

Lecture 3: The Bible

Professor Grimes glanced around the room before beginning his lecture. *Looks like we have eight people today*, he thought to himself. It was still less than a tenth of the people who had registered for that class, but it was the highest attendance he had seen all semester.

True, the three people in the back row were already asleep. But at least they had bothered to show up. They weren't going to get any extra points for sleeping through class, but at the very least it was a step in the right direction.

Professor Grimes shook his head. *If those students would just keep their eyes open and pay attention, why, they might learn something! Who knows what exciting places that might lead them.*

Outside Grimes could hear the roar of a lawn mower. He was tempted to close the windows to block out the noise, but the

building's air conditioner wasn't working and the breeze from the outside helped cool the room down.

On the bright side the roof hadn't collapsed yet, nor was it leaking. That might change if another storm came, but for now Grimes would count that among his blessings.

"Good morning, class," Professor Grimes said. "Today we are going to talk about the Bible."

Brad Kramer spoke up. "Don't we do that in all of our classes? Every day? I mean, this is a seminary, right? Of *course* we're going to be talking about the Bible. What else would we talk about?"

"Well, as I said in our previous class, we are going to be talking about *the Bible itself*. That is quite different from talking about material that is *in* the Bible. Specifically, we are going to discuss where the Bible came from and why we should trust it."

Wally spoke up. "My Bible came from the Christian bookstore. It was on sale."

Grimes sighed. "But that's not where the Bible came from, Wally. You can also go down to the local grocery store and buy a gallon of

milk, but grocery stores don't actually produce milk. The milk that you find in the store actually came from a cow, and getting the milk from that cow to the store was a long process. The same thing can be said for the Bible. It took thousands of years to create the Bible, and God used around 40 different people to write it."

"But no cows. Right?" Wally asked. "I mean, I don't think cows were involved."

"Yes and no," the professor said thoughtfully. "Cows certainly do appear in the Bible, and they occasionally play an important role. They have been a part of God's plan throughout history. However, they weren't directly involved with writing the text of the Word."

Professor Grimes paused for a moment. "Let me be clear: the Bible was written by God. It is His words, handed down to us through the centuries. It contains no errors and it is not of human origin. However, God did not personally write down its words. Instead He worked through prophets, priests, fishermen, and a tax collector – just to name a few. He also worked through a physician, a

shepherd, and a king.³”

Iris spoke up. “So God dictated it to them?”

“I’m afraid not. God did not use these people as secretaries, and the Bible is not dictation. Each of these men wrote with their own unique writing style, and their writing reflects their personality and background – but what they wrote was exactly what God intended to be written. Even though the Bible was written over a period of 1500 years by around 40 different people, it tells one coherent message.⁴ The Bible’s collection of 66 books are all in perfect agreement with one another. It is the most unique library that has ever been assembled – in fact, it is truly a divine and holy thing. It is called the Word of God, and it literally contains the words of God.”

“But it was written by people,” Brad said.

“No, it was written *through* people. God works through people all the time to

³ *Evidence for Christianity*, Josh McDowell, p20-21

⁴ *Evidence for Christianity*, Josh McDowell, p23-25

accomplish His will. For example, He uses them to preach the gospel and disciple the nations. When a pastor preaches the gospel and a soul is saved, the pastor didn't save that soul; instead God worked through that pastor to save that soul. The men who wrote the books of the Bible did not do so of their own accord; instead they wrote the message that God gave them."

"But the Bible is arbitrary," Brad objected. "There were a lot of things that could have been included in it, and there are lots of books out there besides the 66 that just happened to make the cut. When it came time to decide what was canon, people just decided what they liked best and went with it. We could have ended up with something completely different."

Professor Grimes looked at him curiously. "So you are claiming that after God spent more than a thousand years carefully conveying His message to dozens of people, He then decided to leave the canon itself to pure chance? You seriously believe that God inspired the Bible but played absolutely no role in making sure that good books weren't

left out of the canon and bad books weren't included? Why, you seem to think that all God wanted to do was get them written so He could go on vacation! That is simply preposterous. I find it impossible to believe He wasn't the least bit concerned with what happened to the 66 books He took so much time and care to write. That is simply not plausible. Of *course* God determined the canon. It is madness to think otherwise."

Brad frowned. "The canon was decided by a council – the council of something-or-other. The point is that it was done by a committee of people."

"You are greatly mistaken, young man. First of all, there were three councils, not one. Second, the Council of Laodicea in 363 AD, of Hippo in 393 AD, and Carthage in 397 AD did not *decide* what was canon. God is the one who authored the books and He is the one who decided which ones would be included in the Bible. All the councils did was recognize what the Church had already known for several hundred years – that the 27 books of

the New Testament really were of God.⁵ All three councils came to the same conclusion.”

Iris spoke up. “But what about the Old Testament?”

“Historically speaking, there has actually been very little controversy over the Old Testament canon. The evidence indicates it was established as early as the 4th century BC.⁶ In fact, Jesus Himself confirmed the Old Testament canon on three separate occasions – in Luke 24:44, John 10:31-36, and Luke 11:51. The only serious challenge to it arose around a thousand years later when the Catholic Church attempted to add the Apocrypha to the canon.⁷ However, it doesn’t take much effort to look at it and realize that the Apocrypha is *not* on par with the Scriptures. It’s too goofy and full of errors. Excluding it is definitely the right choice to make.”

Brad spoke up. “But couldn’t the councils have made a mistake? How do you know they

43 ⁵ *Evidence for Christianity*, Josh McDowell, p42-

⁶ *Evidence for Christianity*, Josh McDowell, p50

⁷ *Evidence for Christianity*, Josh McDowell, p54

got it right?”

“That’s an excellent question,” Professor Grimes. “However, that subject is well outside the scope of this introductory class. In my Christianity 210 course we will study the criteria the councils used and what differentiates Scripture from non-Scripture.”⁸

“Since I don’t have an entire semester to examine that topic, let’s look at it in a simplified way. Even today there are a lot of other books out there that claim to be inspired – the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Judas, etc. These books can easily be dismissed as frauds because they are all deeply flawed. The Bible is without error, and these other books are not. The Bible is without contradiction, but these other works attempt to introduce doctrine that is very different from what the Bible contains. That alone gives us ample reason to disqualify them.

“The truth is that there are simply no other serious contenders for the canon

⁸ Or you could read *Evidence for Christianity*, Josh McDowell, p42-57

outside of the 66 books that we already have. If there was another book that God inspired, we would definitely know about it. After all, the only other option is that God inspired it but then hid it from the Church – which is a preposterous idea.”

“Why?” Rob asked. “Couldn’t God be keeping it a secret until it’s needed?”

“Absolutely not,” the professor replied firmly. “In fact, if someone comes to you and tells you that they have new revelation from God that you need in order to live your life, you should run from them. The truth is that there is no new revelation – God has stopped doing that in this Age. Instead God gave us the Bible, which is complete. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 tells us that the Bible contains *all* of the information that we need in order to do *all* of the good works that God wants us to do. No doctrines, teachings, or revelation was omitted.”

“But how can you prove that?” Brad asked. “How can you possibly know that nothing important got left out?”

“Well, there are several ways. One reason is because I know God’s character. I

know that He is competent and wise. He would never write the Bible and then allow it to be lost or corrupted. He would never give us His words and then allow them to disappear, nor would He forget to include things that we needed. Isaiah 40:8 says that the word of God will stand forever, and in Matthew 24:35 Jesus said that His words would never pass away. God promised to preserve His Word, and I am convinced that God always keeps His promises.

“But there is more. God has given us a lot of evidence to show that the Bible we have today is the same Bible that God intended for us to have. His words have not been lost over time.”

The professor picked up his notes from his desk and looked through them, until he found the piece of paper he was looking for. “For example, according to F. E. Peters in *The Harvest of Hellenism*, the New Testament is the most frequently copied and widely circulated book in the entire ancient world. Charles Leach in *Our Bible: How We Got It* says that there are more than 25,000 manuscript copies of portions of the New

Testament in existence today. Twenty-five thousand! The second runner-up is Homer's *Iliad*, which only has 643 manuscript copies in existence. In other words, there is an *order of magnitude* more copies of the Bible than there are of anything else – which means there is far more manuscript evidence to support the Bible than there is to support any other document from the ancient world. On top of that, there is only a 250 to 300 year gap between the original manuscripts and the oldest known copy.⁹

Iris spoke up. “That seems like a long time, doesn’t it? I mean, 300 years ago the United States wasn’t even a country yet.”

“In the world of *nations*, it is true that 300 years is a long time. But in the world of ancient manuscripts 300 years is nothing at all. For example, the oldest known copies of the plays of Sophocles date to 1,400 years after his death – but scholars still believe those copies are reasonably accurate. It is not at all uncommon to have a thousand-year gap

⁹ *Handbook to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, Kenyon, p4

between the original and the oldest existing copy.¹⁰ To have a gap of just 300 years is astonishing. But it gets even better: we possess manuscript fragments of the New Testament that date to within a century of the originals.¹¹ When it comes to manuscript evidence, the quality, quantity, and age gap for the New Testament is simply unbeaten. Nothing else even comes close. There are more reasons to trust the New Testament than there are to trust any other ancient document.”

“But what about the Old Testament?” Iris asked.

Professor Grimes selected a different sheet of paper from his notes. “The Old Testament also has excellent evidence to support it. Since it is so much older than the New Testament there are fewer copies that have survived the passage of time, but there are still more than 700 known ancient copies

¹⁰ *Handbook to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, Kenyon, p4

¹¹ *Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism*, Greenlee, p16

of it.¹² Considering that some ancient manuscripts from other authors have come to us on the basis of *one surviving copy*, I would say that is remarkably impressive. On top of that, the Dead Sea Scrolls contains a copy of the book of Isaiah that dates back to the third century BC.¹³ That is truly a staggering find, because that means we now have a copy of Isaiah's Messianic prophecies that predate the birth of Jesus by several hundred years."

"I don't get it," Brad said. "Why does that matter?"

"Because it silences the critics who claimed that the Isaiah prophecies were forgeries. You see, until the Dead Sea Scrolls were found, critics were fond of saying that the prophecies Jesus fulfilled were added to the Old Testament by the early Church in order to make Jesus seem like the Messiah. However, we can now prove that the prophecies were in *the originals*. The Old Testament prophesied about the life of Christ

¹² *Evidence for Christianity*, Josh McDowell, p106

¹³ *Evidence for Christianity*, Josh McDowell, p107

centuries before His birth in Bethlehem, and Jesus fulfilled all of those prophecies. That is a very significant argument in favor of Christ being exactly who He claimed to be – the Messiah and the Son of God.”

Outside the roar of the lawnmower stopped. Harold must have finished mowing the courtyard, which meant he would soon begin weed-eating. The groundskeeper was supposed to be the one who kept up with the lawn, but the school no longer had a groundskeeper. It was all up to Harold now. Grimes was partly surprised that the school had been smart enough to keep Harold employed – and then realized that if the school let him go there would be no one left to vacuum the President’s office. Perhaps there was a method to Harris’ madness.

Brad spoke up. “But you don’t have any of the originals, right? Sure, you have some old copies. But how can you know they’re the same as the originals? For all you know the Bible has changed tremendously over the millennia. There’s no telling what it might have originally said.”

Professor Grimes shook his head. “One

of the unique things about the Bible is that we know your argument is *not* true. Unlike all other known books from the ancient world, the Bible has *not* changed throughout the course of history. If you look at, say, records from two different periods in ancient Egypt, you can see that the same document underwent dramatic changes over the course of a thousand years. Clauses changed, text was left out, and different text was added. However, when we apply that same test to the Bible we find that it *remains consistent*. The Dead Sea Scrolls were a thousand years older than any other known copy of the Old Testament. Despite that thousand-year gap, the two documents *were the same*. They were word-for-word identical in more than 95% of the text, and the remaining 5% consisted of variations in spelling and obvious slips of the pen.¹⁴ In a thousand years the Bible *had not changed* – and the reason was because God preserved it.

“But that is not the only argument in its

¹⁴ *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, Archer, p23-25

favor. The *accuracy* of the Bible is also phenomenal. If you take an apologetics or history course – which I highly recommend – you will study this in great detail. It's true that there are some things the Bible says that cannot be tested. For example, there is the statement that Jesus will return. That is a prophecy about the future, and the only way to test statements about the future is to wait and see what happens. However, the Bible also contains a great many statements that *can* be tested. The Bible talks about the reign of kings, the territory of nations, the existence of cities, and so forth, all of which can be put to a historical test to see if it is right or wrong. Interestingly, *none* of these testable statements have ever been found to be in error.¹⁵ Instead we find that whenever we *can* test what the Bible says, we find that the Bible is telling us the truth. Even proper names are transmitted with incredible accuracy.¹⁶ Since the Bible is accurate in all places where it *can*

¹⁵ *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, Geisler, p52

¹⁶ *A Scientific Investigation of the Old Testament*, Wilson, p64, 71

be tested, it makes a lot of sense to believe it in the areas where it *can't* be tested."

Wally spoke up. "But the Bible is full of errors. They're everywhere."

"You are quite wrong," the professor replied. "Throughout the centuries people have tried very, very hard to find errors, and they utterly failed. Historians once claimed there never was a Sargon, and they were proven wrong. They claimed the Hittites never existed, and they were proven wrong. They claimed the Bible exaggerated the size of David's kingdom, and they were proven wrong. They claimed there never was a Belshazzar, and they were proven wrong. They said Sodom and Gomorrah were myths, and they were proven wrong. Time and time again the archaeological record has proven the naysayers wrong and has upheld the Biblical account.¹⁷"

Professor Grimes paused a moment to gather his thoughts. "What I am trying to say is that there are many excellent reasons to

¹⁷ *Evidence for Christianity*, Josh McDowell, p136-

trust the Bible. People today speak of ‘blind faith’, as if it is somehow a noble thing to trust something simply because you feel like trusting it. However, we don’t have to have blind faith in the Bible. There is excellent evidence to support its claims.”

Iris spoke up. “But we’re supposed to have faith. Without faith it is impossible to please God.”

Professor Grimes smiled. “Yes, that is true, but consider this: ‘faith’ is just another word for ‘trust’. What God wants us to do is trust Him and trust His Word. Now, if God had wanted to He could have simply said ‘Here is the Bible; you just have to take my word for it.’ He could have asked us to trust it simply because He said so – but that’s not what He did. Instead He has given us many proofs to validate the Bible. We have discussed a few of these proofs today, but there are countless others.

“The point is that faith in God is a very *reasonable* choice to make. We have a lot of solid, intelligent reasons for believing that the Bible hasn’t been corrupted. It is actually logical and rational to believe that the Bible is

accurate, is inspired by God, is inerrant, and has been preserved.”

The professor glanced at his watch. “Well, class, it looks like that’s all the time we have for today. In our next class we will have the first exam of the semester. It will cover everything we have discussed so far, so be prepared.”

The class groaned. “There’s a test already?” Rob asked.

“It’s shocking, isn’t it?” Grimes remarked. “Can you believe that the information in the syllabus I handed you was accurate, and that the exams are happening precisely when I said they would happen? Could life get any more scandalous than that?”

Brad spoke up. “It’s way too soon to have a test. We haven’t covered that much material.”

Professor Grimes smiled. “Then this should be an easy test, shouldn’t it?”

“What kind of test is it going to be?” Rob asked. “Essay? Multiple choice? True or false?”

“Is this a big part of our grade?” Brad asked.

Wally spoke up. “Can you give us the

answers in advance? And can you write them down for me? I don't like taking notes."

Professor Grimes sighed. "I have already given you the answers, Wally. My lectures have covered everything that will be on the test. In fact, the whole idea behind the tests is to *see if you have mastered the material in the lectures*.

"As far as the other questions go, why don't you *read the syllabus and find out*? You would be amazed to discover what you can learn by reading the handouts I've given you! Amazingly enough, I did *not* print those documents and give them to you for the sole purpose of massacring entire forests. Those pieces of paper are intended to *communicate something*. That's why they've got all those words on them. Try *reading* them and see what happens. Class dismissed!"