

From Acorn to Oak

Why We Believe the Bible is the Word of God, Part 1: Jesus, Eyewitnesses, Archaeology
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Mark and his client, Tom, had been discussing the fine points of his products over an enjoyable lunch. As Mark was bringing his presentation to a close, Tom said that he would be willing to sign a contract but gave the subtle indications there would need to be something in it for him as well. Sensing the demand for a kickback, Mark replied that he was sorry but that wouldn't be right. "What do you mean, not right?" Tom resisted. "This is pretty standard practice."

Mark started to see the sale slipping away, and it hurt; he needed this account, but he summoned his courage and countered, "Not according to my beliefs." Tom responded, "What do you mean, your beliefs?" "The Bible teaches that kind of thing is wrong," Mark declared. "The Bible?" Tom said, "that book is over 2,000 years old; how do you know what it says is true, much less relevant to today?" What would you say to Tom?

Tom's question is asked a lot in these times when so many competing, yet mutually exclusive, views claim to be true. In philosophy this is called the epistemological question: how do you know a given statement is true? Scenarios such as this one give us the opportunity to be the witnesses God has called us to be (e.g., Acts 1:8, 1 Peter 3:15b), if we know how to support what we say. In fact, everything we believe regarding the Christian faith and life is based on Scripture. Therefore, why do we believe the Bible is God's Word, and, therefore, true?

Jesus affirmed the Old Testament.

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished." (Matthew 5:17-18) In Jewish thought all of the books in the Old Testament were categorized into three parts: The Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. The third category, called "The Writings," comprise the remaining five books, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs, from which Jesus quoted and to which he referred.

Eyewitnesses to Jesus' Resurrection and other events wrote the New Testament.

Matthew, John and Peter were Jesus' disciples. Mark and Luke were closely associated with Peter and Paul respectively. Paul had the special post-ascension experience with Jesus as is recorded in Acts 9. It is most likely that James and Jude are the Lord's brothers. As Paul explains, the firm foundation of our faith is the Resurrection, which was witnessed by over 500 people, "most of whom are still living" (meaning, "check it

out if you still doubt,” including going and talking with these people). This statement in 1 Corinthians 15:6 is the first century A. D. manner of documentation; today he would have supplied their phone and fax numbers, e-mail addresses, and other contact information.

Skeptics are inclined to say that eyewitnesses often disagree about an event they’ve seen. This observation is not new. My dad, Edward T. Seely, who was for 37 years an automobile casualty insurance adjuster primarily in the metropolitan New York City area, told me on a number of occasions about how he would interview eyewitnesses to an accident and the witnesses would disagree on the details. BUT, they did not disagree on the main and most important fact: that the accident did indeed occur.

One day, U. S. Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren was asked if 500 witnesses appeared in his court and testified to an event having occurred if that would be enough to sustain the testimony. “Of course,” he said. “That would be more than enough.” The apostle Paul says that more than 500 people saw the resurrected Jesus from Nazareth. Furthermore, the outstanding Biblical Greek scholar, R. C. H. Lenski, presents a cogent rationale citing texts from God’s Word that on at least one occasion those over 500 people who witnessed Jesus after his resurrection did so when they were all together in a large group in addition to the other times recorded that Jesus appeared to smaller numbers of people following his resurrection.*

Historical writings and archeological findings confirm Scriptural statements.

Many academics and others believe that the Bible is full of errors and contains places and people that never existed. However, more careful consideration of this subject reveals that contemporary writings, at the same time as the Bible was being written, e.g., the annals of Babylonian kings and the works of Roman authors, mention places, people and events described in the Bible. Archaeologists use the Bible to find places for which they are looking. People who attended the Christ Church Holy Land Tours with me saw inscribed on the Karnak Temple the Egyptian view of the event described in 1 Kings 14:25-28 and 2 Chronicles 12:1-4. Nothing in the Bible has ever been disproved by careful scientific research. Indeed, all truth is God’s truth.

Since our authority and most important source of truth is God’s Word, and since we base what we say primarily on the Bible, we must be able to answer the question critics, skeptics, and others who are just plain interested ask, “How do you know the Bible is true and trustworthy?” In this brief essay, we’ve already given three answers as to why it is reasonable to conclude that the Bible is the true and trustworthy Word of God. The essays that follow will give more answers to that question.

* R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians*, pp. 636-637. WORDSearch.