

Chapter 9. The Bible as Hearsay or Heresy

1 Peter 1 ¹⁶For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

Session overview

- Refute the charge that the Bible is just hearsay
- Refute the charge that the Bible is just heresy
- Provide empirical evidence of the uniqueness of the Bible

Key passages

- Bible's explicit denial of being hearsay: **Luke 1:14**, **Luke 3:1-2**, **Acts 2:22**, **Acts 26:24-26**, **John 19:35**, and **1 John 1:3**
- Addressing the charge of the Bible as heresy: **Matthew 5:17**, **John 1:29**, and **John 10:30-31**

Hearsay, heresy, or history

- Hearsay – “information received from other people that one cannot adequately substantiate; rumor.”¹
- Heresy – “belief or opinion contrary to orthodox religious (especially Christian) doctrine.”²
- History – “the study of past events, particularly in human affairs.”³

Three hypotheses (H1, H2, and H3):

- **H1:** The Bible is just hearsay. The Bible was written in response to a cultural movement.
- **H2:** The Bible is heresy. The Bible was written by a group in the 300s AD in an attempt to manipulate a cultural movement.
- **H3:** The Bible is history. The Bible was written by the claimed authors and is authentic history. A cultural movement developed while the Bible was being written.
- Aristotle notes that “... the benefit of the doubt is to be given to the document itself, not arrogated by the critic to himself.”⁴

Is the Bible just hearsay?

- Hearsay is based on unsubstantiated information
- Luke, a physician, wrote very concretely providing an enormous amount of specific information
- Interestingly, much of this information has been attacked as false only to be later substantiated as historically plausible
- The level of vicious attack speaks to the specificity given in the Bible
- Luke is not addressing philosophy, rather making an effort to “write an orderly account”

¹*New Oxford American Dictionary*, provided on Mac computer.

²*New Oxford American Dictionary*, provided on Mac computer.

³*New Oxford American Dictionary*, provided on Mac computer.

⁴J. McDowell, S. McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict: Life-Changing Truth for a Skeptical World*, Thomas Nelson, 2017, p. 68.

Luke 1:1-4

¹Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, ²just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, ³it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.

Luke 3:1-2

¹In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, ²during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness.

- Now if the whole Bible is merely hearsay, why give such explicit detail
- There have been countless cases where “higher critics” have argued that something is wrong in accounts like the one above
- It is well-known that these objections have been fully resolved over the past 100 years or so
- Conclude that a current unresolved problem may not be an error, just a lack of information
- Luke continues in Acts to appeal to well-known events

Acts 2:22

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—

Acts 26:24-26

²⁴And as he was saying these things in his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, “Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind.” ²⁵But Paul said, “I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words. ²⁶For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner.

- When writing hearsay, you would not accuse one of your key leaders (Paul) as being out of his mind
- Generally, you would write about what a great person he is
- In other passages, we find the authors appealing to eyewitness testimony, not hearsay

John 19:35

He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe.

1 John 1:3

that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

- Peter asserts firsthand knowledge as an eyewitness (**1 Peter 1:16**)
- Remember, Jesus prophesied that Peter would die by crucifixion
- Peter abandoned Jesus the night before his crucifixion
- Later we find Peter defending Jesus Christ as Lord—something happened to Peter
- Thus, Peter explicitly rejects the hearsay argument here
- Gospel According to Luke and Acts were written sequentially. All extant evidence points to Paul being beheaded in Rome. Why wasn't that fact included at the end of Acts? Consider perhaps that Acts was written before Paul's death. This puts the record of Luke nearly at Jesus' lifetime. Many scholars hold that Matthew was written before Luke!
- The Bible clearly points to eyewitnesses thus rejecting the hearsay argument
 - The New Testament contains numerous embarrassing accounts of Jesus' followers
 - Corinthian church was deep in sexual sin
 - Peter fights with Paul
 - The Bible is not a carefully devised fable
 - Given the explicit historical details given that have only recently been verified, one can reasonably conclude the New Testament is a historical document not just hearsay

Bible as hearsay and personal finance

- Even ardent atheist are reluctant to suggest the Bible is simply hearsay—a compilation of rumors
- If the Bible is simply hearsay, then there is no compelling reason to consider its teaching related to personal finance
- We may apply a few proverbs to our leadership approach, but that is about all
- Without a biblical foundation, we simply must take the position of ownership as opposed to stewardship
- We would have to look elsewhere for guidance
- Interestingly, it is typically little children that can recognize the awesome truthfulness of the Bible and it could not be hearsay as illustrated in Figure 9.1.

Is the Bible promoting a heresy?

- Recall a heresy is a belief that is contrary to some religious doctrine
- Is the Christian worldview simply a heresy designed to attract folks away from Judaism to Christianity?
- From the outset, early Christian writers documented that Jesus Christ was born within a Jewish family and sought to fulfill the law

Matthew 5:17

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.

- Without the context of the Old Testament, much of the content of the New Testament is incoherent. Consider the following proclamation of John the Baptist.

John 1:29

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

- Within Old Testament doctrine, the sacrifice of lambs was to cover sin, not take it away
- John the Baptist's assertion is heretical and deeply incoherent, unless Jesus is the Son of God—a perfect sacrifice for our sins
- Jesus himself often asserted claims that would be deemed heretical and were often interpreted as such by those around him

John 10:30-31

³⁰I and the Father are one. ³¹The Jews picked up stones again to stone him.

- Jesus routinely asserts claims that seem mythical at best and heretical at worst
- C. S. Lewis, an English literature scholar and a person with deep knowledge of mythology, makes the following observation regarding Christianity and myth.

“Now as myth transcends thought, Incarnation transcends myth. The heart of Christianity is a myth which is also a fact. The old myth of the Dying God, without ceasing to be myth, comes down from the heaven of legend and imagination to the earth of history. It happens—at a particular date, in a particular place, followed by definable historical consequences. We pass from a Balder or an Osiris, dying nobody knows when or where, to a historical person crucified (it is all in order) under Pontius Pilate. By becoming fact it does not cease to be myth: that is the miracle. I suspect that men have sometimes derived more spiritual sustenance from myths they did not believe than from the religion they professed. To be truly Christian we must both assent to the historical fact and also receive the myth (fact though it has become) with the same imaginative embrace which we accord to all myths. The one is hardly more necessary than the other.”⁵

- Also, if heretical, why do Luke and Acts contain medical terms typical of physicians?
- Luke was in fact a physician. Why would you actually need a physician if crafting a heresy?

Direct manuscript evidence related to the New Testament (NT)

- John Rylands' (130 AD) - portions of John. This fragment destroyed a carefully developed theory by Baur that John was not written until about 160 AD.
- Bodmer Papyrus II (150-200 AD) - contains most of John. Keynon concludes based on this document and others, “No other ancient book has anything like such early and plentiful testimony to its text, and no unbiased scholar would deny that the text that has come down to us is substantially sound.”
- Codex Vaticanus (325-350 AD) - contains nearly all of the Bible.
- More than 15,000 existing copies of various ancient versions of the NT
- Historically, ancient literature was rarely translated into different languages
- The NT has shown up in Syriac, Greek, and Latin
- Syriac Versions: Believed to have been produced around 150-200 AD. There are now more than 350 extant manuscripts today from the 400's in Syriac Peshitta.
- Latin Versions: "E. A. Lowe shows paleographical marks of it having been copied from a second century papyrus." (Codex Babbensis which is in old Latin) Jerome produced the Latin Vulgate between 366-384 AD.

⁵C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock*, “Myth Became Fact,” William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI, 1970, p. 66-67.

Indirect manuscript evidence from early church leaders

- Early church leaders' writings "... are so extensive that the NT could virtually be reconstructed without the use of NT MS." Greenlee Dalrymple claims to have found every verse referenced except 11.
- Early church leaders include Clement of Rome (95 AD) (appointed by Peter), Tertullian (160-220 AD), and Irenaeus (130-202 AD)
- Irenaeus claims he "... had the preaching of the Apostles still echoing in his ears and their doctrine in front of his eyes."
- Irenaeus quotes from Matthew, Mark, Luke, Acts, I Corinthians, I Peter, Hebrews, and Titus. Tertullian quotes the NT more than 7,000 times, where 3,800 of which are from the Gospels),
- Ignatius (70-110 AD) quotes from Matthew, John, Acts, Romans and 11 other NT books
- Others who quote from the NT include:
 - Polycarp (70-156 AD) (a disciple of John)
 - Barnabas (70 AD)
 - Hermas (95 AD)
 - Tatian (170 AD)
 - Clement of Alexandria (150-212 AD) (2,400 quotes are from all but three books of NT)
 - Hippolytus (170-235) (1,300 references to NT)
 - Justin Martyr (133 AD)
 - Origen (185-254 AD) (compiled more than 6,000 works, quotes NT more than 18,000x)
 - Cyprian (died 258 AD) (quotes approximately 740 OT and 1,030 NT).
- According to Geisler and Nix, "... a brief inventory ... will reveal that there were some 32,000 citations of the NT prior to the time of the Council of Nicea (325 AD) (the time the "higher critics" claimed a heresy developed)"
- F. E. Peters states that "... the works that made up the Christians' NT were the most frequently copied and widely circulated books of antiquity."
- Manuscript evidence includes over 5,300 Greek, over 10,000 Latin Vulgates, over 9,300 other early versions in a variety of languages, and we have over 24,000 total manuscripts of at least portions of the NT which still exist today. The Iliad by Homer has only 643 manuscripts, the first complete text dating from the 13th century.

Bible as heresy and personal finance

- Heresy implies an explicit effort to conceal the truth
- As the resurrection is the central event of all of Christianity, its falsehood would negate the Christology found throughout the entire Bible
- The lack of eternity would render Bible-based personal finance pointless
- Fortunately, the abundance of historical documents as illustrated in Figure 9.2 give us warrant to reject the heresy argument.

Summary

- In this Chapter, we considered whether the Bible is just hearsay or actually heresy
- Found the hearsay argument is addressed in the Bible itself and rejected
- Rather than the New Testament being written in response to a cultural movement, we found it to be documenting empirically verifiable historical events
- Further, the Bible was not just a nasty heresy written in an attempt to manipulate a cultural movement

Key Bible Passages

Luke 1:1-4

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