

Can the Bible be Trusted?

Here is a review of the main points made in last week's Sermon (2014-May-18).

1. Jesus stressed Scripture's unchanging importance, going as far to say that even the smallest punctuation mark should not be altered. (Matthew 5:18)
2. Paul described Scripture as "God Breathed." In other words, the writers of the Bible were inspired by God to write down the history, poetry, stories, prophecy and prayers of God's people over the ages. (2 Timothy 3:16).

Hold it a minute, says the sceptic. Just because Jesus and other writers of the New Testament say that the Bible is inspired by God doesn't prove anything. After all, those who wrote the Bible want readers to think this book is important. And there are other gospels, too you know. Why isn't the gospel of Thomas, Judas, and Mary Magdalene in the New Testament? The objection implied is that because these other gospels give a very different picture of Jesus (for example, that he was married), the churches gospels are suspect.

Important points to remember:

1. The four gospels were written within 40 – 60 years after Jesus died. These "other" or "pseudo" gospels came much, much later. While the four gospels we have in our bibles were completed and circulating among the churches in the first century, the pseudo gospels didn't come on the scene until the 3rd century.

2. The four gospels were understood to be the only authentic gospels by leaders in the church. For example, in the second century a church leader named Irenaeus declared that there were but four gospels. The pseudo gospels that the author Dan brown made popular in his book "*The DaVinci Code*" were written at least 100 years AFTER our gospels were already in widespread use.
3. Note the honesty of the gospels. The gospels tell everything, warts and all, sparing no punches for those closest to Jesus. The gospels tell us about Peter's denial; the petty quarrels among the disciples; the traitor amongst Jesus' followers; the disciple's astounding lack of comprehension about who Jesus really was; and on it goes. The gospels even tell us that after his resurrection, some still didn't believe in Jesus. This, I believe, is unheard of in religious literature. Writers of sacred books tend to white wash the foibles and failings of the followers who established the faith. Rather, we have what the gospel writer Luke promised: *"...I have carefully investigated everything from the beginning... to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so you might know the certainty of the things you have been taught."* Luke 1:3, 4.

A note about the Dead Sea Scrolls.

The discovery of ancient Old Testament manuscripts, between 1946 and 1956, proved to be the most significant find in modern Biblical studies.

Here's the deal. Biblical writings had to be copied by scribes whenever someone wanted their own copy or if the original needed to be replaced. There were no photo copiers in those

days! So texts could only be preserved and shared through hand written copies. This is true of all ancient manuscripts. Prior to the discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls, the earliest copy we had of the Old Testament (O.T.) was dated around the 10th century A.D. This is a lot of years between the Biblical writings and our most recent copies. Putting it another way, if David the Shepherd king lived around 1,000 B.C. our record of his story is 2,000 years after. The objection people raised was the veracity and reliability of the O.T. after so many years of hand copying. Wouldn't it be reasonable to say that mistakes were made in the copying process? Additionally, how can we be certain copyists with a particular agenda didn't change the text to suit their ideas? The Dead Sea scrolls answered these objections. For example, the Dead Sea scrolls discovery showed that the book of Isaiah was virtually identical to the copy 11 centuries later. The Dead Sea scrolls shed light on the copyist's extreme attention to faithfully reproduce the Biblical text. And this has provided great support in asserting the reliability of our Bible.

Archaeology

Findings in the field of Archaeology have also provided confirmation for Scripture. Here are a few samplings.

1. *William Albright*, known for his reputation as one of the great archaeologists, states: "there can be no doubt that archaeology has confirmed the substantial historicity of Old Testament tradition.
2. As to the critique that the New Testament (N.T.) was written long after the events took place, theologian *F.F. Bruce* points out that archaeology has filled in the contemporary background of the N.T. He goes on to state: "And this background is a first-century

background. The N.T. narrative just will not fit into a 2nd century background."

3. Critics formerly believed that Luke's gospel was mistaken about Quirinius being governor of Syria when Christ was born. But an inscription dated to 7 B.C. was found in Antioch that mentions Quirinius holding this post. As the writer of the book I took these three examples from states, "*If one discards the bible as being unreliable, then he must discard almost all literature of antiquity.*" Josh McDowell. *Evidence that Demands a Verdict.* San Bernardino: Here's Life Publishers, 1979. Pg. 73.

There is much more that could be said about the reliability of our entire Bible, but I think this is enough for now. The important point to remember is that there are very good reasons for trusting the words of Scripture. While there are many theories about Jesus and the Bible circulating in our culture today, they are often without any basis and often derived from highly dubious sources. For example, many people's understanding of the Bible may simply be informed by the fiction of Dan Brown. We therefore need to help people jettison their unfounded objections to Scripture so that they can move toward living faith in Christ.