

CONFIDENCE IN THE BIBLE—PART TWO: THE TEXT  
Jude 1-3

"Jude, a slave of Jesus Christ and a brother of James: To those who are the called, loved by God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ. <sup>2</sup> May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you. <sup>3</sup> Dear friends, although I was eager to write you about the salvation we share, I found it necessary to write and exhort you to contend for the faith that was delivered to the saints once for all."

## INTRODUCTION

Some things in life are more or less certain than others. The odds that a first marriage will last 15 years in our nation today are 1/3. Your odds of being born a twin in America are 1/90. Your odds of being born with 11 fingers or toes are 1/500. The odds you'll find a pearl in an oyster (if you can find an oyster) are 1/12,000. The odds of dying in an airplane accident are about 1/354,319. We probably don't lose sleep about this. But maybe we should be more concerned about being injured in an airplane. I recently read the odds of being on a plane with a drunken pilot are 1/117. This means nearly 1% of the time when we fly, our pilot might not be fit to get us to our destination safely. Here's an even more sobering thought: What are the odds we'll reach a safe destination when we die if we have unfit beliefs about the Bible? Probably zero, especially if our beliefs about the Bible give us distorted views about **Jesus Christ**.

The Bible teaches we can know for certain if we have God's lasting forgiveness and everlasting life. **I John 5:11-13**: "And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. <sup>12</sup> The one who has the Son has life. The one who doesn't have the Son of God does not have life. <sup>13</sup> I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life." The Bible also spells out in unmistakable terms we must entrust ourselves to **Jesus Christ** as Savior and Lord or we will experience the full force of God's judgment. **John 3:36**: "'The one who believes in the Son has eternal life, but the one who refuses to believe in the Son will not see life; instead, the wrath of God remains on him.'" Yet, despite the doom we face if we're wrong, it's astonishing how many think it's okay to trust their own opinion about how to please God. When standing before God as judge, they may look for the priest, minister, friend, imam, skeptic, or guru who assured them they'd be okay by following their advice. God will say, "You should have followed what I told you in the Bible about what you needed to do to get right with Me. You shouldn't have taken someone else's word you'd make it safely to Heaven."

A man died and stood before Heaven's gates. An angel told him, "Here's how it works. You need 100 points to get into Heaven. Tell me the good things you've done. I give you a number of points depending on their merits. If you reach 100 points, you're in. Otherwise . . . ; but let's not think about that now." He starts off, "I was married to the same woman for 50 years and never cheated on her, even in my heart." "Great!" said the angel, "that's worth three points!" "Three points?" "Well, I attended church all my life and supported its ministry with my tithe and service." "Terrific!" says the angel, "that's certainly worth a point." "One point?" He gulped. "How about this? I started a soup kitchen in my city and worked in a shelter for homeless veterans." "Wonderful; that's good for two more points." "Wow," the man cried, "At this rate I'll never make it. The only way I'll get into Heaven is by the grace of God on **Jesus'** merits." "Yes!" exclaimed the angel, "by the grace of God through **Jesus Christ**. Come on in!"

Loretta and I had neighbors in east Tucson. The man noticed what looked to him like a skin rash on his chest. He tried remedies he and others thought would take care of it. "No big deal," he kept thinking. But when it persisted 9 months, he finally went to his Dr., who sent him to a Dermatologist. The "rash" proved to be skin cancer. Not treated properly in time, it escalated into a very aggressive form of Melanoma. In less than 6 months, he died (but not before we shared the Gospel with him!). He'd followed other's advice or trusted his own opinion. By the time he got the only opinion that mattered, a skin specialist, it was too late. Early treatment would have promised him about a 100% cure rate; late treatment promised him nearly

a 100% death rate. If we seek the only "sin specialist" whose opinion matters, **Jesus Christ**, He promises us a 100% cure rate. The odds are 100% we'll face everlasting death if we fail to follow Christ's cure for our sin rash as prescribed in the Bible. This is why confidence in the Bible is crucial and why the forces of darkness wage an unrelenting war to undermine it. A survey released in May 2016 revealed just one-in-three Americans now strongly agree, "The Bible is totally accurate in all of the principles it teaches," whereas just six years ago nearly half of adults believed this to be true. And the percentage of those who strongly disagree with this statement has nearly doubled in just six years (from 12% to 23%). It's more eternally fatal than ever to accept the opinions of the people around us about the Bible and **Jesus Christ!**

In today's text, Jude exhorts his readers "to contend for the faith that was delivered to the saints *once for all*." He uses an unusual Greek word translated "once for all," found only here in the New Testament, to make two points. First, there's a finality in the Bible about the "faith" ("beliefs") of Christians. They are built upon the teachings of Christ and His apostles that were "delivered" ("handed down") to the Church "once for all" (time). They are not to be revised to suit our preferences or society's changing standards. Secondly, there's a finality about the text of the Bible itself. Jude exhorts us "to contend" to preserve the Bible's teachings and text "delivered" to the Church. "Contend" is an intensive form of the Greek word from which we get our word "agonize." Because our relationship with the Lord hinges upon our confidence in the Bible, Jude appeals to us to put ourselves out, to agonize, if necessary, to gain victory over skeptics outside the Church who assault the Bible's authority or false and misguided believers within the Church.

People often attempt to make an artificial distinction by saying "science is based upon facts and the Bible is based upon faith." It is true faith is required to believe **Jesus** came to earth as the Son of God, was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, died sacrificially on the Cross in our place to receive the punishment our sins deserve, and was resurrected bodily three days later. But no faith is required to accept the accuracy of either the historical information presented in the Bible or the accuracy of the Biblical text itself. These are verified by science as much as science can verify any facts. In today's message, Confidence in the Bible-Part Two, you will be presented evidence supporting the reliability of the text of the Bible.

## **I. THE RELIABILITY OF ANCIENT TEXTS OTHER THAN THE BIBLE**

Let's cite manuscript evidence for Socrates to illustrate how the Bible's reliability compares to other ancient texts. Born around 470 BC in Athens, Greece, he spent most of his adult life as a philosopher, left behind no writings, and was executed by the Athenian government. Most of what is known of Socrates comes from writings of his contemporaries, Plato and Xenophon. According to Plato, the Oracle at Delphi called Socrates the wisest of all men. He claimed he heard an inner voice when he was about to make a mistake (which he called his "daemonic sign," or spirit guide). Plato recorded his views on reincarnation and the mystery religions of his day, which taught their secret knowledge and ritual would guarantee people the salvation of an everlasting life. Some famous Socrates quotes are, "Nature has given us two ears, two eyes, and but one tongue—to the end that we should hear and see more than we speak"; "our prayers should be for blessings in general, for God knows best what is good for us;" "true wisdom comes to each of us when we realized how little we understand about life, ourselves, and the world around us"; and, "By all means, marry. If you get a good wife, you'll become happy; if you get a bad one, you'll become a philosopher." The oldest manuscript we have of any of Plato's writings mentioning Socrates dates to about 900 A.D., over 1200 years after they were written, and there are but seven such ancient copies. What if your only hope of having your sins forgiven and gaining a personal relationship with the Lord, and of being guaranteed a place by God's side in Heaven for eternity, depended upon what Socrates told us about God?

Siddhartha Gautama was born in 583 B.C. You know him as "the Buddha," meaning "awakened one," referring to his claim of spiritual enlightenment. Buddha taught life's main goal is "tranquility," which he defined as avoidance of stress and pain by denying our desires. A joke says someone sent the Buddha a gift box tied with a ribbon. Buddha opened it to find it empty. "Aha!", he said, "Just what I wanted. Nothing!"

Buddha's teachings were given orally, as were those of **Jesus**. But within 300 years they'd become so fragmented and given such varied interpretations that a council was convened to weed out the false teachings. The compilation of official Buddhist scriptures resulting from this council was not recorded until 29 B.C. The oldest surviving copy of Buddhist scriptures is dated 868 A.D. Recently, 60 fragments of Buddha's teachings written on tree bark were discovered, dating to the first century A.D; the oldest known manuscript evidence of what Buddha *may* have taught. If you are a Buddhist, you are relying upon manuscripts of his teachings that were not written down until 550 years after Buddha's death, and the oldest copies you have of these manuscripts, apart from a few meager fragments, date to 1400 years after Buddha died.

## II. THE RELIABILITY OF THE BIBLE'S TEXT

Now let's consider the New Testament's reliability. There are 5,686 Greek manuscripts, to date, for portions of the New Testament. This makes it undeniably the best-attested ancient history text of all time! No original copies exist of the Gospels or letters found in the New Testament, but what should we expect of documents written on papyrus, an inferior early version of paper that normally lasted 10 years? No original copies exist of any text of the ancient world! Not until the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries were important documents customarily written on vellum (parchment) made from animal skins. Three parchment copies of nearly the entire New Testament survive dating as early as 325 A.D. and no later than 400 A.D. We have another 650 ancient copies of the entire (or nearly entire) New Testament, and another 5,000 copies of certain books or book portions have survived, including full copies of some books dating to 200 A.D. Fragments of Luke and John's Gospels have been found that date to within 30-40 years of the originals! There are also citations from nearly every New Testament book made by early Church leaders of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries, and 19,000 copies of the New Testament in other languages (as Latin) made prior to A.D. 600. This means every possible copyist error that may have crept into the earliest surviving New Testament texts has had multiple ways to be checked, checked, rechecked, and corrected. A simple illustration, which I've used before, will explain how effectively this has been done.

Assume you have an Aunt Sally consumed with better health. One night, she dreams of the recipe for an elixir that wondrously maintains youth. She awakes, scribbles the recipe on a paper scrap, then runs into the kitchen to make her first batch. In a few days Sally is a picture of radiant youth due to her daily dose of what comes to be known as "Aunt Sally's Secret Sauce." She's so excited she sends handwritten, detailed instructions of how to make her Sauce to her three bridge partners. She's eager to know if her elixir works as well for them in hopes she might market it. They, in turn, send handwritten instructions to ten of their own friends. All is going well until one day Aunt Sally's pet schnauzer eats the original copy of the recipe. Sally is beside herself. In a panic she contacts her three friends, but each of their copies have suffered similar mishaps. The alarm then goes out to their friends in the attempt to recover the original wording.

They finally round up all surviving handwritten copies; 26 in all. When spread on the kitchen table, some differences are found. Twenty-three copies are exactly the same. But two have a misspelled word, one has two phrases inverted ("mix then chop" instead of "chop then mix"), and one includes an ingredient none of the others list. Here's the key question: Do you think Aunt Sally can accurately reconstruct her original recipe? Of course she can! The misspelled words can easily be corrected, the inverted phrase can be repaired, and the extra ingredient can be ignored. This, in simplified form, is how the science of textual criticism works. Even with more numerous or diverse variations, the original can still be reconstructed with a high level of confidence given the right textual evidence. The thousands of early copies of the New Testament in our possession make our confidence in the reliability of its text an absolute certainty!

## CONCLUSION

If we have absolute confidence our actions rest upon a solid foundation, like confidence in the text of the New Testament, we can often do rather amazing things in life even over objections of those who might think we are fools. John Evans, a 6'6", 343 lb. British man calls himself a professional "head balancer."

He's already broken 25 records in 11 Guinness World Records categories for balancing motorcycles, boats, washing machines, and people on his head without using his hands. He even managed to balance a 353 lb. mini car atop his head for 33 seconds. Evans credits his astonishing 24" neck for his astounding feats.

The feats of 5'5", 140 lb. Frenchman Charles Blondin, the greatest funambulist of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, are even more astounding. "Funambulist" literally means a "rope dancer." We would call him a tightrope walker. Would you believe he once pushed a stove in a wheelbarrow on a tightrope stretched across Niagara Falls, stopped halfway, started a fire, and cooked an omelet above the Falls? He did!

In 1829, at age 5, Blondin became enthralled by the circus tightrope walker he saw perform. His father, a gymnast, supported his son's ambition to become a tightrope walker. After six months of training, "The Little Wonder" began demonstrating his surprising skill in popular, amateur performances. After his father died leaving him an orphan at age 9, the young Blondin turned professional. By his late 20s, he began touring the United States with a Troupe of acrobats. He always worked without a net, believing that preparing for disaster only made one more likely to occur. In 1858, Blondin beheld Niagara Falls for the first time and became obsessed with the idea of crossing the gorge over this enormous natural wonder.

Official roadblocks and concerns for his safety at first denied his dream. He was told only a fool would be confident he could safely perform this feat. But on June 30, 1859, a crowd of about 25,000 witnessed Blondin make history by becoming the first person to cross over the Falls on a tightrope. He started across from the American side while walking upon a 3-inch-wide hemp cord 1,300 feet long and rigged 160 feet above the Falls at one side and 270 feet at the other. Blondin knew he could tread a 3"-wide rope above the roaring waterfalls as calmly as most people could have crossed a 3'-wide bridge. He carried a 26'-long balancing pole weighing nearly 50 pounds. At midpoint Blondin stopped, dropped a bottle tied to a piece of twine into the Maid of the Mist tourist boat below, hauled up some Niagara River water, and drank it. He then triumphantly finished the crossing in 20 minutes, rested, and then recrossed the Falls in just 8 minutes.

Over two summers, Blondin crossed Niagara Falls 17 times. He did it on a bicycle, on stilts, and without his balancing pole. He turned somersaults and stood on his head on a chair over the crashing waters that could have crushed or drowned him had he fallen. Halfway across one day, he lay down on the cable, flipped himself over, and began walking backward to the Canadian side. On the journey back he wore a sack over his body, depriving himself of sight. A reporter wrote, "One can scarcely believe that the feat was indeed real. I stand gazing upon the slender cord and the awful gulf in a state of utter bewilderment.... I look back upon it as upon a dream."

But his greatest feat came on September 14, 1860. After he'd tightroped the Falls a 5<sup>th</sup> time, he'd convinced most onlookers he could take almost anything safely across with him. He called out to the cheering spectators, "Do you think I could push a man across sitting in a wheelbarrow?" A mighty roar of approval rose from the crowd. He asked a man cheering loudly, "Sir, do you think I could safely carry you across in this wheelbarrow?" "Yes, of course," said the man promptly. "Get in," the Great Blondin replied with a smile. The man refused. His faith in Blondin stopped at the point of truly putting his own life on the line. Blondin then called to his manager, Harry Colcord, with whom he'd prearranged to accept Blondin's offer. Though Colcord weighed a mere 5 lbs. less than him, Blondin carried him across the Falls on his back. Later that same year, Edward, Prince of Wales, son of Queen Victoria, professed his belief Blondin could take most anyone safely over the Falls, but politely and firmly refused to entrust himself to Blondin's skill.

We should have no doubts **Jesus** will safely carry us from earth to Heaven. We can have absolute confidence in Biblical texts like **I John 5:11-13**, "I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life." No fact from ancient history is more substantiated than that we hold in the New Testament the true words of **Jesus** and His Apostles!