

THE OBJECTIVE EVIDENCE

For

The Christian Faith

What is Truth?

At the trial of Jesus, Pontius Pilate asked Jesus the question, 'What is truth?' Jesus did not answer him. Pilate walked away to inform the crowd that he could "... find no basis for a charge against him." (John 18:38).

Religion is one area of life where people can argue very strongly over what is the truth. Is the truth in religious matters arrived at by having a group of people sit down and each one present his subjective experience, with the result that whoever can present the best subjective experience is declared to have the answer? Or can the much more reliable objective evidence alone be used to determine which religion is true? This paper will reveal how the different religions fare when subjected to the test of objective evidence.

Subjective is defined as "existing in the mind; belonging to the thinking subject rather than to the object of thought (opposed to objective)." ¹ Objective by contrast is "... dealing with things external to the mind rather than thoughts or feelings..." ²

Some may object that a certain religion or belief system has a highly subjective (feelings) component and therefore an objective test may unfairly disadvantage that belief system. My response to that concern is to point out that objective evidence usually takes precedence over feelings. Let's imagine for instance that I am travelling down a road and I feel that I can quite happily drive at 100 kilometres per hour (60 mph), but a sign tells me that the speed limit for that section of the road is 80 kph. I notice a little further up the road a speed camera. Now, as much as I feel like I can safely travel up the road at 100 kph, the objective reality is that if I follow my feelings instead of the objective evidence, I will receive a speeding fine. Objective reality has a habit of catching up with people who ignore it.

The subjective (feelings) do play a part. That subject will be dealt with very briefly at the end. The primary task now is to deal with the objective evidence.

This paper will closely examine the four major faiths:

- Hinduism
- Buddhism
- Islam
- Judo/Christian faith.

It will see if there is a claim that God spoke to the founder or at least, a key person in the religion. If there is a claim that God spoke to the founder/key person, then we will closely investigate that claim. It is only by this process that we can reliably determine which faith is standing on firm ground. We will begin by looking at Hinduism.

Hinduism

Hinduism is a very old religion, it had its beginning as Vedantism around 2,500 BC.³ At first it had an oral tradition which was put into written form (The Vedic texts)

probably about 800 BC - several centuries after Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible. It has no founder and no prophet. The Hindu god, Brahman, is not separate from creation, the universe *is* Brahman. Even the lesser gods are a manifestation of Brahman, which means that the Hindu can worship one god or a thousand gods. The Hindu can also look to god within himself. For him, "... God is the reality within the self." ⁴ There is no set of beliefs which the Hindu must believe in. "Radhakrishnan, a former president of India, once remarked 'Hinduism is more a culture than a creed.'" ⁵ There is however, one belief found everywhere within Hinduism, and that is the belief in reincarnation, the flow of life through many existences, human or animal. Also, Hindus believe the cow is sacred.

There is no powerful supernatural event that the Hindu can point to as evidence that their religion is from God.

Buddhism has a founder, Siddhartha Gautama (c. 560-480 BC), later known as Buddha. He grew up in the religious world of Hinduism and struggled with the question of how to be freed from the misery of endless rebirths. He believed he received enlightenment over three nights while meditating under a fig-tree, which came to be called "the tree of enlightenment" (Bo or Bodhi tree). He felt led to pass on the teaching he received to others. Through following his teachings, the Buddhist believes he can escape the endless cycle of rebirths (as taught in Hinduism) and enter Nirvana, the goal of life for all Buddhists.

Buddha gathered around him a group of followers who were "...convinced as much by the serene calm and unshakeable authority of his manner as by the content of his teaching." He reluctantly allowed women to join the order at the urging of his stepmother and cousin. He believed that because of their inclusion, his teaching would only last 500 years instead of 1,000. That prophecy was not fulfilled.⁶

No great supernatural event accompanies the alleged meeting of God with Buddha.

Islam, has a founder, Muhammad (c. 570-632 AD). Islam claims that God spoke to Muhammad through the angel Gabriel while he was in a cave on Mount Hira to which he had gone to meditate in the year 610. He was alone and it was during the hours of darkness when he received his first revelation. ⁷ The messages he claims he received from the angel became the essence of the Koran. "Some of his countrymen believed he was possessed by a Jinn (a demonic spirit). Muhammad himself believed this at first..." ⁸ A not unreasonable conclusion when it is considered that he sometimes entered into an altered state of consciousness when he received the revelations. "The Prophet's companions testified that he would often turn red or livid, sweat profusely, and fall into trances while receiving revelations." ⁹ "His wife, Khadijah, encouraged him to believe that they had come from God. Later she became his first convert." ¹⁰ We can ask at this point, "Where would

Islam be without his wife?"

When we look at that great founding moment for Islam when an angel is alleged to have spoken to Mohammad. We do not see any great supernatural sign from God of the type which you could reasonably expect from one who rules the universe. Whatever the sign was that Mohammed received, it was so weak that he was quite confused about what he was experiencing. Mohammed had to rely on someone who was not anywhere near him at the time of his revelation - his wife - for instruction and guidance as to what he was receiving.

We will now look at the largest of the four faiths, the Judo/Christian faith to see if there is any great supernatural event from God to give it credibility.

The Meeting of God with Moses on Mt. Sinai

There are two things which stand out regarding the revelation from God to Moses:

1. It was not the receiver of the revelation (Moses) who initiated the event. It was God who took action.
2. It was not a secret meeting. God made sure others would know about it.

God said to Moses, "... 'I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, so that the people will **hear me speaking with you** and will always put their trust in you'...." (Exodus 19:9).

Not only was the verbal communication from God to Moses dramatic, the events surrounding that great moment were also dramatic.

The Bible says, "On the morning of the third day there was **thunder and lightning**, with a **thick cloud** over the mountain, and a **very loud trumpet blast**. **Everyone in the camp trembled**. Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because **the Lord descended on it in fire**. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, **the whole mountain trembled violently, and the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder**. Then Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him. The Lord descended to the top of Mount Sinai and called Moses to the top of the mountain. So Moses went up" (Exodus 19:16-20).

The events surrounding the meeting of God with Moses were not only seen, they were also experienced; the people experienced fear. When the people saw the lightning and the mountain in smoke, and heard the thunder and the loud trumpet blast, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance and said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die." (Exodus 20:18-19). See also Deuteronomy 4:32-36, 5:4-5, 22-24.

Part of the reason why people were fearful was because the voice of God was very loud. When I was in the Air Force, I sometimes had the privilege of standing beside the runway as the jets took off. The noise from two jets taking off side by side at full throttle was so great that the ground would shake beneath my feet. It is little wonder that the

people were fearful because the Bible reveals that "At that time **his voice shook the earth**," (Hebrews 12:26).

This is the type of revelation which we should expect from God who rules the universe.

Face To Face

Moses spoke with the Lord face to face, when he did so, his face became radiant, an event which was witnessed by the whole nation of Israel. The Bible says of Moses, "But whenever he entered the Lord's presence to speak with him, he removed the veil until he came out. And when he came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, they **saw that his face was radiant**. Then Moses would put the veil back over his face until he went in to speak with the Lord." (Exodus 34:34-35).

The Bible makes the following assessment of Moses, "Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew **face to face**, who did all those miraculous signs and wonders the Lord sent him to do in Egypt - to Pharaoh and to all his officials and to his whole land." (Deuteronomy 34:10-11).

The face to face conversation describes the intimate type of meeting that Moses had with God, however, the Bible specifically states that Moses did not actually see the face of God in the literal sense. God said to Moses, "...you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live." (Exodus 33:20).

A passage dealing with Aaron and Miriam sheds some light on what Moses saw. The Lord rebuked Aaron and Miriam because they began to rebel against the special authority which Moses had, the Lord said, "... 'Listen to my words: 'When a prophet of the Lord is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams. But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. With him I speak **face to face**, clearly and not in riddles; **he sees the form of the Lord**. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?'" (Numbers 12:6-8).

Many Witnesses

God spoke with Moses, an event which was witnessed by the whole nation of Israel, numbering more than one hundred thousand. That number is calculated from the numbering of the male population one month old and above. "So Moses counted all the firstborn of the Israelites, as the LORD commanded him. The total number of firstborn males a month old or more, listed by name, was 22,273." (Num. 3:42-43). If we assume that one person in three is firstborn - a very conservative figure - then the total male population is 66,819. That would put the entire population of Israel at 133,638 if we assume exactly half the population is female. We can safely round that figure up to 150,000.

The Moabites were fearful of Israel because they were large in number. "and Moab was terrified because there were so many people. Indeed, Moab was filled with dread because of the Israelites." (Numbers 22:3). Balak, the king of the Moabites said to Balaam, "... 'Come with me to another place where you can see them; you will see only a part but not all of them'..." (Num. 23:13).

The Doubter

There are those who doubt that God spoke with Moses on Mt. Sinai. They quickly dismiss that important historical event and the entire historical account of Moses leading the nation of Israel out of Egypt to the edge of the promised land. They label the account 'a myth', but try telling that to the Jew who knows better.

Lets consider for a moment the difficulties with organising a giant hoax to be perpetrated upon a whole nation, and then upon the whole world. A leader who tried to rewrite history would need to destroy all evidence of the truth, he would also need to go into foreign lands to destroy the true account. Furthermore, he would need to kill those who were likely to tell the truth. However, the more determined a leader was to hide the truth, the more determined some would be to reveal the truth. In this situation, two versions of history would survive.

The trouble for doubters is that there is no second version to challenge what God did at Mt. Sinai. Because the events at Mt. Sinai were witnessed by a large number of people, we must accept their evidence.

Moses and secular history compared

What if we persist in doubting the witness of the large number of people? The doubter, to be consistent, must doubt all events in history which were witnessed by a small number of people. In that case, he would have to doubt the official version of the first permanent white settlement of what has become known as the United States of America, because only **104** people took part in that settlement in May 1607 and that "Of the original 104 settlers, only 38 survived the first year, many dying of dysentery, typhoid fever, or starvation."¹¹

He would also need to doubt the official version of the account of the first fleet which settled in Australia on 26th January 1788, because the total number of those who sailed with the first fleet was **1,487**, and the total number who left the ships and remained to make up the first settlement was **1,030**.¹² The number of witnesses to the above events is small in comparison to the approximately 150,000 that witnessed the meeting of God with Moses at Mt. Sinai.

From the above, it can be seen that there is a big difference between the witness to the ministry of Moses who is foundational to the Judo/Christian faith, and the alleged witness to the religions of the world. The Hindu has no prophet to whom God has spoken, the early Buddhists put their trust in Buddha because of his serene manner and authority. His "enlightenment", which took place during the hours of darkness, is devoid of any supernatural witness of the type which accompanied the communion of God with Moses.

With Islam we have the remarkable situation where Mohammed at first is unsure about the revelations. The first person to believe, his wife, wasn't even present at the great foundational event when it is alleged the angel spoke with Mohammed! With Moses, God leaves no room for doubt that he has spoken. God also used Joshua as a witness to what he said on many occasions.

The Witness of Joshua

The conversations between God and Moses were not in secret, Joshua was a witness to what was said in the "tent of meeting" (tabernacle). "The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend. Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide Joshua son of Nun **did not leave the tent.**" (Exodus 33:11).

The fact that God did not speak with Joshua face to face even though he was in the tent suggests that he was in a different room in the tent. Joshua was in an excellent position to confirm everything that Moses reported to the people. It was possibly his role to record the conversation between God and Moses. We can be sure that Moses himself did not write everything in the first five books. He certainly did not write the passage describing his own death (Deuteronomy 34:5-12). Nor is it likely that he wrote, "(Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.)" (Numbers 12:3).

Not only do we have the double witness to what was spoken by God - Moses and Joshua - we also have the assurance that if there was anything that Moses was not sure about, he could ask God directly during any of the many occasions that he spoke with him. By comparison, none of the other religions of the world have a founder or key person who was seen by a large multitude to have spoken directly with God.

A Faith with A Firm Foundation

I have sometimes heard the claim that the many miracles connected with the history of Moses were made up e.g. The crossing of the Red or Reed Sea. The problem with that view is that it is very difficult to fabricate history when a lot of people are involved. The larger the number of people involved in the deception, the greater the chances of its failure to succeed.

Engineers at NASA conduct very thorough tests on all vital components to rockets to determine the success rate of the component. If the success rate to a component is found to be 98%, that may be acceptable. But what is the success rate if two vital components are involved, A and B? If the success rate for A is 98% and B is 100%, then the overall success rate will be 98%. However, if component B also has a success rate of 98%, then the engineers must calculate the overall success rate of the mission. The probable success of the mission in that case is reduced to 96.04%. The greater the number of components, the greater the chance of failure. The calculations listed below are based on each component having a failure rate of two percent.

- Two components 96.04%
- four components 92.23%
- six components 88.58%
- twelve components 78.47%
- twenty components 66.7%

To greatly increase the chance of success in light of the above problem, engineers, where possible, employ back-up components i.e. components which are not directly involved

in the success of the mission until a parent component fails.

From the above, it can be seen that if a person tries to push an elaborate hoax upon the world, his chances of success are dramatically reduced if a lot of people are involved.

See the evidence for the various faiths listed below:

FAITHS COMPARED

HINDUISM

Hinduism does not have a single founder that it can point to. It developed over many centuries. It does not have a clearly defined set of beliefs. The Hindu can believe in one god or thousands. It does not have at its foundation any major supernatural event.

BUDDHISM

Founded by Siddhartha Gautama (563-483 BC)
After a period of intense meditation, he and his followers believe he received enlightenment while sitting under a tree at night. His followers put their trust in him because of his calm and serene manner.

ISLAM

Founder is Muhammad (c. 570-632 AD)
He believed - after initially doubting - that the angel Gabriel spoke to him while in a cave on Mt Hira near Mecca. The number of people who witnessed this event which is foundational to Islam; nil. It was during the hours of darkness that Islam's foundational event occurred.

TAOISM

Founder is Lao-Tse (604-531 BC)
Initially Taoism was a philosophy. It did not become organised into a religion until 440 AD. Centuries after the death of La-Tse he was deified by those who developed his philosophy into a ritualistic religion. No major supernatural event supports Taoism.

CONFUCIUS (c. 551-479 BC)

A Chinese philosopher who gave much ethical teaching to China. He did not claim to have received any supernatural revelation from God.

Moses is Highly Regarded

Moses is the most highly regarded by the Jews of all the Old Testament prophets. He has this high honour because he led the nation out of slavery in Egypt; the people witnessed God speaking with him face to face, and he wrote the first five books of the Bible (this group of books is known as the Pentateuch). To the modern reader, the Pentateuch appears to have been written by someone else because Moses wrote in the third person (he used the word 'Moses' instead of the pronoun 'I'). Julius Caesar in the first century BC wrote his account of his wars in Gaul in the third person. Also, Josephus in the first century AD. wrote, "*The Wars of the Jews*" in the third person.

The book of Deuteronomy is the last of the five books

MOSES

150,000 saw Moses go up Mt Sinai.

MOSES

The people of Israel followed Moses because they heard God speak with him.

MOSES

The number of people who witnessed the fearful events surrounding God speaking to Moses at Mt Sinai number at least 150,000.

MOSES

The writings of Moses are supported by the supernatural events at Mt. Sinai.

MOSES

150,000 witnessed the miraculous deliverance from slavery in Egypt and God's speaking with Moses at Mt Sinai.

attributed to Moses. To answer those who make the claim that the events in the book of Deuteronomy were written down several centuries after they took place, one authority makes the point that the "... structure shows a remarkable resemblance to the literary pattern of the Ancient Near Eastern treaties or covenants of the mid-second millennium BC. **This unmistakable resemblance confirms the early date of Deuteronomy...**"¹³ Also, there is no mention in the five books of Moses of three locations which become important to Israel after they enter the promised land; Shiloh, Jamah and Jerusalem. It would be a remarkable oversight to not mention Jerusalem if the five books of Moses were written after Jerusalem became prominent for the Jews. Jerusalem became prominent for the Jews during the reign of King David. So the completion of the Mosaic books

(Pentateuch) is logically before about 1,000 BC.

God did not make the mistake of clearly proving to a whole nation that he spoke with Moses, then get someone to record the events several centuries after they took place.

There is no doubt in the mind of the Jews that the first five books of the Bible are the work of Moses under divine inspiration. Jesus is able to challenge the Jews using the authority of Moses. He says, "Now about the dead rising - have you not read in the **book of Moses**, in the account of the bush, how God said to him, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'?" (Mark 12:26). See also Luke 2:22.

At the end of his ministry on earth, Jesus told the disciples "... This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the **Law of Moses**, the Prophets and the Psalms." (Luke 24:44). Please note that one of the three divisions is attributed solely to Moses; none of the other two collections of writings are attributed to just one man.

Although many prophets came after Moses, the Jews in the time of Jesus regarded themselves as the disciples of Moses. On one occasion they said to a man who had been healed by Jesus, "... You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! **We know that God spoke to Moses...**" (John 9:28-29). For the Jew, the fact that God spoke with Moses is unavoidable, the event was witnessed by too many people to be ignored.

The high regard for Moses is not limited to the religious authorities. Philo, the Jewish Greek-speaking philosopher who lived from about 15 BC to 50 AD says, "...But I will ... tell the story of Moses as I have learned it, both from the sacred books, the wonderful monuments of his wisdom which he has left behind him, and from some of the elders of the nation." ¹⁴

An incident in the trial of Stephen, the first Christian martyr, reveals the high regard in which Moses was held. The religious authorities persuaded some men to say, "We have heard Stephen speak words of **blasphemy against Moses** and against God." (Acts 6:11). We note from this passage that Moses is so highly regarded that it is possible - in the minds of the Jews at least - to commit blasphemy against him. It is the type of awe that you would expect from a nation that had heard God speak face to face with Moses (Exodus 19:9). For further references to the first five books of the Bible being the work of Moses, see also Luke 16:29, 20:29, 24:27, John 1:45, Acts 26:22, 28:23.

The Testimony of Stephen

It is significant to note that in the above trial of Stephen in Jerusalem (Acts 6:8-8:1). Stephen, although God worked miracles through him (6:8), does not refer to these miracles or to the great inner change in his life in his defence. For instance, inner peace joy and contentment. The argument he put forward was not subjective; it was objective.

We should keep in mind at this point that his personal (subjective) benefits were quite considerable. One of the obvious benefits he received was a boldness in his testimony because of the work of the Holy Spirit in his life (see Acts

4:13, 31, 6:10).

Stephen's subjective testimony would have been a strong testimony to the right audience, but Stephen had a highly critical audience, so he had to resort to a more powerful testimony; the objective testimony of history.

Stephen began his defence by relating the history of Abraham (Acts 7:2-8). He continued the history of Israel by relating the history of Moses (7:20-44). Finally, he related to his audience the fact that the leaders in Israel killed many of the prophets that God sent to them, and that the current generation of leaders had delivered Jesus Christ up to death (7:52).

It is highly significant for our topic to see that the leaders in Jerusalem had no answer to the powerful (objective) historical evidence that was presented to them. The leaders could not change history to suit themselves, so they decided to silence Stephen; they murdered him by stoning (7:57-60).

Evidence is particularly valuable when the enemies of the truth can not refute the evidence. For this reason, we shall turn our attention to the fact that the historical evidence of what God did through Moses has withstood the rivalry between the tribes to the north and the south in ancient Israel.

The North-south Rivalry

Occasionally there was rivalry between the twelve tribes which came to a head after the death of King Solomon (c. 930 BC). Ten of the twelve tribes refused to accept Rehoboam as their new king and chose to appoint Jeroboam as their king instead. Jeroboam determined to prevent his people (located in the north) from going to Jerusalem (in the territory of Judah) to worship God. That would invite the risk of their uniting again under Rehoboam. Jeroboam set up idols for the people to worship to deliberately turn their hearts from Jerusalem. The division was permanent.

If there was any flaw in what the two tribes to the south believed about God and his prophet Moses, then the ten tribes to the north would have held the tribes to the south up to ridicule for believing what was false - with the benefit of enhancing their new idols - if in fact what they believed about the events at Mt. Sinai were really false. Furthermore, the people of Israel could accuse the prophets who came to them, especially Hosea, Amos and Micah, of being in error concerning what they believed about God - particularly points revealed through the prophet Moses, if Moses was false in any way.

The rivalry between the north and the south wasn't simply a matter of ill feeling, the bible says, "There was continual warfare between Rehoboam and Jeroboam." (1 Kings 14:30). See also 1 Kings 15:6, 16, 32.

An incident from modern history further reveals the difficulty in keeping a major lie a secret.

Watergate

Some men on behalf of President Nixon and his aids broke into the Watergate building in Washington on 17 June 1972 and bugged the offices of an opposition party. But things went terribly wrong for Nixon and his aids when the five men were caught. Investigators soon found out who

planned and authorised the break in. Chuck Colson, one of the top aids to Nixon who was sent to jail for his part in planning and authorising the break in made the point that Nixon, with all the resources at his command as President, could not successfully cover up what had been done. John Dean revealed the truth. The secret lasted just two weeks.¹⁵ The truth will stand the test of time, but not a lie.

So far we have looked at the reactions of the Israelites to God working through Moses, but what about those outside of Israel?

The Gibeonites

News of God's powerfully working through Moses in Egypt could not be confined to the Jews and the Egyptians; it spread to other countries. The Gibeonites, who knew what God did to the Egyptians, came to Joshua to seek peace. When asked where they came from, "They answered: 'Your servants have come from a very distant country because of the fame of the Lord your God. For we have heard reports of him: all that he did in Egypt'" (Joshua 9:9). Even today, almost 3,500 years later, modern secular books bear testimony to the work of God through Moses. For instance:

The Encyclopedia Britannica

"Moses was a gifted, well-trained person, but his true greatness was probably due to his personal experience of and relationship with Yahweh [God]."¹⁶

World Book Encyclopedia

"Moses was the principal leader and teacher of the Israelites and one of the most important characters in the Bible. He also figures prominently in the Quran. He led his people out of slavery in Egypt to their homeland in Canaan, later called Palestine."¹⁷

Collier's Encyclopedia

"MOSES, chief prophet and founder of the Jewish religion. He is regarded as the liberator of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, and as the author, by divine inspiration, of the Torah (Pentateuch), the basic canonical text of Judaism."¹⁸

A Murder Story

It is possible to arrive at the truth beyond all reasonable doubt, when the objective evidence is tested. To illustrate that point, I will turn some of the events at Mt. Sinai into a murder story to see if there is enough evidence to convict a person who has committed murder.

On Mt. Sinai, George shoots Harry. Because everyone heard the trumpet blast from God on Mt. Sinai, in our story, everyone hears the shot that killed Harry. Because the trumpet blast was supernaturally loud, the weapon he is shot with is also very loud, he is shot with a large cannon. Ammunition used in a cannon is designed to give off very little smoke. However, because Mt. Sinai was covered in smoke when God descended on the mountain to speak with Moses, our cannon will give off a lot of smoke when Harry is shot. Because the voice of God was very loud when he spoke (his voice shook the earth), the voice of George (with the aid

of an amplifier) is very loud when he announces, "I George, have just shot Harry." Just as there is further evidence of the contact between God and Moses in the form of the tablets written with the finger of God, so too in this story, there is evidence of the murder with the discovery of Harry's body. Admittedly, there is not much left of Harry after he has been hit in the chest with a cannon shell.

In addition to the above evidence, there are no conflicting stories. No person for instance comes forward to say that George was at a different location at the time of the shooting. We will call this story, story A.

Story B

A man in a cave on the side of a mountain is startled by the sound of a voice which awakes him from his sleep. The voice says, "I George, have just shot Harry." He is not sure if he actually heard the voice, or if it was part of his dream. To help clarify the matter, he asks his wife who was many kilometres from the mountain at the time. She becomes convinced that George did shoot Harry and assures her husband that this is the correct view to take. Her opinion becomes part of the main evidence in this particular case.

Story C

While a man meditates beneath a tree one night, he becomes convinced that he heard a voice announce that George has shot Harry. No other person hears the shot or the voice, and there is no body. Several of the man's friends become convinced that Harry was shot by George because the man was sincere about his belief and was serene and calm in his manner. The convictions of the man and his friends become the primary evidence in the case.

With story A, there is enough evidence to convict George of murder, but not with story B or C because there is no clear objective evidence.

The subjective Witness

Although it is primarily objective evidence that the apostles presented to people when they preached. See Acts 2:14-36, 3:12-26, 4:8-12, 7:1-53, 9:20, 10:34-43, 13:16-41. I must say something about subjective evidence to give the subject some context and balance.

The witness that God presents to the believer is not limited to the objective variety. He also gives us a powerful subjective witness, so we have a double witness. Every believer has a spiritual birth (John 3:3), and has the spiritual assurance from God that he or she is one of God's children. "The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children." (Romans 8:16).

There are many and varied ways in which God has dealt with people individually to draw them to himself. Some confess to having lived terrible self-indulgent lives which had the intention of giving them joy, but instead, their selfish lives brought them misery until God intervened and brought them to himself. Others don't have a dramatic change, nevertheless, they are encouraged, comforted and strengthened by the quite gentle work of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

In some Christian circles there has been an emphasis in the past on discussing personal experiences to the neglect of the objective evidence. That situation can leave young Christians poorly equipped to share the faith with others. The Bible says, "... Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. ..." (1 Peter 3:15).

The other danger is to neglect evidence of what God is doing in peoples lives. That can give the false impression that God is not interested in individuals. So clearly, we need to meditate on both the objective evidence and the evidence of what God is doing in our own lives and the lives of others.

The question now arises, "When should I present the solid objective evidence to people and when is it safe to give a personal testimony?"

The few subjective testimonies

In Acts 22:1-22 Paul explains to the Jews his change from one who zealously persecuted Christians to one who preaches Christ. Paul testifies that while he was on the road to Damascus with the intention of persecuting believers, "... a bright light from heaven flashed around me." (22:6).

Some of his experience is subjective. He testifies that he heard the voice of the Lord say to him, "I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting" (v. 8), but that his companions could not understand the voice. "... they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me." (v. 9).

At first the crowd patiently listens to Paul's testimony, but when he tells of the command from the Lord to preach to the Gentiles, they become very hostile (22:17-22).

In Acts 26:1-23 Paul again explains his dramatic conversion. This time to King Agrippa and several officials. His companions are a witness to the objective parts of this incident (26:13-15).

While Paul was on a ship which has been battered by a fierce storm, he receives a visit from an angel who gives him a message of encouragement (Acts 27:24). Paul later relates the incident and message to others so that they can be encouraged also. In this case, there is no direct evidence to the people in the boat that an angel had visited, but no doubt, they would have observed the changed demeanor of Paul after the encouragement from the angel.

From the above, we can see that as a general rule, the personal testimony (subjective evidence) is primarily for believers and those who are at least sympathetic to the type of evidence that is going to be presented.

We will now leave the subject of the subjective witness and deal more specifically with the witness of the Bible.

The witness of Scripture

The Bible says regarding itself. "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness," (2 Tim. 3:16, RSV).

This passage which declares that all Scripture is 'inspired by God' or 'God breathed' (NIV), should not be viewed in isolation. It has a powerful history. The beginning

of the history is summed up in Exodus 19:9 "The Lord said to Moses, 'I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, so that people will hear me speaking with you and will always put their trust in you.'"

Both passages declare that God is the initiator of his revelation to mankind. You will note that we have gone back in this discussion to where we began. The reason is simple. Any discussion on the inspiration of Scripture should begin with Exodus 19:9 because if any person can not believe Exodus 19:9 with its powerful objective evidence, then he or she is not going to believe 2 Timothy 3:16.

There is an additional testimony to Scripture which we must consider. God has provided us with two key figures by which we know that we can trust the whole of Scripture. Those two key figures are Moses and Jesus Christ. We know that we can trust everything that has been revealed to us through Moses in the Scriptures for the various reasons already outlined. We might then ask, 'Can we trust everything that has been revealed to us through other prophets who did not have the advantage of the voice of God speaking directly to them and to the people from within a cloud on a mountain?'

The answer to that question is an emphatic "yes!" We can trust them because of the testimony of Jesus regarding the whole of Scripture. Before we look at the statement of Jesus, we must look at his qualifications.

Moses said of Jesus, "... 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you.'" (Acts 3:22). The apostle Peter revealed that the 'prophet' refers to Christ (3:24).

- He is greater than Moses (Hebrews 3:5-6).
- His relationship with the Father is greater. He is the Son of God (Heb. 1:1-2, 8, 3:5-6, John 1:14).
- As with Moses, people hear the voice of God speak in reference to him (Matt. 3:17, Mark 1:11).

Jesus - speaking in the capacity of someone who was 100% God and 100% man - said, "... your Word is truth." (John 17:17). We should note that Jesus is declaring the whole of Scripture is truth, not just some of it.

If Jesus had any doubts about any part of Scripture, then he would have given us a warning about the passage that was corrupt, particularly as he was very concerned about false teaching. He said on at least one occasion, "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves." (Matt. 7:15). See also, Matthew 24:4 and Mark 8:15).

The reader might wonder why I have gone to such trouble in bringing out the greatness of Moses and Jesus Christ. Why not place some emphasis on some of the other prophets as well?

I will answer that concern with an illustration. Moses and Jesus Christ are like supporting pillars at either end of a long stack of books. As already shown above, Moses, or rather, God through Moses, gives support to the other prophets when we see that God initiated the events at Mt.

Sinai. The support from Jesus works like this; lets say I have to take a flight in a new aircraft that has been designed and built by a team of 100 men. Clearly I am placing my life in the abilities of the 100 men, so what should I do? Should I spend hours, perhaps days examining the training and ability of each person, or is there a better way? The answer is 'Yes'!

I simply examine the qualifications of the chief engineer. If he says the engineers and workmen under him are qualified to do the work, then I can trust that they are, because he knows better than I do. Jesus knows better than I do and he says, "... your word is truth." That comment refers not only to the Old Testament, but to the whole of the New Testament as well.

Having established the trustworthiness of Scripture, we will now look at the objective evidence for an important event for the Christian faith; the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

The Witness of the Resurrection

The religious authorities thought they had finally and completely dealt with Christ when he was put to a cruel death on a cross. Just to make sure they would not have any trouble from the followers of Jesus, they decided to have some soldiers guard his tomb because they had heard the claim that he would rise from the dead.

Scripture says, "'The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. 'Sir,' they said, 'we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said', 'After three days I will rise again.' So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first.'" (Matt. 27:62-64).

Their request was a wise move from their point of view. If the disciples made a false claim that Christ had risen from the dead, all the authorities had to do was produce the body to prove their case and destroy the credibility of the disciples. Their request was granted, "'Take a guard,' Pilate answered. 'Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how.' So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard.'" (Matt. 27:65-66).

When Jesus rose from the dead, the Roman army and the religious authorities had no corpse with which to quell the claims of the disciples regarding the resurrection of Christ.

Clear evidence of Christ's resurrection was evident as soon as the disciples, Peter and John, entered the tomb. The Bible testifies of John, "... he saw and believed." (John 20:8). I am not simply referring to it being empty, there was something strange within the tomb which they saw. It was the position of the grave clothes. They were not dumped in a heap in a corner of the tomb. Jesus rose up through the grave clothes so they collapsed where they lay. We know that the resurrected Christ was not subject to the normal physical forces which we encounter. By contrast, when Peter was miraculously released from prison. He went to the house of Mary, the mother of John. He had to stand at the door and knock for a while (Acts 12:12-17). When Jesus came to the

eleven disciples as they sat at the table, he did not have to stand at the door and knock. He suddenly appeared before them (Mark 16:14).

Those able to testify to the resurrection of Christ are not small in number, Jesus appeared to more than 500 people in the one day (1 Cor. 15:5-6).

In addition to the direct evidence of Christ's resurrection, there is good circumstantial evidence. The disciples were not taken in for questioning. They were not beaten or mistreated in any way in order to find out where the body was hidden.

They remained free to worship at the temple (Luke 24:53). The above facts indicate that the religious authorities and the soldiers who guarded the tomb did not believe the disciples had stolen the body. Furthermore, the disciples became so bold as a result of the resurrection of Jesus they caused the religious authorities to be astonished at their boldness (Acts 4:13).

The apostles were so convinced from the evidence, that Jesus is the Christ, they were willing to put themselves at great risk in their efforts to proclaim Christ. The high priest, speaking on behalf of the religious authorities, said to the apostles:

"'We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name,' he said. 'Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood.' Peter and the other apostles replied: 'We must obey God rather than men! The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead - whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Saviour that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.' When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death'" (Acts 5:28-33).

Clearly, the message about the resurrection of Christ did not make the apostles popular with the religious authorities, but they could not help but proclaim what they had seen. Both Peter and Paul endured imprisonment and death in Rome proclaiming Christ. Their martyrdom is not recorded in the Bible because it was completed prior to their deaths.

We are now coming to the end of this study of the objective evidence for Christianity. Much of the evidence points to the worth of the Bible, so I will end this paper with a testimony on the value of reading the Bible from England's greatest evangelist of all time, that being of course, George Whitefield.

George Whitefield (1714-1770), is a man through whom God brought both a revival and a great awakening to large areas of Great Britain and the USA in the eighteenth century. The "*New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*" says of George Whitefield, "In his kind Whitefield is supreme among preachers, sharing his eminence only with Latimer. Others might be more learned, even more stylish, but none was more eloquent or more moving. J.C. Ryle has justly claimed, 'No preacher has ever retained his hold on his hearers so entirely as he did for thirty-four years.'" ¹⁹ As we

can expect from a man who was so greatly used of God, George Whitefield had a great respect for the Word of God, he says, "I began to read the Holy Scriptures upon my knees, laying aside all other books and praying over, if possible, every line and word. This proved meat indeed and drink indeed to my soul. ... I got more true knowledge from reading the Book of God in one month than I could ever have acquired from all the writings of men."²⁰

The above evidence shows that God honours those who understand the Bible to be the Word of God. It has the same authority as the voice of God speaking to us personally from Mt. Sinai. The Bible says, "... 'This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word.'" (Isaiah 66:2).

For more information on the authority of Scripture, read my paper found on the Internet site titled, "*The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture*". This paper is more academic and technical.

END NOTES

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