

Sunday, March 13, 2016—Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*  
 Lesson 24 External Evidence of Inspiration: The Historicity of the Old Testament

## Introduction

- Way back at the beginning of this class, in Lesson 2, we discussed the difference between an Evidential and Presuppositional approach to the topic of inspiration. Specifically I stated:
  - “In the weeks and months leading up to the start of class I gave a lot of thought to how I should begin and the best order for covering the material. While I knew I was going to start with the issue of inspiration, originally I thought I would cover the evidentiary proofs of inspiration first.

As I pondered my options further I decided that beginning with an evidentialist approach might send the wrong message. I believe that the Bible is the inspired word of God because that is the Bible’s claim for itself. This does not mean that there are no evidentiary proofs that speak to the Bible’s inspiration, it just means that we need to base our study on the proper set of assumptions.

- God exists. (Psalms 14:1)
- God has magnified His word above His own name. (Psalms 138:2)
- God’s word is eternally settled in heaven. (Psalms 119:89)
- God, through the process of inspiration, has communicated His word to mankind. (I Timothy 3:16 and II Peter 1:21)
- God’s words were written down so that they could be made eternally available to men. (I Peter 1:23)
- God promised to preserve that which He inspired. (Psalms 12:6-7)

So, for the purposes of this class, we are going to initially adopt a presuppositional approach that assumes the Bible to be the inspired word of God at the outset. This assumption is made on account of the FACT that the Bible claims to be inspired by God. After we have learned what the Bible says about itself, we will consider the many evidential proofs that the Bible is, in fact, of divine origin.

I am aware of the division that exists within Christian Apologetics between the presuppositional and evidential approaches. It is my view that both are valid and have a seat at the table. Consequently, throughout the course of this study we will be looking at both. There is ample internal and external evidence that the Bible was given by inspiration of God and is therefore of divine origin.” (Ross, [Lesson 2](#))

- After taking some time to get our footing (Lessons 1-10), we have spent the last twelve lessons (Lesson 11-23) studying the Bible’s own claim of inspiration as well as the internal evidence that substantiates that claim.

- Now beginning with Lesson 24, I would like to adopt a more evidentialist approach and look at some of the external proofs for inspiration. In order to accomplish this task, I intend to touch upon the following:
  - Historicity of the Old Testament
  - Historicity of the New Testament
  - The Transmission of the Text
- For the remainder of this lesson we will focus on the first of these three points—the Historicity of the Old Testament.

### **Historicity of the Old Testament**

- We have already seen in Lessons 19 and 20 that Jesus and the rest of the New Testament authors referred to the most disputed passages of the Old Testament as historical, including the creation of Adam and Eve, Jonah and the whale, and Noah's flood. Indeed, the New Testament writers refer to persons or events from every chapter of Genesis 1-22 and many others from the rest of the Old Testament.
- First, it is important to state at the outset that the purpose of this lesson is not to exhaust this subject. We could easily spend twenty plus lessons just on the topic of the historical reliability of the Old Testament. The amount of available literature that has been written on this topic is as deep as it is wide.
- Unlike the *Book of Mormon* or the Islamic *Quran*, the Bible was not written in a historical vacuum. Consider the following unique features of the Scriptures:
  - Written over a 1,500 year span.
  - Written by more than forty authors from every walk of life:
    - Kings, military leaders, peasants, philosophers, fishermen, tax collectors, poets, musicians, statesmen, scholars, and shepherds.
  - Written in different places:
    - Moses in the wilderness
    - Jeremiah in a dungeon
    - John while in exile on the isle of Patmos

- Written at different times:
  - David in times of war
  - Solomon in times of peace and prosperity
  
- Written on three continents:
  - Asia
  - Africa
  - Europe
  
- Written in three languages:
  - Hebrew
  - Aramaic
  - Greek
  
- Written in a wide variety of literary styles:
  - Poetry, historical narrative, song, romance, personal correspondence, memoirs, satire, biography, autobiography, law, prophecy, parable, and allegory.
  
- In spite of its diversity, the Bible presents a single unfolding story: God’s redemption of human beings.
  - “Contrast the books of the Bible with the compilation of Western classics called the *Great Books of the Western World*. The Great Books contains selections from more than 450 works by close to 100 authors spanning a period of about twenty-five centuries: Homer, Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, Augustine, Aquinas, Dante, Hobbes, Spinoza, Calvin, Rousseau, Shakespeare, Hume, Kant, Darwin, Tolstoy, Whitehead, and Joyce, to name but a handful. While these individuals are all part of the Western tradition of ideas, they often display incredible diversity of views on just about every subject. And while their views share commonalities, they also display numerous conflicting and contradictory positions and perspectives. In fact, they frequently go out of their way to critique and refute key ideas proposed by their predecessors. . . The uniqueness of the Bible shown does not prove that it is inspired. It does, however, challenge any person sincerely seeking truth to consider seriously its unique quality in terms of its continuity.” (List amended from McDowell, 3-7)
  
- The Bible is an historical document of demonstrable accuracy and reliability. It is full of information on the history of the Hebrew people as well as other ancient civilizations. In every area in which it can be checked-out: historically, culturally, geographically, and scientifically the Bible has been verified as factual by extra-biblical sources. (Story, 33)

- “Over the past one hundred years, the archaeologist’s spade has verified numerous events, customs, cities, and nations mentioned in the Old Testament. At one time many scholars dismissed some of the Old Testament as mythical because they had no outside confirmation of the people, places, or events in doubt. But archaeology has changed all that, demonstrating the Old Testament’s reliability on literally hundreds of historical facts.” (Story, 36)
- In his 1992 book *Defending Your Faith: How to Answer the Tough Questions*, Christian apologist Dan Story provided the following list of archeological confirmations of the Old Testament. In the intermittent 24 years this list has grown by leaps and bounds.
  - The Ebla Tablets. Since 1974, archeologists have unearthed seventeen thousand tablets at Tell Mardikh in northern Syria. These tablets contain a record of laws, customs, and events from the same area Moses and the patriarchs lived. This discovery helped to disprove the Documentary hypothesis which, in part, claimed that Moses lived before the invention of written language and therefore could not have composed the first five books of the Old Testament. Thus Bible critics claimed that the Old Testament was written much later (and by many unknown authors) than traditionally thought. However, the Ebla Tablets prove that written language existed at least a thousand years before Moses...
  - Archaeology has proven that Israel derives its ancestry from Mesopotamia, as the Bible teaches (Genesis 11:27-12:4)
  - Archaeology suggests that the world’s languages likely arose from a common origin, as Genesis 11 teaches.
  - Jericho, and several other cities mentioned in the Old Testament previously thought to be legendary by skeptics, have now been discovered by archaeologists.
  - Bible critics used to claim that the Hittite civilization mentioned in Genesis did not exist at the time of Abraham because there was no record of it apart from the Old Testament. However, archaeology has discovered that it not only existed but it lasted more than 1,000 years. Now you can get a doctorate in Hittite studies from the University of Chicago.
  - Social customs and stories in the Old Testament credited to the time of the patriarchs (Abraham, Jacob, and Isaac) are in harmony with archaeological discoveries, casting additional light on the historical accuracy of the Biblical record. (Story, 36)
- See the PowerPoint provided by Bud Chrysler of Chrysler Ministries for further examples.

### **Conclusion**

- Literally thousands of archaeological finds have validated the picture presented in the Old Testament, none have refuted it. Negative higher criticism of the Old Testament, based as it is on

philosophical presuppositions and not factual data, has crumbled under the facts of archaeological discoveries.(Geisler, 345) Regarding the historicity of the Old Testament, world-renowned archeologist William F. Albright stated:

- “There can be no doubt that archaeology has confirmed the substantial historicity of the Old Testament tradition.” (Albright, 176)
- Nelson Glueck, author of *Rivers in the Desert* has stated:
  - “It can be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a Biblical reference.” (Glueck, 31)
- Norman L. Geisler states the following in his chapter on “The Historicity of the Old Testament” in his *Systematic Theology In One Volume*:
  - “Even usually liberal sources are now admitting the overall historical reliability of the Old Testament. Excerpting from his book, *Is the Bible True?*, Jeffery L. Sheler notes for U.S. News & World Report:

In extraordinary ways, modern archaeology has affirmed the historical core of the Old Testament—corroborating key portions of the stories of Israel’s patriarchs, the Exodus, the Davidic monarchy, and the life and times of Jesus.” (Geisler, 331)

- “In other words, in every instance where the Bible could be checked-out historically against extra-biblical sources, the Bible has always been found accurate in what it reports.” (Story, 37)
- Given the fact that the Bible has been proven to be trustworthy in what it reports when checked against extra-Biblical sources it is reasonable to assume that one can trust its spiritual content as well. This would extend to the Bible’s internal claim to have been given by inspiration of God.

### **Works Cited**

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