

THE BIBLE AND MODERN SCIENCE

By

HENRY M. MORRIS, Ph.D.

CHAPTER FOUR -

The Bible and History

PROBABLY NO PARTS of the Bible have been more completely vindicated by modern discovery than those parts which deal with the history of the Jewish people and those nations with which they came in contact.

It was once the custom of the higher critics to attack almost everything mentioned in the Bible as unhistorical, written long after the supposed events took place or, as like as not, simply fabricated by the writer. Since the multitude of archaeological discoveries made within the past 75 years, however, the pendulum is swinging the other way and the Bible is regarded even by those who do not believe in its inspiration as an exceedingly trustworthy book from the historical standpoint.

It is well known that the earliest known civilizations of the world were those of Sumeria, Egypt, Babylonia, Assyria, and other countries in the region near the eastern shores of the Mediterranean.

A tremendous amount of research has been applied to the study of the histories of these lands by modern archaeologists and historians. Their findings occupy literally hundreds of volumes, and we cannot begin to consider all of them here. However, it would be interesting to look at a few of the more striking examples of the Bible's vindication by archaeology and related fields.

Some of the most interesting of the Babylonian and Egyptian discoveries have to do with the period before the flood.

In these and other countries have been discovered numerous stories of the creation, the fall, the antediluvian patriarchs, and the flood.

Many of these stories bear striking similarities to the Bible accounts and since many of them antedate the writing of Genesis by Moses, critics occasionally claim that he obtained his material from these sources and that consequently the Genesis record is merely legendary like the other stories.

However, a mere comparison of the majestic account in the Bible with the garbled and mythological nonsense of practically all these other stories is sufficient evidence that the record of these events as given in the Bible is incomparably superior to all other records combined, a fact which can be accounted for only on the basis of inspiration. It is only natural to suppose that some recollection of such important happenings as the creation and the flood would be handed down by word of mouth to all the descendants of Adam and Noah. And it is extremely

significant that in spite of their obviously legendary character, these spurious records show marked resemblance to the account given in the Bible.

It seems certain that these stories must, therefore, have a definite factual basis.

The story of the dispersion of the peoples after building the Tower of Babel is usually caviled at by Bible critics. Nevertheless, it is very likely that a part of the original tower is still standing. It has not been many years since what seemed to be the greatest of the Babylonian ziggurats was excavated. However, it was found from the Babylonian records that this tower was old during Babylon's heyday and had, in fact, been repaired and restored for use in her sacrificial worship.

The Greek historian, Herodotus, about 500 B.C., described the structure, which then consisted of a series of eight ascending towers, each one recessed in turn, with a spiral roadway running around it as a means of climbing to the top. At the very top was a great temple, which was used in the worship of Babylon's gods.

Babylonian legend had it that this tower originally had been built by Nimrod, which coincides with the Bible record. In fact, the region is still called Birsnimroud by the Arabs. This great structure had a height of something over 700 feet, of which several hundred still remain. If this tower is not actually the original Tower of Babel, it probably at least was meant to be a replica of it, as indeed may have been true of many of the other ancient Mesopotamian ziggurats.

It has been difficult to find direct archaeological evidence bearing on the early patriarchs of Israel before the time of Joshua.

This is, of course, explainable by the fact that Israel was not yet a nation; and it would be an extremely fortunate coincidence if relics of individuals such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, or Moses would be found. On the other hand there is quite a bit of collateral evidence which illumines the Biblical stories and proves that the descriptions of the countries, peoples, and general conditions of life during those times as given in the Bible are quite accurate and must have been written either by very trustworthy eyewitnesses or written under the inspiration of the HOLY SPIRIT.

For example, Abraham's boyhood home is mentioned in the Bible as Ur of the Chaldees. The location and the very existence of this place were at one time uncertain, but in recent years it has been discovered and fully explored.

Critics at one time claimed that the Pentateuch could not have been written by Moses because the art of writing was unknown when he was living. Discoveries in Ur and other places, however, have proved beyond all doubt that writing was well developed for at least many hundreds of years before even Abraham's time.

Furthermore, it is interesting here to note that the former "armchair theories" of the higher critics about the gradual evolution of culture, science, religion, etc., are gradually being demolished by each new archaeological discovery. Recent explorations at great numbers of these ancient cities have revealed over and over again that the very earliest discoverable civilizations were the highest, and that there was a constant degeneration in the arts and sciences as time went on. It has even been shown that their religion was originally monotheistic and later degraded into

polytheism, rather than the other way around, as formerly claimed.

The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah by the raining of fire and brimstone (sulphur) from the sky sounds much like a volcanic eruption, a supposition which is amply supported by an examination of the region formerly occupied by these cities, on the shores of the Dead Sea.

The large quantities of sulphur and bitumen, as well as the volcanic rocks and the sulphurous gases generated in the soil all point back to some tremendous holocaust of the past.

Even the case of Lot's wife becomes clearer in the light of these facts. It is likely that she lagged behind (the probable meaning of 'looked back') and was overcome in the catastrophe. There are huge beds of salt in the region, and it may be that she was buried by a mass of salt thrown in the air. The word translated "salt" does not necessarily denote sodium chloride, but might mean any crystalline chemical compound. It is conceivable that she was buried by the lava and later, through the years and by the ordinary forces of nature, became petrified or fossilized, thus actually turning into "salt."

This very thing is known to have happened to a great many individuals in the volcanic destruction of the Roman city of Pompeii. Furthermore, "archaeological explorations at the site prove definitely that the region was inhabited during the time of Abraham, but immediately thereafter became barren of inhabitants and remained so for about two thousand years.

The Hebrew captivity in Egypt, as well as the exodus are now, because of archaeological evidence, accepted as historical even by the critics, although they were formerly concluded to be legendary.

The ten plagues, although no directly corroborative evidence of them has yet been discovered, have attained added significance with the discovery that every one of them seemed particularly aimed at some phase of the religion of the Egyptians. The deities of the Nile, the goddesses of the frog, the fly, and the cattle, the gods of medicine, the elements, the sun, the fertility of the fields, and finally the goddess of birth, all suffered tremendous loss of prestige in the minds of the extremely polytheistic Egyptians because of the plagues of JEHOVAH. Archaeology, by thus revealing the religion of the Egypt of Moses' day, indirectly substantiates the Bible records and certainly endues them with greater meaning.

Concerning the wanderings of the Israelites in the wilderness little of a secular nature is known other than the fact that a people called Khabiri (possibly the Hebrews) began overrunning the countries of Canaan about this time. The conquest began with the crossing of the Jordan and the destruction of Jericho, both events being accomplished by means of miraculous help from GOD. The Bible relates how, when the priests bearing the ark of the covenant stepped to the Jordan's edge: "**... the waters which came down from above stood and rose up upon an heap, ... and the people passed over right against Jericho.**"

It is interesting that a similar thing has happened at least three other times in history, the last in 1927.

Each time it has been caused by an upstream landslide, which left the river bed below dry for

several hours. The Bible account could well describe a miraculously timed landslide and the resultant damming of the waters.

The story of the conquest of Jericho, which followed this crossing, has been completely vindicated by archaeology.

The walls of Jericho were found to have literally "**[fallen] down flat.**" It has been suggested that this was caused by an earthquake. Possibly so, but the event itself attests the truth of the Scriptures. Furthermore, it was found that the city itself had not been looted, as was the custom in those days, but burned, which further substantiates the Bible account.

Among the strongest of the peoples which the Hebrews had to face in the promised land were the Hittites. There are a great many references to these people in the Bible, but until the closing years of the nineteenth century, there was no external evidence that they ever existed.

For many years, the higher critics used the Hittite legend as one of their most telling blows against the inspiration of the Scriptures.

Archaeological scholarship, however, has long since revealed that these people constituted one of the most powerful and influential nations of antiquity, thus once more demonstrating the weakness of the critical position and the truth of the Bible. The same story might be told of Edom and the Edomites, who are mentioned time and again in the Bible, but were completely forgotten in secular history until the nineteenth century, when references to them were found in Egyptian and Assyrian monuments.

Finally, the splendidly preserved remains of their capital city, Petra, "the rock city," were discovered. Thus the critics, who had maintained the Edomites to be legendary, were again routed.

The very common critical view regarding the cruelty and injustice of JEHOVAH's instruction to the Israelites to exterminate the Canaanite inhabitants of the Promised Land must now be viewed in the light of archaeological discoveries relating to Canaanitish civilization and religion.

These discoveries have demonstrated that Canaan had degenerated into an area of unbridled wickedness and cruelty, including the extensive practice of child sacrifice, and accompanied by the grossest immoralities regularly practiced in the guise of religion.

Their influence on GOD's people was bound to be degenerating unless they were completely removed, and in fact history demonstrated it to be so when Israel failed to carry out GOD's command of extermination.

Many discoveries have also thrown light on the periods of the judges and the kings of Israel, all strongly supporting the historical accuracy of the Old Testament accounts.

King Solomon's great stables have been unearthed, for example, as well as a great copper-smelting furnace belonging to Solomon at his seaport of Ezion-Geber. During the later period of the divided kingdom, the Assyrian Empire was in its ascendancy and power, and many

discoveries in Assyrian archaeology also illumine and confirm the Biblical histories. The failure of Sennacherib to take Jerusalem from King Hezekiah, in spite of the seeming invincibility of his mighty army, is implied in one of the Assyrian's cylinders, unearthed at the site of his ancient capital, Nineveh. Hezekiah's pool and conduit, constructed during this time probably in anticipation of the coming Assyrian siege, have been found still intact beneath Jerusalem.

These are only a few of the great number of discoveries which have been made in the past century confirmatory of the accuracy and authenticity of the Old Testament histories. For a more detailed study of this subject, the reader should read one of the many recent conservative books on Biblical archaeology, such as those by Free, Unger, Wight, and others.

Problems still exist, of course, in the complete harmonization of archaeological material with the Bible, but none so serious as not to bear real promise of imminent solution through further investigation. It must be extremely significant that, in view of the great mass of corroborative evidence regarding the Biblical history of these periods, there exists today not one unquestioned find of archaeology that proves the Bible to be in error at any point. Truly this book is the Word of GOD!

We need to consider briefly the subject of the authenticity of the Old Testament writings.

It has long been one of the chief tenets of modernism that most of the canonical books of the Old Testament were written long after the events they purport to describe and usually by other than the traditional authors, and that, as a consequence, they contain many anachronisms and errors. There is no proof of an objective nature of this claim, and yet this claim is almost always made in a very dogmatic way as one of the proved results of modern scholarship.

In particular, the Pentateuch and the Book of Daniel have been maligned in this manner.

By a critical examination of the words, phrases, etc., in the first five books of the Bible, critics have come to the conclusion that these books were written by several different writers, probably at a period just before or just after the Babylonian exile, instead of by Moses.

This claim is made in spite of the fact that many of the New Testament writers and even JESUS Himself refer to these writings as of Mosaic authorship.

These men were much closer to the time of writing of the disputed books and were much better acquainted with their history than the modern critics. To deny the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch is to deny the deity of CHRIST. For if He was, as He claimed to be, the Son of GOD, surely He would not have spoken so frequently of Moses' writings as such, if Moses were not the author.

However, an unbiased examination of the books themselves surely must convince a reasonable person that they must have been written about the time of Moses. They abound with evidences of Egyptian influence.

Even in the very early parts of Genesis, which are commonly supposed by the critics to have been derived from the Babylonian and Sumerian legends, there are many words, roots, and phrases that are very clearly borrowed from the Egyptian language.

It is likely, however, that Moses drew on older Babylonian records for part of his material regarding the early patriarchs, since there are distinct linguistic evidences of such influence. However, this cannot, as claimed, be attributed to a later writer during the Babylonian exile, because the traces of Babylonian influence are really rather slight, especially when compared with the books that actually were written during or after the captivity, such as Daniel, Ezekiel, Ezra, and Nehemiah, which contain a language and style that throughout give unmistakable evidence of considerable Babylonian influence.

The story of Israel in Egypt, the Exodus, and the forty years in the wilderness are very greatly steeped in Egyptian influence, of both a linguistic and a cultural nature. There are no demonstrably Persian or late Babylonian words. On the other hand, there are a number of archaic Hebrew forms which were not in use at all at the time at which the critics claim the Pentateuch was written. It is occasionally claimed that parts of these books contain Aramaic or late Hebrew words. However, it has been demonstrated that the great majority of these words are really root words common to all Semitic languages.

In fact, on the critical theory, it is absolutely impossible to understand why such a large portion of the writings would have been taken up with details of the exodus and the wilderness wanderings.

For example, why did the supposed post-exilic writers take so much time and space to describe the minutest details of the construction of the tabernacle in the wilderness and the forms of worship to be used in connection with it? Most of the critics claim that the tabernacle never actually existed.

Finally, it is impossible to imagine the slightest reason why these writers would have gone to such great pains to deceive the people and clothe their writings with a spurious antiquity, claiming them to be the works of Moses. How was it possible that no one, down through all the centuries, seemed to have the slightest suspicion that these writings were not genuine works of Moses until the modern higher critics went to work on them?

It is truly amazing that the channel through which has come the highest code of morals in the world and the purest and sublimest conception of GOD should have been contaminated with intentional fraud at its source. If they were not really what they were represented to be, it seems quite impossible that the books could have been received as genuine at any time after that of Moses.

They contain detailed instructions as to laws and civil and ecclesiastical ordinances, which are presented as having been in force from the time of Moses, and of the institution and continued observance of the Passover, which according to the records, had been observed from the time of Moses.

Such a book, or laws, or priesthood, or ordinance could never have been accepted at a later date if they were not actually existing at that time, and were believed by the people to have been continually in force from the time of Moses.

Naturally, in a work of this nature, we cannot dwell upon the details of the evidence for and

against this critical theory of the authorship of the Pentateuch and, for that matter, other sections of the Old Testament as well. However, for the student who is interested in the subject, a wealth of literature is available. Every claim and dogmatism of the critics has been adequately answered and refuted by Christian scholars.

Let us briefly consider the Book of Daniel, however.

Probably not even the Books of Moses have been subjected to as much criticism and as many charges of spurious antiquity as has this book.

However, this was to be expected, because of the amazing prophecies in the book, most of which have already been fulfilled with meticulous accuracy.

Consequently, it is claimed that the Book of Daniel was written after the events predicted had already occurred, a position forced on the critics for the simple reason that, if the genuineness of Daniel were admitted, the fulfillment of its prophecies would constitute an incontrovertible proof of its supernatural inspiration and by inference would establish the fact that all of the Bible had been given by inspiration of GOD.

Some of these prophecies and their fulfillments will be discussed in the next chapter, but here we are concerned with the matter of the historical authenticity of Daniel.

The book purports to have been written over a rather long period of years, but all during the exile in Babylon. It is written partially in Aramaic and partially in Hebrew, those portions which especially concerned the captive Jews being in the latter language and those addressed especially to the Babylonians and their King Nebuchadnezzar in the former. However, the book contains three Greek words and this fact was used as the basis of the assertion of the higher critics that the book could not have been written until after the conquest of Babylon by Alexander the Great.

Archaeology, however, has proved beyond any doubt that there was extensive commerce between Greece and Babylon even before the time of Nebuchadnezzar and it is known that at least one of the questioned words (all three of which were the names of Greek musical instruments) was the name of an instrument which had been in more or less common use in Babylon for many years before the time of Daniel.

Not only did this "proof" backfire, but the existence in Daniel of eight Sumerian words would seem definitely to establish the time of writing as not later than Nebuchadnezzar's reign, for this language was never used after that and was almost a dead language at that time. Even the Hebrew language was no longer used after the captivity; so the fact that much of the book is written in Hebrew would imply that it was written before or during the captivity.

Considerable archaeological evidence has been brought to light that indirectly reveals the genuineness of the setting of the Book of Daniel in the Babylon of Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus.

Excavations on the site of ancient Babylon have unearthed a building, the inscriptions on which show that it was used for the instruction of captive princes and nobles in the learning of the Chaldeans, thus indicating that the treatment of Daniel and his three friends, by the Babylonians in such a gracious fashion at first was not at all foreign to the policies of that time, as formerly

claimed by the critics.

A huge furnace was discovered, with inscriptions to the effect that it was used to burn those who refused to worship the gods of the Babylonians, which shows that the story of the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace had a basis, at least, of fact.

A large pit was discovered which was used for feeding to the wild beasts those men who disobeyed the decrees of the king. There was even a list of the ones who had been slain there, and Daniel's name was not among them. An inscription was discovered made by Nebuchadnezzar himself containing a strange story which many archaeologists are convinced corresponds to the period of the king's madness described by Daniel.

The most serious criticism of Daniel has lain in its supposed historical inaccuracies.

According to Daniel, Belshazzar was king of Babylon at the time of the conquest of the Persians by Cyrus and was slain on the night of his drunken feast when the Persian army under Darius the Mede captured Babylon. But secular history said that Nabonidus was king of Babylon at the time and, furthermore, that he was not slain but carried away captive by the Persians. Of course, the critics made the most of this very obvious error, maintaining that Belshazzar was merely a nonexistent person invented by some later writer who was unfamiliar with history.

But, through the years a great abundance of archaeological evidence has been accumulated which establishes beyond all doubt that Belshazzar actually did exist, although all historians but Daniel seemed to have forgotten all about him.

Belshazzar, it is now known, was the son of Nabonidus and was a sort of regent over Babylon, serving in the place of his father, who was away from the city at the time of the Persian conquest. In other words, both Nabonidus and Belshazzar were kings of Babylon, in a very real sense, at that time.

Archaeology has also revealed that Belshazzar actually was killed in his palace by the Persians on that fateful night.

The Book of Isaiah also contains many marvelous prophecies, which were later fulfilled.

Therefore, it has been commonly divided by the critics into at least two divisions, assigned to different authors at different periods of history, in spite of an abundance of external testimony and evidence against this notion. JESUS quoted from both of the two main divisions of Isaiah, and attributed both to the one prophet Isaiah.

The discovery in 1948 of a very early copy of the book of Isaiah has been given wide publicity in the popular press.

This manuscript has been dated at no later than 100 B.C., which is earlier by many centuries than any other extant Old Testament manuscripts.

In view of this, it is very significant that the manuscript is in all important particulars identical with the received Isaiah text, bearing a striking testimony to the care and accuracy with which

the Hebrew scribes copied and transmitted the Scriptures. Most of the few differences that do exist are merely matters of spelling, and there are no discrepancies of any real significance at all.

There is no indication whatever that the scribe regarded the book as being subdivisible into two main parts, composed by different authors.

Since this first discovery, many other manuscripts have been found in caves around the Dead Sea, probably deposited there by a pre-Christian sect known as the Essenes. These manuscripts contain almost the entire Old Testament, and are all essentially identical with the received text, in spite of the fact that the oldest copies previously available are dated some 900-1000 years later than these "Dead Sea Scrolls."

We could occupy several chapters with other details of how the Old Testament has been and is being vindicated in a most wonderful way by the finds of archaeology. But let us consider briefly some of the discoveries of modern research in archaeology and textual criticism which bear on the historicity and trustworthiness of the New Testament.

Although it was formerly suggested by some critics that JESUS was entirely a legendary character, in recent years such a mass of evidence to the contrary has been compiled that no informed person longer doubts that JESUS actually lived and was at least a very great religious leader and teacher.

Numerous inscriptions and papyri have been discovered that either mention the name of CHRIST as the leader and founder of the sect of the Christians, or that simply refer to the Christians and their amazingly rapid growth. Many of these date from the first or very early second centuries, and it is impossible to suppose that they all resulted from the devotion of a group of fanatics to a legendary character.

It has also been well established now that the books of the New Testament are all completely authentic from the standpoint of authorship and antiquity.

It was formerly charged that many of the books, if not all, were written long after the time of JESUS by men other than the traditional authors. This indictment was aimed not so much at the Pauline writings, however, as at the Gospels, especially that of John, and at the Acts. Especially in the latter book, it was long supposed that there were numerous gross historical inaccuracies and that, in fact, the whole tenor of the book belonged to a much later time than days of the Apostles. However, archaeology has very completely refuted this claim.

Practically all the towns and cities mentioned in Acts or in the Gospels have been located, with the finds at all these places being of such nature as to wholly vindicate the historical accuracy of the writers.

There are many remains of the architecture of Herod throughout Palestine, although his temple in Jerusalem was completely destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D.

Well-preserved relics of a synagogue have been explored on the site of Capernaum. It is very possible that this was the very synagogue in which JESUS occasionally preached. Of course, there are a great many sites and structures that are connected by tradition with JESUS and the

apostles, but in most cases these are not susceptible of either proof or disproof.

Miniature images of Diana, such as described by Luke in the Acts, have been unearthed in Grecian cities. An altar was found dedicated to "**the unknown GOD**," probably similar to the one that Paul made the subject of his Athens sermon. The remains of the Areopagus, or Mars' hill, from which Paul delivered this sermon may still be seen.

Inscriptions have been found in great abundance, some of which seem to contain names of people actually mentioned in the New Testament.

Many Roman coins have been found, including the Roman penny with Caesar's likeness which JESUS observed and which prompted Him to caution His questioners to "**Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto GOD the things that are GOD's.**" Inscriptions have been found describing the Roman census, which was taken, it seems, about every 13 years. During one of these, Luke states, JESUS was born. Criticism long maintained that this was a certain historical error because there was no record of any Roman census at a date that early. Later discoveries have revealed otherwise, however, and it is now known that the census had been an established custom for many years previous.

All of these finds, as well as many others, date from Apostolic times, and give the historical portions of the New Testament a definite vindication.

Even when attacked from the linguistic side, the New Testament has emerged victorious.

The oldest New Testament manuscripts extant were written in Greek, but in a form of Greek unknown to classical literature. A great many words were ascribed by the critics to later origin. However, it is known now, from the many finds of papyri inscriptions, dating from the first century and earlier, that this peculiar language, now known as koine Greek, was the universal language of the common people of the Mediterranean world during the time of CHRIST and the Apostles.

The book of John has been subjected to great criticism through the centuries, probably because of its superb presentation of JESUS as the Son of GOD, through whom alone men can be saved.

Modern critics have dated its composition at some three or four centuries after CHRIST, because, they decided, its supposedly peculiar theology belonged to that period rather than to the first century. However, many evidences exist, from early second century writers who refer to or quote from John's Gospel, that it was composed no later than 95 A.D. and by John himself.

A papyrus fragment of a part of John's Gospel was found in 1935, which has been dated by all authorities as at least before 150 A.D.

This has demonstrated conclusively that this Gospel could not have been written later than about 100 A.D., which has always been maintained by the Church.

Similar papyrus evidence has come to light demonstrating the first-century origin of the other Gospels.

There remains, however, the question of whether the events described in the books, especially those involving miracles, ever really took place or were invented by the writers as aids to the spread of the new religion. Along with this question may be placed the question as to whether the character and life of JESUS was really as perfect as represented.

It will surely be admitted that all the facts of the New Testament record - the virgin birth, the miracles, the transfiguration, the sinless life - stand or fall with the truth or falsity of JESUS' resurrection from the dead. If JESUS died and rose again, which is the central and foundational belief of all true Christianity, then He must in truth have been very GOD, and there remains no rational difficulty in believing the other things, which upon analysis in the light of His resurrection become, in fact, quite necessary.

Well, did JESUS of Nazareth rise from the dead?

To deny it means to deny on a priori grounds the specific testimony of six of the eight New Testament writers. The other two definitely imply their belief in and knowledge of the resurrection. As we have seen, these witnesses are all established as to date and authenticity.

The descriptions of the resurrection morning and the later appearances of CHRIST in the four Gospels and in Acts do not have the character of manufactured evidence. The differences in the accounts (which, however, are not contradictory but complementary) alone prove this.

The different accounts would almost necessarily have been the same if the writers had connived on the tale. The apostle Paul acknowledged even by his critics to have been a man of great intellect and discernment, states that he was instantaneously changed from a Pharisee of the Pharisees to a Christian at the sight of the resurrected CHRIST. His great life and works prove the genuineness of his conversion. He states, in his first letter to the Corinthians, that more than 500 people saw the risen Lord on one occasion, many of whom were still living when he wrote.

There can be little doubt that JESUS actually was crucified and was dead when He was placed in the tomb.

The Roman soldier thrust a spear into His side to assure himself that He really was dead, and saw blood mixed with water flow out, evidence of a hemorrhage in the heart cavity. He was placed in a tomb, covered from head to foot with graveclothes and a Roman guard was set to watch the sealed tomb. It is unthinkable that He could merely have been in a sort of coma and could have recovered sufficiently to have removed the graveclothes and walked out of the tomb. Yet, it is also a fact of history that the tomb was empty early on the first day of the week following His crucifixion.

The Pharisees and the Sadducees would certainly have produced the body if they could have done so in order to halt the rapidly growing Christian faith. And this rapid growth (there were over 5,000 converts in one day at Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost) can only be explained by the fact that these people believed that the tomb of CHRIST was empty and also, for that matter, that many had seen Him since His resurrection.

But it might be argued that the disciples had actually stolen the body of JESUS from the tomb, as

the Pharisees bribed the soldiers to testify. Of course, even if the soldiers of the watch were sleeping on guard, that very fact would have made it impossible for them to see the disciples steal the body; so no real proof could be offered.

Besides, there is an overpowering moral and spiritual question involved. It is unthinkable that the greatest spiritual force and power of righteousness that the world has ever seen could have been founded on an intentional deception.

The very change in character of the disciples themselves gives the lie to this blasphemous charge. Men who had been weak, vacillating, and doubting, suddenly became bold, powerful, Spirit-filled proclaimers of the Gospel of salvation through faith in the risen CHRIST. They had nothing of a material sort to gain from any such deception. Instead they were persecuted and regarded as mad fanatics, and most of them were finally put to death in the great Herodian and Roman persecutions. The uniform testimony of even the enemies of Christianity down through the centuries has been that the Apostles and the thousands of other Christians that have been slain for their faith in CHRIST all died gloriously and unafraid. Men do not die like this for something they know to be a lie.

The very existence in the world of the Christian institutions of the Church, the observance of Sunday, and the observance of Easter, all testify to the literal truth of the physical resurrection of CHRIST from the dead.

All of these institutions can be traced back to about 30-40 A.D. Something extraordinary must have happened at that time to give them a start. Sabbath observance, for example, was one of the most rigidly adhered to of the Jewish laws and customs. Most of the early Christians had been very devout Jews. How is it possible, apart from the resurrection, to explain the sudden change from Saturday to Sunday for the religious services of these people?

The impact of JESUS CHRIST upon the world's history in the past 1900 years is itself a unique testimony to His own deity.

There are some people who have thought this influence was harmful, citing as evidence certain evil practices or doctrines promulgated or condoned by certain segments of organized Christianity so-called, especially during the Middle Ages and Renaissance period.

But in spite of these things, which in most cases have been shown to be chargeable to men or groups who are not truly Christian in the Biblical sense (true Christians, of course, according to Scripture are those who have received the LORD JESUS by faith as their Saviour from sin), the great majority of men who have honestly thought on the matter have recognized that the impress of CHRIST and His followers upon the world has been ennobling and uplifting to a degree far surpassing that of all other teachers and philosophers.

The souls and lives of numberless men and women have been redeemed from sin, fear, despair, and misery, to peace, holiness, and love.

The morality of whole continents has been purified and elevated by the Christian Gospel.

Schools, hospitals, and benevolent institutions of all kinds for the alleviation of suffering and

advance of true knowledge have been by-products of Christianity by cumulated thousands. JESUS CHRIST has been the inspiration and theme for the world's greatest music, art, and literature.

That all this, and much more, should result from the life and teaching of an obscure Jewish carpenter (such as JESUS of Nazareth was, if He were human only) would be more miraculous and inconceivable than that He should be, as He claimed, GOD's only and eternal Son, become man for the purpose of redeeming man.

Humanly, He was born in a stable in a small village, then was brought up in another village that was despised even by His Jewish countrymen, who themselves were then and have ever since been despised and often hated by the other peoples of the world.

He had little formal education, no obvious cultural talents, no financial position and no political stature.

He taught a small, motley, unpromising group of followers His doctrines, and made seemingly strange and impossible assertions and promises.

Then, after only three and a half years of such teaching, He was unjustly crucified and died as a common criminal on a Roman cross.

Yet it was this Man who made statements which, if He were only a man, must immediately have stamped Him a preposterous liar or a mad fanatic. For example, He said on one occasion: **"I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life"** (John 8:12).

If any mere man should ever say such a thing, it would immediately be interpreted by most sensible people as colossal conceit or even rank madness, especially if his human circumstances were those of JESUS.

Yet the amazing thing is that for 2,000 years this statement coming from Him has sounded natural and true and trustworthy, and in fact has been demonstrated to be a marvelously fulfilled prophecy. For 2,000 years He has been the light of the world, inspiring all those institutions, individuals, and motives which have most contributed to all that is worth while in our present world. Those who have followed Him have not walked in darkness, but have had the light of life, and there are millions upon millions who have testified so. Many have willingly and gladly followed Him into places of hardness, even death, with no motive except love for Him, who died that they might have everlasting life.

It was also He who said: **"Upon this rock [that is, upon that belief in Himself as the Son of GOD, as just confessed by Peter], I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it"** (Matthew 16:18). This is also quite a ridiculous statement if made by one who was only a man, but the centuries have revealed its prophetic realism.

Against the Church of JESUS CHRIST (not an ecclesiastical organization, but the invisible body of those individuals who have shared Peter's confession of faith and have taken CHRIST into

their hearts as SAVIOUR and LORD) have been hurled all the weapons of destruction that Hell could conceive - the force of empires, relentless and bloody persecution, intellectual rationalism which is even more deadly - and worst of all, the great burden of sin and indifference in the Church itself.

And yet they have not prevailed against it, even as He promised.

And again, He said: "**Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away**" (Matthew 24:35).

What a preposterous, presumptuous, outrageous claim for any man to make! But now, in the twentieth century, more than a few are fearing the earth's imminent destruction in atomic warfare. Biblical signs of the nearing end of the age are numerous. Yet JESUS' words are more widely distributed and believed by more people than ever before. More books, by far, have been written about Him and His words than those of any other man.

Through the centuries men have acclaimed Him as the world's greatest teacher and its most perfect man.

In the light of all this what reasonable conclusion is possible but that He is all that He claimed, and can and will fulfill all His marvelous promises to those who believe on Him?

The very center of His mission, His teaching, and His Gospel was the redemption of man from sin, through His own sacrificial, atoning death for man's sin.

The completion of all this is signaled and guaranteed by His bodily resurrection from the dead, which has been declared again and again, by men trained and competent in the analysis of evidence, to be the best-demonstrated fact of all ancient history.

Thus, the Christian worships not a dead prophet or teacher or leader, but the living Son of GOD, whose bodily presence at the right hand of the FATHER in Heaven is affirmed in Scripture, and whose spiritual presence in the Christian's own heart offers further and final daily attestation to the great fact of CHRIST's resurrection from the dead.

~ end of chapter 4 ~
