

View

July 29, 2007

This Week's Agenda

The Lord's Day

9:30 AM: Singing, Prayer, Lord's Supper, Sermon: David Posey

5 PM – Singing, **Prayer**, Lord's Supper, Sermon

Classes Offered This Week

Today at 5:30

Classes for all ages 18 months and up.

Auditorium: Studies in Authority

Room 11-12: Seed Sowers Workshop

Tuesday at 7 PM

John's Gospel (Where - TBA)

Wednesday

7:30 PM – Summer Program - Everyone 6th grade and up will be in the auditorium. Classes for younger ages.

News & Prayer Concerns

"First of all, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men..."

Prayer Concerns

Pray for Naomi Fannin. She is home and doing better each day.

Continue to pray for Herman Ward. He is doing much better. He is now able to walk on his own and hopes to be at services today. Also remember Fern in your prayers.

Pray for Tom Royston. He is doing a little better. Also, remember Boots in your prayers.

Pray for David Main's mother, Patsy. She had a stroke and has been moved to a rehabilitation center. She is partially paralyzed on one side. David would appreciate our prayers for Patsy and Don (father), they live in Ohio. Pray for the family.

Pray for Bill Cain, Trey's father. He was admitted to the hospital with some serious health issues, no details as of yet. Bill was to hold a meeting at Carmichael, it has been cancelled.

Continue your prayers for Dylan Franklin, David Ramsey, Julie Bumgarten, Kathy Wilson and Sharon Jones. Keep Myrtle Farrell, Gwen's mother, in mind.

Continue to pray for Jackson Agee, Logan and Julie's child.

Continue to pray for Carl and Arlene Hanson.

Pray for those who are expecting: Sarah Cain, Nicole Grinnell and Jamie Gardner, April Franklin and for the couples that would like to have children, but have not been able.

Continue your prayers for those who serve our country. Jeremy Allen, Art and Peggy's son, is heading back to Iraq and will be serving in the Baghdad area, so pray for him.

Quarterly Singing

Our next quarterly singing will be held on September 30th, the last Sunday of the quarter.

Wedding

Pray for our newly weds. Wes Shamblin and Jamie Perkins were married yesterday.

Out of Town

CJ and Matthew Woolington will be in Nevada for the balance of the summer. Pray for their welfare while they are away and for Dawn.

Dave and Carly Posey are in Hawaii. The Terry's will be traveling for the next two Sundays. Bryan and Janet Byrd (and family) are in Texas for a family reunion.

Gospel Meetings

Reminder: Mark your calendar for October 8-10, 2007 for a meeting with Ed Harrell. We have also booked gospel meetings with Bob Owen in the Fall of 2008, Paul Earnhart in 2009 and Dee Bowman in 2011.



**Read your Bible
each day, and
spread the word!**

For the last two Sunday nights, in our class on Authority, we have been discussing the reliability of the Bible as our standard of authority. We appreciate Dennis Reagan for taking on the task of covering this topic in two 45 minute sessions — there is so much material, it is impossible to cover it all, but he did a fine job.

For those who would like some additional information, we are including the following article as a supplement to the material Dennis taught. We also plan to include an additional class on the Inspiration of the Bible in the next few weeks. If you are interested in additional resources, please ask Dennis or David Posey.

dp

Reliability of the Bible

If the Bible is not historically reliable, then it is not reliable at all. While the Bible makes no claim to be a history textbook, as such, it does present a history, centered in Jesus of Nazareth. Some people are under the false impression that the Scriptures were manufactured by fallible men in order to perpetuate a myth about Jesus. While very few historians attempt to deny the historicity of Jesus (that is, they do not deny that such a man lived around the time the gospels claim), they do attempt to undermine, or at least minimize, the claims that the Bible makes about Him. To accomplish this they must discredit the historical authenticity of the Bible and its authors.

Yet those who attempt to do this betray their prejudices, since they know that the Bible is the most well-attested ancient book ever written. The manuscript evidence is monumental. There are far more extant copies of manuscripts of Bible books than any other piece of ancient literature, and the copies are closer in time to the original than any other written document in antiquity.

In this article, we'll examine that evidence. There are three basic tests of the veracity of a written document: The Bibliographical Test, the Internal Test and the External Test. We'll examine the evidence for the historical reliability of the Bible in light each of these tests.

The Bibliographical Test

Since we do not have the autographs (the original manuscripts) of the Bible books, we must rely on copies of the originals. The question is, how reliable are these copies? Can we rely on them as accurate reproductions of the original manuscripts?

The bibliographical test is concerned with the number of copies of the original, how they compare with one another and the time span between the original document and the copies. Obviously, a document is considered historically reliable to the degree that there are many copies which are consistent in content from one copy to the next and to the degree of the proximity of the copies to the original document.

Applying this to the Bible, if we can find numerous copies which are consistent with one another and if some of those copies are very close to the date of the original writings, we have strong evidence of historical integrity. So how does the Bible do? As mentioned above, the Bible is the most well-attested ancient document ever. There is really no comparison at all.

The earliest fragment (p⁵²), a fragment of John 18:31-33 discovered in 1920, dates about AD 120, less than 50 years from the original. There are about 50 other fragments dating within 150-200 years from the time of original composition. Two major manuscripts, Codex Vaticanus (AD 325) and Codex Sinaiticus (AD 350) date within 250 years from the time of composition. Compared to other ancient works, this is a very short time span. For example, Caesar's The Gallic Wars dates 1,000 years after it was written and the first complete copy of Homer's Odyssey is 2200 years removed from the time it was originally written. Yet few people question the historical reliability of these documents. F. F. Bruce observed that "if the New Testament were a collection of secular writings, their authenticity would generally be regarded as beyond all doubt."

Oddly enough, this last point is illustrated by the hype surrounding a recent motion picture. A number of months ago, when the new Robin Hood movie was released, there was renewed interest in whether Robin Hood was a real man or just a fictional character. The local news did a story about a document that was uncovered, supposedly dated at about the time of Robin Hood, 1261 AD, which mentions a "Robin Hood." They wondered if this one copy proved that such a man existed. But this just illustrates how unfair some people are when it comes to judgment about the Bible. The 27 books of the New Testament alone are attested by nearly 5,000 Greek manuscripts and over 24,000 copies! By comparison, Homer's Iliad is the second best-attested ancient document, with 643 copies. But the closest copy to the original is about 500 years old!

But how accurate are the copies of the biblical documents themselves? Are they reliable in the sense of being free from textual corruption? "Only 400 of the 150,000 variants materially affect the sense, and of these perhaps 50 are of real significance. But no essential teaching of the New Testament is greatly affected by them" (Ira M. Price, *The Ancestry of Our English Bible*, 1956, p. 222, cited by Jenkins, p. 83-84). Those 400 variants amount to only one-half of one percent of the New Testament, an amazing figure for an ancient document. By comparison, over five percent of the Iliad is in question. If critics of the Bible are fair, they would not even attempt to discredit the Bible at the bibliographical level.

The Internal Test

The second test applied to an ancient document involves looking at the document itself to determine what kinds of claims it makes and whether those claims are true. In other words, what does the Bible say about itself?

The Bible is often referred to as "the Good Book" and is generally considered to be worthy of close reading and application. But is it? If what it says about itself is not true, can it be useful for any purpose? If the writers of the Bible would lie about the nature of what they've written, how can we believe anything else they say?

The Bible is a unique document consisting of a collection of 66 books, written by more than forty men over a period of at least 1500 years. Yet, one finds doctrinal unity, moral consistency, one plan of salvation and one world view throughout. Given the diverse time period, authorship and geographical background of the writings, such consistency is truly amazing. But what does the Bible claim for itself? What did the writers believe they were doing when they wrote? Perhaps the most notable feature of the Bible in this regard is its explicit claim to be God's word. Something 3500 times in the Old Testament, the writers claim that

what they are about to say is what "the Lord says." Were they deluded? Were they lying? Or did they actually receive words from the Lord that they then wrote down? (See I Pet. 1:10-12; II Pet. 1:19-21).

In the New Testament, men like the apostle Paul claimed to have preached "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). He told the Thessalonians that they received, not the word of men, but the word of God, when they heard him and the rest of the apostles speak (I Thess. 2:13). Various writers in the Bible claim absolute perfection and authority for the words they write: e.g., "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul. . ." (Psalm 19:7) Furthermore, one book recognizes another book as speaking with absolute authority. Daniel, for example, mentions the book of Jeremiah and the written Law of Moses (Daniel 9:2, 11). Luke, writing in Acts, mentions Isaiah, and says the Holy Spirit spoke through him (Acts 28:25). Peter mentions Paul and implies that his writings are "Scripture" equal to the rest of the Bible (II Peter 3:15). Paul calls the whole Old Testament "Scripture" (II Tim. 3:15) and says all Scripture is inspired by God. Peter refers to the prophets and says they were "moved by the Holy Spirit" (II Peter 1:20ff.). Either these men were deluded, intentionally lying, or they were right.

Jesus also believed that the Bible is God's word to man. For example, in referring to a difficult and obscure statement in Psalm 82:6, He said, "the Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). That's a powerful statement about how he viewed the authority and infallibility of the Bible. At His temptation, He answered every thrust of Satan with a Bible text. He also said, referring to Psalm 110, that the Spirit spoke through David (see Mt. 22:43). These and many other passages clearly show that Jesus believed that the writings of the Old Testament were God's own words.

The apostles also claimed that the Bible is God's word. Paul, for example, said about the gospel he preached, "For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ" (Galatians 1:12). See also I Cor. 2:10-13 and I Thess. 2:13. The Bible writers believed that they were writing the very words of God.

But what about contradictions? Isn't the Bible full of them? Critics want people to believe this about the Bible. But where is the proof? The law of non-contradiction states that a thing cannot be both a and non-a at the same time. In other words, it cannot be both light and dark at the same time in the same place. Only when one proves a violation of this principle from the Bible can he prove that there is a contradiction in the Bible. Many of the so-called "contradictions" that have been cited over the years are nothing more than an attempt to question the credibility of the Bible in order to follow some liberal agenda. While there certainly are difficulties in the Bible, there are no discrepancies for which there is not a plausible explanation. There are a number of good books on the subject and, as archeological and historical discoveries continue, more light is being shed on these issues all the time. It is grossly unfair to ignore the proffered answers.

The External Test

The Bible is unmatched in its manuscript evidence and is consistent and unambiguous in its internal claims of reliability and authority. But is there evidence outside the Bible which tends to confirm its historical reliability?

There is in fact a great deal of external evidence supporting the Bible's veracity. For example, secular historians such as Josephus (37-100 AD), Tacitus (c. 55-117 AD), Lucian

(2nd century), Seutonius (c. 120 AD) and Pliny (c. 112 AD) mention Jesus and the apostles, along with other Bible material. Josephus, for example, often mentions figures familiar to New Testament readers. F. F. Bruce summarizes some of this evidence: "Here in the pages of Josephus, we meet many figures who are well known to us from the New Testament; the colorful family of the Herods; the Roman emperors Augustus, Tiberius, Claudius and procurators of Judea; the high priestly families—Annas, Caiaphas, Ananias and the rest; the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and so on" (quoted in Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*, p. 323).

Pliny the Younger (c. AD 112), writing to the emperor about his achievements as governor of Bithynia, gave information about how he had killed multitudes of Christians — men, women and children. He said he attempted to "make them curse Christ, which a genuine Christian cannot be induced to do" (Epistles X.96, cited by Geisler, p. 324). In the same letter, he said: "They were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day, before it was light, when they sang in alternate verse a hymn to Christ as to a god, and bound themselves to a solemn oath, not to do any wicked deeds and never to deny a truth when they should be called upon to deliver it up.

The citations could be multiplied which demonstrate that the teaching of the Bible was not fiction but was being lived out in the day to day lives of Christians in the first and second centuries.

Also, archeological discoveries overwhelmingly confirm the historicity of the Bible. Ferrell Jenkins reports on some of these in his *Introduction to Christian Evidences*, pp. 58-67. He quotes Jack Lewis (in his *Historical Backgrounds of Bible History*, p. 177, 1971) who notes: (1) ". . . forty-four Old Testament figures have with reasonable certainty been identified with figures whose names occur in various sorts of ancient records of the Middle East." (2) "Seventeen New Testament figures are known from coins or from other types of inscriptions." (3) "An additional eleven figures were known to Josephus, to Mishnaic sources or to classical historians where these writers are not thought to have had New Testament books as one of their sources of information."

Renowned archeologist and paleographer William F. Albright made the following observation: "All radical schools in the New Testament criticism which have existed in the past or which exist today are pre-archeological and are, therefore, since they were built in der Luft ("in the air"), quite antiquated today" (*Retrospect and Prospect in New Testament Archeology in The Teacher's Yoke*, ed. E. Jerry Vardeman, p. 29).

A person who argues against the historical reliability of the Bible is arguing against good sense. The Roman historian, A. N. Sherwin-White, made the following comment: "For [the book of] Acts, the confirmation of historicity is overwhelming. . . Any attempt to reject its basic historicity, even in matters of detail, must now appear absurd. Roman historians have long taken it for granted" (*Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament*, p. 189). The moral of this is clear: be very careful who you listen to when you are considering whether the Bible is reliable or not. It seems that those who have an ax to grind against the Bible are relying (or manipulating?) old, long-overturned data for their arguments. Of course, they would not do that with any other kind of material! In fact, the case for denying the historical reliability of the biblical documents is based upon faith — nothing more, nothing less. If it were not so serious, it would be comical as we observed alleged "scholars" utilizing such puerile means to try to disprove

something they cannot afford, professionally, to accept. Unfortunately, their high-sounding arguments sweep many others away with them.

Geisler summarizes the current state of affairs very well when he says, "the integrity of the New Testament writers is established by the character of the witnesses as well as by the quantity and independent nature of their witness. As to the accuracy of their

reports there is support in general from the secular history of the first century and in particular from numerous archeological discoveries supporting specific details of the New Testament account" (p. 327).

The great classical scholar Sir Fredric Kenyon observed over fifty years ago: "The interval then between the dates of original composition and the earliest extant evidence becomes so small as to be in fact negligible, and

the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed. Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established" (The Bible and Archeology, Harper, 1940, pp.288f.). If such was the case in 1940, how much more so today! You can rest assured that the Bible you hold is reliable, accurate and true.

David Posey

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The View contains news and articles of interest to the members of the Folsom Point church of Christ. Announcing an activity or event does not necessarily imply that we financially sponsor the event or that the elders specifically endorse every component of that event, since it may not fall under the direct oversight of the elders. The church's work and the elders' oversight is limited by Scripture. We will not announce events that are primarily social in nature. However, we do want to publicize and encourage those activities that provide an opportunity to be built up in the faith and provide an opportunity for you to be a more involved and active member of the body at Folsom Point.

ABOUT THE CHURCH OF CHRIST AT FOLSOM

We are a church of Christ patterned after the New Testament example of local churches. We believe in the authoritative word of God and will provide you with a Bible answer for everything we do in our doctrine and practice. We exalt Jesus Christ and seek to glorify Him, not ourselves (Ephesians 3:21). Therefore, our efforts are directed toward promoting commitment to Christ, not to any man or institution (I Corinthians 2:5).

Our assemblies are simple. We sing without use of an instrument (see Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; we will be happy to show you why we use no instrument, if you desire further study on this issue). We pray (I Timothy 2:1), partake of the Lord's Supper each first day of the week (I Corinthians 11:23-29; Acts 20:7) and teach from God's word. All preaching comes from the Bible.

The financial support of this congregations comes entirely from the free-will offerings of its members made on the first day of the week (I Corinthians 16:1-2; II Corinthians 8:1-5; 9:6-7). We never solicit funds from non-members. Contributions are used for the spiritual growth of this church and for the support of a few men in other areas, such as the Philippines, who are preaching the gospel. We do not use money collected here for social programs or the support of any human institution. We believe the church itself can do all the work God has given it to do. And we aim to do *only* the work God has given it to do — teach the gospel, build up the members, and help needy Christians. All other "good work" is the responsibility of individual Christians (Titus 2:11-14; James 1:27; Galatians 6:9-10).

We offer personal Bible studies at your convenience. We are here to help you with your spiritual needs: please favor us with a request for a Bible study or correspondence course that you can complete at your pace.