

Can The Bible Be Used to Testify to the Existence of God?

I have seen those in the atheist community who say that Christians cannot use the bible to testify for the existence of God. They insist, when the Christian for example, declares the bible establishes the existence of God, that this believer is presupposing its premise. In other words, it is circular reasoning. On a surface level this is true. The bible does testify on its own behalf as being inspired by God. However, this testimony should not automatically be disqualified from being true simply because it testifies for itself. For example, if someone were to ask about me, I could tell them my name and some other information about myself. This testimony I gave would not be considered invalid because I testified about myself.

Jesus faced a comparable situation and indeed, I find the parallel between the atheist who declares the testimony of the bible invalid because it is circular reasoning and the Pharisees who essentially said the same about Jesus when he testified to his own identity, deliciously fascinating.

"Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, 'I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the Light of Life.' So the Pharisees said to Him, 'You are testifying about Yourself; your testimony is not true.' Jesus answered and said to them, 'Even if I testify about Myself, My testimony is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going; but you do not know where I come from or where I am going'" (John 8:12-14 NASB).

Simply put, the bible, like Jesus, is not automatically disqualified because it testifies on its own behalf, nor more than you and I are disqualified for the testimony we might make as to our own identity. However, as I mentioned, on a surface level, it is circular reasoning, and it is helpful if we can identify witnesses to corroborate the testimony of the bible and that of Jesus.

Jesus who was familiar with scripture was obviously aware that truth of a person or event, when in dispute, should be established with corroborating testimony. For surely Jesus was not the first to declare Himself the Messiah. Then also as it pertains to the bible, well, we know there are many competing religious works that would have us follow their god.

To add to this, Jesus continues; I am He who testifies about Myself, and the Father who sent Me testifies about Me". "So they were saying to Him, 'Where is your Father?' Jesus answered, "You know neither Me nor My Father; if you knew Me, you would know My Father also" (John 8:18-19 NASB).

Jesus invokes the Father as a corroborating witness as to who Jesus is. The same might be said of the bible. It too, even as it bears witness to the Father God, it also invokes the Father as a witness to its own identity. Bah! The atheist and the Pharisee might say, you are once more using circular reasoning. Of course, they are right at this point. However, it does not end there.

"The Jews gathered around Him and were saying to Him, 'How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.'" Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father's name, these testify of Me. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one" (John 10:24-30 NASB).

The "works", Jesus is referring to can also be called "miracles" and in some translations "miracles" is how it is rendered. Jesus had been performing many miraculous signs which pointed to the Father, whom Jesus claimed sent Him. Just what is a miracle though. The term is used often enough and even by atheists. In the 1980 Winter Olympics, when the USA hockey team won the Gold Medal, it was hailed; "The Miracle on Ice". We often use the term to denote any event that transpires which was highly unlikely. However, even though the word miracle is used broadly, in the truest sense of the word, a miracle is an event which happened through the will and action of the supernatural, that is by forces outside of this physical world. By this definition, the atheist must acknowledge that there is no such thing as miracles.

Yet Jesus appealed to those, who after declaring Himself to be one with the Father; to look at the miracles as a vindication of who He declared Himself to be.

"If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father" (John 10:37,38) What is fascinating about this, is that religious leaders among the Jews do indeed testify that Jesus did miracles, but they wrongly attribute them to demonic sources instead of God.

After giving sight to a blind man a mute, who was demon possessed was brought before Jesus. *"After the demon was cast out, the mute man spoke; and the crowds were amazed, and were saying, "Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel". But the Pharisees were saying, 'He casts out demons by the ruler of demons" (Matthew 9:33,34).* There are other passages of scripture in other gospel accounts which also show, among the religious leaders, the official account was that Jesus performed miracles by the power of demons, Beelzebub being invoked by name more than once.

Why is this important though. Is it not just another instance of the bible supporting itself? Well, yes, it is, but there is something important to recognize in this. The religious leaders of Israel, collectively rejected Jesus as Messiah. They did not support His claims of being the Son of God. However, what they did recognize, was that Jesus performed miracles. They did not attribute these works to God, but they do acknowledge Jesus was performing them. This creates within the bible narrative, what can only be called a hostile witness to who Jesus is and

what he is capable of doing. This kind of evidence is strong in that you have the testimony of people who oppose someone, but they inadvertently support the person, by the recognition of a truth. The simple truth here being that Jesus did miracles.

However, to this point there is corroborating evidence from outside the bible. It comes from the Babylonian Talmud. There is a statement which reads as follows:

“On the eve of the Passover Yeshu³⁴ was hanged. For forty days before the execution took place, a herald went forth and cried, 'He is going forth to be stoned because he has practised sorcery and enticed Israel to apostasy. Any one who can say anything in his favour, let him come forward and plead on his behalf.' But since nothing was brought forward in his favour he was hanged on the eve of the Passover!” (Babylonian Talmud 43A).

Before we go any further it should be mentioned that Yeshu or Yeshua is the Jewish name of Jesus. It is also the same as Joshua. They all hold the same meaning which is “The Lord Saves”. Now the bible does not verify a herald going out looking for someone to speak on behalf of Jesus, but what the Talmud does do, once more as a hostile witness, acknowledges that Jesus performed miracles. Of course, it is possible that Babylonian Talmud is not referring to the Jesus of the bible, but that seems a remote possibility considering how well it aligns with the biblical narrative.

Then also there is the death and resurrection of Jesus. Naturally, there is no miracle in dying. It is a fate we are all to share in at different points of our life, but returning once more to life, and especially so after being dead for approximately three days would have to be recognized as a miracle. The only answer the physical world could conjure up would have to be more fantastical than admitting there is a God. Ah, but the atheist would not declare Jesus rose from the dead, assuming of course that they even admit that Jesus was a real person. Most atheists I believe do recognize Jesus as an actual physical person, but they do not believe he rose from the dead. How could they?

I will not go into a great deal of depth on this because I have already addressed this in previous works. But I will say this. Ten out of the eleven apostles, (not counting Judas who betrayed Jesus) died a martyrs death declaring that they had seen the risen Jesus. Who does that? It is one thing for a Christian today to sacrifice their life on the belief that Jesus rose from the dead, but it is another thing altogether when someone is willing to die with the eye witness testimony of an event. Christians today act on faith that Jesus rose from the grave on the day we celebrate as Easter. The apostles did not act on faith, they were first hand witnesses to the event. In other words, they knew whether they were perpetuating a lie or advancing the truth. Who puts their life in danger for something they know to be a lie?

It should also be noted, not one of their deaths is recorded in the bible, but instead are found

through secular sources. Thus, we have corroborating testimony from outside the bible as to the acts of the apostles and their belief in the risen Jesus.

Then also, we have the Saul of Tarsus who later became the apostle Paul and author of much of the New Testament. In the bible we have his testimony of while on his way to Damascus to persecute Christians, he is confronted by the risen Jesus. This becomes a life changing event for Saul as he is given the new name of Paul and charged with preaching the risen Jesus. He would go from being the persecutor to the persecuted. Eventually he would be beheaded for his testimony of the risen Jesus. Like the apostles, I ask the same question in regards to Paul. Who dies for something they know to be a lie? You may have the courage to risk your life for the truth, but who is willing to be put to death for something they know to be a lie? Who exchanges being the hunter to become the prey? Paul gave up a rather good life for one of hardship and eventual martyrdom.

Also, like the death of the apostles, Paul's death is not recorded in the bible, but is found from outside sources, which again provides a testimony to the works of Paul, found in the bible.

Then also we have ancient writers who have also, unintentionally I might add, contributed corroborating testimony towards what is written regarding Jesus. Cornelius Tacitus, a first century Roman and Senator under Emperor Vespasian wrote this in regard to former Emperor Nero who had assigned the blame for the burning of Rome on the Christians. Tacitus writes.

"Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular."

What Tacitus does inadvertently in his writing, is he uses the name Christians which derives its name from "Christus" or as we more commonly know the word today, "Christ" which is the English word for "Messiah". He also verifies that this Messiah figure suffered the extreme penalty by Pontius Pilate. This clearly corroborates the bible's testimony of the death of Jesus by Pilate. Now, while it cannot be certain, it seems highly likely, that the "mischievous superstition" Tacitus is referring to is the resurrection. Now this is not proof in itself that Jesus resurrected, but it does bolster the bible's account that Christians believed Jesus had been resurrected and were talking about it in the first century.

Ancient historian Thallus wrote around 52 AD of an eclipse that took place around the time of the crucifixion of Jesus. He did not attribute it as a supernatural event which Julius Africanus a

second century early church father chastises Thallus for, however, at the very least, it corroborates the bible's testimony about the land going dark during the daylight hours. "Now from the sixth hour darkness fell upon all the land until the ninth hour. About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, saying 'ELI, ELI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?' that is, 'My God, My God, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME'" (Matthew 27:45,46 NASB)? This quote of Jesus is also considered the prophetic fulfillment of Psalm 22:1 which utters the same. Now it is possible that Jesus was simply quoting scripture right before his death to fulfill prophetic words, but is that really going to be the priority of one who is about to die in the most horrible and excruciating manner possible?

But about whether the testimony of the bible can be trusted as it testifies on its own behalf. One should examine the prophecies that are fulfilled. It is one thing to look at short term events to attempt to forecast the future. One could look at the history of the weather and accurately determine when spring, summer, fall and winter will arrive. Based upon this we can even forecast with some degree of precision what each of those seasons will look like. However, it is quite another thing to describe long range future events in exacting details and find out that they have indeed come true centuries later. We have an advantage today in that we can look back on the prophecies of the Old Testament and see if they have come true. I will share some which I find very compelling and virtually impossible if the physical world is all that we have.

I will begin with the book of Daniel, a work that is classically understood to be written in the 6th century BC. There are those in recent times who have sought to assign a much later date to Daniel, but their reasoning which I will go into later is primarily based upon the presumption that there is no way it could be written in the sixth century but be so accurate with its long-range prophecy, so instead they have determined it must have been written later with hindsight into events which transpired. This is at odds with Jewish tradition that ascribes the completion of the Tanakh or Old Testament in the year 450 BC. This is because the last books of the Tanakh date to this time period. However, Daniel as I mentioned dates to the sixth century BC. Let me share with you Daniel's vision of the Ram and the Goat.

"In the third year of the reign of Belshazzar the king a vision appeared to me, Daniel, subsequent to the one which appeared to me previously. I looked in the vision, and while I was looking I was in the citadel of Susa, which is in the province of Elam; and I looked in the vision and I myself was beside the Ulai Canal.

Then I lifted my eyes and looked, and behold, a ram which had two horns was standing in front of the canal. Now the two horns were long, but one was longer than the other, with the longer one coming up last. I saw the ram butting westward, northward, and southward, and no other beasts could stand before him nor was there anyone to rescue from his power, but he did as he pleased and magnified himself.

While I was observing, behold, a male goat was coming from the west over the surface of the whole earth without touching the ground; and the goat had conspicuous horn between his eyes. He came up to the ram that had the two horns, which I had seen standing in front of the canal, and rushed at him in his mighty wrath. I saw him come beside the ram, and he was enraged at him; and he struck the ram and shattered his two horns, and the ram had no strength to withstand him. So he hurled him to the ground and trampled on him, and there was none to rescue the ram from his power.

Then the male goat magnified himself exceedingly. But as soon as he was mighty, the large horn was broken; and in its place there came up four conspicuous horns towards the four winds of heaven” (Daniel 8:1-8 NASB).

Okay, admittedly how are we supposed to understand this prophecy and apply it to specific events in our history? Well fortunately like us, Daniel was as much in the dark towards understanding it as we are, and so in his vision he asks the person who comes to stand before him.

“When I, Daniel, had seen the vision, I sought to understand it; and behold, standing before me was one who looked like a man. And I heard the voice of a man between the banks of Ulai, and he called out and said, ‘Gabriel, give this man an understanding of the vision.’(Daniel 8:15,16 NASB).

Now Gabriel addresses Daniel: “He said, ‘Behold, I am going to let you know what will occur at the final period of the indignation, for it pertains to the appointed time of the end. The ram which you saw with the two horns represents the kings of Media and Persia. The shaggy goat represents the kingdom of Greece, and the large horn that is between his eyes is the first king. The broken horn and the four horns that arose in its place represent four kingdoms which will arise from his nation, although not with his power” (Daniel 8:19-22 NASB).

These prophet words given to Daniel and recorded in the book of Daniel demonstrate long range fulfilled prophecy. Since Daniel is dated as a sixth century writing, we should consider it outstanding that we find the fulfillment of these prophecies hundreds of years later in the person of Alexander the Great. Up to the time of Alexander, the Medo-Persian Empire had been the dominant empire doing exactly as is depicted in the book of Daniel. They were able to take and subjugate nations at their pleasure. Now admittedly this may not be so fantastic of a prophecy. Daniel, himself having lived a long life was himself taken into captivity as a youth by the nation of Babylon, only to then experience later within his own life the overthrowing of Babylon to the Persians. In other words, they were a swiftly rising force to be reckoned with. However, Daniel not only records the continued rise of the Medo-Persian empire, but he then also is given insight into which nation will then overcome this empire.

This was to be Greece and the individual who leads this campaign is Alexander the Great. Now, you might challenge me on this part and suggest, if you are a history buff, that Alexander was not the first king of Greece. Certainly, Alexander's father ruled Macedonia, which was one of Greek states and thus the bible is wrong. Ahh, I would then offer up, but it was Alexander who became the first King of Greece having united all the individual Grecian states into one nation of Greece.

There are other interesting details as well, like the prophecy including how this Greek king would move so swiftly that the goat was depicted as if he was flying over the land. At the age of 20 he ascended to the throne. In a mere ten years, his empire became the single largest empire in history. He never lost a single battle and is today regarded as one of the top military strategists that ever lived. Yet there is still more in the prophecy that pertains to Alexander.

We are informed in verse 8 of chapter nine; "The goat became very great, but at the height of his power his large horn was broken off and in its place four prominent horns grew up toward the four winds of heaven."

Once more we will turn to secular history and find out that Alexander the Great died at the young age of thirty-two, at the height of his power. The cause of his death remains a mystery to this day, though there are many speculations. After he died, we also know that his kingdom broke up into four separate kingdoms just as the prophecy states.

Furthermore, the book of Daniel goes back to this topic after covering numerous other in chapter 11. While clearly referencing the prophecies we have gone over, it gives even more details as to what happens.

"Now then, I tell you the truth; Three more kings will appear in Persia and then a fourth, who will be far richer than all the others. When he has gained his power by wealth, he will stir up everyone against the kingdom of Greece. Then a mighty king will appear, who will rule with great power and do as he pleases. After he has appeared, his empire will be broken up and parceled out towards the four winds of heaven. It will not go to his descendants, nor will it have the power he exercised, because his empire will be uprooted and given to others' (Daniel 11:2-4 NIV).

History informs us, this is exactly what happened following the death of Alexander. He did have a son who was being raised up to take over the kingdom, but this son was assassinated and never got a chance to rule. Instead, it was broken up into four smaller kingdoms, which because of being partial led out, never had the same prestige it had under Alexander.

The exacting accuracy of these fulfilled prophecies can only be attributed to one of two

possibilities. The first is that these prophecies as given to Daniel, do in fact have supernatural origins. The book of Daniel credits these origins as coming from God as revealed through angels. The second possibility is, as I have pointed out earlier, is the argument some make, that the book of Daniel was composed at some point shortly after the events of Alexander and his nation being broken up. The primary reason this is even being offered up by some, stems from the belief that there is no God and thus there can be no long-range prophecy with such remarkable accuracy. In other words, because of their disbelief, they cannot accept the book of Daniel dates to the sixth century.

Now to be sure, because of their disbelief, they have made attempts to rationalize their disbelief. It has been suggested that three musical instruments depicted in Daniel did not even exist in the sixth century. However, that is a very shaky thing to base one's disbelief upon. For even if you accept that the instruments in question did not exist, (which I am not at all certain has been established as a fact), there likely was, at the very least, similar instruments and as the bible gets translated from generation to generation, it is likely that some words are updated for the reader to understand. This would not be unlike the King James bible comparing to say the NIV or NASB versions of the bible.

Also, the critic of Daniels date must contend with the date of 450 BC, which is recognized as the year, the Tanak(Old Testament) was completed and accepted as scripture. The last books written and thus entered Jewish Canon were Ezra, Esther, Malachi and Nehemiah. These were all completed in the 400's prior to being canonized by 450 BC.

It seems evident that like Jesus, God has given the bible a unique authority to provide credible testimony about God the Father and Creator of us all. However, what I have just provided is but a tiny smattering of the prophetic words compiled within the pages of the Old Testament and even the book of Daniel for that matter. For even if you wish to doubt the long range prophecies which are fulfilled in the book of Daniel because of some flimsy questions regarding musical instruments, how can you account for the prophecies fulfilled by Jesus?

Let us take a look towards these as well. Daniel is praying when the angel Gabriel appears before him and has this to say to him: "As soon as you began to pray, an answer was given, which I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed. Therefore, consider the message and understand the vision: Seventy 'sevens' are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting prophecy and to anoint the most holy. Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'sevens,' and sixty-two sevens. It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. After the sixty-two 'sevens,' the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary" (Daniel 9:23-26 NIV).

The prophecy depicts a starting point which has not yet happened. This is the decree from a king to restore and rebuild the city of Jerusalem. It had been destroyed by the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel was one of those who had been taken away as a captive when this happened. Yet a future king would give the order to rebuild Jerusalem. I can only imagine, but I think Daniel must have been very thrilled at this future prospect. However, it is what follows as a prophetic utterance to this decree which thrills me at this moment. The "Anointed One" is a translation of "The Messiah". The coming Messiah, the one in which the hope of humanity rests was predicted to come forth. However, and this is one which divides Jewish belief, for the Jewish people were expecting the Messiah to be a king in the line of David, one in which they believed their nation would be not only restored to its former glory, but even exceed it. This king would rule forever and never die. Then there are other Jews who would look at this prophecy and other prophetic writings concerning the Messiah and understand that the Messiah would die. Some have even concluded that there would be two Messiahs, one who would die and another who would rule.

However, this is a discussion for another day though we may yet touch lightly upon it as it pertains to our topic. What is important for us is that a timeline has been established, and this is that from the issuing of the decree to rebuild Jerusalem until the Messiah is killed would be after the sixty-two sevens. What are the sixty-two sevens you may ask. It is referring to years. The seven sevens would be a forty-nine-year period and after this sixty-two more sevens would take place. This is an additional four hundred and thirty-four years. After this time the Messiah would be killed.

We know the exact year the decree to rebuild Jerusalem was given. It was given by King Artaxerxes in the year 457 BC. What we have then is the prophecy that the Messiah would be cut off 483 years later. Though the bible does not give the year Jesus was born, but work done by scholars using the information of the bible and coupling it with secular history have concluded Jesus was born between 6-4 BC. 483 years after the decree is issued, the Messiah would be killed. This puts the year the Messiah would die at 26 AD. Remarkably if Jesus was born 6 BC, he would have been 32 years old, maybe even 33 depending on when he was born if it was 6 BC. Most scholars believe Jesus died in his early thirties with most agreeing on an age of 33. This conclusion is based upon the understanding of his birth happening in the range I have mentioned. We know his birth could not have taken place later because we are told his birth took place during the reign of Herod the Great. He ruled from 37 BC to 4 BC.

However, can you see how remarkable this prophecy is? It literally gives us a time table for the coming Messiah and informs us when he would be killed. Even critics who raise issue and say Daniel was written shortly after the Alexander the Great, cannot account for this. There is simply no credible reason anyone can provide which can undermine the fact that Daniel provides long range prophecy of events which we can find fulfilled in exacting details from secular history. And yes, as I have already shown, the death of Jesus is recorded in secular

ancient history.

Going back to the original question posed in this work; "Can the bible be used to testify to the existence of God?" I have already established that if I told you my name, that it should not automatically be rejected because I am appearing as my own witness. I could additionally support my identity by showing you my driver's license. If you doubted my claim previously you would likely have your doubts erased by showing you my ID. The ID provides a secondary testimony to my claim that only the most hardheaded and obstinate of people would still claim, I am not who I claim to be.

When the Pharisees disputed who Jesus claimed to be, He used the miracles he was doing as an authenticating ID to establish His identity. For those who claim God does not exist and the bible cannot be used to testify otherwise, God has shown the bible to be an incredible piece of ID authenticating His existence. For whom but God could forecast long range events with such accuracy? Within these prophecies we also find another who testifies to the existence and identity of God. This is Jesus, who not only fulfills the prophecies of God within the pages of the bible, but also rises from the dead which was prophesied in the 53rd chapter of Isaiah. I would argue, the bible does a better job of testifying and identifying who God is than the government issued driver's license I carry with me. Yet, if you doubted my identity before showing you my ID, you would readily accept it after.

If this is so, how can you reject the identity of God when the bible so readily establishes who he is? What I have shared with you in this work, it is but a tiny speck of how the bible uniquely establishes the existence and identity of God. If I may finish with a quote from Captain America. "I can do this all day."