

Bible Overview

Introduction

Ray Stedman did a series called “Adventuring Through The Bible” that inspired this series. You can download his series for free on raystedman.org

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The Bible is made up of 66 different books, written by over 40 different authors, written in 3 different languages (Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek), written on 3 different continents (Africa, Asia and Europe) and it took over 1500 years to write. The Bible is a collection of books and yet it has ONE primary message and ONE primary topic: God’s redemptive work through Jesus and the free gift of salvation that God offers through Jesus.

John 5:39 You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me.

Luke 24:27 And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He [Jesus] expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.

Hebrews 10:7 The volume of the book is written of Me

Romans 15:4 For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.

Jesus is the topic of the Bible so if you have a difficult time understanding a passage, place Jesus in that passage and see what happens.

Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

Not everything in the Bible is considered “good” but we'll see how God uses everything to work it to His good and His purpose.

Can We Trust The Bible?

Proof vs. Evidence

When talking about HISTORICAL events, you cannot “prove” them. The only things in this life that we can PROVE are things that are repeatable and predicable.

History cannot be proven like that. We can't repeat events. So when we're talking about history, the best you can do is gather all of the evidence, examine it and figure out what *probably* happened.

It's the same with the Bible. When we talk about "proving" the Bible or "proving" anything in history, we're talking about presenting evidence. If the evidence seems to be pointing to something happening, then it probably did.

The Evidence: Bible manuscripts

When you're talking about ancient manuscripts, like the Bible books, or histories of Julius Caesar, or accounts of Alexander the Great, or whatever - you are talking about copies. The real issue is: how good are your copies?

Author	Book	Date Written	Earliest copies	Time Gap	No. Of Copies
Homer	Iliad	800 B.C.	400 B.C.	400 years	643
Herodotus	History	480-425 B.C.	A.D. 900	1,350	8
Thucydides	History	460-400 B.C.	A.D. 900	1,300	8
Plato		400 B.C.	A.D. 900	1,300	7
Demosthenes		300 B.C.	A.D. 1100	1,400	200
Caesar	Gallic Wars	100-44 B.C.	A.D. 900	1,000	10
Livy	History of Rome	59 B.C. - A.D. 17	4 th Cent. (partial), mostly 10 th Cent	400 1,000	1 partial 19 copies
Tacitus	Annals	A.D. 100	A.D. 1100	1,000	20
Pliny Secundus	Natural History	A.D. 61-113	A.D. 850	750	7
New Testament		A.D. 50-100	114 (fragment) 200 (books) 250 (most of NT) 325 (complete NT)	+50 years 100 150 225	5,366

Josh McDowell's "New Evidence That Demands A Verdict" - pg 38

Even without the manuscripts, we could reproduce the entire New Testament except for maybe a handful of verses from the church fathers (the disciples of the apostles, theologians in the first three centuries).

Translation vs. Transmission

Translation is where you take the Greek or Hebrew and translate it into English. There are many translations out there: NIV, NKJV, NASB or whatever. These translations are taken from the original languages, from the manuscripts we have available.

Transmission is where something is written down, then copied and copied.

Textual Criticism

Let's say you have a rich uncle who dies and leaves you one million dollars. The lawyers are trying to find you so they send you a series of letters.

You have inherited One Million dollar.

You inherited One Million dollars.

You have inherited 1 Million Dollars.

Have inherited One Million dollars.

You have inherited One Million dollars.

Well, some words are capitalized, others are missing words... can you figure out what the original message was?

The problems we have between the manuscripts is the difference between "Jesus Christ our Lord" and "Our Lord, Jesus Christ" – it might be difficult, but can you figure out what they're both trying to say?

The other neat thing about having so many copies but no originals is that it prevents someone from changing key doctrines. With the thousands of manuscripts out there, if someone did make a change to a document or even 50 documents, they would still stand out among the thousands of other documents that read differently.

That is a testament to the preservation of God's word. The guys who study this sort of thing estimate that the Bible manuscripts we have agree to within 99.95%.

How did we get the Bible?

The Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew. It was then translated into Greek about 250 BC and called the *Septuagint*. The Septuagint was probably the Bible that the disciples were familiar with, though there were Hebrew scholars that could still read the Hebrew manuscripts.

The New Testament was originally written in Greek and then translated into the vulgar language of the day (Latin) in about 380 AD. This became known as the *Latin Vulgate*. The Vulgate became the official Bible of the Roman Catholic Church.

In 1330, John Wycliffe translated the Vulgate into English. English translations were then outlawed by the Roman Church.

In 1516, a Catholic priest named Erasmus printed a Greek New Testament. This is probably the most important book ever published because it led to the Reformation. He only had 5 or 6 manuscripts, mainly from the city of Constantinople (AKA Byzantine). "The Byzantine Text" became dominant during the middle ages. This will later become known as the received text, or the Textus Receptus, which formed the basis of the King James Version.

Following this, more and more manuscripts were discovered, including the Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus. Sinaiticus is believed to be the oldest complete manuscript of the New Testament, dated to about 350 AD. Vaticanus isn't as complete but agrees with Sinaiticus. With more and more manuscripts being discovered, people started to get dissatisfied with the Textus Receptus and people wanted a better Greek New Testament.

In 1881, Bishop Westcott and Fenton Hort published the *Critical Greek New Testament*. This was the beginning of the modern English Translations.

The Revised Version came out of a joint committee of British and American scholars. But the Americans disagreed with the British and came out with the American Standard Version, which became the New American Standard Bible (NASB). Then a bunch of translations started to come out including the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), the New International Version (NIV), English Standard Version (ESV) and many others. They all used the Critical Greek New Testament as their starting point.

About Bible Translations

When you talk about translations they basically fall into two groups: word-for-word translations (“literal translations”) and thought-for-thought (“dynamic equivalent”) translations.

Each of these translations provides something different. You can take the Hebrew and the Greek and translate it literally word for word. The Bibles which do this would include the NASB, KJV, NKJV, and the ESV.

You can also take the Hebrew and the Greek and carefully translate sentences thought for thought. This is known as Dynamic Equivalence. Dynamic Equivalents would include the NIV and the NLT.

The Amplified Bible and the Message Bible are not really translations at all, but more of a transliteration - a commentary on the Bible. The author basically wrote down what he believed the passage said from the Greek or English.

The Bibles mentioned are solid and proven translation: NASB, KJV, NKJV, ESV, NIV, and NLT.

The Evidence: Science

The Bible talks about things we *can* verify and things we *can* observe. If it fails on any of those points, then it's not the word of God. If God is the Creator, He should know more about it than any man.

The Bible talks about cosmology. Genesis 1:1 “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” I’m going to tell you another secret: no atheist on Earth knows how the universe was started. In fact, the sciences, like physics and math, all indicate that the universe had to be created.

Isaiah 40:22 God “sits above the circle of the earth.”

The Bible tells us that Earth isn’t flat, but a round sphere. The Hebrew word for circle is sphere or roundness. This was Isaiah long, long before anyone had a clue that the Earth was round.

Job 26:7 He hangs the earth on nothing

Job is the oldest book and says that Earth is suspended on nothing. This was when people thought that Atlas carried it on his back, or that it was carried on the back of a giant turtle or an elephant. For natural man, it’s inconceivable that Earth would hang on nothing.

Job 36:27-28 For He draws up drops of water,
Which distill as rain from the mist,
Which the clouds drop down
And pour abundantly on man.

This explains the hydrological cycle: water evaporates, it condenses, it rains, and over and over they cycle.

Job 38:16 Have you entered the springs of the sea?

Tells us there are springs in the sea. This was not known until 1913, when they found rivers in the seas.

Psalms 8:8 And the fish of the sea
That pass through the paths of the seas.

Matthew Maury, who lived in the middle 1800s, had a career with the U.S. Navy. He was the founder of modern oceanography and hydrography. Maury was inspired by Psalm 8:8 and dedicated his life to find and document these paths God had mentioned in Scripture. “Whatever passes along the paths of the sea.” These paths were unknown before he charted the winds and currents of the Atlantic. Maury drew accurate maps of ocean currents that are still used today.

God had directed Abraham to circumcise newborn males specifically on the eighth day (Genesis 17:12). It wasn’t until the twentieth century we discovered that after eight days of life, vitamin K in the infant’s diet permit prothrombin, an important blood clotting factor, to reach its peak. To circumcise on an earlier day, when the clotting mechanism is immature,

could result in excessive bleeding. There are many other cultures that circumcise their males on the first, fourth, sixth, seventh, or twentieth days of life. If the Jews had discovered the eighth day merely by trial and error, why didn't other cultures do so? Clearly Jewish practice was based on obedience to divine revelation.

Leviticus and Deuteronomy talk about hygienic and medical knowledge far in advance of its time. Throughout the dark ages, the Jews were protected from the plagues because of their good hygiene.

For example, when they touched a dead body, they had to wash and were unclean for a certain period of time. They had to bury their feces outside of the camp. They couldn't eat pork, which avoided trichinosis at the time. They couldn't eat an animal found dead.

Leviticus 17:11 The life is in the blood. Even 200 years ago, if you had problems, the doctors would say that you have too much blood and bleed you. The barber poles were to show you that this was where you could get bled. George Washington died because of being bled.

The Evidence: Prophecy

If you're going to worship a God, that God better be able to tell you what's going to happen in the future. The Bible is the only holy book on Earth that can stand solely on its prophecies. The only one.

Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done. – Isaiah 46:10

No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. - 2 Peter 1:20-21

Peter is saying that the men who wrote prophecy didn't just make it up, but were moved by the Holy Spirit, like a ship's sail being pushed by the wind. They were able to write using their own vocabulary and their own style, but the content was from the Holy Spirit.

The Bible not only contains prophecies, but it's 100% accurate on every score. The biblical prophecies aren't general, like those from Nostradamus, but very specific.

Jeremiah says that the Jews would be in Babylon for exactly 70 years. He predicted this while Nebuchadnezzar was still out conquering everything. Then in the book of Daniel, Daniel reads the writing on the wall and says that Babylon's time is finished. That very night Cyrus the Persian took over the city. Babylon had city walls wide enough to have chariot races along. They had water coming into the city from under the walls. Cyrus diverted a little bit of the water and they walked right into the city. They were so

effective that the people of Babylon didn't even know they had been conquered. They were too busy partying. So Cyrus is feeling pretty good that he took the greatest empire in the world without even having to fight a war. Then he does something weird: he lets the Jews go home and rebuild Jerusalem. Why would he do that? Why would he care about the Jews? Someone bent on world domination isn't going to allow a group of people to get organized and possibly rebel. Because 160 years before Cyrus was born, God named him (Isaiah 44:28-45:7)!

Daniel 9 tells you the EXACT day that Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey. Sir Robert Anderson earned a knighthood for his research on this very topic, showing this occurring. Others have gotten doctorates on the subject. Liberal scholars always try to late date Daniel, but even the most liberal will say that Daniel was 160-200 years before Christ, and yet he predicts the exact DAY that Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey?

Josh McDowell (New Evidence that Demands a Verdict) gives 61 specific prophecies that were fulfilled by Jesus' first coming. Some other scholars count as many as 300 prophecies that He fulfilled at His first coming.

There are a LOT of prophecies that refer directly to Jesus.

1. Micah 5:2 – He would be born in Bethlehem. (When the magi showed up, Herod asked the Jews, and even the liberal Jews at the time knew where to find it.)
2. Zechariah 9:9 – He would ride on a donkey.
3. Zechariah 11:12 – Sold for 30 pieces of silver
4. Zechariah 11:13 – Temple, Potter (Matthew 27:7)
5. Zechariah 13:6 – Talks about the wounds in His hands
6. Psalm 22. – Crucifixion before it had even been invented
7. Isaiah 53:7 – He was innocent and gave no defense
8. Isaiah 53:9 – He died with the wicked, but was buried with the rich

If you took these simple 8 prophecies, does anyone know of the chances of them all happening to one man? Well, depending on how you do the math, you would get 1 in 10^{17} or 1:100,000,000,000,000,000.

Chances :

- Bethlehem – Maybe 1 out of 100,000 people have been born there. (It's a really small city).
- King on a Donkey – Far fetched. Maybe 1 out of 100 kings ride donkeys.
- 30 Pieces of silver – Pretty specific, but let's pretend that 1 out of 1,000 people get sold for that amount.
- Temple / Potter – Pretty difficult there. assume 1 out of 100,000
- Wounds in hands – Let's pretend that 1 out of 1,000 people get those
- Crucified – Assume 1 out of 10,000 people

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- Didn't give a defense – Very rare. Most people give a defense but let's say 1 out of 1,000.
 - Died with wicked, buried with the rich – Maybe 1 out of 1,000

Only the Bible can stand on its record of prophecy. Most holy books don't even have prophecies. Those that do tend to have prophecies that are very general and have all sorts of conditions on them.

The Evidence: Archaeology

Cities are mentioned throughout the Bible, most of which you can go and visit today.

Acts 27:28-29 says that off the coast of Malta, the water was 120 feet deep. Colin Hemer wrote a book called "The Hellenistic Setting of the Book of Acts" and he details fact after fact after fact that Luke got correct in the book of Acts, including the depth of the water around Malta.

John 5:2 says the pool of Bethesda had 5 gates. Nobody believed that until they dug it up.

People said that there never was a man named Pilate until they were digging around the Caesarea theater and found a stone with his name on it.

They recently found Ai where Joshua experienced a defeat after Jericho. It was basically just a military outpost. (There is a whole area of biblical archaeology that validate the events in the Bible.) Someone said that there are 25,000 sites that have validated the Bible.

There's some really good youtube channels like Expedition Bible and Digging for Truth that have archaeologists examining the evidence for the Old Testament. There has been a lot of stuff coming out in even the last few years. For example, they've recently found a tablet on Mt Ebal, which is very, very significant (but we'll look at that when we get to Deuteronomy).

There is no archaeological FACT that contradicts the Bible. People have a lot of funny ideas that contradict the Bible, but not one archaeological fact has contradicted the scriptures.

In contrast, the Book of Mormon, written in 1830, talks about elephants in North America, cities made out of cement, and iron swords. However, there hasn't been a single city, other than Jerusalem, or detail in the book found to support such statements. Here's part of an article from Ensign, an LDS church publisher, written in 2001 (emphasis mine):

Book of Mormon Linked to Site in Yemen - "News of the Church," Ensign, Feb. 2001, 79

A group of Latter-day Saint researchers recently found evidence linking a site in Yemen, on the southwest corner of the Arabian peninsula, to a name associated with Lehi's journey as recorded in the Book of Mormon.

Warren Aston, Lynn Hilton, and Gregory Witt located a stone altar that professional archaeologists dated to at least 700 B.C. This altar contains an inscription confirming "Nahom" as an actual place that existed in the peninsula before the time of Lehi. The Book of Mormon mentions that "Ishmael died, and was buried in the place which was called Nahom" (1 Ne. 16:34).

This is the first archaeological find that supports a Book of Mormon place-name other than Jerusalem or the Red Sea, says Brother Witt.