

Why I Believe in the Bible

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This text has been edited from a transcript of a talk given by David Gooding in Belfast, N. Ireland in the 1990s.

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Why I Believe in the Bible

In discussing the topic, 'Why I believe in the Bible,' I want to point out that the reasons I provide here are not necessarily the reasons that you hold for believing in the Bible. They are not necessarily, as you might imagine, the very best reasons why anyone believes in the Bible. They are my personal reasons why I believe in the Bible. As you read this, some of you may decide that I am an unnecessarily complicated man and that I ought to come to the point more quickly, clearly, and decidedly. Others of you, and perhaps the majority of you, will come to think that I am a very simplistic man. Be that as it may, these are the reasons, or some of them, why I personally believe in the Bible. So let me come straight to the point and tell you that I personally believe the Bible to be God's word and true. I believe in it because I believe in Jesus Christ. I believe that the claims Jesus Christ made for himself are true, and therefore I believe that Jesus Christ is the Word of God incarnate—God and man.

Because Jesus Christ authorises our New Testament and puts his authority or belief in the Old Testament, I follow him and believe both the New Testament and the Old. Now some of you may say to me at this juncture, 'Are you not, sir, with all respect, arguing in a circle? You tell us you believe the Bible because you first of all believe in Jesus Christ.' Thus says my critic, 'How did you come to know about Jesus Christ?' Of course if you ask me how I came to know about Jesus Christ, I've got to say, 'I know of him from the Bible.' 'There you are,' you say. 'You're arguing in circles. You believe in Jesus Christ because the Bible says so, and then you believe in the Bible because Jesus Christ says so. So first of all you have to believe in the Bible, and then you believe in Jesus Christ, and when you come to believe in Jesus Christ, then you come to believe in the Bible. You are arguing in a terrible, vicious circle.'

Well so it may sound. I beg leave to point out, however, that I'm not really arguing in a vicious circle at all. For when I come in this sense to the Bible, I do not first come presupposing it is the word of God. If you wish to follow me higher, you'll have to come to the Bible as you would come to a newspaper—not to the *Daily Mirror*, that would be too absurd, but maybe to *The Times* or *The Guardian*, whichever is your preferred newspaper.

When you come to your favourite newspaper, you do not first of all come to it with the belief that everything in this newspaper is one hundred percent true. No, you are aware that a newspaper can report true things and false things, so you come to the newspaper with an open mind. If a reporter is telling you a story, you listen to the facts of the story as he records them, and you let your belief be determined by the quality of the evidence itself. If you are not yet a Christian and you do not believe the Bible is the word of God, and therefore you do not believe that it is necessarily true, then I suggest you first of all come to Scripture as you would to a reliable and sensible newspaper. Let me immediately interject that, of course, to

compare the Bible with a newspaper is, in a sense, nonsense, for millions upon millions of folk in many generations have indeed proved to themselves that the word in Scripture is the word of God, and they have found it living and powerful. Therefore, in one sense, to compare it with anything else is folly. For the sake of logical argument, however, I'm asking you to come to holy Scripture as you would to a reliable newspaper and read what it has got to say. You needn't come with any presuppositions that it is inspired and infallible. Just come and read it as you would read your newspaper, and let the facts, as it reports them, convince you.

So when I say, 'I believe in the Bible because first of all I believe in Jesus Christ,' I'm not arguing in a circle. I do genuinely come first to Christ. When I come to the record of his character in holy Scripture, this is the first thing I put in logical order, the first thing that impresses itself upon me. The character of Jesus Christ that I meet in the New Testament, I say to myself, was surely not invented by the human authors of the New Testament. They must be reporting a real character whose life they observed, whose deeds they saw, and whose character they have faithfully represented but did not invent. Why do I say that? Well, I follow that line of argument because it appeals to me as being true. That was laid out many years ago in the famous book *The Original Jesus* by Otto Borchert, which states that the character of Jesus you meet in the New Testament is not such a character as anyone would have invented in the ancient world.¹ The ancient world into which Jesus Christ was born had people, amongst its thoughtful members at any rate, who had some clear ideas of what the human ideal is. The Jesus Christ that appears in the New Testament is nobody's ideal. As Paul remarked on one occasion, Jesus Christ was 'a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles' (1 Cor 1:23). The character of Jesus Christ who appears in the New Testament is nobody's ideal.

Of course if you read the story carefully, you will find that even his closest disciples recalled the facts with scrupulous honesty, even when it reflected badly on themselves. When they came to one of the critical things in all that Jesus Christ stood for, even his closest disciples abandoned him and fled. You will remember the story of how in the garden of Gethsemane, when the troops came to arrest our Lord, his disciples asked permission to ward off the attack by the sword. Without getting permission, Peter did draw his sword and attempted to defend the Lord Jesus. Straight away the Lord Jesus forbade him, and told him to put his sword into its sheath. Then he said to Peter and the rest, 'Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?' (Matt 26:53–54). Then all his disciples forsook him and fled. It was not that they all of a sudden lost their nerve. Peter displayed his physical courage in being prepared to draw his lonely sword against the whole squad of soldiers and fight the whole thing out to the death. He didn't flee for lack of physical courage. He and the rest of them fled because, to them, the whole situation was absurd. They were Jews, and they were looking for a messiah who would come to put down evil, remove the oppressor, and see that justice was done in the world. In short, their hope was reasonable

¹ *The Original Jesus* [Der Goldrund des Lebensbildes Jesu]. Trans. L. M. Stalker. London: Lutterworth Press, 1933.

given their time in history, was it not? This was their ideal: justice and freedom for the oppressed.

But a messiah who, when it came to crunch time and he was about to be arrested by evil and wicked men, just stood there and did nothing, making no attempt to save himself—that was a contradiction in terms to the Jews, including Jesus' disciples. When our Lord insisted that the sword not be permitted to defend him or to put down evil and crush his enemies, the disciples forsook him. The thing was too absurd for words. In that very truthful record from the pens of the early disciples, at that critical juncture in our Lord's life and ministry, they disagreed with him and fled.

You will see in Scripture that Jesus Christ was certainly not the Jewish ideal. He still isn't. I have an elderly Jewish friend who favours me with his company from time to time. He has said to me many times, 'David, how can your Jesus be Messiah? Son of God you say. And where was God, please, when Hitler was gassing 6 million Jews? Gone on holiday or something?' So my first point is that Jesus certainly was not the ideal that his contemporary Jews held, not the ideal of the men who penned the New Testament. That is, before the resurrection totally changed their concept.

Of course, as far as anybody could tell, he wasn't the ideal that the Greeks looked forward to either—and here I talk of seriously minded, philosophically minded Greeks. Obviously Jesus Christ was no Stoic. Nor was he the ideal of Platonists such as Socrates. These men sought by their wisdom to understand the universe, believing that by understanding the universe they might behave rightly and rationally. It led to some superb characters marked by their tremendous self-control; Stoics who despised death and despised men who showed any fear or weakness in the face of suffering. Consider Socrates in his last years, as penned in the famous record of Plato. How, when faced with the injustice of the death he was about to suffer, he met it calmly. In the power of his logic and philosophy, he went to his end peacefully serene and, in a sense, majestic. That's your Greek ideal favoured by Platonist and Stoic alike. On the other hand, when Jesus Christ faced death, it is recorded that he knelt in the garden, groaned, was moved, and sweat drops of blood—tormented you might say. When he died on the cross, his most loyal disciples tell you he died having cried, 'My God, why have you forsaken me?' (Matt 27:46). No wonder Paul reports the reaction of many thoughtful, philosophical Greeks to the story of Jesus Christ was that the cross of Christ was foolishness. It contradicted all the ideals espoused by their philosophers.

Romans thought it was laughable. The imperial governors of the then worldwide Roman empire were used to political upstarts who for one reason or another—patriotism, enthusiasm, or even religion—tried to start a rebellion against Rome. Many had attempted it; some had managed it for a little while until Rome crushed them. A man claiming to be the King of the Jews who wouldn't fight—Herod's soldiers thought they'd never met anything so screamingly funny in all their life. They clothed him with a purple robe and put a reed in his hand and a crown of thorns on his head, and they mocked him and had great fun. They had never heard anything so absurd. 'He saved others; he cannot save himself' (Matt 27:42).

I am referring to one particular, essential part of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, and my argument is this: As I come to the New Testament and read of him, I say that this character was not invented. He was nobody's ideal. In fact, he went sharply against the ideals

of the ancient world—Jewish, Greek, and Roman. Even his closest disciples, I repeat, tell you that at the crucial moment, they abandoned him because they disagreed with his policy. And they were not changed in their minds until he rose from the dead.

So then I come to the next feature about this character who we find facing us in the New Testament. I observe a simple fact that for uncountable millions of people, the Jesus Christ of the New Testament is a living person. You say, 'That's simply because they're Christians.' Ah, but just half a moment. Let's proceed on to what for me is the impossible view now: that he is an invention of some ancient people. Well if he is, they are forthwith to be congratulated as the greatest geniuses the world has ever seen. As anybody knows who has a notion of literary things, it is exceedingly difficult to create or invent a character and describe him in a work of fiction in such a way that the character lives for people. At that level it has been achieved but once or twice perhaps in the course of literature. In Jesus Christ you have a character who many people claim to know. They know him as a real person who lives. He's such a character who not only lives for them, but they will die for him. Did you ever know of a fictional character in history for whom millions of folks were prepared to lay down their lives? How did this character, if he were invented, come to have such great power over men? If we believe that a few fishermen invented this character, then they performed such a miracle that I think we should fall down and worship them instead of the Jesus they created.

Along that line, as I listen to this Jesus Christ in the New Testament, I come now to the question of his claim to be in some sense the Son of God. That claim was made finally when he stood before his judges, aware that in making that claim he was, in human terms, sealing his death warrant. I must ask myself now what I think of him. If it is true that the writers of the New Testament have not invented this character but are reporting a real person whom they met, then my next concern is what I shall make of his claim. On my decision here will presently rest my further decision. If I believe he is the Son of God, then what he says about the Old and New Testaments are, for me, final.

Here I start my thinking with our Lord, Jesus Christ, and his moral teaching. I don't care here whether you believe the Bible or that the New Testament is inspired by God. Here I'm merely appealing to your moral sense—a moral sense common to all people, in some more refined than in others, admittedly. Now when it comes to questions of morality, of right and wrong, I submit to you that unquestionably there have been certain experts in the course of human history who have stood head and shoulders above others.

Let me, as a student of the ancient world, cite to you once more my beloved Socrates. If the record of him in Plato is even half true, here you have a man with a burning passion to know the truth. A man who wanted to know the truth because of the importance of morality. A man who was prepared to stake his very life on the absolutes of morality as he understood them. Among all those experts who have walked our earth and talked to us about morality, I submit to you that Jesus Christ towers way above them all. Not content to say, 'Love your friends and hate your enemies,' he taught us to love God, to love our fellow man, and to love our enemies. He taught us that external keeping of a moral code is not enough, that the moral code pertains to our inner thoughts, our inner being. It is not enough not to have murdered a man, for if we hate him in our hearts, at one level our hatred is tantamount to murder. To this present day, Jesus Christ stands acknowledged throughout the world at the level of morality.

I take that simply to be stated and not to be proved. Then I observe that it was this one who claimed to be God's Son. I say to myself that one of my reasons for believing Jesus Christ is the Son of God is precisely because he said so. You wouldn't believe it if I say so, of course not. You would encourage me to consult a psychiatrist. You wouldn't believe it even if a great moralist of our own day says it.

Jesus Christ stands before us in history as the Mount Everest of all moralists. It is unthinkable to believe he deliberately deceived people. You would be left with saying, therefore, that great moralist as he was, when he claimed to be God's Son he was simply self-deceived, mentally astray. It is common knowledge that Jesus Christ has been the ceaseless fountain of more mental health and stability than anybody known in history. Millions still maintain their mental equilibrium by the power of his peace. He is the man who taught us the love of God as none other taught it, the wonder of forgiveness as none other taught it, the man whose life exemplified the peace that he offers us. Could he be insane? Bring on insanity I say, if that be true!

Then I come at these things from another point of view as well. He claimed to be the Son of God, and I have just indicated reasons that I find compelling for accepting his claim. To them let me add another: I am impressed by what one of his apostles subsequently said. In talking of the deity of Jesus he said, 'This is he who came by water and blood' (1 John 5:6). His apostle points to two things: (1) that Jesus was announced and officially introduced by John the Baptist, and (2) that very fact involves the claim that he came as fulfilment of the Old Testament and its prophecies, to which theme I shall return presently.

In saying that he came not by water only but by water and blood, the apostle is calling our attention to the extraordinary fact that Jesus Christ came into our world and at the beginning of his public ministry was officially introduced to the world as one who had come to die for the sins of the world. He came by blood, and the forerunner said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!' (John 1:29). Now you may be more widely read than I, but for myself, I know of nobody who came into this world professing to have a mission to die for the sins of the world. There is, of course, a very good reason why there have been exceedingly few people like him. If today a thirty-year-old just at the beginning his public career announced that he had come to die for the sins of the world, once again, people would ring for the psychiatrist. Why is it that when we hear Jesus Christ saying these things, we don't feel that he is a lunatic or a schizophrenic? You say, 'To claim it is one thing, to prove it is another.' Admittedly so, but here comes the rub of my argument. In saying this now, I expose myself, putting my heart on my sleeve in front of you. In all this matter I am not unprejudiced. I am not unbiased. I know you might contrive to be unbiased yourself, but I am not.

Here I confess it, even though to your logical mind it destroys all my argument, but I must be honest to the fact. You see, I do not come to this question of 'is Jesus Christ true' as a matter of objective inconsequence. Some may say, 'Well, I don't mind, he could be or he could not be. To me, it is simply an objective, logical puzzle that I have to solve.' No, I cannot come that way, for the simple reason that I happen to be a sinner. Not a lurid sinner I hope, though God's notions of sins and sinners may be different from ours and from mine, but a sinner nonetheless. Here I find Jesus Christ unique among the leaders of thought in the world

in that, according to his own claim, he didn't come primarily to tell us to be good. There have been millions of people who have done that. For all that, I could get up on my hind legs and tell you to be good, not without cause, but what's the use? My trouble is not that I don't know I ought to be good. I know that. My trouble is, I have not been good. When people come along and simply tell me to be good and raise before me the moral standard higher than I ever thought it could possibly be raised, won't that drive me to despair? In this I find Jesus Christ unique. According to his forerunner and himself, he came not primarily to tell us to be good, but he came to die as the Lamb of God for men and women who have not been good.

Here I find he meets my need. And if I mistake not that basic problem of all humanity, how can we still remain human and not descend to the level of animals, mere brutes, unless we maintain our moral values? Yet we have broken the moral laws and transgressed against our moral values, let alone God's values. Hence our predicament. How can I now turn around and say, 'Well, so I have, but never mind. It's done now. What's the use of making a fuss over spilt milk.' To say that is to say, 'Right ho! It doesn't matter in the end how you behave. If you foul life's values and break the moral law, then in the end it doesn't matter.' Well, if it doesn't matter in the end, it didn't matter in the beginning. If the moral law does not matter, how do we remain human? Yet I have broken it. How can I find release on the plague of real guilt—not psychological guilt, but real guilt—and still maintain my value system? Then Jesus Christ comes and says that is the prime point of his coming. How do I know he's true?

I ask you, how do you know bread is good? You would reply to me that when you get hungry, you go looking around, to see if in this great world there is something that matches your need. But having the hunger doesn't make you biased about what meets that need.

You would laugh at anybody who said, 'This is silly, you see. You think that bread is good to eat simply because you're prejudiced. You have this funny feeling inside that people call hunger, so you're prejudiced as to whether the bread is good to eat or isn't.' Alright, be prejudiced then. But you know that bread is good to eat because you have hunger, and you search around, and in this world you find there is such a thing as bread that feeds you; it meets your need. I come with a hunger that is equally universal among mankind and deals with things more important than bread.

Our quest for moral integrity makes us aware that we are sinners who need forgiveness, and Jesus Christ is the only one who answers that need. All religions make us aware of our need, but all of them without exception will tell you that salvation is by your effort, and exhorts you to be good—by your meditation, by your exercise, by your meritorious acts, by your spiritual discipline. Jesus Christ says, 'When you've done it all, you are still a sinner. The basic problem is sin, and I have come to die for you.' In this sense, ladies and gentlemen, allow me to observe that if you should come around to seeing things like this, you only have to make the decision once. There is only one person in the whole of history who will, so to speak, come by your side and say, 'I am your Creator. You, my child, have sinned. I came to die for you.'

How do I know it's true? Friend, it meets my need, like bread meets my hunger. You say, 'So far, however, you have been talking of the claims of Christ. Is there no objective validation of that claim?' Of course there is, and I refer to the resurrection of Jesus Christ our

Lord, and that's all I do. I do not discuss with you the evidence for that great event. I take it that you are aware of the vast amount of exceedingly powerful and potent evidence that Jesus Christ rose again on the third day. So I leave it there. I ask you not to allow the brevity of my reference to obscure the weight of the evidence. It's simply that I have neither time, nor you the patience, to examine it in detail.

You may, at this juncture, be surprised that I base my faith in Scripture on these things. Let me sum up where we have gotten so far. First, reading the Bible as I might read any book, without presuppositions, simply asking myself, 'Is it true?' I'm confronted by the character of Jesus Christ and am convinced that it is impossible to think that he could be the fictional invention of those who wrote the New Testament. Second, I have listened to his claim to be God incarnate, and I have found reasons to believe it is true. At the level it meets my need, at the level of his own model integrity, and finally at the level of the great event of the resurrection on the third day which demonstrates the truth of all he claimed.

I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and was raised from the dead, and it is by his authority that we have the New Testament, and I receive it as so. If he is the Son of God, risen from the dead, then he himself indicated that the Old Testament was indeed God's word, and he claimed even more than that, as we shall see in a moment. These are the grounds upon which I believe the Bible. Maybe you are surprised that I have not placed more emphasis on believing the Bible because of, say, archaeology, historical research, or philosophical apologetics. So let me say quite frankly, I don't believe the Bible because archaeology has proved it. I don't believe the Bible because accurate historians have in many cases demonstrated that the Bible record is accurate. Nor do I believe the Bible because philosophers have shown that in spite of what many say, it is not philosophically invalid to believe in the miraculous. It is not for those reasons that I believe the Bible. Now let me make myself clear on this point; I am not saying that archaeological research, historical research, and philosophical apologetics are valueless. They are exceedingly valuable disciplines, and I'm grateful for those who have laboured in these fields because what they can do for us is to remove some of the stumbling blocks that lie in the path towards faith.

Here is a young woman, for instance, who is told by her teachers that you cannot believe the Bible because it is full of miracles, and scientifically we know that miracles are impossible. Philosophically miracles aren't respectable. Therefore, the dear young lady concerned never gets around to even examining the claims or the evidence for Christianity because she has this roadblock in her way. She thinks it would be intellectually dishonest even to contemplate believing the Bible, because it's full of miracles. Of course it's full of miracles. The very centre of the Christian faith is that tremendous miracle that is the resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord. And if resurrection is philosophically unrespectable, so to speak, and you can't believe it without committing intellectual suicide, well then my good young lady is not going to believe it. That, of course, is quite false. I have here, taken at random from my bookshelves, a book by Norman L. Geisler titled *Miracles and Modern Thought* in which he demonstrates how unfair is the claim by both ancient and more modern philosophers that it is intellectually invalid to believe in miracles. If you are interested in those things, it is a very helpful book to read. Or here again I have a book, known to many of you, by the much-beloved professor F. F. Bruce on the reliability of the New Testament

documents in which he makes the same point.² Unfortunately, it has commonly been advertised by many that the New Testament writers are supposed to be inaccurate historically.

Many a young man and woman have not even considered reading Scripture seriously because they suppose it is full of all kinds of historical mistakes and inaccuracies. The learned professor here labours to show that where the New Testament historians can be tested, they show up as exceedingly reliable and knowledgeable historians. Nor am I forgetting that archaeology has served us well. Discoveries from digging the earth have vindicated many points in the Old and New Testaments.

So go back into the dimmer past for a moment. Most of us have read of times when critics of Holy Writ scorned the Old Testament because it talked of people like Sargon, and they said there was no record anywhere of Sargon. But then the archaeologists got busy. Now, of course, it is known that there is a stela with Sargon's name on it. Or in the New Testament, people derided the Acts of the Apostles, and in particular the mention of Gallio, the Roman magistrate in Corinth. Nothing was ever known about Gallio in secular records, and they said he was a non-existent person whom Luke had unfortunately manufactured and put into his Acts of the Apostles. Then sure enough, old Gallio turned up in the archaeological records, relative of the famous Seneca.

So I am not despising the help that archaeology and these other sciences can give us as they go about their task of understanding the past and finding the truth about it, or of thinking to the best of our logical abilities about what is rational and what is not rational to believe. Having said all that, I repeat that I do not believe the Bible is the word of God because archaeology has proved it reliable or because the philosophers have shown it is philosophically respectable to believe in miracles. I believe it because I first believe in Jesus Christ. You may ask why I regard that distinction as important. Well, for a whole host of reasons. When I get home to heaven at last I shall not say, 'God, you're real.' And he says, 'My child, how did you know?' 'Because the archaeologists taught me.' No, no. Some God he'd be if I could only believe him real and personally get to know him and find him true by dint of an archaeologist's spade. When I meet my Lord and Redeemer and say to him, 'Lord, I believe you,' if he inquires why, I won't say, 'Because the philosophers said it was philosophically respectable to believe you', or 'Because Mr Geisler gave me permission.' Some Redeemer he would be, wouldn't he?

I have regard to what our blessed Lord himself said when he was here on earth. Talking to his contemporaries, he said, 'I sent you to John the Baptist, and he acted as a pointer towards me, a very valuable pointer. But actually gentlemen,' he said, 'I do not receive testimony from men.' Of course that must logically be true if the claims of Jesus Christ are true. If Jesus Christ is God incarnate, then ultimately there is no evidence outside of Jesus Christ. He made it all. You will never be able to find a little rock ledge in the whole universe, were you to travel to its remotest bounds, you'll never be able to find a foothold in this universe where you can take an independent stand of God and say, 'There you are God, over there, in your world, and here am I in my world, separate from you. I go independently to

² F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* 6th ed., Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003.

make up my mind about you.' There is no such place. In that sense, all comes from God, archaeologists included. They are but his creatures, and if they have any wit in their head, or validity in their spade, or logic in their pens, it all derives from the Creator. God is his own evidence, and it must be so. Jesus Christ showed his truthfulness when he said, 'Yes, in a certain sense, it's useful for you as human beings to consult other human beings, and I have commissioned them. I have commissioned John the Baptist and others to be testimonies to me.' It is helpful that we use one another; we should point one another to Jesus Christ.

You, sir, with your experience say to me, 'Ah yes, I have proved Jesus Christ to be true. Look, I was a rotten gambler in the chains of evil habit. I know Jesus Christ is true because his power saved me!' You point me to him; that is valid. This woman over there says, 'Yes, I was burdened with guilt, and I found relief in Jesus Christ. I've proved him true. Go to Christ.' And this young man says, 'Yes, and I have proved Jesus Christ to be true because he claimed to be God's Son, but not merely so, because he claimed to be able to impart to us eternal life. With that life he gives us the faculty of knowing God, and I do know God. For if I know nothing else, this I know, that once I was blind and now I see! It was Jesus Christ who gave me that faculty of sight.' Your argument would be similar to the thoughts of the man in an art museum. As you are looking at some great painting, he comes gently to your side and says, 'Do you know what that painting's about?' You say, 'No, I can't make heads or tails of it.' He says, 'Let me tell you. You know, I was blind like you once. I saw nothing in it. There came a marvellous expert in art, and he gave me an understanding that I might see it. When your eyes are open to see it, how supremely marvellous it is.'

'Yes,' you say to me, 'I was blind to God. God meant nothing to me whatsoever.' Of course he didn't. You are but human and God is spirit. You say, 'Jesus Christ came along and gave me the faculty of sight. He opened my eyes, he gave me eternal life that I might know God, and this one thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see. Go to Christ.' Very helpful of you, sir, so to argue. That said, I shall answer you back like the Samaritans answered their fellow townsman when she said to them with feminine tact, 'Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?' (John 4:29). The men answered, 'This couldn't be the Christ, would you think?' They came out to see and believe, but instead they showed how arrogant men are: 'Now we believe him. Not because of what you said my dear good woman,' they said. No, no, no. 'We've heard him for ourselves' (see v. 42). Ah, but then that was an important point, for if you point me to Christ because of your experience, and you rightly so do, then I shall say, 'Yes they got their experience from Christ. They're not independent witnesses.' Our Lord's sovereign words remain. I receive not, in that ultimate sense, testimony from men. Jesus Christ is his own evidence.

If you think that is hard to swallow, then let me ask you on what grounds you believe your mother loves you, if ever she did. Is it because the social scientists have given you permission to believe, or the philosophers have shown it is not illogical to believe that your mother loved you? 'Oh no,' you say, 'I know it by direct experience of Mother.' So may we know God in Christ. Therefore, on that ground I believe what he said and believe what he said about holy Scripture. For that reason I expect Scripture to be accurate, and I'm interested, of course, to find that archaeology and history and philosophy can be used to demonstrate the accuracy of many things in Scripture. There are other things, other problems

in history and geography that archaeology cannot, to this moment, solve. Problems remain; of course they do. Why do I keep on believing the Bible when there are problems that archaeology cannot solve? Because I believe in Jesus Christ, that's why. Therefore if I cannot solve a problem in the Bible, how it relates to external history or external geography, I reserve my judgment because the reason upon which I believe the Bible to start with was not because I'd solved every archaeological puzzle or every historical difficulty. If I did that, I wouldn't yet believe, would I? Because in the nature of things, if you were believing on grounds of archaeology, you would have to prove every particular case before you could come to belief.

No, I believe it because I believe in Jesus Christ. Therefore let us do all we can in our own studies and our own disciplines, then fearlessly investigate the evidence, be it archaeological, historical, or textual, whatever it is. I myself have tried to do my little part in some of those fields.

Finally, one other strand of evidence. I have talked largely of the New Testament. Let me say a concluding word about the Old Testament. Why do I believe the Bible? Why do I believe it to be the word of God? I believe it because of the evidence of the Old Testament fulfilled in Jesus Christ. It is the claim of Christ and of his apostles that Jesus was born of the seed of David, according to the flesh, and the son of Abraham. He was the fulfilment of the prophecies of the Old Testament, and here we are introduced to a vast topic. It is easily demonstrable that the Old Testament was in existence before Jesus Christ was born. Its character is declared by the fact that it stands unique among all the holy books of the world. Its people still stand unique among the nations of the world. I refer to those we now call Jews or Israelis but in the ancient world they were called Hebrews. A special nation in history, marked in the ancient world and in their Old Testament not only by their separateness from the other nations, but by their extraordinary belief in monotheism, one God, when the whole other world was wallowing in idolatry.

How did this nation get this tremendous insight? Again, it is obvious they didn't invent it because that very nation's Scriptures (the Old Testament) proclaim everywhere that God is one and preaches the transcendent Lord, as distinct from the crude idolatries of their contemporaries who deified the powers of nature or the psychological powers of the human being. While the Jews preached monotheism, their history shows they were forever departing from it and slipping back into the idolatries of the ancient world. I say to myself, 'Well, that's evidence enough that they didn't invent the idea of monotheism.' If I tried to tell you that Luther invented the doctrine of justification by faith, you would smile benignly, wouldn't you? You'd say, 'Not so. It goes back to the beginnings of the New Testament era. Christ and his apostles taught it, and what happened is that Christendom slipped away from it.' It is not that Christianity gradually evolved until at last, in the time of Luther, it came to the high doctrine of justification by faith. Justification by faith was talked of at the very first, and being human, Christendom slipped from it and had to be recalled to it. So it was with monotheism in Israel. It is not a late phenomenon. It was there at the very beginning, and Israel continually slipped back from it and had to be drawn back to it because they didn't invent it. They were given it.

They stand as the nation that taught us morality, that religion must be joined with morality. By and large the ancient world looked upon religion as a way of currying favour

with the gods, morality largely being irrelevant. Israel's God said that religion must be joined with morality. This was a nation that alone pointed to the future, and to a reasonable hope for the future. Whereas all the other ancients looked back to a time of paradise at the beginning and onward to destruction or else to an endless cycle, going nowhere, like our Buddhist and Hindu friends to this present day. The Jews stood, prophetically pointing onward to the coming of a messiah, they said. They said this was God's world, and God would not abandon it to its sin and hopelessness, but God had a plan and a purpose for the world. That purpose was fulfilled in the coming of the Saviour of the world, and they said it for centuries. Jesus Christ came of that nation; he was the only one who ever credibly claimed to be the Saviour of the world.

Finally, it is not merely that as you read the books of the Old Testament you will find that they're written by men of different ages and different backgrounds, you will also find that the whole thing points solidly to one person. By this I mean that the seed of the woman promised to Eve in the garden, that seed is Christ (Gen 3:15). The great Passover that delivered Israel from Egypt (Exod 12) becomes a finger pointing to Christ, the Passover Lamb. The suffering servant that Isaiah proclaimed as God gave him to see the secrets of what must be—the characteristic of a universal ruler—that suffering servant is Christ. Not only is it thus on the surface, it is in the very watermark of holy Scripture.

I suspect you are like me; you have a bank card. Mine is sorely limited, but I notice that because there is so much fraud, the bank card is very cunningly made. Look at it one way and it says 'Ulster Bank.' Tip it just a little bit, oh, there's another design underneath the thing. You couldn't counterfeit that, the banks hope. It is exceedingly cunning. Looks one thing on the surface, another thing just below. It's not a question whether one is true or the other true; both are true. When I look at Old Testament Scripture, time and time again I find it thus. There on the surface is one lesson; tip it a little bit, you'll see another. So it was that the great patriarch Abraham was asked to surrender his son to God. In obedience to God, Abraham walked to the hill of Moriah, and in obedience to God, his son allowed himself to be sacrificed (Gen 22:1–18). Therein Abraham had experience of the God who provides for man's need, and called the place Jehovah-Jireh, and found there his security.

The lesson is written on its face, tip it a little bit and what now do you see? From that remote part of the Old Testament, a watermark in the story of another and greater Father and another and a greater Son who came together to the hill called Calvary, where God proved himself Jehovah-Jireh indeed, the provider of all that man needs. So we now read, 'He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?' (Rom 8:32). Like my bank card, the Old Testament proved to have beneath it a watermark. This is the kind of thing I said without sentiment or shame, and over many years it has kept my mind entranced by the beautiful accuracy of God's holy word. The stunning wisdom of it is that when one looks at it and stays with it, the Old Testament becomes self-evidently inspired, as on the surface and behind it. Behind the very history—the real history—one sees ever and again the watermark of God's Holy Spirit pointing on to the coming Saviour of the world, that is Jesus Christ.

I say to myself, 'However could it have been thus?' I find only one explanation: that beyond Moses and beyond Jeremiah, beyond Isaiah and Samuel was the wisdom of God and

the inspiration of his Holy Spirit. For these reasons, primarily, I believe that the Bible is the word of God. You will have other reasons as well, I hope. But if you're a non-Christian, do not allow yourself to be stumbled by the opposition of men who do not really know what the Bible is saying. Come and prove it. God requires no prime belief of you save the sincerity to believe that he is, and is the rewarder of those who diligently seek him. If you will thus seek him, Jesus Christ guarantees that if, when you know God's will, you are prepared to do it, you shall know, for God will tell you, whether Jesus Christ's teaching is of God or is not. So may God bless these humble remarks and this feeble but genuine testimony to faith in him and in his Word.

About the Author

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