

# 119

## MINISTRIES

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### **Why the Bible is God’s Word**

The most important question we can ever ask is, “Does God exist?” If the answer to that question is yes, the second most important question we’ll ever ask is, “Who is He?”

We know that God exists because *we* exist. We can observe that there’s something rather than nothing. In fact, we’ve observed that there’s an entire universe that exists. And since things don’t just pop into existence without a cause, there must be something that caused the universe’s existence.

Think about it. When was the last time you observed a house, or a tree, or a person, or a computer, or *any* object just pop into existence without an explanation for its existence? It doesn’t happen. Everything that begins to exist has a cause. Why should we assume that universes are excluded from that basic observable fact?

And since whatever caused the universe to come into existence must necessarily be beyond space and time, immaterial, and immensely powerful, the only explanation for the universe’s existence is a timeless, spaceless, immaterial, immensely powerful creator. Or in other words, “God.”

In addition to the observable fact that something does not come from nothing, we’ve never observed chaos producing complex organized information. For example, nobody looks at a sculpture and says, “Amazing! This beautiful piece of art was completely formed on its own through nature!” No, that would be silly. We assume that the sculpture had an artist. Why would we assume differently when it comes to our complex organized universe—planets, solar systems, and, of course, us?

As Astrophysicist and cosmologist, Fred Hoyle, once wrote:

A common sense interpretation of the facts suggests that a superintellect has monkeyed with physics, as well as with chemistry and biology, and that there are no blind forces worth speaking about in nature. The numbers one calculates from the facts seem to me so overwhelming as to put this conclusion almost beyond question.

-Fred Hoyle, “*The Universe: Past and present Reflections.*”

Physicist Paul Davies wrote:

There is for me powerful evidence that there is something going on behind it all [...] It seems as though somebody has fine-tuned nature’s numbers to make the Universe [...] The impression of design is overwhelming.

-Paul Davies, “*The Cosmic Blueprint: New Discoveries in Nature’s Creative Ability to Order the Universe*”

So it’s clear that nature and the universe testify to the existence of God. That entails that God wants us to know Him. Otherwise He wouldn’t have given us all this evidence of His existence, right? So, then that brings us to the second most important question we’ll ever ask: Who *is* this God?

Since God wants us to know Him, it would seem reasonable that He would have given us some way to connect with Him—some special revelation identifying who He is and what His will is. He would give us a clear outline of our purpose and the right way to live our lives. We believe that He’s done just that through the writings that make up the Bible.

## 2 Timothy 3:14-17

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with **the sacred writings**, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus [Messiah Yeshua]. **All Scripture is breathed out by God** and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Okay, but how do we *know* that the God who created the universe is YHWH, the God revealed in the Bible? How do we know that He’s not Allah, the god revealed in the Qur’an? Or the god revealed in the Book of Mormon? Or the god revealed in the Veda, the sacred texts of Hinduism? Take your pick! There are countless holy books that describe countless different gods. Why should we believe *the Bible’s* revelation?

Of course, the Bible itself claims to be the Word of God. But to believe that the Bible is true just because the Bible says so is to argue in a circle. So why *is* the Bible true? How can we be sure that God revealed Himself through the Bible? Do we just have to accept it by exercising blind faith, or are there ways to actually verify the truth of the Bible?

One of the ways that we can know that the Bible is God’s Word is that it’s verified supernaturally. That is to say, God Himself authenticated His revelation to us through the Scriptures by divine miracle—namely, the resurrection of Yeshua the Messiah.

Now, the resurrection of Messiah is something that many people suppose you just accept by blind faith. However, there are actually good *historical* reasons to believe that the resurrection of Messiah actually happened.

If it can be shown that God did in fact raise Yeshua from the dead, it would therefore follow that the God revealed by Yeshua—the God of the Bible—is indeed the One True God. That would also entail

that the Scriptures affirmed by Yeshua are in fact God's revelation to us.

But before we can prove that the Bible is God's Word, we'll first need to prove that it's historically reliable, right? So what reasons do we have to believe that the biblical accounts of Yeshua's life, his death, and his resurrection are reliable accounts of what actually happened?

For instance, critics might claim that the authors of the New Testament were making everything up!

"The gospel accounts are just a bunch of fairy tales written by people trying to deceive and control the masses!" Skeptics might say.

However, you might be surprised to discover that scholars universally reject that idea. For instance, scholar and theologian, Dr. William Lane Craig, writes:

"No modern scholar thinks of the gospels as bald-faced lies, the result of a massive conspiracy. The only places you find such conspiracy theories are on atheist Web sites and in sensationalist books and movies. When you read the pages of the New Testament, there's no doubt that these people sincerely believed in the truth of what they proclaimed."

*-Dr. William Lane Craig, "On Guard: Defending Your Faith with Reason and Precision"*

There's simply no reason to believe that the New Testament authors just made everything up. They actually believed that what they said happened, happened! But what else is there that can help us determine whether these writings are historically reliable?

Well in his book, "On Guard," Dr. William Lane Craig lists five reasons why we can believe in the historical reliability of the New Testament. Let's quickly go through each of them.

## **1) There was insufficient time for legendary influences to erase the core historical facts.**

Skeptics will argue that we really can't trust the historicity of the New Testament on the assumption that the original facts about Yeshua were lost between the times of the events to when those events were written down. This is known as the "legend hypothesis."

But according to scholars, one major problem with the legend hypothesis is that the time gap between the events of the New Testament and when they were written down is just too short for legendary tendencies to blot out the historical facts.

For instance, Greco-Roman historian, A. N. Sherwin-White, says that the ancient writings of the Greek historian, Herodotus, who lived between 484 – 425 BCE, help us learn the rate at which legend accumulates. He writes:

Herodotus enables us to test the tempo of myth-making, and the tests suggest that even two generations are too short a span to allow the mythical tendency to prevail over the hard historic core of the oral tradition.

*-A.N. Sherwin-White, "Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament," pg. 190*

So, to give some perspective, the two earliest biographies of Alexander the Great were written down more than 400 years after his death, and yet historians still have the utmost confidence in their reliability.

In contrast, while there is some debate concerning when the gospels were written, there's no question that they were certainly completed before the close of the first century and written by eyewitnesses or under the guidance of eyewitnesses to the events they describe.

If virtually everyone trusts the earliest biographies of Alexander the Great as historical, how much more ought we to trust the gospel accounts? In either case, the possibility that myth had crept into the gospel accounts to make them untrustworthy, simply isn't reasonable.

## **2) The gospels are not analogous to folk tales or contemporary “urban legends.”**

Unlike folk tales about imaginary people and events, such as Paul Bunyan and others, the gospel accounts concern actual historical individuals and events. For instance, people like Pontius Pilate, Joseph Caiaphas, John the Baptist, and even James, the brother of Yeshua, can be found in the writings of the first century Jewish historian Josephus. The fact that the claims of the New Testament are confirmed in outside historical sources speaks a lot to the New Testament's historical reliability.

For more information on the writings of Josephus as they concern the New Testament, see our teaching, [Brit Hadasha: Josephus and the New Testament](#).

## **3) The Jewish transmission of sacred traditions was highly developed and reliable.**

The Jewish disciples of Yeshua first passed on His teachings orally before they were eventually written down. Dr. Craig writes:

In an oral culture like that of first-century Israel, the ability to memorize and retain large tracts of oral tradition was a highly prized and highly developed skill. From the earliest age children in the home, elementary school, and the synagogue were taught to memorize faithfully sacred tradition. The disciples would have exercised similar care with the teachings of Jesus.

*-Dr. William Lane Craig, “On Guard: Defending Your Faith with Reason and Precision”*

Indeed, ancient Jews were known for memorizing large amounts of Scripture. This is also true of ancient Greek storytellers who were able to memorize the entire Iliad or Odyssey. The high value placed on memorization might sound odd to us today, but that's because our culture is immersed in written information. It wasn't like that in the ancient world.

Skeptics might argue that it would be easy to change or distort information transmitted through oral tradition, but this is simply false. For instance, oral tradition was transmitted publically in front of entire communities, and it was repeated over and over for everyone there to memorize. Therefore, if someone misstated information, the whole community would have been present to correct errors.

## **4) There were significant restraints on the embellishment of traditions about**

## **Jesus, such as the presence of eyewitnesses and the apostles' supervision.**

As Dr. Craig explains:

Those who had seen and heard Jesus were still on the scene and could be asked about what Jesus had said and done. Moreover, the traditions about Jesus remained under the supervision of the original apostles. These factors would act as a natural check on tendencies to elaborate the facts in a direction contrary to the one preserved by those who had known Jesus. In fact, in the case of the gospels, it would be more accurate to speak of "oral history" rather than "oral tradition," since the living eyewitnesses and apostles were still around.

*-Dr. William Lane Craig, "On Guard: Defending Your Faith with Reason and Precision"*

### **5) The gospel writers have a proven track record of historical reliability.**

In the places we're able to verify the historical claims of the New Testament against other historical sources, we find that the New Testament authors were dead on when it came to historical reliability.

Let's unpack this a bit. If actual eyewitnesses wrote the gospels, the authors should be able to correctly identify the customs, geography, and names of towns and historical individuals.

Christian apologist and philosopher, Michael Jones, gives this analogy: If someone from a thousand years in the future discovered a book about the history of our current time, in order to verify that an eyewitness of our time wrote the book, the author should be expected to get basic facts straight. For instance, they wouldn't ascribe customs from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the 21<sup>st</sup> century or misplace cities in the wrong state or misidentify which presidents served at which times.

So then what do we see in the New Testament? Does it accurately align with what we can confirm in ancient history? Indeed it does! Here are just a few of the countless examples:

#### **1) Many of the historical rulers mentioned in the New Testament have been discovered in archaeology.**

For instance, the existence of Herod the great, who was the ruler of Judea mentioned in Matthew 2, has been confirmed through the discovery of his ancient coins dated to the time when the New Testament says he ruled.

Also, excavations at ancient Tiberias unearthed a marble floor that was part of a grand structure believed to be one of the palaces belonging to Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great and tetrarch of Galilee during Yeshua's ministry. He's mentioned throughout Matthew, Mark, and Luke. (*ScienceDaily*, "Ancient Tiberias Reveals More of Its Beauty")

Fragments of a letter written by the Roman emperor Claudius in 52 C.E. reveal the existence of Gallio the Proconsul, who was the Roman senator mentioned in Acts 18. He was the one who dismissed the charge brought by the Jews against the apostle Paul.

Israeli scholars recently confirmed the authenticity of a 2,000-year-old burial ossuary bearing the name of a relative of the high priest Caiaphas, who is mentioned throughout the gospels, thus confirming the existence of Caiaphas during the time of the events described in the gospels.

## 2) Many of the historical places mentioned in the New Testament have been discovered in Archaeology.

The existence of small ancient towns of Bethlehem and Nazareth has also been confirmed archeologically. Regarding Bethlehem, Israeli archaeologists have discovered a 2,700-year-old seal that bears the inscription “Bethlehem.” According to Fox News:

“The tiny clay seal’s existence and age provide vivid evidence that Bethlehem was not just the name of a fabled biblical town, but also a bustling place of trade linked to the nearby city of Jerusalem, archaeologists said.”

*-Fox News, “Archaeologists unearth ancient Bethlehem seal,” [www.foxnews.com](http://www.foxnews.com)*

In Nazareth, remains of a house from the time of Yeshua have also been found.

But wait! There’s more! In Jerusalem, Archaeologists have found the remains for the Pool of Bethesda, mentioned in the gospel of John (John 5:2-9).

Archaeologists also believe to have found the place of Yeshua’s trial prior to His crucifixion in the old city of Jerusalem. They identified the foundations of King Herod the Great’s palace, built in the first century BCE, which many believe served as Pontius Pilate’s headquarters and the location where he tried Yeshua. Archaeology professor at the University of North Carolina, Shimon Gibson, says this:

There is, of course, no inscription stating it happened here, but everything—archaeological, historical and gospel accounts—all falls into place and makes sense.

*-Shimon Gibson, “Possible Site of Jesus’ Trial Found During Jerusalem Dig,” [www.patternsofevidence.com](http://www.patternsofevidence.com)*

Many more archaeological discoveries could be mentioned confirming the historical reliability of the New Testament, but for the sake of time, let’s move on to another area of historical evidence: The New Testament’s coherence with ancient history.

This is important because it demonstrates that the authors of the New Testament were actual eyewitnesses to the events they described and not later frauds.

For instance, in Matthew 17, collectors approached Peter regarding the two-drachma Temple tax. Notice what was used to pay the Temple tax:

### **Matthew 17:24-27**

When they came to Capernaum, the collectors of **the two-drachma tax** went up to Peter and said, “Does your teacher not pay the tax?” He said, “Yes.” And when he came into the house, Jesus [Yeshua] spoke to him first, saying, “What do you think, Simon? From whom do kings of the earth take toll or tax? From their sons or from others?” And when he said, “From others,” Jesus said to him, “Then the sons are free. However, not to give offense to them, go to the sea and cast a hook and take the first fish that comes up, and when you open its mouth you will find **a shekel**. Take that and give it to them **for me and for yourself**.”

A shekel was used to pay for both Yeshua and Peter's temple tax. Why is this significant? Because in ancient Rome, a shekel was equal to four drachma. Thus, as Christian apologist Michael Jones explains, this is another example that the gospel writers knew what they were talking about. Jones says this:

If I told you to tell me the proper currency exchange in Mexico eighty years ago, could you do it? Remember, you must do it without modern technology like the Internet or extensive libraries. The odds are very slim. In the same way, when the gospel writers give details like this, it matters. If the gospels were written by later forgers, after the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD, which dramatically changed the culture, they would make numerous errors demonstrating they were not part of that culture.

*-Michael Jones, "The Reliability of the New Testament: External Evidence,"  
www.inspiringphilosophy.com*

There are countless examples like this that demonstrate the fact that the New Testament authors were intimately familiar with the ancient culture of which they wrote about.

In his book, "The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History," scholar and historian Colin Hemer points out eighty-four historically confirmed facts just in the last sixteen chapters of Acts. Here are a few examples:

Luke, the author of Acts, correctly records:

- The proper names of ports (Acts 13:4-5, 13; 14:25; 27:5-6)
- The appropriate travel routes to take in view of certain weather conditions (Acts 21:3; 27:7)
- The specific languages spoken in certain regions (Acts 14:11)
- The proper titles for local and regional government officials. For example, rulers in Philippi are called governors (Acts 16:20-22) while those in Thessalonica are called politarchs (Acts 16:6-8)
- The proper locations where travelers would spend successive nights on the journey from Philippi to Thessalonica (Acts 17:1)
- The use of correct Athenian slang terminology (Acts 17:18-19)
- That the Ephesian theater was the meeting place of the city (Acts 19:29)
- The suitable distance between certain cities (Acts 21:8)
- The precise names of rulers of particular regions during the times they ruled (Acts 23:2, 34; 24:27)
- Whose jurisdiction Cilicia was in during the time described (Acts 23:34)
- The specific superstitions held by local peoples of the day (Acts 28:4-6)

We can go on and on! But gain why are these details important? Well, they are crucial in demonstrating that Luke was a direct eyewitness to these events and not a later forger, otherwise these historical details wouldn't add up as precisely and as often as they do.

Scholars believe that Luke himself even joined the apostle Paul in his travels, as indicated by Luke's use of first-person plural pronouns. Starting in Chapter 16 of Acts, Luke starts using the pronouns "we," "our," and "us." According to scholars, the obvious reason for this is that Luke accompanied Paul on many of his journeys, which makes sense seeing as how Luke was intimately familiar with the specific details of every place they traveled to.

This is incredibly significant when it comes to not only the historicity of Acts but also the historicity of the life of Yeshua, since Luke is the also the author of the gospel of Luke. Dr. Craig explains:

Beginning in the sixteenth chapter of Acts, when Paul reaches Troas in modern-day Turkey, the author suddenly starts using the first-person plural: “*We* set sail from Troas to Samothrace,” “*We* remained in Philippi some days,” “As *we* were going to the place of prayer,” etc. The most obvious explanation is that the author had joined Paul on his evangelistic tour of the Mediterranean cities. Eventually he accompanies Paul back to Israel and finally to Jerusalem. What this means is that the author of Luke-Acts was, in fact, in firsthand contact with the eyewitnesses of Jesus’ life and ministry in Jerusalem [...] There’s no avoiding the conclusion that Luke-Acts was written by a traveling companion of Paul who had the opportunity to interview eyewitnesses to Jesus’ life while in Jerusalem.

*-William Lane Craig, “On Guard: Defending Your Faith with Reason and Precision”*

All of this goes to show that the authors of the New Testament were trustworthy and reliable in what they wrote. In fact, the historical value of the New Testament is pretty remarkable when you think about. It’s worth noting that scholars and historians today are particularly amazed with Luke. Here’s what World-famous archaeologist, Sir William Ramsay, writes:

**Luke is a historian of the first rank;** not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy; he is possessed of the true historic sense; he fixes his mind on the idea and plan that rules in the evolution of history; and proportions the scale of his treatment to the importance of each incident [...] **This author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians.**

*-Sir William Ramsay, “The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament,” p. 222*

Therefore, according to the evidence, it’s reasonable to assume the historical reliability of the gospels and what they tell us about Yeshua.

So with that established, let’s get back to our original question: How can we be sure that God revealed Himself through the Bible?

Like we said at beginning, one of the ways that we can know that the Bible is God’s Word is that it’s verified supernaturally. God, Himself, authenticated the truth of the Scriptures by divine miracle—namely, the resurrection of Yeshua the Messiah.

If it can be shown that God did in fact raise Yeshua from the dead, it would therefore follow that the God revealed by Yeshua—that is, the God of the Bible—is indeed the One True God. And that would also entail that the Scriptures affirmed by Yeshua are in fact God’s revelation to us.

So now let’s turn our attention to the resurrection of Yeshua. What reasons do we have to believe that this supernatural event occurred?

Well, Dr. Craig argues that there are four historical facts that are best explained by the resurrection of Yeshua. And the vast majority of New Testament historians actually recognize these facts. Those facts are:



- 1) After Yeshua's crucifixion, He was buried in a tomb by Joseph of Arimathea
- 2) Yeshua's tomb was found empty by a group of His women followers
- 3) On separate occasions different individuals and groups saw appearances of Yeshua alive after His death
- 4) The original disciples suddenly came to believe in the resurrection of Yeshua

Regarding the first fact, this is significant for several reasons. First, it means that everyone in the area—believers, unbelievers, and enemies alike—knew the location of Yeshua's burial site. Thus, the disciples couldn't have proclaimed the resurrection in Jerusalem had if Yeshua's tomb not been found empty. Furthermore, the details of the account of Yeshua's burial make it highly unlikely that the authors would have fabricated the event. As Dr. Craig argues:

As a member of the Jewish court that condemned Jesus, Joseph of Arimathea is unlikely to be a Christian invention. There was strong resentment against the Jewish leadership for their role in the condemnation of Jesus (1 Thess. 2:15). It is therefore highly improbable that Christians would invent a member of the court that condemned Jesus who honors Jesus by giving him a proper burial instead of allowing him to be dispatched as a common criminal.

- Dr. William Lane Craig, *"The Resurrection of Jesus,"* [www.reasonablefaith.org](http://www.reasonablefaith.org)

The second fact—that Yeshua's tomb was found empty by a group of His women followers—is significant for several reasons as well. To name just a couple, the fact that the gospels describe women discovering the empty tomb lends support to the authenticity of the account. Why? Well, according to first century Jewish historian Josephus, the testimony of women was regarded as untrustworthy in the ancient world—so much so that it couldn't even be admitted into the Jewish court:

"But let not the testimony of women be admitted, on account of the levity and boldness of their sex"

-Josephus, *Antiquities*, 4:8.15

Since, in the ancient world, the testimony of a woman was regarded as less trustworthy than that of a man's, we can assume that a later myth would have made male disciples the ones to find Yeshua's empty tomb. Thus, the fact that it was women who had first discovered Yeshua's empty tomb shows that it is highly unlikely that the ancient writers fabricated this account. As historian N.T. Wright explains:

As historians we are obliged to comment that if these stories had been made up five years later, let alone thirty, forty, or fifty years later, they would never have had Mary Magdalene in this role. To put Mary there is, from the point of view of Christian apologists wanting to explain to a skeptical audience that Jesus really did rise from the dead, like shooting themselves in the foot. But to us as historians this kind of thing is gold dust. The early Christians would never, never have made this up.

-N.T. Wright, *"There is a God,"* p. 207

Second, the original objection to the claim that Yeshua rose from the dead was that His disciples had stolen Yeshua's body:

### **Matthew 28:13**

*"While they were going, behold, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests*

all that had taken place. And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers and said, “Tell people, ‘His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.’”

This indicates that even the very enemies of the early followers of Yeshua affirm the fact that the tomb was indeed found empty.

Regarding the third fact, how do we know that the disciples really did see appearances of the risen Messiah after His Crucifixion? How do we know they weren't just making things up?

You could argue that these accounts were made up later. But that is unlikely since the fact is established in very early tradition and creeds. For instance, in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul preserved an early creed that gives a list of witnesses to whom Yeshua appeared after His resurrection.

### **1 Corinthians 15:**

“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: The Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.”

Most scholars believe that this list of witnesses in 1 Corinthians 15 goes back to within three years of the Shavuot-Pentecost event in Acts 2. The reason is that it is fewer than 50 words and written in a Mnemonic structure with parallelism, which indicates that it was an early creed for the purpose of catechizing new disciples since it was easy to memorize.

Furthermore, the phrase, “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received,” is a Rabbinic statement of a teacher passing what he was taught on to his students, and this indicates that Paul was quoting from an old tradition that most likely goes back to the disciples themselves. The fact that these appearances of Yeshua were such an early tradition, dated within five years of Yeshua’s death, rules out the possibility that the accounts of Yeshua’s post-mortem appearances were mere legends made up later.

Thus, it seems that the best explanation for the historical fact of individuals and groups seeing appearances of Yeshua after His crucifixion is that God Himself raised Yeshua from the dead.

This conclusion is all the more obvious when we consider the 4<sup>th</sup> fact: That the original disciples suddenly came to believe in the resurrection of Yeshua—so much so that they were willing to be tortured and killed for that belief. As N.T. Wright says:

That is why, as an historian, I cannot explain the rise of early Christianity unless Jesus rose again, leaving an empty tomb behind him.

*-N.T. Wright, “The New Unimproved Jesus,” Christianity Today (Sept. 13, 1993), p. 26*

That being the case, the only reasonable conclusion we can draw from these facts is that Yeshua was who He claimed to be, the Messiah of Israel. And God Himself performed a divine miracle backing up Yeshua’s claims. And from this it follows that the God of Israel revealed by Yeshua is the One True

God.

The Hebrew Scriptures reveal this God. And Yeshua, who died and was raised again, proclaimed the truth of the Hebrew Scriptures. Yeshua affirmed that the God of Israel is the God who created the universe, who delivered Israel from slavery and gave them His Torah, and who promised to send the Messiah.

And by the way, that brings up another point: The overwhelming amount of fulfilled prophecy in the Bible goes even further to supernaturally authenticate the Bible as God's revelation! But we'll have to save that for another teaching.

We could literally go on and on. But the evidence already presented in this teaching is enough to give us reasonable answers to our questions.

Does God exist? Yes.

Who is He? None other than the God of Israel—the One revealed in the Bible.

*We pray you have been blessed by this teaching.*

*Remember—continue to test everything.*

*Shalom!*

*For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at [www.testeverything.net](http://www.testeverything.net)*

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