

Defending the Gospel

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It's reported on the biblearchaeology.org website that they recently received an e-mail from a person named "Jenny." In her message Jenny made a number of claims maligning the integrity of Scripture. The gist of her assertions is that the Bible is fiction. Among the specifics she alleged:

- There was no mass exodus of erstwhile Israelite slaves from Egypt.
- David and Solomon are fictional characters.
- The accounts of battles and victories of Israel over her enemies is fiction.
- The Biblical writers hijacked Egyptian history and passed it off as their own.

The Associates For Biblical Research, owns the biblearchaeology.org domain. A representative of the organization, in a lengthy response to Jenny's e-mail, stated in part: "Sadly, most people hold these views because of what they read on the internet or watch on TV. Many have been lied to by their unbelieving college professors and mentors. Some even learn these erroneous views about the Bible in Christian colleges and seminaries! In providing this rather long and detailed response, it is our hope that 'Jenny' and others like her will seriously reconsider the authority of the Bible and its author, Yahweh, and the claims of the Gospel of Jesus Christ."

I might add that many also learn the views expressed by Jenny in their churches.

In this article, I want to discuss the relationship of the gospel to history, and how the gospel is defended and propagated in part by the study of history, and fields touching on history, such as archaeology, and epigraphy, which is the study and deciphering of ancient inscriptions.

Some of you may wonder why many of my sermons and articles have to do with historical subjects. For example, among others I've given sermons on ideas about locations of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the means of their destruction; on Egypt, and evidence of the presence of Joseph and the Israelites in Egypt; on Jesus, James and other apostles and what extra-biblical historical

sources reveal about them; on David and Solomon, and their exploits, and the evidence concerning them from history and archaeology; on the battles of the Bible, and how the record concerning them supports the historical authenticity of Scripture; and we had a service featuring recent discoveries relating to the development of the written Hebrew language.

I'm afraid far too many who identify themselves as Christians have a much too narrow view of what the "gospel" is. Many might think that the subjects I mentioned have little or nothing to do directly with the gospel. If there are people who have that idea, they are mistaken.

The **word of God** is the gospel. Peter wrote: "'But the word of the Lord endures forever.' **Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you**" (1 Peter 1:25). Jesus Christ said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but **by every word** that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). He was quoting Moses, who is recorded as have made that statement in Deuteronomy 8:3. In the book of Hebrews we read, "For indeed **the gospel was preached to us as well as to them,**" meaning **the Israelites in wilderness** before they entered the land of Canaan (Hebrews 4:2). The **ones who preached the gospel** to them were Moses and Aaron, and those who assisted them, and also God himself, when he spoke the ten commandments from Mt. Sinai.

What these Scriptures tell us is that **every book of the Bible is part of the gospel**. Every paragraph, every word in the original autographs of the books of the Bible is part of the gospel. The gospel is not limited to statements to the effect that Jesus died for our sins, or that Jesus is coming to rule the world, although those are central features of the gospel, and in certain respects, everything in the Bible relates to those concepts.

Since the entire word of God, the Bible, is the gospel, that means that **much of the gospel message consists of history**. In certain respects nearly all of it is history, or is directly related to historical material.

The book of Genesis is history, the book of Exodus is history, the book of Leviticus is a history relating the giving of the law through Moses, the book of

Numbers is a history of Israel in the wilderness, the book of Deuteronomy, besides recording laws and prophecy, contains a good deal of historical material. The prophecies of the Bible are history written in advance.

The books of Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1st and 2nd Samuel, the books of Kings, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, and Job are history. And nearly all the other books of the Old Testament contain a significant amount of historical material. Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and Acts are historical records concerning Jesus' ministry and the early Church. Most if not all the other books of the New Testament contain significant historical material as well.

Moses is mentioned seventy-nine times in the New Testament. Abraham is mentioned seventy-one times in the New Testament. David is mentioned fifty-four times in the New Testament.

Although the Bible consists largely of history, in many ways it is a mere summary, containing waymarks, or pointers, to a much larger volume of knowledge. John, at the end of his account of Jesus' ministry, wrote, "And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written" (John 21:25). What this tells us is that the record we find in the book is a tiny fraction of what could be learned about the things Jesus has done. And since Jesus is the Creator, what John wrote is not just hyperbole.

Just as there is much more that could be learned about Jesus, so there's much more we could learn about any subject in the Bible's historical record. Historical research is necessary to fill in many of the gaps in what the Bible reveals.

For example, Luke speaks of Jesus being born in the days of a king named Herod. He writes of a decree from Caesar Augustus, issued while Quirinius was governor of Syria, which coincided with Jesus' birth. Luke tells us, "Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, while Annas and Caiaphas were high priests, the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness" (Luke 3:1-2). To get a better idea of when these things occurred, we can consult historical records. We are given clues from Luke what to look for.

In the book of Daniel are prophesied a series of four kingdoms to be dominant on the earth. The first three of these kingdoms are identified by name. But the fourth is not named. The only way to know what the fourth kingdom is, is through the study of history, and relating historical facts to what is revealed in the prophecies.

The Bible is the foundation of knowledge, it's not the totality of knowledge. We are to build on that foundation and grow in knowledge and spiritual understanding. "The heart of the prudent acquires knowledge, And the ear of the wise seeks knowledge" (Proverbs 18:15).

One way we can grow in knowledge is by learning more from history and science about matters that are covered only briefly in the Bible. A great deal has been learned in modern times, not only about the creation and how it functions, but also about historical matters relating to the Bible. Studying these things in the proper way can help strengthen and confirm our faith and confidence in the Bible and lead us to a more in depth understanding of its revelation.

If you were Satan, or one of Satan's henchmen, how would you go about undermining people's confidence in the gospel, in God's laws, his way of life? An obvious way of doing that, since the Bible is largely a book of history, is to assail the Bible as unreliable, to assert that the historical record related in the Bible is fraudulent, that it's mostly just made up, fiction, myth.

And that's exactly what Satan and his witting or unwitting minions have done. The Bible tells us that God created the universe, and that he created all living things on the earth. Now along comes someone with an alternative explanation. No, it's claimed, "God didn't create life on earth. Life arose spontaneously, of it's own accord. And God didn't create the vast array of living creatures on the earth. They evolved somehow from the first microscopic living things that emerged from a chemical soup."

How did life, complex as it is, even in the tiniest organisms, emerge by chance from a chemical soup, you might ask? And how did even more complex creatures of every description manage to evolve from those tiny organisms? "Well never mind the details, just trust the experts," we're told. And if you don't believe what they say, you are "anti-science."

Don't trust the Bible, trust the spin meisters of the evolutionary fable, is what

we're expected to do.

And what about Moses? Moses didn't really write the first five books of the Bible we're told, writing didn't even exist when he supposedly lived. When that claim was proven false, additional claims were made to the effect that the Bible is fraudulent. Where's the proof? There is no proof, but "trust the experts," because that's what they say.

Jude wrote: "Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to **contend earnestly for the faith** which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 1:3).

An article published by the Associates For Biblical Research relates their conception of how confidence in God's word has steadily eroded in the modern world.

"If we've heard it once, we've heard it a thousand times: 'Those who ignore history are destined to repeat it.' This little truism would long ago have slipped to the status of mere cliché', except for the fact that it's painfully true. Indeed, we can't correct the mistakes of the past unless we know what they are, and understand their negative impact on our lives."

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In the nineteenth century, "... while Christians were busy focusing on the salvation of Polynesians and pygmies, a handful of marginal university scholars were breeding worms of doubt about the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. At first, the scholarly majority paid little attention to their theories. By the mid 19th century, in the absence of anything like biblical archaeology or ancient Near Eastern studies that might have acted as a corrective, higher critical scholarship was well on its way toward acceptability. But if Moses didn't write the Pentateuch, then who did, and where did all those stories come from? The higher critical answer: The first five books of the Bible derived from a series of Jewish writers during the 9th through the 5th centuries BC, who wrote down their versions of ancient "campfire" stories spun by more ancient Israelites, embellished by vivid imaginations and theological agendas. In a nutshell, the growing community of European higher critics was saying that the foundational

portion of Scripture, the Mosaic Torah itself, was historically unreliable and little better than fiction. And the gnawing of the worms was increasing exponentially.

"By the late 1800s, the tide of scholarly opinion concerning the historical reliability of the Bible was turning decidedly in the favor of the higher critics. The worms of doubt had eaten a whole [sic] through the (former) Christian faith of vast swaths of academia, and were beginning to gnaw into the minds of the public as well. The missionaries were still preaching to the natives in distant lands, but back home the credibility of Scripture was quickly disintegrating. European Christianity wasn't paying much attention, however, and what worms it did see, it simply tolerated. Churches took no steps to cure the rising doubts about biblical reliability, and the worms began to eat away at European Christendom itself.

"The erosion of belief in the historical authenticity and authority of Scripture might have gone farther and faster if not for the rise of biblical exploration and archaeology in the 1880s. Early in the 19th century, the published exploits of Napoleon in Egypt had lit a fire of interest in the Near East, the Bible lands. British, German and French explorers plied through Egypt, Mesopotamia, Asia Minor and the Levant, shedding light on the biblical word and hauling back huge quantities of artifacts to the museums of Europe, heightening interest in biblical history. During this period the disciplines of Near Eastern studies and archaeology were born, and they slowed the public acceptance of higher critical scholarship, even tempering it in the universities, by demonstrating the tangible reality of the world described in the Bible. But right here the story takes an almost bizarre turn.

"Ironically, the church, its universities and seminaries, by the late 19th century, had almost completely swallowed critical biblical scholarship hook, line and sinker. And they chose mostly to ignore the secular phenomenon of digging up the biblical world. That's right—biblical archaeology was almost entirely a secular enterprise because the church and its schools for ministers chose to ignore it in favor of studying the biblical text in isolation, and higher critical theory was now their adopted method for doing just that. The worms had eaten the need for biblical reliability right out of the church! From the latter part of the 19th century into the first half of the 20th century both European and American Christianity had the opportunity to embrace and support the scientific confirmation of the Bible through archaeological research, but failed to do so."

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"So here we are. The worms of doubt that gnaw away at our trust in biblical truth have infested our American culture, and have even shredded much of contemporary Christianity's belief in biblical reliability. But individual Christians and churches still have a chance not to repeat history, but to take the present opportunity to support the scientific confirmation of Scripture in the field most relevant to the biblical text itself: archaeology" ("Missions of the Mind: Christianity's Colossal Failure to Win on the Home Front," July 05, 2006, Steven Collins, www.biblearchaeology.org, originally published by Trinity Southwest Seminary).

It should be understood that originally the term "archaeology" meant the study of all kinds of historical records, not just artifacts dug up from the earth. A full comprehension of history must include all evidence available, including written records and artifacts that can shed light on the details of history.

Overwhelmingly an accurate appraisal of those records supports the Biblical testimony. But most people have been led to believe the exact opposite, because they have not been taught much about how the Bible is supported by historical research. Instead they've been fed and swallowed a steady diet of cleverly devised lies.

A reason to be interested in the discovery of the earliest stages of the development of the Hebrew alphabet during the era of the Israelite sojourn in Egypt is that it helps to expose certain falsehoods that have been promulgated to discredit the Bible.

"...the fact that Old Hebrew is thought to have first emerged around 900 BC contributes to the thinking that the accounts in the first books of the Bible, like the exodus from Egypt, were passed down as oral traditions that became exaggerated and mixed with fiction before being written down centuries later."

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"If it turns out that the world's oldest alphabet was Hebrew, and that Moses did, in fact, use it to write the Torah, that would change how the world views the Exodus period, the Bible, and world history" ("WAS HEBREW THE FIRST ALPHABET?" Steve Law, March 9, 2019, patternsofevidence.com).

Maybe in fact the world wouldn't change how it views the Bible, but it would

have even less of an excuse to believe the malicious fables that have been spun to destroy confidence in the historical record contained in the Bible. But even without proof that Hebrew was the first alphabet, there is little basis for denying Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch.

Another source comments on the skepticism towards the Bible that's dominant in today's world, and how the historical record preserved in the Bible was developed, and how the Bible has been vindicated by archaeological and historical research.

"The first five books of the Old Testament—Genesis to Deuteronomy—are known collectively as the Pentateuch, and the belief of Jews and Christians that in their present form they are the work of Moses was not challenged until two centuries ago when the emergence of 'Textual Criticism' gave opportunity to men with rationalising tendencies to find reasons for asserting that most of the Old Testament was written neither by the reputed authors nor at the period indicated. From this it was an easy step to suggest that much of Old Testament narrative and history is in fact nothing more than 'written up' legend and folk-lore having little or no basis in fact: this process, continued into the present, has created in the popular mind a totally false impression of the Old Testament and taken away a great deal of its value. The fact that the discoveries of archaeologists in the last century have nullified many of the Critics' conclusions and assertions, and in not a few cases made their confident 19th century pronouncements look rather silly, has not yet filtered through to popular writers, teachers and broadcasters, with the result that the 19th century picture of the Old Testament is still the one that gets the publicity. It is unfortunately true that youthful Christians are liable to be impressed by this show of scholarship and tend to accept the presentation without knowing how utterly out-of-date it really is...."

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"The main principles upon which the case for the late writing of the Old Testament is built up are five in number, to wit:

1. That writing was unknown and had not been invented before the time of the Hebrew prophets, about 700-800 B.C.

2. That the religious thought of nations, without exception, started with polytheism in the earliest times and progressed to monotheism, the worship of one God, in later times, and not the other way round, as Genesis has it.
3. That the code of laws credited to Moses is too advanced for so early a date and must have been devised in the time of the kings of Israel and Moses' name attached.
4. That the Levitical ritual is too sophisticated for a people just out of Egypt and must have been the product of a priestly class after the Babylonian captivity.
5. That the historical events in Babylonia and Egypt recorded in Genesis are unhistorical and never occurred, and are a later compilation of old traditions and folk-lore, and that many of the kings and notable persons referred to never existed.

"The cold hard facts of archaeological discovery since 1880 have exploded all these assumptions—for assumptions they were—and demolished the theories regarding the Old Testament built up so painstakingly... by the critics of the 19th century."

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"Not one statement of fact in Genesis has been disproved; a great many records of people and events for which the Bible was the only authority for thousands of years have now been established indisputably true by means of contemporary written tablets and documents. The quiet comment of Prof. A. H. Sayce (died 1933) a noted archaeologist, is relative and pungent. *'It is not the Biblical writer, but the modern author, who is now proved to have been unacquainted with the contemporaneous history of the time.'*

"In thus establishing the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch the origin of the documents now composing Genesis have still to be explored; the whole of the events therein narrated occurred long before Moses' lifetime. With regard to the other four books, Exodus to Deuteronomy, the position is different; they have to

do entirely with matters with which Moses was personally connected. There can be no doubt that these four books were composed and completed in written form during the Exodus itself, probably in the main during the thirty-eight years that Israel was stationary at Kadesh, the final chapters of Deuteronomy with their account of the death of Moses being added by Joshua or Eleazar. Dr. A. S. Yahuda, a leading authority on the ancient Egyptian and Hebrew languages, pointed out in 1933 that these four books were written in an Egyptianised form of Hebrew which demanded that the writer thought as much in Egyptian as he did in Hebrew. That writer, of course, was Moses, brought up in the court of Pharaoh and 'learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians'.

"In the case of Genesis it has been well established by experts in the ancient languages that the last fourteen chapters of Genesis, which detail the story of Joseph in Egypt, contain a goodly number of Egyptian words, and the first eleven chapters, from creation to the death of Terah, a great number of Akkadian and Sumerian words and names. (The Akkadians were descendants of Shem and Sumerians descendants of Ham; both races dwelt together in the plains of the Tigris and Euphrates whence Abraham came). In the first case it is evident that the history of Joseph's life in Egypt and the death there of Jacob was recorded by Joseph or his fellows and these documents, written on papyrus and quite likely in Egyptian, came into Moses' possession. The records of the lives of Abraham, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, and the twelve sons of Jacob in Canaan, which might well have been either on goatskins, parchment or clay tablets, all of which were in use in Canaan, would also have been preserved in the archives of one of the heads of the tribes—probably Judah—and so likewise have come to Moses. In the case of the first eleven chapters internal evidences point to their having been compiled, in the form in which they came to Moses, during the period twenty-two to twenty-five centuries before Christ, and therefore considerably earlier than the time of Abraham. Among these evidences are the facts that all the geographical names are those in current use at that period and some of them had passed out of use or been replaced by other names by Abraham's day; the proper names are derived from Akkadian or Sumerian originals and in many cases incorporate the names of their gods; many words of Akkadian or Sumerian origin appear in the text. Thus the geographical names Eden, Havilah, Nod, Hiddekel, in Gen. 2 & 4 are the

Sumerian Edinu, Khavila, Nadu, Diglat, of the 24th century B.C.

"Instances such as these show that Genesis chapters 2 to 4 at least were composed by a dweller on the Euphrates not later than about 2300 B.C.; certain grammatical errors in dealing with some Sumerian words tend to indicate that the compiler was more familiar with the Semitic Akkadian language than the Hamitic Sumerian, and this strengthens the supposition that he was one of the ancestors of Abraham, perhaps Eber. He must, even at this early date, have compiled his narrative from pre-existing records, and almost certainly had two separate accounts of previous times before him, one Semitic and one Hamitic, which he combined into a continuous story.

"So the sacred book of the Christian and Jewish faiths had its origin, not in folklore and legends of ancient times collected and edited by some priestly dignitary in the 8th B.C. century, but in the painstaking work of men of God who lived in the dawn of history, setting down their stories in archaic forms of writing which had to be translated and copied time and again in new and different characters, even before Abraham saw them. It has been abundantly demonstrated in this our day that the stories of the Old Testament are factually true, the work of men who knew the facts and lived within measurable time of the events they recorded" ("THE ANTIQUITY OF THE BOOKS OF MOSES," Bible Study Monthly, www.biblefellowshipunion.co.uk).

In 1888 the Tel-el-Amarna tablets were discovered, with the dates of the writings stretching back to 1400 B.C. Then the uncovering of the Hittite Empire in Anatolia divulged writing dated to 1800 B.C. Ras Shamra in Syria was dug up, with writing dating to 1400 B.C. Tablets found in Babylon, Assyria and Sumer are dated as far back as 2000 to 2500 B.C. And these are just a few of many examples of how the Bible's critics have been proven wrong.

What I plan to continue to do as long as I have the breath and strength to do so, is to expand on the themes of Scripture, and to expose the falsehoods of those who attack its veracity. I plan to highlight corroborative evidence of the truth of Scripture, and thus to help make the gospel more plain and believable to those who are willing to hear.

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