

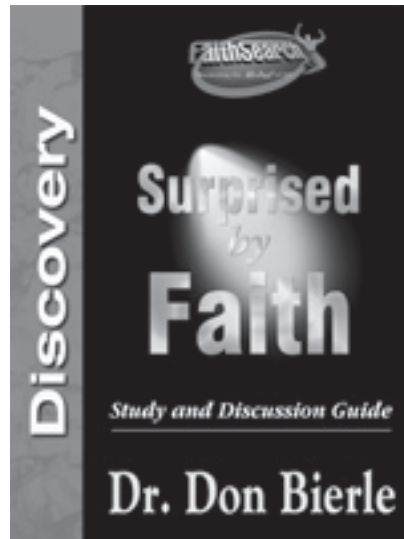
Surprised by Faith Study and Discussion Guide

LEADER'S MANUAL

CHAPTER 4

Is the Bible True?

Discovering Archaeological Evidence that
Confirms the Bible is Historically Reliable



- **Answer Key for the *Surprised by Faith Study and Discussion Guide***
- **Teaching Helps for the Teacher/Facilitator of the *FaithSearch Discovery Presentation***



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PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL WITH EVIDENCE TO ALL PEOPLES EVERYWHERE

CHAPTER 4

Is the Bible True?

Discovering Archaeological Evidence that Confirms the Bible is Historically Reliable

Getting Focused

Materials

- *Surprised by Faith Study and Discussion Guide*, chapter 4
- *Surprised by Faith* text, chapter 2, pages 37-49
- PowerPoint® slides: through *Discovery #4* (slides 61-85)
Chapter review: slides 86-87
Which is correct? (slide 88)

Key Points

1. External evidence supports the historical reliability of the New Testament.

Over the years, archaeology has consistently supported the credibility of the New Testament. As more dirt has been overturned, more evidence has been found to show that people and places of the New Testament were real, and the events were described the way they really happened. Other independent, ancient writings also confirm the accuracy of the New Testament.
2. Early manuscripts support the historical reliability of the New Testament.

Eyewitness accounts and very early dating of manuscripts provide additional confirmation that the New Testament is historically credible. Legends have never been shown to originate and be accepted as historically true in the same generation as the actual events. This is especially true when the records are tested with people living in the same area as the events themselves.

Glossary of Terms Used

Historically reliable: factual; containing information about real people, places, and actual events; not fiction or legend

Legend: exaggerated or fictional accounts of an individual, place or event; not historical

External evidence: sources outside the New Testament, e.g., archaeological discoveries

Answers to the numbered, objective questions are available at the end of each chapter.

Here's where we're headed

The purpose of this section is to guide the participant to make their own *Ah-ha!* Discovery number four.

Subjective questions on page 31
of the *Study Guide*

Subjective question on page 31
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Subjective question on page 33
of the *Study Guide*

Subjective question on page 33
of the *Study Guide*

Making the DISCOVERY

Ah-ha!

The DISCOVERY

#4 Archaeological discoveries have confirmed that the New Testament writings are historically reliable!

Introduction

Read Luke 3:1-2 in a Bible, or in the margin of this page. According to author Luke, who were the Roman emperor, the governor of Judea, and the Jewish high priest when John the Baptist began his ministry?

Tiberius was the Roman emperor (the Caesar) Pontius Pilate was the governor of Judea, and Joseph Caiaphas was the Jewish high priest.

Would we be able to trust Luke about his record of the words and deeds of Jesus if sources outside the New Testament were to demonstrate that he is wrong about information like that in these verses?

No, if he was wrong about these leaders, what basis would we have for believing him when he tells us about Jesus? It would limit our confidence about Luke as a writer of history.

The Evidence of Archaeology: People

What do we find in sources outside the New Testament concerning these three rulers?

The stone inscription found at the ancient city of Caesarea identified both Tiberius and Pilate with the same titles as stated in the New Testament. Both are also identified in the history of Josephus written near the end of the first century. The historical accuracy of Luke has been confirmed by the extensive field research of famous archaeologist William Ramsay (see SBF, pp. 43-44 and reference 57 on p. 135).

The Evidence of Archaeology: Places

Read John 9:7 in a Bible, or in the margin of this page. Refer to SBF, p. 42, for confirmation that the Pool of Siloam has been found thereby supporting this biblical reference as historically reliable.

The Pool of Siloam has been found in Jerusalem and excavated by archaeologists to confirm it as a real place of history.

The Evidence of Archaeology: Events

Read Luke 24:39 and John 20:20 in a Bible, or in the margin of this page. Why would Jesus show the disciples His hands, feet and side?

Apparently His resurrected body retained the scars of his crucifixion wounds. He showed them these scars as proof of His identity and to assure them (and us) that it was really Him. It also confirms that it was His earthly body that was resurrected, thereby establishing that resurrection in Christian theology is both spiritual and physical.

Read John 20:25 and 27-28 in a Bible, or in the margin of this page. What was the test that Jesus' disciple, Thomas, demanded in order to believe that He was resurrected?

Thomas was not present when Jesus showed Himself to the other disciples and he did not believe their testimony concerning Jesus' resurrection. Thus, he demanded to see and place his fingers in the nail imprints in Jesus' hands and the wound in His side. He wanted to see it for himself.

What does Thomas' final response prove?

Thomas' profession of faith in Jesus as Lord and God proves that he must have seen what he demanded. For Thomas, seeing was believing—the physical evidence of Jesus' body convinced him.

Early Date of Writing

Explain briefly why it would be easier for you to detect the fabrication of an event to which you were an eyewitness, compared to one which you had heard from your grandmother, which in turn had occurred in her mother's lifetime.

In a court of law, information gained by being passed from generation to generation is considered hearsay. It cannot be confirmed by eyewitness testimony. On the other hand, you as an eyewitness would recall details about the event which you could use to detect exaggerations or even falsehoods concerning the event. As a result, you, as an eyewitness authority, could cross-examine the "story teller." Hearsay from your grandmother does not have that recall quality or eyewitness authority. You cannot cross examine your grandmother's mother—she is dead. You are limited to hearsay sources. Consider this question as it relates to the Kennedy illustration (SBF, p. 46). How many years have passed since the former president's assassination? Every person alive yet at this time would probably agree that they could recognize a major fabrication of Kennedy's life such as saying he raised people from the dead or he was born into a poor family. Likewise, so could the Jews of Jerusalem detect a fabrication of Jesus' life. Jesus was crucified in A.D. 30. Peter began preaching details about Jesus within 50 days (Acts 2:22-24); Paul wrote the first New Testament letters within 17 years; and the first Gospel was penned within about 25 years. They, too, were eyewitnesses, and the time interval for their memory was much shorter than between us and JFK.

Consider the quote from *Surprised by Faith* (p. 46): ...In view of your answer to the question immediately above, explain briefly how this quote weakens the allegation by some people that the New Testament account of Jesus' life are fabricated legends.

The eyewitnesses of Jesus who were not believers would have firsthand and authoritative knowledge of what actually happened. If they knew as eyewitnesses that the things said about Jesus were not true, why would they believe and follow Him knowing that they would experience suffering and persecution—even death? Liars do not make martyrs! (See SBF, pages 47-49, for a more thorough discussion of this.)

For Additional Consideration

The early date of the New Testament writings supports the position that the Gospels were written by eyewitnesses or that they consulted eyewitness sources. Even Luke (who was probably not

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an eyewitness of Jesus) says that his information was derived from eyewitness sources (see Luke 1:2). Since this is so, then these accounts can stand as legitimate legal evidence for Jesus. They are not hearsay. Prior to the early manuscript discoveries resulting from the last 100 years of archaeology, it was customary in critical writings to place the date of the New Testament composition in the second century, A.D. With so much time between Jesus and the New Testament accounts, some said that it was not possible for eyewitnesses to have written them. Thus, it was alleged that the stories had accumulated considerable legendary material. The current dating of the New Testament writings within the lifetime of the eyewitnesses makes the allegation of legend a weak one, if it is viable at all.

Subjective question on page 35
of the *Study Guide*

Based on all the information presented in this chapter, identify in your own words three areas in which historical and scientific evidence has strengthened confidence in the historical reliability of the New Testament record.

Archaeology can provide convincing evidence for the Bible's historicity. It is a valuable revealer of ancient life and times. For example, archaeology can provide answers to questions like: "Is there a historic Jericho?" "Was it destroyed by invasion?" "Did the walls fall out?" and "When did this occur?" Likewise, archaeology can verify the historical existence of the governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate; the high priest Caiaphas; and the Pool of Siloam. Evidence is now available to demonstrate that New Testament; 1) people; 2) places; and 3) events are historically accurate. Further, the early manuscript evidence demonstrates that the New Testament records are eyewitness testimony, eliminating legendary tendencies. These facts are confirmed as true by the testimony of many scholars as well.

Some people agree with this fourth Discovery, but still wonder about the alleged errors and contradictions in the Gospel accounts of Jesus. How can the Bible be trusted if these allegations are valid?

Refer to the answer provided to this question on the top of page 36 in the *Study Guide*. If this is an area of concern, also consult the references provided on this issue in the margin of page 36.

Application and Reflection

Subjective question on page 36
of the *Study Guide*

What evidence in this chapter, if any, was unexpected or came as a surprise to you?

This will be a personal and individual response. Often people will say that they were not aware of the archaeological evidence that confirms the Bible's historical accuracy. Most are surprised that people, places and events in the Bible can be checked by archaeology at all. A number of specific archaeological finds is itemized on page 32 in the *Study Guide*.

Subjective questions on page 36
of the *Study Guide*

In what ways has this chapter changed your view of the New Testament or strengthened your faith?

Again, this is personal. Archaeological evidence usually elicits a greater positive response from unbelievers than manuscript evidence, perhaps because they understand it better. Often believers say that this evidence gives them greater confidence as a Christian and more boldness in their witness for Christ.

Based on what you have learned in this chapter, write out a brief answer to someone who asks, “Why do you believe that the New Testament writings about Jesus can be trusted?”

I believe they are trustworthy because the evidence shows that they were recorded as eyewitness accounts and transmitted by scribal copying over the centuries without significant change. I also believe them because archaeological discoveries have verified the historical accuracy of the people, places and events mentioned by the writers. Finally, the proclamation of this same message was made among eyewitness Jews, even enemies of Christ, in Palestine (who were in an excellent position to know whether what they were saying was true) who were convicted by its truth and converted to become followers of Jesus—even in the face of likely personal peril.

According to 1 Peter 3:15, what command is given to the believer who is asked a question like the one above?

The believer should be prepared to give an answer with reasons for their faith in the Bible and in the deity of Jesus.

How does it say you should do it?

It should be done with gentleness and respect of the person asking. This removes the “arguing” that can sometimes accompany the use of reason and evidence. It also increases the likelihood of a positive response from the unbeliever, since the ego challenge has been reduced.

Field Test

Were they aware of the archaeological evidence for the New Testament that was presented there?

This is a personal and individual response. Likely, most people will admit that they were not aware of the archaeological evidence. Some may even attempt to deny the evidence or play it down as unimportant.

Did it seem that this evidence made them more open to the Christian faith?

Again, this is a personal and individual response. Usually, the response is dependent on whether the individual is in “ignorant,” “doubt,” or “decisional” unbelief (see SBF, pp. 92-96). A person who is uninformed or confused about the Bible and Christian faith will often find this evidence to be exciting and motivating to them. A person who does not want to believe regardless of the evidence, will often remain aloof and noncommittal. Prayerfully, we would ask the Holy Spirit to use this evidence to convince everyone. If each Christian were to tell someone about one or two facts they have learned, then many more would begin to be informed. As Christians, we can make a difference. Furthermore, the book *Surprised by Faith* can be shared with others for a more thorough witness of the evidence. Finally, each of us could facilitate the *Study Guide* in small groups, Church classes, etc., so that both believers and unbelievers become more informed about the truth.

Subjective questions on page 37
of the *Study Guide*

Subjective question on page 37
of the *Study Guide*

There is an increase of religious diversity in our society, and with it, diverging truth claims for various sacred texts. How do other religious writings compare to the New Testament's integrity and historical reliability?

Refer to the answer provided to this question on page 37 in the *Study Guide*. The New Testament is superior to all other religious texts on the basis of methods of literary analysis used in professional and educational institutions concerning such matters. The New Testament has many more manuscripts, earlier manuscripts and more accurate manuscript transmission than any other ancient writing. If someone suggests that the evidence for the New Testament is not good enough for them, then to be consistent, they must acknowledge that no ancient writing can be trusted—which essentially eliminates our ability to know anything about the past at all!

Confirming the Discovery

Bible confirmation on page 38
of the *Study Guide*

Read the references below in a Bible, or as provided here in the margin. Write below how the main teaching of each relates to or confirms the discovery made in this chapter.

The summary that follows in the *Study Guide* text following the verse listing is the author's view of the main teaching of these passages. Refer to that for the answers to this section.

Subjective question on page 39
of the *Study Guide*

Why is *FaithSearch* Discovery so concerned about demonstrating the reliability of the New Testament? Asked another way, why is it so important for the argument of God's existence that the New Testament is a trustworthy, first-century, historical record?

Author's Comment

To this point in *FaithSearch* Discovery we have purposely avoided using the Bible as our primary source of authority concerning Jesus and His teachings. That changes beginning in chapter 5. We have now demonstrated that the New Testament is eyewitness quality and that it has been transmitted over the centuries without significant change. We can now legitimately use it as a dependable source of historical information about Jesus from the first century. In other words, the approach we use in Discovery is not to derive the authority of the New Testament based on its inspiration by the Holy Spirit (which I personally believe) but rather on its demonstrated eyewitness and historical reliability. This is what distinguishes the Christian truth claim concerning Jesus as God from other religions with a similar claim for their deity. Because we have records of Jesus that have been accurately preserved, we are able to know what Jesus claimed for Himself and what He did that supported His claim. This enables everyone to arrive at a reasonable conclusion whether He is the incarnation of God to earth. That's the goal of the next two chapters of Discovery.

The quote on page 39 in the *Study Guide* provides some perspective on this question. The claim of Christianity is the physical incarnation of the infinite and personal God into our history, thereby confirming the certainty of God's existence. This is convincing only if the New Testament records documenting this incarnation have integrity and historical reliability—that they record what Jesus actually said and did. Therefore, this is the first condition for testing the Christian claim that Jesus is God. Without the historically-valid New Testament records, the Christian claim that Jesus is God is reduced to experience and allegation, i.e., it has little advantage over the truth claims of other religions. Therefore the historical incarnation of God to earth would no longer be testable in a legal sense, and the way to know God with reasonable certainty would be gone.

Looking Ahead

Related Reading

- Paul Barnett, *Is the New Testament Reliable?* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), Chapter 13.
- F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), Chapters 1-3.
- Paul Little, *Know Why You Believe* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008), Chapter 7.
- Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1998), Chapter 5.