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THE BIBLE, PART TWO

Is God the real author of the Bible? If the answer to this question is "yes", then Christianity is the true, and only true, religion from God, for, according to the Bible, God said, "You shall have no other gods before me" and Jesus said, "No one comes to the Father but by me." Thus, the evidence for the inspiration of the Bible is crucial to our whole study of Christian evidence.

In lesson eight, we looked at the internal evidence for the inspiration of the Bible. We considered seven remarkable facts or characteristics found within the Bible itself, which point to God as the real author. Other features of the Bible that point to its inspiration could have been named, but those given are probably

the most important. Lesson nine is a study of the external evidence for the inspiration of the Bible, that is, evidence that depends, at least in part, on sources outside the Bible.

The Bible claims to be historical. It claims to relate actual events that occurred in the lives of actual people. Of course, the Bible does not present a review of ancient history. That is not its purpose. But the Bible does present the history of man's redemption by God, and in doing so, it does touch upon numerous events in human history. Thus, the Bible may be put to the same tests as other historical books. If it proves to be historically inaccurate then we cannot expect men to accept it as the Word of God. Certainly the Holy Spirit would not make mistakes in His record of historical events.

Furthermore, while the Bible is not concerned with the technicalities of science, it does contain incidental references to facts of nature which come within the realm of modern science. Here again, if the Bible is God's Word, it will not contain the scientific fallacies so common among ancient peoples.

Note, however, the affirmative side of this. If, in the 20th Century, men dig up clay tablets that have been buried for 3500 years and find writing thereon which confirms events or conditions recorded in the Bible; or if, in the 20th Century, men discover remarkable facts entirely unknown to scientists of just 100 years ago, only to find that such discoveries are in harmony with statements in the Bible written thousands of years ago; then we have powerful evidence that the Bible is indeed the Word of God. So these external evidences present not just a challenge, but instead more of an opportunity for defenders of the Bible.

THE SCIENTIFIC ACCURACY OF THE BIBLE

An excellent and very comprehensive study of the scientific reliability of the Bible is found in a book by Henry M. Morris, *The Biblical Basis for Modern Science*, Baker Book House, 1984. Dr. Morris, whose outstanding qualifications as a scientist are given in lesson six, made these statements in his introduction:

Men have too rapidly jumped to the conclusion that the Bible is unscientific (or "prescientific" as some would say). The Biblical cosmology has never been disproved; it has simply made men uncomfortable and been rejected. Nevertheless the actual facts of observation and experience can be shown to correlate with the Biblical view of the world and history in a highly satisfying way.

The Bible authors claim to have written the very Word of God, and it has been accepted as such by multitudes of intelligent people down through the centuries. This is more true today than ever in the past, and there are now thousands of qualified scientists around the world who quite definitely believe in the full verbal inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures. It is absurd for anyone to say that "science" has disproved the Bible.

Whenever a Biblical passage deals either with a broad scientific principle or with some particular item of scientific data, it will inevitably be found on careful study to be fully accurate in its scientific insights. Often it will be found even to have anticipated scientific discoveries.

Some examples of "anticipated scientific discoveries" follow:

Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished

the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done (Gen. 2:1-3).

Thus, we are told that creation is not a continuing process. It was a completed process – God finished. Modern scientists with all their modern equipment know that mass/energy is being neither created or destroyed. They call this the 1st Law of Thermodynamics. How did Moses, writing 3500 years ago, without telescopes or any scientific instruments for measurement, know this unless the Holy Spirit told him what to write?

Or how did the Psalmist, writing 3000 years ago know about the 2nd Law of Thermodynamics – that the universe is running down and wearing out:

In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. Like clothing you will change them and they will be discarded. But you remain the same, and your years will never end (Psa. 102:25-27).

Moses lived about 3500 years ago in a comparatively small area in Egypt and Arabia. Most of the animal species existing on the Earth were unknown to him. Yet he wrote that human beings are different from all others – a special creation, created in the image of God. Indeed, as we saw in lesson four, human beings are different in kind from all other forms of life, possessing spiritual qualities in common with God. How did Moses know this unless the Holy Spirit told him?

So God created man in his own image, in the image of

God he created him; male and female he created them
(Gen. 1:27).

Without the benefit of modern chemistry how did Moses know that our physical bodies are composed of chemical elements that are found in the ground?

The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being (Gen 2:7).

What is holding the Earth up? In view of the absurd answers given by other ancient peoples, how did the Biblical writer know the correct answer thousands of year ago?

He spreads out the northern skies over empty space; he suspends the earth over nothing (Job 26:7).

Modern medicine tells us that much illness is psychosomatic. In fact, many doctors believe that such things as worry, hate, envy, fear, and guilt cause or contribute to most illness. This is a new field in medicine, but consider what King Solomon wrote about it nearly 3000 years ago:

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil. This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones (Prov. 3:5-8).

Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones (Prov. 16:24).

A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones (Prov. 17:22).

Today, anyone who watches the weather reports on television knows how wind currents move in circular fashion around high pressure and low pressure areas. We know how the water cycle works, with the moisture drawn up by evaporation and then condensed into rain, so the water runs in streams to the sea and then comes back again. But how could the Biblical writers, thousands of years ago, with virtually no means of long distance communication, with no knowledge of which way the wind was blowing even a few miles away, let alone in Greece or Persia, know about these vast wind currents and know about the wonders of the water cycle?

The wind blows to the south and turns to the north; round and round it goes, ever returning on its course. All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. To the place the streams come from, there they return again (Eccl. 1:6-7).

He draws up the drops of water, which distill as rain to the streams; the clouds pour down their moisture and abundant showers fall on mankind (Job 36:27-28).

Just in the last century, have physicists discovered that matter and energy are interchangeable. Now we are told that what appears to be good solid matter is really a sort of compressed energy, and is held together by powerful forces that keep the universe from blowing up. Of course when the New Testament was written nearly 2000 years ago, no human being knew these things. Then how could these writers have known that physical matter was made from something invisible and that it was necessary for it all to be held together?

By faith we understand that the universe was formed

at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible (Heb. 11:3).

For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together (Col. 1:16-17).

Other Bible passages could be cited that anticipate scientific discoveries of later centuries. Such things are not found in other ancient writings. Equally important is the fact that the Bible avoids the fallacies and scientific absurdities that are so common in other ancient writings. The odds against the Biblical writers getting all these things right by accident are astronomical. The only reasonable explanation is that these writers were guided to the truth by the Holy Spirit.

THE HISTORICAL ACCURACY OF THE BIBLE

1. As Tested by Ancient Historians

Judged even by human standards, the Bible writers are easily the most reliable of all ancient historians. The high ethical standards which they espoused, and their willingness to suffer persecution for what they wrote, attest to their truthfulness. Furthermore, the Biblical accounts are, by far, the most carefully preserved of all ancient documents.

But even apart from the Bible, such ancient writings as have been preserved, do confirm many of the important historical facts related in the Bible. Of even greater significance is this — we have no contemporary writings of any kind that refute any of the facts

and events that are found in the Bible. Some examples follow:

The famous Roman historian, Tacitus (55 – 117 A.D.), who obviously despised Christians, wrote about the burning of Rome in 64 A.D. during the reign of Nero, and how Nero shifted the blame to the Christians and persecuted them for it. He wrote further,

The name Christian comes to them from Christ, who was executed in the reign of Tiberius by the Procurator Pontius Pilate; and the pernicious superstition, suppressed for a while, broke out afresh and spread not only through Judea, the source of the malady, but even throughout Rome itself, where everything vile comes and is feted.

Note that Tacitus confirms the following important facts of Biblical history:

- There was such a person as Jesus.
- He was put to death by Pilate.
- He was executed as a criminal.
- The Christians derived their name from Him.
- Christianity arose in Judea and spread to Rome.
- Christians were a great multitude in Rome.
- Christians suffered terrible persecution in Rome.

Suetonius (69–140 A.D.), another Roman historian, wrote the Life of the Emperor Claudius, who reigned from 41 to 54 A.D. Suetonius wrote that Claudius “banished the Jews from Rome, who were continually making disturbance, Christus being their leader.” Although Suetonius had some of his facts confused, not being quite clear on the distinction between Jews and Christians, he does confirm that Jesus was a very real and recent historical person, and that He was being preached among the Jews in Rome as being still

alive and leading the new Church. We know from the Bible that it was this preaching that caused controversy among the Jews. As to the Jews banishment from Rome, Luke recorded this in Acts, as follows:

After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them (Acts 18:1-2).

Perhaps the most revealing account by an early Roman writer, is that written by Pliny the Younger (62 – 113 A.D.), who was governor of Pontus and Bithynia in Asia Minor on the southern shore of the Black Sea. He wrote a letter to the Emperor Trajan, who reigned from 98 to 117 A.D., seeking advice about what to do with the large number of Christians whom he had been persecuting. From some who had recanted under torture, he had learned the following:

They affirmed that the whole of their fault, or error, lay in this, that they were wont to meet together on a stated day before it was light and sing among themselves, alternately, a hymn to Christ, as God, and bind themselves by an oath, not to the commission of any wickedness, but not to be guilty of theft, or robbery, or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor to deny a pledge committed to them when called upon to return it. When these things were performed it was their custom to separate, and then to come together again to a meal, which they ate in common without any disorder.

Perhaps Pliny realized that the Romans were torturing and killing their best, most law-abiding subjects, as he wrote further:

Suspending, therefore, all judicial proceedings, I have recourse to you for advice; for it has appeared to me a matter highly deserving consideration, especially on account of the great number of persons who are in danger of suffering; for many of all ages and every rank, of both sexes likewise, are accused. Nor has the contagion of this superstition seized cities only, but the lesser towns also, and the open country.

Truly the early Christians were people sanctified, that is, set apart to God, shining lights in a pagan world. Note that Pliny confirms the following facts about the early Church, all of which are taught in the Bible:

- That the Christians met together on a certain day.
- That they sang hymns together.
- That they worshipped Christ as God.
- That they practiced honesty and high morals.
- That they shared a common meal or communion.
- That they ate without the drunken disorder typical of the pagan feasts.
- That great numbers had been won to Christ.
- That many were prepared to suffer and die for Christ.
- That the Gospel of Christ had an universal appeal to all ages, all ranks, both sexes, and in both urban and rural areas. (There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus, Gal. 3:28).

A man named Thallas, who was born in Samaria, wrote at Rome about 52 A.D. No copies of his writings have been preserved, but reference is made to them by Julius Africanus, a second century writer, who, in discussing the darkness that occurred when Jesus was

being crucified, said, "Thallas, in Book Three of his history, explains away the darkness as an eclipse of the sun – unreasonably as it seems to me." This shows that the events surrounding the crucifixion of Jesus were well known even at Rome some 20 years after they occurred.

The famous Jewish historian, Josephus (37 – 100 A.D.), as would be expected, had a better understanding of events occurring in Bible lands during the first century than did the Roman writers. He wrote about many of the same people who are found in the Bible and confirmed several of the events described in the New Testament. Although Josephus was not a Christian, he had this to say about Jesus:

At that time lived Jesus, a wise man, if he may be called a man, for he performed many wonderful works. He was a teacher of such men as received the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him many Jews and Gentiles. This was the Christ; and when Pilate, at the instigation of the chief men among us, had condemned him to the cross, they who before had conceived an affection for him did not cease to adhere to him; for on the third day he appeared to them alive again, the divine prophets having foretold these and many wonderful things concerning him. And the sect of the Christians, so called from him, subsists to this time.

In this short passage, Josephus confirms the following facts about Jesus:

- That He was a wise man.
- That He performed many miracles.
- That He was a teacher of truth.
- That many followed Him.
- That He was the Christ.

—That Pilate condemned Him to the cross.

—That this was done at the instigation of the Jewish leaders.

—That on the third day He arose from the tomb.

—That His followers adhered to Him after the Resurrection.

—That the Christians were named for Him and so continued.

Other contemporary historians could be cited. Particularly reliable are early Christian historians such as Clement of Rome, Polycarp, Ignatius, and Justin Martyr, the last three of whom were willing to die for the truth of what they wrote. They confirm many of the facts related in the Bible. However, since they all wrote about the Resurrection of Christ, quotations from their writings will be saved for that study.

Although comparatively few historical writings from Bible times have been preserved to our time, those that we have do confirm the historical accuracy of the Bible. And as noted before, there is no contemporary history that refutes anything found in the Bible.

2. As Tested by Archaeology

Archaeology is the scientific study of the life and culture of ancient peoples, as by excavation of ancient sites, relics, artifacts, etc. It is a young science, most of its accomplishments having been made in the last two centuries.

Of course, archaeologists have not found specific confirmation for everything in the Bible. That would be too much to expect. But they have found specific confirmation for a considerable number of Bible statements, and have found general confirmation for many conditions and customs mentioned in the Bible.

Considering the natural destructive power of the elements over thousands of years, and the deliberate destruction by rulers who wanted to wipe-out all memory of prior regimes, and by grave robbers and vandals, it is only in the providence of God that so much has been preserved.

The following is quoted from *Archaeology and the Old Testament*, Zondervan, 1954, by Merrill F. Unger, Th.D., Ph.D., a leading authority in the field of Biblical Archaeology.

Before the advance of research in Biblical lands, especially in the last half century, reams of what has been subsequently proved by archaeology to be sheer nonsense were written by scholars who viewed the Bible as legend, myth, or at best unreliable history. Acting as a corrective and a purge, archaeology has exploded many of these erratic theories and false assumptions that used to be paraded in scholarly circles as settled facts. No longer can higher critics, for example, dismiss the Hebrew patriarchs as mere legendary figures or deny that Moses could write. Archaeology has shown the falsity of both these and numerous other extreme contentions. Illuminating evidence is now available that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were historical persons, as Genesis describes them. As for Moses, not only could he have written documents in Egyptian hieroglyphics, as his early residence in Egypt would indicate, or in Akkadian, as the Amarna Letters of the fourteenth century B. C. show, but in ancient Hebrew as well, as the discovery of the Ugaritic literature at Ras Shamra in North Syria (1929-1937) demonstrates.

Regarding authentication of the Bible, such confirmation may be general or specific. Examples of general confirmation are innumerable. For instance, excavations at Shiloh, Gibeah, Megiddo, Samaria and other Palestinian sites have fully corroborated the

Biblical notices of these cities. Cases of specific confirmation, while, of course, not as numerous as those of general corroboration, are nevertheless more striking.

Specific confirmation by archaeology can be spectacular. For example, the Bible tells how Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, conquered the Jews and put Jehoiachin, king of Judah, in prison at Babylon. However, Nebuchadnezzar's successor took Jehoiachin out of prison and gave him a regular ration for life.

In the thirty-seventh year of the exile of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the year Evil-Merodach became king of Babylon, he released Jehoiachin from prison on the twenty-seventh day of the twelfth month. He spoke kindly to him and gave him a seat of honor higher than those of the other kings who were with him in Babylon. So Jehoiachin put aside his prison clothes and for the rest of his life ate regularly at the king's table. Day by day the king gave Jehoiachin a regular allowance as long as he lived (II Kings 25:27-30).

About 2500 years later, archaeologists unearthed a clay tablet at the ruins of Babylon, that gave a list of those to whom rations were paid. Among the names was "Yaukin, king of the land of Yahud" which, translated to Hebrew is "Jehoiachin, king of the land of Judah." Surely God had a hand in preserving that fragile bit of evidence for 25 centuries.

Prior to 1843, the only reference found anywhere to an Assyrian king named "Sargon" was the following:

In the year that the supreme commander, sent by Sargon king of Assyria, came to Ashdod and attacked and captured it (Isa. 20:1).

Since no non-Biblical source mentioned Sargon,

hostile critics cited this passage as proof that the Bible was not history, but myth. Then, in 1843, Paul Emile Botta discovered Sargon's palace, and today Sargon is one of the best known of the Assyrian kings.

Until near the end of the nineteenth century, the Hittites were unknown in secular history. Yet the Bible mentions them 48 times and presents them as a numerous and powerful race. Hostile critics argued that it was impossible for such a people to disappear without leaving a trace, and cited this as proof of the Bible's unreliability. But again, archaeology proved to be the critics' undoing, as numerous finds culminated in the discovery of the capital of the great Hittite nation in modern Turkey.

Another alleged error in the Bible involved Belshazzar, king of Babylon:

For a long time the fact that the Book of Daniel makes Belshazzar king at the time of the fall of Babylon (Dan. 5) instead of Nabonidus, as the cuneiform records show, was held as strong evidence against the historicity of the sacred account. The solution of this so-called discrepancy was apparent when evidence was uncovered not only indicating Belshazzar's association with Nabonidus on the throne but also demonstrating that during the last part of his reign the latter resided in Arabia and left the conduct of the kingdom of Babylon to his eldest son Belshazzar. (Unger, *supra*)

Other examples of specific confirmation of the Bible by archeological discoveries could be given. A much greater volume of general confirmations could be cited. While they are not as spectacular, the general confirmations are extremely important, because they show that the Bible presents a true and correct picture of the peoples, laws, customs, conditions,

etc., which prevailed at the various periods involved. It would have been impossible for a forger, writing many centuries later, to have done this.

The science of archaeology has done much to confirm and illuminate the Bible, and much to silence its critics. Also important is the fact, that of all the thousands of archeological discoveries, none has refuted any part of the Bible. Archaeology provides strong evidence that the Bible is true, and therefore is the Word of God.

3. As tested by Historical Standards

This point involves evidence for the historical accuracy of the Bible by applying to it the methods and standards used by historians to test the credibility of ancient writings. Whereas the evidence from archaeology is more applicable to the Old Testament, this evidence applies especially to the New Testament.

a. Are they contemporary accounts — that is, were they written and published at or near the time of the events they record? This is important because the initial readers would know whether the accounts were true or not, and thus their acceptance of the accounts is strong evidence of truth. It is generally accepted that all of the New Testament was written in the 1st century A.D., and that it was accepted by many people who were familiar with the events it records.

b. Were they written and published at the place where the events happened? Again this is important because the initial readers would know if the accounts were true or not. It is clear that the New Testament was widely circulated in Palestine and the rest of the Roman world where the events occurred.

c. Were they written by persons in a position to

know the truth? It is clear that the New Testament was written by eye witnesses or by persons in close contact with eye witnesses.

d. Do the writings purport to recount public, widely known events? This is important because, if so, then not just a select group, but the general public would know whether the accounts were true or false. Much of Jesus' ministry and many of the other New Testament events occurred in public before large crowds. They occurred at the very crossroads of 3 continents, and most occurred in the largest and most important cities of the area. They could hardly have been more public.

e. Do the writings give specific details, such as names, dates, places, circumstances, etc.? False writings tend to be vague, so that it will be difficult to check them out. But the Bible gives the names of the people involved, the places where events occurred, the names of rulers, and other details that tie it securely to history. It can be checked out.

f. Do the writings call for action and did such action occur among the initial readers? If the initial readers, who were in a position to know the truth, all ignore the call for action, this tends to discredit the writings. But if large numbers respond to the call for action, especially if this response calls for drastic changes in their lives, then this is strong evidence of the truth of the writings. Of course, this is exactly what happened in the early Church. Thousands of people who had seen and heard Jesus, and who had witnessed many of the New Testament events, responded to the call for action even though it meant loss of jobs, confiscation of property, exile, persecution, and even martyrdom. What other historical records were tested by the tor-

ture and death of the historians and of many of those who witnessed their history?

g. Do the writings fit into the over-all fabric of history? Every important event that actually occurs is connected to other events that precede and follow it. There is a cause and effect relationship that cannot be faked. To falsely insert the story of Jesus into the history of the world is impossible. His life was lived at the crossroads of the ancient world, where the Hebrew, Greek, and Roman cultures all met, and His life had a vast and immediate effect on all 3 cultures. Take out the life of Jesus, and much of history becomes unexplainable.

All these standards for testing credibility point to the truth and accuracy of the Bible. Add to this the testimony of contemporary historians, and the testimony of archaeology, and we have powerful proof of the historical accuracy of the Bible. And if the Bible is true and accurate, then it is the inspired Word of God, because, (1) it records supernatural events that could come only from God, and, (2) it repeatedly claims to be from God.

Study Questions

1. Why is the historical and scientific accuracy of the Bible important to us?
2. Compare Bible references to scientific matters with those found in other ancient writings.
3. Name some scientific principles that were anticipated in the Bible.
4. Using evidence only from pagan writers, refute the claim that no such person as Jesus ever lived.

5. Name some important facts about the early Church that are revealed in Pliny's letter to Trajan.

6. What is meant by general confirmation of the Bible by archaeology? Give some examples.

7. What is meant by specific confirmation of the Bible by archaeology? Give some examples.

8. Why is it important that the New Testament was written at or near the time and place of the events it records?

9. Why is it important that the New Testament gives many details of the events it records?

10. How do the events recorded in the New Testament fit into the overall fabric of history and why is this important?

