

Everything we know about God, about Jesus Christ, about heaven, about hell, about the afterlife, about the plan of salvation all comes out of the Bible.

Now not everybody agrees with our understanding of the Bible. For example, Jonathan Murray O Hare, former president of the American Atheists, said, The Bible is a fictional non-historical book. It's a myth that's good for business.

Well, our bottom line question for today is simply, How can we be sure that Jonathan O Hare is wrong? Is there any external proof, any verifiable evidence of any kind that we can bring to bear that backs up the Bible's claim that it is the inspired, inerrant Word of God? Well, actually there are. There are actually three lines of evidence that I want to share with you today, so let's get right to it.

Proof number one is the changed lives of people who have believed the Bible. II Corinthians 5:17 says, If any person is in Christ, that person becomes a new creature. Old things pass away. Behold, all things become new. You see, friends, the Bible says that if I give my life to Christ in simple childlike faith just the way the Bible tells me to, then I will become a new creature supernaturally from the inside out. Old things in my life, things that are ungodly, things that are unwholesome will peel off and begin to pass away. New things, things that are holy, wholesome and honorable before God will begin to dominate my life.

The Bible says that this will be a transformation driven not by my human energy, nor by self-help theology, nor by the power of positive thinking, but it will be a transformation driven by the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit who is now dwelling in my life as a follower of Jesus Christ. Indeed, this is one of the greatest proofs that the Bible is what it says it is, namely the supernatural transformation that takes place in the lives of those people who simply believe what the Bible says about Jesus Christ and who act on it.

Now we all know the famous hymn Amazing Grace, but you may not

know that it was written by a fellow named John Newton, an Englishman. His story is a tremendous illustration of this truth in action. John Newton's mother died when he was six. His father died when he was sixteen, and at that point, John Newton went to sea. He became a sailor and was eventually the captain of his own ship. He became a slave trader. He would go to Africa and commandeer innocent men, women and children. He would subject them to grossly inhumane conditions below deck for months, crossing the Atlantic, often losing over 50% of his human cargo to death. He was a brutal man who spent the entire voyage drunk. He was a profane man. He was a despicable creature, but in 1749, at the age of 24, Newton was in west Africa trying to secure more innocent men, women and children, when he became deathly ill. There on his deathbed, he remembered how, before she died, his mother used to pray with him when he was a little boy. He remembered how she used to read the Bible to him as a little boy, so he asked for a copy of the Bible. He began to read the Bible. There in west Africa, John Newton gave his life to Jesus Christ.

The transformation that took place in his life was utterly radical, just the way the Bible says. He sold his slave ship. He stopped slave trading. He stopped swearing. He stopped drinking. He became a pastor, a preacher and a hymn writer, as well as an untiring advocate for the abolition of slavery throughout the entire British empire. On his tombstone, he had these words written, talking about himself. He said, Once an infidel and libertine, a servant of slaves in Africa. By the rich mercy of Jesus Christ, I was pardoned, preserved, restored, and appointed to preach the faith I had long labored to destroy.

Many of us here, hundreds of us here have experienced this exact same kind of radical transformation in our lives. Friends, we know the Bible must be true because of what happened in our lives when we believed the part about Jesus Christ the way He told us to. We know the Bible has to be right, because we didn't make that change. We didn't cause that change. It happened from the inside out, and we were simply observers watching it happen.

You say, Well, Lon, all right. Okay, fine, but listen. There are a lot of

people out there who say their lives have been transformed by all kinds of things. I mean, just listen. People say their lives have been transformed by Islam, by yoga, by scientology, by acupuncture, by Weight Watchers, by goji berries. I'm sorry, but that in and of itself does not prove that the Bible is what it says it is. Fair enough.

Let's go on to proof number two, which is archaeology, and all that archaeology that has discovered about the Bible. Now you say, Well, I don't even understand why that even matters. I mean, what difference do the discoveries of archaeology make if the Bible is historically accurate? Well, it makes a lot of difference, and let me tell you why. Friends, so much of the Bible cannot be proven in a test tube. We cannot empirically prove the miracles that Jesus did. We can't empirically prove the resurrection of Christ. We can't prove in a test tube everything Jesus said about the afterlife and the efficacy of the plan of salvation; however, there is one area where we can subject the Bible to a rigorous, scientific, empirical examination, which is the issue of historical accuracy.

Here's the logic. Follow me now. If we can prove that the Bible is historically accurate, then it's logical to assume that the Bible is spiritually accurate. To put it another way, do you remember we said last week that the Bible is not a history book, not a geography book, not an anthropology book, but if we can prove the Bible is accurate on the topics that are not even its main focus, then it's only logical to assume that the Bible must be accurate on those topics that really are its main focus, the nature and character of God, the plan of salvation, the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the afterlife. Does that logic make sense to you? (audience responds) Yeah, it makes sense to me.

So when we look at archaeology, what do we find? Well, friends, we find that the discoveries in the ancient Near East over the last hundred years have done an amazing job of confirming the historical reliability and trustworthiness of the Bible. I could fill the rest of the day telling you about all these, so let me just pick a few.

Number one, critics of the Bible once said that writing was unknown in the ancient Near East at the time of Moses in 1500 B.C.; therefore, there's no way that Moses could have possibly written the first five books of the Bible the way the Bible says. Well, now we know from archaeology that people could write. In fact, people did write all the way back to 3000 B.C. We have all kinds of clay tablets from Sumerian and from the Acadian Empire. Let me show you just a couple of them from the example. We have everything from law codes to legal documents to sales contracts. You know, Dam Zhu gives Nerdu three chickens for two pigs. You understand what I'm saying. (laughter) In fact, at Serabit el-Khadim, which was a turquoise mine in the Sinai Desert, we actually found writing on the cave walls by Canaanite slaves. This writing is alphabetic writing very similar to the biblical Hebrew that Moses wrote the Bible in. This dates to 1500 B.C., the very time of Moses. What it tells us is that, at the time of Moses, even ordinary slaves could write in the language that Moses used to write the Bible. Of course it's reasonable that Moses could have written those books!

Number two, the critics of the Bible once said that Abraham never existed at all, or if he did, what the Bible says about him is highly distorted. They said, for example, that Ur of the Chaldees, where he's supposedly from, never even existed. Well, that is, until 1922, when Leonard Woolley dug it up and found it to be a large and prosperous city at the time of Abraham, just the way the Bible says.

These critics said, The story of Sodom and Gomorrah is ridiculous. Today if you go to that area, it's a barren wasteland. The southern Jordan valley was never green and luscious the way Genesis 12 describes it. Well, that is, until Jewish rabbi and noted archaeologist Nelson Glueck did excavations there and found that at the time of Abraham and Lot, there were more than seventy cities in the southern Jordan valley, and that this area was luscious, fertile and thickly populated exactly the way the Bible says.

Number three, critics of the Bible once said the customs of Abraham as

described in the Bible are unhistorical. They are totally foreign to the culture of the ancient Near East in 2000 B.C. when Abraham lived. That is, until Edward Chiera excavated Nuzi in 1925. Here you see a map. Nuzi is in modern-day Iraq near ancient Nineveh. He found thousands of clay tablets that date back to the time of Abraham. These tablets overwhelmingly confirm what the Bible says about the everyday customs in Abraham's time that we see recorded in the Bible. For example, at Nuzi, a barren wife could give her handmaid to her husband, so he could have children by her handmaid. Does that sound familiar to you? Sarah and Hagar, huh? At Nuzi, if the barren wife later had children, it was illegal for her to drive out the handmaid and the handmaid's children. Do you want to know why, when Sarah kept telling Abraham to throw Hagar out, why he resisted her, and God had to step in and tell him to do it? It's because what she was asking him to do was illegal in his day. At Nuzi, it was legal to sell your birthright and all of its privileges to any one of your brothers. Does that sound familiar? Finally, at Nuzi, a deathbed blessing, the kind that Isaac gave Jacob by mistake instead of Esau—do you remember?—was irreversible, irrevocable, even if the father gave it by mistake. Do you ever wonder why Isaac didn't just go, "Whoops! I gave the blessing to the wrong kid. Okay, let's just move it around." He couldn't do that. It was illegal.

Friends, the correlation is so striking between the customs described in the Bible about Abraham and his time and those we find at Nuzi that the greatest American archaeologist of all time, William F. Albright, was forced to declare, "It is now becoming increasingly clear that the traditions of the patriarchal age—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—preserved in the book of Genesis reflect with remarkable accuracy the actual conditions of the ancient Near East in the middle bronze age, that is, in the time that Abraham lived."

Number four, critics of the Bible once said, "Well, you know, the Bible talks about the Hittites. We don't have any evidence the Hittites even existed. We never discovered them in archaeology." That is, until 1906, when Hugh Winkler excavated Boghazkoy, a city in central Turkey, and found it to be the

capital city of a massive Hittite empire that stretched across Asia Minor and Syria exactly the way the Bible says.

Number five, critics of the Bible once said, You know the account of all that gold in Egypt that the Israelites brought out. That's preposterous! There was never that much gold in Egypt. That is, until 1922, when Howard Carter discovered the tomb of King Tut. Friends, King Tut was a minor Pharaoh. He was a small potato Pharaoh. He ruled for only nine years. That's it, and yet there was so much gold in his tomb that when Howard Carter first glanced in, he was so overwhelmed he had to sit down; he couldn't even go in the tomb! King Tut's inner gold coffin, right here on display in the Egyptian Museum, weighs 243 pounds of solid gold. This was a small potato Pharaoh. Can you imagine how much gold must have been in Egypt at the time of a big potato Pharaoh like Yul Brynner? Do you understand what I'm saying to you? (laughter) Of course the story of the Bible is reasonable!

Critics of the Bible once said, King David never even existed. We've never even found his name outside the Bible. That is, until 1993, when a team excavating at Tel Dan in northern Israel found an inscription, not even by an Israelite king but by a Syrian king, that mentions the name of David big as life. Of course, David existed.

Critics of the Bible once said, Well you know, Pontius Pilate never existed, nor did Caiaphas the high priest that sentenced Jesus to death. We've never found either name outside the Bible. Then in 1961, archaeologists unearthed a slab of stone at Caesarea in Israel that had the name of Pontius Pilate on it big as you please. In 1990, a construction crew in Jerusalem by mistake broke into an ancient tomb that they didn't even know was there. They found a bone box with the bones in it of a gentleman whose name was inscribed on the side, and you'll never guess what his name was. It was Caiaphas the high priest! Does God have a sense of humor or what? Jesus, who he condemned to death, rose from the dead, and we've got Caiaphas bones. I think that's hysterical. (laughter) I don't know. Maybe it's my twisted sense of

humor.

We found a synagogue in Capernaum just the way the Bible says. We found a tunnel that Hezekiah built under the wall of Jerusalem in II Kings 20:20, just like the Bible said.

We found a black obelisk from Shalmaneser, the Assyrian king, with a picture of an Israelite king on it, Jehu the son of Omri. This is him bowing down before the king of Assyria. When we look at the Bible, we find the Bible tells us that Jehu, the son of Omri, was one of the last kings of the northern kingdom who was a vassal for Shalmaneser and served him, and here you have his picture on this black obelisk that was found in Assyria.

Recently we found a seal of a queen from the northern kingdom of Israel. When they looked to see whose name was on it, it was Jezebel. Do you remember her? She was the wife of Ahab; she was a bad Oreo. You remember her, right? That woman was a nasty old woman, and now we actually found her royal seal with her name on it, exactly the way the Bible says.

Friends, I could keep on going here like the Energizer bunny. (laughter) You understand what I'm saying to you, but I want to give you just one more. In the late 1800s, there was a professor at Oxford University in England who was a professor of classical Greek art and archaeology. His name was Dr. William Ramsey. Ramsey was a skeptic of the Bible. He was not a believer, but he had a bunch of students who were that kept witnessing to him and trying to share Christ with him. He got so upset with him that he decided to take his sabbatical one year and prove they were wrong about the Bible, so they would shut up and leave him alone.

What he did was take the book of Acts and went to Turkey and Greece and traced the apostle Paul's missionary journeys, doing archaeology at every site, because he was trained in that. He was convinced that he would find so many historical errors in the record of the book of Acts that he could come back and say once and for all that the whole thing was a hoax and all discredited.

Well, what happened is that, to the contrary, he found that the book of

Acts was so incredibly accurate down to its smallest historical detail that William Ramsey gave his life to Jesus Christ and became one of the greatest defenders of the faith in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Time magazine said, After more than two centuries of facing the heaviest guns that could be brought to bear, the Bible has survived and is perhaps better for the siege. Even on the critics own terms, historical facts, the Scriptures seem more acceptable now than they did when the attack began.

Well you know, if you ever go to Israel with me, you'll see almost everything I just showed you on the screen up close and personal. That's why everywhere we go in Israel, we have a mantra that we say over and over and over again. We say, The more they dig out of the ground, the more the Bible proves to be right. I said that. (laughs, laughter) But it's true! It's absolutely true.

You say, All right, Lon. Okay. Goodness gracious, man! Take a breath! All right, all right. So the Bible maybe is historically accurate, but that still doesn't prove the supernatural character of the Bible. That still doesn't prove that the Bible is a book from God. Okay.

Then let me move on to my final proof, proof number three, which is fulfilled prophecy. Fulfilled prophecy is the greatest objective proof of the supernatural nature of the Bible that we have. You see, God says in Isaiah 46:9, I am God, and there is none other, and I declare where? in the Bible from ancient times things that have not happened yet. God says, I'm going to write things in the Bible that haven't happened in time and space, so that when they happen in time and space, you know that I am real and I wrote the book. That's exactly what He did.

I could give you lots of examples, but the most impressive of them all are the thirty prophecies in the Old Testament, dealing with the life, the ministry, the death, the burial, and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. For example, Isaiah chapter 7 tells of His virgin birth. Isaiah 11 tells He will be a descendant of David. Micah chapter 5 says He will be born in Bethlehem. Isaiah 9 says He

will have his headquarters in Galilee. Judas betrayal for thirty pieces of silver is told to us in Zechariah chapter 11. Psalm 22 tells us about the crucifixion of Christ. It tells us about the soldiers casting lots for His garment. The exact words of His enemies that they said to Him on the cross are recorded in Psalm 22. Psalm 16 tells us about the resurrection.

I got a letter from Richard Park, a member of our staff. He said, Lon, during this past week, I was talking with a research scientist and mathematician, formerly employed at the Pentagon, who researched thirty of the greatest Old Testament prophecies referring to Jesus. She calculated that the probability of one and the same person fulfilling all thirty prophecies was one chance in 10^{100} , ten with a hundred zeros after it.

Now do you know how big a number that is? You say, Yeah, I think it's pretty big. Well, let me tell you, a guy wrote me to tell me how big it was. I got this e-mail, and he said, Imagine filling the surface of the earth with people standing shoulder to shoulder. Now stack those people ten high, then imagine ten such earths circling our sun. Then imagine ten such earths circling every known star in the universe. That amount of people would come to roughly half of this number. To actually reach this number, you would have to repeat all of that stacking of all of those earths around every known star a trillion, trillion times to get a hundred zeros. Wow!

You say, All right, Lon, wait a minute. Look, Jesus was a smart fellow, right? He went back and read the Old Testament, and then don't you understand what He did? He simply orchestrated His life so it looked like He fulfilled all of these things. He's a smart guy.

Well, I think there are some problems with that. Do you think Jesus really said to those Roman soldiers who were beating Him up, Hey, fellows, by the way, could you do me a big favor? Could we pick up two thieves on the way to the cross and put them on either side of Me, because I've got to be crucified between two thieves. And by the way, while I'm on the cross, would you mind casting lots for My clothes, because that has to happen. Do you really think the

Roman soldiers would have said, Sure, Jesus, anything you want, pal. What else can we do to help You?

You say, Maybe His disciples bribed them. All right, then explain to me how Jesus convinced Caesar Augustus, the Roman emperor, to take a census that caused his mother to have to leave Galilee and go back to Bethlehem, so He could fulfill Micah's prophecy to be born in Bethlehem. Tell me how He convinced Caesar Augustus to do it while He was still in his mother's womb! That's a problem. I think that's a big problem.

You say, All right, all right, Lon. But look, maybe what happened was that Jesus lived His life, and then His disciples took His life, went back and rewrote the Old Testament to make it retro-fit Jesus' life, so it looked like He fulfilled all these prophecies, but really they just retro-fitted the Old Testament. Isn't that possible? Friends, that is not possible.

You say, Well, how can you be so sure? How can I be so sure? I'll tell you how I can be so sure. It's because in 1947, we discovered a complete scroll of the book of Isaiah called the Dead Sea Scrolls. On the screen, you see the one Q Isaiah scroll, the entire scroll of the book of Isaiah, dated 150 B.C. Did you hear that? It's dated that time by everybody, not just Christian scholars. And guess what? Isaiah 7, Isaiah 9, Isaiah 11, Isaiah 53 read exactly the same in this scroll written 150 years before Jesus was ever born as those passages read in your Bible. Then we found a copy of the Psalm scroll from cave 11 from 50 B.C., and Psalm 22, Psalm 8, Psalm 16, Psalm 116 all read exactly the same in here as they do in your Bible, written 50 years before Jesus was born. Sorry, it didn't happen.

So if Jesus didn't orchestrate His life to fit the Bible and the people in Jesus' time didn't go back and rewrite the Bible, friends, we're back to one times 10 with 100 zeros. This means that the Bible was written by a supernatural God, for whom predicting the future is no more difficult than our predicting the past. This means we can have total confidence in the Bible, that it is telling us the straight-up truth about God, about Jesus Christ, about salvation, about heaven,

about hell, about the afterlife and everything else.

I do tours to Israel, and when I was there several years ago, I was going through El-Al security there at the airport. They always ask the tour leader to come over and talk to the head of security. I was talking to this young lady. She said, So what kind of group is this that you've got here? I said, Well, it's a Christian group, a church group. She looked at my passport and said, Oh, your name is Solomon. I said, Yeah. She said, That's kind of a Jewish name. I said, I know, I'm Jewish. She said, You're Jewish? I said, Yeah. She said, And you're a priest. Well, it was too much trouble to try to straighten that out, so I went, Yeah, close enough. She said, I don't understand. I don't get it. I said, Well, I'm a Jewish person who believes that Jesus is the Messiah. She looked at me and said, What possible evidence could there be to back up a crazy idea like that? (laughter) Well, bingo!

So I said, Sit down for a second, and I shared with her much of what I shared with you, especially the part about one times ten with a hundred zeros after it. After a few minutes, she said, Look, I've got to get up. I'm busy. I've got to go. It was interesting talking to you. She started to walk off, and I'll never forget she looked back at me and said, I just have one question for you. Doesn't it ever occur to you that you might be wrong? I said, Ma'am, when I have one times ten with a hundred zeros on my side, I cannot be wrong. I can't be.

Well, that was the end of that conversation, but friends, that's true. When we have one times ten with a hundred zeros on our side, we cannot be wrong. You listen to me now. There are going to be a lot of people trying to talk you out of your belief in the Bible. If you're a student, you're going to go to school and get all kinds of high-sounding professors who are going to try to bring all kinds of fancy logic to bear on you and try to convince you that the Bible's wrong. You're going to run into people, friends who are going to try to discredit the Bible and undermine your confidence in the Bible.

Friends, you listen to me. Until those people can untransform your life,

until those people can undiscover everything that archaeology has discovered over the past hundred years, and until those people can undo one times ten with a hundred zeros after it, folks, you stick with the Bible. You stick with the Word of God. I'm here to tell you, when the dust clears in eternity, you are going to be eternally grateful you stuck with the Word of God. You make the Word of God the central authority in your life, and I promise you, when the smoke clears, you're going to be glad you did.

Remember what Jesus said in Luke 21. He said, Heaven and earth will pass away, but My word will never pass away. Build your life on something that's going to last for eternity, my friends, the inspired, inerrant, infallible Word of the living God. Let's pray together.

Lord Jesus, thanks for talking to us today about the reliability of the Scripture. Father, I thank You for giving us prophecy so that we can bring that to bear. I thank You for making the Bible historically accurate. I thank You for how You change lives when we trust simply what the Bible says about Christ. Most importantly, Lord Jesus, I thank You for giving us a book that we can use as our authority and our guide through life to safely navigate the shoals of this life and, Lord, to safely land in heaven in eternity. Father, help us to have undiluted, absolute confidence in the Word of God, to believe it from the crown of our head to the sole of our foot, as Moody said. Help us build our life on the rock that will never pass away. Lord Jesus, use the things we've shared today to encourage our faith and deepen our confidence in the Word of God, and we pray these things in Jesus' name, and God's people said, amen.