

Bible Special 06-05-09b

Let's pick up our study this evening. We're looking specifically at the Bible. Generally, in our Bible study, we study the content of the Bible, but we're looking at the Bible itself.

Is it worth our time? What makes Christians think that the Bible is in fact the Word of God to the exclusion of all other candidates, to all other pretenders? Well, we've talked about the uniqueness of Scripture. We've talked about its consistent witness. Forty authors, 1,500 years, 66 books, and it is a fabric.

And I can tell you from my own observation that the closer you look at it, if you look at it in Hebrew, if you look at it in Greek, if you subject it to rigorous examination, it only is that much more so. Because the consistency and the continuity goes down to what you might call the microscopic level, even to the tense of the verbs and the specific meanings of individual words are so precise and so accurate and so reflective of the integrity of the account that any honest scholar who looks at it recognizes, whether they're a believer or not, that it is one extraordinary collection of writings. It is unlike anything else.

Again, remember I told you about William F. Albright, the great sort of secular archaeological scholar from the 1900s. If you read any archaeology from 1900 through 1960, if you look at the Dead Sea Scrolls and so on, you will see W.F. Albright quoted and listed and articles that he's written and so on. Here's another thing that he said in 1958.

He said, The Bible towers in content above all earlier religious literature, and it towers just as impressively over all subsequent literature in the direct simplicity of its message and the Catholicity, Catholic means universal. When they say the Catholic Church, they're really saying the universal church. Catholic in Latin means universal.

So he's saying the universality of its appeal to men of all lands and times. I want to read that again, because Albright made no pretense of being a Christian, but when he looked at the Bible as a scholar and as someone familiar with archaeology and history of the ancient Near East, this was his conclusion. The Bible towers in content above all earlier religious literature, and it towers just as impressively over all subsequent literature in the direct simplicity of its message and the Catholicity of its appeal to men of all lands and times.

So you don't need to be embarrassed. You don't need to hang your head or be ashamed or get a confused look on your face if someone says, so you believe the Bible? Why do you think the Bible is the Word of God and none of these other books? Anyone who asks that question is ignorant, as we used to say in Oklahoma. In Oklahoma, ignorant is a two-syllable word.

They do not know about the Bible. And you can say, if you don't understand why Christians believe the Bible is true, you need to go take a look at the Bible and discover its uniqueness. It is unlike anything in history.

It's unlike any other book. It is unlike any other religious message. No other book has the credentials that it has.

No other book even comes close. Another famous name in history, Victor Hugo, if you know who he is, said this, England has two books, the Bible and Shakespeare. England made Shakespeare, but the Bible made England.

That's Victor Hugo. Well, people will say, oh now, wait a minute, you're saying it's unique and it's without contradiction and so on. I've heard that the New Testament in particular is just late and it's a copy of a copy of a copy and it's full of mistakes and errors and it's changed.

Jesus said some things originally, but by the time the New Testament got written down, why, they changed a bunch of it. And the New Testament that we have today is not really even the New Testament that originally got written down. So again, how can you think that this is the inspired Word of God when it's all garbled and messed up? If you haven't heard people say this, you will as you go through life.

You'll hear people who get up on the World Wide Web and they'll go to the, there's a place called the Skeptic's Bible where there's this mocking, running commentary of all the different verses in the Bible and some yahoo with a Bachelor of Arts degree and something has gone through and tried to point out supposed contradictions and errors and allegedly nonsensical statements. And really, after you read a little bit of it, you just get tired because it's somebody without any education. It's somebody without any familiarity.

And it sounds good to equally ignorant people. But there's lots of this. And so one of your friends or one of your colleagues, one of your co-workers or somebody in your family may come up and say, oh, that New Testament, that's just a garbled bunch of writings.

It isn't really... Nobody knows what Jesus really said and so on. There have been these accusations that monks decided to add things to the Bible and make it better. We have evidence to the contrary.

We have strong evidence to the contrary because if this were true, then you couldn't really take the promises of God at face value. It just says, he that hath the Son hath life. You'd say, well, I don't know if Jesus said that or if the Apostle said that or if maybe some monk in the third century said it.

Maybe that isn't even true. Maybe there's some other way of salvation. Maybe the promises of enduring to the end and being an overcomer and the profitability of the Word of God, maybe that's just some guy's idea.

Well, there is witness for the New Testament text like no other ancient text in history. We have approximately 5,500 separate pieces of Greek text that have some or all of the New Testament in them. 5,500 relatively early copies of the Greek New Testament.

Different portions. Some of those are just a page or a part of a page. Others of them are a complete codex of a book or many books.

And these copies are very, very old. Now, the New Testament was written in the generation after the Lord Jesus Christ. Let's have a little pop quiz here.

What's the approximate year of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection and ascension? About when did that happen? About roughly 30 A.D., right? Give or take a year or two. Could have been 29. Could have been 28.

Could have been 31 or 32. A lot of people say 33 A.D. They just assume Jesus was born in the year zero and He was 33 when He was crucified. So, anywhere in that 27 to 33 range.

So, we'll just say 30 A.D. Round it off. The New Testament books were all written somewhere in the vicinity of 50 A.D. to 90 A.D. in that general range. Again, give or take a few years.

The earliest fragment of New Testament text that we have, an actual piece of it, is dated to A.D. 120, which is within 50 years of the writing of the book. No other ancient text do we have a copy that close to the original. No other book.

We have two really major manuscripts of the Bible and in particular, the Greek New Testament. One is Codex Vaticanus, which is from about 325 A.D. This would be roughly 300 years after Christ. And Codex Sinaiticus, named because it was found in a monastery there at Mount Sinai.

And this is from around 350 A.D. Again, a little over 300 years after Christ. And Sinaiticus is a virtually complete copy. And that dates within 250 years of the completion of the New Testament books.

And that's just unheard of. For example, there's a really famous work from the ancient world written by Caesar called the Gallic Wars. If you ever take ancient history, you'll perhaps read some excerpts and you'll see references to the Gallic Wars written by Caesar.

Julius Caesar was in the century before Christ, in the double digits before Christ. The earliest copy we have of Caesar's Gallic Wars is 1,000 years later. The earliest copy is 1,000 years after Caesar wrote the thing.

Homer wrote the Odyssey. Everybody's heard of the Odyssey? Very famous piece of writing. The first complete copy of the Odyssey that we have is 2,200 years after the fact.

Now, does anybody say, well, we don't think Homer wrote the Odyssey? Does anybody say, we don't think Caesar wrote the Gallic Wars? But here we've got copies of the New Testament dated well within 200 years. Some of them within 50 years of the writing of the book. And people say, oh no, the people that wrote it didn't write it and it isn't what it says it was and the copies are not accurate and so on.

They subject the Bible to a completely unreasonable standard when you look at any other

pieces of ancient writing. Not only do we have 5,500 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, but we also have, which by the way is multiple times more than we have copies for any other book. Catullus was an ancient historian.

You know how many early copies we have of his work? Three. And the oldest one is 1,600 years after he wrote. Herodotus, very famous ancient Greek historian.

Remember Herodotus wrote about Alexander the Great and the Persian Empire and that sort of thing. Herodotus, you know how many copies we have? Early copies of Herodotus? Eight. And the oldest copy of Herodotus that we have is 1,300 years after Herodotus.

Like around 1,000 AD and he wrote circa 200 BC. And we have one from like 1,100 AD or so. Not only does the New Testament have more documentary witness, 5,500 manuscripts, and a closer time to the earliest known copies, which is anywhere from 50 to 250 years, but it was translated into other languages at a very early date.

It was recognized as inspired scripture and valuable and was translated into other languages very early. You know how many versions, like Syriac and Coptic and other languages we have? The number of copies that we have of those early versions, early translations into other languages than Greek? Somewhere between 18,000 and 25,000 early copies of the New Testament. Translations into other languages.

Now, what other holy book do you want to name that has that kind of attestation, that has that kind of respect and circulation? There is none. Nothing comes close. The great classics of Greek literature don't even come close.

The Bible is unique and remarkable because it is the inspired Word of God. Even if we didn't have the 5,500 Greek manuscripts attesting the text, even if we didn't have the 18,000 or 20,000 versions of the New Testament in other languages from the early centuries, we would still be able to reconstruct the early text of the New Testament. You know why? Because the early church fathers like Irenaeus and Papias and others quoted extensive portions of Scripture in their writings to the early church.

These were church leaders in the first few centuries, in the 100s and the 200s and the 300s A.D. And they had copies of the text and they would quote out of them as they wrote. And here would be a heretic over here trying to teach some bogus, goofball doctrine. And so, Irenaeus wrote a great, big, long, I mean, the thing is gigantic, called *Adversus Hieracum*, which is Latin for against the heresies, against the heretics.

And he said, here's a heretic over here saying this goofball thing about Christ that Christ wasn't actually born the Son of God, that He was wandering around and lightning struck Him when He got baptized by John and He suddenly became the Son of God. Then when He was hanging on the cross, away went the divine essence and now He's not the Son of God anymore. He was just the Son of God for a couple of years.

And Origen just got all incensed and he wrote all kinds of paragraphs and he quoted all kinds of Scripture and said, there's no way this can be true. And he just took on heretic after heretic after heretic and goofball idea after goofball idea after goofball idea and he wrote about it extensively and he quoted practically the whole Bible writing this down. And so we have Irenaeus, we have Papias, we have Eusebius who was a historian who quoted the different individuals.

The early church fathers, and you can get a set of them, they have the anti-Nicene fathers and the post-Nicene fathers. There's like a 30 volume set of the church fathers that would fill a big long bookcase. And these men down through the centuries quote Scripture over and over and over, all different verses.

There's a man named John Burgon, B-U-R-G-O-N. He's gone through and counted how many times the early church fathers quoted Scripture. Well, when he got to 86,000, he kind of gave up.

He has cataloged more than 86,000 citations by the early church fathers quoting different parts of the New Testament alone. That's just the New Testament. 86,000 references to the New Testament in the early church fathers.

Now, show me somebody that's got 86,000 quotations of the Koran, or 86,000 references to the Bhagavad Gita, or the other supposedly holy books and writings. No other book has had this kind of attention and study and respect and diligence in copying and faithfully recording as the Word of God. Don't let anybody tell you that the Bible is just another book.

It's ludicrous. All that shows you is that they are abysmally ignorant of history and of the evidence. The evidence for the Bible is overwhelming.

5,500 Greek manuscripts, 20,000 versions, 86,000 citations by the early church fathers. It's as though God backed up the Queen Mary full of evidence and said, you want to believe this is My Word? Here you go. Don't let anybody frown at you and say, oh, what's the matter with you that you believe the Bible? What's the matter with them that they don't? How much evidence does it take? There is nothing like the Bible in all of recorded history.

Nothing. Because it is unique and it is the Word of God. There's another great scholar named F.F. Bruce.

If you read anything in the theological realm, you will run across F.F. Bruce sooner or later. He's everywhere. He wrote a lot.

He makes this observation. 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. Nobody questions Herodotus.

Nobody questions Thucydides. Nobody questions Xenophon. Nobody questions many of these

other ancient writers unless and until they mention Christ.

If Eusebius mentions Christ or if Josephus mentions Christ or if some other early author mentions the Lord Jesus or mentions Christians or Christianity, well, now we're going to question them. Now we're going to pick them all apart. But they're not questioned.

And the evidence for the New Testament writings is hugely greater than for any of these other ancient books. He goes on to say, if the New Testament were a collection of secular writings, their authenticity would generally be regarded as beyond all doubt. If it was any other writing, nobody would question it.

If it was secular writings. Sir Frederick Kenyon was the principal librarian of the British Museum for years and years and years. He was one of the foremost experts, still is, one of the foremost experts that has ever lived on ancient manuscripts and their legitimacy, their authority.

He wrote this about the New Testament. Now remember, this is Frederick Kenyon at the British Museum. The interval between the dates of original composition of the New Testament and the earliest extant evidence becomes so small as to be in fact negligible.

And the last foundation for any doubt that the scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed. There is no doubt that the New Testament that you have right in front of you now, that's what the authors wrote. Sir Frederick Kenyon, the principal authority on ancient manuscripts says the interval is so minuscule, so negligible between the early witnesses we have for the text and the actual writing, it's negligible.

And it has come down to us just as it is written. Any doubt has been removed. Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established.

This is one of the foremost scholars in the world on ancient manuscripts. He says, there's no doubt. What you've got is what was written.

So, people who question your faith and say, well, what makes you think the Bible? Hopefully now you're beginning to have a few ideas and a few answers about that. They need to go back and look. Well, show me another book that's got 55,000 ancient witnesses, that's got 20,000 translations in the early years, that's got textual witnesses within 50 to 200 years of its writing.

Show me that for Herodotus. Show me that for Thucydides. Show me that for Xenophon.

Show me that for Homer. Show me that for Aristotle or Plato or any of the other ancient works. The gospel accounts, people say, oh, this circulated for years and years as traditions and by the time it got written down, it was all garbled and it's not accurate.

Look at the evidence. For example, let's start with the book of Luke. We went through the gospel of Luke and Acts not long ago.

And you'll remember at the end of the book of Acts, the last half of Acts is all about the Apostle Paul, right? And at the end, Luke traveled with him and there are the sections of Acts where Luke switches over from saying, and Paul did this and Paul and Barnabas did that, Paul and Silas did this, and he says, we went here and we went there and we saw and did this, that and the other. And those we sections show us where Luke was traveling with the Apostle Paul. Well, where does the book of Acts end? Paul is alive.

He's under house arrest and he's entertaining visitors and if Luke had been writing later, after all of the detail he gives of the career of Paul, he would have certainly recorded his death and behold, they did come arrest Paul and chop off his head, would be the last part of the book. But Luke breaks off the account with Paul alive and operating in Rome. Why? Because that's when he wrote.

Well, the book of Acts is after the Gospel of Luke. He says in the beginning chapter of Acts, the former book I wrote to you, O Theophilus, to tell you about the life and work of Jesus Christ and now I'm going to tell you about the church. And he goes on and writes Acts.

Well, the Apostle Paul died in the 60's A.D., anywhere from 63 to 68 A.D., depending on who you believe. So, if Acts was written before that, say circa 60 A.D., well, the Gospel of Luke had to be written before that. So, if the book of Acts was written before 64 A.D., 68 A.D., whenever it is that Paul was executed, the death of Christ took place around 30 A.D., then Luke wrote down the account sometime within 20 years of the departure of the Lord Jesus.

Now, that is very contemporary. Universally, in the early church, when you've got Matthew and Mark and Luke, today everybody says, Oh, Mark was written first. Mark is the first Gospel and Matthew and Luke depended on it.

Well, that's by no means a fact. It's a possibility, but, the early church universally said Matthew was written first. Matthew is one of the disciples.

Levi, the tax collector, who was with Jesus. And he, according to early church fathers, eventually left Palestine. And before he left, he wrote his Gospel account down.

So, the Gospels are written within the living memory of people who received them. Now, why is that important? Why am I even talking about when the Gospels were written? Why does it matter? Think about this. Jesus leaves circa 30 A.D. Luke and Matthew and Mark write their accounts down earlier than 60 A.D. If you believe that Mark was written first, you can see that Luke has the same language as Mark and Matthew has the same language as Mark.

And if Luke was written before 60, well then Matthew and Mark had to be around also. Why is that important? Think about it. Let's say, let's pretend like everybody is, some of you are going to be happy about it, probably everybody would be happy about it.

Let's pretend like you're 22 years old. Those of you who aren't that old think it would be great to be 22. Those of you that are past that would love to be 22 again, at least for a while.

So, we're all 22 years old and the Lord Jesus has just been crucified, buried, risen, and ascended. It's 30 A.D. and we're 22 years old. Now, 20 years later, 30 years later, let's say 30 years later, the Gospels come out.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke all come out in 50 A.D. How old are we? If we were 22 in 30 A.D. and now it's 50 A.D., that's 20 years later, right? So, how old are you? 42. Well, I'm glad this is not a math class. I'd be really disappointed.

But I'm an English major. I could barely figure it out myself. So, you're 42 years old, right? Now, more than half the people in the ancient world, people try to say, oh, everybody died at the age of 25 in the ancient world because there was disease and no doctors.

That's nonsense. Most people lived into their 40s and a great many of them lived into their 50s and 60s and 70s and 80s and some of them lived even into their 90s. There are a lot of people still around.

This is my point. In 50 A.D., a lot of the eyewitnesses are still alive and around, aren't they? Now, if Matthew or Mark or Luke wrote a bunch of nonsense down, they'd get laughed out of town, wouldn't they? Wait a minute. I lived in Nazareth back in 30 A.D. and I didn't see that happen.

This is bogus. They'd be laughed out of town. The stuff would be torn up and thrown away.

Right? Eyewitnesses are alive. When Paul the Apostle writes his letters, he says Jesus was seen upwards of 500 people before he ascended to heaven. And he says most of these people are still around.

Go ask them. And Paul wrote that in the 50s A.D. And he said there's 500 people and a great majority of them are still around. Go ask them if you don't think this is true.

There's hundreds of people who saw this with their own eyes. What does this tell us about the integrity of the Gospel accounts? It isn't something that was written in 200 A.D. when nobody could refute it and nobody could argue with it. It came out in the early years when there were plenty of people who could verify its authenticity.

This is why it was accepted. This is why people died in front of the lions in the Roman Colosseums refusing to recant their faith because they knew it was true. Many of them were eyewitnesses.

And they said there is no doubt in my mind. So, once again, W.F. Albright, that great scholar, here's another quote from him. Great biblical archaeologist.

He says, We can say emphatically there is no longer any solid basis for dating any book of the New Testament after A.D. 80. The entire New Testament is in existence with the exception possibly of the book of Revelation. But there is no longer any solid basis for dating any book of the New Testament after A.D. 80, two full generations before the date between 130 and 150

given by the radical New Testament critics of today.

People try to say it was written late. It wasn't. And the archaeologists and the scholars who know admit it.

So, I hope that this gives you a little bit of perspective and will increase your confidence. When we study the Word of God, when we look at this Gospel of John as we're going to do here in a few weeks, it's worth studying. It is the Word of God.

It is alive and powerful. And it ought to make a difference. We can have confidence.

Christianity is not just any old faith. It is the only faith. It is the only way to find the truth, to find eternal life, and have a relationship with God.

There is no other way. Jesus said, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father but by me.

Let's close in prayer. Father, thank You for the gift of Your Word. Thank You for the Holy Spirit who makes it real to us, helps us remember and apply it.

We pray that He will impress it on our hearts so that we can live in a way that's pleasing in Your sight. We ask it in Jesus' name, Amen.