



Reasons To Believe

by S. D. Hower

Truth or Fiction?

Their young son had spent the morning in Sunday school and was being debriefed by his parents over lunch. The boy's parents hung on his every word.

"You would not believe the story we heard today. It was about an Israeli general named Moses who led some Israeli POWs out of prison in Egypt," the boy began.

"That sounds really interesting," replied his father, curious to hear how his son would remember the story. "So what happened?"

"This guy named Moses tricked the president of Egypt to release the prisoners by threatening to blow up his family. So the president had no choice but to agree. But as soon as the president's family was safe, he sent troops to capture Moses and the POWs, before they could get out of Egypt. And his army might have succeeded, but Moses was pretty smart. He set the Egyptian oil wells on fire to slow down the army, until he could get the prisoners to safety. It took a long time for the army to get through the smoke and fire, and by then it was too late.

"Moses led the POWs across a pontoon bridge the Israelis built to cross the Red Sea. They no more got to the other side, when the Egyptians showed up and began crossing right behind them. It looked real bad. The Egyptians had tanks and rocket launchers and lots and lots of weapons. The POWs didn't have any weapons and were running for their lives. Moses radioed ahead and some fighter jets came swooping in to the rescue. They caught the Egyptian army right in the middle of the bridge and blew them out of the water. Their tanks and all their weapons sunk to the bottom of the sea, and the army drowned. It was really cool!"

The boy's father, who had more knowledge of the Bible than his son suspected, listened politely until his boy finished the story. "Son, I'm glad you enjoyed your class, but I don't think that's exactly how your teacher told the story, now is it?"

His son replied, "No. But if I told you the whopper he laid on us, you'd never believe it!"

The boy's observation hits the nail on the head. "If I told you the whoppers Christians tell non-Christians, you'd never believe it." Believers and nonbelievers are not connecting, and it's confusing to them both. What

seems perfectly logical to Christians, by all objective standards, seems ridiculous to nonbelievers. Christians are frustrated by their inability to convince their friends of the Bible's veracity, and non-Christians can't fathom how otherwise intelligent, reasonable people could be sucked in by such unrealistic notions of God, good, evil and a faith which Christians believe "... is the beginning of wisdom." (See Proverbs 9:10.)

Must We Choose between Faith and Facts?

Is faith make-believe? Must those who accept Christianity and its claims check their brain at the door? Is it possible to be an educated, scientifically minded and historically well-educated Christian? Or is faith and fact by definition mutually exclusive?

I propose it is not only possible to be all those things and still be a Christian, it is to the benefit of a Christian's faith and their credibility to be well-informed in the facts and the evidence for faith. Christians who sheepishly default to the weak response, "I know it doesn't make a lot of sense, but it's what I believe" are shortchanging themselves as well as those with serious questions who deserve serious answers—answers that can and should be provided.

I'm not suggesting Christians can "argue" anyone into accepting the Christian faith or should attempt to do so. In fact, the Bible warns Christians *not to be argumentative*. (See 2 Timothy 2:14, 14-27; Titus 3:10-11.) But at the same time the Bible also urges Christians to, "... Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15b).

The creation of faith is the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit, who alone can overcome skeptical human nature that causes intelligent people to question the existence of God. (See 1 Corinthians 12:3; 1 Corinthians 2:4-5; Romans 10:16-17.) Even so, there are OBJECTIVE REASONS and HISTORIC EVIDENCE that can be examined to verify the beliefs of Christians. This booklet will examine seven reasons why it is logical to believe the claims Christians make about the Bible, about Jesus, and the truth that Christians base their lives upon.

Reason 1: Christianity is a faith based in history. If the history of the Bible can be trusted, the message it contains is likewise worthy of consideration.

Unlike most religions, Christianity is an historic faith and not merely a collection of wise sayings and philosophical axioms designed to make people morally better. It has been said there are really only two distinctive spiritual beliefs in the world. There are those religions that tell you *what you must do to please god*, and the Christian faith, which describes what God has done throughout history to *make you pleasing*. The events of Christianity took place in a context that can be examined by investigating the events described in the accepted histories of other people.

Ancient written histories are rare in any form, yet there are monuments and pictographs that record the historic triumphs of ancient peoples; some of these verify the existence of Israel in the historical record of other nations. New Testament evidence is more readily available by virtue of cultural advancements, a greater number of

surviving written documents, and the Roman Empire's dominance. But even before the advent of widespread written languages, evidence has been recovered that substantiates ancient biblical history.

The Rosetta Stone, discovered in 1799 in Egypt, was written in three languages: Egyptian hieroglyphics, Demotic and Greek. It unlocked the mystery of the hieroglyphics, which has helped confirm the authenticity of the Bible.

The Merneptah Stele, or the so-called Israel Stele, was discovered at Thebes in northern Egypt in 1896. It contains a song marking a military victory of Merneptah, a son of Ramses II. The text includes the phrase, "Israel is devastated, having no seed." It is dated to about 1224 B.C. and is the earliest reference to "Israel" outside the Bible.

The Mesha Stele, also called the Moabite Stone, was discovered in 1868 in Jordan; it confirmed Moabite attacks on Israel as recorded in 2 Kings, chapters 1 and 3.

The Lachish Letters, discovered in 1935, 24 miles north of Beersheba, described the attack of the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar on Jerusalem in 586 B.C.

The Cyrus Cylinder, discovered in Babylon in 1879, records the Persian King Cyrus' overthrow of Babylon and his subsequent deliverance of the Jewish captives.

An archaeological team working in northern Israel in 1993 discovered a piece of basalt at Tel Dan with 13 lines of Aramaic text. It included a mention of "Bet David," referencing the "House of David."

Other historic references verifying the events of the New Testament are numerous enough to fill a sizeable book. The writings of Josephus, a non-Christian, Jewish captive charged with recording Israel's history for Rome are especially important. His mention of Jesus is particularly significant in his work, *Antiquities of the Jews*:

"Now, there was about this time, Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ; and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him; and the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day."

The existence of Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor who sentenced Jesus to death, had long been questioned, until an excavation in 1961 of the Roman amphitheatre at Caesarea Maritima on the Mediterranean coast uncovered a dedicatory stone erected by "Pontius Pilate, Prefect of Judea" to honor Tiberius Caesar. And so it goes

Reason 2: Archaeological discoveries corroborate the people, places and stories of the Bible.

The archaeological evidence far surpasses the historic mention of biblical events in ancient histories. Many cities, rivers and landmarks mentioned in the Bible have been discovered in connection with physical locations where the Bible places them. The wars and destruction of various cities is also demonstrable.

Another noteworthy example is the city of Jericho and the discovery its walls had been destroyed as the Bible describes in the miraculous account of Joshua. Excavations have shown the bricks from its collapsed walls fell outward in such a way as to form a ramp against the retaining wall. The Israelites could merely climb up the pile of rubble and enter the city.

A German excavation near modern Baghdad in 1899 unearthed evidence of King Nebuchadnezzar, including a notation of a food allotment he made for the king of Judah. This discovery corroborated the biblical account of the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., according to 2 Kings 24.

Other archaeological discoveries have corroborated (among other things):

- the enslavement of Semitic people in Egypt during the age of the Pharaohs;
- the existence of the Hebrew people in Mesopotamia before Abraham's sojourn to Palestine;
- the existence of the Hittites, during the time of Abraham, a now extinct civilization;
- the existence of the name "Abraham" as common among people during the patriarchal period;
- the seal of Baruch, a scribe of Jeremiah;
- the census of Rome at the time of Jesus' birth;
- evidence that Quirinius was governor of Syria around 7 B.C.;
- several cities of the New Testament, including those visited during Paul's missionary journeys;
- the judgment court of Pontius Pilate;
- the pool of Bethesda where Jesus healed the paralytic man;
- and that crucifixion was a means of execution by Roman forces during the time of Christ.

Reason 3: The existence of complex prophecies made centuries before their fulfillment helps guard against fraudulent claims of charlatans, who otherwise could make claims no one could test.

Joshua prophesied that Jericho would be rebuilt by one man. He also said that man's eldest son would die when the reconstruction began and that his youngest son would die when the work reached completion (see Joshua 6:26). About five centuries later this prophecy found its fulfillment in the life and family of a man named Hiel. (See 1 Kings 16:33-34.)

Jahaziel prophesied that King Jehoshaphat and a tiny band of men would defeat an enormous, well-equipped, well-trained army, without even having to fight. Just as predicted, the king and his troops stood looking on as their foes were supernaturally destroyed to the last man. (See 2 Chronicles 20.)

One unnamed prophet of God (perhaps Shemiah) said that a future king of Judah, named Josiah, would take the bones of all the false priests of Israel's King Jeroboam and burn them on Jeroboam's altar (see 1 Kings 13:2 and 2 Kings 23:15-18). This event occurred approximately 300 years after it was foretold.

More than 150 years before it occurred, Isaiah foretold the captivity of Israel by the nation of Babylon. Isaiah also predicted *by name*, that King Cyrus of Persia would conquer Babylon and grant Israel permission to return and rebuild their beloved Jerusalem. Critics called the prophecy bogus, claiming it was written after the facts, but the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls confirmed the historic reliability of Isaiah and other ancient texts.

Jeremiah, who predicted the destruction of Jerusalem and the captivity of her people, would later write Lamentations, in which he described how his heartbreaking predictions come to pass. Before his words were proven true, Jeremiah suffered for his honesty and was abused by those who didn't like the predictions he made. But God allowed Jeremiah to also foretell the rescue He planned for His people. In chapters 25 and 29 of the book bearing his name, Jeremiah foretold Israel's rescue after 70 years of enslavement. Seventy proved accurate. Seventy was the number of years Israel endured the Babylonian captivity.

Reason 4: Specific prophecies concerning Jesus validate His role as the Lord's Messiah.

Prophecies surrounding the birth, life and death of Jesus are even more amazing than the historic prophecies over other biblical predictions. Predictions surrounding the facts of His birth are so complex they appear almost contradictory. It was predicted by Isaiah the Messiah would be born of a virgin, from the region of northern Israel, but Micah foretold His birth would take place in the City of David (Bethlehem), while Hosea said, "... out of Egypt I have called My son" (Hosea 11:1b). How could all of those predictions come true? But now we know they did—every one of them. Jesus' parents came out of Nazareth, a city in northern Israel, to fulfill the requirements of a Roman census. He was born in Bethlehem. And to protect their newborn Son, Jesus' parents fled to Egypt until the death of Herod, when they returned to their hometown of Nazareth.

Anyone who reads the prophetic words of David in Psalm 22 or Isaiah's description of Jesus' suffering and death in Isaiah 53 stands amazed at the accuracy. They are vivid and specific descriptions of Jesus' death centuries before execution by crucifixion was known to the Jewish people, or to anyone in the world.

In the fifth century B.C. a prophet named Zechariah declared the Messiah would be betrayed for the price of a slave—30 pieces of silver, according to Jewish law, and also that this money would be used to buy a burial ground for Jerusalem's poor foreigners. (See Zechariah 11:12-13.)

Prophecies are God's ways of protecting His Word against false claims made by pretenders to the truth. Skeptics and uninformed believers need to reexamine claims that there is no solid evidence to justify the faith Christians put in the Word of God.

Reason 5: Consider the miraculous nature of God's creation.

I stand amazed that any educated person would believe the complexities of our universe are the result of mere chance.

The Earth is positioned perfectly for life to exist. The size of the Earth is perfect. The Earth's size and corresponding gravity hold a thin layer of mostly nitrogen and oxygen gases, extending about 50 miles above the Earth's surface. If the Earth were smaller, an atmosphere would be impossible, like the planet Mercury. The Earth is the only known planet equipped with an atmosphere of the right mixture of gases to sustain plant, animal and human life.

The Earth is located the exact right distance from the Sun. Consider the temperature swings we encounter, from roughly 30 degrees below zero to more than 120 degrees. If the Earth were any farther from the Sun, we would all freeze—any closer and we would burn up. Even a fractional variance in the Earth's position to the Sun would make life on Earth impossible. The Earth remains this perfect distance from the Sun while it rotates around the sun at a speed of nearly 67,000 miles per hour. It's also rotating on its axis, allowing the entire surface of the Earth to be properly warmed and cooled every day.

And our Moon is the perfect size and distance from the Earth for its gravitational pull. The Moon creates important ocean tides and movement, so ocean waters do not stagnate, and yet our massive oceans are restrained from spilling over across the continents. (See *The Wonders of God's Creation*, Moody Institute of Science, Chicago, Illinois, 2004.)

The Bible says, "By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible" (Hebrews 11:3). To believe otherwise is to accept as truth something that has never happened. With all man's technological advancements, computer-assisted analysis, and advanced scientific processes, no one has ever combined inorganic materials in such a way to create organic matter. In other words, no one has ever created life from anything that is not living. Yet evolutionists expect educated people to accept this unproven, unscientific explanation for the origins of life on Earth. It absolutely begs the question, "Who has greater faith in the impossible—Christians or nonbelievers?"

It stands to reason (since we are discussing the reasonable nature of life), those who accept the evolutionary model must accept the fact that "something" can miraculously self-create out of "nothing," which, by the way, sounds a lot like creation. Even if you believe inert gases combined in such a way to create life, it is reasonable to ask for an explanation for the origin of inert gases.

There is also a surprising absence in our world of any evidence of morphing life forms. The evolutionary theory requires educated, scientifically minded people to believe in a process that does not exist today and cannot be examined, which by definition is unscientific. If one accepts evolutionary speculation as fact, biological transitions from one species to another not only occurred in the historic record, they were common and occurred repeatedly. Evolutionary theory suggests the simplest amebic life forms transitioned from species to species multitudinous times until the process "miraculously" and suddenly stopped, never to occur again. If evolutionary theory is the way life began, and it occurred repeatedly to create the most complex life forms, we must believe it no longer works. There simply is no evidence of transitional life forms found anywhere on Earth today. It is reasonable to assume such examples would be commonplace, but alas they are not.

Even in the fictional movie series, *Planet of the Apes*, there were lower and more advanced examples of primates from the most rudimentary to the most advanced. Their speculation was logical and a scientifically minded expression of the evolutionary concept.

At least Christians are honest in their acceptance of miracles. Christians accept God's explanation on the basis of faith.

“By the Word of the LORD the heavens were made, their starry host by the breath of His mouth. He gathers the waters of the sea into jars; He puts the deep into storehouses. Let all the Earth fear the LORD; let all the people of the world revere Him. For He spoke, and it came to be; He commanded, and it stood firm” (Psalm 33:6-9).

Reason 6: What about the universal belief in right and wrong?

No nation or her people are amoral. Every human instinctively knows it is wrong to steal, to lie, or hurt an innocent person. Every human being has an internal moral compass “hard-wired” into their social conscience. There are exceptions—when due to emotional trauma, early abuse, or psychological dysfunction a person becomes a sociopath—but, thankfully, they are few and far between.

That is not to say people always listen to their inner voice. They don't. God made mankind with freewill, which they can exercise in disobedience to God and their conscience. To have made humans incapable of error would have eliminated the bond of love between each other and between God and His creation. A child who has no option except to please his parents would make his obedience no better than a cyborg imitation of human life, preprogrammed to do its master's bidding. God, however, prefers a relationship based on love.

Theologians called this internal compass, “the second use of the law.” This purpose of God's law is to *alert* mankind to their flawed nature and drive them in search of a solution for their sin. Theologians describe that use of the law as a *mirror*. God's truth reveals the truth of our sinful nature. The apostle Paul said, “... I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, “You shall not covet” (Romans 7:7b).

If that is the second use of the law, you might wonder about the first. The first use of the law is described as a moral *curb* established by God to help maintain social order in the world. Because the law of God is indelibly written on each human heart, even those with no formal instruction in the Bible or any other Christian training instinctively know right from wrong. The Bible describes this condition as proof that God exists and cares about all people—those who believe and those who do not yet believe. In the book of Romans Paul describes this quality. “When Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them” (Romans 2:14-15).

The part of God's Word called the “third use of the law” are the *expectations* of God, which reveal His preferences in life's decisions. Such guidance is sought out by believers who, in gratitude for the love and grace of God as shown in the life, death and resurrection of their Savior Jesus, desire to live a life that pleases their Creator.

To discover those behaviors that please God, believers consult His Word and, with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, offer their lives as a witness to others and as a living expression of gratitude to God their Redeemer. They soon discover that not only does their obedience please God the Creator, it is also the path to a life of satisfaction and meaning. In other words, God is not selfishly motivated to be honored in a way that demands Christians “walk the line” to avoid being whacked, as if God behaved like a misguided school teacher. No, the obedience that brings God joy also serves as a blessing to those who obey. The forgiveness provided by grace through faith in Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross is all the acceptance needed for believers to find favor with God. He has done it all. Obedience is a Christian’s response to God’s love, not an attempt to earn it.

The Bible describes it this way. “I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will” (Romans 12:1-2). By this God makes Himself known to those outside the Christian faith in order to bring them back into a saving relationship with Himself, as existed before sin came into the world. The Bible describes this behavior of obedience by believers as a “light” to those who sit in darkness, or as “salt” to those who need to be preserved from decay (see Matthew 5:13-14).

Reason 7: Note the willingness of Jesus’ disciples to endure torture and martyrdom rather than deny the Christian faith.

There is only one logical reason that explains how ordinary men from nondescript towns and villages were willing to suffer extreme torture and even death rather than deny their faith in Jesus and live. They believed the benefit was worth the sacrifice. One expressed it in his own words when he wrote, “I’m convinced that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18).

The disciples were fishermen, farmers and shepherds. They were not hardened military types filled with pride and hatred towards their enemies, willing to die as an ultimate expression of ego. They were given the opportunity to desert the faith and live; yet they refused. They accepted the calling of Jesus who said, “Whoever wants to be My disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow Me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for Me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?” (Matthew 16:24-26).

After Jesus’ crucifixion His followers fled the scene. They, like everyone else, were confused by the turn of events. No one attacked the soldiers on the day of His crucifixion, willing to die in defense of their Master. As they watched Jesus die, they heard (and perhaps agreed with) the voices in the crowd that shouted, “You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, come down from the cross and save Yourself!” In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked Him among themselves. “He saved others,” they said, “but He can’t save Himself! Let this Messiah, this King of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe” (Mark 15:30-32).

So what changed?

After Jesus' death, His closest followers went into hiding, plotting exit strategies behind closed doors. Then came Jesus' resurrection on Easter Sunday. Easter changed everything. Jesus spoke to their confusion:

“This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.” Then He opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in His Name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things” (Luke 24:44-48).

Jesus connected the dots for them. He helped His disciples understand that His death was not a tragic and unexpected turn of events. His death was the culmination of His Father's ultimate plan of restoration. “Just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous” (Romans 5:19).

The disciples believed and went to their death rather than deny what they knew to be true. No one would die for a lie, but for the truth these previously timid men found extreme courage. They suffered the cruelest deaths a person could inflict upon another. Their deaths prove the certainty of their faith.

Summation: *There are sound reasons to believe what many find untenable.*

The Christian faith at first glance appears foolish. Who ever witnessed a virgin birth or a dead man rise from the grave? It is not within our human experience. If we are to accept any religious tenets, those that teach a philosophical approach to life would seem more reasonable than a faith requiring acceptance of events that defy human experience. But as we have seen, faith in God—and in the miracles of God—is not without sound reason.

If the history, the archaeology, the prophecies, and the claims of Scripture prove true, perhaps the message of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus should also be considered valid.

Christian belief will always be a matter of faith, but it is a faith based on evidence that is trustworthy. The stakes are high. As the prophet said,

“This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to His voice, and hold fast to Him. ...” (Deuteronomy 30:19-20a).

Paul said it best when, in a moment of absolute candor, he described the difference between the Christian faith and all other belief systems:

“We preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength” (1 Corinthians 1:23-25).

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