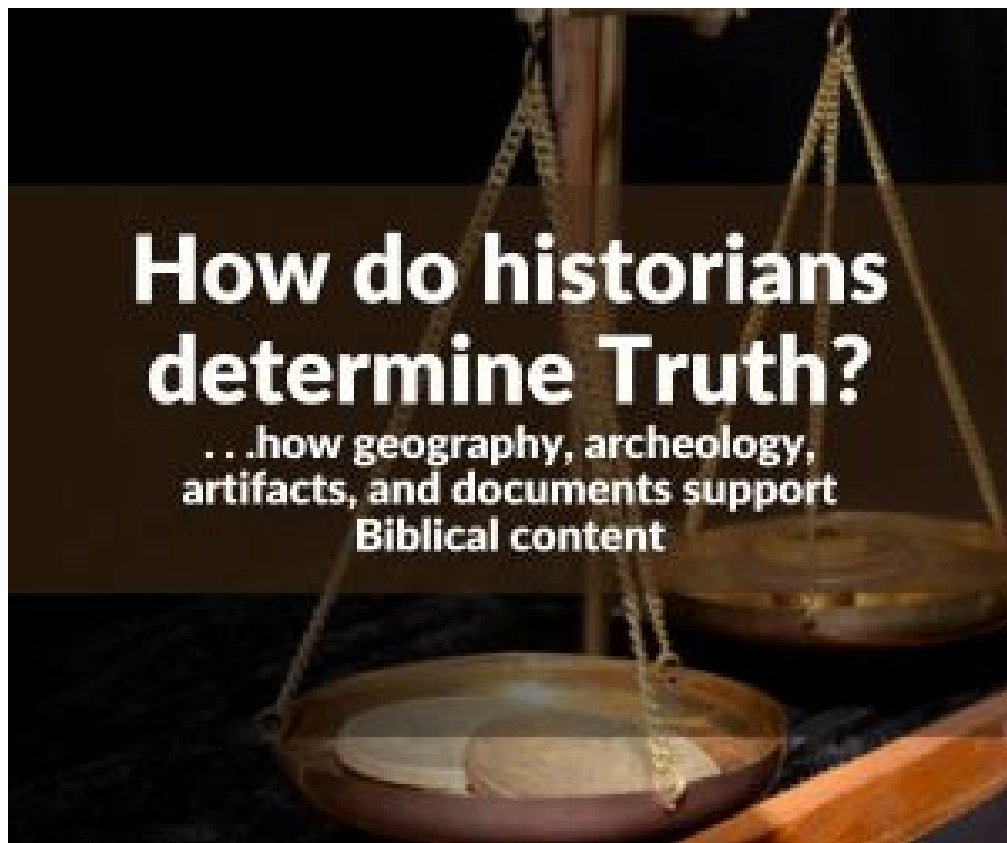


Handouts

Notes, Infographic & Questions



How Do Historians Determine Truth?

why geography, archeology, artifacts, and documents matter

Your Notes

Before we begin, this lesson is part of a 4-part foundational series:

How Truth & History confirm that we can trust the Christian Bible

Though each lesson is useful on its own, all four lessons in this series go together for a complete understanding of the topic

- The 4 lessons in this series are:
- **#1 What is Truth?**
... *and how historical truth relates to religious truth*
- **#2 How do historians determine Truth?**
... *why geography, archeology, artifacts, and documents matter*
- **#3 How is the historical truth of the Christian Bible unique? part one**
... *a comparison with the Hindu and Buddhist scriptures*
- **#4 How is the historical truth of the Christian Bible unique? part two**
... *a comparison with Muslim and Mormon scriptures*

Please plan to listen to or watch all for a full understanding of the topic of why we can trust the Christian Bible, all available at www.Bible805.com

Why does it matter how historians determine what is true?

- In the previous lesson we talked about the importance of truth and *how truth is that which corresponds to reality*.
- We then talked about how history is a useful way to determine what corresponds to reality and how this is foundational to determining if a religion is true.
- But how do historians go about figuring out what corresponds to reality?
- Obviously, we don't have time machines.
- We can't go back to the events themselves.

What historians do have as they evaluate the truth of scripture

- **Tangible evidence**
- Like a CSI, (a crime scene investigator) a good historian carefully examines the evidence before making conclusions.
- He or she should not have a pre-determined bias before examining evidence.
- For example, when evaluating prophecy, you shouldn't date events after the prophecy was given simply because you believe predictive prophecy isn't possible. If you do that you aren't objective; you have an anti-supernatural bias.
- You should look at the evidence and THEN draw conclusions.
- **The categories for historical evidence that testify to the truth that is in the Bible are: Geography, archeology, artifacts, and documents**
- Let's briefly look at each one.

Geography

- Are the places talked about in the scripture of a religion REAL PLACES?
- Can we find them on a map? New or old?
- A story about something that took place in Atlantis lacks the credibility of something that happened in "Bethlehem, in Judea."
- You might think that this is an obvious requirement, but not every faith system has identifiable places, past or present, where key events of the faith took place.

- ***There is a reason the Christian Bible has maps and the scriptures of some other religions do not.***

Once the geography is determined then archeology goes to work

- Once we determine that the events described in a scripture happened in a specific place, we should then be able to go to that place and find evidence of this.
- For example, we read in the Bible about a sermon the Apostle Paul preached at the Areopagus in Athens, Greece and today you can go to a hill in Athens with stone seats and a plaque describing Paul's sermon there over 2,000 years ago.
- Archeology also helps us DATE what happened in a particular location.
- Dating is incredibly important for confirming Biblical prophecy and trustworthiness overall.
- There are two categories of archeology we'll briefly discuss:
- ***The Big Stuff—cities, buildings, roads, etc.***
- ***The Little Stuff—statues, artifacts, pottery, coins.***

Big stuff—buildings, etc.

Lachish reliefs (carvings in gypsum wall panels) from the palace—all around a sort of waiting room in his palace

What we learn about Assyrians from the Lachish reliefs

- On these panels we learn a lot about them—the importance of war, and hunting—how incredibly cruel they were—beheadings, skinning alive, impaling, torture—not only did they do it, but they were proud of it.
- Which helps us understand many things in the Bible other than simply confirming various things happened, such as.....
- Though it took place earlier, it is understandable why Jonah didn't want to go there. And then after God had had enough of them, the description of Nineveh prophesying their destruction in Nahum 1-3:
- ***Woe to the city of blood, full of lies, full of plunder,
never without victims!***
***² The crack of whips, the clatter of wheels, galloping horses
and jolting chariots!***
***³ Charging cavalry, flashing sword and glittering spears!
Many casualties, piles of dead, bodies without number,
people stumbling over the corpses—***
- The images help verify the truth of scripture and our understanding of it.

Even in smaller details, e.g. images of lions and their royalty defeating them—

- Which then helps makes more sense Nahum prophesying against them says... Nahum 2:13 *"I am against you....the sword will devour your young lions...."*
- At the end of the book, the prophet concludes:
- ***Nothing can heal you; your wound is fatal.
All who hear the news about you
clap their hands at your fall,
for who has not felt
your endless cruelty? Na 3:19***

New Testament—an abundance of geographical evidence

- Ancient world—Jerusalem, Rome, the cities of Greece and Asia Minor.
- Many still there and as described by Dr. Luke.
- Historians can see not only that the Bible talks about REAL PLACES, but events happened in them in the ways the Bible talked about—the types of government, the key people, their religions, idols worshipped.
- ***ALL well documented archeologically.***

Not only the places, but the people

- People never change
- Today we are constantly taking pictures, of ourselves, of family members
- The desire to record people, how we look or want to look was no different in the past
- Access to do that was however limited to most people
- Mostly of leaders and often idealized—but we can SEE what they looked like, for example Nero, who had both Peter and Paul martyred.
- But archeology has discovered many statues and images characters talked about in the Bible—kings, pharaohs, emperors
- And an especially interesting set of images is....

The Pharaohs of Egypt

- The Pharaohs were obsessive about creating images of themselves as, many ancient ones were.
- And though of course somewhat idealized, I'm sure (as we are today with our pictures), they were also very individualistic and we assume realistic
- Because of that, you can see the image of the Pharaoh that Joseph served and the one who Moses stood before, and his adoptive mother.
- Check out the video on the Bible805 YouTube channel for this—it is at: <https://youtu.be/7HqcKSU5wDs?si=3czGRJMctg24nZEm> or go to www.youtube/Bible805 and put “pharaoh” into the search box for the channel.

Little stuff, pottery & coins—why so important

- **Pottery and Coins provide specific, narrow dating in these ways—**
- In many instances, archeology discovered collections of documents like the Dead Sea Scrolls—the scrolls were in **pottery** hidden in a cave.
- If not IN the pottery, pottery was often found at an archeological site.
- You can get an idea of the date of the manuscript by dating the pottery.
- Easy to date pottery for those familiar with it, just like when you go to a second-hand store—easy to date olive green 70's dishes, mid-century star patterns, depression glass, or more contemporary ones that are unbreakable white Corelle.
- Archeologists date ancient pottery in similar ways.

Pottery styles

- For example, Pottery decorated with a style consistent with the early Philistines from 1200-1000 BC had many images of a seafaring people.
- As we get closer to the time of Christ the black and red-glazed pottery we often see in pictures of Greek history was popular.
- Some of the Dead Sea Scrolls were found in pottery that was found in only one other place in excavations of that time—at Qumran—which was one of the reasons why they tied the scrolls to that community.
- Not difficult to do for someone who has studied these styles and is familiar with them anymore than it is for me to go into a thrift store and pick out 70's dishes.

Coins also help date documents

- People as messy and careless through the ages as they are today.
- Just like how today we find coins in-between sofa cushions; archeologists find coins scattered in rooms or around other documents.
- Important for dating because the emperors and other rulers usually had their image stamped on their coins when they came into power.
- Therefore, if you found a cave with coins stamped with the image of Caesar Augustus and earlier emperors and none of the later ones, you could say that the manuscripts or other objects were most likely placed in the cave,

probably around the time Augustus was emperor.

- Then it follows that the documents would have to have been written prior to that time.
- And that's consistent with what we find.

All these tangible areas form the historical foundation for evaluating documents called "Source Criticism"

- ***Source Criticism doesn't mean evaluating if a written document is good or not, it means to evaluate the data surrounding its creation (its source) including these areas:***
- **Date written**—important foundation for all else because that helps you determine—and all the "little things" just mentioned help with that.
- **Authorship**—did the purported author live at that time?
 - Many ancient documents have falsely given authors to lend the document credibility, but if other factors don't support this, we can't trust a false author.
- **Credibility of the author**—again, date needed to determine that.
- **Reliability of the sources used**—if a document was written close to the event, much more reliable than something written hundreds of years later.
- **Authenticity or corruption of the text**—has the text changed over years of copying? Number and quality of documents considered here.
- Let's now look at some of these areas

Dating the manuscript

- ***WHEN something was written is foundationally important.***
- If something was written close to the time the events recorded are talked about, we are much more likely to believe the account than something written hundreds of years later.
- If we know the authors lived when the events took place, particularly if their lives are verified by other sources, again it's much more likely the events are true as opposed to someone hundreds of years later writing down legends.
- ***So how do we DATE documents?***
- Here are some questions historians ask—

Where was the document found & what was found with it?

- Was it found in the area written about and can we verify the geography of the time it was written? We already talked about.....
- The cities listed in the document—are they where they are described?
- What was found with them?
- What are the dates the pottery, coins, other artifacts around them?
- ***What about the documents themselves, how can we tell how old they are, when written, etc?***
- ***In addition to what surrounds them or where they were found, can you date documents by simply looking at them, examining them?***
- Yes, and it's not that difficult—we do it all the time.....

If I showed you two newspapers—

which one was printed in 2020 and which much earlier?

It's obvious—just looking at the style of letters, paper, use of color, even though we may not know the language

- All newspapers were printed with only black ink in the past.
- USA TODAY pioneered 4-color newspaper printing in 1982 and if you see a newspaper with color on it you know it was probably written after that date.
- The paper also looks different, its base color is still white as opposed to the yellowing of old newsprint.
- Style of print has changed from ornate to more simple type

- The date is printed on each (1928 and 2020), but anyone can guess by simply looking at them which is older and which one is more recent.
- Biblical scholars go into even more detail, but it's the same basic process—they know **how** documents were constructed during a certain time and can date them based on that.
- In some cases, Carbon 14 dating is used, but it isn't necessary in most.

Here are some of the additional criteria—

use of color, how letters formed, paper

- **What were they written on? Easy to identify, as all other criteria.**
 - Papyrus, in the earliest (200s and later)
 - Parchment, vellum (used more from 300 on)
- **How the letters are constructed**
 - Uncial is written entirely in capital letters commonly used from the 1st to 8th centuries AD by Latin and Greek scribes.
 - Miniscule (upper/lowercase) 8th century on
- **Word spacing**, early MSS all words run together
- **Illumination or illustrations of the pages was** not used until later, in monasteries.
- Again, more images are in the lesson on How We Got Our Bible—but just by looking at them you can tell approximately when they were written—anyone can.
- But the manuscripts themselves aren't the only criteria we use to date them.

Additional verification that NT documents were written close to the events recorded

- This verification is similar to how we rank social media posts today.
- The more “likes” or interaction a post gets today the more popular it is and the more it is passed on.
- Evaluating past documents is similar. If something was considered important (and probably true) many people outside the original author would comment on it.
- It would be quoted, discussed, argued about.
- ***And that was the case, as evidenced by many, many contemporary writings at the same time the New Testament documents were written, both positive and negative.***
- Two groups of commentary writing are worth noting: Church Fathers and critics of Christianity.

More about the Church Fathers

- After the Christian church was founded, early church leaders, who we now call “the Church Fathers” wrote about how the Bible came to be written, when it was written; they quoted it and wrote commentaries on it—and obviously it all had to be written BEFORE they lived.
 - Example: the Apostle John's disciple was Polycarp (69-155 AD), Polycarp's disciple was Irenaeus (130-202 AD) who wrote about the chain of the truthfulness of the writings.
- “Irenaeus wrote. . . that he personally had heard Polycarp tell of conversations ‘with John and with the rest of those who had seen the Lord...’ (Eusebius recorded in his history)*

•A personal recollection can be very powerful

- If you actually meet someone who knew someone and you can ask him about that person.
- I had an English professor who had gone to Cambridge when C.S. Lewis taught there.

- I was quite excited to find that out and when I asked him about Lewis, he said, “Oh, he was a dangerous man. People would get to know him, and their lives were *changed*.”
- Can you imagine the stories Polycarp heard from John about Jesus? John tells us many more things happened than he recorded in his gospel.

We not only have writings from those positive to the Christian faith

- Some of the most interesting verification we have of the teachings of the early church comes from critics of it.
- For example, documenting the importance of the concerns for hurting people in the early church, there are writings by the enemies of Christianity lamenting how the Christians, “not only take care of their own poor, but ours as well”
- The above quote is from Julian the Apostate, who was antagonistic to Christianity yet who did a great job of verifying the social concerns of the early church.
- He tried to reverse the acceptance of Christianity in the Roman empire, but it didn’t work. He wrote extensively about his frustration, detailing and documenting the good they did.

More negative criticism that confirms NT history

- The negative authors didn’t realize is that they often confirm the facts of what happened in the early years of the Christian faith.
- Though they don’t agree to the source of it, they verify the reality of what happened.
- Porphyry an early critic, 235-304 AD, claimed that the disciples based their writings on hearsay because only Matthew and John were eyewitnesses whereas Luke and Mark based their writings on the testimony of others.
- Which is precisely what the Bible itself and church history tells us.
- He affirms the eyewitness account of Matthew and John, and the source for Mark and Luke of their material for their gospels.
- Celsus (wrote between 170-180 AD an extensive critique of Christianity that was refuted by Origen b.184) where he recounts the miracles of Jesus and does not deny they happened, but said they were because of sorcery.

Conclusion: Thousands of manuscripts, plus the testimony of friends and critics all affirm NT reliability,

Author	Book	Date Written	Earliest Copies we have	Time Gap	Copies
Homer	Iliad	800 BC	c 400 BC	c 400 years	643
Herodotus	History	480-425 BC	c AD 900	c 1,350 years	8
Plato		400 BC	c AD 900	c 1,300 years	7
Caesar	Galic Wars	100-44 BC	c. A D 900	c.1,000 years	10
New Testament		AD 50-100	c.AD 114 (fragment) & earlier c. AD 200 (books) c. AD 250 (most of N.T.) c. AD 325 (complete N.T.)	+50 years 100 years 150 years 225 years	5366 original lang plus 15,000 translations
Gnostic Gospels	Gospel of Judas Gospel of Thomas and, at the most, 10 others	AD 150-300	c.AD 200-300	+50 years	1-3

But ONE MORE question is important.....

Were the texts “corrupted?”

- Have the texts of the Christian Bible have been copied and recopied so many times they are no longer true to their original?
- What does evidence, what does history show us, objectively, in answer to this question?
- It is a valid question asked by many Christians and critics of the Christian faith.
- Also foundational to the Mormon challenges to the historic Christian faith as Joseph Smith’s judgement on the validity of the Bible was that the KJV Bible could be used, “insofar as it was correctly translated” and the common Mormon assertion follows that the Bible can’t be trusted because it was recopied so many times and thus is no longer accurate.
- Which then to follow Mormon theology is why he taught the Book of Mormon is needed as a later revelation—we will talk about the validity of those claims in Part 4 of this series.
- How do we answer this question?

Answered by historical evidence, no belief or theology needed

Dead Seas Scrolls: Discovered in 1947 in caves near Qumran, a village about twenty miles east of Jerusalem on the northwest shore of the Dead Sea

- They include manuscripts or fragments of every book in the Hebrew Bible except the Book of Esther, all of them created ***nearly one thousand years earlier than any previously known biblical manuscripts.***
- ***It follows that we can compare them to current manuscripts and answer definitely if copying over the 1,000 intervening years has changed them.***
- First, confirm the dating of the Dead Sea Scrolls
 - Manuscript evidence: from 3rd century BC into first century AD—we know that because of
 - Verified by Carbon 14 dating
 - Archeological Dating: Pottery and coins from 150 BC to about 100 AD.
 - Also, style of writing, what written on as always

Beware of claims to the contrary

- We tend to want to believe people
- Especially those from prestigious universities—quoted on TV
- An entire religion—the Mormon church that claims the Bible was corrupted
- BUT THEY ARE SIMPLY incorrect; wrong
- We have trustworthy text in our Bibles
- Knowing that ought to motivate us to study and learn it more deeply

Significance of Dead Sea Scrolls

- When compared with Medieval Mss. Old Testament Manuscripts that are the result of over 1,000 years of copying, the Dead Sea Scrolls are 95% identical with the medieval manuscripts upon which our current Bibles are based.
- The 5% difference is in minor spelling and scribal error.
- ***Conclusion: over 1,000 years of copying from the Dead Sea Scrolls documents to the ones from medieval libraries and there was almost no change.***
- And our Bibles today are translations from the ones in the medieval libraries (of course updated for changing language).
- ***Shows that “corruption” wherein the contents were changed did not happen.***

Conclusion: History is a powerful witness to the truth of the Christian faith

- We've looked at how historians determine what is true through geography, archeology, artifacts, and document evidence
- We've seen that this historical evidence is not.....
- An esoteric, hidden, or a field requires any advanced intelligence to understand—pretty simple actually—verified locations, giant buildings, coins, pottery, thousands of manuscripts—that are all easy to date show that the events of the Christian Bible are true, that the people lived where and when it claims and did what the Bible says they did.
- And the overwhelming conclusion is that based on all these areas we can trust the historical, factual content of the Bible.

One MORE THING Beware of claims to the contrary that cause doubt on the Bible

- We tend to want to believe people.
- Especially those from prestigious universities—quoted on TV.
- An entire religion—the Mormon church that claims the Bible was corrupted—it's hard to say the whole thing is WRONG.
- But it is. BUT THEY ARE SIMPLY incorrect; they are wrong.
- And the consequence of believing the wrong sources is eternal damnation—strong warning, but true.

Historical verification is a foundation—but it isn't enough!

- It is still a long way from asserting God as the author of the Bible and believing everything in it.
- And an even longer way from putting trust in Jesus as your personal Savior.
- But it's very hard to even begin that journey if you can't trust the documents about the Christian faith and Jesus to be historically accurate. . .
.. But it's a great start!

The question now is. . . .

What about other religions, do they have the same historical verification?

That is what our next two lessons are about, and I think you'll find the answers fascinating!

How Historians Evaluate the Bible

Discussion Questions

1. What are some questions you've heard others ask about the Bible?
2. How have you answered them in the past?
3. What was most interesting to you in the areas of geography, archeology, or coins and pottery in how these areas show us we can trust the Bible?
4. How can you answer people who say the Bible has been changed so many times it can't be trusted?
5. Why is the historical reliability of the Bible important to how you interact with people who don't know Jesus?
6. Why is the historical reliability of the Bible important to you personally?

Comparing the New Testament Gospels with the Gnostic Gospels

NT Gospels

- Based on OT Prophecy, Theology
- Consistent message
- Verified authors
- Eyewitness accounts
- Written soon after events
- Hundreds of manuscripts for each book
- Accepted by the church universally
- Reliable source for salvation and growth as a disciple

Gnostic Gospels

- Based on Gnostic belief system
- Inconsistent, scattered teachings
- False authors
- No eyewitness accounts
- Written 100 or more years after events
- 1-4 manuscripts per book
- Condemned by the church fathers
- Deceptive source of salvation and spiritual growth

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