



IS THE BIBLE RELIABLE?

building the historical case

Welcome, Leader!

Thank you for accepting the challenge of leading a TrueU group discussion. You have the enjoyable task of helping your group members learn together some fascinating information about the Bible's reliability. Not only will this strengthen their confidence in Scripture, but it will also equip them to offer strong reasons for their faith when challenged.

These 10 lessons contain many details concerning the archaeological and documentary evidence that backs up the Bible's historical record. You and your group will love learning about specific discoveries. But take heed! It's more important that everyone come away with a firm grasp of the main points in each lesson, which we've labeled the "Big Ideas." (Each big idea is presented in both a short headline and a more complete description.)

So as you lead the discussions, keep the following questions in mind: Are they grasping the key point(s)? And in such a way that they will remember it/them long after? If you have only a half hour or so for a discussion, budget your time so that the big ideas are emphasized.

Near the end of each lesson, you'll find a section called "Questions They Might Ask." This information can help you anticipate some common objections or issues that could arise in the discussion. It may be beneficial to glance at those questions and answers before the group session begins.

One last bit of advice: Your goal in this discussion should not be to act as the "answer man" on every issue but to encourage group members to help one another wrestle with the material. Often your best response to a question might be, "What do the rest of you think?"



TrueU: Is the Bible Reliable?

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Cartoons by Ed Koehler

Editor: Ray Seldomridge

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LESSON 01

THE PATRIARCHAL NARRATIVES AND THE DOCUMENTARY HYPOTHESIS

LEADER

Begin by reading this introduction aloud to the group or asking a volunteer to do so.

Lesson 1 is found on page 5 in the participant's guide.

LEADER

Before watching the DVD, draw the group's attention to the following exercise ("Quote Unquote"). Make sure all group members are ready to write in the missing words or phrases as they view the lecture. Keep the lights in the room up high enough so people will be able to take notes. That will also help them stay alert!

Now watch the DVD all the way through together.

Who is God, and how can we know Him? The Bible claims to be the direct revelation of our Creator. Therefore, if the biblical record is true, it is a primary means by which the God of the universe has revealed Himself to mankind. However, if it can be proved false, then the God of whom it speaks is simply one more pretender in the pantheon of gods that man has created.

In this introductory lesson, Dr. Stephen Meyer begins to lay a historical foundation for the accuracy of the biblical text by looking into the lives of the early Patriarchs, namely Abraham and his descendants. In so doing, he starts to build the case for the historicity of Scripture. Is the Bible true? You decide.

(5 minutes or less)

QUOTE UNQUOTE

LEADER

When the DVD ends, immediately take the group through this exercise one quote at a time, encouraging them to come up with the right answer together. Note that we have supplied the answers for you, the leader. Note also that on four of the statements, we've offered a question or two that may help you drive home the significance of the quote; spend about a minute on each of these quotations.

What did Dr. Meyer say? Fill in the blanks as you watch his presentation.

1. The Bible is arguably the **[oldest]** book in human history that claims to be the revelation of the same God who made the universe.

What if we found out that the Bible wasn't so old after all but was written a thousand years after the events it describes? How would that affect your view of the Bible?

2. The heart cannot exult in what the **[mind rejects]**.
3. With a theistic worldview, you can at least be open to the possibility of **[miracles]**.
4. **[Extra-biblical]** evidence corroborates the testimony of the patriarchal narratives, both directly and indirectly.

What does "extra-biblical" mean? Why not just believe Scripture without additional evidence?

5. Several classes of external archaeological evidence have shown that the **[Documentary Hypothesis]** is untenable.

What is the "Documentary Hypothesis," and how strong is the argument for this theory?

6. The biblical text contains **[nitty-gritty details]** that could not have been known long after the fact.
7. Naturalistic assumptions about the origin of the Bible give rise to a view of the Bible that is at odds with the **[archaeological]** and **[documentary]** evidence.
8. The use of **[multiple]** names for God in the Torah does not establish the existence of **[multiple]** authors or sources.
9. The external evidence **[situates]** the origin of the biblical text close to the time of the events it describes.

How would you say that again in your own words?

10. "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the **[word of our God]** stands forever" (Isaiah 40:8).

(5 minutes)

WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

LEADER

Now let's focus on the key thoughts in Dr. Meyer's presentation. Have a group member read aloud the big idea to the right (both the short and long versions), then ask the questions that follow to clarify its meaning and help everyone apply it to his or her life.

These cartoons, related to the big ideas, appear in the participant's guide as a way to help make the big ideas more memorable. They need not be discussed unless you want to.

BIBLE HISTORY CAN'T BE FACT IF GOD IS FICTION.

Disbelief in the existence of God leads people to doubt the historical accuracy of the Bible, since it makes sense only if its account of God's intervention in history is true.

Why is the debate over the Bible's accuracy not just an objective, intellectual discussion but a matter of the heart? What makes some people cling to anti-God presuppositions?

TIP: Encourage the group to explore how sin and guilt make people hide from God, just as Adam and Eve did in the Garden. Often, our intellectual stand is based on what we hope is true rather than on the evidence.

Could the Bible's theology be true even if its historical accounts were false? Why doesn't it just tell us who God is without reference to things that have happened on earth?

TIP: Help the group to contrast the personal God of the Bible—a God who acts in history and in our individual lives—with the impersonal force or detached, uninvolved deity of many false religions.



(5 minutes)

WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

LEADER

Have a group member read aloud the big idea to the right (both the short and long versions), then ask the questions that follow to clarify its meaning and help everyone apply it to his or her life.

HAVE FAITH IN ABRAHAM

An impressive amount of archaeological and other documentary evidence shows that the stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob must have originated close to the time of the events they describe and are therefore historically reliable.

How would you rate the evidence that Dr. Meyer described? How do you feel about the fact that such evidence rarely includes direct mention of such biblical figures as Abraham or Isaac?

TIP: Encourage the group members to be honest. Were they really impressed by the evidence, moderately helped, or downright disappointed? There are no right answers here; this is just a chance to reflect as a group on what you all heard from Dr. Meyer. For more help, see question #2 under "Questions They Might Ask" (page 6).

What does it do for your faith when you hear about an archaeological discovery that backs up Scripture?

TIP: Again, your goal here is to elicit some gut responses. What do group members feel when they become aware of some extra-biblical evidence? Does it help them realize in a new way that their faith is centered on real events?



(5 minutes)

WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

LEADER

Have a group member read aloud the big idea to the right (both the short and long versions), then ask the questions that follow to clarify its meaning and help everyone apply it to his or her life.

THE HISTORY CHECKS OUT

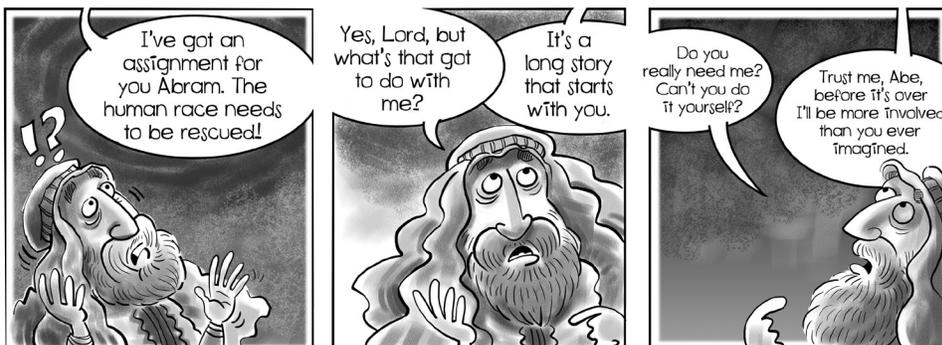
Since the Bible's account of key historical events seems to be accurate, then what it says about God's acting in those events is likely to be accurate as well.

What do you think about the way God chose to redeem our fallen human race? Would you have expected something different from the long historical drama that began with Abraham and culminated in Jesus Christ?

TIP: Get the group members to talk to one another. If no one jumps in at first, try another angle, such as "Why do you think God spent 2,000 years working with the Israelites before coming down to us in Jesus?" Let this discussion lead into the next question.

Do you find value in going over the Old Testament again and again, the way we do with the New Testament, or does much of it seem a bit remote and unrelated to your life? Talk about this.

TIP: Your goal here should be to get group members to encourage one another about Bible reading and study, including the Old Testament. You might want to ask people to describe which books of the Old Testament, such as the Psalms, mean the most to them and why.



(10 minutes or less)

PROFESSOR SAYS, YOU SAY

LEADER

Have the group discuss what they would say if a college professor asked this question in class:

WHAT SORT OF EVIDENCE MAKES YOU THINK THE BIBLICAL STORIES OF ABRAHAM, ISAAC, AND JACOB ARE HISTORICAL FACT?

Encourage group members to support or add to one another's responses, bringing in any relevant Bible passages. Perhaps they'd like to role-play the dialogue, taking turns to represent the skeptical professor. Or if you want, you can be the professor and have fun giving them a really hard time!

Their answers could include mention of covenants and social customs, price of slaves in law codes, personal names, place names, existence of the Amorites and Hurrians, patterns of nomadism, climate patterns, and political conditions.

(5 minutes or less)

WHAT IS WHAT? *A matching quiz*

LEADER

This exercise is meant primarily for individual study. But if there's still time, you may wish to lead the group through at least part of it. (Otherwise, skip to the Wrap-Up.) Note that we have provided the answers for you, the leader.

TIP: If anybody seems unclear about one of the terms or its significance, ask the other group members to help out. Don't let the discussion bog down on lesser matters; focus on the terms that relate directly to the big ideas from this lesson (especially #3, #7, and #9).

Draw a line from each term in the first column to its definition in the second column.

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| 1. PRIME REALITY [I] | A. many authors wrote the first five books of the Bible |
| 2. HIGHER CRITICISM [D] | B. the world was created by a Supreme Being |
| 3. DOCUMENTARY HYPOTHESIS [A] | C. biblical narratives have no historical basis |
| 4. MIRACLE [J] | D. researching the author/source and purpose of biblical texts |
| 5. PATRIARCHAL [F] | E. when something doesn't seem to belong to the time period it has been assigned |
| 6. THEISTIC WORLDVIEW [B] | F. the period of Israel's history dominated by Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph |
| 7. SITUATES [H] | G. Old Testament stories, though loosely based on real people or events, are mostly fiction |
| 8. ANACHRONISM [E] | H. when a story's details help pinpoint its actual historical setting |
| 9. BIBLICAL NIHILISM [C] | I. the source of everything else (Exodus 3:14 "I am who I am") |
| 10. BIBLICAL MINIMALISM [G] | J. an act of God; something not explainable by natural laws |

(1 minute)

WRAP-UP

LEADER

Read this summary aloud.

Okay, folks, let's sum this up. Many people who refuse to accept the possibility of God's existence naturally feel compelled to question the historical accuracy of the book that talks about Him. But modern archaeology has yielded much evidence pointing to the reliability of the patriarchal narratives. So we can read the Bible with confidence and look forward to uncovering more such evidence in the future.

A few scholars are grudgingly convinced by the evidence to adopt the view known as biblical maximalism, which admits that the Bible has a small historical core, even though the rest is supposedly fiction. As you may recall, Jesus warned against those who demand a sign—some sort of outward evidence—before putting their faith in Him.

But for Christians, it's still well worth knowing about the extra-biblical evidence that backs up Scripture. In the next lesson, we'll look at the period of the Exodus, retracing the Israelites' steps from Egypt to Canaan. Be sure to join us.

QUESTIONS THEY MIGHT ASK

1. *More than a hundred years have passed since Wellhausen. Do liberal scholars still teach the Documentary Hypothesis today?*

Some do, but now a multitude of complex theories about the date and source of the Torah compete for attention—everything from one author to a whole community effort more than a thousand years later. It's a confusing discussion for scholars who want to undermine the Bible's historicity.

2. *Is there any direct, external evidence of the Patriarchs to go along with the indirect stuff?*

Good question! Early in his lecture, Dr. Meyer said that the “evidence corroborates the testimony of the patriarchal narratives, both directly and indirectly.” But the rest of his lecture concentrated on the indirect findings. The search for direct evidence (that is, for external mention of actual biblical names and events) might be a fun challenge for further study. To get started, you could read *The Old Testament Documents: Are They Reliable & Relevant?* by Walter C. Kaiser.

3. *Aside from the evidence we're studying in this series, how else can we know that the Bible is reliable?*

Those who step out in faith and give their lives to Jesus Christ certainly discover that the Bible is true when they encounter the One it speaks of. (The Bible really is all about Him; see Luke 24:27; John 5:39.) Moreover, everything the Bible says about life and the human experience rings true as we struggle with our own fallen nature and reach out to God for strength and the hope of salvation.

DID YOU KNOW?

LEADER

These extras are meant for individual reading, but you may choose to mention or discuss them in the group if you have time.

BLOWING IN THE WIND

*In the late 1800s, Julius Wellhausen and other scholars began to think that religion had just evolved over time. According to this theory, mankind had moved naturally—without any divine revelation—from pantheism or animism (“god” in nature) to polytheism (many “gods”) to monotheism (one God, outside of nature). This evolutionary view came on the heels of Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* (1859), which set out his theory of biological evolution. A coincidence? Or could this be what the apostle Paul meant when he said that people are “tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning” (Ephesians 4:14, ESV)?*

ANOTHER DUH MOMENT

“A professor of theology has the practical task of preparing the students for service in the Protestant church, ... but instead ... I make my hearers unfit for their office.”

—Julius Wellhausen, on resigning from his professorship

LESSON 02

THE EXODUS: FROM EGYPT TO CANAAN

LEADER

Begin by reading this introduction aloud to the group or asking a volunteer to do so.

Lesson 2 is found on page 15 in the participant's guide.

LEADER

Before watching the DVD, draw the group's attention to the following exercise ("Quote Unquote"). Make sure all group members are ready to write in the missing words or phrases as they view the lecture. Keep the lights in the room up high enough so people will be able to take notes. That will also help them stay alert!

Now watch the DVD all the way through together.

The Exodus story is one of the longest continuous narratives in the entire Bible, and it has significant historical and theological implications for both Christians and non-Christians. The story starts with Joseph's being sold into slavery in Egypt, imprisoned, then rising to prominence under Pharaoh and saving his family from a great famine. Once Joseph dies, his descendants (the Israelites) are forced into bondage by the Egyptians. After four hundred years, the Lord rescues them by having Moses lead them out of Egypt, across the Red Sea and into the wilderness to wander for another 40 years before conquering the Promised Land. It is a tale of epic proportions, but did it really happen? Can we prove that the Israelites were even in Egypt, or that they later escaped Pharaoh's grasp and fled into the desert?

Historians have discussed this narrative for centuries, wondering how such incredible events could have taken place. But this is more than just a great drama; the Exodus is a revealing look into the nature and character of God Himself. He is portrayed as the author and writer of history. He brings forth justice on the unjust and mercy for the persecuted. He remembers and rescues His people. He is the author of salvation, and it is He who controls the destiny of mankind.

(5 minutes or less)

QUOTE UNQUOTE

LEADER

When the DVD ends, immediately take the group through this exercise one quote at a time, encouraging them to come up with the right answer together. Note that we have supplied the answers for you, the leader. Note also that on three of the statements, we've offered a question or two that may help you drive home the significance of the quote; spend about a minute on each of these quotations.

What did Dr. Meyer say? Fill in the blanks as you watch his presentation.

1. If you hold a materialistic worldview, then the [parting of the Red Sea] simply cannot have occurred.
2. The typical defenses of the historical reliability of the Bible have been essentially arguments from [silence].

What did Dr. Meyer mean? What sort of defense or argument does he offer instead?

3. There is a lot of extra-biblical evidence that the Egyptians had large public building projects involving the forced labor of [Asiatic] slaves.
4. From the time of King David right up to the Babylonian Conquest, the most common style of Israelite architecture was the [four-room] house.

How does knowing this help prove the historicity of biblical events?

5. We find distinctive Hebrew names in the [slave records] of Egyptian households. Were the Israelites present in Egypt? It certainly appears that they were.
5. The Amarna letters refer to raids and conquest of several Canaanite cities by a group of [Habiru].
6. Why are the [Egyptians] talking about the Israelites in 1400 B.C.?
7. An archaeological inscription mentioning “[Ta shasu Yahweh]” by itself puts to rest the whole school of biblical minimalism on the question of the Exodus.

How would you translate that inscription into English and explain its significance?

8. There was a migration of Israelites from Egypt to Canaan about the middle of the 15th century B.C., otherwise known as the [Exodus].

(5 minutes)

WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

LEADER

Now let's focus on the key thoughts in Dr. Meyer's presentation. Have a group member read aloud the big idea to the right (both the short and long versions), then ask the question that follows to clarify its meaning and help everyone apply it to his or her life.

A PYRAMID SCENE

We know from archaeological evidence that the Israelites were slaves in Egypt before 1446 B.C., just as the Bible says.

Without first being slaves in Egypt, the Israelites would never have had an exodus. How would that have changed our Christian faith?

TIP: One Bible scholar said of the Exodus: "No other event is so basic to the fabric of both Testaments. Our concepts of deliverance and atonement, of God dwelling with his people, of God taking a people for himself and so forth have their roots in this complex of events" (Dictionary of Biblical Imagery, InterVarsity Press, 1998). Challenge group members to investigate for themselves what the New Testament says about the Exodus.



(5 minutes)

WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

LEADER

Have a group member read aloud the big idea to the right (both the short and long versions), then ask them to do the assignment that follows.

THEY MADE IT TO CANAAN (FINALLY)

We know from archaeological evidence that the Israelites arrived in the land of Canaan around 1400 B.C., just as the Bible claims.

As best as you can, pinpoint on the map on page 39 of your student guide where the Israelites started from in Egypt and where they ended up prior to crossing the Jordan River.

TIP: Let group members work on this together if they prefer, turning to the books of Exodus and Numbers for help. Emphasize that since we're talking about historical events, it's important for us to have a basic grasp of the geography behind these events.



(5 minutes)

WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

LEADER

Have a group member read aloud the big idea to the right (both the short and long versions), then ask the question that follows to clarify its meaning and help everyone apply it to his or her life.

FOOTPRINTS IN THE SAND

We have archaeological evidence of the Israelites' wandering in the wilderness between Egypt and Canaan, just as the Bible says.

Why did the Israelites wander in the wilderness for 40 years instead of heading straight for the Promised Land? What do these notions of “wilderness” and “wandering” mean to you in your Christian walk?

TIP: Point out that these historic events from the past have implications for today. You might have someone look up 1 Timothy 6:10, 2 Timothy 4:4, or James 5:19. Ask group members what can be done when a friend or family member begins to wander away from the truth.



(10 minutes or less)

PROFESSOR SAYS, YOU SAY

LEADER

Have the group discuss what they would say if a college professor asked this question in class:

WHAT SPECIFIC EVIDENCE IS THERE TO SUPPORT THE BIBLE'S CLAIM THAT THE ISRAELITES ONCE LIVED IN EGYPT AND THEN MADE THEIR WAY TO CANAAN AROUND 1400 B.C.?

Encourage group members to support or add to one another's responses, referring to their notes if any. Ask them to describe each document, artifact, or other archaeological finding and how it relates to the Bible's account. Perhaps they'd like to role-play the dialogue, taking turns to represent the skeptical professor. Or if you want, you can be the professor and have fun giving them a really hard time!

Their answers could include mention of house architecture, the Tomb of Rekhmire, lists of slave names, Amarna letters, the Merneptah Stele, and the Ipuwer Papyrus.

(5 minutes or less)

WHAT IS WHAT? *A matching quiz*

LEADER

This exercise is meant primarily for individual study. But if there's still time, you may wish to lead the group through at least part of it. (Otherwise, skip to the Wrap-Up.) Note that we have provided the answers for you, the leader.

If anybody seems unclear about one of the terms or its significance, ask the other group members to help out. Don't let the discussion bog down on lesser matters; focus on the terms that relate directly to the big ideas from this lesson (especially #1, #5, and #10).

Draw a line from each term in the first column to its definition in the second column.

- | | |
|------------------------------|---|
| 1. 1446 B.C. [F] | A. ancient Egyptian reference to various people groups living in Canaan |
| 2. ARGUMENT FROM SILENCE [I] | B. nomadic, marauding tribes in the Middle East—possibly referring to the Israelites themselves |
| 3. ASIATICS [A] | C. detailed match between the biblical and archaeological records |
| 4. 430 YEARS [G] | D. inscription that proves the Israelites were a dominant group in Canaan by around 1209 B.C. |
| 5. SPECIFICITY [C] | E. area of ancient Palestine west of the Jordan River, the Promised Land of the Israelites |
| 6. HABIRU [B] | F. when the Exodus occurred, according to the Bible |
| 7. MERNEPTAH STELE [D] | G. duration of Israelites' bondage in Egypt |
| 8. CANAAN [E] | H. Egypt's Nile Delta area where the Israelites settled after Joseph's time |
| 9. IPUWER PAPYRUS [J] | I. a conclusion based on the lack of contrary evidence |
| 10. GOSHEN [H] | J. possibly an Egyptian account of the 10 plagues |

(1 minute)

WRAP-UP

LEADER

Read this summary aloud.

Okay, let's wrap this up. We've seen ample evidence that the Israelites were once enslaved in Egypt, left there around 1446 B.C. to wander in the desert, and eventually showed up at the eastern border of Canaan. Other nations like Egypt seemed to be aware of this large group of people and their religion.

So when our own salvation in Christ is likened to the Exodus, and we learn how God called out a nation for His own special purposes, we can rest assured that all this is based on actual historical events, not just interesting stories.

But that's not the end of it. Let's see what happened next.

QUESTIONS THEY MIGHT ASK

1. Occasionally some piece of evidence seems a bit weaker than it's made out to be. When is it okay to question the evidence without adopting the negative approach of a biblical minimalist?

It is true that in our enthusiasm to refute the arguments of unbelievers, we sometimes overstate the reliability of a certain piece of evidence. You be the judge. While some evidence will appear weaker than you first thought, you will probably still conclude that the sum of evidence is impressive and reassuring.

2. Have archaeologists found the location of the Red Sea Crossing and Mt. Sinai?

Much controversy surrounds the sites that have traditionally been identified, so no one knows the locations beyond a doubt. (See "Be Your Own Archaeologist" below.) But new discoveries continue to be made, so stay tuned.

3. Why did God tell the Israelites to wipe out the people in Canaan, rather than live alongside them?

That's a good question, but you're getting ahead of things. We'll look at the conquest of Canaan in the next lesson. For now, the Israelites have just arrived in the neighborhood.

DID YOU KNOW?

LEADER

These extras are meant for individual reading, but you may choose to mention or discuss them in the group if you have time.

BE YOUR OWN ARCHAEOLOGIST

The crossing of the Red Sea. Mt. Sinai. The Ark of the Covenant. Who wouldn't want to don Indiana Jones's fedora and go searching for the actual biblical locations and artifacts? Many archaeologists and amateurs have done so with mixed results.

Enough evidence has been uncovered to throw into doubt the traditional location of the sea crossing and Mt. Sinai. But the evidence is not definitive, and further research is complicated by governments who keep explorers at a distance.

Nothing can stop the Internet adventurer who embarks on a search for the facts. You may want to start with the Base Institute (baseinstitute.org). Whatever you find, remember that the evidence unearthed in this lecture is every bit as fascinating and more reliable in providing extra-biblical proof of Scripture's accuracy.

LESSON 03

LEADER

Begin by reading this introduction aloud to the group or asking a volunteer to do so.

Lesson 3 is found on page 25 in the participant's guide.

THE ISRAELITE CONQUEST

After the Israelites fled Egypt, God commanded them to settle in the "Promised Land." But in order to do so, they first had to conquer the Canaanite towns and cities, which included Jericho, Ai, and Hazor. The biblical texts document this fiery conquest at length, including a strange and miraculous story of the fall of Jericho.

Small details mentioned in these ancient writings can now be scrutinized in light of archaeological finds. Did Joshua really fight the battle of Jericho? Did the walls come tumbling down? If so, when? Let's allow the evidence to lead us to the most logical conclusion.

LEADER

Before watching the DVD, draw the group's attention to the following exercise ("Quote Unquote"). Make sure all group members are ready to write in the missing words or phrases as they view the lecture. Keep the lights in the room up high enough so people will be able to take notes. That will also help them stay alert!

Now watch the DVD all the way through together.

(5 minutes or less)

QUOTE UNQUOTE

LEADER

When the DVD ends, immediately take the group through this exercise one quote at a time, encouraging them to come up with the right answer together. Note that we have supplied the answers for you, the leader. Note also that on four of the statements, we've offered a question or two that may help you drive home the significance of the quote; spend about a minute on each of these quotations.

What did Dr. Meyer say? Fill in the blanks as you watch his presentation.

1. From an archaeologist's point-of-view, there's nothing better than a good [fiery destruction] .

Explain that. Why is fire so helpful in rediscovering the past?

2. Part of the reason that God condemns the Canaanites to this destruction is their idolatry, their [child sacrifice] .

3. Biblical minimalists claim that any destruction evidence you find in these sites is from a series of indigenous [peasant rebellions] .

In other words, according to the minimalists, who never existed? What never happened?

4. There's really not much doubt about the site for [Jericho] .

5. One way of dating an area is to look for distinctive styles of [pottery] that were known to characterize a particular era.

What mistake did the archaeologist Kathleen Kenyon make when analyzing the pottery at Jericho?

6. For some reason, the Egyptians really thought that [dung beetles] were cool. ... Whatever floats your boat, I guess.

7. In the Jericho burial grounds, you have inscriptions mentioning [pharaohs] that were not even alive yet in 1550 B.C.

So what theory does this refute?

8. [When] the walls fell outward, it formed a natural [ramp] that allowed Joshua's soldiers to go right in.

9. When the Bible makes [very specific] claims, it invites [very specific] testing.

10. What was one of the things that God commanded the Israelites to do as they entered these pagan cities? [Destroy the idols.]

(5 minutes)

WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

LEADER

Now let's focus on the key thoughts in Dr. Meyer's presentation. Have a group member read aloud the big idea to the right (both the short and long versions), then ask the questions that follow to clarify its meaning and help everyone apply it to his or her life.

THE WALLS CAME TUMBLIN' DOWN (AND WE FOUND THEM)

The Bible's account of the Israelite battle against Jericho is backed up by impressive archaeological evidence.

Why is so much made of the battle at Jericho compared to other Canaanite cities?

TIP: There might be several reasons. The conquest of Jericho is described at greater length in Scripture, and dramatically at that. It was also the first city in Canaan to be destroyed by the Israelites. And the only survivors at Jericho were the prostitute Rahab and her family. Rahab is remembered as one of Jesus' ancestors (Matthew 1:5). She is also praised for her faith (Hebrews 11:31) and her actions on behalf of God's people (James 2:25) during the conquest of Jericho.

Is it sheer coincidence that the archaeological record at Jericho is so complete?

TIP: Probably nothing in this life is sheer coincidence. It is not hard to imagine that the Lord Himself is involved in helping us uncover evidence of His actions in history.



(5 minutes)

WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

LEADER

Have a group member read aloud the big idea to the right (both the short and long versions), then ask the question that follows to explore its significance for us today.

HEADLESS IDOLS

The Bible's account of the conquest of Hazor is also backed up by impressive archaeological evidence.

Why do you think God commanded the Israelites to completely destroy and burn Hazor so there was nothing left?



(5 minutes)

WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

LEADER

Have a group member read aloud the big idea to the right (both the short and long versions), then ask the question that follows to explore its significance for us today.

THE CANAANITES WERE TOAST

Unearthed evidence from key Canaanite cities and extra-biblical references to the presence of the Israelites confirm the main elements of the scriptural account of the conquest.

Why do you think it was important that the Israelites conquer the Canaanites rather than simply co-exist with them?

TIP: Point out how God often exhorted His people not to be influenced by the practices or beliefs of other nations (see, for example, Judges 3:5-6; 1 Samuel 7:3; or 2 Kings 17:15). What sort of problems has the church experienced today as a result of His people's adopting the mindset and values of secular society?



(10 minutes or less)

PROFESSOR SAYS, YOU SAY

LEADER

Have the group discuss what they would say if a college professor asked this question in class:

WHAT SPECIFIC EVIDENCE MAKES YOU THINK THE ISRAELITES CONQUERED JERICO IN THE TIME AND MANNER THAT THE BIBLE DESCRIBES?

Encourage group members to support or add to one another's responses, referring to their notes if any. Ask them to describe each document, artifact, or other archaeological finding and how it relates to the Bible's account. Perhaps they'd like to role-play the dialogue, taking turns to represent the skeptical professor (or even Kathleen Kenyon herself).

Their answers could include a discussion of Jericho's walls, grain storage, fire evidence, and the kind of pottery and Egyptian scarabs found on the site.

(5 minutes or less)

WHAT IS WHAT?

A matching quiz

LEADER

This exercise is meant primarily for individual study. But if there's still time, you may wish to lead the group through at least part of it. (Otherwise, skip to the Wrap-Up.) Note that we have provided the answers for you, the leader.

If anybody seems unclear about one of the terms or its significance, ask the other group members to help out. Don't let the discussion bog down on lesser matters; focus on the terms that relate directly to the big ideas from this lesson (especially #1, #2, and #4).

Draw a line from each term in the first column to its definition in the second column.

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| 1. FIRE [H] | A. archaeologist who claimed that Jericho was destroyed much earlier than the Bible says |
| 2. JERICHO [I] | B. city conquered by the Israelites on their second try |
| 3. LATE BRONZE AGE 1 [F] | C. promising site for the ancient city of Ai |
| 4. HAZOR [G] | D. type of pottery imported from Cyprus and used by the wealthy in 15th century B.C. |
| 5. SCARAB [J] | E. there was a conquest, but it happened in the late 13th century B.C. |
| 6. KENYON [A] | F. period of Middle Eastern history (roughly 1550-1400 B.C.) when Joshua entered the Promised Land |
| 7. KHIRBET MAQATIR [C] | G. last and largest city that the Israelites destroyed by fire |
| 8. AI [B] | H. an archaeologist's best friend |
| 9. EARLIER CONSENSUS VIEW [E] | I. first city that the Israelites conquered after crossing the Jordan |
| 10. CYPRIOT [D] | J. large dung beetle regarded as sacred in ancient Egypt |

(1 minute)

WRAP-UP

LEADER

Read this summary aloud.

Let's summarize what we've talked about today. We've seen all kinds of evidence that the Israelites invaded the land of Canaan just as the Bible describes. First they attacked the city of Jericho, where a woman who aided them, Rahab, became famous for her faith in God. Next they tried to conquer the town of Ai, but they failed on their first attempt because of the disobedience of one man. The story of Achan in Joshua 7 deserves our attention when we begin to think that our walk with the Lord is an individual affair.

The last battle we examined occurred at Hazor, where the great city was destroyed by fire and the idols were smashed to pieces. We've found the burned city today and unearthed some of the broken idols.

If we stare at all this evidence long enough, it begins to sink in that these events really happened. The Bible is not some "religious" document about a fairytale world. God really did act in history and is doing so today. But we've seen only the beginning. Next time we'll look at one of the key personalities of all biblical history and study the evidence that backs up what we know about David from Scripture.

QUESTIONS THEY MIGHT ASK

1. How can we get a closer look at some of the artifacts or diggings shown in Dr. Meyer's presentation?

There wasn't time in Dr. Meyer's lecture or room in this guide to picture the archaeological findings in greater detail. But you have the Internet! Google what you are interested in, and you'll be surprised at what's out there. Don't settle merely for a Wikipedia article, either. There's much more to see. But be warned: The minimalist views that you've learned about in this series of TrueU lectures are everywhere on the Internet, as expected. Be discerning.

2. What if I can't remember all these archaeological details when I'm trying to convince a professor or friend about the Bible's historical accuracy?

Anyone who sincerely wants to learn the truth will be happy to let you review your notes or even watch TrueU with you. Only the closed-minded will try to nail you on the spot for not remembering all the facts.

Be assured that it's not up to you to draw someone else to God; all you have to do is witness to the truth and then let God take it from there. It's worth quoting again what Jesus said about this: "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him" (John 6:44, ESV).

DID YOU KNOW?

LEADER

These extras are meant for individual reading, but you may choose to mention or discuss them in the group if you have time.

FACTS ABOUT JERICHO (AT THE TIME OF JOSHUA)

- * A city with an ancient past (7000-8000 B.C.), often considered the oldest city in the world, repeatedly destroyed and rebuilt
- * Important city, though only about 9-10 acres in size
- * Situated on major trade routes in a fertile plain
- * Home to several thousand people
- * Fed by a perennial spring inside the city walls, yielding 1,000 gallons an hour
- * A wonderful tropical oasis surrounded by date palms
- * Strong fortress, with a high set of walls (only one section of the brick wall still stands, suggestive of Rahab's house)
- * So evil and steeped in idol worship that God wanted every living being—except for Rahab and her household—to be destroyed

RAMPING IT UP

“After the city walls fell, how did the Israelites surmount the four to five meter (12–15 foot) high retaining wall at the base of the tell? Excavations have shown that the bricks from the collapsed walls formed a ramp against the retaining wall so that the Israelites could merely climb up over the top.”

—Archaeologist Bryant Wood

“Have all the people give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse and the people will go up, every man straight in.”

—Joshua 6:5, NIV

LESSON 04

THE UNITED KINGDOM OF DAVID AND SOLOMON

LEADER

Begin by reading this introduction aloud to the group or asking a volunteer to do so.

Lesson 4 is found on page 35 in the participant's guide.

LEADER

Before watching the DVD, draw the group's attention to the following exercise ("Quote Unquote"). Make sure all group members are ready to write in the missing words or phrases as they view the lecture. Keep the lights in the room up high enough so people will be able to take notes. That will also help them stay alert!

Now watch the DVD all the way through together.

The Old Testament reads like an epic—one grand story after another that portrays the might, sovereignty, grace, and salvation of the one true God who revealed Himself in the life of Israel. After establishing His people in the land of Canaan, God appointed His servant David to the throne. David was more than just a warrior-poet turned king; he was God's instrument in delivering the Israelites from oppression, defending the defenseless, crushing the wicked, and establishing a royal line of kings through which the Messiah would eventually come. King David built a palace in the great city of Jerusalem. His son Solomon vastly expanded the kingdom and established the Temple as the earthly throne of God.

However, this story too has been much maligned by the biblical minimalists, claiming that David either never existed or was simply a small tribal leader with little or no political power. We see once again that if one can discount the historicity of the Bible, then its theological implications and message can also be dismissed. But if these stories prove to be true, then the message and meaning of the accounts must be taken seriously as well.

(5 minutes or less)

QUOTE UNQUOTE

LEADER

When the DVD ends, immediately take the group through this exercise one quote at a time, encouraging them to come up with the right answer together. Note that we have supplied the answers for you, the leader. Note also that on three of the statements, we've offered a question or two that may help you drive home the significance of the quote; spend about a minute on each of these quotations.

What did Dr. Meyer say? Fill in the blanks as you watch his presentation.

1. As you get closer and closer to modern times, there's **[more]** corroborating evidence, **[more]** specificity in the evidence.
2. We think of David as the **[archetypal]** figure in a child's story, yet ... he's also a real figure in history.

If we believe that a biblical event is historical, why are we still surprised when we see evidence that it actually happened?
3. Every single part of **[biblical]** history has been challenged by skeptics.
4. The minimalists insist that in 10th-century B.C. Judah, there's little evidence of any permanent **[population]**, no urban centers, no capital, no temple, and no big building projects.
5. Archaeology has provided some very compelling evidence for the reality of **[Jerusalem]** as an urban center.
6. From 1230 B.C. right up to the beginning of the Davidic monarchy, we see the number of small villages in the central hill country go up from 29 to **[254]**.
7. It's the largest Iron Age structure in Israel, and most archaeologists ... think this is clearly the **[palace of David]**.

What is it about these ruins that make archaeologists think they've found David's palace?
8. With almost every discovery in archaeology, there are **[controversies]**.
9. **[Solomon]** embarked on big building projects in key cities—Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer.
10. **[Mount Moriah]** is perhaps the most hotly contested piece of land on the entire planet.

Why? What is located at Mount Moriah? What used to be there?

(5 minutes)

WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

LEADER

Now let's focus on the key thoughts in Dr. Meyer's presentation. Have a group member read aloud the big idea to the right (both the short and long versions), then ask the questions that follow to bring out its significance for us today.

GOD'S METROPOLIS

Archaeology has proved that Jerusalem was a large, important, and fortified city in the 10th century B.C.

Why is Jerusalem not just another city, but the most special city ever known to man? What does it symbolize that matters very much to us?

TIP: Challenge members to take it upon themselves individually to trace the role of Jerusalem throughout the Bible, first as the city where the Ark of the Covenant would reside and God would uniquely dwell, then as a symbol of the New Jerusalem, the final home of all God's people (Revelation 21:2).



(5 minutes)

WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

LEADER

Have a group member read aloud the big idea to the right (both the short and long versions), then ask the question that follows to make it more relevant for us today.

STUPENDOUS STONES

Archaeology has unearthed evidence of David's and Solomon's building projects.

The most important building in Jerusalem was Solomon's temple, later destroyed by the Babylonians, rebuilt, and then expanded by Herod the Great. But what did the temple mean to Jesus?

TIP: Ask two volunteers to read Mark 11:15-17 and then Mark 13:1-2. You might even explore what it meant when the curtain of the temple was torn in two at Jesus' death (Mark 15:38).



(5 minutes)

WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

LEADER

Have a group member read aloud the big idea to the right (both the short and long versions), then ask the questions that follow to underscore its significance.

DAVID, DA MAN!

David is a real figure in history for whom there is a great deal of extra-biblical evidence. The unbroken line of Davidic kings (the “House of David”) lasted over 400 years.

Why is it especially important that David was a real person in history?

TIP: If David were fictional, why not also the “son of David” (Jesus), the ultimate king in David’s line?

Why do you think God loved David so much despite the great sins that David committed? What was special about this man?

TIP: For an answer, ask the group what they can glean from the many psalms that David wrote. You might point them especially to Psalm 51.



(10 minutes or less)

PROFESSOR SAYS, YOU SAY

LEADER

Have the group discuss what they would say if a college professor asked this question in class:

WHAT PROOF IS THERE THAT DAVID WAS A REAL HISTORICAL FIGURE?

Encourage group members to support or add to one another’s responses, referring to their notes if any. Ask them to describe each document, artifact, or other archaeological finding and how it relates to the Bible’s account. Perhaps they’d like to role-play the dialogue, taking turns to represent the skeptical professor. Or if you want, you can be the professor and have fun giving them a really hard time!

Their answers could include mention of the discovery of David’s palace, the Tel Dan Stele, the Mesha Stele, and the wall relief of Shoshenq I.

WHAT IS WHAT? *A matching quiz*

LEADER

This exercise is meant primarily for individual study. But if there's still time, you may wish to lead the group through at least part of it. (Otherwise, skip to the Wrap-Up.) Note that we have provided the answers for you, the leader.

If anybody seems unclear about one of the terms or its significance, ask the other group members to help out. Don't let the discussion bog down on lesser matters; focus on the terms that relate directly to the big ideas from this lesson (especially #2, #3, and #9).

(1 minute)

Draw a line from each term in the first column to its definition in the second column.

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| 1. FINKELSTEIN [D] | A. 9th-century B.C. basalt slab that mentions the "House of David" |
| 2. HOUSE OF DAVID [I] | B. recent discoverer of David's palace |
| 3. STEP STONE STRUCTURE [G] | C. approximate start of David's reign |
| 4. TEL DAN STELE [A] | D. Israeli archaeologist and biblical minimalist at Tel Aviv University |
| 5. MESHA STELE [J] | E. "the heights of David" |
| 6. HADABIYAT-DAWIT [E] | F. valley where archaeologists found a gated fortress and a pottery shard mentioning a king |
| 7. KURKH STELE [H] | G. 12-story-high wall discovered at Jerusalem by Kathleen Kenyon |
| 8. 1010 B.C. [C] | H. Assyrian monolith that mentions King Ahab |
| 9. EILAT MAZAR [B] | I. the 400-year royal line of kings begun by David |
| 10. ELAH [F] | J. stone on which the king of Moab claims to have wiped out Israel |

WRAP-UP

LEADER

Read this summary aloud.

Today we've come into close contact with some of the Bible's most important people and places—especially David and the city of Jerusalem. We've examined plenty of evidence that David and Solomon lived, and that they built an impressive city under the guidance of God Himself.

It's especially exciting to see how recent archaeological discoveries keep building the case for the Bible's historicity. And it's worth noting that the scholars who take their cues from the Bible, rather than doubting it, end up making the most dramatic finds of all.

This lesson covered the beginning of the long Davidic monarchy. Next time we look at what almost brought it to an end.

QUESTIONS THEY MIGHT ASK

1. *Is Jerusalem still a big deal today? Should we expect the temple to be rebuilt in the end times?*

That's a fascinating topic, but it goes beyond the scope of this series. Ask your church leaders for guidance if you want to dive into that subject further. Christians have differing views about the role that modern Israel plays in God's plan. But whatever view you take, isn't it amazing that some 3,000 years after the time of David, the city of Jerusalem is still at the center of human drama and contention?

2. *Even if we could prove without a doubt the historicity of David or of the whole Bible, do you really think that would make someone want to become a Christian?*

Not necessarily. Some folks directly observed Jesus' working incredible miracles but still did not believe in Him. And He did not trust those who demanded or relied on some kind of proof (see John 2:23-24).

But presenting people with evidence for the Bible's historical accuracy takes away one more excuse they might use to ignore the gospel. If the Holy Spirit is drawing someone into the kingdom, the evidence presented in this series may help remove some obstacles to belief.

DID YOU KNOW?

INTERVIEW WITH AN ARCHAEOLOGIST

NOVA: How important to your work is the text of the Bible?

Eilat Mazar: The Bible is the historical source, so important, so fantastically written. The question is, how much of the reality that the Bible describes can we archaeologists reveal? Sometimes you find something like the bulla with the name of a minister that appears in the Bible. This happens once in a while. More often you find structures that surely were constructed in ancient times, and the stones, the remains, speak. We need to listen to what they say.

WHO WAS DAVID?

- * second king of Israel
- * a forgiven adulterer and murderer
- * a man chosen by God (see 1 Samuel 13:14)
- * author of most of the Bible's "songbook," the Psalms
- * ancestor of Jesus Christ, the "son of David"

"It seems to me that Jerusalem at the time of King David and King Solomon was very much like the Bible describes. It was monumental; the constructions were massive. They used the Phoenicians, with their capability and skill, to build the largest structures ever built in Jerusalem: the temple, the two palaces—King David's and later the palace of King Solomon—and the wall of Jerusalem around these structures."

—Eilat Mazar, who says she has found David's palace

LEADER

These extras are meant for individual use, but you may choose to mention or discuss them in the group if you have time.

LESSON 05

HISTORICITY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT: A TALE OF TWO CONQUESTS

LEADER

Begin by reading this introduction aloud to the group or asking a volunteer to do so.

Lesson 5 is found on page 45 in the participant's guide.

LEADER

Before watching the DVD, draw the group's attention to the following exercise ("Quote Unquote"). Make sure all group members are ready to write in the missing words or phrases as they view the lecture. Keep the lights in the room up high enough so people will be able to take notes. That will also help them stay alert!

Now watch the DVD all the way through together.

The Davidic monarchy lasted more than four hundred years and saw God's people become major players in the history of the Middle East. But the Bible describes how they were unfaithful to the Lord, which led to their punishment when both the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah were attacked by the Assyrian Empire.

This lesson examines the archaeological record of Sennacherib's assault on Judah. We learn how the evidence backs up the Bible's account of the defense of Jerusalem. God intervened in that siege when Judah's king, Hezekiah, turned to Him for help. So again, we have actual historical events and a God who intervenes in human affairs. Let's look at the evidence for this amazing story.

(5 minutes or less)

QUOTE UNQUOTE

LEADER

When the DVD ends, immediately take the group through this exercise one quote at a time, encouraging them to come up with the right answer together. Note that we have supplied the answers for you, the leader. Note also that on a couple of the statements, we've offered a question or two that may help you drive home the significance of the quote; spend about a minute on each of these quotations.

What did Dr. Meyer say? Fill in the blanks as you watch his presentation.

1. The Davidic monarchy stretched from about the year 1000 B.C. until it finally ended with the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 by the [Babylonians].
2. In about 701 B.C., following the conquest of Israel, the Assyrians moved on to attack the kingdom of [Judah].
3. [Assyria] is one big dude. This is not an empire you want to be messing with.
4. We found the seal, a little signet ring, bearing his name and the name of one of his officials, Abdi, servant of [Hoshea].

How likely does it seem that we would ever find something as small as a signet ring belonging to none other than a king of Israel? Do you think the Lord is involved in archaeology?

5. As you're approaching Jerusalem, you have to come through the mountain pass that goes through [Azekah] and Lachish.
6. Excavations of [Lachish] have uncovered about 1,500 skulls and hundreds of Assyrian arrowheads.
7. An angel of the Lord came in the middle of the night and caused [185,000] Assyrians to die.
8. There was no conquest of [Jerusalem] despite the fact that the most powerful empire in the world was now laying siege to this city.

God doesn't always intervene to give us victory over our enemies. Why do you think He did so this time but not when the Babylonians attacked Jerusalem years later?

9. When we get to this period at the end of the Davidic monarchy, guess what happens? The [minimalists] say almost nothing.
10. There are [no] significant challenges to the historicity of these narratives.

(5 minutes)

WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

LEADER

Now let's focus on the key thoughts in Dr. Meyer's presentation. Have a group member read aloud the big idea to the right (both the short and long versions), then ask the questions that follow to bring out its significance for us today.

ASSYRIA'S THREAT

Archaeology has yielded ample proof that Assyria attacked Israel and Judah exactly as the Bible records.

In what ways had Israel and Judah been unfaithful to the Lord, eventually bringing destruction upon their kingdoms?

TIP: To help members grasp what God felt passionately about His people's sins, have them read aloud Isaiah 1 and/or Jeremiah 2.

How do you feel about God's using a powerful, tyrannical empire like Assyria to discipline His own wayward people (see Isaiah 10:5)?

TIP: Point out that even though the Lord first used the Assyrians as His instrument, they too got what was coming to them. Suggest that interested group members delve into the book of Nahum.



(5 minutes)

WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

LEADER

Have a group member read aloud the big idea to the right (both the short and long versions), then ask the questions that follow to make it more relevant for us today.

185,000 TO 0—GAME OVER

Extra-biblical evidence shows that Jerusalem was indeed protected from Sennacherib's army as a result of King Hezekiah's trust in the Lord, just as the Bible says.

Why did Hezekiah try to bribe Sennacherib or stop him by building a stronger wall? Should he have taken these measures?

TIP: Debate whether Hezekiah was reluctant at first to leave Judah's predicament in the Lord's hands. Is God pleased when we try to "help" Him, or is that a sign of weak faith?

What did Hezekiah say to God that pleased Him so much?

TIP: Remind members of the slide Dr. Meyer used from 2 Kings 19:17-19.



(10 minutes or less)

PROFESSOR SAYS, YOU SAY

LEADER

Have the group discuss what they would say if a college professor asked this question in class:

WHAT SPECIFIC THINGS ABOUT THE ASSYRIAN ASSAULT ON JUDAH SHOW AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE BIBLICAL RECORD AND THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL OR DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE?

Encourage group members to support or add to one another's responses, referring to their notes if any. Ask them to describe each document, artifact, or other archaeological finding and how it relates to the Bible's account. Perhaps they'd like to role-play the dialogue, taking turns to represent the skeptical professor. Or if you want, you can be the professor.

Their answers could include mention of the skulls and arrowheads found at Lachish, Hezekiah's tunnel and the Siloam inscription, the fortified walls in Jerusalem, the mural in Nineveh, the Taylor Prism, and Hezekiah's bulla.

WHAT IS WHAT? *A matching quiz*

LEADER

This exercise is meant primarily for individual study. But if there's still time, you may wish to lead the group through at least part of it. (Otherwise, skip to the Wrap-Up.) Note that we have provided the answers for you, the leader.

If anybody seems unclear about one of the terms or its significance, ask the other group members to help out. Don't let the discussion bog down on lesser matters; focus on the terms that relate directly to the big ideas from this lesson (especially #4, #6, #8, and #10).

Draw a line from each term in the first column to its definition in the second column.

- | | |
|----------------------------|--|
| 1. JUDAH [E] | A. number of fenced Judean cities that Sennacherib conquered |
| 2. 30 TALENTS OF GOLD [J] | B. Judean city that Sennacherib brags about destroying |
| 3. HOSHEA [F] | C. Assyrian king assassinated by his own sons |
| 4. CONSPICUOUS SILENCE [H] | D. where Assyrian arrowheads have been discovered |
| 5. AZEKAH [B] | E. southern kingdom with Jerusalem as capital |
| 6. SENNACHERIB [C] | F. last king of Israel (the northern kingdom) |
| 7. 46 [A] | G. Jerusalem's source of water while under attack |
| 8. HEZEKIAH [I] | H. Sennacherib's failure to mention conquering Jerusalem |
| 9. LACHISH [D] | I. king of Judea who trusted God |
| 10. HEZEKIAH'S TUNNEL [G] | J. part of Hezekiah's tribute to Sennacherib |

(1 minute)

WRAP-UP

LEADER

Read this summary aloud.

Do you remember hearing Dr. Meyer note that as we move our study closer to the present, the extra-biblical evidence gets stronger and stronger? We have seen proof of that in this lesson, leaving us no reasonable doubt about the historicity of the clash between God's people and the Assyrian Empire. According to Dr. Meyer, even the biblical minimalists are left speechless.

In the next installment, we'll venture into the Old Testament one last time to review the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. Then we'll move on to the exciting world of the New Testament.

QUESTIONS THEY MIGHT ASK

1. *Why do we even have to bother about all these battles from long ago? This stuff seems so irrelevant to us in the 21st century.*

The Lord gave us the biblical record for a reason, or perhaps several reasons. First, there is much to learn in the details about who God is and how to obey Him. Second, this historical saga concerning Israel and Judah recounts the events through which the Father eventually brought us a Savior to rescue us from death. Not only is it a grand story—"the greatest story ever told"—but our lives depend on it.

2. *Don't historical events like these make some people think of the God of the Old Testament as an angry God, unlike the loving God of the New Testament?*

Perhaps so, but disciplining children when they go astray is an act of love, not of vengeance. Anyone who thinks God was merely angry at His people should read through the book of Isaiah. That prophecy reveals a God who not only disciplined His people but anguished over their waywardness, pleaded with them to return to Him, and promised that He would lovingly restore them when they repented. The God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament are one and the same!

DID YOU KNOW?

LEADER

These extras are meant for individual use, but you may choose to mention or discuss them in the group if you have time.

INTERESTING FACTS

- * Jewish sources claim that the archangel Gabriel is the one who destroyed Assyria's 185,000 troops.
- * Egyptians attributed Sennacherib's defeat at Jerusalem to field mice who ate the Assyrians' bowstrings.
- * Hezekiah hated idolatry so much that he even destroyed Moses' famous bronze serpent after people began to worship it (2 Kings 18:4).
- * Sennacherib was murdered while worshipping Nisroch, an eagle-headed idol that some believe was a demon.

LESSON 06

THE BABYLONIAN CONQUEST OF JUDAH

LEADER

Begin by reading this introduction aloud to the group or asking a volunteer to do so.

Lesson 6 is found on page 55 in the participant's guide.

LEADER

Before watching the DVD, draw the group's attention to the following exercise ("Quote Unquote"). Make sure all group members are ready to write in the missing words or phrases as they view the lecture. Keep the lights in the room up high enough so people will be able to take notes. That will also help them stay alert!

Now watch the DVD all the way through together.

The Christian worldview attests not only to the existence of God, but also to His sovereignty over history. It is in fact His story, not ours. He started the story with His creative work, He continues to act providentially within history, and one day He will bring the story to its ultimate climax through His return. History is simply the outworking of the divine plan to bring all of creation back under His rule and establish His kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

This particular lesson describes the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, thereby ending the Davidic monarchy. Due to Israel's rebellion against Him, God handed them over to their enemies to be taken into exile. Once again, through historical events we can see the love, patience, mercy, and judgment of the creator God on and for His people.

These stories aren't myths; they weave together a delicate and beautiful tapestry of events that not only demonstrate God's existence, but also show His unfailing love for His people and His control over history.

(5 minutes or less)

QUOTE UNQUOTE

LEADER

When the DVD ends, immediately take the group through this exercise one quote at a time, encouraging them to come up with the right answer together. Note that we have supplied the answers for you, the leader. Note also that on a couple of the statements, we've offered a question that may help you drive home the significance of the quote; spend about a minute on each of these quotations.

What did Dr. Meyer say? Fill in the blanks as you watch his presentation.

1. When we get to this account of the destruction of Jerusalem in 605 B.C., the [minimalists] are nowhere to be found.
2. You find the passion of God ... spoken through [Jeremiah].
3. At the battle of [Carchemish], Nebuchadnezzar ... defeats Necho.
4. The prophet Jeremiah warned [Jehoiakim] that God had decided to put the Judahites under the control of Nebuchadnezzar.
5. [Azekah] and [Lachish] are always the last two cities to fall.
6. I found I could not stay away from Jerusalem and the [archaeological digs].

What is your impression of biblical archaeology after having watched several of these TrueU presentations?

7. In Jeremiah 36 you've got [five] biblical figures corroborated by extra-biblical findings.
8. We have no right to expect this level of [corroboration] for any event that long ago.

Why do you think we're finding such amazing evidence of the Bible's accuracy?

9. We've seen that in [tiny, tiny details], and in the great movements of history, the biblical record is accurate.

(5 minutes)

WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

LEADER

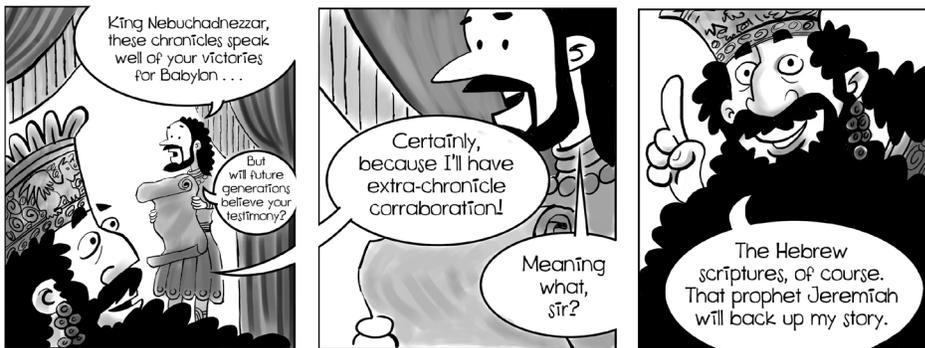
Now let's focus on the key thoughts in Dr. Meyer's presentation. Have a group member read aloud the big idea to the right (both the short and long versions), then ask the question that follows to clarify its significance for our lives.

BAD DUDES FROM BABYLON

The biblical account of the Babylonian conquest of Judah contains many details supported by external evidence, making these events some of the most well attested in history.

We trust the Bible more than any other source, right? So why do we put so much stock in things like the Babylonian Chronicle?

TIP: The Bible should be “good enough” for us, but when we are talking to someone who doesn't trust the scriptural record, it helps tremendously to have other sources that back it up. That sort of corroboration makes it much harder for someone to discount what the Bible says.



(5 minutes)

WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

LEADER

Have a group member read aloud the big idea to the right (both the short and long versions), then ask the questions that follow to clarify its meaning and help everyone apply it to his or her life.

NOT JUST “BIBLE STORIES”

We tell ourselves that we believe the Bible's historical accounts, but when we see actual proof that these events happened, it finally sinks in that all of this is for real—the events and the God who acted in them.

Why do you think we're in the habit of sorting life into compartments like a news magazine (politics, business, health, entertainment, sports, religion, etc.)? Doesn't that make us view the Bible as a “religious book” rather than as real life, real history?

TIP: Have the group discuss whether or not these TrueU lectures are helping them overcome this false way of thinking. Do these Bible accounts seem more factual than before?



(10 minutes or less)

PROFESSOR SAYS, YOU SAY

LEADER

Have the group discuss what they would say if a college professor asked this question in class:

WHAT POSSIBLE EVIDENCE IS THERE TO PROVE THAT THE BIBLICAL RECORD IS TRUE CONCERNING NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S CONQUEST OVER JUDAH?

Encourage group members to support or add to one another's responses, referring to their notes if any. Ask them to describe each document, artifact, or other archaeological finding and how it relates to the Bible's account. Perhaps they'd like to role-play the dialogue, taking turns to represent the skeptical professor.

Their answers could include mention of the Babylonian Chronicle, the arrowheads and ostraca from Lachish, and the burn layer and bullae from Jerusalem.

(5 minutes or less)

WHAT IS WHAT? *A matching quiz*

LEADER:

This exercise is meant primarily for individual study. But if there's still time, you may wish to lead the group through at least part of it. (Otherwise, skip to the Wrap-Up.) Note that we have provided the answers for you, the leader.

If anybody seems unclear about one of the terms or its significance, ask the other group members to help out. Don't let the discussion bog down on lesser matters; focus on the terms that relate directly to the big ideas from this lesson (especially #3, #4, and #6).

Draw a line from each term in the first column to its definition in the second column.

- | | |
|-----------------------|---|
| 1. ZEDEKIAH [J] | A. ancient city-state located just south of modern Baghdad |
| 2. JEHOIACHIN [E] | B. first king of Judah to rebel against Nebuchadnezzar |
| 3. OSTRACON [G] | C. a person or country in a subordinate position to another |
| 4. BABYLON [A] | D. Persian king who conquered Babylon |
| 5. NECHO [F] | E. son of Jehoiakim |
| 6. NEBUCHADNEZZAR [I] | F. Egyptian pharaoh defeated at Battle of Carchemish |
| 7. CYRUS [D] | G. shard of pottery with writing on it |
| 8. JEHOIAKIM [B] | H. Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem |
| 9. 587 B.C. [H] | I. Babylonian king who conquered Judah |
| 10. VASSAL [C] | J. last king of Judah before the destruction |

(1 minute)

WRAP-UP

LEADER

Read this summary aloud.

When Nebuchadnezzar burned down Jerusalem and carried off the survivors to his own country, it appeared to be the end of the nation that God had established centuries ago. But as we saw, the Persian king who later conquered Babylon allowed the Jews to return and begin once again.

Nothing would deter our Creator from His plan to bring the Jews—and the whole world—a son of David who would save us from the dominion of darkness and offer each one of us eternal life.

In the next lesson, we take a giant leap forward to Jesus' day and begin looking at the amazing evidence that supports what we know from the New Testament about our Lord.

QUESTIONS THEY MIGHT ASK

1. Did foreign kings like Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon or Cyrus of Persia act freely of their own will, or were they just pawns in God's hand to bring about His purposes?

The answer is ... yes! It's a mystery, but both are true. No doubt Nebuchadnezzar was just doing what his ambition drove him to, with mostly evil motives. So God used him without his knowing about it. Cyrus, on the other hand, seemed to hear directly from the Lord before deciding to let the Jews return to their land (see 2 Chronicles 36:23; Ezra 1:2).

2. Why are we jumping now from the 6th century B.C. to the time of Christ? Did nothing happen in between?

The Old Testament itself says little about what occurred after the Jews returned and Jerusalem was rebuilt. We have zeroed in on a few turning points in the life of Israel because the destruction from those times left much for the archaeologists to discover (remember why fire is the archaeologist's best friend?), and documents from invading empires were more likely to mention the nation of Israel.

DID YOU KNOW?

LEADER

These extras are meant for individual use, but you may choose to mention or discuss them in the group if you have time.

BULLAE FOR US

What happens to clay when exposed to fire? It's hardened. And that explains why the little blobs of clay that citizens of ancient Israel used to seal documents—stamping the clay with their signet ring—have brought us impressive proof of the Bible's reliability.

The fires that destroyed Jerusalem (2 Kings 25:9) under the assault of the Babylonian army also helped preserve these "bullae" for our benefit. So now we know that Jeremiah's friend and scribe, Baruch son of Neriah (Jeremiah 36:4), along with several other key officials mentioned in Jeremiah's account of events, really lived.

It's a good thing they didn't use wax seals in those days. Or, for that matter, e-mail.

LESSON 07

CANONS OF HISTORICITY: THE NEW TESTAMENT

LEADER

Begin by reading this introduction aloud to the group or asking a volunteer to do so.

Lesson 7 is found on page 65 in the participant's guide.

LEADER

Before watching the DVD, draw the group's attention to the following exercise ("Quote Unquote"). Make sure all group members are ready to write in the missing words or phrases as they view the lecture. Keep the lights in the room up high enough so people will be able to take notes. That will also help them stay alert!

Now watch the DVD all the way through together.

The last two hundred years of biblical scholarship have produced a hostile and critical view of the New Testament writings. Critics claim transmission errors, dating problems, authorship concerns, and a lack of extra-biblical sources verifying what really happened.

Recent archaeological finds, however, have unearthed mounds of evidence that are slowly bringing the age of skepticism to its end. The apostle Paul encouraged the believer to "test everything" (1Thessalonians 5:21, NIV) to determine truth. That is exactly what we are doing in this series. By looking at the evidence, studying the recent findings, and corroborating the stories, we realize there is no good reason to doubt the accuracy of the New Testament.

(5 minutes or less)

QUOTE UNQUOTE

LEADER

When the DVD ends, immediately take the group through this exercise one quote at a time, encouraging them to come up with the right answer together. Note that we have supplied the answers for you, the leader. Note also that on a couple of the statements, we've offered a question or two that may help you drive home the significance of the quote; spend about a minute on each of these quotations.

What did Dr. Meyer say? Fill in the blanks as you watch his presentation.

1. It's not hard to find critics of the reliability of the [New Testament] .

What motivates critics like those in the "Jesus Seminar" to strip out the supernatural from the Gospels in search of the "real [human-only] Jesus"? Why do you think the public falls for this so-called scholarship?

2. The skepticism about the New Testament started right back at the end of the [19th] century.
3. Some of those [critical] ideas have made their way into popular novels and books like [The Da Vinci Code] .

Have you read Dan Brown's controversial book or seen the 2006 movie? How should you respond when a popular book or film questions the validity of the Christian faith?
4. The New Testament is one of the most [well-attested] books or series of books of antiquity.
5. There are ways of analyzing whether or not the documents we currently possess have been reliably [transcribed] .
6. A document that's written [closer] to the time of the events it describes is going to have more historical value.
7. It's clear that [Luke] is setting forth a very systematic historical description of the life of Jesus of Nazareth.
8. The [New Testament] has been preserved in more ancient manuscripts than any other document from antiquity.
9. The New Testament clearly has documents within it, like the Gospels, that display a [historical] genre or style of writing.
10. We have good reason to be confident that the New Testament has come down to us in much the same form as its original [composition] .

(5 minutes)

WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

LEADER

Now let's focus on the key thoughts in Dr. Meyer's presentation. Have a group member read aloud the big idea to the right (both the short and long versions), then ask the question that follows to clarify its significance for our lives.

WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, WHY

Our confidence in the New Testament's historical reliability is based in part on the evidence that most of it was written to document actual events

Dr. Meyer already discussed Luke and the other Gospels. So let's shift the focus. What do you see in the letters of the apostle Paul that convinces you they were actual letters dealing with real people and problems, not just timeless essays in letter form?

TIP: Though the letters contain many profound passages of eternal truth, they also reveal a very human Paul who complained to or admonished his readers, talked in detail about his plans to meet with them, and sent warm greetings to many fellow believers by name. Let the group search for and read aloud a few examples.



(5 minutes)

WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

LEADER

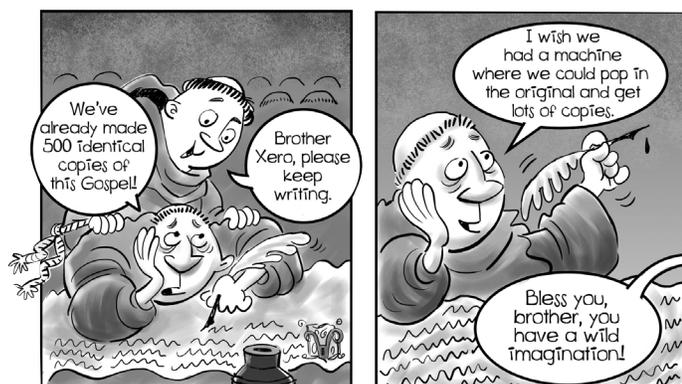
Have a group member read aloud the big idea to the right (both the short and long versions), then ask the questions that follow to clarify its meaning and help everyone apply it to his or her life.

COPY THAT

Our confidence in the New Testament's historical accuracy is based also on the evidence that the original documents were reliably transmitted to us over the centuries.

The best way to assure such accuracy is to find copies that were made close to the time of the originals. Can you describe some of the earliest manuscripts that back up parts of the New Testament?

TIP: Review what Dr. Meyer said about the Codex Alexandrinus, Codex Vaticanus, Magdalen Papyrus, Chester Beatty Papyri, and the John Rylands fragment.



How does it help that we have so many copies of the New Testament writings?

TIP: Point out that if we had, say, 1,000 copies of a particular Bible passage and only 10 of them differed from the other 990, we would know with some degree of certainty that those 10 were likely to be inaccurate.

(10 minutes or less)

PROFESSOR SAYS, YOU SAY

LEADER

Have the group discuss what they would say if a college professor asked these questions in class:

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO YOU THAT THE NEW TESTAMENT BE HISTORICALLY ACCURATE?

CAN'T YOU STILL HAVE YOUR RELIGION WITHOUT THAT?

THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS ARE VERY GOOD, SO CAN'T YOU JUST FOLLOW THOSE TEACHINGS WHETHER JESUS WAS A REAL PERSON OR NOT?

Encourage group members to support or add to one another's responses, bringing in any relevant Bible passages. Perhaps they'd like to role-play the dialogue, taking turns to represent the skeptical professor. Or if you want, you can be the professor and have fun giving them a really hard time!

Help them zero in on the fact that our faith is not just about Jesus' words, as vital as they are, but also about His deity, His becoming a man, and His dying in our place. If it were not for who Jesus is and what He did on the Cross, His teachings might have had no more lasting impact on the world than other spiritual leaders of the past.

(5 minutes or less)

WHAT IS WHAT? *A matching quiz*

LEADER

This exercise is meant primarily for individual study. But if there's still time, you may wish to lead the group through at least part of it. (Otherwise, skip to the Wrap-Up.) Note that we have provided the answers for you, the leader.

If anybody seems unclear about one of the terms or its significance, ask the other group members to help out. Don't let the discussion bog down on lesser matters; focus on the terms that relate directly to the big ideas from this lesson (especially #1, #5, #9, and #10).

Draw a line from each term in the first column to its definition in the second column.

- | | |
|------------------------------|--|
| 1. TRANSMISSION [E] | A. 5th-century manuscript of the Greek Bible |
| 2. BULTMANN [G] | B. confirming or supporting with additional evidence |
| 3. THEOPHILUS [J] | C. expert in the study of ancient manuscripts |
| 4. CODEX ALEXANDRINUS [A] | D. purporting to give a factual report; not fiction |
| 5. JESUS SEMINAR [H] | E. to accurately pass something on to the next generation |
| 6. MAGDALEN PAPYRUS [I] | F. fragments of the Greek Bible dating as far back as A.D. 150 |
| 7. PALEOGRAPHER [C] | G. German theologian who called for "demythologizing" the New Testament |
| 8. CHESTER BEATTY PAPYRI [F] | H. group of scholars who say the "historical Jesus" was just a man with a message, not God Himself |
| 9. DOCUMENTARY STYLE [D] | I. ancient scrap of Matthew studied by Peter Thiede |
| 10. CORROBORATION [B] | J. man to whom Luke dedicated both the Gospel of Luke and Acts of the Apostles |

(1 minute)

WRAP-UP

LEADER

Read this summary aloud.

Okay, we've looked at two criteria by which to judge the accuracy of the New Testament accounts. Do they claim to be relating historical fact, and were the manuscripts we possess today copied close enough to the time of the original documents, or are there enough of them by which to measure the copies' accuracy anyway?

Yes all around. In the next lesson we take a step further and examine how soon the New Testament Scriptures were written after the events they describe. This is exciting, isn't it? The events we'll be talking about are key to everything we believe, and, after spending so much time on the Old Testament, these events seem to have happened only yesterday!

QUESTIONS THEY MIGHT ASK

1. *Why is the church always being accused of altering the original, of covering up some fact about what really happened?*

Just as the world heaped abuse on Jesus, it will do the same to His followers. Those eager to disprove the existence of God would love to prove instead that we Christians are dishonest and are making all this up. So every generation will have its *The Da Vinci Code* or something similar.

2. *Why do people just assume that Homer is the real deal when all the manuscripts we have from him are dated a thousand years after he lived?*

Because Homer's existence doesn't threaten them, while Jesus' does. As we've seen throughout this TrueU course, it all goes back to matters of the heart. Doubts about the reliability of the Bible stem mostly from ulterior motives—from materialist presuppositions—and not from lack of evidence.

DID YOU KNOW?

LEADER

These extras are meant for individual use, but you may choose to mention or discuss them in the group if you have time.

HISTORY AND THEOLOGY INTERTWINED

"It is difficult to restrict a discussion of the New Testament writings to the purely historical plane; theology insists on breaking in. But that is as it should be; history and theology are inextricably intertwined in the gospel of our salvation, which owes its eternal and universal validity to certain events which happened in Palestine when Tiberius ruled the Roman Empire."

—F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*

LESSON 08

EARLY COMPOSITION OF LUKE AND ACTS

LEADER

Begin by reading this introduction aloud to the group or asking a volunteer to do so.

Lesson 8 is found on page 75 in the participant's guide.

LEADER

Before watching the DVD, draw the group's attention to the following exercise ("Quote Unquote"). Make sure all group members are ready to write in the missing words or phrases as they view the lecture. Keep the lights in the room up high enough so people will be able to take notes. That will also help them stay alert!

Now watch the DVD all the way through together.

The Gospel of Luke is the prequel to the book of Acts, and Luke, a "fellow worker" with Paul, wrote both. From the outset, Luke informs his reader that he is writing history. In fact, Luke states that he is simply writing down eyewitness accounts, and writing very close to the date when these events took place. Luke is not writing propaganda, fiction, or myth. And yet scholars are troubled by the message of both books because in Luke's historical record, he presents Jesus as both Messiah and Lord, proclaiming the historical truth of Jesus' bodily resurrection.

As you move into academia and culture, you will find professors and peers who attack Scripture based not so much on historical facts but on their presuppositions or worldview. Understanding why someone believes what he believes is half the battle. Take the time to understand the worldviews that drive so many to reject the historicity and claims of Scripture; in so doing, you may earn enough credibility to explain the what and why of your own beliefs.

(5 minutes or less)

QUOTE UNQUOTE

LEADER

When the DVD ends, immediately take the group through this exercise one quote at a time, encouraging them to come up with the right answer together. Note that we have supplied the answers for you, the leader. Note also that on a couple of the statements, we've offered a question that may help you drive home the significance of the quote; spend about a minute on each of these quotations.

What did Dr. Meyer say? Fill in the blanks as you watch his presentation.

1. [Mark, Matthew] and [Luke] have a very straightforward documentary style.

How would you compare these books to the Gospel of John?

2. In all three of the synoptics, Jesus is recorded as having predicted ... the [destruction of Jerusalem] .
3. If you hold a naturalistic worldview, is it possible to tell what's going to happen before it happens? No, that's called [prophecy] .
4. If we are able to date the book of Acts, what will we also get to know about the book of Luke? It's going to be [earlier] .
5. Luke is a [first-rate] historian because he gets all those nitty-gritty details absolutely right.
6. The tone toward the Romans throughout the book of Acts is very [irenic] .
7. There's no mention [in the book of Acts] of the death of [James, Paul,] or [Peter] .

What does that tell us about its date of composition?

8. New Testament scholars think that [Mark], the shortest Gospel, is a source for Luke.
9. There are good reasons to believe that Luke and Acts and Mark were written [close] to the time of the events they record.

(5 minutes)

WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

LEADER:

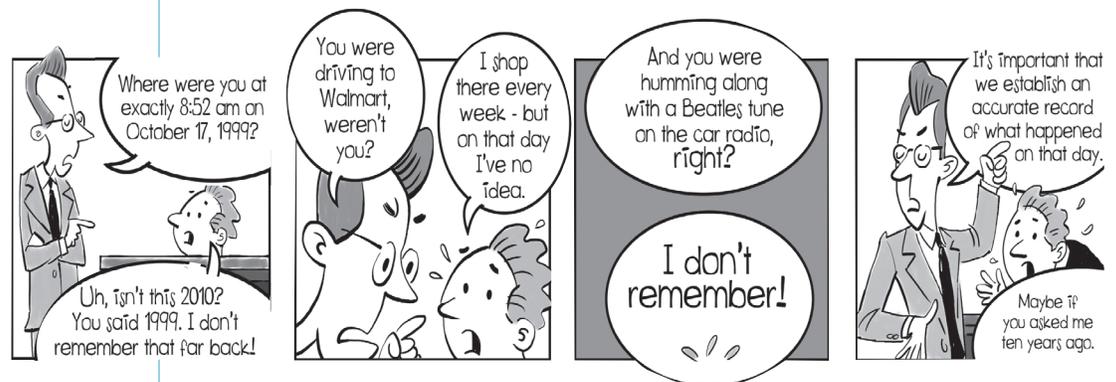
Now let's focus on the key thought in Dr. Meyer's presentation. Have a group member read aloud the big idea (both the long and short versions), then ask the following question to clarify its significance for our lives.

YOU HAD TO BE THERE

Our confidence in the New Testament's historical reliability is based in part on the evidence that it was composed soon after the events it describes.

Much of this evidence comes to light only after learning the geography, politics, and social customs of Jesus' day. How interested are you in studying the background of the New Testament? Why?

TIP: Encourage group members to get acquainted with Bible commentaries, Bible dictionaries, biographies, and other reference materials. Ask them if they have any favorite sources to share with the rest of the group. For starters, try *The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament Era*, by James S. Jeffers (InterVarsity Press, 1999).



(10 minutes or less)

PROFESSOR SAYS, YOU SAY

LEADER

Have the group discuss what they would say if a college professor asked these questions in class:

HOW CAN YOU POSSIBLY KNOW THAT THE BOOK CALLED THE "ACTS OF THE APOSTLES" IS HISTORICALLY ACCURATE?

SPECIFICALLY, THAT IT WAS WRITTEN CLOSE TO THE TIME OF THE EVENTS IT CLAIMS TO RECOUNT?

Encourage group members to support or add to one another's responses, referring to their notes if any. Ask them to describe each document, artifact, or other archaeological finding and how it relates to the Bible's account. Perhaps they'd like to role-play the dialogue, taking turns to represent the skeptical professor.

Their answers could include mention of Publius, Sergius Paulus, Gallio, the temple warning inscription, and Lysanius, as well as the absence of any mention of the fall of Jerusalem or the deaths of James (brother of Jesus, not the brother of John), Paul, or Peter.

(5 minutes or less)

WHAT IS WHAT? *A matching quiz*

LEADER

This exercise is meant primarily for individual study. But if there's still time, you may wish to lead the group through at least part of it. (Otherwise, skip to the Wrap-Up.) Note that we have provided the answers for you, the leader.

If anybody seems unclear about one of the terms or its significance, ask the other group members to help out. Don't let the discussion bog down on lesser matters; focus on the terms that relate directly to the big idea from this lesson (especially #5, #7, and #10).

Draw a line from each term in the first column to its definition in the second column.

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| 1. LYSANIAS [D] | A. proconsul of Achaea |
| 2. PROCONSUL [G] | B. a judge's raised platform in ancient Rome |
| 3. JOHN A.T. ROBINSON [I] | C. Jewish historian |
| 4. GALLIO [A] | D. Tetrarch of Abilene |
| 5. YOU-HAD-TO-BE-THERE PRINCIPLE [J] | E. peaceable, neutral |
| 6. SERGIUS PAULUS [H] | F. author of "Acts of the Apostles" |
| 7. JOSEPHUS [C] | G. governor of a senatorial province in ancient Rome |
| 8. IRENIC [E] | H. proconsul of Cyprus |
| 9. JUDGMENT SEAT [B] | I. author of <i>Honest to God</i> |
| 10. LUKE [F] | J. the idea that you could know specific details only if you had witnessed an event or obtained information from an eyewitness |

(1 minute)

WRAP-UP

LEADER

Read this summary aloud.

In this lesson, we looked at how soon after Jesus' resurrection His followers began to draw up their accounts of His life and the birth of His church. Contrary to the critics, we discovered that little time had elapsed between the momentous events and the written accounts.

Next time we subject the New Testament to the same search for external corroboration that we applied in our study of the Old Testament. Get ready for some surprises!

QUESTIONS THEY MIGHT ASK

1. *Is there any more evidence that the book of Acts was written soon after it all happened?*

Yes, at several places, Luke slipped into using the first person (see Luke 20:7, for example), indicating that he himself was actually on the scene. The details he described, such as the winds during Paul's voyage to Rome (Acts 27-28), are therefore highly accurate. For more information, see the classic book *St. Paul the Traveler and Roman Citizen*, by William M. Ramsay.

2. *What about other books of the New Testament not mentioned in this lesson? How do we know when they were written?*

Pick a few and research them. There's nothing more interesting than digging into these matters yourself. Enjoy!

DID YOU KNOW?

LEADER

These extras are meant for individual use, but you may choose to mention or discuss them in the group if you have time.

COPIOUS COPIES

"In comparison with the remaining manuscripts of any other ancient Greek or Latin literature, the New Testament suffers from an embarrassment of riches. It is almost incomprehensible to think about the disparity. When it comes to quantity of copies, the New Testament has no peer. More than 5,700 Greek New Testament manuscripts are still in existence, ranging in date from the early second century to the sixteenth century."

— Dr. Daniel B. Wallace in *ESV Study Bible*

CHIEF OF THE ISLAND

It was a good day for the people of Malta when the ship carrying the apostle Paul ran aground on the island (Acts 27:41). Through Paul, the Lord healed the father of Publius, the "chief man of the island" (28:7), as well as many others.

Publius was later appointed the first bishop of Malta, and he is said to have been martyred by the Romans around A.D. 125. Malta eventually became regarded as one of the first Christian nations in the world. Catholicism is still the official and dominant religion of that country.

LESSON 09

EXTERNAL CORROBORATION

LEADER

Begin by reading this introduction aloud to the group or asking a volunteer to do so.

Lesson 9 is found on page 83 in the participant's guide.

The people and places of the New Testament have been externally corroborated by archaeology and primary source material, such as the writings of the historian Flavius Josephus. Whether studying the major political figures of the day, like Herod the Great, or average people like Erastus, we know these individuals lived during the time of Jesus, providing further evidence for the historical truth of Scripture.

As the evidence continues to build, it is becoming harder and harder to doubt the historicity of the New Testament. Stories, places, individuals, and events continue to be verified, bolstering our confidence in the reliability of the early Christian writings.

LEADER

Before watching the DVD, draw the group's attention to the following exercise ("Quote Unquote"). Make sure all group members are ready to write in the missing words or phrases as they view the lecture. Keep the lights in the room up high enough so people will be able to take notes. That will also help them stay alert!

Now watch the DVD all the way through together.

(5 minutes or less)

QUOTE UNQUOTE

LEADER

When the DVD ends, immediately take the group through this exercise one quote at a time, encouraging them to come up with the right answer together. Note that we have supplied the answers for you, the leader. Note also that on three of the statements, we've offered a question or two that may help you drive home the significance of the quote; spend about a minute on each of these quotations.

What did Dr. Meyer say? Fill in the blanks as you watch his presentation.

1. The Gospels and other parts of the New Testament clearly have a [documentary] style.
2. It's actually uncanny how accurate the book of [John] is.
3. As archaeologists have excavated in the area around Cana ... they have found a preponderance of [stone] waterpots.

Why does this matter?

4. Today there is in Samaria a well that is, by tradition, thought to be [Jacob's] well.
5. The pool [of Bethesda] has certainly been discovered; so have those distinctive five covered [colonnades].
6. If you go under the ruins of that 4th-century synagogue [in Capernaum], guess what's been discovered? A 1st-century [synagogue].
7. Not all tombs [in Bethany] were [cave tombs] .
8. Herod was a really big builder, and the [Temple Mount] was expanded dramatically when he was in power.
9. Historians tend to regard [personal letters] of extreme significance.

How should this affect their view of the New Testament's reliability?

10. Only [wealthy] or [prominent] people had their bones placed in ossuaries.

Which well-known follower of Jesus left us his ossuary? What do you think of that discovery?

(5 minutes)

WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

LEADER

Now let's focus on the key thought in Dr. Meyer's presentation. Have a group member read aloud the big idea (both the long and short versions), then ask the following question to clarify its significance for our lives.

PLACES AND PLAYERS

Significant corroboration between external evidence and the people and places of the New Testament gives us confidence in the Bible's historical reliability.

In a minute, we'll review the Gospel of John. But aside from that, can you recount how three New Testament people provide points of corroboration? Work on it as a group.

TIP: Prod them to include the following: Herod the Great (his coins, a mention in Josephus, the Temple Mount, 4th-century Saturnalia, 1st-century Assumption of Moses), Erastus (inscription in Corinth), and the ossuary of James, the brother of Jesus.



(10 minutes or less)

PROFESSOR SAYS, YOU SAY

LEADER

Have the group discuss what they would say if a college professor asked these questions in class:

HOW CAN YOU SAY THAT THE GOSPEL OF JOHN IS A HISTORICAL DOCUMENT?

WHAT EVIDENCE IS THERE THAT THE PLACES IT MENTIONS ONCE EXISTED?

Encourage group members to support or add to one another's responses, referring to their notes if any. Ask them to describe each document, artifact, or other archaeological finding and how it relates to John's account. Perhaps they'd like to role-play the dialogue, taking turns to represent the skeptical professor. Or if you want, you can be the professor and have fun giving them a really hard time!

Their answers could include mention of waterpots at Cana, Jacob's well in Samaria, the Pool of Bethesda, the synagogue at Capernaum, the Pool of Siloam, and the cave tomb at Bethany.

WHAT IS WHAT? *A matching quiz*

LEADER

This exercise is meant primarily for individual study. But if there's still time, you may wish to lead the group through at least part of it. (Otherwise, skip to the Wrap-Up.) Note that we have provided the answers for you, the leader.

If anybody seems unclear about one of the terms or its significance, ask the other group members to help out. Don't let the discussion bog down on lesser matters; focus on the terms that relate directly to the big idea from this lesson (especially #2, #7, and #10).

(1 minute)

Draw a line from each term in the first column to its definition in the second column.

- | | |
|----------------------------|--|
| 1. ERASTUS [D] | A. place where Jesus healed a lifelong invalid |
| 2. CAPERNAUM [H] | B. soil residue that collects on an artifact over time |
| 3. ASSUMPTION OF MOSES [E] | C. arched recess used as a burial place |
| 4. POOL OF BETHESDA [A] | D. public employee at Corinth |
| 5. POOL OF SILOAM [I] | E. document attesting to the existence of Herod |
| 6. PATINA [B] | F. Samaritan woman's source of drinking water |
| 7. ATTEST [J] | G. bone box |
| 8. ARCOSOLIUM [C] | H. village on north shore of Sea of Galilee |
| 9. JACOB'S WELL [F] | I. place where Jesus healed a blind man |
| 10. OSSUARY [G] | J. serve as clear evidence |

WRAP-UP

LEADER

Read this summary aloud.

In review, we've found a number of ways in which the extra-biblical evidence attests to the historical accuracy of the New Testament. But we've only scratched the surface. If you are hungry for more, you should go on your own search. There are archaeological finds all over the Mediterranean that make the New Testament come alive.

In our final segment, we're going to concentrate on evidence surrounding the most important events in history—the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

QUESTIONS THEY MIGHT ASK

1. Aren't there additional books that tell us, for example, what Jesus was like as a child? Why aren't those books included in the New Testament?

The biblical “canon” was formed by the Christian community over many years. Each book was judged by such criteria as: Was it written by an apostle? Do the teachings in it seem consistent with the rest of Scripture? Some books, such as James, were debated for a long time before being accepted as divinely inspired. We must trust that the Holy Spirit guided the church in this crucial process. You might try reading some of the apocryphal books (such as the Gospel of Thomas) yourself; in most cases you'll sense right away why they didn't make the cut.

2. Do we know for sure where some of the events in the Bible took place, or is much of it just based on tradition?

There will always be conflicting claims for certain sites. Every town competes for tourism and fame! So if you ever visit Israel, you might want to take each claim with a grain of salt (especially at the Dead Sea). But as Dr. Meyer found out on his adventures, there is also much to discover that leaves little room for debate.

DID YOU KNOW?

LEADER

These extras are meant for individual use, but you may choose to mention or discuss them in the group if you have time.

HEROD'S HAPPY PLACE?

In September 2010, even more evidence of Herod the Great and his opulent lifestyle was unearthed at the Herodium, a vast country club/fortress that Herod built on a hill just south of Jerusalem. Herod's tomb was discovered here in 2007. A 400-seat amphitheater, built around 15 B.C., was excavated in 2008. Most recently, archaeologists have revealed Herod's private theater box, elaborately decorated with Roman wall paintings and plaster moldings. Imagine the ruler entertaining his friends in style while pondering his order to kill all male infants in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:16), or his execution of a wife, former mother-in-law, and three sons.

LESSON 10

THE TRIAL OF JESUS

LEADER

Begin by reading this introduction aloud to the group or asking a volunteer to do so.

Lesson 10 is found on page 91 in the participant's guide.

Jesus is the most important person in human history—assuming that He really lived, and that He died and rose again according to the scriptural accounts. In this final lesson of TrueU's "Is the Bible Reliable?" Dr. Meyer culminates his defense of Scripture by studying the trial of Jesus. Specifically, he examines extra-biblical sources that attest to the historicity of several individuals who played a key role in the events of that momentous week.

In conclusion, go forth with courage and strength, knowing that what you believe really is real, that it rests on solid historical facts and can be trusted with your very life.

LEADER

Before watching the DVD, draw the group's attention to the following exercise ("Quote Unquote"). Make sure all group members are ready to write in the missing words or phrases as they view the lecture. Keep the lights in the room up high enough so people will be able to take notes. That will also help them stay alert!

Now watch the DVD all the way through together.

(5 minutes or less)

QUOTE UNQUOTE

LEADER

When the DVD ends, immediately take the group through this exercise one quote at a time, encouraging them to come up with the right answer together. Note that we have supplied the answers for you, the leader. Note also that on three of the statements, we've offered a question or two that may help you drive home the significance of the quote; spend about a minute on each of these quotations.

What did Dr. Meyer say? Fill in the blanks as you watch his presentation.

1. One-[**fourth**] of the Gospels are devoted to an account of the trial of Jesus and His death by crucifixion.

When one particular week in history is given such extensive coverage, what does that tell you about the events of those few days?

2. We see in Luke 23 that Herod [**Antipas**] is very glad to see Jesus.
3. [**Peter**] happens to have authored two first-person narratives in which he identifies himself as the author.
4. Often we have the sense that biblical history is really a bunch of [**kid stories**].

Do you still feel that way after viewing this entire series? Or has your perspective changed?

5. [**Caiaphas**] was the Jewish high priest from A.D. 18 to 36, and he organized the plot to kill Jesus.
6. We really have no reason to doubt the [**existence**] of Jesus of Nazareth.

Do you know anyone who does? How would you now respond to that person?

7. Recently a version of [**Josephus**] has been discovered that did not pass through Christian hands.
8. We saw that Tacitus, the Roman historian, ... attested to Pontius Pilate, but that passage also mentions not Christ but “[**Christus**].”
9. You get the feeling ... that the basic facts of the life of Jesus of Nazareth were [**well known**].
10. One of the things that's most exciting about the faith is that truth stands up to [**scrutiny**].

(5 minutes)

WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

LEADER

Now let's focus on the key thought in Dr. Meyer's presentation. Have a group member read aloud the big idea (both the long and short versions), then ask the following question to clarify its significance for our lives.

THE EVENT OF ALL TIME

We know that the trial and death of Jesus actually happened because five of the key people involved—especially Jesus Himself—have been independently attested by ample documentary and inscriptional evidence.

Aside from Jesus, who were the other four people, and what evidence do we have for each one?

TIP: Let the group work together to come up with:

—Herod Antipas (coins, Josephus, Philo, Suetonius, Dio)

—Peter (his house in Capernaum, Vatican engraving, plus writing two books in the New Testament and being mentioned in others)

—Pontius Pilate (inscription at Caesarea Maritima, plus mentions in Philo, Tacitus, and Josephus)

—Caiaphas (his ossuary)



(10 minutes or less)

PROFESSOR SAYS, YOU SAY

LEADER

Have the group discuss what they would say if a college professor asked these questions in class:

SOME OF THE TEACHINGS IN THE GOSPELS ARE ADMIRABLE. BUT HOW DO YOU KNOW JESUS WAS A REAL PERSON?

WHAT SOURCES BESIDES THE BIBLE ARE YOU RELYING ON?

Encourage group members to support or add to one another's responses, referring to their notes if any. Ask them to describe each document, artifact, or other archaeological finding and how it relates to the Bible's account. Perhaps they'd like to role-play the dialogue, taking turns to represent the skeptical professor.

Their answers could include mention of Josephus, Tacitus, Justin Martyr, Bar-Serapion, ancient creeds, church fathers, Mishnah, and several other Roman historians (Pliny, Lucian, Celsus, etc.).

(1 minute)

WRAP-UP

LEADER

Read this summary aloud.

Every person on earth who honestly pursues the truth is faced with these facts:

- Jesus really did live (and not all that long ago, in the overall scheme of things).
- Jesus really was killed, and His disciples underwent a miraculous transformation three days later when they claimed to encounter Him alive again.

This is no fairy tale, even though it seems too good to be true. Neither is the rest of the Bible; it is history, reliably transmitted down through the ages.

Our message to everyone who asks? Your life depends on what you do with the evidence. Deal with it.

QUESTIONS THEY MIGHT ASK

1. So now we know that the Bible is historically reliable. But how can we be certain that what it says about the origin of life, the fall of man, God, Jesus, heaven—in other words, the important spiritual stuff—is equally reliable?

First, the physical and the spiritual are intertwined. Establishing the historicity of the Bible goes a long way toward verifying its entire message; that's why the minimalists are so eager to disprove the historical part.

Second, there are many other reasons to believe what the Bible says. The evidence is all around us—in the night sky, in the way we humans behave, in the design of the living cell, and so on.

Ultimately, though, God requires that we step out in faith and yield our very selves to Him. When we do that, the Holy Spirit takes up residence in us and gives us many reassurances of His reality that we can experience in no other way.

2. What if I can't remember most of the evidence you presented in these 10 lessons?

The important thing is that you know it's out there. Come back and view the lectures again if you like; you'll absorb more the second time. Or do your own research on whatever biblical period or person interests you the most. This is a lifelong study to enjoy.

DID YOU KNOW?

LEADER

These extras are meant for individual reading, but you may choose to mention or discuss them in the group if you have time.

PETER'S PAD—THE ULTIMATE HOUSE CHURCH

Near the ancient synagogue in Capernaum, archaeologists have found a first-century house that appears to have been transformed into a house church only a few years after Jesus' death and resurrection. Architectural changes suggest that the building was used for larger meetings, while numerous inscriptions include the name of Jesus and various crosses and other symbols. Today, a modern church building rests on the site, with a glass floor that allows people to look down upon the house once occupied by Peter and perhaps Jesus Himself.