

Why believe the Bible? A brief summary of the evidence

Before you consider a summary of the evidence for the reliability of the Bible, you need to reflect on the honesty of your heart. Do you really *want* to know if the Bible is true? If the God of the Bible challenged your life direction, would you be willing to follow him? Stop and think about whether you are a truly open-minded seeker of truth. So much of the open-mindedness that people talk about today is really an “openness to closedness.” It is cool these days to be open to everything—except the assessment of Jesus Christ. When Jesus told the Roman governor Pontius Pilate that he came to testify to the truth, Pilate asked “what is truth?” and walked away, betraying the insincerity of his question. He took refuge in the fact that he found no guilt in Jesus. He didn’t hate Jesus. But he evaded Jesus’ challenge to make a decision about the truth. Jesus said that if you are *willing to do his will*, you will know his word is true (John 7:17). Are you willing to follow the evidence wherever it goes?

I believe the Bible for two main reasons. First of all, because trying to live by the teachings of the bible over a period of thirty years has changed my life profoundly. And not only my life, but the lives of countless others. Secondly, I am convinced that the biblical worldview is far and away the most plausible explanation of reality as whole. No other worldview can explain (in a satisfying way) both the greatness of human beings along with our brokenness. No other worldview can explain the varied and often contradictory nature of human impulses. I’ll develop these reasons below by grouping them into “families of evidence.”

Families of Evidence for the Bible’s truthfulness

I. Experiential Evidence:

The Bible explains our longings for a love relationship with our creator and the sense that there is a personal and eternal purpose to our lives. We sense there must be more than this world:

“If I find in myself a desire which no experience can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.” C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Book III, chapter 10

We know we have this innate desire, but our culture cynically tells us to regard this as wishful thinking.

Another aspect of experiential evidence is the Bible’s power to accomplish a deep and unique change in the lives of those who follow it. While many religions and even self-help techniques can change people’s lives, only the word of God transforms people into sacrificial, others-centered people who delight in giving as a way of life. Followers of Jesus are not focused on abstaining from certain things. They thrive by pursuing God’s purpose—helping people be reconciled to God.

II. Historical Evidence (part 1):

C.S. Lewis made this important observation: “If we are committed to the belief that miracles are impossible, no amount of historical evidence will convince us otherwise.” Are you open to possibility of the supernatural or are you

committed to skepticism? Have you thought about it or have you just “caught” your view from others?

The most plausible explanation of the historical facts is that Jesus is God and that he was raised from the dead. The facts are these:

- The Jewish scriptures foretold Jesus’ death and resurrection in detail.
- Jesus existed and made incredible claims about himself.
- He died and His tomb was found empty.
- A rapidly growing movement of his followers began in the very city where he was buried

What best explains these facts? No credible scholar claims that Jesus did not exist. It is hard to see why Jesus was killed apart from his incredible claims—namely, his claim to be God. Why would the authorities execute a man who merely claimed to teach a moral path? When it comes to the empty tomb, no one had a motive to steal the body. Furthermore, if the tomb was not empty and Jesus was dead, it was in the interest of the authorities to display his body and squelch the rumor of a resurrection before it started. If his body remained in the tomb, the early Christians would have convinced no one that Jesus was alive.

III. Historical Evidence (Part 2): The Judeo-Christian Bible is unique among religious literature in five ways:

1. In its claim to be God’s revelation

Only the Jewish Christian scriptures (and the Muslim Koran, which is based on those scriptures) even claim to be God’s word. In eastern religion, the writings are admitted by their authors to be the speculations of wise sages.

2. In its concern with evidence and history

Religious literature outside the bible has almost no concern with space and time, with precision about where and when things happen. It tends to be “long ago and far away.” The authors of the bible take the incredible and unnecessary risk of naming specific places and dates.

3. In its specific predictive material

The Bible anticipates our need for unique authentication and provides its own means of authentication through fulfilled prophecy.

In ancient Israel, there were many Gods, prophets, and “scriptures” to choose from. How could God’s people recognize his authentic voice? God gave the Israelites a unique way to determine if a “prophet” was truly speaking on his behalf. He promised that authentic prophets would couple their spiritual teachings with short term predictions that ALWAYS came true. Would-be prophets, he warned, would pay with their lives if they uttered a single prediction that did not come to pass (see Deuteronomy 18:20-22).

So the Old Testament prophets were vindicated by their short-term predictions. This is one reason why their many long-term predictions were recorded—predictions of historical events and (supremely) the coming of Messiah.

The Old Testament prophets made many predictions about the coming Messiah, most of which were beyond anyone's power to deliberately fulfill. For example:

The Time of his death (Daniel 9:24,25) - Over 500 years earlier, his death was predicted to the year.

The Response of Jews to the Messiah (Isaiah 53) - So detailed that prior to the Dead Sea Scrolls, many thought it was a Christian forgery.

The Mode of Execution (Psalms 22:1-18) - This was predicted several centuries before crucifixion was invented!

It was this kind of evidence to which the apostles referred when they proclaimed that Jesus' death and resurrection was "according to the scriptures" (Lk. 24:44-48; 1 Cor. 15:3-5). They were claiming to have the one true message about God, but they were also providing unique evidence for that claim.

For a more detailed treatment of prophecy, see Dennis McCallum, *Christianity: the Faith that Makes Sense*

4. *In its unique message of salvation (grace versus works)*

Only the bible teaches that the way to God's acceptance and eternal life is a gift from God rather than a wage earned. Non-Christian religions differ in many ways, but agree on one thing: it is up to the individual to do something for his salvation/enlightenment.

5. *In its unique preservation*

We can have confidence in the text of the bible because it has been carefully preserved. For most religious texts, there is a huge gap of time between when it was written and the oldest existing copy—sometimes over a thousand years!

Sir Frederic Kenyon, former director and principal librarian of the British Museum, was one of the foremost experts on ancient manuscripts and their authority. He wrote:

"The interval between the dates of original composition (of the New Testament) and the earliest extant evidence becomes so small as to be in fact negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed. Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established." --Sir Frederick Kenyon, cited in J.A. Thompson, *The Bible and Archaeology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1982) pp. 288-289.

For more of this kind of historical evidence, see Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ*.

IV. Philosophical Evidence:

The biblical worldview is the most coherent of all worldviews. It makes sense of what we observe about the world and human behavior.

The biblical worldview best explains our inescapable sense of justice—that people the world over think and act as if there is a known standard of right and wrong. The bible argues that this sense of right and wrong was built into us by God.

Every one has heard people quarrelling. Sometimes it sounds funny and sometimes it sounds merely unpleasant; but however it sounds, I believe we can learn something very important from listening to the kind of things they say. They say things like this: "How'd you like it if anyone did the same to you?"—"That's my seat, I was there first"—"Leave him alone, he isn't doing you any harm"—"Why should you shove in first?"—"Give me a bit of your orange, I gave you a bit of mine"—"Come on, you promised." People say things like that every day, educated people as well as uneducated, and children as well as grown-ups.

Now what interests me about all these remarks is that the man who makes them is not merely saying that the other man's behaviour does not happen to please him. He is appealing to some kind of standard of behaviour which he expects the other man to know about. And the other man very seldom replies: "To hell with your standard." Nearly always he tries to make out that what he has been doing does not really go against the standard, or that if it does there is some special excuse. He pretends there is some special reason in this particular case why the person who took the seat first should not keep it, or that things were quite different when he was given the bit of orange, or that something has turned up which lets him off keeping his promise. It looks, in fact, very much as if both parties had in mind some kind of Law or Rule of fair play or decent behaviour or morality or whatever you like to call it, about which they really agreed. And they have. If they had not, they might, of course, fight like animals, but they could not quarrel in the human sense of the word. Quarrelling means trying to show that the other man is in the wrong. And there would be no sense in trying to do that unless you and he had some sort of agreement as to what Right and Wrong are; just as there would be no sense in saying that a footballer had committed a foul unless there was some agreement about the rules of football.

These, then, are the two points I wanted to make. First, that human beings, all over the earth, have this curious idea that they ought to behave in a certain way, and cannot really get rid of it. Secondly, that they do not in fact behave in that way. They know the Law of Nature; they break it. These two facts are the foundation of all clear thinking about ourselves and the universe we live in. (C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, book I, chapter 1)

The biblical worldview best explains the reality of evil in a world run by a loving and powerful God.

If a good God made the world why has it gone wrong? And for many years I simply refused to listen to the Christian answers to this question, because I kept on feeling "whatever you say, and however clever your arguments are, isn't it much simpler and easier to say that the world was not made by any intelligent power? Aren't all your arguments simply a complicated attempt to avoid the obvious?" But then that threw me back into another difficulty.

My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of just and unjust? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has

some idea of a straight line. What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust?

Of course I could have given up my idea of justice by saying it was nothing but a private idea of my own. But if I did that, then my argument against God collapsed too- for the argument depended on saying that the world was really unjust, not simply that it did not happen to please my private fancies. Thus in the very act of trying to prove that God did not exist—in other words, that the whole of reality was senseless—I found I was forced to assume that one part of reality—namely my idea of justice—was full of sense.

Consequently atheism turns out to be too simple. If the whole universe has no meaning, we should never have found out that it has no meaning: just as, if there were no light in the universe and therefore no creatures with eyes, we should never know it was dark. Dark would be without meaning. (C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Book II, chapter 1)

Lewis explains free will:

God created things which had free will. That means creatures which can go either wrong or right. Some people think they can imagine a creature which was free but had no possibility of going wrong; I cannot. If a thing is free to be good it is also free to be bad. And free will is what made evil possible. Why, then, did God give them free will? Because free will, though it makes evil possible, is also the only thing that makes possible any love or goodness or joy worth having. A world of automata—of creatures that worked like machines—would hardly be worth creating.

Of course God knew what would happen if they used their freedom the wrong way: apparently He thought it worth the risk... If God thinks this state of war in the universe a price worth paying for free will—that is, for making a live world in which creatures can do real good or harm and something of real importance can happen, instead of a toy world which only moves when He pulls the strings—then we may take it that it is worth paying.

When we have understood about free will, we shall see how silly it is to ask, as somebody once asked me: "Why did God make a creature of such rotten stuff that it went wrong?" The better stuff a creature is made of—the cleverer and stronger and freer it is—then the better it will be if it goes right, but also the worse it will be if it goes wrong. A cow cannot be very good or very bad; a dog can be both better and worse; a child better and worse still; an ordinary man, still more so; a man of genius, still more so; a superhuman spirit best or worst of all. (C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Book II, chapter 3)

For Lewis' extended answer, see his book, *The Problem of Pain*.

V. Scientific Evidence: the biblical worldview is supported by strong evidence of design at the macro and micro level. See Lee Strobel's *The Case for a Creator* for examples of design, one of the most interesting being the phenomena of "irreducible complexity."

Excellent Reading on the trustworthiness of the Bible

Christianity: the Faith that Makes Sense, Dennis McCallum

The Case for Christ, The Case for Faith, and The Case for a Creator—all by Lee Strobel

Also, see his excellent website, which features many video interviews: <http://www.leestrobel.com/>

Mere Christianity, C.S. Lewis