



LESSON 54

The Bible, Part 3

“Given the large portion of the New Testament written by him, it’s extremely significant that Luke has been established to be a scrupulously accurate historian, even in the smallest details. One prominent archaeologist carefully examined Luke’s references to thirty-two countries, fifty-four cities, and nine islands, finding not a single mistake.”

JOHN MCRAY

Kirk’s Comment

The Bible is God’s Word. It is trustworthy, powerful, and effective. It cuts through self-righteousness and leads men to faith in Jesus Christ—the antidote for death. The facts in this lesson lay a good foundation for your trust in God’s Word.

QUESTIONS & OBJECTIONS

“Christians can’t use ‘circular reasoning’ by trying to prove the Bible by quoting from the Bible!”

The “circular reasoning” argument is absurd. That’s like saying you can’t prove that the President lives in the White House by looking into the White House. It is looking into the White House that will provide the necessary proof. The fulfilled prophecies, the amazing consistency, and the many scientific statements of the Bible prove it to be the Word of God. They provide evidence that it is supernatural in origin.



Archaeology and History Attest to the Reliability of the Bible

By Richard M. Fales, Ph.D.

No other ancient book is questioned or maligned like the Bible. Critics looking for the flyspeck in the masterpiece allege that there was a long span between the time the events in the New Testament occurred and when they were recorded. They claim another gap exists archaeologically between the earliest copies made and the autographs of the New Testament. In reality, the alleged spaces and so-called gaps exist only in the minds of the critics.

Manuscript Evidence. Aristotle's *Ode to Poetics* was written between 384 and 322 B.C. The earliest copy of this work is dated A.D. 1100, and there are only forty-nine extant manuscripts. The gap between the original writing and the earliest copy is 1,400 years. There are only seven extant manuscripts of Plato's *Tetralogies*, written 427–347 B.C. The earliest copy is A.D. 900—a gap of over 1,200 years.

What about the New Testament? Jesus was crucified in A.D. 30. The New Testament was written between A.D. 48 and 95. The oldest manuscripts date to the last quarter of the first century, and the second oldest A.D. 125. This gives us a narrow gap of thirty-five to forty years from the originals written by the apostles.

From the early centuries, we have some 5,300 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. Altogether, including Syriac, Latin, Coptic, and Aramaic, we have a whopping 24,633 texts of the ancient New Testament to confirm the wording of the Scriptures. So the bottom line is, there was no great period between the events of the New Testament and the New Testament writings. Nor is there a great time lapse between the original writings and the oldest copies. With the great body of manuscript evidence, it can be proved, beyond a doubt, that the New Testament says exactly the same things today as it originally did nearly 2,000 years ago.

Corroborating Writings. Critics also charge that there are no ancient writings about Jesus outside the New Testament. This is another ridiculous claim. Writings confirming His birth, ministry, death, and resurrection include Flavius Josephus (A.D. 93), the Babylonian Talmud (A.D. 70–200), Pliny the Younger's letter to the Emperor Trajan (approx. A.D.



100), the Annals of Tacitus (A.D. 115–117), Mara Bar Serapion (sometime after A.D. 73), and Suetonius' *Life of Claudius* and *Life of Nero* (A.D. 120).

Another point of contention arises when Bible critics have knowingly or unknowingly misled people by implying that Old and New Testament books were either excluded from or added into the canon of Scripture at the great ecumenical councils of A.D. 336, 382, 397, and 419. In fact, one result of these gatherings was to confirm the church's belief that the books already in the Bible were divinely inspired. Therefore, the church, at these meetings, neither added to nor took away from the books of the Bible. At that time, the thirty-nine Old Testament books had already been accepted, and the New Testament, as it was written, simply grew up with the ancient church. Each document, being accepted as it was penned in the first century, was then passed on to Christians of the next century. So, this foolishness about the Roman Emperor Constantine dropping books from the Bible is simply uneducated rumor.

Fulfilled Prophecies. Prophecies from the Old and New Testaments that have been fulfilled also add credibility to the Bible. The Scriptures predicted the rise and fall of great empires like Greece and Rome (Daniel 2:39,40), and foretold the destruction of cities like Tyre and Sidon (Isaiah 23). Tyre's demise is recorded by ancient historians, who tell how Alexander the Great lay siege to the city for seven months. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had failed in a 13-year attempt to capture the seacoast city and completely destroy its inhabitants. During the siege of 573 B.C., much of the population of Tyre moved to its new island home half a mile from the land city. Here it remained surrounded by walls as high as 150 feet until judgment fell in 332 B.C. with the arrival of Alexander the Great. In the seven-month siege, he fulfilled the remainder of the prophecies (Zechariah 9:4; Ezekiel 26:12) concerning the city at sea by completely destroying Tyre, killing 8,000 of its inhabitants and selling 30,000 of its population into slavery. To reach the island, he scraped up the dust and rubble of the old land city of Tyre, just like the Bible predicted, and cast them into the sea, building a 200-foot-wide causeway out to the island.

Alexander's death and the murder of his two sons was also foretold in the Scripture. Another startling prophecy was Jesus' detailed prediction of



Jerusalem's destruction, and the further spreading of the Jewish diaspora throughout the world, which is recorded in Luke 21. In A.D. 70, not only was Jerusalem destroyed by Titus, the future emperor of Rome, but another prediction of Jesus Christ in Matthew 24:1,2 came to pass—the complete destruction of the temple of God.

Messianic Prophecies. In the Book of Daniel, the Bible prophesied the coming of the one and only Jewish Messiah prior to the temple's demise. The Old Testament prophets declared He would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2) to a virgin (Isaiah 7:14), be betrayed for thirty pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:12,13), die by crucifixion (Psalm 22), and be buried in a rich man's tomb (Isaiah 53:9). There was only one person who fits all of the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament who lived before A.D. 70: Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Mary.

Because fulfilled prophecies are so beneficial in showing the supernatural origin of the Bible, and are lacking in other religions, we will look in depth at prophecies in upcoming lessons.

Yes, the Bible is an amazing book.

QUESTIONS

- 1. In your opinion, what is the motivation for critics who claim there are gaps between when New Testament events occurred and were recorded, and between the original writing and the existing copies?**

- 2. How does the Bible compare to other ancient writings in the number of early manuscripts?**



3. **How does the Bible compare to other ancient writings in the age of early manuscripts?**

4. **Where can some of the extra-biblical references to Jesus be found?**

5. **Which books of the Bible were excluded from the canon of Scripture at the early church councils?**

FEATHERS FOR ARROWS

Great Leaders Speak About the Bible

“I say to you, search the Scriptures! The Bible is the book of all others, to be read at all ages, and in all conditions of human life; not to be read once or twice or thrice through, and then laid aside, but to be read in small portions of one or two chapters every day, and never to be intermitted, unless by some overruling necessity.” *John Quincy Adams*

“Within the covers of the Bible are all the answers for all the problems men face. The Bible can touch hearts, order minds and refresh souls.” *Ronald Reagan*

“In all my perplexities and distresses, the Bible has never failed to give me light and strength.” *Robert E. Lee*

“I have read the Bible through many times, and now make it a practice to read it through once every year. It is a book of all others for law-



yers, as well as divines; and I pity the man who cannot find in it a rich supply of thought and of rules for conduct. It fits a man for life—it prepares him for death.” *Daniel Webster*

“It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God or the Bible.” *George Washington*

“A thorough knowledge of the Bible is worth more than a college education.” *Teddy Roosevelt*

“The Bible is the sheet anchor of our liberties. Write its principles upon your heart and practice them in your lives.” *Ulysses S. Grant*

Last Words

George Herbert (1593–1633), English poet, said to friends gathered around his bed:

“I shall be free from sin and all the temptations and anxieties that attend it: and this being fact, I shall dwell with men made perfect—dwell where these eyes shall see my Master and Saviour.”

Memory Verse

“Give me understanding, and I shall keep your law; yes, I shall observe it with my whole heart. Make me to go in the path of your commandments; for therein do I delight.”

PSALM

119:34,35