

## IS OUR FAITH BLIND – PART I

**Atheists Question: Isn't faith in God blind? After all, what evidence is there that a God you cannot touch or see actually exists?**

You might begin speaking to atheists by mentioning the fact that the Bible is a personal love letter from God in which our history, intimate details of how God created the world and our relation to Him; is described in great detail. In response the sceptic will often question the veracity of the Bible by asking what they think are unanswerable questions:

- 1. There are contradictions in the Bible so how can it represent truth when it contradicts itself?**
- 2. Since there are no original manuscripts then how can one be certain the word of God accurately represents the events it describes?**
- 3. Since the Bible was written by humans who were sinners how can one be certain their sin did not taint the revelation from God?**
- 4. The Bible has been translated so many times over the centuries how can one know with certainty it has not been altered to fit modern times?**

To answer the critics lets put the Bible to the test by 1) determining if there are multiple voices and textual agreement of the sources of the Bible and 2) close proximity of time in which these sources are written to the actual events, and 3) the predictability of events.

When we receive a document claiming to know what happened in the past it must first pass rigorous tests to prove its claim for authenticity. Often we view history as being the exact representation of an event written down to be forever preserved in time. This certainly is not the case. Ever have two people experience the exact same event and come out with completely different details? Or have an event occur but only parts are remembered? Ever hear someone falsify details of an event for their own selfish reasons? Unless we can time travel back in time and see the entire event for ourselves then how can we know for certain any historical document is true?

History, truthfully is merely the reconstruction of an event based on those details that have the highest probability of occurrence.

1. The probabilities are increased when the evidence is collected from more than one reliable source. When multiple sources give the exact same details this increases the probability that they in fact occurred.
2. Also, those sources that were written closest to the event are deemed more credible because the longer times goes on before one writes the more that is forgotten.

These two criteria: agreement between multiple sources and proximity of time that the event occurred and when it was written; is the criteria historians use to prove a manuscript authentic or a fake.

## Multiple Sources

1. **Papyri.** Manufactured in Egypt as far back as the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC took the papyri plant and made sheets to write on. Egyptians took the inner pith and overlapped it, then soaked and pounded the plant material into sheets. The sheets are then pressured dried. Paper was not invented until about 100 BC and not in wide circulation until much later. The oldest source comes from writing done on the Papyri plant in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century. We have 86 pieces of Papyri plant with either a single or multiple verses written on them. As you can see, one of the negative things about this form of writing is that the plant material degrades over time making it very hard to read something written almost 2000 years ago.
2. **Leather.** Obviously taken from animal skins and was called Uncials. It is much easier to read these documents because they tend to stand the test of time better. We have approximately 274 of these sources.
3. **Minuscules.** Were written in cursive or long hand writing. They are called minuscule because they only contain a very small part of the overall text of the body in which they represent. For instance, the above minuscule is from the book of James but is a single verse 4:15. We have 2795 of these.
4. **Lectionaries.** These were worship guides that contained passages of Scripture. We have 2209 of these.
5. **Full Manuscripts.** Full manuscript of the New Testament. The Vaticanus was written in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century. There were two others: the Sinaiticus written in the 4<sup>th</sup> century as well and the Alexandrinus written in the 5<sup>th</sup> century.

According to the authors of God's Not Dead that are over 20,000 manuscripts that make up the base of the Bible. Substantial evidence but is it enough to say it is reliable? Ancient historical books such as Plato, Caesar, Pliny, Euripes, Tacitus, Herodutus have 20 copies or less! Only Sophocles has 193 and Aristotle has 49. In other words, the evidence from a source perspective is OVERWHELMING!

Many will attack the credibility of the Bible on the bases of textual discrepancies. Several such instances:

- (1) the number of arms-bearing men in Judah and Israel (cf. 2 Samuel 24:9 **(800,000 men)** to 1 Chronicles 21:5 **(1,100,00 men)**)
- (2) the number of Syrian charioteers slain by David (cf. 2 Samuel 10:18 **(700)** to 1 Chronicles 19:18 **(7000)**)
- (3) Number of stalls Solomon had 1 Kings 4:26 **(40,00)** and 2 Chronicles 9:25 **(4000)**
- (4) the number of baths in the "molten sea" (cf. 1 Kings 7:23,26 **(2000)** to 2 Chronicles 4:5 **(3000)**)

There were also date discrepancies: such as when was Jesus born 4 BC (Matthew 2:1) or 6 AD (Luke 2:14). Secular Web gives 101 inconsistencies in numbering but when I looked up debate.org I found 101 of them answered with logical reasons. For instance, the arms-bearing men in Judah and Israel could be explained by stating Samuel only included men ready for

battle whereas the Chronicler might have included all men who were of age to fight whether they were ready or not.

The author's of God's not Dead cited 40 lines of Scripture that are in doubt but none of them affect our doctrine.

The Bible is not meant to be purely a historical document or even a scientific one. Most universities no longer make the claim that the Bible is inerrant due to the above discrepancies. It is meant to be a love letter from God to us. When it comes to our Baptist denomination: the following is held as true: Scripture is infallible in matters of faith and practice. Even with the 40 variations the Bible is still 98 % accurate by secular thinking. My personal stance is the Bible is inerrant when one gives leeway for the culture in which various writings were written.

**Atheists will ask: how can you ensure the Bible is accurate when there has been so many translations over time. Surely the modern day person is altering the text to make it more palatable to our society?**

The Bible translations range from word for word for those who want a literal translation, to thought for thought to a complete paraphrase of the original text. All of these translations merely exist to make the word of God easier to understand. The Bible was written predominately in three languages: Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic. It was written by many authors and over centuries of time. So for us today to read the original text in say either Hebrew, mostly the OT, Aramaic or Greek, the NT; would be very difficult because we would have to learn these languages and the dialect in which they were written. Words today have different meanings than they did in the past. Today we speak with many cultural specific nuances: for example, know anyone who speaks Chiac? This is a language mixed heavily in French with English words. Very hard to understand. Can you imagine someone reading Chiac 500 years from now? What would they understand? It would have to be translated into modern language to be understood.

This is what the translators of the Bible have done. The Bible has been translated not to synthesize writings with modern day culture, but to make it understandable. If anyone was to change the details of the Bible in a translation, they would be immediately challenged by our Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic scholars who have access on the internet to the original languages and know the nuances of said texts. If found to be a false translation, then they would deem it as such and it would be thrown out as being illegitimate.

## **Close Proximity**

**Theory: Documents that are written much later after an event has occurred are less likely to contain all the details of the event and are more prone to including factual errors. The question is: how long after the events occurred was the Bible written? This is a complicated question. First, lets look at the books of the Bible. Let's look at both of the Testaments and the evidence.**

**Old Testament (OT).** The most difficult criticism to handle comes from the writing of the Pentateuch – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. If Moses was the author of the Pentateuch, which I believe he was, then it would have been written around 1300 Bce. In other words, Moses wrote about events that happened millenniums or thousands of years before his time. Does this mean it fails the test of having been written close in time to the events it describes? The answer is no because the question is flawed. The way in which people communicated history before writing was through what is called oral tradition. People would memorize mass details of events and pass those details down from one generation to the next. The atheists at this point of course would object. Anytime you tell a secret from one person to the next the details get distorted. Also, time tends to make us forget many details and specifics of events. The problem with this kind of thinking is that it projects our modern ability to remember onto a past culture. Oral tradition historians have found is remarkably accurate. In ancient times people were able to pass down information impeccably because they learned how to memorize and recite massive amounts of information. We today have lost this ability because writing is assumed to be a superior form of communication. Atheists have to be very careful to not throw out oral tradition because a lot of our history before writing comes to us in this form. So if they throw out the OT because the sources are written extremely late after they occurred then a lot of history has no evidence as well. Surprisingly, the Pentateuch was almost ominously considered divine and accurate at the time of its writing and the Old Testament was accepted as God's word by 90 AD whereas the New Testament took much longer.

**New Testament (NT).** Most of the books were written within 70 years after Jesus' death. This means there would be many eye witnesses alive that could refute the NT if it contained false data. This of course does not mean the NT was not contested. It took over 200 years for the early Christians to agree on the 27 books that should be included in the NT Canon of Scripture. Right after Jesus' return to heaven many authors wrote books and claimed that they represented the life of Jesus. Many tried to falsify the beliefs of Christ by ascribing to Him false beliefs. For instance, Gnosticism that was predominant in Paul's time, was written down in a book called the Gospel of Thomas. Most of this book agrees with Scriptures but some of it is radically different. Gnostics believed that each of us has a divine spark within us and when we receive the secret knowledge of the Gnostics the spark can be freed to return to God as part of Him. In response to so many radical beliefs being attributed to Christ believers decided to canonize their beliefs according to the following criteria: the writing must be part of Jesus' teachings, the writing must come from a primary witness such as an apostle, and the teachings must be proven as acceptable to the churches who agreed they are authentic. Remarkably these criteria are the same that people use today to evaluate the authenticity of historical documents. How does the NT compare to other documents? For example, Homer's Iliad was written approximately 500 years after the events it wrote happened. Conversely, one NT piece – John 18 – is dated within 25 years of the events of Christ.

### **Predictability of Events**

The Bible is far from just a historical document; it is a supernatural one as well. The atheists ask: how do you know that the writers of Bible who had sin in their lives, did not taint the very words they wrote? Peter answered this very same question in 2 Peter 1:21: For

prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. This does not mean that the writers were mere stenographers. After all, we only have to look at the books of the Bible to find many different styles of writing were employed. While the writers had freedom in linguistic style they did not have freedom to alter the message from God! 2 Timothy 3:16-17 states All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. Amen

The Bible stands so much taller than any other writing because of the inspiration of God who gave us predictions that are 100 accurate of events. According to The Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy there are 1,239 prophecies in the OT and 578 prophecies in the NT. While our time does not permit review all the prophecies that were have been fulfilled, I do want to focus on those pertaining to our Lord Jesus Christ. For instance, Isaiah 7:14 states the Messiah would be a virgin, Micah 5:2 states the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, Zechariah 11:12-13 states the Messiah would be betrayed for 30 shekels of silver and Psalms 22:12-18 describes the death of the Messiah. Jesus fulfilled all of these prophecies and over 300 more! I love numbers to let's look at the probability of a person meeting just 8 of the prophecies attributed to the Messiah: The number is 1 in 100 quadrillion! These events were predicted hundreds of years before they occurred! To fulfill all 300 prophecies is a statistical impossibility. There has not been a single prophecy in all the Bible that has been proven to be false! No other book can even come close to making such a statement. **Obviously, the Bible is a supernatural document!**

## **Conclusion**

Is our faith blind? We began by examining the veracity of the Bible: a personal love letter from God in which our history, intimate details of how God created the world and our relation to Him; is described in great detail. In response the sceptic we found the following to be true:

- 1. Since there are no original manuscripts then how can one be certain the word of God accurately represents the events it describes? To this we said that there are over 20,00 manuscripts that were written with a 98 % accuracy rate. Far more evidence than any other historical document in existence.**
- 2. There are contradictions in the Bible so how can it represent truth when it contradicts itself? To this we said that yes there are about 40 numerical discrepancies in the Bible but none of them affects doctrine and faith in God.**
- 3. Since the Bible was written by humans who were sinners how can one be certain their sin did not taint the revelation from God? To this we said that the Holy Spirit carried the writers along to ensure the message was not tainted by their sin. If it was then how could it have gotten 98% accuracy rate by worldly standards? More importantly the Bible predicts events with 100 percent accuracy. It truly is a supernatural document.**
- 4. The Bible has been translated so many times over the centuries how can one know with certainty it has not been altered to fit modern times? To this we said that the original Greek text is available for all scholars to read so modifying it is impossible without sharp criticism.**

Next week we are going to continue answering the question: is our faith blind by looking at other evidence that God exists such as: our experience, answered prayers, creation and the church.