

The New Testament – Hoax or Fraud?

Whatever Happened to True Christianity -- Is It Mere Mythology?

Can the Bible be trusted as historical fact and the Word of God, which it claims? Is the New Testament also inspired Scripture, or is it based on myths, hoaxes, and fabrications? Is there really a God who is our Creator? Did He leave us a message through His servants the prophets? What is the honest TRUTH? Agnostics And anti-religious scholars and philosophers and skeptics deplore The Christian religion *in toto*. Some claim it is the worst deception of all time and the CAUSE of all world problems! Where did the critics get off the track? How did they become BLINDED to the truth? The battle over the Bible still rages today!

William F. Dankenbring

Bible critics have long insisted that the Scriptures are mere myth and Christianity is a “hoax.” A deliberate fraud perpetrated upon innocent, naïve, gullible people by the billions.

Attacks on the Bible and the basis of Christianity are commonplace in the modern world of unbelief and agnosticism. Whole Bible stories have been relegated to myth and legend. The Bible today is under siege, and is attacked from everywhere, it seems. The media, the academic world, college professors, novels such as *The DaVinci Code* which purport to be based on facts, doubts about the historical accounts of the Scriptures have seized the minds of a whole generation which now doubts the historical reliability and authenticity of the Scriptures.

Even a Jewish rabbi, Dr. Michael Chandler, professor of Astrotheology, claims, “Why all the fuss over Sodom and Gomorrah? It’s a mythological, moralistic story. The cities never existed.”

An American Bible scholar, Dr. Rocco A. Errico, professor of Aramaic studies in southern California, asserted, “No knowledgeable person believes in the account of the tower of Babel as historical fact.” He adds, “No scholar, no historian, takes any of these stories as historical facts.”

Declared Dr. Gerald Larue, emeritus professor of biblical history at UCLA, “All the shouting and trumpet blowing in the world would not cause fifteen-foot walls to collapse. The whole Joshua/Jericho account is just a religious legend.”

Atheist George H. Smith challenges, “Christian theism must be rejected by any person with even a shred of respect for reason.” Atheist Richard Dawkins claims, “The virgin birth, the Resurrection, the raising of Lazarus, even the Old Testament miracles, are all freely used for religious propaganda, and they are very effective with an audience of unsophisticates and children.”

The battle over the Bible is real – and the battle lines have clearly been drawn.

I received the following letter recently which I think is of widespread interest and importance. He writes:

“I have been a fan of yours for quite some time, love your articles and respect your ability to find truth in a matter even when it goes against the flow.

“Personally, I have been a Christian for 12 years and have a wife and 6 children, whom we home school. My beliefs are slightly different than the fundamental mass, I am good at asking the questions one is not supposed to ask, and finding truth to be most important, I want to teach my children accurately.

“I was recently exposed to this movie and it has shaken me a little I am ashamed to admit (even though I only watched the first 1/3) I did not want to complete the movie as I do not know enough to correctly interpret, and this type of media can easily lead one into un-truth in many ways. <http://www.zeitgeistmovie.com>.

“Anyway, I respect your understanding of these matters and would like to know if you have any articles which can help me that you could point me to.

“Thanks for your help and God Bless you.”

Agnostics with a Message

I watched the film. It claimed that there is no proof or need of God, that mankind evolved from ancient ocean slime, and it is foolish to believe in a Creator God. It further claimed that religions have milked innocent people of billions of dollars, gold, and silver, and enslaved them in ridiculous superstitions. It said that the ancient pagan world itself was full of various Messiahs, some of which did miracles, died, were resurrected, according to their religions, and all of them anticipated the one known as Jesus Christ by thousands of years. So, the film makers ask, isn't He just another false god whose followers cleverly claimed the same things for Him as the pagans did anciently for their gods? Isn't Christianity all based on pagan myth and is a device of charlatans and power-mongers seeking to control the lives of people and support?

The movie is very clever, with amazing film footage of famine, war, death and destruction. It cleverly illustrates the ancient beliefs concerning some of the ancient gods and goddesses, such as Isis, Osiris, and Horus, and other Egyptians gods, and those of Greece, and the Middle East, and India.

But the movie is pure propaganda – an anti-religious scree and diatribe which cleverly weaves its message with pictures and sound-bites. Hitler once said if you tell a lie big enough and often enough, everyone will believe it!

Sadly, the human race is very gullible.

Nothing New Under the Sun

The same old arguments against early Christianity were used by unbelievers and skeptics during the first few centuries of the Church. Solomon wrote under divine inspiration, “What has been is what shall be, what has gone on is what shall go on, and there is nothing new under the sun” (Eccl.1:9).

So it seems to be with so-called “Bible criticism.” There have always been critics and skeptics of the Scriptures, and Christianity. The apostle Peter wrote, “To begin with, you know that mockers will come with their mockeries in the last days, men who go by their own passions, asking, ‘Where is his promised advent? Since the days our fathers fell asleep, things remain exactly as they were from the beginning of creation’” (II Pet.3:3-4, Moffatt).

For more than one hundred years, the western world has abounded with highly educated men who have devoted their lives to tearing down and claiming to be “demythologizing” the Bible. Since the time Darwin shocked the world with his evolutionary theory, Bible scholars and German rationalists have applied his theory to the Bible itself!

According to critics of the Bible, the books of the Bible gradually EVOLVED INTO EXISTENCE, and are the legendary writings of an ancient race of men the

Hebrews. Did God inspire the Bible? Of course not, they tell you. The original God of Israel, Himself, they claim, was merely an ancient tribal deity! He was merely the local mountain "god" of the Sinai region, adopted by wandering Hebrews as they passed through.

My Own Experience

James wrote, "Whoever of you is defective in wisdom, let him ask of God who gives to all men without question or reproach, and the gift will be his. Only, let him ask in faith, with never a doubt; for the doubtful man is like a surge of the sea whirled and swayed by the wind; that man need not imagine he will get anything from the Lord, double-minded creature that he is, wavering at every turn!" (James 1:5-8, Moffatt translation).

Therefore, when questions arise, or doubts are sown by manipulators and deceivers, it is our responsibility to face them squarely, STUDY to determine the TRUTH of the matter.

I faced a question like this when I was a young man in high school. I had been studying for years the Bible, and had become a believing Christian, following the teachings of Christ. Then one day I discovered a "book" in the 'history' section of the high school library, ostensibly on the subject of ancient history and the Bible. The author claimed that the Bible is mostly mythological, with transparent legends, and that the "truth" was that the books of Moses were written centuries later, fabricated, because supposedly "writing" did not exist in the middle of the second millennium B.C. Furthermore, he said, the Exodus of Israel from Egypt was a gross exaggeration, "miracles" of themselves could not have possibly occurred (further 'evidence' he said of myth), and the "god" of Israel was a simple deity of the Sinai desert nomads, which the few Israelites picked up and chose as their "god" as they passed through the region.

The whole approach was critical of the Bible, and was written from a very hostile, critical, unbelieving, supercilious, pseudo-scholarly premise and viewpoint.

About the same time, I was reading the amazing books by Immanuel Velikovsky, a Jewish scholar and friend of Albert Einstein, who thoroughly discredited much modern evolutionary thought, mixed up Egyptian ancient history, and convoluted archaeology and geology. His books *Earth in Upheaval*, *Ages in Chaos*, and *Worlds in Collision*, did much to help insulate me to the attacks of various radical-leaning and opinionated scholars and historians. Although not a Christian, he showed the Exodus was REAL, the Genesis Flood was REAL, the battle of Jericho really occurred, and the conquest of Canaan was true history, based on TRUE historical and archaeological evidence, correctly interpreted. So the Bible history was CORRECT and trustworthy.

An Ancient Drug-Taking Cult?

Notice the amazing words of one extreme Bible critic. John Marco Allegro, a

humanist professor and Hebrew language scholar working with the Dead Sea Scrolls, said the roots of Christianity lay in an ancient drug taking cult and the New Testament is “just a cover story” for it. Said Allegro, “Now my views are more critical than ever about the New Testament story.” He added, with seeming disdain, “It is no more than a COVER STORY for a vegetation cult, involving the use of drugs of earlier times.”

This so-called scholar called Bible priests and prophets the “dope pushers” of their day and compared them with South American drug-using Indians. When the prophets saw visions, they were probably “taking a trip” on LSD or something like it, he said.

Says Allegro, “The Bible is a literary work – and not a religious or historical work. It’s got to be accepted on that basis. If you can lay bare the real purpose behind the Old and New Testament stories, then the whole foundation of the church must be shattered. They’ll have to think again. Figures like David and Solomon, Samson and Delilah, are just myths. The very possibility that Jesus ever existed is *open to question*.”

Allegro’s views are not generally accepted by the community of Biblical scholars. However, they point up the fact that many so-called “higher critics” and “scholars” have extreme bias and very strong negative opinions about the Biblical record, its history, and contents. Biblical accounts of “miracles” are the worst problem for them. They see many accounts of supernatural interventions by God, and automatically ascribe them to the realm of mythology and legend – mere fiction – because they discount *a priori* the concept that a God could intervene in human events and change the destiny of nations, as well as individuals.

Scholars Attack the Bible

Another member of the 12-man team analyzing the Dead Sea Scrolls, Dr. James A. Sanders, has taken the opposite tack and said there is no evidence to support Allegro’s speculations. Dr. Sanders noted that Allegro cited no evidence for his opinions and said they seem “to reflect his own state of mind rather than anything in antiquity.”

But Allegro’s bold-faced declarations and suggestions should not simply be ignored. What about modern Bible criticism? Can critics be relied upon to reveal the TRUTH? Or is much of Biblical criticism based on a lot of human speculation, guesswork, and opinion?

Surprisingly enough, even many modern ministers publicly declare the Bible is not inspired by a Creator God. Harry Emerson Fosdick, a noted American minister, wrote, “We know now that every idea in the Bible started from *primitive* and childlike origins . . . “ (*The Modern Use of the Bible*, p.11). He spoke of certain “crudities” in the earlier writings in the Bible and said, “Their lack is a lack of maturity.”

Dr. Edgar J. Goodspeed, who translated the Bible into English, said of the first twelve books in the Bible, “It is man’s first attempt to organize his knowledge of his past

into what we would call an outline of history. Genesis,” he wrote, “is a great encyclopedia of *Hebrew* thought . . .” – NOT divine revelation from Almighty *GOD!*

The book of Joshua, he says, “is the *legendary story* of the conquest of Canaan.” The book of Ruth, he believes, “belongs to Israel's *fiction*, rather than to its history, and should be among its *tales and stories*” (*How to Read the Bible*, p. 39, 51).

The Real Truth

The truth is, already archaeology confirms the historical account of the conquest of Canaan by Joshua and the Israelites at the middle of the second millennium before Christ. Although Bible critics have used Jericho as a major point in their attempt to destroy faith in the Scriptures and “demythologize the Bible”, new evidence unearthed, and old evidence re-examined, of the Jericho archaeological digs have proved that the Bible account is true, after all. The archaeological ruins of the city of Jericho contain tell-tale evidence of an earthquake and burning such as described in the book of Joshua, showing the conquest of that city was not mere “myth” or “legend” after all! Our article, “The Battle of Jericho -- Fact or Fiction?” gives the fascinating data on this subject.

New excavations at the ancient city of Hazor in the north of Israel have revealed a massive burned layer which may well be attributable to the destruction of that city by the ancient Israelites under Joshua, just as the Bible describes.

More and more, the archaeologists' spades are uncovering more evidence to substantiate the Biblical record, its history, and its reliability. What will be next? Will they soon discover some of the bones of the giants who existed when Israel invaded Canaan -- the Nephilim and Rephaim? Will they one day discover the huge bed frame of king Og?

Recently, new evidence of massive flooding in Palestine was uncovered by archaeological probes in Yemen, southern Arabia. The archaeologist who is responsible thinks it may well be evidence of Noah's Flood.

Why Do Scholars Reject the Bible?

But WHY the onslaught of attacks on the Bible? What is behind it?

THESE are the words of ministers, translators, and Bible scholars! They should not be taken lightly. They are the opinions of the vast, overwhelming majority of Biblical scholars and critics. Why do such people generally believe the Bible is merely a grouping of stories, legends and myths?

There is a REASON! The Scriptures purport to be the very WORD of the Living, Creator GOD! And no one hates the Word of God more than Satan the devil! From the beginning he has sought to lead mankind astray by “mythologizing” the Scriptures, denying their veracity, and sowing seeds of doubt in human minds!

So Satan appeals to human nature, which itself is “hostile” to the laws of God (Rom.8:7). Most professors and scholars are unwilling to admit the divine inspiration of the Bible because of their own resistance to divine authority.

As the apostle Paul wrote, “For whatever is to be known of God is plain to them; God himself has made it plain – for ever since the world was created, his invisible nature, his everlasting power and divine being, have been quite perceptible in what he has made. So they have no excuse. Though they knew God, they have not glorified him as God nor given thanks to him; they have *turned to futile speculations till their ignorant minds grew dark*” (Rom.1:19-21, Moffatt).

Such men *are BLINDED to the truth!* Human nature tends to resist “authority” of any kind. For a human being to admit to the authority of a God, and His divinely inspired Word, they would then be in a very awkward position if they continued to criticize His Word and its contents. If they accepted its divine origin as to contents and inspiration, then they would have to recognize its AUTHORITY over their lives – they would be obligated to *OBEY it!* How many men do you know who really want to obey the Ten Commandments? Who deep down really desire to obey ALL the laws and commandments of the God of the Bible?

Why do all these men reject the Bible as inspired truth? Why do even many ministers of Churches repudiate the Bible as divine revelation and discount its miracles, including the virgin birth of Christ, and the resurrection? If they acknowledged its truth and authority, then they would be compelled to live according to its instructions, and give up their vices, lusts, vanity, and pride!

The State of Bible Criticism Today

Modern scholars themselves have some remarkable things to say about the field of Bible criticism. John Bright, of the Union Theological Seminary, has declared, “The whole field is in a state of flux. It is moving, certainly, but it is not always easy to say in what direction.”

Bright adds, “Sometimes it gives the impression that it is moving in several MUTUALLY CANCELING DIRECTIONS at once. Even upon major points there is often little unanimity to be observed” (*Modern Studies of Old Testament Literature*, p. 14).

Controversy reigns supreme. New theories, says Bright, make their appearance from time to time. He adds, “New light has been thrown on theories of yesteryear so that a revision of them is required, SO DRASTIC as to amount to virtual *abandonment*”

In other words, Bible scholars themselves admit that even on “MAJOR POINTS” there is often “LITTLE unanimity” to be observed! They admit that hardly a statement could be made about Bible criticism that would be absolutely provable, absolutely true,

acknowledged by the majority of scholars!

Perhaps the most generally accepted statement one could make about the whole field of modern Bible criticism is that it is in a STATE OF FLUX! George E. Mendenhall, another Biblical scholar, however, goes further. He wrote, “The ‘fluidity’ in this field . . . may with perhaps less courtesy but more accuracy be called **CHAOS**.” Mendenhall confesses that Bible criticism has come to an “IMPASSE” (*Biblical History in Transition*).

Too often, in far too many theories of Bible criticism “only those facts which *FIT THE HYPOTHESIS* are taken up and others *IGNORED*.” How did Bible criticism come to such a state? What led to the present modern CHAOS – the present IMPASSE? Obviously, something is serious wrong with modern Bible criticism! Could it be that the whole approach of most modern critics needs to be examined? What is their general, over-all approach, anyway?

Evolutionary Criticism

After the rise of the theory of evolution, popularized by Charles Darwin, the evolutionary concept of life on planet earth began to worm its way into many facets of education – including the field of Biblical criticism which was already in existence. Critics believed that ancient Israel developed from a primitive animism or polytheism to monotheism in a period of five or six short centuries. Darwin’s theory of evolution spurred this kind of reasoning, as it suggested there is no need for a “God” in the history of the world.

The simple truth is that theologians and critics long ago concluded that the first books of the Bible could not have been written by Moses – for writing, they believed, was invented at a later time. Hebrew religion, they taught, gradually evolved. The evolutionary process led to the rising up of Christianity.

Of course such a belief makes Christianity itself merely one stage of the evolutionary process. Today, with the advent of the “God is dead” theology, and trends in modern secularism, historical “Christianity” as we have known it is also in danger of passing away! Perhaps this is not such a bad thing, however, when we stop to consider how modern “Christianity” itself has treated the contents of the Bible! Oftentimes, so-called “Christian” ministers are among the most dangerous misinterpreters and abusers of the Holy Scriptures!

At any rate, after the coming of Charles Darwin and his *Origin of Species*, the evolutionary philosophy came to dominate the Western world and all education. Thus, the evolutionary concept even insinuated itself into the field of Biblical criticism. Biblical records were rejected as unreliable, of mere human origin. Biblical history came to be regarded as primarily myth. Biblical miracles were called superstition and legend.

In this calculated way Satan the devil managed to have the entire Word of God

thrown into QUESTION! The world began to doubt the existence of a literal God, real angels, demons, and of course, the literal existence of the devil himself! Satan duped the whole Western world into embracing a *fable* – the fable of evolution – in place of the existence of a Creator God. And since the existence of God was no longer admitted as truth, it became easy to dismiss the Bible records as mere human inventions and human folklore! The plot to undermine the Bible was hatched in the febrile brain of the devil, and it has worked!

Today, just as the Word of God states, the WHOLE WORLD *has been totally deceived!* “That old serpent called the Devil and Satan, the seducer of the whole world,” the apostle John calls him (Rev.12:9). He was a “liar” from the beginning (John 8:44). His primary tool of deception is to sow seeds of doubt, to plant seeds of suspicion, and distraction. He caused Eve to doubt the Word of God in the garden of Eden, by slyly saying, “Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?’” (Gen.3:1, NKJV). He called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, mixed together, a tree of knowledge and wisdom, whose fruit would make one wise, even like God Himself (v.4-5). He accused God of lying when He told them they would DIE if they ate of that tree’s fruit! And in so eating, they brought death upon the human race! The serpent beguiled them, and they were snared and taken captive!

As Paul wrote, “But I fear, lest somehow as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ” (II Cor.11:3).

Archaeology and Biblical Criticism

Critics of the Bible don't generally like to admit it, but the greatest danger to the fanciful theories of Biblical critics is the spade of the archaeologist!

Since the first excavation in the Middle East in 1842 at Nineveh, a huge mass of texts and materials from archaeological digs has been gathered confirming the history of the Bible. More such evidence is coming to light every day.

Excavations have uncovered the ancient capital of the Hittites and confirmed their business practices as alluded to in the Bible (Gen. 23:17). Ten thousand texts from the Hurrian city of Nuzu in Mesopotamia have confirmed the Bible description of the period of the patriarchs and the customs of that time.

For instance, in Nuzu a childless couple could adopt a servant who would then inherit their goods. If a child was later born, the adopted heir would be set aside. This is reminiscent of the case of Abraham and his servant Eliezer (Gen. 15:2-4). Further, barren wives in Nuzu were under the obligation to have a handmaid produce a son by their husbands. How similar to the case of Sarah and Hagar (Gen. 16:1-3). The firstborn at Nuzu were permitted to transfer their birthright, also, as in the case of Jacob and Esau (Gen. 25:29-34).

The Bible records that Joseph's brothers sold him as a slave into Egypt. An Egyptian papyrus dated during the time of Joseph (around 1740 B. C.) lists the names of almost a hundred slaves from one household – about half called “Asiatics” or Semites! Here is proof that what happened to Joseph was a fairly common occurrence in those days.

Increasingly, as the decades roll by, more and more archaeological evidence is found confirming Biblical statements, history, and settings. The name of king David has been found at Tel-Dan on an ancient inscription. Twice! The name of Caiaphas, the high priest who had Jesus Christ condemned to death, has been found on ancient ossuaries. In fact, the tomb of his priestly family has been found in Jerusalem!

But will Biblical critics admit the proof? Will they accept the evidence? In most cases, unbelievers continue in their unbelief, and skeptics continue in the scoffing and skepticism. As the old adage says, “A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still.” Having their minds poisoned by evolutionary teaching and philosophy, most critics and scholars still cannot see and will not admit the divine origin and inspiration of the Holy Scriptures! As another old saying declares: “You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make him drink!”

Most Bible critics agree with Bertrand Russell who wrote in 1944, “The early history of the Israelites cannot be confirmed from any source outside the Old Testament, and it is impossible to know at what point it ceases to be *purely legendary*” (*Ancient Israel*, p. 6). However, their skepticism is becoming a moot point as more and more archaeological evidence is brought out of the ground, confirming the existence of places, individuals, cities, and battles, recorded in the Scriptures!

The “Documentary Hypothesis”

Most scholars and critics have believed that there were four different documents (represented by J, E, P, and D) which were later compiled by editors into the five books of Moses. This theory might be knocked around a bit, but critics generally are unwilling to completely depart from it. Bible scholars and critics claim that four different schools, the Jahvists, Elohist, Deuteronomists, and Priests, were responsible for editing and writing the five books generally ascribed to “Moses,” by Jewish tradition.

The Jews themselves, of course, and Jewish rabbis, have no doubt that MOSES was the author of the Pentateuch! But the “documentary hypothesis” denies this fact. Why is this? Critics have believed that writing was “unknown” in the days of Moses, the middle of the second millennium before the time of Christ! Therefore, according to their arguments, Moses simply *could not* have written the first five books of the Bible.

This argument, however, falls flat on its ugly face when we analyze the facts of historical research in the Middle East. Was writing really “unknown” among the Hebrews during the time of Moses?

Contrary to the commonly accepted idea among Bible critics a few decades ago that writing was unknown in the early days of Old Testament history, many records and documents have been found in archaeological excavations throughout the region of the Middle East and prove writing was known *from the earliest times*.

Berosus, the Chaldean historian, related the tradition that Zisuthrus (the Babylonian Noah) buried the sacred writings *before the Flood* on tablets of clay.

The Epic of Gilgamesh, as well as other Babylonian and Egyptian documents from early times, PROVE that written records and traditions existed LONG BEFORE MOSES!

Says *Halley's Bible Handbook*: "Until recent years it was commonly believed that Writing was unknown in the early days of Old Testament history. This was one of the bases of the modern critical theory that some of the Old Testament books were written long after the events they describe thus embodying only Oral Tradition. But now the spade of the archaeologist has revealed that WRITTEN records of important events were made *from the dawn of history*" (p.44).

Halley points out that both Arabs and Jews have a tradition that Enoch, one of the patriarchs who lived before the Flood, invented writing.

An ancient king of Assyria, archaeological documents show, said he loved to read the writings of the age before the Flood. This Assyrian king, whose name was Assurbanipal, founded the great library at ancient Nineveh, and wrote of the "*inscriptions of the time before the Flood*" (see *Halley's Bible Handbook*, p. 44).

Therefore, the main support of the documentary theory, that writing was unknown in the time of Moses, has already been SHATTERED and crumbled to dust before the searching light of increasing archaeological knowledge! The basic underpinnings of the documentary hypothesis have structurally collapsed!

The Greek Poet Homer

A hundred years ago a critic of Homer declared, "We may safely say that no scholar will again find himself able to embrace the unitarian hypothesis." It became heresy to believe Homer wrote the epic poems ascribed to him by the Greeks.

Then along came Heinrich Schliemann who began excavating at Troy in 1870. Further excavations were undertaken between 1932-38. Archaeological finds and the archaeologists' picks and shovels PROVED that Homer did write the *Iliad and Odyssey*), after all! Archaeologists uncovered even the bronze breastplates mentioned by Homer!

In the field of classical criticism, critics have been forced to confess the errors of past generations. Homer has been vindicated. *But when it comes to vindicating the BIBLE*, hardly a voice can be heard among the critics! *Why?*

Scholars will exonerate a pagan poet such as Homer. But they would be the last to confess the Old Testament *is historical*, and ACCURATE!

Is there an unholy, unprofessional bias and prejudice against the Biblical record, on the part of its critics and human scholars?

The truth of the matter is, artificial criteria have been imposed upon the Bible which have NOT been imposed on classical literature such as the words of Homer. Very little research has been done in the literary evaluation and analysis of ancient Egyptian or Babylonian texts and records to help understand more about the language used in the early records of the Bible. Biblical critics have approached the study of the Bible with a totally NEGATIVE ATTITUDE! No wonder, then, most of their conclusions have been negative as well, and they are today mired in a quagmire of confusion and *chaos!*

Scholars now admit that if the criteria applied in the past to the Bible were applied to other classical literature, multiple authorships would have to be theorized for literature which is CLEARLY one man's work!

Negative Approach

Unfortunately, many scholars tend to reject a part of the Bible record for the sole reason that they have not found corroborative evidence in classical literature, history, or other non-Biblical, secular documents.

This is a tragic mistake, and horribly short-sighted. A leading archaeologist pointed out thirty years ago that only *TWO PERCENT* of the known sites in Palestine have been excavated. Most of the record is still buried in the ground. Increasingly, as this evidence comes to light, it supports, confirms, and corroborates the historicity and accuracy of the Bible, both Old and New Testaments!

The sad truth is, many scholars reveal unscholarly bias when they make negative pronouncements about Biblical history simply because classical history is *SILENT* on the subject! This fault has been all too common in the past, and still lingers in the attitudes of many archaeologists and Bible critics, today!

Even when positive archaeological support is discovered from some excavation supporting the Biblical record, it seems, some critics shake their heads with mystification and maintain that they are still not convinced! In other words, some critics demand only a scrap of circumstantial evidence when it comes to *denying* the Bible, but when it comes to finding archaeological corroborative evidence, they demand MOUNTAINS of proof!

Of course, by its very nature, archaeological evidence is hard to come by. Usually it is fragmentary, discovered by fortuitous circumstance, and may have only a slight bearing on the matter.

To give you an example, critics have pounced on the gospel of John, claiming it was not authentic. The gospel uses the word *didaskalos* for “teacher.” Critics claimed this was a second century word not used in the time of Jesus. Who was right? The author of John’s gospel, or the higher critics?

The Hebrew scholar Dr. E. L. Skenik made a careful study of ossuaries (burial urns) dating *before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.* He found the word *didaskalos* inscribed on one of the burial urns he unearthed! As usual, the “critics” had jumped the gun – they were in confusion and error! They didn’t know what they were talking about!

Other critics have claimed the proper names used in the Gospel of John were not names currently used during the time of Jesus. But, again, burial urns uncovered by archaeologists dated to the time of Christ have refuted the claims of the Bible skeptics. Names such as Miriam, Martha, Elizabeth, Salome, Johanna, etc., have been found on such ossuaries!

Time and time again, the evidence of archaeology from recent discoveries has proven the Biblical record to be correct!

New Testament Origin

But what about the New Testament Scriptures? Are they also inspired? Or were they written centuries after the fact, by self-absorbed clerics to deceive the masses?

Scholars have long denied the veracity of the New Testament Scriptures, claiming that the earliest gospels were not eye-witness accounts of Christ and His life, but were written some one hundred years afterward, or about the middle of the second century, and were based on hearsay, myth, fable, and oral stories which had been passed down. Thus many scholars have regarded the very words of Christ, as recorded in the gospels, as “suspect.”

Astonishing as it may seem, however, bits of papyrus in an Oxford University library puts the lie to the cherished theories of unbelieving, skeptical scholars! Three scraps of text of the gospel of Matthew, inscribed in Greek, have traditionally been believed to have been written in the late second century. But German papyrus expert Carsten Thiede has published a paper arguing that these fragments kept at Oxford's Magdalen College *could be an EYE WITNESS ACCOUNT of the life of Jesus!*

The London Times reported that the evidence on an early form of writing paper was a potentially “important breakthrough in biblical scholarship, on a level with the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947” (*Los Angeles Times*, Dec.25, 1994, “Gospel Fragments in Britain May Be Contemporary Account of Life of Jesus Christ,” p.A42).

Some scholars have questioned the accuracy of the New Testament as historical, believing that the earliest texts were written long after the actual events described. However, if Thiede has correctly dated the fragments, they would be evidence that the

Matthew Gospel was written only a generation after the crucifixion, or even earlier! Says William Tuohy of the *Los Angeles Times*, “Parts of the New Testament may have been written by men *who actually knew Christ*, rather than authors recounting a 2nd-Century version of an oral tradition.”

The Magdalen fragments have been at the Oxford college since 1901. Little work has been done on them since 1953 when they were last edited by biblical scholars. But earlier this year, Thiede visited Oxford and inspected the papyrus. He concluded,

“The Magdalen fragment now appears to belong to a style of handwriting that was current in the 1st Century A.D., and that slowly petered out around the mid-1st Century. Even a hesitant approach to questions of dating would therefore seem to justify a date in the 1st Century, about 100 years earlier than previously thought.”

The lines on the fragments are from Matthew 26 and include the oldest written reference to Mary Magdalene and the betrayal of Christ by Judas.

This new discovery by Professor Carsten Thiede, a papyrus expert, will provoke controversy among scholars, if not even dismay and consternation on the part of disbelievers and skeptics. His discovery, if true, is strong evidence that the gospel accounts regarding the life of Jesus Christ are accurate, and reliable historical documents.

A Look at the New Testament

Some critics charge that the New Testament writings cannot be inspired because of what they call “contradictions” in the text. On close examination, however, many of their so-called “contradictions” are not contradictions at all. Matthew, Mark and Luke reported the life of Christ as they either witnessed it, or based on sources which they deemed accurate and trustworthy.

Some of the minor differences in the accounts of the words of Jesus may be due to the fact that the gospel writers were writing the “gist” of what Jesus said – a summary of sorts – and did not intend to give every word He spoke in every parable or discourse. Also, Jesus may have repeated some of His parables or stories several different times, and altering them a little each time, depending on the audience. Ministers often do the same thing, today, when they give the “same sermon” to different congregations, making little alterations each time.

However, the trustworthiness of the gospels and epistles of the New Testament should be deemed very high, as the agreement between the many Greek copies is extremely high. Most differences are relatively minor, such as spellings of words, punctuation, variants in names, etc.

Says Graham Stanton in *Gospel Truth? New Light on Jesus and the Gospels*, “There is no shortage of manuscripts of the Gospels: their sheer numbers is something of an embarrassment” (p.47). Unlike other ancient writings, such as the works of Josephus, or the Jewish philosopher Philo, or the Greek historian Herodotus, of which there are

limited manuscripts that have come down to us, the plethora of New Testament writings is testimony to how highly they were regarded in early times by the Church.

Stanton points out that the discovery of fragments of papyri containing portions of the Gospels which pre-date the great fourth-century uncial manuscripts, “even though they are fragmentary, they confirm the general reliability of the great fourth-century uncials which contain the full text of the Gospels” (p.48).

Eusebius, the church historian who lived in the fourth century, quotes Papias concerning the Gospel of Mark, generally considered as the first of the accounts of the life of Christ to have been written. We read in his *Church History*:

“And this is what the Elder said, 'Mark, who became Peter's interpreter, wrote accurately, but not in order, as many of the thing said and done by the Lord as he had noted. For he neither heard the Lord nor followed him, but afterwards, as I said, he followed Peter who adapted his teaching to the needs (of his hearers) but not as a complete work of the Lord's sayings. So Mark made no mistake in writing some things just as he had noted them. For he was careful of one thing, to leave nothing he had heard out and to say nothing falsely” (Eusebius' *Church History*, 3:39:15).

Matthew and Luke, however, contain about 230 sayings of Jesus which are not recorded in the book of Mark. Where did these sayings come from? The traditional view of course is that Matthew himself was a disciple of Christ, and so his writings could well be from his own memory of the events. Luke, however, admits he was not an original follower of Christ, but reported on his life based on the many authorities and leaders who told him the events he recorded.

Strangely, for over a century the sayings of Jesus not found in Mark's gospel have been referred to by the term “Q.” In 1861 the German scholar H. J. Holzmann claimed that Matthew and Luke used two main sources for their gospel accounts – the gospel of Mark, and a collection of the saying of Jesus, which came to be called *Quelle* (source). In 1890 this was abbreviated to “Q” for short.

The “Q” hypothesis has been the basis for nearly all serious study of the origin of the gospel accounts since that time. Scholars today argue over which words quoted in the gospels really were uttered by Jesus, and which were added later as if they were His words, based on traditions in the Church. Such arguments seem singularly nonsensical, however, since all the arguments of all the unbelieving men in the world cannot invalidate Scripture. The early Church accepted all the gospels as being written by the apostles. Nothing that was not written during the first century, and by one of apostolic rank in the Church, was ever accepted as “Scripture.”

In a letter written in 96 A.D. to the church in Corinth, Clement, who was then bishop of Rome, wrote that both “Scripture” and “the words of the Lord Jesus” were of equal value (see I Clement 13:1; 46:2, 7). In the epistle of Barnabas, also written before the end of the first century, the author quotes the phrase “many are called but few are

chosen” from Matthew 22:14, and introduces the quotation with the remark, “as it stands written,” showing he used the New Testament gospels as “Scripture.”

Most important, however, the apostle Peter, in his second epistle, refers to the writings of the apostle Paul – who was certainly the most controversial apostle of the early church – as being in the category of “Scripture.” He declared, “Paul, also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; as also in *all his epistles*, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, *as they do also the OTHER SCRIPTURES*, unto their own destruction” (II Pet.3:15-16).

History tells us that the main lines of the New Testament canon were settled by A.D. 200. The decision of which books belonged in the New Testament was based on the criteria that the document in question had to have been written in the first century, it had to have the imprimatur of an apostle or disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ, and it had to have been in general circulation among the churches.

The first list of these accepted books, that has come down to us, was written up in 367 A.D., and exactly corresponds to our present day New Testament!

The Bibliographical Test

In a fascinating study entitled, “Is Christianity True?”, author Eric Snow, writes, “The military historian, C. Sanders, devised a three part test when investigating any historical document to determine whether it was reliable. One of these tests is the bibliographical test, which judges an ancient historical document to be more reliable if many copies of the manuscript exist. A second test maintains the smaller the time gap between the first copy of the document and the first surviving copy, the more reliable it is because there is less time for scribal errors to creep into the preserved text. By these two standards the NT is the best attested ancient historical writing in existence. Some 24,633 known copies (including fragments, etc.) exist of it, 5,309 of these being in Greek. By contrast, the document with the next highest number of copies, outside the Hebrew Old Testament [OTJ (which has over 1700 copies), is Homer’s Iliad, with 643. Other historical writings by prominent ancient historians have far fewer copies: Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War, 8; Herodotus, The Histories, 8; Julius Caesar, Gallic Wars, 10.

“Furthermore, the time gap between the earliest preserved copies and the autograph, or first manuscript, is much smaller for the NT than these works. For the NT, the gap is about 90 years or less, since most of it was first written before 70 A.D. Scholar, John A. T. Robertson, in ‘Redating the New Testament’, has maintained that every NT book was written before 70 A.D., including John and Revelation. Dates that place the writing of the NT in the second century have been generally discredited by scholars in recent decades. A fragment of John, dated to 125 A.D., is traditionally cited as the earliest copy known of any part of the NT. However, nine fragments of the NT were found in 1972 in a cave by the Dead Sea. Among these fragments, part of Mark

was dated to around 50 A.D., Luke 57 A.D., and Acts from 66 A.D. The earliest major manuscripts, such as Vaticanus and Sinaiticus are dated to 325-350 A.D. and 350 A.D. respectively.”

Snow continues, “By contrast, the time gap is much larger for the pagan works mentioned above. For Homer, the gap is 500 years (900 B.C. for the original writing, 400 B.C. for the first copy). For Caesar, it’s 900-1000 years, Herodotus, 1300 years and Thucydides, 1300 years. Hence, the NT can be objectively judged more reliable than these pagan historical works both by having a much smaller time gap between when it was written and the first preserved copies, and in the number of ancient handwritten copies.”

Textual Criticism

Snow points out that skeptics can throw out some frightening figures, and say “There are 200,000 variations in the NT,” and create doubts in the minds of many Christians. However, the principles of the science of textual criticism show us that we can have certainty that the scribes preserved the NT accurately. Most of variations between the manuscripts can be ruled out using this test. Most of these “200,000 variations” are very minor in nature – such as spelling mistakes, homophones (such as in English, “two,” “too,” “to”), words accidentally repeated twice by scribes, etc. For example, if the same word is misspelled 3,000 times, that counts for 3,000 variations.

Says Snow, “Scholar, Ezra Abbott, maintained 19/20ths of NT variations have so little support that they can be automatically ruled out. Scholars Geisler and Nix, building upon the work of F. J. A. Hort, said only about 1/8 have weight, with 1/60 being “substantial variations.” Furthermore, the number of variations is high precisely because so many ancient manuscripts of the NT exist, allowing for more mistakes. This also allows a greater ability to detect and eliminate those mistakes, unlike the case for Caesar’s ‘Gallic Wars’ with its mere 10 copies. Scholar Philip Schaff said only 400 of all the 150,000 variations he knew to exist caused doubt on textual meaning, with 50 being of great significance. Even then, he said no variation altered ‘an article of faith or a precept of duty which is not abundantly sustained by other and undoubted passages, or by the whole tenor of scripture teaching.’”

The Canon of the New Testament

The New Testament canon (selection of and order of the books) is another area of controversy. How can we know which ancient books should have been included? What was the criteria? What authority made the decisions and why?

Historically, the canon of the New Testament, as we have it today, is absolutely accurate and was the accepted canon of books *used in the early centuries of the church*. In the days of Jesus Christ, there was a body of literature called “The Scriptures” which was commonly regarded by the Jews as having come from God. They called it the Word of God, and Christ Himself acknowledged it (John 10:35; 5:39). As the first century writings of the apostles appeared, they were added to these Jewish Scriptures and held in

the same sacred regard throughout the new scattered churches. By widespread and common acceptance, they came to be regarded as inspired Scripture as well. They were put together into a “canon,” or list of original and authorized list of books, by the apostle Paul, and finally by the apostle John, that last remaining apostle who died about 90 A.D. Any writings by any Christians after that date were automatically excluded.

While the apostles were yet living, they had begun under their own supervision collecting their writings to be made use of by the churches. Paul claimed his teaching was inspired by God (I Cor.2:7-13; 14:37; I Thess.2:13). Peter accepted Paul’s writings as inspired “Scripture” (II Pet.3:15-16). John also claimed the book of Revelation was “revealed” to him by Christ (Rev.1:1-2). These writings were intended to be read in the churches (Col.4:16; I Thess.5:27; II Thess.2:15), including after their “departure” (II Pet.1:15; 3:1-2). Paul quoted as “Scripture”, the declaration, “The laborer is worthy of his hire” (I Tim.5:18), a statement found only in Matthew 10:10 and Luke 10:7, thus categorizing those two gospels as inspired Scripture.

In the fourth century and thereabouts, various Gnostic sects arose, claiming other “inspired” books and made up their own “list” or “canon” of inspired writings, their own “New Testaments,” as it were. As a result, at that time, to maintain order and to refute the Gnostic canons, the visible Church had to make up its own official “canon” of Scriptures. It was based on all the commonly accepted New Testament books which were then in use by the Christian churches throughout the Mediterranean region. It was because of these spurious “canons” coming on the scene, devised by heretics like Marcion (circa A.D. 140), and others, which compelled the Church at that time to designate and put its stamp of approval upon all those New Testament books which were already in common use in the Churches.

The canonization of the New Testament, itself, was no Catholic “conspiracy.” This was a simple step of prudence – to make a final stamp of approval and authenticity upon those books already in common usage at that time. A formal decree recognizing the Christian canon was not made until 405 A.D. – long after Constantine’s time.

For more discussion and insight, I refer you to *Halley’s Pocket Bible Handbook*, and various Bible Dictionaries, and F. F. Bruce’s books, *The Books and the Parchments: How We Got Our English Bible*, and *The Canon of Scripture*.

Christians should have no doubts on the canon of the NT, meaning which books should be in it and which ones shouldn’t be. The quality of the apocryphal (so-called “missing”) books, such as “The Gospel of Peter,” “The Gospel of Thomas,” and “The Shepherd of Hermas,” is so much lower and/or their teachings at such variance with the canonical books that they can be eliminated from consideration easily. As M. R. James commented in *The Apocryphal New Testament*: “There is no question of anyone’s having excluded them from the New Testament: They have done that for themselves.” In evident reaction against the heretic Marcion’s (c. 140 A.D.) attempt to edit the canon, lists of the canonical books were made in the late second century onwards. These lists, which even from the beginning, contain most of the books we find in the NT today, were

made by the author of the Muratorian fragment (170 A.D.), Irenaeus (180 A.D.), and Clement (190 A.D.).

Furthermore, despite its claims to the contrary, the Roman Catholic Church did not choose the canon, and then impose it from the top down. The Sunday-observing Church before the time of emperor Constantine and the Edict of Milan (313 A.D.) was not a tightly controlled, highly organized, monolithic group, and had suffered terrible persecution itself during the rule of Diocletian and earlier emperors. The canon came from the traditional practices of average members and elders, from the bottom up. As scholar Kurt Aland noted: “It goes without saying that the Church, understood as the entire body of believers, created the canon . . . it was not the reverse – it was not imposed from the top, be it by bishops or synods.”

Was First Century Christianity Influenced by Paganism?

What about the claim that the Christian religion, and Christ Himself, are just carryovers of ancient pagan myths, legends, and the “savior motif”?

German scholar, Adolf von Harnack, addressed this claim. Was original Christianity influenced by ancient pagan beliefs, which it incorporated into its theology?

Van Harnack asserts, “We must reject the comparative mythology which finds a causal connection between everything and everything else, which tears down solid barriers, bridges chasms as though it were child's play, and spins combinations from superficial similarities. . . . By such methods one can turn Christ into a sun god in the twinkling of an eye, or one can bring up the legends attending the birth of every conceivable god, or one can catch all sorts of mythological doves to keep company with the baptismal dove; and find any number of celebrated asses to follow the ass on which Jesus rode into Jerusalem; and thus, with the magic wand of ‘comparative religion,’ triumphantly eliminate every spontaneous trait in any religion.”

Let's get this! Mere so-called “similarities” do NOT prove causal influence! Just because Christianity and false religions have some similar ideas, it does not mean in every case that Christianity derived its basic core teachings from ancient pagan mythological religions! This is especially true when the pagan myths are carefully compared to the New Testament doctrines.

But was first century Christianity at all influenced by paganism? As Eric Snow writes, “We face the raw fact that such charges are dead issues among contemporary scholars in the fields of classics and Biblical studies. Seeing parallels between the ideas of Gnosticism or Mithraism and Christianity were common in the period from about 1890 to 1940, but are rarely circulated today except by the uninformed. Hence, when H.G. Wells saw parallels between the language used by Paul about the crucifixion and Mithraism in his history of the world, *The Outline of History*, that book, which was first published just after WWI, reflected its day and age.”

He goes on, “In order to press the charge first century Christianity was influenced by ancient pagan religions, normally chronology gets ignored. Mithraism, for example, had very little presence within the Roman Empire in the first century, and so for that reason alone it simply could not have been a major influence on early Christianity’s development. Scholar M. I. Vermaseren has stated: ‘No Mithraic monument can be dated earlier than the end of the first century A.D.’” No images of this god were found in Pompeii – buried by Vesuvius in 79 A.D. A standard technique of skeptics is to place something done by a pagan religion in a later century, to the first century and say it influenced the first century church. An example is communion (the Passover ceremony) which was similar to Mithraism’s ceremonial meals. They will take an inscription dated from 376 A.D. that said, in Latin, “reborn for eternity in the *taurobolium* and *criobolium*,’ and say these pagan ceremonies that sacrificed bulls and sheep influenced first century Christianity’s idea of spiritual begetting. By this time the pagans could have easily gotten the idea from Christianity instead!”

Says Snow, “Furthermore, once one becomes highly specific about the legends in question, the apparent similarities to Christianity vanish. For example, in the mystery religion of “Cybele and Attus”, Attus comes alive after dying. To call this a “resurrection” is to apply Christian terminology in order to force an analogy. In the legend, Attus’ body was preserved, his hair would grow, and a finger would move – and that was it. In another version of the myth, he became an evergreen tree. While one can find other “savior gods” in pagan religions, one discovers upon closer examination that only in Christianity was the death of God for other people, that it was for sin, that it was once for all, and that it was an actual event in history, not a myth.

“Or, consider the ceremony in which a bull would be killed on top of a pit which had boards covering it. The pagan believers would be below, and move around to try to get the blood from it to drip on them. To label this a ‘blood baptism’ ignores how this ceremony, called the *taurobolium*, was not an initiation rite for new believers. It was something done repeatedly by the same individuals, unlike baptism in Christianity – which immerses the believer in water only once and does not splatter blood on the believer.”

Undeniable Differences

A number of major differences existed between the mystery religions and Christianity. Writes Eric Snow, “The mystery religions, as well as Gnosticism, attempted to have special, secret knowledge known only to a few initiates of the ‘truth.’ In contrast, Christianity sought to publicly proclaim ‘Christ, and Him crucified’ (I Cor.2:2) and His message to the world. To everyone, whether they believed or not. Christianity maintained there was only one way to salvation (Acts 4:12; John 14:6), and so believed in exclusivity. Believers in pagan religions did not care how many gods they or others worshipped. Most of these religions (Mithraism being the exception) had notions of ‘resurrections’ that were tied to a cyclical view of nature and of history. This was arrived at by looking at the birth, death, and rebirth of vegetation from spring to winter and back again.

“By contrast, Christianity emphatically believes in a linear view of time and history, because God created the world at a specific time in the past, and because Jesus died "once for all." Christianity also has a much stronger ethical, moral, and intellectual aspect than most mystery religions. Who can deny the demanding and majestic sweep of Christian ethics as proclaimed in the Sermon on the Mount, the Letter of James, the ‘Love Chapter’ of I Cor.13? The idea of salvation in paganism did not involve a moral change or moral duties or deliverance from sin, while Christianity’s idea of it involved all three. It is for reasons such as these, against the charge Paul created a mystery religion on a Jewish base, that historian of philosophy Gordon Clark said: ‘Such surmises are not so much bad scholarship as prejudiced irresponsibility.’”

The Authenticity of Jesus Christ

What about Jesus Christ, Himself? Did He really live? Did He perform miracles? Was He resurrected, as the New Testament writers so plainly acknowledge?

Bible critics have in the past even denied the very existence of Christ, claiming He was also a myth. However, we have solid evidence for the existence of Christ, even apart from the New Testament witness.

The Roman historian Tacitus who was born about A.D. 56 in his *Annals* tells us about the outbreak of the great fire of Rome in A.D. 64. He tells us of the Christians, who were accused by Nero, of starting the fire. He wrote:

“They got their name from Christ, who was executed by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberius. The pernicious superstition, suppressed for the moment, broke out again, not only throughout Judaea, the birthplace of the plague, but also in the city of Rome” (*Annals*, 15:44).

Tacitus was a close friend of Pliny the Younger, governor of Bithynia in Asia Minor in A.D. 111-113. In about A.D. 111, Pliny wrote a letter to Emperor Trajan, in which he passed on information he had learned about the sect called “Christians.” He wrote:

“They meet on a certain fixed day before sunrise and sing an antiphonal hymn to Christ as a god, and bind themselves with an oath: not to commit any crime, but to abstain from all acts of theft, robbery and adultery, and from breaches of trust” (*Letter*, 10:96).

Suetonius, writing about 120 A.D., may also refer to Christians, in his work on the life of the Emperor Claudius. Declared Suetonius, “He [Claudius] expelled the Jews from Rome because of the riots they were causing at the instigation of Chrestus.” The term “Chrestus” could well have been a variant spelling of “Christus.” We know there were riots instigated among the Jews of the Roman Empire, when they rejected the teachings of the apostle Paul and others about Christ (see Acts 13:40-46; 14:19; 17:5-9; 18:12-17).

Even the Jewish historian Josephus, who wrote his *Antiquities of the Jews* shortly after the Jewish-Roman war of 70 A.D., acknowledged Christ. Josephus, who was certainly no Christian, wrote a passage describing Jesus Christ, which has caused no small controversy among scholars and historians alike. According to the church historian Eusebius, who quotes Josephus in full, he wrote:

“About this time lived Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one ought to refer to him as a man. For he was one who did surprising deeds, a teacher of those who delight in accepting the unusual. He brought trouble to many Jews, and also many from the Greek world. He was the Messiah-Christ. On the accusation of our leading men Pilate condemned him to the cross, but those who had loved him from the first did not cease to do so. For on the third day he appeared to them again alive, just as the divine prophets had spoken about these and countless other marvelous things about him. And to this day the tribe of Christians, named after him, has not died out” (*Antiquities*, XVIII, 63-64).

Even His enemies wrote of Him in various Jewish writings of the rabbis of the following centuries. The Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds, completed about A.D. 350 and A.D. 500 respectively, are commentaries or supplements to the Jewish Mishnah, the written version of the Oral laws handed down by the Jews, which was finished about A.D. 200.

Two passages in the Talmud discuss the existence of Jesus Christ, but from a hostile, pejorative point of view.

We read in the Talmud of an old tradition, or *baraita*, which said:

“On the eve of Passover Yeshu was hanged. For forty days before the execution took place, a herald went forth and cried, 'He is going forth to be stoned, because he has practiced sorcery and enticed and led Israel astray. Anyone who can say anything in his favor, let him come forward and plead on his behalf.' But since nothing was brought forward in his favour, he was hanged on the eve of Passover.

Ulla retorted: 'Do you suppose that he was one for whom a defense could be made? Was he not a deceiver, concerning whom Scripture says (Deuteronomy 13:8), 'Neither shalt thou spare neither shalt thou conceal him?' With Yeshu, however, it was different, for he was connected with the government” (*Sanh.43a*).

In another place, the Talmud also states:

“One day he (R. Joshua) was reciting the Shema when Jesus came before him. He intended to receive him and made a sign to him. He (Jesus) thinking it was to repel him, went, put up a brick and worshipped it. 'Repent,' said he (R. Joshua) to him. He replied, 'I have thus learned from thee: He who sins and causes others to sin is not afforded the means of repentance.' And a Master has said, 'Jesus the Nazarene practiced magic and led Israel astray'” (*Sanh. 107b*).

The exact meaning of this second passage from the Talmud is a matter of dispute and is difficult to interpret. The reference to Jesus the Nazarene as one who “practiced magic and led Israel astray,” however, is plain and clear.

Interestingly, all of these non-Christian witnesses, from Tacitus, Pliny the Younger, Josephus, and the Talmud, refer to the violent death of Jesus Christ. When all the evidence is put together, there is no reason at all to question the existence of the central figure of the New Testament, nor the authenticity of the New Testament documents of the Bible.

How and When Pagan Influence Entered the Church

When in the fullness of time, the true Christ came on the scene, as recorded in the gospels of the New Testament, the old pagan Messiahs had preceded him, and even “died” in a counterfeit of the death of Christ, and were supposedly “resurrected”, in the pagan religious beliefs.

What very few people realize is how these ancient pagan beliefs, customs, and even religious holidays later became BLENDED in with the “Christianity” of the world, over the centuries, beginning most pronouncedly in the days of Constantine, emperor of Rome circa 325. A.D.!

True original Christianity never compromised with paganism. True Christianity has withstood the onslaught of pagan doctrines, holidays, teachings, and immorality.

In truth, however, much of modern mainstream “Christianity” IS based on paganism – such as celebration of Christmas, Easter, Halloween, the cross, the Trinity doctrine, the “mass,” and eternal-burning “Hell,” the ‘immortal soul,” going to “Heaven” when you die, and of course, that old farce, a form of “Church government” which allows religious rulers to dictate to and rule over and brutalize the members, through “fear,” etc. etc. How did this happen? The story is as intriguing as it is sanguinary.

The early apostles foretold it would occur. The apostle Peter wrote, warning, “There will be false teachers among you, who will SECRETLY bring in destructive heresies” (II Pet.2:1). He said, “Many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the WAY of TRUTH will be blasphemed” (v.2). The word translated “secretly” here is *pareisago* and means “to lead in aside,” “introduce surreptitiously.”

Jude also wrote, “For certain men have crept in UNNOTICED, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 4). The Greek word for “unnoticed” here is *pareisduno*, meaning “to settle in alongside,” “lodge stealthily,” “creep in unawares.”

It began happening during the first century itself. Paul warned the Galatian church, “I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a DIFFERENT GOSPEL” (Gal.1:6). He warned the church at Ephesus, “For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves” (Acts 20:29-30).

Soon whole churches began falling away from the truth and going astray. Paul warned, “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned to fables” (II Tim.4:3-4). The apostasy spread quickly, so much so that Paul wrote to Timothy saying, “This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me” (II Tim.1:15).

It had begun to happen, just as Paul had predicted. He described the process this way – “For the *MYSTERY* [“hidden truth,” margin] of lawlessness is already at work” (II Thess.2:7). The word for “mystery,” *musterion*, literally means “to shut the mouth,” “a secret or mystery (through the idea of silence imposed by initiation into religious rites).”

This age-old conspiracy is called here the “MYSTERY of lawlessness,” or “the mystery of iniquity” (KJV), “secret power of lawlessness” (NIV), “Mysterious Wickedness” (Good News Bible), “The *Amplified Bible* describes it as “that hidden principle of rebellion against constituted authority.”

It infiltrated the church. It wormed its way inside and gradually “took over” the reins of the visible churches. It did this covertly, so that almost no one was the wiser. Only a few caught on to the destruction and corruption that was occurring in the church around the Mediterranean world. The ancient PAGAN gods were incorporated into the church as “saints,” their festivals as “Christian” festivals, renamed, and their rites and ceremonies were now “baptized” and sprinkled with “holy water” to make them acceptable to naïve and unsuspecting church members.

Ancient pagan religions DID influence 2nd, 3rd, and 4th century Christianity – in fact, paganism gradually STOLE THE MAINSTREAM CHURCH! The Biblical day of worship – the weekly Sabbath – was changed to Sunday by the Bishop of Rome, as Rome adopted wholesale pagan institutions. Sunday worship was borrowed direct from Mithraism, the worship of the Sun-god, so popular in Rome and the Roman Empire.

For example, today’s Easter celebration is universally believed to be “Christian” in origin. But it has its roots deep in ancient paganism – centuries before the birth of Christ – and its rites have scarcely changed.

Says Ralph Woodrow in *Babylon Mystery Religion*:

“The word itself, as the dictionaries and encyclopedias explain, comes from the name of a Pagan Goddess – the goddess of Spring. Easter is but a more modern form of Ishtar, Eostre, Oстера, or Astarte. Ishtar, another

name for Semiramis of Babylon, was pronounced as we pronounce 'Easter' today! And so the name of the Spring Festival, 'Easter,' is definitely paganistic, the name being taken from the name of the Goddess" (p. 152).

The Pagan Connection

Says historian James George Frazer, "The professing church, to build its membership, adopted paganism wholesale. Pagan spring religious customs were adopted by the Church. At the approach of Easter, women in Sicily sow wheat, lentils, and canary-seed in plates, which they keep in the dark and water every two days. The plants soon shoot up, the stalks are tied with red ribbons, and the plates are placed on sepulchres, with effigies of the dead Christ – "just as the gardens of Adonis were placed on the dead Adonis." Says Sir James George Frazer, "The whole custom – sepulchres as well as plates of sprouting grain-may be *nothing but a continuation, under a different name, of the worship of Adonis*" (Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, p.400).

Says historian and scholar Alexander Hislop:

"The difference, in point of time, betwixt the Christian Pasch, as observed in Britain by the native Christians, and the Pagan Easter enforced by Rome, at the time of its enforcement, was *a whole month*; and it was *only by violence and bloodshed*, at last, that the Festival of the Anglo-Saxon or Chaldean goddess came to supersede that which had been held in honour of Christ" (*The Two Babylons*, p. 107).

After the New Testament was completely written and after all the original apostles had died, a change occurred. Church historian Jesse Lyman Hurlbut describes the age that followed as "the Age of Shadows." Says Hurlbut: "For fifty years after. . . Paul's life *a curtain hangs over the church*, through which we strive vainly to look; and when at last it rises, about 120 A.D. with the writings of the earliest church-fathers, we find a church *in many aspects very different* from that in the days of St. Peter and St. Paul" (*The Story of the Christian Church*, p. 41).

Says Alan W. Watts in *Easter, Its Story and Meaning*: "It would be tedious to describe in detail all that has been handed down to us about the various rites of Tammuz, Adonis, Kore, Dionysus, and many others. . . . Some of them were celebrated at the vernal equinox, or thereabouts, and some at midsummer. But their universal theme – the drama of death and resurrection – makes them the forerunners of the Christian Easter, and thus the *first 'Easter services'*" (p. 58).

By the early fourth century A.D. nominal Christianity became established as a state religion of the Roman Empire. Almost everybody sought membership in the new Church and almost nobody was rejected. Says Hurlbut of this period: "The services of worship increased in splendor, but were less spiritual and hearty than those of former times. The forms and ceremonies of paganism gradually crept into the worship. *Some of the old heathen feasts became church festivals with change of name and of worship*" (*ibid.*, p. 79).

The church leaders of that day felt that for “Christianity” to conquer the world, it would be wise to compromise with pagans throughout the Empire. Since the common people were habituated to their pagan customs and reveled in their pagan holidays, church leaders devised a method to reconcile paganism and nominal Christianity. They simply “baptized” pagan customs, thereby making them “Christian” in appearance and name. The result? Pagans began to flock into the Church in droves. They kept the same days and performed the same rituals, but now they did it to “Christ” instead of to Astarte or Tammuz!

What were the real motives for the church leaders to incorporate Christmas into the church’s calendar of festivals? States Frazer, again:

“What considerations led the ecclesiastical authorities to institute the festival of Christmas? The motives for the innovation are stated with great frankness by a Syrian writer, himself a Christian. ‘The reason,’ he tells us, ‘why the fathers transferred the celebration of the sixth of January to the twenty-fifth of December was this. It was a custom of the heathen to celebrate on the same twenty-fifth of December the birthday of the Sun, at which they kindled lights in token of festivity. In these solemnities and festivities the Christians also took part. Accordingly *when the doctors of the Church perceived that the Christians had a leaning to this festival*, they took counsel and resolved that the true Nativity should be solemnized on that day and the festival of the Epiphany on the sixth of January. Accordingly, along with this custom, the practice has prevailed of kindling fires till the sixth.’ The heathen origin of Christmas is plainly hinted at, if not tacitly admitted, by Augustine when he exhorts his Christian brethren not to celebrate that solemn day like the heathen on account of the sun, but on account of him who made the sun. In like manner Leo the Great rebuked the pestilent belief that Christmas was solemnized because of the birth of the new sun, as it was called, and not because of the nativity of Christ.”

It is just absolutely amazing how ancient paganism has wrapped its tentacles around “Christianity,” so that the modern church is much more pagan than Christian. As historian Will Durant wrote in *The Story of Civilization*, volume 3, “Caesar and Christ,” not long after the church began, the pagans began their onslaught to infiltrate it, subvert it, and destroy it. Says Durant,

“Christ was assimilated to the religious and philosophical traditions of the Hellenistic mind. Now the pagan world – even the anti-Semitic world – could accept him as its own. Christianity did not destroy paganism; it adopted it. The Greek mind, dying, came to a transmigrated life in the theology and liturgy of the Church . . . The Greek mysteries passed down into the impressive mystery of the Mass. Other pagan cultures contributed to the syncretist result. From Egypt came the idea of a divine trinity . . . From Egypt the adoration of the Mother and Child, and the mystic theosophy that made Neoplatonism and Gnosticism, and obscured the Christian creed. . . . From Phrygia came the worship of the Great Mother; from Syria the resurrection drama of Adonis; from Thrace, perhaps, the cult of Dionysus, the dying and saving

god” (page 595).

In fact, Will and Ariel Durant go so far as to say,

“The Mithraic ritual so closely resembled the eucharistic sacrifice of the Mass that Christian fathers charged the Devil with inventing these similarities to mislead frail minds. *CHRISTIANITY WAS THE LAST GREAT CREATION OF THE ANCIENT PAGAN WORLD*” (*ibid.*).

In analyzing the strange customs of the pagans and their astonishing similarity to certain “Christian” customs today, Alan W. Watts was moved to write,

“At first sight it is surprising to find so many of these stories and symbols of death-and-resurrection in so many different places. The points of resemblance between the Christ story, on the one hand, and the myth and ritual of ancient and ‘pagan’ cults, on the other, is at times *startling enough to look like a CONSPIRACY*” (*op. cit.* p. 22).

It had begun to happen, just as Paul had predicted.

It infiltrated the church. It wormed its way inside and gradually “took over” the reins of the visible churches. It did this covertly, so that almost no one was the wiser. Only a few caught on to the destruction and corruption that was occurring in the church around the Mediterranean world. The ancient PAGAN gods were incorporated into the church as “saints,” their festivals as “Christian” festivals, renamed, and their rites and ceremonies were now “baptized” and sprinkled with “holy water” to make them acceptable to naïve and unsuspecting church members.

The Bible in its Own Defense

In the final analysis, however, the Bible is its own greatest witness. Simply reading it carefully, patiently, and open-mindedly, one cannot but marvel at its store of wisdom, its incredibly wise and just laws, its moral superiority, and moral elevation of its contents.

The New Testament, also, containing the laws and commandments and philosophy taught by Jesus Christ, the One “greater than Moses” who was prophesied to come, is overwhelming in its incredible moral tone, ethical superiority, and unity. One only has to read it, with an open mind and heart, to be moved by its amazing veracity and story, as told by the original “four witnesses” who wrote the four gospels, and the further elucidations and epistles of Paul, James, Peter, John, and Jude. The scope and unity is breathtaking. Each speaks with a unity of purpose and mind. There is no contradiction in their teachings, doctrines, or faith. They each speak as if they were “one” in heart and mind.

Jesus taught that “love” is the foundation of the law (Matt.22:37-40). The first commandment is to love God; the second, to love our neighbor. This ethical code

actually goes back to the Old Testament itself! In the book of Deuteronomy we read the “Shema,” the command to love the Lord our God (Deut.6:4-6), as well as elsewhere. In the book of Leviticus we read of the commandment to “love our neighbor” (Lev.19:18).

Jesus Christ explained how to put this code into action in our lives, by the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-36). He also taught, “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets” (Matt.7:12).

Jesus the Messiah, in expounding on the Old Testament laws and commandments, established and amplified the only moral and ethical guidelines by which a society can live, prosper, and continue to grow and function -- the way of “love of neighbor” and “peace.” In rejecting that way of life, the world has chosen the way of suffering and death.

The whole Bible, both Old and New Testaments together, is a most remarkable document. Despite what the critics have said in their attempt to ridicule, besmirch, and defoul the Scriptures, they stand unassailed, incorruptible, uncontaminated, pure, like burnished gold and polished diamonds.

Just as Solomon wrote, “Every word of God is pure” (Prov.30:5). As David wrote, “Your word is very pure: therefore Your servant loves it” (Psalm 119:140). David also wrote of the awesome purity of the word of God thus, saying: “The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver is tried in the furnace of earth, purified seven times” (Psalm 12:6-7).

The Verdict Is In -- The Bible Is Right!

Is the Bible mere mythology? Is the New Testament a pious fraud? Is Christianity nothing more than dressed up, disguised PAGAN MYTH? Or did a diabolical event occur where Satan the devil co-opted the TRUE religion of Christ and the apostles, perverted it, and foisted his version upon the world?

Is true Christianity just paganism dressed up in new clothing?

The truth is, the preposterous theories of the critics, atheists, agnostics and “scholars” have been exploded by increasing new evidence, all pointing in the direction of Biblical accuracy and reliability.

Paul wrote, concerning the critics and skeptics who deny the truth and reliability of Scripture: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness *suppress the truth*. For what can be known about God is plain to them, *because God has shown it to them*. . . So they are *WITHOUT EXCUSE* . . . they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became FOOLS” (Romans 1:18-22).

The truth is, it requires FAR *GREATER* FAITH to swallow the claims of skeptics than it takes to believe the simple, honest, truthful Word of God which is corroborated and *confirmed* by the spade of archaeology!

Biblical history is accurate! You can bank on it! God's people have no need whatsoever to stand in awe of the claims of Bible critics. The fact that critics have resorted to a *double standard* when it comes to the Bible should be obvious to all. As Yeshua the Messiah Himself said: "The Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35).

God Himself inspired the apostle Paul to write in His Word, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (II Tim.3:16-17).

Thank God for the reliability and integrity of His Word!

Stand Strong in the True Faith!

What most people fail to realize, today, there really IS a Devil who KNEW the plan of God from the beginning, who understood the prophecies long before Christ fulfilled them, and so he COUNTERFEITED HIS OWN PAGAN MESSIAHS, after the flood, beginning with Nimrod and Semiramis, and exported the PAGAN concepts around the ancient world, with different names in different nations and regions.

Thus he cleverly "pre-empted" the miraculous birth of Christ, miracles, death and resurrection, to make it seem as if when the REAL MESSIAH came along, and FULFILLED the prophecies, it was nothing new, so skeptics and doubters could point and say "ho hum, just another false mythology."

That is sheer nonsense! The EVIDENCE proves otherwise!

The Proof of the Bible is IN the Bible – no matter how much Satan knows, or counterfeits. The LIFE of Christ AND His authentic Messiahship is proved and attested to by the RECORDS of the New Testament gospels, and eye witnesses, and PROVED by the hundreds of fulfilled prophecies He and only He could have fulfilled, including even the DATE or YEAR His ministry began (Dan.9"24-27), His suffering (Isa.53:1-12), and town of birth (Micah 5:2), etc, etc. Read our articles on "Astonishing PROOF Jesus in the Messiah!" and "Daniel's 70 Weeks Prophecy PROVES the Messiah!" And while you are at it, read our article, "The Bible – Superstition or Scientific Truth?"

The film/movie mentioned earlier in this article, *The DaVinci Code*, is nothing but a short-lived flurry of wind – sheer propaganda based on Satan's attempt to counterfeit in advance the true coming of Christ, and to deceive and delude mankind.

The sad thing is that most people will look at a slick, professional appearing "movie," or purported "documentary," and ASSUME that it must be true, if it is "clever,"

well-crafted, and “appears” to be factual. It is the case of the old “con man” who fleeces the sheep of their wool, or the elderly of their bank accounts, by “appearing” to be honest, genuine, sincere, and who cites a few “facts” here and there to give the “appearance” of truth and reliability. It is the oldest “con” in the world, going back to the lie of the serpent in the Garden of Eden.

How do you combat such propaganda, so that you won't be deceived?

First of all, put it to a careful TEST. As Paul said, “PROVE ALL THINGS; hold fast to that which is good” (I Thess.5:21). To prove the veracity of the BIBLE, for example, you must STUDY THE BIBLE ITSELF, with an open, unprejudiced mind and attitude. Be like the Bereans – study the Scriptures DAILY so you really KNOW what they say, and take no man's word for it (Acts 17:11).

The Bible is its own best witness and defense. People get trapped, and fooled, because they are IGNORANT and haven't really STUDIED as they ought, so their faith is weak. Paul commands, “STUDY to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (II Tim.2:15).