

The One True Faith: Historical and Archeological Evidence

Hello again from Hong Kong. Last week we investigated the notion of Christians being *'in the world but not of the world'* and in that teaching I made the claim that Christianity was the one true faith. Now, over the next three weeks, I am going to share with you the basis of this claim by drawing on evidence rather than just expecting you to take my word for it. This week, I'm going to examine the historical and archeological evidence for the Christian faith and next week the scientific evidence. In the third week, I'll compare Christianity with the two other major faith systems based on the number of followers as a percentage of the world's population, and these two faith systems are Hinduism and Islam.

Now, many non-Christians will tell you that the reason for not becoming Christians is because they cannot accept a 'blind faith' as they term it. This statement is made out of ignorance and hearsay because you will seldom find a non-Christian who has actually read the Bible or investigated it in order to test the claims for its authenticity.

I know this only too well because I was such a person, and I spent over 40 years of my life living in the deception that the Bible is a meaningless fabrication. It was only after really beginning to examine the evidence that I became convinced that what was in the Bible, despite all I had believed for over 40 years, was actually true. I think it was Josh McDowell, a Christian writer and scholar, who said *'you don't have to commit intellectual suicide to become a Christian.'* Actually, just the opposite is true because the Lord has left us with sufficient evidence to be absolutely sure of our faith. In fact, those who are more likely to be exercising a blind faith are, for example, the scientific community who are effectively *'clutching at straws'* to prop up the tired theory of evolution, which tends to be contrasted with Christianity as the alternative and in their terms, real explanation of human existence. Anyway, I don't want to run ahead because science and Christianity is the subject of next week's teaching.

This week, I'm going to take a look at the historical and archeological evidence for the authenticity of the Bible. Before I start, I want to confirm to you that Jesus Christ himself was very much concerned with evidence, so he actually endorses our search for evidence to support our faith. There was a time when John the Baptist was languishing in prison and being alone, he was obviously fair game for Satan, the great deceiver, who sowed the seeds of doubt in John's mind as to the identity of Jesus Christ. I'm going to read you the relevant passage and it's from Matthew 11 verses 2 through 5:

When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples to ask him, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?" Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. (NIV)

Note Jesus' response which essentially is saying to John, if you are having doubts, look at the evidence! This reference to evidence was not an isolated statement of Jesus. For

example, in John 10 verse 24 to 25, we read: *The Jews gathered around him, saying, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly". Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me."* (NIV)

Furthermore, in John 14:11 Jesus is having a dialogue with his disciples and in confirming His identity says this to them: *Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves.* (NIV)

In all three of these Bible references, Jesus indicates that any doubt can be dealt with by looking at the evidence. This is not to deny the importance of faith, but Jesus is not asking us to have a faith that had no foundation in reality. My focus today is going to be on the authenticity of the Bible from a historical and archeological point of view. The apostle Paul states in 2 Timothy 3:16 that *All Scripture is God-breathed*. On this basis, it follows logically that if the Bible turns out to be a fiction, the Christian faith crumbles. However, fortunately for the 2.3 billion Christians in this world, this is far from the case. In examining the historical accuracy of the Bible as supported by archeological evidence, we have to remember that the Bible was not written as a history book, but in the course of explaining God's plan for this world, it does mention various historical events. In the time we have available in this teaching we will first deal with a central Bible authorship issue which has been challenged by skeptics, and then move on to the examination of some of the major biblical events that have also been challenged.

The Accuracy of the Old Testament

The Torah or Pentateuch: Authorship

Let's begin with the Old Testament and the authorship of The Torah, or the Pentateuch, both referring to the first five books of the Bible. Now, critics of the Bible as an accurate document, challenge the biblical claim that Moses, of the baby in the crib in the Nile, the burning bush and partings of the waters fame, actually wrote the Pentateuch. Given that these books were likely to have been written around 1300 years before Christ's birth, we are never going to be able to prove categorically that Moses wrote these books.

However, the evidence suggests that Moses was probably the author and there is no evidence that he was not. Now, Moses is a famous biblical character, and for Christians, one of the central figures in the Old Testament. It's also quite likely that most non-Christians, who have probably not read the Bible through, will be familiar with the Moses story, part of which is his upbringing by Pharaoh's daughter as a Prince of Egypt, which was the title of a 1998 animated movie. Those a little older, like me, will remember the late 1950s movie called 'The Ten Commandments' which also tells the story of Moses.

Now, critics have suggested that Moses could not have written the Pentateuch because writing was not invented at the time, particularly at the time when Moses is supposed to have authored these books. Contrary to this argument, archeological evidence has confirmed that writing was widespread in Moses' day. What is particularly interesting is that the Pentateuch, although written in Hebrew, contains more Egyptian words than

anywhere else in the Bible. Contrary to the views of the critics, there is every indication that Moses, a Hebrew brought up in the Egyptian court, wrote the first five books of the Bible.

Reference:

<http://creation.com/did-moses-really-write-genesis>

The Tower of Babel

The Tower of Babel story is recounted in Genesis 11 verses 1 to 9 and for those unfamiliar with this event, I will read the account in Genesis.

Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth." But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. The Lord said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other." So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. That is why it was called Babel - because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world. From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth. (NIV)

Now, skeptics argue that the Tower of Babel story is pure fiction; however there are two points that need to be made in favour of the truth of the story.

First, philologists are scientists that study the origins of language and believe it is perfectly possible that all the languages of the world can be traced to one common language. Secondly, cuneiform inscriptions discovered in the ruins of ancient Babylon contain the writings of King Nebuchadnezzar who reigned around 600 years before Christ and who was notoriously famous for throwing Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego into the fiery furnace. Nebuchadnezzar talks about rebuilding the base of what he calls "*the tongue tower*" that was built 16 centuries before the first king of Babylon and confirms that the tower was never finished because people were "*without order expressing their words*", in other words, their language was confused.

So, according to the language experts, it is possible there was one common language at some point in human history, and there is confirmation that the Tower of Babel actually existed from writings of 2,600 years ago.

References:

www.christiancourier.com/articles/140-tower-of-babel-legend-or-history-the
Jeffrey. G. R. (1998). *The Signature of God*, Tennessee, Thomas Nelson.

Joseph and the Seven Years of Famine (Genesis 41)

The Bible has an Old Testament account of Joseph of the coat of many colours fame, being sold into slavery by his brothers, and he Joseph, eventually becoming second in command to Pharaoh in Egypt, somewhat equivalent to the Prime Minister. During his time as Prime Minister, the Bible recounts a famine of seven years that had followed seven years of plenty. Joseph knew this was coming because he was given this in a dream by the Lord. He therefore stored up food during the seven years of plenty to be used in the famine years. Again, critics of the Bible have viewed the whole story as pure fantasy and even also call into question whether Joseph actually existed. However, they have difficulty dealing with the fact that a marble tablet was discovered in a ruined fortress in Yemen dated 1800 years before Christ, the time of Jacob and his 12 sons, one of whom was Joseph, which confirms the seven good years followed by seven years of famine. Furthermore, in the 19th Century, a flood exposed an ancient graveyard in Yemen. One of the tombs, that of a rich woman who died during the famine, specifically mentions Joseph by name and the fact that she sent her servant to buy grain from him. Enough said here I think!

Reference:

Jeffrey. G. R. (1998). The Signature of God, Tennessee, Thomas Nelson.

The Sinai Inscriptions and the Exodus

When Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, the route was through the Sinai Peninsula and inscriptions on the rocks and cliffs in the Peninsula have been referred to since 10 BC but were only translated in the 19th Century. The translation confirms that these writings are in ancient Hebrew but in an Egyptian style. They also refer to Moses by name, and describe the parting of the Red Sea, the provision of quail, and the rebelliousness of the Israelites including Miriam, who was Moses's sister. The style of writing suggests a race of people who could write Hebrew but who had lived among the Egyptians and adopted the Egyptian style of forming sentences. This is another powerful evidence for the biblical accounts in the Old Testament, this one, the exodus, and counters skeptics' claim that the whole story is a fiction.

References:

<http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/7234/sinai2.html>

Jeffrey. G. R. (1998). The Signature of God, Tennessee, Thomas Nelson.

The Existence of David

Some more evidence that supports the accuracy of Old Testament events: a particular area of dispute is the existence of David. Skeptics have disputed that David (of David and Goliath fame) was a real person and they've likened him to King Arthur in the English fictional classic, King Arthur and The Knights of the Round Table. However, in 1993, an archeologist discovered various fragments of ancient stone clearly referring to David as the King of Israel and to the House of David.

Reference:

<http://www.gmagazine.org/booklets/BT/king-david.asp>

Joshua and The Taking of Jericho

OK, let's move to another event. In the book of Joshua, we have the strange story of Joshua and the battle for Jericho, one of the fortified cities in the promised-land. Joshua is instructed by God that in order to take this fortress, he and his whole army should walk around the walls of Jericho seven times with the trumpeters blowing their trumpets, and on the seventh trip around, the walls will fall down and Jericho can then be taken. Joshua chapter 6 verse 20 records the final events of this story like this: *When the trumpets sounded, the army shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the men gave a loud shout, the walls collapsed; so everyone charged straight in, and they took the city.* (NIV)

Now, critics have consigned this story to pure fantasy, but they have to deal with the fact that, first, when the original site of Jericho was excavated, which was between 1930 and 1936, the chief archeologist excavating the site made a written statement with his team that the walls fell flat rather than inwards, which was usually the case when armies broke through a fortified wall. Also, it's been noted that a portion of the wall did not fall, that on the north side where Rehab lived, these walls were still intact.. Now, biblically, Rehab and her family were spared because she had previously hidden an Israelite reconnaissance team, and in doing so, she recognized the power of God and that the Israelites were God's chosen people.

Now, these are just snapshots of many archeological discoveries that all tend to confirm the accuracy of the Old Testament.

References:

www.apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=11&article=988

<http://www.answersingenesis.org/articles/cm/v21/n2/the-walls-of-jericho>

Let's now move to the New Testament. Now, what about the New Testament? And I guess the central figure we need to consider, of course, is Jesus. Did he exist, what was his status and what was his effect?

The Existence and Status of Jesus

Now, Josephus is a key figure here. He was born in AD 37 probably a year after Jesus' death according to most scholars and was a soldier. He was a Pharisee and later a historian paid by the Romans. He was not a Christian and so might be called a hostile witness, and hostile witnesses by their very hostility are viewed as being particularly powerful sources of evidence given that they are not going to say anything in support of the subject under study unless it is unavoidable. It is interesting what he, Josephus, said in his '*Antiquities*', which is the history of the Jewish nation. What did he say about Jesus?

This is one popular translation:

"At this time there was a wise man who was called Jesus. His conduct was good, and he was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and the other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. But those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion, and that he was alive; accordingly he was perhaps the Messiah, concerning whom the prophets have recounted wonders."

He also described, Josephus described, the death of James and confirmed him to be the brother of Jesus.

Now, there are other accounts of Jesus and his impact, again by hostile witnesses. For example, in AD 64, the Roman historian, Tacitus talked about Nero trying to excuse the great fire of Rome: *"Nero fastened the guilt . . . on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of . . . Pontius Pilatus ..."* This is what Tacitus says.

Pliny, around AD 112, Governor of a Roman Province asks Trajan's advice about the appropriate way to conduct legal proceedings against those accused of being Christians. Pliny says that he needed to consult the Emperor about this issue because a great multitude of every age, class and sex stood accused of Christianity. So it was a problem.

Lucian of Samosata was a second century Greek satirist. In one of his works, he wrote about the early Christians as follows:

"The Christians . . . worship a man to this day - the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account... [It] was impressed on them by their original lawgiver that they are all brothers, from the moment that they are converted, and deny the gods of Greece, and worship the crucified sage and live after his laws."

So having established that Christ existed and had a major effect on this world, according to hostile witnesses, I want to move to talk about the Dead Sea Scrolls.

References:

<http://carm.org/non-biblical-accounts-new-testament-events-and-or-people>

<http://www.raptureforums.com/FeaturedCommentary/specialreportthehistoricaljesus.cfm>

The Dead Sea Scrolls

These were a set of scrolls discovered in a cave in Qumran in 1947 that contained a complete set of Old Testament writings except for the book of Esther.

Based on various dating methods, the Dead Sea Scrolls were written during the period from about 200 BC to AD 68. The biblical text in the Dead Sea Scrolls is in substantial agreement with the versions of the Old Testament used today. So our Bible is accurate.

According to Grant Jeffrey (1998), a well-known Christian writer, in 1991, it was discovered that one of the scrolls made reference to the Messiah who “*suffered crucifixion for the sins of men*” Another scroll referred to the Messiah as “*the Son of God*”. A Dr. Jose Callaghan has analysed eight different scroll fragments that date between 50 BC and AD 50 that appear to be direct quotes or copies of Mark’s Gospel, the book of Acts, Romans, 1 Timothy and the book of James. No other writings have been found from that time to dispute any of the content of these books that were written about events that took place less than 20 years before they were written. In other words, Christ’s crucifixion etc.

If we bring this into modern times, we only have to think how difficult it would be to fabricate an account of significant events that took place less than 20 years ago without the account being challenged.

References:

<http://www.allaboutarchaeology.org/dead-sea-scrolls.htm>

Jeffrey. G. R. (1998). *The Signature of God*, Tennessee, Thomas Nelson.

Closing Words

OK, I want to close with a few summary statements. Our faith has a sound historical foundation supported by archeology. I’ve provided these facts as just a sample of the evidence in support of the Christian faith. I want you to be in no doubt that, far from being a blind faith, the Christian faith is authentic and accurate. Evidence was important to Jesus and he has left enough for Christ followers to be sure that they are believers in the truth. If you’re not a believer at this time, Jesus said in John chapter 14 verse 6: *I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.* (NIV) I hope our discussions today have left you in no doubt that this statement merits serious consideration in your life. Please be encouraged to check out the facts for yourself.

Well as always, thanks for watching and I hope that the issues raised in this teaching facilitate some fruitful and informed discussions in your various churches and groups. Now, I will say good bye and God bless and will see you next week when we’ll deal with scientific support for the authenticity of the Bible. Goodbye.

Discussion Questions

1. What are the implications of the statement that the Christian faith is a blind faith?
2. What does the fact that Jesus was Himself very much concerned with evidence tell us about the way we should share our faith?
3. The late Dr. Grant Jeffrey reported the evidence supporting the existence of Joseph, the family, the Sinai inscriptions and so on, and a search of the Internet does not reveal any major critics of his research in these areas. Why then are these amazing facts among the best kept secrets in human existence?
4. Why does it seem that God wants mankind to search for evidence of the truth of

scripture through archaeological discoveries and so on rather than making His existence and scripture absolutely clear?

5. Do you think that if you presented all the evidence contained in this message, non-believers and skeptics would immediately give their lives to Christ? Why or why not?

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