

# Department of Bible and Theology

Southwestern Assemblies of God University

## Sample Paper

Students often ask for a sample paper that serves as a good example of what faculty in the Department of Bible and Theology expect in their courses. To that end, the department presents the following paper by Ryan Ragozine, a Theological Studies major who graduated in spring 2010. The department would like to thank Ryan for granting permission to reproduce his paper for the benefit of future students.

In addition to this sample paper, the department has a Turabian guide sheet available on the departmental page on the SAGU website. Both documents serve only as guides; students should consult the latest edition of *Turabian Manual* for more specifics. Students should also dialogue with their professors to determine their preferences for term papers. Some aspects of Turabian are left open to the preferences of individual professors or institutions. Always consult your professor and the course syllabus.

SOUTHWESTERN ASSEMBLIES OF GOD UNIVERSITY

A RATIONAL DEFENSE OF BIBLICAL AUTHORITY

PRESENTED TO BRUCE ROSDAHL, Ph.D.

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT

OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE COURSE

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY I

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## **Introduction**

It can be said that the philosophy of postmodernism has produced a culture of skepticism and agnosticism that has not yet been seen before in the history of humanity. At the very foundation of this philosophy lies the belief that mankind lacks the capabilities necessary to obtain certain knowledge of universal laws and absolute truth. This affirmation has invariably led to extreme subjectivism and relativism. For example, in postmodernism, all truth statements are simply subjective opinions; and since absolute truth is unattainable, all individual opinions about God and metaphysical reality are interpreted as mutually valid and acceptable. This means that religious truth is created out of the freedom of the individual, and that authority is placed within the subjective interpreter. However, one's subjective theological interpretations will almost always conform to one's desires. Thus, in postmodernism, theology is often a production of the will, rather than a sincere search for truth.

With all of this in mind, the idea of biblical authority is often interpreted as a hostile and threatening concept by most postmodernists—it impinges upon their freedom and creativity. In light of this, because ultimate authority in postmodernism resides within the subjective opinion of the individual, and because one's subjective theological interpretations almost always conform to one's desires, it naturally follows that a common presupposition in postmodernism is the denial of the Bible as absolute truth. In fact, the very possibility of the Bible being divine revelation is often not even considered. For this reason, in postmodernism, the Bible is viewed as just another book; it is not seen as being any more authoritative than any other religious book existing in our world today.

In terms of ultimate authority, the views of orthodox Christianity radically oppose those of postmodernism. For Christians, the Bible is not just another religious book filled with subjective theological expressions and interpretations; Christians do not view the Bible as mere religious opinion. Instead, orthodox Christianity affirms that the Bible is the very Word of God. With this in mind, Christians believe that God guided, influenced, and inspired the human authors of the Bible in such a way that what they wrote actually resulted in God's divine revelation of himself, his plan, and his will.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, because Christians assert that God is the essence of truth, and because they believe that God has communicated his truth through the Scriptures, they believe that the Bible itself is the essence of truth. Therefore, orthodox Christianity adamantly affirms the divine authority of the Bible.

In the midst of the epistemological skepticism and metaphysical agnosticism of the present postmodern age, how can one possibly defend the orthodox Christian claim? Is the Christian belief in biblical revelation reasonable? The answers to these questions relate to the very purpose of this essay. Indeed, there are several logical arguments that can be used to support the orthodox Christian view of the Bible. When these facts and proofs are combined, the evidence can be overwhelming. In light of this, the goal of this paper will be to demonstrate why it is reasonable to believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. In order to accomplish this, the author will utilize a cumulative case approach—maximizing several different types of evidence, which systematically build on top of one another in a logical order.

### **Evidence for the Integrity of the Bible**

The ultimate goal of this section will be to demonstrate why it is reasonable to believe that the Bible of today is an accurate representation of the Bible that was originally composed.

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<sup>1</sup>Millard J. Erickson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 61.

Because the Old Testament and New Testament require different argumentations and methodologies in proving this claim, the evidence for the integrity of the Old and New Testament will be examined individually.

In establishing the integrity of the Old Testament, one does not need to look any further than the finds and claims of modern science and archaeology. William Albright, a notable archaeologist who excavated the ancient occupation sites of Palestine in the beginning of the twentieth century, affirmed that the book of Genesis flawlessly reflected many of the distinct events, conditions, customs and rituals prevalent in the ancient Near East, about which nothing was thought to have been known to the writers of later days.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, it has been well documented that archaeologists who have utilized the Old Testament as a guide have discovered significant parts of ancient history thought to be completely nonexistent.<sup>3</sup> In fact, the famous archeologist Nelson Glueck found the data in the Old Testament so overwhelmingly accurate in locating sites that he spoke of the “wonderful memory of the Bible.”<sup>4</sup>

By demonstrating the accuracy of the Old Testament in depicting the historical landscape of the ancient world, archaeological information proves that the Old Testament was originally written during the specific historical eras that it claims (both directly and indirectly)—since it would have been impossible to so accurately depict the historical climate of these specific eras at a significantly later date. Consequently, this naturally suggests that the biblical documents have been passed down accurately throughout the centuries as well, since all of the archeological claims stated above are based on the testimony of the current Old Testament.

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<sup>2</sup>Herman O. Wilson and Morris M. Womack, eds., *Pillars of Faith: Biblical Certainty in an Uncertain World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), 133.

<sup>3</sup>Ralph O. Muncaster, *Examine the Evidence: Exploring the Case for Christianity* (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 2004), 239.

<sup>4</sup>Wilson and Womack, *Pillars of Faith*, 133.

In establishing the integrity of the New Testament, one must look no further than the number of New Testament manuscript copies that are possessed today and their closeness in time to the originals. As with all other documents of ancient literature, there are no known original manuscripts of the New Testament existing today—there are only manuscript copies. However, there are now over 5,686 known Greek manuscript copies, 10,000 Latin Vulgate copies and 9,300 other early copies in our possession. Thus, in total, there are around 25,000 manuscript copies of the New Testament currently in existence. Furthermore, these manuscript copies contain either fragments of books, full books, the majority of the New Testament or the complete New Testament, and they are dated anywhere from 50-225 years after the originals. In comparison, Homer's *Iliad* is the closest ancient document with 643 copies that still survive, and the earliest of these copies are dated 400 years after the original.

The total number of manuscript copies for the New Testament is significant because it gives translators the ability to reconstruct the original text with virtually complete accuracy.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, the closeness in time between the manuscript copies and the original manuscripts demonstrates that the reconstruction of the original text is virtually analogous with the original text itself. In fact, to doubt these conclusions would be to completely undermine the very integrity of every ancient document ever written.<sup>6</sup>

Based on all of the evidence provided in this section for both the Old and New Testament, it is reasonable to believe that the Bible was originally composed during the time periods that the Bible claims to have been written in. Furthermore, it is also reasonable to believe that the Bible has been accurately and faithfully transmitted down through the centuries. Thus, it

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<sup>5</sup>Josh McDowell, *New Evidence that Demands a Verdict* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999), 35.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*

is more than reasonable to believe that the Bible today is an accurate representation of the Bible that was originally composed.

### **Archeological and Historical Evidence of the Bible**

The ultimate goal of this section will be to demonstrate why it is reasonable to believe that the Bible of today—which is likely an accurate representation of the Bible that was originally written—is reliable, accurate and trustworthy. This goal will be pursued by analyzing the archaeological and historical evidence of both the Old and New Testament respectively.

Archaeology cannot only be utilized to display the integrity of the Old Testament, but it can be utilized to display the reliability and trustworthiness of the Old Testament as well. In light of this, archaeological finds have helped confirm the existence of many Old Testament rulers, cities, people and nations. For example, the existence of rulers such as Ahab, Jehu, Jeroboam, Nebuchadnezzar, and Belshazzar have all been verified by archaeology. Furthermore, cities such as Jericho, Sodom, Gomorrah, and Canaan have also been confirmed. Archaeology has also verified the existence of people such as Abraham, David, Solomon, Jacob, and Joseph. The existence of the Hittites (Gen 15:20; 23:10; 26:34) has been proven by the science of Archaeology as well. Finally, archaeology has also uncovered many significant Old Testament artifacts. The discovery of the “Cyrus cylinder” is amongst the greatest of these artifacts. This discovery verified the historical occurrence of the decree of Cyrus (Ezr 1:1-6), which allowed Israel to return to Jerusalem following the first exile.

The science of archaeology has helped support the reliability and trustworthiness of the New Testament as well. With this in mind, archaeological finds have helped confirm the historical existence of many New Testament cities, sites and rulers. For example, the existence of cities such as Gadara (Lk 8:26), Emmaus (Lk 24:13), Cana (Jn 2:1), Tyre (Mt 15:21), Sidon (Mt

15:21) and Sychar (Jn 4:5) have all been verified by archaeology. Furthermore, sacred sites such as the “Pool of Siloam” (Jn 9:11), the “Stone Pavement” (Jn 19:13) and the “Pool of Bethesda” (Jn 5:2) have also been confirmed. Finally, archaeology has also verified the existence of rulers and authoritative figures such as Herod the Great (Mt 2:16-18), Herod Antipas (Mt 14:1-12), Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12:1), Herod Agrippa II (Acts 25:13-26:32), Quirinius (Lk 2:2) and Pontius Pilate.

Based on all of the evidence provided in this section for both the Old and New Testament, it is clear that the science of archaeology has helped verify the historical accuracy of the Bible. Whole books are not even large enough to contain all of the archaeological evidence that support the reports and claims of the biblical text. With all of this said, it is completely reasonable to believe that the Bible is a reliable, accurate, and trustworthy document.

### **Prophetic Evidence of the Bible**

Now that it is reasonable to affirm that the Bible of today is an accurate representation of its original form, and that this Bible is reliable, accurate, and trustworthy, the purpose of these next three sections will be to demonstrate why it is reasonable to believe that the Bible is divine revelation. With this in mind, the goal of this particular section will be to display the efficacy of fulfilled prophecy in validating such a claim. However, it is important to note that this section will only contain a few of the many prophecies that have been fulfilled in the biblical text. Nevertheless, the overall goal of this section will be pursued by dividing the prophetic evidence of the Bible into two main portions: (1) Biblical prophecy fulfilled in the Old Testament and (2) biblical prophecy fulfilled in the New Testament.

For the purpose of this study, the evidence for biblical prophecy fulfilled in the Old Testament can be divided into three categories: (1) The first Jewish exile, (2) the Israelite’s

return from the first exile and (3) the destruction of foreign nations. It is important to understand that all of this prophetic evidence is based on the central claims of the last two sections.

Moreover, in accordance with those claims, both the dates of these events and their occurrence in history have all been confirmed by historical sources and archaeological data.

In light of all of this, there were many Old Testament prophets who accurately predicted the first Jewish exile. Moses (Deut 28:49-57) predicted this event nearly 900 years in advance, Amos (Am 3; 5-9) predicted the fall of the Northern Kingdom almost forty years in advance and he predicted the fall of the Southern Kingdom around 200 years in advance and Isaiah (Is 7:18-25; 9:8-10:4) predicted the captivity of the Northern Kingdom twenty years in advance and he predicted the captivity of the Southern Kingdom nearly 180 years prior to its occurrence. Furthermore, Isaiah (Is 44:28-45:3) also predicted that Cyrus would allow the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple. This prophecy was made 100 years before the Temple was destroyed and 160 years before Cyrus was even born. In addition to this, Ezekiel (Ezr 26) predicted the destruction of Tyre hundreds of years in advance, Moses (Ex 17:14) predicted the destruction of the Amalekites nearly 450 years in advance, and finally, Isaiah (Is 10:5-34) predicted the fall of Nineveh more than 100 years prior to its occurrence.

Most of the biblical prophecy fulfilled in the New Testament is based on the presupposition that Jesus Christ is the Messiah who was prophesied about in the Old Testament. With this in mind, in order to demonstrate the efficacy of these prophecies, a brief explanation must be given for why it is reasonable to utilize messianic prophecies in order to support biblical revelation. With this said, Christians believe that Jesus is the Messiah for two main reasons: (1) Jesus himself claimed to be the Messiah, and the historically accurate, reliable and trustworthy authors of the New Testament believed him and depicted him as such; and (2) the

Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah fit the description of Jesus perfectly. In light of this, the large number of prophecies about the Messiah—which perfectly reflect the description and portrayal of Jesus by the New Testament authors—help validate Jesus’ claim of messiahship, and in doing so, help verify the efficacy of the prophecies themselves. Therefore, it is more than reasonable to utilize these prophecies in order to support the divine nature of the Bible.

With all of this said, it is now necessary to examine these messianic prophecies. According to the Scriptures, the Messiah was to come from the line of descent running through Shem (Gen 9-10), Abraham (Gen 22:18), Isaac (Gen 26:4), Jacob (Gen 28:14), Judah (Gen 49:10), Jesse (Is 11:1-5) and David (2 Sam 7:11-16). Furthermore, the Old Testament is also clear that the Messiah’s life and ministry would include such things as teaching in parables (Ps 78:2), riding into Jerusalem on a donkey (Zec 9:9), being betrayed by a friend (Ps 41:9), being rejected by Israel (Is 8:14), being mocked with lots cast for his clothing (Ps 22:18), being crucified (Ps 22) and being buried in a rich man’s grave (Is 53:9). Finally, the Old Testament also ventures so far as to predict the very birthplace of the Messiah—Bethlehem Ephrathah (Mic 5:2).

As stated above, one does not need to be a biblical scholar to know that these prophecies perfectly fit the description of Jesus Christ found in the authentic and historically accurate New Testament. With this in mind, based on all of the evidence displayed in this section, it is clear that the Bible has both consistently and accurately predicted significant future events throughout history. This uncanny and astonishing ability should at the very least prompt one to consider the orthodox Christian view of the Bible. Therefore, it is clear that the prophetic evidence of the Bible helps support the claim of divine inspiration.

### **Evidence from the Continuity of the Bible**

In the same way that prophecy can be used to help support biblical revelation, an examination of the solidarity and unity of the Bible can also be used to support biblical revelation. Thus, the goal of this section will be to demonstrate how the continuity of the Bible helps solidify the case for biblical authority.

The Bible was written over a fifteen hundred year period by more than forty authors from every walk of life. Kings, military leaders, peasants, philosophers, fisherman, tax collectors, poets, musicians, statesmen, scholars, and shepherds all represent the immense diversity of authorship for the Bible. The Bible was also written in many different places; it was written in the wilderness, in a dungeon, in prisons, in a palace, on a hillside, on an island and in many other locations. Furthermore, the Bible was also written on three different continents—Asia, Africa, and Europe—and in three different languages—Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic. The Bible was written in many different literary styles as well. Allegory, autobiography, biography, historical narrative, law, poetry, and personal letters represent just a portion of the vast array of literary forms exhibited in the biblical text. In addition to all of this, the Bible also addresses a countless number of topics, which relate to nearly every aspect and area of human life.

However, in spite of all of this diversity, the Bible presents a single unfolding story: God's redemption of human beings.<sup>7</sup> This story has one doctrinal system, one ethical and moral standard, and one wholly unified plan of salvation.<sup>8</sup> With this in mind, the remarkable consistency of the Bible's message from beginning to end—in the midst of all of the diversity stated above—invariably leads one to consider the divine nature of the Bible. Therefore, based

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 6.

<sup>8</sup>Henry Clarence Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1979), 46.

on the evidence displayed in this section, it is clear that the continuity of the Bible helps support the claim of divine inspiration on the evidence displayed in this section, it is clear that the continuity of the Bible helps support the claim of divine inspiration.

### **Evidence from the Internal Claims of the Bible**

The goal of this section will be to demonstrate that the Bible itself claims to be nothing else than divine revelation, and to explain why it is reasonable to believe that the Bible is exactly what it claims to be. This goal will be pursued by analyzing the internal claims of both the Old Testament and New Testament respectively.

The Old Testament is full of statements that proclaim its divine authority. For example, in the Pentateuch, God not only speaks to Moses directly (Ex 14:1; Lev 4:1; Num 4:1; Deut 32:48), but God also commands Moses to write his words down (Ex 17:14; 34:27), and Moses complies to these requests again and again (Ex 24: 4; 34:28; Nm 33:2; Deut 31:9; 22, 24). Furthermore, the books of the Old Testament prophets are entrenched with proclamations like these: “For the Lord has spoken....” (Is 1:2 NIV, and for all future references); “Then the Lord said to Isaiah....” (Is 7:3); “This is what the Lord says....” (Is 43:1); “This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord....” (Jer 11:1); “The word of the Lord came to Ezekiel....” (Ez 1:3); “The word of the Lord that came to Hosea....” (Hos 1:1); “The word of the Lord that came to Joel....” (Joel 1:1). It is claimed that statements like these occur more than 3,800 times in the Old Testament.<sup>9</sup>

Likewise, the New Testament writers claimed that they declared the message of God as well. For example, the apostle Paul claimed that the orders he gave were the very commandments of God (1 Cor 14:37), and the message he preached was the very word of God

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 49.

(1 Thes 2:13), and that he received this message by revelation from God himself (Gal 1:11). Moreover, John taught that the message he proclaimed was the message of God as well (1 Jn 5:10). In addition to this, Peter claimed that all of the apostles declared the words of the Lord (2 Pet 3:2). Finally, in accordance with Peter's claim, Jude (Jude 1:17) and the author of Hebrews (Heb 1:2-4) also affirmed the divine authority of the message of the apostles.

Based on the evidence displayed in this section, it is clear that the historically reliable, prophetically accurate and wholly unified Bible claims to be the very Word of God. Because these claims are rooted on such a firm foundation of evidence, they cannot and should not be easily ignored or denied. In other words, if the authority of the Bible could not be at least partially supported by rational proofs and logical argumentation, then accepting the internal claims of the Bible would be a foolish act. However, since the Bible is supported by such a great deal of evidence, and since the Bible is accurate in its reporting about other subjects, it is more than reasonable to accept its claims about itself.<sup>10</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Even if one affirms that certain knowledge of absolute truth cannot be attained through the intellectual process of the human mind, the possibility of biblical authority should not be denied. In fact, it is irrational to deny the reality of a concept simply because one cannot know for certain that the concept is true. In an unbiased and impartial culture, biblical authority would be seen as at least a viable possibility. With this said, in the pursuit of truth, it is absolutely impossible to attain one's goal when driven by the affections and desires of one's heart—a sincere search for truth can only manifest itself when one decides to view the world from an impartial and unbiased perspective.

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

Those who accept the Christian orthodox view of the Bible are not those who blindly place their faith in a myth or a superstition. If one were to take the evidence provided in this paper out of its proper context, and weigh each argument individually, then surely the evidence would not be very conclusive or effective. However, when one thoughtfully examines all of the evidence in its entirety—and views the evidence as a unified whole—one will have a difficult time denying the reasonableness of the orthodox Christian claim. With this in mind, based on all of the evidence provided within this cumulative case approach, it is more than reasonable to believe that the Bible is divinely inspired by God. In fact, in view of all of the evidence, some would say that the orthodox Christian view of the Bible is not only reasonable, but very likely and highly probable. In the end, the belief in biblical authority will always remain an act of faith. However, such a faith is not absent from reason.

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