

# The Case For The Bible

The message of Christianity is essentially this: all have sinned against God, and the wages of sin is death. If our sins are not forgiven then God will condemn us and cast us into Hell. However, forgiveness can be obtained through Jesus Christ. Those who repent of their sins and believe in Jesus will be saved. When they are judged they will be found faultless and will inherit eternal life.

As you can see, the message of Christianity depends upon the person of Jesus Christ. In order for the gospel to be true and have genuine saving power, Jesus Christ has to be a real person who actually existed. He had to have been born in Bethlehem, lived a sinless life, died a cruel death on a Roman cross, and then raised to life again on the third day. If these events are not true – if Jesus never lived at all, or if He was not crucified, or if He was crucified but never rose again – then Christianity is false and the gospel can save no one.

In other words, Christianity is not some vague search for “enlightenment”. It is not about “finding the real you” or “living your best life now” or becoming “empowered”. Christianity makes a lot of claims about the past, and it depends upon those historical claims. If these claims are false then the entire religion crumbles to the ground. In order for Christianity to be of any value at all it must be *true*.

But how do we know that it is true? Some people say “Well, you just have to take it on faith.” I realize that sounds very spiritual and holy, but it's actually a terrible answer. If you go up to someone who isn't a Christian and ask them why they don't believe in Jesus, a lot of times they will say “Well, I just don't have that kind of faith.” What they are actually saying is that they find it impossible to believe things that they don't think are true. When you tell them “just have faith”, they interpret that to mean “You need to believe in things that are dumb and can't possibly be real”. The world equates faith with magical thinking.

A much better word to use is *trust*. When God tells us to have faith in Him, what He is really asking us to do is to trust Him. However, God didn't stop there; He has actually given us *reasons* to trust Him. God did not simply say “I'm going to tell you things, but I'm not going to give you any reason to believe that they are true. You'll just have to believe them, even though they sound stupid.” Instead He gave us “many infallible proofs” (Acts 1:3).

Believe it or not, Christianity is actually *reasonable*. There are good reasons to believe that its claims are true. Many people in the Church act as if “reason” is some sort of demonic concept, but it's not. The word “reason” actually appears quite a few times in the Bible. God Himself reasoned with people:

**Isaiah 1:18:** “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”

Did you see that? *God reasoned with people!* Thinking things through is *not* evil or sinful. Samuel the prophet reasoned with the nation of Israel:

**I Samuel 12:6:** “And Samuel said unto the people, It is the Lord that advanced Moses and Aaron, and that brought your fathers up out of the land of Egypt.  
7 Now therefore stand still, that I may reason with you before the Lord of all the righteous acts of the Lord, which he did to you and to your fathers.”

How did Samuel reason with the people? By reminding them of the past. Samuel actually used the Jews' own history to give them *reasons* to believe God. He used facts, evidence, and logic to make his case.

It's worth noting that Jesus Himself said that we were to love God with all of our *mind*:

**Mark 12:30:** "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment."

Despise all of this, a lot of people seem to leave their mind at the door when it comes to talking about the Bible. The truth is that God has provided us with many reasons to trust Him. God does not ask for blind faith; instead He has provided us with a great deal of evidence. When people come to us and say "How do you know the Bible is true?", it's actually possible to give *reasons* to trust the Scriptures.

What we are going to do in this lesson is take a look at some of the reasons why we can trust the Bible. How do we know that it is really what it claims to be? How do we know it can be trusted? Let's take a look and find out.

## ***The New Testament***

The New Testament contains the account of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It reveals the gospel, the letters to the churches, the early church's history, and the apocalyptic letter of Revelation. But how do we know that it is what it claims to be? After all, it was written a long time ago. What evidence do we have that it isn't some kind of modern forgery? Do we have any reason to believe that its contents can be trusted?

Well, we actually have a *lot* of reasons for trusting it. First of all, the New Testament is *by far* the most widely copied book from antiquity:

"On the basis of manuscript tradition alone, the works that make up the Christians' New Testament were the most frequently copied and widely circulated books of antiquity." (Peters, *The Harvest of Hellenism*, p50)

The number of ancient New Testament manuscripts that have been discovered is staggering, and far outclasses any other ancient document. There are a total of 25,000 copies of portions of the New Testament in existence today. The second runner-up is Homer's *Illiad*, which has only 643 surviving manuscripts:

"There are now more than 5,686 known Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. Add over 10,000 Latin Vulgate and at least 9,300 other early versions (MSS), and we have close to, if not more than, 25,000 manuscript copies of portions of the New Testament in existence today. No other document of antiquity even begins to approach such numbers and attestation. In comparison, Homer's *Illiad* is second, with only 643 manuscripts that still survive. The first complete preserved text of

Homer dates from the thirteenth century.” (Leach, *Our Bible: How We Got It*, p145)

Not only are there vastly more copies of the New Testament available than any other ancient document, but the time interval between today and the oldest known copy is also far shorter. The first complete text of Homer is dated more than *a thousand years* after the original. By contrast, copies of the New Testament exist that were made only 250 to 300 years after the originals:

“...besides number, the manuscripts of the New Testament differ from those of the classical authors . . . In no other case is the interval of time between the composition of the book and the date of the earliest extant manuscripts so short as in that of the New Testament. The books of the New Testament were written in the latter part of the first century; the earliest extant manuscripts (trifling scraps excepted) are of the fourth century – say from 250 to 300 years later. This may sound a considerable interval, but it is nothing to that which parts of most of the great classical authors from their earliest manuscripts. We believe that we have in all essentials an accurate text of the seven extant plays of Sophocles; yet the earliest substantial manuscript upon which it is based was written more than 1400 years after the poet's death.” (Kenyon, *Handbook to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, p4)

People believe that they have an accurate copy of Sophocles' plays, even though the oldest known copy is dated *1400 years* after his death. By that standard, a 250-year gap is nothing. As Kenyon said, there are *no other cases* where the time interval is as short as it is for the New Testament.

But that's not all. We even possess manuscript fragments that date to within 100 years of the originals:

“The oldest known MSS of most of the Greek classical authors are dated a thousand years or more after the author's death. The time interval for the Latin authors is somewhat less, varying down to a minimum of three centuries in the case of Virgil. In the case of the New Testament, however, two of the most important MSS were written within 300 years after the New Testament was completed, and some virtually complete New Testament books as well as extensive fragmentary MSS of many parts of the New Testament date back to one century from the original writings.” (Greenlee, *Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism*, p16)

So, not only is there a tremendous wealth of manuscripts – far, far more than for any other ancient document – but the gap between the originals and the oldest copy is quite brief. Scholars have no problem accepting a thousand-year gap for other ancient documents; after all, no one argues that we can't trust the plays of Sophocles because of the 1400-year gap. The fact that the gap for the New Testament is just a couple centuries makes it even more certain that it is reliable:

“Since scholars accept as generally trustworthy the writings of the ancient classics even though the earliest MSS were written so long after the original writings and the number of extant MSS is in many instances so small, it is clear that the reliability of the text of the New Testament is likewise assured.” (Greenlee, *Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism*, p16)

It's important to realize that many ancient documents managed to survive by the slimmest chance. Some manuscripts were only preserved in a single ancient copy, while others don't have *any* ancient copies available at all:

"The works of several ancient authors are preserved to us by the thinnest possible thread of transmission. For example, the compendious history of Rome by Velleius Paterculus survived to modern times in only one incomplete manuscript, from which the *editio princeps* was made – and this lone manuscript was lost in the seventeenth century after being copied by Beatus Rhenanus at Amerbach. Even the *Annals* of the famous historian Tacitus is extant, so far as the first six books are concerned, in but a single manuscript, dating from the ninth century. In 1870 the only known manuscript of the *Epistle to Diognetus*, an early Christian composition which editors usually include in the corpus of Apostolic Fathers, perished in a fire at the municipal library in Strasbourg. In contrast with these figures, the textual critic of the New Testament is embarrassed by the wealth of his material." (Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, p34)

This extreme rarity seems very reasonable when you think about all the things that can happen to a document during a span of two thousand years. During that time there can be fires, floods, wars, earthquakes, and all sorts of disasters – not to mention the normal ravages of time. It takes a very special set of circumstances for *anything* to survive that long. Yet, the New Testament doesn't depend on one or two surviving manuscripts; instead there are more than 25,000. That is more than impressive. There is literally nothing else like it:

"In real terms, the New Testament is easily the best attested ancient writing in terms of the sheer number of documents, the time span between the events and the document, and the variety of documents available to sustain or contradict it. There is nothing in ancient manuscript evidence to match such textual availability and integrity." (Zacharias, *Can Man Live Without God*, p162)

This means that if there is *any* ancient document that can be trusted as being reliable and free from corruption, it is the New Testament. It is by *far* the most trustworthy, and has the most manuscript evidence to back it up.

But that's not all. Throughout the course of history many people have quoted the New Testament. The early Church Fathers referred to it in their commentaries, sermons, and letters. In fact, they referred to it so many times that if the New Testament was somehow lost entirely, it would be possible to reconstruct nearly the *entire thing* just from those quotations:

"Besides textual evidence derived from New Testament Greek manuscripts and from early versions, the textual critic has available the numerous scriptural quotations included in the commentaries, sermons, and other treatises written by early Church Fathers. Indeed, so extensive are these citations that if all other sources of our knowledge of the text of the New Testament were destroyed, they would be sufficient alone for the reconstruction of practically the entire New Testament." (Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, p86)

To give you an idea of how extensive these quotations are – and how old they are – one researcher stated that there are 32,000 quotations of the New Testament that date before 325 AD:

“... a brief inventory at this point will reveal that there were some 32,000 citations of the New Testament prior to the time of the Council of Nicea (325). These 32,000 quotations are by no means exhaustive, and they do not even include the fourth-century writers. Just adding the number of references used by one other writer, Eusebius, who flourished prior to and contemporary with the Council at Nicea, will bring the total number of citations of the New Testament to over 36,000.” (Geisler, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, p353-354)

All of this is evidence that demonstrates that the New Testament has not been corrupted or lost through the centuries. There is simply no other ancient manuscript that has this much evidence to back it up. It is truly in a class all its own.

It's also important to remember that the New Testament contains a tremendous amount of firsthand material. It is not a collection of stories that were collected thirdhand from someone who knew someone else. A great deal of the New Testament is actually a *firsthand* account, and it was written while the people who had experienced the events were still alive:

“The earliest preaches of the gospel knew the value of ... first-hand testimony, and appealed to it time and time again. 'we are witnesses of these things,' was their constant and confident assertion. And it can have been by no means so easy as some writers seem to think to invent words and deeds of Jesus in those early years, when so many of His disciples were about, who could remember what had and had not happened.”

“And it was not only friendly eyewitnesses that the early preachers had to reckon with; there were others less well disposed who were also conversant with the main facts of the ministry and death of Jesus. The disciples could not afford to risk inaccuracies (not to speak of willful manipulation of facts), which would at once be exposed by those who would be only too glad to do so. On the contrary, one of the strong points in the original apostolic preaching is the confident appeal to the knowledge of the hearers; they not only said, “We are witnesses of these things,” but also, “As you yourselves also know” (Acts 2:22). Had there been any tendency to depart from the facts in any material respect, the possible presence of hostile witnesses in the audience would have served as a further corrective.” (Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*, p33, 44-46)

This is an important point. The New Testament was *not* written hundreds of years after all of the witnesses had died. The fact that it was written by people who had actually been there and *seen the events themselves* gives it a tremendous amount of reliability:

“...the books of the New Testament were not written down a century or more after the events they described but during the lifetimes of those involved in the accounts themselves. Therefore, the New Testament must be regarded by scholars today as a competent primary source document from the first century” (Montgomery, *History and Christianity*, p34-35)

Some people may say “Well, sure, it's a firsthand account, but the writers were all fans of Jesus. Since they're obviously biased you can't trust their testimony.” This is actually a very foolish objection. If you really want to know what actually happened, the very best people you could ask *are the people who were there*:

“The objection that the writings are partisan involves a significant but false implication that witnesses cannot be reliable if they were close to the one about whom they gave testimony. This is clearly false. Survivors of the Jewish holocaust were close to the events they have described to the world. That very fact puts them in the best position to know what happened. They were there, and it happened to them . . . The New Testament witnesses should not be disqualified because they were close to the events they relate.” (Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, p381)

Not only does the New Testament give us firsthand information, but it actually gives us *multiple* firsthand accounts of the life of Christ. It is truly remarkable.

## New Testament History

Another key factor in this issue is the evidence of the historical record. Every time the Bible has been put to the test it has been found accurate. No historical discovery has ever disproven anything in the Bible or shown it to be in error:

“It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference.” (Glueck, *Rivers in the Desert: History of Negev*, 31)

This is a critical point. As was mentioned at the beginning of this lesson, the Bible makes many historical claims, and those claims are central to its message. It talks about rulers, kingdoms, people, cities, events, and wars. It speaks of certain things that happened at certain times to certain people – and *none* of its historical claims have ever been found to be in error. Time and time again history has verified that the Bible is exactly right in its assertions:

“The excessive skepticism shown toward the Bible by important historical schools of the eighteenth- and nineteenth centuries, certain phrases of which still appear periodically, has been progressively discredited. Discovery after discovery has established the accuracy of innumerable details, and has brought increased recognition to the value of the Bible as a source of history.” (Albright, *The Archaeology of Palestine*, p127-128)

The reason this matters is because the Bible contains two types of information: things that we *can't* test, and things that we *can* test. The fact that it passes every historical test gives us a good *reason* to trust it in matters that we can't verify. Think of it this way: if the Bible was full of errors in matters relating to history and geography, then who would trust it in the much greater matters of spirituality and

eternal destiny? The tremendous accuracy of the Bible offers us good grounds for believing all of its contents.

For example, Luke had a great deal to say about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. One of the things we know about Luke is that he was a first-rate historian who paid a lot of attention to detail:

“Luke's history is unsurpassed in respect of its trustworthiness.” (Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen*, p81).

“In all, Luke names thirty-two countries, fifty-four cities and nine islands without an error.” (Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, p47)

“For Acts the confirmation of historicity is overwhelming. . . Any attempt to reject its basic historicity must now appear absurd. Roman historians have long taken it for granted.” (Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament*, p189)

In fact, Luke's history reveals that he had a great deal of firsthand knowledge:

- Specialized details, which would not have been widely known except to a contemporary researcher such as Luke who traveled widely. These details include exact titles of officials, identification of army units, and information about major routes.
- Details archaeologists know are accurate but can't verify as to the precise time period. Some of these are unlikely to have been known except to a writer who had visited the districts.
- Correlation of dates of known kings and governors with the chronology of the narrative.
- Facts appropriate to the date of Paul or his immediate contemporary in the church but not to a date earlier or later.
- Offhand geographical references that bespeak familiarity with common knowledge.
- Materials the immediacy of which suggests that the author was recounting a recent experience, rather than shaping or editing a text long ago after it had been written.
- Cultural or idiomatic items now known to be peculiar to the first-century atmosphere. (*Evidence for Christianity*, p97)

If Luke was careless with his facts about history then it would be easy to suspect that he was also careless about the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. The fact that he showed such tremendous care in describing everything – even minute details – gives us solid reasons for believing that his account of Christ is also reliable.

## ***The Old Testament***

There are far fewer ancient manuscripts of the Old Testament than there are of the New Testament. Considering the extreme age of the Old Testament, though, this really shouldn't come as a surprise. It's very easy for a document to be destroyed over the course of a couple thousand years! However, even given the extreme age of the Old Testament, there are still hundreds of ancient manuscript copies of it:

“Several reasons have been suggested for the scarcity of early Hebrew manuscripts. The first and most obvious reason is a combination of antiquity and destructibility; two to three thousand years is a long time to expect ancient documents to last. Nonetheless, several lines of evidence support the conclusion that their quality is very good. . .

“There are several important collections of Hebrew manuscripts today. The first collection of Hebrew manuscripts, made by Benjamin Kennicot (1776-80) and published by Oxford, listed 615 manuscripts of the Old Testament. Later, Giovanni de Rossi (1784-8) published a list of 731 manuscripts. The most important manuscript discoveries in modern times are those of the Cairo Geniza (1890s) and the Dead Sea Scrolls (1947 and following years).” (*Evidence for Christianity*, p106)

The oldest of these manuscripts date to the third century BC, which puts them *before* the time of Christ:

“The most significant Hebrew Old Testament manuscripts date from between the third century BC and the fourteenth century AD. Of these, the most remarkable manuscripts are those of the Dead Sea Scrolls, which date from the third century BC to the first century AD. They include one complete Old Testament book (Isaiah) and thousands of fragments, which together represent every Old Testament book except Esther. The Dead Sea Scrolls manuscripts are highly significant because they confirm the accuracy of other manuscripts dated much later.” (*Evidence for Christianity*, p107)

One of the remarkable facts about these ancient Old Testament manuscripts is their quality. It is very common for copies of ancient documents to change over time, as people make copying mistakes or change their contents. Yet the Old Testament does not demonstrate this degradation over time at all. Astonishingly, the oldest copies are virtually identical to the more recent copies:

“It should be clearly understood that in this respect, the Old Testament differs from all other pre-Christian works of literature of which we have any knowledge. To be sure, we do not possess so many different manuscripts of pagan productions, coming from such widely separated eras, as we do in the case of the Old Testament. But where we do, for example, in the Egyptian Book of the Dead, the variations are of a far more extensive and serious nature. Quite starting differences appear, for example, between chapter 15 contained in the Papyrus of Ani (written in the Eighteenth Dynasty) and the Turin Papyrus (from the Twenty-sixth Dynasty or



later). Whole clauses are inserted or left out, and the sense in corresponding columns of text is in some cases altogether different. Apart from divine superintendence of the transmission of the Hebrew text, there is no particular reason why the same phenomenon of divergence and change would not appear between Hebrew manuscripts produced centuries apart. For example, even though the two copies of Isaiah discovered in Qumran Cave 1 near the Dead Sea in 1947 were a thousand years earlier than the oldest dated manuscript previously known (AD 980), they proved to be word for word identical with our standard Hebrew Bible in more than 95 percent of the text. The 5 percent of variation consisted chiefly of obvious slips of the pen and variations in spelling. They do not affect the message of revelation in the slightest.” (Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, p23-25)

The fact that the text has *not* changed over time gives us a very solid reason to trust it. However, there is more. Like the New Testament, the Old Testament makes many historical claims – claims about kings, kingdoms, cities, and people. These historical, testable claims have been found to be accurate time and time again:

“The Hebrew Scriptures contain the names of 26 or more foreign kings whose names have been found on documents contemporary with the kings. The names of most of these kings are found to be spelled on their own monuments, or in documents from the time in which they reigned in the same manner that they are spelled in the documents of the Old Testament. The changes in spelling of others are in accordance with the laws of phonetic change as those laws were in operation at the time when the Hebrew Documents claim to have been written. In the case of two or three names only are there letters, or spellings, that cannot as yet be explained with certainty; but even in these few cases it cannot be shown that the spelling in the Hebrew text is wrong. Contrariwise, the names of many of the kings of Judah and Israel are found on the Assyrian contemporary documents with the same spelling as that which we find in the present Hebrew text.

“In 144 cases of transliteration from Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian and Moabite into Hebrew and in 40 cases of the opposite, or 184 in all, the evidence shows that for 2300 to 2900 years the text of the proper names in the Hebrew Bible has been transmitted with the most minute accuracy. That the original scribes should have written them with such close conformity to correct philological principles is a wonderful proof of their thorough care and scholarship; further, that the Hebrew text should have been transmitted by copyists through so many centuries is a phenomenon unequaled in the history of literature.” (Wilson, *A Scientific Investigation of the Old Testament*, p64, 71)

This phenomenal accuracy and lack of change over time did not happen by accident. The copyists who were responsible for making copies of the Old Testament took extreme care to avoid errors. They followed a very strict set of rules:

- Each column must have no less than 48 and no more than 60 lines. The entire copy must

first be lined.

- No word or letter could be written from memory. The scribe must have an authentic copy before him, and he must read and pronounce each word aloud before writing it.
- Revisions must be made within 30 days after the work was finished; otherwise it was worthless. If three mistakes were found on any page then the entire manuscript was condemned.
- Every word and every letter was counted. If a letter was omitted, an extra letter inserted, or if one letter touched another, the manuscript was condemned and destroyed.

An incredibly exacting system was developed to check the validity of the text. It was so good that they could tell if *just one consonant* was left out of the entire Old Testament:

“[The Masoretes were well disciplined and treated the text] with the greatest imaginable reverence, and devised a complicated system of safeguards against scribal slips. They counted, for example, the number of times each letter of the alphabet occurs in each book; they pointed out the middle letter of the Pentateuch and the middle letter of the whole Hebrew Bible, and made even more detailed calculations than these. 'Everything countable seem to be counted,' says Wheeler Robinson, and they made up mnemonics by which the various totals might be readily remembered.” (Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments: How We Got Our English Bible*, p117)

“The scribes could tell if one consonant was left out of, say, the entire book of Isaiah or the entire Hebrew Bible. They built in so many safeguards that they knew when they finished that they had an exact copy.” (*Evidence for Christianity*, p112)

These people were serious about making an exact copy of the Old Testament. In fact, they were fanatical about it:

“A factor that runs throughout the above discussion of the Hebrew manuscript evidence is the Jewish reverence for the Scriptures. With respect to the Jewish Scriptures, however, it was not scribal accuracy alone that guaranteed their product. Rather, it was their almost superstitious reverence for the Bible. According to the Talmud, not only were there specifications for the kind of skins to be used and the size of the columns, but also the scribe was required to perform a religious ritual before writing the name of God. Rules governed the kind of ink used, dictated the spacing of words, and prohibited writing anything from memory. The lines – and even the letters – were counted methodically. If a manuscript was found to contain even one mistake, it was discarded and destroyed. This scribal formalism was responsible, at least in part, for the extreme care exercised in copying the Scriptures. It was also for this reason that there were only a few manuscripts (because the rules demanded the destruction of defective copies)” (Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, p552)

That last part is critical. Not only were defective copies destroyed, but older copies tended to be destroyed as well. This is because as a copy grew older it would get damaged, and since a damaged copy could not be trusted it was therefore only fit to be thrown away:

“The same extreme care which was devoted to the transcription of manuscripts is also at the bottom of the disappearance of the earlier copies. When a manuscript had been copied with the exactitude prescribed by the Talmud, and had been duly verified, it was accepted as authentic and regarded as being of equal value with any other copy. If all were equally correct, *age gave no advantage to a manuscript*; on the contrary age was a positive disadvantage, since a manuscript was liable to become defaced or damaged in the lapse of time. A damaged or imperfect copy was at once condemned as unfit for use.

“Attached to each synagogue was a “Gheniza”, or lumber cupboard, in which defective manuscripts were laid aside; and from these receptacles some of the oldest manuscripts now extant have in modern times been recovered. Thus, far from regarding an older copy of the Scriptures as more valuable, the Jewish habit has been to prefer the newer, as being the most perfect and free from damage. The older copies, once consigned to the “Gheniza” naturally perished, either from neglect or from being deliberately burned when the “Gheniza” became overcrowded.

“The absence of very old copies of the Hebrew Bible need not, therefore, either surprise or disquiet us. If, to the causes already enumerated, we add the repeated persecutions (involving much destruction of property) to which the Jews have been subject, the disappearance of the ancient manuscripts is adequately accounted for, and those which remain may be accepted as preserving which alone they profess to preserve – namely, the Masoretic text.” (Kenyon, *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts*, p43)

Even though the practice was to destroy old copies, there are some ancient copies that have survived over time. In fact, there are even copies of the Old Testament that predate the birth of Christ:

“...the most important documents of the Dead Sea Scrolls are copies of the Old Testament text dating from more than a century *before* the birth of Christ.” (*Evidence for Christianity*, p114)

The Isaiah scroll is dated to 125 BC (*Evidence for Christianity*, p115). Before the Dead Sea Scrolls were found, some people claimed that the Old Testament prophecies about Christ were added to the text after Christ's life and therefore could not be trusted. However, that claim is no longer valid. The prophecies about Christ were *not* inserted into the text at a later date; they were there all along – and Christ fulfilled them perfectly. The fact that we have copies of Bible prophecies that *predate the events*, coupled with the fact that they were fulfilled perfectly, goes very far to demonstrate that the Bible is exactly what it claims to be and can be trusted.

Time and time again the Bible is put to the test and found to be accurate. There was a time when historians dismissed large portions of the Old Testament as myth or fable, but that is no longer possible:

"In the nineteenth century, the Biblical critic could hold with good reason that there never was a Sargon, that the Hittites either did not exist or were insignificant, that the patriarchal accounts had a late background, that the sevenfold lampstand of the tabernacle was a late concept, that the Davidic Empire was not as extensive as the Bible implied, that Belshazzar never existed, and that a host of other supposed errors and impossibilities existed in the Biblical record.

"Archaeological discoveries showed, on the contrary, that Sargon existed and lived in a palatial dwelling some twelve miles north of Nineveh, that the Hittites not only existed but were a significant people, that the background of the patriarchs fit the time indicated in the Bible, that the concept of a sevenfold lamp existed in the Early Iron Age, that a significant city given in the record of David's Empire lies far to the north, that Belshazzar existed and ruled over Babylon, and that a host of other supposed errors and contradictions are not errors at all." (Free, "Archaeology and Higher Criticism", 30, 31)

There was a time when people laughed at the idea that God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. Critics claimed that no such cities ever existed and that the whole story was just a myth. However, history has finally caught up with what the Bible said all along:

"The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was thought to be spurious until evidence revealed that all five of the cities mentioned in the Bible were in fact centers of commerce in the area and were geographically situated as the Scriptures describe. The biblical description of their demise seems to be no less accurate. Evidence points to earthquake activity and to layers of the earth being disrupted and even hurled high into the air. Bitumen is plentiful there, and an accurate description would be that brimstone (bituminous pitch) was hurled down on those cities that had rejected God. There is evidence that the layers of sedimentary rock have been molded together by intense heat. . ." (Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, p50-51)

History has also shown that the city of Jericho was destroyed just as the Bible said:

"During the excavations of Jericho (1930-36), Garstang found something so startling that he and two other members of the team prepared and signed a statement describing what was found. In reference to these findings Garstang says: "As to the main fact, then, there remains no doubt: the walls fell outwards so completely that the attackers would be able to clamber up and over their ruins into the city. Why so unusual? Because the walls of cities do not fall outwards, they fall inwards. And yet in Joshua 6:20 we read, 'The wall fell down flat. Then the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city.' The walls were made to fall outward." (Garstang, *The Foundations of Bible History; Joshua, Judges*, p146)

Historians once claimed that King David was just a myth. They have been proven wrong:

"A remarkable inscription from the ninth century BC that refers to both the [House of David], and to the [King of Israel]. This is the first time that the name of David has been found in any ancient inscription outside the Bible. That the inscription refers not simply to a [David] but to the House of David, the dynasty of the great Israelite king, is even more remarkable... this may be the oldest extra-biblical reference to Israel in Semitic script. If this inscription proves anything, it shows that both Israel and Judah, contrary to the claims of some scholarly biblical minimizers, were important kingdoms at this time." (Biram, *Biblical Archaeology Review*, March/April 1994, p26)

In fact, not one historical find has ever demonstrated an error in the Bible:

"In every period of Old Testament history, we find that there is good evidence from archeology that the Scriptures speak the truth. In many instances, the Scriptures even reflect firsthand knowledge of the times and customs it describes. While many have doubted the accuracy of the Bible, time and continued research have consistently demonstrated that the Word of God is better informed than its critics.

"In fact, while thousands of finds from the ancient world support in broad outline and often in detail the biblical picture, not one incontrovertible find has ever contradicted the Bible." (Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, p52)

Instead of disproving the Bible, archaeological finds are demonstrating that the Bible knew exactly what it was talking about all along. As new facts come to light about ancient cultures and customs, passages in the Bible suddenly start to make a lot more sense:

"Over 1,000 clay tablets were found in 1925 in the excavation of a Mesopotamian site known today as Yorgan Tepe. Subsequent work brought forth another 3,000 tablets and revealed the ancient site as "Nuzi." The tablets, written about 1500 BC, illuminate the background of the Biblical patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. One instance will be cited: When Jacob and Rachel left the home of Laban, Rachel stole Laban's family images or 'teraphim.' When Laban discovered the theft, he pursued his daughter and son-in-law, and after a long journey overtook them (Genesis 31:19-23). Commentators have long wondered why he would go to such pains to recover images he could have replaced easily in the local shops. The Nuzi tablets record one instance of a son-in-law who possessed the family images having the right to lay legal claim to his father-in-law's property, a fact which explains Laban's anxiety. This and other evidence from the Nuzi tablets fits the background of the Patriarchal accounts into the early period when the patriarchs lived, and does not support the critical view – which holds that the accounts were written 1000 years after their time." (Free, *His Magazine*, May 1949, p20)

For example, it may seem strange to us that Esau sold his birthright in exchange for food, but that's not unheard of. In that time period it was legally possible to do exactly that:

"In one Nuzi tablet, there is a record of a man named Tupkitilla, who transferred his inheritance rights concerning a grove to his brother, Kurpazah, in exchange for

three sheep. Esau used a similar technique in exchanging his inheritance rights to obtain the desired pottage.” (Free, *Archaeology and Bible History*, p68-69)

Nor was it all that strange for Joseph to become the prime minister of Egypt. There were other people from ancient times who had similar things happen to them:

“Joseph's being lifted from slavery to prime minister of Egypt has caused some critical eyebrows to rise, but we have some archaeological accounts of similar things happening in the Land of the Nile.

“A Canaanite Meri-Ra, became armor-bearer to Pharaoh: another Canaanite, Ben-Mat-Ana, was appointed to the high position of interpreter; and a Semite, Yanhamu or Jauhamu, became deputy to Amenhotep III, with charge over the granaries of the delta, a responsibility similar to that of Joseph before and during the famine.

“When Pharaoh appointed Joseph prime minister, he was given a ring and a gold chain or collar which is normal procedure for Egyptian office promotions.” (Vos, *Genesis and Archaeology*, p106)

“Asiatic slaves in Egypt, attached to the households of officials, are well-known in later Middle-Kingdom Egypt (c. 1850-1700 BC) and Semites could rise to high position (even the throne, before the Hyksos period), as did the chancellor Hur. Joseph's career would fall easily enough into the period of the late thirteenth and early fifteenth dynasties. The role of dreams is, of course, well-known at all periods. From Egypt, we have a dream-reader's textbook in a copy of c. 1300 BC, originating some centuries earlier; such works are known in first-millennium Assyria also.” (Kitchen, *The Bible in Its World*, 74)

As strange as Jacob's life may seem to us, it is actually supported by the historical record:

“Other [Nuzi] texts show that a bride was ordinarily chosen for a son by his father, as the patriarchs did; that a man had to pay a dowry to his father-in-law, or to work for his father-in-law if he could not afford the dowry, as poor Jacob had to do; that the orally expressed will of a father could not be changed after it had been pronounced, as in Isaac's refusal to change the blessings pronounced over Jacob even though they had been obtained by deception; that a bride ordinarily received from her father a slave girl as a personal maid, as Leah and Rachel did when they were married to Jacob; that the theft of cult objects or of a god was punishable by death, which was why Jacob consented to the death of the one with whom the stolen gods of his father-in-law were found; that the strange relationship between Judah and his daughter-in-law Tamar is vividly illustrated by the laws of the ancient Assyrians and Hittites” (Horn, *Christianity Today*, June 21 1968, p14)

Another item that historians use to have a problem with was the Bible's account of Belshazzar. Historians have since discovered that it wasn't an error at all:

“Records found in Babylon's famous hanging gardens have shown that Jehoiachin

and his five sons were given a monthly ration and a place to live and were treated well (2 Kings 25:27-30). The name of Belshazzar caused problems because there was not only no mention of him but no room for him in the list of Babylonian kings. However, Nabodonius left a record that he appointed his son, Belshazzar (Daniel 5), to reign for a few years in his absence. Hence, Nabodonius was still king, but Belshazzar ruled in the capital. Also, the edict of Cyrus as recorded by Ezra seemed to fit the picture of Isaiah's prophecies too well to be real, until a cylinder was found that confirmed the decree in all the important details" (Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, p52)

The bottom line is that not only has the Bible's text been preserved over time, but its contents have been put to the test and demonstrated to be accurate time and time again:

"In summary, archaeological discoveries show at point after point that the biblical record is confirmed and commended as trustworthy. This confirmation is not confined to a few general instances." (Free, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 113, p225)

Why can we trust the Bible? Because it has been demonstrated to be trustworthy. If the Bible were full of mistakes and inaccuracies then it would make sense to doubt its message, but instead we find it to be rock-solid. This gives us a good rational basis for believing that it can be trusted in *all* matters.