



THE PASTOR'S PEN

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Is the Bible Reliable?

In our last newsletter we talked about the individual responsibility we all have in reading and interpreting scripture. Along with that responsibility comes the questions: “Is the Bible that we are reading reliable?” After all, if it is proven to be filled with errors or contradictions, then how can we possibly put any trust into what it says? If it is inaccurate, how can we make a correct interpretation of its message? How can we trust it to be a guide for our lives and our conduct?

To answer these questions let me begin by saying that the scriptures are accurate. As scholars and translators have worked with the text, they have discovered that there are no real contradictions in the Bible and that it is more factual than the other contemporary historical accounts of its time. Most of the so called “errors” stem from a lack of historical information or archeological proof.

A good example of errors being used to question the validity of the Bible involves Luke’s writings. Luke uses a lot of technical Roman terms and titles in the books of Luke and Acts. In the early to mid 1900’s critics were quick to point out that most of his titles were inaccurate or that accurate titles were applied to the wrong people or location based upon the historical and archeological evidence of that day. Since those claims were made archeologists have found Roman and Greek inscriptions that matched Luke’s descriptions perfectly. These new finds now discredit the critic’s old arguments. It was not a matter in the mid 1900’s of Luke being wrong, he was right all along. The problem was that we just did not have enough information and the necessary facts to see the full truth of Luke’s accounts. Unfortunately, so many of today’s skeptics still quote those older volumes in their claims of error when trying to disprove the validity of the Bible. The modern result is that the truth is often missed or even worse, ignored. When we do not follow up on what has happened in archeology and history since the critical claims were first made, we too can fall victim to this error. The solution is that we must study not only the scriptures, but also the discoveries that help us interpret and understand the scriptures in order to know the truth.

Is the Bible reliable? Until the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered (between 1946-56), the oldest copy of the Old Testament in existence was the Aleppo Codex. This book is a hand written copy of the Old Testament dating to about 1000 A.D. It was a copy, of a copy, of a copy, of a copy... stretching back to originals written down over 1000 years between roughly 1400BC and 400 BC. In other words about 1400 to 2400 years before the codex was even begun. The critics were quick to question that with the text being copied so many times over so many centuries, how could it possibly be accurate? Yet, when the Dead Sea Scrolls were found (dated to between 50BC-50AD) they matched up almost perfectly with the Aleppo Codex even after 1000 years of intervening copies. It is interesting to note that most all of the differences that were found between the two texts were minor spelling variations and bits of punctuation. Nothing was discovered in the scrolls that

disagreed with the meaning or the content of the codex. So now the question is, if the copies can be accurate for 1000 years, why not 1400 years or even longer? If we are going to allow for possibilities, and it has been shown that it is very possible that our Biblical text is just as reliable today as it was when it was written, then why not accept that the copies we have are authentic? After all, there is no proof to the contrary, only speculation by the skeptics.

Is the Bible reliable? Did you know that for over 2000 years the only known historical reference to the Hittites was the Old Testament? The Bible mentions the ancient Hittite civilization more than 50 times, yet prior to their rediscovery in the 19th century, there appeared to be no evidence for their existence outside of the Bible. Skeptics and critics once again cited the missing evidence as proof that the Bible actually invented their existence. Basically the argument was, "We can't find any evidence for the Hittite civilization outside of the Bible. This shows that the Bible cannot be trusted as an historical source."

Well, in the 19th and 20th centuries archaeologists and historians found and explored the Hittite civilization. Not only did they discover references to the Hittite civilization in written documents and inscriptions, but they also found and excavated the ancient Hittite capital city of Hattusa (modern day Bodazkoy in northern Turkey). Even more evidence for the Hittites surfaced in Egypt with the discovery of a treaty between Pharaoh Ramses II and the Hittite Empire. The treaty was originally written on silver tablets deposited in Heliopolis and Hattusus and a huge copy was found on a wall of the great Karnak Temple. Once again, the critics were found to be in error and the scriptures were vindicated.

Is the Bible reliable? Along with the Hittites, the proof that over fifty individual people mentioned in the Bible actually existed was not found until the 20th century. However, it was finally found. The same is true for more than twenty-five cities scattered from Egypt to Syria. Until that proof was found the skeptics pointed to the Biblical record and claimed it was inaccurate. So far, the biblical account has been proven 100% accurate in what historians and archeologist have found to date. So what arguments do the critics and skeptics really have?

This list of facts and discoveries could go on for many pages, but it seems to me that the point is already clear. In reality, there has not been any historical or archeological fact established that has proven the Biblical account to be wrong once the full account of the discovery was known. The total validation of the Bible is still intact despite the assaults of the critics and skeptics. Is the Bible reliable? Yes, it has been proven over and over again to be reliable. Of course, the Bible's detractors claim once more that the accounts that are still undiscovered by science and history are in question. That is where faith comes in. A faith that is not blind, but a faith in the Bible that is based on evidence and substance, just as the writer of Hebrews tells us it should. So what is your opinion? Is the Bible reliable?

Trusting in the truth of the Scriptures,

James