

CAN WE BELIEVE THE BIBLE?

INTRODUCTION.

- A. Scripture text: **1Peter 3:15; 1Thessalonians 5:21**. From Roy H. Enoch (09/04/1994).
- B. The subject of the believability of the Bible does not occur to many who grew up being taught that it is the word of God.
 - 1. We have found its teachings so reliable and valuable that it has proven true in our lives.
 - 2. Yet when someone asks questions about its reliability, we may even feel repulsed by one even questioning it.
 - 3. We need to reflect on the evidence available to confirm our confidence, and be able to use it to defend that confidence.
- C. In this lesson we want to look at evidence from history which corroborates the Bible, and in the next lesson, examine the Bible itself for characteristics of consistency and harmony that will confirm our confidence.
- D. But now, we want to look for evidence in history that will confirm the Bible as a reliable source for our faith or trust.
 - 1. Pliny the Younger corroborates the Biblical record.
 - 2. The Jewish historian Josephus confirms Bible history.
 - 3. There are other examples of confirmation.

I. **PLINY THE YOUNGER CORROBORATES THE BIBLICAL RECORD.**

- A. He is called "the younger" to distinguish him from a well known uncle.
 - 1. He was born near Milan, Italy, in about 61AD.
 - 2. He was an eloquent writer and several of his works are preserved.
 - 3. He was 18 when he witnesses the violent eruption of the volcano Vesuvius, by the Bay of Naples, which buried the cities of Pompeii and Stabiae with ash, and the city of Herculaneum with a mud flow.
 - 4. His two letters to the historian Tacitus give an excellent descriptions, and his uncle, Pliny the Elder was admiral over the naval station and died in the fumes while trying to save survivors.
 - 5. In 100AD he became a consul of Rome and in 106 was made proconsul of Bithynia, a Roman province in now, Turkey.
 - 6. When he arrived in Bithynia, he found great persecution was being waged by the government against Xians.
 - 7. As Proconsul or Governor, he continued the persecution for a while and wrote a letter to the emperor Trajan (98-117AD) in Rome. (This was just a few years after John wrote Revelation, and just north of the Roman province of Asia.)
- B. Pliny's letter tells us a great deal about the church and is witness of one persecuting and trying to destroy it.
 - 1. A great number of Xians were then in all parts of the country.
 - 2. Their influence had emptied the heathen temples.
 - 3. Xians would not worship any sort of idol.
 - 4. No vices had been found among Xians.
 - 5. Xians suffered for their beliefs, without being charged with crime.
 - 6. Xians were accustomed to meet on stated days, singing "in concert" and eating a "harmless meal."
 - 7. Xians who were Roman citizens were sent to Rome for trial.
- C. All of this testimony comes from Pliny the Younger, who was an independent source.
 - 1. This information is in perfect harmony with what the Bible says about the Xian life and suffering persecution.
 - 2. It is also in harmony with what uninspired Xians wrote at the same time.

- D. Most people who are skeptical about the Bible will still accept the testimony of secular writers like Pliny the Younger, Tacitus and Josephus.
1. But when there is a difference between these secular writers and the Bible writers, the Bible writers are usually more reliable because they were better informed and better understood the situations with Xians.
 2. History during NT times was characterized by frequent political changes:
 - a. In Acts, we have the changes of the governors over Judea, Samaria and Idumea who were located at Caesarea.
 - b. They asked Paul to defend himself against the charges of the Jews.
 - c. The Governors did not know much about Jewish teaching, much less about Xianity.
 - d. heir interests were political and their allegiance was to Rome and if religious, to the Roman worship.

II. THE JEWISH HISTORIAN JOSEPHUS ALSO CONFIRMS THE BIBLICAL RECORD.

- A. The NT often does not give details of an incident, but usually refers to them in an incidental way.
1. Historians usually describe the events in more detail, though from a secular viewpoint.
 2. These detailed accounts of times and events give an excellent opportunity to test the accuracy of writers.
 3. Agreement between secular and Xian writers could not be accounted for except by accurate accounts on both sides.
 4. Let us look at some things that Josephus writes about the political, social and religious scene of the first century.
- B. The New Testament speaks of several rulers in Judea and Galilee without explaining how they came to be rulers, or much about them.
1. There was Herod who was king when Jesus was born, who slew the male children two years old and younger, and his death is recorded in Mt. 2:19.
 2. There was Archelaus who reigned over Judea in place of his father (Mt. 2:22).
 3. Then there was Herod the tetrarch who had John the Baptist put to death (Mt. 14:1-12).
 4. And there was Herod the king who killed James the brother of John w/the sword, and this Herod was eaten of worms and died (Ac. 12; his death is mentioned in v23).
 5. There was also king Herod Agrippa who came to Caesarea to greet Festus in Ac. 25:13, before whom Paul made his defense (Ac. 26:1-32).
 6. There were also Roman governors, Pontius Pilate (Mt.27:2), Felix (Ac. 23:24), and Festus (Ac. 24:27).
- C. Josephus gives details that help us understand who these were.
1. The Herod at the birth of X was called "Herod the Great" because he ruled all of Palestine: Judea, Samaria, Galilee, Idumea, Trachonitis and Perea.
 2. At his death the territory was divided among his sons.
 - a. Archelaus ruled over Judea, Samaria and Idumea.
 - b. Antipas (Herod the tetrarch) ruled over Galilee and Perea.
 - c. Philip ruled over Trachonitis. (East of Sea of Galilee.)
 - d. (They all wore the name Herod which was the name of the dynasty of kings.)
 3. But the sons did not have the political skills for getting along w/the Jews like their father.
 - a. Archelaus was removed as ruler of Judea, Samaria and Idumea by the emperor in Rome who made this part of Palestine a Proconsul and appoint Proconsellers or Governors for that area. (Pilate, Felix and Festus)
 - b. Antipas, Herod the Tetrarch continued to rule in Trachonitis.

- c. The Herod of Acts 12, "who killed James the brother of John w/the sword" (v2), and died a painful death being eaten with worms, (v23) was the son of Aristobulus, another son of Herod the Great. He ruled over about the same territory as Herod the Great. He is also know as Herod Agrippa I because his son is also called Herod Agrippa.
 - d. Agrippa of Acts 25 and 26 was the son of the Herod of Ac. 12 and if often referred to as Herod Agrippa II, and Paul preached to him in Acts 26.
 - 4. Josephus' description in minute detail of these rulers and their rules corroborate the NT accounts during the life of Jesus and the church of the first century.
- D. Other documents have confirmed the accuracy of the NT writers.
 - 1. Luke tells us that Augustus Caesar issued a decree that all of the (Roman) world would be enrolled (for taxation), (Lk. 2:1-7; 3:1-2).
 - 2. For 1900 years no other record was known of this event.
 - 3. In Angora, Asia Minor, the original decree was found on the walls of an unearthed building.
 - 4. Millions of dollars are being spent on Archaeology, often to prove that the Bible is wrong.
 - a. Sometimes the archaeologists draw conclusions that are in contradictions to the Bible account.
 - b. But the evidence that is sometimes interpreted to contradict, can also be interpreted to be in harmony of the Bible.
 - c. No evidence has been found that proves that the Bible is in error or contradiction and most confirm the accuracy of the Scriptures.

III. **THERE ARE OTHER EXAMPLES OF THE NEW TESTAMENT BEING CONFIRMED.**

- A. The NT was written when Palestine was under Roman law.
 - 1. Jewish coins had gone out of use and Roman coins were used.
 - 2. The shekel--the commonest Jewish coin--is not mentioned in the NT, but it was still used for the temple tax.
 - 3. Had the NT been written earlier, the Roman coins would not have been used.
 - 4. Had it been written later, the Jewish coins would not have been know.
- B. The NT record of the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well indicates the bad relations between Jews and Samaritans (Jn. 4).
 - 1. Luke also records the same feelings when Jesus was on His last trip to Jerusalem (Lk. 9:51-56).
 - 2. Josephus gives absolute confirmation of this feeling. He describes how on one occasion Samaritans went out against a company of Jews and killed many.
- C. The geographical confirmations are probably more significant than the political leaders.
 - 1. It is very difficult for travelers, and especially for writers, to keep geographical and topographical accuracy for areas they are familiar with, much less where they travel and just pass through.
 - 2. When the Encyclopedia Britannica first appeared--though prepared by experts, it had so many errors regarding places in America the publishers of The New American Cyclopedia published a pamphlet exposes these blunders.
 - 3. When Tacitus wrote "Description of Germany," there were so many errors that some doubted that this great historian wrote it.
 - 4. The accuracy of the Bible is amazing: "down to Jericho," "up to Jerusalem," "down to Gaza," "down to Caesarea," "down to Lydda," "down to Antioch" are all accurate statements.

CONCLUSION.

When we look at confirmation of the Scriptures from historians, geographers and archaeologists, we have our faith in it supported.

