

# Proving The Bible True

**Introduction.** The truthfulness of the Bible can be proven in much the same way that we prove cases to a jury. Juries are, for the most part, receptive to logical and reasonable arguments. They have an almost uncanny ability to hear cases presented and come to a fair verdict.

The same type of logical arguments which are compelling to a jury can be formulated from the inspired biblical record. Proving the truthfulness of the Bible is no mysterious, incomprehensible exercise. It is done by the presentation of logical proof. And, at its most fundamental level, the Bible is an extremely logical and compelling book. It does not leave the reader depending on mere hopes, wishes, and hunches. It is an evidentiary record (Hebrews 11:1).

The Bible claims to be the inspired Word of God. But in a secular culture of increasing ignorance and doubt, these claims are often rejected without investigation. Fewer and fewer are willing to accept the Bible's claim that it is the infallible and absolute truth of God. So, how would you prove to a jury that the Bible is true? You would utilize the rules of evidence in presenting the case, and then emphasize the standards which the jury should apply in making a fair decision based on that evidence.

For example, it is commonly accepted that the jury can properly evaluate the credibility of witnesses. It can do this by considering such elements as: (1) The witness's opportunity to observe the facts about which testimony was given; (2) The accuracy of the witness's memory; (3) Whether the witness has a motive to not tell the truth; (4) Whether the witness has an interest in the outcome of the case; (5) Whether the witness's testimony was consistent; (6) Whether the witness's testimony was supported or contradicted by other evidence; and, (7) Whether and to what extent the witness's testimony in court differed from the statements made by the witness on any previous occasion.

Let us study how these accepted standards can be applied in a specific Bible event: the empty tomb. They can be applied in a similar fashion to most any major event recorded in the Bible. But we will use the incident involving the empty tomb because of its centrality to the gospel message (Romans 1:4; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4), and because if it can be established, most of the other Bible events will readily fall into place.

## ***I. The Witnesses To The Empty Tomb***

- A. The Bible teaches, and good jurisprudence demands, that important matters must be established "at the mouth of two or three witnesses" (Deuteronomy 19:15; Matthew 18:16). Interestingly, the witnesses to the empty tomb more than satisfy this corroboration requirement. They are listed in the complimentary accounts of John, Matthew, Mark, and Luke as follows: Mary Magdalene, the "other" Mary, Mary the mother of James (the less), Salome, Joanna, and "other" women. Also of significance is the fact that there are actually two different "layers" of witnesses, since both John and Peter arrived at the scene as well.
- B. These individuals are among the last people to see the Lord before He died. They had an excellent opportunity to observe the events immediately preceding His death, as well as His body after crucifixion. Most of them were in close

proximity to Jesus throughout His intensive ministry, and they had an excellent opportunity to observe the facts in question.

- C. Their memory has never been seriously questioned. There is not any indication that any of them suffered from mental illness, delusional episodes, senility, or mental impairment of any kind. Both John and Peter went on to write detailed narratives and well-reasoned statements of doctrine and instruction. None of them would appear to have had any trouble recalling the events, and there is no indication that any of them ever deviated from their recollection of the empty tomb. If they had given conflicting reports due to failing memory, such would no doubt have been published broadly, but history records no such discrepancies.

## **II. The Details Of The Record**

- A. Details are signs of credibility. They establish a witness's opportunity to observe the events in question, and they show a carefulness typical of truthful testimony.
- B. John details these events as occurring "on the first day of the week," "early," and "when it was yet dark" (John 20:1). Matthew's account is consistent, but utilizes language which might be expected with a Jewish audience: "In the end of the Sabbath." He then provides an additional detail: "as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week" (Matthew 28:1).
- C. When all three accounts are read together, they suggest that these events occurred after the sun was risen, but just barely risen, in the early morning, while it was still mostly dark. Such an understanding agrees well with Luke's detailed observations that the events occurred "upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning" (Luke 24:1). Mark sets the time as "when the Sabbath was past" (Mark 16:1) and adds yet another detail: "very early on the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun" (Mark 16:2).
- D. If four witnesses had taken the stand in court and described an early-dawn occurrence as depicted here, it is difficult to imagine a more believable sequence of testimony. Had it been manufactured pursuant to some preconceived plot, it would have been much more uniform, but far less believable.
- E. There are a great many other details, which, if they are not truthful, are unexplainable. John tells us that, as between him and Peter, he arrived at the empty tomb first (John 20:4). Mark informs us that the women brought spices that they might "anoint him" (Mark 16:1), and Luke adds that the women brought spices which they themselves had prepared (Luke 24:1). Such details have the ring of truthfulness. Further, John advises us that he stooped and looked into the tomb (John 20:5). Mark actually provides details of the conversation the women had on their way to the tomb regarding who would roll away the stone (Mark 16:3). Luke offers the interesting detail that Peter ran to the tomb (Luke 24:12). John tells us that he saw the linen cloths lying in the tomb (John 20:5), but Luke adds that Peter saw the linens by themselves (Luke 24:12). John agrees that Peter saw the linen cloths, but adds the telling fact that he saw a napkin separate from the cloths, "in a place by itself" (John 20:6-7). Why would such details be included if they were not true? Details provided in a witness's testimony are marks of truthfulness, especially when they appear to serve no other purpose, because they end up establishing overall credibility of the narrative.

### **III. The Unflattering Testimony**

- A. These are relatively small insertions which would not be necessary to advance a false narrative. For example, it is a consistent trait of human nature that people do not usually include “unflattering” details about themselves. Mark provides the unflattering detail that the women did not speak to others after this occurrence out of simple fear (Mark 16:8). Indeed, the women are seen, not in some artificial and well-reasoned conspiracy, but in a completely believable state of confusion, failing to even consider who would roll away the mighty stone until they were well on their way to the tomb. Such details, however unflattering, are completely consistent with actual human events. They are typical of what people really do, not of what people say they do.
- B. Mary’s pitiful, “They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him” (John 20:2), so typical of an exasperated and unplanned predicament, shows that she did not comprehend what had really occurred in the resurrection of Christ. Such is an unflattering admission, written long after the events, which would have been corrected had it not been true.
- C. The apostles do not escape this less-than-complimentary treatment. Luke concedes that the report of the women “seemed to them as idle tales” to the apostles, and admits very plainly that they did not believe them (Luke 24:11). John, for example, admits that after he had out run Peter to the tomb, he hesitated and did not enter. But Peter boldly did, a fact included by John himself which appears to be unaccounted for unless it is true (John 20:3-5). It is also stated that the apostles, who later had such a commendable understanding of God’s plan, at the time simply left the tomb and went to their own homes (John 20:10). Such behavior, being fully characteristic of confused and exhausted men, would be inexplicable were it not true.

### **IV. The Dissimilarity Of The Accounts**

- A. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John each describe the same event. Yet their language is dissimilar, far from a mere copy of each other. This is a mark of truthfulness. It has the distinguishing marks of reliability, and does not read like accounts which were deliberately manufactured to advance a false story. Each writer approaches the story from a different cultural background and expresses it in words and concepts consistent with his audience.
- B. Certain contradictions disappear when realizing that Matthew is framing the time with a Jewish mindset, as opposed to John’s description. But that realization may not be at first apparent, and if these accounts were falsified, it is hard to understand why they would not have simply used the same language, rather than what at first seems inconsistent. After reading and considering each of them, we get the confident conviction that we understand exactly what occurred.
- C. The accounts are not contradictory but supplementary. By reading all of the narratives in full, one gets a complete understanding of what occurred. Likewise, reading only one or two narratives leaves questions and an incomplete perception. This suggests an over-arching Guide in these writings, a higher control, which guaranteed that all of the necessary information was included. It

verifies the Bible claim that these writings are inspired by God (1 Corinthians 2:11-13; 2 Timothy 3:16).

- D. Our faith is founded on evidence (Hebrews 11:1). The evidence adduced from these credible witnesses is believable and compelling. It certainly proves the narrative beyond any reasonable doubt. If there is any remaining doubt, one might well ask how could a band of working-class fishermen and women “cook up” such a well-documented event? If they had lied, the accounts would not bear such marks of truthfulness and credibility. Further, if they had lied, they would have had to have maintained those lies consistently to their deaths. Believing this would stretch credibility beyond its limits.

**Conclusion.** If I were trying this case before a jury, I would summarize the biblical evidence and point out these standards which the jury should apply. When that is done, the conclusion is obvious: There is no reasonable and proper explanation, except that the events described in the Bible concerning the empty tomb are true.

I am deeply indebted to Robert C. Veil, Jr. for the use of his material.