

# Answering Critics of the Bible

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## INTRODUCTION

Ancient, outdated, barbaric, erroneous, fallible, irrelevant, homophobic, chauvinistic, misogynistic, intolerant, and even laughable. These are just a few of the words that are tossed around these days by men and women regarding the word of God, the Bible. And yet, when they toss around these words, they do not do it against “God’s word,” so to speak. They claim that the Bible is not the product of God, but the product of lunatics or liars or a combination of both – the vilest and basest men whoever walked the face of the earth. After all, who but the most devious or depraved would claim as the Bible authors do, that God has spoken (e.g. Hebrews 1:1,2) when He has not?

The type of language that is used by critics to describe the Bible though brings up an interesting point. Logically, when someone uses insulting language in a debate, he has employed a tactic called “ad hominem” – arguing “against the man” rather than using reason or logic. Could it be that when a discerning individual looks past the smoke and mirrors employed by Bible critics today, that he finds little or nothing of substance? Could it be that when one truly examines the Bible that one finds an entirely different picture than that which is painted by the Bible’s critics? The answers are there for someone who truly wants to know.

How can Christians who hold the belief that the Bible is God’s inspired word (2 Timothy 3:16, 17) and is just as relevant today as it was 2000 years ago (2 Peter 1:3) respond to critics of the Bible today? Is the debate entirely one sided in favour of the critics? Is it already over? Applying more reason and logic than critics of the Bible often employ themselves, one can find that there in fact several responses to modern attacks on the Bible.

### “YOU ARE NOT THE FIRST”

The first response that a Christian could give to critics of the Bible today would simply be to say, “Get in line – you are not the first.” In each successive generation, a group of critics arises to destroy the Bible and bring the cause of Christ to nothing. Does this prove that the Bible is wrong? Actually, it proves that the Bible is right – because while the critics have died and gone, the Bible still stands. When one considers popular works of literature, the only books that remain are the ones that are timeless. Only a fraction of books written enjoy even small success twenty years after their publication; most works fade into obscurity, especially those that receive intense criticism. The Bible has withstood the test of time – not only against those who would criticize it, but against those who would undertake efforts to destroy it absolutely.

Men were trying to destroy the Bible even before it was finished. Jeremiah was once instructed by the Lord to write His message on a scroll that it might be delivered to Jehoiakim (then king of Judah) in the hopes that he would repent of his wickedness. When Jehoiakim finally heard the message, he took the scroll from the one who was reading it and “cut it with the penknife, and cast it into the fire that was on the hearth, until all the roll was consumed in the fire that was on the hearth” (Jeremiah 36:23). Did this stop the Lord delivering his message to Judah? Did it keep Him from preserving His message for future generations? Not at all: “Then took Jeremiah another roll, and gave it to Baruch the scribe, the son of Neriah; who wrote therein from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the book which Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire” (v. 32). Jehoiakim eventually lost his crown and ultimately would lose his life, being buried like a donkey outside the gates of Jerusalem (22:18). The Bible, however, lived on.

After the Old Testament was complete, a Syrian king by the name of Antiochus Epiphanes came to power over a realm that included Judea. Antiochus viewed the Jewish people as a rebellious sect and a threat to his ideology, which was both Greek and idolatrous. Antiochus believed the best way to handle the Jew problem was to exterminate it. Under his reign, keeping the feasts, Sabbaths, and rites of circumcision commanded under the Law of Moses was made an offense punishable by death. In addition to this, Antiochus ordered his officials to conduct a monthly search – if any copies of the Law of Moses were found, they were destroyed, and anyone who had them was killed. Antiochus Epiphanes succeeded – in producing an insurrection of the Jews that forced him out of Judea for the rest of his life; he died in the Eastern provinces of his kingdom, a failure. The Bible, however, lived on.

After the New Testament was complete, another enemy of the Bible came to power, this time over

a much larger realm – the Roman Empire. His name was Diocletian, and because of hatred of Christianity and love of idolatrous worship (due in no small part to the fact that he presented himself as a god to be worshiped), he ordered the destruction of every copy of the New Testament scriptures. So thorough were his efforts that he actually believed he had succeeded in his task. Archaeology reveals at least two artefacts that testify to this belief: a monument constructed over the site of a Bible burning which reads, “Extinct is the name of the Christians,” and a medal, which reads, “The Christian religion is destroyed and the worship of the gods restored.” After his death however, an emperor came to power that was friendly to the cause of Christ. This man, Constantine, ordered that Bibles be placed in all the churches throughout his empire, and offered a monetary reward to anyone who could produce a copy of the scriptures to be copied. Within twenty five hours, he received fifty copies. The Bible lived on.

As time moved forward, enemies of the Bible began to arise from a strange place. This unlikely enemy of the Bible was none other than the Catholic Church, which by the time of the Middle Ages had transformed from a religion into a political power structure. Viewing the Bible as a threat to their control of the masses, popes began enacting edicts against owning Bibles. Pope Innocent I (an ironic name) ordered the burning of French Bibles at Metz in 1199. Pope Gregory IX gave a similar decree to the Spanish some three decades later. Bible destruction continued in the following years even into the seventeenth century. For instance, the Jesuits, a fanatical sect of the Catholics, actually boasted of

having burned 60,000 Bibles in 1637. \* \* \* \* \*

Not only did the Catholic Church delight in the destruction of Bibles, they held an intense distaste for anyone who translated the Bible into common languages or in any way made it widely available to the public. John Wycliffe for instance was condemned as a heretic for translating the Bible in 1382. So intense was Catholic hatred for Wycliffe that years after his death, his body was dug up, burned, and the ashes were cast into a river. John Tyndale, another translator of the Bible, was not so lucky; Catholic authorities strangled him and then burned him at the stake 6 October, 1536. All Tyndale had done was make an English translation of the Bible some ten years earlier.

Catholic efforts to keep Bibles out of the hands of the public and to persecute and kill those who translated the Bible failed. The Bible eventually found its way into common languages and mass distribution. The popes, priests, and other clergy members who had worked so hard to keep the Bible a possession of the Catholic hierarchy would be shocked to see where the Bible is today. The Bible lived on, and amazingly so – it was the first book printed on a printing press and today remains the bestselling book of all time, having been translated into over 1100 languages.

Since the late seventeenth century, attempts to destroy or discredit the Bible have come not from churches or governments as much as they have from individuals. The Renaissance led mankind to rediscover the individual; this rediscovery eventually led to a period known as the enlightenment, in which social institutions or beliefs that had been long accepted began to be questioned. The enlightenment led many intellectuals towards a belief among men that God was either “hands-off” concerning the earth (hence no inspired word was ever given by God to man), or that man was the only “god” that man needed. This belief continues to this day – has the Bible withstood the intense scrutiny that has been placed upon it over the past three hundred years?

Ask Voltaire. Voltaire (1694-1778) has been dubbed by some the embodiment of eighteenth century enlightenment. While living, he said this concerning the Bible: “One hundred years from my day there will not be a Bible in the earth except one that is looked upon by an antiquarian curiosity-seeker.” Amazingly enough, only fifty years after his death, both Voltaire’s former home and personal printing press were not being used to produce copies of Voltaire’s works. Instead, they were being used by the Geneva Bible Society to produce Bibles (ironically, the same thing happened with the printing press of Thomas Paine after his death, a man who like Voltaire sought to destroy the Bible). Further, on a certain day one hundred and fifty years after his death, a first edition copy of Voltaire’s work sold for 11 cents in Paris. On that same day, December 24, 1933, the British government purchased an ancient New Testament manuscript – *Codex Sinaiticus* – for half a million dollars. The Bible lived on.

Examples of the durability of the Bible over time could be given ad infinitum. However, an illustration that B.J. Clarke once offered drives the point home:

*Suppose that there was a man who had lived upon this earth for 1800 years. And suppose that during*

*this 1800 years that this man had often been thrown into the sea and yet could not be drowned; that he had frequently been thrown to the wild beasts who were unable to devour him; that he had many times been forced to drink deadly poisons that never did him any harm; that he had often been bound in chains and locked in prisons and dungeons, yet he had always been able to throw off the chains and escape from his captivity; that he had repeatedly been hanged till his enemies thought him dead, yet when his body was cut down he sprang to his feet and walked away as though nothing had happened; that hundreds of times he had been burned at the stake, till there seemed to be nothing left of him, yet as soon as the fires were out he leaped up from the ashes as well and as vigorous as ever! We would call such a man indestructible! Such a man would be superhuman! Yet this is exactly how we should regard the Bible! This is practically the way in which the Bible has been treated. It has been burned, drowned, chained, put in prison, and torn to pieces, YET NEVER DESTROYED!*

No work of ancient literature has withstood the test of time better than the Bible, even without having faced the Bible's unrelenting stream of criticism and destruction. The Bible was born out of adverse circumstances and kept under worse circumstances. The Bible lives on!

Modern criticism attempts to claim that the Bible as it exists today is not the Bible as it was originally written. Such claims are completely unfounded, and simply represent a human effort to explain the unexplainable accuracy of the Bible. The Bible has more manuscript evidence than any 10 works of classical literature combined. No one doubts the composition date or textual accuracy of the works of Plato, Confucius, Virgil, or any other ancient author - yet these are supported by only a fraction of the evidence that supports the Bible. Consider for instance Homer's famous work, *The Iliad*. Like the Bible, *The Iliad*, has undergone textual criticism to come down to us in its' present form. Unlike the Bible, *The Iliad* as we now have it is considered to be the same today as it was when it was written. Yet, consider the two logically from the eyes of honest textual critics:

- Number of ancient copies (complete and partial) of *The Iliad*? 643.
- Number of ancient copies (complete and partial) of the New Testament? Over 6,000.
- Number of words questioned in *The Iliad*? Measured not in words but in lines – 764 (out of 15,600 lines).
- Number of words questioned in the Bible? 40 – words (out of 20,000 lines).
- Percentage of *The Iliad* in need of emending? Five percent.
- Percentage of the New Testament in need of emending? Less than one half of one percent.

The Bible as it exists today is without a doubt the Bible as it existed when it was first written.

The only way one can account for the preservation of the Bible even to this present age is to listen to what the Bible itself says: "It is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail [...] Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away" (Luke 16:17; Matthew 24:35). The Bible exists because it cannot be destroyed; it exists because God has worked throughout the annals of history to preserve it.

#### **"YOU TRY WRITING IT"**

The second response that a Christian could give to critics of the Bible today would be this: "You try writing something comparable to the Bible." The Bible is a book of books – it contains 66 books. As a book of books, the Bible certainly is a product of men – in fact, the books were written by forty men over a span of roughly 2000 years. However, the Bible cannot be a product of men alone – when one considers the abilities and knowledge of the individuals who wrote it as compared to the content and knowledge expressed in their books, one sees the mark of someone no less than Divine.

Without a doubt, works of literature are products of their places and time and often reflect the knowledge and backgrounds of their authors. What would *Heart of Darkness* be without Joseph Conrad's real life experiences on the Congo? What would Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis* be without the influence impressed upon him by urban life in his day? What if the same logic were applied to the Bible? The Bible would prove to a book that transcends both its place and time. Consider just one Bible author and the books he wrote – a man named Moses.

Before one can truly appreciate the accomplishment of the Law of Moses (the first five books of the Bible, which conservative scholars unreservedly attribute to the man named Moses who appears in four of the books), one must learn a little bit about Moses and his background. Consider the points that might come out in an imaginary conversation between an interviewer and Moses:

- Interviewer: "Moses, where were you born?"

- Moses: “Egypt.”
- Interviewer: “Where were you educated?”
- Moses: “Also in Egypt. I was educated in the house of the Pharaoh.”
- Interviewer: “Oh, so you weren’t educated by the Hebrews?”
- Moses: “Not exactly – I was nursed by my natural mother, who was a Hebrew, but I was educated and influenced according to the desires of my adopted mother, Pharaoh’s daughter.”
- Interviewer: “Tell me Moses, what did the Egyptians teach you about God?”
- Moses: “Oh, they didn’t believe in Jehovah God at all... they worshipped gods.”
- Interviewer: “Gods – you mean more than one?”
- Moses: “That’s right.”
- Interviewer: “What were these Egyptian gods like?”
- Moses: “They were cruel and warlike; at times they marry each other, at times they demand human sacrifices... they’re pretty arbitrary... a lot like humans can be at times.”
- Interviewer: “What then made you write about a single, loving God who is not only good, but a creator of good things for His creation?”
- Moses: “It would be an understatement to say that I had a lot of help – I didn’t write those books at all. Yes, I know I wrote them down – but God wrote them through me.”

Moses did not just go against the flow in terms of the God about whom he wrote and that God’s nature and actions, he wrote with a knowledge of mathematics, history, and medicine that exceeded that of the Egyptians, the Hebrews, and his generation for both the period in which he lived, and in some cases all subsequent generations for over three thousand years.

Consider first the realm of mathematics. In the book of Genesis, Moses records the account of Noah’s life. A detail of his life was that the Lord commanded him to build an ark that according to Moses’ record was to be built according to the following specifications: “The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, the breadth of it fifty cubits, and the height of it thirty cubits” (Genesis 6:15). It was not until the nineteenth century that man discovered that this seemingly incidental fact mentioned by Moses was actually the “magic ratio” for building a barge type vessel. Barge ships used for transporting huge amounts of supplies during World War II were made according to this exact ratio.

In terms of history, Moses knew something that other historians had forgotten until as recently as a hundred years ago. Throughout his account of the history of the Patriarchs and the Jews, he mentions a nation of people called the Hittites (e.g. Exodus 3:8). Until 1906 to be exact, the Bible was the only historical document to contain any mention of this tribe of people, and historians assumed it was a discredit to the Bible. If the Hittites were such a prominent group, they surmised, why could no evidence be found of them? However, in 1906 several burial plots were excavated to reveal whole cities of the Hittites. Amazingly, at some universities today a person can get a Ph.D. in Hittite studies; however, it does not take a doctor to see the amazing accuracy of the Bible in this situation.

The medicinal knowledge of Moses was also quite beyond what was par for the course in Moses’ day. In the midst of some regulations concerning sacrifices, he says, “For the life of the flesh is in the blood” (Leviticus 17:11). One might think that the relationship between life and blood has always been known to man, but George Washington would disagree, were he able to speak today. This first president of the United States died some 200 years ago because doctors in that day treated a sickness he had using a practice called bloodletting. Rather than think that the life of the flesh was in the blood, these doctors thought that the disease of the flesh was in the blood, and that if enough blood were drained, a person with a sickness would get better. Had George Washington’s doctors known what Moses knew, Washington might have lived a longer life. Today, doctors practice blood transfusions because they agree with Moses that life is in the blood.

Moses is just one Bible author, and the instances mentioned here by no means represent a complete list of the pre-scientific (to know something before science “discovered” it) information that can be found in the books he wrote. Moving outside of his books, one finds that the Bible is full of information beyond the abilities of the men who wrote and beyond what was understood in their respective places and times. Though the Bible is no university textbook, in every field a Bible author touches, one finds amazing accuracy – regardless of whether it is concerning history, geography,

science, medicine, mathematics, or any other field known to man. The only way to account for knowledge that the Bible contains having been written prior to this present age is to cite the credentials of its true author: “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!” (Romans 11:33).

#### **“... WITH FORTY OTHER MEN OVER 2000 YEARS”**

A third response that could be offered to critics of the Bible by Christians today is to finish the above comment: “You try writing a book like the Bible with forty other men over a span of 2000 years.” To understand the achievement that the Bible represents, one might perform a little test. Send out a survey to forty men of just one occupation – say historians – and ask them to write on just one subject – why did world war one begin? Though there might be some similarities among the authors, one would be hard pressed to find perfect agreement or unity.

Now make the test more accurate by reflecting the actual circumstances under which the Bible was written. Survey men of different occupations – not all religious occupations or those involving great amounts of education, but occupations such as farmers, tax collectors, and fishermen in addition to kings, priests, scribes, and physicians. Add this variable – these men must write over a span of 2000 years! Beyond this, survey the men not about something that would be common knowledge among them, but expect of them the ability to write with accuracy in a number of different fields. This is the achievement that the Bible represents – and yet among all these authors from all these different backgrounds one finds not only pre-scientific thought, one can find in the pages of the Bible no hint of inconsistency or contradiction.

Though the Bible was indeed written by roughly forty men over a span of about 2000 years, its contents point to having just one Divine author. Beyond the pre-scientific thought the Bible presents and its unity, one can find in the Bible but one simple yet profound story – the story of Jesus Christ. The Old Testament presents Christ in promise and prophecy; the New Testament presents Him in act and in fact. A book like the Bible could not be produced in this present age (or in any other) unless the Bible was inspired by God. Truly, “No prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Peter 1:20-21).

#### **“THOSE WHO WOULD JUDGE THE BOOK MUST READ IT”**

Thomas Henry Huxley was called by some of his contemporaries, “Darwin’s bulldog” for his loud and passionate agreement with the Darwinian hypothesis on the origin of the species. Before Darwin published his landmark volume *On the Origin of Species*, he gave a copy to Huxley to hear what he thought. To say that Huxley was impressed with Darwin’s book is an understatement – and yet, what he desired more than anything else was for others to accept it. He decided that the best means he had for doing so was to write an article in which he would appear to be an unbiased judge of Darwin’s work. In the course of writing this article, he said something interesting: “Those who would judge the book must read it.”

Huxley hoped his article would open the minds of a world biased against Darwinian thought. Whether because of Huxley or not, people did read Darwin’s book, and with a paucity of evidence to defend against the force of Darwin’s argument began to accept it wholesale. Even though the tide of evidence has now turned against Darwin, people refuse to let him go simply because they now do not heed Huxley’s advice – they judge the information without reading it.

The final response that a Christian might give to critics of the Bible today is this: “Those who would judge the book must read it.” The Bible deserves to be examined in a new light – not under the mantle of Catholicism, Protestantism, or any other “ism,” and certainly not with a mind closed by years of training via post-modernism and Darwinism. To judge the Bible truly one must read it with an open mind and – just as importantly – an open heart. Doing so will allow one to see a book that is not at all what critics claim it to be, but a book that is timeless, perfect, and, “able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:15).