

Study Guide for Why Believe the Bible?

To be used along with the video of the same name on www.ChristianfromMuslim.com

Summary and Notes:

Quick summary: In learning about Jesus and how to live the Christian life, the Bible is of utmost importance. Christians claim the message of the Bible has not changed in thousands of years. Muslims claim that it has been corrupted and is unreliable, and that to follow God, one must rely on the Qur'an. Which is true?

The Bible has many critics, and only some of them are Muslim. This study guide gives reasons for Christian claims that the Bible has not been corrupted and is the true source of knowledge about God. It reviews and expands the video lesson. Because the topic is so important, we include additional information about the Bible's reliability, clues on how to evaluate scientific and archaeological findings, and some strong defenses against the Bible's critics. We call this defense of the Bible ***Biblical Apologetics***. Those who want to know even more will find it in the Bonus material.

The Bonus material also examines the evidence the Qur'an gives for believing it, and encourages Christians to develop a ***Personal Apologetic Testimony*** of what they believe and why.

We hope that everyone taking this course will become firm in the Christian faith, and not tossed about with new discoveries and ideas, as Ephesians 4:14 warns us can happen.

Reality segment – Choosing a Suitcase

We all make choices on the journey of life. In today's reality segment, the stage is set for making decisions with Dr. C and Huda on a trip. While visiting the East Coast of America, they discover that they need more luggage. Even deciding which suitcase to choose can be difficult. But in the long run that matters little in comparison to deciding what to believe and how to live.

Why Believe the Bible? an interview with Rev. Georges Housney

Dr. Cynthia and today's guest discuss the reliability of the Biblical manuscripts. Georges Housney has been ministering to Muslims for over 40 years, and regularly hears them say that the Bible has been corrupted.

"It's a rumor!" Housney says to them. "What was corrupted and when?" he asks. He tells Muslims to check the evidence for themselves, then he presents some.

Housney points to the 24,000 Greek and Hebrew manuscripts we have of the Bible. It is by far the greatest number of any ancient book! Many of those manuscripts date from the early centuries before and after Christ. A full translation of the Old Testament, the writings in the Bible from before Jesus, was done from Hebrew into Greek before Jesus was born. It is called *The Septuagint*. Its content is consistent with existing Hebrew manuscripts.

Regarding the New Testament, the writings of the Bible from after Jesus was born, besides the thousands of Greek manuscripts, we have Latin manuscripts from the first few centuries, including a full Bible in Latin, the *Vulgata* (*Vulgate* in English).

Even if we did not have those, Houssney tells us, we could re-assemble the entire New Testament with only a few verses lacking, from another source: quotations in writings of the Early Church Fathers. These were the leaders that came immediately after Jesus' disciples, and were trained by them. It was their habit to include long passages from the New Testament in their advice to Christians and scholarly works.

Bible Teacher Kevin's Testimony about researching the Bible's reliability

Kevin shares with us in the video lesson, that part of his coming to the Christian faith was his investigation of the Bible's reliability. He points out that America now is filled with scoffers who don't believe the Bible. When he looked into the background of the Bible, he came to the conclusion that it is a true historical record. He found it to be the most reliable and accurate of all ancient books. It was the reliability of the Bible that encouraged him to stay strong as a new believer.

Kevin says, if the Bible is reliable, then we should ask ourselves, what if it is true? What will we do with its message?

Kevin says we should read and respect what the Bible says about God and us. The Bible reveals a plan to bridge the gap between us and God, through Jesus Christ. If we follow what it says, we will:

- **Repent** of our sins and old way of life
- become a Christian by **accepting Jesus' sacrifice** in our place
- receive the **Holy Spirit** into our lives
- **obey** what the Bible says

Dr. Cynthia's Lesson on Why Believe the Bible?

In this segment Dr. Cynthia teaches former Muslim Huda, why the Bible is reliable. The study guide will review her points, and add some additional information and references.

We include what we think is the strongest evidence, with enough detail for it to make sense. But you might want to further investigate things that interest you, on the internet or in books.

INTERNAL and EXTERNAL Evidence for the Reliability of the Bible

INTERNAL Evidence for the Bible – meaning proofs within the words of the Bible itself

1. The Bible claims to be the unchangeable Word of God:

- In the Old Testament, the Prophet Isaiah says in verse 40:8,
"The grass withers, and the flowers fade, but the word of our God stands forever."
- In the New Testament, Jesus in says in Matthew 5:18,
"I assure you, until heaven and earth disappear, even the smallest detail of God's law will remain until its purpose is achieved."

2. Consistent message: By consistent we mean the same, or fitting together. This is remarkable because the Bible is composed of 66 books, written by more than 40 authors over a period of greater than 1,500 years.

- Considering all that, it is an amazingly consistent message. As Houssney points out, the fact that the Bible fits together perfectly, supports its claim to be the Word of God.

- This is a much greater accomplishment than preserving the words from only one prophet at a set point of time.

EXTERNAL Evidence for the Bible – meaning proofs outside of the claims of Bible itself. Here we discuss eight of them.

1. **Existing Manuscripts**

- There are no known existing original manuscripts of the Bible. But this is usual for all ancient documents.
- What is unusual, is the large number of early manuscripts in the Bible’s case, as pointed out by Housney above, that support its authenticity.
- Ancient Jewish scribes had 4,000 rules to follow to assure they copied manuscripts accurately.
- The **Dead Sea Scrolls** were buried in caves in Palestine before Jesus was born.
 - These include all the books of the Old Testament, excepting Esther.
 - They are 1,000 years younger than the previously existing manuscripts of the Old Testament. Yet, there are few variations between those and the Dead Sea Scrolls.
 - They confirm that the process of copying Scriptures by the Hebrew scribes was very precise, and that what we have today is reliable.
 - Originally written about 700 B.C., the ***entire book of Isaiah*** is preserved in a copy from 125-150 B.C., including its prophecies of Jesus.
- Early **New Testament papyrus** fragments exist, like the ***John Rylands papyrus fragment p52***. It contains portions of verses from the Gospel of John chapter 18, and is dated about 125 A.D. This shows that the New Testament actually was written soon after Jesus death.
 - The Gospel of John is estimated to have been written at about 85 A.D. That means that this papyrus copy would have been made within about 40 years of the original by John. Due to traditional practices of copying from the earliest available source, it is even possible that this papyrus was copied from the original manuscript. That means it could be only one copy away from the lost original, amazing situation, seldom seen with ancient documents.
 - This and others, like the *Chester Beatty Papyri* show that the claims of Christians that Jesus as God the Son died for our sins, extend back to the early days of the church, not, as some claim, invented by Constantine and church counsels.
- Manuscripts like the ***Codex Sinaiticus***, from the fourth century, are important because:
 - They show very little variation from the Bible of today
 - Confirm that the **message** of the Bible is unchanged throughout time
 - they show that the message of the Bible was the **same at the time of Mohammed**, in the seventh century, as it was in the early church

(Note 1: A codex is in book form, not a scroll.)

Note 2: This codex is housed in the British Library in London. Dr. C has visited it and confirmed that important passages that we have now are essentially unchanged. Anyone can view the entire contents of this codex on-line. It is a great apologetic tool for the Christian faith.)

2. **The Qur’an** is an outside source which backs up the authenticity of the Bible as the Word of God. We are not saying that this is necessary, or that the Qur’an is from God. But we think it is essential for Muslims and Christians sharing with them to know this.

Qur’an confirms the reliability of the Bible in multiple places (Surahs 2:41,91,97; 3:3,39; 4:47).

For example, in the video, Huda reads for us in Arabic, part of the important passage in Qur'an Surah 5:43-47 (Book of the Table, or *Surah al-Ma'idah*). In English verses 46 & 47 say,

*“We sent Jesus son of Mary, confirming the Torah that had come before him, and we gave him the Injeel, in which was **guidance and light and confirmation** of the Torah that had come before it, a guidance and an admonition for the pious. Let the people of the Injeel judge by what Allah has revealed therein. And whoever does not judge by what Allah has revealed is disobedient to Allah.”* (slightly paraphrased)

This tells Muslims that the Old and New Testaments (*Torah* and *Injeel*) brought guidance and light, and that Christians should follow them. Verses 68 and 69 add to this by saying that Christians have nothing to fear and will not grieve if they follow the Bible.

Even in Arabic, their meaning is clear. Having been raised Muslim, Huda expresses her dismay at reading these verses, because in practice, Muslims routinely claim that the Bible has been corrupted. She says,

“You see Cynthia, even the Qur'an says we can trust the Bible, yet they tell us not to believe it!”

The Book of Jonah in the Qur'an 10:94 (or *Surah Yunus*) gives a clear and easy to remember example of the Qur'an's view of the Bible. (Note: when the Qur'an refers to “the Book” it means the Bible.)

“If you are in doubt concerning that which we have revealed to you, then ask those who are reading the Book before you.”

There are other **verses in the Qur'an which clearly** state that the Old and New Testaments are:

- 1) reliable and
- 2) confirm the Qur'an.

We agree with them on the first assertion: the Bible is reliable. However, any serious comparison of the Bible and Qur'an shows that the messages of the two holy books are very different. In fact, the Bible does not confirm the Qur'an on the most important doctrines.

In the video, Dr. C points out the problem this creates for Islam. There is a great disagreement between what the Qur'an says and the doctrine of Islam. This is called, the ***Qur'anic Dilemma***. (A dilemma is a big problem regarding difficult choices with no clear escape.)

How could this dilemma arise? Surely God, or Allah as the Qur'an calls him, would know that the Bible does not confirm Islamic doctrines? The explanations are as follows:

The Muslim explanation of the Qur'anic Dilemma:

Since verses confirming the Bible are many and well known, they claim that the Bible has been changed, or “corrupted” from what it was when Mohammed had his revelations.

Yet how can this be? The Qur'an itself agrees with the Bible that no one can change God's words.

“And the word of your Lord has been fulfilled in truth and justice. None can change his words.”

The Christian rebuttal:

To us, it indicates that the Qur'an is not from God. He knows all and would know what the Bible says. Prophet Mohammed however, would not have known this.

Surprisingly, the Bible was not available in Arabic until over a hundred years after Mohammed lived. Mohammed believed that all the prophets brought the same message as his – return to the worship of one God. He assumed that his was the same message that the Prophets Moses and Jesus brought. (Note: See also the lesson and study guide on *What Makes a True Prophet?*).

Mohammed encouraged Christians to follow the Injeel, because he believed that it did not support Christian doctrine. That fits with why early in his career he thought that Christians and Jews would agree with his message of one God, and follow him as a prophet. He was surprised that they did not.

But the Christians of that time knew the scriptures, and knew the scriptures said that Jesus was the Son of God and Savior.

When after Mohammed, the Bible became available in Arabic, Muslim scholars read it. They had a big shock! Not only did the Bible not confirm the Qur'an or prophesy Mohammed, it actually did claim that Jesus was Savior and God. So, they had a dilemma:

Either: option 1) the Qur'an was wrong or
option 2) somehow the Bible had been changed between the time Mohammed affirmed it and the time the scholars read it.

As we know from history, the Islamic scholars chose option 2.

Two essential questions for those believing what Housney calls the rumor that the Bible has been changed:

- **When** was it changed? Mohammed lived in the 600s A.D. If the Bible was changed before him, why did the Qur'an honor it? We know from the many manuscripts in existence at the time of Mohammed that the Bible and its doctrines have not changed before or after him.
- **Who** changed it? Copies of those manuscripts were spread half way around the world by the time of Mohammed. Who could have collected and changed them all? Besides Jews, there were rival Christian sects by the time of Mohammed. Which group changed them? Wouldn't they have changed them in their favor? For example, wouldn't the Jews have removed prophecies of Jesus as the Messiah? Yet Jews and Christians share the same Old Testament books, and Christian sects use the same Bible.

3. History is another external proof of the Bible.

Historical details in the Old and New Testaments are accurate in ways that would be nearly impossible, if the events were not recorded around the time they happened. Discoveries in the last 200 years have confirmed facts recorded in the Bible, which over time were forgotten and became unknown. These historical details could not have been included if the events were written hundreds of years later, as some critics suggest.

- The details of the cultural and legal practices at the time of Abraham fit with what is now known of the Middle Bronze Age (2,000-1700 B.C.).
 - For example, the covenant of Abraham includes the 5 elements of the Akkadian oath. Whereas late bronze age covenants have 7 components. (Meaning, if the story were written later it would likely have 7 components, or something entirely different.)
 - Inheritance favors the son of the first wife
 - The price of slaves fits with the times
- Place names and locations fit with what was described at the time in both the Old and New Testaments. For example:
 - Abraham moving from Ur to Haran to Hebron (Genesis 11:31)
 - The four gospels have accurate descriptions of going up (like to Jerusalem), and going down. They mention 23 towns known in that era
 - By contrast, the false *apocryphal* and *gnostic* gospels document few locations and get details wrong.
- Names used for God, like Elohim, confirm early writing of Old Testament
- People groups are recorded in the Bible which disappeared from the earth, only to be rediscovered hundreds or thousands of years later. For example, Amorites.
- Names of people are accurate to the time:
 - Abraham is an example of name style used in the middle bronze age (*Amorite imperfective style*)
 - People's names in the New Testament are not invented. Names like Jesus, John, Mary, and Judas have been confirmed to be very popular during the first century in Jerusalem, when Jesus walked the earth. That is why some have description added to their names, like John the Baptist, Mary Magdalene, or Jesus Christ. If the gospels were written centuries later, they would not have known about these name frequencies.
- Historical documents outside of the Bible confirm Biblical events and characters at the time of Jesus. For example:
 - The Annals of Tacitus, in book 15, chapter 44 written around 116 A.D., the Roman senator and historian Tacitus documents several important details, including that Christ was **crucified under Pilate**.
 - Pliny the Younger, a Roman governor in what is now Turkey, reported to the Emperor Trajan in around 112 A.D., that Christians gather on certain day "**and sing hymns to Christ as to a God.**" This is very significant because it shows that Jesus was worshiped as God essentially from the beginning of the church.
 - Josephus, a Jewish historian, documents important facts. He is controversial in what he says about Jesus, but probably accurate.

4. Archaeology, which is briefly, the study of history through physical remains.

Archaeology, often involves excavation, a type of digging. Almost everything from Bible times has been destroyed. It is estimated that only 2 of 10,000 pieces of evidence will ever be found. So, we must recognize that *the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence*.

Before archaeology, the Bible was criticized for mentioning people and cultures unknown to history, saying they were myths. However, every year we are finding confirmation of more and more people, places, and customs of the Bible.

For example, the Bible speaks much of the Assyrian Empire. Skeptics scoffed until the black obelisk of Shalmaneser III, found in 1846, confirmed the Assyrians. King David and his dynasty were viewed as mythical as King Arthur or Robin Hood. But now discoveries regarding the “House of David,” details of Hezekiah’s tunnel for water when sieged, Babylon, and Persia, all verify events in the Bible.

Here is a short list of important finds. We won’t take the time to explain them all, but you can investigate them over the internet or in publications if you like. Note that the first example actually includes over 53 important discoveries combined into one entry:

- **IMPORTANT – 53 Old Testament People:**

In its May/June 2017 issue, the journal Biblical Archaeology Review listed 53 “Real people in the Bible.” These people are **confirmed** by archaeological inscriptions from the time and regions in which the Old Testament places them, and can be authenticated in more than one way.

The impressive list includes 5 Egyptian pharaohs, 5 kings from the Damascus region, 8 kings of Israel, 6 kings of Judah, 5 Assyrian kings, 3 Babylonian kings, and 5 Persian kings, along with high ranking officers and priests of those regions.

- People you might recognize include **David, Hezekiah, Ahab, Ahaz**, Omri, Tiglath-Pileser, Sargon II, Sennacherib, **Nebuchadnezzar**, Belshazzar, **Cyrus the Great, Darius I and Darius II**, and Shishak
- These verify that events recorded in the Bible involve historical personages, not invented ones.
- Until the last century or so of archaeology, a fair number of these people were known only in the Bible

Documentation exists for other people of the Bible, which are considered “reasonable but uncertain.” Although likely, these names are not included on the confirmed list, because there are other possible interpretations of who they might represent.

- This category includes the important, recently found clay document seal, or **bull of the “Prophet Isaiah.”** It was found only a few feet away from the bulla of King Hezekiah, with whom he was closely associated in life. But part of the Isaiah bulla is broken, so it is not totally conclusive.

- **Ruins of ancient civilizations** mentioned in the Bible have been excavated:

- Nineveh, Persia, Jerusalem, Turkey, New Testament churches cities, and others
- Iron age villages from the time of David and Solomon have been excavated in the last few years. They document towns and Biblical descriptions of town features of that period, which *Biblical Minimalists* and others doubted existed. (Tell es-Safi/Gath, Abel Beth Maakah, Tel Gezer, others)

- **New Testament Discoveries:**

Since the New Testament is less concerned with stories of empires, that with Jesus the Savior, the archaeological support needed is different. To a large degree the historical documents, as described above, are more significant.

In the last few decades however, inscriptions bearing the names of previously doubted men have come to light. Both of these men were prominently involved in the trial and sentencing of Jesus to crucifixion.

1. **Caiaphas** ossuary – an inscription on a bone box found in 1990 is believed to be of the high priest who condemned Jesus.
2. **Pilate Inscription** on a stone re-used later in a building in Caesarea Maritima, found in 1961, documents the Roman who sentenced Jesus to crucifixion.
3. **Very IMPORTANT floor mosaic** from 230 A.D. in Northern Israel discovered in 2005, has the earliest known Greek inscription saying ***God Jesus Christ***. It probably decorated a house church. This is important as another proof that Jesus was worshipped as God early, and in the Holy Land. It was not theology invented by Constantine or church counsel of Nicea in 325 A.D.

It is very exciting to follow the news and the archaeology journals for the appearance of evidence supporting the Bible. However, as we discuss in the section on findings and interpretation below, the unbelieving archaeologists making these discoveries cannot be expected to view them in a light favorable to the Bible. In fact, they bend over backwards to find alternate interpretations.

5. Science – The Bible is not at all a scientific text book, but much of what it says fits nicely with today’s science.

In her experience Dr. Cynthia, a medical doctor who has done basic science research and taught medicine, finds that **rather than contradict the Bible, science helps confirm it**. She is not alone in this. Besides many believing physicians, Ph.D. scientists are starting to leave atheism because of the weight of evidence favoring God.

- As with archaeology above, we are not saying that scientists support the Bible, or that all discoveries fit neatly into a Christian or Muslim, world view. What we are saying is that when one simply looks at the facts overall, they fit best with the world view of *theism*: that there is a God. Another way to say this is that, “The weight of the evidence favors the existence of God.”
(Note 1: See below on the term “weight of the evidence.”
Note 2: See also the lesson and study guide on “*Does God Exist?*”)
- Important examples from science that **support the Biblical view** are:
 - The universe has a beginning – which only the Bible and Qur’an claim, making them unique among world religions
 - The tendency of all things to become less complicated, rather than more complicated over time goes strongly against macro-evolution.
 - The complexity of life is appearing less and less random as we learn more about:
 - DNA coding and cellular information processing
 - intracellular micromachines
 - the limits of mutation and natural selection process
 - Likewise, our amazing universe is so finely tuned for life on earth that to counter this, atheist scientists came up with:
 - the *multiverse hypothesis* which proposes that there are unlimited universes, of which ours is only one: the others aren’t tuned for life
 - Note: the multiverse hypothesis is supposedly scientific, but has no support. It is simply a guess at how the constants of the universe could be set as they are without God.
 - As Dr. C explains, when you get to the beginning of the universe, both *theists* and *atheists* alike must rely metaphysical explanations. Considering the weight of the evidence theists have, and how much the multiverse theory sounds like a fairy tale, believing in God even easier.
(Note: *Theists* believe in God, as opposed to *atheists*, who don’t.)

- Scientific details are beyond the scope of this study guide. For more information on how science fits with the Bible, see sites such as: www.discovery.org, or www.reasons.org.

6. Prophecies fulfilled –

- Prophecies of Jesus are the best example, starting in Genesis 3, and including hundreds of others like: Isaiah 9:1-7 & 11:1-6 & chapter 53; Job 19:25; Psalms 16 & 22; Micah 5:2
- Destruction of cities and empires, for example:
 - Nineveh in *Nahum*
 - Assyria, Moab, Egypt, Babylon, Cush, Israel and Judah in *Isaiah*
 - Jerusalem in *Matthew* chapter 24

7. Endurance – considering how often it has been attacked, it is nothing short of amazing that the Bible has survived throughout time, or *endured*, to the present day.

- Great persecution of the early church, first by Jews, then by Romans, tried to destroy Christianity and its scriptures. Many manuscripts were burned. Yet the Bible survived.
- Critics propose artificial criteria that they know are impossible to fulfill so that they can refuse to accept the Bible. One of those is that we need to have original manuscripts. But consider:
 - This demand is not placed upon other ancient writings
 - The age and fragility of the original documents
 - Intentional destruction, wars, and accidental fires
 - The policy of scribes to copy from the oldest available manuscripts, which reduces the chance of errors being passed on
- By comparison, even without persecution, information about Homer, Plato, Alexander the Great, Tiberius Caesar is less, and comes from much later sources than the New Testament.
- In the video lesson, Dr. C points out that early Qur’ans were also burnt – but by Muslims, especially by Caliph Uthman. He wanted to assure that any Qur’ans that disagreed with his were destroyed.

8. The Bible fits the best with REALITY of all world religions

Reality is one of the strongest defenses of the Bible. With a worldview other than the Bible’s, you must deny an aspect of life which your senses tell you is real – either the material world or the spiritual world. This causes discomfort.

Because of this, besides confirming the Bible as the most realistic holy book, discussing reality can also be an evangelistic tool with secular nonbelievers. This proof of the Bible was not discussed in the video lesson, is practical and important.

(Note 1. Read more about the Bible and Reality in the study guide for the lesson on *Looking for Truth*.

Note 2: This is true of Islam’s world view as it agrees with the Bible in these areas.)

Summary of the Evidence for the Bible: As you see from the eight proofs discussed above above, there is an extensive amount of internal and external evidence that the Bible is reliable.

Barbie’s Letter to Huda

Now we change pace. In this segment of the video lesson, Barbie tells us that life is a school. She shares with us that the World, the Flesh, and the Devil are against our becoming all that we can be. But the Bible is a living book, she says, and its words are powerful, just as we are told in Hebrews 4:12.

Our sister Barbie has suffered great losses and grief in life. Despite trouble in this world, Barbie says we should remember what Paul says in Philippians 1:20,

“For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

(Note: Barbie’s story is told in Joni Erikson Tada’s book, *Ordinary People Extraordinary Lives*.)

Bonus Material

Here we are including three features of bonus material that was not in the video lesson, but that should be of benefit to the serious student:

#1 Ways to Evaluate Evidence

#2 Why Believe the Qur’an

#3 Developing a PAT, *Personal Apologetic Testimony*

Bonus Material #1: Ways to Evaluate Evidence

Besides giving you facts about why we can believe the Bible, we would like to give you some thought tools for understanding how to look at evidence now, and in the future.

(See also teachings on logic in the lessons on *Looking for Truth*, and *Does God Exist?*)

1. Beware: Straw Men, Headless Horsemen, and Snow Monsters!

What is a straw man?

People make a “straw man” when they falsely represent a position, to make it easier to knock down. Using a false claim or imposing a requirement that doesn’t accurately reflect the opponent’s position, depicts it as weak as if it were straw.

Occasionally straw men can be easy to spot. For example, when someone says, “There are hypocrites, so I don’t believe the Bible.” They imply that if the Bible is true, everyone who believes it has to follow it perfectly. That is a straw man they can easily attack.

Variations and gradations of straw men exist, some are harder to spot. Often, they are frustrating and feel like false accusation. Everybody hates to be misunderstood, and then told they are wrong because of it. Have you ever said, “I never said that!” in response to an accusation?

Tricky straw man examples:

When Dr. C was in university, one day she heard on the radio news that research had just shown that apples could not grow in Mesopotamia, the region between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Since this is where the Garden of Eden was, they said, the discovery disproves the Biblical story of Adam and Eve.

If you have studied Genesis chapter 3, you probably find this as frustrating as Dr. C did. The Bible never said the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was an apple. That is a secular perception. Then to claim that the Bible is disproven on the basis of something it doesn’t even say? How frustrating! Diabolical even? Perhaps!

Such messages bombard the post-modern West. The process of setting up of and knocking down straw men has undermined the wide-spread acceptance that Christianity and the Bible had in prior generations.

Other straw men constructed by scholars, in notable journals, claim the Bible is wrong because:

- Ancient Israel had much polytheism
- During and right after Jesus there were other interpretations and books about him
- Solomon's marriages were political, not just *sin*.

These are straw men because the Bible actually says these things. We already know them! But these "discoveries" convince people who don't know the Bible, or don't want to believe it.

Manuscript Straw Man examples:

Our faith is in God, not simply manuscripts. What we do claim is that the original manuscripts were the inspired Word of God, and despite persecution and burning, the message of the Bible is reliable and amazingly unchanged over time.

We do not claim that there have never been any copy errors or variants in the manuscripts. That is not even what the Bible claims about itself. To claim this is inaccurate, and sets up a perception which allows faith to be shaken when a variant is found.

It would be foolish to claim that a Bible verse would be untrue, if someone in a room full of people copying it made a mistake. Likewise, it does not fit with what we know about God to assume that anyone miscopying, or even inserting something into the Bible would be struck dead before they could do it. Nevertheless:

- Some people have set up an unreasonable human requirement for faith which does not originate from the Bible itself.
- Note: these requirements are usually above what they require for any other old manuscript, none of which have the Bible's supporting evidence.
- This *straw*, or weak concept, can easily be struck down to disprove what someone does not want to believe.
- For example, they say that we can not trust a manuscript unless:
 - We have the original manuscript (we don't)
 - The name of the author is clearly within the text (a common practice in the ancient world was to put the author's name in a tag outside of the scroll)
 - The book must be the production of only one author.

(Note: Some books of the Bible were contributed to by more than one author, for example the Psalms. This is usually accepted for Old Testament books. In the New Testament however, it is usually considered corruption if someone besides the primary author adds to the manuscript. But consider: there are cases where another inspired individual might have seen an event not documented by the primary author, such as in John and Mark.)

- Many unbelievers, sometimes even well-meaning pastors, have said if the Bible is from God, its words must be exactly preserved without errors. If anyone can show otherwise, they say, it is not the Word of God.

Sad Example: This happened with a famous scholar. His pastor gave him an unrealistic expectation: any variation would mean that the entire Bible is unreliable. When he found out what all seminary students know, that there are variations in Biblical manuscripts, he lost his faith. He became a scholar, and now debates against the Bible worldwide as an expert.

(Note: although he publicly claims he lost his faith over the manuscripts; in an interview he admitted it is actually the problem of pain and evil, which keeps him there.)

What is a Headless Horseman?

The straw man concept is well known in debate circles. We might imagine that he looks like a scare crow. Working on that theme, let's consider monsters we might encounter on our side of the debate: **Headless Horsemen and Ice Monsters.**

The headless horseman is a creation of Early American author Washington Irving in *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*. The story features a creature with no head, who rode a horse through the night, trying to scare his rival – with or without a pumpkin at his side.

We can use the *headless horseman* to describe someone who is moving on without using his head. This can be a frightening spectacle. Don't be one. Take the time learn about what you believe, especially if you talk about it.

But a head without a body, or heart, is also sick.

What is an Ice Monster?

An ice monster has much knowledge and well-defined beliefs, but lacks heart. His frosty breath chills his opponents.

While we engage our heads, we must not forget our hearts. What assignment did Jesus give us before he left? To love everyone and share his gospel. Not to focus on figuring everything out.

So we need to BALANCE Knowledge with Love:

Our *Heads* with our *Hearts*: Apologetics and Polemics with the loving Gospel of Salvation:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind and all your strength. The second is equally important: love your neighbor as yourself.” Mark 12:30,31

KEYS for Balance:

- **Study** to correctly use the Word of God (2 Timothy 2:15)
- Be **fully persuaded** in what you believe and why (Acts 17:11 & Romans 14:5)
- Remember that **love** builds up, **knowledge** puffs up (1 Corinthians 8:1,2)
- Avoid **useless arguments** (Titus 3:9)
- Remember that we are **saved by grace**, not perfect doctrine (Ephesians 2:8)
- Be ready to **defend** what you believe when asked (1 Peter 3:15)
- Speak the truth in **love**, with **gentleness** and **respect** (Ephesians 4:15, 1 Peter 3:15)

The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing!

While living for the Kingdom of God, our ultimate goal is to see people come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.
(Matthew 28:18-20 & 1 Corinthians 9:22)

Be convinced about what you believe; but we caution you about being dogmatic, especially about things that the Bible is not definite on. Don't insist on your point of view without listening and thinking. Be humble (Philippians 2:3). We can't all be right on everything.

(For more about caution with defending and proving the faith, see also the lesson and study guide on *What Makes a True Prophet?*)

2. Findings versus Interpretation

Findings refers to **facts** discovered, also known as data. Findings tend to be neutral, or **objective**. Interpretation is an **opinion** regarding these facts. Interpretation involves the opinion of the person looking at the findings, and so is **subjective**. Understanding this difference is of great importance in evaluating evidence regarding the Bible. If you know how to tell the difference, you will find far more facts supporting the Bible than you will opinions.

Investigators are finding ever more and more new discoveries in archaeology, science, psychology, etc. Those discoveries of themselves are findings, or facts. Dr. C has found that although she is pleased with the number and wide variety of findings that have come to light in the past few decades, she often does not agree with the opinion of those interpreting them.

Every person's interpretation of facts is flavored by what they believe, whether or not they believe in God. The world now is slanted against believing in God.
(Note: in this Muslims and Christians agree.)

Most of the times, a skeptical or atheist worldview has compromised scientists' ability to interpret the facts. Atheists claim that those of us who believe in God have slanted view of truth; but in recent years their stubborn refusal to look objectively at facts that support the intelligent design of the universe and other things, clearly shows that they are even more biased.

Double Standard and Reluctant Acceptance

Typically, there is a reluctance to accept evidence that supports the Bible compared with other views. This has resulted in a double standard of higher proof required for accepting evidence that supports the Bible.

Examples of good findings which are not objectively interpreted are found in archaeology. Biblical Minimalists is the name for archaeologists and historians who do not rely on anything written in the Bible to direct their view of history. They outnumber Biblical maximalists by about 70 to 1.

In practice, Biblical Minimalists go as far as possible to find alternate interpretations of data which would otherwise support what the Bible says. Many times, this has gotten them into uncomfortable positions, when findings they come across openly contradict their pronouncements. But they seldom change.

Recognized tactics that Biblical minimalists are known to use when encountering a fact that would seem to support the Bible are:

- call it a fake
- place it in a different time period than that which the Bible implies
- make a different interpretation of it

Two significant Examples – Egypt and Jericho:

- 1) There is much evidence of ancient Semitic people, like Israelites, in the **Egyptian Delta** region, as described in Exodus. Rather than accept that this would tend to confirm Exodus, mainstream archaeologists play with the dates – man made chronologies – and exclude this evidence. And so, they persist in saying there is little or no archaeological evidence of the Exodus.
- 2) The same tactic of time period change was used by the famous archaeologist Kathleen Kenyon regarding **excavations at Jericho**. Although excavations there show ancient fallen walls and fire, the same as the Bible describes, Kenyon and subsequent archaeologists refuse to credit the Biblical account of its destruction recorded in Joshua 6. Even those who claim that it occurred only about 50 years earlier than when they think the Bible describes, deny the Biblical account.

Usually a document written closer to the event has greater power, but not when it comes to interpretations by Biblical minimalists. Again at Jericho, they place more confidence in the time table that they fabricated themselves 3,200 years later, than in the Bible, an ancient document written nearer to the time. This is very questionable scientific practice.

3. Weight and Trend

In considering evidence, we should look at, and point out to our critics both the **weight of the evidence, and the trend of the evidence**.

(Note: With weight and trend, we're not talking about fashions. However, if that helps you remember these terms, it's good! It's what we call a *mnemonic device*, a memory aid.)

With these two ways of presenting evidence, by weight and trend, we recognize that in matters of faith, as in much else in life, **there is no definite way to prove some things right or wrong**. We can simply weigh the evidence, or examine its trend, and decide what interpretation is the most convincing to us.

Those who argue against us could claim we haven't proven something; but **they can't disagree that we find the weight or trend of evidence convincing**. Think about that for a minute.

In the West at least, we have a right to our own opinions. Most of us have some reasons for believing what we do – even if they are not good enough to convince someone else. If thinking it over, you do not have any reasons for believing what you do, outside of because your family or your society says so, now would be a good time to start evaluating evidence, and decide what you think it favors.

- **WEIGHT of the Evidence** – In using this term, we are saying that we have made our decision based on what set of evidence which we think is strongest, the “weightiest.”
 - It implies that we have looked at the reasons supporting both or several views.
 - We could use this term at the end of a presentation of what we think is convincing evidence, for example a list of facts supporting our position on
 - the Bible's preservation
 - God's existence
 - Jesus' resurrection
 - whether Christianity or Islam is the true religion
 - Or we could simply say we believe something, like the gospel or the Bible because, “*I believe the weight of the evidence supports it.*”
 - But if you say that, you should be ready to give the evidence that convinces you.

- This term would not really fit with saying, “I believe because my pastor/Imam/parents said so.”
- **TREND of the Evidence** – In using this term, we are saying that not all the evidence is in yet, but the way the evidence is stacking up, its “trend,” tends to show that our position is the correct one.
 - An excellent example of this is archaeology of the Bible. We will probably never have archeological evidence for everything recorded in the Bible. But discovery after discovery coming to light now with more and more frequency, confirm statements in the Bible, often against what the Bible’s critics had predicted.
 - Another trend of this can be seen in some fields of science, such as astronomy and genetics. In fact, these trends have been cited as reasons that some formerly atheist scientists have become believers.
 - In genetics, DNA evidence is still in early stages. Not all the data is in yet, and some findings are contrary; but the trend of the evidence is consistent with the Bible’s claim that all humans descended from one man and one woman.

4. Traps to avoid with difficult Bible passages

Here we list a few traps that can lead people down the road of mistakenly disbelieving the Bible. (We discuss similar insights in our lessons and study guides on *How to Study the Bible*, *Inspiration of the Bible*, and *Jesus’ Teaching Style*.)

Don’t be deceived, and don’t be surprised: Muslims rely upon the critiques of secular and very liberal Western scholars support their claims of corrupted scriptures. Both groups share the goal of destroying the Bible. Muslims call these academics “Christian,” claiming, “Christian scholars say…” Look very critically at any of these claims.

Unrealistic Expectations: When we read and research the Bible, we are looking thousands of years into the past. Over the millennia there have been huge changes.

Languages have changed. Languages now are more sophisticated with more words and tenses. Because we can communicate very precisely, we tend to expect similar clarity in Biblical passages.

Cultures are very different. Consider the difficulty an average American has in fully understanding the words and allusions of a Shakespearean play. Even today, Americans and Middle Easterners have big cultural differences which lead to misunderstandings.

Western science has exploded our understanding of the natural world. Things familiar to us now were beyond their comprehension then, and vice versa. A map from hundreds of years ago seems wrong to us now, but worked then; just as they would have now idea of how to use Google Earth, and would likely consider it witchcraft.

In light of all that, to expect that every Bible verse should be crystal clear is not reasonable. It’s predictable that a certain number of verses or passages would be unclear, but that doesn’t make them wrong. In fact, we would expect there to be more confusing or unclear passages than there actually are.

With such a long intervening time span, there is a place for “**benefit of the doubt**,” meaning don’t jump to assuming an error simply because we can’t explain it.

Overlooking the Forest for the Trees: There are difficult passages in the Bible. Some are hard to understand in our century, seem out of place, or even contradictory. The saying, “can’t see the forest

for the trees” can apply to examining evidence for the Bible. There is an abundance, a figurative national forest of evidence supporting the Bible. Don’t misfocus on the rare odd tree.

The Process of Finding to Fact: When a report comes out in science – either supporting or contradicting the Bible, don’t jump to any fast conclusions. Findings must be verified over a long process before they can be considered *facts*. And some are always controversial.

Dr. C shares with us from her experience with basic science and medical discoveries. In medicine when a new discovery is made it is not immediately accepted. An initial report is part of a process. The findings of that report must be tested by other institutions for confirmation. So average medical practitioners stay with what has been confirmed as good medical treatment, *the standard of practice*, rather than jumping to every new practice or drug.

Likewise, we shouldn’t let our faith jump up and down with every new finding in science or archaeology – like how old a newly discovered Biblical papyrus is, if an artefact is thought to be fake, if there was water on Mars, or what ancestors in DNA of the human genome has.

Defining errors: Bible critics jump and the chance to identify errors. Just because something does not make sense to us or seems wrong does not mean it is an error. Be aware of these danger zones:

- **Numbers** are a problem in all ancient documents, like Homer, not just the Bible. If they don’t make sense, don’t worry much about them, because:
 - Systems of counting were different. We take for granted the base 10 system.
 - We aren’t always sure what amount a number represented.
 - Definite numbers were used for generalizations, like we might say, “I have hundreds of reasons for not going,” when actually we have 5. It is not always clear which settings were generalized numbers, and which were literal.
 - Dates can fall into the same category because of differing calendars.

- **Different versions** do not mean errors.
 - The gospels are prime examples of the same sermon being recorded differently. Critics jumping on these differences overlook that Jesus was a travelling preacher who likely gave the same sermons many times in slightly different ways. Naturally they are recorded differently.

 - Summaries and selections – Jesus taught for hours at a time. A direct transcript of each sermon would make the gospels overwhelming long. As when journalists, university students, or writers record an event, they emphasize some highlights, and summarize others.

 - Different observers remember, weigh, report differently, aspects of the same event. *Rashoman*, the Japanese film classic illustrates this, in what is considered possibly the finest film example of this phenomenon. It is significant for us because it shows a secular example of another culture documenting *interobserver variation*. Interobserver variation occurs in the Bible.

- The gospels are considered by experts to be **Greco-Roman Biographies**, written in the style of their time, not our time. One of their features is stating the goal at the beginning and end, and then supporting it with examples in the body of the writing. For example, the Gospel of John, which is bracketed in 1:34 and 20:31.

- **Event sequence.** Our era is very time oriented. Most of us reading a biography expect it to be in chronological order, relating a sequence of events in the order in which they happened. Without thinking, we impose that expectation onto the gospels.

However, the goal in writing the gospels was not primarily to record a chronology. An event might be positioned to support a point, although out of sequence. The author probably never even suspected that readers 2,000 years later would consider that an error.

- Beware of **weighting words** with modern connotation. For example, our idea of *immediately* and *soon* might not be the same as was intended. Remember, we have more words now. If the fig tree withered immediately does it have to be that second, or could it take a few hours or days? Sometimes even we use *immediately* for a longer period than an instant.
- **Misinterpreting Textual Criticism.** the enormous number of Biblical manuscripts means:
 - **Proportion:** Because of the enormous number of Biblical manuscripts there are naturally quite a few minor variations. In other works, with fewer existing manuscripts, the total number of variations could be lower, while actually being proportionately greater.
 - the large number of Biblical manuscripts allows for *textual criticism*, meaning the ability for expert to **reconstruct** the variations backwards to make a text which is **over 98% certain**.
 - no important doctrines are involved in uncertainties
 - **Homer's writings by contrast**, which have the most manuscript fragments of any ancient author, there is extreme difficulty in correlating the full medieval manuscripts with the many variant ancient papyrus fragments (*The Homer Multitext Project*). Some experts have abandoned hope of ever reconstructing the original, saying, "There is no authentic version of Homer out there."
- Manuscript **variants do not equal errors.**
 - Critics count every little difference as a variant, regardless of how insignificant
 - **Spellings** were not standardized. Even in English this happened only about 200 years ago.
 - Someone calculated that **using the same standards** on a famous critic's book, that he used on a Biblical manuscript (multiplying the number of typographical errors by the number of books printed), resulted in a far greater number of variants of him, than in the Biblical manuscripts he was criticizing!

Inflexibility – if we box ourselves into a single interpretation of a fact or set of facts, we place our selves at risk for disappointment, embarrassment, and possible damage to our faith. Remember the old Christian adage: *unity in essentials, liberty in particulars*.

In conclusion, the ways that science, history, and archaeology intersect with the Bible – both for and against it – can be fascinating. It has become a favorite and life long interest of Dr. Cynthia and other Bible teachers.

We hope that this introduction to **Biblical Apologetics** has opened interest in you as well. The more we understand about these things, and the better we interpret them, the stronger our faith is, the more confidence we have in the Bible, and the better we are able to share its truth with others.

Bonus Material #2: Why Believe The Qur'an?

The Qur'an is not under examination in this lesson, but since this series is directed toward Muslim thinking, it seems appropriate to make a reference to evidence for the Qur'an.

1. **Produce a Surah.** In contrast to the internal and external proofs for the Bible, the main proof the Qur'an offers that it is of God, is that no one else could write a surah like one of its surahs, or chapters (2:23). People have tried to do so, and some Arabic scholars confirm that their surahs are written as well or better than the Qur'an's. However, since that sort of interpretation is subjective, meaning in the mind of the reader, and requires excellent Arabic, the Qur'an cannot really be proven on that basis alone.
2. **Refer to Christians.** The Qur'an does also direct Muslims to Christians and Jews for confirmation of its message; but as you have seen in this and other lessons, the Bible does not confirm the Qur'an on its most important doctrines.
3. **Science.** In presentations supporting Islam, Muslims usually select passages from the Qur'an which touch on science. Careful examination of most of these passages however, like astronomy, geology, anatomy, and embryology are actually not in keeping with modern science. (For example, as Dr. C has confirmed with dissection and the microscope, semen does not originate from the back near the kidneys.)
4. **Prophet Mohammed's Testimony.** Islam claims that the Qur'an is God's final word, because the Prophet Mohammed says it is. And it claims that Prophet Mohammed is from God because the Qur'an says he is. This is unfortunately circular reasoning that cannot logically prove anything.

In Summary, as we, and other Christians see it, neither the Prophet Mohammed nor the Qur'an have significant proof outside of each other, that they are what they claim to be.

Bonus Material #3: Developing a Personal Apologetic Testimony

In the New Testament, 1 Peter 3:15 says,

"If you are asked about your Christian hope, always be ready to explain it."

When teaching apologetics, Dr. Cynthia encourages participants to, "Develop a **PAT** and get it down pat!" A **PAT** is a **Personal Apologetic Testimony**. In this testimony you explain the reasons for what you believe, and how they impact your life. It is something you should probably think about anyway, and today's lesson gives you a good opportunity to do that.

(Note to English learners: to get something "down pat," means to learn it well.)

A PAT is a great tool for all Christians to develop. A testimony based simply on feelings or a miracle will not hold up to extended attacks, like, "Well, you can believe that if it makes you feel good, but I'm not feeling it." Feelings are real, but unstable. We need stable faith, that extends beyond feelings. A PAT will prevent your listeners from discounting your testimony as simply emotional.

For example, Dr. C's PAT explains how since she dealt with death on a daily basis in her medical work, she cannot deny that we are going to die. Since this is so, why we are here? Where do we go after we die?

These are questions of the utmost importance. Then she explains to her listeners the scientific and other reasons that she believes in God, and the salvation presented in the Bible.

But don't feel that you need to be a doctor or a scientist to have a PAT. Everyone has reasons for what they believe. A PAT is just recognizing what your reasons are and learning to express them.

Perhaps your PAT is simply, "From what I've seen in the world, nothing comes from nothing." Or, "If my old watch falls apart, I think it will take more than shaking it in a bag for a million years to put it back together. So I don't believe we could have the universe without an intelligence."

Maybe your PAT is complex, with many points, and might even include some of the evidence we share in this or other study guides. And your PAT could vary, depending on whom you are sharing it with, for example: a Muslim, an atheist, or a child.

A PAT is as individual as you are. There is no right or wrong PAT. What we want to encourage is that you think about some real reasons for why you believe what you do – something besides "I believe because my pastor, or Iman, told me so," or, "I believe there is no God, because then I can do whatever I want."

Scripture References: (New International Version and New Living Translation)

II Corinthians 5:17

Ephesians 4:14

Isaiah 40:8

Genesis 11:31

Matthew 5:18 & 24

Isaiah 9:1-7 & 11:1-6 & chapter 53

Job 19:25

Psalm 22

Micah 5:2

Nahum

Genesis 3:3,6

Mark 12:30,31

Acts 17:11

II Timothy 2:15

Acts 17:11

Romans 14:5

I Corinthians 8:1,2

Titus 3:9

I Peter 3:15

Ephesians 2:8

Matthew 28:18-20

Philippians 2:3

Joshua 6:1-27

I Corinthians 9:22

Psalm 119:18

Philippians 1:21

Qur'an:

The Bible has Guidance and light – Surah 5:46,47

The Qur'an confirms the Bible – Surahs 2:41,91,97 & 3:3,39 & 4:47

Refer to People of the Book if you have questions about the Scriptures before the Qur'an (the Bible) – Surah 10:94

Christians have nothing to fear if we follow our book – Surah 5:69

No one can change God's words – Surah 6:115

If you doubt the Qur'an, produce a surah – Surah 2:23

Study Questions:

Because of the great importance of its topic, this study guide has a lot of material in it. You might need to reread it. We hope that these study questions will help you process what you learned, and find practical ways to use it.

1. Consider the reality segment. Every day we make choices based on our evaluation of different options.
 - If we put effort into the pros and cons of something as temporal as a suitcase, shouldn't we also have reasons why we believe the Bible and follow the Christian faith, or Islam?
 - During the week after this lesson, keep reflecting on whether or not you have investigated the truth of what you believe. And if you need to change something you believe.
2. Today we examined many proofs for the Bible:
 - Did you learn anything?
 - Did you find the evidence for the Bible compelling (meaning strongly convincing)?
 - What evidence stood out to you as most convincing?
 - What evidence do you think would be easy to share with someone else?
 - If you were not impressed with the evidence, what type of evidence would you find more convincing? Is that a reasonable expectation?
3. Did you learn anything about ways to evaluate evidence? For example?
Then:
 - State the difference between *the weight of the evidence* and the *trend of the evidence*. If possible, give an example of each.
 - After reading about traps, can you state a couple you hope to avoid?
4. How do you compare the evidence supporting the Bible versus the Qur'an as the Word of God?
5. The bonus material talks about something Dr. C thinks is important: making a PAT, your **Personal Apologetic Testimony**. Here is an exercise for developing one:
 - What do you believe?
 - Reflect on the reasons why you believe it.
 - What elements would you incorporate into your PAT?
 - You might be able to think of a few ideas right away.
 - Think about it over the week, and see what other elements you might be able to add.
 - If time allows, share your PAT with someone else in the study group.
 - This could be either ideas you can come up with right now, or after a longer period for thought (as your leader or the group decides).
 - In what real-life settings can you imagine sharing it?
 - When you feel confident, pray for God to open a door for you to share your PAT with someone who needs to hear it.
6. Kevin challenges us that if the Bible is reliable, are we willing to obey it?
 - Is the evidence compelling enough for you to follow the Bible?

- If so, how would you share this reliability with others so that they also find it compelling to follow and/or obey?

7. In consideration of Philippians 1:21, which Barbie shares is so important for Christians:

- How does “to live is Christ” apply to your life?
- What does “to die is gain” mean to you?

by Christian from Muslim, 2019
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