

Finally, the episode has *coherence*, since it was typical of Jesus to prophesy in this way.

The field of biblical archaeology has provided a wealth of discoveries that substantiate events and peoples from the Bible, even the Old Testament. For example, the Hittites were thought to be a figment of the biblical imagination, unknown outside of the Hebrew Bible, until 1906, when archaeologists digging east of Ankara, Turkey, discovered the ruins of Hattusas, the ancient capital of the Hittites. The Philistines were also historically verified, by an inscription on the Temple of Rameses III at Thebes, which is dated around 1150 BC. Dozens of ancient cities have been excavated, at least in part, revealing clues that point to actual biblical places and events. Israel's entrance into the Promised Land, the burial of King Uzziah, King Hezekiah's water tunnel, and even the return of the Jews from the Babylonian Captivity have all been confirmed by archaeological discoveries. There are other examples that are too numerous to mention.

What this means is that, via a wealth of both internal and external evidence, there is good reason to believe that, whenever the biblical authors intended to provide a historical account of peoples, places, and events, their intentions were largely realized.

The Bible Is Inspired

The term inspired means that the message is revealed by God, it has God as its author. Specifically, in the act of biblical inspiration, God worked with the human author in such a way that He ensured that the human author wrote what God wanted to be written, while at the same time respecting the human author's own intellect, will, and writing style.

This means that the human author was not merely a stenographer, mindlessly putting to paper whatever was dictated by God. Instead, the divine author and the human author were, in a sense, co-workers in the act of writing a book of the Bible. Since God inspired the works of the Bible, and God is perfect Truth, it follows that the Bible is true.

Catholics believe that the bible is inspired based on the authority of the Church whose faith it records. Why should you take the Church's word for it? Well, approach the Bible not yet as an inspired work, but as a historical and reliable account of what Jesus and the apostles said and did. From that it follows that Jesus founded the Catholic Church and endowed it with a very special authority to teach in His name.

For example, Jesus promised the Apostles, who represent the Church, that the Spirit would be with them forever (Jn 14:16), teaching them everything (Jn 14:26) and guiding them into all the truth (Jn 16:13). It is through this Church that the wisdom of God in all of its richness is made known (Eph 3:10). This Church, which Jesus founded on Peter (Mt 16:16-18), is the pillar and bulwark of the truth (1 Tim 3:15). It is by listening to

the apostles, who represent the Church, that "we know the spirit of truth from the spirit of error" (1 Jn 4:6).

We know this church was the Catholic Church, and no other, because only the Catholic Church shares unity of faith with the very earliest Christians, the very fruit of the great missionary work of the apostles themselves. Documents from the first four centuries after Jesus died give us a picture of a Church doing very Catholic things: celebrating the Mass, seeking the intercession of the saints, acknowledging the authority of the pope and the bishops, professing the sinlessness of Mary, etc.

The works of the New Testament are in fact written expressions of the faith of this Christian community. It just makes sense that this community, this Church, would know better than anyone else which works are authentically from her and which are not, which ones are inspired and which are not. And this Church has declared that, not only is the Bible reliable and historical, it is also inspired. And so, what began as a matter of the historical record ends as an item of faith.

Conclusion

Of course, there are other reasons that could be marshaled in support of the truth of Scripture, but its reliability, its historicity, and its inspiration are sufficient to prove that it is true. If Scripture is true, then the gospel message is true. If the message is true, then only one question remains: Will you accept the truth revealed in the Bible that Jesus Christ is God and He died on the Cross and rose from the dead to save you from your sins?

Written By

Nicholas Hardesty - <http://phatcatholic.blogspot.com/>
M.A. Theology, Franciscan University

Bible Version

Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition

Prayer of consecration to Jesus

God our Father, I believe that out of Your infinite love You have created me. In a thousand ways I have shunned Your love. I repent of each and every one of my sins. Please forgive me.

Thank you for sending your Son to die for me, to save me from eternal death. I choose this day to renew my covenant with you and to place Jesus at the center of my heart. I surrender to him as Lord over my whole life and over all things.

I ask you now to flood my heart and soul with the Gift of Your Holy Spirit and to grant me the gift of new life. Give me the grace and courage to live as a missionary disciple for the rest of my days. Amen.

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The Truth of the Bible & the Gospel Message



St. Paul
Street Evangelization

Introduction

Do you know what a Catholic evangelist is? It is someone who has committed himself to proclaiming the gospel, the message of who Jesus is and what He has done for us. A Catholic evangelist probably gave you this very pamphlet! In the course of sharing the gospel message, he most likely referred to the Bible. This is to be expected, since the Bible is where Catholics find the content for any gospel proclamation.

Now, the evangelist had the boldness to proclaim this message because he held the firm conviction that what the Bible reveals in its Old and New Testaments is true. Perhaps you are not so sure. You may have heard arguments from non-Christians that attempt to discredit the truth of the Bible, or makes the text sound ridiculous. It's difficult to accept the gospel message with confidence if the source for this message is potentially filled with errors!

It is necessary then, before anyone can seriously consider the gospel, to answer this fundamental question: Is the Bible true? Catholics believe that the Bible is true for three reasons: it is *reliable*, it is *historical*, and it is *inspired*. As such, it is a trustworthy source for the gospel message.

The Bible Is Reliable

The reliability of the Bible is backed by strong evidence. Like other ancient documents, the original works (or "autographs") by the biblical authors are no longer available, but the wealth of manuscript evidence and other source material for the Bible provide an extraordinarily clear picture of what the authors originally penned.

The manuscript evidence is indeed truly remarkable. A "manuscript" is a handwritten copy of a text, either in whole or in part. Biblical scholars count around 12,000 Old Testament manuscripts. For the New Testament, there are 5,800 Greek manuscripts, 10,000 Latin manuscripts and 9,300 manuscripts in various other ancient languages. Add to this the approximately one million quotations of Scripture in the works of the Church Fathers (150 – 1300 AD) and you have something that is quite simply unparalleled. **There is no other ancient document that has such corroboration.**

Not only are there an extraordinary number of manuscripts, but the manuscripts themselves are in agreement on the vast majority of their content. By comparing the various manuscripts and versions of the Bible, scholars have concluded that, of the approximately 138,000 words in the New Testament, only about 1,400 remain in doubt. The text of the New Testament is thus about 99% established, and the remaining 1% includes words and phrases that are incidental to Christian faith or practice.

Also adding to the reliability of the Bible, or at least to the New Testament, is the fact that the originals as well as many of our manuscripts can be dated within close proximity to the events they describe. The latest works of the Bible, the three letters of John, were written in 100 AD, only around 70 years after the death of Christ. The earliest work of the New Testament, Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, was written in 50 AD! This means that when the New Testament was written, there would have been people alive at the time who were contemporaries of Christ and who could discredit any historical inaccuracies. This made it all the more necessary that the authors get it right the first time.

Like I said, many early manuscripts and source materials are available for biblical scholars to examine. For example, P52, the "John Rylands Fragment" of Jn 18:31-33, 37-38 dates to 125 AD, only 35 years after the Gospel of John was written! P46, the "Chester Beatty Papyrus" includes the bulk of Paul's letters and dates to around 200 AD. In all, there are 90 or so manuscripts from the first four centuries after the death of Jesus. In addition, many of the works from the Church Fathers of even the first and second centuries contain quotations from Scripture.

When you have a large number of manuscripts and other source material in textual agreement on the vast majority of what they contain, then you have a rather solid witness to the autographs. This reliability ensures that scholars are analyzing the actual works of the Bible, and not distorted or incomplete versions of them. The next step in establishing the truth of the Bible is to determine if it is *historical* and *inspired*.

The Bible Is Historical

The term historical means that the Bible provides an accurate account of real events. While the Old Testament provides valuable historical information, when the question of the historicity of the Bible is raised, it is most often in reference to the Gospels. The Gospels are the books by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John that give us an account of the lives of Jesus and the apostles. Since the gospel message is very much about what Jesus came to do for us, this message really lives or dies based on the historicity of the Gospels.

While some scholars insist that the Gospel writers sat down to devise fictional stories with theological meaning, or to defend their faith by investing ordinary events with supernatural import, many of the New Testament writers themselves tell us that their intentions were different. For example:

"For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty" (2 Pet 1:16).

"Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile

a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us, just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed." (Lk 1:1-4)

"This is the disciple who is bearing witness to these things, and who has written these things; and we know that his testimony is true. But there are also many other things which Jesus did; were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written." (Jn 21:24-25)

Indeed, the New Testament writers intended to record real events as they actually occurred, not cleverly-devised myths. This intention of the original authors is important when considering the historical reliability of their work.

Furthermore, scholars have established various criteria for discerning whether or not a person, place, or event in Scripture is grounded in history. Of course, there is always debate on such things, but the following list is representative of scholarship in this area:

1. Historical congruence – Does the event coincide with known facts about history at that time?
2. Independent and early attestation – Do multiple sources close to the event corroborate it?
3. Embarrassment – If an event would be embarrassing to the author, it is unlikely to be fictional.
4. Dissimilarity – If an event challenges popular belief or practice, it is also unlikely to be fictional.
5. Semitisms – Does the event coincide with popular ways of speaking in Jesus day?
6. Coherence – Is the event consistent with already-established facts about Jesus?

This criteria can be used to demonstrate that what the Gospels report about the lives of Jesus and the apostles truly transpired as the authors indicated.

For example, take the words of Jesus at the Last Supper, with which He prophesied that Peter would deny Him three times before the cock crowed. These words have *historical congruence*, the "cockcrow" referring to what ancient Romans called the bugle call for the third watch. His words have *independent* and *early attestation*, appearing as they do in all four Gospels (cf. Mt 26:33-35; Mk 14:29-31; Lk 22:33-34; Jn 13:36-38). They would certainly be an *embarrassment*, especially to Mark, who was a disciple of Peter. It is very unlikely that the Gospel writers would just make up the fact that the apostle who held the place of primacy among them actually denied that he even knew Jesus, let alone was a follower of His.