

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 mountain did Balaam plan to curse Israel from?

Answer To Last Week's Question:

The Sea of Tiberias - Jong 6:1

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Why Trust the Bible? Part 2

Doy Moyer

In our last study, we asked some questions about the internal reliability of the Bible. The questions express criteria by which documents may be examined for reliability and authenticity. Internally, the Bible passes the tests.

Now we turn to some questions that express external criteria by which documents may be tested.* By "external," we refer to the criteria that are applied outside of the documents in question. Some argue that the Bible has no "external" evidences for it. However, the Bible does pass the tests for external criteria. Following are some questions and answers relating to this.

External Criteria

1. Would the authors have a motive for fabricating what they wrote?

If ulterior motives can be established for the author making up the account, then the reliability of the document is not as trustworthy. On the other hand, if, in the writing, the author had nothing to gain and perhaps even something to lose, then the trustworthiness of the document is increased.

Think about the Bible. What motive would the writers have had to make up their stories about Jesus? Rather than helping themselves, they put themselves in harm's way by telling

about Jesus as they did. The preaching of the resurrection caused them to be arrested and persecuted. So they had nothing physical to gain by their accounts. In fact, they lost their lives for the biblical message. Why would they do this for something that was dreamed up by their own imaginations?

2. Are there other sources which confirm material in the document or substantiate the authenticity of it?

Credibility is enhanced by the existence of other sources that corroborate material in the document. Further, it is even more desirable to have outside sources that attest to authorship. (As Boyd notes, though, the same criteria must be applied to these outside sources also.)

The authorship of the New Testament books is attested to by several second-century sources. These men were in a much better position to know what they were talking about than anyone today. So they cannot be lightly dismissed. Further, there are several secular sources (e.g., Tacitus, Josephus, Pliny, Jewish writings) that give information about Jesus and the early Christians.

Incidentally, it is noteworthy that if all copies of the New Testament manuscripts were lost, there are virtually enough quotes from early Christians who wrote that the New Testament could be almost completely reproduced.

3. Does archaeology support or hinder material in the document?

Trustworthiness is increased when archaeological evidence supports the document in question. Credibility is damaged when findings go against the document. Care needs to be taken. The lack of archaeological findings neither helps nor hinders. Skeptics have been embarrassed by making charges prior to the findings.

Many findings have been found to support the biblical texts. Even some things that used to be thought contrary to the Bible have been reversed in favor of the Bible (e.g., the existence of the Hittite empire; Luke's account of the census and birth of Jesus). There is much in favor of the Bible; and

we know of nothing conclusive that has proved that the Bible is in error. Assumptions and misinterpretations of findings (or lack thereof) do not prove the Bible to be erroneous.

4. Could those who lived at the time of the writings have falsified the accounts, and would they have had a motive for doing so?

If there were those who could have shown that the account given was made up, and if they had a motive for doing it but did not, then the document's trustworthiness is increased. We must remember that the Gospel was born in a hostile situation. There were plenty of people who would have refuted the proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus if they could have. Many would have loved to have been able to do so (e.g., produce the body of Jesus). But no one could. To the contrary, the message of Christ spread and grew tremendously. Even enemies of Jesus could not deny the miracles that were done in His name (Acts 4:16). When Peter preached on Pentecost, he appealed to what the people knew, because Jesus had not worked in a corner somewhere (Acts 2:22).

All of this just goes to the point that we have good grounds for accepting the reliability of the biblical documents. They are true sources of history; and we may treat the accounts as such. F. F. Bruce commented:

"The evidence for our New Testament writings is ever so much greater than the evidence for many writings of classical authors, the authenticity of which no one dreams of questioning. And if the New Testament were a collection of secular writings, their authenticity would generally be regarded as beyond all doubt." (The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable? p. 15)

Finally, let us keep in the mind that the Bible does not exist simply as history. It is given for our learning and doing. By it we can be transformed into new creatures, if we will but receive it with meekness and let it be implanted into our hearts (James 1:21).