

THE PLEASANT VIEW PLUMB LINE

JEFFERSON'S BIBLE IS A PAGE TOO SHORT

I picked up my copy of the Jefferson Bible while visiting Poplar Forest, Jefferson's Palladian retreat in Bedford County, Virginia. I have a keen interest in Jefferson, and have read more about him than any other modern figure. I've stood in the Jefferson Memorial in Washington, D.C., and read his famous words carved in stone. I walked his footsteps in Natural Bridge, Virginia. I've been to the University of Virginia, which he designed and founded in his old age. Jefferson was a remarkable man for his day—in many ways, he was far ahead of his time. I always come away from Monticello impressed with his curiosity, invention, attention to detail, wide-ranging talents, and boundless energy.

But Jefferson had his flaws, and recent history has been less flattering to him than the previous two centuries. Suffice it to say that he was a man—a remarkable man in many ways, but he still walked on clay feet. We see the clay prints most clearly when we pick up *The Jefferson Bible. The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth*, which he completed in 1819. The dust jacket explains:

“Working in the White House in 1804, Jefferson set out to edit the Gospels in order to uncover the essence of true religion in the simple story of the Life of Jesus. Jefferson was convinced that the authentic message of Jesus could be found only by extracting from the Gospels Jesus' message of absolute love and service, rather than the miracle of the Annunciation, Virgin Birth, or even the Resurrection.”

Jefferson's Bible gives us, according to the back cover, “a preaching Jesus of Distinctly human dimensions, without miracles or resurrection.” We are not surprised, then, to find that the last sentence in the “Gospel According to Jefferson” reads: “There they laid Jesus. And rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulcher, and departed.” You see, Jefferson's Bible is a page short—it ends in Matthew 27 instead of Matthew 28, on Friday afternoon instead of Sunday morning.

What did Jefferson miss? What evidence do we have of the resurrection? There is much, but let's focus on the witnesses.

Collaborating Witnesses. The most outstanding proof that Jesus rose from the death is that at least 515 eyewitnesses saw Him on twelve different occasions over a period of forty days. “He shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). Jesus had six weeks to establish His identity for all time, and He used the time wisely.

The resurrection of Christ is a fact to be proved, like all other facts, by competent and credible witnesses. If you hit a hole-in-one playing golf Saturday, how would you prove it to incredulous friends on Sunday? You would call over your golfing partner to confirm that he saw you do it. If that failed, then you would bring in others who were there to confirm your story. Any sensible person will believe a report corroborated by several credible witnesses. Paul uses the same logic to prove the resurrection in I Corinthians 15. He appeals to the witnesses who had attested to the resurrection, and then showed that it was not possible that so many witnesses were deceived (I Corinthians 15:5-7).

THE APPEARANCE LOOKED AT AS A WHOLE

The witnesses are sufficient. The apostle Paul, when writing a letter to a group of new Christians, laid it all out in I Corinthians 15:3-6. If every person the Bible identifies as being an eyewitness to Jesus' resurrection were called to the witness stand for cross-examination, it would take 129 hours to hear their testimony at only fifteen min-

“...then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel...” (Amos 7:8)

CHRISTIANITY AND SCIENCE AGREE

Benjamin Franklin said, “I believe...that the soul of man is immortal and will be treated with justice in another life respecting its conduct in this.

For years the world has erroneously thought science and religion contradict. It is true that many speculations and hypotheses of scientific men conflict with the Bible truths. However, nothing scientifically found or proved differs with Bible facts. Yet so many—even learned people—think that science and the Bible are incompatible. It was refreshing to read an article on “Immortality” in This Week Magazine dated January 24, 1960. The author is Dr. Wernher Von Braun, director at the time of the Army Ballistic Missile Agency.

This world scientist maintained survival is based on ethics and not atoms. He scoffs at the idea that religion had made religious ideas old fashioned. In fact, Dr. Von Braun says two factors move us: (1) The Last Judgment, and (2) faith in an immortal soul.

May I quote him? “But I think science has a real surprise for the skeptics. Science, for instance, tells us that nothing in nature, not even the tiniest particle, can disappear without a trace... Nature does not know extinction. All it knows is transformation. Now if God applies this fundamental principal to the most minute and insignificant parts of his universe, doesn’t it make sense to assume that he applies it also to the masterpiece of his creation—the human soul? I think it does. And everything science has taught me—and continues to teach me—strengthens my belief in the continuity of our spiritual existence after death. Nothing disappears without a trace.

Young people, real men in science realize how little is known. They realize as they study this universe how infinite it really is. Christianity has been tried but not found wanting.

HOW OLD ARE YOU?

Each person has five ages at any one time:

- Chronological: How many years?
- Physical: How old does one look and feel?
- Mental: How much does one know?
- Emotional: How mature is one’s behavior?
- Spiritual: how deep is one’s knowledge and practice of Christian principles?

-Jay Lockhart

utes a person. In other words, it would take from opening session on Monday until the closing session on Friday at dinnertime listening around the clock to hear the testimony of those witnesses. We in the twenty-first century have a decision to make: whose report will we believe—the five hundred eyewitnesses, or the skeptical “scholars” seventeen hundred years removed from the events?

The witnesses were diverse. Skeptics, most of whom live centuries removed from the events, would have us believe that the appearances can be explained by mass hysteria or mass hallucinations. Yet the facts do not fit this hypothesis. The time frame does not fit. The interactions were spread over forty days—not merely a few hours or a couple of days (cf. Luke 24:13-35; I Corinthians 15:5-7). Most of these five hundred witnesses were still living twenty-five years later when Paul wrote I Corinthians. There is no record of a single one who ever changed his mind and recanted his testimony.

They number witnesses and the circumstances do not fit these theories. A large number of people saw Him alive in difference locations, at different times, and under different circumstances. No two appearances were exactly alike. Several saw Him more than once, some alone, and some in large groups. One was in the morning; another in the evening. In some cases Jesus ate with them; one time He cooked a meal; another, He repeated a miracle He had earlier done—the large draft of fish (John 21). The reactions to seeing the resurrected Christ were also diverse. Some worshipped; others wept for joy. Yet all were transformed by the encounter.

The witnesses were uniform in identifying the Lord. Each told similar stories about his or her experience. How could they be sure that the person they were seeing was not a stand-in imposter? Jesus kept the scars from His crucifixion, which no one else could imitate (Luke 24:39). Presumably He could have had any resurrected body He wanted, and yet He chose one identifiable, mainly by scars that could be seen and touched. Doubtless the reason could be summed up in the theme of John’s biography: “to the intent that ye may believe” (John 11:15). Dr. Luke records Jesus’ reference to His body as “flesh and bone” (Luke 24:39), which is the only time that phrase is used in the New Testament (usually the body is identified as “flesh and blood” - five times in the New Testament). Some see in this a change in Jesus’ resurrection body—that it was bloodless—and tie it to His giving His blood for us. Evidently His body did still have a gapping hole large enough for Thomas to insert his hand (John 20:27).

-Allen Webster
to be continued

WE ARE WONDERFULLY MADE

Over the past two decades, I have had numerous occasions to gaze upon the internal works of a computer. I am always amazed at the circuitry and complexity therein. An accident? Of course not! Now consider man. As Shakespeare once said, "What a piece of work is man!" Here is what our God has made:

THE EARS: A piano has 88 keys, but each of your ears has a keyboard with 1500 keys. They are so finely tuned that you can hear the blood rushing through your vessels. The outside of your ear can catch up to 73,700 vibrations per second.

THE EYES: They are both microscopes and telescopes. One can look upon a star millions of miles away, or inspect the smallest of insects.

THE FEET: Each foot has more than two dozen bones, none of which is wider than your thumb. But the foot is so manufactured with its ligaments, tendons, muscles, and joints that a 300-pound man can put all his weight on these tiny bones.

THE HEART: This little muscle is about the size of your fist, but it beats 4320 times an hour. That amounts to approximately 40 million beats a year. A single drop of blood can make a complete trip around your circulatory system in 22 seconds. When considered as a whole, indeed we are wonderfully made. And to think that somebody came up with the silly notion that this happened by chance! Three weeks ago I had the opportunity to hear a wonderful lesson on the very topic we are considering.

Here is but a portion of the wonderful evidence that indeed, we are wonderfully made: The basis for the development of a human being in his mother's womb is a complex molecule known as DNA—deoxyribonucleic acid. DNA is the coded information, present in every cell, which forms the instruction manual for human development. The code of DNA is composed of four chemical bases: Adenine, guanine, cytosine, and thymine, represented by the letters A, G, C, and T. Human DNA consists of about three billion bases arranged in such a way as to form inconceivably complex "words." These genetic "words" are the basis of life. Without this information, the cells cannot reproduce and the body cannot be formed in the womb. The position of each base or "letter" is highly significant. Genetic diseases, such as sickle-cell anemia and Down syndrome are caused by glitches in the genome, some as subtle as a single misplaced letter. If written out, the information in the DNA of one cell would fill a thousand six hundred page books. What is the origin of this information? The complexity of DNA is evidence of design.

Perhaps one of the clearest descriptions of this implication from DNA was stated by Charles Colson in a Breakpoint commentary titled, "Little Green Men." If one were walking along the beach and saw ripples in the sand, he might reasonably conclude that the regular pattern they formed was merely the result of a natural process of waves lapping in the beach. However, if on the same beach he were to see the words, "John loves Mary" scratched into the sand, he would immediately conclude that an intelligent being was responsible for the sentence. These simple words communicate information.

In a similar way, the "words" of DNA are not just randomly produced patterns. They communicate information that could not just happen. Colson concluded that if "John loves Mary" scratched in the sand had to be the product of an intelligent being, how much more the DNA code.

No wonder the psalmist proclaimed, "[We are] fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14).

-Tom Wacaster

WHY GO TO WORSHIP?

A churchgoer wrote a letter to the editor of a newspaper and complained that it made no sense to go to church every week. "I've gone for 30 years now," he wrote, "and in that time I have heard something like 3,000 sermons. But for the life of me, I can't remember a single one of them. So, I think I'm wasting my time..." This started a controversy in the "Letters to the Editor" column, much to the delight of the editor. It went on for weeks until someone wrote this clincher:

"I've been married for 30 years now. In that time my wife has cooked some 32,000 meals. But, for the life of me, I cannot recall the entire menu for a single one of those meals. But I do know this...they all nourished me and gave me the strength I needed to do my work. If my wife had not given me these meals, I would be physically dead today. Likewise, if I had not gone to church for nourishment, I would be spiritually dead today!"