**4 -- The Historical Reliability of the Bible**

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[1] The Historical Reliability of the Bible

[2] So far in this series, we have noted that the Bible is unique in many ways.

[3] It claims to be an inspired revelation from the God who speaks and acts in history.

[4] And its message has been handed down accurately from generation to generation throughout the centuries.

[5] In this presentation, we will look at the historical reliability of the Bible.

[6] The Bible contains many historical references which can be cross-checked with other historical sources. We will look at some specific examples.

[7] Many times, when it has been suggested that the Bible is historically inaccurate, ancient historical records have been discovered that disprove these claims.

[8] When a collection of cuneiform tablets from the ancient Mesopotamian city of Nuzi was found, scholars began to learn a lot about the details of domestic life in that time and place. They noticed interesting similarities between these details and the biblical stories involving patriarchs—like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

[9] There were similarities in personal names, the movements of peoples, political alliances, religious ideas and practices, and especially social customs.

[10] Giving a birthright to an eldest son is mentioned several times in the Bible and was widespread in the ancient Near East. / There are also examples of a son losing this privilege for a serious offense against the family (Gen 35:22 Gen 49:3-4).

[11] Including a female slave as part of a dowry was well known in the ancient Near East, / and sometimes the woman was given to the husband to produce children, in cases where the wife was unable to have children.

[12] A father forbidding a prospective son-in-law from taking a second wife in place of his daughter is found regularly in ancient marriage contracts.

[13] These are just three examples of social customs from the Bible that have been documented in contemporary historical records.

[14] Next we will look at three other examples of the Bible’s historical accuracy.

[15] The Bible mentions a Babylonian king named Belshazzar. During a great feast for his nobles, he saw the famous “handwriting on the wall” and had to call Daniel in to read it. / Two of Daniels visions were dated in the first and third years of Belshazzar’s reign.

[16] For many years, there was no evidence of Belshazzar’s existence outside the Bible. Eventually, however, many details of his life and reign have since appeared in the historical records.

[17] These records show that Belshazzar’s father Nabonidus spent ten of his seventeen years as king about 450 miles away from Babylon, with Belshazzar ruling in his place in Babylon. / A cuneiform chronicle records that Nabonidus had “entrusted the kingship into his hand, / and there is evidence of oaths sworn in both names. / This would also explain why Belshazzar only offered Daniel the third place in the kingdom—because Belshazzar, himself, was only in second place).

[18] A similar example involves the existence of the Hittites. Hittites are mentioned nearly 50 times in the Old Testament. / The Lord promised to give Abraham the land of the Hittites, / and they are mentioned again as one of the Canaanite nations God promises to displace in favor of the Israelites.

[19] Abraham purchased the cave of Machpelah as a burial place for Sarah from Ephron the Hittite. / Esau married two Hittite wives. / And Uriah—husband of Bathsheba—whom David murdered, was a Hittite.

[20] Solomon imported horses and chariots from Egypt and exported them to the Hittite kings. / and the Kings of the Hittites are mentioned along with the Kings of Egypt by Israel’s enemies whom God had frightened.

[21] For a long time, there was no evidence outside of the Bible for the Hittites, causing some people to think they had never existed. / Since then, however, the Hittite nation was discovered in what is now Turkey. Here’s how it happened…

[22] Hieroglyphs in Asia Minor attracted the attention of travelers and researchers. / After examining them in person, one scholar suggested they were of Hittite origin / and identified the mountainous area north of Mesopotamia and the Anatolian peninsula as the lands of the Hittites.

[23] In 1887 more than 350 letters were found in Egypt. / These cuneiform tablets contained information about the Hittites / and even a letter of congratulation from a Hittite king to an Egyptian when he became king.

[24] In 1906, Dr. Hugo Winckler began excavating the ruins of a great civilization in Turkey, which turned out to be the ancient Hittite capital of Hattusa. / He discovered a royal archive with more than 10,000 cuneiform tablets, which confirmed that Anatolia was, in fact, the land of the Hittites. / From this discovery, he was able to publish a partial list of Hittite kings. / As scholars deciphered the Hittite language, they learned much about the Hittite civilization.

[25] Among the discoveries in the royal archive was the Hittite account of the famous Battle of Kadesh, fought between Ramses II of Egypt and the Hittite Empire, and the Treaty signed afterward by the two kings. The Egyptian copy of the treaty was found on a wall of the great Karnak Temple.

[26] This evidence of the existence of the Hittites once again demonstrated the historical reliability of the Bible.

[27] The Bible mentions camels in several stories about the Patriarchs. / The Egyptian Pharaoah gave Abram sheep, oxen, donkeys, and camels. / And Abraham’s servant, Eliezer, asked Rebekah to water his camels.

[28] Jacob had large flocks of camels (Gen 30:43), / put his wives and children on camels when they left Haran (Gen 31:17), / and sent a gift of 30 milking camels and their colts to his brother Esau (Gen 32:15.

[29] The Ishmaelites who purchased Joseph from his brothers had camels loaded with goods to take to Egypt

[30] Until recently, some scholars believed that these references to camels in the stories about the patriarchs were “anachronistic.” / Anachronistic means something that is not in its correct historical time. / They claimed that camels had not been domesticated at the time of Abraham

[31] However, more recently, evidence for the early domestication of camels has been found.

[32] In 1998, a small group from Andrews University went to the Wadi Nasib—which means “the valley of the stone altar” …

[33] …to view the inscriptions on the vertical face of a large rock.

[34] After examining and photographing the inscriptions they had come to study…

[35] … archaeologist Randy Younker stepped back to look at the rest of the rock and noticed a number of petroglyphs found on the same rock near the inscriptions, including a couple of camels that were presented as walking caravan style.

[36] The camels were quite distinctive, with their long necks, large heads, and single humps very easy to make out. What made the camel petroglyphs even more interesting was the presence of human figures. One man appears behind the lead camel, and another appears leading the trailing camel.

[37] Using evidence for human activity in the area, clues about the sequence of rock engravings on the cliff face, and evidence from the inscriptions, Dr. Younker concluded that a reasonable date for the camel petroglyphs was about 1500 B.C. / This discovery adds to the growing body of evidence showing that camels were domesticated sooner than some scholars had thought. This would mean that when the Old Testament describes Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob using camels as pack and riding animals, it is not anachronistic at all. / Instead, it accurately represents the use of camels at that time in history.

[38] Another interesting piece of evidence related to the historical reliability of the Bible involves the defeats and failures of its heroes. In the historical records of ancient world empires, it was common to leave out defeats and personal faults of the kings.

[39] In contrast, the Bible does not “gloss over Israel’s defeats in battle nor the moral faults of its historical figures. / There are numerous examples in the Bible of national defeat when Israel failed to trust God. / Jacob’s deceptions and David’s adultery and murder are truthfully recorded.

[40] Biblical history is actually more “true to life” than the historical writings of surrounding nations.

[41] To summarize: We have looked at several lines of evidence that point to the historical reliability of Scripture. There are numerous examples of social customs in secular historical records that parallel stories in the Bible about the patriarchs.

[42] And there are numerous examples where suggestions that the Bible is historically inaccurate have been disproved by newly uncovered evidence.

[43] In addition, instead of glossing over defeats and failures like other ancient records, the Bible accurately portrays events in the lives of God’s people.

[44] In his book on the reliability of the Old Testament, Kenneth Kitchen says this: “We have a consistent level of good, fact-based correlations right through from about 2000 B.C. down to 400 B.C. In terms of general reliability—and much more could have been instanced than there was room for here—the Old Testament comes out remarkably well, so long as its writings and writers are treated fairly and evenhandedly, in line with independent data, open to all.”

[45] Similarly, in his book about the reliability of the New Testament, Paul Barnett describes numerous ways “in which we are able to objectively crosscheck historical data from source to source with respect to Jesus and Christian origins. . . . At many points of historical importance about Jesus and Christian beginnings we have not one but several independent sources, not all of them sympathetic to Jesus. If we accept the historicity of the Jewish War on the grounds of independent sources that are able to be crosschecked, it is inconsistent to doubt the essential historicity of Jesus and the early church.”

[46] In our next presentation, we will look in more detail at another interesting piece of evidence about the historical reliability of the Bible—the seeming discrepancies in the biblical numbers of the Hebrew kings—a problem that has perplexed Bible scholars for centuries.

[47] The following sources have been used in this presentation.