

## **The Reliability of the Bible**

As we begin our class, we visit a topic central to all Christianity, the Bible. Crucial to our study is the issue of the reliability of the Bible. If the Bible is reliable, then it can be used for study. If it is unreliable, then it is worthless. We must therefore assess the reliability of the Bible.

The first question asks for three reasons why we should consider the Bible to be reliable. There are many reasons possible, and this question is asked as a means of stimulating class members. There are no specific correct answers to this question. Answers which come to mind include the effect that the Bible has on the individual, the scientific accuracy of the Bible, the historical accuracy of the record of the Bible, and the accuracy of the prophecy contained within the Bible. The last reason is the major focus of the next section of the study.

Question No. 2 asks for specific characteristics of God identified by God in the book of Isaiah. The first characteristic is that God is unique. There are no other gods. The second one is that God is our Creator. Characteristic No. 3 is that God is eternal. Characteristic No. 4 is that God alone can accurately prophesy. All false gods will fail in their attempts at prophecy. Characteristic No. 5 it is that God is our redeemer and characteristic No. 6 is that he is the one who forgives our sins.

It is very important that we understand these characteristics of God as being exclusive. All false gods will claim to have some of these characteristics. But only the true God will in fact have these characteristics. These will allow us to identify and separate the true from the false. As Paul says the 1 Timothy 4:1, there will be many seducing spirits. John in 1 John 4:1 says that we are to test the spirits. The six characteristics are key elements by which we may carry out the testing which is required of us.

Question No. 3 and asks how God shows that he is God. Essentially this question is asking is "How does God prove that he is God?" The key to the proof is the issue of prophecy. Amos 3:7 is the classic text on this issue. In it is declared "that God will do nothing except He reveals his purposes to his servants the prophets". Jesus takes this discussion one step further in saying that prophecy is given so that we will believe in God. But it is unnecessary for us to have prophecy. Psalm 19 and Romans 1:20 make it clear that nature is a second book of God's word. Those who've gone before who were unable to read the Bible as we know it had every opportunity to be saved just as we do.

At this point, we know look at some specific examples which demonstrate that the Bible is true. We will begin with the statute in Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2. In this dream God showed Nebuchadnezzar the progression of future history. It included four kingdoms of which Babylon was one. It showed the succession of these kingdoms and the breakup of the final kingdom. It then shows the ultimate victory of God's kingdom over all the others. The final stage is a world wide Kingdom which will never end.

The next several questions deal with details of the vision. The first kingdom was Babylon. The second was MedoPersia. The third was Greece. And the fourth with Rome. Rome finally broke up into many small kingdoms. These were unable to recombine into any stable form. The progression of these kingdoms as presented in the vision given to Nebuchadnezzar in 601 BC was reproduced perfectly in the history of the world.

Question 10 asks what the final outcome will be. This is a test of whether Jesus fulfills his end of the bargain as presented in John 13:19 and John 14:29. Because the preceding elements of the vision have been fulfilled, we have faith that God is who he says he is and will carry out what he says he will do. We can have no doubt whatever that the ultimate victory over San will be accomplished for us. God's kingdom will crush all earthly kingdoms and will fill the entire earth.

It is one thing to note that the prophecies of the Bible are correct. Many critics will brush this issue aside, and will point out what they perceive to be contradictions in the Bible. There are so many of these potential contradictions that large books have been written to deal with them. In the questions, I noted one prominent example of this. Literally for centuries it was believed that the chronology of the kings of Israel and Judah could not be reconciled with reality. Then, in the 1950's Edwin Thiele proved that the chronology of the Kings was exact. This proof was not possible until Dr. Thiele's work because the information which allowed the proof had not yet been developed.

In a similar fashion we may very well find apparent contradictions in the Bible which we cannot disprove. This may very well arise because we do not have the information required to carry out a proof. Does this mean that we must surrender our faith to the cynics? Heaven forbid! Our faith does not rest on a logical proof or disproof of a single point. We have found many points where the Bible is correct, and many others where our original concerns have been disproved as knowledge has increased. It is an appropriate

statement of faith to say that while we do not understand everything, those things we do understand have been shown to be true. As a result, the things which we do not understand can be accepted as true, since the Bible is the word of God, who created all things, and the cannot tell all lie.

This is the point at which question No. 11 drives. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 states that all scripture comes from God. The Greek in this text says literally "God-breathed". Titus 1:2 states that God cannot lie. If God cannot lie, and all scripture comes from God, then all scripture will be true. It is then an article of faith to say that the things which we do not understand but which are stated in the Word are true. Without faith in God we are nothing.

The two stories of the centurion's servant in the gospels are a very good example of an apparent contradiction which must be resolved. In Matthew the story begins with the centurion coming directly to Jesus. The same story as told by Luke indicates that the centurion sent some Jewish elders to make the request of Jesus. Some scholars have attempted to resolve this apparent contradiction by saying that these are two separate events. If they are two separate stories, then there is no possibility of a contradiction. This is an extremely unlikely way to resolve the problem. There are too many elements in the two stories which are identical to allow this answer.

A far better answer comes from an understanding of different ways of expressing the same event. The simple fact is that the centurion sent Jewish elders to ask Jesus to heal his slave. This would seem to make the story in Matthew incorrect. This however, is an incorrect perception. By way of example what us take a modern circumstance. If the President of the United States wishes to speak to the President of France, there will be an interpreter used, since the president of the United States does not speak French, and the President of France does not speak English. News reporters would report that the president of the United States and the President of France had a conversation. This would be correct, but technically incomplete. On the other hand it would be equally correct to report the presence of the interpreter. We can see from this example of how would is possible to report an event in two very different ways, and yet have both reports be totally accurate.

This is the way we should understand the two reports in the gospels. The Jewish elders sent by the centurion were merely conveying the request. In every real sense the centurion made the request of Jesus, and Jesus answered to the centurion. The Jewish elders were merely acting as a means of conveying the request, and there is no real difference between these to allegedly contradictory accounts.

It is necessary for us to consider the necessity of resolving all of the apparent contradictions in the Bible. The first consideration is that it is impossible, since a skeptic will always find one more somewhere, just to continue in his unbelief. This would place us in an impossible situation, since the issue would never be resolved.

Second, we never need to resolve even all of the apparent contradictions, since we know that reasonable resolutions exist, even if they are not currently known. This is an issue of faith. If we have to nail down every possible point before believing, we will never really believe. It is like Jesus said at the end of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus;

31 "But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead.'" Luke 16:31

We know that God is truth, that He cannot lie, and that the Bible is His word. Therefore it is true. We can take the time to resolve apparent contradictions, but we should not waste our time trying to convert skeptics by arguing proofs. Resolutions should be used to advance our faith and knowledge. The God who challenged all others to prophesy has done so successfully. He has also recorded His word accurately and without contradiction.