of transmission, that was the only change. This shows God's hand in the preservation of the texts. (This is not addressing the translation issues from one language into another. What we're talking about here is the copying of one manuscript to another, in the same way that the printing press accomplishes this today. The translations are a whole other issue, which is why we need to stick to the original language whenever possible.)

Let's look at the writings from another point of view--from archaeologists. Read these quotes—

- Nelson Glueck (An American rabbi, academic and archaeologist. He served as president of Hebrew Union College from 1947 until his death, and his pioneering work in biblical archaeology resulted in the discovery of 1,500 ancient sites.)

"No archaeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference."

- William F. Albright (An American archaeologist, biblical scholar, linguist and expert on ceramics. From the early twentieth century until his death, he was the dean of biblical archaeologists and the universally acknowledged founder of the Biblical archaeology movement. His student George Ernest Wright followed in his footsteps as the leader of that movement, while others, notably Frank Moore Cross and David Noel Freedman, became international leaders in the study of the Bible and the ancient Near East, including Northwest Semitic epigraphy and paleography. Albright is assured of a place in the history of the development of Middle Eastern archaeology.)

“Archaeology has confirmed the historicity of the Old Testament tradition.”

- Sir Frederic Kenyon (A British paleographer, biblical and classical scholar. He was the director of the British Museum. He was also the president of the British Academy from 1917 to 1921, and from 1918 to 1952 he was Gentleman Usher of the Purple Rod. Kenyon was a noted scholar of ancient languages, and made a life-long study of the Bible, especially the New Testament as an historical text. His book *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts* (1895) showed how Egyptian papyri and other evidence from archeology can corroborate the narrative of historical events in the Gospel.)

“The Bible can only benefit from the continued digs of Palestine.”

- Millar Burrows (A professor of Biblical literature, received his divinity degree from Union Theological Seminary in 1915 and his doctorate from Yale in 1925. He was chairman of the Department of Near Eastern Languages and literatures at Yale Graduate School from 1950 until his retirement in 1958. In 1931-32 he was on leave of absence from Brown to serve as director of the American School of Oriental Research in Jerusalem. He was again director of the school in 1947-48, but was away on a trip to Baghdad when some ancient scrolls found in a cave were brought to the school. On his return he was shown the manuscripts, which came to be known as the Dead Sea Scrolls, and, after that devoted himself to the study of the scrolls, on which he became an authority, publishing *The Dead Sea Scrolls* in 1955, and *More Light on the Dead Sea Scrolls* in 1958.)

“More than one archaeologist has found his respect for the Bible increased by the experience of excavation in Palestine.”

And here’s some evidence for historical accuracy—

- The critics of the Bible used to point to Luke as one of the worst historians ever (claiming over 200 mistakes); however, after continued excavation, that list is down to 10 and Luke is considered (by many) to be the most accurate historian in human history.
- A man named John Garstang excavated the site of the city of Jericho in the 30’s and discovered something so startling that he had others sign proof of the fact: that the walls of Jericho fell OUT, not in as walls always do, which is exact accord with Joshua 6:20. With the walls falling out, they would indeed fall flat.

That’s just one part. Now, believing in the accuracy of the manuscripts, that what we have today (removing translation issues, staying with original language as much as possible) is very close to what each of the 40 authors intended, how does the whole of what is written stand up to scrutiny of facts, and more importantly, to fulfilled prophecy?

Concerning prophecy, consider this; Deuteronomy 18:20-22 states that if a prophet prophesies and it does not come true, then he is a false prophet and must die. Deuteronomy 13:1-5 states that if a prophet (or dreamer) counsels against God and toward false gods, EVEN IF IT COMES TRUE, they are a false prophet and must be put to death. Also, according to Jeremiah 6:14-15 and 23:9ff, the prophet must not promise false hope when there is no hope, and they must be godly in their own lifestyle. Pretty good test, huh? So how does the Bible stand up to this (remembering that 40 different authors wrote it, over a period of 1600 years!)

Here’s some examples of fulfilled prophecy—

Concerning the city of Tyre—

- PREDICTIONS/PROPHECIES:
 - Nebuchadnezzar will destroy the mainland city of Tyre (Ezek. 26:8-11).
 - There will be many nations against her (Ezek. 26:3).

- It would be made a bare rock, flat like the top of a rock (Ezek. 26:4, 14).
- Her stones, timber and debris would be thrown into the water (Ezek. 26:12).
- She would be a place for the spreading of nets (Ezek. 26:5, 14).
- She will never be rebuilt...never “found” again (Ezek. 26:14, 21).
- FULFILLMENTS:
 - Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to mainland Tyre for 13 years from 585-573 BC. When he finally broke the gates down, he found the city almost empty. The majority of the people had moved by ship to an island ½ mile off the coast and fortified a city there. He destroyed the mainland city, but it still remained powerful for several hundred years.
 - In 333 BC Alexander the Great called on all the Phoenician cities to open their gates to him. Tyre refused. Thus, Alexander tore down the whole city of Tyre, left by Nebuchadnezzar, and *scraped it clean*. The reason he did this was to use the debris, throw it into the water and construct a 200 foot wide path from the coast to the island city. This causeway and ancient Tyre’s debris can still be seen below the water today. Alexander did not have ships so he had to attach the island city this way—it was a grueling battle, as the people of Tyre fought back quite well.
 - Alexander realized that he needed ship to get this job done, so he pressed his conquered subjects to provide and man them for him. At least 9 different nations supplied ships for him, thus there were in fact “many nations against them.” Alexander finally won.
 - Many historians, both religious and secular, have observed the spreading of nets to dry on the rocks of mainland Tyre’s ruins. A small fishing village of those who spread their nets is there to this day.
 - While there is a great flow of fresh water at this site today that would clearly make it an excellent site for a large city, it still remains today “not built or found.”

Concerning the city of Sidon—

- PREDICTIONS/PROPHECIES:
 - No mention of her being destroyed, yet blood in the streets and a sword on every side (Ezekiel 28:22, 23).
- FULFILLEMENTS:
 - Sidon has had one of the bloodiest histories imaginable. In 351 BC, after successfully defending their city against the Persian king, their king betrayed them to him. Instead of accepting the torture they knew would come, 40,000 citizens shut themselves up inside their homes and burned themselves to death. It has been attacked and massacred many times in its history, but it still stands today.
 - Tyre and Sidon have always been linked together in history—both secular and in the Bible. This is probably because of their close proximity to each other on the Mediterranean coast. The amazing thing is that Ezekiel, a Jew who was exiled to Babylon, was able to accurately predict the exact happenings for both cities, hundreds of years before the occurrence.
 - This prophecy of the day would be very much like someone today predicting the fate of San Francisco and Los Angeles, saying one would have constant wars and the other would fall.

Concerning the city of Ninevah—

- PROPHECIES/PREDICTIONS:
 - Would be destroyed in a state of drunkenness (Nahum 1:10).
 - Would be destroyed in an overflowing flood (Nahum 1:8, 2:6).
 - Would be burned (Nahum 3:13).
 - Would fall easily, like ripe figs on a tree when shaken (Nahum 3:13).
 - Totally destroyed (Nahum 3:19) and probably not rebuilt.
- FULFILLMENTS:

- The end of Ninevah began when the Assyrians, who had been indulging in an evening drinking heavily, staged a battle outside the walls.
- The king of Nahum felt secure inside its wall; however, after some heavy rains a flood of water broke down some of the city's walls and flooded the lower parts of the city. This made it open to invasion.
- The king panicked and ordered all of his possessions (which included concubines) to be brought in to the palace. He then sealed it and burned it down, with everything and everyone inside.
- The city was under a 3 month siege (which is not long at all, considering most took years—the longest siege being 29 years). When Ninevah finally fell, she fell easily. This is most amazing because consider the city—
 1. Her walls were 100 feet high.
 2. Her wall were 50 feet thick.
 3. Her towers were 200 feet high, with 15 gate.s
 4. There was a 150 feet wide moat all the way around the city.
- Ninevah was so destroyed at this time that critics said for years that it did not even exist! Excavators walked over the ruins many times before they found it—30-45 feet under the ground.

These are just a few of the prophecies of the Old Testament that came true. To truly understand the greatness of this collection of books, we need to look at the prophecies that spoke of “Messiah.” We will begin by looking at what was said concerning this Coming, Promised One centuries before His arrival. Then we must look at the claims made by the Man Himself, Jesus, who claimed that He was the One. Let's begin with *just a few* of the close to 300 prophecies made about Messiah in the Old Testament:

- He would be a descendant of Abraham, Isaac (not Ishamael), Jacob (not Esau), Judah (not any of his 11 brothers), Jesse, and David.
- He would also be *the Son of God*.
- He would be in the likeness of the prophet, Moses.
- He would be born of a virgin.
- He would be born in Bethlehem.
- He would also come out of Egypt.
- He would be preceded by a messenger.
- He would have a ministry of signs and wonders.
- He would be betrayed by a friend.
- He would be sold for 30 pieces of silver.
- This money would be given for a field.
- He would be accused by false witnesses.
- He would be struck and spit on.
- He would be scourged.
- He would be given gall and vinegar to drink.
- His hands and feet would be pierced.
- He would be hung on a tree.
- He would be hung on a tree with criminals.
- People would cast lots for his clothes.
- He would be mocked.
- His bones would not be broken.
- He would be pierced.

These are just a few. Now, we've already established that the written records concerning these events can be trusted; therefore, how did Jesus pull this off? Maybe by accident He fulfilled these written prophecies? The mathematical probability (according to the book, *Science Speaks* by Peter Stoner, honored and accepted as accurate by the American Scientific Affiliation and the Executive Council of the same group) of one man fulfilling **just 8** of these mentioned (taking 8 out of 300) is 1 chance in 100,000,000,000,000,000. If you take 48 out of the 300, the number climbs to 1 chance in 10^{157} .

Now some may claim that these “prophecies” were written *after* the time of Jesus so as to support their claim of His identity—simply recorded history trying to look like fulfilled prophecy. However, consider that the historic date for the completion of the Old Testament is approximately four hundred years prior to the birth of Jesus. The Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament) was completed in the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus around 240 BC. Now of course it stands to reason that if you have the Greek translation over two hundred years prior to the birth of Jesus, then the Hebrew version must have existed before that.

So, what do we believe? Do we believe Jesus is the Promised Messiah? We know that Jesus was a man of history, as many other historians (many secular) document this: Cornelius Tacitus (born 52 AD), Lucian, Flavius Josephus (born 37 AD), Seutomius (born 120 AD), Pliny the Younger (born 112 AD), Tertullian (born 197 AD), and more.

Let’s take a look at what Jesus said of Himself.

- Jesus acted like He had the right and ability to forgive sins.
- Jesus was worshipped as God and accepted it.
- Jesus claimed to be God.
- Jesus claimed to be the Son of God.
- Jesus said His words will not pass away.
- He said God was “My Father.”
- He said that He and the Father are One.
- He said that if you have seen Him, you’ve seen the Father.
- He said that He would be crucified (prophesying His own death).
- He said that He would rise up again (prophesying His resurrection).
- He said that He would go to the Father, yet come back again.
- He claimed to be the King of the Jews.
- He claimed to have a kingdom.

And his followers, who followed Him for three years, accepted all of these things as truth! In fact, they found him to be *sinless!*

So what does this make the man Jesus? Besides the fulfilled prophecy, take a look at some conclusions we must draw:

1. Jesus was lying (not believing what He said, but fooling others to believe it).
2. Jesus was a lunatic (actually believing the things He said).
3. Jesus is who He said He was.

So why is it that most major religions who reject Him as God/Son of God claim that He was a great prophet? At the very least even the secular community would say that He was a moral (perhaps the most moral) man. But think about it—how can you see a man as a great moral teacher and example if he was a liar? How can you accept that Jesus said what He did, yet view Him as just a man that you may want to emulate? He spoke very controversial words---that is not in dispute! His identity is in dispute. Was He a lunatic? Was He a liar? What would He have to gain from these two options? DEATH! So what is the other option? That He was telling the truth. As C.S. Lewis wrote in *Mere Christianity*,

“I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: ‘I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.’ That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg, or else he would be the devil of hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon, or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us...He did not intend to.”

And lastly, let's not forget that it was actually recorded many times over that this man Jesus did indeed rise from the dead. He was seen by many after His death. So what do we do with that information? Disregard it, even though it is recorded in numerous books throughout the New Testament, books that are the most highly regarded among the works of antiquity? It was a fraud, a sham, perpetrated by those who wanted to fool us all? Let's consider the different scenarios regarding the resurrection—

How was He doing physically throughout His arrest and trial and sentence of crucifixion? He was first in agony in the garden, sweating drops of blood (a condition known as hematomidrosis). He was obviously in great emotional and mental anguish. Then He was up all night taking part in 3 Jewish trials (Annas, Caiaphas and Sanhedrin, then the whole Sanhedrin). This ended with Him being spit on, blindfolded, beaten and slapped by the officers. Then in the morning Jesus goes through 3 more trials (Pilate, Herod, then Pilate again). Then Jesus is scourged; and although the Jews had a limit of 40 blows (always making sure to only give 39 as to not exceed this), the Romans had no such limit. Jesus was scourged to the point that most of the flesh was removed from His back side, leaving Him very close to death. Then, they put a robe on Him, along with a crown of thorns (the thorns being close to 1 ½ inches long as is found in Palestine). They then beat Him and spit on Him, pushing the thorns deeper into His head.

Then they took off the robe, which would have now begun to adhere to His wounds. This would have broken them open again.

Then Jesus carried His own cross (probably just the crossbeam) to the place of His death (part of the way), approximately 1 ½ miles.

They tried to give Him wine and gall to dull His sense, but He did not take it after He tasted what it was. He was then crucified. The act of crucifixion involved 18” spikes driven into both hands and both feet. The process of death was that while hanging, the person would actually drown in his own body fluids. If the person raised themselves up to breathe, that would bring excruciating pain in His feet. If he let down to hang, he again couldn't breathe. This was the process that eventually would lead to death. This would and could actually go on for days before the person would succumb to asphyxiation. The merciful thing to do was to break the person's legs, allowing them to drown quickly.

However, Jesus' legs were never broken (in fulfillment of one prophecy). But, He died quickly...after just 6 hours. After He died, His side was split open by a spear to prove that He was dead.

In the burial process, Jesus' body would have been prepared in the following way: 75 pounds of myrrh and aloes were mixed together with cloth to encase the body. This would have hardened and effectively “mummified” the corpse. Jesus was then placed in Joseph of Arimathea's tomb. This tomb was hewn out of rock, having never been used before. The stone placed over the entrance was quite large, taking 20 men to move it (the Codex Bezae text cites this. We know that 3 women couldn't move it because in Mark 16:1-4 we read that they were worried about who would move it for them). The purpose of the stone was to prevent any grave tampering.

After His burial a Roman guard was stationed at the gravesite. This guard would have been armed and highly trained and disciplined (as Romans were). The sole responsibility of the guard was to stop anyone from tampering with Jesus' body.

A seal was then placed across the stone. This seal was a string that stretched across the stone and then was sealed with a Roman seal, in wax, to indicate whether tampering had occurred. The well-known penalty for tampering with the seal was death.

These things really did happen. It is recorded as a historical event that Jesus of Nazareth was crucified by Roman soldiers. He did indeed go through horrific bodily harm, ultimately leading to His death.

Now, what do we believe about His resurrection? Do we believe the accounts recorded in the New Testament? Or do we not? There is first and foremost an historical aspect to this that cannot be denied. First Jesus was in the tomb, then He was not in the tomb. This must be explained. Now that we have the facts (remember that the accuracy of the testimony is not in question), here are our choices—

- Jesus' body was stolen. Can we accept this? If we do then we must explain the following:
 - The guard's testimony said otherwise.
 - The disciples were cowards, hardly brave in this sense to pull off a grave robbery.
 - They didn't even understand the prophecies that Jesus had foretold about Himself.
 - The guard would have been killed if he had been sleeping on duty (he was not killed).
 - If the guard was sleeping on duty, he most definitely would have heard the stone being moved!
 - The disciples were never arrested or accused of theft.
 - How was the stone moved?
- Jesus was not really dead; he was still barely alive and exited the tomb Himself.
 - Re-read the physical punishments He went through.
 - Then explain how He was able to even move!
 - How did He move the stone?
 - Don't forget the 75 pounds are hardened shell encasing him.
 - Also, His grave clothes were still where He had lain. (Imagine Him getting up, covered in 75 pounds of hardened myrrh and aloë, breaking free of that then neatly laying His clothes in order to deceive many. Then He Superman-like rolls the stone. Oh yeah, the soldier guard is taking a break somewhere else?)
 - Then, on His mangled feet (from the 18" spikes), He walks 7 miles to Emmaus, talking to some of His disciples who are none the wiser.
 - Ridiculous theory.
- Theory #3—the women went to the wrong tomb! And all the others did too!
 - Not viable—Joseph of Arimathea knew his own tomb.

If we do not believe that Jesus was resurrected, then we must explain the absence of His body. And note that all the Jews had to do to quell this damaging rumor was to produce the body of Jesus. They could not do it.

So to end, let's ask again the same question—why do we believe the Bible? Do we believe it because someone told us to? Because someone said it was a "holy" book? No, we believe it because of its history. We believe what is written within it because it has proven itself to be true...against all natural odds...over and over and over again. We believe it because it goes beyond being just the writings of men—it contains the writings of men who were moved along by the One Breath of God, orchestrating every word to be in its final form the complete revelation of God Himself. It contains everything we need to know about the man Jesus who was God in the flesh—who was God making Himself known to man in such a way that man could understand. Yet for all of this revelation we see that man, time and time again, denies the Words of God (either spoken or written) and ultimately kills anyone and everyone who dares to speak something contrary to their social, economic, and political platforms and beliefs.

Reviewing all that was said concerning the Old Testament and the New, can the same be said of the Quran? Of Mohammed? Can it stand up to the same tests? Can any religious book, for that matter?

--written by Jeanne Alley--

