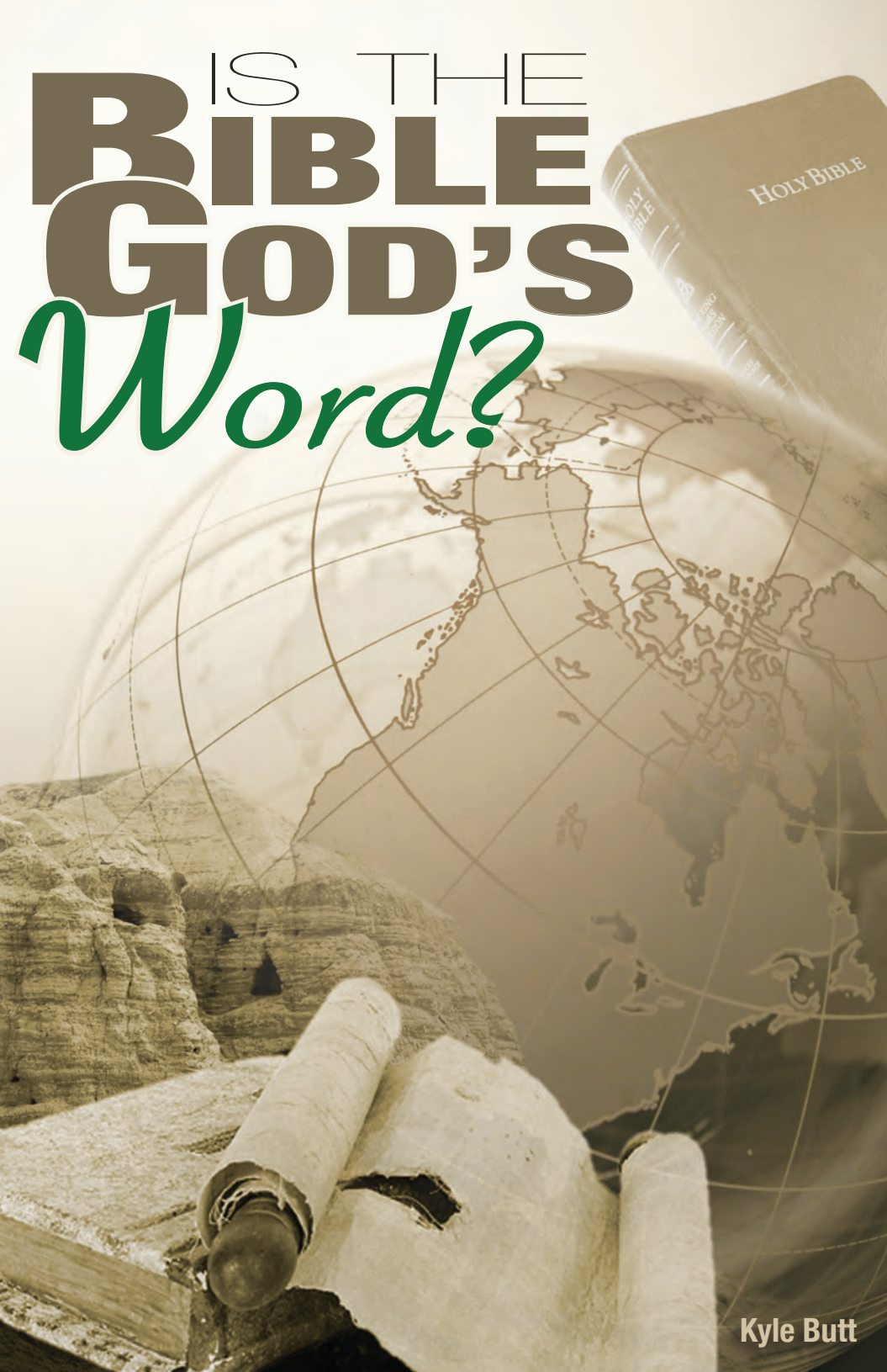
IS THE BIBLE GOD'S *Word?*



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IS THE BIBLE GOD'S *Word?*

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CHAPTER 1

THE BIBLE'S CLAIM OF INSPIRATION

The Bible is far and away the most popular book that has ever been printed. It has been translated in whole or in part into over 2,000 different languages.[1] The Bible was one of the first books mass produced on Gutenberg's printing press in 1455.[2] In a single year over 585 million Bibles or sections of the Bible were distributed worldwide by the United Bible Society alone.[3] To estimate a total number of Bibles and portions of it that have been produced and distributed worldwide throughout history would be virtually impossible, but the number stands well over tens of billions, since the United Bible Society alone has distributed over nine billion since 1947.[4] Without dispute, the Bible is the best-selling book of all time.[5] About 90% of American households have at least one copy of the Bible.

In truth, the Bible has smashed every statistical record ever devised in regard to numbers published, printed, and distributed. The Bible has proven itself to be a timeless resource that crosses all geographic and generational barriers. For hundreds of years, witnesses in judicial proceedings have sworn (or affirmed) to tell the truth with their right hands on the Bible. More Bible verses have been quoted by United States Presidents in their public speeches than all other books combined.

The Bible speaks to the deepest yearnings of mankind, answers the most difficult philosophical questions, and comforts the most downtrodden spirits. The practical, every-day advice from this magnificent book has been the foundation for countless best-selling self-help books and seminars.

Why is the Bible so popular and pervasive? The primary reason given in response to this question is that the Bible is God's Word. Millions of people print, purchase, read, and reread the Bible because they believe that the book they are reading is actually a product of the one true God.

Oftentimes, when people are asked to prove that the Bible is from God, they offer as "proof" the fact that the Bible **claims** to be from God. Anyone who reads the Bible cannot help but be impressed with the fact that the Bible is replete with statements that suggest that it is a product from God. Second Timothy 3:16 states: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God...." In fact, were a person to search the entire Bible, he or she would discover that it contains approximately 3,000 instances that claim inspiration. A quick perusal of the Old Testament book of Jeremiah uncovers the fact that, in this one book, inspiration is claimed over 500 times by the use of such phrases as: "Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying" (1:4; 2:1); "Hear the word of the Lord" (2:4); "The Lord said also to me" (3:6); "For thus says the Lord to the men of Judah and Jerusalem" (4:3); "Says the Lord" (5:19). This list of inspiration claims in the book of Jeremiah could literally fill several pages. Other books such as Isaiah, Ezekiel, Psalms, and Micah, to name a few, are similarly packed with such claims.

New Testament writers, as well, insist that their writings are not the product of human invention, but

instead are the work of God. In writing to the Thessalonians, Paul stated: "For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, **but as it is in truth, the word of God**, which also effectively works in you who believe" (1 Thessalonians 2:13). Similar sentiments flowed from Paul's pen in his first letter to the Corinthians, in which he wrote: "If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 14:37). The apostle Peter also attributed inspirational status to the writings of Paul when he included Paul's writings in connection with the "rest of the Scriptures" (2 Peter 3:16). Peter further included the commandments of the apostles in with the words "which were spoken before by the holy prophets" as inspired commandments and teachings (2 Peter 3:1-3). It certainly cannot be denied that the Bible **claims** to be inspired by God.

Yet, even though one would expect to find that any book truly produced by God would claim such inspiration, such a claim does not necessarily prove anything. It is a **necessary** trait of inspiration, but it is not a **sufficient** trait. Several other books claim to be inspired by God, but are contradictory to the books found in the Bible, and can be proven to be inaccurate and deficient in multiple categories.[6] Just because a book or particular writing claims inspiration is not positive proof of its inspiration. Any person could stand in front of an audience and claim to be the president of the United States of America. In fact, he could fill many hours claiming such to be the case in a multitude of diverse ways. But his multiple claims to the presidency would utterly fail

to prove his case unless he could provide more adequate and sufficient evidence for his claim.

Sadly, most of those individuals who consider themselves to be Christians have never taken their defense of the Bible past the statement that it claims to be God's Word. When asked why they believe that the Bible is God's Word, they site passages like 2 Timothy 3:16-17 or 2 Peter 1:20-21 and insist that the case is closed. When they are shown that such does not sufficiently prove the Bible's inspiration, they often are at a loss for additional evidence that verifies the Bible's divine origin.

In fact, when confronted with the fact that biblical claims of inspiration are insufficient proof, many Christians say that the Bible's inspiration must be accepted by "faith." By the term "faith," most people in the religious world mean the acceptance of the claim without sufficient evidence to prove it. Even *Webster's Dictionary* gives one definition of faith as a "firm belief in something for which there is no proof."[7] To accept this idea, however, lands the adherent in complete confusion. If one is to accept the Bible's inspiration by "faith" (without adequate evidence), what would stop the Mormon practitioner from demanding that the *Book of Mormon* and *The Pearl of Great Price* should be considered inspired based on "faith"? The same could be said for the Quran, Hindu Vedas, and several other writings that claim inspiration. If "by faith" is meant that adequate evidence is not necessary to establish the claim, then any book in the world could be considered inspired "by faith."

In most instances, when a person says that the Bible's inspiration should be accepted by "faith" (without supporting evidence), that person believes that he is recapitulating the Bible's own statements regarding the necessity of having faith (see Hebrews 11:6). The

problem lies, however, in the discordant definitions of faith. The biblical definition of faith never has embodied the idea of accepting or believing something without adequate evidence. On the contrary, when Bible writers demand "faith" from their readers, they are demanding that the readers draw only those conclusions that are warranted by the evidence.

The showdown between Elijah and the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel provides the perfect case-in-point (1 Kings 18:20-40). Elijah had summoned Ahab and all the people of Israel to Mount Carmel. He then said to the multitude of people, "How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow Him" (18:21). Elijah then proposed a contest in which the 450 prophets of Baal would be given a bull and he would be given one as well. Each "team" would be allowed to put the bull on an altar prepared for a sacrifice. No fire, however, would be given to either group. It was the responsibility of Baal or Jehovah God to produce fire. The God who sent fire from heaven would be the true God and would warrant the worship of the Israelites. The evidence for belief, in this case, was fire coming from heaven. The prophets of Baal begged for fire, but none was forthcoming. Elijah prayed for fire to consume his sacrifice and that is exactly what happened (18:37-38). The people present at this showdown then concluded, "The Lord, He is God!" (18:39).

This account concerning Elijah is not interjected in this book as a proof of biblical inspiration. It is rather introduced as evidence that those who wrote the Bible never asked their readers to believe in God, or the authenticity of His Word (which they were writing and speaking), **without adequate evidence**.

The Bible writers insisted that their writings were not based on imaginary, nonverifiable people and events, but were instead grounded on solid, verifiable facts. The apostle Peter, in his second epistle, wrote: "For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty" (1:16). In a similar statement, the apostle John insisted: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life.... [T]hat which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us" (1 John 1:1,3).

When Luke wrote his account of the Gospel of Christ, he specifically and intentionally crafted his introduction to ensure that his readers understood that his account was historical and factual:

> Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed (Luke 1:1-4).

In a similar line of reasoning, Luke included in his introduction to the book of Acts the idea that Jesus "presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3).

In addition, when the apostle Paul argued the case that Jesus Christ had truly been raised from the dead, he wrote that the resurrected Jesus

> was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time (1 Corinthians 15:5-8).

This handful of verses reveals that the Bible writers insisted with conviction that their writings were not mythical, but were indeed based on factual events. Furthermore, they specifically documented many proofs that could be assessed to determine the accuracy of their statements. The evidence is overwhelming that the Bible writers understood and insisted that their information was accurate and factual, and should be accepted, not based on a lack of evidence or a "leap in the dark," but instead based on an abundance of documentable, verifiable proof. Having dismissed, then, the idea that the Bible's inspiration should be accepted by "faith" (without adequate evidence), it will be the purpose of the remainder of this book to supply such evidence as would lead an unbiased, honest observer to the conclusion that the Bible is the product of a divine Mind.

ENDNOTES

[1] "About the Bible" (2005), http://www.ibs.org/bibles/about/19.php.

[2] "Johann Gutenberg" (2006), http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johann_Gutenberg.

[3] "Worldwide Scripture" (1999), http://www.biblesociety.org/wr_340/sdr_1998.htm.

[4] "God Facts" (no date), http://www.wwj.org.nz/gfacts.php.

[5] "Best Selling Author Worldwide" (2002), http://answers.google.com/answers/threadview?id=14.

[6] Dave Miller (2005), *The Quran Unveiled* (Montgomery, AL: Apologetics Press), https://apologeticspress.org/user_file/Quran-w.pdf.

[7] "Faith" (2006), *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, http://www.m-w.com/dictionary/Faith.

CHAPTER 2

DEFINING INSPIRATION

One of the first steps that must be taken in any discussion is to identify key terms and define them. Since the term "inspiration" is obviously one of the key terms in this discussion, what does it mean? The word is defined by *Merriam-Webster* as: "a divine influence or action on a person believed to qualify him or her to receive and communicate sacred revelation."[1] When the New Testament writer, Peter, discussed inspiration, he noted that "holy men of God spoke **as they were moved** by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). The English Standard Version translates the phrase "carried along." In 1 Thessalonians, Paul commented that the Word he was speaking was not the word of men, "but as it is in truth, the word of God" (1 Thessalonians 2:13). Inspiration, then, means that the actual human writers were "carried" or "moved" by the divine Author to communicate His message.

FURTHER NARROWING OF THE DEFINITION OF BIBLICAL INSPIRATION

The idea that the holy men of God were moved by the Holy Spirit must yet be qualified further. Did these men communicate ideas in their own words? Did they include additional information from their own ideas?

Is the entire Bible inspired, or does it contain certain non-inspired sections as well? These questions and others similar to them hinge on the biblical definition of "inspiration."

Verbal Inspiration

Several times in the Bible, an argument is made by one of the writers or speakers that hinges on the accuracy of a single word in the biblical text. For instance, when Paul wrote to the Galatians, he tried to show them that Christ was the Seed of Abraham through Whom the entire world would be blessed. Paul stated: "Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, 'And to seeds,' as of many, but as of one, 'And to your Seed,' who is Christ" (3:16). Paul's entire argument rests on the fact that the Old Testament passage he is quoting has the word "seed" in the singular form and not the plural form. From this fact, it is evident that Paul considered even such a minor difference in the number of a noun as an important, inspired (divinely ordered) difference that could be trusted and used as evidence.

In a similar way, Jesus made arguments based on word order or tense. On one occasion, the Sadducees approached Jesus in an attempt to trap Him in His words. Since they did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, they posed a scenario which they thought was sure to catch Jesus in some type of error. They presented the case of a woman who had seven husbands during the course of her life. "In the resurrection," they asked, "whose wife of the seven will she be?" Jesus proceeded to explain to them that they did not understand the Scriptures or the power of God. In the resurrection, humans would neither marry nor be married. As evidence of the reality of life after death, Jesus quoted a section of Scripture from Exodus 3, in which God stated: "I am

the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Jesus then concluded that "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living" (Matthew 22:23-33). How could Jesus conclude that God is the God of the living, even though Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had been dead for many years prior to God's conversation with Moses?

The answer lies in the tense of the verb recorded in the text. God did not say "I was" the God of Abraham, or "I will be" the God of Isaac. God stated that at the present "I am" the God of these patriarchs, meaning that even though their earthly lives had ended, they continued to exist and God continued to be their God.[2] From these two instances, it is clear that not only are the ideas of the Bible writers inspired, but even the very words used were a product of divine guidance–down to the tense of a verb or number of a noun.

Verbal, inspiration does not imply divine dictation in which the writers were nothing more than human typewriters. In fact, anyone familiar with the Bible can bring to mind several instances in which an individual writer's personal writing style or unique experiences are recorded. For instance, in the book of Philippians, Paul made several allusions to personal interactions that he enjoyed with the Philippians. He mentioned that their messenger, Epaphroditus, had safely arrived with the gift sent by the church there. Furthermore, Paul noted several helpers who had done a part to aid him in furthering the Gospel, including Euodia, Syntyche, and Clement. Obviously, Paul's interactions with these people were real and personal. Verbal inspiration does not mean that the writers could never include personal information or unique writing style. It does mean that the Holy Spirit guided the writers to include only the information that would be relevant to the gospel

message in some way, and only in the words permitted by the Holy Spirit.

Complete Inspiration

Another paramount aspect of biblical inspiration is the idea that the Bible contains the entire Word of God, without additional, humanly devised material. This was Peter's point when he wrote that "no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation [or origin–KB]" (2 Peter 1:20). It is not the case that the Bible **contains** the Word of God, or that His Word must be filtered out from other, non-inspired material inserted by the Bible writers. Paul stated that "**all** Scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Timothy 3:16). According to the biblical idea of inspiration, the Bible, in its entirety, is the Word of God. The psalmist wrote: "The entirety of Your word is truth, and every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever" (Psalm 119:160).

Many modern liberal scholars have suggested that some parts of the Bible are not the product of divine inspiration, but instead are simply human opinions or stories inserted by the Bible writers to make the book more interesting or relevant. This type of thinking lands the adherent in a hopeless mess. Which parts of Scripture, then, are to be taken as inspired and which are to be deemed as human invention? One quickly realizes that the answer to that question basically consists of the idea that whatever information the liberal scholar likes or agrees with happens to be inspired, and what he or she does not like "must be" human invention. In truth, the biblical definition of "inspiration" includes the idea that all Scripture is inspired, and that the Bible writers did not "insert" anything into the text on their own.

The idea of "complete" (or plenary) inspiration can also entail the concept that the Bible is all that is now needed in order for a human to understand God's will. In John 16, Jesus informed His apostles that He had many things to tell them that they simply were not yet ready to handle. He then promised to send "the Spirit of truth" Who would guide them "into all truth" (16:13). On another occasion, Jesus encouraged His apostles to be aware that they would be delivered up to leaders who would abuse them and persecute them. When this happened, Jesus instructed the men not to "worry about how or what you should speak, for it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you" (Matthew 10:19-20). In Acts 1:25-2:4, the text records the fact that the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles and they immediately were "moved" to preach the Word of God. Throughout the book of Acts, the apostles and other inspired men made statements, preached sermons, and wrote epistles that laid out God's plan of salvation for mankind. In one of his epistles, the apostle Peter noted that commandments which were spoken by the apostles were just as authoritative as the words spoken "by the holy prophets" (2 Peter 3:2). Peter further noted that the writings of Paul were inspired and deserved their place alongside "the rest of the Scriptures" (2 Peter 3:16).

According to the New Testament, everything necessary for human salvation has been recorded and included in the Scriptures. Peter verified this statement when he wrote that God's divine power "has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3). Paul's statement to Timothy includes these sentiments as well, since he stated that the Scriptures were enough to make the man of God "complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:17). Furthermore,

Paul noted that even an angel from heaven would be cursed if he preached to the Galatians any other Gospel than the one that they had received (Galatians 1:8-10).

The biblical definition of inspiration, then, is the idea that the Holy Spirit moved the Bible writers to pen the words that He wanted, but allowed them to maintain their own unique style and personal experiences that fit the message. Furthermore, this text is complete in that it is God's Word in its entirety, without additional, uninspired information by the biblical writers. And it is complete in that it contains God's entire plan for human salvation without the need for additional inspired materials. [NOTE: The verbal, plenary inspiration of the Bible applies to the original message that the writers penned in the autographs of their works–an autograph being the actual, original letter or book produced by the Bible writer. The next chapter deals with the transmission of the text from the original autographs to the present.]

ENDNOTES

[1] "Inspiration" (no date), *Merriam-Webster On-line Dictionary*, http://www.m-w.com/dictionary/Inspiration.

[2] The claim that Jesus made arguments based even on the tense of verbs is true. Nevertheless, such a statement needs clarification. Hebrew actually has no past, present, or future tense. Rather, an action is regarded as being either complete or incomplete, and so verbs occur in the Hebrew as perfect or imperfect. No verb occurs in God's statement in Exodus 3:6. Consequently, tense is implied rather than expressed. In this case, the Hebrew grammar would allow any tense of the verb "to be." Jesus, however, clarified the ambiguity inherent in the passage by affirming specifically what God had in mind, which is why Matthew preserved Jesus' use of the **Greek** present tense (*ego eimi*).

CHAPTER 3

HOW WE GOT THE BIBLE

When we open the Bible, we are reading from a catalog of 66 books, some of which were written more than 3,400 hundred years ago. The latest books of the New Testament were completed by 100 A.D., almost 2,000 years ago. How do we know that the original message penned by the writers of the Bible is the message that has been preserved in the Bible that we read today? Members of various world religions have suggested that the text of the Bible might have originally been inspired by God, but that message has been corrupted over the many centuries of copying and transmission. They would suggest that the books we now have may contain some inspired material, but non-inspired material has inevitably seeped into the text.

This allegation that the Bible has not been transmitted accurately, however, simply cannot be honestly upheld in light of the available evidence. In fact, entire books have been written detailing the evidence that verifies the accurate transmission of the biblical text. This chapter will provide a brief overview of such evidence.[1]

Stone

In the past, a medium was needed that could contain written material that would last an extended period of

time. Furthermore, the material needed to be abundant and easily accessible to those who would be using it. Stones provided just such material. The supply of stone was virtually inexhaustible, and information carved into it would be lastingly set and preserved. For these reasons, stone was used in the past as a popular medium for transmitting written messages, including certain portions of the biblical text. Neil Lightfoot notes that the Babylonian code of Hammurabi was engraved in stone. This set of legal codes was written about 1750 B.C. Lightfoot further explains: "The oldest substantial portions of Hebrew writing found in Palestine are also on stone. The best examples of these are the Gezer Calendar and the Siloam inscription."[2] Other famous stone inscriptions include such archaeological treasures as the Rosetta stone, which was discovered in 1799. This remarkable discovery was instrumental in deciphering the ancient Egyptian language of hieroglyphics.[3]

When we turn to the biblical text, we find that certain portions of the Old Testament, such as the Ten Commandments, were engraved in stone. Exodus 34:1 states: "And the Lord said to Moses, 'Cut two tablets of stone like the first ones, and I will write on these tablets the words that were on the first tablets.'" In addition, Moses instructed the elders of Israel to gather stones, whitewash them, and "write very plainly on the stones all the words of this law" (Deuteronomy 27:8).

Naturally, however, stone writing tablets would have inherent qualities that would pose difficulties for scribes. First, stone would be very heavy and would not be easily transported. It would do well for sedentary inscription, but messages that required more mobility would be difficult to transport. Furthermore, the chiseling process often used to inscribe stone was arduous

and time consuming. In addition, the inflexible nature of stone resulted in the destruction of many tablets by shattering–as is recorded in Exodus 32:19. For these reasons, ancient people looked for other materials on which to write.

Clay

Since stone often required considerable time to engrave, the ancients turned to a medium that could be engraved more quickly–clay. Clay possessed many qualities that made it suitable writing material. It was common, inexpensive, and easy to engrave. Furthermore, once the clay dried, the words engraved in it became permanently set. Multiplied thousands of ancient writings have been discovered carved into clay. In 1879, Hormoz Rasam discovered a now-famous clay cylinder (about nine inches long), upon which King Cyrus had inscribed his victory over the city of Babylon and his policy toward the nations he had captured.[4] Researchers have uncovered significant clay seals called bullae that contained the names of certain biblical characters.[5] And in 1876, archaeologist Hugo Winkler helped discover an enormous cache of more than 10,000 clay tablets describing the life and times of the Hittite nation.[6] In addition, the prophet Ezekiel mentioned a clay tablet in 4:1: "You also, son of man, take a clay tablet and lay it before you, and portray on it a city, Jerusalem."

Although clay possessed several excellent traits that made it suitable for writing, it had drawbacks. Once dried, the text of clay could not easily be adjusted and the clay could not be reused. Furthermore, dried clay tablets could be quite brittle and would often break. In addition, since it is quite heavy, clay tablets or cylinders were not easy to transport.

Papyrus

Near shallow lakes and rivers grew a tall reed called papyrus. It especially grew by the Nile River in Egypt. The ancient people would harvest this hollow reed, slit it down the middle, and roll it out flat. Then they would glue the flattened reeds together. After gluing many of the reeds together, a rock was used to smooth the surface of the papyrus so that it could be written on like modern paper. The ink, made from plants or dyes, would be applied to the finished sheet using a sharp stick, quill, or other "pen-like" instrument. Miller and Huber explain that papyrus was one of the world's first inexpensive, durable writing mediums.[7] In fact, many of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the oldest scrolls that contain portions of the Old Testament, were composed of papyrus.[8]

During the New Testament times, most of the manuscripts of New Testament books were papyrus documents. Lightfoot notes: "The popularity of papyrus spread from Egypt to surrounding countries, and its use was so general that it became the universal medium for the making of books in Greece and Rome. We are quite sure that the letters and books of the New Testament were written at first on papyrus."[9]

With the use of papyrus, much information could be carried at one time (unlike the use of clay and stone). Also, if a person dropped a papyrus scroll, it did not crack and break. Writing on papyrus was not difficult either; it did not take hours to engrave and dry. With all the advantages that came with the use of papyrus, certain disadvantages also presented themselves. Papyrus decayed easily and usually would not last as long as clay or stone. Much like paper, if it fell into water or if it was exposed to rain, it would be ruined. The advantages, however, far outweighed the disadvantages, and

papyrus became a significant medium by which the New Testament documents were originally transmitted.

Leather

Parchment and vellum are the names given to animal skins that were used as "paper." These animal skins would be dried and polished with a stone. Sometimes the ancient writers dyed the skins purple and used gold ink to write on them. Leather was lightweight, did not decay as quickly as papyrus, and could be produced by anyone in the world (not just people who lived by the Nile). Because of its superior durability, the Jews stipulated in the Talmud that the Torah was to be copied onto animal skin.[10] Several of the most important New Testament manuscripts are composed of vellum. The Vatican manuscript, a "rare gem" in that it "contains in Greek almost all of the Old and New Testaments," is written on 759 leaves of fine vellum.[11] The Sinaitic manuscript, another extremely important New Testament document, is composed of 393 leaves of vellum.[12]

Of course, other materials were used in the ancient past to transcribe information. Wood, ivory, bone, pottery, and shells are but a few of these additional materials. But the ones mentioned in this chapter were the most popular forms of writing materials upon which important aspects of the Bible's transmission have depended.

OLD TESTAMENT TRANSMISSION

Moses began to write the first books of the Old Testament almost 3,500 years ago. All of the original documents that Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the other Old Testament writers produced have been lost or destroyed. We have only copies of their writings. How do we know that the original books were copied correctly? Can we

be sure that the book of Genesis that we read in the 21st century is the same book that God inspired Moses to write 3,500 years ago? Yes, we can be sure that the Old Testament we read today has been copied accurately.

Serious Scribes

Although scribes are mentioned in the Bible as far back as 1,000 B.C. (Samuel 8:17), history records three general periods of Jewish scribal tradition: (1) the period of Sopherim (from Ezra until c. A.D. 200); (2) the Talmudic period (A.D. 100 to 500); and (3) the period of the Massoretes (c. 500 to 950).[13] Jewish copyists were aware of the importance of their work and took it very seriously. Infinitely more important than students copying spelling words, cooks copying recipes, or secretaries copying a boss's memo, scribes believed that they were copying the Word of God. Even the important work of medical transcriptionists cannot compare with the copyists of old. McGarvey noted how copyists in the Talmudic period "adopted for themselves very minute regulations to preserve the purity of the sacred text."[14]

Later, the Massoretes took even more stringent steps to insure top-quality manuscripts. With a deep reverence for the Scriptures, they went above and beyond the "call of duty," laboring under ultra-strict rules in order to make the most accurate copies possible. In his *Introduction to the Old Testament*, Professor R.K. Harrison addressed the approach of the Massoretes to the Scriptures and their professionalism, saying:

> They concerned themselves with the transmission of the consonantal text as they had received it [Hebrew has no vowels–KB], as well as with its pronunciation, on the basis that the text itself was inviolable and every consonant sacred.
>
> The detailed statistical work that the Massoretes undertook on each book included the counting of verses,

> words, and letters, establishing the middle of the book (a procedure which was useful in the case of bifid, or two-part, compositions) noting peculiarities of style, and other similar matters.[15]

By taking such precautions in the copying of letters, words, and verses (by sections and books), it could be known if a word or letter had been omitted or added. Indeed, as Eddie Hendrix affirmed: "Such minute checks contributed to a high degree of copying accuracy."[16] No other group of ancient copyists is more renowned than those of the Old Testament.

The Dead Sea Scrolls

The Dead Sea Scrolls make up one of the greatest archaeological discoveries of all time. In 1947, a number of ancient documents were found by accident in a cave on the northwest side of the Dead Sea.[17] This collection of documents, which has become known as the Dead Sea Scrolls, was comprised of old leather and papyrus scrolls and fragments that had been rolled up in earthen jars for centuries. From 1949 to 1956, hundreds of Hebrew and Aramaic manuscripts and a few Greek fragments were found in surrounding caves, and are believed by scholars to have been written between 200 B.C. and the first half of the first century A.D. Some of the manuscripts were of Jewish apocryphal and pseudepigraphical writings (e.g., 1 Enoch, Tobit, and Jubilees); others are often grouped together as "ascetic" writings (miscellaneous books of rules, poetry, commentary, etc.). The most notable and pertinent group of documents found in the caves of Qumran near the Dead Sea is the collection of Old Testament books. Every book from the Hebrew Bible was accounted for among the scrolls except the book of Esther.

The Dead Sea Scrolls serve as strong evidence for the integrity of the Old Testament text. Prior to 1947, the earliest known Old Testament manuscripts dated only to about A.D. 1000. With the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, Bible scholars have been able to compare the present-day text with the text from more than 2,000 years ago. Textual critics have found that these ancient copies of Old Testament books are amazingly similar to the Massoretic text. Indeed, they serve as proof that the Old Testament text has been transmitted faithfully through the centuries. As Rene Paché concluded: "Since it can be demonstrated that the text of the Old Testament was accurately transmitted for the last 2,000 years, one may reasonably suppose that it had been so transmitted from the beginning."[18]

En-Gedi Scrolls

One astounding fact about the Bible's transmission is that new information continues to come to light, bolstering an already irrefutable case for the Bible's inspiration. One such discovery was made in 1970 near the area where the Dead Sea scrolls were found. A group of scrolls known as the En-Gedi scrolls came to light, but were badly damaged by fire and were unreadable with the technology available at the time.[19] While the dating methods used to date the scrolls are not completely reliable, experts place the date of the writing near 300 A.D. That means the scrolls predate the Masoretic Text from which the King James Version was translated by about 500 years.

By using technology known as volume cartology, computer scientist Brent Seales and others were able to "map" the text and identify the writing. When they did, they found an ancient Hebrew text that coincided

perfectly with the Masoretic Text of Leviticus 1:1-8. Newitz wrote:

> What's incredible about these chapters, according to archaeologist Emanuel Tov, is that they are virtually identical to the medieval Masoretic Text, written hundreds of years later. The En-Gedi scroll even duplicates the exact paragraph breaks seen later in the medieval Hebrew. The only difference between the two is that ancient Hebrew had no vowels, so these were added in the Middle Ages.[20]

Were this situation to have occurred with some other ancient text (such as the Quran or even the texts of ancient writers such as Herodotus or Thucydides), scholars would hail the event as unprecedented. In truth, however, this is a " run-of-the-mill" normal occurrence for the biblical text.

Emanuel Tov went on to say this about the En-Gedi text: "[It is] 100 percent identical with the medieval texts, both in its consonants and in its paragraph divisions.... [T]he scroll brings us the good news that the ancient source of the medieval text did not change for 2,000 years." Newitz added, "In other words, the Jewish community managed to retain some of the exact wording in passages from their biblical texts over centuries, despite massive cultural upheavals and changes to their languages."[21] Indeed, such text preservation is unparalleled when compared to all other ancient documents in the world.

NEW TESTAMENT TRANSMISSION

Over 1,900 years ago, God inspired the writers of the New Testament to pen their books and letters. The actual letters and books written by these men are known as "autographs." Some may wonder how Christians can be confident that we have God's Word today, when the original autographs are no longer available for our view-

ing. How can one know the Truth, if the Truth comes from copies of copies of copies of the autographs, many of which contain various transcriptional errors? Should we simply give up and declare that attempts at finding the Truth are futile?

It is highly unreasonable to think that truths can be learned only from autographs. Learning and forming beliefs based on reliable copies of various written documents, objects, etc. is a way of life. To conclude that a driver in a particular state could not learn to drive adequately without having in hand the **original** driving manual produced by the state years earlier is absurd. To assert that no one could measure the length of one yard without having the standard yard in hand from the National Institute of Standards and Technology is ridiculous. Even if the standard yard was lost, the millions of copies of the yard in existence today would be sufficient in finding (or measuring) exactly what a yard is. Consider the example McGarvey used of an autograph, which eventually was destroyed.

> A gentleman left a large estate entailed to his descendants of the third generation, and it was not to be divided until a majority of them should be of age. During the interval many copies of the will were circulated among parties interested, many of these being copies of copies. In the meantime the office of record in which the original was filed was burned with all its contents. When the time for division drew near, a prying attorney gave out among the heirs the report that no two existing copies were alike. This alarmed them all and set them busily at work to ascertain the truth of the report. On comparing copy with copy they found the report true, but on close inspection it was discovered that the differences consisted in errors in spelling or grammatical construction; some mistakes in figures corrected by the written numbers; and some other differences not easily accounted for; but that in none of the copies did these mistakes affect the rights of the heirs. In the essential matters for which the will

> was written the representations of all the copies were precisely the same. The result was that they divided the estate with perfect satisfaction to all, and they were more certain that they had executed the will of their grandfather than if the original copy had been alone preserved; for it might have been tampered with in the interest of a single heir; but the copies, defective though they were, could not have been.[22]

Every day, all around the world, individuals, groups, businesses, schools, etc. operate with the conviction that autographs are unnecessary to learn the truths within them. Copies of wills, articles, and books can be gathered, inspected, and scrutinized until new copies are published that are virtually identical to the original. "[A]ccurate communication is possible despite technical mistakes in copying."[23] So it is with the Bible.

The New Testament Evidence Compared to Other Ancient Books

How does the New Testament measure up when it is compared to other ancient writings? F.F. Bruce examined much of the evidence surrounding this question in his book, *The New Testament Documents–Are They Reliable?* As he and other writers[24] have noted, there are approximately 5,800 manuscripts of the Greek New Testament in existence today, in whole or in part, that serve to corroborate the accuracy of the New Testament. The best manuscripts of the New Testament are dated at roughly A.D. 350, the most important of these being the Codex Vaticanus, "the chief treasure of the Vatican Library in Rome," the Codex Sinaiticus, which was purchased by the British from the Soviet government in 1933, and the Codex Alexandrinus.[25] Additionally, the Chester Beatty papyri, made public in 1931, contain eleven codices, three of which contain most of the New Testament (including the gospel accounts). Two of

these codices boast a date in the first half of the third century, while the third is dated in the last half of the same century.[26] The John Rylands Library claims even earlier evidence. A papyrus codex containing parts of John 18 dates to the time of Hadrian, who reigned from A.D. 117 to 138.[27]

The available evidence makes it clear that the gospel accounts were accepted as authentic by the close of the second century.[28] They were complete (or substantially complete) before A.D. 100, with many of the writings circulating 20-40 years before the close of the first century.[29] Linton remarked concerning the gospel accounts: "A fact known to all who have given any study at all to this subject is that these books were quoted, listed, catalogued, harmonized, cited as authority by different writers, Christian and Pagan, right back to the time of the apostles."[30]

Such an assessment is absolutely correct. In fact, the New Testament enjoys far more historical documentation than any other volume ever known. There are only 643 copies of Homer's *Iliad*, which is undeniably the most famous book of ancient Greece. No one doubts the text of Julius Caesar's *Gallic Wars*, but we have only ten copies of it, the earliest of which was made 1,000 years after it was written. To have such abundance of copies for the New Testament from within 70 years of their writing is nothing short of amazing.[31]

In his work, *The New Testament Documents–Are They Reliable?*, Bruce offered more astounding comparisons. Livy (59 B.C.–A.D. 17) wrote 142 books of Roman history, of which a mere 35 survive. The 35 known books are made manifest due to some 20 manuscripts, only one of which is as old as the fourth century. The *History of Thucydides*, another well-known ancient work, is depen-

dent upon only eight manuscripts, the oldest of these being dated about A.D. 900 (along with a few papyrus manuscripts dated at the beginning of the Christian era). *The History of Herodotus* finds itself in a similar situation. "Yet no classical scholar would listen to an argument that the authenticity of Herodotus or Thucydides is in doubt because the earliest MSS [manuscripts–KB] of their works which are of any use to us are over 1,300 years later than the originals."[32] Bruce thus declared: "It is a curious fact that historians have often been much readier to trust the New Testament records than have many theologians."[33]

Early Patristic Writers

Many of us have listened to a preacher talk about the Bible. Sometimes, that preacher might quote a certain biblical passage. In order to quote the passage, he had to have read it or heard it sometime in the past. In the same way, there were many ancient preachers who quoted the Bible, just like preachers do today. These early preachers lived only a few years after the Bible was written, and they quoted from it quite often. For instance, Ignatius, who lived from A.D. 70-110, quoted from the books of Matthew, Acts, Romans, and several others. Another man, Polycarp, lived from A.D. 70-156. In chapter four of a letter he wrote to people who lived in Philippi, Polycarp stated that "the love of money is the root of all evils" (cf. 1 Timothy 6:10) and that "we brought nothing into the world, so we can carry nothing out" (cf. 1 Timothy 6:7). In chapter five of the same letter he wrote, "God is not mocked" (cf. Galatians 6:7). Later in chapter seven, he said: "For whosoever does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is antichrist" (cf. 1 John 4:3).

Justin Martyr, another early "church father" who lived from approximately A.D. 100 to 165, quoted large sections of the New Testament. In his *First Apology*, chapter 15 opens with this quote: "Whosoever looketh upon a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart before God" (cf. Matthew 5:28). And, "If thy right eye offend thee, cut it out; for it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of heaven with one eye, than, having two eyes, to be cast into everlasting fire" (cf. Matthew 5:29).

Irenaeus (A.D. 130-202), in *Against Heresies*, book 1, chapter 8, quoted Paul as saying, "and last of all, He appeared to me also, as to one born out of due time" (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:8). And in the same chapter, he quoted Jesus (cf. Matthew 26:39) as saying, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me."[34]

The list of names and quotes could go on for several pages. After researching the church fathers and their texts for several years, the eminent New Testament scholar, Bruce Metzger, wrote: "Indeed, so extensive are these citations that if all other sources for our knowledge of the text of the New Testament were destroyed, they would be sufficient alone in reconstructing practically the entire New Testament."[35]

If the ancient preachers who lived between A.D. 70-200 quoted extensively from the New Testament, it means that the New Testament had to be complete, already circulating among the Christians, and accepted as Scripture before they quoted it. It also means that we can compare the New Testament that we read in the 21st century to the quotes that such preachers produced in those early years. What we find when we compare the two is that they are virtually identical. As Linton correctly observed: "There is no room for question that

the records of the words and acts of Jesus of Galilee came from the pens of the men who, with John, wrote what they had 'heard' and 'seen' and their hands had 'handled of the Word of life.'"[36]

CONCLUSION

The transmission of the Bible has been scrutinized and critically considered more than any ancient book in human history. The evidence for its faithful transmission has been brought forth in such a forceful way that any honest person who has studied it carefully is forced to admit that the message of the Bible in the 21st century is the message that was originally penned by the Bible writers in every relevant respect. Eminent Bible scholar Sir Frederic Kenyon once stated concerning the New Testament's transmission that it is a subject "of which the foundations now stand fast on a firm basis of ascertained historical fact, and on which the superstructure of religion may be built with the full hope and confidence that it rests on an authentic text."[37]

ENDNOTES

1 For a readable, yet scholarly treatment of the subject see Neil Lightfoot's excellent volume *How We Got the Bible,* (2003), (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker). See also Dave Miller, "3 Good Reasons to Believe the Bible Has Not Been Corrupted," Apologetics Press, https://apologeticspress.org/APContent.aspx?article=5196.

2 Lightfoot, p. 13.

3 Paul Wegner (1999), *The Journey from Text to Translations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic), p. 91.

4 Randall Price (1997), *The Stones Cry Out* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House), pp. 251-252.

5 Ibid., pp. 235-237.

[6] Ibid., p. 83.

[7] Stephen M. Miller and Robert V. Huber (2004), *The Bible: A History: The Making and Impact of the Bible* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books), p. 20.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Lightfoot, p. 18.

[10] Ibid., p. 19.

[11] Ibid., p. 38.

[12] Ibid., p. 51.

[13] Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix (1986), *A General Introduction to the Bible* (Chicago, IL: Moody), revised edition, p. 502.

[14] J.W. McGarvey (1886), *Evidences of Christianity* (Cincinnati, OH: Guide Printing), 1:9.

[15] R.K. Harrison (1969), *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), pp. 212-213, parenthetical item in orig.

[16] Eddie Hendrix (1976), "What About Those Copyist Errors?" *Firm Foundation*, 93[14]:5, April 6.

[17] Justin Rogers (2019), "The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Bible," Apologetics Press, https://apologeticspress.org/apPubPage.aspx?pub=1&issue=1307.

[18] Rene Paché (1971), *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), p. 191.

[19] Annalee Newitz, "One of the World's Oldest Biblical Texts Read for the First Time," https://arstechnica.com/science/2016/09/scholars-use-x-rays-to-read-ancient-biblical-text-for-the-first-time/.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

[22] McGarvey, 1:17.

[23] Gleason L. Archer Jr. (1982), *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), p. 29.

[24] Bruce Metzger (1968), *The Text of the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press), p. 36. See also Norman L. Geisler and Ronald M. Brooks (1990), *When Skeptics Ask* (Wheaton, IL: Victor), p. 159.

[25] F.F. Bruce (1953), *The New Testament Documents–Are They Reliable?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), fourth edition, p. 20.

[26] Ibid., p. 21.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Donald Guthrie (1970), *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press), third edition, p. 24.

[29] Bruce, p. 16.

[30] Irwin H. Linton (1943), *A Lawyer Examines the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker), sixth edition, p. 39.

[31] Norman L. Geisler and Ronald M. Brooks (1990), *When Skeptics Ask* (Wheaton, IL: Victor), pp. 159-160.

[32] Bruce, pp. 20-21.

[33] Ibid., p. 19.

[34] For an extensive catalog of the writings of the "church fathers" see Kevin Knight (2002), "The Fathers of the Church," http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/.

[35] Bruce Metzger (1968), *The Text of the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press), p. 86.

[36] Linton, pp. 39-40.

[37] Sir Frederic Kenyon (1951 reprint), *Handbook to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), second edition, p. 369.

CHAPTER 4

THE UNITY OF THE BIBLE

Most people who read the Bible in the 21st century rarely stop to think about the 66 different books that compose the sacred Scriptures. Because the 66 books fit together so perfectly, it is easy to consider them to be one organic unit. The major themes and stories from Genesis, the first book of the Bible, flow through the remaining books, and their meanings and implications are developed throughout the entire biblical library. Because of its seamless unity, few take the time to consider that the 66 books of the Bible were written over a vast period of time by a host of writers. The first five books of the Old Testament were composed by Moses in about 1450 B.C.[1] Revelation, the last book of the New Testament, was written by John, the apostle of Jesus and brother of James, between the years 60-100 A.D.[2] Thus, the composition of the entire library of 66 books spanned some 1,600 years.

During those years, the books of the Bible were penned by approximately 40 men of varying backgrounds, cultures, and educational status. The book of Amos was written by a herdsman from Tekoa (1:1). Many of the Psalms were written by David, the shepherd-boy-turned-king. Ezra, "skilled scribe in the Law of Moses," penned the book that bears his name (7:6). Nehemiah,

the butler to King Artaxerxes, wrote the Old Testament book named for him. King Solomon, renowned in the ancient world for his immense wisdom, penned the majority of the Proverbs and the entire books of Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon. The apostle Paul, a man highly educated at the feet of the Jewish teacher Gamaliel, wrote 13 of the 27 New Testament books. Luke, the first-century physician, penned the gospel account that bears his name as well as the book of Acts. Other New Testament writers included Peter and John who were fishermen with little formal education.

To say that the writers of the Bible were diverse would be an understatement. Yet, though their educational and cultural backgrounds varied extensively, and though many of them were separated by several centuries, the 66 books that compose the Bible fit together perfectly. To achieve such a feat by employing mere human ingenuity and wisdom would be impossible. In fact, it would be impossible from a human standpoint to gather the writings of 40 men from the **same** culture, with the **same** educational background, during the **same** time period, and get anything close to the unity that is evident in the Bible. The Bible's unity is a piece of remarkable evidence that proves its divine origin. The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to showing several different aspects of the Bible's unity. [NOTE: One of the primary examples of the Bible's unity revolves around the Messianic prophecies contained in the Old Testament and their fulfillment in the New Testament. The Messianic theme underlies the entire text of the 66 books of the Bible, and is explored more fully in chapter 10.]

UNITY OF NARRATIVE MATERIAL

Many of the Bible writers used historic narrative to record the events that were pertinent to their particular

writings. Stories such as Noah's ark and the Flood, the ten plagues in Egypt, and Daniel being thrown to the lions are recognized even among those with little Bible knowledge. A systematic study of the 66 books of the Bible quickly reveals an amazing unity between these books when they deal with such narratives.

Noah's Flood

The historic narrative detailing the events of the global Flood of Noah provides an excellent example of the Bible's unity. In Genesis 6-9, Moses recorded the events surrounding the greatest physical catastrophic event in Earth history. In this story, God chose a man named Noah to build a huge ark designed to carry at least two of every kind of animal, eight humans (Noah, his wife, his three sons, and their wives–Genesis 7:13), and all necessary supplies. When Noah completed the construction of this amazing vessel, Genesis records that God sent a flood to cover the entire globe. The text says: "And the waters prevailed exceedingly on the earth, and all the high hills under the whole heaven were covered.... And all flesh died that moved on the earth: birds and cattle and beasts and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, and every man" (Genesis 7:19-21). The worldwide Flood destroyed every creature that had the breath of life except those saved in the ark. These events were recorded by Moses in about 1450 B.C.

As we scan the remaining books of the Bible, we find perfect harmony in regard to the events surrounding Noah, his descendants, and the global Flood. In 1 Chronicles, the text suggests that Noah's three sons were Shem, Ham, and Japheth, exactly as Genesis 7:13 records (1:1). The prophet Isaiah also referred to Noah (chapter 54). In that text, the prophet recorded the words God spoke to the Israelites of Isaiah's day: "For this is

like the waters of Noah to Me; for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah would no longer cover the earth, so have I sworn that I would not be angry with you, nor rebuke you" (54:9). The oath to which Isaiah referred is found in Genesis 9:11, where God said to Noah: "Thus I establish My covenant with you: Never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood; never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." Remarkably, Isaiah's comment exhibits a perfect understanding and awareness of God's statement to Noah, yet the prophet's writings were separated from Moses' writing of the Pentateuch by more than 600 years. In addition, the prophet Ezekiel acknowledged the story of Noah when he recorded God's Word to the Israelites of his day: "'Or if I send a pestilence into that land and pour out My fury on it in blood, and cut off from it man and beast, even though Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, as I live,' says the Lord God, 'they would deliver neither son nor daughter; they would deliver only themselves by their righteousness'" (14:19-20).

The books of the New Testament exhibit the same unity in regard to the story of Noah as those of the Old. Matthew records the words of Jesus regarding Noah: "But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be" (24:36-39). Notice the points of agreement between Jesus' statement and the Genesis record. Jesus said that Noah was the man who built the ark. He also said that a great flood destroyed "them all," referring to everyone outside the ark, exactly as the Genesis account described. In fact, even though Jesus did not go into great detail,

every aspect of His statement agrees perfectly with the information recorded in the Old Testament regarding the Flood. Luke recorded a similar statement by Jesus in Luke 17:26-27, which is the parallel passage to Matthew 24:36-39. He exhibited additional unity with Genesis in that he recorded that Noah's son was Shem (Luke 3:36).

In Hebrews 11, the Bible writer stated: "By faith, Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith" (11:7) This passage in Hebrews concurs with various other passages that show that Noah built an ark by which his family was saved. Additionally, the apostle Peter twice mentioned Noah and the global Flood. He stated: "...when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water" (1 Peter 3:20). He also said: "[I]f God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment; and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly" (2 Peter 2:5). Notice several things about Peter's comments regarding Noah. First, he records that Noah was the man who built the ark. Then he gives the exact number of people who were saved in that ark–eight. This number corresponds perfectly with the statement in Genesis 7:13 in which Moses said that Noah, his wife, his three sons, and their wives were saved. Furthermore, Peter states that the Flood destroyed the "ungodly." His description of the lifestyle of those destroyed in the Flood perfectly matches the Genesis account which states: "Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the

earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5). Thus, from the first book of the Old Testament through 2 Peter, one of the last books written in the New Testament, the Bible exhibits complete and perfect unity in its dealing with Noah and the Flood. [NOTE: It is not the purpose of this discussion to verify the veracity and truth of the global Flood of Noah. That has been done successfully elsewhere.[3] The sole purpose of this discussion is to show that the various Bible writers agree with each other in their individual assessments and statements regarding Noah and the Flood.]

Sodom and Gomorrah

The names of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah are synonymous with wickedness throughout the books of the Bible. Genesis explains that Abraham and Lot had been traveling together after leaving the city of Haran. Due to the multitude of cattle possessed by both men, their respective herdsmen began to quarrel. Not wanting any root of strife to spring up between them, Abraham asked Lot to choose what land he would take, and Abraham suggested that he would separate from Lot by moving to a different area. Lot looked to the plain of Jordan and saw that it was well-watered, so he "pitched his tent even as far as Sodom" (Genesis 13:12). In the text immediately following Lot's decision, the Bible says: "But the men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked and sinful against the Lord" (Genesis 13:13).

Sodom and its sister city Gomorrah were so sinful that the Lord decided to destroy the cities by sending fire and brimstone from heaven to consume them. In Genesis 19, the text explains that Lot showed hospitality to angels sent from God. Lot attempted to protect the angels from being abused by the men of Sodom.

In turn, the angels helped Lot escape the city before God destroyed it. The text also records that Lot's wife disobeyed the commandment of God delivered by the angels when she looked back at the city. As punishment for her disobedience, she was turned into a pillar of salt (Genesis 19:26).

Throughout the 66 books of the Bible, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is referenced as an example of God's hatred of sin and His righteous judgment. The city of Sodom is mentioned over 40 times. The large majority of these instances have to do with the destruction brought on the city due to the wickedness of its inhabitants. The prophet Isaiah, in prophesying about the destruction of Babylon, noted that the wicked city would "be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah" (13:19). In Jeremiah's prophecy against the nation of Edom, the prophet said: "'As in the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah and their neighbors,' says the Lord, 'No one shall remain there, nor shall a son of man dwell in it'" (Jeremiah 49:18). Jeremiah also stated: "The punishment of the iniquity of the daughter of my people is greater than the punishment of the sin of Sodom, which was overthrown in a moment, with no hand to help her!" (Lamentations 4:6). Ezekiel mentioned that Sodom was proud and committed abominations in the sight of the Lord, therefore the Lord took the city away as He saw fit (16:50). Amos also referenced the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and associated it with fire and burning (4:11).

New Testament books present the same gruesome picture of wickedness and destruction as their Old Testament predecessors. In his gospel account, Luke recorded the words of Jesus, saying: "Likewise as it was also in the days of **Lot**: They ate, they drank, they bought, they

sold, they planted, they built; but on the day that **Lot** went out of **Sodom** it rained **fire** and **brimstone** from heaven and destroyed them all" (17:28-29). Notice the similarities between the statement made by Jesus and the Old Testament narrative. First, Lot was associated with the city of Sodom. Second, the city was destroyed on "the day" that Lot left, as the Genesis accounts asserts. Third, the destruction was caused by fire and brimstone sent from heaven (cf. Genesis 19:24). Additionally, in Luke 17:31-32, when Jesus admonished His listeners not to look back when they fled Jerusalem, He said: "Remember Lot's wife." He was obviously referring to the fact that she was turned to a pillar of salt when she looked back at Sodom.

The apostle Peter noted that God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, turning them to ashes, but saved righteous Lot who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the Sodomites (2 Peter 2:6-8; cf. Jude 7). Lot's righteousness is referenced by Peter and seen in the Genesis account when he confronted the wicked men of Sodom who were bent on abusing the visiting angels. Lot went out to the Sodomites and said: "Please, my brethren, do not do so wickedly" (Genesis 19:7). Also, the apostle John makes a passing reference to the wickedness of Sodom in Revelation 11:8. Thus, from the first book of the Old Testament to the last book of the New Testament, we have a completely unified picture of the destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah based on their wickedness.

In truth, the narratives of Noah's Flood and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah are only two of literally hundreds of examples that could be produced to prove the Bible's unity. Stories about Moses, Abraham, Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau,

Joseph, Daniel, and Jonah provide equally impressive illustrations of the Bible's perfect cohesion.

MORAL UNITY OF THE BIBLE

The books of the Bible contain various moral themes that are treated consistently throughout the entire 66-book canon. A list of all such themes would exhaust the reader's patience, and would require a document comparable in length to the Bible itself. A brief sample, however, of these moral issues proves interesting and valuable to the overall discussion of the Bible's unity.

Lying

Throughout the Bible, the writers consistently present lying in a negative light, describing it as sin. In John 8:44, Jesus is quoted as saying that the devil "does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar, and the father of it." Jesus' statement about the devil is corroborated by the book of Genesis, in which the devil deceived Eve into thinking that she would escape death even if she disobeyed God and ate from the forbidden tree (Genesis 3:1-5,13). The apostle Paul also attested to Eve's deception in 1 Timothy 2:14– "And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression."

From the first chapters of Genesis, in which the devil's first lie is recorded, to the last book of Revelation, lying is condemned wholesale. Moses scaled Mount Sinai and received the Ten Commandments from God, the ninth of which was, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" (Deuteronomy 5:20), or in other words, "you shall not lie about your neighbor." The psalmist wrote: "I hate and abhor lying, but I love

your law" (Psalm 119:163). Solomon, the wisest man alive during his time, wrote: "These six things the Lord hates...a lying tongue...a false witness who speaks lies" (Proverbs 6:16-19). The Old Testament prophets wrote similar statements about lying: "Now go, write it before them on a tablet...that this is a rebellious people, lying children, children who will not hear the law of the Lord" (Isaiah 30:8-9).

The New Testament continues the thought of the Old Testament in its denunciation of lying. On one occasion, a rich young man came to Jesus, asking Him what was necessary to inherit eternal life. Jesus responded by telling him to keep the commandments. The young man then asked Jesus which commandments he needed to keep. Jesus said: "Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, **do not bear false witness**, do not defraud, honor your father and mother" (Mark 10:19). In speaking of lying, it has already been noted that Jesus attributed such activity to the devil, and condemned it as a practice that is totally foreign to the character of God (John 8:44).

Luke, the writer of the book of Acts, recorded the story of Ananias and Sapphira, in which God struck dead a man and his wife for lying (Acts 5:1-11). The apostle Paul, in his letter to the young preacher Titus, noted that God cannot lie (Titus 1:2). Paul also wrote to the Christians in Ephesus: "Therefore, putting away lying, each one speak truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another" (Ephesians 4:25). In Revelation, the last book of the New Testament, John wrote: "But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and **all liars** shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death" (Revelation 21:8).

Without fail, every Bible writer who comments on the moral value of lying condemns the practice. This fact, at first, may not seem remarkable, since many assume that lying has been condemned by every culture throughout history. But such is not the case. Under certain circumstances, a host of philosophers and teachers of morality have proposed that lying could be morally acceptable under certain circumstances. The atheistic writer Dan Barker is on record as saying: "We all know that it is sometimes necessary to tell a lie in order to protect someone from harm."[4] Barker then illustrates with a scenario about a woman who is being hunted by her abusive husband, and he concluded: "I would consider it a **moral act** to lie to the man." Yet, it is not only atheistic thinkers like Barker who have suggested that lying could be moral. The esteemed early church writers Origen and John Chrysostom both believed and wrote that under certain conditions, lying could be morally acceptable. And the Greek philosopher Plato took a similar stance.[5]

But the Bible states that lying is always morally wrong, never morally permissible. Throughout the 1,600 years of its production, the books of the Bible consistently maintain the idea that lying is immoral. The practice is never justified by any of the 40 different writers. Although skeptics have alleged that the Bible condones lying under certain circumstances, such allegations have been proven to be baseless and false.[6] Not a single Bible writer swayed even a fraction in the unanimous condemnation of lying as a moral evil.

Additional examples of the moral unity of the Bible could easily be cited, including the Bible's condemnation of murder, the command to honor one's parents, the prohibition on stealing and a host of others.[7]

DOCTRINAL UNITY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Elder Qualifications

Literally thousands of instances of internal agreement between the New Testament books could be listed. One such example involves the subtle mention of Peter as an elder. In 1 Peter 5:1, the text says: "The elders who are among you I exhort, **I who am a fellow elder** and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed." Of interest is the fact that, to be an elder, a man must be the "husband of one wife," as stated by Paul in his letter to Titus (1:6). From reading Luke's account of Jesus' life, we discover that on one occasion Jesus visited Simon Peter's house, at which time He healed Peter's "wife's mother" of a high fever (4:38). Thus, we know that Peter was married and would meet the requirement to become an elder by being the husband of one wife. Of further interest is the fact that the apostle Paul, although he provided immense teaching and edification to the church, is never described as holding the office of elder in the church. The context of 1 Corinthians 11 indicates that Paul remained unmarried so that he could focus his attention on his ministry. Thus, Paul would not have been the husband of one wife, and would not have been qualified to be an elder. When these facts are synthesized, then, we can understand that subtle statements in the books of 1 Peter, Titus, Luke, and 1 Corinthians intertwine perfectly to give a consistent picture of the qualifications of an elder as they related to the lives of Peter and Paul.

The Lord's Supper

The examples and instructions pertaining to the Lord's Supper provide another clear instance of New Testament unity. Near the end of all four gospel accounts, Jesus and the 12 apostles gathered in an upper room to eat the Passover. During that feast, Jesus instituted what is commonly known today as the Lord's Supper. Luke's account of the event states: "And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, 'This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you'" (22:19-20). The Lord's Supper, also known as communion (1 Corinthians 10:16), has been eaten in the assemblies of the church since its establishment.

Interestingly, the apostle Paul was not present with the Lord and the other apostles that night. In fact, during that time, his name was still Saul, and he was an unconverted Jewish leader. Yet, several years after his conversion, in his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul wrote:

> For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the **same night in which He was betrayed** took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is for you; do **this in remembrance of Me**." In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "**This cup is the new covenant in My blood**. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

Notice how similar Paul's wording is to Jesus' statements in Luke. Both Luke and Paul acknowledge that this took place the night of Christ's betrayal. Paul then quotes

Jesus verbatim in several lines, in complete accord with the accounts recorded in the Gospel.

Where does Paul claim to have gotten the information regarding the Lord's Supper? He explained to the Corinthians that he had received it "from the Lord" (1 Corinthians 11:23). But if Paul was not in the upper room the night of the betrayal, how would he have received such information "from the Lord"? In the first chapter of Paul's epistle to the Galatians, he is forced to defend his apostleship. In that context, he wrote to the Galatians: "But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ" (Galatians 1:11-12). Thus, Paul's statement that he had received the information concerning the Lord's Supper from Jesus would be consistent with the direct communication with Christ he claims to have had when writing to the Galatians. [NOTE: I am not, here, trying to defend Paul's claim of inspiration and direct revelation from Christ. The external evidences for the Bible's inspiration are explored further in other chapters of this book. Paul's statements in this connection are being used solely to show the unity and internal consistency in the New Testament writings.]

In addition to the remarkable consistency and similarity of Paul's statements in 1 Corinthians 11 concerning the Lord's Supper and those in the gospel accounts, other information regarding the communion confirms the unity of the New Testament documents. The gospel accounts make it clear that Jesus rose "on the first day of the week."[8] In 1 Corinthians 11, in the context of the Lord's Supper, Paul explains that the Corinthians were "coming together" to take the Lord's Supper. His

statements indicate that the church at Corinth was eating the Lord's Supper during their worship assembly. Five chapters later, when Paul gave instructions for the monetary collection of the church, he wrote: "On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come" (1 Corinthians 16:2). This verse indicates that the Corinthian church met on the first day of the week, at which time they would have eaten the Lord's Supper and taken up their monetary contribution.

In Acts 20:7, the text states: "Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them...." The phrase "to break bread" is used here to refer to the Lord's Supper.[9] Thus, the Bible provides an example of the church taking the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week and the Corinthian church meeting on the first day of the week to take up their collection and eat the Lord's Supper. The first day of the week was the New Testament day of meeting based on the historical fact that Jesus rose on that day. Such internal consistency between Luke, Acts, and 1 Corinthians testifies to the New Testament's inspiration.

Baptism

Throughout the New Testament, various Bible writers address the theme of baptism with remarkable consistency. Such consistency is even more impressive in light of the varied and contradictory opinions held by many today in the religious world about the subject.

After Jesus' resurrection, just before His ascension, He called His disciples together and issued to them what is often called the Great Commission. He said: "All

authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:18-20). From His instructions, it is clear that baptism plays a key role in the conversion of the lost. In fact, in Mark's account of the Gospel, he quotes Jesus as saying: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:15-16). Mark's account of Jesus' statement clarifies the role of baptism, showing that it is an essential step in the salvation process.

The book of Acts records the history of the disciples fulfilling the Great Commission given to them by Christ. In Acts 2, we have the first recorded gospel sermon preached by Peter to the Jews in Jerusalem. In his powerful sermon, Peter explained to the Jews that they had crucified Jesus, the Messiah and Son of God. Many of the hearers believed Peter and asked what they needed to do. Peter responded by saying: "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). Notice that Peter connected baptism with the remission of sins, completely consistent with Jesus' statement in Mark requiring baptism for salvation. Throughout the book of Acts, water baptism is presented as a necessary step in the conversion of the lost to Christ.[10] In fact, when the apostle Paul recounted his conversion, he quoted Ananias' statement to him as follows: "And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16). Here, again, baptism is connected with the washing away or forgiveness of sins.

In the epistles, baptism is consistently presented in a way that conforms perfectly to the gospel accounts and Acts. In his letter to the Romans, Paul stated:

> Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection (Romans 6:3-5).

In these verses, Paul states that a person is baptized into Christ (cf. Galatians 3:27). In 2 Timothy 2:10, Paul says that salvation is in Christ. Thus, to obtain the salvation that is in Christ one must be baptized into Christ. Also note that Paul says that a person is baptized into the death of Christ (cf. Colossians 2:12). In Ephesians 1:7, Paul stated that the blood of Christ is the spiritual force that forgives a person's sins. That blood was shed at His death. Thus, when a person is baptized into Christ's death, he or she contacts the blood of Christ, linking baptism with the forgiveness of sins exactly as is presented in Acts 2:38, Acts 22:16, and as is implied in Mark 16:15-16.

The apostle Peter also spoke on baptism in a way that coincides flawlessly with Paul, Luke, Matthew, and Mark. Peter said: "There is also an antitype which now saves us–baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 3:21). Notice that Peter connects baptism to salvation dependent upon the resurrection of Christ, exactly as Paul did. The New Testament's presentation of baptism provides an outstanding illustration of the unity of the New Testament books.[11]

OBJECTIONS

The Writers Copied Each Other

The skeptic may attempt to suggest that much of the agreement and unity found in the Bible is unremarkable because the writers could have copied the information from books that were written prior to their own writings. Let us critically consider such an objection. First, the mere objection assumes the perfect unity of the 66 books of the Bible. Why would a skeptic be forced to suggest that the various writers copied each other if their unity and agreement could be disputed? The fact that the skeptic must resort to this charge is evidence of the reality of the Bible's unity.

Second, this allegation assumes that the various Old Testament prophets and New Testament writers had access to perfectly preserved texts of the various books they were "copying." Interestingly, skeptics often deny the accurate and complete transmission of the text. If a skeptic demands that the unity is a result of copying, he will be forced to admit the astonishing preservation of the text of the Bible. And, while the Christian gladly acknowledges that such preservation did occur, and that some material would naturally be based on previous texts, it is not the case that the various writers would have had ready access to all the texts before they wrote.

Furthermore, non-canonical writers who had many of the same texts preserved for them wrote material that contradicted the canonical Scriptures. How is it that not a single book in the 66-book canon contains a single legitimate contradiction? Even if every writer had a copy of every other book in front of him before he wrote, such unity would be impossible from a human standpoint. In truth, individuals often contradict their

own writings due to a slip of the mind or a change in their previous thinking. **Yet no such slips, changes, or other aberrant occurrences can be found in the 66-book library of the Bible**.

The Bible Contains Contradictions

Skeptics often suggest that the unity of the Bible is only superficial. They say that even though it might look like it is unified in its themes, on closer inspection it contains hundreds of discrepancies and contradictions. Dennis McKinsey, the author of *The Skeptics Annotated Bible,* stated:

> Every analyst of the Bible should realize that the Book is a veritable miasma of contradictions, inconsistencies, inaccuracies, poor science, bad math, inaccurate geography, immoralities, degenerate heroes, false prophecies, boring repetitions, childish superstitions, silly miracles, and dry-as-dust discourse. **But contradictions remain the most obvious, the most potent, the most easily proven, and the most common problem to plague the Book.**[12]

Yet, McKinsey and others have no legitimate basis to support the accusation that the Bible contradicts itself. Christian apologist Eric Lyons has done extensive work on the subject of alleged Bible contradictions, in which he has successfully refuted the idea that the various books of the Bible contradict each other. He has written three volumes of *The Anvil Rings* that provide over 500 pages of material refuting specific accusations made by the skeptic.[13] In fact, for the last 2,000 years, a long line of competent Christian apologists have thoroughly and effectively refuted the charges of alleged biblical discrepancies.[14] Even a cursory look at such research forces the honest student to conclude that **if** the Bible does, in fact, contain a genuine contradiction of some kind, it **has not yet been found.** When all the facts are considered, each alleged biblical contradiction has been

shown to be something other than a legitimate contradiction. That is a powerful statement, considering the fact that no book in the world has been examined more closely or scrutinized more carefully. After the Bible has been put under the high-powered microscope of hostile criticism, and dissected by the razor-sharp scalpel of supposed contradictions, it rises from the surgery with no scratches or scars, none the worse for wear.

CONCLUSION

No series of books in human history has maintained the supernatural internal consistency that is present within the pages of the Bible. From the first book of Genesis to the last book of Revelation, approximately 40 men penned individual treatises that combine to form the best-selling, most widely distributed, perfectly unified, flawlessly written book ever produced. Mere human genius could never have accomplished such an extraordinary feat. As the psalmist aptly spoke of God's Word 3,000 years ago: "The entirety of Your word is truth, and every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever" (Psalm 119:160).

ENDNOTES

[1] Eric Lyons and Zach Smith (2003), "Mosaic Authorship of the Pentateuch," *Reason & Revelation*, 23[1]:1-7.

[2] Donald Guthrie (1970), *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press), third edition, pp. 949-961.

[3] Bert Thompson (1999), *The Global Flood of Noah* (Montgomery, AL: Apologetics Press).

[4] Dan Barker (1992), *Losing Faith In Faith–From Preacher to Atheist* (Madison, WI: Freedom from Religion Foundation), p. 345, emp. added.

[5] T. Slater (2007), "Lying," http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09469a.htm.

[6] Eric Lyons (2017), "Did God Approve of Rahab's Lie?", Apologetics Press, https://apologeticspress.org/apPubPage.aspx?pub=1&issue=1250&article=2718.

[7] The skeptic sometimes argues that since the Old Testament Law is no longer in force and the New Testament regulations differ from the Old, then God's moral nature changed as well. However, this allegation is false. By altering the system of animal sacrifices and physical ordinances in the Old Testament, God's nature did not alter. For example, if the rules of baseball changed so that a person gets four strikes instead of three, that would not mean that the person could cheat by using a weighted bat. Changes in regulations are not equivalent to changes in moral judgments.

[8] Cf. John 20:1; Luke 24:1; Mark 16:2; Matthew 28:1.

[9] Eric Lyons (2005b), "'Breaking Bread' on the 'First Day' of the Week," http://www.apologeticspress.org/articles/343.

[10] Acts 8:37-38; 9:18; 10:48; 16:15,31-33; 19:5.

[11] Skeptics often have accused the Bible of being contradictory on certain points regarding the doctrine of baptism. For a refutation of such an idea see Eric Lyons (2005a), *The Anvil Rings: Volume 2* (Montgomery, AL: Apologetics Press), pp. 193-198.

[12] C. Dennis McKinsey (1995), *The Encyclopedia of Biblical Errancy* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus), p. 71, emp. added.

[13] Eric Lyons (2003 & 2005a), *The Anvil Rings: Volume 1, 2, & 3* (Montgomery, AL: Apologetics Press).

[14] E.g., L. Gaussen (1850), *Theopneustia: The Plenary Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures* (London: Johnstone & Hunter). See also John Haley (1876), *An Examination of the Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1977 reprint).

CHAPTER 5

ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE OLD TESTAMENT

A man with a leather vest and a broad-rimmed hat wraps a torn piece of cloth around an old bone, sets it on fire, and uses it as a torch to see his way through ancient tunnels filled with bones, rats, bugs, and buried treasure. Close behind him lurks the dastardly villain ready to pounce on the treasure after the hero has done all the planning and dangerous work. We have seen this scenario, and others very similar to it, time and again in movies like *Indiana Jones* or *The Mummy.* And although we understand that Hollywood exaggerates and dramatizes the situation, it still remains a fact that finding ancient artifacts excites both young and old alike. Finding things left by people of the past is exciting because a little window into their lives is opened to us. When we find an arrowhead, we learn that the Indians used bows and arrows to hunt and fight. Discovering a piece of pottery tells us how the ancients cooked or drew water from wells. Every tiny artifact gives the modern person a more complete view of life in the past.

Because of the value of archaeology, many have turned to it in order to answer certain questions about the past. One of the questions most often asked is, "Did the things recorded in the Bible really happen?" Truth be told, archaeology cannot always answer that ques-

tion. Nothing material remains from Elijah's trip in the fiery chariot, and no physical artifacts exist to show that Christ actually walked on water. Therefore, if we ask archaeology to "prove" that the entire Bible is true or false, we are faced with the fact that archaeology can neither prove nor disprove the Bible's validity. However, even though it cannot conclusively prove everything in the Bible, archaeology does provide important pieces of the past that consistently verify the Bible's historical and factual accuracy. This chapter is designed to bring to light a small fraction of the significant archaeological finds that have been instrumental in corroborating the biblical text of the Old Testament.

HEZEKIAH AND SENNACHERIB

When King Hezekiah assumed the throne in Judah, he did so under the most distressed conditions. His father, Ahaz, had turned to the gods of Damascus, cut in pieces the articles of the house of God, and shut the doors of the temple of the Lord. In addition, he had made high places "in every single city" where he sacrificed and offered incense to other gods (2 Chronicles 28:22-27). The people of Judah followed Ahaz, and the Bible says: "The Lord brought Judah low because of Ahaz king of Israel, for he had encouraged moral decline in Judah and had been continually unfaithful to the Lord" (2 Chronicles 28:19).

Upon this troubled throne, King Hezekiah began to rule at the youthful age of 25. He reigned for 29 years, and the inspired text declares that he "did what was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father David had done" (2 Chronicles 29:2). Among other reforms, Hezekiah reopened the Temple, reestablished the observance of the Passover, and appointed the priests to receive tithes and administer their proper duties in

the Temple. After completing these reforms, Scripture states that "Sennacherib king of Assyria entered Judah; he encamped against the fortified cities, thinking to win them over to himself" (2 Chronicles 32:1).

It is here that we turn to the secular record of history to discover that the powerful nation Assyria, under the reign of King Sargon II, had subdued many regions in and around Palestine. Upon Sargon's death, revolt broke out within the Assyrian empire. Sennacherib, the new Assyrian monarch, was determined to maintain a firm grasp on his vassal states, which would mean that he would be forced to invade the cities of Judah if Hezekiah continued to defy Assyria's might.[1] Knowing that Sennacherib would not sit idly by and watch his empire crumble, King Hezekiah began to make preparations for the upcoming invasion. One of the preparations he made was to stop the water from the springs that ran outside of Jerusalem and to redirect the water into the city by way of a tunnel. Second Kings 20:20 records the construction of the tunnel in these words: "Now the rest of the acts of Hezekiah–all his might, and how he made a pool and a tunnel and brought water into the city–are they not written in the book of chronicles of the kings of Judah?" The biblical text from 2 Chronicles 32:30 further substantiates the tunnel construction with this recorded statement: "This same Hezekiah also stopped the water outlet of Upper Gihon, and brought the water by tunnel to the west side of the City of David." The tunnel, today known as "Hezekiah's tunnel," stands as one of the paramount archaeological attestations to the biblical text. Carved through solid limestone, the tunnel meanders in an S-shape under the city of Jerusalem for a length of approximately 1,800 feet. In 1880, two young boys swimming at the site rediscovered an

inscription about 20 feet from the exit that detailed how the tunnel was made:

> ...And this was the account of the breakthrough. While the laborers were still working with their picks, each toward the other, and while there were still three cubits to be broken through, the voice of each was heard calling to the other, because there was a crack (or split or overlap) in the rock from the south to the north. And at the moment of the breakthrough, the laborers struck each toward the other, pick against pick. Then water flowed from the spring to the pool for 1,200 cubits. And the height of the rock above the heads of the laborers was 100 cubits.[2]

Of the inscription, John C.H. Laughlin wrote that it is "one of the most important, as well as famous, inscriptions ever found in Judah."[3] Incidentally, since the length of the tunnel was about 1,800 feet and the inscription marked the tunnel at "1,200 cubits," archaeologists have a good indication that the cubit was about one and a half feet at the time of Hezekiah.[4]

Hezekiah dug his tunnel in order to keep a steady supply of water pumping into Jerusalem during the anticipated siege of Sennacherib. Today it stands as a strong witness to the accuracy of the biblical historical record of 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles.

In addition to Hezekiah's tunnel, other amazingly detailed archaeological evidences give us an outstanding record of events between Hezekiah and Sennacherib as they unfolded. Much of the information we have comes from the Taylor Prism. This six-sided clay artifact stands about 15 inches tall and was found in Nineveh in 1830 by the British Colonel R. Taylor. Thus, it is known as the "Taylor Prism."[5] The prism contains six columns covered by over 500 lines of writing. It was purchased in the Winter of 1919-1920 by J.H. Breasted for the Oriental Institute in Chicago.[6]

Part of the text on the Taylor Prism has Sennacherib's account of what happened in his military tour of Judah:

> As to Hezekiah, the Jew, he did not submit to my yoke, I laid siege to 46 of his strong cities, walled forts and to the countless small villages in their vicinity, and conquered (them) by means of well-stamped (earth-) ramps, and battering-rams brought (thus) near (to the walls) (combined with) the attack by foot soldiers, (using) mines, breeches as well as sapper work. I drove out (of them) 200,150 people, young and old, male and female, horses, mules, donkeys, camels, big and small cattle beyond counting, and considered (them) booty. Himself I made a prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a cage. I surrounded him with earthwork in order to molest those who were leaving his city's gate.[7]

At least two facts of monumental significance reside in Sennacherib's statement. First, Sennacherib's attack on the outlying cities of Judah finds a direct parallel in 2 Chronicles 32:1: "Sennacherib king of Assyria came and entered Judah; he encamped against the fortified cities...." The most noteworthy fortified city besieged and captured by the Assyrian despot was the city of Lachish. Second, Sennacherib never mentions that he captured the city of Jerusalem.

Lachish Under Siege

When we turn to the biblical account of Sennacherib's Palestinian invasion in 2 Kings 18, we read that he had advanced against "all the fortified cities of Judah" (vs. 14). At one of those cities, Lachish, King Hezekiah sent tribute money in an attempt to assuage the Assyrian's wrath. The text states: "Then Hezekiah king of Judah sent to the king of Assyria at Lachish, saying, 'I have done wrong; turn away from me; whatever you impose on me I will pay'" (vs. 14). From Lachish, Sennacherib demanded 300 talents of silver and 30 talents of gold, which Hezekiah promptly paid. Not satisfied, however,

the Assyrian ruler "sent the Tartan, the Rabsaris, and the Rabshakeh from Lachish, with a great army against Jerusalem, to King Hezekiah" (vs. 17) in an attempt to frighten the denizens of Jerusalem into surrender. The effort failed, "so the Rabshakeh returned and found the king of Assyria warring against Libnah, for he heard that he had departed from Lachish" (19:8). From the biblical record, then, we discover very scant information about the battle at Lachish–only that Sennacherib was there, laid siege to the city (2 Chronicles 32:9), and moved on to Libnah upon the completion of his siege.

From Sennacherib's historical files, however, we get a much more complete account of the events surrounding Lachish. The Assyrian monarch considered his victory at Lachish of such import that he dedicated an entire wall (nearly 70 linear feet) of his palace in Nineveh to carved wall reliefs depicting the event.[8] In the mid 1840s, the famous English archaeologist Henry Layard began extensive excavations in the ruins of ancient Nineveh. He published his initial findings in a best-selling volume titled *Nineveh and its Remains* (1849), and subsequent volumes titled *The Monuments of Nineveh* (1849); *Inscriptions in the Cuneiform Characters* (1851); and *Discoveries in the Ruins of Nineveh* (1853).[9] Since Layard's early discoveries, archaeologists have located and identified thousands of artifacts from at least three different palaces. The remains of ancient Nineveh are located in two mounds on opposite banks of the Hawsar River. One mound, known as Kouyunjik Tepe, contained the remains of the palaces of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal. The other mound, Nebi Younis, held the relics of the palace of Sennacherib. These palaces were built on raised platforms about 75 feet high.[10]

One of the most outstanding artifacts found among the ruins of Nineveh was the wall relief depicting Sennacherib's defeat of the walled city of Lachish. Ephraim Stern offers an excellent description of the events pictured in the relief:

> The main scene shows the attack on the gate wall of Lachish. The protruding city gate is presented in minute detail, with its crenellations and its special reinforcement by a superstructure of warriors' shields. The battering rams were moved over specially constructed ramps covered with wooden logs. They were "prefabricated," four-wheeled, turreted machines. The scene vividly shows frenzied fighting of both attacker and defender in the final stage of battle.[11]

Stern also mentions flaming firebrands that the defenders of Lachish launched at its attackers, long-handled, ladle-like instruments used to dowse the front of the battering rams when they were set on fire, slingmen, archers, and assault troops with spears. One of the most striking features of the relief is the depiction of the tortures inflicted on the inhabitants of Lachish. Several prisoners are pictured impaled on poles while women and children from the city are led past the victims (2:5-6). The epigraph that accompanied the relief read: "Sennacherib, king of the world, king of Assyria, sat upon a *nimedu*-throne and passed in review the booty (taken) from Lachish (*La-ki-su*)."[12]

Of further interest is the fact that archaeological digs at the city of Lachish bear out the details of Sennacherib's wall relief. Extensive archaeological digs at Lachish in 1935-1938 by the British, and again in 1973-1987 under Israeli archaeologists, David Ussishkin and others, have revealed a treasure trove of artifacts that fit the events depicted by Sennacherib. Concerning the Assyrian siege of Lachish, Dever noted:

> The evidence of it is all there: the enormous sloping siege ramp thrown up against the city walls south of

> the gate; the double line of defense walls, upslope and downslope; the iron-shod Assyrian battering rams that breached the city wall at its highest point; the massive destruction within the fallen city.... Virtually all the details of the Assyrian reliefs have been confirmed by archaeology.... Also brought to light by the excavators were the double city walls; the complex siege ramp, embedded with hundreds of iron arrowheads and stone ballistae; the counter-ramp inside the city; the destroyed gate, covered by up to 6 ft. of destruction debris; huge boulders from the city wall, burned almost to lime and fallen far down the slope....[13]

Indeed, the Assyrian monarch's siege of Lachish is documented by the biblical text, and the destruction of the city is corroborated by the massive carving dedicated to the event in Sennacherib's palace at Nineveh, as well as the actual artifacts found in stratum III at Lachish.

Jerusalem Stands Strong

Of special interest in Sennacherib's description of his Palestinian conquest is the fact that he never mentioned taking the city of Jerusalem. On the Taylor Prism, we find the writings about his conquest of 46 outlying cities, in addition to "walled forts" and "countless small villages." In fact, we even read that Hezekiah was shut up in Jerusalem as a prisoner "like a bird in a cage." It is also recorded that Hezekiah sent more tribute to Sennacherib at the end of the campaign.[14] What is not recorded, however, is any list of booty that was taken from the capital city of Judah. Nor is an inventory of prisoners given in the text of the Taylor Prism. Indeed, one would think that if the city of Lachish deserved so much attention from the Assyrian dictator, then the capital city of Judah would deserve even more.

What we find, however, is complete silence as to the capturing of the city. What happened to the vast, conquering army to cause it to buckle at the very point

of total victory? Hershel Shanks, of *Biblical Archaeology Review*, wrote, "...although we don't know for sure what broke the siege, we do know that the Israelites managed to hold out."[15]

The biblical text, however, offers the answer to this historical enigma. Due to Hezekiah's faithfulness to the Lord, Jehovah offered His assistance to the Judean King. In the book of Isaiah, the prophet was sent to Hezekiah with a message of hope. Isaiah informed Hezekiah that God would stop Sennacherib from entering the city, because Hezekiah prayed to the Lord for assistance. In Isaiah 37:36, the text states:

> Then the angel of the Lord went out, and killed in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred and eighty-five thousand; and when people arose early in the morning, there were the corpses—all dead. So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and went away, returned home, and remained at Nineveh.

Sennacherib could not boast of his victory over the city of Jerusalem, because there was no victory. The Lord delivered the city out of his hand. In addition, Dever noted: "Finally, Assyrian records note that Sennacharib did die subsequently at the hands of assassins, his own sons...."[16] Luckenbill records the actual inscription from Esarhaddon's chronicles that describe the event:

> In the month Nisanu, on a favorable day, complying with their exalted command, I made my joyful entrance into the royal palace, an awesome place, wherein abides the fate of kings. A firm determination fell upon my brothers. They forsook the gods and turned to their deeds of violence plotting evil.... To gain the kingship they slew Sennacherib, their father.[17]

These events and artifacts surrounding Hezekiah, Sennacherib, Lachish, and Jerusalem give us an amazing glimpse into the tumultuous relationship between Judah and her neighbors. These facts also provide an

excellent example of how archaeology substantiates the biblical account.

THE MOABITE STONE

Another important archaeological find verifying the historicity of the biblical account is known as the Moabite Stone. It is true that writing about a rock which was discovered over 150 years ago certainly would not fit in a current "in the news" section. In fact, since 1868, so much has been written about this stone that very few new articles pertaining to it come to light. But the truth of the matter is that even though it was discovered more than a century ago, people need to be reminded of its importance.

The stone is known as the Moabite Stone, or the Mesha Inscription, since it was written by Mesha, the king of Moab. A missionary named F.A. Klein first discovered the stone in August of 1868.[18] When he initially saw the black basalt stone, it measured approximately 3½ feet high and 2 feet wide. Upon hearing of Klein's adventure, a French scholar named Clermont-Ganneau located the antiquated piece of rock and copied eight lines of the stone. He also had an impression, called a squeeze, made of the writing on its surface. A squeeze is made by placing a soggy piece of paper over the inscription, which retains the form of the inscription when dry.[19] From that point, the details surrounding the stone are not quite as clear. Apparently, the Arabs who had the stone decided to shatter it for reasons unknown. [Some reasons given include the idea that they thought it was a religious talisman of some sort, or they thought they could get more money selling the stone in pieces. However, LeMaire claims that these reasons are "apocryphal" and says they broke it because they hated the Ottomans who were attempting to purchase

the stone.[20]] By heating it in fire and then pouring cold water on it, they succeeded in breaking the stone into several pieces. The pieces were scattered, but about two-thirds of the original stone has been relocated and currently resides at the Louvre in Paris.[21]

The written inscription on the stone provides a piece of outstanding evidence verifying the Bible's accuracy. Mesha, the king of Moab, had the stone cut *circa* 850 B.C. to tell of his many conquests and his reacquisition of certain territories that were controlled by Israel. In the 30-line text composed of about 260 words, Mesha mentions that Omri was the king of Israel who had oppressed Moab, but then Mesha says he "saw his desire upon" Omri's son and upon "his house." Mesha wrote:

> I (am) Mesha, son of Chemosh-[...], king of Moab, the Dibonite–my father (had) reigned over Moab thirty years, and I reigned after my father, –(who) made this high place for Chemosh in Qarhoh [...] because he saved me from all the kings and caused me to triumph over all my adversaries. As for Omri, (5) king of Israel, he humbled Moab many years (lit., days), for Chemosh was angry at his land. And his son followed him and he also said, "I will humble Moab." In my time he spoke (thus), but I have triumphed over him and over his house, while Israel hath perished forever.[22]

The Mesha stele cites Omri as the king of Israel, just as 1 Kings 16:21-28 indicates. Furthermore, it mentions Omri's son (Ahab) in close connection with the Moabites, as does 2 Kings 3:4-6. In addition, both the stele and 2 Kings 3:4-6 list Mesha as the king of Moab. Later in the inscription, the stele further names the Israelite tribe of Gad, and the Israelite God, Yahweh. Not only are the references to the Israelite kings quite notable, but also Pritchard commented that this reference to Yahweh is one of the few that have been found outside Palestine proper.[23]

Another important feature of the Moabite stone is the fact that it "gave the solution to a question that had gone unanswered for centuries." Alfred Hoerth recounts how the biblical record chronicles the Moabite subjugation under king David and king Solomon, but that the Moabites broke free at the beginning of the divided kingdom. However, in the next biblical reference to Moab, 2 Kings 3:4, the Bible records that Ahab was receiving tribute from Moab. "Nowhere does the Bible state how or when Moab was reclaimed for Ahab to be receiving such tribute. The Moabite Stone provides that information, telling, as it does, of Omri's conquest from the Moabite point of view."[24]

From the end of the quoted portion of the Mesha Inscription ("while Israel hath perished forever"), it is obvious that Mesha exaggerated the efficacy of his conquest, a common practice among ancient kings. Pritchard noted that historians agree that "the Moabite chroniclers tended generally, and quite understandably, to ignore their own losses and setbacks."[25] Free and Vos document the works of John D. Davies and S.L. Caiger, which offer a harmonization of the Moabite text with the biblical record. Davies, formerly of the Princeton Seminary, accurately observed: "Mesha is in no wise contradicting, but only unintentionally supplementing the Hebrew account."[26]

As a further point of interest, the French scholar André LeMaire, in an extensive article in *Biblical Archaeology Review*, has "identified the reading of the name *David* in a formerly unreadable line, 'House of D...,' on the Mesha Stele (or Moabite Stone)."[27] Whether or not this identification is accurate has yet to be verified completely by scholarly consensus. Even the liberal scholars Finkelstein and Silberman, however, noted

LaMaire's identification along with the Tel Dan inscription documenting the House of David, and concluded: "Thus, the house of David was known throughout the region, this clearly validates the biblical description of a figure named David becoming the founder of the dynasty of Judahite kings in Jerusalem."[28]

Taken as a whole, the Moabite stone remains one of the most impressive pieces of evidence verifying the historical accuracy of the Old Testament. And, although this find has been around over 150 years, it "still speaks" to us today (Hebrews 11:4).

THE CYRUS CYLINDER

Cyrus, the king of the Medo-Person Empire, stands among the more important foreign rulers of the Israelite nation. In fact, many Old Testament prophecies revolve around this monarch. The prophet Isaiah documented that the Babylonian Empire would fall to the Medes and the Persians (Isaiah 13; 21:1-10). Not only did Isaiah detail the particular empire to which the Babylonians would fall, but he also called Cyrus by name (Isaiah 44:28; 45:1-5). Amazingly, Isaiah's prophecy was made approximately 150 years before Cyrus was born (Isaiah prophesied in about 700 B.C., Cyrus took the city of Babylon in 539 B.C.). To add to Cyrus' significance, Isaiah predicted that Cyrus would act as the Lord's "shepherd." In fact, Isaiah recorded these words of the Lord concerning Cyrus: "And he shall perform all My pleasure, even saying to Jerusalem, 'You shall be built,' and to the temple, 'Your foundation shall be laid'" (Isaiah 44:28).

In 1879, Hormoz Rasam found a small clay cylinder (about nine inches long) in the ancient city of Babylon (now in the British Museum). Upon the clay cylinder, King Cyrus had inscribed, among other things, details

of his victory over the city of Babylon and his policy toward the nations he had captured, as well as his policy toward their various gods and religions. Price records a translation of a segment of the cuneiform text found on the cylinder:

> ...I returned to [these] sacred cities on the other side of the Tigris, the sanctuaries of which have been in ruins for a long time, the images which [used] to live therein and established for them permanent sanctuaries. I [also] gathered all their [former] inhabitants and returned [to them] their habitations. Furthermore, I resettled upon the command of Marduk the great lord, all the gods of Sumer and Akkad whom Nabonidus has brought into Babylon to the anger of the lord of the gods, unharmed, in their [former] chapels, the places which made them happy. May all the gods who I have resettled in their sacred cities ask daily Bel and Nebo for long life for me and may they recommend me...to Marduk, my lord, may they say thus: Cyrus, the king who worships you and Cambyses, his son, [...] all of them I settled in a peaceful place.[29]

The policy, often hailed as Cyrus' declaration of human rights, coincides with the biblical account of the ruler's actions, in which Cyrus decreed that the temple in Jerusalem should be rebuilt and all the exiled Israelites who wished to join in the venture had his permission and blessing to do so (Ezra 1:1-11). The little nine-inch clay cylinder stands with the other archaeological evidences that corroborate, in minute detail, the historical accuracy of the biblical text.

DAVID INSCRIPTION

Of all the men in the Old Testament, few are spoken of with such reverence and honor as King David–shepherd, psalmist, soldier, and king. With God's mighty power behind him, he slew a bear and a lion to save his father's sheep, toppled a wicked giant with a single stone, slaughtered thousands of godless Philistines, and

united the children of Israel under a monarchy of righteousness and justice. The Bible mentions David some 1,048 times. He wrote 73 of the psalms and stands as the major character in approximately 62 chapters of the Old Testament. Anyone who has ever read the Good Book cannot help but know the name of David–a man said to be "after God's own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14).[30] And those familiar with the modern-day nation of Israel know that its flag proudly bears a symbol known as the Star of David.

Yet, if the Bible is removed from the discussion, David–King of Israel–vanishes into the shadows of secular history. At least he did for almost 3,000 years. David's name and story were conspicuously missing from either archaeological evidence or the testimony of history. His name was so absent, in fact, that for many years skeptics had dubbed David's life as fantasy and his deeds as legendary. After all, every nation needs a hero who slays giants. The Saxons had Beowulf, the Greeks had Hercules, and the Jews had David. David's daring deeds and courageous conduct were relegated to the fabled heaps of legend and myth.

But a find unearthed in Palestine in 1993 changed David's status in secular history forever. Professor Avraham Biran, director of the Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology at Hebrew Union College, was digging at a site in northern Israelite known as Tel Dan. There he unearthed a 3,000-year-old black basalt obelisk inscribed by one of the enemies of the ancient nation of Israel. The obelisk explained that Ben Hadad, King of Damascus, had defeated the Israelites and taken many of them captive. But the most amazing aspect of the obelisk is that it plainly states that the Israelite monarch defeated by Ben Hadad was "of the house

of David." This serves to confirm the biblical usage of this very designation (cf. 1 Kings 12:19; 14:8; Isaiah 7:2; et al.). And, for the first time in secular history, David appears connected to Israel from a historical standpoint. The implications of the stone cannot be ignored. If a king–any king–reigned who belonged to the "house of David," then there must have been a real, historical David who established such a house and began the dynastic name.[31]

The story of David thus has assumed a new place in the halls of history. No longer can David, King of Israel, be relegated to the status of myth or legend. Instead, he takes his rightful place beside the other documented kings of ancient history. David lived, just as the Bible had stated. And once again, the Bible remains the anvil on which the blows of the skeptic fall in vain.

HIDDEN HITTITES

Almost 50 times in the Old Testament, we can read about a people known as the Hittites. They were major players in Jewish history, and were listed as one of the nations that the children of Israel needed to conquer when entering the Promised Land (Joshua 11:3-4). Also, King David had among his army a valiant Hittite named Uriah, who was murdered by David because the king had committed adultery with his wife, Bathsheba. Without a doubt, the Old Testament frequently mentions the Hittites as a very real group of people. But for many years in secular history and in archaeology, the Hittites were as invisible. No solid archaeological evidence could be found that verified the existence of the Hittites.

However, in 1876, archaeologist, Hugo Winckler visited a city in Turkey named Boghaz-Köy. Upon excavating portions of the city, he found a breathtaking

number of human artifacts–including five temples, many sculptures, and a fortified castle. But more important, he found a huge storeroom filled with over 10,000 clay tablets. After completing the difficult task of deciphering the tablets, it was announced to the world that the Hittites had been found. The sight at Boghaz-Köy had been the Hittite capital city, Hattusha.[32]

NEBO-SARSEKIM

In 1920, the British Museum acquired a small stone tablet about two inches wide and one inch high. This stone tablet went into a large cache of tablets with ancient cuneiform writing on them. Since few people have the skill and knowledge to translate cuneiform, the tablet sat untranslated in the British Museum for about eight decades. Decades after the discovery, however, Dr. Michael Jursa of the University of Vienna, one of the few people who can read cuneiform, translated the small stone tablet.[33]

The information on the tablet is nothing inherently spectacular. The tablet is dated to 595 B.C. and simply states that a Babylonian official named Nebo-Sarsekim dedicated a large gift of gold to the temple of Esangila in Babylon.[34] While this inscription is unremarkable by itself, it provides an exciting link to the biblical text.

In Jeremiah 39, the prophet described Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar's successful attack on the city of Jerusalem. Jeremiah wrote that Nebuchadnezzar penetrated the walls of Jerusalem in the 11th year of King Zedekiah, which corresponds to 587 B.C. Upon infiltrating the walls, Nebuchadnezzar and several of his Babylonian princes sat at the Middle Gate. One of the princes listed as sitting with Nebuchadnezzar was Sarsechim (Jeremiah 39:3). The name "Sarsechim" is

recognized as the same name as Nebo-Sarsekim. Thus, the small stone tablet mentions a Babylonian official alive in 595 B.C. and less than 10 years later Jeremiah mentioned an official by the same name. One member of the British Museum's staff, Dr. Irving Finkel, who works in the Department of the Middle East, said: "A mundane commercial transaction takes its place as a primary witness to one of the turning points in Old Testament history. This is a tablet that deserves to be famous."[35]

While there is always the possibility that this Nebo-Sarsekim is not the same as the one mentioned in Jeremiah, the circumstantial evidence linking the two names establishes a strong case that the names refer to the same person. They both mention a Babylonian official, during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, in a time frame that would be expected if the same person is under discussion. Concerning the significance of the find, Dr. Finkel stated: "If Nebo-Sarsekim existed, which other lesser figures in the Old Testament existed? A throwaway detail in the Old Testament turns out to be accurate and true. I think that it means that the whole of the narrative [of Jeremiah] takes on a new kind of power."[36]

HEZEKIAH SEAL

Second Kings 18:1 says that Hezekiah was "the son of Ahaz, king of Judah." On December 2, 2015, a press release from Hebrew University in Jerusalem explained that a small clay seal was discovered near the Temple mount, unearthed in a garbage heap along with more than 30 other seals. The text on the seal reads, "Belonging to Hezekiah [son of] Ahaz king of Judah."[37] This seal is called a bulla (bullae is the plural form). Clay bullae like this were used to seal documents. There are many other bullae, but this one is the first of an Israelite or

Judean king that has been discovered by professional archaeologists *in situ* (in the location where it was left).[38]

THE JEHOIACHIN RATION LIST

For centuries, God had warned the sinful nation of Judah to turn from its wicked, idolatrous ways. Judah refused, and strayed farther from the true God. Due to their immoral, rebellious behavior, God sent His prophets to foretell Judah's destruction and exile at the hands of the Babylonians. Just as God had predicted, the Babylonians crushed the forces of Judah and took them into exile.

The ruling king of Judah at the time of the Babylonian invasion was an eighteen-year-old named Jehoiachin. His brief reign of three months is chronicled in 2 Kings 24:15-12. The text states that he did evil in the sight of the Lord and that the Babylonian king (Nebuchadnezzar) came against the capital city of Jerusalem and besieged it. In response to this siege, the text states: "Then Jehoiachin king of Judah, his mother, his servants, his princes, and his officers went out to the king of Babylon; and the king of Babylon, in the eighth year of his reign, took him prisoner" (2 Kings 24:12).

Jehoiachin's miserable state of affairs lasted over thirty years, throughout the entire reign of Nebuchadnezzar. Yet, when Evil-Merodach became king of Babylon, he took pity on Jehoiachin and released him from prison. The biblical text mentions that the Babylonian king "spoke kindly" to Jehoiachin, and "gave him a more prominent seat than those of the kings who were with him in Babylon" (2 Kings 25:28). In addition to releasing him from prison, the Bible says that Evil-Merodach gave Jehoiachin a set amount of provisions: "And as for his provisions, there was a regular ration given him by

the king, a portion for each day, all the days of his life" (2 Kings 25:30).

These rations given to Jehoiachin have become increasingly important in light of an interesting archaeological discovery. Several administrative documents have been found in ancient Babylon that record events and transactions that took place during the reign of Evil-Merodach. These documents were preserved on clay, cuneiform tablets, of which many have been found broken into several pieces. Jehoiachin's name, however, is clearly legible on the tablets. Not only is he mentioned, but documentation for an allotment of grain, oil, and foodstuffs is also provided. Alfred J. Hoerth mentions the find in his book *Archaeology and the Old Testament* and includes a picture of the cuneiform tablet that mentions Jehoiachin.[39]

The significance of this find is not lost on the observant reader. The Bible mentions Jehoichin's captivity and subsequent elevation and daily rations at the hand of Evil-Merodach. The secular record uncovered in the ruins of ancient Babylon verifies the facts to an exacting degree.

SEARCHING FOR SARGON

A favorite argument against the Bible's inspiration comes from the silence of the archaeological record. On more than one occasion, skeptics have accused the Bible of making a mistake regarding a person, place, or thing simply because no archaeological evidence has been uncovered corroborating the statement found in the Bible. Sargon, King of Assyria, was one biblical character who lacked archaeological confirmation for many years. In Isaiah 20:1, the prophet said: "In the year that Tartan came to Ashdod, when Sargon the King

of Assyria sent him, and he fought against Ashdod and took it." Many inscriptions and archaeological finds from the Assyrian Empire had been found, yet not a single one of them mentioned the Sargon of Isaiah 20. In fact, a well-known list of Assyrian kings conspicuously omitted Sargon.[40]

The situation changed in 1843 with a discovery by archaeologist Paul Emile Botta. Acting on information he had received about the small village of Khorsabad, Iraq, Botta began searching for ancient bricks with cuneiform writing on them. Not only did he find a rich collection of such bricks, but he also stumbled upon one of the most magnificent finds in archaeological history. Occupying the entire side of a hill, buried under centuries of dirt, stood the remains of King Sargon's palace. This palace was of such size that it has been described as "probably the most significant palace the world has ever seen, covering an area of more than twenty-five acres." Among the ruins, Sargon left numerous inscriptions detailing his military conquests. Not the least among those inscriptions was a particularly revealing inscription discussing his actions against Ashod, the very city mentioned in Isaiah 20:1.

CONCLUSION

The archaeological evidence presented in this chapter that confirms the biblical history is, in truth, only a tiny fraction of the evidence that could be amassed along these lines. Countless volumes have been produced to this point, and with every new find comes new information that will fill archaeological texts for decades to come. The more we uncover the past, the more we uncover the truth that the Bible is the most trustworthy, historically accurate document ever produced. As John Greenleaf Whittier once wrote:

> We search the world for truth; we cull the good, the pure, the beautiful, from all the old flower fields of the soul; and, weary seekers of the best, we come back laden from our quest, to find that all the sages said is in the Book our mothers read.

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CHAPTER 6

ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

Any time a book alleges to report historical events accurately, that book opens itself up to an immense amount of criticism. If such a book claims to be free from all errors in its historical documentation, the criticism becomes even more intense. Such **should** be the case, for it is the responsibility of present and future generations to know and understand the past, and to insist that history, including certain monumental moments, is recorded and related as accurately as possible. The New Testament does not claim to be a systematic representation of first-century history. It is not, *per se*, merely a history book. It does, however, claim that the historical facts related in the text are accurate, without error (2 Timothy 3:16-17; Acts 1:1-3). Due to this extraordinary claim, the New Testament has been scrutinized more closely than any other text in existence (except maybe its companion, the Old Testament). What has been the result of such scrutiny? The overwhelming result of this intense examination is an enormous cache of amazing archaeological evidence that testifies to the exactitude of the historical references in the New Testament. As can be said of virtually every article on archaeology and the Bible, the following few pages that document this archaeological evidence only scratch the surface of

the available evidence. Nevertheless, an examination of this subject makes for a fascinating study in biblical accuracy.

THE PILATE INSCRIPTION

Few who have read the New Testament accounts of the trial of Jesus can forget the name Pontius Pilate. All four gospel accounts make reference to Pilate. His inquisition of Jesus at the insistence of the Jewish mob stands as one of the most memorable scenes in the life of Jesus. No less than three times, this Roman official explained to the howling mob that he found no fault with Jesus (John 18:38; 19:4,6). Wanting to placate the Jews, however, Pilate washed his hands in a ceremonial attestation to his own innocence of the blood of Christ, and delivered Him to be scourged and crucified.

What can be gleaned from secular history concerning Pilate? For nearly 2000 years, the only references to Pilate were found in such writings as Josephus and Tacitus. The written record of his life placed him as the Roman ruler over Judea from A.D. 26-36. The records indicate that Pilate was a very rash, often violent man. The biblical record even mentioned that Pilate had killed certain Galileans while they were presenting sacrifices (Luke 13:1). Besides an occasional reference to Pilate in certain written records, however, there were no inscriptions or stone monuments that documented his life.

Such remained the case until 1961. In that year, Pilate moved from a figure known solely from ancient literature, to a figure attested to by archaeology. The Roman officials who controlled Judea during Jesus' time, most likely made their headquarters in the ancient town of Caesarea, as evinced from two references by Josephus to Pilate's military and political activity in that city.[1]

Located in Caesarea was a large Roman theater that an Italian-sponsored group of archaeologists began to excavate in 1959. Two years later, in 1961, researchers found a two-foot by three-foot slab of rock that had been used "in the construction of a landing between flights of steps in a tier of seats reserved for guests of honor."[2]

The Latin inscription on the stone, however, proved that originally, it was not meant to be used as a building block in the theater. On the stone, the researchers found what was left of an inscription bearing the name of Pontius Pilate. The entire inscription is not legible, but concerning the name of Pilate, Finegan noted: "The name Pontius Pilate is quite unmistakable and is of much importance as the first epigraphical documentation concerning Pontius Pilate, who governed Judea A.D. 26-36 according to commonly accepted dates."[3] What the complete inscription once said is not definitely known, but there is general agreement that the stone originally may have come from a temple or shrine dedicated to the Roman emperor Tiberius.[4] A stronger piece of evidence for the New Testament's accuracy would be difficult to find. Now appropriately known as "The Pilate Inscription," this stone slab documents that Pilate was the Roman official governing Judea, and even uses his more complete name of Pontius Pilate, as found in Luke 3:1.

CONCERNING DEATH BY CRUCIFIXION

Throughout centuries of history, crucifixion has been one of the most painful and shameful ways to die. Because of the ignominy attached to this means of death, many rulers crucified those who rebelled against them. Historically, multiplied thousands have been killed by this form of corporal punishment. John McRay, in a brief summary of several of the most notable examples of

mass crucifixion, commented that Alexander Jannaeus crucified 800 Jews in Jerusalem, the Romans crucified 6,000 slaves during the revolt led by Spartacus, and Josephus saw "many" Jews crucified in Tekoe at the end of the first revolt.[5] Yet, in spite of all the literary documentation concerning crucifixion, little, if any, physical archaeological evidence had been produced from the Bible lands concerning the practice. As with many of the people, places, and events recorded in the Bible, the lack of this physical evidence was not due to a fabrication by the biblical author, but was due, instead, to a lack of archaeological discovery.

In 1968, Vassilios Tzaferis found the first indisputable remains of a crucifixion victim. The victim's skeleton had been placed in an ossuary that "was typical of those used by Jews in the Holy Land between the end of the second century B.C. and the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70."[6] From an analysis of the skeletal remains of the victim, osteologists and other medical professionals from the Hadassah Medical School in Jerusalem determined that the victim was a male between the approximate ages of 24 and 28 who was about five feet six inches tall. Based on the inscription of the ossuary, his name seems to have been "Yehohanan, the son of Hagakol," although the last word of the description is still disputed.[7] The most significant piece of the victim's skeleton is his right heel bone, because a large spike-like nail had been hammered through it. Between the head of the nail and the heel bone several fragments of olive wood were found lodged. Randall Price, in his book, *The Stones Cry Out*, suggested that the nail apparently hit a knot in the olive stake upon which this man was crucified, causing the nail and heel to be removed together, due to the difficulty of removing the nail by itself.[8] [A full-color photograph of the feet portion of the

skeleton (showing the nail) can be found in an article titled "Search for the Sacred" by Jerry Adler and Anne Underwood in the August 30, 2004 issue of *Newsweek* magazine.[9]]

As to the significance of this find, Price has provided an excellent summary. In years gone by, certain scholars believed that the story of Jesus' crucifixion had several flaws, to say the least. First, it was believed that nails were not used to secure victims to the actual cross, but that ropes were used instead for this purpose. Finding the heel bone with a several-inch-long spike intact, along with the fragments of olive wood, is indicative of the fact that the feet of crucifixion victims were attached to the cross using nails. Second, it had been suggested that victims of crucifixion were not given a decent burial. Certain scholars even suggested that the story of Jesus' burial in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea was contrived, since crucifixion victims like Jesus were thrown into common graves alongside other condemned prisoners. The burial of the crucified victim found by Tzaferis proves that, at least on certain occasions, crucifixion victims were given a proper Jewish burial.[10]

POLITARCHS IN THESSALONICA

When writing about the Christians in Thessalonica who were accused of turning "the world upside down," Luke noted that some of the brethren were brought before the "rulers of the city" (Acts 17:5-6). The phrase "rulers of the city" (NKJV, ASV; "city authorities"–NASV) is translated from the Greek word *politarchas*, and occurs only in Acts 17 verses 6 and 8. For many years, critics of the Bible's claim of divine inspiration accused Luke of a historical inaccuracy because he used the title *politarchas* to refer to the city officials of Thessalonica, rather than employing the more common terms, *stra-*

teegoi (magistrates) or *exousiais* (authorities). To support their accusations, they simply pointed out that the term *politarch* is found nowhere else in Greek literature as an official title. Thus, they reasoned that Luke made a mistake. How could someone refer to such an office if it did not exist? Whoever heard or read of *politarchas* in the Greek language? No one in modern times. That is, no one in modern times had heard of it until it was found recorded in the various cities of Macedonia–the province in which Thessalonica was located.

In 1960, Carl Schuler published a list of 32 inscriptions bearing the term *politarchas.* Approximately 19 of those inscriptions came from Thessalonica, and at least three of them dated back to the first century.[11] On the Via Egnatia, a main thoroughfare running through ancient Thessalonica, there once stood a Roman Arch called the Vardar Gate. In 1867, the arch was torn down and used to repair the city walls.[12] An inscription on this arch, now housed in the British Museum, ranks as one of the most important when dealing with the term *politarchas.* This particular inscription, probably dated somewhere between 30 B.C. and A.D. 143 begins with the phrase "In the time of Politarchas...."[13] Thus, most likely the arch was standing when Luke wrote his historical narrative known as Acts of the Apostles. And the fact that politarchs ruled Thessalonica during the travels of Paul now stands as indisputable.

SERGIUS PAULUS, THE PROCONSUL OF CYPRUS

Throughout Paul's missionary journeys, he and his fellow travelers came in contact with many prestigious people–including Roman rulers of the area in which the missionaries were preaching. If Luke had been fabricating these travels, he could have made vague

references to Roman rulers without giving specific names and titles. But that is not what one finds in the book of Acts. On the contrary, it seems that Luke went out of his way to pinpoint specific names, titles, places, and cities. Because of this copious documentation, we have ample instances in which to check his reliability as a historian.

One such instance is found in Acts 13. In that chapter, Luke documented Paul's journey into Seleucia, then Cyprus, and Salamis, then Paphos. In Paphos, Paul and his companions encountered two individuals, a Jew named Bar-Jesus, and his "proconsul" companion Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man who summoned Paul and Barnabas in order to hear the Word of God (Acts 13:4-7). This particular reference to Sergius Paulus provides the student of archaeology with a two-fold test of Luke's accuracy. First, was the area of Cyprus and Paphos ruled by a proconsul during the time of Paul's work there? Second, was there ever a Sergius Paulus?

For many years, skeptics of Luke's accuracy claimed that the area of Cyprus would not have been ruled by a proconsul. Since Cyprus was an imperial province, it would have been put under a "propraetor" not a proconsul.[14] While it is true that Cyprus at one time had been an imperial province, it is not true that it was such during Paul's travels there. In fact, "in 22 B.C. Augustus transferred it to the Roman Senate, and it was therefore placed under the administration of proconsuls."[15] Biblical scholar F.F. Bruce expanded on this information when he explained that Cyprus was made an imperial province in 27 B.C., but that Augustus gave it to the Senate five years later in exchange for Dalmatia. Once given to the Senate, proconsuls would have ruled Cyprus,

just as in the other senatorial provinces.[16] As Thomas Eaves remarked:

> As we turn to the writers of history for that period, Dia Cassius (*Roman History*) and Strabo (*The Geography of Strabo*), we learn that there were two periods of Cyprus' history: first, it was an imperial province governed by a propraetor, and later in 22 B.C., it was made a senatorial province governed by a proconsul. Therefore, the historians support Luke in his statement that Cyprus was ruled by a proconsul, for it was between 40-50 A.D. when Paul made his first missionary journey. If we accept secular history as being true we must also accept Biblical history, for they are in agreement.[17]

In addition to the known fact that Cyprus became a senatorial province, archaeologists have found copper coins from the region that refer to other proconsuls who were not much removed from the time of Paul. One such coin, called appropriately a "copper proconsular coin of Cyprus," pictures the head of Claudius Caesar, and contains the title of "Arminius Proclus, Proconsul... of the Cyprians."[18]

Even more impressive than the fact that Luke had the specific title recorded accurately, is the fact that evidence has come to light that the record of Sergius Paulus is equally accurate. It is interesting, in this regard, that there are several inscriptions that could possibly match the proconsul recorded by Luke. The *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (ISBE) records three ancient inscriptions that could be possible matches.[19] First, at Soli on the north coast of Cyprus, an inscription was uncovered that mentioned Paulus, who was a proconsul. The authors and editors of the ISBE contend that the earliest this inscription can be dated is A.D. 50, and that it therefore cannot fit the Paulus of Acts 13. Others, however, are convinced that this is the Paulus of Acts' fame.[20]

In addition to this find, another Latin inscription has been discovered that refers to a Lucius Sergius Paulus who was "one of the curators of the Banks of the Tiber during the reign of Claudius." Eminent archaeologist Sir William Ramsay argued that this man later became the proconsul of Cyprus, and should be connected with Acts 13.[21] Finally, a fragmentary Greek inscription hailing from Kythraia in northern Cyprus has been discovered that refers to a Quintus Sergius as a proconsul during the reign of Claudius.[22] Regardless of which of these inscriptions actually connects to Acts 13, the evidence provides a plausible match. At least two men named Paulus were proconsuls in Cyprus, and at least two men named Sergius Paulus were officials during the reign of Claudius. Luke's accuracy is once again confirmed.

COUNTING QUIRINIUS

The precision with which Luke reported historical detail has been documented over and over again throughout the centuries by archaeologists and biblical scholars. In every instance, where sufficient archaeological evidence has surfaced, Luke has been vindicated as an accurate and meticulously precise writer. Skeptics and critics have been unable to verify even one anachronism or discrepancy with which to discredit the biblical writers' claims of being governed by an overriding divine influence.

However, observe the above-stated criterion that serves as the key to a fair and proper assessment of Luke's accuracy: **where sufficient archaeological evidence has surfaced**. Skeptics frequently level charges against Luke and the other biblical writers on the basis of **arguments from silence**. They fail to distinguish between a genuine contradiction on the one hand, and insufficient evidence from which to draw a firm conclusion on the

other. A charge of contradiction or inaccuracy within the Bible is illegitimate and, therefore, unsustained in those areas where evidence of historical corroboration is either absent or scant.

In light of these principles, consider the following words of Luke: "And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria" (Luke 2:1-2). Some scholars have charged Luke with committing an error on the basis of the fact that history records that Publius Sulpicius Quirinius was Governor of Syria beginning in A.D. 6—several years **after** the birth of Christ. It is true that thus far no historical record has surfaced to verify either the governorship or the census of Quirinius as represented by Luke at the time of Jesus' birth prior to the death of Herod in 4 B.C. As distinguished biblical archaeologist G. Ernest Wright of Harvard Divinity School conceded: "This chronological problem has not been solved."[23]

This void in extant information that would provide definitive archaeological confirmation notwithstanding, sufficient evidence **does** exist to postulate a plausible explanation for Luke's allusions, thereby rendering the charge of discrepancy ineffectual. Being the meticulous historian that he was, Luke demonstrated his awareness of a separate provincial census during Quirinius' governorship beginning in A.D. 6 (Acts 5:37). In view of this familiarity, he surely would not have confused this census with one taken ten or more years earlier. Hence Luke claimed that a **prior** census was, indeed, taken at the command of Caesar Augustus sometime prior to 4 B.C. He flagged this earlier census by using the expression *prote egeneto* ("first took place")—which

assumes a later one.[24] To question the authenticity of this claim, simply because no explicit reference has yet been found, is unwarranted and prejudicial. No one questions the historicity of the second census taken by Quirinius around A.D. 6/7, despite the fact that the sole authority for it is a single inscription found in Venice. Sir William Ramsay, world-renowned and widely acclaimed authority on such matters, wrote over one hundred years ago: "[W]hen we consider how purely accidental is the evidence for the second census, the want of evidence for the first seems to constitute no argument against the trustworthiness of Luke's statement."[25]

In addition, historical sources indicate that Quirinius was favored by Augustus, and was in active service of the emperor in the vicinity of Syria previous to, and during, the time period that Jesus was born. It is reasonable to conclude that Quirinius could have been appointed by Caesar to instigate a census/enrollment during that time frame, and that his competent execution of such could have earned for him a repeat appointment for the A.D. 6/7 census.[26] Notice also that Luke did not use the term *legatus*–the normal title for a Roman governor. He used the participial form of *hegemon* that was used for a propraetor (senatorial governor), or procurator (like Pontius Pilate), or quaestor (imperial commissioner).[27] After providing a thorough summary of the historical and archaeological data pertaining to this question, Finegan concluded: "Thus the situation presupposed in Luke 2:3 seems entirely plausible."[28] Indeed it does.

GALLIO THE PROCONSUL OF ACHAIA

Acts chapter 18 opens with a description of Paul's ministry in the city of Corinth. It was there that he contacted Aquila and his faithful wife Priscilla who had been expelled from Rome at the command of Claudius,

and who, as a result, had come to live in Corinth. Due to the fact that they were tentmakers, like Paul, the apostle stayed with them and worked as a "vocational minister," making tents and preaching the Gospel. As was usually the case with Paul's preaching, many of the Jews were offended, and opposed his work. Because of this opposition, Paul told the Jews that from then on he would go to the Gentiles. That said, Paul went to the house of a man named Justus who lived next door to the synagogue. Soon after his proclamation to go to the Gentiles, Paul had a vision in which the Lord instructed him to speak boldly, because no one in the city would attack him. Encouraged by the vision, Paul continued in Corinth for a year and six months, teaching the Word of God among the people.

After Paul's eighteen-month stay in Corinth, the opposition to his preaching finally erupted into violent, political action. Acts 18:12-17 explains.

> When Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him to the judgment seat, saying, "This fellow persuades men to worship God contrary to the law." And when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, "If it were a matter of wrongdoing or wicked crimes, O Jews, there would be reason why I should bear with you. But if it is a question of words and names and your own law, look to it yourselves; for I do not want to be a judge of such matters." And he drove them from the judgment seat. Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. But Gallio took no notice of these things.

From this brief pericope of Scripture, we learn several things about Gallio and his personality. Of paramount importance to our discussion is the fact that Luke recorded that Gallio was the "proconsul of Achaia." Here again, Luke, in recording specific information about the political rulers of his day, provided his read-

ers with a checkable point of reference. Was Gallio ever really the proconsul of Achaia?

Marianne Bonz, the former managing editor of the *Harvard Theological Review*, shed some light on a now-famous inscription concerning Gallio. She recounted how, in 1905, a doctoral student in Paris was sifting through a collection of inscriptions that had been collected from the Greek city of Delphi. In these various inscriptions, he found four different fragments that, when put together, formed a large portion of a letter from the Emperor Claudius. The letter from the emperor was written to none other than Gallio, the proconsul of Achaia.[29]

McRay, in giving the Greek portions of this now-famous inscription, and supplying missing letters in the gaps of the text to make it legible, translated it as follows: "Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus, Pontifex Maximus, of tribunician authority for the twelfth time, imperator twenty-sixth time...Lucius Junius Gallio, my friend, and the proconsul of Achaia."[30] And while certain portions of the above inscription are not entirely clear, the name of Gallio and his office in Achaia are clearly legible. Not only did Luke record the name of Gallio accurately, but he also recorded his political office with equal precision.

The importance of the Gallio inscription goes even deeper than verification of Luke's accuracy. This particular find shows how archaeology can give us a better understanding of the biblical text, especially in areas of chronology. Most scholars familiar with the travels and epistles of the apostle Paul will readily admit that attaching specific dates to his activities remains an exceedingly difficult task. The Gallio inscription, however, has added a small piece to this chronological puzzle. Jack Finegan, in his detailed work on biblical chronology, dated the

inscription to the year A.D. 52, Gallio's proconsulship in early A.D. 51, and Paul's arrival in Corinth in the winter of A.D. 49/50. Finegan stated concerning his conclusion: "This determination of the time when Paul arrived in Corinth thus provides an important anchor point for the entire chronology of Paul."[31]

A WORD ABOUT OSSUARIES

The *Archaeological Encyclopedia of the Holy Land* provides an excellent brief description of ossuaries in general. The writers explain that an ossuary is a small box about 2.5 feet long, usually made out of clay or cut out of chalk or limestone, primarily used to bury human bones after the soft tissue and flesh had decomposed. They "are typical of the burial practices in Jerusalem and its vicinity during the Early Roman period, i.e., between *circa* 40 B.C. and A.D. 135. Ossuaries found in the Herodian cemetery in Jericho are dated by Hachlili to a more restricted time period of between A.D. 10-68."[32] Ossuary panels often had decorations on them, and many had inscriptions or painted markings and letters, indicating whose bones were inside.

Of interest is the fact that many of the ossuaries discovered to date contain the same names that we find in the biblical account. And, while we cannot be sure that the bones contained in the ossuaries are the bones of the exact personalities mentioned in the Bible, the matching nomenclature does show that the biblical writers at least used names that coincided accurately with the names used in general during the time that the New Testament books were written.

Coming down the direct descent on the Mount of Olives is the site known as *Dominus flevit*, "the name embodying the tradition that this is the place where

'the Lord wept' over Jerusalem."[33] In 1953, excavations began in this area, and a large cemetery was discovered, consisting of at least five hundred known burial places. Among these many burial sites, over 120 ossuaries were discovered, more than 40 of which contained inscriptions and writing. Among the labeled ossuaries, the names of Martha and Miriam appear on a single ossuary. Other names that appear on the ossuaries are Joseph, Judas, Solome, Sapphira, Simeon, Yeshua (Jesus), Zechariah, Eleazar, Jairus, and John.[34] Free and Vos, in their brief critique of Rudolph Bultmann's "form criticism," used ossuary evidence to expose a few of the flaws in Bultmann's ideas. They wrote: "[S]ome scholars formerly held that personal names used in the gospels, particularly in John, were fictitious and had been selected because of their meaning and not because they referred to historical persons. Such speculations are not supported by the ossuary inscriptions, which preserve many of the biblical names."[35]

Along these same lines, Price discussed several ossuaries that were found accidentally in 1990, when workers were building a water park in Jerusalem's Peace Forest. Among the twelve limestone ossuaries discovered, one "was exquisitely ornate and decorated with incised rosette. Obviously it had belonged to a wealthy or high-ranking patron who could afford such a box. On this box was an inscription. It read in two places *Qafa* and *Yehosef bar Qayafa* ('Caiphas,' 'Joseph, son of Caiphas')."[36] Price connected this Caiaphas to the one recorded in the Bible, using two lines of reasoning. First, the Caiaphas in the biblical record was an influential, prominent high priest who would have possessed the means to obtain such an ornate burial box. Second, while the New Testament text gives only the name Caiaphas, Josephus "gives his full name as 'Joseph who was called

Caiaphas of the high priesthood.'"[37] Of further interest is the fact that the ossuary contained the bones of six different people, one of which was a man around the age of 60. Are these the bones of the Caiaphas recorded in the New Testament? No one can be sure. It is the case, however, that many ossuary finds, at the very least, verify that the New Testament writers used names that were common during the period in which they wrote.

A note of caution is needed regarding attempts to prove a direct connection between ossuary finds and biblical characters. One of the most famous of such attempts thus far comes from the "James" ossuary that captured the world's attention in late 2002. The inscription on that particular bone box reads: "James, the son of Joseph, brother of Jesus." Was this the ossuary that contained the bones of Jesus Christ's physical brother? In 2002, the answer remained to be seen. A brief article authored on this matter in December 2002, stated: "At present, we cannot be dogmatic about the ossuarial evidence."[38] Currently, the inscription still finds itself embroiled in debate. After analyzing the inscription, a committee appointed by the Israeli Antiquities Authority declared it to be unauthentic. According to Eric Myers, a Judai-studies scholar at Duke University, "the overwhelming scholarly consensus is that it's a fake."[39] However, Hershel Shanks, the distinguished editor of *Biblical Archaeology Review*, insists that the inscription remains antiquated and may possibly be linked to the Jesus and James of the Bible.[40]

Whether or not the inscription is authentic remains to be seen. Yet, even if the inscription does prove to date to around the first century, that still would not prove that the ossuary contained the bones of Jesus' physical brother. It would prove that names like Joseph, James,

and Jesus were used during that time in that region of the world. This would, at the very least, verify that the biblical writers related information that fit with the events happening at the time they produced their writings. As Andrew Overman, head of classics at Macalester College, stated: "Even if the [James] Ossuary is genuine, it provides no new information."[41]

Another famous ossuary connection to the biblical text was the tomb that documentary filmmakers James Cameron and Simcha Jacobovici alleged to be the lost tomb of Jesus–complete with His bones in an ancient ossuary. This outlandish claim has been thoroughly refuted.[42] Furthermore, Cameron and Jacobovici's use of scanty archaeological information highlights the fact that caution must be used when attempting to make direct archaeological connections to the Bible.

When looking to archaeology, we must avoid asking it to prove too much. The discipline does have limitations. Yet, in spite of those limitations, it remains a valuable tool that can be used to shed light on the biblical text. As Adler and Underwood remarked, the value of archaeology is "in providing a historical and intellectual context, and the occasional flash of illumination on crucial details."[43]

GENTILES AND THE TEMPLE

Near the end of the book of Acts, the apostle Paul was making every effort to arrive in the city of Jerusalem in time to celebrate an upcoming Jewish feast. Upon reaching Jerusalem, he met with James and several of the Jewish leaders, and reported "those things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry" (Acts 21:19). Upon hearing Paul's report, the Jewish leaders of the church advised Paul to take certain

men into the Temple and purify himself along with the men. While in the Temple, certain Jews from Asia saw Paul, and stirred up the crowd against him, saying, "Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against the people, the law, and this place; and furthermore he also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place" (Acts 21:28). In the next verse, the inspired text relates the fact that the men had seen Trophimus the Ephesian with Paul in the city, and they "supposed" Paul had brought him into the Temple (although the record does not indicate that anyone actually **saw** this happen).

In response to the accusation that Paul had defiled the Temple by bringing in a Gentile, the text states that "all the city was disturbed; and the people ran together, seized Paul, and dragged him out of the temple; and immediately the doors were shut" (Acts 21:30). The next verse of Acts states explicitly what this violent mob planned to do with Paul: "Now as they were seeking to kill him, news came to the commander of the garrison that all Jerusalem was in an uproar." Under what law or pretense was the Jewish mob working when they intended to kill Paul?

A plausible answer to this question comes to us from archaeology. In his description of the Temple in Jerusalem, Josephus explained that a certain inscription separated the part of the Temple that the Gentiles **could** enter, from the parts of the Temple that Gentiles **could not** enter. This inscription, says Josephus, "forbade any foreigner to go in, under pain of death."[44] A find published in 1871 by C.S. Clermont-Ganneau brings the picture into clearer focus. About 50 meters from the actual Temple site, a fragment of stone with seven lines of Greek capitals was discovered.[45] Finegan gives

the entire Greek text, and translates the inscription as follows: "No foreigner is to enter within the balustrade and enclosure around the temple area. Whoever is caught will have himself to blame for his death which will follow."[46]

In addition to this single inscription, another stone fragment was found and described in 1938. Discovered near the north gate of Jerusalem, also known as St. Stephen's Gate, this additional stone fragment was smaller than the first, and had only six lines instead of seven. The partially preserved words clearly coincided with those on the previous inscription. Finegan noted concerning the preserved words: "From them it would appear that the wording of the entire inscription was identical (except for *aut*) instead of *eautoo*...."[47] [NOTE: Finegan mentioned that the letters of this second inscription had been painted red, and the letters still retained much of their original coloration.]

In light of these finds, and the comments by Josephus, one can see why the mob in Acts 21 so boldly sought to kill Paul. These inscriptions shed light on the biblical text, and in doing so, offer further confirmation of its accuracy.

CORBAN

On several occasions, Jesus was accosted by the Pharisees and other religious leaders, because He and His disciples were not doing exactly what the Pharisees thought they should be doing. Many times, the religious leaders had instituted laws or traditions that were not in God's Word, but nonetheless were treated with equal or greater reverence than the laws given by God. In Mark 7:1-16, the Bible records that the Pharisees and other leaders were finding fault with the disciples of Jesus

because Jesus' followers did not wash their hands in the traditional manner before they ate. The Pharisees said to Jesus: "Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?" (Mark 7:5).

Upon hearing this accusatory interrogation, Jesus launched into a powerful condemnation of the accusers. Jesus explained that His inquisitors often kept **their** beloved traditions, while ignoring the commandments of God. Jesus said: "All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition" (Mark 7:9). As a case in point of their rejection of God's Law, Jesus went on to say:

> For Moses said, "Honor your father and your mother"; and, "He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death." But you say, "If a man says to his father or mother, 'Whatever profit you might have received from me is **Corban**' (that is, a gift to God)," then you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother, making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do (Mark 7:11-13).

In this passage, Jesus repudiated the Pharisees' ungodly insistence upon their own traditions, and at the same time included a reference that can be (and has been) authenticated by archaeological discovery. Jesus mentioned the word *corban*, a word that the writer of the gospel account felt needed a little explanation. Mark defined the word as "a gift to God." In a discussion of this term in an article by Kathleen and Leen Ritmeyer, the word comes into sharper focus. They documented a fragment of a stone vessel found near the southern wall of the Temple. On the fragment, the Hebrew word *krbn* (korban–the same word used by Jesus in Mark 7) is inscribed.[48]

Of further interest is the fact that the inscription also included "two crudely drawn birds, identified as pigeons or doves." The authors mentioned that the vessel might have been "used in connection with a sacrifice to celebrate the birth of a child."[49] In Luke 2:24, we read about Joseph and Mary offering two pigeons when they took baby Jesus to present Him to God. Since these animals were the prescribed sacrifice for certain Temple sacrifices, those who sold them set up shop in the Temple. Due to the immoral practices of many such merchants, they fell under Jesus' attack when He cleansed the Temple and "overturned the tables of the moneychangers and seats of those who sold doves" (Mark 11:15).

FINDING NAZARETH

In 2008, the American Atheist Press published a book by René Salm titled, *The Myth of Nazareth: The Invented Town of Jesus*. The thesis of the book simply is that Nazareth was uninhabited at the time of Christ, thus the Bible writers could not have been correct in their statements concerning Christ's life there. So positive are the publishers that Salm had effectively proved his thesis, that the back of the book cover includes tremendously brazen statements by those who have read the book. The cover quotes Frank Zindler who says: "Christianity cannot survive unless this book can be refuted." And, "By proving scientifically that Nazareth was uninhabited at the time of Jesus of Nazareth and his family were supposed to be living there, Salm strikes the Achilles' heel of a very popular god." Robert Price's comment on the back cover states: "I am amazed by your work and can't wait to see the pathetic attempts to reply." According to his "fans," Salm's book **must be** answered in order for Christianity to remain a reasonable, historic religion.

Throughout the book, Salm stresses the lack of archaeological discoveries supporting Nazareth. He reasoned over and over that the absence of such evidence proved that the settlement of Nazareth was not there. Salm's assertion violated one of the most fundamental rules of interpreting archaeological information. It is a well-known truth that "absence of evidence" does not provide "evidence of absence." A host of reasons exist as to why the settlement may not have been discovered by the excavations. It could be that the small area excavated was a field or a yard in a settlement that did not have any artifacts to yield. Yet Salm insists that because no evidence of such a settlement was found, then that proves there was not a settlement. He wrote: "The fact that habitations and other domestic evidence have never been uncovered on the hillside confirms the obvious. It is clear that the settlement in all ancient periods was situated on the valley floor."[50] Actually, the only thing that the lack of evidence of a settlement proved at the time of excavation, was that search had not uncovered one yet, not that one did not exist. Furthermore, using his own statement, if evidence for a settlement was found, then that would confirm the obvious fact that Nazareth was inhabited during the time of Christ.

Salm's faulty reasoning and biased skepticism became apparent in late 2009 when evidence of a habitation was unearthed in the area he claimed was never a first-century settlement. In late December of 2009, Nazareth made worldwide headlines. Archaeologist Yardena Alexandre and her colleagues uncovered a small structure that dated to the time of Christ.[51] The Israel Antiquities Authority official press release hailed this discovery as the first of its kind in which a residential structure was uncovered. The official press release noted the importance of the discovery, and quoted Yardena:

> The discovery is of utmost importance since it reveals for the very first time a house from the Jewish village of Nazareth and thereby sheds light on the way of life at the time of Jesus. The building that we found is small and modest and it is most likely typical of the dwellings in Nazareth in that period. From the few written sources that there are, we know that in the first century CE Nazareth was a small Jewish village, located inside a valley. Until now a number of tombs from the time of Jesus were found in Nazareth; however, no settlement remains have been discovered that are attributed to this period.[52]

Alexandre based her dating conclusions on the clay and chalk pottery shards that were found in the house. The pottery shards date from the Hellenic Roman period from 100 B.C. to A.D. 100. The researchers suggested that the existence of chalk indicated that Jews lived in the town, since such chalk "was used by the Jews at the time to ensure the purity of the food and water kept inside the vessels."[53] The Israel Antiquities Authority confirmed this statement, and added that using such chalk vessels was unique and exclusive to the Jewish community.[54] Hadid also reported that Yardena and her fellow archaeologists believe that the lack of fancier, more expensive materials such as glass indicates that the residents of the small village were "simple," maybe traders or farmers.

The house on which Alexandre and her team focused their research seems to have been about 900 square feet in area. The remains of the house include "a wall, a hideout, a courtyard and a water system that appeared to collect water from the roof and supply it to the home."[55] In addition, the team also found a hidden entryway into a small cave that Alexandre believes the Jews living in Nazareth used to hide from Roman soldiers.

The dating method used by Yardena and her team, of matching pottery from the site to other pottery in

an attempt to properly identify the time frame of the dig, is one of the most frequently used dating methods in archaeology. McRay mentioned this dating method as one of the most effective. He wrote:

> The potters of antiquity were careful imitators but reluctant innovators.... At any rate style did seem to change from period to period, slowly but decisively, and we are now able to observe those changes in style and from them establish a chronology. The methodology is not exact, but within reasonable limitations it does provide a workable typology upon which to construct a fairly reliable chronology.[56]

Once again, the mere turn of the digger's spade put to silence and to shame the critics of the Bible.

CONCLUSION

Over and over, biblical references that can be checked prove to be historically accurate in every detail. After hundreds of years of critical scrutiny, both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible have proven their authenticity and accuracy at every turn. Sir William Ramsay, in his assessment of Luke's writings in the New Testament, wrote: "You may press the words of Luke in a degree beyond any other historian's, and they stand the keenest scrutiny and the hardest treatment, provided always that the critic knows the subject and does not go beyond the limits of science and of justice."[57] Now, over a hundred years after that statement originally was written, the exact same thing can be said with even more certainty of the writings of Luke–and every other Bible writer. Almost 3,000 years ago, the sweet singer of Israel, in his description of God's Word, put it perfectly when he said: "The entirety of Your word is truth" (Psalm 119:160).

ENDNOTES

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[2] John McRay (1991), *Archaeology and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker), p. 204.

[3] Finegan, p. 139.

[4] E.M. Blailock(1984), *The Archaeology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), revised edition, p. 57.

[5] McRay, p. 389.

[6] Ibid., p. 204.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Randall Price(1997), *The Stones Cry Out* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House), p. 309.

[9] Jerry Adler and Anne Underwood (2004), "Search for the Sacred," *Newsweek*, 144[9]:37-41, August 30, 144[9]:38.

[10] Price, pp. 308-311; cf. Adler Underwood, 144[9]:39.

[11] McRay, p. 295.

[12] Ibid.

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[14] Merrill Unger (1962), *Archaeology and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), pp. 185-186.

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[18] "Cyprus," John McClintock and James Strong (1968 reprint), *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker), p. 627.

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[22] Ibid.

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[24] W. Robertson Nicoll (no date), *The Expositor's Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 1:471.

[25] William M. Ramsay (1897), *St. Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1962 reprint), p. 386.

[26] Gleason L. Jr. Archer (1982), *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), p. 366.

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[28] Finegan, 1959, 2:261.

[29] Marianne Bonz (1998), "Recovering the Material World of the Early Christians," http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/maps/arch/recovering.html, p. 8.

[30] McRay, pp. 226-227.

[31] Jack Finegan (1998), *Handbook of Biblical Chronology* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson), pp. 391-393.

[32] "Ossuary" (2001), *Archaeological Encyclopedia of the Holy Land*, ed. Avraham Negev and Shimon Gibson (New York: Continuum), p. 377.

[33] Finegan, 1992, p. 171

[34] Ibid. pp. 366-371.

[35] Free and Vos, p. 256.

[36] Price, p. 305.

[37] Ibid., p. 305.

[38] Kyle Butt (2002), "James, Son of Joseph, Brother of Jesus," http://www.apologeticspress.org/articles/495.

[39] As quoted in Adler and Underwood, 144[9]:38.

[40] Hershel Shanks (2004), "The Seventh Sample," http://www.bib-arch.org/bswbbreakingseventh.html; cf. Adler and Underwood, p. 38.

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[42] Dewayne Bryant (2007), "Discovering the Truth About 'The Lost Tomb of Jesus,'" *Reason & Revelation*, 27[5]:33-39, http://www.apologeticspress.org/articles/3322.

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[49] Ibid.

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[52] "Residential Building from the Time of Jesus Exposed in Nazareth" (2009), Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, (2009), http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/History/Early+History+-+Archaeology/Residential_building_time_Jesus_Nazareth_21-Dec-2009.htm.

[53] Hadid.

[54] "Residential...."

[55] Hadid.

[56] John McRay (1991), *Archaeology and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker), p. 32.

[57] William M. Ramsay (1915), *The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1975 reprint), p. 89.

CHAPTER 7

SCIENCE AND THE BIBLE (PART 1)

Generally speaking, science is the study of the natural world. Scientific breakthroughs produce amazing technologies that allow us to launch rockets into space, create vaccines that save lives, genetically modify crops to increase yields, and so much more. One thing we understand about science is that modern discoveries often disprove incorrect ideas that people had in the past. Newtonian physics changed the way the world viewed nature, and Einstein's theories of relativity pushed our understanding even further. Quantum physics and mechanics continue to plumb the depths of the smallest subatomic particles, and the latest medical research proves that many of the old ideas en vogue years ago were simply wrong. Due to the nature of human fallibility, asbestos, that we once thought was a perfect flame retardant, has been replaced because of its health hazards. Lead-based paint that once seemed like such a good idea, must be removed from homes so babies don't get lead poisoning. There is a good reason that many science textbooks are in their 10th, 11th, and 12th editions. The first editions needed correcting and updating. The most up-to-date modern science is often the most accurate, and even much of that will be replaced as the overall knowledge of humanity continues to increase.

The Bible, on the other hand, is an old book. The first books of the Old Testament were penned by Moses around 1450 B.C. The last book of the New Testament, Revelation, was finished before the end of the first century. That means the entire Bible is almost 2,000 years old and some parts of it are approximately 3,500 years old. If the 66 books that compose the Bible were written by mere humans, as some people claim they were, we would expect to find all of the foibles and mistakes that plague other books. In light of the rapid advances in scientific fields, we would certainly expect to find outdated information about the natural world; information that has been shown by modern science to be incorrect. If, on the other hand, the Bible is inspired by the Creator of the Universe, as the writers claim it was, we should find a different situation altogether. If the God Who created the World inspired the Bible we should observe perfect agreement between every scientific statement in the Bible and everything that is **verified as fact** in the natural world. In addition, since the all-knowing God has knowledge that surpasses that of any human at any given time in history, we might also expect to discover that some of the scientific information in the Bible would exhibit an understanding of science that was far ahead of anything the writers knew at the time–an idea known as scientific foreknowledge.

The stage, then, is set for a showdown between the skeptic, who claims that the Bible is not inspired, and the Christian, who believes it is. The skeptic must simply show that the Bible, a 3,500-year-old book, is filled with the typical scientific mistakes made by mere humans. If the Bible is a human production, that should be extremely easy to do. The Christian, on the other hand, must show that the Bible does not contain even one scientific error. Further, it would add credence to

the case for inspiration if it could be proven that the Bible exhibits scientific information that was ahead of anything the human writers could have known by themselves. Which of these two positions is validated by an honest comparison between the Bible and modern scientific research? Time and again, the Bible exhibits a perfectly accurate understanding of natural phenomena, even to the point of legitimate scientific foreknowledge, without putting forth a single idea that contradicts a known scientific fact. Let us turn our attention to a listing of these findings.

The Law of Biogenesis

In biology, one of the most widely used laws of science is the Law of Biogenesis. "Biogenesis" is composed of two words–"bio," which means life, and "genesis," which means beginning. Thus, this law deals with the beginning of life. It simply says that life in the material world comes only from previous life of its own kind. We see this law played out everyday all around the world. Over the years, the truthfulness of this law has been documented by thousands of scientists, one of the most famous of whom was Louis Pasteur. His work dealt a crushing blow to the notion of spontaneous generation (the idea that life arises on its own from nonliving sources). In earlier centuries, the idea that life arose from nonliving chemicals was very popular.

Teachers and professors correctly point out today that Pasteur triumphed over this "mythology" when he disproved the concept of spontaneous generation through his well-designed scientific experiments. In truth, however, the naturalistic theory of evolution could not have occurred without some form of spontaneous generation. For this reason, many scientists have concocted experiments attempting to create life from

nonliving substances. But after all these attempts, life has never been created from something nonliving. If thousands of scientists have designed carefully planned experiments to create life from something nonliving, and yet have failed miserably every time, how in the world can we be expected to believe that nature did it by using accidents, chance, and blind forces? On the contrary, whether **in nature or in the laboratory, scientists never have documented a single case of spontaneous generation!** Life comes only from previous life of its own kind, which is exactly what the Bible has taught for 3,500 years. To put it in the words of Genesis 1:24: "Then God said, 'Let the earth bring forth the living creature **according to its kind**: cattle and creeping thing and beast of the earth, each according to its kind'; and it was so."[1]

The Laws of Thermodynamics

The study of matter and energy and how they relate is often referred to as thermodynamics. There are four primary Laws of Thermodynamics, and two of them are of particular importance. The first is known as the Law of Conservation of Energy. It simply says that in a closed system, such as our Universe, matter and energy can change forms, but no matter or energy can be created or destroyed. To understand this, think of a burning piece of paper. The paper is burned and changes to ash, while heat and gases are released into the atmosphere, but the total amount of matter/energy left is still the same. The Second Law of Thermodynamics basically states that closed systems are moving toward a state of disorder, also known as entropy. Think about the burning paper. The energy and gases released after burning are less usable than they were before. The Second Law

dictates that rooms get messier over time, automobiles wear out, and things wear down.

As we look into the Bible, we see that it agrees perfectly with these Laws. As Dr. Jeff Miller stated:

> The Laws of Thermodynamics, which science itself recognizes in its explanations of the phenomena in the Universe, were designed by the Chief Engineer. As expected, they prove to be in complete harmony with His existence.... God, Himself, articulated these laws centuries ago. At the very beginning of the Bible, the First Law of Thermodynamics was expressed when Moses penned, "Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, **were finished**. And on the seventh day, God **ended** His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done" (Genesis 2:1-2). After the six days of Creation, the mass/matter/energy creation process was terminated.... Through the hand of the Hebrews writer, God also articulated centuries ago what scientists call the Second Law of Thermodynamics: "You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands; they will perish, but You remain; and **they will all grow old like a garment**" (1:10-11).[2]

Ship Engineering

In Genesis 6:15, God instructed Noah to build an ark that was 300 cubits long, 50 cubits wide, and 30 cubits high. This is a ratio of 30 to 5 to 3 (length to breadth to height). In terms that we understand better, the ark was about 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high. As it turns out, these dimensions are the perfect ratio for a huge boat built for seaworthiness and not for speed. Obviously the ark was not built for speed, since it had nowhere to go! What is more, shipbuilders during World War II used a similar ratio to build a boat named the *S.S. Jeremiah O'Brien*, that came to be known as "the ugly duckling"–a barge-like boat built to carry tremendous amounts of cargo.[3] How did Noah

know the perfect seagoing ratio to use in building the ark? Modern shipbuilders had many generations of shipbuilding knowledge to use, but Noah's was the first of its kind ever recorded.

Countless Stars

Who could forget God's promises to the "father of the faithful"? Not only would God bless all nations through Abraham and give his descendants the land upon which Abraham's feet had trod, but God also would cause Abraham's descendants to multiply so that they would be as countless as the stars of the sky. In Genesis 15:5, we read God's promise to His friend Abraham: "Then He [God] brought him outside and said, 'Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.' And He said to him, 'So shall your descendants be.'" The fact that the stars are numberless comes as no surprise to those of us who have seen pictures taken from the Moon, or peered into other galaxies through million-dollar telescopes.[4]

Yet the idea that the stars could conceivably be counted remained firmly planted in the minds of some all the way up until the early 1900s. In the past, ancient (and not-so-ancient) personalities attempted to count the stars. One such Greek astronomer, Hipparchus, almost two centuries before Christ, went on record in multiple ancient sources with figures anywhere from 800 to 1,080 for the total number of stars. Chang Hing, put the number around 2,500 "not including those which the sailors observe." The idea that there existed a fairly small number of stars that could be counted by humans was quite a prevalent notion.[5]

It is humorous today to compare the actual estimated number of stars to those figures garnered from

the ancients. With our modern knowledge we have estimated that there are at least thousands of billions of stars! Indeed, the Bible was correct when it commented that the stars "cannot be numbered." And, even though the promises to Abraham and David were not uttered with scientific information as their primary concern, it is true that whenever the Bible speaks on such matters, it is always scientifically accurate.

Sewage and Waste Disposal

In modern First World countries, it is well understood that raw sewage carries disease. Historically, however, and even in some places today, people do not understand this fact. Literally millions of people have died due to diseases caused by the improper disposal of waste. The London cholera epidemic of 1846, in which 16,000 people died, is just one example of this unfortunate truth.[6]

If only the people of London had turned in their Bibles to Deuteronomy 23:12: "Also, you shall have a place outside the camp, where you may go out; and you shall have an implement among your equipment, and when you sit down outside, you shall dig with it and turn and cover your refuse." More than 3,300 years before London's epidemic, the Lord, through his servant Moses, implemented a plan to stop such epidemics before they started. Such tragedies as those that befell London could have been prevented if people simply had accepted God's Word on the matter and observed the kind of hygiene that the Israelites had practiced so many years before. The fact is, Moses' instructions could still be used to save lives today in countries all over the world that do not have running water or proper waste disposal.

Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Countries across the globe are experiencing major epidemics of sexually transmitted diseases. For instance, every hour in China a baby is born with syphilis, and "the rate of mother-to-child transmission jumped from 7 to 57 cases per 100,000 live births between 2003 and 2008."[7] In recent years, syphilis cases in China were "rising by 30 percent every year." Syphilis infection is increasing in the United States as well. To what do the experts attribute the surge of syphilis infection? "Prostitutes along with gay and bisexual men, many of whom are married with families, are driving the epidemic" in China. And in the United States, "more than 60 percent of cases [are] linked to gay sex."[8]

What is the solution to epidemic sexually transmitted diseases like syphilis? The United States Center for Disease Control outlined a simple, effect way to eradicate such diseases:

> The surest way to avoid transmission of sexually transmitted diseases, including syphilis, is to **abstain from sexual contact or to be in a long-term mutually monogamous relationship** with a partner who has been tested and is known to be uninfected.[9]

The recipe for eliminating STDs bears a striking resemblance to the Bible's instructions concerning sex being reserved for a life-long covenant marriage relationship (see Matthew 19:1-4; Hebrews 13:4; 1 Corinthians 6:15-20).

In truth, God's instructions concerning sex and all other aspects of human life have always been intended to help humans be truly happy. In Deuteronomy 6:24, Moses wrote: "And the Lord commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, **for our good always**, that He might preserve us alive, as it is this day." The biblical instructions in this regard agree

perfectly with the best scientific research we have on the subject.

A Global Flood

Genesis chapters 6-9 tell the story of Noah and a world wide Flood that covered every square inch of the globe. Consider the boldness of such a statement. There would have been no possible way for one man or family to know what happened across the whole Earth. The most any person could do would be to describe what happened in their specific geographic area. Today we have global communication and satellite surveillance that allow us to know what is happening on the other side of the world, but nothing like that was available during the time of Noah or Moses who recorded the story. For a mere human to recount with certainty the fact of a global Flood would be beyond the scope of any and all human knowledge. Yet, that is exactly what Moses did.

When we look at the globe, do we find evidence of massive, worldwide flooding? We certainly do. Geologist Andrew Snelling provides a list of six powerful lines of evidence that verify the fact of a global Flood:

1. Fossils of sea creatures high above sea level
2. Rapid burial of plants and animals
3. Rapidly deposited sedimentary layers spread across vast areas
4. Sediment transported long distances
5. Rapid or no erosion between strata
6. Many strata laid down in rapid succession[10]

Snelling further described a geological formation known as a seismite that normally forms in water during earthquakes. The ones formed in modern times generally are only a few inches. The ones he describes are

30 feet thick, massively bigger than anything geologists have ever seen form. He noted that those who reject the Flood have no explanation for these huge seismites. The Flood, however, perfectly predicts and explains their existence.[11]

The Science of Archaeology

As discussed previously, the scientific discipline of archaeology deals with the study of human artifacts from the past. These artifacts provide information and evidence for historical events. Just as we can study various aspects of geology and know what happened in the past to cause certain formations, we can study archaeological finds and gather accurate information about ancient people and civilizations. Some have argued that historical studies are not scientific, since we were not there and cannot reproduce exact experiments to verify what happened. Even many atheists, however, admit that we cannot discount history as unscientific.

Famed atheist and New York Times bestselling author Sam Harris stated:

> For the purposes of this discussion, I do not intend to make a hard distinction between "science" and other intellectual contexts in which we discuss "facts"—e.g., history. For instance, it is a fact that John F. Kennedy was assassinated. Facts of this kind fall within the context of "science," broadly construed as our best effort to form a rational account of empirical reality. Granted, one doesn't generally think of events like assassinations as "scientific" facts, but the murder of President Kennedy is as fully corroborated a fact as can be found anywhere, and it would betray a profoundly unscientific frame of mind to deny that it occurred.[12]

If mere men composed the Bible, the writers should have made various mistakes in listing ancient peoples, places, and events. If God inspired the text, however, it should be perfectly accurate in its discussion of all past

events. When we apply the scientific study of archaeology to the Bible, we find that it is the most historically accurate book ever penned, without a single error.[13]

CONCLUSION

The challenge is a simple one. If ancient humans authored the Bible, it would be filled with all the baggage and mistakes that come with being human. We would find some accurate information, but a noticeable amount of inaccurate information. Due to the rate at which scientific knowledge increases, a book as old as the Bible should be filled with scientific statements that are outdated and have been proven false. That is not what we find. Instead, we find a series of 66 books that are thousands of years old that contain a depth of scientific accuracy that has never been seen in any ancient writing. Not only are scientific mistakes completely absent from its pages, but the writers often exhibit an understanding of the world that was unavailable by human wisdom or understanding at the time. The ancient psalmist, speaking of the God's Word, once wrote: "The **entirety** of Your word is **truth**, and **every one** of your righteous judgments endures forever" (119:160). His assessment was exactly right, from the largest ships to the tiniest germs.

ENDNOTES

[1] For an extensive, in-depth discussion of this topic, see Jeff Miller's book *Science vs. Evolution* (Montgomery: Apologetics Press), pp. 51-110.

[2] Miller, pp. 19-39.

[3] Walter W. Jaffee (1993), *The Last Liberty: The Biography of the SS Jeremiah O'Brien* (Palo Alto, CA: Glenncannon), pp. 2-3. Also Harry Butowsky (1985), *SS Jeremiah O'Brien*, "Warships Associated with World War II in the Pacific," National Park Service, http://npshistory.com/publications/nhl/world-war-ii-warships.pdf.

[4] It is not to be understood that the words "countless" or "numberless" indicate an infinite number of stars. This is a hyperbolic expression used by the Bible writer to mean simply that humans could not count the number because it is so vast. The fact that many in the past attempted to count them shows the wisdom of the Bible writer's statement. Furthermore, it seemed obvious to Abraham in his discussion with God that he could not count the stars. This example of science in the Bible may not necessarily be one of major foreknowledge as much as one of accurate knowledge that was ignored by many.

[5] Kenny Barfield (1997), *Why the Bible is Number 1* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock), chapter 12.

[6] See S.I. McMillen and David Stern (2000), *None of These Diseases* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell), third edition.

[7] Margie Mason, "1 Chinese Baby Born With Syphilis Every Hour," http://www.nbcnews.com/id/36967341/ns/health-infectious_diseases/t/chinese-baby-born-syphilis-every-hour/#.W4BQbWRKgr8.

[8] Ibid.

[9] "Syphilis–CDC Fact Sheet" (2008), http://www.cdc.gov/std/syphilis/STDFact-Syphilis.htm#protect, emp. added.

[10] Andrew Snelling, "Transcontinental Rock Layers" (2008), https://assets.answersingenesis.org/doc/articles/pdf-versions/flood_evidence_3.pdf.

[11] Snelling, "When Continents Collide" (2017), *Answers Magazine*, https://answersingenesis.org/geology/plate-tectonics/when-continents-collide/.

[12] Sam Harris (2010), *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Value* (New York: Free Press), p. 195.

[13] As chapters five and six of this book show.

CHAPTER 8

SCIENCE AND THE BIBLE (PART 2)

While it is the case that the Bible does not present itself as a scientific or medical textbook, it is only reasonable that if God truly did inspire the books that compose the Bible, they would be completely accurate in every scientific or medical detail found among their pages. Furthermore, if the omniscient Ruler of the Universe actually did inspire these books, scientific and medical errors that fill the pages of other ancient, non-inspired texts should be entirely absent from the biblical record. Is the Bible infallible when it speaks about scientific fields of discipline, or does it contain the errors that one would expect to find in the writings of fallible men in ancient times?

That the first five books of the Old Testament are a product of Moses is a matter of historical record.[1] Furthermore, the story of Moses' education among the Egyptian culture was well understood. In fact, even those Jews who did not convert to Christianity were so familiar with the historic fact that Moses was educated in "all the wisdom of the Egyptians" (Acts 7:22), that Stephen's statement to that effect went completely undisputed. Moses had been trained under the most advanced Egyptian educational system of his day. With such training, it would have been only natural for Moses

to include some of the Egyptian "wisdom" in his writings if he were composing the Pentateuch by using his own prowess and mental faculties.

A look into the medical practices from ancient Egypt and those found in the Pentateuch, however, reveals that Moses did not necessarily rely on "wisdom" of the Egyptians (which, in many cases, consisted of life-threatening malpractice). While some medical practices in the Pentateuch are similar to those found in ancient Egyptian documents, the Pentateuch exhibits a conspicuous absence of those harmful malpractices that plague the writings of the Egyptians. Moses penned the most advanced, flawless medical prescriptions that had ever been recorded. Furthermore, every statement that pertained to the health and medical well-being of the Israelite nation recorded by Moses could theoretically still be implemented and be completely in accord with every fact modern medicine has learned in regard to germ spreading, epidemic disease control, communal sanitation, and a host of other medical and scientific discoveries.

It is the case that the ancient Egyptians were renowned in the ancient world for their progress in the field of medicine. Dr. Massengill noted that "Egypt was the medical center of the ancient world."[2] During the days of in the Medo-Persian Empire, the ancient historian Herodotus recorded that it was king Darius' practice "to keep in attendance certain Egyptian doctors, who had a reputation for the highest eminence in their profession."[3] Thus, while the medical practices of the Bible could be equally compared to those of other ancient cultures and found to be flawlessly superior, comparing them to that of the eminent Egyptian cul-

ture should suffice to manifest the Bible's supernatural superiority in the field.

It Will Cure You—If It Doesn't Kill You First

Among the ancient documents that detail much of the Egyptian medicinal knowledge, the Ebers Papyrus ranks as one of the foremost sources. This papyrus was discovered in 1872 by a German Egyptologist named Georg Ebers (the name from which the papyrus acquired its moniker).[4] It consists of a host of medical remedies purported to heal, enhance, and prevent. "Altogether 811 prescriptions are set forth in the Papyrus, and they take the form of salves, plasters, and poultices; snuffs, inhalations, and gargles; draughts, confections, and pills; fumigations, suppositories, and enemata."[5] Among the hundreds of prescriptions, disgusting treatments that caused much more harm than good can be found. For instance, under a section titled "What to do to draw out splinters in the flesh," a remedy is prescribed consisting of "worm blood, mole, and donkey dung."[6] [Doctors S.I. McMillen and David Stern note that dung "is loaded with tetanus spores" and "a simple splinter often resulted in a gruesome death from lockjaw."[7]] Remedies to help heal skin diseases included such prescriptions as: "A hog's tooth, cat's dung, dog's dung, aau-of-samu-oil, berries-of-the-xet-plant, pound and apply as poultice."[8] Various other ingredients for the plethora of remedies concocted included "dried excrement of a child,"[9] "hog dung,"[10] and "a farmer's urine."[11] One recipe to prevent hair growth included lizard dung and the blood from a cow, donkey, pig, dog, and stag.[12] While it must be noted that some of the Egyptian medicine actually did include prescriptions and remedies that could be helpful, the harmful remedies and ingredients cast a sickening

shadow of untrustworthiness over the entire Egyptian endeavor as viewed by the modern reader.

As medical doctor S.E. Massengill stated:

> The early Egyptian physicians made considerable use of drugs. Their drugs were of the kind usually found in early civilizations; a few effective remedies lost in a mass of substances of purely superstitious origin. They used opium, squill, and other vegetable substances, but also excrement and urine. It is said that the urine of a faithful wife was with them effective in the treatment of sore eyes.[13]

In addition, it seems that the Egyptians were among the first to present the idea of "good and laudable pus."[14] Due to the idea that infection was good and the pus that resulted from it was a welcomed effect, "well-meaning doctors killed millions by deliberately infecting their wounds."[15] Needless to say, the modern-day reader would not want to be a patient in an ancient Egyptian clinic!

PRESCRIPTIONS IN THE PENTATEUCH

The first five books of the Old Testament, admittedly, are not devoted entirely to the enumeration of medical prescriptions. They are not ancient medical textbooks. These books do, however, contain numerous regulations for sanitation, quarantine, and other medical procedures that were to govern the daily lives of the Israelite nation. Missing entirely from the pages of these writings are the harmful remedies and ingredients prescribed by other ancient civilizations. In fact, the Pentateuch exhibits an understanding of germs and disease that much "modern" medicine did not grasp for 3,500 years after the books were written.

Blood: The Liquid of Life

Blood always has been a curious substance whose vast mysteries and capabilities have yet to be fully explored.

Doctors in the twenty-first century transfuse it, draw it, separate it, package it, store it, ship it, and sell it. And, although modern-day scientists have not uncovered completely all of the wonders of blood, they have discovered that it is the key to life. Without this "liquid of life," humans and animals would have no way to circulate the necessary oxygen and proteins that their bodies need in order to survive and reproduce. Hemoglobin found in the red blood cells carries oxygen to the brain, which in turn uses that oxygen to control the entire body. A brain without oxygen is like a car without gas or a computer without electricity. Blood makes all of the functions in the body possible.

In the past, ignorance of blood's value caused some "learned" men to do tragic things. For instance, during the middle ages, and even until the nineteenth century, doctors believed that harmful "vapors" entered the blood and caused sickness. For this reason, leeches were applied to victims of fever and other illnesses in an attempt to draw out blood containing these vapors. Also, the veins and arteries located just above the elbow were opened, and the patient's arms were bled to expunge the contaminated blood. George Washington, the first President of the United States, died because of such misplaced medical zeal. An eyewitness account of Washington's death relates that he came down with a chill, and in an effort to cure him, those who attended him resorted to bleeding; "a vein was opened, but no relief afforded."[16]

Thousands of years before the lethal practice of bloodletting was conceived, mankind had been informed by God that blood was indeed the key to life. In Leviticus 17:11, Moses wrote: "For the life of the flesh is in the blood."

Today, we understand completely the truthfulness of Moses' statement that "the life of the flesh is in the blood." But how did an ancient shepherd like Moses come to know such information? Just a lucky guess? How could Moses have known almost 3,500 years ago that life was in the blood, while it took the rest of the scientific and medical community thousands of years (and thousands of lives!) to grasp this truth? The Old Testament's conspicuous failure to institute improper medical procedures as they related to blood speaks loudly of its medical accuracy.

Germs, Labor Fever, and Biblical Sanitation

In their book, *None of These Diseases*, physicians S.I. McMillen and David Stern discussed how many of the hygienic rules established by God for the children of Israel still are applicable today. To illustrate their point, they recounted the story of Ignaz Semmelweis.

In 1847, an obstetrician named Ignaz Semmelweis was the director of a hospital ward in Vienna, Austria. Many pregnant women checked into his ward, but 18% of them never checked out. One out of every six that received treatment in Semmelweis' ward died of labor fever.[17] Autopsies revealed pus under their skin, in their chest cavities, in their eye sockets, etc. Semmelweis was distraught over the mortality rate in his ward, and other hospital wards like it all over Europe. Nuland noted that Australia, the Americas, Britain, Ireland, and practically every other nation that had established a hospital suffered a similar mortality rate.[18] If a woman delivered a baby using a midwife, then the death fell to only about 3%. Yet if she chose to use the most advanced medical knowledge and facilities of the day, her chance of dying skyrocketed immensely!

Semmelweis tried everything to curb the carnage. He turned all the women on their sides in hopes that the death rate would drop, but with no results. He thought maybe the bell that the priest rang late in the evenings scared the women, so he made the priest enter silently, yet without any drop in death rates.

As he contemplated his dilemma, he watched young medical students perform their routine tasks. Each day the students would perform autopsies on the dead mothers. Then they would rinse their hands in a bowl of bloody water, wipe them off on a common, shared towel, and immediately begin internal examinations of the still-living women. Nuland commented concerning the practice: "Because there seemed no reason for them to wash their hands, except superficially, or change their clothing before coming to the First Division, they did neither."[19] As a twenty-first-century observer, one is appalled to think that such practices actually took place in institutes of what was at the time "modern technology." What doctor in his right mind would touch a dead person and then perform examinations on living patients–without first employing some sort of minimal hygienic practices intended to kill germs? But to Europeans in the middle-nineteenth-century, germs were virtually a foreign concept. They never had seen a germ, much less been able to predict its destructive potential. According to many of their most prevalent theories, disease was caused by "atmospheric conditions" or "cosmic telluric influences."

Semmelweis ordered everyone in his ward to wash his or her hands thoroughly in a chlorine solution after every examination. In three months, the death rate fell from 18% to 1%. Semmelweis had made an amazing discovery. On the inside cover-flap of the book about

Semmelweis, written by medical doctor and historian Sherwin Nuland, the text reads:

> Ignác Semmelweis is remembered for the now-commonplace notion that doctors must wash their hands before examining patients. In mid-nineteenth-century Vienna, this was a subversive idea. With deaths from childbed fever exploding, Semmelweis discovered that doctors themselves were spreading the disease.[20]

Had Semmelweis made a groundbreaking discovery, or is it possible that he simply "rediscovered" what had been known in some circles for many years? Almost 3,300 years before Semmelweis lived, Moses had written: "He who touches the dead body of anyone shall be unclean seven days. He shall purify himself with the water on the third day and on the seventh day; then he will be clean. But if he does not purify himself on the third day and on the seventh day, he will not be clean." Germs were no new discovery in 1847; the biblical text recorded measures to check their spread as far back as approximately 1500 B.C.

The Water of Purification

Also germane to this discussion is the composition of the "water of purification" listed in Numbers 19. When Old Testament instructions are compared to the New Testament explanations for those actions, it becomes clear that some of the ancient injunctions were primarily symbolic in nature. For instance, when the Passover Lamb was eaten, none of its bones was to be broken. This symbolized the sacrifice of Christ, Whose side was pierced, yet even in death escaped the usual practice of having His legs broken (John 19:31-37).

With the presence of such symbolism in the Old Testament, it is important that we do not overlook the Old Testament instructions that were pragmatic in value and that testify to a Master Mind behind the writing

of the Law. One such directive is found in Numbers 19, where the Israelites were instructed to prepare the "water of purification" that was to be used to wash any person who had touched a dead body.

At first glance, the water of purification sounds like a hodge-podge of superstitious potion-making that included the ashes of a red heifer, hyssop, cedar wood, and scarlet. But this formula was the farthest thing from a symbolic potion intended to "ward off evil spirits." On the contrary, the recipe for the water of purification stands today as a wonderful example of the Bible's brilliance, since the recipe is nothing less than a procedure to produce an antibacterial soap.

When we look at the ingredients individually, we begin to see the value of each. First, consider the ashes of a red heifer and cedar. As most school children know, the pioneers in this country could not go to the nearest supermarket and buy their favorite personal hygiene products. If they needed soap or shampoo, they made it themselves. Under such situations, they concocted various recipes for soap. One of the most oft'-produced types of soap was lye soap. Practically anyone today can easily obtain a recipe for lye soap via a quick search of the Internet.[21] The various lye-soap recipes reveal that, to obtain lye, water often is poured through ashes. The water retrieved from pouring it through the ashes contains a concentration of lye. Lye, in high concentrations, is very caustic and irritating to the skin. It is, in fact, one of the main ingredients in many modern chemical mixtures used to unclog drains. In more diluted concentrations, it can be used as an excellent exfoliant and cleansing agent. Many companies today still produce lye soaps. Amazingly, Moses instructed the Israelites to

prepare a mixture that would have included lye mixed in a diluted solution.

Furthermore, consider that hyssop was also added to the "water of purification." Hyssop contains the antiseptic thymol, the same ingredient that we find today in some brands of mouthwash.[22] Hyssop oil continues to be a popular "healing oil," and actually is quite expensive. In listing the benefits of hyssop, one Web site noted: "Once used for purifying temples and cleansing lepers, the leaves contain an antiseptic, antiviral oil. A mold that produces penicillin grows on the leaves. An infusion is taken as a sedative expectorant for flue, bronchitis, and phlegm."[23]

Other ingredients in the "water of purification" also stand out as having beneficial properties. The oil from the cedar wood in the mixture most likely maintained numerous salutary properties. A Web site dealing with various essential oils noted: "Cedar wood has long been used for storage cabinets because of its ability to repel insects and prevent decay. In oil form, applied to humans, it is an antiseptic, astringent, expectorant (removes mucus from respiratory system), anti-fungal, sedative and insecticide."[24] Another site, more specifically dealing with the beneficial properties of cedar, explained:

> Cedar leaves and twigs are in fact rich in vitamin C, and it was their effectiveness in preventing or treating scurvy that led to the tree's being called arbor vitae or tree of life. In addition, recent research has shown that extracts prepared from either *Thuja occidentalis* or *Thuja plicata* [types of oriental cedar–KB] do in fact have antiviral, anti-inflammatory, and antibacterial properties. A group of German researchers reported in 2002 that an extract prepared from cedar leaf, alcohol, and water inhibits the reproduction of influenza virus type A, while a team of researchers in Japan found that an extract of Western red cedar was effective in treating eczema.[25]

It is interesting to note that this information about the beneficial properties of the ingredients such as cedar, hyssop, and lye in the water of purification is not coming from Bible-based sources. Most of it is simply coming from studies that have been done through cosmetic and therapeutic research.

Finally, the Israelites were instructed to toss into the mix "scarlet," which most likely was scarlet wool (see Hebrews 9:19). Adding wool fibers to the concoction would have made the mixture the "ancient equivalent of Lava® soap."[26]

Thousands of years before any formal studies were done to see what type of cleaning methods were the most effective; millennia before American pioneers concocted their lye solutions; and ages before our most advanced medical students knew a thing about germ theory, Moses instructed the Israelites to concoct an amazingly effective recipe for soap, that, if used properly in medical facilities like hospitals in Vienna, would literally have saved thousands of lives.

Quarantine

Moses detailed measures to prevent the spread of germs from dead bodies to living humans long before such was understood and prescribed in modern medicine. But the Old Testament record added another extremely beneficial practice to the field of medicine in its detailed descriptions of maladies for which living individuals should be quarantined. The book of Leviticus lists a plethora of diseases and ways in which an Israelite would come in contact with germs. Those with such diseases as leprosy were instructed to "dwell alone" "outside the camp" (Leviticus 13:46). If and when a diseased individual did get close to those who were

not diseased, he was instructed to "cover his mustache, and cry, 'Unclean! Unclean!" (13:45). It is of interest that the covering of one's mustache would prevent spit and spray from the mouth of the individual to pass freely through the air, much like the covering of one's mouth during a cough.

Concerning such quarantine practices, S.E. Massengill wrote in his book *A Sketch of Medicine and Pharmacy*:

> In the prevention of disease, however, the ancient Hebrews made real progress. The teachings of Moses, as embodied in the Priestly Code of the Old Testament, contain two clear conceptions of modern sanitation–the importance of cleanliness and the possibility of controlling epidemic disease by isolation and quarantine.[27]

In regard to the understanding of contagion implied in the quarantine rules in the Old Testament, McGrew noted in the *Encyclopedia of Medical History*: "The idea of contagion was foreign to the classic medical tradition and found no place in the voluminous Hippocratic writings. The Old Testament, however, is a rich source for contagionist sentiment, especially in regard to leprosy and venereal disease."[28] Here again, the Old Testament exhibits amazingly accurate medical knowledge that surpasses any known human ingenuity available at the time of its writing.

LAWS OF FOOD CONSUMPTION

Food regulations enumerated in the first five books of the Old Testament have been scrutinized by credentialed professionals in the fields of dietary and pathological research. The regulations have proven to coincide with modern science's understanding of various aspects of health and disease prevention.

Fins and Scales

The Mosaic criteria for eating water-living creatures was that the creatures have scales and fins (Leviticus 11:12). This injunction was extremely beneficial, since a multitude of problems surround many sea creatures that do not have scales and fins.

The Blowfish

The blowfish has fins but does not have scales. Thus, it would not have been edible under the Old Testament laws–fortunately for the Israelites. The blowfish can contain toxin in its ovaries, liver, and other organs that is highly potent and deadly. This toxin, called tetrodotoxin, is thought to be "1250 times more deadly than cyanide" and 160,000 times more potent than cocaine. A tiny amount of it can kill 30 grown adults.[29] As odd as it sounds, blowfish is served as a delicacy all over the world, especially in Japan and other far eastern countries. As a delicacy, it is called fugu, and is prepared by certified, licensed chefs. The toxins can be removed successfully, making the food edible, but the procedure often goes awry. Some who have researched fugu say that it is a food connoisseur's version of Russian roulette. Due to the extreme danger involved in eating fugu, it is illegal to serve it to the Emperor of Japan! The Mosaic instructions concerning edible fish would have helped the Israelites avoid the dangerous blowfish, as well as danger posed by eating other toxic sea creatures such as certain jelly fish, sea anemones, and octopi.

Shellfish

Although shellfish are edible today, there are inherent dangers in eating ill-prepared types such as oysters. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has produced a twelve-page tract warning people about the dangers of

eating raw or partially cooked oysters.[30] In the tract, the FDA warns that some raw oysters contain the bacteria *Vibrio vulnificus.* In regard to this dangerous bacteria, the tract states:

> Oysters are sometimes contaminated with the naturally occurring bacteria *Vibrio vulnificus.* Oysters contaminated with *Vibrio vulnificus* can't be detected by smell or sight; they look like other oysters. Eating raw oysters containing *Vibrio vulnificus* is very dangerous for those with pre-existing medical conditions such as liver disease, diabetes, hepatitis, cancer and HIV.... 50 percent of people who are infected with *Vibrio vulnificus* as a result of eating raw contaminated oysters die.[31]

Eating oysters if they are not cooked properly can be potentially fatal, says the FDA. Thus, the wisdom of the Mosaic prohibition is evident to an honest observer. In a time when proper handling and preparation procedures were difficult to achieve, the best course of action simply would have been to avoid the risk of eating potentially contaminated foods, especially since the contamination cannot be detected by smell or sight.

Reptiles and *Salmonella*

In Leviticus 11, Moses included reptiles in the list of unclean animals. Obviously, they are not cud-chewers that walk on cloven hooves, so they would not classify as clean, edible animals according to Leviticus 11:3. But to make sure that the Israelites understood, Moses specifically mentioned reptiles such as the large lizard, gecko, monitor lizard, sand reptile, sand lizard, and chameleon (Leviticus 11:29-31). Immediately following this listing of reptiles, the text states: "Whoever touches them when they are dead shall be unclean until evening" (11:31).

Interestingly, reptiles have a much higher rate of carrying *Salmonella* bacteria than do most mammals,

especially those listed as clean in the Old Law. The Center for Disease Control has repeatedly warned people about the possibility of being infected with *Salmonella* passed through reptiles. In summarizing the CDC's 2003 report, Lianne McLeod noted that the CDC estimates over 70,000 cases of human *Salmonella* infection a year are related to the handling of reptiles and amphibians.[32] The CDC recommends that homes with children under five should not have reptiles as pets. Furthermore, while other animals such as cats and dogs can pass *Salmonella,* McLeod noted:

> As high as **90% of reptiles** are natural carriers of *Salmonella* bacteria, harboring strains specific to reptiles without any symptoms of disease in the reptile. While it is true that many pets can carry *Salmonella*, the problem with reptiles (and apparently amphibians) is that they carry *Salmonella* with such high frequency. **It is prudent to assume that all reptiles and amphibians can be a potential source of Salmonella.**[33]

In light of such evidence, the prudence of the Mosaic prohibition to eat or handle reptile carcasses is clearly evident.

Of further interest is the fact that reptilian *Salmonella* contamination can occur without even touching a reptile. If a person touches something that has touched a reptile the bacteria can spread. The ARAV (Association of Reptilian and Amphibian Veterinarians) made this statement: "*Salmonella* bacteria are easily spread from reptiles to humans. Humans may become infected when they place their hands on objects, including food items, that have been in contact with the stool of reptiles, in their mouths."[34]

When this statement by the ARAV is compared with the injunctions in Leviticus 11:32-47, the astounding accuracy of the Old Testament regulation is again confirmed.

> Anything on which any of them falls, when they are dead shall be unclean, whether it is any item of wood or clothing or skin or sack, whatever item it is, in which any work is done, it must be put in water. And it shall be unclean until evening; then it shall be clean. Any earthen vessel into which any of them falls you shall break; and whatever is in it shall be unclean: in such a vessel, any edible food upon which water falls becomes unclean, and any drink that may be drunk from it becomes unclean (Leviticus 11:32-34).

After reading Leviticus 11:32-34, it seems as though a microbiologist was present with Moses to explain the perfect procedures to avoid spreading *Salmonella* and other bacteria from reptiles to humans. How could Moses have accurately laid down such precise regulations that belie a superior understanding of bacteria? An honest reader must conclude that he had divine assistance.

Bats and Rabies

Moses specifically forbade the Israelites to eat bats (Leviticus 11:19). The wisdom of this instruction is demonstrated by the fact that bats often carry rabies. While it is true that many animals are susceptible to rabies, bats are especially so. The American College of Emergency Physicians documented that between 1992 and 2002, rabies passed from bats caused 24 of the 26 human deaths from rabies in the United States.[35] In the *Science Daily* article describing this research, "Robert V. Gibbons, MD, MPH, of Walter Reed Army Institute of Research in Silver Spring, MD, reviewed the 24 cases of humans with bat rabies." From his research, he advised "the public to seek emergency care for preventive treatment for rabies **if direct contact with a bat occurs.**"[36]

As it turns out, bats have a special ability. When humans or mammals encounter a virus or other disease causing agent, their bodies "turn on" an immune system response that begins to fight the danger. When no

such dangers are present, the body "switches off" the system. The reason for this on-off switch is that when the immune system is on, it fights threats, but it also poses risks to the animal. Michelle Baker, a member of the team, stated, "In other mammalian species, having the immune response constantly switched on is dangerous–for example it's toxic to tissue and cells."[37] Bats, however, never seem to turn off their immune defense system. Even when no viruses or diseases threaten bats, they always have their immune response switched on. Baker noted that, in contrast to other mammalian immune responses that seem to harm their cells and tissues, "the bat immune system operates in harmony" with its body.[38] What we see, then, is a mammal that can carry 100 viruses without getting sick, but that can easily transmit those viruses to other mammals and people.

As we further explore the prohibition against eating or touching bats, a modern reader might wonder why even make such a law, because who wants to eat bats anyway? The fact is, however, bats have historically been "on the menu" in a number of countries. Lucy Maddox, writing for *Science*, penned an article in 2003 titled "Don't Eat the Bats,"[39] an instruction that sounds remarkably like what Moses said more than 3,000 years before she wrote her article. Maddox reviewed the history of the Chamorro people who live on Guam. This group was known to have unusually high chances of falling prey to a neurodegenerative disorder that can be debilitating and fatal. One reason suggested for this fact was that Chamorro people eat the seeds from the cycad plant. These seeds are known to have the neurotoxin BMAA in them. By washing the seeds thoroughly, however, most of the toxin can be removed. So, researchers were still baffled by the high rates of the disorder.

Further research showed that the Chamorro people like to eat "flying foxes," Guam's large fruit bat. The bats also enjoy eating the seeds of the cycad plant, but they, of course, do not wash them. Because of this, BMAA builds up in bat flesh. Researchers found toxin levels in bat flesh to be "hundreds of times higher than in cycad flour."[40] Avoiding eating and touching bats is a great idea.

It is clear that Moses' instruction to avoid bats coincides perfectly with modern research. Once again, the super-human wisdom imparted through Moses by God cannot be denied by the conscientious student of the Old Testament. As the eminent archaeologist, W.F. Albright, in comparing the list of clean and unclean animals detailed in the Pentateuch, noted that in other ancient civilizations, "we find no classifications as logical as this in any of the elaborate cuneiform list of fauna or ritual taboos."[41]

Case in Point: Pork Consumption

One of the most well-known Old Testament food regulations is the prohibition of pork consumption (Leviticus 11:7). Under close scrutiny, this prohibition exemplifies the value of the biblical laws regarding clean and unclean animals. During the days of Moses, proper food preparation and cooking conditions did not always exist. In fact, the general knowledge of the need to separate certain uncooked foods, especially meats, during preparation from other foods was virtually non-existent. Certain meats, if contacted raw or undercooked, have greater potential to carry parasites and other harmful bacteria that can infect the end consumer (in this case, humans).

Due to the fact that pigs are scavengers, and will eat practically anything, they often consume parasites and bacteria when they eat the carcasses of other dead animals. These parasites and bacteria can, and often do, take up residence in the pigs' muscle tissue. Fully cooking the meat can kill these harmful organisms, but failure to cook the meat completely can cause numerous detrimental effects. R.K. Harrison listed several diseases or other health maladies that can occur due to the ingestion of improperly cooked pork. He noted that pigs often are the host of the tapeworm *Taenia solium.* Infection by this parasite can cause small tumors to arise throughout the body, including on the skin, eyes, and muscles. Furthermore, these tumors can affect the brain and cause epileptic convulsions. Additionally, humans can develop trichaniasis (*trichinosis*) infestation from eating undercooked, as well as tape worm known as *Echiococcus granulosus* from water polluted by pigs. Further, pigs can pass on the microorganisms that cause toxoplamosis, a disease affecting the nervous system.[42]

Because modern readers have a much more exhaustive body of knowledge concerning parasites and pathogens, they are increasingly attuned to the dangers of consuming raw or undercooked pork. In fact, most pork bought in grocery stores contains nitrates and nitrites that have been injected into the meat to hinder the growth of harmful microorganisms. But Moses and the Israelites did not have access to such modern knowledge. How is it that the food regulations recorded by Moses over 3,000 years ago contain such an accurate understanding of disease control? Albright noted along these lines, "thanks to the dietary and hygienic regulations of Mosaic law...subsequent history has been marked by a tremendous advantage in this respect held by Jews over all other comparable ethnic and religious groups."[43]

Circumcision

In the book of Genesis, the text relates that God chose Abraham and his descendants to be a "special" people who were set apart from all other nations. The covenant that God made with Abraham included a physical "sign" that was to be implemented in all future generations of Abraham's descendants. According to the text, God said:

> He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised, every male child in your generations, he who is born in your house or bought with money from any foreigner who is not your descendant. He who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money must be circumcised, and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant (Genesis 17:12-14).

Thus, the covenant with Abraham and his offspring was to be indelibly marked in the flesh of every male child.

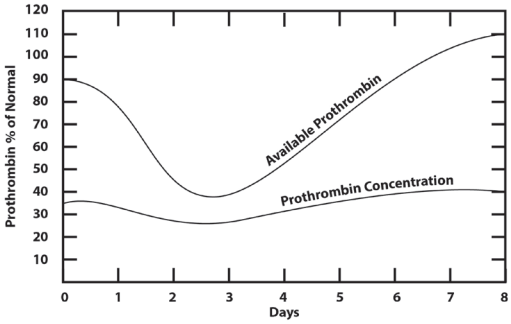
The inclusion of this medical, surgical practice provides another excellent example of the medical acumen of the biblical text. Two significant aspects of biblical circumcision need to be noted. First, from what modern medicine has been able to gather, circumcision can lessen the chances of getting certain diseases and infections. Pediatrician, Dorothy Greenbaum noted in regard to the health benefits of circumcision: "Medically, circumcision is healthful because it substantially reduces the incidence of urinary tract infection in boys, especially those under one year of age. Some studies cited in the pediatric policy statement report 10 to 20 times more urinary tract infection in uncircumcised compared with circumcised boys." She further noted that sexually transmitted diseases are passed more readily among men who have not been circumcised.[44] In

addition, circumcision virtually eliminates the chance of penile cancer. In an article titled "Benefits of Circumcision," the text stated: "Neonatal circumcision virtually abolishes the risk [of penile cancer–KB]" and "penile cancer occurs almost entirely in uncircumcised men."[45] [NOTE: Morris' work is of particular interest due to the fact that it has an evolutionary bias and was in no way written to buttress belief in the biblical record.][46]

Not only can a litany of health benefits be amassed to encourage the practice of infant circumcision, but the day on which the biblical record commands the practice to be implemented is of extreme importance as well. The encyclopedic work *Holt Pediatrics* remains today one of the most influential works ever written about child care, pediatric disease, and other health concerns as they relate to children. First written in 1896 by L. Emmet Holt, Jr. and going through several revisions until the year 1953, the nearly 1,500-page work is a master compilation of the "modern" medicine of its day. One section, starting on page 125 of the twelfth edition, is titled "Hemorrhagic Disease of the Newborn." The information included in the section details the occurrence of occasional spontaneous bleeding among newborns that can sometimes cause severe damage to major organs such as the brain, and even death. In the discussion pertaining to the reasons for such bleeding, the authors note that the excessive bleeding is primarily caused by a decreased level of prothrombin, which in turn is caused by insufficient levels of vitamin K. The text also notes that children's susceptibility is "peculiar" (meaning "higher") "between the second and fifth days of life."[47]

In chart form, *Holt Pediatrics* illustrates that the percent of available prothrombin in a newborn dips from

Prothrombin Blood Levels
During First Eight Days Post-Birth



about 90% of normal on its day of birth to about 35% on its third day of life outside the womb. After the third day, the available prothrombin begins to climb. By the eighth day of the child's life, the available prothrombin level is approximately 110% of normal, about 20% higher than it was on the first day, and about 10% more than it will be during of the child's life. Such data prove that the eighth day is the perfect day on which to perform a major surgery such as circumcision.

How did Moses know such detailed data about newborn hemorrhaging? Some have suggested that the early Hebrews carried out extensive observations on newborns to determine the perfect day for surgery. But such an idea has little merit. McMillen and Stern noted:

> Modern medical textbooks sometimes suggest that the Hebrews conducted careful observations of bleeding tendencies. Yet what is the evidence? Severe bleeding occurs at most in only 1 out of 200 babies. Determining the safest day for circumcision would have required careful experiments, observing thousands of circumcisions. Could Abraham (a primitive, desert-dwelling nomad) have done that?[48]

In fact, such amazing medical accuracy cannot be accounted for on the basis of human ingenuity in the ancient world. If circumcision was the only example

of such accuracy, and the Hebrew writings were laced with incorrect, detrimental medical prescriptions, such an explanation might be plausible. But the fact that the entire Old Testament contains medical practices that would still be useful in third world countries, without a hint of error in regard to a single prescription; divine oversight remains the only reasonable answer.

CONCLUSION

In reality, entire books could be written on the Old Testament's amazing medical accuracy. Medical doctors McMillen and Stern have done just that in their extremely interesting volume *None of These Diseases*. Many physicians who have compared Moses' medical instructions to effective modern methods have come to realize the astonishing value and insight of the Old Testament text. As Dr. Macht once wrote: "Every word in the Hebrew Scriptures is well chosen and carries valuable knowledge and deep significance."[49] Such is certainly the case in regard to the medical practices listed in its pages. Indeed, the accurate medical practices prescribed thousands of years before their significance was completely understood provide excellent evidence for the divine inspiration of the Bible.

ENDNOTES

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[23] "Hyssop" (no date), http://www.taoherbfarm.com/herbs/herbs/hyssop.htm.

[24] "Spa Essential Oils" (2005), http://www.mysticthai.com/spa/essential_oil.asp.

[25] Rebecca J. Frey (no date), "Thuja," http://health.enotes.com/alternative-medicine-encyclopedia/thuja.

[26] McMillen and Stern, p. 25.

[27] Massengill, p. 252.

[28] Roderick McGrew (1985), *Encyclopedia of Medical History* (London, England: Macmillan Press), pp. 77-78.

[29] Denise Dilion (2005), "Fugu: The Deadly Delicacy," *Welcome Magazine*, http://www.welcome-moldova.com/articles/fugu.shtml.

[30] "Carlos' Tragic and Mysterious Illness: How Carlos Almost Died by Eating Contaminated Raw Oysters" (2003), U.S. Food

and Drug Administration, http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~acrobat/vvfoto.pdf.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Lianne McLeod (2007), "*Salmonella* and Reptiles," http://exoticpets.about.com/cs/reptiles/a/reptsalmonella.htm.

[33] Ibid., emp. added.

[34] "*Salmonella* Bacteria and Reptiles" (2007), ARAV, http://www.arav.org/SalmonellaOwner.htm.

[35] "Human Rabies Often Caused by Undetected, Tiny Bat Bites" (2002), *Science Daily*, http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2002/05/020506074445.htm.

[36] Ibid.

[37] "Bat 'Super Immunity' Could Help Protect People," *ScienceDaily*, CSIRO Australia, https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2016/02/160222155631.htm.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Lucy Maddox, "Don't Eat the Bats," *Science*, http://www.sciencemag.org/news/2003/08/dont-eat-bats.

[40] Ibid.

[41] W.F. Albright (1968), *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday), p. 180.

[42] R.K. Harrison (1982), "Heal," *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), revised edition, p. 644.

[43] Albright, p. 181.

[44] Dorothy Greenbaum (2006), "Say 'Yes' to Circumcision," http://www.beliefnet.com/story/8/story_813_1.html.

[45] Brian Morris (2006), "Benefits of Circumcision," http://www.circinfo.net/#why.

[46] Some have wondered why, if God created the human body perfectly, the removal of the foreskin would bring about certain health benefits. Is this an example of poor design? When thinking about this situation, it must be remembered that God created the world perfectly, without sin, and without disease. Due to the devastating effects of sin, death and disease entered the world and began to wreak havoc on God's perfect creation. Notice that the health benefits mentioned have to do with risks associated with sexually transmitted diseases, infection, and

cancer—problems that would have resulted form the Fall. God's original designs were perfect, but the entrance of sin into the world resulted in the need for contingencies such as medicine and surgery in certain cases for the prevention or cure of various maladies.

[47] L.E. Holt and R. McIntosh (1953), *Holt Pediatrics* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts), twelfth edition, p. 126.

[48] McMillen and Stern, p. 84.

[49] Macht, p. 450.

CHAPTER 9

THE PROPHECY OF DANIEL 8

One extremely valuable line of evidence that confirms that the Bible is the inspired Word of God is the presence of accurate, predictive prophecy contained in its pages. Not only are the prophecies of the Bible fulfilled in minute detail with complete accuracy, but these fulfillments are often accomplished centuries after the prophecies were made. Even the skeptic understands that if this is the case, then a supernatural agent must be responsible for the writing of the Bible. That is why the skeptic attempts to discredit the prophecies by claiming that they were written after the events, or by claiming that they were not fulfilled in detail. By attempting to disparage the prophecies using these methods, the skeptic admits that if the prophecies were written centuries before the events, and if they are fulfilled in detail, then a supernatural agent is responsible for them. As the prophet Jeremiah wrote: "As for the prophet who prophecies of peace, when the word of the prophet comes to pass, the prophet will be known as one whom the Lord has truly sent" (28:9). Completely accurate, fulfilled prophecy is a characteristic that verifies the divine inspiration of the Bible.

In truth, a multitude of accurate, predictive prophecies fill the pages of the Bible. This article will deal with

only one, which is found in Daniel chapter 8. In that passage, the prophet Daniel relates to his readers the following prophetic vision:

> In the third year of the reign of King Belshazzar a vision appeared to me–to me, Daniel–after the one that appeared to me the first time. I saw in the vision, and it so happened while I was looking, that I was in Shushan, the citadel, which is in the province of Elam; and I saw in the vision that I was by the River Ulai. Then I lifted my eyes and saw, and there, standing beside the river, was a ram which had two horns, and the two horns were high; but one was higher than the other, and the higher one came up last. I saw the ram pushing westward, northward, and southward, so that no animal could withstand him; nor was there any that could deliver from his hand, but he did according to his will and became great. And as I was considering, suddenly a male goat came from the west, across the surface of the whole earth, without touching the ground; and the goat had a notable horn between his eyes. Then he came to the ram that had two horns, which I had seen standing beside the river, and ran at him with furious power. And I saw him confronting the ram; he was moved with rage against him, attacked the ram, and broke his two horns. There was no power in the ram to withstand him, but he cast him down to the ground and trampled him; and there was no one that could deliver the ram from his hand. Therefore the male goat grew very great; but when he became strong, the large horn was broken, and in place of it four notable ones came up toward the four winds of heaven. And out of one of them came a little horn which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the Glorious Land. And it grew up to the host of heaven; and it cast down some of the host and some of the stars to the ground, and trampled them. He even exalted himself as high as the Prince of the host; and by him the daily sacrifices were taken away, and the place of His sanctuary was cast down. Because of transgression, an army was given over to the horn to oppose the daily sacrifices; and he cast truth down to the ground. He did all this and prospered. Then I heard a holy one speaking; and another holy one said to that certain one who was speaking, "How long will the vision be, concerning the daily sacrifices and the

> transgression of desolation, the giving of both the sanctuary and the host to be trampled underfoot?" And he said to me, "For two thousand three hundred days; then the sanctuary shall be cleansed" (Daniel 8:1-14).

After narrating what he saw in the vision, Daniel wondered what the dream meant. While in this state of contemplation, the angel Gabriel approached Daniel to explain the dream. Gabriel proceeded to offer an accurate interpretation of the events that Daniel saw:

> The ram which you saw, having the two horns–they are the kings of Media and Persia. And the male goat is the kingdom of Greece. The large horn that is between its eyes is the first king. As for the broken horn and the four that stood up in its place, four kingdoms shall arise out of that nation, but not with its power. And in the latter time of their kingdom, when the transgressors have reached their fullness, a king shall arise, having fierce features, who understands sinister schemes. His power shall be mighty, but not by his own power; he shall destroy fearfully, and shall prosper and thrive; he shall destroy the mighty, and also the holy people. Through his cunning he shall cause deceit to prosper under his rule; And he shall exalt himself in his heart. He shall destroy many in their prosperity. He shall even rise against the Prince of princes; but he shall be broken without human means. And the vision of the evenings and mornings which was told is true; therefore seal up the vision, for it refers to many days in the future (Daniel 8:20-26).

THE TIME OF THIS PROPHECY

In order to understand the significance of this prophecy, it is important to settle the date that the prophecy purports to be written. The author claims to be writing the prophecy in the "third year of the reign of King Belshazzar." A look at secular, historical records gives us a solid understanding of this date. Nabonidus was the king of Babylon and father of Belshazzar. In the ancient historical inscription known as *The Verse Account of Nabonidus*, we read, that when "the third year was

about to begin––He [Nabonidus] entrusted the 'Camp' to his oldest (son), the firstborn, the troops everywhere in the country he ordered under his command. He let everything go, entrusted the kingship to him."[1] A different ancient inscription known as the *Nabonidus Cylinder* explains that his firstborn son was Belshazzar.[2] He was entrusted with the army in the third year of Nabonidus' reign, which most scholars agree was around the year 553 B.C. So the third year of his reign, in which the prophecy of Daniel 8 was delivered, was approximately 550 B.C.

THE KINGS OF MEDIA AND PERSIA

Daniel saw a ram with two notable horns, one being higher than the other. This ram was pushing westward, northward, and southward, and became great. The angel Gabriel explained that this ram with two horns signified the kings of Media and Persia. When we look into history, we see that the description of their activities matches what we know from secular historical accounts. The Median Empire had been growing in strength for many years. Historian J.M. Cook noted, "By the middle of the seventh century [B.C.–KB] things were running for the Medes."[3]

Herodotus describes the formation of the Median Empire in which the Medes had numerous smaller settlements that were united by a man named Deioces. This man built a large capital city known as Ecbatana. According to the historian, he reigned for 53 years and united at least six regional groups into the kingdom of Media. Herodotus then documents that Deioces' son Phraortes reigned for 22 years after his father. He was succeeded by his son Cyaxares, who "united all Asia beyond the Halys under his rule."[4] Cyaxares reigned 40 years, died, and was succeeded by his son Astyagas.

Under the reign of Astyagas, the Persians revolted against the Medes. Led by Cyrus the Great, the Persian army defeated Astyagas' army, and Cyrus ascended to the throne of both the Medes and the Persians.[5] The *Nabonidus Chronicle* confirms Cyrus' victory against Astyagas.[6]

One interesting point as it relates to the prophetic vision of Daniel is the fact that initially, the Medes were the superior, ruling class. This information comes from numerous statements found in Herodotus. For instance, Astyagas married his daughter to "a Persian named Cambyses, a man he knew to be of good family and quiet habits–though he considered him much below a Mede even of middle rank."[7] When Cyrus took control of the empire, however, the Persian facet of the kingdom grew to be stronger, even though it was the second to rise. Herodotus wrote: "On the present occasion the Persians under Cyrus rose against the Medes and from then onwards were masters of Asia."[8] This historical fact coincides perfectly with Daniel's vision in which the first ram had two horns "but one was higher than the other, and the higher one came up last."

The dual power of the Medo-Persian Empire, led first by Cyrus and then by his son Cambyses, continued to grow in strength and territory. Herodotus documents that the empire stretched across all Asia. Cyrus then began to "push westward," subjugating peoples such as the Ionians as far westward as the Aegean Sea[9]. The historian notes that Cyrus was possessed of "restless ambition" and engaged in "successive acts of aggression against one nation after another."[10] Cambyses, who reigned over the empire after his father, seemed to have the same ambitious spirit. He "pushed southward," conquering nations as far south as Egypt.[11] Darius, who assumed the throne after Cambyses, claimed to rule

over a host of nations, including areas as far north as Armenia.[12] Thus, there can be no doubt that the ram with two horns signified the Medo-Persian Empire, exactly as the angel Gabriel stated.

THE MALE GOAT FROM THE WEST— ALEXANDER THE GREAT

In Daniel's vision, the ram with two horns, which was the Medo-Persian Empire, was defeated by a male goat that arose out of the west and had a notable horn in the center of its head. In his explanation of the vision, Gabriel said that this male goat was the kingdom of Greece, and the notable horn was the "first king." Anyone familiar with ancient history recognizes this first king as Alexander the Great, the son of Philip of Macedon. Alexander was arguably the most successful military commander in the history of the world. First-century A.D. Roman historian Quintus Curtius Rufus stated that Alexander had "a lust for glory and fame reaching a degree which exceeded due proportion."[13] His conquest of the world was so thorough, that Rufus suggested that Fortune had shown her face on him with such delight that it was to Fortune he owed the most gratitude. In fact, Rufus stated: "The fates waited for him to complete the subjection of the East and reach the Ocean, achieving everything of which a mortal was capable."[14] In the course of his conquest, he defeated the Medo-Persian Empire and assimilated it into the Greek Empire. Rufus documented the various battles Alexander fought with king Darius, the ruler of the Persian armies, and the Greek's victory over the opposing Medo-Persian Empire (Books 3 and 4).

THE FOUR NOTABLE HORNS— RULERS AFTER ALEXANDER

Quintus Curtius Rufus noted that upon Alexander's death, since he lacked a definite heir, various individuals would most likely make a bid for the throne.[15] Amidst the scramble for Alexander's throne, his kingdom was divided into four segments: "[T]he Macedonian Empire split into four main kingdoms–the one of Seleucus (Asia), Ptolemy (Egypt), Lysimachus (Thrace), and Antipater's son Cassander (Macedonia, including Greece)."[16]

Plutarch, the ancient historian, documented this division in great detail. In his exposition on Demetrius, he wrote:

> The followers of Ptolemy in Egypt on their part…gave him the title of king. And thus their emulation carried the practice among other successors of Alexander. For Lysimachus began to wear the diadem, and Seleucus also in his interviews with the Greeks…. Cassander, however, although the others gave him the royal title in their letters and addresses, wrote his letters in his own untitled name.[17]

Diodorus Siculus confirmed this account in book 19 of his work when he wrote: "When they had been brought into the council, they demanded that Cappadocia and Lycia be given to Cassander, Hellespontine Phrygia to Lysimachus, all Syria to Ptolemy and Babylonia to Seleucus."[18] Both writers mention that Antigonus and his son Demetrius fought for control of portions of the empire as well, but upon their defeat, Plutarch wrote: "The victorious kings carved up the entire domain which had been subject to Antigonus and Demetrius, as if it had been a great carcass, and took each his portion, adding thus to the provinces which the victors already had."[19]

Thus, over 250 years after Daniel's vision in the third year of the reign of King Belshazzar, Alexander's kingdom was divided and ruled by "four notable horns."

As the prophet Gabriel had predicted concerning the kingdom of Greece in Daniel 8:22, "four kingdoms shall arise out of that nation, but not with its power." Secular history perfectly confirms the accuracy of this statement.

ANTIOCHUS EPIPHANES IV— THE LITTLE HORN

In Daniel's vision, a little horn came out of one of the four notable horns (kingdoms) and grew to be great. This horn spread his authority toward the south, east, and the "Glorious land." He exalted himself as high as the "Prince of the host," and took away the daily sacrifices. Gabriel stated that this horn represented a king who would "understand sinister schemes," "magnify himself," and "be broken without human hand." Does history record the life of an individual who fits this prophecy? It certainly does. Out of the Seleucid Empire arose a king named Antiochus Epiphanes IV. His reign began in 175 B.C. and lasted until 164 B.C. It was characterized by tyranny, deceit, and brutality, just as Daniel's vision predicted and Gabriel confirmed. A brief look into the specifics of these prophecies verifies Antiochus Epiphanes IV's presence predicted in them.

"Exalted Himself as High as the Prince of the Host"

The little horn of Daniel's vision was predicted to be so enamored with his own importance that the text states, "He even exalted himself as high as the Prince of the host" (Daniel 8:11). The angel Gabriel explained that he would "magnify himself in his heart" (Daniel 8:25). When we compare this prediction with the historical record of the life and actions of Antiochus Epiphanes IV, we see a striking fulfillment in the hubris of this king. Bible scholar H.W. Hoehner explained that Antiochus Epiphanes IV "assumed the title of Theos Epiphanes

meaning 'the manifest God.'"[20] Coins that were minted during Epiphanes' reign add further weight to the fact that he exalted himself to the position of deity. Mahlon H. Smith provides detailed pictures of a silver tetradrachma minted by Epiphanes that has on it "*Basileos Antiochou Theou Epiphaniou Nikephorou*," which means "of King Antiochus, God Manifest, Victory Bearer."[21] Smith also presents a bronze coin that depicts Antiochus IV with the phrase "God Manifest" on it as well. There can be no doubt that Antiochus Epiphanes IV exalted himself "as high as the Prince of the host," a fact that adds additional weight to the idea that Antiochus Epiphanes IV is the little horn of Daniel's vision.

The Daily Sacrifices Were Taken Away

Daniel's vision predicted that the little horn that arose from the male goat would grow "exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the Glorious land" (Daniel 8:9). The reference to the "Glorious Land" is a reference to Judea and Jerusalem, a fact that is born out by the statement that the little horn would cause the daily sacrifices in the temple in Jerusalem to cease. It is a simple matter of history to identify the point in time when the daily sacrifices in the temple were taken away. The book of 1 Maccabees documents that Antiochus IV waged war against Ptolemy, routing his army and killing many.[22] On the return trip from Egypt, Antiochus IV plundered the temple. Two years later, he sent a general named Mysarch who destroyed many of the towns of Judah and killed a host of the Jews. In addition, he sent letters to Jerusalem "to put a stop to burnt offerings and meal offering and libation in the temple, to violate Sabbaths and festivals." And in 167 B.C. he desecrated the altar in the temple, which

the 1 Maccabees writer refers to as the abomination of desolation.[23]

"Broken Without Human Means"

When the angel Gabriel explained Daniel's dream, the heavenly messenger predicted that the wicked king who was portrayed as the little horn would be "broken without human means" (Daniel 8:25). When we compare the death of Antiochus Epiphanes IV with this statement, we can see that it accurately describes his demise. Antiochus did not die in battle, as many ancient kings did, nor was he assassinated by conspirators. In fact, Antiochus did not die at the hands of any other human. Various historical references relating to his death verify the fact that he died because of a distemper or fever. Josephus stated:

> [H]e was confounded, and, by the anxiety he was in, fell into a distemper, which, as it lasted a great while, and as his pains increased upon him, so he at length perceived he should die in a little time; so he called his friends to him, and told them that his distemper was severe upon him, and confessed withal, that this calamity was sent upon him for the miseries he had brought upon the Jewish nation, while he plundered their temple and condemned their God; and when he had said this, he gave up the ghost.[24]

Polybius, a Greek historian from the second century B.C., stated that Antiochus "died at Tabae in Persia, smitten with madness, as some people say, owing to certain manifestations of divine displeasure."[25] Appian, a Roman historian from the second century A.D., said that he died of "wasting disease."[26] And Diodorus Siculus, who wrote during the first century B.C., recorded that Antiochus Epiphanes IV "was driven mad by certain apparitions and terrors, and finally died of disease."[27] Both Siculus and Polybius attribute Antiochus' disease to divine displeasure over his attack on the temple of

Artemis, while Josephus attributes it to his actions against the temple of the Jews. But the fact upon which they agree is that Antiochus Epiphanes IV died of a "disease," or "distemper," or "madness," that was not the result of any human means. Thus, his death perfectly coincides with the death of the little horn of Daniel 8 that would be "broken without human means."

ENEMIES ACCUSE DANIEL 8 OF BEING HISTORY, NOT PROPHECY

Daniel's vision and Gabriel's commentary on it have proven to be so accurate that skeptics are forced to admit its accuracy, but claim that it was written **after** the events transpired, not hundreds of years before. One can see why skeptics must adopt this tactic. If the vision of Daniel 8 actually was written in approximately 550 B.C., and it accurately predicted events in detail that did not transpire until 164 B.C., then whoever wrote the book must have been aided by divine guidance. Since the atheists, skeptics, and many liberal theologians cannot tolerate such a conclusion, they must find some way to deny the prophecy. Since secular history verifies the prophecy in great detail, to deny that the vision of Daniel 8 documents actual events would be tantamount to intellectual suicide. Thus, the only alternative is to contend that the record of the events in Daniel 8 is a historic record that was penned after the events took place. We will see that such a tactic is misguided and flawed, and cannot be sustained. But the fact that it is used does much to confirm the accuracy of the prophecy. After all, if the prophecy were not accurate, why would any unbeliever be forced to call it history?

Near the beginning of the 5th century A.D., Jerome became a prominent figure among Christians. He penned

a commentary on the book of Daniel, in which he mentioned a skeptic by the name of Porphyry

> who wrote his twelfth book against the prophecy of Daniel, denying that it was composed by the person to whom it is ascribed in its title, but rather by some individual living in Judaea at the time of Antiochus who was surnamed Epiphanes. He furthermore alleged that "Daniel" did not foretell the future so much as he related the past…. [B]ecause Porphyry saw that all these things had been fulfilled and could not deny that they had taken place, he overcame this evidence of historical accuracy by taking refuge in this evasion…. For so striking was the reliability of what the prophet foretold, that he could not appear to unbelievers to be a predictor of the future, but rather a narrator of things already past.[28]

Modern-day skeptic, Chris Sandoval, was forced to adopt the same line of reasoning, stating: "Actually, the book was written in Palestine in the mid-second century BC by an author who expected God to set up his everlasting kingdom in his own near future…."[29] Throughout his work, while claiming (without success) that the author of Daniel made mistakes, he insists that the author had an accurate knowledge of much world history. Sandoval said of the author of Daniel: "We see that he was well-acquainted with the history of the Seleucids and Ptolemies up to a century and half before his time;" and "[s]ince these predictions largely came true until the middle of the war and failed thereafter, we know that the author lived in Seleucid times, not Babylonian times."[30] Sandoval's statement that Daniels prophecies "failed" after the war is false, but he concedes that Daniel's predictions "largely came true until the middle of the war." Such reasoning tacitly admits the fact that Daniel's vision accurately detailed events as they occurred in history.

WERE DANIEL'S VISIONS PROPHECY OR HISTORY?

The fact that Daniel's vision coincides perfectly with actual events to such a degree that the skeptic is forced to label it history instead of prophecy, the Christian apologist is left with the task of showing that the book of Daniel was, indeed, written hundreds of years prior to the events it describes. If that can be done conclusively, and it can, then Daniel's prophetic vision in Daniel 8 stands as a fulfilled, predictive prophecy, and an infallible proof of the Bible's inspiration and the existence of God Who inspired the book. Let us explore various reasons why the book of Daniel should be dated to the sixth century B.C.

The Primary Reason to Date Daniel in the Second Century is its Accuracy

Skeptics insist that the book must have been written in the second century B.C. due to anachronism in its text and various other discrepancies. None of their allegations has been sustained. Instead, the astute reader finds that the primary reason the skeptic rejects the early date of Daniel is because of its accuracy. Due to their naturalistic assumptions that no writer could accurately predict events that occurred 400 years after his writing, skeptics assert a late date for Daniel based on the false assumption that predictive prophecy is impossible.

Sandoval's article provides an excellent example of this assumption. He stated: "Since these predictions largely came true until the middle of the war and failed thereafter, we know that the author lived in Seleucid times, not Babylonian times."[31] observe the reasoning behind how he arrives at a date for the book. The information in Daniel is accurate up to the time of the Seleucids,

thus Daniel must have been written after those events occurred. [Again, I would note that his accusation that Daniel's information fails after that point is false.]

Notice the circular reasoning involved. The assertion is that Daniel must have been written in the second century solely because of its accuracy. But the assertion fails to account for the possibility of accurate, predictive prophecy. In essence, the skeptic is forced to say that Daniel is accurate, and thus could not have been written before the second century, because no such thing as predictive prophecy exists. Yet, is it not the case that the very point of the discussion is to determine the legitimacy of predictive prophecy? The skeptic cannot say that Daniel is not predictive prophecy because there is no such thing as predictive prophecy. To date Daniel in the second century because it is accurate is faulty reasoning of the highest order.

The Internal Evidence of Authorship

The book of Daniel claims to have been written by an Israelite exile named Daniel. Various verses in Daniel[32] insist that Daniel authored the book. In addition, the book provides specific statements such as, "in the second year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign" (2:1), "in the third year of the reign of King Belshazzar" (8:1), and "in the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus" (9:1), that date the book to the sixth century B.C. In order for the skeptic or liberal theologian to reject these clear statements, he must provide valid reasons why they cannot be true. Such reasons have never been provided. As jurisprudence expert Simon Greenleaf stated: "Every document, apparently ancient, coming from the proper repository or custody, and bearing on its face no evident marks of forgery, the law presumes to be genuine, and

devolves on the opposing party the burden of proving it to be otherwise."[33]

Daniel in the Dead Sea Scrolls Collection

Another reason to date Daniel in the sixth century B.C. instead of the second is its presence in the Dead Sea Scrolls collection. Several partial copies of Daniel were found at Qumran. First, this fact shows that by the time the books were being collected to store at Qumran, the book of Daniel was viewed with such respect that numerous copies were made to store there. As Bruce Waltke stated: "The discovery of manuscripts of Daniel at Qumran dating from the Maccabean period renders it highly improbable that the book was composed during the time of the Maccabees."[34] By the time of the Maccabees, Daniel was already such a respected and revered sacred book that it had been copied and stored with other ancient texts at Qumran. Second, in his study of a section of Job found at Qumran, a fragment known as 11QtJob, Robert Vasholz suggested that the composition of the fragment "may have originally dated to the late third century or early second century B.C."[35] He compared this fragment to sections of Daniel and concluded that the data "suggest that Daniel was written before 11QtJob and lead us to believe that the evidence now available from Qumran indicates a pre-second-century date for the Aramaic of Daniel."[36] Not only does the presence of Daniel at Qumran provide evidence of a pre-second-century date, but the Aramaic used in the book supplies additional weight to support an early date.

Daniel's Use of the Name Belshazzar

For many years, critics used Daniel's reference to Belshazzar as evidence that the book contained histori-

cal errors. They asserted that Nabonidus was the last king of Babylon and Belshazzar was a figment of the author's imagination. Evidence began to accrue, however, in the form of ancient writings and inscriptions, that showed that "for much of the reign of Nabonidus, his eldest son, Belshazzar, acted as coregent."[37] This fact led Waltke to correctly conclude: "It seems clear, then, from a straightforward reading of the narratives of the Book of Daniel that the author possessed a more accurate knowledge of Neo-Babylonia and early Achaemenid Persian history than any other known historian since the sixth century B.C."[38] In essence, the name Belshazzar had disappeared from the annals of history from about 450 B.C. until the writing on *The Nabonidus Chronicle* was published in 1882. Thus the author of Daniel could not have been a second century observer because he would have had no way to know of the co-regency of Nabonidus and Belshazzar.[39]

Josephus' Witness to an Early Date for Daniel

Josephus, the first century A.D. historian who penned Jewish history for a Roman audience, adds additional weight to the fact that Daniel was written in the sixth century B.C. and not in the second century. First, in regard to the book of Daniel, Josephus expressed the then-common Jewish belief that Daniel was a prophetic book that belonged among the Scriptures or sacred writings. He concluded that a person who wanted to know certain aspects of prophecy should be "diligent in reading the book of Daniel, which he will find among the sacred writings."[40] A few paragraphs later, after relating information taken directly from the book of Daniel, Josephus said, "Let no one blame me for writing down everything of this nature, as I find it in our ancient books."[41] Notice that Josephus viewed Daniel

as both part of the "sacred writings" and as part of the list of "ancient books" about which the entire Jewish community had no doubt of their authenticity.

In addition, in his book *Against Apion*, Josephus explained that the Jewish nation revered 22 books as divinely inspired, Daniel being one of those. Concerning the date of the writing of the books, he said: "[F]rom the death of Moses till the reign of Artaxerxes, king of Persia, who reigned after Xerxes, the prophets, who were after Moses, wrote down what was done in their times in thirteen books."[42] He went on to explain that certain Jewish writers had written history books after the time of Artaxerxes, but their writings were not esteemed "of the like authority with the former by our forefathers."[43] Thus, Josephus viewed Daniel as sacred Scripture, and noted that no such Scripture had been written after the reign of Artaxerxes, the date of whose reign is established by secular historians as 465 B.C. to 424 B.C.[44] There is, then, no honest way to read Josephus without understanding that he viewed the date of Daniel to be prior to 424 B.C. and, speaking as a representative for the Jewish nation, believed this view was the common one among his people.

Furthermore, when Josephus wrote about the conquest of Alexander the Great (336-324 B.C.), he again mentioned the book of Daniel. He noted that as Alexander was coming into the land of Judea, one of the priests showed him the book of Daniel: "And when the book of Daniel was showed him, wherein Daniel declared that one of the Greeks should destroy the empire of the Persians, he supposed that himself was the person intended."[45] He came into Jerusalem, treated the high priest "magnificently," and offered sacrifices to God in

the temple. He also promised to let the Jews "enjoy the laws of their forefathers."

Additionally, after Josephus' discussion of Daniel's prophecy in chapter 8, he stated: "And indeed it so came to pass, that our nation suffered these things under Antiochus Epiphanes, according to Daniels's vision, and what he wrote many years before they came to pass."[46] Were the testimony of Josephus all that history had preserved about the book of Daniel, it would be enough to positively date the book to the sixth century B.C. In order to discredit such powerful testimony, the skeptic or liberal theologian must completely reinvent the way ancient history is viewed. Such attempts show an obvious and ill-advised prejudice against biblical prophecy. The only reason to dismiss such testimony is if a person is dedicated to the proposition that prophecy is impossible. An honest evaluation of the testimony of Josephus forces the analyst to conclude that Daniel cannot be a second century B.C. document, but must be included in the list of ancient books–sacred Scripture–that was written prior to 424 B.C.

AN ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATION

Of course, it has been impossible to consider at length all the reasons to date the book in the sixth century and not the second, but one additional reason merits brief mention. "The precision of the details within the book [Daniel] relative to the city of Babylon argues that the writer was an eyewitness of that ancient culture."[47] Indeed, so accurate are the historical facts and the specific knowledge of the writer of the book that a lengthy article could be written solely documenting the myriad examples of the writer's intimate, accurate knowledge of the culture and history of the precise period in which the book claims to have been written.

CONCLUSION

Daniel 8 provides an accurate, detailed description of the historic events that occurred between 550 B.C. and 164 B.C. A straightforward reading of the text indicates that these events were predicted hundreds of years before they actually occurred. If they are accurate predictions, then the book of Daniel stands as irrefutable evidence that (1) God exists, and (2) the book is divinely inspired by God. Of course, the skeptic and unbeliever do not believe in divine inspiration or God's existence. Due to their preconceived bias against the supernatural, they are forced to concoct ways to try to discredit the prophecies in Daniel. Since the secular historical record so clearly coincides with the book, attempts to gainsay the book as inaccurate fail miserably.

Thus, the skeptic is forced to conjecture that the book was written after the events took place, instead of before. In this vein, it has been suggested that Daniel was written in the second century B.C., instead of the sixth. The evidence against this assertion, however, is so powerful that to adopt the late date for Daniel lands the skeptic in a morass of contradiction and inconsistency. Gleason Archer, Jr. accurately summed up the force of the evidence for an early date for Daniel when he wrote:

> This poses such problems for the committed antisupernaturalist, who can only explain the successful predictions of Daniel as prophecies after the fulfillment, that he is not likely to be swayed by any amount of objective evidences whatever. Nevertheless, such evidence continues to pour in….[48]

In truth, Daniel 8 stands as an insurmountable barrier to naturalism and an atheistic worldview, and provides positive evidence of God's existence and the inspiration of the Bible.

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CHAPTER 10

TYRE IN PROPHECY

On Tuesday, September 11, 2001, a horrible tragedy shocked the United States when terrorists attacked the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Amidst the tragedy, a rumor circulated that Nostradamus, a supposed fortuneteller, had predicted the turn of events. Web sites with information on Nostradamus received thousands, even millions of hits. After all was said and done, the rumored prediction had been fabricated and misunderstood; Nostradamus had no more predicted the future than you or I. But it was obvious from the public's response that anyone who can accurately predict the future is more than just a little special. The prophet Jeremiah wrote: "Who is he who speaks, and it comes to pass, when the Lord has not commanded it?" (Lamentations 3:37). The prophet's point was clear: nobody accurately foretells the future unless God informs him of it. Therefore, if the Bible accurately predicts the future, we can know that it is from God. When we look to the Bible for evidence of predictive prophecy, we find it in abundance. The next four chapters deal with just a few of the biblical prophecies that verify the Bible's inspiration.

Ezekiel's prophetic message is one of the simplest to place in an accurate time frame. In verse 2 of the first chapter, the prophet noted that his visions and prophe-

cies began "in the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity." The date for this captivity is virtually unanimously accepted as 597 B.C., during the second deportation of citizens from Judea to Babylon, which is documented in detail in 2 Kings 24:10-20. Furthermore, not only is the deportation recorded in the biblical account, but the ancient Chaldean records document it as well.[1] Since Ezekiel's visions began five years after the deportation, a firm date of 592 B.C. can be established for the beginning of his prophecy. The prophet supplies other specific dates such as the seventh year (20:1), the ninth year (24:1), the eleventh year (26:1), and the latest date given as the twenty-seventh year (29:17).[2]

Due to the firmly established dating system that Ezekiel chose to use for his prophecy, the date of the prophecy regarding the city of Tyre, found in chapter 26, can be accurately established as the eleventh year after 597, which would be 586 B.C.

THE CITY OF TYRE

According to history, the Phoenician city of Tyre, located on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea, stood as one of the most ancient and prosperous cities in history. Herodotus lived and wrote between about 490 B.C. and 425 B.C.[3] During a visit to the temple of Heracles in Tyre, Herodotus inquired about the age of the temple, to which the inhabits replied that the temple was as old as "Tyre itself, and that Tyre had already stood for two thousand three hundred years."[4] From Herodotus, then, it can be ascertained that the city supposedly can be traced back to 2,700 B.C.[5]

Due to its advantageous geographical position and good ports, Tyre became one of the wealthiest trading cities in history. Fleming noted that it "was the most

important of all Phoenician cities."[6] During the reigns of King David and King Solomon (*circa* 1000 B.C.), Hiram, king of Tyre, played a major role in the acquisition of building materials for important structures such as the Israelite kings' houses and the first Temple. In numerous biblical passages, the text states that Hiram sent cedar trees, carpenters, masons, and builders to Israel (2 Samuel 5:11) because of the Tyrians' renowned skill in timber cutting (1 Kings 5:1-18). In addition, the Tyrians were equally well known for their remarkable abilities to navigate the seas during Solomon's era. Second Chronicles documents that Hiram sent ships and "servants who knew the sea" to work with Solomon's men in acquiring gold from foreign lands (2 Chron. 8:18).

The city of Tyre had a rather interesting and beneficial geographical arrangement. About half a mile off the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea stood a small rocky island on which the original city of Tyre was most likely founded. Some time after the founding of this island city, the mainland city of Tyre, which the Greeks called "Old Tyre," was founded.[7] Josephus cites a Phoenician historian named Dius, as reporting that the Phoenician king Hiram, who was closely connected to kings David and Solomon, built a causeway from the original island to a smaller island, connecting the two.[8]

In addition to its beneficial geographic position, the city had great confidence in its many excellent defensive advantages. Fleming noted: "As early as 1400 B.C. Tyre was not only a great city but was considered impregnable."[9] The ancient historian Quintus Curtius Rufus (most likely writing in approximately A.D. 50), listed several of these defensive traits that had remained intact as late as the siege by Alexander in 332 B.C. The force of the water and the wind that prevailed on the

side of the city closest to the land was said to have produced a "corrosive force of waves" that would hinder the construction of any type of bridge or causeway from the mainland.[10] Furthermore, the water nearest to the walls of the city was "especially deep" and would force any would-be attackers to position any type of siege mechanisms in the unstable foundation of a ship, and the wall "dropped sheer into the sea," which prevented the use of ladders or approach by foot.[11]

During the time of Ezekiel, Tyre was well established and renowned for its building, manufacturing, and trade. Ezekiel said of Tyre: "Your builders have perfected your beauty" (27:4), and then he proceeded to list several different kinds of wood and imported materials used by the Tyrians (27:3-11). The prophet stated: "When your wares went out by sea, you satisfied many people; you enriched the kings of the earth with your many luxury goods and your merchandise" (27:33).

But Tyre's profitable trading had done little to improve its spiritual condition. In fact, as is often the case, the riches accrued by the city had caused widespread dereliction and spiritual decay. Concerning the city, Ezekiel noted: "By the abundance of your trading you became filled with violence within, and you sinned.... Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of splendor.... You defiled your sanctuaries by the multitude of your iniquities" (28:16-18). Among the sins listed by Ezekiel, one specific attitude maintained by Tyre was designated by the prophet as the ultimate reason for the city's demise. Ezekiel noted: "[B]ecause Tyre has said against Jerusalem, 'Aha! She is broken who was the gateway of the peoples; now she is turned over to me; I shall be filled; she is laid waste.' Therefore thus says the Lord God: 'Behold,

I am against you, O Tyre'" (26:2-3). Apparently, in an attitude of commercial jealousy and greed, the city of Tyre exulted in Jerusalem's misfortunes and expected to turn them into its own profit. Among Tyre's list of despicable activities, the city's slave trade ranked as one of the most profitable. The prophet Joel noted that Tyre had taken the people from Judah and Jerusalem and sold them to the Greeks so that the Tyrians could "remove them far from their borders" (Joel 3:6). These dastardly dealings with the inhabitants of Judah would not go unpunished.

In Ezekiel 26, the prophet mentioned several events that were to occur in Tyre as punishment for the city's arrogance and merciless actions. The following is a lengthy, but necessary, quote from that chapter:

> Therefore thus says the Lord God: "Behold, I am against you, O Tyre, and will cause many nations to come up against you, as the sea causes its waves to come up. And they shall destroy the walls of Tyre and break down her towers; I will also scrape her dust from her, and make her like the top of a rock. It shall be a place for spreading nets in the midst of the sea, for I have spoken," says the Lord God; "it shall become plunder for the nations. Also her daughter villages which are in the fields shall be slain by the sword. Then they shall know that I am the Lord."
>
> For thus says the Lord God: "Behold, I will bring against Tyre from the north Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, king of kings, with horses, with chariots, and with horsemen, and an army with many people. He will slay with the sword your daughter villages in the fields; he will heap up a siege mound against you, build a wall against you, and raise a defense against you. He will direct his battering rams against your walls, and with his axes he will break down your towers. Because of the abundance of his horses, their dust will cover you; your walls will shake at the noise of the horsemen, the wagons, and the chariots, when he enters your gates, as men enter a city that has been breached. With the hooves of his horses he will trample all your streets;

> he will slay your people by the sword, and your strong pillars will fall to the ground. They will plunder your riches and pillage your merchandise; they will break down your walls and destroy your pleasant houses; they will lay your stones, your timber, and your soil in the midst of the water. I will put an end to the sound of your songs, and the sound of your harps shall be heard no more. I will make you like the top of a rock; you shall be a place for spreading nets, and you shall never be rebuilt, for I the Lord have spoken," says the Lord God....
>
> For thus says the Lord God: "When I make you a desolate city, like cities that are not inhabited, when I bring the deep upon you, and great waters cover you, then I will bring you down with those who descend into the Pit, to the people of old, and I will make you dwell in the lowest part of the earth, in places desolate from antiquity, with those who go down to the Pit, so that you may never be inhabited; and I shall establish glory in the land of the living. I will make you a terror, and you shall be no more; though you are sought for, you will never be found again," says the Lord God (26:1-21).

Several aspects of this prophecy deserve attention and close scrutiny. The prophet predicted: (1) many nations would come against Tyre; (2) the inhabitants of the villages and fields of Tyre would be slain; (3) Nebuchadnezzar would build a siege mound against the city; (4) the city would be broken down and the stones, timber, and soil would be thrown in "the midst of the water;" (5) the city would become a "place for spreading nets;" and (6) the city would never be rebuilt.

In chronological order, the siege of Nebuchadnezzar took place within a few months of Ezekiel's prophecy. Josephus, quoting "the records of the Phoenicians," says that Nebuchadnezzar "besieged Tyre for thirteen years in the days of Ithobal, their king."[12] The length of the siege was due, in part, to the unusual arrangement of the mainland city and the island city. While the mainland city would have been susceptible to ordinary siege tactics,

the island city would have been easily defended against orthodox siege methods.[13] The historical record suggests that Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the mainland city, but the siege of the island "probably ended with the nominal submission of the city" in which Tyre surrendered "without receiving the hostile army within her walls."[14] The city of Tyre was besieged by Nebuchadnezzar, who did major damage to the mainland as Ezekiel predicted, but the island city remained primarily unaffected.

It is at this point in the discussion that certain skeptics view Ezekiel's prophecy as a failed prediction. Farrell Till stated: "Nebuchadnezzar did capture the mainland suburb of Tyre, but he never succeeded in taking the island part, which was the seat of Tyrian grandeur. That being so, it could hardly be said that Nebuchadnezzar wreaked the total havoc on Tyre that Ezekiel vituperatively predicted in the passages cited."[15] Till and others suggest that the prophecies about Tyre's utter destruction refer to the work of Nebuchadnezzar.

After a closer look at the text, however, such an interpretation is misguided. Ezekiel began his prophecy by stating that "many nations" would come against Tyre (26:3). Then he proceeded to name Nebuchadnezzar, and stated that "he" would build a siege mound, "he" would slay with the sword, and numerous other things that "he" would do (26:7-11). However, in 26:12, the pronoun shifts from the singular "he" to the plural "they." It is in verse twelve and following that Ezekiel predicts that "they" will lay the stones and building material of Tyre in the "midst of the waters." The shift in pronouns is of vast significance, since it shifts the subject of the action from Nebuchadnezzar (he) back to the many nations (they). Till and others fail to see this shift and

mistakenly apply the utter destruction of Tyre to the efforts of Nebuchadnezzar.

Furthermore, Ezekiel was well aware of Nebuchadnezzar's failure to destroy the city. Sixteen years after his initial prediction, in the 27th year of Jehoiachin's captivity (*circa* 570 B.C.), he wrote: "Son of man, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon caused his army to labor strenuously against Tyre; every head was made bald, and every shoulder rubbed raw; yet neither he nor his army received wages from Tyre, for the labor which they expended on it" (29:18). Therefore, in regard to the prophecy of Tyre as it relates to Nebuchadnezzar's activity at least two of the elements were fulfilled (i.e., the siege mound and the slaying of the inhabitants in the field).

Regarding the prediction that "many nations" would come against Tyre, the historical records surrounding the illustrious city report such turmoil and war that Ezekiel's prophecy looks like a mild understatement of the facts. After Nebuchadnezzar's attack, "a period of great depression" plagued the city, which was assimilated into the Persian Empire around 538 B.C.[16] In 392 B.C., "Tyre was involved in the war which arose between the Persians and Evagorus of Cyprus" in which the king of Egypt "took Tyre by assault."[17] Sixty years later, in 332, Alexander the Great besieged Tyre and crushed it (see below for further elaboration). Soon after this defeat, Ptolemy of Egypt conquered and subjugated Tyre until about 315 B.C. when Atigonus of Syria besieged Tyre for 15 months and captured it.[18] In fact, Tyre was contested by so many foreign forces that Fleming wrote: "It seemed ever the fate of the Phoenician cities to be between an upper and a nether millstone."[19] Babylon, Syria, Egypt, Rome, Greece, Armenia, and Persia are

but a sampling of the "many nations" that had a part in the ultimate destruction of Tyre. Thus, Ezekiel's prophecy about "many nations" remains as a historical reality that cannot be gainsaid.

ALEXANDER AND TYRE

The historical account of Alexander the Great's dealings with Tyre adds another important piece to Ezekiel's prophecy. By 333 B.C., Ezekiel's prophecy that Tyre would be destroyed and its building material cast into the midst of the waters had yet to materialize. But that situation was soon to be altered. Ancient historian Diodorus Siculus, who lived from approximately 80-20 B.C., wrote extensively of the young Greek conqueror's dealing with Tyre. It is from his original work that much of the following information on Tyre's destruction derives.[20]

In his dealings with Tyre, Alexander asserted that he wished to make a personal sacrifice in the temple of Heracles on the island city of Tyre. Apparently, because the Tyrians considered their island refuge virtually impregnable, with war machines covering the walls, and rapidly moving water acting as an effective barrier from land attack, they refused his request. Upon receiving their refusal, Alexander immediately set to work on a plan to besiege and conquer the city. He started building a land bridge or causeway (Siculus calls it a "mole") from the mainland city of Tyre to the island city. Siculus stated: "Immediately he demolished what was called Old Tyre and set many tens of thousands of men to work carrying stones to construct a mole."[21] Curtius Rufus noted: "Large quantities of rock were available, furnished by old Tyre."[22] This unprecedented action took the Tyrians by complete surprise. Fleming noted: "In former times the city had shown herself well nigh

impregnable. That Alexander's method of attack was not anticipated is not strange, for there was no precedent for it in the annals of warfare."[23] And yet, even though this action was unprecedented militarily, it was exactly what one might expect from the description of the destruction of Tyre given by Ezekiel hundreds of years prior to Alexander's actions. The mainland city was demolished and all her stones, timber, and soil were thrown into the midst of the sea.

In spite of the fact that the Tyrians were taken by surprise, they were not disheartened, because they did not believe that Alexander's efforts would prevail. They continued to maintain supremacy on the sea, and harassed his workers from all sides from boats that were equipped with catapults, slingers, and archers. These tactics were effective in killing many of Alexander's men. But Alexander was not to be outdone. He gathered his own fleet of ships from nearby cities and was successful in neutralizing the Tyrian vessels' effectiveness.

With the arrival of Alexander's sea fleet, the work on the land bridge moved much more rapidly. Yet, when the construction of the bridge was nearing completion, a storm damaged a large section of the mole. Refusing to quit, Alexander rebuilt the damaged structure and continued to move forward. In desperation, the Tyrians sent underwater divers to impede construction by attaching hooks to the rocks and trees of the causeway, causing much damage.[24] Yet, these efforts by the Tyrians could not stop Alexander's army, and eventually the bridge spanned the distance from the mainland city to the island. Huge siege machines bombarded the walls of Tyre. Siculus' description of the fight is one of the most vivid accounts of a battle in ancient history.[25] Eventually the Tyrians were defeated, their walls penetrated, and

Alexander's forces entered the city and devastated it. Most of the men of Tyre were killed in continued fighting. Siculus recorded that approximately 2,000 of the men in Tyre who were of military age were crucified, and about 13,000 "non-combatants" were sold into slavery.[26] [Others estimate the number even higher.] In describing the devastation of the city by Alexander, Fleming wrote: "There was general slaughter in the streets and square. The Macedonians were enraged by the stubborn resistance of the city and especially by the recent murder of some of their countrymen; they therefore showed no mercy. A large part of the city was burned."[27]

The secular historical record detailing Alexander's destruction of Tyre coincides precisely with Ezekiel's prophecy concerning what would happen to its building materials. As Ezekiel had predicted, the stones, timber, and soil of the mainland city were thrown into the midst of the sea in an unprecedented military venture. For Ezekiel to have accurately "guessed" this situation would be to stretch the law of probability beyond the limits of absurdity. His acutely accurate representation of the facts remains as outstanding and amazing proof of the divine inspiration behind his message.

ADDITIONAL ASPECTS OF THE PROPHECY OF TYRE

One of the most disputed aspects concerning Ezekiel's prophecy is the statement that the city of Tyre would "never be rebuilt" (26:14), and "be no more forever" (28:19). The skeptic points to modern day Tyre and suggests that these statements have failed to materialize. Till stated: "In fact, Tyre still exists today, as anyone able to read a map can verify. This obvious failure of a highly touted Old Testament prophet is just one more nail in the coffin of the Bible inerrancy doctrine."[28]

Several possible solutions exist that dissolve this alleged problem. First, it could be the case that the bulk of Ezekiel's prophecy dealt with the mainland city of Tyre, the location of which has most likely been lost permanently and is buried under the waters of the Mediterranean Sea. This solution has merit for several reasons. In approximately A.D. 1170, a Jewish traveler named Benjamin of Tudela published a diary of his travels. "Benjamin began his journey from Saragossa, around the year 1160 and over the course of thirteen years visited over 300 cities in a wide range of places including Greece, Syria, Palestine, Mesopotamia and Persia."[29] In his memoirs, a section is included concerning the city of Tyre.

> From Sidon it is half a day's journey to Sarepta (Sarfend), which belongs to Sidon. Thence it is a half-day to New Tyre (Sur), which is a very fine city, with a harbour in its midst.... There is no harbour like this in the whole world. Tyre is a beautiful city.... In the vicinity is found sugar of a high class, for men plant it here, and people come from all lands to buy it. A man can ascend the walls of New Tyre **and see ancient Tyre, which the sea has now covered**, lying at a stone's throw from the new city. And should one care to go forth by boat, one can see the castles, market-places, streets, and palaces **in the bed of the sea.**[30]

From this twelfth-century A.D. text, then, we learn that by that period of time the city known as ancient Tyre lay completely buried beneath the sea and a new city, most likely on some part of the island, had been erected. George Davis, in his book *Fulfilled Prophecies that Prove the Bible*, included a picture of Syrian fishermen under which the following caption appeared: "Syrian fishermen hauling in their nets on the probable site of ancient Tyre, which perished as predicted by the prophet."[31] In his monumental work on the city of Tyre, Katzenstein mentioned several ancient sources that discussed the

position of "Old Tyre." He wrote: "Later this town was dismantled by Alexander the Great in his famous siege of Tyre and **disappeared totally with the change of the coastline** brought about by the dike and the alluvial deposits that changed Tyre into a peninsula."[32]

It very likely is the case that the specific site of ancient Tyre has been buried by sand and water over the course of the last 2,500 years and is lost to modern knowledge. That the prophet was speaking about the mainland city in reference to many aspects of his prophecy has much to commend it. It was to that mainland city that King Nebuchadnezzar directed most of his attention and destructive measures described in Ezekiel 26:8-11. Furthermore, it was the mainland city that Alexander destroyed completely and cast into the sea to build his causeway to the island city. In addition, Benjamin Tudela's quote corresponds precisely to the statement that the prophet made in the latter part of chapter 26: "For thus says the Lord God: 'When I make you a desolate city, like the cities that are not inhabited, **when I bring the deep upon you, and great waters cover you**'" (26:19). In addition, Katzenstein noted that the scholar H.L. Ginsberg has suggested that the name "Great Tyre" was given to the mainland city, while the island city was designated as "Little Tyre."[33] He further noted 2 Samuel 24:7, which mentions "the stronghold of Tyre," and commented that this 'may refer to 'Old Tyre,'" or the mainland city.[34]

Besides the idea that the bulk of the prophecy dealt with the mainland city, other possible solutions exist that sufficiently support the prediction that Tyre would "never be rebuilt" and would "be no more forever." While it is true that a city does currently exist on the island, that city is not a "rebuilt" Tyre and has no real connection to

the city condemned by Ezekiel other than its location. If the history of Tyre is traced more completely, it becomes evident that even the island city of Tyre suffered complete destruction. Fleming noted that in approximately A.D. 193: "Tyre was plundered and burned after a fearful slaughter of her citizens."[35] Around the year 1085, the Egyptians "succeeded in reducing Tyre, which for many years had been practically independent."[36] Again, in about 1098, the Vizier of Egypt "entered the city and massacred a large number of people."[37] In addition, the city was besieged in A.D. 1111,[38] and again in April of 1124.[39] Around the year 1155, the Egyptians entered Tyre, "made a raid with fire and sword...and carried off many prisoners and much plunder."[40]

In addition to the military campaigns against the city, at least two major earthquakes pummeled the city, one of which "ruined the wall surrounding the city."[41] And ultimately, in A.D. 1291, the Sultan Halil massacred the inhabitants of Tyre and subjected the city to utter ruin. "Houses, factories, temples, everything in the city was consigned to the sword, flame and ruin."[42] After this major defeat in 1291, Fleming cites several travel logs in which visitors to the city mention that citizens of the area in 1697 were "only a few poor wretches...subsisting chiefly upon fishing."[43] In 1837, another earthquake pounded the remains of the city so that the streets were filled with debris from fallen houses to such a degree that they were impassable.[44]

Taking these events into consideration, it is obvious that many nations continued to come against the island city, that it was destroyed on numerous occasions, and that it became a place for fishing, fulfilling Ezekiel's prediction about the spreading of nets. Furthermore, it is evident that the multitudinous periods of destruction

and rebuilding have long since buried the Phoenician city that came under the condemnation of Ezekiel. The *Columbia Encyclopedia*, under its entry for Tyre, noted: "The principal ruins of the city today are those of buildings erected by the Crusaders. There are some Greco-Roman remains, but **any left by the Phoenicians lie underneath the present town.**"[45] Concerning Tyre's present condition, other sources have noted that "continuous settlement has restricted excavation to the Byzantine and Roman levels **and information about the Phoenician town** comes only from documentary sources."[46] Another report confirmed, "Uncovered remains are from the post-Phoenician Greco-Roman, Crusader, Arab and Byzantine times.... **Any traces of the Phoenician city** were either destroyed long ago or remain buried under today's city."[47] Thus, the only connection that the present town maintains with the ancient one in Ezekiel's day is **location**, and the present buildings, streets, and other features are not "rebuilt" versions of the original city. If Ezekiel's prophecy extended to the island city as well as the mainland city, it can be maintained legitimately that the ruins lying underneath the city have not been "rebuilt."

WHEN DID EZEKIEL PROPHESY?

Some have questioned the date of the composition of Ezekiel, due to the prophecy's amazing accuracy in regard to its predictions concerning Tyre. Yet, the book of Ezekiel has much that lends itself to the idea that it was composed by Ezekiel during the time it claims to have been written. When did Ezekiel write his material? Kenny Barfield noted that, besides a belief that supernatural revelation is impossible,

> no evidence supports the thesis that Ezekiel's predictions were penned later than 400 B.C. Moreover, the

> book (Ezek. 1:1; 8:1; 33:1; 40:1-4) claims to have been composed by the prophet sometime in the sixth century, B.C., and Josephus attributes the book to the Hebrew prophet during the time in question.[48]

In addition, Ezekiel was included in the Septuagint, which is the "earliest version of the Old Testament Scriptures" available–a translation from Hebrew to Greek which was "executed at Alexandria in the third century before the Christian era."[49]

Simon Greenleaf, the lawyer who is renowned for having played a major role in the founding of Harvard Law School and for having written the *Treatise on the Law of Evidence*, scrutinized several biblical documents in light of the procedures practiced in a court of law. He noted one of the primary laws regarding ancient documents: "Every document, apparently ancient, coming from the proper repository or custody, and bearing on its face no evident marks of forgery, the law presumes to be genuine, and devolves the opposing party the burden of proving it to be otherwise."[50] He then noted that "this is precisely the case with the Sacred Writings. They have been used in the church from time immemorial, and thus are found in the place where alone they ought to be looked for."[51] Specifically in regard to Ezekiel, that is exactly the case. If the prophet wrote it in the sixth century B.C., his work is exactly where it should be, translated in the Septuagint around the year 250 B.C., and noted to be from the proper time period by Josephus in approximately A.D. 90.

Furthermore, the scholarly world recognized the book's authenticity and original date of composition virtually unanimously for almost 1,900 years. The eminently respected Hebrew scholars Keil and Delitzsch, who wrote in the late 1800s, commented: "The genuineness of Ezekiel's prophecies is, at the present

day, unanimously recognized by all critics. There is, moreover, no longer any doubt that the writing down and redaction of them in the volume which has been transmitted to us were the work of the prophet himself."[52] Indeed, Archer noted that no serious objection to the book's integrity was even put forth until 1924.[53]

OBJECTIONS TO EZEKIEL'S AUTHENTICITY CONSIDERED

In regard to the objections that have been put forth, as Greenleaf noted, the burden of proof concerning the authenticity of Ezekiel lies with those who attempt to consider it inauthentic. Yet, far from proving such, they have put forth tenuous suggestions based on alleged internal inconsistencies. First, these critics have proposed that the work could not have been by one man since some sections are filled with descriptions of doom and destruction, while others resound with hope and deliverance. This alleged inconsistency holds little weight, as Miller noted:

> Of course, this viewpoint is based on purely subjective considerations. No inherent reason exists that forbids a single writer from presenting both emphases. In fact, virtually all the prophets of the Old Testament announce judgment upon God's people and/or their neighbors and then follow that judgment sentence with words of future hope and restoration if repentance is forthcoming.... One must be in possession of a prejudicial perspective before approaching Scripture to come to such a conclusion.[54]

The second objection to the integrity of Ezekiel has little more to commend it than the first. The second "proof" of the book's alleged inauthentic nature revolves around the fact that in certain sections, Ezekiel seems to be an eyewitness to events that are happening in Palestine, while at the same time claiming to be writing from Babylon. This objection can be dealt

with quickly, in a twofold manner. First, it would be possible, and very likely, that news would travel from the remnant of Israelites still free in Palestine to the captives in Babylon. Second, and more likely, if Ezekiel was guided by divine inspiration, he could have been given the ability to know events in Palestine that he did not see.[55] Taking the prophecy of Tyre into account, it is clear that Ezekiel did possess/receive revelation that allowed him to report events that he had not seen and that were yet to take place.

A third objection to Ezekiel's authenticity actually turns out not to be an objection at all, but rather a verification of Ezekiel's integrity. W.F. Albright, the eminent and respected archaeologist, noted that one of C.C. Torrey's "principle arguments against the authenticity of the prophecy" (the book of Ezekiel–KB) was the fact that Ezekiel dates things by the "years of Jehoiachin's captivity."[56] Supposedly, Jehoiachin would not have been referred to as "king" since he was captive in another land and no longer ruled in his own. Until about 1940, this argument seemed to possess some merit. But in that year, Babylonian tablets were brought to light that contained a cuneiform inscription giving the Babylonian description of Jehoiachin as king of Judah, even though he was in captivity.[57] Albright concluded by saying: "The unusual dates in Ezekiel, so far from being indications that the book is not authentic, prove its authenticity in a most striking way."[58]

Due to the fact that modern critics have failed to shoulder the burden of proof laid upon them to discredit Ezekiel's integrity and authenticity, Smith rightly stated: "The critical studies of the Book of Ezekiel over the past fifty years or so have largely cancelled each other out. The situation now is much the same as it was

prior to 1924 (the work of Hoelscher) when the unity and integrity of the book were generally accepted by the critics."[59] Miller correctly concluded: "All theories and speculations which call into question the unity and integrity of the book of Ezekiel are unconvincing.... The most convincing view is the traditional one that sees Ezekiel as the long recognized sixth century Hebrew prophet and author of the Old Testament book which bears his name."[60]

CONCLUSION

So accurate were the prophecies made by Ezekiel that skeptics were forced to suggest a later date for his writings. Yet, such a later date cannot be maintained, and the admission of Ezekiel's accuracy stands as irrefutable evidence of the prophet's divine inspiration. With the penetrating gaze that can only be maintained by the divine, God looked hundreds of years into the future and told Ezekiel precisely what to write so that in the centuries following the predictions, the fulfillment of every detail of the prophet's words could not be denied by any honest student of history. "When the word of the prophet comes to pass, the prophet will be known as one whom the Lord has truly sent" (Jeremiah 28:9). Ezekiel's accurate prophecy adds yet another piece of insurmountable evidence to support the fact that "all Scripture is inspired of God" (2 Timothy 3:16).

ENDNOTES

[1] Joseph P. Free and Howard F. Vos (1992), *Archaeology and Bible History* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), p. 194.

[2] For an outline, see Gleason L. Archer Jr. (1974), *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago, IL: Moody), revised edition, pp. 368-369.

[3] Herodotus, (1972 reprint), *The Histories*, trans. Aubrey De Sélincourt (London: Penguin), p. i.

[4] Ibid., 2.44.

[5] While the ancient historians were known to exaggerate the ages of cities, or often be off by several hundred years, the statements stand as evidence that the city of Tyre was extremely ancient.

[6] Wallace B. Fleming (1966), *The History of Tyre* (New York, NY: AMS Press), p. ix.

[7] Ibid., p. 4.

[8] Flavius Josephus (1987 edition), *Against Apion*, in *The Life and Works of Flavius Josephus*, trans. William Whiston (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson), 1.17.

[9] Fleming, p. 8.

[10] Quintus Curtius Rufus (2001), *The History of Alexander,* trans. John Yardley (New York, NY: Penguin).

[11] Ibid., 4.2.9.

[12] Josephus, 1.21.

[13] Fleming, p. 45.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Farrell Till (no date), "Prophecies: Imaginary and Unfulfilled," http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/farrell_till/prophecy.html.

[16] Fleming, p. 47.

[17] Ibid., p. 52

[18] Ibid., p. 65.

[19] Ibid., p. 66.

[20] Diodorus Siculus (1963), *Library of History*, trans. C. Bradford Welles (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 17.40-46.

[21] Ibid., 17.40.

[22] Rufus, 4.2.18.

[23] Fleming, p. 56.

[24] Rufus, 4.3.10.

[25] Siculus, 17.43-46.

[26] Ibid., 17.46.

[27] Fleming, p. 63.

[28] Till, n.d.

[29] Benjamin of Tudela (no date), "Traveling in Jerusalem," http://chass.colostate-pueblo.edu/history/seminar/benjamin.htm.

[30] Benjamin of Tudela (1907), *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela* (New York, NY: The House of the Jewish Book), http://chass.colostate-pueblo.edu/history/seminar/benjamin/benjamin1.htm, emp. added.

[31] George T.B. Davis (1931), *Fulfilled Prophecies that Prove the Bible* (Philadelphia, PA: Million Testaments Campaign), p. 11.

[32] Jacob Katzenstein (1973), *The History of Tyre* (Jerusalem: The Schocken Institute for Jewish Research), p. 15, emp. added.

[33] Ibid., p. 20.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Fleming, p. 73.

[36] Ibid., p. 85.

[37] Ibid., p. 88.

[38] Ibid., p. 90.

[39] Ibid., p. 95.

[40] Ibid., p. 101.

[41] Ibid., p. 115.

[42] Ibid., p. 122.

[43] Ibid., p. 124.

[44] Ibid., p. 128.

[45] "Tyre" (2006), *Columbia Encyclopedia,* http://yahooligans.yahoo.com/reference/encyclopedia/entry?id=48355, emp. added.

[46] "Ancient Tyre (Sour)" (no date), http://ancientneareast.tripod.com/Tyre.html, emp. added.

[47] "Ancient Phoenicia" (no date), http://gorp.away.com/gorp/location/africa/phonici5.htm, emp. added.

[48] Kenny Barfield (1995), *The Prophet Motive* (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate), p. 98.

[49] Septuagint (1998 reprint), (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson), p. i.

[50] Simon Greenleaf (1995), *The Testimony of the Evangelists* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Classics), p. 16.

[51] Ibid., pp. 16-17.

[52] C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch (1982 reprint), *Commentary on the Old Testament–Ezekiel and Daniel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 9:16.

[53] Archer, p. 369.

[54] Dave Miller (1995), "Introduction to Ezekiel," *Major Lessons from the Major Prophets*, ed. B.J. Clarke (Pulaski, TN: Sain Publications), p. 138.

[55] Ibid., pp. 138-139.

[56] W.F. Albright (1948), "The Old Testament and Archaeology," *Old Testament Commentary*, ed. Herbert Alleman and Elmer Flack (Philadelphia, PA: Muhlenberg Press), p. 164.

[57] Ibid., p. 165.

[58] Ibid.

[59] James Smith (1979), *Ezekiel* (Joplin, MO: College Press), p. 33.

[60] Miller, p. 139.

CHAPTER 11

BABYLON: A TEST CASE IN PROPHECY

by Wayne Jackson, M.A.*

It was the most remarkable community of its day—a San Francisco, New York, or London of the antique world. Herodotus (484-425 B.C.), known as the father of ancient history, once visited the great metropolis. He said that "in magnificence there is no other city that approaches to it."[1] It was Babylon!

Babylon's roots reached back almost to the dawn of civilization. Its genesis was with the mighty hunter, Nimrod, who conquered men and made them his unwilling subjects (Genesis 10:10). From that ignoble origin eventually evolved the Neo-Babylonian empire (614-539 B.C.), which figures so prominently in Old Testament history.

THE GOLDEN CITY

The city of Babylon straddled the Euphrates River about fifty miles south of what is now modern Baghdad in Iraq. Herodotus claimed that the town was laid out in an exact square, approximately fifteen miles on each side. The historian suggested that the city was surrounded by a moat (more than 260 feet broad), behind which was a massive wall—some 75 feet thick and 300 feet high, with 15 large gates of brass on each side. Later writers (e.g., Strabo and Diodorus Siculus) gave somewhat smaller

dimensions. But these may reflect different areas of measurement, or perhaps other historical periods.[2] When Jacob Abbott wrote his fascinating volume, *History of Cyrus the Great*, he suggested that Babylon was four or five times the size of London.[3] Modern archaeological investigations have involved a significantly smaller area. One of the prominent features of this illustrious city was Nebuchadnezzar's Hanging Gardens, constructed for his Median wife who was homesick for her hill-country environment. This botanical marvel was considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

The Scriptures take note of the fame that characterized this community. The prophets designated Babylon as "great" (Daniel 4:30), the "glory of the kingdoms" (Isaiah 13:19), the "golden city" (Isaiah 14:4), the "lady of the kingdoms" (Isaiah 47:5) who was "abundant in treasures" (Jeremiah 51:13), and the "praise of the whole earth" (Jeremiah 51:41). Surely a kingdom of this nature could last forever.

BABYLON: THE INSTRUMENT OF PROVIDENCE

In order to appreciate the significance of Babylon in light of Bible prophecy, one must understand something of Hebrew history. The northern kingdom of Israel had been destroyed by the Assyrians in 722-721 B.C. The southern kingdom (Judah) had been spared that catastrophe (see Isaiah 37) but, due to her progressive apostasy, was on a clear collision course with Babylon. The prophets warned that if Judah continued her rebellion, Jehovah would raise up Nebuchadnezzar as His "servant" to punish the wayward Hebrews. Many of them would be killed; others would be captured and taken away as prisoners by the marauding Babylonians (Jeremiah 25:9). The Chaldean monarch, however, would not be

commended or rewarded for this endeavor; rather, after his subjugation of Judah, the Lord would punish him, and the Babylon regime would commence a journey toward oblivion. Jeremiah summed up the history of this affair in the following way:

> Israel is a hunted sheep; the lions have driven him away: first, the king of Assyria devoured him; and now at last Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon has broken his bones. Therefore thus says Jehovah of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold I will punish the king of Babylon and his land, as I have punished the king of Assyria (Jeremiah 50:17-18).

But Babylon was the epitome of arrogance. She boasted that no one would be able to conquer this powerful citadel. The Babylonians felt absolutely secure within their mighty fortress, and believed that the capital city would never be vanquished. "I shall be mistress forever.... I am, and there is none else besides me; I shall not sit as a widow, neither shall I know the loss of children" (Isaiah 47:7-8). Inscriptions from the Chaldean archives have illustrated the haughty disposition that characterized the Babylonian rulers.[4]

PROPHECY AS AN APOLOGETIC

Before I discuss prophecies relating to Babylon, there are some preliminary matters that must be considered. First, there is the nature of God–the eternal "I AM" (Exodus 3:14). He is the One Who is, Who was, and Who is to come (Revelation 1:4). He, and only He, knows the future as well as the past. The Lord, therefore, is able to speak of those things that "are not" as though "they were" (Romans 4:17).

Only God can know the future. If, then, we are able to establish the fact that the prophets announced–many years in advance–truths regarding the desolation of Babylon, it would amount to a demonstration that ultimately

the biblical record was given by God Himself. These matters never could have been known by mere chance.

There is an interesting passage in the book of Jeremiah that illustrates this point. On a certain occasion in the prophet's ministry to Judah, Jeremiah was told by the Lord that his cousin, Hanamel, would arrive soon, offering to sell him a parcel of land in the town of Anathoth. Presently, Hanamel came to the prophet and made that very offer. Jeremiah subsequently uttered this significant statement: "**Then I knew** that this was the word of Jehovah" (Jeremiah 32:8). When a prophecy is made–and the prediction comes to pass–one can **know** that God has spoken, provided other prophetic guidelines are in place.

PROPHETIC PRINCIPLES

In this chapter, we will survey some of the prophecies that focus upon Babylon's demise. First, though, let us remind ourselves of several principles that govern the validity of genuine prophecy. (1) True prophecies are stated emphatically; they are not couched in the jargon of contingency (unless, of course, contextual evidence suggests that one is dealing with a **conditional** prophecy). (2) Generally, a significant time frame must lapse between the prophetic utterance and the fulfillment, so as to exclude the possibility of "educated speculation." (3) The prophecy must involve specific details, not vague generalities. (4) The predictive declarations must be fulfilled precisely and completely. No mere substantial percentage will suffice. One should recognize, though, that occasionally a prophecy may contain figurative terminology; this does not, however, militate against its evidential validity.

In the forthcoming reflections, we will emphasize these important points: (1) Babylon's fall is announced unequivocally: (2) the time of the beginning of her end is declared; (3) the invading forces are specified; (4) particular details of the Chaldean destruction are chronicled; (5) the final result–Babylon's utter dissipation–is portrayed quite graphically. These factors, considered in concert, testify eloquently to the divine inspiration of the sacred Scriptures.

BABYLON TO FALL

In addition to the passage mentioned earlier (Jeremiah 50:17-18), there are many other prophecies that affirm the ultimate desolation of Babylon. In the early eighth century before the birth of Christ, and almost two hundred years before Cyrus conquered the "golden city," Isaiah declared: "Fallen, fallen is Babylon; and all the graven images of her gods are broken unto the ground" (21:9). The double use of "fallen" is for emphasis. Although the verb "fallen" is in the present tense form in English, it actually is in the perfect tense in Hebrew, which represents **completed** action. This reflects a grammatical idiom commonly known as the "prophetic perfect," frequently employed in the Old Testament to stress the absolute certainty of fulfillment.[5] The action thus is expressed confidently–as though it had been accomplished already.

Again Jehovah, through his prophet, rhetorically calls to Babylon: "Come down, and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon; sit on the ground without a throne, O daughter of the Chaldeans" (Isaiah 47:1). Babylon is designated as a "virgin" because for many years she had escaped the ravages of other nations. But that status would come to an end!

Or consider the announcements of Jeremiah: "Declare you among the nations and publish, and set up a standard; publish, and conceal not: say, Babylon is taken" (Jeremiah 50:2). "Babylon is suddenly fallen and destroyed; wail for her; take balm for her pain" (Jeremiah 51:8). Among other contexts, a survey of Isaiah, chapters 13 and 14, and Jeremiah, chapters 50 and 51, will reveal numerous declarations concerning Babylon's impending fall and ultimate desolation.

THE PROPHETIC CHRONOLOGY

In giving consideration to the "time" factor in prophecies regarding the destruction of Babylon, two things must be kept in view. First, there was to be an **initial** defeat of the superpower. Second, afterward there would be a **gradual but progressive degeneration** of the locale that ultimately would result in total ruin. At this point, we will consider only the first of these matters.

After Judah's good king, Josiah (639-608 B.C.), died during the battle of Megiddo, he was succeeded by his son Jehoahaz, a miserable failure who reigned only three months. Jehoahaz was taken captive to Egypt (2 Kings 23:30-34), where, as Jeremiah prophesied, he died (Jeremiah 22:11-12). Then Jehoiakim, Josiah's second son, came to Judah's throne. He reigned eleven years (608-597 B.C.). During his administration, the compassionate Jeremiah, via his prophetic proclamations, was attempting to bring the southern kingdom to a state of repentance–with little success, I might add. Let us focus momentarily upon the oracles of Jeremiah, chapter 25.

First, we must observe that the material of this important chapter is dated. "The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim" (25:1). Thus, the following prophecies

can be dated to 605 B.C. The prophet described the horrors that were to be visited upon Palestine by the impending Babylonian invasion. He then announced the fate of Babylon herself.

> And this whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations [Judah and several of her neighbors–WJ] shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, says Jehovah, for their iniquity (Jeremiah 25:11-12).

Thus, almost three-quarters of a century before Babylon fell, when there was absolutely no indication of Chaldean vulnerability, Jeremiah announced the impending doom of the ancient world's superpower, and he gave a time indicator as to when those circumstances would unfold. There simply was no natural way he could have "guessed" it.

THE CONQUERORS SPECIFIED

But who would overthrow mighty Babylon? Both Isaiah and Jeremiah provide that information. In a section that concludes with: "Fallen, fallen is Babylon," the messianic prophet wrote: "Go up, O Elam; besiege O Media; all the sighing thereof have I made to cease" (Isaiah 21:2). As I have noted elsewhere, "Elam is here used to facilitate the Hebrews' understanding of the source of the impending invasion, since Persia was not yet prominent. Later, Elam is considered as a part of the Persian empire...."[6] Skinner observed that Elam and Media were

> [t]he dominions of Cyrus. The former lay east of the Tigris and north of the Persian Gulf; Media was the mountainous district adjoining it on the north. Cyrus, according to the Babylonian records, was originally king of Anzan, in the north of Elam; in 549 he conquered Media, uniting the two in one kingdom.[7]

Rawlinson noted that "Elam" is named because it was familiar to the Hebrews, whereas "Persia" would have been a designation alien to them at the time of Isaiah's writing.[8] What precision!

Again, Isaiah detailed the conquering exploits of Cyrus, leader of the Medo-Persian forces and the brilliant strategist who overthrew the city of Babylon:

> Thus says Jehovah to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him, and I will loose the loins of kings; to open the doors before him, and the gates shall not be shut (45:1).

The prophecy was uttered two centuries before the birth of the Persian monarch, and yet, as I shall demonstrate subsequently, it set forth a number of remarkable events in connection with the conquest of the Chaldean capital.

Jeremiah was equally specific regarding the invaders of Babylon. "Make sharp the arrows, hold firm the shields: Jehovah has stirred up the spirit of the kings of the Medes; because his purpose is against Babylon to destroy it" (51:11). Some have suggested that this passage sarcastically urged the Babylonians to sharpen their arrows and firmly clutch their shields–as if they would be able to defend themselves against the Lord's forces.[9] Others feel that this is a rhetorical charge to the Medo-Persian soldiers to prepare their military implements for attack against the Chaldean forces.[10] "The Persians were famous among the ancients for their archers."[11] Jehovah has plans for Babylon. He will destroy it by means of the "kings" (tribal rulers) of the Medes. Again, the accuracy of the biblical text is demonstrated by the precise terminology used. As Wiseman has noted concerning Jeremiah 51:11: "Babylonian texts (Nabonidus) show that the title 'king of the Medes' (11) was correctly in use in 544 B.C."[12]

The historical facts are not disputed. The Babylonian ruler, Nebuchadnezzar (605-562 B.C.), was succeeded by his son, Evil-Merodach (562-560 B.C.), who is mentioned in 2 Kings 25:27-30 and in Jeremiah 52:31-34. Next came Neriglissar (560-556 B.C.), an evil conspirator who was defeated and slain in battle by the Medes and Persians.[13] Labashi-Marduk subsequently came to the Chaldean throne in 556 B.C., but was assassinated after a few months. Finally, there was Nabonidus, who ruled from 556-539 B.C. His son, Belshazzar, was co-regent with his father. Actually it was Belshazzar who was occupying the city of Babylon when it fell (see Daniel 5:1ff.). Inscriptions have been discovered which make it clear that Nabonidus had entrusted the "kingship" of the capital city to his son while he campaigned in Arabia for about a decade.[14] When Cyrus advanced against Babylon, Nabonidus marched east to meet him, but fled before the Persian general's army. Later, after Cyrus had captured the city (539 B.C.), Nabonidus surrendered to the Persians. And so, the biblical prophecies regarding the conquerors of the city of Babylon were fulfilled exactly.

BABYLON FEARFUL

The works of Herodotus and Xenophon are the two principal sources of historical confirmation. Herodotus (484-425 B.C.), known as the "father of history," produced the first attempt at secular narrative history. His work, which dealt primarily with the Persian Wars, is an important source of information on the ancient world. He vividly describes the overthrow of Babylon. Xenophon (*circa* 430-355 B.C.), a student of Socrates, was a Greek historian born in Athens. He served in the Persian army and produced several valuable literary works. One of these, called *Cyropaedia*, is a sort of

romance founded on the history of Cyrus the Great (559-530 B.C.). It provides considerable data on the fall of Babylon. Again, we emphasize that one of the traits of true prophecy is that it deals in **specific details**, not generalities. Let us examine some of these particulars.

Babylon had been a brutal force. She was "the glory of the kingdoms" (Isaiah 13:19). She had been Jehovah's providential "battle-axe" that had broken in pieces the nations of the ancient world (Jeremiah 51:20-24). For example, Nebuchadnezzar had defeated thoroughly the Egyptians at the battle of Carchemish (605 B.C.), and had enjoyed great success in Syria and Palestine, even subjugating "Zion" at the Lord's bidding.

One might surmise that Babylon would have feared no one. Oddly, though, Jeremiah said: "The mighty men of Babylon have ceased fighting. They stay in the strongholds; their strength is exhausted, they are becoming like women" (Jeremiah 51:30). How remarkably this conforms to the actual history. Xenophon said that when Cyrus brought his army to Babylon, he initially was perplexed as to how he would take the city, since the Chaldean soldiers "do not come out to fight."[15] The Babylonians fearfully remained behind their massive walls refusing, for the most part, to encounter the enemy–exactly as the prophet had indicated.

EUPHRATES RIVER TO BE DIVERTED

When Cyrus surveyed Babylon's fortifications, he said: "I am unable to see how any enemy can take walls of such strength and height by assault."[16] Accordingly, he devised a brilliant strategy for capturing the city.

The Euphrates river ran under the walls through the center of Babylon. From the river, canals–quite broad and sometimes navigable–were cut in every direction.

The Jews in captivity could thus lament: "By the rivers of Babylon, There we sat down, yea, we wept, When we remembered Zion" (Psalm 137:1). Just to the west of the city was a huge lake-basin, some thirty-five feet deep and covering forty miles square, but which, at the time of the invasion, was but a marsh. Cyrus stationed soldiers at the point where the river entered the city, and also where it exited. At a given time, he diverted the Euphrates from its bed into the marshy lake area. His forces then entered Babylon under the city walls.[17]

Consider what the prophets declared regarding Babylon's fall. Isaiah, writing more than a century and a half earlier, referred to Jehovah's decree. The Lord "saith to the deep: Be dry, and I will dry up thy rivers, that saith of Cyrus, he is my shepherd and shall perform my pleasure" (Isaiah 47:27). Some contend that the language of this passage is an allusion to the Exodus, which occurred in Israel's early history. That cannot be the case, however. The utterance is framed in the future tense, and the context specifically relates this matter to Cyrus. The prophecy "is usually taken as referring to the device Cyrus used in order to capture Babylon."[18]

Later, in his famous oracle against Babylon, Jeremiah exclaimed: "A drought is upon her waters, and they shall be dried up: for it is a land of graven images, and they are mad over idols" (50:38). Again, "I will dry up her sea, and make her fountain dry" (51:36). Though these passages have been interpreted in various ways, the language is quite consistent with the diversion of the river, which allowed the Persians to take the city virtually unopposed.[19]

SURPRISE CAPTURE DURING DRUNKEN FEAST

Concerning Babylon's fall, Jeremiah represented the Lord as saying: "I have laid a snare for you, and you are also taken, O Babylon" (50:24). The term "snare" suggests that the citizens of the city would be taken by surprise; they "were not aware" of what was happening until it was too late (50:24b). Herodotus wrote: "Had the Babylonians been apprised of what Cyrus was about, or had they noticed their danger, they would never have allowed the Persians to enter their city."[20]

One aspect in the rapid conquest of the city had to do with the fact that the Babylonians, in their smug security, were engaged in drunken festivities; thus, they were wholly unconcerned about the enemy beyond their massive walls. But the Lord had declared: "When they are heated, I will make their feast, and I will make them drunken, that they may rejoice, and sleep a perpetual sleep, and not wake, says Jehovah" (Jeremiah 51:39). Again: "And I will make drunk her princes and her wise men, her governors and her deputies, and her mighty men; and they shall sleep a perpetual sleep, and not wake, says the King whose name is Jehovah of hosts" (Jeremiah 51:57).

Herodotus recorded that the citizens of the central section of the city did not know that Babylon had fallen for a good while because "they were engaged in a festival, continued dancing and reveling until they learnt the capture."[21] Similarly, Xenophon said that "there was a festival in Babylon, in which all the Babylonians drank and reveled the whole night."[22]

BABYLON TO BE SACKED

The prophets indicated that when great Babylon was taken, her rich treasures would be looted. The Lord, speaking prophetically to Cyrus, had promised: "[A]nd I will give you the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places" (Isaiah 45:3). Jeremiah announced: "And they shall become as women: a sword is upon her treasures, and they shall be robbed" (50:37). The treasures of Babylon were splendid beyond description. Herodotus, in describing just one of the temples in the city, declared that it contained more than twenty tons of gold.[23] It is interesting to note that when Cyrus issued his famous decree that allowed the Jews to return to their land, he endowed them with silver and gold to help finance the project, as well as returning some 5,400 vessels of gold and silver that originally had been taken from the Hebrew temple (Ezra 1:4,11).

When Jehovah beckoned the Persians to come against evil Babylon, He charged: "[O]pen up her store-houses [granaries, ASV footnote]; cast her up as heaps, and destroy her utterly; let nothing of her be left" (Jeremiah 50:26). Xenophon reports that Babylon "was furnished with provisions for more than twenty years."[24] No wonder they felt secure; the storehouses were bulging. But God emptied them–just as His prophet had announced!

WALLS TO BE ABOLISHED

I already have mentioned Babylon's famous walls. An ancient historian, Diodorus, stated that it took 200,000 men a full year to construct these fortifications.[25] But Jeremiah prophesied: "The broad walls of Babylon shall be utterly overthrown, and her high gates shall be burned with fire" (51:58). Where are Babylon's walls, and her one hundred gates of brass today?[26] Under

the "Summary" below, I will detail more precisely the demolition of the city.

BABYLON TO FADE INTO OBLIVION

The prophets repeatedly proclaimed the eventual utter desolation of ancient Babylon. Isaiah gave the following particulars:

> And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldeans' pride, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall shepherds make their flocks to lie down there. But wild beasts of the desert shall live there; and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures; and ostriches shall dwell there, and wild goats shall dance there. And wolves shall cry in their castles, and jackals in the pleasant palaces: and her time is near to come, and her days shall not be prolonged (13:19-22).

Jeremiah was equally graphic; the reader may consult chapters 50 and 51 of his book for the numerous details given there.

At this point, I would like to mention two points. First, there was to be an **initial defeat** of Babylon. Second, afterwards there would be a **gradual but progressive degeneration** of the locale, which ultimately would become a site of absolute waste. In the following section, I will catalogue the destructions and degeneration of once-great Babylon.

A SUMMARY OF EVENTS

1. After a siege of two years, the city of Babylon was captured by Cyrus, commander of the Medo-Persian forces, in October of 539 B.C. This brought the Neo-Babylonian empire (614-539 B.C.) to a close. Significant damage to the city was not inflicted at this time, though some of the walls may have been broken down, at least partially.

2. Following a rebellion of the Babylonian subjects, Darius Hystaspes took the city again in 520 B.C. He demolished the walls significantly and carried off the huge gates (see Jeremiah 51:58). Elsewhere I have given a detailed account of how the city was taken–again by a "snare."[27] Herodotus wrote: "Thus was Babylon taken for a second time. Darius having become master of the place, destroyed the wall, and tore down all the gates; for Cyrus had done neither the one nor the other when he took Babylon."[28] Apparently, however, there was some subsequent repair of the walls.[29]

3. During the reign of Xerxes (485-465 B.C.), the temple of Bel (Marduk) was plundered and destroyed. Much of the city was turned into ruins in 483 B.C., and the walls were dismantled further.

4. Babylon again fell to Alexander the Great in 331 B.C. As Alexander neared the city, priests and nobles went out to meet him with lavish gifts, surrendering the city. Alexander proposed that he would rebuild the temple of Marduk. He employed 10,000 men to clear the dirt and rubble. They labored in vain for two months. Alexander died and the work was abandoned.[30] A clay tablet has been found that confirms this enterprise. It records that in the sixth year of Alexander's reign, he made a payment of ten manehs of silver for "clearing away the dust of E-sagila [Marduk's great temple]."[31]

5. In 270 B.C. Antiochus Soter, a Greek ruler, restored several of the temples in Babylon, but the general decay of the city continued.

6. In the time of Strabo (at the end of the 1st century B.C.), the site was in ruins. Jerome (fourth century A.D.), learned that Babylon had been used as a wild game park for the amusement of numerous Persian dignitaries.[32] In the fifth century A.D., according to Cyril of Alexandria, due to the bursting of canal banks, Babylon became a swamp.[33]

7. Volney, the French atheist who was such a militant adversary of the Bible, wrote his book, *The Ruins of Empires*, in 1791. Therein he stated: "Nothing is left of Babylon but heaps of earth, trodden under foot of men."[34] As Jeremiah had prophesied: "[C]ast her up as heaps" (50:26). It is

ironic that a skeptic should lend support to confirming the accuracy of the biblical narrative!

8. When archaeologist Austen Layard explored Babylon in the mid-nineteenth century, he described the heaps of rubbish that rendered the area a "naked and hideous waste."[35] Later, when Robert Koldewey excavated the city for eighteen seasons beginning in 1899, he said that as he gazed over the ruins, he could not help but be reminded of Jeremiah 50:39.[36] He reported that many of the sites were covered with forty to eighty feet of sand and rubble.

9. A relatively modern air-view of Babylonia—once the world's greatest city—shows only a mound of dirt and broken-down walls.[37]

Saddam Hussein attempted to build a tourist center near the site of old Babylon. The 1990 Persian Gulf War seriously impaired his plans.

THE CRITICS AND THE PROPHECY

The accuracy of the dozens of prophecies regarding the fall of Babylon has baffled skeptics for generations. So remarkable has been the precision of the fulfillment that critics often have resorted to **redating** the predictions in both Isaiah and Jeremiah so as to make them appear to be records of **history** instead of **prophecy**! For example, in commenting upon the oracles of Jeremiah, chapters 50-51, James Philip Hyatt wrote: "Some of the poems in this present collection seem to reflect the city's downfall, as prophecies **after the event** rather than predictions...."[38] Such a view ignores the evidence for dating the books at a much earlier period.

A former professor in a Christian university has even capitulated to this liberal viewpoint. Anthony Ash asserted:

> Dating chapter 50 is virtually impossible. The arrangement of the text indicates that it was a composite, probably containing materials from different periods.... The

> chapter may have reached this form near the mid-sixth century B.C., when the fall of Babylon appeared likely.[39]

Upon this basis, then, one supposes that Jeremiah–or whoever put the composite together!–simply made a **lucky guess** as to the fall of Babylon. Such a view is disgusting, and unworthy of any Christian writer.

CONCLUSION

The prophetic details regarding the fall of ancient Babylon, as minutely recorded in the Old Testament narratives, truly are astounding. This is but another example of the amazing evidence that demonstrates the character of the Bible as the inspired Word of God.

ENDNOTES

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CHAPTER 12

MESSIANIC PROPHECY

In hindsight, a good mystery fits together perfectly, like the various pieces of an intricate puzzle that need but one final piece to link the parts that form the completed magnificent panorama. Until that final piece is added, the mystery is virtually impossible to grasp in its entirety. In fact, while the mystery is developing, the inquisitor's greatest challenge is to assess correctly which pieces of information or evidence are of significance and which are the banal elements that add nothing of consequence to the story. Is it important that Mr. Brown forgot his hat at the train station? Does it matter that the water faucet in the kitchen suddenly is not working properly? Inevitably, the astute inquisitor accurately pinpoints those elements in the story that are of great import. The less astute inaccurately labels ordinary events as important, or fails to understand fully events that were of major consequence.

Such is the case when approaching the study of the predicted Messiah, or, as it were, when solving the mystery of the Messiah. Anyone familiar with New Testament writings is quite familiar with the term "mystery" as it is applied to God's plan for the redemption of the human race through the predicted Messiah. Paul wrote concerning this mystery: "But we speak the wisdom

of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before ages for our glory" (1 Corinthians 2:7). In his letter to the Colossians, he stated: "I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to his saints" (1:25-26). Paul's epistle to the Ephesians contains similar comments: "[I]f indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery...which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets" (3:3,5).

The New Testament writers identified for us several characteristics of this Messianic mystery: (1) The mystery revolves around the prophesied Messiah and the redemption of mankind; (2) The mystery is one that has been hidden in various ways from all generations of people prior to the time of the New Testament; (3) The various tenets of the mystery are divinely revealed and made known only through divine communication; (4) During the times of the New Testament writers, God revealed the final piece of the mystery to the New Testament writers themselves.

The intention of this discussion is to trace out the various divinely revealed tenets of the Messianic mystery. Upon completion of that task, we must then determine if, in truth, the New Testament writers did possess the final, completing piece of that mystery. We have dealt in other places with the traces of a Savior originating from various sources outside the biblical writings.[1] Therefore, since the Hebrew Scriptures are renowned for being

the most complete repository of Messianic predictions available, we will focus our attention upon them.

OLD TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES

In contemplating the Old Testament, Jewish Scriptures, it would be beneficial for us to consider several important features of the writings. First, the opening eleven chapters of the first book, Genesis, do not relate to the Hebrews only, but to the broader scope of humanity as a whole. These chapters describe the creation of the Universe, the fall of man from his perfect state of innocence, the wickedness of man and the destructive, world-wide Flood, and the repopulation of the Earth. They contain approximately 2,000 years of history, not a year of which necessarily has anything to do with the Jewish nation, any more than with any other nation.

Second, the remainder of the Old Testament, from Genesis 12-Malachi focuses primarily on the descendants of Abraham. Note that the narratives and terms often used to describe these descendants are none too flattering. They are called stubborn, stiff-necked, sinful, rebellious, and a host of adjectives equally as caustic (see Deuteronomy 9:7; Ezekiel 2:3-10; Hosea 4:16). And yet, these descendants of Abraham are the ones responsible for preserving the very Scriptures that repeatedly rebuked them for their idolatrous backsliding from God. Remember, too, that they could have altered and preserved these writings in a more flattering form. From archaeological finds we have learned that other nations surrounding ancient Israel often chose to embellish their history, intentionally excluding derogatory remarks or events concerning themselves.

Why did the Israelites preserve the writings as they did? The answer to this is actually twofold. First, they

believed the particular writings that they preserved to be inspired by God. But secondly, each of the 39 books contains a calculated revelation describing some aspect of the coming Messiah, Who, according to these Scriptures, is not only destined to save the nation of Israel, but the entire world. In fact, the reader cannot progress far into the Old Testament writings before he is inundated with descriptions of, and predictions concerning, the coming Messiah.

WERE THE JEWS LOOKING FOR A MESSIAH?

It has been suggested that the ancient Jewish scribes, rabbis, and general population were not really looking for a personal Messiah. Eminently respected Messianic Jewish author David Baron first published his work, *Rays of Messiah's Glory*, in 1886. In that volume, Baron wrote:

> I am aware also that in recent times many intelligent Jews, backed by rationalistic, so-called Christians...deny that there is hope of a Messiah in the Old Testament Scriptures, and assert that the prophecies on which Christians ground such a belief contain only "vague anticipations and general hopes, but no definite predictions of a personal Messiah," and that consequently the alleged agreement of the gospel history with prophecy is imaginary.[2]

In his statements that refute the "non-Messianic" view of Old Testament Scripture, Baron wrote: "Even Maimonides, the great antagonist of Christianity, composed that article of the Jewish creed which unto the present day is repeated daily by every true Jew: 'I believe with a perfect faith that the Messiah will come, and although His coming be delayed, I will await His daily appearance.'"[3] He commented further: "Aben Ezra, Rashi, Kimchi, Abarbanel, and almost every other respectable and authoritative Jewish commenta-

tor, although not recognizing Jesus as the Messiah, are yet unanimous that a personal Messiah is taught in the Old Testament Scriptures."[4] Baron also noted that only an "insignificant minority of the Jews" had dared to suggest that the Old Testament lacks definitive predictions of a personal Messiah. He then eloquently stated: [W]ith joy we behold the nation [Jews–KB], as such, still clinging to the anchor which has been the mainstay of their national existence for so many ages–the hope of a personal Messiah, which is the essence of the Old Testament Scriptures."[5]

In his volume, *The Messiah in the Old Testament: In Light of Rabbinical Writings*, Risto Santala wrote: "If we study the Bible and the Rabbinic literature carefully, we cannot fail to be surprised at the abundance of Messianic interpretation in the earliest works known to us.... [T]he Talmud states unequivocally: 'All the prophets prophesied only for the days of the Messiah.'"[6]

In regard to specific Old Testament prophecies, a plethora of rabbinical commentary verifies that the nation of Israel certainly had in view a coming Messiah. Concerning Genesis 49:10, the noted author Aaron Kligerman wrote: "The rabbis of old, though not agreeing with each other as to the meaning of the root Shiloh, were almost unanimous in applying the term to the Messiah."[7] Immediately after this statement, Kligerman listed the Targum Onkelos, Targum Jerusalem, and the Peshito all as referring to Genesis 49:10 as a Messianic prophecy pointing toward an individual, personal Messiah.[8] With reference to Genesis 49:10, David Baron wrote: "With regard to this prophecy, the first thing I want to point out is that **all antiquity agrees in interpreting it of a personal Messiah**. This is the view of the LXX Version [Septuagint–KB]; the Targumim of Onkelos, Yonathan,

and Jerusalem; the Talmud; the Sohar; the ancient book of 'Bereshith Rabba;' and among modern Jewish commentators, even Rashi, who says, 'Until Shiloh come, that is King Messiah, Whose is the kingdom.'"[9]

Concerning the book of Isaiah and the predictive, Messianic prophecy contained within it, Santala stated: "The Messianic nature of the book of Isaiah is so clear that the oldest Jewish sources, the Targum, Midrash and Talmud, speak of the Messiah in connection with 62 separate verses."[10] Santala then, in a footnote, proceeded to list several of those verses, including Isaiah 4:2, 9:5, 10:27, 11:1, 11:6, 14:29, 16:1, 28:5, 42:1, 43:10, 52:13, and 60:1.[11]

The prophecy of Jeremiah contains material that has long been recognized as Messianic in nature. Concerning Jeremiah 23:5-6, David Baron wrote: "There is scarcely any contrary opinion among ancient and modern Jews but that this is a Messianic prophecy."[12]

In truth, statements that verify that the ancient Israelite nation recognized certain passages in the Old Testament as Messianic are legion. Regardless of what a person believes about the **identity** of the Messiah, it cannot be gainsaid that the nation of Israel, through the influence of the Old Testament writers, has been waiting for His coming.

THE PROTEVANGELIUM

Virtually from the first glimpse of human life on the Earth, traces of the predicted Messiah were divinely revealed to mankind. All too familiar is the tragic story of the fall of man. Under God's gracious care, Adam and Eve were specially designed to suit each other's needs and were ushered into the Edenic Paradise, the joys of which humanity has not seen since nor will see

again this side of eternity. God gave the first family only one prohibitory commandment–that they should not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If they chose to rebel against this lone prohibition, God informed them that the consequence would be death. Yet despite God's gracious warning, Eve's senses were dulled by her evil desires, and she soon fell prey to the deceitfulness of sin, convincing her husband Adam to join in her rebellion.

Into this scene of shame and sin, God brought judgment upon all parties involved. Death would be the consequence of this sinful action, as well as increased pain in childbirth for the woman and increased hardship and toil for the man. Yet in the midst of God's curse upon the serpent, He included a ray of glorious hope for humanity. To the serpent he said: "And I will put enmity between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel" (Genesis 3:15). This brief statement made by God to the serpent concerning the Seed of woman is often referred to as the protevangelium. J.A. Huffman commented on the passage:

> Here the prophecy of a deliverer is unmistakably uttered. Even a temporary bruise, that of the heel, suggesting the apparent, momentary defeat of the deliverer is predicted: but, at the same time, the deliverer's ultimate and final triumph is prophesied, in his bruising of the serpent's head, which means a fatal blow.[13]

The Jewish scholar, Aaron Kligerman, noted that three things stand out in this first prediction of the Messiah, "namely that the Deliverer must be–(A) of the *seed of woman* and (B) That He is to be *temporarily hindered* and (C) *Finally victorious.*"[14] Kligerman further noted that the ancient rabbinical opinions found in the Palestinian Targum testify "that in Genesis 3:15 there is promised a healing of the bite in the heel from the

serpent, which is to take place 'at the end of the days, in the days of King Messiah.'"[15,16]

Of the protevangelium, Charles A. Briggs, in his classic work, *Messianic Prophecy*, noted:

> Thus we have in this fundamental prophecy explicitly a struggling, suffering, but finally victorious human race, and implicitly a struggling, suffering and finally victorious son of woman, a second Adam, the head of the race.... The protevangelium is a faithful miniature of the entire history of humanity, a struggling seed ever battling for ultimate victory.... [U]ntil it is realized in the sublime victories of redemption.[17]

Briggs went on to comment that the protevangelium "is the only Messianic prophecy which has been preserved from the revelations made by God to the antediluvian world."[18]

Here, then, is the seminal prophecy made to pave the way for all others that would deal with the coming of the great Deliverer of mankind. Several qualities of this coming Deliverer are readily apparent. First, He will come in human form as the seed of woman. Second, He will defeat the effects of sin brought about by the fall of man and the entrance of sin into the world. Third, He will be hindered in His redemptive activity by the serpent, Satan, who will inflict upon Him a minor wound. Fourth, He will ultimately overcome the wound of Satan and finally triumph. In this first prediction of the Messiah, we catch an underlying theme of a suffering, victorious redeemer–a theme that will be fleshed out in the remaining pages of the Old Testament.

THE SEED OF ABRAHAM

The protevangelium in Genesis 3:15 predicted that the conquering Messiah would belong to the seed of woman, taking on a human form. But that feature alone, admittedly, does not help much in identifying the Mes-

siah, since billions of people have been born of woman. In order for Messianic prophecy to prepare its readers for the actual Messiah, the scope would need to be narrowed.

Such narrowing of the Messianic scope can be seen in God's promise to the patriarch, Abraham. In Genesis 12, the Bible records the fact that God specifically chose Abraham from among all the peoples of the world (Genesis 12:1-3). Through Abraham, God promised that all the nations of the world would be blessed, and that Abraham's descendants would multiply as the sand of the sea and the stars of the sky. As Huffman noted, "It was to Abraham, the son of Terah, a descendant of Shem, that God gave a peculiar promise, one which could not be omitted in any serious effort to trace the Messianic hope."[19] For many years, this promise of progeny remained unfulfilled due to the fact that Abraham's wife, Sarah, was barren. In order to "help" God fulfill His promise, Abraham and Sarah devised a plan by which Abraham could have a child. Sarah sent her handmaid, Hagar, to serve as a surrogate wife to Abraham. As a result of this union, Hagar conceived and gave birth to a child named Ishmael.

In Genesis 17, God renewed His covenant with Abraham and instructed Abraham to institute circumcision as a sign of the covenant. In Genesis 17:19, God informed Abraham that Sarah would have a son named Isaac. In an interesting conversation with God, Abraham petitioned God to let Ishmael be the son of promise and the heir of the covenant that God made. Yet God insisted that Ishmael was not the son of promise and that the promise of all nations being blessed through Abraham's descendants would not pass through Ishmael, but would be fulfilled only through Isaac. God said: "But My

covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next year" (Genesis 17:21).

James Smith, in writing about God's promise to bless all nations through Abraham, noted that this promise "has Messianic implications. Both the Church Fathers and Jewish Rabbis so interpreted it."[20] Aaron Kligerman concurred when he wrote about God's promise to Abraham: "This is more than the promise of 'The Hope of a Prosperous Era.' It is a promise of the coming of a 'Personal Messiah.'"[21] At this point in human history, then, the Messianic implications fall to the descendants of Isaac. It is important not to miss the significance of the Messianic hope through Abraham and Isaac. The scope of the Messiah has been narrowed from all other peoples and nations of the world, to a single nomadic family. And yet, not just to Abraham's family in its entirety, but to only one of Abraham's sons–Isaac.

But the picture becomes even clearer with the birth of the twin sons of Isaac and Rebekah. Because of abnormalities with her pregnancy, Rebekah went to inquire of the Lord about her situation. To answer her questions, the Lord said: "Two nations are in your womb, two peoples shall be separated from your body; one people shall be stronger than the other, and the older shall serve the younger" (Genesis 25:23). Concerning this passage, Briggs noted: "This prediction breaks up the seed of Isaac into two nations, assigns the headship with the blessing to Jacob, and makes Edom subject to him."[22] The fact that the promised Messiah would come through Jacob's descendants becomes increasingly clear throughout the Genesis narrative that tells the stories of Jacob and Esau. God confirmed the promise to Jacob in Genesis 28:14, when He said to the patriarch: "Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you

shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and **in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.**" The picture of the Messiah continues to become increasingly focused: The seed of woman, the seed of Abraham, the seed of Isaac, the seed of Jacob.

TWO MESSIAHS: A SUFFERING SERVANT AND REIGNING KING

Throughout the Old Testament, various Messianic passages refer to a majestic, glorious King Who will reign over a never-ending kingdom. Yet, at the same time, other Messianic prophecies depict a suffering Messiah Who will bear the guilt and sin of the entire world. Because these two aspects of Messianic prophecy seem contradictory, many in the ancient Jewish community could not understand how such diverse prophetic sentiments could be fulfilled in a single individual. Due to this conundrum, ancient and modern Jews have posited the idea that two Messiahs would come: one would be the suffering Servant, while the other would be the glorious King.

Concerning this separation of the Messiah into two different individuals, John Ankerberg and his colleagues John Weldon and Walter Kaiser wrote:

> [T]hey (early Jewish rabbis–KB) could not reconcile the statements that so clearly spoke of a suffering and dying Messiah with those verses in other passages that spoke of a triumphant and victorious Messiah. What is important to note is that they did recognize that both pictures somehow applied to the Messiah. But they assumed it was impossible to reconcile both views in one person. Rather than seeing one Messiah in two different roles, they saw two Messiahs–the suffering and dying Messiah, called "Messiah ben Joseph," and the victorious conquering Messiah, called "Messiah ben David."[23]

Jewish rabbi Robert M. Cohen stated:

> The rabbis saw that scripture portrayed two different pictures of King Messiah. One would conquer and reign and bring Israel back to the land by world peace and bring the fullness of obedience to the Torah. They called him Messiah ben David. The other picture is of a servant who would die and bear Israel's sin that they refer to as the "leprous one" based on Isaiah 53.[24]

It is evident, from the rabbinical view of two Messiahs, that the themes of suffering and regal authority were so vividly portrayed in Old Testament Messianic prophecy that both themes demanded fulfillment. To suggest two Messiahs provided such a fulfillment. However, the dual Messianic idea failed to comprehend the actual nature of Messianic prophecy, and missed a primary facet of the Messianic personality: that the Messiah would be **both** a suffering Servant and a majestic King. As Huffman rightly observed: "The theme of Messianism is composed of two inseparable strands or threads–the scarlet and the golden, or the suffering and the reigning, or the priestly and the royal."[25] To misunderstand or miss either of these two interwoven threads would be to miss the Messiah completely.

Genesis 49:10—Shiloh

The Lord kept His promise to Jacob and multiplied his descendants exceedingly. His twelve sons and their wives and children escorted him to Egypt to live in the land of Goshen at the behest of Joseph, who had been elevated in Egypt as the Pharaoh's chief advisor. As Jacob neared the end of his rather long life (over 130 years, Genesis 47:9), he gathered his sons around his death bed, and stated: "Gather together, that I may tell you what shall befall you in the last days" (Genesis 49:1). Following this introductory statement, Jacob proceeded

to address each of his sons and bestow blessings (or in some cases, curses) on his descendants.

In the midst of his final speech, in his blessing on Judah, Jacob stated: "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people" (Genesis 49:10). The Messianic nature of this statement has long been recognized and discussed in ancient Jewish circles. As stated earlier, David Baron wrote:

> With regard to this prophecy, the first thing I want to point out is that **all antiquity agrees in interpreting it of a personal Messiah**. This is the view of the LXX. Version; the Targumim of Onkelos, Yonathan, and Jerusalem; the Talmud; the Sohar; the ancient book of "Bereshith Rabba;" and among modern Jewish commentators, even Rashi, who says, "Until Shiloh come, that is King Messiah, Whose is the kingdom."[26]

Recall what Aaron Kligerman added: "The rabbis of old, though not agreeing with each other as to the meaning of the root Shiloh, were almost unanimous in applying the term to the Messiah."[27] Santala, in his discussion of several of the oldest Jewish documents available, wrote:

> Targum Onqulos says of Judah's scepter that it will not depart "*until the Messiah comes, he who has the power to reign.*" Targum Jonathan puts it that the verse refers to "*the age of the Messiah-King, the King who will come as the youngest of his children.*" Targum Yerushalmi speaks of the 'time' when "*the Messiah-King will come.*"[28]

Much commentary and debate surrounds the "Shiloh" prophecy found in Genesis 49:10. It is often viewed as an indication of the time that the Messiah should arrive on the scene. As can be deduced from Kligerman's quote, the actual origin and exact meaning of the word "Shiloh" are disputed in many scholarly circles. Yet, despite the controversy in reference to this prophecy, the one aspect of it that stands out is the central idea that this is

a Messianic prophecy. As such, it narrows the identity of the Messiah even further to a descendant, not just of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but to the house of Judah.

The Son of David

Of all the monarchs that possessed the throne of Israel, none is as storied as King David. From his youth he proved himself to be a courageous, valiant warrior who trusted in the Lord. He was described as a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14). He wrote many of the Psalms, and ushered in a united kingdom that paved the way for the majestic reign of his son, Solomon.

David's relationship to the Messiah is a rather interesting one. First, Jewish antiquity recognized the fact that Messiah would be the Son of David. Santala commented: "*Tradition ascribes 73 of the 150 psalms to King David*. In the Rabbinic literature the Messiah is constantly referred to as the 'Son of David.' For this reason, everywhere the future blessing of the house of David is described, the Sages saw Messianic material.'"[29]

Such Messianic sentiments in regard to David find their seminal origin in the promise made by God to David through the prophet Nathan. In 2 Samuel 7, the text narrates the events that lead to this promise. David had become a great king and his reign had spread far and wide. Due to his love for the Lord, he wanted to show honor to God by building a glorious Temple in which the Ark of the Covenant could be housed. He mentioned his idea to the prophet Nathan, who immediately encouraged the building plans. But soon after Nathan had told David to do all that was in his heart, God conveyed to Nathan that He did not want David to build a Temple. Instead, God would commission David's son, Solomon, to construct the magnificent edifice. Yet,

in God's message to David, He promised: "And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever" (2 Samuel 7:16).

In later psalms, the promise of David's descendant reigning over an eternal Kingdom is expanded and given more substance. Psalm 89 contains several Messianic aspects, not the least of which is the following statement: "I have made a covenant with My chosen, I have sworn to My Servant David: 'Your seed I will establish forever, and build up your throne to all generations'" (vss. 3-4). Psalm 132 contains a very similar statement: "The Lord has sworn in truth to David; He will not turn from it: 'I will set upon your throne the fruit of your body. If your sons will keep My covenant and My testimony which I shall teach them, their sons also shall sit upon your throne forevermore" (vss. 11-12).

Along with the various inspired psalmists, other Old Testament writers noted the Messianic lineage through David and his throne. One of the most memorable of all Messianic predictions from the Old Testament, Isaiah 9:6-7, mentioned the Messianic reign upon the throne of David:

> For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.

Yet, along with the fact that the Messiah was to be of the seed of David and reign on His throne, at least one Psalm places David in a subservient position to this majestic Messianic ruler. Psalm 110 opens with

the statement: "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool'" (Psalm 110:1). In regard to Psalm 110, Briggs noted: "The 110th Psalm is in the form of an utterance from Jahveh respecting the son of David. It is therefore a prediction that unfolds the prediction of Nathan."[30] Walter Kaiser, in his discussion of Psalm 110, wrote: "While the external evidence that this psalm is Messianic is large, the internal evidence is just as overwhelming."[31] In reference to the Messiah mentioned in the first verse, Kaiser stated: "That unnamed Lord is a royal person, for he was invited to 'sit at [God the Father's] right hand....' If the God of the universe invited this other Sovereign to take such a distinguished seat alongside himself, then we may be sure he was no one less than the promised Messiah, invited to participate in the divine government of the world."[32]

Psalm 110 adds an interesting aspect to the character and position of the Messiah. Not only would the Messiah be born from the seed of David and reign on the throne of David, He also would be exalted to a position far above David, to such an extent that David called him "Lord" in Psalm 110. David's statements in this psalm not only speak to the pre-existence of the Messiah before David, but also to the pre-eminence that the Messiah would assume.

With these details, the portrait of the Messiah becomes increasingly sharp. He was to come from the seed of woman and crush the power of Satan. He was to be of the seed of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah and now David. He would rule on the throne of David, yet He existed before David and was so preeminent that David called Him Lord. And there would be no end of His glorious, majestic kingdom.

THE SUFFERING SERVANT

Anyone who reads the Old Testament would be hard pressed to miss the idea of the Messiah's glorious regal prominence. Yet the idea that this same Messiah must also suffer is equally apparent. The protevangelium in Genesis 3:15 makes reference to this suffering in the statement about the heel of the Seed of women being bruised, but it does not include the details of this suffering. The theme of suffering introduced in Genesis 3:15 is expanded in the remainder of the Old Testament.

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

The passage of Scripture found in Isaiah 52:13-53:12 stands as a somber reminder of the horrendous suffering that the Messiah would endure. The text mentions that He would be highly exalted and extolled (52:13). And yet His appearance would be marred more than any man (52:14). He would not be physically attractive (53:2), and He would be despised and rejected by men, familiar with sorrows and grief (53:4). He would be perfect and without sin (53:9), and yet He would be beaten, suffer, and die for the sins of the Lord's people (53:5-6,11). This suffering Servant would be killed among the wicked, but buried among the rich (53:8-9). Yet, in spite of His death (or even because of it), He would be numbered among the great and divide the spoil with the strong (53:12).

Needless to say, this picture of the Messiah seems to stand in stark contrast to the glorious King on David's throne. As has been mentioned, this contrast has caused some to concoct two Messiahs to accommodate the prophecies. Still others have attempted to discount Messianic prophecies such as Isaiah 52:13-53:12. Some have suggested that this passage of Scripture is not Messianic

in nature, but that the servant under discussion represents the collective nation of Israel. Along these lines, David Baron noted: "Modern Jews, in common with a number of rationalistic so-called Christians, are trying hard these days to weaken the Messianic application of this remarkable prophecy."[33] James Smith stated:

> The Messianic interpretation of Isaiah 53 was acknowledged by Jewish authorities until the Middle Ages. Almost all Christian leaders until the beginning of the nineteenth century saw in this passage a clear picture of the suffering, death and resurrection of the Messiah. Jews and some Christian scholars now hold primarily to the collective view of the Servant: The Servant is Israel as a whole, or the remnant. The traditional view, however, has much to commend it.[34]

That the ancient Jewish community, and the bulk of scholars for the last 2,000 years, have recognized Isaiah 53 as a prophecy concerning a personal, individual Messiah cannot be questioned. Baron correctly commented regarding this sentiment: "That until recent times this prophecy has been almost universally received by Jews as referring to Messiah is evident from Targum Yonathan, who introduces Messiah by name in chapter lii 13, from the Talmud ('Sanhedrin,' fol. 98, b); and from Zohar, a book which the Jews as a rule do not mention without the epithet 'holy....'"[35]

The recent view that Isaiah 53 refers to the nation of Israel not only garners little (if any) support from ancient Jewish commentators, but it collapses under the scrutiny of critical examination. The foremost objection to the view that Israel collectively is the Servant in Isaiah 53 is the fact that the Servant is described as perfect and sinless (53:9), not deserving the punishment that He willingly accepts for the sins of God's people. No one remotely familiar with the nation of Israel as portrayed in the Old Testament would dare suggest

that they were sinless. From their first few steps out of Egypt and into freedom they began to provoke God and bring judgment upon themselves. On numerous occasions the Old Testament depicts the Israelites' sin of such a rebellious nature that God executes thousands of them. One fundamental aspect of an atoning sacrifice in Old Testament literature was its condition of spotless perfection. No nation of mere mortal men, including the ancient Israelite nation, could suffice as an atoning sacrifice for sins, as the Servant does in Isaiah 53. Nor could a sinful nation make another group of people "righteous" as the Lord's Servant would. Furthermore, the Servant of the Lord is depicted as being stricken for "transgressions of my people." If the Servant was collectively depicted as the nation of Israel, then who would be the Lord's people in 53:8?[36]

Indeed, the evidence points overwhelmingly to the fact that Isaiah 53 stands as one of the most poignant portrayals in all of the Old Testament of an individual, suffering Messiah. As Smith correctly noted: "The Servant of the Lord here is portrayed in a strongly individualistic way. It takes rich imagination or strong prejudice to see the Servant here as a symbol for Israel, the remnant, the prophets, or any other group."[37] Kaiser similarly commented: "Undoubtedly, this is the summit of OT prophetic literature. Few passages can rival it for clarity on the suffering, death, burial, and resurrection of the Messiah."[38]

VARIOUS SPECIFIC MESSIANIC PROPHECIES

In addition to the broad strokes portraying the Messiah as a reigning king and suffering servant, there are a host of more specific, detailed prophecies that relate to His coming. In regard to the number of Messianic

prophecies, Santala wrote: "It is estimated that the Old Testament contains altogether some 456 prophecies concerning Christ. Of these 75 are to be found in the Pentateuch, 243 in the Prophets and 138 in the 'Writings' and Psalms."[39]

Space prohibits a listing of all of these prophecies, but a representative sampling is appropriate. The Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem in Judea (Micah 5:2) of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14). He was to be betrayed by a friend (Psalm 41:9) for thirty pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:13). The Lord's Ruler would come into Jerusalem riding on the foal of a donkey (Zechariah 9:9). He would be buried with the rich (Isaiah 53:9). During His suffering, His clothes would be distributed to those who cast lots for them (Psalm 22:18). His attackers would pierce Him (Zechariah 12:10). Even though His physical suffering would be severe, His bones would not be broken (Psalm 34:20). And in spite of His death, His physical body would not experience decay (Psalm 16:10). This small sampling of specific prophetic details is only a fraction of the many Old Testament prophecies that exist. The prophecies were specifically designed to be an efficient mechanism by which the Jewish community could recognize the Messiah when He arrived.

WHO IS THE MESSIAH?

When all of the pieces of the Messianic puzzle are put together, one individual stands out as the only person who fulfilled every single prophecy in minute detail–Jesus Christ. The life and activities of Jesus Christ as recorded in the New Testament blend the theme of a regal monarch and a suffering servant into one magnificent portrait of the triumphant Jesus Who was the sacrificial lamb at His death on the cross, and Who became the triumphant Lion of Judah in His resurrection from

the grave. The lineage of Jesus Christ is meticulously traced in order to show that He qualified as the Seed of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob, of Judah, and of David (see Matthew 1 and Luke 3:23-38). The narrative detailing His birth verifies that He was born in Bethlehem of Judea, from which city the Messiah would arise (Luke 2:1-7). The birth narrative also intricately portrays the pre-existence of Jesus before time began, fulfilling the prophecy that the Messiah would come before King David. Furthermore, Jesus did, in fact, enter Jerusalem riding on the foal of a donkey (Matthew 21:1-11).

The New Testament narratives depicting the death of Jesus Christ verify that He was betrayed by His friend and sold for exactly 30 pieces of silver (Matthew 24:14-16). At His death His bones were not broken, soldiers cast lots for His garments, and His side was pierced with a spear (John 19:33-37 and Matthew 27:35). During His suffering, He was numbered with the transgressors, as Isaiah 53 predicted, by being crucified between two thieves, and at His death He was buried in the tomb of a wealthy man as was also foretold (Matthew 27:57). This type of verification could continue for many pages. The life of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, as depicted in the New Testament documents, was designed to fulfill the Messianic prophecy of the Old Testament.

Due to this overwhelming congruence of the life of Jesus Christ with the predictive Messianic prophecy of the Old Testament, some have suggested that Jesus was an imposter who was able, by masterful manipulation, to so artificially organize His life as to make it look like He was the Messiah. Such a contention cannot be reasonably maintained in light of the fact that many of the prophecies were far beyond His control. Obviously, it would be impossible for a person to arrange where

he would be born. Furthermore, it would be impossible to coordinate events so that He could ensure that He was buried in the tomb of a rich man or crucified among thieves. How could the betrayal price of Judas be manipulated by Jesus? And how, pray tell, would Jesus have managed to arrange it so that soldiers cast lots for His clothing? The idea that Jesus manipulated events to make it appear as if He was the Messiah not only is indefensible, but it also speaks to the fact that Jesus obviously was the fulfillment of the Old Testament, Messianic prophecies.

Others have objected to Jesus as the Messiah based on the idea that the New Testament documents are not reliable, and were artificially concocted to describe things that Jesus never really did. This objection also falls flat in light of the actual evidence. It cannot be denied that the New Testament has proven itself to be the most reliable book in ancient history. When it records people, places, and events that are checkable using archaeological means, those people, places, and events invariably prove to be factual and historic (see chapters 5-6). Again, the abundant evidence verifies that the New Testament is accurate and factual. Many of the Messianic prophecies documented in the New Testament do not describe anything inherently miraculous. There was nothing miraculous about Jesus being buried in a rich man's tomb. Nor was there anything miraculous about Jesus riding into Jerusalem on the foal of a donkey, or being betrayed by His friend for 30 pieces of silver. These events are, if not ordinary, at least very plausible, everyday events that theoretically could have happened to anybody. And yet, due to the fact that such everyday events had been predicted about the Messiah **hundreds of years before the arrival of Jesus**, the fulfillment of the events becomes one of the most amazing miracles

recorded in the Bible. It is no wonder that Jesus, the apostles, and the early church used fulfilled Messianic prophecy as one of their foundational pillars of proof and evangelistic tools.

APPEALING TO PROPHECY

Even a slight familiarity with the New Testament texts sufficiently demonstrates the idea that Jesus, the apostles, and the other New Testament writers used the Old Testament Messianic prophecies as one of their main apologetic tools to prove the deity and Messianic role of Jesus Christ.

The Writers of the Gospel Accounts Applied Messianic Prophecy to Jesus Christ

The Gospel writers repeatedly peppered their narratives of the life and actions of Jesus Christ with allusions, quotes, and Messianic prophecies from the Old Testament, which they applied to Jesus. Matthew 1 includes the Messianic prophecy taken from Isaiah 7:14 in which a virgin is predicted to bear a son. Matthew applies this virgin-birth prophesy to the birth of Jesus Christ. In chapter 2, Matthew references Micah 5:2, in which the birth city of the Messiah is named, again applying the prophecy to Jesus. In Matthew 3, the Bible writer notes that John the Baptizer was the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy in 40:3, indicating that John was the forerunner of the Messiah which, again, is Jesus Christ. Matthew 4:15-16 references another Messianic prophecy that discusses the land of Zebulun and Naphtali, again applying the prophecy to Jesus Christ. Looking, then, at the first four chapters of the book of Matthew, one is forcefully struck with the fact that one of the Bible writer's primary apologetic tools used to confirm that Jesus was (and is) the Messiah was a fervent appeal to

Messianic prophecy as fulfilled in the life and actions of Jesus. Furthermore, Matthew's pattern of applying Old Testament, Messianic prophecy to Jesus continues throughout the remainder of his account.

Mark's gospel account, although not as replete with such prophecies, nevertheless includes appeals to Messianic prophecy and applies those prophecies to Jesus. Mark chapter 1 begins with quotations from Malachi 3 and Isaiah 40 that predict the forerunner of the Messiah. Mark applied these passages to John the Baptizer as the forerunner of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, during the crucifixion account as recorded in Mark, the Bible writer noted that Jesus was crucified between two thieves, and then he commented, "So the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'And He was numbered with the transgressors'" (15:28). In addition, Mark included instances in which Jesus applied Messianic prophecy to Himself.

As with Matthew and Mark, Luke and John also included numerous Messianic prophecies and appeal to them as proof of the deity of Jesus Christ. Luke chapter three cites the prophecy from Isaiah 40 concerning the Messianic forerunner and applies it to John the Baptizer, the forerunner of Christ. John does the same in 1:23. During Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, John records that Jesus rode into the city sitting on a donkey. John then commented on the situation by saying: "as it is written: Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your King is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt." His reference was a clear appeal to the Messianic nature of this prophecy found in Zechariah 9:9. Again, in John 12:37-38, the Bible writer refers to a Messianic prophecy in Isaiah 53:1, and applies its fulfillment to the ministry of Jesus. During the crucifixion of Christ, John records that the soldiers cast lots for Jesus' clothing. John then references

Psalm 22:18 as a Messianic prophecy: "They divided My garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots."

Only a few of the many Messianic prophetic references in the gospel accounts have been documented here. Yet, even with this small sampling, the reader is struck with the clear conclusion that the gospel writers appealed to Old Testament, Messianic prophecy as proof of the deity of Christ.

Jesus' Appeal to Prophecy as it Applied to Him

On multiply occasions, Jesus directed His listeners to certain Messianic Old Testament Scriptures, and applied those Scriptures to Himself. Luke records an incident in the life of Jesus in which He visited a synagogue on the Sabbath in His hometown of Nazareth. While in attendance there, Jesus read a passage from Isaiah 61:1-2, and commented to those in attendance that the particular Scripture He had just read was fulfilled in their hearing.

During His arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus addressed those who had come to arrest Him, asking them why they did not apprehend Him while He was with them daily teaching in the Temple. He then stated: "But the Scriptures must be fulfilled" (Mark 14:49). His statement implied that this deed they were doing was a fulfillment of Old Testament Scriptures as they related to His Messianic role.

Again, in Luke 24, the resurrected Jesus appeared to two of His disciples on the road to Emmaus. They treated Him as a stranger, because they did not recognize Him. Upon striking up a conversation with Jesus, they began to discuss the events of Christ's death and

burial in Jerusalem only a few days earlier. After the disciples related the events of the women at the empty tomb, Jesus began to speak to them with these words: "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory" (Luke 24:25-26). The verse following Jesus' statement explains: "And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself."

A few verses later, in the same chapter, Jesus appeared to several more of His disciples and applied the Old Testament prophecies to His activities again: "Then He said to them, 'These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all the things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me" (Luke 24:44). Such statements made by Jesus show that one of the main lines of evidence that He used to establish His identity as the Messiah was the application of Old Testament Messianic prophecy to Himself.

Messianic Prophecy Applied to Jesus in the Book of Acts

The recorded writings and sermons of the apostles after the ascension of Jesus are replete with appeals to Messianic prophecy as proof of the Messianic identity of Jesus Christ. In the first recorded gospel sermon on the Day of Pentecost, Peter explained to those in Jerusalem that the resurrection of Christ was a fulfillment of the Messianic prophecy uttered by David in Psalm 16:8-11 (which says that the Lord would not allow His Holy One to see corruption). In Act 3, Peter addressed another multitude of those dwelling in Jerusalem. In his sermon, he stated: "But those things which God foretold

by the mouth of all His prophets, that Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled" (vs. 18). In that same sermon, Peter referred his audience back to Deuteronomy 18, in which Moses had foretold the coming of a prophet like himself, which Peter applied to Jesus (as did Stephen in his sermon in Acts 7:37). In the next chapter, Peter is arrested and allowed to speak to the high priest and his family. In Peter's statements to these leaders, he again referred back to the Old Testament, quoted Psalm 118:22 about the stone that was rejected by the builders, and applied the prophecy to Jesus.

In one of the most memorable conversion accounts, Philip the evangelist is called to meet with an Ethiopian treasurer on the road to Gaza. As Philip approached, the Eunuch was reading a passage from Isaiah 53. Upon their meeting, the Eunuch asked Philip about the prophecy, wondering whether the prophet was speaking of himself or someone else. From that text, the Bible says that Philip preached Jesus to the Eunuch, applying the passage from Isaiah as a Messianic prophecy with its fulfillment in the person of Christ (Acts 8:26-40). In another memorable conversion account, Peter visited the house of Cornelius and preached the Gospel to him and all his household. Included in Peter's message was the following statement concerning Jesus: "To Him **all the prophets witness**, that through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins" (Acts 10:43).

As one continues through the book of Acts, it becomes evident that Paul often appealed to prophecy as evidence of Christ's deity. In Acts 13, while preaching to those in the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia, he commented that those responsible for killing Jesus did so because they did not know "the voices of the Prophets which are

read every Sabbath" (Acts 13:27). In the same verse he concluded that because of their ignorance of the prophetic message, the murderers of Christ actually fulfilled the prophecies concerning Jesus in their abuse of Him. Paul further quoted from Psalm 2:7, Isaiah 55:3, and Psalm 16:10, noting these Old Testament passages as Messianic prophecy and applying them to Jesus Christ.

In a separate sermon, delivered much later, Paul stood before King Agrippa and told him that Jesus is the Christ. In his oratory to Agrippa, Paul acknowledged that the king was "expert in all customs and questions which have to do with the Jews" (Acts 26:3). Paul further noted that in his teachings concerning Jesus as the Messiah, he was telling Agrippa "no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come" (26:22). In his concluding remarks, Paul said to the king, "King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe." Agrippa responded to Paul with these words: "You almost persuade me to become a Christian" (Acts 26:27-28).

Examples of Messianic prophecy applied to Jesus by the early propagators of Christianity as recorded in the book of Acts could easily be multiplied further. These few instances suffice to establish the fact that, throughout the book of Acts, predictive prophecy as it applied to Jesus as the Messiah stood as one of the foundational pillars upon which Christianity was based and spread.

Messianic Prophecy Applied to Jesus in the Epistles

Without providing an exhaustive study of every instance of Old Testament prophecy applied to Jesus in the epistles, this brief section will provide enough examples to establish the fact that the epistles, in similar

fashion to the other books of the New Testament, rely heavily upon Messianic prophecy to establish the deity of Jesus Christ.

The book of Romans begins with a section discussing the Gospel of God, "which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh..." (1:2-3). In the book of Galatians, Paul refers back to the promise made to Abraham, that through the seed of the patriarch all nations would be blessed. Paul then applies that promise to Jesus, stating that Jesus is the Seed of Abraham through whom the world would receive the blessing of Abraham (Galatians 3:15-18). The writer of the book of Hebrews opens by discussing the merits of Christ, applying many Old Testament passages such as Psalm 2:7 and Psalm 110:1 to Jesus. In Hebrews 5, the writer argues the case that Jesus is a priest after the order of Melchizedek as prophesied in Psalm 110:4. He repeats these sentiments in 7:17 and 7:21.

The epistles of 1 and 2 Peter contain numerous examples of such prophetic application to Jesus. One of the most potent passages along these lines is found in 1 Peter 1:10-12, in which Peter wrote:

> Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven–things which angels desire to look into.

In 1 Peter 2:6, the apostle applies Isaiah 28:16 and Psalm 118:22 to Christ, describing Him as the chief

cornerstone rejected by the builders. Again in 1 Peter 2:22, the apostle applies Isaiah 53:9 to Jesus, referring to the fact that the Messiah would be sinless as was Jesus.

It becomes readily obvious, then, that the New Testament writers and apostles frequently referred to Old Testament Messianic prophecy and applied the fulfillment of such prophecies to the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. It is impossible to deny that one of the main lines of reasoning upon which the Christian faith was founded from its inception is the idea that Jesus Christ fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies that looked forward to a coming Messiah.

CONCLUSION

In the Old Testament, it is almost as if we have a satellite picture from space of the Messiah many thousands of miles away, yet with each new prophecy, the picture continues to move nearer, until at last we are able to view a complete close-up of the Messiah–Jesus Christ. As the distinguished Hebrew scholar Charles Briggs noted: "In Jesus of Nazareth the key of the Messianic prophecy of the Old Testament has been found. All its phases find their realization in His unique personality, in His unique work, and in His unique kingdom. The Messiah of prophecy appears in the Messiah of history."[40]

In Acts 8:26-40, Philip the evangelist approached the Ethiopian who was riding in a chariot reading the Old Testament Scriptures. As Philip approached, he heard the man reading a section from Isaiah 53 in which the sufferings of the Messiah are depicted. Upon entering into a conversation with Philip, the man asked Philip, "[O]f whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?" Immediately after this question, the Bible says that Philip "opened his mouth, and beginning

at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him" (Acts 8:35). In truth, Jesus is the sum total of every Old Testament Messianic prophecy ever uttered. From any single one of those ancient Scriptures, the honest, informed individual could open his or her mouth and preach Jesus, the Messiah.

ENDNOTES

[1] Kyle Butt and Eric Lyons (2006), *Behold the Lamb of God* (Montgomery, AL: Apologetics Press), pp. 35-74.

[2] David Baron (2000 reprint), *Rays of Messiah's Glory* (Jerusalem, Israel: Kern Ahvah Meshihit), p. 16.

[3] Ibid., p. 18.

[4] Ibid., pp. 19-20.

[5] Ibid., p. 20.

[6] Risto Santala (1992), *The Messiah in the Old Testament: In the Light of Rabbinical Writings*, trans. William Kinnaird (Jerusalem, Israel: Keren Ahvah Meshihit), p. 22.

[7] Aaron Kligerman (1957), *Old Testament Messianic Prophecy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), pp. 19-20.

[8] Ibid., p. 20.

[9] Baron, p. 258, emp. added.

[10] Santala, pp. 164-165.

[11] Ibid., p. 165.

[12] Baron, p. 78.

[13] J.A. Huffman (1956), *The Messianic Hope in Both Testaments* (Butler, IN: Higley Press), p. 38.

[14] Kligerman, p. 13, iltalics in orig.

[15] Ibid., p. 14.

[16] The Targums "are interpretive renderings of the books of Hebrew Scriptures...into Aramaic" [Bruce Metzger (1993), "The Jewish Targums," *Bibliotheca Sacra,* 150:35, January, http://www.bible-researcher.com/aramaic4.html]. Such versions were needed when the major populations of the Jews no longer spoke Hebrew as their primary language. Metzger further explains that the oral

Targum began as a simple paraphrase of the text, "but eventually it became more elaborate and incorporated explanatory details." John Stenning, in his detailed article on the Targum, explained that oral Targum was introduced several years prior to the first century A.D. in connection with "the custom of reading sections from the Law at the weekly services in the synagogues" ("Targum," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1911, http://www.bible-researcher.com/aramaic3.html).

[17] Charles A. Briggs (1988 reprint), *Messianic Prophecy: The Prediction of the Fulfillment of Redemption through the Messiah* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson), p. 77.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Huffman, p. 41.

[20] James Smith (1993), *What the Bible Teaches about the Promised Messiah* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson), p. 47.

[21] Kligerman, pp. 17-18.

[22] Briggs, p. 90.

[23] John Ankerberg , John Weldon, and Walter Kaiser (1989), *The Case for Jesus the Messiah* (Chattanooga, TN: John Ankerberg Evangelistic Association), pp. 57-58.

[24] Robert M. Cohen (no date), "Why I Know Yeshua is the Jewish Messiah," http://www.imja.com/Atonem.html; also see Parsons, John (2006), "Hebrew Names of God: The Mashiach as Revealed in the Tanakh," http://www.hebrew4christians.com/Names_of_G-d/Messiah/messiah.html.

[25] Huffman, p. 7.

[26] Baron, p. 258, emp. added.

[27] Kligerman, pp. 19-20.

[28] Santala, p. 50, italics in orig.

[29] Ibid., p. 109, italics in orig.

[30] Briggs, p. 132.

[31] Walter Kaiser (1995), *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), p. 94.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Baron, p. 225.

[34] Smith, p. 307.

[35] Baron, p. 226.

[36] For a more complete refutation of Israel as the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah 53, see Baron, 2000, pp. 225-251.

[37] Smith, p. 307.

[38] Kaiser, p. 178.

[39] Santala, p. 149; cf. Joseph P. Free and Howard F. Vos (1992), *Archaeology and Bible History* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), p. 241.

[40] Briggs, p. 498.

CHAPTER 13

JESUS' PROPHECY OF THE FALL OF JERUSALEM IN A.D. 70

While Jesus was on Earth, He performed amazing miracles that verified His claim to be the Son of God. He often used these miracles as legitimate evidence that would lead any reasonable person to conclude that He was Who He declared Himself to be. He presented a challenge to those who disbelieved: "If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him" (John 10:37-38). Jesus' proposal was simple, if He accomplished things that mere mortals could not do, then He must be Who He claimed to be. One such evidence of Jesus divinity was the fact that He often predicted the future. Many times those predictions had to do with "immediate" events that would occur within a brief time after He made the predictions, such as His own capture by the Jews and His death and resurrection (Matthew 16:21), or the establishment of the Church after His ascension (Matthew 16:18; Acts 1:4-8). One of Jesus' most profound and easily verified predictions, however, had to do with events that would occur years after His time on Earth. With meticulous detail, Jesus predicted the destruction of Jerusalem, an event that took place almost four decades after His ascension.

Not only does this prophecy verify His deity, it adds another powerful piece of evidence to the case for the inspiration of the Bible.

JESUS' PREDICTION

Even the most casual reader of the Gospel accounts in the New Testament quickly discovers that the majority of the Jewish leaders in the first century wanted Jesus dead. In spite of Jesus' healings, teachings about love, sermons on the coming Kingdom of God, and invitations to enjoy God's forgiveness, the Jewish nation, in large part, completely rejected Him. We hear His heartbroken cry for the capital city of Jerusalem, and the Jewish nation, when He lamented, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!" (Matthew 23:37).

The text of Matthew's account of Jesus' life transitions from His sorrow over Jerusalem into an episode when Jesus' disciples wanted to bring their Teacher's attention to the majestic stones and architecture of the "buildings of the temple" (Matthew 24:1). Jesus responded to their fawning over the physical structures of Jerusalem with a startling pronouncement. "Do you not see these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down" (24:2). Such a declaration from the Christ would have shocked even His most ardent disciples.

First, in the minds of virtually every first-century Jew, the Messiah was supposed to usher in a glorious new Kingdom. "Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom to order it and establish it with

judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever" (Isaiah 9:7). Furthermore, this Kingdom surely would have for its seat of government the Holy City, Zion, Jerusalem, as Isaiah predicted, "For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Isaiah 2:2). If the Messiah was to reign on the throne of David "forever," and if the center of governmental power was to be in Jerusalem, then foretelling the city's, and especially the Temple's, destruction approached blasphemy.

Second, the actual, physical destruction of Jerusalem seemed virtually impossible to Jesus' hearers, and for good reason. First-century Jewish historian, Josephus, writing about the stones of the Temple, stated: "Now the outward face of the temple in its front wanted nothing that was likely to surprise either men's minds or their eyes, for it was covered all over with plates of gold of great weight.... Of its stones, some of them were forty-five cubits in length, five in height, and six in breadth."[1] Such massive stones have been estimated to weigh several hundred tons. Furthermore, the towers that adorned and protected the Temple were magnificent in and of themselves. "Now as these towers were so very tall.... The largeness also of the stones was wonderful, for they were not made of common small stones for of such large ones only as men could carry...each stone was twenty cubits in length, and ten in breadth, and five in depth."[2] After all, it had taken over 40 years just to build the Temple (John 2:20). Tacitus was struck by the city's defenses as well. He noted that "the commanding situation of the city had been strengthened by enormous works which would have been a thorough defence even for level ground." He went on to comment that "two hills of great height were fenced in by walls" and "within were other walls surrounding the palace, and rising to

a conspicuous height, the tower of Antonia."[3] In view of Jerusalem's excellent military defensive position with a high elevation and massive walls, Jesus' prediction seemed outlandish.

Naturally, such a sweeping statement of destruction piqued the curiosity of the dubious disciples and they further questioned their Leader, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"[4] In answer to their questions, Jesus proceeded to explain events that His disciples could identify that would signal the destruction of Jerusalem.[5]

1: False Christs and Prophets

In enumerating the events that would precede the fall of Jerusalem, Jesus stated: "Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There!' do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to deceive, if possible, even the elect. **See, I have told you beforehand**" (Matthew 24:23-25, also 24:5, 11). When we scour the pages of history between the years of A.D. 30 and A.D. 70 we find a host of references that verify Jesus' prophecy.[6]

Josephus wrote: "Theudas persuaded a great part of the people...to follow him...for he told them he was a prophet, and that he would by his own command, divide the river and afford them an easy passage over it; and many were deluded by his words."[7] When writing of events that happened during the reign of Felix (A.D. 52-60), he stated: "There was also another body of wicked men gotten together.... These were such men as deceived and deluded the people under pretense of divine inspiration...and these prevailed the multitude

to act like madmen, and went before them into the wilderness, as pretending that God would show them the signals of liberty."[8] The historian further recorded: "Moreover, there came out of Egypt about this time to Jerusalem, one that said he was a prophet.... He said further that...at his command the walls of Jerusalem would fall down."[9] And "there was an Egyptian false prophet...he was a cheat, and pretended to be a prophet also."[10] Josephus wrote despairingly of the prevalence of such false prophets when he stated, "Now, as for the affairs of the Jews, they grew worse and worse continually, for the country was again filled with robbers and impostors, who deluded the multitude. Yet did Felix catch and put to death many of those impostors every day, together with the robbers."[11]

In recording events during these years, Luke, the writer of the book of Acts, stated: "But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was something great, to whom all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, 'This man is the **great power of God**'" (Acts 8:9-10). Origen, who lived from A.D. 185-253, wrote in his book *Contra Celsum*: "And after the times of Jesus, Dositheus the Samaritan also wished to persuade the Samaritans that **he was the Christ** predicted by Moses; and he appears to have gained over some to his views."[12] He further stated that Dositheus proclaimed himself to be "the Son of God."[13] It is evident to all who give this period of history the most casual glance that it was rife with people claiming to be prophets, saviors, and divinely inspired christs.

2: Wars and Conflict

Jesus predicted, in no uncertain terms, that prior to the fall of Jerusalem there would be "wars and rumors

of wars," and that nation would "rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom" (Matthew 24:6,7; Luke 21:10). While it is true that wars and talk of wars is fairly common, Jesus' prediction corresponds precisely to the worldwide increase in hostilities during the years between A.D. 30 and 70.

Tacitus, the Roman historian, wrote of the months leading up to A.D. 70 and the strife that raged during this time, when he stated: "I am entering on the history of a period rich in disasters, frightful in its wars, torn by civil strife, and even in peace full of horrors. Four emperors perished by the sword. There were three civil wars; there were more with foreign enemies; there were often wars that had both characters at once."[14] In addition, Josephus wrote an entire book titled *The Jewish Wars*, because the various wars, conflicts, and battles that the Jews were involved in during this time literally required an entire volume to document. Jesus' allusion to wars and strife during this time cannot be gainsaid by even the most ardent skeptic of divine prophecy.

3. Famines, Pestilences, and Earthquakes

In answering His disciples' question about the signs that would precede the destruction of Jerusalem, Jesus foretold that there would "be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places" (Matthew 24:7; Luke 21:11). History could not be more abundantly clear that Jesus knew what He was talking about.

When recording events from the year A.D. 51, Tacitus wrote, "This year witnessed many prodigies.... Houses were flattened by repeated **earthquakes**.... Further portents were seen in shortages of corn, resulting in **famine**.... In this year war broke out between Armenians and Iberians, and seriously disturbed relations

between Rome and Parthia."[15] Concerning the years A.D. 65-66, Tacitus wrote:

> Heaven, too, marked this crime-stained year with tempest and **pestilence**. Campania was ravaged by a hurricane which destroyed houses, orchards, and crops.... At Rome, **a plague devastated** the entire population. No miasma was discernible in the air. Yet the houses were full of corpses, and the streets of funerals. Neither sex nor age conferred immunity. Slave or free, all succumbed just as suddenly.[16]

Roman historian Suetonius documented that "a series of droughts had caused a scarcity of grain" during the reign of Claudius.[17] Josephus details the story of Helena visiting Jerusalem, stating, "Now her coming was of very great advantage to the people of Jerusalem, for whereas a **famine** did oppress them at that time, and many people died for want of what was necessary to procure food...."[18] In addition, Acts 11:27-30 records that Agabus, a prophet, foretold of "a great famine throughout all the world," which severely affected those in Judea.

Seneca the Younger, in writing about a specific earthquake that occurred in the A.D. 60s, stated: "This tremor was on 5 February in the consulship of Regulus and Verginius, and it inflicted devastation on Campania.... For part of the town of Herculaneum too fell down and even the structures that remain are unstable."[19] Tacitus noted that an "earthquake too demolished a large part of Pompeii."[20]

One remarkable aspect to all these historical events is the fact that in reality, we have very little that is recorded about the first century. Yet, what little we do have includes direct verification of exactly what Jesus predicted.

4. Persecution of the Disciples

In looking into the future at the trials that His followers would face, Jesus predicted: "But before all these things, they will lay hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and rulers for My name's sake" (Luke 21:12). Those of us in the 21st century, aware of the persecution experienced by the early Christians, hardly find such a prediction remarkable. In truth, however, the idea that Jews who were former fishermen, tax collectors, and zealots who became followers of a carpenter from Nazareth would be so infamous in secular circles that they would stand before the most politically powerful rulers of the age was a rather bold prediction.

The fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy is so well documented it hardly even needs verification. The book of Acts records this persecution thoroughly. Acts 5:18,40 state: "Then the high priest rose up, and all those who were with him...and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison.... And when they had called for the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus." Stephen was murdered in Acts 7. King Herod killed James the brother of John with a sword (Acts 12:2), and proceeded to capture Peter with the obvious intent of doing him harm (12:4). The Jewish leaders brought Paul before the Sanhedrin (Acts 22:3). He was then sent to the governor Felix (24:10), then to Festus (24:27), and stood before King Agrippa (24:26).

The early church historian Eusebius stated: "It is therefore recorded that Paul was beheaded in Rome itself, and that Peter likewise was crucified under Nero. This account of Peter and Paul is substantiated by the

fact that their names are preserved in the cemeteries of that place even to the present day.... And that they both suffered martyrdom at the same time is stated by Dionysius, bishop of Corinth, in his epistle to the Romans."[21] Suetonius wrote that during the reign of Nero, "Punishments were also inflicted on the Christians, a sect professing a new and mischievous religious belief."[22] And Tacitus added that Nero "inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians.... Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight expired. Nero offered his garden for the spectacle."[23] Additional testimony could be added to this, but little need there is for it. Mark it down as historical fact: Christ's followers were subjected to the exact punishments and persecutions predicted by their Lord.

5. Jerusalem Surrounded by Armies

In Matthew's account of Jesus' prophecy, he recorded that Jesus said, "Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (whoever reads, let him understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains" (24:15-16; Mark 13:14-15). Admittedly, the term "abomination of desolation" sounds vague to a 21st-century reader. To what does this reference apply? Apparently, from Matthew's parenthetical statement "whoever reads, let him understand," the author was confident that his readers would recognize the situation when it occurred. Since it is generally recognized that Matthew wrote for an early Jewish audience, he could assume that they had an understanding of the prophet

Daniel that would help them identify the "abomination of desolation" (Daniel 9:27).

Luke's account, on the other hand, does not leave the warning shrouded in any vagueness. In his parallel passage to Matthew 24, he recorded Jesus as stating, "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. Then let those in Judea flee to the mountains..." (Luke 21:10). The context places Luke's statement of Jerusalem being surrounded by armies in the exact place that Matthew positioned Jesus' statement about the "abomination of desolation." Also notice that Luke's account connects the ideas by stating that Jerusalem's "desolation" would be near when the armies surrounded it. Clearly, the "abomination of desolation" and the surrounding of Jerusalem by armies was so closely connected that Jesus' listeners should take action when they saw the armies around Jerusalem. That being the case, can we historically document the surrounding of Jerusalem by armies? We most certainly can.

Josephus, at length, explains that the Roman General Cestius brought a massive Roman army against Jerusalem. In his explanation of the event, Josephus further stated: "But now Cestius, observing that the disturbances that were begun among the Jews afforded him a proper opportunity to attack them, **took his whole army along with him, and put the Jews to flight and pursued them to Jerusalem**."[24] The Roman armies surrounded Jerusalem as Jesus predicted.

The attentive reader will note that Jesus warned His listeners that when they saw Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then they should flee from the city (Luke 21:20-21). How would that be possible with the Roman army surrounding and besieging the city? Cestius' behavior

provides one of the most remarkable instances of historic verification for any prophecy ever recorded. Josephus noted that those in Jerusalem could not withstand the forces of Cestius. In fact, he stated that "had he but at this very time attempted to get within the walls by force, he had won the city presently, and the war had been put an end to at once."[25] But Cestius did not press his advantage. In fact, not only did he refuse to take the walls, he withdrew his entire army. The reader can almost hear Josephus' disgust as he wrote: "It then happened that Cestius was not conscious either how the besieged despaired of success, or how courageous the people were for him, and so he recalled his soldiers from the place, and by despairing of any expectation of taking it, without having received any disgrace, he retired from the city, **without any reason in the world**."[26]

From a military standpoint, Cestius' behavior was inexplicable. In his struggle to understand why the events occurred as they did, Josephus suggested that Cestius could have ended the war at that point, but the reason he did not, was "owing to the aversion God had already at the city and the sanctuary, that he was hindered from putting an end to the war that very day."[27] In other words, God was not finished with His judgment of Jerusalem.

It is important to remember that Josephus was not a Christian and showed little, if any, awareness of the teachings of Jesus as recorded in the Gospel accounts. He never considered these events to be fulfilled prophecy and never seemed to have been aware of Jesus' prediction warning His followers to flee Jerusalem. The reader is urged to remember this fact. Josephus was not inspired, nor was he attempting to validate the biblical account. Since the events he recorded are so clearly an exact fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy, it is tempting to

think that somehow he was "in league" with the Bible writers, but even the most liberal scholars and skeptics recognize that cannot be the case. Josephus saw absolutely no "reason in the world" that Cestius should have withdrawn his army. Those attending to Jesus' words, however, have an exceedingly good idea as to why this strange event occurred.

6. Flight of Christians from Jerusalem

Cestius' retreat provided the perfect opportunity for the Christians in Jerusalem to flee the city. Jesus had sternly warned them that when they saw the city surrounded by armies, to take no care about their earthly possessions, but run from the city for their lives. History records that they did precisely that. Church historian Eusebius wrote:

> But the people of the church in Jerusalem had been commanded by a revelation, vouchsafed to approved men there before the war, to leave the city and to dwell in a certain town of Perea called Pella. And when those that believed in Christ had come there from Jerusalem, then, as if the royal city of the Jews and the whole land of Judea were entirely destitute of holy men, the judgment of God at length overtook those who committed such outrages against Christ and his apostles, and totally destroyed that generation of impious men.[28]

Epiphanius, a fourth-century church writer, noted: "This sect of the Nazoraeans is to be found in Beroea near Coele-syria, in Decapolis near Pella.... For that was its place or origin, since all the disciples had settled in Pella, after their remove from Jerusalem–Christ having told them to abandon Jerusalem and withdraw from it because of the siege it was about to undergo."[29] Josephus mentioned that after Cestius' retreat many Jews "swam away from the city, as from a ship when it was going to sink."[30] He did not specifically mention Christians, but

it is quite probable that many of those who fled at that time were followers of Christ.

7. Great Distress and Death in Jerusalem

Jesus warned His followers to leave Jerusalem because soon after the armies surrounded the city He predicted there would be "days of vengeance" and "great distress in the land and wrath upon this people" (Luke 21:22-23). Matthew recorded Jesus' foreboding description in these words: "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be" (24:21). Some have questioned how Jerusalem would suffer more destruction, death, and horror than those in the Flood, or those during the time of the Holocaust. While it is possible that Jesus was using hyperbole, a look at the devastation brought upon Jerusalem in A.D. 70 reveals a period of pain, terror, and rapine that easily could be argued to surpass any in human history.

In the year A.D. 70, Roman general Titus besieged the city in an assault that would spell doom for Jerusalem. Not only did the siege begin to choke the food supplies, but the problem was compounded by warring factions within the city. Josephus mentions three "armies" of zealots in the city that fought one another for control. One of their strategies was to burn the supplies of the other factions. The result of this was that the supply of corn that the inhabitants laid up for such a siege that could have sustained them for many years, was destroyed by the Jews themselves.[31]

Thus, famine quickly took hold of the city. A famine so horrific that the details turn the stomach. The militant factions in the city marauded the streets, killing many and confiscating all food. "They also invented

terrible methods of torment to discover where any food was, and they were these: to stop up the passages of the privy parts of the miserable wretches, and to drive sharp stakes up their fundamentals."[32] As the famine worsened "upper rooms were full of women and children that were dying by famine; and the lanes of the city were full of the dead bodies of the aged." The children and the young men "all swelled with famine, and fell down dead wheresoever their misery seized them."[33] One report before the entire ordeal was finished, said the number of dead from the famine was more than 600,000, with many dead bodies not even able to be counted.[34] So much so that "the multitude of carcasses that lay in heaps one upon another, was a horrible sight, and produced a pestilential stench."[35] As the famine continued, those dying ate the dead carcasses of animals, the leather off of their shoes, girdles, and shields, and old wisps of hay. Furthermore, in coming to an end of his description about the famine, Josephus related a story of a woman killing and roasting her son, eating half of it, and offering the other half to the marauders who came when they smelled cooking flesh. They were so appalled by the sight that even they went out trembling.[36] The factions that caused the famine inside the city did so much destruction that Josephus said that a list of all the terrible things they did could not even be written, but because of these men "**neither did any city ever suffer such miseries**, nor did any age ever breed a generation more fruitful in wickedness than this was, from the beginning of the world."[37]

In relating further instances of suffering brought on the Jews in Jerusalem, we read that Romans were also responsible for immense amounts of cruelty. Concerning Jews that attempted to desert to the Romans, the Roman soldiers "out of the wrath and hatred they bore

the Jews, nailed those they caught, one after one way, and another after another, to crosses, by way of jest."[38] And many were "whipped, and then tormented with all sorts of tortures before they died, and were then crucified."[39] Other Jews that attempted to desert to the Romans met a more gruesome fate. Certain Jews coming out of the city had swallowed their gold in an attempt to hide it. Soldiers in the Roman army heard of this ploy and "cut up those that came as supplicants, and searched their bellies." In one night, about 2,000 Jews were thus dissected.[40] Such instances could be multiplied extensively. In Josephus' summary of the death and destruction of the Jews, he wrote that because the siege happened during the time of the Passover, millions of Jews from all over the world had congregated in the city. A final, estimated number of those killed in the few months of the siege was 1.1 million, with another 97,000 sold as prisoners (as Jesus stated in Luke 21:24, that not only would the inhabitants of Jerusalem be killed, but also "led away captive into all nations").[41] Josephus lamented, "Accordingly the multitude of those that therein perished **exceeded all the destructions that either men or God ever brought upon the world**."[42] Jesus' description of great distress aptly expresses what horrors were experienced during the fall of Jerusalem.

9. The Destruction of the Physical Temple

When the disciples sat marveling at the "buildings of the temple," they could not resist drawing Jesus' attention to the architecture and magnificence of the structures. Surely they believed that the city and its buildings would continue through history. Imagine their surprise when Jesus declared and prophesied, "Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be

thrown down" (Matthew 24:2). Is it true that the buildings of the Temple were destroyed as Jesus predicted?

Again, Josephus provides one of the only first-hand accounts of the destruction of the Temple by the Roman armies. He noted how the Roman soldiers "put fire to the gates, and the silver that was over them quickly carried the flames to the wood that was within it, whence it spread itself all of the sudden, and caught hold of the cloisters."[43] As for what was left of the Temple, he noted a Roman soldier "being lifted up by another soldier, set fire to a golden window, through which there was a passage to the rooms that were round about the holy house, on the north side." Josephus detailed how Titus tried to stop his soldiers from destroying the remainder of the building, but he was unsuccessful. And "flames burst out from within the holy house itself immediately... and thus the holy house burnt down."[44]

Thus, the Temple itself was destroyed, but what about the stones of the "buildings of the temple." To discover that information we must turn to archaeology. When we do, we find complete fulfillment of Jesus' prediction. Archaeologist Harold Mare wrote: "We do not have any remains of the Herodian temple itself because of the devastating Roman destruction in A.D. 70."[45] H.T. Frank noted, "Strictly speaking, the Temple proper is not a matter of archaeological consideration since only one stone from it and parts of another can be positively identified."[46] Randall price stated, "In fact, after the destruction of the Second Temple, the Romans plowed under the Temple Mount and erected pagan structures upon it (which themselves were later destroyed)."[47]

What about the Wailing Wall?

Not long ago I received an email from a skeptic who claimed that Jesus' prophecy had been falsified. He stated, "Jesus was flat wrong in saying not one stone will remain on top of another. The Wailing Wall is still there today." Supposedly, since the Western Wailing Wall existed during the time of Jesus, and since some stones are still intact, then Jesus' prediction that "not one stone shall be left here upon another" did not come true. Does the Wailing Wall disprove Jesus' prediction?

To discover the truth on this issue, I asked the skeptic to tell me "where, exactly did Jesus say that every stone in Jerusalem would be knocked down?" He then quoted Matthew 24:2, "And Jesus said to them, 'Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down.'" He said, because of the Wailing Wall, "So, I conclude Jesus was wrong and cannot be God's representative."

In response, I asked him, "Did you read the context of the passage? What had the disciples specifically asked Jesus about?" He wrote back and admitted that in Matthew 24 the disciples "wanted to draw Jesus' attention to the buildings of the temple."

Again, I responded by saying, "Looking closely at the context, could you tell me which buildings of the temple...the followers of Jesus were showing Him?" He stated, "I don't know. It doesn't say. I don't see what difference it would make as to which buildings, since Jesus says 'all these things' will not have one stone left upon another." When I asked him what he understood "all these things" to mean, he said, "Jesus means the things to occur in the following verse 7."

I then recapped our conversation by pointing out that he first claimed that Jesus' statement about the stones in Jerusalem not being left one on another could not be true because there are stones in the Wailing Wall. Then when I asked if he had read the context, he admitted that Jesus was actually talking about the buildings of the Temple, which might not have had anything to do with the Wailing Wall. Then I asked him which buildings Jesus predicted would be destroyed, and he correctly stated that he did not know, since the text does not say.

I then asked about his understanding of "all these things," and he said it must be everything that follows in verse seven. Yet, a close look at the context shows that cannot be the case. Verse two is immediately connected to verse one and Jesus is specifically talking about the stones of the buildings of the Temple (whatever buildings His disciples were showing Him). Verse three starts a different discussion in a different location. Now, if we knew which buildings were under discussion in verse one, and we knew that some stones of those buildings were left, there might be a case against this prophecy (barring the frequent use of hyperbole, which does not seem to be used here, but is a possibility). But, of course, we do not know that. Furthermore, it is a historical fact that Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70, and that destruction included vast numbers of buildings that were connected to the Temple that were completely demolished. Thus, the existence of some intact stones in the structures around Jerusalem cannot be used to logically argue against Jesus' prediction.

Jesus never predicted that every single stone in Jerusalem would be displaced. He was specifically addressing those "buildings of the temple" that His disciples pointed out. Archaeologist Leen Ritmeyer wrote: "If you

read the text in Matthew, the site [the disciples] pointed out were the buildings of the Temple. Read the exact text–'the buildings of the Temple.' The only buildings I know that belonged to the Temple were [those] built around it and the porticos. And all these buildings that stood on the Temple Mount were indeed left without one stone upon another."[48] Randall Price concluded, "Obviously Jesus was referring to those buildings (including the Temple itself) which were on the huge supporting platform.... Archaeology has confirmed that no trace of these Temple buildings exists today, although some of their stones may have been put to secondary use in the walls and homes in Old City Jerusalem. Nevertheless, none remain in their original setting."[49] Indeed, the attempt to discredit Jesus by pointing to the Wailing Wall falls as flat as the buildings surrounding the Temple during the destruction of Jerusalem.

CONCLUSION

Jesus' disciples boldly declared that they saw His miracles and were eyewitnesses to His marvelous works (1 John 1:1-3; 2 Peter 1:16-18). They recorded His prediction that He would be arrested, killed, and rise again (Matthew 16:21)–events about which they had first-hand knowledge. Jesus' prophecy about the destruction of Jerusalem, however, was set for a time in the future after Jesus ascended to heaven, but during the lifetime of many of His hearers. His primary purposes for the predictions were to warn His followers when to flee Jerusalem, as well as to add further proof for His divinity by providing yet another example of His ability to foresee the future. The historical record verifies that Jesus' prophecy was so detailed and accurate that, after all the signs He predicted occurred, and His followers saw "Jerusalem surrounded by armies" (Luke 21:20),

they knew exactly what to do in order to avoid the fate of the wicked Jews who refused to recognize Jesus as God. Even so, Jesus has predicted another future event, His Second Coming, which will be Universal in its scope. Concerning this event, there will be no signs that enable anyone to predict when it will occur.[50] Indeed, it will come with no warning or announcements, like a thief in the night (Matthew 24:43). As surely and as accurately as Jesus predicted the fall of Jerusalem, He has foretold His Second Coming and the Judgment of all humanity. Let us all heed His words: "And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!" (Mark 13:37).

ENDNOTES

1 Josephus, *Jewish Wars,* 5:5:6.

2 Ibid., 5:4:4.

3 Tacitus, *Histories*, 5:11.

4 Luke 21:5-24 and Mark 13:3-23 provide parallel accounts to these events in Matthew. Some have suggested that these accounts discuss the Second Coming of Christ and the events that will precede the end of the world. The clearest facts that show this cannot be true are seen in Jesus' references to the hardships that would be experienced by pregnant women (Matthew 24:18-19), that the situation would be worse if it happened during the winter (vs. 20), that those outside the city or on their housetops should not expend any effort to get their earthly belongings (vs. 20), and that those "in Judea" should flee to the mountains (Luke 21:20). When Christ comes again, none of these precautions will have any bearing or significance. For a more thorough discussion, see Dave Miller (2014), "Left Behind–Or Left Bedazzled?," Apologetics Press, http://apologeticspress.org/apPubPage.aspx?pub=1&issue=1176.

5 While some interpreters have attempted to mark Jesus' statements in Matthew 24:1-35 as predictions about the end of time, the context precludes this as a legitimate option. In Matthew

23:36, Jesus explained to the audience that Jerusalem's judgment would "come upon this generation" and in Matthew 24:34, He again stated, "this generation will by no means pass away till all these things are fulfilled." Skeptics have seized upon the statements of those who teach that Jesus was predicting end times and claim that since the world did not come to an end during the lifetime of Jesus' listeners (the term "generation" being generally understood to be about 40 years), then Jesus was wrong and could not be the Son of God. These skeptics and errant biblical interpreters fail to recognize that Jesus specifically detailed events in Jerusalem, regarding the physical city and Temple, and the area of Judea, that could not be universal in scope. On the contrary, Jesus clearly predicted situations that His disciples could watch that would help them know exactly when Jerusalem would be destroyed.

[6] Due to the accuracy of Jesus' predictions, many who deny the reality of the spiritual world (and thus argue against all types of prophecy) attempt to date Jesus' predictions after the fall of Jerusalem. Such a late date for Jesus' statements cannot be maintained in light of the numerous historical reasons to date the prophecy to the life of Jesus during the A.D. 30s. For additional reading on this topic see Erik Manning (2019), "13 Good Historic Reasons for the Early Date of the Gospels," https://isjesusalive.com/13-good-historical-reasons-for-the-early-dating-of-the-gospels/; Kenny Barfield (2018), *The Things That Were, The Things That Are, The Things That Will Be* (Florence, AL: Lambert), pp. 1-142.

[7] Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 20:5:1

[8] *Jewish Wars,* 2:13:4.

[9] *Antiquities*, 20:9:6.

[10] *Jewish Wars,* 2:13:5.

[11] *Antiquities*, 20:8:5.

[12] Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 1:57, https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/04161.htm.

[13] Ibid., 6:11 https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/04166.htm.

[14] Tacitus, *Histories*, 1:2.

[15] *Annals*, 12:43-44.

[16] *Annals*, 16:13.

[17] Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, 5:18.

[18] *Antiquities*, 20:2:5.

[19] Seneca the Younger, *Natural Questions,* 6:1:2.

[20] *Annals*, 15:22:2. J. Antonopoulos documents other seismic events during these years in his 1980 work, "Data From Investigation on seismic Sea-waves and events in the Eastern Mediterranean from the Birth of Christ to 500 A.D.", https://www.annalsofgeophysics.eu/index.php/annals/article/view/4701.

[21] Eusebius, *Church History*, 2:25:5-8, https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/250102.htm.

[22] *The Twelve Caesars*, 6:16.

[23] *Annals*, 15:44.

[24] Ibid., 2:19:4.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid., 2:19:7.

[27] Ibid., 2:19:6.

[28] *Church History*, 3.5.3, https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/250103.htm.

[29] Epiphanius, *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis*, ed. Frank Williams, *Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies*, https://gnosis.study/library/%D0%9A%D1%80%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B0/ENG/Epiphanius%20of%20Salamis%20-%20The%20Panarion,%20Book%20I%20(Sects%201-46).pdf, 29.7.7-8, p.129.

[30] *Wars*, 2:20:1.

[31] *Wars,* 5:1:4.

[32] Ibid., 5:10:3.

[33] Ibid., 5:12:3.

[34] Ibid., 5:13:7.

[35] Ibid., 6:1:1.

[36] Ibid., 6:3:4.

[37] Ibid., 5:10:5.

[38] Ibid., 5:11:1.

[39] Ibid., 5:11:1.

[40] Ibid., 5:13:4.

[41] Ibid., 6:9:3.

[42] Ibid., 6:9:4.

[43] Ibid., 6:4:2.

[44] Ibid., 6:4:6-7.

[45] Harold Mare (1987), *The Archaeology of the Jerusalem Area* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker), p. 141.

[46] H.T. Frank (1972), *An Archaeological Companion to the Bible* (London: SCM Press), p. 249.

[47] Randall Price (1997), *The Stones Cry Out* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House), pp. 257-258.

[48] As quoted in Price, p. 257.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Miller.

CHAPTER 14

DOES THE BIBLE REALLY SAY THAT?

DOES THE BIBLE REALLY SAY THAT?

On one occasion I was involved in a very productive discussion with two atheists. They were in their early thirties, intelligent, and extremely well spoken. We arranged the meeting to discuss why they had chosen to adopt atheism, and reject God and the Bible. In the course of the two-hour discussion, it became clear that many of their complaints about their understanding of the Bible and "Christianity" were legitimate. In fact, I heartily agreed with a host of their lengthy refutations of, and rebuttals to, "Christianity." Lest I mislead the reader, however, let me explain. Notice that I have put in quotation marks the "Christianity" against which they railed, because the term demands qualification. Much of the "Christianity" that so incensed these young men involved gross misrepresentations of God and heinous misinterpretations of the Bible. For instance, during the discussion, one of the men explained that if, according to John Calvin's views, God arbitrarily chose some people to be saved and some to be lost, regardless of their choices, then God would be unjust. He explained this point in detail for several minutes. After listening attentively to his astute refutation of Calvinism, I completely agreed with him, but noted

that the Bible does not teach Calvinism. It seemed that since Calvinism had been so inseparably bound-up in many interpretations of the Bible to which this young man had been exposed, he was taken aback that any "Christian" would so readily agree with his assessment of its evident flaws.

The discussion with these men, coupled with a critical reading of the atheistic community's primary authors, has impressed upon my mind the fact that skeptical writers have a knack for exposing pseudo-Christianity for the error that it truly is. Unfortunately, skeptics often use the pseudo-Christianity and misinterpretations of the Bible that they so adequately debunk as straw men that they insist represent God's Word. In truth, they certainly do not. It is a useful study, however, to study a few examples of how biblical misinterpretation can cause some to doubt the Bible's inspiration.

THEISTIC EVOLUTION IS INDEFENSIBLE

David Mills authored a book titled *Atheist Universe: The Thinking Person's Answer to Christian Fundamentalism.* Much of the material in that book is incorrect. But chapter six, titled "Can Genesis Be Reconciled with Modern Science?" has some trenchant things to say about those who claim to believe the Bible but try to bend its interpretation to jibe with modern evolutionary findings. At the beginning of the chapter, Mills stated:

> According to Genesis, God made Adam and Eve on the sixth day of Creation Week. The Genesis genealogies then detail the exact ages at which Adam and his male descendants "begat" their own male offspring. The New Testament books of Matthew and Luke [NOTE: Matthew and Luke actually do not give ages–KB] then continue the genealogy from David to Jesus, again specifying the age at which each male descendent "begat" the next generation. Since we have a fixed "historical" time period for Jesus' birth, creationists

> thereby calculate that the heavens and Earth were created by God in the year 4004 B.C. Earth, therefore, is only 6000 years old by biblical chronology. [NOTE: Although Mills is correct about the general age of 6000 years, the chronology is not so precise as to nail down the exact date of 4004 B.C.–KB.] Despite widely divergent viewpoints, creationists and evolutionary biologists agree on a crucial fact: Six-thousand years is insufficient time for evolution to have produced the complex life-forms we observe on Earth today.... A 6000-year-old Earth means therefore that Genesis and the Theory of Evolution are forever irreconcilable.[1]

He further noted:

> If Earth's history began with Creation Week, and if Genesis provides an accurate historical record, then Earth had no prehistoric eras, no prehistoric peoples, and no prehistoric animals. Dinosaurs walked the Earth only a few thousand years ago, side-by-side with modern man.[2]

Mills went on to write: "If creationists now wish to abandon their historical position and acquiesce to an ancient Earth, then I applaud their progress. **But it is a farce to maintain that Genesis never really demanded a young Earth since the genealogies were always intended as metaphors.**"[3]

Regarding those who attempt to compromise the literal nature of Genesis and accept both the Bible and evolution, Mills wrote: "Citing the Day-Age theory, these Great Pretenders make believe that Genesis actually describes an ancient Earth. The purpose of this pompous intellectual charade is to allow the Great Pretenders to 'have it both ways'–imagining themselves to be both religious and scientific at the same time."[4] In what sounds exactly like a young Earth apologist's writings, Mills then commented: "In seeming anticipation and preemptive rebuttal of the Day-Age theory, however, the Book of Genesis itself provides a clear and specific

definition of Creation Week...'the evening and the morning' were a day—a literal 24-hour day."[5]

Mills is exactly right in regard to the fact that a compromise of the Genesis account of Creation is indefensible and illogical. He does an excellent job showing that the special pleading needed to warp the text of Genesis into agreement with modern evolutionary ideas cannot stand critical scrutiny. He concludes correctly that: "A 6000-year-old Earth means therefore that Genesis and the Theory of Evolution are forever irreconcilable."[6] Those who compromise the text of Genesis in an attempt to force it to agree with modern evolutionary teachings have gotten it wrong, and would do well to listen to Mills' criticism of their inaccurate interpretation.

Unfortunately, Mills' incorrectly reasons that the Bible has been wrong all along and that evolution is the true creative agent of our planet. We have shown repeatedly that such simply cannot be the case[7] and Mills and other atheists would do well to apply the same critical thinking to the false evolutionary theory as they so aptly apply to indefensible compromises of the biblical text.

INHERITED SIN

Many people who consider themselves Christians today have accepted the idea that humans are born with a sinful nature. These religious people believe that sin can be inherited from one's ancestors, and that every human, even infants, deserve death due to their inherently sinful nature. The Bible, however, nowhere teaches such a doctrine. Thus, when atheists and skeptics seize on this false interpretation of Scripture, they correctly

insist that such a teaching would manifest a contradiction in the nature of the God of the Bible.

Christopher Hitchens, in his discussion of Christ's death on the cross, wrote:

> Furthermore, I am required to believe that the agony was *necessary* in order to compensate for an earlier crime in which I also had not part, the sin of Adam.... Thus my own guilt in the matter is deemed "original" and inescapable. However, I am still granted free will with which to reject the offer of vicarious redemption.[8]

Hitchens correctly concluded that such an idea "negates the moral and reasonable idea that the children are innocent of their parent's offenses."[9] Richard Dawkins weighed in on the idea as well: "The sin of Adam and Eve is thought to have passed down the male line–transmitted in the semen according to Augustine. **What kind of ethical philosophy is it that condemns every child, even before it is born, to inherit the sin of a remote ancestor?"**[10]

Hitchens, Dawkins, and numerous other atheistic writers correctly conclude that a god who condemns children because they inherited their ancestors' sins would be an unjust being unworthy of worship. The biblical portrait of God, however, is not of such a cruel, unjust being. In fact, it is the exact opposite. The Bible points out in unambiguous terms that children do not inherit the sins or guilt of their ancestors. The prophet Ezekiel wrote: "The one who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself" (18:20). It has been shown repeatedly and beyond doubt that the Bible never indicates that children inherit sin or guilt from their parents,[11] nor do children ever suffer any type of **spiritual** punishment

as a result of the sins of their parents.[12] It is the case that children often suffer physical consequences of their parents wrong choices, such as when a drunken father abuses his children. It is not the case, however, that those children bear any of the father's spiritual guilt or inherit any of their parent's sin.

One can completely understand why the skeptical community would be aghast at a being who would cast innocent babies into hell as punishment for the sins of their parents. Yet, a correct interpretation of the Bible shows that such is not the case. While it is sad that many religious people have falsely taught such a view, their false teaching on the subject, and the skeptics' acceptance of that false teaching as a correct interpretation of the Bible, cannot be used as a legitimate weapon to impugn the character of the God or the inspiration of the Bible.

WRONG DEFINITION OF FAITH

It is unfortunate for Christianity that some Christians completely misunderstand the basic concept of faith. For many in Christendom, faith is a warm feeling in their hearts when they have failed to find adequate evidence to justify their beliefs. Modern dictionaries have done much to engrain this false definition of faith into modern Christianity. For instance, *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* states that faith is "a firm belief in something for which there is no proof."[13] *The American Heritage Dictionary* gives as a primary definition of faith: "belief that does not rest on logical or material evidence."[14] The idea that faith is a warm, fuzzy feeling divorced from logical thinking and separated from all "material evidence" does not coincide with what the Bible actually says about faith.[15] As Sztanyo correctly noted: "There is not a single item in Christianity, upon which our souls' salvation depends, that is only 'probably'

true. In each case, the evidence supplied is sufficient to establish conclusive proof regarding the truth of the Christian faith."[16]

The false view that faith is "a leap in the dark" without adequate evidence provides the skeptical community plenty of fodder for their atheistic, anti-Bible cannons–and rightly so. If believing in God, or the divine inspiration of the Bible, or the deity of Jesus Christ is not established by rational, logical evidence, then those ideas are as unworthy of belief as the unprovable ideas of atheism and evolution. In his analysis of religion, Richard Dawkins quipped: "The whole point of religious faith, its strength and chief glory, **is that it does not depend on rational justification.**"[17] Because of his belief that biblical faith is belief without rational justification, Dawkins concluded: "We believe in evolution because the evidence supports it, and we would abandon it overnight if new evidence arose to disprove it. **No real fundamentalist would ever say anything like that.**"[18] What Dawkins really means to say is that no fundamentalist who has adopted the concept that faith does not depend on rational justification would abandon his or her belief if evidence were provided to the contrary. But if his definition of faith is wrong, then he is incorrect to conclude that those who believe in God, the divine inspiration of the Bible, and the deity of Christ would not alter their views based on the evidence. In fact, according to a proper definition of biblical faith, **it is only because of the rational justification and logical evidence available** that true Christians hold to their beliefs.

When Dawkins states, "Christianity, just as much as Islam, teaches children that unquestioned faith is a virtue. You don't have to make the case for what you

believe,"[19] he manifests his lack of knowledge of what biblical faith is. Biblical faith is based completely and solely on truth and reason, as the apostle Paul succinctly stated in Acts 26:25. The prophet Isaiah underscored this fundamental truth about biblical faith when He recorded God's invitation to the Israelites: "'Come now, and let us **reason together**,' says the Lord" (1:18). Luke, in his introduction to the book of Acts, pressed the point that Jesus' resurrection was attested by "many infallible proofs" (Acts 1:3). For one to believe in the resurrection requires faith, based on infallible proofs.

Sam Harris wrote: "It is time that we admitted that faith is nothing more than the license religious people give one another to keep believing when reasons fail."[20] Harris' accusation is justified when it is applied to false religions, and to those who attempt to defend Christianity without providing a logical, rational justification for their belief. But his allegations, and similar sentiments from Dawkins, Hitchens, and other atheists, are wholly inadequate to attack the Bible and its accurate definition of faith. Sadly, too many self-proclaimed Christians open the door for the skeptical community to bash biblical "faith," when, in reality, the "faith" that is being destroyed was never biblical in the first place.

MODERN MIRACLES

It is often the case that "Christianity" is abused by modern skeptics due to the tendency of many in Christendom to claim that the Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit continues to work miracles today just as He did during New Testament times. Atheist Dan Barker wrote about the time that he was thrown out of "Peter Popoff's 'miracle' rally." He wrote that Popoff "grabbed a woman's head, deliberately mussed up her hair, shook her and pronounced her healed."[21] Barker's assessment

of the event was, "It was comical; and it was sad. The man was practicing medicine without a license, raising false hopes and endangering lives. (Many of his believers have discarded medicine or cancelled doctor's appointments.) I remember having participated in meetings just like this when I was a full-gospel evangelist, and I was ashamed."[22] Barker's caustic assessment of Popoff's "faith healing scam" is accurate in many ways. As Barker admitted, he at one time in his past participated in many false-healing events, and thus he knows the inherent dishonesty involved in such deceptive shenanigans. Here again the skeptical community has logically and correctly concluded that such faith healings are not valid. As David Mills wrote: "If God has the power to miraculously cure others (though invariably in a vague and uncertain way), why doesn't God ever help amputees?"[23]

Skeptics are correct to surmise that if the miraculous power that was available during the time of the apostles is still available today, as many Christians erroneously teach and believe, then miracles that can be empirically verified like the healing of amputees should be documented. After all, even the enemies of the apostles had to admit that the miracles worked by the apostles were empirically verifiable: "For indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it" (Acts 4:16).

In truth, the skeptical community does an excellent job of showing that such "faith healing" events are emotionally charged frenzies that do not produce legitimate medical results. The problem arises, however, when the skeptical community tries to lump all Christians into this mold, or attempts to use these verifiably false miracles

to discount the possibility of any type of miracle at any time in history. The fact of the matter is, the Bible predicted that the miraculous power that was available to the apostles would come to an end, and would not continue throughout the ages until modern times.[24] Furthermore, it has been repeatedly and definitively shown that such false miracles sustain no argumentative value against the historical legitimacy of true miracles recorded in the Bible, such as the resurrection of Christ.[25]

CONCLUSION

Mortimer J. Alder once stated, "Christianity is the only logical, consistent faith in the world."[26] Unfortunately, the truth of his statement is often obscured by the copious, false philosophies and inaccurate biblical interpretations that masquerade as Christianity. Calvinism, theistic evolution, inherited sin, misdefined faith, and a belief in modern-day miraculous healings are just a few of the obstacles standing in the way of a proper understanding of New Testament Christianity and the inspiration of the Bible. To this list could be added hundreds of similar ideas fraught with error such as the unscriptural concepts of purgatory, limbo, modern-day Divine inspiration, the perseverance of the saints, and a plethora of "predictions" supposedly rooted in the biblical text of Revelation. Those who genuinely wish to defend the validity of New Testament Christianity and biblical inspiration must be willing and able to arrive at and defend proper interpretations of God's inspired Word. One of the most appropriate responses when dealing with challenges to the Bible is first to ask and correctly answer the question: "Does the Bible really say that?"

ENDNOTES

[1] David Mills (2006), *Atheist Universe: The Thinking Person's Answer to Christian Fundamentalism* (Berkeley, CA: Ulysses Press), p. 137.

[2] Ibid., p. 141.

[3] Ibid., p. 148, emp. added.

[4] Ibid., p. 151.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid., p. 137.

[7] See Jeff Miller (2017), *Science Vs. Evolution* (Montgomery, AL: Apologetics Press).

[8] Christopher Hitchens (2007), *god Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: The Twelve), p. 209, italics in orig.

[9] Ibid., p. 99.

[10] Richard Dawkins (2006), *The God Delusion* (New York: Houghton Mifflin), p. 251.

[11] Kyle Butt (2004), "Do Children Inherit the Sins of the Parents?", http://www.apologeticspress.org/articles/2543.

[12] Kyle Butt (2003), "Do Babies Go to Hell When They Die?", http://www.apologeticspress.org/articles/2255.

[13] *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* (1988), (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster).

[14] *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (2000), (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin), fourth edition, p. 636.

[15] Dick Sztanyo (1996), *Faith and Reason* (Montgomery, AL: Apologetics Press).

[16] Ibid., p. 7.

[17] Dawkins, p. 23.

[18] Ibid., p. 283.

[19] Ibid., p. 306.

[20] Sam Harris (2006), *Letter to a Christian Nation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf), p. 67.

[21] Dan Barker (1992), *Losing Faith in Faith: From Preacher to Atheist* (Madison, WI: Freedom From Religion), p. 293.

[22] Ibid., p. 294.

[23] Mills., p. 161.

[24] Dave Miller (2020), *Modern-Day Miracles? Do Miracles, Tongue-Speaking, & Holy Spirit Baptism Occur Today?* (Montgomery, AL: Apologetics Press).

[25] Kyle Butt (2002), "Jesus Christ–Dead or Alive?", *Reason & Revelation*, http://www.apologeticspress.org/articles/121.

[26] Doug Sharp and Jerry Bergman, eds. (2008), *Persuaded by the Evidence* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books), p. 288.

CHAPTER 15

THE BIBLICAL VIEW OF WOMEN

It has become increasingly popular in our secular culture to caustically criticize God, the Bible, and the Christian religion. Many best-selling books by high-profile atheistic writers are filled with accusations against God and alleged reasons why Christianity cannot be the true religion devised by a moral God. One reason commonly given by the skeptical community for its rejection of the Bible and Christianity is the way that women are purportedly viewed in the Scriptures. According to these secular apologists, the Bible writers viewed women as inferior creatures who are less valuable than men and do not deserve to be treated with respect and dignity.

Evangelist-turned-skeptic, Charles Templeton, summarized this view well when he wrote, "The Bible is a book by and for men. The women in it are secondary creatures and usually inferior."[1] In addition, the God of the Bible and various Bible writers are accused of hating women. In his book, *The God Delusion*, Richard Dawkins stated that the God of the Bible is "misogynistic."[2] Atheist spokesman Dan Barker made a similar assertion when he wrote: "Although the bible is neither antiabortion nor pro-family, it does provide modern antiabortionists with a biblical basis for the *real* motivation behind their views: the bible is not pro-life, but it is anti-woman. A

patriarchal system cannot stand women who are free."[3] Famed skeptic Christopher Hitchens wrote:

> A consistent proof that religion is man-made and anthropomorphic can also be found in the fact that it is usually "man" made, in the sense of masculine, as well.... The Old Testament, as Christians condescendingly call it, has woman cloned from man for his use and comfort. The New Testament has Saint Paul expressing both fear and contempt for the female.[4]

Is it true that the biblical treatment of women presents an immoral code of ethics and falsifies the idea that the Bible was inspired by a perfectly moral Creator? Certainly not. In fact, just the opposite is the case. The Bible's treatment of women is in perfect accord with truth and legitimate moral teaching. The accusations leveled against the Bible in this regard are vacuous and cannot be used in any legitimate way to militate against either the morality of God or the inspiration of the Bible. On the contrary, it is the teachings and logical implications of atheistic evolution that cannot hold up under the scrutiny of reason.

THE DARWINIAN VIEW OF WOMEN

Atheistic Darwinism is plagued by a host of problems regarding morality. In fact, it has been conclusively demonstrated that without a belief in God, concepts such as good and evil, moral and immoral, have no meaning.[5] Only a supernatural moral Creator can explain the very existence of morality in man. Therefore, any attempt to question the morality of the God of the Bible based on atheistic ideas is fraught with error and self-contradiction from its inception.

Furthermore, the logical implications of Darwinism lead the honest thinker to the conclusion that equality for all humans is illusory. Not only did Charles Darwin admit that Darwinian evolution implies that certain races

of people are inferior to others, with equal candor he concluded that women are inferior to men as well.[6] In his monumental work, *The Descent of Man*, Darwin wrote:

> The chief distinction in the intellectual powers of the two sexes is shown by man's attaining to a **higher eminence, in whatever he takes up, than can woman**–whether requiring deep thought, reason, or imagination, or merely the use of the senses and hands.... [T]he average of **mental power in man must be above that of woman**.... **[M]an has ultimately become superior to woman**.[7]

According to Darwin, males had evolved to a higher level than females. As evidence of his conclusion, he simply stated that males "attain to a higher eminence" in everything that they take up when compared to females. Using this line of reasoning, then, it would be impossible to condemn men for treating women as inferior, because, if men have the mental or physical ability to treat women as inferior, it must mean that men are stronger or more fit to survive and rule. It is ironic that the atheistic community, that is so enamored with Darwin, is suggesting that the Bible's view of women is immoral. In reality, if their view of atheistic evolution is true, then all male-dominated societies are such because males are more able to dominate. And since survival of the fittest is desired, then one must conclude that a male dominated society, in which women are viewed as inferior to men (as Darwin put it), must be at least one very prevalent natural order of things. Even if the skeptical community is right about its accusations about the Bible's "mistreatment" of women (which it is not), how could the Bible be accused of maintaining an immoral stance, when that stance coincides perfectly with the Darwinian view of the "natural order of things?" In truth, those who propound atheism and Darwinian ideals have a much more thorny problem with the logi-

cal implications of their ideas as they relate to women, than those who teach that the Bible is the inspired Word of a perfectly moral God.

THE VALUE OF WOMEN ACCORDING TO THE BIBLE

When they use the treatment of women in their attack on the integrity of the Bible, most skeptics make blanket statements about the Bible's position, without presenting anything resembling a balanced handling of the topic. For instance, Templeton wrote: "Women were associated with evil and weakness. Indeed, Israelite males sometimes thanked God in the synagogue that they had not been born women."[8]

Such generalized statements are designed to appeal to the emotions of a 21st century audience, but they simply do not accurately represent the true sentiments behind the biblical texts. For instance, using the type of reasoning in which we cherry pick verses without adequate explanation, we could say that men are treated unfairly in the Bible because husbands are told that they must be willing to give their lives for their wives, while the wives are never commanded to make such a sacrifice (Ephesians 5:25). In addition, we could accuse the Bible of mistreating males, because, throughout the text, men are told they must work to provide food for their entire households, while women are not held to such a standard (Genesis 3:17-19; 1 Timothy 5:8). Such indiscriminate statements should be viewed by the honest observer as suspect, and a more complete and accurate picture of the biblical view of women should be sought.

Upon closer inspection, it becomes clear that both the Old and New Testaments present a picture of woman that appraises her worth as equal to that of the man.

While it is the case that the Bible presents **different roles** for men and women, it is not the case that men are **valued** more than women. A look at various biblical passages will confirm this truth.

Wisdom as the Portrait of a Woman

The book of Proverbs, written by King Solomon, is a literary genre known as Wisdom literature. The main theme of the book is the concept of wisdom. The writer stated: "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom" (3:7). To further stress the importance and value of wisdom, he penned: "For wisdom is better than rubies, and all the things one may desire cannot be compared with her" (8:11). Building on the idea of the immeasurable value of wisdom, the writer of the book of Job stated: "But where can wisdom be found? It cannot be purchased for gold, nor can silver be weighed for its price. It cannot be valued in the gold of Ophir, in precious onyx or sapphire...for the price of wisdom is above rubies.... Nor can it be valued in pure gold" (28:12-19). It is clear, then, that the Bible writers viewed wisdom as a personality trait of inestimable value.

What picture, then, was used to personify this trait of such value? Throughout the book of Proverbs, the idea of wisdom is personified by a woman. The text reads: "Wisdom has built her house" (9:1); "Does not wisdom cry out, and understanding lift up her voice? She takes her stand on the top of the high hill" (8:1-2). The most illustrative picture of the virtue of wisdom that the Proverbs writer could conjure was that of a woman.[9] How then can the Bible writers be so misrepresented as to suggest that they did not value women, when wisdom, which is "the principle thing" according to Proverbs, is portrayed as a woman? Additionally, the Proverbs writer stated, "A gracious woman retains honor" (11:16). The

inspired writer also included a lengthy section (31:10-31) in which he extolled the worth of a virtuous woman who is clothed in "strength and honor," who "opens her mouth with wisdom, and on her tongue is the law of kindness. She watches over the ways of her household." Needless to say, you do not hear these passages about wisdom personified as a woman and the value of virtuous women in the jaded rants of the modern skeptic.

God's Attitude Toward His People as Illustrated with Traits of a Woman

On occasion, the Bible writers illustrate some of God's personality traits by comparing them to personality traits possessed by certain categories of people. For instance, it is a well-known fact that the God of the Bible often compares the love that He has for His created humans with the love that a father has for his biological children (1 John 3:1-2). If the Bible were truly sexist, then it would be obvious that comparisons between God and any human being would be confined to the masculine gender. A truly sexist god would never compare Himself to any traits possessed by a woman.

Yet the Bible records instances in which the God of Heaven compares traits that He possesses to similar traits found in women. For instance, John Willis noted: "A most compelling piece of evidence that OT writers had a high regard for women is that they describe God as a mother." Willis then mentioned at least three passages as examples, including Isaiah 66:12: "For thus says the Lord.... As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; and you shall be comforted in Jerusalem."[10]

Furthermore, if it truly were the case that the apostle Paul was a misogynist, was afraid of women, and had contempt for them, it would be unreasonable to imag-

ine him comparing himself to certain traits possessed by women. Yet in 1 Thessalonians 2:7 he wrote: "But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. So affectionately longing for you." Surely a misogynistic man who is afraid of women would never describe himself in such feminine terms. Such examples as these bring to light the fallacious idea that the Bible writers hated women or viewed them as inferior to men.

Women Made in the Image of God

Many skeptics insinuate that the creation of Eve from Adam's rib to be a helper for man manifests a view that woman is less valuable or inferior to man. Recall the claim of Hitchens when he wrote: "The Old Testament, as Christians condescendingly call it, has woman cloned from man for his use and comfort." Supposedly, the fact that Eve was Adam's helper somehow "proves" that the Bible writers viewed her as inferior.

The problem with this line of reasoning is at least two-fold. First, it completely ignores the stress that the Bible places on women being made in God's image **exactly like man**. Genesis 1:27 states: "So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him, **male and female** he created them." Contrary to many religious groups and male chauvinist thinkers, from the very first chapter, the Bible insists that both male and female were made in God's image, and both deserve to be treated with the dignity that is inherent in that composition.

So what of the word "helper"? Is it true that a "helper" implies that the person he or she is helping is viewed as superior or of greater worth? Such an incorrect position is impossible to maintain in light of the clear biblical

teaching regarding those who help others. For example, in John 15:26, Jesus explains that the Holy Spirit was going to visit the apostles after His resurrection. He stated: "But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me." Using the skeptic's reasoning, we would be forced to conclude that the Holy Spirit is inferior to the apostles, since He is referred to as "the Helper." Such a conclusion is obviously absurd. [NOTE: It is understood that the skeptic will not concur that there even is a Holy Spirit. This example, however, is used only to show that the Bible consistently maintains a picture of "helpers" and "helping" that in no way insinuates inferiority or less value.]

In Philippians 4:3, Paul urged the receiver of his epistle to "help these women who labored with me in the gospel." Did that mean Paul viewed the one who received his letter as inferior to those women with whom he had labored? Not in any way. Furthermore, Jesus Christ Himself stated that He came into this world not "to be served, but to serve" (Mark 10:45). Would that imply that since He was "serving" or "helping" mankind, then He was inferior in some way to humans? Certainly not. The concept of "helping" or "serving" carries with it no inherent meaning of inferiority.

A HOST OF EXAMPLES OF WORTHY WOMEN IN THE BIBLE

In an attempt to bolster their misrepresentation of the biblical view of women, skeptics often "count noses" and insist that far too much biblical "press" is given to narratives whose central figures are men, while not enough time is given to women. In addition, many in the skeptical community insist that if God truly viewed women as equal, they would have been granted equal

positions of leadership in both Old Testament times and in the ministry of Jesus. Dan Barker stated: "Jesus upheld the Old Testament view of women. Not a single woman was chosen to be among the 12 disciples or to sit at the Last Supper."[11]

Such statements are plagued with dishonest selectivity. When the entire biblical picture is viewed objectively, it is easily seen that women in both the Old and New Testaments played vital, powerful roles in God's plans for the national rule of Israel, and for the spiritual Kingdom established by Jesus Christ. And, while space is lacking in this article to adequately list and describe each of these women, a few of the most notable will be addressed.

Deborah

The fact that women attained prominent, powerful positions in Israel militates strongly against the skeptic's accusation that the biblical view of women is sexist. For instance, the book of Judges relates the story of Deborah, a prophetess and the recognized judge and ruler of the Israelite nation during her lifetime (Judges 4:4). A close look at the narrative shows that Deborah was the woman who commissioned Barak, a man, to lead the Israelites in battle against the foreign forces. When the time came for action to be taken, it was Deborah who said to Barak: "Up! For this is the day in which the Lord has delivered Sisera into your hand. Has not the Lord gone out before you?" (Judges 4:14). After the battle was won, and Sisera, the opposing general, was killed by a woman named Jael, Deborah and Barak composed and sang a victory hymn. Throughout the hymn, Deborah is mentioned as the leader of Israel who, with Barak's help, defeated Sisera and Jabin. The text says: "Village life ceased, it ceased in Israel, until I, Deborah, arose,

arose a mother in Israel" (Judges 5:7). "And the princes of Issachar were with Deborah" (5:15).

Using the skeptic's logic, should we conclude that the Bible views all men as inferior to women since Deborah was a female leader of Israel at the time? Should we conclude that since Deborah's story is recorded in a book that claims inspiration, such an inspiration claim is negated because, based on the Deborah narrative, whoever wrote the Bible hates men, shows contempt for them, and treats them as less valuable than women? Such reasoning is obviously flawed.

Once it is shown that the story of Deborah exalts women to an equal position with men, however, the skeptic is forced to back peddle and attempt another tactic. While it cannot be denied that the story of Deborah manifests an exalted view of women, the skeptic contends that such stories are few and far between, and if God and the Bible really viewed women as equal in worth to men, then the Bible would have just as many stories about women rulers and leaders as it has about men.

This faulty assertion can be answered in two ways. First, how many examples would the Bible need to provide of the Gospel being preached to Ethiopians to prove that the Bible writers viewed them as just as valuable as Jews, and just as viable candidates to hear the Gospel? Would anyone contend that in order for the God of the Bible to be vindicated of bigotry against Ethiopians, the text must contain just as many conversion stories about Ethiopians as it does about Jews? Certainly not. When the book of Acts records that Phillip the evangelist delivered the Gospel to Candace's Ethiopian treasurer (8:26-40), that one example is sufficient to provide evi-

dence that all Ethiopians are just as valuable to God as all Jews, Arabians, or Egyptians.

Furthermore, let us apply the skeptic's reasoning to a brief history of the United States of America. Were we to attempt to relate the history of our country, spending our time dealing with the Presidency, the most powerful position in our land, how many stories about women would we be able to include who have ascended to the presidency? To date, our nation has inaugurated more than 40 presidents, and not a single one of them has been a woman. Using the skeptic's accusations as a springboard, should we insist that the ancient nation of Israel had a more "enlightened" and elevated view of women than does the United States in the 21st century? Moreover, would we despise and accuse of sexism those history writers who spent the majority of their texts focusing on the men who held the office of President? Such thinking flies in the face of common sense and could only be concocted by those who refuse to deal honestly with actual history and the biblical text.

Huldah, the Prophetess

Second Kings 22 records the life and reign of Josiah, the righteous king of Judah. In the course of his attempts to eradicate idolatry from Judah, he made a focused effort to repair the temple of God that had fallen into a state of disrepair. He commissioned Hilkiah, the high priest, to collect money to be used to clean out and repair the temple. During Hilkiah's labors to revamp the temple, he stumbled across a copy of the book of the Law of Moses. Having read it, he sent it to Josiah, who listened to the words of the Law and was heartsick because the nation of Israel had wandered so far from God's commands. Josiah commanded Hilkiah and several of the other religious leaders to "go, inquire of the Lord for me,

for the people and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found" (2 Kings 22:13). The text then states: "So Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe. (She dwelt in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter.) And they spoke with her" (22:14). After speaking with her, Huldah delivered a message from God to Josiah through these officials.

Notice that, not only did these leaders in Israel seek out a woman prophetess, though she was married, there is no indication that the advice or counsel of her husband was sought. The envoy journeyed to a woman's house to hear a message that the Lord related to a woman. Also notice that Josiah was recognized as one of the greatest rulers that Judah ever had, yet this passage shows that he sought the counsel of a woman of God. Here again, the narrative about Huldah undermines the skeptics' assertion that the Bible views women as inferior.

Various Women in the Bible

Much could be said concerning women of prominence in the Bible, such as Esther, about whom an entire book is written. She ascended to the queenly throne of Persia and heroically saved her people. A lengthy section relating the selfless sacrifice of Ruth for her mother-in-law (Naomi) would further undercut the skeptics' argument, especially in light of the fact that Ruth is listed in the genealogy of Christ as the great grandmother of Jesus. Moreover, the faith of Hannah and her prayer for, and subsequent birth of, Samuel, one of the greatest prophets to ever live in Israel, would go far to put to silence the skeptic's assertion that women are viewed as inferior by the Bible writers. Attention cold be directed to Lydia, the seller of purple whom Paul and his companions

found praying by the riverside, or Priscilla, who helped her husband Aquila teach the eloquent Apollos the Gospel of Christ (Acts 18:26). Additional information refuting the skeptics' claim could include the faith of Jochebed, or the leadership skills and prophesying of Miriam, or the courage of Rahab, or the faithfulness of Jesus' mother Mary, or the good deeds of Dorcas. One wonders how many examples of women in exalted positions the skeptical community would need in order to be satisfied that the biblical treatment of women is not sexist. Unfortunately, no matter how many examples are given, the skeptical answer about this and so many other things is "Just a few more than we have." In reality, the biblical examples of how the God of the Bible views women are more than sufficient to refute the tenuous complaints of the naysayers.

Numbering, Genealogies, and Traveling Groups

Certain practical matters must be properly considered in order to achieve an accurate picture of the biblical view of women. Some people who read the biblical text are struck by the fact that some of the genealogies only include the names of the men in the family. As Templeton wrote: "In the long list of Adam's descendants over the hundreds of years that intervened before the Great Flood, *not one female is so much as named*."[12] Furthermore, it is often the case that, when counting or listing the numbers of people involved, the Bible generally only counts the males. These instances have been viewed as sexist and discriminatory against women.

Upon further inspection, it becomes apparent that such accusations fail to take into account certain practical aspects of the cultural context. For example, Templeton mentioned the genealogy in Genesis five as an example of a "sexist" view, but he failed to mention the genealogy

of Jesus Christ that is listed in Matthew 1:1-17 in which the women Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Mary are mentioned. Additionally, the text states: "And Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary, **of whom** was born Jesus who is called Christ" (1:16). The prepositional phrase "of whom" is a feminine word in the original language and relates back to Mary. Thus the text indicates that Jesus was the biological son of Mary. Would it be proper to use this genealogy to insist that God has a lower view of men, since the text specifically mentions that the Christ descended biologically from a woman? No. And neither can the "male genealogy" idea be used to sustain the false accusation that the Bible views women as inferior. Add to that the fact that even today in 21st America, the majority of wives assume their husbands' last names, and daughters assume their fathers' last names, and are thus recorded in modern genealogical records [such as Annaka Harris, the wife of Sam Harris, or Juliet Emma Dawkins, daughter of Richard Dawkins[13]] and the skeptics' charge becomes manifestly erroneous.

In a similar vein, the biblical numbers often only included the men. For instance, Numbers 1:2 states: "Take a census of all the congregation of the children of Israel, by their families, by their fathers' houses, according to the number of names, **every male individually.**" Is this numbering an example of biblical sexism, or evidence that the Bible writers thought women of so little value they did not need to number them? Not in any way. The simple, practical aspect of this numbering system had only to do with able-bodied men who went out to war. As the text explains: "according to the number of names, every male individually, from twenty years old and above, **all who were able to go to war"** (1:20). In the same way that we could not use such numbering systems to insist that the God of the Bible, or the Bible

writers, devalued children under 20, or old men past the age of battle strength, we could not use this method of numbering to disparage the biblical writers' view of women. And, while the skeptic might attempt to argue that it was sexist for women to be excluded from military service in Bible times, a simple response could be that it was unfair to men to force them to be numbered for military service, while women were exempt from such. Would it be fair to state that since men were "serving" their women by providing military protection, then their "service" shows they were inferior? To ask is to answer.

Other practical matters, including such simple concepts as travel and sleeping arrangements, must be factored into this discussion. For example, Dan Barker was quoted earlier in this article as saying: "Jesus upheld the Old Testament view of women. Not a single woman was chosen to be among the 12 disciples or to sit at the Last Supper." While this statement is true, the skeptic Charles Templeton offers an extremely plausible reason for this:

> The New Testament frequently reveals Jesus' concern for women.... There were no women in Jesus' band of apostles, **but there would have been compelling reasons for this**. Jesus and the disciples travelled frequently, often daily, invariably on foot. Often they slept out in the open. In the circumstances it would have been impossible—and potentially scandalous—for a woman to be a part of that male group.[14]

Even a cursory consideration of certain practical matters that relate to numbering, genealogies, and travel arrangements goes far to defeat the skeptics' claim that the Bible devalues women.

Miscellaneous Accusations of Rudeness to or Mistreatment of Women

Sometimes, those who accuse the Bible of mistreating women will focus on a certain passage and attempt to use it to justify their claim that the biblical stance toward women is sexist.

Jephthah's Daughter

One of the most commonly used biblical narratives in this regard is the story of Jephthah (Judges 11). In this narrative, Jephthah was appointed to be the military leader of Israel to lead an attack on the Ammonites. Before the battle, Jephthah vowed to God that if he was victorious, he would offer to the Lord the first thing that came out of his house to meet him on his return. He was victorious and, upon returning home, his daughter was the first to greet him. Jephthah was grieved, and said to her: "Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low! You are among those who trouble me! For I have given my word to the Lord, and I cannot go back on it" (Judges 11:35). The text then relates "at the end of two months that she returned to her father, and he carried out his vow with her which he had vowed" (11:39).

Skeptics are quick to seize upon this story and insist that it manifests an immoral attitude maintained by the Bible writers against women. As Templeton wrote: "Israel's attitude toward women is starkly and tragically revealed in the story, retold here in contemporary language, of Jephthah's daughter."[15] He went on to insist: "Yahweh uses Jephthah to achieve his purpose–defeating the Ammonites–and that accomplished, callously **requires** Jephthah to keep his vow and sacrifice his only daughter."[16]

Notice that Templeton clearly attributes Jephthah's actions to Yahweh, or Jehovah God. Yet the text never once insinuates or implies that God approved of or condoned Jephthah's action. As Dave Miller wrote:

> If Jephthah offered his daughter as a human sacrifice, no indication is given in the text that God actually approved of the action. The Bible records many illicit actions carried out by numerous individuals throughout history, without an accompanying word of condemnation by the inspired writer. We must not assume that silence is evidence of divine approval. Even the commendation of Jephthah's faith in the New Testament does not offer a blanket endorsement to **everything** Jephthah did during his lifetime. It merely commended the faith that he demonstrated when he risked going to war. Similarly, the Bible commends the faith of Samson, and Rahab the prostitute, without implying that their behavior was always in harmony with God's will.[17]

John T. Willis stressed this extremely important point in his essay titled, "Women in the Old Testament":

> First, the fact that an OT writer records an event or statement in which a man (or men) harbors a negative feeling toward a woman (or women) or treats a woman (women) in a negative way does not mean the writer condones such a feeling or treatment or evidences a bias against women.... Second, the fact that an OT writer records an event or a statement in which a man (or men) exercises power over a woman (or women) does not mean that the writer approves of such activities, or that he/she is biased against women. The same line of reasoning would force one to conclude that if an OT writer records an event or statement in which a man (or men) exercises power over a man (or men), that writer approves of such activities or is biased against men![18]

In truth, one of the major themes in the book of Judges is that all of Israel, including many of the Judges, lived morally incomplete lives, because the nation had wandered from the Mosaic Law. The last verse of the book says: "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (21:25). The self-appointed moral code adopted by the Israelites was not

equivalent to obeying God's commands; thus Jephthah's treatment of his daughter can in no way be used to suggest that God's dealing with women is immoral.

Was Jesus Rude to Women?

Those who are antagonistic to the Bible sometimes accuse Jesus of being rude to others, especially his own mother. Christopher Hitchens quipped: "Jesus makes large claims for his heavenly father but never mentions that his mother is or was a virgin, and **is repeatedly very rude and coarse to her** when she makes an appearance, as Jewish mothers will, to ask to see how he is getting on."[19] Richard Dawkins commented in a similar vein: "Jesus' family values, it has to be admitted, were not such as one might wish to focus on. **He was short, to the point of brusqueness, with his own mother**."[20]

A more thorough analysis, however, reveals that what these writers are attempting to label as rudeness was nothing of the sort. In his article, "How Rude!?", Eric Lyons effectively demonstrated that the way Jesus addressed his mother was neither rude, nor disrespectful.[21] Jesus' statements in response to His mother are in perfect accord with the biblical injunction to honor one's parents. Only a misunderstanding of the original languages and phrases used, and a cynical approach to the text, could lead a person to accuse Jesus of rudeness in these instances. His statements to his mother coincide completely with the fact that the Bible's overall treatment of women presents them as neither inferior nor superior to men, but as equals.

GALATIANS 3:28—THE GOLDEN TEXT OF EQUALITY

The apostle Paul is often demonized as a woman-hater who feared the opposite sex and held them in contempt. The skeptical attitude toward Paul is summed up well in Templeton's statement: "To judge by his epistles, the apostle Paul was a confirmed misogynist."[22] Such statements conveniently overlook one of the boldest statements of gender and race equality in all religious literature. In Galatians 3:28, Paul wrote: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither **male nor female**; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (emp. added). About this verse, Jan Faver Hailey wrote: "Common exegesis understands Paul here to be advocating that access to God is open to all through faith in Christ, without regard to race, social standing, or **gender**."[23] To insist that Paul was a misogynist in light of his statement in Galatians 3:28 runs counter to evidence-based reasoning.

So why do some aver that Paul hated women, even with Galatians 3:28 in view? The main reason for this assertion is that Paul consistently maintained that, while men and women are equal in God's site, they have been given different duties and roles. The skeptical community mistakenly equates the concept of **different roles**, with the idea of **different status**. Allegedly, since Paul instructs men to be elders (Titus 1:5-9), and to lead publically in worship (1 Corinthians 14:34-35; 1 Timothy 2:8-15), and husbands to be the "head" of their homes (Ephesians 5:22-24), then he must view women as less able, less valuable, or inferior to men.[24]

Is it true that since the Bible assigns different roles to the different genders, their status or worth must be unequal? Certainly not. In Titus 3:1, Paul explained

to Titus that Christians were supposed to be subject to rulers and authorities and to obey the government (see also Romans 13). From that statement, is it correct to conclude that Paul views all those in governmental positions to be of more value than Christians? Does this passage imply that, because Christians are to obey other humans who are in governmental positions, Paul sees those in governmental positions as mentally, physically, or spiritually superior to Christians? Not in any way. The mere fact that Christians are to obey those in the government says nothing about the spiritual status or value of either party. It only addresses different roles that each party plays.

Again, in 1 Timothy 6:2, Paul instructs Christian servants to be obedient to their own masters. Does this imply that Paul believed masters to be superior, or to be of more inherent worth than servants? No. It simply shows a difference in roles, not of status. Logically speaking, different roles can never be used to support an accusation that such roles necessitate different value or status.

Furthermore, while the skeptic is quick to seize on Paul's ordination of men as elders and leaders in their homes, those skeptics neglect to include the responsibilities involved in such roles. Husbands are called upon to give their lives for their wives (Ephesians 5:25), physically provide food, shelter, and clothing for their families (1 Timothy 5:8), and to love their wives as much as they love themselves (Ephesians 5:25). While much is said about the "unfairness" of Paul's instructions, it is productive to ask who would get the last spot on a life boat if a Christian husband and wife were on a sinking ship? The Christian husband gives himself for his wife in such instances. Is that fair that he is called upon to

accept the sacrificial role of giving himself for his wife? Is she more valuable than he because God calls upon him to protect and cherish her and die for her if necessary? No. It is simply a difference is assigned roles, not in status or worth.

CONCLUSION

The militant atheistic and skeptical community incessantly attempts to discredit the Bible and the God Who is represented in its pages. One line of reasoning used in their efforts is to demand that the Bible presents a sexist picture of men and women, in which the Bible writers place more value on men, and view women as inferior and of less inherent worth. This accusation falls apart, however, when the entirety of the text is considered. Careful study reveals that Bible writers personified and illustrated such invaluable attributes as wisdom in the form of a woman. God himself compares traits that He possesses to similar traits found in women. Both the Old and New Testaments are filled with narratives lauding the actions of faithful, powerful women. The apostle Paul, who is often accused of misogyny, makes one of the boldest statements of gender equality ever recorded in religious literature. And the misguided attempt to discredit Paul by claiming that different gender roles in his epistles prove he valued women less cannot be honestly or reasonably sustained. In truth, the Bible presents the clearest picture of gender equity, value, and inherent worth ever recorded in either ancient or modern literature. The status of women in the Holy Scriptures, not only is not a challenge to its divine inspiration, but the biblical treatment of women actually provides another piece of evidence for the Bible's perfection and inspiration.

ENDNOTES

[1] Charles Templeton, (1996), *Farewell to God* (Ontario, Canada: McClelland and Stewart), p. 177.

[2] Richard Dawkins (2006), *The God Delusion* (New York: Houghton Mifflin), p. 31.

[3] Dan Barker (1992), *Losing Faith In Faith–From Preacher to Atheist* (Madison, WI: Freedom from Religion Foundation), p. 212, italics in orig.

[4] Christopher Hitchens (2007), *god Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: The Twelve), p. 54.

[5] Kyle Butt (2008), "The Bitter Fruits of Atheism: Parts 1 & 2," http://www.apologeticspress.org/articles/3740 and http://www.apologeticspress.org/articles/3762.

[6] Eric Lyons and Kyle Butt (2009), "Darwin, Evolution, and Racism," http://www.apologeticspress.org/articles/240063.

[7] Charles Darwin (1871), *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (New York: The Modern Library, reprint), pp. 873-874, emp. added.

[8] Templeton, p. 184.

[9] John T. Willis (1993), "Women in the Old Testament," *Essays on Women in Earliest Christianity Volume 1*, ed. Carroll Osburn (Joplin, MO: College Press), p. 37.

[10] Ibid., p. 39.

[11] Dan Barker (2008), *godless* (Berkeley, CA: Ulysses Press), p. 179.

[12] Templeton, p. 178, italics in orig.

[13] Oliver Pereira (no date), "Descent of Richard Dawkins from Edward III," http://humphrysfamilytree.com/Royal/Notes/dawkins.txt.

[14] Templeton, pp. 184-185.

[15] Ibid., p. 81.

[16] Ibid., p. 184.

[17] Dave Miller (2003), "Jephthah's Daughter," http://www.apologeticspress.org/articles/2320.

[18] Willis, pp. 25-27.

[19] Hitchens, p. 116.

[20] Dawkins, p. 250.

[21] Eric Lyons (2004), "How Rude!?", http://www.apologeticspress.org/articles/593. For a discussion of Jesus' response to the Syrophoenecian women in Mark 7:25-30 see Kyle Butt (2006), "Jesus, The Syrophoenician Woman, and Little Dogs," Apologetics Press, http://apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=10&article=317.

[22] Templeton, p. 185.

[23] Jan Faver Hailey (1993), "'Neither Male and Female' (Gal. 3:28)," *Essays on Women in Earliest Christianity Volume 1*, ed. Carroll Osburn (Joplin, MO: College Press), p. 132.

[24] For an excellent biblical exposition of these verses, see Wayne Jackson (2010), "Women's Role in the Church," http://www.christiancourier.com/articles/169-womans-role-in-the-church.

CHAPTER 16

DEFENDING THE BIBLE'S POSITION ON PRAYER

In their efforts to discredit the Bible, skeptics often attack its teachings concerning prayer. They claim that certain statements made by Jesus regarding prayer can be proven to be inaccurate, and thus all rational people should reject both Jesus and the Bible. Skeptics routinely quote Jesus' words, "If you ask anything in My name, I will do it" (John 14:14). After quoting this verse, the skeptic usually mentions praying parents who asked God, in the name of Jesus, to save their sick children; but the children died in spite of the prayer. The skeptic then argues that the children's death is proof positive that Jesus was a liar and His statements about prayer cannot be true. In addition to John 14:14, skeptics often use Matthew 21:22 in a very similar way. According to the skeptic, if a person asks for a million dollars every day, truly believes in his heart that he will get it, and tacks the name of Jesus on the end of the prayer, then if God does not answer that prayer, Jesus lied and the Bible is false.

Is it true that the Bible's teaching on prayer cannot be reconciled with what we see happening in daily life? Did Jesus make false statements to His disciples about the efficacy of prayer? Is the skeptics' interpretation of Jesus' statements accurate and justified? The answer

to these questions is a resounding "No." An honest, critical look at the Bible's teachings regarding prayer reveals that its teachings are internally consistent and correspond perfectly with reality.

QUALIFYING A STATEMENT

Most of us understand the concept of attaching qualifying remarks to a statement. For instance, hypothetical syllogisms constructed with "if-then" clauses are good examples of qualification. Suppose a person named Bill makes the statement: "If John works for eight hours, then I will give John $50." If John demands payment from Bill without doing the work, he has misunderstood the qualifier. He could contend that Bill said: "I will give John $50." Even though, technically speaking, John's quotation is correct, his argument would fail because he disregarded the qualifying statement: "If John works for eight hours." Without the first condition being met, the person making the statement is not responsible for fulfilling the second condition. In regard to prayer in the Bible, even a superficial reading of the New Testament shows that many of Jesus' statements concerning prayer are qualified by certain criteria that must be met in order for that prayer to be effective.

IN THE NAME OF JESUS

John 14:14, one of the skeptics' favorite verses to quote along these lines, can be used to show one of the primary "qualifying" concepts concerning prayer. In that verse, Jesus told His disciples: "if you ask anything **in My name**, I will do it." It is extremely important that we understand how the Bible uses the phrase "in Jesus' name." The way the skeptic understands this verse, the phrase means that as long as a person puts the words "in Jesus' name" at the end of a prayer, then God is obli-

gated to answer that prayer positively. Attaching Jesus' name on the end of a prayer, however, is not what the Bible means when it says that a prayer is to be offered "in Jesus' name." The phrase "in Jesus' name" means that whatever is being said or done must be done **by the authority** of Jesus. Earnest Bible students have long understood this to be the proper use of the phrase. In fact, Colossians 3:17 makes this clear: "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him." This verse does not mean that you should proclaim before every action or sentence that what follows is being done "in Jesus' name." It means that whatever actions are taken or words are spoken should be **in accord with Jesus' teachings and by His authority**.

To illustrate, suppose a man bangs on your door and yells: "Open this door in the name of the Law." Should you open the door for this man? That depends. If he truly is a policeman who has a warrant and has been authorized by the government to enter your house, then you should. However, if he is a civilian off the street who simply added the phrase "in the name of the Law" to his sentence to make it sound more forceful, then you should not open the door. The phrase "in the name of the Law" only has force if the person using it is actually authorized by the government to perform the action. In the same way, the phrase "in Jesus' name" (or "in the name of Jesus") only has power if what is being prayed for truly is authorized by Jesus. For instance, if a person prayed, "Lord, please forgive me of my sins even though I will not forgive others of their sins, in Jesus' name, Amen," would Jesus comply with such a request? No, because He explained that God will forgive only those people who are willing to forgive others (Matthew 6:14-15). Including the phrase "in Jesus' name" does

not give a prayer some magical power that allows the request to bypass the authority and teachings of Christ.

In the book of Acts, we see an extremely effective illustration of this truth. Paul, Peter, and the other apostles were preaching and doing miracles "in the name of Jesus." Their healing activities were authorized by Christ, and their message was inspired by the Holy Spirit. Seeing how effectively Paul accomplished such miracles, "some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists took it upon themselves to call the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying 'We adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches'" (Acts 19:13). The itinerant Jewish exorcists had fallen into the same misunderstanding as the modern skeptic. They thought that by simply tacking Jesus' name onto their activities, that would qualify as doing things "in Jesus' name." The result of their misuse of Jesus' name quickly became apparent. When seven sons of Sceva attempted to invoke Jesus' name, the evil spirit answered: "'Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?' Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overpowered them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded" (Acts 19:14-16). Simply adding Jesus' name to actions or requests that Jesus has not authorized does not qualify as doing something "in Jesus' name" as the Bible instructs. [NOTE: Even though the skeptic does not believe the story in Acts to be true, he cannot deny that the story provides a valid illustration and explanatory commentary on what the Bible means by saying or doing something "in Jesus' name." If the skeptic is going to attack the Bible's position on prayer, he or she must allow the Bible to explain itself.]

ACCORDING TO GOD'S WILL

It is inexcusable for a person to claim to attack the Bible's position on prayer, but then to avoid many of the paramount concepts associated with the Bible's teaching on the subject. You can know that any person who pulls verses out of context about prayer, and does not turn to primary passages, such as Matthew 6:9-15, is either unaware that such passages are in the Bible, or is intentionally being intellectually dishonest. If you really want to know what Jesus taught on prayer, you simply must consider **all** that He taught about prayer, not just the few scattered verses skeptics want to rip from their contexts.

In Jesus' instructions to His disciples regarding prayer, He explained that they should include in their prayers the idea that God's will should be done (Matthew 6:10). The apostle John, who would have been well-aware of Jesus' teaching on prayer, stated: "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything **according to His will**, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him" (1 John 5:14-15). Notice that if we do not include verse 14 of 1 John 5, we could make the passage say, "whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him." Yet to do that would be to leave off the important qualifying statement that the request should be in accordance with God's will, and should be offered from a heart that is humble enough to accept God's will–even if that means that the request is denied. When the skeptic pulls snippets of verses from the Gospel accounts concerning prayer, he or she is guilty of leaving off just such important qualifying information.

When we consider the idea of praying "according to God's will," we can see how important this qualifier is. No requests will be granted that attempt to violate or circumvent God's ultimate will. For instance, suppose a person were to pray: "God, please save my mother even though she does not believe in Jesus Christ and refuses to repent of her sins, please let her go to heaven anyway, in Jesus' name, Amen." Would God grant that petition? The Bible is clear that He certainly would not, because to do so would be to violate His ultimate will that salvation is through the name of Jesus (Acts 4:12).

Furthermore, certain events and actions in this physical world are required for God to accomplish His will on this Earth. For instance, if one of Jesus' apostle had asked God to spare the life of Jesus and not let Him die on the cross, that request would not have been in accord with God's ultimate will and would not have been answered in the affirmative. Mark 8:33 provides an excellent example of this when Peter rebuked Jesus for predicting His own death. Jesus responded to Peter, saying: "Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men." Whereas Peter most likely thought his actions were in accord with God's will, they were not. To further illustrate, many events in the life of the Old Testament character Joseph may have seemed unfair at the time. No doubt Joseph prayed to be freed from slavery or to be released from jail. But at the end of Joseph's life, we see that God's will was to make him a great leader in Egypt and to save the Jewish nation through him. Joseph recognized this, and said to his brothers who had sold him into Egypt: "Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant if for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive" (Genesis 50:20). Joseph's slavery and

incarceration were the vehicles by which God brought Joseph to power, accomplishing His will.

Could it be that humans are unaware of all of God's plans for their lives? Absolutely. Moses wrote: "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deuteronomy 29:29). Is there any indication that God revealed to any humans His plans for Joseph before they were carried out? No. Is there any indication that God told any humans about His conference with Satan and His plan for Job prior to the events? None. Is God obligated to express to humans all the various aspects of His will? Certainly not. That is one of the points Jesus was attempting to make in His teachings on prayer. Even though we may not know the specific will of God for our lives, we must pray with a heart that is ready to accept the events God allows, understanding that God has a will to which we are not always privy.

It is important to be clear that once it is proven that certain qualifications do apply to prayer, the skeptic must alter the entire argument against it. Instead of the Bible's position being internally inconsistent or at odds with reality, the skeptic must drop back and demand that, even though it **cannot be proven to be such**, prayer is "useless." Again, however, the skeptics' assertion that praying according to God's will renders the prayer useless to change the world is groundless. Could it be possible that multiple outcomes to certain events or situations fit into God's will? Surely. To illustrate, suppose that a father was getting a child a drink from the refrigerator. The father had various nutritious options from which to choose including juice, milk, or water. Could the child request water and that option be

according to the father's will? Sure. If the child requested juice, could that option be equally as acceptable as water? Yes. But suppose the child requested something not in the refrigerator, or something harmful to drink. While those options would be outside the father's will, the other three choices of milk, water, or juice would all be possibilities. Thus, if the child wanted juice, and asked for it, then the child's request (prayer) would be effective. [NOTE: The skeptic may attempt to say that since God knows everything, He should know what His children want before they ask. But the Bible articulates this very point in Matthew 6:8. While it is true that God knows everything (Psalm 139:1-6), it is also true that God has instructed His children to ask for what they desire (Matthew 7:7). Numerous reasons could be given for why God wants His children to present their requests to Him. One is simply that God wants humans to understand their dependence on Him (Acts 17:28).]

To illustrate, there are several biblical examples in which God's will for people involved considerable latitude in what He could allow to happen. For instance, 2 Kings 20:1-11 gives us the story of Hezekiah's terminal sickness. The prophet Isaiah informed Hezekiah that he was going to die. Hezekiah then turned his face to the wall and prayed that the Lord would extend His life. The Lord listened to his prayer and extended Hezekiah's life for fifteen years. Here we have an example of two outcomes both of which were consistent with God's will on Earth: Hezekiah living and Hezekiah dying. Without Hezekiah's prayer, he would have died of his sickness. Because of his prayer, however, God intervened and allowed Hezekiah to live. Contrary to the skeptics' false assertion, Hezekiah's prayer certainly did have the power to alter real world events. It is also interesting to note that Hezekiah's sickness was healed through **natural**

means. Isaiah instructed the king's attendants to place a poultice of figs on Hezekiah's boil. When they did so, Hezekiah recovered. This story provides an excellent example of a person who prayed according to God's will. That prayer drastically altered nature, and God worked through natural means to accomplish His purpose. [NOTE: While the skeptic may refuse to accept the truthfulness of this Bible story, he cannot refute the fact that the story provides at least a theoretical explanation as to how a person could pray in accordance with God's will and alter the course of nature.]

BELIEVING YOU WILL RECEIVE

Another widely recognized qualification for effective prayer is that the one praying must honestly believe that God can and will grant the prayer, if it is according to His will. As Jesus stated in Matthew 21:22: "And all things, whatever you ask in prayer, **believing**, you will receive." Of course, this verse does not mean that believing is the only prerequisite for having a prayer answered. Factors that we have mentioned such as asking by the authority of Jesus and according to God's will are necessary as well. But this verse and others teach us that belief is a necessary component of effective prayer, which is stated clearly in James 1:5-8.

It is often the case that the skeptic will contend that millions of good Christian people regularly pray for things they that do not receive. The skeptic usually stresses that the people truly believed that they would receive them, and yet their prayers were ineffective. The skeptic claims to know for a fact that the petitioners in question honestly believed their prayers would be answered positively. Yet it must be stressed that the skeptic has no possible way of knowing who, in their hearts, truly believe that God will answer their prayers.

Even some who claim to believe in the outcome could be harboring doubts about God's power and promises in regard to prayer. In truth, a person would need to be able to search people's hearts and minds to be an accurate judge of belief. And since the Bible explains that only God is capable of knowing the secrets of the heart (Psalm 44:21), then only He would be in a position to gauge a person's true belief. While it is true that other factors such as praying according to God's will and by the authority of Christ influence the effectiveness of prayer, it is also true that fervent belief in God's willingness and ability to answer a prayer are also necessary for the prayer to be successful.

THE PRAYER OF A RIGHTEOUS MAN OR WOMAN

The Bible writers stress throughout the text, from the Old Testament to the New, that sinful, rebellious people should not expect to have God answer their prayers in a positive way. Only penitent, obedient followers of Christ are promised God's listening ear and His active hand in their lives. As James 5:16 states: "The effective, fervent prayer of a **righteous** man avails much." Peter stated:

> He who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking guile; let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil (1 Peter 3:10-12).

The unnamed blind man Jesus healed summarized this position well when he stated: "Now we know that God does not hear sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him" (John 9:31). The writer of Proverbs noted: "The Lord is far from the wicked, but He hears the prayer of the righteous" (15:29).

The book of Ezekiel provides further evidence that righteousness is a required element of effective prayer. During Ezekiel's day, the elders and leaders of the Jewish nation had begun to worship idols. Yet, in their troubled times, they also attempted to seek the true God along with their idols. Ezekiel 14:1-4 states:

> Now some of the elders of Israel came to me and sat before me. And the word of the Lord came to me saying, "Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their hearts, and put before them that which causes them to stumble into iniquity. Should I let Myself be inquired of at all by them? Therefore speak to them, and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: "Everyone of the house of Israel who sets up his idols in his heart, and puts before him what causes him to stumble into iniquity, and then comes to the prophet, I the Lord will answer him who comes, according to the multitude of his idols, that I may seize the house of Israel by their heart, because they are estranged from Me by their idols."'"

The Bible clearly and plainly teaches that those who are not faithfully following God should not expect Him to answer their prayers. It should also be noted along these lines that, although many people feel that they are faithful followers of Christ, they have not obeyed God's will. As Jesus stated:

> Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord," shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?" And then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!" (Matthew 7:21-23).

It is often the case that a bulk of the people who skeptics claim are faithful followers of Christ simply have not obeyed God and, according to the Bible's teachings, should not expect Him to answer their prayers because of their rebellious lives.

SELFISH MOTIVES AND DESIRES

Suppose that a person prays that God will give him ten thousand dollars every day for the rest of his life **so that he can spend that money only on himself to gratify his physical pleasures**. Even if he adds the phrase, "in Jesus' name" to the end of that prayer, and honestly believes that God will answer the prayer, is God obligated to comply with such a request? The way the skeptic has twisted the Scriptures, God is bound to grant such an absurd appeal. Yet an elementary understanding of the biblical doctrine of prayer quickly sets such a conclusion on its head. One of the key concepts regarding prayer centers on the reason for which the petitioner is making the request. If the one making the request is driven by selfish, impure motives, then he or she cannot expect God to grant the plea. James made this point abundantly clear when he wrote: "You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may **spend it on your pleasures**" (4:2-3). Selfish ambitions not motivated by a sense of spiritual concern nullify the effectiveness of prayer.

Acts 8:9-25 provides an adequate illustration of this truth. In this passage, a man named Simon had been practicing sorcery in the city of Samaria. Many of the Samaritans had been convinced by his deceptive, "magic" tricks. When Philip visited the area, however, and preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ, a host of the Samaritans believed and obeyed the truth, including Simon the sorcerer. After a while, the apostles came to the area and laid their hands on some of the disciples for the purpose of imparting spiritual gifts to them. When Simon saw this power, he offered the apostles

money, requesting to purchase the ability to give people spiritual gifts. Apparently, he had not purged himself of old habits of selfish ambition. Peter rebuked Simon and explained that he needed to repent and beg God to forgive him of the wicked thoughts and intents of his heart. Simon's request for the power to impart the gifts of the Holy Spirit was denied, not only because it violated the will of God, but also because it was issued out of purely selfish motives.

Jesus further documented the fact that prayers which issue from selfish motivations will not be effective. In the Sermon on the Mount, He stated: "And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward" (Matthew 6:5). The hypocrites' showy prayers designed to garner public approval negated the effectiveness of their requests.

PERSISTENCE

The persistence of the petition is another factor that the Bible indicates has a bearing on the efficacy of prayer. In Luke 18:1, the Gospel writer stated: "Then He [Jesus] spoke a parable to them, that men **always ought** to pray and not lose heart." The parable Jesus told in this context was about a widow who made a request to an unjust judge. Her request was noble and right, but the unjust judge did not feel obligated to comply with her appeal. Due to her persistence, however, and her "continual coming" to the judge, he finally granted her petition. Jesus then commented that if an unjust judge can be swayed by persistence, how much more effective is the persistent prayer of a virtuous person when addressed to the righteous Judge of all the Earth.

Additionally, Jesus told of a man who visited his neighbor at midnight requesting bread to feed a guest. Initially, the neighbor refused the request, but eventually he complied. Jesus stated: "I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet **because of his persistence** he will rise and give him as many as he needs." Jesus then coupled this parable with the instructions to be persistent in requests to God (vss. 9-13). In fact, throughout the Scriptures, persistence plays a prominent role in effective prayer (see Philippians 1:4; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; Ephesians 6:18; Luke 2:37).

THE PRAYER EXPERIMENT

One prominent atheistic writer caustically attacked the concept of the effectiveness of prayer to accomplish any real world results. He focused primarily on a "prayer experiment" in which approximately 1,800 heart patients were divided into three groups: "Group 1 received prayers and didn't know it. Group 2 (the control group) received no prayers and didn't know it. Group 3 received prayers and did know it."[1] The results of the experiment suggested that the prayers that were offered for groups 1 and 3 did not favorably affect the successful results of their surgery or recovery. The skeptic focused on these negative results, insinuating that such an experiment **proves** that prayer is useless and the Bible's teaching on the topic is at odds with reality. He quoted one of the religious people who had offered some of the prayers, who stated that the results did not dissuade him from his belief in the efficacy of prayer. He then sarcastically retorted: "Yeah, right: we know from our faith that prayer works, so if evidence fails to show it we'll just soldier on until finally we get the result we want."[2]

The skeptic's assessment of the experiment, however, shows a glaring ignorance of the Bible's true position concerning prayer, and a complete failure to approach the subject with any type of scholarly rigor. Every critique of a scientific experiment must certainly include a knowledge and understanding of the factors that would "skew" the results of the study. For instance, if the Bible plainly says that the prayers of a righteous person and those of an unrighteous person differ in their efficacy, then such information must be considered in order for an accurate assessment of any prayer experiment to take place. Furthermore, if the Bible specifically details that the motives driving a particular request have a bearing on the answer, then the "experimental" format in which the prayers were offered would itself be called into question and would adversely effect the accuracy of the report. In addition, if the Bible clearly states that those who are praying must truly believe that God, according to His will, will comply with the request, then the level of belief held by each of the members in the "prayer groups" must be factored into the critique of the experiment.

Please do not misunderstand what is being said. It is impossible to know or compare the faithfulness of a prayer group, much less each individual's level of belief. Nor would it be feasible to attempt to study the various lives of the ones who were being prayed for and try to systematically document how their health or sickness would factor into God's will on this Earth. We are not suggesting that the experiment could have been arranged better so that more accurate results could have been obtained. A negative result to prayer cannot prove that prayer is ineffective, but only that at least one of the biblical criteria was lacking. We are suggesting, however, that the skeptics' failure to comprehensively view the Bible's

qualifications about prayer, and glossing over the true facts concerning prayer, would not be tolerated in any critique of a scientific experiment, and should be shown to have absolutely no value in discrediting the Bible's position on prayer. [NOTE: It is unfortunate that even some religious people have so misunderstood the Bible's teachings about prayer that they would even attempt such an experiment. We would be wise to consider that many people who profess to be defending the Bible's position on subjects such as prayer are actually doing more harm than good by misrepresenting the truth.]

CONCLUSION

To document the millions of incidents in which people's prayers have been answered positively would be humanly impossible. The Bible offers a multitude of examples in which the prayers of God's faithful followers were answered, and modern Christians could detail countless examples of such in their personal lives. It is true, however, that God does not always respond positively to all those who petition Him. The skeptic delights in pulling out scattered verses, misrepresenting the Scriptures' true position on prayer, and demanding that the Bible cannot be God's Word, since its teachings concerning prayer are "contradictory" and do not accurately represent what occurs in the real world. A critical look at the skeptics' claims, however, quickly and clearly reveals that much is amiss with their allegations. It is only the feeble straw man built by the skeptic's own imagination that can be effectively demolished. An accurate representation of the Bible's position concerning prayer reveals complete internal consistency and perfect correspondence to real world events. The Bible explains that prayer is not a magic incantation that can be spouted out to accomplish selfish ambitions. Instead,

the effective prayer comes from a righteous person, who prays persistently, by the authority of Christ, according to God's will, out of unselfish motives, believing he or she will receive the petitions requested.

ENDNOTES

[1] Richard Dawkins (2006), *The God Delusion* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin), p. 66.

[2] Ibid.

CHAPTER 17

WHY IS THE BIBLE SO HARD TO UNDERSTAND?

Most Christians who have ever tried to talk to someone about God have been asked why the Bible is so hard to understand. The idea behind this question is that if God is perfect and knows everything, and if He wants all people to know His will, then wouldn't he have written a very simple book that everyone could easily understand? Is the Bible really hard to understand? And if it is, why would a loving God write such a book?

Before Answering, Look Closely at the Question

Christians generally take the question at face value. We feel like we need to answer it the way it is presented, because we all know that we have run across passages that are difficult to get our minds around. The fact is, however, the question is worded in a way that **assumes** an idea to be true that is not. It is one of those questions that if you answer it the way it is stated, you have painted yourself into a corner. We are all familiar with such questions. Someone might ask a man, "Have you stopped beating your wife?" A "yes" or "no" answer assumes, or at least comes across as if, he was beating his wife at some point. If this man has never beaten his wife, then he needs to clarify the question. He might insist that he cannot answer the question as it is presented, since

he has never beaten his wife. We can see how tricky such questions are designed to be. "Why is the Bible so hard to understand?" is one of those tricky questions. If you begin to answer it as it is presented, then you let the inquirer assume that the Bible as a whole is hard to understand. That is simply not the case. The Bible contains countless passages composed of thousands of words that are extremely easy to understand. The narrative of the wise men coming from the east to visit baby Jesus in Bethlehem is easy enough for small children to grasp (Matthew 1:18-2:12). The account of the Jewish rulers subjecting Jesus to a farce of a trial and deviously manipulating Pilate to have Him crucified is not hard to comprehend (Mark 14-15). The commandment to stop stealing and commit to respectable work is extremely easy to figure out (Ephesians 4:28). The vast majority of the Bible is rather easy to understand.

The question would be more accurately restated, "Why are some parts of the Bible hard to understand?" It certainly is true that some of the Bible is difficult to understand. The Bible itself admits as much. Peter wrote about the apostle Paul's writings, saying, "as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are **some things** hard to understand, which those who are untaught and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the rest of the Scriptures" (2 Peter 3:16). The implication of this statement is that most things Paul says are quite understandable, but some things are more difficult than others. Peter goes on to explain that those who twist these difficult passages are "untaught" and "unstable." He explains that they even do the same with aspects of the Bible (the rest of the Scriptures) that are **not** difficult to understand.

The situation can be illustrated by a comparison to the study of physics. Suppose a person asks, "Why is physics so hard to understand?" Anyone who has spent time in a classroom studying the equations of acceleration and other complicated mathematical formulas initially accepts the question as it is stated and tries to explain the more complicated aspects of the science. Not all aspects of physics, however, are difficult to understand. In fact, if you succeed in staying alive for an entire day, then you have a solid working idea of physics. Even young children, at an early age, learn you cannot jump off tall buildings, step in front of moving cars, dive face first onto concrete, throw baseballs at glass windows, stand under a falling tree, or jump off a bike speeding down a hill. The concept of gravity, though it can be broken down into complicated equations, can still be understood on a basic level by young children. Sure, the study of subatomic particles, relativity, or quantum physics can get cerebral rather quickly. It is still the case, however, that most people understand a huge amount of physics. Even so with the Bible, while it might be difficult to pinpoint who the number 666 is supposed to represent (Revelation 13:18), or who the man of sin represents (2 Thessalonians 2:3), much of the Bible is very easy to understand. Love your neighbor, forgive others, feed the poor, help the sick, take care of widows and orphans, and pray for your enemies are instructions even the youngest among us comprehend.

You Are Only Expected to Know What You Should Know

Someone might ask, however, that if there are difficult parts of the Bible, then isn't it the case that all people must know even the most difficult parts in order to understand what God wants from them? The Bible

answers that question by explaining that each person is only responsible for the aspects of God's Word that they **should** know. It is common sense that a person who has been a Christian for 30 years and has been given access to the Bible that entire time would understand God's Word better than a person who is a new Christian and has just been exposed to the Word of God. The Bible illustrates this idea by comparing those who have had little opportunity to digest God's Word to babies who need milk and not solid food (1 Peter 2:2). As the "child" in the Word grows, he or she should progress to understanding more about God and His Word and begin to comprehend the more difficult aspects of the Bible. Sometimes, however, people who should be understanding more are not growing as they should. As the Hebrews writer scolded his readers, "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need **milk** and not **solid food**. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Hebrews 5:12-14). Notice that the author recognized that at one time, his readers were "newborns" and were only responsible for grasping the milk of the Word. That time was past, however, and they had not trained themselves to understand more difficult aspects of the spiritual world. God will never hold people responsible for understanding more of His will than their life situations and capabilities afford. A 13-year-old who has just become a Christian will not comprehend as much about God and the spiritual world as a faithful Christian who has been studying the Bible for 50 years.

7 COMMON REASONS PEOPLE MISUNDERSTAND THE BIBLE

1: They Do Not Read It

The primary reason many people do not understand the Bible is simply because they do not read it. Many people want to. They make resolutions to. They buy and read other books about it. They talk about reading it. They even start the beginning of each year determined to make it through the Bible. Sadly, however, all the resolve and talk seem to accomplish very little when it comes to actually reading the Bible. Ironically, people often complain that they do not read the Bible because it is difficult to understand. Of course it will be somewhat difficult to understand if we do not read it.

Any book that contains helpful information of any sort must be read in order to be understood. The Bible writers made this point perfectly clear. Paul said that God had revealed a message to him that he then put in written form to the Ephesians. He then stated, "by which, when you **read**, you may **understand** my knowledge in the mystery of Christ" (Ephesians 3:4). There were no hidden codes in the original language of Paul's letter to the Ephesians. No special formulas were needed to uncover the "mystery" of Christ. They simply needed to read Paul's inspired message recorded in the book of Ephesians (and the New Testament).

This idea of reading the Word carried with it an understanding that some who would be exposed to the Word could not read. In Revelation 1:3, the text states, "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near." Many early church worship assemblies included a time when a reader would stand

and read Scripture aloud, as is evident from Revelation 1:3. Both the listeners and the readers were then challenged to "keep the things" (obey) written in the Bible. It may be true that a person is a poor reader, or even has poor eyesight or another physical disability that keeps him from reading. The point, however, is clear: take the Word of God into your mind through reading or listening and apply it to your life. In 1 Timothy 4:13, Paul told Timothy, "Till I come, give attention to **reading**, to exhortation, to doctrine." The NIV and ESV both translate this verse using "public reading," meaning that Timothy was to publically read the Scriptures to the Church regularly.

How is it that the successful stockbroker knows which stock to buy, when to buy it, and when to sell it? He studies the market, looks at data, listens to podcasts, and immerses himself in the information. How is it that the extreme couponer knows how to buy certain foods at certain stores and clip and cut coupons to save thousands of dollars each year? She pours over the papers, the store adds, and the on-line sale material, spending hours just getting ready to go to the store. How does a successful doctor learn to treat patients with diseases or difficulties that the doctor herself has never seen? She studies the literature, reviews the latest test results, and looks to research and journals that provide the most up-to-date material on the issue. In a similar way, if you want to understand the Bible, you must "be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). In order to understand the Bible, we simply must read it.

2: The "Flip-and-Point" Method

Many of us have done it. We will be lying in bed about ready to go to sleep, but we feel the need to have our "daily dose" of Bible. So, we roll over, grab our Bible off the bedside table and think that the Lord will somehow "show us" what He wants us to know by directing the Bible to flip open to the proper page for us at this particular time in our lives. We then flip the Bible open, drop our finger on the page, and begin to read. What happens when we flip to Job 22:3 and read Eliphaz's comments, "Is it any pleasure to the Almighty that you are righteous? Or is it gain to Him that you make your ways blameless?" Eliphaz goes on to accuse Job, "Is not your wickedness great, and your iniquity without end? For you have taken pledges from your brother for no reason, and stripped the naked of their clothing" (22:5).[1] Or what do we do when we turn to Psalm 139:9, "Happy shall he be who takes and dashes your little ones against the stone."[2] Or "Therefore I hated life because the work that was done under the sun was grievous to me, for all is vanity and grasping for the wind. Then I hated all my labor in which I had toiled under the sun, because I must leave it to the man who will come after me" (Ecclesiastes 2:17-18).

Such an unsystematic approach to the Bible will not fail to confuse even the most sincere. Imagine trying this flip-and-point method with the owner's manual to your new phone. You might be trying to turn the phone on, but you flip to the section that tells about how to download pictures. This method would be a ridiculous way to figure out how to change a tire from your car manual while you are stranded on the side of the road with a flat. Imagine a poor algebra student practicing the flip method early in the semester and flipping to the

back of the book and "diving in," trying to grasp the concepts. In order to understand the Bible, we should make a dedicated effort to reading all of it in context in a systematic way. Of course, many passages in the Bible would be perfectly fine to read independently of others and require very little context or understanding of surrounding material. But a **habitual** flip-and-point approach will inevitably lead to misunderstanding and frustration.

3: Unfamiliar Ancient Customs and Practices

Moses penned the first five books of the Old Testament in the mid-1400s B.C. The last books of the New Testament were finished by A.D. 100. That means that in modern times, we are separated from even the latest parts of the Bible by almost 2,000 years. At times, the customs and practices of the ancient world are unfamiliar to us, which leads us to misunderstand what the text is trying to say. For instance, Proverbs 20:11 says, "Diverse weights and diverse measures, they are both alike, an abomination to the Lord." The ESV says, "Unequal weights and unequal measures." What is so bad about "diverse" or "unequal" measures? Why does God hate them? In ancient times, merchants often bought and sold materials such as grain, gold, and silver that needed to be weighed. Dishonest merchants would have two sets of weights. They would use one set for buying and one set for selling. Suppose a farmer brought his grain to the merchant and the broker agreed to buy one pound of grain. The crooked buyer would reach into his "buying" weight bag and pull out the weight marked "One Pound." The weight was actually slightly heavier than one pound, so the merchant would get more than a pound of grain for the price of a pound. When the merchant went to sell the grain, he would pull out his "selling"

weight marked "One Pound." This weight would be less than a pound. So when he sold the "pound" it was actually less than a pound. The transaction of buying "one" pound and selling "one" pound would gain the corrupt businessman more grain when it should have been an exactly equal trade. The two differing weights were marked the same, but their weights were different. Knowing this ancient custom helps us understand that the Proverbs writer is condemning corrupt, dishonest business practices.

4: Confusing and Inaccurate Translations

We have all heard the term "lost in translation." The process of translating a message from one language to another language is a tricky business. Those who have taken on the responsibility of translating the Bible from its original languages have often taken the job very seriously and taken great pains to get the translations as accurate as possible. The end product has been a number of very useful and accurate versions and translations of the Bible. For all that effort, however, it is important to understand that there is no perfect translation. The original message that God inspired directly to the original writers that is contained in the original manuscripts of the Bible is God-breathed, but translations of that message are not. Therefore, we sometimes see poor translations of certain passages causing confusion and misunderstanding.

One such passage is found in Acts 2:29. In this context, Peter preached the first recorded Gospel sermon to those in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. He used Old Testament prophecy to verify that Christ died, but that He also rose from the grave. He quoted from Psalm 16 and stated that the writer of that psalm, King David, "seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ

that his soul was not left in **hell**, neither his flesh did see corruption" (Acts 2:29, KJV). The picture that this translation of Acts 2:29 paints is that Jesus went to hell, where the sinful lost will be consigned for eternity. In fact, this verse has been used to teach that those in hell at that time were given a second chance to repent at the teachings of Jesus. This unfortunate translation has further lent itself to the concept of purgatory and the idea that once a person is dead, there will be a second chance to obey God in the afterlife.[3]

The inaccuracy lies in the use of the word "hell." The Greek text actually uses the word *hades. Hades* is the word for the realm of all the dead. It is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word *sheol*, and it makes no differentiation between those who die in a saved state or those who die in a lost state. It is simply the realm of all the dead, whether righteous or wicked. The concept of hell, however, is associated with the wicked dead. We read in Mark 9:43, "If your right hand makes you sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed, than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched, where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched." This verse discusses hell, but it does not use the word *hades* (the realm of all the dead). It uses the word *gehenna*, which is where the "fires of hell" will burn forever. Jesus never went to *gehenna.* In fact, just the opposite is the case. While on the cross, the penitent thief asked Jesus to remember him when the Lord came into His Kingdom. Jesus responded to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). When Jesus died on the cross, He did not go to hell, He went to Paradise.

To further understand the situation, we turn our attention to Luke 16:19-31. This text contains the story

of the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man apparently was greedy and apathetic to Lazarus' poor, pitiful condition. The text explains that they both died. They both entered into the realm of hades, the realm of all dead. They are, however, in different places in hades. Lazarus is in the realm of the dead in a place referred to as "Abraham's bosom" (16:22). This would be the Paradise that Jesus mentioned to the thief on the cross. The text details the fate of the rich man, "And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom" (16:23). Notice the place of "torments" was located in hades along with Abraham's bosom. The text further notes that there was no way to cross from torment to Abraham's bosom and that both fates of the dead Lazarus and rich man were sealed for all eternity (16:27). Going back to Acts 2, when Jesus died, He did not go to torments or gehenna, He went to hades, the realm of all the dead. Hades is currently divided into two sections: Paradise (Abraham's bosom) and torments. Jesus went to Paradise, not torments. The mistranslation that Jesus went "to hell" confuses this situation and lends itself to any number misunderstandings.

This type of misunderstanding and mistranslation can happen with the simplest matters. For instance, I once sat in a Bible class discussion on the life of Samson. The teacher had been telling about Samson's poor choices of marrying a Philistine wife. Samson was forced to leave her for a time, but he wanted to see her again. The text explains, "But it came to pass within a while after, in the time of wheat harvest, that Samson visited his wife with a kid; and he said, I will go in to my wife into the chamber" (Judges 15:1, KJV). The teacher proceeded to explain that the two had a child together and that the "kid" was the result of their previous union. In fact, the kid was a large part of the teacher's discus-

sion. I was reading from the NKJV at the time, which states, "it happened that Samson visited his wife with a young goat." The "kid" in this context was not a human child, it was a gift for his wife. Young goat is the proper translation here.

Did you know that unicorns are in the Bible? Numbers 23:22 says, "God brought them out of Egypt, he hath as it were the strength of an unicorn" (KJV). The prophet Isaiah wrote, "And the unicorns shall come down with them, and the bullocks with the bulls" (34:7, KJV). When you think of the word "unicorn," what comes to your mind? If you are like most of us, you picture a perfectly white horse with a spiraling single horn projecting from the center of its majestic head. You probably also associate such a "creature" with magical fairy tales. Is the Bible referring to such a mythical creature? Again, this is just a case of a poor translation. The actual word in these verses is the Hebrew word *re'em*. It could be referring to a one-horned animal such as a rhinoceros, but most translators who have studied the word believe it is simply a wild ox.[4] There is no hint of mythical, magical one-horned horses in these verses. Imagine the poor third-grade girl whose favorite creature is a unicorn coming across this unfortunate translation in the Bible! As was stated earlier, there are no perfect translations. The above examples are from the King James Version, but each translation has it's own issues. It is the job of the sincere Bible student to "be diligent" and put the work into finding out the real meaning of the text. Most of the time, any decent English translation can render the meaning rather easily. Sometimes, however, it takes a little more work to ferret out what is being said.

5: Misleading Teachers

It is sad but true that one of the primary reasons people misunderstand the Bible is because they have been misled by their teachers. The Bible is filled with warnings about false teachers who will lead many away from the truth. Paul warned Timothy, "Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to **deceiving** spirits and the **doctrines** of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron" (1 Timothy 4:1-2). Paul told the Ephesian elders, "For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also, from among yourselves men will rise up, **speaking perverse things**, to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:29-30). Luke, the writer of Acts, explains that during the missionary work of Paul, Jewish teachers who opposed him "stirred up the Gentiles and **poisoned their minds** against the brethren" (Acts 14:2). Cult leaders such as Jim Jones, David Koresh, and Marshall Applewhite (Heaven's Gate), provide testimony to the fact that persuasive teachers, tragically can mislead their followers. Founders of religious movements such as Joseph Smith of the Mormons and Muhammed of Islam show the power of false teaching and its ability to influence the masses.

How can a person guard against being led away by false teaching? I once was at a Summer Camp where the late Jerry Jenkins was addressing this very issue. He had been preaching the Gospel for decades at the time and was an excellent communicator. The illustration went something like this. He stood before the gathering of young people and held up a Bible. "How many of you believe this Bible is 18 inches long?" The Bible was

much smaller than that, as most of the audience could see, and no hands went up. He then talked about the importance of a standard and how we can't just make up lengths; instead, we need something to measure them by. He pulled out a tape measure and put it next to the Bible and measured it. "Eight inches. Now how many of you in the audience believe the Bible is eight inches long?" Virtually the entire audience raised their hands. After all, he had measured the Bible using a legitimate standard. To the audience's surprise, however, he exclaimed, "You are all wrong." Then he took the tape measure and the Bible to a young person on the front row and asked the person to read the length—seven inches. Dr. Jenkins then explained that we should never accept what a person tells us the standard says. Instead, we should measure and see for ourselves. His point was clear: Just because someone tells you that the Bible says or means this or that, does not make it so. You should not take their word for it. You should check it out for yourself. This mode of operation is just what the Jews in Berea followed when Paul and Silas came to their city to preach. The text states, "These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11). The only way to avoid being led astray by false teaching is to compare the teaching to what the Scriptures say.

6: Heart Issues

We all like to think that we come to the biblical text with sincere hearts, wanting nothing more than to hear what God says to us. If we are honest, however, we know that certain teachings are harder to "understand" than others. It is not that the wording is confusing, it

is that the teaching would force us to change the way we think or act in ways we would find very difficult. It may be that Jesus' teaching on marriage and divorce in Matthew 19:1-9 means that a person would need to get out of an adulterous relationship. It may mean that what a person's parents taught and lived is unscriptural, and to accept the Bible's teaching on a subject would be to admit that one's parents were mistaken. An accurate understanding of a text might mean what a person has taught thousands of people has been wrong, and the responsibility for such false teaching would be extremely difficult for that person to shoulder. Of all the reasons that people "misunderstand" the Bible, this one is probably the most common. We often come to the Bible, not to hear what God is **actually saying**, but to be justified in what we have already decided God **should be saying**.

This situation is not new. The book of Jeremiah provides an excellent example of what often happens. The Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and took thousands of Israelites captive. They left a scattered remnant in the land. Those who were left gathered together to talk to Jeremiah about their options. They were trying to decide if they should flee to Egypt or stay in the land of Israel. They brought the question to Jeremiah to take before the Lord. They said, "Please, let our petition be acceptable to you, and pray for us to the Lord your God...that the Lord your God may show us the way in which we should walk and the thing we should do" (Jeremiah 42:2-3). The prophet agreed to take it before God and to come back to them with a divine answer. "Then they said to Jeremiah, 'Let the Lord be a true and faithful witness between us, if we do not do according to everything which the Lord your God sends us by you. Whether it be pleasing or displeasing, we will obey the voice of the Lord our God to whom we send you"

(42:5-6). What a commendable attitude these people had. They professed sincerity and complete obedience to whatever God would tell them to do.

After 10 days, God spoke to Jeremiah and gave him directions for the people. God, through Jeremiah, told the people to stay in the land of Israel. He specifically and adamantly warned them not to go to Egypt. After Jeremiah delivered the message, the people responded, "You speak falsely! The Lord our God has not sent you to say, 'Do not go to Egypt to sojourn there'" (43:2). They then disobeyed the message and fled to Egypt. Jeremiah boldly declared, "For you were hypocrites in your hearts when you sent me to the Lord your God, saying, 'Pray for us to the Lord our God, according to all that the Lord your God says, so declare to us and we will do it'" (42:20). How tragic it is that many people, like the Israelites, profess sincerity and an honest desire to know what God says. Their real approach, however, is not to find out what God is saying, but to find passages and ideas that justify what they already believe. They often "misunderstand" passage that teach something they do not want to hear.

One of the most powerful examples of this attitude I have heard happened in a Bible study focused on the plan of salvation. The subject of water baptism arose. The Christian conducting the study went to verses that discuss the importance and necessity of baptism for the forgiveness of sins and salvation.[5] The man he was studying with vehemently denied that baptism was essential for salvation. He said that people are saved by faith alone and that no works, such as baptism, could be necessary for salvation. In fact, he said that the Bible does not teach that baptism saves a person. The Christian directed him to 1 Peter 3:21 and asked him to

read the verse. The man turned to the passage and read, "The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also **not** save us (not the putting away...)." The Christian politely interrupted and asked the man to start at the beginning and read it again. He read, "The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also **not** save us (not the...)." Again, the man was asked to read the passage, "The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also **not**...." Because of his preconceived notion on baptism, he mentally supplied the word **not** to the text. The text actually reads, "The like figure whereunto even baptism doth **now** save us."[6] He supplied what he **thought** the text should say, and not what the text **does** say. This is a rather dramatic example. Most people don't physically change the text as they read it. Many do, however, alter the meaning of the text in their mind to fit something they already believe. Let us all strive to avoid such an attitude and heed the words of James, when he said: "Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with **meekness** the implanted word which is able to save your souls" (James 1:21).

7: Some Parts of the Bible are Difficult

Even the most sincere Bible students readily admit that there are portions of the Bible that are difficult to understand. As stated earlier, the Bible itself admits as much–"in which are some things hard to understand" (2 Peter 3:16). It is tempting to respond to this fact with anxiety and wonder why a loving God would make anything in His Word difficult to understand. With a moment's pause and consideration, however, we can see the wisdom of this. First, as noted earlier, we know that God will not hold people responsible for understanding ideas that they are incapable of grasping. God is a fair and righteous judge Who, as Abraham reminded

us, always does that which is right (Genesis 18:25). Second, remember that we grow in our understanding and knowledge as we learn the Word and apply it in our lives. If you are maturing as a Christian, you will know and understand more about God and spiritual truth a year from now than you know now. That process will continue as you age. Third, if it is true that a maturing Christian will grow in knowledge and understanding his or her entire life, that must mean that there are aspects of the spiritual world and God that are so deep they could occupy even the most brilliant, sincere, and dedicated Christians for an entire lifetime. In God's wisdom, He provided His Word which can be understood by elementary children, but can be read and studied by the most advanced scholar for decades. Isn't that exactly what we would expect from an all-knowing, all-loving God? That fact should lead us to pray to the Lord, as David did so long ago, "Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law" (Psalm 119:18).

CONCLUSION

"Why is the Bible hard to understand?" It is a question that many have asked. Before answering it, we must make sure we get the **question** right. The Bible is not hard to understand. Some parts of it are, but the bulk of it is rather straightforward. Unfortunately, the Bible is often misunderstood, due to the fact that many don't read it. They may have a poor translation, they may not come to the text with an honest heart, or any number of other causes. It should be the goal of every truth seeker to diligently study God's Word and to spend intentional effort and time in a systematic approach to the Bible. Ultimately, on the last day, our understanding of God's Word will be of utmost importance. As Jesus foretold while on Earth: "He who rejects Me, and does

not receive My words, has that which judges him–the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day" (John 12:48). There will be no pop quiz or novel information that God will demand us to know. He has not hidden any secret codes or mystical star readings. On the contrary, through the Bible, "His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3).

ENDNOTES

1 Job never did those things. Eliphaz was wrong and falsely accused Job in order to keep his mistaken theology about God allowing only the wicked to suffer.

2 For a discussion of this verse see Kyle Butt, "Psalm 137:9–Dashing Babies' Heads Against a Stone," Apologetics Press, https://www.apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=13&article=913.

3 See Dave Miller's article "Afterlife and the Bible," Apologetics Press, https://apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=11&article=1478.

4 See "Unicorns, Satyrs, and the Bible," Apologetics Press, http://apologeticspress.org/apPubPage.aspx?pub=1&issue=504&article=177.

5 Dave Miller, "13 Objections to Baptism," Apologetics Press, http://apologeticspress.org/apPubPage.aspx?pub=1&issue=1222.

6 Of course, being immersed in water is only a part of God's plan of salvation. Through immersion, a person spiritually contacts the blood of Christ, which is the only thing that has the power to forgive sins. See Kyle Butt's article "In Christ," Apologetics Press, http://apologeticspress.org/APContent.aspx?category=11&article=1982.

AFTERWORD

For more than 3,500 years, God has providentially preserved His inspired Word in the 66 books of the Bible. The message preserved in those books provides humanity with all things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). In fact, so complete is that message, that it perfectly equips the man of God for all good works (2 Timothy 3:16). Yet, among those who profess to believe that the Bible is God's Word, it has become a common practice to avoid following certain biblical commands, based on the idea that such commands were specifically for the individuals at the time of the writing, and do not have broader application to those of us who are reading the text in a modern-day setting. The idea, then, is that God is not really talking to us through the Bible today, but was talking only to "those" people "back then."

Jesus had something to say about this very idea. On one memorable occasion, the Sadducees came to Jesus, testing Him with questions pertaining to the resurrection. In their minds, they had concocted an unanswerable scenario. If a woman had seven husbands in this life, they questioned, whose wife would she be in the resurrection? Jesus, knowing their wickedness and their ignorance of the Scripture, explained that "in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage" (Matthew 22:30). He then said to the Sadducees, "But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you

not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living" (Matthew 22:31-32, emp. added).

Notice that Jesus quoted to the Sadducees a segment of Scripture that was taken from the Pentateuch (Exodus 3:6). The text was written almost 1,500 years before this group of Sadducees even existed. In the text, God was speaking directly to Moses, who had a much different culture than those of the first-century Jews. And yet, even with such a lengthy time span and major cultural differences involved, Jesus stated clearly that God was talking to His first-century audience.

We must realize that God speaks to us today through His inspired Word, just as He spoke to the Sadducees almost 2,000 years ago. While it is true that some things in Scripture must be analyzed in their cultural setting, and the division between the Old Testament and New Testament must be recognized, it is extremely dangerous to jettison applicable commands and divine principles based on the idea that they no longer apply to us. Even though our culture may drift far from many of the biblical teachings, those teachings have not changed, and will not change due to ever-waffling cultural trends. Regardless of cultural shifts, it will never be right to jettison God's applicable commands based on the idea that such commands were solely for someone else in some other time. As the psalmist wrote about God in the long ago, "The entirety of Your word is truth, and every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever" (Psalm 119:160). If you want to listen to God speak to you today, read His inspired Word, "which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32).