

NICK GUY & THE MAN FROM NAZARETH AFFAIR

NICK GUY, VOLUME 2

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THEME: Historicity of Jesus and the reliability of Scripture.

NOTES: The purpose of this episode was to give a solid defense for the historicity of Jesus. But, since the Bible contains most of the information we have on Jesus, it seemed necessary to prove the reliability of Scripture first.

Proving whether something is historically accurate is not easy. One cannot travel back in time to see whether the events really happened, so we are dependant upon what evidence we have. As in a court of law. The evidence should show that something is true beyond a reasonable doubt. The verdict is reached on how strong the evidence is to support it.

In His book *Introduction to Research in English Literary History*, Chauncy Sanders, lists three basic principles of historicalography. They are the bibliographical test, the internal evidence test and the external evidence test.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL TEST: Since we don't have the original documents, we must determine the reliability of the documents we do have. How soon after the original writing were the copies we now have made, and how many of them are there? The closer they were made to the original writing, and the more of them there are, the more likely it is that what we now have is true to the original writing.

The Bible is a very unique book. It is harmonious from the first page to the last. This harmony exists even though it was written by over 40 different writers from every walk of life in a period of over 1600 years. They wrote on three different continents in three different languages. They were separated by many years and many miles, as well as by their background, education and circumstances.

It was written by kings, shepherds, soldiers, politicians, fishermen, priests, prophets, a doctor and a tentmaker, as well as numerous others of whose backgrounds and occupations we know nothing.

Some of these writers wrote in times of peace, and others in times of war. Some were writing from the height of joy and others from the valley of despair. Yet, the Bible's message is amazingly harmonious on a multitude of controversial subjects.

To put it into perspective, consider this: If you took 10 writers, all from the same walk of life, the same background, the same place, all in the same mood and living in the same generation and gave them one controversial issue you would never expect them to all come to the same conclusion. Yet the Bible is in harmony concerning hundreds of

controversial issues.

To be fair, there are other books which claim to be inspired by God, but continuity wouldn't be a serious problem, as they were all written by only one person. None has the diversity of writers, spanning hundreds of years as the Bible does. And when one considers how it has survived all these years, despite persecution, derision, and attempts to destroy it, its uniqueness becomes even more startling.

We don't have the original documents made by the writers of the Bible, but we do have copies, a lot of them. In the case of the Old Testament, the oldest Hebrew manuscript was from the 9th century A.D. Then in 1947, the Dead Sea scrolls were discovered. They date between 200 BC and 68 AD. And those parts of Scripture that they contain have very few variations from those of later dates. And none of those variations affect the meaning of the later documents in any way.

The New Testament passes the Bibliographical Test with flying colors. It's unparalleled in ancient literature. There are over 5,000 Greek manuscripts, about 8,000 Latin manuscripts, and another 1,000 manuscripts in other languages, plus tens of thousands of citations of New Testament passages in the writings of the early church leaders. All told there are over 24,000 manuscripts for the New Testament.

And, the time span between the copies and the original writings is exceptional. The John Rylands manuscript contains fragments of the gospel of John that date between AD 117-138. Just decades after the original writing. There's one that's dated from A.D. 175-225, and another dated from about A.D. 250. In fact, the time span for most of the New Testament copies we have is less than 200 years, with some within 100 years from the date of the original writing.

This is impressive compared to other ancient literature.

We have 7 manuscripts of Plato's "Tetralogies," the earliest copy being 1,200 years after it was originally written.

Caesar's "Gallic Wars" - 10 surviving manuscripts, the earliest dating 900 years after the original.

Aristotle - 49 surviving manuscripts, with a 1,400 year time span.

Tacticus - 20 manuscripts with a 1,000 year time span.

Compare this with the fact that there are over 24,000 manuscripts for the Bible, the earliest dating only 100 years from the original writing at most.

Homer is no doubt the most widely read author in antiquity. His Iliad was written in 900 BC. We have 643 copies of his work, the earliest dating to 500 years after the original.

INTERNAL EVIDENCE TEST: The Bibliographical Test only helps us determine how accurate the documents we now have are to the original. To determine how *true*

what is written in the original document is, we use the second test, that of Internal Evidence. Two rules that apply to the Internal Evidence Test.

The first rule is: If one finds what looks like an error or discrepancy, the benefit of the doubt must be given to the document being tested. Robert Horn, an English Churchman of the 16th Century wrote: "Difficulties do not constitute objections." This means, unsolved problems do not mean that the document is wrong. Unless the author contradicts himself or writes something that is known to be inaccurate, one should not assume fraud or error.

The second rule is: The closer the writer is both in time and place to what he is writing about, the more he should be considered to be believable.

In 1924 Drs. Albright and Kyle found, at the southeast corner of the Dead Sea, the remains of a great fortified enclosure. They found there potsherds, flints and other remains that dated back to between 2500 and 2000 BC. There was also evidence that life there ended abruptly as if by some great catastrophe. Evidence indicates that the region was, at the time it was populated, very fertile. Today the area is desolate. Dr. Kyle said that under Mt. Usdom there was found a stratum of salt 150 feet thick, and above it a stratum of marl mingled with free sulphur. The once-fertileness of the land, the salt and sulphur now found there, and the apparently abrupt end of the civilization coincides with the Biblical story of Sodom & Gomorrah found in Genesis 19.

There have been instances where the Bible's accuracy has been called into doubt. One such instance is Isaiah 20:1, which reads: "Sargon king of Assyria sent Tartan and fought against Ashdod and took it."

This is the only known mention of Sargon's name in ancient literature. Many, therefore, doubted the Bible's accuracy because it mentions a king who was never known to have existed. But, in 1842, French archeologist Paul-Emile Botta discovered the ruins of the Sargon's palace in Nineveh. What he found revealed that Sargon was one of Assyria's greatest kings. An inscription, found there, read thus: "I conquered Ashdod, and Gath. I took their treasures and their people. I settled in them people from the lands of the east. I took tribute from Philista, Judah, Edom and Moab." This is a prime example of the trustworthiness and accuracy of the Bible.

Another is found in the book of Daniel which speaks of Belshazzar as the last king of Babylon. But no mention of Belshazzar had ever been found among the discovered Babylonian records. Nabonidas had always been considered the last Babylonian king. But, in 1953 an inscription was found in a cornerstone of a temple in Ur in which Nabonidas mentions his son Belshazzar. It has since been learned that Nabonidas ruled only three years and then went to the oasis of Tayma and devoted himself to the worship of the moon god. He made Belshazzar co-regent in 553 B.C. Again, the Bible has proven to be very accurate, and what is written in it trustworthy.

There is a most amazing fact concerning the story of creation found in Genesis 1 & 2.

Early Babylonian inscriptions have many references to a “tree of life.” We there find the story of “Adapa.” Adapa, like the name Adam, means “man.” Two Seals have been discovered among ancient Babylonian tablets which certainly seem to refer to the Garden of Eden story. In the center of the first seal is a tree, on the right a man, and on the left a woman, plucking fruit. Behind the woman, standing erect, is a serpent, as if whispering to her. The second seal depicts a man and a woman, walking as if downcast or dejected, followed by a serpent.

Other ancient civilizations, like the Persian, Hindoo, Greek, Chinese, Mongolian & Tibetan, have stories about the first people living in a sort of golden age, enjoying communion with the gods, surrounded by peaceful animals. Some relate how an evil spirit in the form of a serpent appeared and man’s idyllic lifestyle ended.

If the story of Adam & Eve is a myth, it seems highly unlikely that so many of these ancient cultures would each have similar stories. The details would change as the story was handed down in various cultures from generation to generation. With the Bible’s historical accuracy already established, it is logically reasonable to assume that the Bible contains the true story of creation.

EXTERNAL EVIDENCE TEST: the external evidence test, asks this question: Are there other historical materials that either confirm or deny the internal testimony of the document? What sources are there, outside of the document being examined, that agrees with what it says, showing that it is accurate and reliable?

There are numerous ancient documents that agree with the Biblical account of Jesus. Adding support to not only the accuracy of the Bible but the historicity of Jesus.

There was a Jewish historian named Flavius Josephus who lived around AD 37 to 101. In his “Antiquities,” Book 18, chapter 3, paragraph 3, he refers to Jesus as a wise and virtuous man with many disciples, and that He was condemned by Pontus Pilate who sentenced Him to be crucified and to die. He further stated that His disciples reported that Jesus had appeared to them alive three days after his crucifixion, and that He was perhaps the Messiah as foretold by the prophets.

Then there is Tacitus, Tacitus was a Roman historian who lived somewhere between AD 55 and 117. He mentions, in his writings “Christus,” which means, of course, Jesus. In his history on the reign of Nero, he referred to Christus, meaning Jesus, who suffered, as he wrote it, “The extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilate.” This gives us non-Biblical historical data confirming that Jesus was sentenced to crucifixion under Pontius Pilate.

Pliny the Younger, who was governor of Bithynia in Asia Minor in AD 112, wrote that the Christians “Were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, and that they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a god.” This corroborates the narratives found in the book of Acts, as well as the writings of the Apostle Paul.

A satirist of the 2nd century, Lucian of Samosata, wrote very mockingly of Jesus and His followers. He wrote that Jesus was “The man who was crucified in Palestine because He introduced this new cult into the world...Furthermore, their first lawgiver persuaded them that they were all brothers one of another after they have transgressed once for all by denying the Greek gods and by worshiping that crucified sophist Himself and living under His laws.” So, though Lucian opposed Christianity, he acknowledges Jesus, that Jesus was crucified, that Christians worship him, and that this was done by faith. Even Jesus’ detractors confirm what the Bible says of Him.

There are some interesting non-Biblical corroborations concerning the crucifixion itself. There was a Gentile writer named Thallus. Although we no longer have any of his writings, he is quoted by others. One such quote is found in the works of a man who wrote in about AD 221, whose name was Julius Africanus. In AD 52 he wrote a history of the Eastern Mediterranean world from the Trojan War to his own time. Julius Africanus, who wrote about AD 221, mentioned Thallus' account of an eclipse of the sun during a full moon. Julius wrote: "On the whole world there pressed a most fearful darkness; and the rocks were rent by an earthquake, and many places in Judea and other districts were thrown down. This darkness Thallus, in the third book of his History, calls, as appears to me without reason, an eclipse of the sun." Julius Africanus found fault with Thallus' explanation for the eclipse, because a solar eclipse is not possible to occur at a full moon. He goes on to quote another first century historian, Phelgon, as having written: “During the time of Tiberius Caesar an eclipse of the sun occurred during the full moon.” This, of course, sounds like the darkness mentioned in Luke 23:44-45: "And it was now about the sixth hour, and darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour.”

CONCLUSION: The Bible passes each of the three tests to prove historicity. If we deny the accuracy and reliability of Scripture and the historicity of Jesus, we must also deny the accuracy and reliability of all of ancient literature, and perhaps some not so ancient literature.

RESOURCES: One of the best resources on this topic is Josh McDowell's *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*. www.josh.org Also check out the following sites: Ravi Zacharias <http://www.rzim.org/resources/watch.aspx>
Albert Mohler <http://www.albertmohler.com/category/topics/bible-topics>