

Can I Trust The Bible?

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Tough Questions That Critics Ask Series

This morning I am going to begin a new series called “Tough Questions the Critics Ask.” And in the course of this series, I hope to address a number of the toughest questions that people ask about Christianity. Questions like: What about all the other religions? Why do you think Christianity alone is totally true? How can God be good and allow innocent people to suffer? How could God be good and ever send anyone to hell?

Last Sunday, Easter Sunday, I began this series by setting forth The Case for the Resurrection. Those of you who were here know that I attempted to look at the Resurrection as a lawyer would look at it, examining and sifting the evidence and putting the question to you whether, in fact, the writers of the New Testament were telling the truth when they said that Jesus was literally and physically raised from the dead. By the way, I want to commend you, the church, for the hard work you put into making Easter weekend a smashing success. I really love you and I particularly love the fact that many of you work very hard to invite friends and relatives and you pray for your church and for your church's growth. And you pray for me. I appreciate that and I love you for it. The reason I mention all of this is because I think that you might be encouraged by the fact that last weekend there were 95 decisions for Christ recorded through this church. That includes the children and the teens as well as the main services and Joshua House. But we had 95 decisions for Christ last weekend. So you guys done good!

Well, to begin this series on Tough Questions that Critics Ask I want to start with the reliability of the Bible since the Bible is foundational for Christian belief. The question absolutely arises at some point: Can I trust the Bible? And anyone of you who has been a follower of Christ more than a few days and have decided to make your followership of Christ public has immediately heard an objection or two or ten to the claims of the Bible.

Now, I need to tell you that in the course of a half an hour or 40 minutes that I get to speak, I won't be able to exhaustively tackle every issue that some of your friends or perhaps you might have. But I can point you to resources that might assist you in answering your friend's questions or answering your own questions. Today, I would like to tackle what I have heard over the course of the last 23 odd years as the chief objections people raise to trusting the Bible. You have probably heard some of these objections.

First of all, how can you believe the Bible when it was written thousands of years ago and copied and recopied? What we have today isn't even close to what was written thousands of years ago. This objection is based on the thought that Bible transmission

is like the old telephone game that maybe you played as children at a party. There would be a simple message that was written down and the kids would line up and the message had to be whispered from one child to another until after 20 kids the last one had to repeat the message and you would see how close you came to the original message. So the message was typically a convoluted sentence like: The little boy was afraid when he saw the big gray elephant at the circus and dropped popcorn all over his mother. By the time that message was whispered through 20 people, the message would come back sounding something like The Gettysburg Address. "Four score and seven years ago, our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation..."

You say how did it ever come out that way? Well, error after error was compounded and repeated and changed and twisted.

How can you believe that what you even have today is close to what was written thousands of years ago and hasn't been the product of some gigantic telephone game? Besides, the Bible was written hundreds of years after the events that it records. I mean it is totally unreliable as history. It is just filled with myths and legends. But you can't rely on the Bible when it comes to history. It is not a history book.

So you have the telephone game objection, which is really a transmission issue. You have the historical question of the trustworthiness or reliability of the biblical documents as history. And this has all been compounded in recent years. Someone is just as likely as not to pick up a Time Magazine and say, "I just read an article in Time Magazine, the final word in biblical scholarship, and a group of biblical scholars just decided that this particular statement was not uttered by Jesus and wasn't said until 100 years later." So the whole issue of reliability has been clouded by well-published reports of meetings among certain biblical scholars. Probably the most famous meeting is the Jesus Seminar.

And once you wade through all of that transmission questions, historical reliability questions, and the issue of contradictions, you might finally come down to the issue of: What makes you think that this book is different than any other book? Why in the world do you think that it is inspired by God? As sort of a tack on to that, some folks might raise the issue of prophecies by other famous psychics or prognosticators – people like Nostradamus.

That is not Christian faith – believing something that you know is not true. Christian faith is believing something that you have checked out. That you know is true and as a result are choosing to submit to and live in conformity to. Let me tell you why I am so enthusiastic about today's topic. It is because of the effect that tackling these questions early on had on my own Christian faith.

Many of you know that I became a follower of Christ from a Jewish background when I was 18. I was going to college up in Cleveland at a school called Case Western Reserve. After I became a follower of Christ at age 18 I decided to double major in religion and history. So I took a lot of philosophy classes and religion classes as well as

history classes. When I was 20 years old, I hit a low point in my walk with God where I began to wonder whether, in fact, I had just been sold a bill of goods regarding the truthfulness of Christianity. Maybe I was just psychologically weak. Maybe I just believed all of this out of emotional need, but it wasn't really true. That thought began weighing down on me in a heavier and heavier way, day by day.

At the time I was being battered from several different directions. One of my religion classes, the professor used to hold me up in front of the rest of the class as an object of ridicule. He used to call me his "Man of Faith." "Well, let's see how our man of faith over there would answer this particular question." At the same time I was living next door to a fellow who was getting his Ph.D. in philosophy and who had been raised in a fundamentalist home, but rejected his upbringing completely. He liked nothing better than to come over in the evening and argue with me about the foolishness of Christianity. So I was being hammered in my religion class. I was being hammered from this fellow who was just finishing up his dissertation in philosophy. Then I was also going through something of an emotional crisis. Marlene and I had just gotten married. We were the only couple in our class who were married at such a young age. And so we were removed instantly from the social life and social interaction of many of the other kids on campus.

Swirl all of this around and I had a faith crisis of major proportions. By the grace of God, God used that crisis by creating in me a desire, an insatiable hunger, to find out if Christianity was really true. Marlene can tell you that I came home night after night with stacks of books. I read everything I could get my hands on regarding the reliability and authority of the Bible. I read everything that the higher critics said. Everything I could get my hands on regarding archeology. Everything I could find regarding the transmission of the text.

The more I read, the more I studied, the more bit by bit, my faith was strengthened and reconstructed. I believe that God allowed me to go through the fire in order to lay a foundation in my life where I became rock solidly convinced that the Bible was true. That Christianity was not just a psychological game or a crutch for the emotionally weak. That this was the sort of thing that the more you looked into it, the better it looked. I praise God for a year in the fire because honestly, friends, that year became the foundation for my entire Christian life. What drives me and keeps on driving me is that I know that this is true. I am willing to give, I am glad to give my life to Christ because I have become convinced after a lot of sweat and tears that I am not involved in a nice little philosophy or a fad or some psychological game. That Christianity accurately describes reality and speaks to us about a God who is really there, who really did at a certain point in time send his Son, Jesus Christ, to die for our sins. And that there really is an eternal future of heaven and hell that awaits a person depending on what they decide to do with Jesus Christ. I believe with all of my heart now that people's eternal destinies hang on what they do with the truth found in the Bible.

So I want to assist other people who ask, "Can I trust the Bible?" That is the title of today's talk.

Now the first question that I want to tackle is simply this: Is the Bible that we have today what was written 2000-3000 years ago? In other words, how do we know that this Bible that I have in my hand is even close to what was originally written? How do we know that this hasn't been the product of an elaborate telephone game in which error upon error has been multiplied and transmitted until the message is so garbled that it is nothing like what Moses actually wrote or what Matthew and Mark actually penned, if they in fact penned it.

Because of the brevity of my remarks, I would like to commend to your attention for further reading two books. If you are taking notes, you may want to jot down these two titles. One is called *The New Testament Documents – Are They Reliable?* by F. F. Bruce. It is a little paperback book. And *Is the New Testament Reliable?* by Paul Barnett. Both of those books will be available in our bookstore next week, but you can pick them up at any Christian bookstore. Both of them do a fine job with the issue of transmission and historical reliability. I hope, over the next few weeks, to convince you that if you don't know a good answer to a good question, someone probably does and has written extensively on it. You can therefore honestly say, "I don't know, but if you're really interested, I'll find out an answer for you." Trust me, after 2000 years, no one is going to come along with a question that has not been thought of and brought Christianity tumbling to the ground.

Let me begin with the Old Testament. The problem before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls was how accurate are the copies of the Old Testament text that we have today compared to the ones that people had 2000 years ago? The story of the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls is one of the truly fascinating tales of modern times. In February of 1947 a young Bedouin shepherd boy named Mohammed was searching for a lost goat. While he was walking he tossed a rock into a hole in a cliff on the west side of the Dead Sea about 8 miles south of Jericho. To his surprise he heard the sound of shattering pottery. He decided to investigate and he climbed into this opening that led to a cave. He discovered an amazing sight. On the floor of the cave were several large jars containing leather scrolls wrapped in linen cloth. Because the jars were carefully sealed, the scrolls had been preserved in excellent condition for over 1900 years.

Well these scrolls immediately got into the hands of a professor at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and several archeologists including the world famous archeologist, William Albright. The bottom line is that the scrolls contained manuscript evidence of the Old Testament written in 125 BC. Previously the oldest Old Testament manuscripts that we had were written in 900 AD. So the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls pushed back the manuscripts that we had 1000 years.

In 1000 years, from 125 BC to 900 AD, was there a faithful transmission of the manuscripts? The extraordinary answer is absolutely yes! One scroll contained the book of Isaiah. Let's take the most important chapter to most Christians - Isaiah 53, just as an example. Comparing the Dead Sea Scrolls version to Isaiah 53 as recorded in

the text from 900 AD, out of 166 words in Isaiah 53 there is only one word of three letters that there was any variation at all after 1000 years.

You need to understand that the Jews preserved the Old Testament as no other manuscript has ever been preserved. They kept tabs on every letter. They had special classes of men [scribes, lawyers, massoretes] within their culture whose sole duty was to preserve and transmit these documents with perfect fidelity. The scribes who copied the Bible in order to insure accuracy actually counted all of the letters and words.

Whoever counted all of the letters and words in Plato? Or in Aristotle? Or in Cicero? The Jews counted all of the letters and all of the words in all of the sentences of the Old Testament! They discovered that the middle letter of the first five books of the Bible known as the Torah, the middle letter was a 'vov' in a word found in Leviticus 11:42. So to insure accuracy that there was no slip of the pen, when they got done with a copy, they would count up all the words and then all the letters and make sure that the middle letter was still the 'vov' in Lev. 11:42. This was a sacred book to the Jews. Their lives were found in this book. They believe that God authored the book. There was nothing more important on earth to them than that it be transmitted accurately. Every flawed or worn out copy was buried.

The evidence for the New Testament writings is even more overwhelming in terms of the accuracy of transmission than the Old Testament. You see, we have over 5000 Greek manuscripts of parts of the New Testament, some of which date from the 2nd and 3rd Centuries. We have a whole New Testament dating from the middle of the 4th Century, about 325-350 AD. I saw one of the oldest complete New Testament in existence, the Codex Sinaiticus, which is contained in the British Museum.

Now to put the manuscript evidence for the New Testament in perspective, there are only 10 ancient copies of Julius Caesar's *Gaelic Wars*, the earliest of which was made 1000 years after it was written. The earliest copy that we have of Homer's *Iliad*, which is the most famous writing from the ancient world, was written 500 years after the original. Tacitus, who was considered by classical scholars to be the authority on ancient Rome, trusted by classical scholars, we have one copy of his work written 1000 years after the original. The earliest copy we have of some of Aristotle's writing is 1400 years after Aristotle wrote.

We have 5400 manuscripts written within two centuries and this abundance of manuscript evidence is strengthened by the fact that the early church fathers, those church leaders from about 90 AD to 250-300 AD so extensively quoted the New Testament that New Testament scholars tell us that you could reconstruct the entire New Testament from their writings. We find 25 of the 27 New Testament books quoted by an early church father who wrote at about 100 AD. So we know that virtually the entire New Testament existed in 100 AD because the books are quoted. The point is that we have writings from virtually every New Testament book other than 2 John and Jude, within 50 years of their actual writing.

I haven't the time to discuss with you the science of textual criticism. But there is a science in which scholars can compare manuscripts with manuscripts, texts with texts, word to word, letter to letter, and from these 5400 manuscripts scholars have been able to come up with a text that is as close to the original as we could possibly hope.

The bottom line is that we have 99.5% of what was actually written. And what was actually written was written between 20 years of Jesus' life and perhaps 40 years of Jesus' life. At the outside 60 years of Jesus' life because we have quotes from the oldest books in the 90's of the first century.

Is what we have today what was written 2000 years ago? The answer is yes! Unreservedly yes! The Bible we have is not the product of a giant telephone game. What we have is remarkably close to what was written.

Well, is the Bible historically reliable? Is what we have accurate as far as all that we know of history?

Let me quote to you from two of the most prominent archeologists in this century – William Albright, who is probably among the greatest two or three archeologists in world history; here is what William Albright said, "There can be no doubt that archeology has uniformly confirmed the historicity of the Old Testament." Nelson Glueck, who was a renowned Jewish archeologist from Hebrew University in Jerusalem said, "It may be stated categorically that no archeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference..." and then he went on to refer to the almost incredibly accurate memory of the Bible, particularly so as it is judged by archeological fact.

Is the Bible historically reliable? Occasionally biblical scholars have opposed a statement in the Bible on the grounds that the statement was anachronistic or clearly at odds with known discoveries only to be proven wrong by later and better information. In the 19th Century it was thought that the Bible was entirely wrong as it referred to the Hittites because this great people of antiquity were never mentioned in the Bible. And the Bible mentions them 47 times. Well, the non-existence of the Hittites was one of the major proofs against the historical reliability of the Bible in the 19th Century. Then in 1906 excavations were done in Turkey and they discovered that this particular area was the capital of the Hittite Empire. The more they dug in this site, the more extensive the evidence was that the Hittites were in fact a great people. The Bible record was vindicated.

Or for example the existence of the City of Nineveh. The Bible says in the book of Jonah that Nineveh was an exceedingly great city and that it took three days to walk around it. The immense city had so completely disappeared that the French philosopher, Voltaire, ridiculed the biblical description as a phantom metropolis that took three days to walk around. Then in the 19th Century archeological work was done and the ancient site of Nineveh was discovered. It was found to be an immense megalopolis for the ancient world.

One of the key accomplishments during the reign of King David was the capture of the city of Jerusalem. This was problematical for scripture scholars because the Bible says that the Israelites entered the city by way of a tunnel that led to the Pool of Siloam. But the pool was thought to be outside the city walls at the time and not inside. And so this was thought to be an anachronism. But in the 1960's they did extensive archeological work on the city walls of Jerusalem and just as the Bible said, that pool was inside the city walls during the time of David.

The point is that a lot of attacks on the Bible are the result of us simply not having enough information. Occasionally we need to say, "Well, this question needs to be studied further. Criticisms in the past have been answered by better and more extensive archeological work. Perhaps this particular issue will be answered in the same way."

There are an extraordinary number of correspondences between Old Testament claims and the assured findings of archeology. For example, in Genesis 14 the Bible says, "Five kings fought against four kings." This war of the kings is recorded in the Mari Tablets. This Mari letter actually revealed names like Abraham and Jacob and Benjamin. Not that they are necessarily referring to the biblical Abraham or Jacob, but we find that Abraham and Jacob and Benjamin were common names in use in the early second millennium BC.

The Bible contains dozens of lists of ancient kings. In no case out of the dozens of lists of ancient kings has archeology ever contradicted the placement of one of the kings on the list. The better the information we get from the ancient world, the more the Old Testament is confirmed.

And we have even better evidence for the historical reliability of the New Testament. I want you to look with me to Luke 3:1. Because a lot of people are unfamiliar with the Bible and think that the style of the Bible is the style of ancient myths and legends. You know – Long, long ago in a far away land... That the Bible ought to have this mystical, far off quality that could have taken place any time and anywhere. In the fog...in the mists... like an ancient tale of the Lochness Monster, swimming through the mist of some Scottish lake. Read Luke 3:1-2. "In the 15th year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar – when Pontius Pilate was Governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene – during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert."

Do you need more exact placement? Luke names every relevant governmental and religious leader at the time and the scope of their authority, and pins the year: the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar. He is referring to 28 AD. If he were writing today, he would say, "I'm talking about 1968; the year of Martin Luther King Junior's assassination; the year Bobby Kennedy was shot; the year riots broke out in Cleveland, Detroit and Harlem; the year Richard Nixon was elected president for the first time." One interesting fact is this Lysanias, the tetrarch of Abilene, was unknown to historians until about 20 years ago. The only Lysanias that anyone knew about was a

guy who was killed in 36 BC. Historians and biblical critics said, “Look here. Luke is anachronistic. He got the wrong person in the wrong time.” Then archeologists found an inscription near Damascus that speaks of the freed men of Lysanias the tetrarch and is dated around 28 AD.

I could give you example after example from the book of Acts. I would encourage you to pick up *Is the New Testament Reliable?* and look at the historical evidence by Paul Barnett. But Luke’s reliability as a historian is unparalleled.

Let me sum this up by saying Sir William Ramsey was an archeologist, a very wealthy Englishman, living at the turn of the Century. He was trained in the German historical school, which taught that the book of Acts was a product of the mid-2nd Century AD. He was firmly convinced that it in no way could have been written by an eyewitness. But he was compelled by his research to completely reverse his beliefs.

Ramsey tells of an incident in which he sought to recreate Paul’s sea voyage from Crete to Rome in a certain season that Luke mentions. And all of the biblical critics of the day said that this was totally fictitious – this shipwreck that is described in the Bible, the winds, and the reefs. Well, Ramsey had the money to thoroughly recreate the scene and they actually built a boat that would be like the ancient boats. They got into it during the season and a wind pushed them out into the sea just as described in the book of Acts. They ended up going through the same journey, and encountered the same kinds of storms and sea currents. They ran up on the same reefs that Luke said his boat ran up on. After dragging himself from the sea that Paul dragged himself up from nineteen centuries before, Ramsey was convinced. In fact, after twenty years, he found that the book of Acts was absolutely reliable in the most minute details of ancient custom, language, topography and geography.

I could demonstrate, if I had the time, the same level of accuracy in the gospel of John and in the gospel of Mark. The point is that the more people look into the historical reliability of the Bible, the more convinced they become of its accuracy.

You say, “Well, Rich, with the abundance of facts that you cited, why is it that some scholars still say that the Bible is historically unreliable?”

Let me tell you a little story about the philosopher Hegel. Hegel’s philosophy underlines a good deal of modern thought. His philosophy was essentially an evolutionary philosophy. But in a famous little story Hegel was teaching a philosophy of history class and showing how a set of facts in one period of history fit his philosophy of history. Well, there happened to be a historian in the room who raised his hand and said, “But Herr Professor, the facts did not happen in the sequence that you said they happened in. The facts are otherwise.” To which, Hegel responded, “Well, then, screw the facts.”

Screw the facts. Let me tell you a personal story.

When I was an undergraduate and as I told you I was, in part, a religious studies major, I had a professor in one of my classes who suggested that the book of Deuteronomy was written in the 5th Century BC. I raised my hand and I said, "Professor, even the most radical critics would not date it any later than the time of King Josiah, about 620 BC. And I happen to believe that it was written during the time of Moses about 1400 BC." Well, the professor responded very curtly, very sharply to me and said, "Have you ever read the article in the Encyclopedia Judaica?" I said, "Well, no." He said, "Why don't you read it before you challenge me on the dating of the book of Deuteronomy." I thought, "Well, I OK I will read it. There might be something there that I need to learn." And I went to the library and read it. Well, the article was a very conservative article written by a Jewish guy who dated Deuteronomy at about 1400 BC. The professor had never read the article. But he was so used to bullying students with these kinds of tactics and having students back down and cower that he was never challenged on his tactics.

So I read the article. Vindicated, I xeroxed it and made copies for the other students in the class. I raised my hand the next day and said, "Professor, yesterday you mentioned that you believe the book of Deuteronomy was written in 500 BC. You said that I should go and read the article in the Encyclopedia Judaica. It said because of the form of Deuteronomy, it is properly dated around 1400 BC." To which he responded not, "Oh my goodness, I guess I was wrong. I must have been mistaken regarding what the encyclopedia article would say" or "Let me see that article" or "I need to revise my thinking" – the Professor said, "Form, what is form? You know I once saw a piece of Myian pottery that when I looked at it I could have sworn that it was just a piece of Egyptian pottery that I had seen in an archeological dig." When the facts are otherwise, screw the facts because of a prior commitment.

You say, "Well, Rich, even if the Bible was historically reliable and even if archeology has confirmed all that you say it has, why should I believe that it is inspired? That it was a product of not only human invention and ingenuity, but a product of God?"

One of the most remarkable things about the Bible is its internal consistency. There are 66 books written over a period of 1500 years by more than 40 persons who lived in different historical eras and regions and cultures. Their occupations ranged from shepherd to physicians and lawyers, tax collectors. Books were written from everywhere from Persia in the East to Rome in the West. And yet there is a remarkable consistency concerning the message. That there is just one God. That that one God is a spiritual being. That he is holy. That people have sinned against this one God. That God is very patient and slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. That God has devised a way for people to be reconciled to himself. That the only way to come to God is through a blood sacrifice and there is a perfect sacrifice that God offered in the death of his Son. That the way is faith.

You say, "Well, why are you pointing out this internal consistency across 66 books and 1500 years?"

Josh McDowell, who has written some classic books defending the truthfulness of Christianity, says this, “A representative of the great books of the western world came to my house recruiting salesmen for their series. I challenged him to take ten of the authors from one walk of life and one generation, in one place, at one time, in one mood, one continent, one language and just one controversial subject. The Bible, of course, speaks on hundreds of controversial subjects. I asked that author if you just took ten coming from the same time, same place, same language and all of that, would they all agree on one controversial subject? He said, ‘No, absolutely not.’ But the Bible has this incredible agreement.”

And the Bible is the only book in world history that has a 100% hit record concerning predictive prophecy.

You say, “Well, Rich, fulfilled prophecy is certainly not unique to the Bible. People like Nostradamus prophesied amazing things centuries before they occurred. And all of Nostradamus’ prophecies were fulfilled.”

Let me tackle this one as I wrap it up in terms of fulfilled prophecy. People like Nostradamus are featured in lots of books – The Amazing Prophecies of Nostradamus or Edgar Cayce or Jeanne Dixon. There are these TV shows that have popularized their prophecies, Unexplained Mysteries. You can’t hardly go into a bookstore and look in the New Age section without seeing one of these so-called prophets and their supposed amazing prophecies. But I just want to tackle one of the most famous ones for you – Nostradamus, and investigate a couple of his prophecies.

He was a man living in the 16th Century from about 1500-1570. He wrote 8 volumes, each volume contained 1000 prophecies. And we will just take two of his most famous prophecies.

The truth is, Nostradamus actually prophesied very little that ever took place except those prophecies that he copied word for word from the Bible. The only prophecy that Nostradamus ever hit on were the ones he copied word for word from the Bible. The other fulfilled prophecies are generally made up after the fact. But there’s a lot of money in unexplained mystery books and TV shows.

All you would need to do to investigate the power of people to prophesy apart from the Bible is to simply take one of the columns that is written at the beginning of the year in the Dispatch – there is always an astrologer like Jeanne Dixon making their predictions for the year. Write down the predictions for the year and then at the end of the year, tally up how many of them actually came to pass.

Let’s say you discovered that 20% of her prophecies came to pass. Simple probability. Close investigation would probably account for hitting 20% of the time. What if it was 40% or even 60%? You would say, “She is a prophet. No one could be right on future events 60% of the time.”

The Bible has a test for a true prophet from the Lord. In Deuteronomy 18 the Bible says that a prophet must be right in their predictions 100% of the time without fail, ever, or they are not from the Lord and ought to be stoned. It wasn't a light thing for people in the Bible to utter prophetic words. If what they said did not come to pass, they would be killed because they spoke in the name of the Lord in a culture that so revered the name of the Lord that to be false when you spoke in the name of the Lord was to blaspheme. And archeology has shown us hundreds of years after the event that prophecy after prophecy in the Old Testament and New Testament has been fulfilled exactly as it was stated.

Now, why do we accept the Bible to be inspired? Because there are literally hundreds of prophecies in the Bible about events that took place centuries after the prophecy that no one could have known about at the time, that have been fulfilled in detail. Only God could have done this.

You say, "Well, like where? Maybe Bible prophecy is just like Nostradamus. You move letters around. You shift stuff around and read into it anything you want to read into it. Anybody can get anything they want out of the Bible."

You've heard that one. "This stuff is like reading tea leaves." Turn with me quickly to Ezekiel 26:3. Here is what we read: "I am against you, O Tyre, and I will bring many nations against you, like the sea casting up its waves. They will destroy the walls of Tyre and pull down her towers; I will scrape away her rubble and make her a bare rock. Out in the sea she will become a place to spread fishnets, for I have spoken, declares the Sovereign Lord. She will become plunder for the nations, and her settlement on the mainland will be ravaged by the sword. Then they will know that I am the Lord. For this is what the Sovereign Lord says: From the north I am going to bring against Tyre Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, king of kings, with horses and chariots, with horsemen and a great army. He will ravage your settlement on the mainland with the sword; he will set up siege works against you, build a ramp up to your walls and raise his shields against you...[verse 12] They will plunder your wealth and loot your merchandise; they will break down your walls and demolish your fine houses and, throw your stones, timber and rubble into the sea...[verse 14] I will make you a bare rock, and you will become a place to spread fishnets. You will never be rebuilt, for I the Lord have spoken...[verse 21] I will bring you to a horrible end and you will be no more. You will be sought, but you will never again be found, declares the Sovereign Lord."

In verse 8 it is predicted that Nebuchadnezzar would come against the city of Tyre. In verse 3 that "I will bring many nations against you" not only Nebuchadnezzar, but many nations. Verse 4 that the city walls will be torn down and the rubble will be scraped away and that the whole city will become like a bare rock. Verse 5, not only will it be a bare rock, but it will be a place where fishermen spread their fishnets.

Verse 12, it says that they will break down your walls and demolish your fine houses. All of the stones and rubble will be thrown into the sea. The city would literally be thrown piece by piece into the sea.

Verse 14, it will never be rebuilt.

Verse 21, it will never be found again.

When this was uttered, Tyre was one of the greatest cities in the ancient world, one of the two or three leading maritime port cities. Thrown into the sea? Scraped bare? Never rebuilt?

Well Nebuchadnezzar lay siege to the city of Tyre three years after this prophecy. Siege ramps were built. After a 13-year siege, Tyre surrendered. Nebuchadnezzar broke the gates down. But the majority of the people had moved by ship to an island about a half-mile off the coast and fortified a city there. The mainland city was destroyed just as it was predicted in v. 8. But there was another city built a half-mile off shore.

200 years after the prophecy, Alexander the Great marched south toward Egypt. He decided to attack the island city of Tyre. The island was completely surrounded by powerful walls. Alexander broke the walls down with his army. He reduced the island city to rubble.

But the interesting thing is, in getting to this island, Alexander took the old city's rubble and literally threw it into the sea to build a causeway out to the island—just as Ezekiel prophesied in Ezekiel 26:12. The city was never rebuilt.

Other cities destroyed by enemies have been rebuilt. Jerusalem was destroyed many times, but has always risen from the ruins. There is a wonderful source of water by ancient Tyre, but 2500 years after this prophetic word, the city of Tyre has still not been rebuilt. One famous 20th century secular historian said that the ancient site of Tyre is now as bare as a flat rock.

I could go through the same kind of analysis regarding a prophecy concerning the destruction of Babylon. The same thing for a prophecy about the destruction of a city called Sidon. The same thing regarding predictions of battles, the splitting of the Roman Empire, the fall of the Greek Empire, the hundreds of predictions regarding the Coming, as well as many events in our own day and prophetic words that are looking to the future concerning the end of time and the end of the world. It is all here in this book. And it has all come true. Here are three facts. Fact #1 – the Bible we have today is virtually the same as the Bible that was written 2000-3000 years ago. Fact #2 – The Bible we have today has repeatedly been proven to be historically reliable. Fact #3 – The Bible is the only book in the world inspired by God, as proven by its 100% accuracy in predictive prophecy.

Well, Rich, why do people attack the Bible then?

Some people attack the Bible because they are uninformed. You can test the sincerity of someone who challenges the authenticity of the scriptures by asking them if they have actually ever read the whole Bible. Or even a significant part of the Bible. If someone says to you that the Bible is full of contradictions, you might hand them a Bible and say, “Well, if it is full of contradictions, it probably wouldn’t be too difficult for you to find me say five or ten.” Most folks are simply parroting something they heard. They can’t show you even one. If the person does come back with a problem you can’t answer – I guarantee you someone has thought of the issue before – you may want to add to your library two wonderful books: *The Hard Sayings of the Bible*, recently published, and *The Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*.

Other people attack the Bible because of prior commitments. My professor in college, many of the so called scholars featured in Time Magazine articles have prior philosophical commitments and end up really close to Hegel’s position – “Screw the facts. We know prophecy can’t be true because we know there’s no such thing as predictive prophecy.” Maybe their prior commitment is to being popular. “We know this book must have been written 100 or 300 years after it actually was written because to say otherwise would break ranks with other scholars and we couldn’t get our articles published.” But you know, ultimately why some people attack the Bible, because to believe it means you must change. The Bible isn’t some book of philosophy; it has a message.

Let’s pray.