

**What is History?
How Should
Believers View
History?
By
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Introduction

Even a novice student of history is familiar with George Santayana's famous quote, "those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."¹ While many are familiar with Santayana's statement, few have given it much thought beyond its common application to convince high school history students that history is important. However, if one subjects the contents of this quote to critical analysis it demonstrates why the information in this essay is critical for believers to consider.

Santayana's statement encapsulates one of history's great debates regarding the philosophical nature of time itself. Is time and therefore history cyclical like Hinduism and indigenous religions teach, or linear possessing both a beginning and ending toward which humanity is advancing? A thoughtful reading of Santayana highlights the following paradox; history is both cyclical and linear. Implicit within Santayana's comment is the notion that if humanity forgets about their past mistakes, their forgetfulness will condemn the species to a cyclic fate of revisiting past mistakes. Conversely, cyclical reoccurrence can be avoided and linear progress continued by acknowledging past mistakes thereby allowing mankind to avoid the same missteps in the present as well as future.

Recent months have seen much discussion amongst grace believers regarding philosophical views of history. In April 2009 Brother Richard Jordan taught a series of seminars entitled *Welcome to Winter* in which he argued for a seasonal view of history. The life of a nation follows the changing seasonal patterns (winter, spring, summer, fall) thereby establishing a cyclical paradigm of history, according to Jordan. Brother Jordan married Biblical teaching with the seminal historical work of William Strauss and Neil Howe, authors of *Generations: The History of America's Future* and *The Fourth Turning*, to argue for a cyclical approach to history.

While seasonality is clearly observable in history, the acceptance of cyclicity at the expense of linear progression leaves the believer with an incomplete historical paradigm. Mid-Acts Grace Believers utilize a strict linear model when teaching how to rightly divide the Word of Truth. When we speak about how God has worked in the past (time past), how God is working in the present (but now), and how God will work in the future (ages to come), we are utilizing a strictly linear view of history. Time originated in Genesis 1 and is advancing forward in linear fashion toward a prophesied end, the establishment of the new heavens and new earth. When the Dispensation of the Fullness of Time arrives the purpose for which God created time will have been fulfilled. One could argue that mid-Acts dispensationalists are the most linear thinkers around.

How then do we reconcile the cyclical with the linear? Is their room in our linear dispensational understanding of time for seasonality, and if so where and how does it fit? Herein lies the goal for the current volume, to reconcile cyclical and linear historical concepts thereby developing a more complete and functional paradigm of history. Second, we will tackle recent attacks on the objectivity of history in an attempt to

¹ George Santayana, *The Life of Reason, Volume 1*, 1905.

demonstrate how Biblical Christianity is predicated on the notion of objective history. Finally, we will discuss the historical reliability of the Biblical documents themselves. The Gospel of Grace is based upon the objective historical reality of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. Any attack on the knowability of history is an assault upon our faith. Grace believers need to be equipped to answer those who would seek to distort history for the furtherance of their own agendas.

Three Views of Time: Dots, Circles, and Lines

Generally speaking there are three theories of time chaotic, cyclical and linear. According to William Strauss and Neil Howe, authors of *The Fourth Turning: What the Cycles of History Tell Us About America's Next Rendezvous with Destiny*, chaotic time was the dominant view of primitive man.² As history unfolded changes in how humanity viewed time occurred. Ancient and traditional civilizations replaced chaotic time with a cyclical paradigm while modern Western societies particularly America, have conceptualized time in linear terms, according to Strauss and Howe.³

Before we can construct a workable historical model, we must first understand the differences in how time and therefore history have been conceptualized. These divergent views regarding time can be summarized by looking at three geometric shapes: dots, circles and lines. Please consider the following explanations of each model along with their corresponding illustrations.

Chaotic Time = Dots

According to the chaotic view of time, human events are random resulting in the notion that history has no path. As a result, any attempt to impute meaning or causal linkages between events is futile. "This was the first intuition of aboriginal man, for whom change in the natural world was utterly beyond human control or comprehension."⁴ Chaotic time can be compared to a bunch of random dots on a piece of paper. Without lines connecting the points they remain random and meaningless in relation to each other. The notion of pathless time can still be found in many eastern religions. For example, Buddhism teaches when one reaches Nirvana, the religions ultimate goal, he is free from any connection to space, time, or selfhood.⁵

Despite the endurance of chaotic time in some religious worldviews this model possesses serious shortcoming as a historical paradigm. First, chaotic time's disregard for cause and effect relationships dissolves society's connective tissue. Without cause and effect, people cannot be held morally culpable for their poor choices or to any system of moral or societal obligations. Even Buddhists who aspire to attain a state where time is meaningless are nevertheless bound to an orderly world of cause and effect in this life through the doctrine of karma.⁶ Consequently, chaotic time has never gained much traction as an explanatory historical model.⁷

² William Strauss and Neil Howe. *The Fourth Turning: What the Cycles of History Tell Us About America's Next Rendezvous with Destiny*. (New York: Broadway Books, 1997), 8.

³ Ibid., 8.

⁴ Ibid., 8.

⁵ Robert S. Ellwood and Barbara A. McGraw. *Many Peoples, Many Faiths: Woman and Men in the World Religions*. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2005), 138.

⁶ Strauss and Howe. *The Fourth Turning*. 8.

⁷ Ibid., 8.

Cyclical Time = Circles

From the perspective of human viewpoint, eventually ancient civilizations linked observable natural cycles such as lunar months and solar years with related cycles of human activity.⁸ Strauss and Howe offer the following explanation of how cyclical thinking conquered the randomness of chaotic time in classical societies. They write:

Cyclical time conquered chaos by repetition, by the parent or hunter or farmer performing the right deed at the right moment in the perpetual circle, much as an original god or goddess performed a similar deed during time's mystical circle. Eventually, great cycles came to mark the duration of kingdom and prophecies, to coming of heroes and shamans, and the aging of lives, generations, and civilizations. Cyclical time is endless, yet also endlessly completed and renewed, propelled by elaborate rituals resembling the modern seasonal holidays.⁹

As the name implies, cyclicity is best diagramed with a circle representing the doctrine of Eternal Return. Eternal Return is the notion that the universe has been recurring and will continue to recur in a similar form for an infinite number of times.¹⁰

Unlike the chaotic view, cyclical thinking enabled classical civilizations to adopt a moral and legal dimension. As a result, present generations possessed a mechanism whereby they could compare their life experiences with those in previous generations. While cyclical time offers apparent advantages over chaotic time as an explanatory model it still offers no explanation for where time and history are headed. For this reason pure cyclicity alone is unacceptable for Bible believers because Scripture clearly teaches that time is advancing forward towards a prophesied climax.

Linear Time = Lines

Beginning with Judaism a new paradigm for understanding time began to emerge. Driven by theological ideas time and history were straightened out into a model that possessed an absolute beginning as well as an absolute end. "Time begins with a fall from grace; struggles forward in an intermediate sequence of trials, failures, revelations, and divine interventions; and then ends with redemption and reentry into the kingdom of God."¹¹ Initially, linearism struggled to gain a foothold in the ancient world: however, with the onset of the Protestant Revolution linearism became the predominant historical paradigm in Western Europe and eventually the United States.

The great achievement of linear time has been to endow mankind with a purposeful confidence in its own self-improvement. "A linear society defines explicit

⁸ Ibid., 8.

⁹ Ibid., 8.

¹⁰ Mark T. Gilderhus. *History and Historians: A Historiographical Introduction*. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000), 51.

¹¹ Ibid., 9.

moral goals (justice, equality) or material goals (comfort, abundance) and then sets out deliberately to attain them. When those goals are reached, people feel triumphant; when they aren't new tactics are applied."¹² Consequently, the Industrial Revolution cemented linearism as the preferred historical paradigm. In fact, it was during the Industrial period, that Marxian philosophy described the future of humanity without God. According to Karl Marx, history would end with the dictatorship of the proletariat rather than righteous governance of Jesus Christ in heaven and on earth as the Christian view of history teaches.

Thus, having ruled out chaotic time and pure cyclical time alone as workable models, in the next chapter we will focus our attention on the details of both the cyclical and linear views of history as well as begin exploring how they might be combined into a single workable paradigm.

¹² Ibid., 11.

A Brief Look at the Cyclical and Christian Views of History

How to conceptualize history falls within the domain of historiography. For those unfamiliar with the term, historiography is the branch of the historical discipline that studies the history of historical writing.¹³ Simply stated, historiography traces the developments in historical writing and conceptualization throughout time. Mark T. Gilderhus, author of *History and Historians: A Historiographical Introduction*, echoes one of the conclusions reached in the previous chapter, that chaotic time is not a workable historical model. Generally, all historical writing fits into one of the following three schemata: cyclical, providential, or progressive, according to Gilderhus.¹⁴ While the providential and progressive views are similar in that they view history as linear progression along which time moves forward from beginning to end, they view history's impetus differently. In the providential view, divine guidance was the cause, and in the progressive view, natural or metaphysical forces were the impetus.¹⁵ Since the first Greek historians set pen to paper all written history has been either cyclical or linear in terms of philosophy of history.

The Greeks and Cyclical Thinking

Many historians view the Greeks as the first practitioners of history in an organized sense. The Greek historian Herodotus is frequently referred to as the father of history. This conclusion is due in large part to the fact that other ancient civilizations such as the Egyptians, Sumerians, Assyrians, and Hittites, left artifacts recounting the deeds of great men but showed little appreciation for the effect of one event upon another and the interrelationship between them.¹⁶ It was their view of time as cyclical that accounts for the lack of attention to cause and effect. For the ancients, time and history were rooted in observation - things occurred, went away, and then recurred, much in the fashion of days, nights, and seasons. Consequently, the familiar and predictable patterns of nature became a way of organizing the unfamiliar and unpredictable happenings in the human world.¹⁷

The consistency of cyclical patterns is quite prominent in Hinduism and Buddhism. The wheel of life represents an endless cycle of birth, life, and death from which one seeks liberation. Native American tribes, such as the Hopi, Inca, Maya, and Aztec civilizations of North and South America who lived in complete isolation from Africa, Europe, and Asia similarly regarded time as cyclical repeating ages that every being of the universe experiences between birth and extinction.¹⁸ In ancient Egypt, the scarab (or dung beetle) was viewed as a sign of the eternal renewal and reemergence of life, a reminder of the life to come.¹⁹ Greek philosophies such as Stoicism and philosophers such as Empedocles and Zeno of Citium taught the cyclical doctrine of

¹³ Gilderhus. *History and Historians: A Historiographical Introduction.*, 15.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁸ *Time* <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Time>.

¹⁹ *Eternal Return* http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eternal_return.

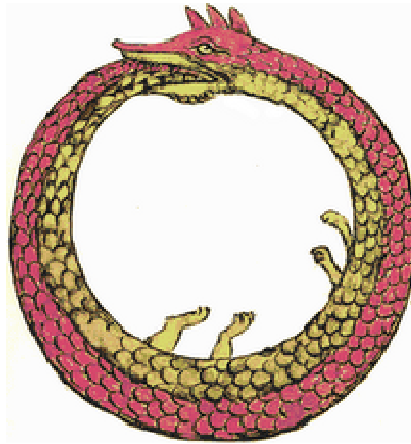
eternal return. Norse mythology bears signs of cyclical thinking as evidenced by the symbol of Ouroboros, the snake or dragon eating its own tail, symbolizing a belief in eternal recurrence.²⁰



Buddhist Wheel of Life



Egyptian Scarab



Norse Ouroboros

Despite making significant contributions to the development of historical thought, specifically in pioneering a critical method of distinguishing between truth and error, Herodotus and Thucydides never abandoned the cyclical construct of their peers.²¹ Mark T. Gilderhus describes the circular thinking of Thucydides as follows:

Expressing a belief typical of his time, he affirmed a cyclical view in the expectation that “what happened in the past . . . will in due course, tend to be repeated with some degree of similarity.” Thucydides intended his writing to have instructional importance as a guide to action in the future. Although history never repeated itself exactly, he anticipated the

²⁰ *Eternal Return* http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eternal_return

²¹ Gilderhus. *History and Historians: A Historiographical Introduction.*, 15.

development of parallel circumstances and believed that the consciousness of history would bestow many benefits. All leaders should learn from the mistakes of the past. Indeed, they could master the arts of politics, statecraft, and warfare only from the study of history.²²

In the end, Thucydides, more so than Herodotus, sought to explain events in secular terms. Events happened not because the gods willed them but because of active human agents who endured the consequences of their actions. As a result, the notion of causation began to enter into the historical conversation.

The Christian View of History

Writing in the wake of the Gothic sacking of Rome by Alaric in 410 A.D. St. Augustine, the bishop of Hippo in North Africa, wrote *The City of God*, the most influential statement of the Christian interpretation of history ever devised.²³ Augustine's view of time was derived from a Hebrew construct that rejected outright Greek notions of cyclical movements.²⁴ "For Augustine, endless revolving and pointless repetitions would have rendered history meaningless—in effect, a nullification of divine influence and purpose."²⁵ In contrast, he viewed history as moving along a line with a clear beginning marked by creation, middle, and end.²⁶ St. Augustine described why the cyclical view is unacceptable to Christians when he wrote:

Far be it, I say, from us (Christians) to believe this (the Classical philosophy of history). For once Christ died for sins; and, rising from the dead, He dieth no more.²⁷

Thus, the Christian view of history as linear and directional created a new understanding of mankind's movement through time. John Warwick Montgomery offers the following analysis in his book, *The Shape of the Past*: "Here for the first time Western man was presented with a purposive, goal-directed interpretation of history. The Classical doctrine of recurrence had been able to give substantiality to history, but it had not given it any aim or direction."²⁸ The linear conception of history is simply another way of saying that all of history is meaningful because it is all directed toward a purposeful end.

Scripture teaches in Genesis 1:1 that time and history had a beginning and are not eternal. The scriptures also teach in Revelation 21-22 that what began in Genesis one will to come to an end. The current heavens and earth will be replaced with a new heavens and new earth with Christ as the head of all things when the dispensation of the fullness of Time is ushered in.²⁹ Thus, linearism is inescapable for the Bible believer,

²² Ibid., 17.

²³ Ibid., 21.

²⁴ Ibid., 22.

²⁵ Ibid., 22.

²⁶ Ibid., 22.

²⁷ Whitney J. Oates. *Basic Writing of St. Augustine*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1980), 192.

²⁸ John Warwick Montgomery. *Where is History Going*. (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1969), 42.

²⁹ Ephesians 1:10, Colossians 1:16-20.

especially a mid-Acts dispensationalist. Herbert Schlossberg, author of *Idol for Destruction*, offers the following summation of the Christian view of history:

Christianity . . . is by its nature historically minded. It rejects both cyclical theories of history and notions of the eternality of the universe. The doctrine of creation and of eschatology are explicit statements that history has both a beginning and an end and that it is possible to say something intelligible about both. Events between these two termini are also intelligible, and, being relation them, have meaning.³⁰

While St. Augustine taught much that mid-Acts grace believers would find abhorrent his views regarding the linear nature of history mesh with our dispensational understanding of the scriptures. Right division of the word according to the Pauline pattern outlined in Ephesians 2 establishes a clear linear progression of how God is going to accomplish his eternal two-fold purpose of reconciling the governmental structures of heaven and earth back to himself through Jesus Christ.

William Strauss and Neil Howe authors of *The Fourth Turning*, correctly observe that linear history has dominated Western historiography. Furthermore, they are correct in their assertion that the Protestant Revolution cemented linearism as the paradigm of choice throughout Western Europe and the United States.³¹ However, they err and threaten the clearly observable teachings of scripture when they assert that linearism needs to be overcome in favor of cyclicity. To abandon the linear model in favor of the cyclical is to violate the clear precepts of dispensational Bible study. Consequently, it is the view of this author that cyclicity cannot overcome linearism. Rather, linearism must continue to be embraced as the predominant framework through which to view history, and to the limited extent that cyclicity is true, cyclical concepts can be incorporated into a linear framework to arrive at a workable paradigm.

³⁰ Herbert Schlossberg. *Idols for Destruction*. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1983), 29.

³¹ Strauss and Howe. *The Fourth Turning: What the Cycles of History Tell Us About America's Next Rendezvous with Destiny.*, 9-15.

Reconciling the Cyclical with the Linear

In the preceding chapter, we saw that linearism is the accepted historical paradigm amongst Christian philosophers, historians, and theologians. We also demonstrated how linearism is rudimentary to a dispensational understanding of the scriptures. Consequently, mid-Acts grace believers should have no difficulty recognizing the importance of linear thinking to their theological construct. Now that we have demonstrated that linearism is fundamental to the Christian worldview, we can now investigate whether there is room within the Christian worldview for cyclical thinking.

A careful reading of the previous chapter reveals an interesting piece of information: virtually all gentile societies have viewed time as cyclical in nature. Regardless of their geographic location or despite their lack of contact with each other, pagan cultures all possessed a circular view of life linked to the seasonality observable in nature. In fact, it was only Judaism, followed by Christianity, that embraced any semblance of linear thinking. Pagan holidays and festivals coincided with seasonal occurrences such as the winter and summer solstices as well as the spring and autumnal equinoxes'. After the so-called conversion of Emperor Constantine to Christianity in 312 A.D., the Roman Catholic Church slowly began the process of trying to Christianize pagan holidays. As a result, the Church positioned Christmas, Easter, and All Saints Day or All Hollows Eve to coincide with pagan festivals that celebrated the seasonal changes of nature. Where did the gentiles obtain this seasonal celestial view of the universe?

What Did Humanity Know and When Did We Know It?

The notion that early men were primitive (e.g., cave men) is an evolutionary supposition that Bible believers should reject. Adam, the first man, was not a half man/half animal creature as evolutionary pseudoscience teaches. Rather, Adam was created in the image of God as a fully functioning adult male possessing superior physical, mental, spiritual, and emotion faculties as you or I.³² Moreover, Adam was placed into a mature, fully functioning, and perfectly created environment. Adam was given a charge to “be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over . . . every living thing that moveth upon the earth.”³³ Adam was given the job of dressing and keeping the Garden of Eden in which he enjoyed unbroken fellowship and communion with God.³⁴

Before God created Adam and placed him in the Garden of Eden, He created the planetary bodies of the universe. Genesis 1:14-19 records this event:

And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years:

³² Genesis 1:26-27.

³³ Genesis 1:28.

³⁴ Genesis 2:15.

15) And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so.

16) And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also.

17) And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth,

18) And to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: and God saw that it was good.

19) And the evening and the morning were the fourth day.

Note a few significant details. First, the alignment and position of the planetary bodies serve the purpose of providing light upon the earth. Second, the relationship between the earth and the celestial bodies of the firmament would not only account for the differences between day and night but would also serve as a mechanism for rendering seasons as well as for counting days, weeks, and years. Third, the dividing of day and night, seasonal differences, and the counting of days and years were designed in verse 14 to serve as signs to the inhabitants of the earth. According to *Strong's Concordance*, the Hebrew word translated "signs" in the King James Bible means "a signal, a distinguishing mark, banner, remembrance, miraculous sign, omen, or warning." Therefore, Adam was placed in an environment in which the planetary bodies served as signs of God's existence and handiwork.

The daily rotation of the earth on its axis would bring day and night. Likewise, the combination of the earth's yearly revolution around the sun along with the tilting of the earth's axis at $23 \frac{1}{2}$ degrees would produce the yearly seasonal differences. All of these natural phenomena were designed by God to serve as a sign and testimony to his existence and creative genius. Consequently, God placed Adam in an environment that had been intentionally designed to bear witness to the glory and splendor of God. Genesis further reports of humanity's fall into sin, which not only wreaked havoc on God's pristine creation but also clouded and distorted man's willingness to see God's handwork in the natural world.

In Romans chapter one, the Apostle Paul reports how mankind's fall into sin distorted his willingness to see the witness God placed within creation. Paul wrote:

Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them.

20) For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:

21) Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

22) Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,

23) And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Romans 1:19-23

The following points about post-fall man are clearly observable from this passage. First, mankind clearly knew who God was through his creation. Second, based on the testimony of creation alone, mankind is without excuse for not desiring to retain God in his knowledge.³⁵ Third, the ultimate result of not glorifying God as God, lack of thankfulness, and vain imaginations is the changing of the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man. In short, mankind took the witness of God through creation and perverted it in an attempt to escape accountability. The end result was that humanity changed the truth of God into a lie³⁶ for which “God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient.”³⁷

Therefore, from the very beginning mankind was aware of the seasonal nature of God’s creation. After the fall, the sons of Adam, in an attempt to remove God from their knowledge, took the signs and seasonal markers God established when he created the planetary bodies and hijacked them as part of their religious systems. Herein lays the explanation for why virtually all pagan societies in the ancient world viewed time as cyclical. They were simply following the course of this world, a perversion of the knowledge of God authored by Satan and his lie program. This is precisely what E. W. Bullinger argues in his landmark book *The Witness of the Stars*, namely, that the Zodiac is a satanic distortion of the witness God placed in the heavens when he garnished them with the various celestial bodies.



Pagan Calendar: Note the cyclical structure and polar positioning of the winter and summer solstice as well as the spring and autumnal equinox.

This author believes that the giving up of the gentiles to a reprobate mind that Paul speaks of in Romans one took place in Genesis eleven. It was at Babel that God “suffered the gentiles to walk in their own way,” because in Genesis twelve God calls out Abram and made a covenant with him to bring from him a great nation that would be formed from Abram’s seed. When God allowed the gentile nations to follow after their own foolishness, he did not reorganize or restructure the physical mechanisms of his creation. Rather, God still uses the seasonality of his creation as a testimony to the nations of his existence. Consider what Paul says to the inhabitants of Lystra in Acts 14:16-17, “Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.” Notice that God left the

³⁵ Romans 1:28.

³⁶ Romans 1:25.

³⁷ Romans 1:28.

signs of seasonality in place to serve as a witness to the gentiles of his existence despite their perversion of it.

Rather than God setting up the nations to follow a cyclical seasonal progression, the nations chart their own course that follows Satan's distortion of God's created order. In other words, seasons continue not because pagan religious rituals bring about their passage but because God ordained his universe at creation to function in this fashion. Sin has not disrupted the seasonal patterns of creation but has instead distorted mankind's understanding of them. In Genesis 8:22, Moses says the following regarding the cyclical functioning of the seasons: "While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease." The famous passage from Ecclesiastes 3 concurs with Moses' statement:

To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: 2) A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; 3) A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; 4) A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; 5) A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; 6) A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; 7) A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; 8) A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace. Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

Initially, the passing from day to night, winter to spring, and year to year were designed as signs to manifest the genius of almighty God, but Satan's lie program utilizes this cyclicity to promote worship of the creature rather than the Creator.

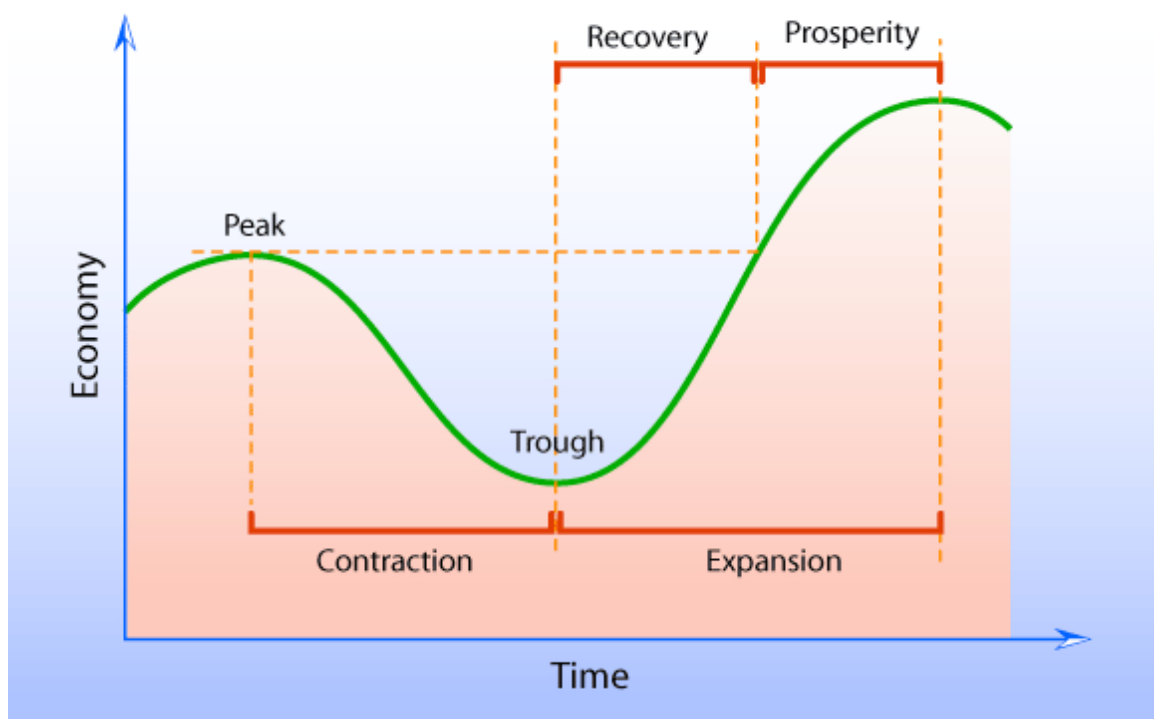
While linearism remains the predominant model for understanding history, we must also recognize that God is also the author of cyclical seasonality. Consequently, to arrive at a complete paradigm of history, we must embrace the reality that as time moves forward linearly towards its prophesied end, cycles are also occurring. A proper understanding of cyclicity is necessary to arrive at a complete Biblical paradigm of history. In this section, we saw how the gentiles followed the course of this world charted by Satan which included the usurping and perversion of God's seasonal order. Therefore, we concluded that while linearism remains the predominant model for conceiving Biblical history, cyclicity needs to find its place within linearism. In short, any paradigm that emphasizes the cyclical over the linear is spurious, just as any linear model that totally excludes the cyclical is incomplete.

Secular Examples of Cyclicity

Examples of cyclicity abound in the secular world. Historically, one could discuss the rise and fall of great civilizations, or the cyclical nature of the Chinese dynastic cycle. Economists discuss the business cycle in an attempt to describe the

alternating periods of economic contraction and expansion. Seasonality and cyclicity can be used to describe many things that occur in the world around us. Christian relationship expert, Dr. Gary Chapman, utilizes the metaphor of seasonal differences to describe the life cycle of marriage in his book *The Seasons of Marriage*. According to Dr. Chapman all relationships go through different seasons: spring (growth), summer (love, cooperation, and nurturing), fall (drifting apart and disconnection), and winter (cold distance during which thoughts or discussion of divorce may arise). Seasonality and cyclicity persist as explanatory models persist within our culture because all humans understand seasonal vacillations as they are common to our earthly experience.

Currently, Americans have become reacquainted with cyclicity through the ongoing economic recession of the past eighteen months. Economist Charles Wheelan famously said that economies “proceed in fits and starts.”³⁸ Wheelan is referring to the recurring periods of growth and decline in economic activity that all economies experience.³⁹ Economists call this recurring pattern the business cycle.



Traditionally, the business cycle consists of four phases. These phases include a period of growth and a period of decline, as well as turning points that mark the shift from one period to the next. A period of economic growth is known as an expansion. During an expansion, real GDP increases along with inflation as unemployment is generally declines. Eventually, a period of economic expansion will reach a peak or

³⁸ Bill Bosshart. *Econ Alive: The Power to Choose*. (Palo Alto, CA: Teachers Curriculum Institute, 2010), 266.

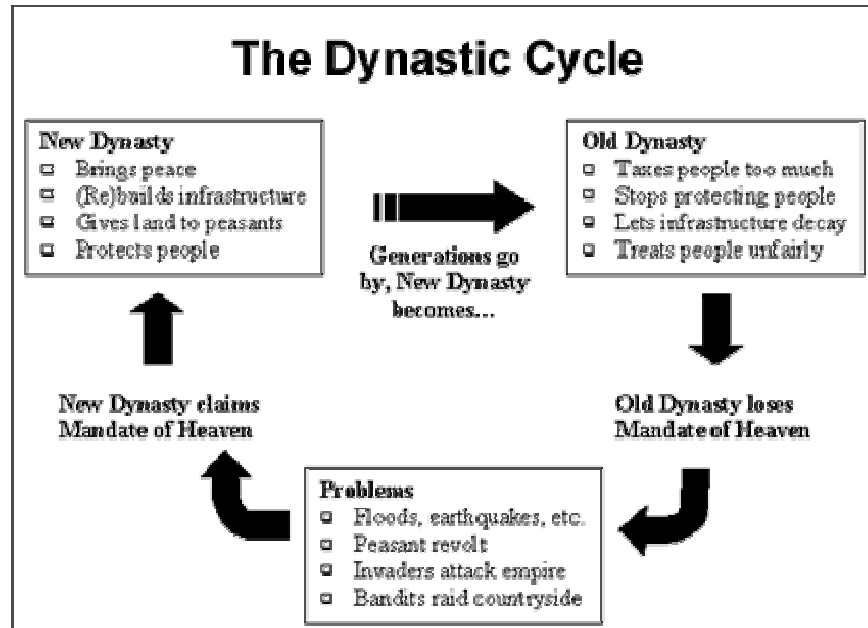
³⁹ *Ibid.*, 266.

point of maximum output. At its peak an economy's GDP stops increasing while unemployment stops decreasing, thus indicating a decline in economic activity. Immediately following the peak comes the contraction phase of the business cycle. During a contraction, a period of economic decline, real GDP falls as unemployment is rising just as we have seen in our current economic downturn. Eventually, a contraction will reach its lowest point called the trough. Consequently, the trough represents the lowest point of economic output prior to a new period of expansion as the cycle renews itself. While the term business cycle implies a regular rhythm between peak and trough, business cycles are irregular in terms of both length and magnitude.⁴⁰

Students of world history are familiar with Edward Gibbon's seminal work, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* or William L Shirer's similarly titled, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany*. Works such as these try to explain the reasons for one of world history's most glaring realities, namely that great civilizations and empires rise and fall only to be replaced by new civilizations or empires which in turn follow the same progression. In fact, one could argue that history's great societies have progressed in exactly the same fashion as the business cycle outlined above. A well-rooted and established culture seeks to take advantage of its surrounding less sophisticated neighbors. Perhaps peaceably at first, often followed by military conquest, one society emerges and expands their power base by subjecting their enemies until they reach a summit of sustainable power. While some cultures were able to maintain their zenith longer than others, corruption and entropy ultimately creep in leading to slow decline and decay, which in the end result in the loss of power. Eventually through the combination of both internal problems and external threats, the civilization falls only to be replaced by a new society that follows the same progression.

Ancient China provides a fascinating case study to demonstrate how the cyclical concepts we saw in the business cycle formed the basis for the Chinese conception of history. The ancient Chinese possessed a cyclical understanding of history which is clearly visible by looking at the Dynastic Cycle. It would start with a powerful family claiming what the Chinese called the Mandate of Heaven, or heavens blessing thereby giving them the right to rule and establish a dynasty. Each new dynasty demonstrated they possessed the Mandate of Heaven by accomplishing the following things: bringing peace, rebuilding infrastructure, giving land back to the peasants, and protecting the people from forgiven invaders. As time went by the new dynasty became an old dynasty and demonstrates their signs of age by over taxation, decaying infrastructure, unfair treatment of the populace, and an inability to protect and secure national borders. As a result, the old dynasty lost the Mandate of Heaven which was revealed to the Chinese people through natural disasters, peasant revolts, bandits raiding the countryside, and invasion by foreign enemies. As one might expect, during this time of political and social upheaval, a new family would inevitably emerge claim the Mandate of Heaven and keep the dynastic wheel turning.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 266-267.



Eventually, the Mongolian hordes lead by Genghis Khan initially and then his successor, Kublai Khan, subjugated most of China under the authority of a Mongolian Khanate thereby disrupting the pure dynastic cycle of ancient China. After establishing the greatest united land empire in world history, the great Mongolian Empire fragmented and collapsed. Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, Byzantium, Mongolia, China, Ottomans, Mayan, Aztec, Incan, Spanish, and the British Empires have all followed the same circular pattern. Through a period of expansion they reach a power zenith only to contract, crumble, and pass into memory.

Why should the United States be any different? For the purposes of comparison, most western historians like to gauge the footing of modern America by comparing it with that of the Western Roman Empire at the time of its collapse. Generally speaking, ten leading theories have emerged within the historical community to explain why Rome fell, which include:

1. Barbarian Invasions
2. Decline in Morals and Values
3. Environmental and Public Health Problems
4. Excessive Military Spending to Defend the Empire
5. Inferior Technology
6. Inflation
7. Political Corruption
8. Rise in Christianity
9. Unemployment
10. Urban Decay

Virtually all historians hang their explanatory hat on some combination of the theories listed above. If indeed Rome is a fair comparison for all her Western progeny than even a cursory reading of this list ought to make every American squirm. There is no reason to think that our civilization can escape the clearly established historical pattern.

Biblical Example of Cyclicity

All mid-Acts dispensationalists know that historically God created only one nation, Israel. At this point an inquisitive Bible student might be wondering, where if at all can one observe the type of cyclical progression describe above in Biblical history? First, the Bible records the history of the rise and fall of gentile nations from the vantage point of the nation of Israel. However, the question remains can cyclicity be observed with God's nation? The answer is yes, as the book of Judges stands out as a clear example of Biblical cyclicity.

According to *Nelson's Complete Book of Bible Maps and Charts*, the book of Judges is organized thematically rather than chronologically. "The book opens with a description of Israel's deterioration, continues with seven cycles of oppression and deliverance, and concludes with two vivid examples of Israel's depravity."⁴¹ The book's authors (who are unnamed for some reason) offer the following elaboration:

The theme of deterioration is highlighted as Judges begin with short-lived military successes after the death of Joshua but quickly turn to the repeated failure of the people to drive out their enemies. The primary reasons for their failure are a lack of faith and a lack of obedience to God (2:1-3).

Repeated deliverance by God are described in the middle section of the book (3:5-16:31) which presents seven cycles of apostasy, oppression, cry for deliverance, salvation, and rest. Israel vacillates between obedience and apostasy as the people continually fail to learn for their mistakes.⁴²

J. Sidlow Baxter author of *Explore the Book*, presents a similar structure to his readership. Baxter outlines Judges by presenting six apostasies, servitudes, and deliverances that reoccur in the following four-stroke rhythm: sin, suffering, supplication, and salvation.⁴³

In order to accurately assess the validity of the two schemata presented above, we need to turn our attention to the text of Judges itself. Judges 2:10-19 outlines the cyclical pattern that rest of the book of Judges follows, the passage states:

⁴¹ *Nelson's Complete Book of Bible Maps and Charts*. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996), 76.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 76.

⁴³ J. Sidlow Baxter. *Explore the Book*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1960).

10) And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel.

11) And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim:

12) And they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the LORD to anger.

13) And they forsook the LORD, and served Baal and Ashtaroth.

14) And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies.

15) Whithersoever they went out, the hand of the LORD was against them for evil, as the LORD had said, and as the LORD had sworn unto them: and they were greatly distressed.

16) Nevertheless the LORD raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them.

17) And yet they would not hearken unto their judges, but they went a whoring after other gods, and bowed themselves unto them: they turned quickly out of the way which their fathers walked in, obeying the commandments of the LORD; but they did not so.

18) And when the LORD raised them up judges, then the LORD was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge: for it repented the LORD because of their groanings by reason of them that oppressed them and vexed them.

19) And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they returned, and corrupted themselves more than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them, and to bow down unto them; they ceased not from their own doings, nor from their stubborn way.

In verse thirteen, Israel does evil in the eyes of the Lord by serving Baal and Ashtaroth. As punishment for their idolatry, Israel is enslaved at the hands of their gentile enemies, according to verses fourteen and fifteen. Discomforted by their enslavement, Israel cries out for deliverance from the hands of their oppressors. Verses sixteen and eighteen report that God heard the cries of his nation and in his grace raised up a series of judges who deliver Israel from gentile enslavement. Israel's peace was only short-lived according to verses eighteen and nineteen, for after each judge was dead they "returned again and corrupted themselves more than their fathers." In short, Judges Chapter two establishes a cyclical pattern that is played out multiple times throughout the duration of the book. Please consider the following chart:



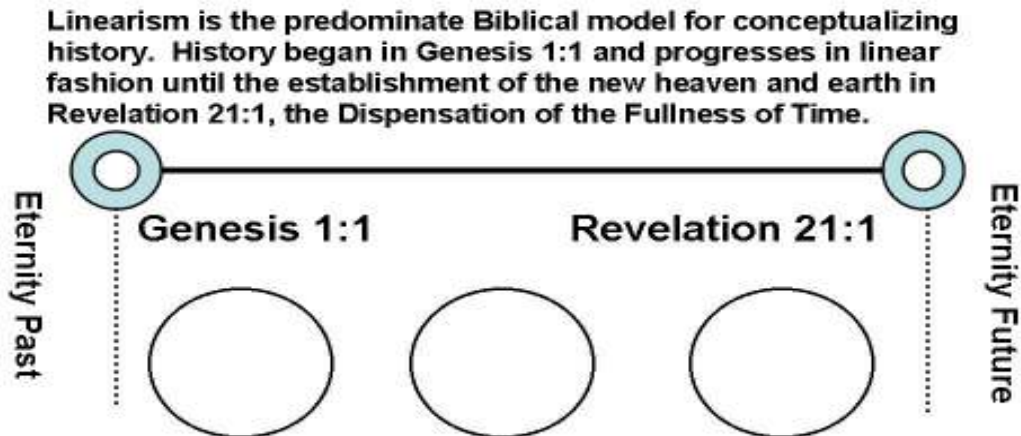
So where does all of this leave us? First, we have seen that God is the author of both the linear and cyclical. Second, the nations do follow the cyclical patterns of seasonality because they have been usurped as part of Satan’s lie program to bring worship to the creature rather than the creator. Third, as a result, cyclicity is observable virtually everywhere from the highs and lows of the business cycle to the rise and fall of civilizations. Fourth, even the nation of Israel experienced life according to a cyclical pattern laid out in the book of Judges. In fact, if one views the kingships of David and Solomon as the pinnacle of Israel political power, it is not difficult to make the argument that the nation entered into a contractionary decline when the split occurred between the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. Eventually, both Israel and Judah were conquered by gentile powers thereby ushering in the times of the gentiles politically and completing Israel’s fall into political irrelevance due to her habitual unbelief. Despite having succumbed to the same cyclical collapse as the gentile nations surrounding Israel, time marched on. The linear was driven forward by the covenants and promises that God made to his nation that have not yet come to pass. Therefore, while the nations are rising and falling in predicable fashion, history is being pulled along a linear plane towards God’s prophesied end.

The Biblical View of History

Throughout the current essay we have been working towards being articulating a complete Biblical paradigm for conceptualizing history. We have ruled out both the chaotic view of time and pure cyclicity alone as workable models. In addition, a brief historiographical survey, beginning with the Greeks, was presented which served to demonstrated that since the beginning of written history time has been articulated by either cyclical or linear constructs. In contrast to the cyclicity of the Greeks, the Christian theologian and philosopher St. Augustine used the historical realities of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection to postulate a linear paradigm of history in *The City of God*. As a result, Augustine viewed history as moving along a line with a clear beginning, middle, and end. Despite the clear preeminence of linearism, especially to mid-Acts Grace Believers, it was further demonstrated that God was is also the author of the cyclical.

In the chapter titled, Reconciling the Cyclical with the Linear, we traced the origin of seasonality in an attempt to explain the nearly universal embracing of cyclicity by the gentiles. In this study we saw how after humanity fell into sin and that Satan moved to distort the seasonal patterns God established at creation to deceive mankind into worshipping the creature more than the creator. Consequently, we concluded that God was the author of the cyclical as well as the linear.

Now having established that both cyclicity and linearism are in fact Biblical concepts, all that remains is for them to be combined into one workable paradigm. Consider the following chart:



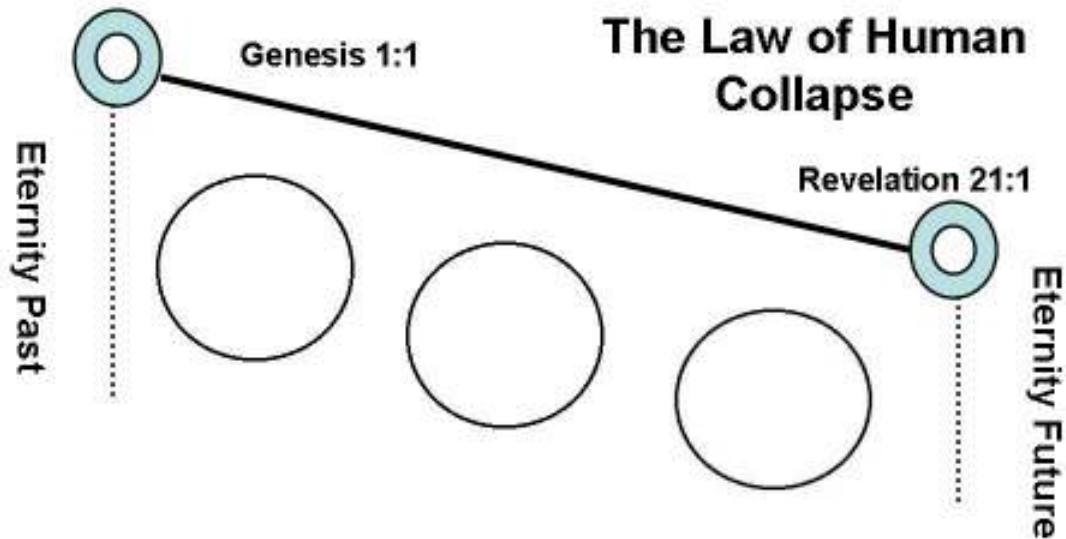
As time progress forward in linear fashion from beginning to end, the cycles of seasonality occur. Economies expand and contract. Civilizations rise and fall. Mankind vacillates between periods of rejection and reception of the God's truth. The main point here is that history is headed somewhere. If cyclicity alone were true, history would never get anywhere, and thus, linearism must remain the predominate parading for a scriptural perspective of history.

The preceding chart seeks to combine linear and cyclical concepts into one complete Biblical model for understanding history. As we have said many times throughout the current study, linearism must remain the primary model for understanding history since the Pauline perspective on right division of the scripture demands it. When we speak about how God has worked in the past (time past), how God is working in the present (but now), and how God will work in the future (ages to come), we are utilizing a strictly linear view of history. Time originated in Genesis one and is advancing forward in linear fashion toward a prophesied end, the establishment of the new heavens and new earth (Revelation 21:1). When the Dispensation of the Fulness of Time (Ephesians 1:10) arrives the purpose for which God created time will have been fulfilled. Accordingly, Mid-Acts dispensationalists ought to be the most linear thinkers around.

Meanwhile, as time progresses towards its prophesied end, the cycles of seasonality are also turning. The above chart attempts to reflect this reality within the confines of a linear construct through the circles that represent seasonal cyclicity. As the chart states, economies expand and contract, civilizations rise and fall, and mankind vacillates between periods of rejection and reception of God's truth. The Apostle Paul is keenly aware of these seasonal realities when he instructs Timothy to "**Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.**"⁴⁴ Placing seasonal cyclicity within a linear construct is necessary because without doing so, history would never get anywhere. This is simply not an option for any mid-Acts Grace Believer since we wait with hopeful anticipation for the catching away of the saints that will occur at the end of the Dispensation of Grace. Each day that passes brings us one day closer to the rapture of the church, the 70th week of Daniel, the return of Christ in glory to set up his kingdom, and the centering of all governmental authority in both heaven and earth under the headship of Jesus Christ (the Dispensation of the Fulness of Time).

Now that we have combined cyclical and linear concepts into a single explanatory model of history, only one detail remains for the articulation of a complete paradigm. The chart presented above does not take into account the Law of Human Collapse. For accuracy's sake, the trajectory of linear progression is best illustrated by a downward sloping line. Drawing the line in this fashion sets the Christian view of history apart from other linear progressive models discussed in previous chapters. Unlike the evolutionary or Marxian views of history, humanity is not improving but finding new ways and methods to rebel against God. In Romans Chapter One, Paul summarizes how the reprobate mind works when he reports that human beings are "inventors of evil things." For the purposes of illustration, please consider the following diagram:

⁴⁴ II Timothy 4:2



It naturally follows from the Law of Human Collapse that the most accurate way to illustrate history's path is through a downward sloping line. Unlike Evolutionary and Marxian views of history, humanity is not improving but finding new ways and methods to rebel against God. Only the prophesied return of Christ will fix the economic and political structures of this world. The Law of Human Collapse is best illustrated by the mineral degeneration observable in Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the great image in Daniel Chapter 2.

As the diagram suggests, Daniel Chapter two stands out as the premier example of the Law of Human Collapse in the Bible. In this passage, Nebuchadnezzar sees the image of a man with a head of gold, chest of silver, belly and thighs of brass, legs of iron, and feet and toes of iron and clay mixed. Moreover, the king sees in his dream a "stone cut without hands" that smashes the feet of the image causing it to crumble and break in pieces. Daniel interprets Nebuchadnezzar's dream and tells him that each part of the statue represents a gentile kingdom beginning with the head of gold, which is his own kingdom of Babylon. In addition, Daniel informs the king that when the "stone cut without hands" topples the image that "the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed." Within Nebuchadnezzar's dream we see the entire duration of the times of gentiles politically foretold in stunning detail. The only thing not foretold in Daniel Two was that God was going to interrupt the progression of gentile power at the ankles on the image and usher in an unprophesied period of grace and peace, namely the Dispensation of Grace. The mineral degeneration seen in each part of the statue reflects the Law of Human Collapse. Mankind has no hope without God. It is only the revelation of Jesus Christ at his second advent to establish his kingdom that stops humanity's descent into oblivion.

In short, a complete Biblical view of history must contain the following three characteristics. First, it must reflect the God-ordained method of Bible study by adhering to linearism as its predominant explanatory model. Second, it must recognize that God is also the author of the cyclical and make room for seasonality as God's linear plan unfolds. Third, the linear progression and imbedded cyclicity must be understood to

progress along a line that is downward sloping in its trajectory, thereby taking into account the Law of Human Collapse.

The Importance of History to the Christian Worldview

Simply stated, Christianity is based on historical events. Christians believe that the basis for their entire worldview appeared in human history some two thousand year ago. The theological reality that “Christ died for our sins” is also a fact of history. David A. Noebel author of *Understanding the Times: The Story of the Biblical Christian, Marxist/Leninist, and Secular Humanist Worldviews*, writes “Christianity is rooted in history and without its historical roots there would be no Christian worldview.”⁴⁵ According to Noebel, the Christian view of history can be summarized by the following landmark historical events:

- the revelation of God (primarily His intelligence and power) through the creation of heaven and earth—Genesis 1:1
- the special creation of male and female as body, soul, and spirit (Genesis 1:26-27)
- the rebellion of mankind against his creator (Genesis 3:1-15)
- the revelation of God through the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) and Israel (Old Testament, Gospels, and Early Acts)
- the crossing of the Red Sea (Exodus 13)
- the appearance of God in history in the person of Jesus Christ to redeem mankind from sin (John 1:1-2, 14)
- the resurrection of Jesus Christ (I Corinthians 15)
- the revelation of God through His Church, the Body of Christ (Paul’s Epistles)
- the judgment of the world (Revelation 19-20)
- the establishment of the new heavens, new earth, and new Jerusalem for the redeemed of all ages (Revelation 21).⁴⁶

A careful reader will note that the events listed above occurred only once, thereby adding further credibility to our previous conclusion that linearism is the primary model for understanding Biblical history.

Noted Christian apologist Josh McDowell offers the following insight regarding the close relationship between Christianity and history. McDowell writes:

⁴⁵ David A. Noebel. *Understanding the Times: The Story of the Biblical Christian, Marxist/Leninist, and Secular Humanist Worldviews*. (Manitou Springs, CO: Summit Press, 1991), 764.

⁴⁶ Adapted from Noebel’s list page 764.

There is no doubt that much of the evidence for the validity of the Christian faith is rooted in history. Christianity is a historically founded faith. Its validity, or credibility is based on Jesus Christ literally living in history. The resurrection is rooted in time-space history. Everything that Jesus lived, taught, and died for is dependent upon His literal historical resurrection.⁴⁷

Consequently, Christianity stands or falls based upon the veracity of certain historical facts according to Dr. William Lane Craig.⁴⁸ While some might view this assertion as scandalous, Dr. Craig points out that this reality makes Christianity unique amongst the world's religions, because if one can prove the truth of the historical record one would also thereby establish the validity of the Christian faith.⁴⁹

Supporters of Christianity are not the only ones to observe the vital relationship between history and Christianity. Skeptics, atheists, and humanists have sought to undermine the faith by arguing that history is unknowable. Historical relativists claim that there is no such thing as objective history. David A. Noebel highlights the challenge posed by historical relativism when he writes, "to shatter Christian doctrine and the Christian worldview, one need only shatter its historical underpinnings."⁵⁰ This is precisely what the historical relativists are attempting to do, according to Dr. Norman Geisler:

Unlike some religions, historical Christianity is inseparably tied to historical events, including the lives of Adam, Abraham, Moses, David, and Jesus. These events, especially those of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, are crucial to the truth of evangelical Christianity (I Corinthians 15:1-9); without them, it would cease to exist. Thus, the existence and knowability of certain historical events are essential to maintaining biblical Christianity.

The knowability of history is important not only theologically but also apologetically, for the overall argument in defense of Christianity is based on the historicity of the New Testament documents. Hence, since the objective knowability of history is strongly challenged by many contemporary historians, it is necessary to counter this claim in order to secure the defense of Christianity.⁵¹

Now more than ever, as the attacks increase on the reliability of the New Testament documents, believers need to be ready with answers for historical relativism. Consequently, part two of our study on how believers should view history will be focused on a discussion of the objectivity of history. First we will look at the assertions of the

⁴⁷ Josh McDowell. *The New Evidence the Demands a Verdict*. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 673.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 673.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 673.

⁵⁰ Noebel. *Understanding the Times.*, 764-765.

⁵¹ Norman Geisler. *Systematic Theology: Volume One*. (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2002), 181.

historical relativists, that history is unknowable to understand their position. Second, we will refute historical relativism and demonstrate that objective history is possible. Finally, we will examine the historicity of both the Old and New Testament documents, thereby offering conclusive proof for the veracity of the Christian Worldview. Apologist Dan Story offers the following assessment of the uniqueness of the Christian worldview and its relationship with history in his book, *Defending Your Faith: How to Answer the Tough Questions*. Story writes, “Christianity is not a mystical religion, such as many Eastern religions and their New Age clones. Neither is it a mythical religion with idols and man-made gods. Nor is Christianity a misinformed religion, such as the various cults. Rather, Christianity is an **historic religion, and its truth-claims are grounded on objective, historical facts.**”⁵²

⁵² Dan Story. *Defending Your Faith: How to Answer the Tough Questions*. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 17.

Objections to the Objectivity of History

In the previous chapter we looked at the importance of history to the Christian worldview. Christianity is a historical faith that rises or falls based upon the validity of the historical record presented in scripture. Moreover, it was demonstrated that many modern historians have questioned the knowability of history by arguing that objective history is not possible. While historical relativism is embraced by skeptics, agnostics, and atheists for Bible believing Christians it is simply untenable. The purpose of this posting is to begin summarizing the arguments made by those who assert that history is unknowable. Later, after having understood the position of the historical relativists we will demonstrate the false nature of their assertions.

According to Dr. Norman Geisler, many arguments have been advanced that history cannot be objectively known.⁵³ One ought not take these challenges lightly, for if they are correct they would render the historical basis for Christianity both unknowable and unverifiable. Historian Charles A. Beard, author of *The Noble Dream: the Quest for Objectivity in History*, is by far the most prominent historical relativist. Beard's aforementioned essay has served as the foundation for the modern push to view history as unknowable.⁵⁴ Geisler reports that the objections to the knowability of history fall into one of the following six categories: epistemological, axiological, methodological, metaphysical, psychological, and hermeneutical.⁵⁵

The Epistemological Objections

Epistemology deals with how one knows anything, and relativists believe that objective truth in any sense does not exist. Specifically, historical relativists maintain that the very conditions by which one knows history are so subjective that one cannot have an objective knowledge of history.⁵⁶ Consequently, historical relativists offer three main epistemological objections to the notion of objective history.

The Unobservability of History

Proponents of historical relativism argue that the substance of history, unlike that studied by the empirical sciences, is not directly observable; in other words the history does not deal with past events but with statements about past events.⁵⁷ As a result, the historian is able to deal with the facts in an imaginative way when attempting to reconstruct events he or she did not observe.⁵⁸ Consequently, historical facts exist only in the mind of the historian, according to historical relativists. Relativists contend that

⁵³ Geisler. *Systematic Theology Volume One.*, 181.

⁵⁴ McDowell. *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict.*, 676.

⁵⁵ Geisler. *Systematic Theology Volume One.* 181-182.

⁵⁶ Norman Geisler. *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 320.

⁵⁷ Geisler. *Systematic Theology Volume One.* 182.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 182.

historical documents do not contain facts, but are, without the historian's understanding mere ink lines on paper.⁵⁹

Two explanations are offered to explain why historians have only indirect access to the past. First, relativists assert that unlike scientists, the historian's world is comprised of records and nonrepeatable events. Consequently, the historians work is really of product of the present because the historian must interject his own understanding in any attempt to recreate the past.⁶⁰ Second, the empirical scientist has the advantage of repeatability through with one can subject their views to falsification, while the historian cannot. In contrast, the unobservable historical event is no longer verifiable therefore what one believes about the departed past is more the product of their own subjective imagination thereby making objective history impossible.

The Fragmentary Nature of Historical Accounts

The second epistemological objection to the knowability of history centers around the documents available to the historian. Relativists argue that the best a historian can never have a complete understanding of past events do the fragmentary nature of the historical evidence. Beard and others state, that the available documents cover only a fraction of the events recorded, thereby leaving holes and blinds spot in the understanding available to the historian which prevent them from reaching final conclusions.⁶¹ Moreover, the available documents are skewed because they disseminate what occurred in the past through the perspective of the one who recorded them, thereby rending them tainted and not completely reliable. This perspective is observable in Edward Hallett Carr's book *What Is History*, in which he states the following regarding the documents available to historians, ". . . what really happened would still have to be reconstructed in the mind of the historian."⁶² In summary, because the documents are so fragmentary and the events so distant the objectivity is not possible, not only does the historian not have all of the puzzle pieces but the pieces the historian does possess are distorted by the mind of the person that recorded them.⁶³

The Historical Conditioning of the Historian

This objection maintains that objectivity can never be attained because the historian plays to prominent a role in the historical process. Relativists claim that historians are a product of their time and are therefore subject to the unconscious programming of their era. According to this line of thought, historical synthesis is to depended upon the personality of the writer as well as social and religious forces that may influence their thinking and cloud their interpretive lenses.⁶⁴ One generation writes history only to have it rewritten by the next, thereby rendering neutral history impossible.

⁵⁹ Geisler. *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*. 321.

⁶⁰ Geisler. *Systematic Theology Volume One*. 182.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 182.

⁶² Edward Hallett Carr. *What is Hisory*. (New York, NY, Vantage, 1961), 20.

⁶³ Geisler. *Systematic Theology Volume One*. 183.

⁶⁴ Carr. *What Is History.*, 31.

Some historical relativists go so far as to say that one must study the historian before one can study their history.

The Axiological (Value) Objection

Historical relativists further assert that objective history is unobtainable because historians cannot avoid making value judgments.⁶⁵ Value judgments are used in the selection and arrangement of materials as well as in the selection of titles, chapters, and sections that are used in organizing historical compositions. In addition, relativists are quick to point out that historical subject matter often consists of events such as murder, betrayal, oppression and the like that cannot be described in morally neutral words. For example, whether one historian chooses to classify a particular ruler as a dictator or a benevolent ruler is a value judgment and therefore subject to personal opinion. In short, for the subjectivist, objectivity is not possible because there is no way for the historian to keep himself out of his history.

The Methodological Objections

Generally speaking, methodological objections deal with the manner in which history is done.

The Selective Nature of Historical Methodology

We have already seen in the section on the epistemological objections to objectivity that historians do “not have direct access to the events of the past, but merely to fragmentary interpretations of those events contained in the historical documents.”⁶⁶ Relativists argue that objectivity is further compromised because historians must now choose from a fragmentary number of reports to build his interpretation of past events. Subjectivists are quick to point out that the sources utilized by the historian are influenced by many relative factors such as personal prejudice, availability of materials, knowledge of languages, as well as personal beliefs and societal convictions.⁶⁷ Edward Hallett Carr summarizes the popular modern view regarding the facts of history when he writes, “The facts speak only when the historian calls on them; it is he who decides to which facts to give the floor, and in what order or context.”⁶⁸ In short, the original facts perished long ago therefore rendering an objective discussion of these facts in the present a mute point.

The Need to Select and Arrange Historical Materials

At the risk of redundancy, historians select from the surviving fragmentary documents only those that fit their overall purpose. Historians then provide an interpretive framework that is tainted by the worldview and generational vantage point of

⁶⁵ Ibid., 158-159.

⁶⁶ Geisler. *Systematic Theology Volume One.*, 184.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 184.

⁶⁸ Carr., *What Is History.*, 32.

the historian, according to relativists. Simply stated, the dice are loaded against objectivity before the historian ever sets pen to paper. “The final written product will be prejudiced by what is included and what is excluded from the material. It will lack objectivity by how it is arranged and by the emphasis given to it in the over all presentation.”⁶⁹ Consequently, all hope for objectivity is eternally dashed, according to the subjectivist.

The Metaphysical (Worldview) Objections

Simply stated, the various metaphysical objections to the objectivity of history stem from the notion that one’s worldview colors his perspective of the past.

The Need to Structure the Facts of History

One of the epistemological objections we studied last week dealt with the fragmentary nature of existing historical documents. For the historical subjectivist, this observation leads to the conclusion that our partial knowledge of the past necessitates that we to fill in the gaps or connect the dots between events with our own imagination. Dr. Norman Geisler illustrates this criticism by comparing it with a connect the dot game often found in children’s activity books. Just as the child starts with dot number one and draws lines connecting each dot, thereby rendering a complete image, so too does the historian. However, unlike the child’s activity historians utilize only their imagination in connecting the fragmentary facts, according to historical relativists.⁷⁰

Second, historical subjectivists make a distinction between a chronicle and history. A chronicle is the unrefined source material used by historians to construct history. Here in lies the problem according to the relativist-the historian is not content to tell his readers what happened but feels compelled to explain why it happened. As one might expect, relativists argue that these connective explanations are influenced by the worldview of the historian and therefore are not objective.⁷¹

The Unavoidability of Worldviews

The second metaphysical objection is similar to the first. Objectivity is compromised because every historian interprets the past within the framework of his own worldview. As discussed in a previous posting there are only three philosophies of history from which the historian can choose, chaotic, cyclical, and linear. Relativists charge that facts occupy a secondary role compared to the philosophy of history chosen by the historian. Rather, one’s faith and philosophical preferences skew their choice of philosophical paradigm. Facts therefore are not allowed to speak for themselves but are given voice based upon the worldview of the historian.⁷² Consequently, “if there are

⁶⁹ Geisler. *Systematic Theology Volume One*. 185.

⁷⁰ Geisler. *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*., 322.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 322.

⁷² Geisler. *Systematic Theology Volume One*., 186.

several different ways to interpret the same facts, depending on the overall perspective one takes, then there is no single objective interpretation of history.”⁷³

The Problem of Miracles

“Even if one grants that secular history could be known objectively, there still remains the problem of the subjectivity of religious history.”⁷⁴ Subjectivists argue that since miracles are supernatural there is no way to objectively verify them. This, of course, presents a potential problem for Bible believers because scripture records many miracles including the resurrection of Christ as historical facts. According to relativists, spiritual history has no connection with the spatiotemporal continuum of empirical events, thereby relegating miracles to the category of myths. As a result, any worldview which accepts miracles as valid would render history written from that vantage point not objective. Therefore, relativists argue that “the historian, like the scientist must adopt a methodological skepticism toward all alleged events in the past for which he has not parallel in the present—the present is the foundation of our knowledge of the past.”⁷⁵

The Psychological Objection

At this point the attentive reader has no doubt noticed similarities among the arguments asserted against the knowability of history. The psychological objection is no exception. This argument is once again biased against anyone writing history from a religious point of view. In simple terms, the psychological objection asserts that history written by persons with religious motives cannot be trusted because their religious passions obscure their objectivity. Supporters of this position will commonly say that the New Testament writers cannot be trusted because they sought to recreate what Jesus said and not simply report His sayings. As a result, the Gospels are more reflective of the experiences of Christians than they are an accurate recording to the words and life of Jesus.⁷⁶

The Hermeneutical Objection

In his book, *Metahistory*, author Hayden White claims that history is poetry. According to this view, history should be treated in the same manner as any other piece of literature. White argues that no history can be written apart from some unifying concept which can only be chosen from one of the following archetypal plot structures: romance, tragedy, comedy, or satire. Since one of these poetic plot structures is not better than the others but merely different, White views all debate about how history should be written as a matter of stylistic variation thereby rendering the entire discussion of historical objectivity moot.⁷⁷

⁷³ Ibid., 187.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 187.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 188.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 188-189.

⁷⁷ Hayden White. *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. 41-42.

All the objections considered in this chapter have one thing in common-they all seek to overthrow Christianity by challenging the validity of the faith's historical underpinnings. In the next chapter, we will begin to present a defense for the objectivity of history against its detractors.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ For further reading on modern views of historical methodology this author recommends reading, *What is History* by Edward Hallett Carr and *The Idea of History* by R.G. Collingwood.

Response to Historical Relativism

In the last chapter we discussed the objections levied against the objectivity of history by the historical relativists. While the outlook for the knowability of history may look bleak at this point, the door is by no means shut on this question. Problems abound within the arguments postulated by historical subjectivists, and over the next two weeks we will focus our attention on answering the objections raised by the historical relativists. In the end, both the knowability of history and the historicity of Christianity will be vindicated.

Response to the Epistemological Objections

In seeking to deconstruct the assertions made by those who argue that history is not knowable an elementary mistake in reasoning becomes apparent. How can the relativist really know that everyone's knowledge of history is not objective unless one had an objective knowledge of it, by which they could determine that all other views were in fact not objective? As a result, it is not difficult to see that the basic premise of the relativist's entire argument is self-defeating. It does not pass its own standard for determining truth. One cannot claim that objective history is not possible without also asserting to have an objective knowledge of history.

Response to the Problem of Unobservability of Historical Events

How one defines the word objective is very important in answering those who doubt that history can be objectively known. If by objective one means absolute knowledge, then no human historian writing under his own power can be objective. However, if objective means an accurate and adequate presentation that reasonable men and women should accept, then the door is open to the possibility of objectivity.⁷⁹

If one accepts the latter definition presented above, than history is no less objective than some of the other so-called empirical sciences. For example, paleontology or historical geology, a science which deals with physical facts and processes of the past, is widely considered one of the most objective of all the sciences.⁸⁰ This is somewhat curious since the events represented by the fossil record are no more observable or repeatable than historical events are for the historian. Dr. Norman Geisler offers the following assessment of the situation:

The fossil is a mechanically true imprint of the original event and the eyewitness of history may be less precise. But natural processes also can mar the fossil imprint. At least if one can determine the integrity and reliability of the eyewitness, one cannot slam the door on the possibility of objectivity in history any more than on objectivity in geology.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Geisler. *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics.*, 323.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 323.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 324.

A scientist might counter that the processes of the past can be repeated by experimentation in the present whereas historical events cannot. Once again this argument is not entirely correct since we have shown earlier that while God is advancing history forward in linear fashion towards its prophesied end, cyclical patterns do occur along history's linear plane. Therefore, history does repeat itself to some degree. "In short, the historian no less than the scientist, has the tools for determining what really happened in the past. The lack of direct access does not hinder one more than the other."⁸²

Finally, it should be noted if either the historian or the geologist takes "fact" to mean the original event then neither possess any facts. As a result, "fact" must be taken to mean information about the original event and as such they are not the subjective imaginations of the historian. Facts are objective data whether anyone reads them or not. Consequently, there remains both for science and history a solid core of objective facts because whatever meaning or interpretation one chooses to ascribe to the facts, the data is not eliminated. In fact, if there were no objective historical facts, one could not distinguish between good history and propaganda.⁸³ Geisler offers the following summation of this point:

If history is entirely in the mind of the beholder, there is no reason one cannot decide to behold it in any way he desires. In this case there would be no difference between good history and trashy propaganda. But historians, even historical subjectivists recognize the difference. Hence, even they assume an objective knowledge of history.⁸⁴

Response to the Problem of Fragmentary Accounts

The fact that the historical record is fragmentary does not render history unknowable anymore than the fragmentary nature of the fossil record destroys the objectivity of geology. Fossils, like primary sources, represent only a small percentage of the history of all living things. However, this does not keep the geologist from reconstructing a picture of what happened in the past based upon the fossils available in the present. How is this different from the process of writing history? In fact, geologists have been known to reconstruct entire animals and people from only a single bone. One should not be quick to demand that every piece be present before reconstruction is attempted. If one possess key pieces of evidence reconstruction can occur with a measurable degree of probability.⁸⁵ "For example, by the principle of bilateral similarity one can assume that the left side of a partial skull would look like the right side that was found."⁸⁶

⁸² Geisler. *Systematic Theology: Volume One.*, 190.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 190-191.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 191.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 191.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 191.

Despite the recent controversy, history like science is subject to revision only if the discovery of new facts warrants a reinterpretation of events. New finds may provide new facts which call for new interpretations. Consequently, interpretations can neither create facts nor can they ignore them if they wish to remain objective. Therefore, one can conclude that history is not any less objective than geology simply because it depends upon fragmentary accounts.⁸⁷ “Scientific knowledge is also partial and depends upon assumptions and an overall framework which may prove to be inadequate upon the discovery of more facts.”⁸⁸

In conclusion to this point, consider the following summation by Dr. Geisler. He writes:

What ever difficulty there may be, from a strictly scientific point of view, in filling the gaps between facts, once one has assumed a philosophical stance toward the world, the problem of objectivity in general is resolved. If there is a God, then the overall picture is already drawn; the facts of history will merely fill in the details of its meaning. If the universe is theistic, the artist’s sketch is already known in advance; the detail and coloring will come only as all the facts of history are fit into the overall sketch known to be true from the theistic framework. In the same sense historical objectivity is most certainly possible within a given framework such as a theistic worldview. Objectivity resides in the view that best fits the facts consistently into an overall theistic system which is supported by good evidence.⁸⁹

Response to the Axiological (Value) Objection

Just because everyday language is laden with value judgments does not automatically eliminate the possibility of writing objective history. Objectivity means to be fair in how one deals with the facts; it means to present what occurred in the past as accurately as possible. Furthermore, objectivity means that when the historian interprets why events unfolded as they did, language should ascribe to these events that value they had in their original context. When this is accomplished objectivity is achieved. When viewed in this fashion, historical objectivity demands the making of value judgments. The real question here is not whether value language can be objective but rather whether value statements objectively portray the events the way they really occurred.⁹⁰ According to Geisler, “Once the worldview has been determined, value judgments are not undesirable or merely subjective; they are, in fact, essential and objectively required. If this is a theistic world, then it is not objective to place anything but a proper theistic value on the facts of history.”⁹¹

⁸⁷ Geisler. *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, 324.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 324.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 325.

⁹⁰ Geisler. *Systematic Theology: Volume One*, 192.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 192.

Response to the Methodological Objections

Historical objectivity is not canceled out simply because every historian must employ a methodology when composing history.

Response to the Problem of Historical Conditioning

Every human being does occupy a relative place in the changing events of the spatio-temporal world. As a result, in at least a limited sense, each historian is a product of his time. However, it does not follow that because the historian is a product of his time; his history is also purely a product of the time. Just because a person cannot avoid their relative place in history does not mean they cannot achieve a meaningful degree of objectivity. This objection confuses the content of knowledge and the process one uses in attaining it.⁹²

Moreover, if relativity were inevitable, historical relativism is self-defeating, because this view would either be historically conditioned and therefore unobjective or it is not relative but objective. If the latter is correct, the historical relativist must admit that objective history is possible. On the other hand, “if the position of the historical relativism is itself relative, it cannot be taken as objectively true—it is simply subjective opinion.”⁹³ In summary, “if it is a subjective opinion it cannot eliminate the possibility that history is objectively knowable, and if it is an objective fact about history, then objective facts can be now about history.”⁹⁴ The bottom line is that objectivity is possible, if the first seneario is true objectivity is not eliminated and in the second relativism is self-defeated.⁹⁵

In the end, is not the constant historical revisionism undertaken by modern historian predicated on the assumption that objectivity is possible? In short, there is no basis for doubting the possibility of a high degree of historical objectivity.

Response to the Problem of Selectivity of Materials

Every day in the United States jurors make judgments about the guilt or innocence of their fellow citizens “beyond reasonable doubt” without having all the evidence. One need not know everything in order to know something. No scientist possesses all the facts yet objectivity is routinely claim and applauded. As long as the historian considers the relevant and critical evidence without overlooking important facts, history is no less objective than science. What is necessary is that facts be selected and reconstructed within the context in which the events represented actually transpired. Selectivity is necessary because no historian can account for everything available on a particular subject. As a result, selectivity does not imply distortion.⁹⁶

⁹² Ibid., 192.

⁹³ Ibid., 193.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 193.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 193.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 193.

In the end, since the evidence for the historicity of the New Testament is greater than for any other document from antiquity, it could easily be argued that if the events recorded in Scripture cannot be objectively known, then it is impossible to know anything else from that time period.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Ibid., 193.

The Historical Reliability of the Bible

Christian apologists and historians have spilt much ink documenting the historical reliability of both the Old and New Testament. Works such as *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* by Josh McDowell, among scores of others, have adequately and conclusively documented the historical reliability of the Bible. Dan Story, author of *Defending Your Faith: How to Answer the Tough Questions*, summarizes the evidence documented by McDowell by observing: “If Christians can demonstrate that the Bible is truthful in all areas in which it can be validated, we have before us the most powerful and compelling evidence for the truthfulness of Christianity. Every apologetic argument rests on the reliability of the Bible, including the deity and resurrection of Jesus Christ.”⁹⁸

Reliability of the Old Testament

In the interest of brevity, we will look at the arguments presented by Dan Story as a tool to summarize the reams of information available on this topic. Story offers the following three proofs for the reliability of the Old Testament: the transmission of the text, archeology, and fulfilled prophecy. Old Testament scribes from the Hebrew tribe of Levi knew they were copying God’s word and therefore went to great lengths to ensure accuracy by counting every line, word, syllable, and letter.⁹⁹ Prior to the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947, the oldest existing Hebrew copy of the Old Testament was the Masoretic Text dated around 900 A.D. The Dead Sea Scrolls have been dated almost a thousands years earlier than the Masoretic Text, around 150 B.C. The Dead Sea Scrolls, which contain two complete copies of Isaiah as well as fragments from virtually every other Old Testament book, were word for word identical to the Masoretic Text in over 95 percent of the readings.¹⁰⁰ The minimal variations that did exist were comprised of obvious slips of the pen and variations in spelling.¹⁰¹ For believers in God’s providential preservation of the scriptures the preceding information is historical proof of preservation, our Old Testament is exactly the same as it was when originally inspired by God.

Nelson Glueck, author of *Rivers in the Desert*, informs his readers that “no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a Biblical reference.”¹⁰² Time and again, the archaeologist’s spade has confirmed Biblical events, customs, cities, and nations mentioned in the Old Testament that skeptics had dismissed as mythological.¹⁰³ Dan Story offers the following summary of the archaeological reliability of the Old Testament:

- Archaeology has proven that Israel derives its ancestry from Mesopotamia, as the Bible teaches (Genesis 11:27-12:24).

⁹⁸ Story. *Defending Your Faith: How to Answer the Tough Questions*. , 34.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁰⁰ Gleason L. Archer. *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*. (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1974), 25.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁰² Nelson Glueck. *Rivers in the Desert*. (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publications Society of America, 1969), 31.

¹⁰³ Story. *Defending Your Faith: How to Answer the Tough Questions*. 36.

- Archaeology suggests that the world’s languages likely arose from a common origin, as Genesis 11 teaches.
- Jericho, and several other cities mentioned in the Old Testament, previously thought to be legendary by skeptics, have been discovered by archaeologists.
- Bible critics used to claim that the Hittite civilization mentioned in Genesis did not exist at the time of Abraham because there was not record of it apart from the Old Testament. However, archaeology has discovered that it not only existed but lasted more than 1,200 years. Now you can get a doctorate in Hittite studies from the University of Chicago.
- Social customs and stories in the Old Testament credited to the time of the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) are in harmony with archeological discoveries, casting additional light on the historical accuracy of the Biblical record.¹⁰⁴

In short, every time the Bible has been checked against extra-biblical sources, the scriptural report has been corroborated, thereby proving the accuracy of the Bible.¹⁰⁵

“One of the strongest evidences that the Bible is inspired by God is its predictive prophecy.”¹⁰⁶ Unlike any other religious documents, the Bible offers over two thousand fulfilled prophecies that validate its historical claims. The specific nature of these predictions cannot be ignored. They deal with the birth, life, and death of Jesus Christ, the nation of Israel, gentile nations (Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, and Rome), cities (Jerusalem, Sidon, and Babylon), and individual people (Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus). In *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, Josh McDowell chronicles 61 Old Testament prophecies that were fulfilled in Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁷ In his book reviewed by the American Scientific Affiliation, *Science Speaks*, Peter Stoner comments on the mathematical probability that any man up to the present time might have fulfilled just eight of the sixty-one prophecies covered by McDowell. Stoner writes, “We find the chance that any man might have lived down to the present time and fulfilled all eight prophecies is 1 in 10¹⁷. That would be 1 in 100,000,000,000,000,000.” In order to comprehend this staggering probability Stoner offers the following illustration:

If we take 10¹⁷ silver dollars and lay them on the face of Texas. They will cover all the state two feet deep. Now mark one of these silver dollars and stir the whole mass thoroughly, all over the state. Blindfold a man and tell him that he can travel as far as he wished, but he must pick up one silver

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 36.

¹⁰⁵ For additional reading on the archeological evidences for the historical reliability of the Bible, consult the following works, Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, Clifford A. Wilson, *Rocks, Relics, and Biblical Reliability*, Edwin Yamauchi, *The Stones and the Scriptures*.

¹⁰⁶ Geisler. *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics.*, 609.

¹⁰⁷ McDowell. *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict.*, 168-192.

dollar and say that this is the right one. What chance does he have of getting the right one? Just the same chance that the prophets had of writing eight prophecies and having them all come true in any one man, from their day to the present time, providing they wrote them according to their own wisdom.¹⁰⁸

When one considers the probability of forty-eight Old Testament prophecies being fulfilled in one person, the odds increase to 1 in 10¹⁵⁷, according to Stoner.¹⁰⁹ Compared to the Biblical prophets, the highly revered seer Nostradamus can only be viewed as a false prophet. Contrary to tabloid claims, Nostradamus never predicted the place or year of a single earthquake nor do his vague prophecies regarding the rise of Hitler compare to the astounding accuracy and specificity of the Biblical prophets.¹¹⁰

Based upon the available manuscript and archeological evidence, as well as the compelling testimony of fulfilled prophecy, there is no reason for any fair-minded person to doubt the historical reliability of the Old Testament.

Reliability of the New Testament

When it comes to the historical reliability of the New Testament, the bibliographical evidence alone is astounding. There are more extant (existing) manuscripts that bear witness to the readings of the New Testament than for any other document from antiquity. More than 24,000 partial and complete New Testament manuscripts are in existence today compared with only 643 copies of Homer's *Iliad*.¹¹¹ Other famous works from antiquity have even less textual evidence than Homer. For example, the writings of Plato, Pliny the Younger, Thucydides, Herodotus, and Caesar have fewer than two dozen surviving copies.¹¹² "In addition, to the Greek manuscripts themselves there are over 86,000 patristic (church fathers) quotations from the New Testament and several thousand lectionaries (early church-service books containing selected Scripture readings) dating from the earliest centuries of the church."¹¹³ In fact, from these sources alone, one is able to reconstruct the entire text of the New Testament with the exception of only eleven verses from materials that date within 150 to 200 years of the life of Christ.¹¹⁴

Not only does the available manuscript evidence for the New Testament dwarf secular works, the amount of time that transpired between the events themselves and their written record is incomparable. The time span between authorship and extant copies for the New Testament is shorter than for any other document from antiquity. While scholars differ on when the New Testament documents were written, there is virtually unanimous agreement, including even the most liberal scholars that all the books of the

¹⁰⁸ Peter Stoner. *Science Speaks*. (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1963), 100-107.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 109-110.

¹¹⁰ Geisler. *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, 615.

¹¹¹ McDowell. *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict.*, 34.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 38.

¹¹³ Story. *Defending Your Faith: How to Answer the Tough Questions.*, 38.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 38-39.

New Testament were written by 100 A.D., approximately 70 years after Jesus death.¹¹⁵ Christian apologists have referenced the fact that Luke does not discuss in the book of Acts the destruction of the temple in 70A.D. by the Romans as proof that Acts was completed in the early 60's A.D.¹¹⁶

Using the traditional dating presented by Ussher in *The Scofield Reference Bible*, Luke finished the book of Acts in 63 A.D. This date is significant for many reasons. First, most of Paul's epistles were written during the Acts period including the Prison Epistles which he wrote under house arrest in Rome as recorded in Acts 28. This is significant because it dates the documents by the New Testament's most prolific writer within thirty years of the life of Christ. Second, according to Acts 1:1, the book of Acts is the second portion of a two part history addressed to Theophilus. By comparing scripture with scripture, it is clear that the first edition of this treatise addressed to Theophilus was the book of Luke. Luke 1:3 records the following, "It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus." If Luke finished the book of Acts in 63 A.D. that means that the gospel of Luke had to have been written first, thereby conclusively proving that the gospel accounts themselves were written within 30 years of the death of Christ. Based upon the authority of Colossians 1:25, this author believes that when Paul penned his last epistle, II Timothy, in 66 A.D. that the canon of the New Testament was complete.¹¹⁷

Once again, no other religious document compares to the New Testament in terms of the space of time between when the events occurred and when they were first written down. For example, "the teachings of Buddha were not recorded until five hundred years after his death."¹¹⁸ Likewise, when one compares the amount of time between the events recorded and the earliest available textual witnesses, the New Testament is infinitely more historically reliable than any other work of antiquity. Consider that Homer's *Iliad* was originally written in 900 B.C. while the earliest surviving copy dates around 400 B.C., resulting in a time span of 500 years. On the other hand, the New Testament which was written between 40-90 A.D. depending on whose dating you use, has early textual witnesses that date around 125 A.D., a time span of less than 100 years.¹¹⁹ In *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, Josh McDowell documents the same reality for eight other leading ancient works. Dan Story offers the following summation of the situation, "In the case of the New Testament, unlike other ancient works, whether secular or religious, not enough time elapsed between when Jesus spoke and when His words were recorded to allow for misrepresentation or the development of legendary material about

¹¹⁵ Norman Geisler and Frank Turek. *I Don't Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 235.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 237-239.

¹¹⁷ Colossians 1:25—"Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God." The word "fulfil" in this verse means to complete. Given the immediate context, Paul is saying that when the revelation of the mystery concerning the Dispensation of Grace is finished, the word of God will also be fulfilled or complete. Therefore, according to the witness of God the Holy Spirit, Paul's writing complete the New Testament canon not John's.

¹¹⁸ Story. *Defending Your Faith: How to Answer the Tough Questions*. 40.

¹¹⁹ McDowell. *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict*. 38.

him.”¹²⁰ The central point here is that despite the attempts of heretics in the 1st century to corrupt the word of God (II Corinthians 2:17), when compared with other classical works, the Bible stands alone in terms of the time gap between when the events recorded occurred and their manuscript witnesses.

The fact that the New Testament was written by eyewitness to the events recorded stands out as a third proof for the historical reliability of the New Testament. In short, the New Testament possesses primary source value. “The New Testament Gospels were written either by eyewitnesses to the events in Christ’s life (Matthew and John) or by men who knew and interviewed eyewitnesses (Mark and Luke).”¹²¹ Paul, having seen the risen and glorified Christ, along with the other authors of the New Testament, was careful to note this first-hand, eyewitness testimony as verification of authenticity. Consider the following examples:

- Luke 1:1-3-- Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, 2) Even as they delivered them unto us, **which from the beginning were eyewitnesses**, and ministers of the word; 3) It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus,
- John 19:35-- And he that **saw it bare record**, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe.
- John 20:30-31-- And many other signs truly **did Jesus in the presence of his disciples**, which are not written in this book: 31) But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.
- Acts 10:39-42-- And **we are witnesses** of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree: 40) Him God raised up the third day, and **shewed him openly**; 41) Not to all the people, **but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us**, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. 42) Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead.
- I Corinthians 15:6-8-- After that, **he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present**, but some are fallen asleep. 7) After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. 8) And last of all **he was seen of me also**, as of one born out of due time.

¹²⁰ Story. *Defending Your Faith: How to Answer the Tough Questions*. 40-41.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 43.

- I Peter 5:1-- The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and **a witness of the sufferings of Christ**, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed:
- II Peter 1:16-- For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, **but were eyewitnesses of his majesty**.
- I John 1:1-3-- That which was from the beginning, **which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life**; 2) For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and **bear witness**, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) 3) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

In addition, the New Testament writers appealed not only to their own observations but also to those of their readers and listeners even when the witnesses were hostile (Acts 2:22, 26:24-28).¹²²

Paul and the other New Testament writers appealed to the testimony of eyewitnesses because people who knew Jesus and had observed his miracles were still alive when the New Testament was being written. This allowed critics and skeptics to openly refute the truth claims of the Biblical writers. The fact that not a single piece of historical information surfaced during the first century to refute the miraculous birth, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is proof that the New Testament documents are historically reliable.¹²³

Have you ever noticed how no one questions whether Plato, Caesar, or Homer have been properly understood? Yet the Bible is criticized by academia as being historically inaccurate and unreliable. All of this demonstrates the bias of unsaved scholarship against the Bible and its central message. Simply stated, the Bible is the most trustworthy historical document from antiquity. “If the Bible is thrown out as unreliable and the critics’ standards remain constant when evaluating the truth-claims of other ancient books, then virtually all other books from antiquity must be discarded as unreliable.”¹²⁴ In conclusion, “there is more evidence for the reliability of the text of the New Testament as an accurate reflection of what was initially written than there is for any ten pieces of classical literature put together. . . [the Bible is] also in better textual shape than the thirty-seven plays of William Shakespeare written in the seventeenth century, after the invention of printing.”¹²⁵

The Incredible Accuracy of Luke

¹²² Ibid., 43.

¹²³ Ibid., 44.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 47.

¹²⁵ Josh McDowell. *A Ready Defense*. (San Bernadino, CA: Here’s Life, 1990), 24.

In last week's posting, we demonstrated by comparing scripture with scripture, that the book of Acts was the second part of a two part history addressed to Theophilus. In Luke 1:1-3, we read the following:

Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us,
2) Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word;
3) It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus,

A careful reading of this passage ought to highlight the following points. First, Luke interviewed eyewitnesses who were present from the beginning of the events recorded. Second, Luke's goal is to present a chronological record of the events as they were commonly believed. While the Gospel of Luke is written to present Christ as the son of man, it also doubles as a chronological history of the life of Christ. When coupled with Acts, the Gospel of Luke takes its reader from the annunciation of the Christ's birth all the way through to Paul imprisonment in Rome in Acts 28. Considering that Luke did not write by his own will or in his own words, but rather the words of God under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit,¹²⁶ the foolishness of doubting these events becomes clear.

Despite the insatiable cries of Biblical skeptics and correctors, Luke's reliability as a historian is unquestionable. Merrill Unger, author of *Archaeology and the New Testament*, informs his readers that archeology has authenticated the gospel accounts, particularly the writings of Luke. Commenting on the book of Acts, Unger writes, "The Acts of the Apostles is now generally agreed in scholarly circles to be the work of Luke, to belong to the first century and to involve the labors of a careful historian who was substantially accurate in his use of sources."¹²⁷ Likewise, after conducting thirty years of research into the accuracy of Luke's writings, historian Sir William Ramsay concluded that, "Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy. . .this author should be placed along with the very greatest historians."¹²⁸

Classical scholar and Roman historian Colin Hemer chronicles Luke's accuracy as a historian in his landmark book, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History*. Hemer identifies eighty-four facts in the last sixteen chapters of Acts that have been confirmed by historical and archeological research:

1. the natural crossing between correctly named ports (Acts 13:4-5)
2. the proper port (Perga) along the direct destination of a ship crossing from Cyprus (13:13)

¹²⁶ II Timothy 3:16, II Peter 1:21

¹²⁷ Merrill, F. Unger. *Archaeology and the New Testament*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1962), 24.

¹²⁸ William Ramsay. *The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament*. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1915), 222.

3. the proper location of Lycaonia (Acts 14:6)
4. the unusual but correct declension of the name Lystra (14:6)
5. the correct language spoke in Lystra—Lycaonian (14:11)
6. to god known to be so associated—Jupiter and Mercurious (14:12)
7. the proper port, Attalia, which returning travelers would use (14:25)
8. the correct order of approach to Derbe and then Lystra from the Cilician Gates (16:1, cf. 15:41)
9. the proper form of the name Troas (16:8)
10. the place of a conspicuous sailors' landmark, Samothrace (16:11)
11. the proper description of Philippi as a Roman colony (16:12)
12. the right location of the river (Gangites) near Philippi (16:13)
13. the proper association of Thyatira as a center of dyeing (16:14)
14. correct designations for the magistrates of the colony (16:22)
15. the proper locations (Amphipolis and Apollonia) where travelers would spend successive night on this journey (17:1)
16. the presence of a synagogue in Thessalonica (17:1)
17. the proper term “politarchs” used for the magistrates there (17:6)
18. the correct implication that sea travel is most convenient way of reaching Athens, with the favoring east winds of summer sailing (14:14-15)
19. the abundant idols in Athens (17:16)
20. the reference to the synagogue in Athens (17:17)
21. the depiction of the Athenian life of philosophical debate in the Agora (17:17)
22. the use of the correct Athenian slang word for Paul, a babler (*spermologos*, 17:18) as well as the court Areopagus (17:19)
23. the proper characterization of the Athenian character (17:21)
24. an altar to the “unknown god” (17:23)
25. the proper reaction of Greek philosophers, who denied the bodily resurrection (17:32)
26. *Areopagites* as the correct title for a member of the court (17:34)
27. a Corinthian synagogue (18:4)
28. the correct designation of Gallio as proconsul, resident in Corinth (18:12)
29. the *bema* (judgment seat), which overlooks Corinth's forum (18:16)
30. the name of Tyrannus as attested from Ephesus in first-century inscriptions (19:9)
31. well-known shrines and images of Diana (19:24)
32. the well-attested “great goddess Diana” (19:27)
33. that the Ephesians theater was the meeting place of the city (19:29)
34. the correct titled *grammateus* for the chief executive magistrate in Ephesus (19:35)
35. the proper title of honor *neokoros*, authorized by the Romans (19:35)
36. the correct name to designate the goddess (19:37)
37. the proper term for those holding court (19:38)
38. use of the plural *anthupatoi*, perhaps a remarkable reference to the fact that two men were conjointly exercising the function of proconsul at this time (19:38)
39. the “regular” assembly, as the precise phrase is attested elsewhere (19:39)
40. use of precise ethnic designation, *beraiaios* (20:4)
41. employment of the ethnic term *Asianos* (20:4)

42. the implied recognition of the strategic importance assigned to the city of Troas (20:7)
43. the danger of the coastal trip in this location (20:13)
44. the correct sequence of places (20:14-15)
45. the correct name of the city (21:1)
46. the appropriate rout passing across the open sea south of Cyprus favored by persistent northeast winds (21:3)
47. the suitable distance between these cities (21:8)
48. a characteristically Jewish act of piety (21:24)
49. the Jewish law regarding Gentile use of the temple area (21:18)
50. the permanent stationing of a Roman cohort at Antonia to suppress any disturbance at festival times (21:31)
51. the flight of steps used by the guards (21:31, 35)
52. the common way to obtain Roman citizenship at this time (22:28)
53. the tribune being impressed with Roman rather than Tarsian citizenship (22:39)
54. Ananias being high priest at this time (23:2)
55. Felix being governor at this time (23:34)
56. the natural stopping point on the way to Caesarea (23:31)
57. whose jurisdiction Cilicia was in at the time (23:34)
58. the provincial penal procedure of the time (24:1-9)
59. the name of Festus, which agrees precisely with that given by Josephus (24:27)
60. the right of appeal as Roman citizens (25:11)
61. the correct legal formula (25:18)
62. the characteristic form of reference to the emperor at the time (25:26)
63. the best shipping lanes at the time (27:5)
64. the common bonding of Cilicia and Pamphylia (27:4)
65. the principal port to find a ship to Italy (27:5-6)
66. the slow passage to Cnidus, in the face of the typical north-west wind (27:7)
67. the right rout to sail in view of the winds (27:7)
68. the locations of Fair Havens and the neighboring site of Lasea (27:8)
69. Fair Havens as a poorly sheltered roadstead (27:12)
70. a noted tendency of a south wind in these climes to back suddenly into a violent northeaster (27:13)
71. the nature of a square-rigged ancient ship, having no option but to drive before a gale (27:15)
72. the precise place and name of this island (27:16)
73. the appropriate maneuvers for the safety of the ship in its particular plight (27:16)
74. the fourteenth night—a remarkable calculation, based inevitably on a compounding of estimates and probabilities confirmed in the judgment of experienced Mediterranean navigators (27:27)
75. the proper term of the time for the Adriatic (27:27)
76. the precise term (*Bolisantes*) for taking soundings, and the correct depth of the water near Malta (27:28)
77. a position that suits the probable line of approach of a ship released to run before an easterly wind (27:39)
78. the severe liability of guards who permitted a prisoner to escape (27:42)

79. the local people and superstitions of the day (28:4-6)
80. the proper title Publius (28:7)
81. Rhegium as a refuge to await a southerly wind to carry them through the straight (28:13)
82. Appii Forum and Tres Tabernae as correctly placed stopping places on the Appian Way (28:15)
83. appropriate means of custody with Roman soldiers (28:16)
84. the conditions of imprisonment, living “at his own expense” (28:30-31)¹²⁹

The accuracy of the preceding list is quite astounding when one considers that Luke recorded these details without the aid of modern GPS, maps, or nautical charts. Can there be any doubt that Luke was an eyewitness to the events he records or at least possessed access to eyewitness testimony, not to mention the knowledge of the Holy Spirit himself? In short, Luke’s use of geographical details, specialized knowledge of nautical details, and specific local knowledge testify to the historical reliability of his writings.

Simply stated, the historicity of the book of Acts is confirmed by overwhelming evidence. As one might expect, this reality makes skeptics rather uncomfortable. In the same book that Luke reports eighty-four historically confirmed details, he also records a total of thirty-five miracles. To make matters worse for the skeptics, many of these miracles are recorded in the second half of the book of Acts within the same historical narrative that has been verified extra Biblically. For example, Luke records the following Pauline miracles:

- temporarily blinded a sorcerer (13:11)
- cured a man who was crippled from birth (14:8)
- exorcized an evil spirit from a possessed girl (16:18)
- performed many miracles that convinced many in the city of Ephesus to turn from sorcery to Jesus (19:11-20)
- raised a man from the dead who had died after falling out a window during a long-winded lecture (20:9-10)
- healed Publius’s father of dysentery, and healed numerous others who were sick on Malta (28:8-9)¹³⁰

Dr. Norman Geisler offers the following assessment of the situation, “in light of the fact that Luke has proven accurate with so many trivial details, it is nothing but pure anti-supernatural bias to say he’s not telling the truth about the miracles he records.”¹³¹

Nothing from antiquity compares with the amount of detailed confirmation that exists for the historical reliability for the book of Acts. Not only does this offer direct confirmation of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, it also indirectly proves the historical reliability of the Gospel of Luke. Paralleling Matthew and Mark, the evidence

¹²⁹ Colin Hemer. *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History*. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990).

¹³⁰ Geisler and Turek. *I Don’t Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist.*, 260.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 60.

suggests that all three of the so-called synoptic gospels were written before 60 A.D., within thirty years after the death of Jesus.¹³²

It is only a foolish heart attitude that would doubt the historical reliability of the Bible. As we said in Part One of this posting two weeks ago, “if Christians can demonstrate that the Bible is truthful in all areas in which it can be validated, we have before us the most powerful and compelling evidence for the truthfulness of Christianity.”¹³³ After weighing the evidence, any reasonable person must accept the Bible as God’s chosen medium for revealing spiritual truth to humanity. The Bible alone can sustain its truth claims in any area in which it can be investigated; therefore, it is reasonable to trust the Bible in the arena of spiritual truth.

¹³² Geisler. *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics.*, 8.

¹³³ Story. *Defending Your Faith: How to Answer the Tough Questions.*, 34.

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