

THE HISTORICITY OF THE BIBLE

This topic deals with the question, “Is the Bible a reliable historical document? There are many who question the historicity of the Bible but would never question other ancient literary works. There are three ways historians evaluate a document for historical reliability—The Internal Test, The External Test and the Biographical Test. That will be the focus of this section.

THE NEW TESTAMENT

THE INTERNAL TEST

Does the Document Claim to Be Written by an Eyewitness?

- Luke was an eyewitness (Lk. 1:1-4)
- Peter was an eyewitness (2 Pet. 1:16-18)
- John was an eyewitness (1 Jn. 1:1-3)
- The writer of Hebrews spoke to eyewitnesses (Heb. 2:3)

Did it Really Happen?

- If the Biblical narratives never happened they could have been easily disproved. There would have been those living at the time who could have contradicted the Biblical accounts. These things were not done in secret (Acts 26:24-26).

- The disciples had nothing to gain and everything to lose by making their claims about Christ. It was their commitment to Christ that eventually caused their martyrdom. Few people are willing to give their life for a lie.
- Facts are recorded that would work against the purpose. If things were fabricated, truly somethings would be left out. For instance, recording that women were the first to see Jesus after His resurrection. In this culture the testimony of a women was not given a lot of emphasis and in some cases was not even admissible in a court case.
- Their writing were in sync with each other. They were four different writers with four focuses.

THE EXTERNAL TEST

Is there external material that confirms the reliability of the document?

Archaeology

Archaeology has confirmed many things spoken of in the New Testament. For example the Caiaphas Ossuary

Quotes by the Church Fathers

If every New Testament in the world were destroyed, the whole New Testament (all but eleven verses) could be reconstructed based on the quotes of the Church Fathers.

Outside References

One example is the reference in Acts 18:2 where all Jews were asked to leave Rome. Suetonius says, “Because the Jews at Rome caused continuous disturbances as the instigation of Crestus [Latin for Christ], he [Cladius] expelled them from the city.”

THE BIOGRAPHICAL TEST

Are there documents that have survived to support the writings? In order to make the Biblical information in the original autographs accessible to others, copies were made. Over time, the original either deteriorated, were lost or destroyed.

Time Gap

Therefore, the closer a copy to the original, the less time for errors to creep in.

The Number of Copies

The more copies available the easier it would be to make comparisons to determine the original writing.

THE OLD TESTAMENT

THE INTERNAL TEST

Does the Document Claim to Be Written by an Eyewitness?

- Moses was an eyewitness, he wrote from the first person perspective (Ex. 3:18; Num. 10:29; Deut. 1:19).
- Joshua recorded the events that he witnesses (Josh. 24:26).
- Ezra, who wrote the Book of Ezra, observed the events he recorded (Ezra 8:21-24).
- Nehemiah, who wrote the Book of Nehemiah, observed the events he recorded (Neh. 1:1-11).

Did it Really Happen?

In Daniel 4 we read about the pride and fall of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. As a result he was removed from his throne, took on certain characteristics of an animal and eat grass in the fields for seven years. At the end of seven years he was restored to his throne (Dan. 4:28-37). Historical records describe a certain time period when Nebuchadnezzar was absent from the throne. Other records talk about his restoration from a particular illness.

THE EXTERNAL TEST

Is there external material that confirms the reliability of the document?

Jesus Christ (who is God and was there from the beginning).

- Jesus Christ acknowledged the historicity of the Old Testament (Matt. 5:17; Lk. 24:27-44).

- He acknowledged the creation (Mk. 13:19)
- He acknowledged the creation of man and woman (Matt. 19:4-6)
- He acknowledged the historicity of Noah's flood and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Lk. 17:26-29)
- He acknowledged Mosaic authorship of the first five books of the Bible (Mk. 12:26)
- He acknowledged the giving of manna in the Wilderness (Jn. 6:32)
- He acknowledged Jonah being in the belly of the great fish (Matt. 12:39-40)

Archaeology

Archaeology has confirmed many things spoken of in the Old Testament. For example the "House of David" inscription.

History

History furnishes many proofs of the correctness of the biblical representation of life in Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, Medo-Persia, and so forth. A number of rulers of these countries are mentioned by name in Scripture, and none of them is represented in a manner contradictory to what is known of him in history. Shalmaneser IV is said to have besieged the city of Samria, but the king of Assyria, whom we now know to have been Sargon II, is said to have carried the people away into Assyria (2 Kings 17:3-6). History shows that he reigned from 722-705 B.C. He is mentioned by name only once in the bible (Isa. 20:1). Neither Belshazzar (Dan. 5:1-30) nor Darius the Mede (Dan.5: 31-6::28) is any longer regarded as a fictitious character. (Henry Theissen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, pp. 56-57).

THE BIBLIOGRAPHICAL TEST

(How many manuscripts copies have survived and how distant are they from original autographs?)

In 1947 the scrolls were discovered by a young boy chasing after a stray goat, in Qumran located on the shore of the Dead Sea. 1100 ancient documents, around 230 manuscripts of the Bible dating 250 BC-100 AD. They contained parts of every book of the Old Testament except the Book of Esther. The scrolls take us back 1,000 years closer to the original writings. When compared to the earliest manuscripts, the wording is almost exactly the same.