

Prayer List

Gene
Veda
Wallace
Sheila
Judy
Rose

Services:

Sunday

Bible Class 9:00 a.m.
Assembly 10:00 a.m.
Assembly 11:00 a.m.

Wednesday

Bible Class 7:00 p.m.

Elders:

Brad Behrens - bradbehrens@pinolechurchofchrist.com
Michael Odom - MichaelOdom@pinolechurchofchrist.com
Ernie Sprinkel - preacher@pinolechurchofchrist.com

This Week's Question:

What name is the Sea of Galilee called in the Gospel of John?

Answer To Last Week's Question:

The Philistines - 1 Samuel 4:10

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Why Trust the Bible?

Doy Moyer

Having overviewed some points regarding the nature of evidence, faith, and the existence of God, we turn to the question of why we should trust the Bible.

Christians are tempted to say that we should trust the Bible because it is God's word. This is true. But this will hardly convince an unbeliever, who will point out that such reasoning is begging the question. In other words, we need to prove that it is the word of God, not just assume it. If we can assume that the Bible is true, why can't Mormons accept their books on the same grounds? Why can't any number of religions with extra-biblical "revelations" accept their works? The difference is that a solid, objective case can be made for the reliability of the Bible.

In order to make this case, we can view the Bible within a framework of history. We don't have to assume inspiration to show that the Bible rests on solid historical grounds. We believe the Bible to be inspired, but this belief does not prove that it is inspired. We should be convinced that the Bible is true historically; then we have reason to accept the inspiration of the Bible without hesitation.

We do not have space here to examine the bibliographical data concerning the Bible (i.e., how it came down to us through history). Instead, we will briefly consider some internal questions—criteria by which historians measure ancient documents to ascertain their historical value. Most of these are just common sense.* We will first pose the question and then briefly show that the Bible passes the tests:

Internal Criteria

1. Was the writer in a position to know what he is talking about? Does the text claim to be based on eyewitness accounts?

The biblical writers are much involved in the events about which they write. Eyewitnesses are often appealed to (Luke 1:1–4; 1 Corinthians 15:1–8; 2 Peter 1:16; John 1:1–3, etc.). They were in a far better position to know what they were talking about than the modern critics.

2. Does the document in question contain specific, and apparently irrelevant, material?

Firsthand sources are often full of details that are not central to the story; false accounts are often generalized. This is not to say that the Bible has irrelevant material. But when we look at given records, there are some details that, on first reading, appear unnecessary. For example, in our reading of John 20:1–8, one might wonder whether it really matters if it was early or late, dark or light. Does it matter that Peter went into the tomb first? Or that the burial cloth was folded? Again, these things may be significant; but from an historical viewpoint, why put material like this in unless it happened just as it says? It boosts the historical reliability.

3. Does the document contain self-damaging material? If a document has material that makes the “heroes” look “bad,” or if the material might even weaken the story, then it strengthens the case for truth being the motivation of the writer. Though it sounds odd, the Bible does contain such material. One of the clearest examples of this is in the Gospel accounts in which women are first to discover the empty tomb

and report the resurrection. This is not to be negative toward women, but it is an historical fact that women could not testify in courts at that time, as they were considered tale-bearers. Now if the account is fabricated and the writer wanted to pass it off as true, it would be self-defeating to put the women in such a position. They probably would not even be part of the account. But there they are! What accounts for it? This is the way that it really happened! So their inclusion strengthens the case for historical reality. Add to this other disciples, such as Peter, that are often portrayed in a bad light. Their faults are not hidden.

4. Is the document reasonably self-consistent? Is there a coherence to the accounts? Do they make sense? Most would expect some inconsistencies in historical documents, but this does not normally cause problems. Concerning the Bible, we do find a self-consistent theme (even though written over a 1600 year period, from men of differing backgrounds, languages, times, etc.). The Gospel accounts present a consistent portrait of Jesus. There are differences, but these do not equal contradictions. The differences do not change the relative consistency of the accounts.

5. Is there evidence of addition and exaggeration? “Fish stories” are exaggerated over time. Critics sometimes claim this about the Bible (e.g., that later disciples added the idea that Jesus is God). However, as C.S. Lewis put it: “As a literary historian, I am perfectly convinced that whatever else the Gospels are they are not legends. I have read a great deal of legend, and I am quite clear that they are not the same sort of things” (God in the Dock). The evidence for exaggeration is not there.

In the next study, we will ask similar questions regarding external criteria.