

Sunday, April 10, 2016—Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*,  
Lesson 26 External Evidence of Inspiration: The Transmission of the Text

### **Introduction**

- Beginning with Lesson 24, we adopted a more evidentialist approach and began looking at some of the external proofs for inspiration. In order to accomplish this task, I told you that we would consider the following three points:
  - Historicity of the Old Testament
  - Historicity of the New Testament
  - The Transmission of the Text
- In Lessons 24 and 25 we looked at the external evidence for inspiration by studying the historicity of both the Old and New Testaments. There is much more that could be said about the historical reliability of the Bible that is beyond the space I wish to devote to the topic in this class.
- This week we want to consider the third and final point identified above—namely the transmission of the text. Once again, my intention in this lesson is not to exhaust all that could be said about the topic. In fact, as we will see moving forward, a discussion of textual issues will play a big role in this class.
- This morning we will not seek to cast judgment upon any of the manuscript witnesses, rather we will just discuss them in a general sense. In future lessons we will discuss them more critically and seek to identify criteria for distinguishing between sound and unsound manuscripts.
- The very fact that the Bible was copied so extensively speaks to the fact that people believed it to be the word of God and of divine authority. In order to accomplish our purpose this morning we will touch upon a few points regarding the transmission of both the Old and New Testament.

### **Transmission of the Old Testament**

- Romans 3:1-2—one of the reasons God created the nation of Israel was so that they could watch over God's word. The oracles of God were committed or entrusted to the nation of Israel.
- Deuteronomy 31:24-28—the tribe of Levi was given the responsibility to teach Israel the word of God.
- Deuteronomy 10:2-8—Moses places the Ten Commandments into the Ark. In verse 8, who was given the responsibility of taking care of the Ark? The Levites.

- Deuteronomy 31:9-13—the Levites were given the responsibility of copying and teaching the Word.
- Ezra 7:6-7—Ezra was a member of the tribe of Levi. He was a ready scribe and an expert in the Law of Moses. He was part of the group of People who God had established for the handling of the Word of God.
- Ezra 7:10-11—Ezra made copies of the Word of God.
- My point is that God did not simply allow his word to be handled and copied by anyone. In the Old Testament He established a specific group of men (the Levitical priesthood) whose job it was to see to the care and copying of the word of God.
- The Levitical scribes knew they were duplicating God’s word, so they went to incredible lengths to prevent error from creeping into their work. The whole process of copying the Bible was controlled by strict religious rituals and the scribes carefully counted every line, word, syllable, and letter to ensure accuracy.
- Prior to the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947, the oldest existing Old Testament manuscript was the Masoretic Text (the Hebrew text supporting the KJB) which dates from around 900 AD.
- Among the manuscripts found in the Dead Sea Scrolls were fragments and two copies of the book of Isaiah. The copies of the book of Isaiah were dated to around 150 BC—almost one thousand years older than the Masoretic Text.
- A comparison of the two sources proved to be word for word identical with our standard Hebrew Bible in more than 95% of the text. The 5% variation consisted chiefly of obvious slips of the pen and variations in spelling.
- In addition to being historical confirmation of the Biblical doctrine of Preservation (not just of the thoughts but of the very words themselves), these facts also serve as strong external evidence of the inspiration of those words.

### **Transmission of the New Testament**

- There is also much evidence to support the reliability and inspiration of the New Testament. Let’s consider the following three areas:
  - Early Eyewitness Testimony
  - Short Time Gap
  - Number of Available Witness

### *Early Eyewitness Testimony*

- The New Testament writers were either eyewitnesses themselves or interviewed eyewitnesses to the events they recorded.
  - Luke 1:2
  - I Corinthians 15:4-8
  - II Peter 1:16
- We convict people in a court of law every day in this nation based on the testimony of eyewitnesses.
- The New Testament documents are written within 35 years of the events recorded. No other religious or secular document from antiquity can make such a claim.
  - Luke 1—Acts 1—Acts 28

### *Short Time Gap*

- Many other religious documents have tremendous time spans between when they were transmitted orally and when they were eventually written down. For example, the sayings of Buddha were not recorded until 500 years after his death.
  - See PowerPoint charts.
- Regarding the New Testament documents, unlike other ancient works whether secular or religious, not enough time elapsed between when Jesus spoke and when His words were recorded to allow for misrepresentation or the development of legendary material.

### *Number of Available Witness*

- There are more extant manuscripts of the New Testament than there are for any ten works of ancient history combined.
  - Use chart to show the number of copies of the New Testament compared with Homer's *Iliad*.
- There are over 86,000 known quotations of Scripture made by the church fathers. Even if we did not have any copies of the New Testament, we could still reconstruct all but eleven verses of the

entire New Testament from material written by the church fathers within 150 to 200 years of the life of Christ.

- Show chart on the PowerPoint
- There is more evidence for the reliability of the New Testament text than for any ten pieces of classical literature combined.
- The Bible is in better textual shape than the 37 plays of William Shakespeare written in the 17th century after the invention of the printing press.
- People do not question whether or not they have accurately understood Plato, Aristotle, or Socrates, yet they will doubt the veracity of the Biblical text when there is exponentially more historical/textual evidence supporting the New Testament. All of this demonstrates the huge bias that people have against the Bible in their thinking.

### **The Charge of Circular Reasoning**

- Unbelievers accuse Christians of using circular reasoning and unsupported assumptions to justify their beliefs. Christians allegedly take unsupported assumptions and use them, to justify other unsupported assumptions, in effect, using "fiction to support fiction." Here is a sample conversation that is illustrative of the Christian use of circular reasoning with respect to the Bible being the word of God, according to unbelievers:
  - Unbelievers Question: "How do you know the Bible is true? How do you know it is the word of God?"
 

Christian Answer: "Because the Bible says it is God's word. The Bible is internally consistent and harmonious. Its writers, who lived thousands of years apart, agree on the same message. It also contains many fulfilled prophecies from the Old Testament that were fulfilled in the New Testament. The odds of that happening by chance, according to Christian theologians, are astronomical. The Bible also agrees with history, archaeology and science. It is the only book that is complete with a chronicle of humanity's history, salvation, and future predicament."
- Definition—a use of reason in which the premises depends on or is equivalent to the conclusion, a method of false logic by which "this is used to prove that, and that is used to prove this"; also called circular logic. ([Dictionary.com](http://Dictionary.com))
  - Show diagram on the PowerPoint
- Definition—a formal logical fallacy in which the proposition to be proved is assumed implicitly or explicitly in one of the premises. For example: "Only an untrustworthy person would run for office. The fact that politicians are untrustworthy is proof of this." ([Wikipedia.org](http://Wikipedia.org))

- The common accusation that Christians use circular reasoning is actually true. In fact, everyone uses some degree of circular reasoning when defending his ultimate standard (though not everyone realizes this fact). (Viet, [Circular Reasoning](#))
- All philosophical systems start with *axioms* (presuppositions), or non-provable propositions accepted as true, and deduce *theorems* from them. Therefore Christians should not be faulted for having axioms as well, which are the propositions of Scripture (a proposition is a fact about a thing, e.g. God is love). So the question for any axiomatic system is whether it is *self-consistent* and is *consistent with the real world*. (Sarfati, [Using the Bible to Prove the Bible](#))
- *Self-consistency*—means that the axioms do not contradict each other. Indeed, allegedly circular reasoning at least demonstrates the *internal* consistency of the Bible’s claims it makes about itself. If the Bible had actually disclaimed divine inspiration, it would indeed be illogical to defend it. (Sarfati, [Using the Bible to Prove the Bible](#))
- *Consistent with the real world*—Christian axioms provide the basis for a coherent *worldview*, i.e. a thought map that can guide us throughout all aspects of life. Non-Christian axioms fail these tests, as do the axioms of other ‘holy books’.
  - Biblical axioms logically and historically provided the basis for modern science. A major one is that the universe is orderly, because it was made by a God of order, not the author of confusion (I Corinthians 14:33). But why should the universe be orderly if there were no God, or if Zeus and his gang were in charge, or if the universe were one big Thought, as Eastern religions teach? It could change Its mind!

Also very importantly, the Christian axioms provide a basis for *objective right and wrong*. Note, it is important to understand the point here—*not* that atheists cannot be moral but that they have *no objective basis for this morality from within their own system*.

Christian axioms also provide a basis for voluntary choice, since we are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26–27). But evolutionists believe that we are just machines and that our thoughts are really motions of atoms in our brains, which are just ‘computers made of meat’. But then they realize that we cannot function in the everyday world like this. Science is supposed to be about predictability, yet an evolutionist can far more easily predict behaviour if he treats his wife as a free agent with desires and dislikes. For example, if he brings her flowers, then he will make her happy, i.e. for all practical purposes, his wife is a free agent who likes flowers. Nothing is gained in the practical world by treating her as an automaton with certain olfactory responses programmed by genes that in turn produce certain brain chemistry. So evolutionists claim that free will is a ‘useful illusion’. (Sarfati, [Using the Bible to Prove the Bible](#))

- The truth is that everyone uses some degree of circular reasoning when defending their ultimate standard (though not everyone realizes this fact). Yet, if used properly, the use of circular

reasoning is not arbitrary and, therefore, not fallacious. Contrary to popular belief, circular reasoning is surprisingly a valid argument. Circular reasoning is a logical fallacy only when it is arbitrary, proving nothing beyond what it assumes. (Viet, [Circular Reasoning](#))

- However, not all circular reasoning is fallacious. Certain standards must be assumed. Dr. Jason Lisle gave this example of a non-arbitrary use of circular reasoning:
  - Without laws of logic, we could not make an argument.
  - We can make an argument.
  - Therefore, there must be laws of logic. (Viet, [Circular Reasoning](#))
- While this argument is circular, it is a non-fallacious use of circular reasoning. Since we could not prove anything apart from the laws of logic, we must presuppose the laws of logic even to prove they exist. In fact, if someone were trying to *disprove* that laws of logic exist, he'd have to use the laws of logic in his attempt, thereby refuting himself. Your non-Christian friend must agree there are certain standards that can be proven with circular reasoning. (Viet, [Circular Reasoning](#))
- The independent and extra Biblical evidence afforded by history and archaeology serves to break the cycle. If the Bible can be proven to be correct in all areas in which it can be checked extra-Biblically, then we have the most compelling evidence for accepting its spiritual truth claims—including its own teaching regarding its own inspiration.

### Works Cited

McDowell, Josh. *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999.

Sarfati, Jonathan. *Using the Bible to prove the Bible?* <http://creation.com/not-circular-reasoning>.

Viet, Darius & Karin. *Circular Reasoning*. <https://answersingenesis.org/apologetics/circular-reasoning/>.