

Biblical Apologetics

2. Isn't the bible full of errors?

Part 1

Working on assumption people are at different places – some not yet a Christian but interested, some new to the faith and others keen to study this kind of material to help encourage their own faith and answer some of the questions folks have.

What points might be made to show that the bible is full of errors and what might some answers be (with scripture references?)

Feedback – believe something out there...

Book recommendations – Case for Christ by Lee Stroebel
Cmf.org.uk – confident Christianity

Last week you will remember we talked about God revealing himself in nature – '**general** revelation' and more specifically in 'special revelation' through his son Jesus Christ and his word.

Let's think, just a minute, about the nature of God revealing himself through his word because some would say, 'how can the infinite possibly be comprehended by the finite'. How can the vastness of God be understood by our tiny minds?

Firstly of course, if God is God then all things are possible with him. Last week we used that illustration of Shakespeare and hamlet – God writing himself into our human history in the person of Jesus who is as Paul writes in Colossians 1:15.

(look up)

Colossians 1:15 ⁵ **He** is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

But before Christ came, there was his word in the Old Testament where he revealed himself in increasing measure to his people. One of the primary ways God reveals himself in the Old Testament is through analogy. He uses something in one area of experience to convey a truth in another e.g. Psalm 2:7 God is called Father, Psalm 23 Shepherd. Of course God is much more than either of these things but God uses our experience in life to illustrate something of who he is. **Like** an adult with '*an infant God is wont in a measure to 'lisp' in speaking to us*', said John Calvin.

So God is more than capable of communicating something of himself with us – through analogy.

But there are things about God that we cannot comprehend, these are sometimes called 'the incommunicable aspects of his character'

Deuteronomy 29:29 - 30:1 *The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may follow all the words of this law.*

The revealed things in nature, his word and his son as ours and they should be precious to us. All these things we find out in his word which, illuminated by his Holy Spirit, is the chief place for us to learn about him and ourselves.

But can we really trust this document. This book of books collated over some 2000 years by different 40 different authors? Surely it must be full of errors!

Abraham Kuyper – The Dutch reformer and politician gave four reasons as to the advantages of God's communications being written

- 1. It achieves durability** – *Errors of memory, deliberate or accidental corruptions are memorized*
- 2. It is universally disseminated through translation and reproduction*
- 3. It has the attributes of fixedness and purity*
- 4. It gives a finality and normativeness which other forms of communication cannot attain*

What the bible says about itself?

2 Timothy 3:16 - 4:1 *16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking,*

correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

2 Peter 3:16 *16 He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.*

2 Peter 1:20-21 *20 Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. 21 For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*

(nature of inspiration – human personality contrast John and Paul)

Probably the main questions that come up about the bible are these:

- **Did** the events really happen in the way the eyewitnesses claimed they did?
- Did the story change before it was written down?
- Is what we have now what was originally written down?
- Are there contradictions?

Look at in part 2

Part 2

In dealing with these questions with friends I think it is best to stick to using the Gospels as an example – not least because it is there that people will encounter Christ himself but we will also consider the old testament.

Did the events really happen in the way the eyewitnesses claimed they did?
(Are there errors of fact?)

If the eyewitnesses did not relate the events as they originally occurred, then there are only two possibilities. Either they were mistaken or they deliberately lied.

Up until recently there was no archeologically evidence that even King David existed. Then low an behold something was found giving verification to the later 1000 years of the bible story. But up until that point you had to take it on trust that at least the characters were real. But on examining the accounts we find a remarkable degree of consistency. Consider for example the parallel histories in Kings, Chronicles and the Prophets, (they overlapped each other in different ways and confirm what was being said by each set of writing). Also consider the biography of Jesus in the four Gospels.

On the other hand would the authors deliberately lie? According to tradition, eleven of the twelve disciples of Jesus met a violent death on account of their belief in his resurrection. Would they really have put themselves through such suffering for a faith they knew was false? (1 Cor 15:15-19; 2 Cor 11:23-29)

1 Cor 15v15-19

If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.

2 Cor 11v23-29

I have worked much harder, been in prison...flogged... exposed to death again and again...five times I received the forty lashes minus one...three times I was beaten with rods...once I was stoned...three times I was shipwrecked...I spent a night and a day in the open sea...in danger from rivers...bandits...I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked...

By far the majority of modern archaeology has only served to verify what the bible teaches e.g. Luke uses a term for a Roman governor and modern scholars slated him but archaeological digs found that the terms was used in that time.

Did the story change before it was written down?
(Are there errors of verbal transmission?)

Many people in our twentieth century world of wordprocessors, photocopiers and faxes disbelieve that verbally transmitted information could ever remain uncontaminated. An examination of the way stories are passed on in contemporary non-literate societies quickly puts paid to this kind of cultural arrogance. Oral traditions are composed in easily memorable format and are constantly repeated and checked. At the time of Jesus Rabbi's memorized the whole of the old testament! The capacity of the human memory is astounding as any mother who has read to her children knows.

Consider these things also – Do you know what is the earliest written book in the new testament? Paul's letter to the Galatians was written in 48 AD within 15 years of the events. What he displays is that the basic understanding of Christ as the Son of God, crucified and risen was prevalent with 15 years of the event. Too early for mythology to develop.

Luke was Paul's companion and see what he does

Luke 1:1-3 *Luke 1:1 Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, ² just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eye-witnesses and servants of the word. ³ Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus,*

Luke also wrote the book of Acts as a second volume and it finishes seemingly before the execution of Paul – AD 62 so it his research would have been done in the early 60's less than 30 years after. Still plenty eyewitnesses around. Take also Mark, looks very much like he drew on Peter's reflections who was also executed in 62AD. Mark is using a firsthand eyewitness who is possibly facing death for what he believes. John lived till in his 80's and probably wrote his account in the 70's. Now people say his stuff very different. But his self declared aim is the same.

John 20:31 - 21:1 ³¹ But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

It is like he had seen the other accounts and writes in different style and complementary fashion.

But it's still a long time since the events of the resurrection! Even at a liberal estimate we are talking it all written within 60 years.

"...the period is too slight to permit any appreciable corruption of the essential centre and even of the specific wording of the sayings of Jesus" WF Albright (Archaeologist)

Is what we have now what was originally written down?
(Are there errors of written transmission?)

Scribes who copied Scripture were meticulous in their attention to detail – they were highly devoted and highly aware this was the word of God. One has only to look at old manuscripts like the book of Kells in the Dublin Trinity College library, or some of the scrolls in the British Museum to see the truth of this. Even if we doubted this fact there are enough early copies of both Old and New Testament documents to show that they have not been changed over the course of time.

Until this century the earliest Old Testament in Hebrew which we possessed was the **Massoretic Text** (cAD900). However, the Dead Sea Scrolls discovered at Qumran in the 1940s, (which contain parts of every Old Testament book save one) are **1,000** years older and virtually identical.

See ppt

Entire copies of the New Testament in Greek dating from the 3rd and 4th centuries (Codex Vaticanus, Sinaiticus and Alexandrinus) can be viewed today. Some of the earliest fragments (eg John Ryland) date from the lifetime of those who knew the apostles personally. When comparisons are made with other

documents of antiquity the Bible documents stand alone in terms of authenticating evidence.

We know about Julius Caesar (whose existence no-one doubts) from less than a dozen copies of the original documents, the earliest of which post-date his death by 1,000 years. By contrast there are over 24,000 records of the life of Christ surviving from the first two or three hundred years after he walked the streets of Palestine.

Apart from the New Testament documents, early Jewish and Roman literature also makes mention of Christ: his teaching, miracles, crucifixion under Tiberius and even the three hours darkness at the time of his death. (see Tacitus, Lucian, Josephus, Suetonius, Pliny and Thallus)

Are there contradictions?

Those who make reference to the 'thousands' of contradictions in the Bible are usually unable to name one. Most genuine contradictions can be attributed to minor errors in hand copying of individual letters or numbers

2 Ch 36v9

Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for three months and ten days..

2 Ki 24v8

Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for three months...

Others arise when the same story is told from the perspective of different observers

Lk 24 v1-2

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb.. Jn 20v1

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance.

Apparent contradictions confirm rather than cast doubt on the Bible's authenticity. They would be carefully edited out in a fake. The fact remains that there is not a single error in the Bible which casts doubt on any significant historical biblical event or doctrine.

Lee Strobel – Athiest to Christ deep criticism of facts

Last point lead us to the Lord's table

Fulfiment of prophecy eg Isa 53

Isaiah writing upto 700 years earlier saw from a distance how the God of heaven would finally pay for

man's sin. He saw he terrible eternal judgement of God visited on a suffering servant – so that by his wounds/his stripes we might be healed.

Read Isa 53

Ultimately the bible is an invitation card, to come yield your life to the saviour and follow him. When all the proof is said and done we should still here the voice of the saviour saying to Christian and non Christian alike – Come follow me. Take up your cross daily and follow me and I will give you life, life to the full. Let your life be a signpost to the reality of a living saviour.