

Solid Ground

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ANCIENT WORDS, EVER TRUE?



It’s not unusual for people to dismiss the Bible because it was “only written by men.” How do you respond when you hear this? What evidence would you give that the Bible is not just a human invention, but rather a supernatural revelation?

This month’s article, “Ancient Words, Ever True?” gives that. Here’s what I’d like you to do with it. Read it carefully. Then reread it. Rehearse the specific “fingerprints” of God that verify the Bible’s supernatural origin. Make those six points your own.

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Thank you..

Greg Kousser





Dear Friend,

This month's article, "Ancient Words, Ever True?" gives that evidence. Here's what I'd like you to do with it. Read it carefully. Then reread it. Rehearse the specific "fingerprints" of God that verify the Bible's supernatural origin. Make those six points your own.

But there's one more thing I'd like you to do with this article—pass it on to others. Any issue of *Solid Ground* can be copied and distributed at will and, in its digital form, emailed anywhere in the world. This is by design.

Solid Ground is not a soundbite pamphlet, but a carefully engineered ministry tool with content summaries, footnotes and—in the digital version—hyperlinks to primary source documentation and other reference material. In every issue you receive a thoughtful, well-organized, carefully reasoned treatment of an important topic that will equip you as Christ's ambassador. Every issue becomes a piece of your spiritual armor as you "gird your loins with truth" (Eph. 6:14).

But it's not just for you. It's for your family members, your Christian friends, your ministry or missionary partners, your skeptical acquaintances—a multitude of people I could never reach directly, but I *can* connect with through you.

In a sense, you're *my* ministry partner, helping me get "Christianity worth thinking about" into the hands of so many others. All it takes is an email and a mouse-click.

And when you choose to support the work of STR through a financial contribution, you deepen your partnership with STR. You help provide the means for every speaking engagement, every written resource, every broadcast, and every mouse-click made on our website.

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Grateful for your partnership,

Greg Koukl



ANCIENT WORDS, EVER TRUE?

"What kind of book is the Bible? There are only two plausible answers. The Bible is merely a book by man about God, or it is a book given by God through man, to man."

By Greg Koukl

Whenever I hear the opening lines of Michael W. Smith's song, "[Ancient Words](#)," I am always moved: "Holy words long preserved /for our walk in this world. /They resound with God's own heart. / Oh, let the ancient words impart."

Being aware of God while gazing on the ocean is all well and good, C.S. Lewis noted,¹ but if you want to go anywhere on that sparkling sea, you must have a map. Going somewhere with God is no different. In His case, though, the map is not made of symbols, but of words—ancient words.

Why Words?

Why any words at all, though? Isn't experience with God enough? As the songwriter says, "You ask me how I know He lives: He lives within my heart."

Experience has its place (Paul used his own dramatic Damascus Road encounter as evidence for skeptical Jews), but it also has its liabilities. Lots of people have spiritual experiences. Any Mormon can tell you of his experience with [Jesus, the created spirit brother of Lucifer](#). Jehovah's Witnesses experience the incarnation of [Michael the Archangel](#). New Ager's experience Jesus the Ascended Hindu Master.

Each has an experience, but each can't be right. Which is the true Jesus? What objective authority separates wheat from chaff? Classically, Christians have turned to details recorded in Scripture as authoritative, objective grounds for truth. God has spoken in the ancient words of the Bible.

The Fingerprints of God

Hundreds of places in the Old Testament we find the phrase, "Thus saith the Lord," or its equivalent. The writer of Hebrews affirms, "God...spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways" ([Heb. 1:1](#))

Jesus and the Apostles constantly affirm the authority of the Old Testament with the simple statement, "It is written..." The words of a text are attributed equally to the writers ("Moses said...") and to God (God said...). Paul reminds us that all Scripture is profitable precisely because it is "inspired" (*theopneustos*, "God-breathed"), the very counsel of God.

Of course, just claiming it's so doesn't make it so. How do we know? Do we have any evidence God has spoken in the Bible?

The challenge can be reduced to a simple question: "What kind of book is the Bible?" I submit there are only two plausible answers. *The Bible is merely a book by man about God, or it is a book given by God through man, to man.*

If the first, then the Bible is a record of human wisdom marked by human limitations. That's all.² If the second, then God is the ultimate author and His word is the last word. Further, being essentially a supernatural book, it would likely bear supernatural marks, God's fingerprints in a sense.

Do we have any good reasons to think God has spoken supernaturally in the Bible? Or have men merely opined? The way to answer this question is to look at the book itself. I want to offer six reasons I think the Bible is God's book, six evidences of supernatural authorship conveniently paired with parts of the hand so you won't forget.³

The "Pinky"



For the first evidence, think "pinky—prophecy." The Bible has fulfilled prophecy—detailed, precise, predictions relating to individuals and entire empires given with hairsplitting accuracy.

Daniel gives prophecy so exact it reads like history written after the fact. For one, the threshold



...A PROFOUND HARMONY OF PERSPECTIVE IS WOVEN THROUGH THE ACCOUNT FROM GENESIS TO REVELATION AS GOD PROGRESSIVELY UNVEILS HIS RESUE PLAN FOR FALLEN CREATION.

of the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy of 70 years of Babylonian captivity for Judah ([Jer. 29:10](#)), Daniel is given the amazing "70 weeks" prophecy. Identifying the specific time of [Messiah's advent and subsequent execution](#), it was fulfilled in the exact 173,880-day time period he predicted ([Daniel 9:24-25](#), cf., [Luke 19:41-44](#)).⁴

There were dozens of specific prophecies fulfilled in Jesus' life alone.⁵ His own prediction that the temple would be destroyed stone by stone ([Luke 21:5-6](#)) was dramatically fulfilled 40 years later when [Roman legions under Titus](#) razed Jerusalem. Is fulfilled prophecy sufficient in itself to make our case for divine authorship? Maybe not for some. Even so, it's an important piece of a cumulative case for the Scripture's Divine authorship. Chalk up one for the supernatural side.

The Ring Finger



A wedding ring, symbolic of marital unity, reminds us of the second evidence for the Bible's supernatural origin—a remarkable unity of purpose and plan despite its diverse origins.

The Bible consists of sixty-six books written by forty or more authors from diverse backgrounds

(rabbis, warriors, shepherds, kings, historians), in a diversity of conditions (dungeons, deserts, battlefields, palaces, pastures), on a diversity of controversial subjects, over a fifteen-hundred-year period of time.

The Bible doesn't read like sixty-six different stories, though. Instead, a profound harmony of perspective is woven through the account from Genesis to Revelation as God progressively unveils His rescue plan for fallen creation.

No individual writer understood the plan completely. Each in his time, as if guided by an unseen hand, added his piece to the puzzle. Later, at the advent of Christ, all the pieces come together, revealing the full picture of [God's strategy for salvation](#) that had been unfolding for ages.⁶

This remarkable continuity defies naturalistic explanation. Chalk up two for the supernatural side.

The Large Finger



The largest finger brings to mind the Bible's ability to address the big issues of life in a coherent way that's also entirely consistent with our deepest intuitions about reality. Simply put, the worldview of the Bible makes sense.

First, the fundamental questions vexing mankind for millennia are all confronted in Scripture: What is life's meaning? Who is God? What does He want? What makes man special? Why is there evil? What went wrong? How can we fix it?



Second, we are all intuitively aware of certain unavoidable facts. The universe is filled with order, meaning, and moral significance. Man is a unique creature, distinct from all other living things in his transcendent nobility, but is deeply damaged and morally broken, plagued by guilt he desperately tries to suppress.

The biblical worldview takes each of these things seriously. The universe is filled with order, meaning, and morality by a holy Creator who made us for friendship with Him. Yet we rebelled against our Sovereign, severing that relationship, damaging our own souls, and crippling the created order.

Evil is the wreckage left behind by our rebellion. Man is noble because he bears God's image. Man is cruel because he is fallen. He *feels* guilty because he *is* guilty. Though our hearts long for restoration, reconciliation, and forgiveness, our wills remain defiant. Only God can rescue us.

Deep inside we already know most of these things. The Bible simply connects the dots, then offers the sole solution to the central problem. The problem is personal guilt that comes with rebellion. The solution is forgiveness that comes with surrender, what the Bible calls "repentance."

The Bible has supernatural insight. Its assessment of the problem and its antidote for the cure both resonate with our deepest longings, and also fit our common-sense intuitions about the world and ourselves. Chalk up three for the supernatural side.

The Index Finger



The index, or "pointing," finger reminds me that the Bible points to history for verification. It's a reliable, detailed record from the distant past of events that have profound spiritual significance. This is important for two reasons.

First, a book allegedly given by God must get its history right. And it does.⁷ Menahem Mansoor, professor emeritus at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, has affirmed, "[Biblical archaeology's greatest significance](#) is that it has corroborated many historical records in the Bible."⁸

David Ussishkin, Jewish professor of archaeology at Tel Aviv University, acknowledges: "In general, the [evidence of material culture](#) fits the biblical account beginning with the period of the settlement of the tribes of Israel in the land of Canaan and the establishment of the kingdom of Israel."⁹

Archaeology and the biblical record fit hand in glove. The trade journal *Biblical Archaeological Review* demonstrates this time and again. No other religious book can summon historical evidence to support its unique theological claims.¹⁰

The New Testament documents are the best historical documents of the ancient world when approached using the standard canons of historical research untainted by naturalistic (anti-supernatural) presuppositions. There are [five reasons](#) historians take the New Testament material seriously.¹¹

First, the accounts are early. As ancient records go, the narratives were written very close to the events they report.

Second, multiple, independent, primary source documents verify each other. In addition to the works of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and the writings of Peter and Paul, 17 [secular references](#)¹² along with prodigious archaeological evidence further corroborate the canonical accounts.

5 Reasons Historians take the New Testament Seriously

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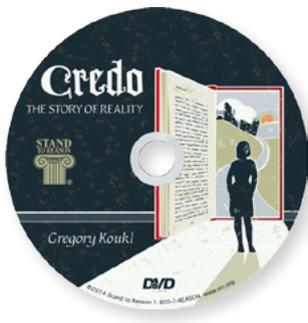
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3. The New Testament documents include details of eyewitness testimony: times of day, weather conditions, local customs, names of provincial rulers, and other minutia characteristic of authentic accounts.

4. The Gospels include embarrassing details. Jesus' disciples are petty, slow to understand, arrogant, and unfaithful. Peter denies Christ; the rest flee. Women, disrespected in the ancient world, are the first to witness the risen Christ. Why include these unflattering details if the Gospels are works of fiction?

5. There was no motivation for the writers to deceive. Those who lie, do so out of self-interest. A testimony that brings torment, torture, and execution is not likely to be fabricated. The earliest disciples—those who were in a position to know the truth—signed their testimonies in blood. Peter wrote, "We did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty" ([2 Pet. 1:16](#)). His claim fits all the facts.¹³



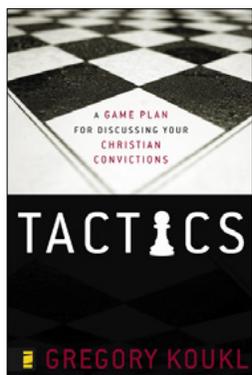


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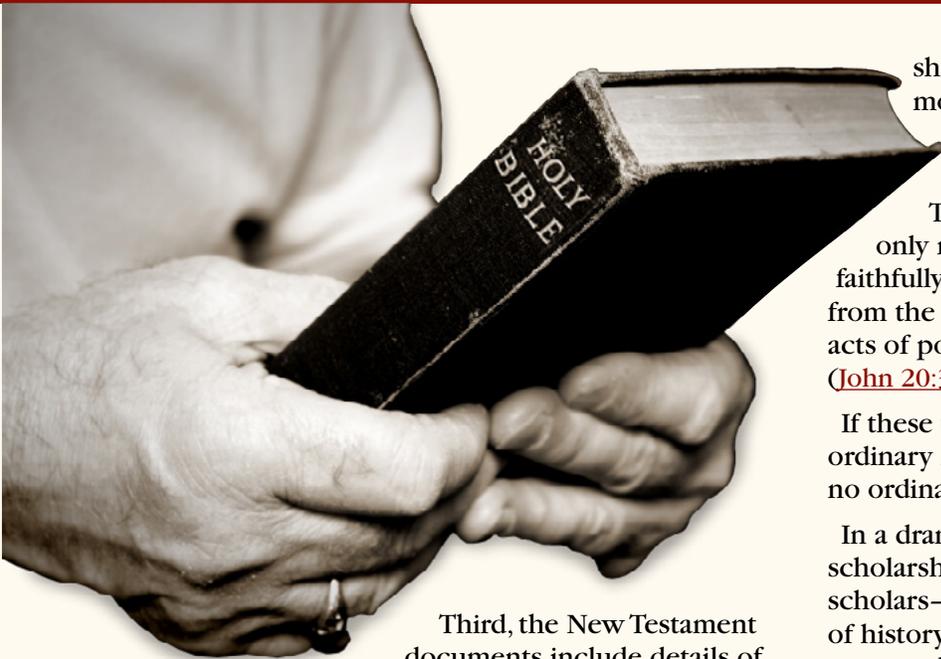


The Bible: Has God Spoken?, Gregory Koukl – \$8.95

CD Audio with PDF (CD110) Also available as an MP3 download

What kind of book is the Bible? Is it merely a book by men about God? Or are there any good reasons to believe that the Bible has supernatural origins? After all, it was only written by men and men make mistakes. Isn't it all just a matter of personal interpretation? If you've been challenged with assertions like these, you need this popular talk. Greg gives six lines of evidence showing it is reasonable to believe the Bible is not just a human invention.





Third, the New Testament documents include details of eyewitness testimony: times of day, weather conditions, local customs, names of provincial rulers, and other minutia characteristic of authentic accounts.

Fourth, the Gospels include embarrassing details. Jesus' disciples are petty, slow to understand, arrogant, and unfaithful. Peter denies Christ; the rest flee. Women, disrespected in the ancient world, are the first to witness the risen Christ. Why include these unflattering details if the Gospels are works of fiction?

Fifth, there was no motivation for the writers to deceive. Those who lie, do so out of self-interest. A testimony that brings torment, torture, and execution is not likely to be fabricated. The earliest disciples—those who were in a position to know the truth—signed their testimonies in blood. Peter wrote, “We did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty” ([2 Pet. 1:16](#)). His claim fits all the facts.¹³

In the most successful work of history in history, *The Story of Civilization*, Pulitzer Prize winning historian Will Durant writes:

Despite the prejudices and theological preconceptions of the evangelists, they record many incidents that many inventors would have concealed. No one reading these scenes can doubt the reality of the figure behind them. . . . After two centuries of higher criticism, the outlines of the life, character and teachings of Christ remain reasonably clear and constitute the most fascinating feature in the history of Western man.¹⁴

“But isn’t the Qur’an historically accurate?” I am asked. Possibly, but that alone is not adequate to

show supernatural authorship. Something more is needed, which leads to the second point: Unlike the Qur’an, the Bible is a record of *supernatural* events.¹⁵

The historical documents of the Gospels not only record Jesus’ claim to be God. They also faithfully document the miracles and resurrection from the dead that substantiate this claim. Jesus’ acts of power give His words tremendous authority ([John 20:30-31](#)).

If these things really happened, then Jesus is no ordinary man, and the book He endorsed as divine is no ordinary book. History itself is our ally, here.

In a dramatic reversal of New Testament scholarship over the last 50 years, the majority of scholars—even secular ones—now affirm four facts of history. One, Jesus of Nazareth died on a Roman cross and was buried in a tomb. Two, the tomb was empty Sunday morning. Three, numerous people (including skeptics like James and Saul) experienced what they thought was the resurrected Jesus. Four, belief in the resurrection launched the early church.¹⁶

What historians do not agree on is what best explains these four facts of history. But there aren’t that many options. No explanation fits the evidence better than the one given by those previously gutless disciples who now put their lives on the line for this testimony: He who was dead is alive. He has risen.

The Bible records supernatural events in history to support its claims. Chalk up four for the supernatural side.

Thumbs Up



“Thumbs up” was the emperor’s sign that a gladiator had won the right to live to fight again. It reminds me that the Bible supernaturally changes people’s lives in deep, profound, and irreversible ways.

This is the acid test of God’s influence on revelation, its ability to dramatically transform. Whether old or young, rich or poor, learned or illiterate, noble or of mean birth, regardless of culture or country or era, the Bible has a revolutionary impact on those who heed its counsel.

And it’s promised in the text: “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature. The old things passed away. Behold, new things have come” ([2 Cor. 5:17](#)). When people consistently obey this book, something radical happens, both to individuals and to whole cultures.¹⁷

Yes, people can change on their own. However, obedience to Scripture changes us in ways we could



never have accomplished by ourselves (we've tried). The Bible has a supernatural impact in human lives. Chalk up five for the supernatural side.

The Fist



The clenched fist reminds me that the Bible is a fighter. It has demonstrated remarkable survival through time and persecution.

Jesus said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words will not pass away" (Matt. 13:31). Isaiah wrote, "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God stands forever" ([Is. 40:8](#)). In prison himself for the Bible's testimony, Paul promised, "The Word of God cannot be imprisoned" ([2 Tim. 2:9](#)).

No other book in history has seen such concerted attempts to obliterate it—both externally (through destruction) and internally (through criticism)—to no avail. No other book has been printed as much, translated as much, read as much, or quoted as much as the Bible. No other name has been written about as much, pondered as much, sung about as much, or recognized as much all over the globe as the name of Jesus.

The Bible's obituary has been written many times, but it refuses to stay in the grave. It remains today the bestselling book of all time. If this book had not been the book of God, men would have destroyed it long ago. This defies a naturalistic explanation. Chalk up six for the supernatural side.

A Verdict and a Confession

The Bible has the stamp of the supernatural: supernatural predictions, supernatural unity, supernatural insight, a reliable record of supernatural events, supernatural impact, and supernatural survival.

Does this *prove* the Bible is God's book? That depends upon what you consider proof. It's always possible to be mistaken, but I have built a cumulative case here. Our claim is reasonable. Christians *do* have [compelling evidence](#) for the divine authorship of the Bible.

But now I'm going to confess something surprising: These persuasive evidences have almost nothing to do with why so many people around the world are convinced that the words of the Bible are also God's own words. It certainly isn't why I believe.

I came to believe that the Bible was inspired the same way most Christians do. I encountered the truth firsthand and was changed. Without really being able to explain why, I knew I was hearing the words of God and not just the words of man.

Consider this question: When Jesus addressed the multitudes, did He routinely give six compelling reasons to believe His words before actually speaking them? No. He simply began to talk and people marveled, even His detractors.

Soldiers sent to arrest Jesus returned empty-handed. Why had they disobeyed orders? They had *listened*. "Never has a man spoken the way this man speaks," they said ([Jn. 7:46](#)). Jesus didn't start with reasons why people should believe His words. Instead, He let the words do the work themselves. And His words worked because they were the very words of God.

If you really want to know if the Bible is God's Word, read it. Let Jesus speak for Himself. There is a powerful role the Spirit plays that is hard to describe, and is therefore difficult to explain to others.

For one, it is personal, subjective. Two, it's non-rational. In a sense, we are not persuaded, as such. We are wooed and won over, and that's very different from weighing reasons and coming to conclusions. Note, I didn't say it was *ir*-rational, but



IF ALL THE EVIDENCE—SUBJECTIVE AND OBJECTIVE—SHOWS THAT GOD HAS SPOKEN IN THE BIBLE, THEN OUR APPROPRIATE RESPONSE IS TO BEND THE KNEE.

non-rational. God uses a different means to change our minds about the Bible.

Even so, the reasons given above are still vital. Here's why: **The objective reasons** are important to show that our *subjective* confidence has not been misplaced, that what we've believed with our hearts can be confirmed with our minds. The ancients called this, "Faith seeking understanding."

When you start giving people reasons to change their minds—to believe in the Bible, for instance—their first instinct is to resist, to keep on believing what they've always believed. It's human nature.

Offering good reasons is a fine approach. I do it all the time. In this case, though, skeptics will find the reasons more compelling *if something else happens first*. It's best if they first *listen*.

If you want people to believe in the Bible, encourage them simply to listen to Jesus for a while, then have them draw their own conclusions. Most people respect Jesus. They've just never listened closely to what He's said. They've never allowed His words to have their impact.

Don't get into a tug-o-war with skeptics about inspiration. Instead, invite them to engage the ideas first, then let God do the heavy lifting for you. The truth you're defending has a life of its own because the Spirit is in the words. Once others have listened a bit, any further reasons you give for biblical authority will have the soil they need to take root in.

If all the evidence—subjective *and* objective—shows that God has spoken in the Bible, then our appropriate response is to bend the knee. Our beliefs bow to revelation, because God Himself is the best authority to tell us what is right and true and good.

When God speaks, our opinions are silenced. The ancient words are the final word—"ancient words, ever true, changing me, changing you."

Putting This Solid Ground into Action

- When someone challenges the authority of Scripture, keep in mind this simple question: "Is the Bible merely a book by man about God, or is it a book given by God, through man, to man?"
- Remember six evidences for supernatural authorship by pairing them up with parts of the hand.
- The objective reasons are important to show that our subjective confidence has not been misplaced, that what we've believed with our hearts can be confirmed with our minds.
- Remember, the truth you're defending has a life of its own because the Spirit is in the words.

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Endnotes:

1 Lewis, C.S., *Mere Christianity*

2 Of course, even if the Bible were entirely man-made, that wouldn't by itself undermine the Bible's message. There are millions of books not penned by inerrant hands that overflow with truth—even spiritual truth (Christian bookstores are filled with them). Though I believe in inerrancy, I don't need inerrant Scripture to substantiate Christianity. Christianity stands or falls not on inerrancy, but on facts of history pertaining to Jesus of Nazareth. If the salient events recorded in the Gospels actually happened, then the claims of Christ are fully justified and Christianity is on solid ground.

3 Some might object that proving the Bible with the Bible is circular. But this is not so in our case. If our method subtly presumed the thing we were trying to prove—the divine inspiration of the Bible—that would be circular. But it does not. Instead, we're merely looking to the text for evidence of Divine authorship. This is not circular.

4 <http://www.gotquestions.org/seventy-weeks.html>

5 See, for example, *Messianic Christology—A Study of Old Testament Prophecy Concerning the First Coming of the Messiah*, by Arnold Fruchtenbaum (http://arielc.org/mm5/merchant.mvc?Screen=PROD&Store_Code=AMC&Product_Code=baf-mc&Category_Code=ba).

6 See "The Bible: Fast Forward" CDs at str.org.

7 For more detail, see "Archeology, the Bible, and the Leap of Faith" at str.org.

8 *Biblical Archaeology Review*, May/June 1995, 29.

9 *Ibid.*, 32.

10 This connection can be overstated. Piecing together hard data from thousands of years ago is difficult, and archaeological evidence is especially vulnerable to bias in its interpretation. Old Testament scholars of the "minimalist" school, for example, characteristically refuse to accept any biblical account without independent corroboration, a virtual impossibility when dealing with texts this ancient and not a demand made on other texts. Even so, a very strong case can be made for the correlation of biblical historical claims and archaeological evidence. An even-handed approach using the standard criteria of historiography minus naturalistic bias yields high marks for the Bible as an historical source. McDowell's *New Evidence that Demands a Verdict* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999) covers this ground thoroughly.

11 See STR's "Jesus: Man or Myth" at str.org for more detail. See also Habermas and Licona's *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004), chapter 2.

12 Gary Habermas, *The Verdict of History* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1988), 108.

13 See also Richard Bauckham's *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

14 Will Durant, *Caesar and Christ, vol. 3 of The Story of Civilization* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1972), 557.

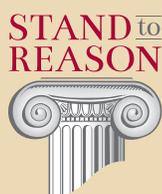
15 By the way, these are accounts, not "Bible stories." They really happened.

16 See Habermas and Licona's *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, chapters 3 and 4, and William Lane Craig's *Reasonable Faith*, third edition (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 349, 361-389.

17 See "Christianity's Real Record" at str.org. See also Alvin Schmidt, *Under the Influence—How Christianity Transformed Civilization* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001) and Carroll and Shiflett, *Christianity on Trial* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2002).

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