

Evidence and the Bible

From time-to-time, some Christians lightly argue that we should not spend so much energy trying to “prove” God, the Bible or other related elements within Christianity. They say that the Bible is sufficient by itself and that it’s a matter of faith overall. I only partially agree.

I do agree that evidence (or “proof”, which is a bit of a strong word) is not required for belief. We are definitely not saved by it, but by faith/obedience alone. However, some great atheist, agnostic or materialistic scientists have come to faith precisely because of some evidence in history, philosophy or science on the existence of God and some rationality in Christianity (e.g. geneticist Dr. Francis Collins who converted from Atheism to Christianity in the 1990s). Of course, this does not prove Christianity in and of itself. Certainly, some past Christians have converted to Islam, other Christians to Judaism, and yet others to different religions or belief systems such as deism. Regardless, the point that I want to emphasize here is that the Bible itself at times shows how evidence is quite important. Of course, none of what I will show here proves that the Bible is true or that its content is flawless. But that’s not my point. I am writing for Christians, not for unbelievers. **The point is that people need to provide evidence for their claims. Otherwise, anyone can say anything. God and the biblical authors seem to understand and acknowledge this point in various instances.**

I will display in this post several textual examples, but there are more that could be documented if I were to write a more exhaustive post.

Two-to-three-witnesses law

Deuteronomy 17:2–7 (esp. v. 6)

2 “You may discover that a man or woman living in one of your cities that the LORD your God is about to give you has done evil in the eyes of the LORD your God by transgressing his covenant. 3 He may be following and serving other gods by bowing down to them—that is, to the sun, the moon,

or to any of the heavenly host (something I did not command). 4 When it is reported to you or you hear of it, then investigate it thoroughly. When the truth has been established that this detestable thing has been done in Israel, 5 summon the man or the woman who did this evil thing to your city gates. Then stone the man or the woman to death. 6 **Based on the testimony of two or three witnesses, they must surely die. But they are not to die based on the testimony of one person.** 7 Let the witnesses be the first to begin executing them, then the rest of the people shall follow. By doing this you will purge evil from among you.”

Deuteronomy 19:15–21 (esp. v.15)

15 **“The testimony of one person alone is not to suffice to convict anyone of any iniquity, sin, or guilt. But the matter will stand on the testimony of two or three witnesses.** 16 When a malicious witness takes the stand against a man and accuses him, 17 then both must stand with their dispute in the LORD’s presence, the priests, and the judges at that time. 18 The judges will investigate thoroughly. If the false witness lies in testifying against his relative, 19 do to him just as he intended to do to his relative. By doing this you will purge evil from your midst. 20 When others hear of this, they will be afraid and will not do such an evil deed again in your midst. 21 Your eyes must not show pity—life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, and foot for foot.”

Discerning false prophets

Deuteronomy 18:15–22 (esp. vv.21-22)

¹⁵“The LORD your God will raise up a prophet like me for you from among your relatives. You must listen to him. ¹⁶For this is what you asked from the LORD your God at Horeb when you were assembled together: ‘Don’t let us hear the voice of the LORD our God again, or even see this great fire—otherwise, we will die.’

¹⁷“Then the LORD told me: ‘What they have suggested is good. ¹⁸I will raise up a prophet like you from among their relatives, and I will place my words in

his mouth so that he may expound everything that I have commanded to them.
¹⁹ But if someone will not listen to those words that the prophet speaks in my name, I will hold him accountable. ²⁰ Even then, if the prophet speaks presumptuously in my name, which I didn't authorize him to speak, or if he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet must die.' ²¹ **Now you may ask yourselves, 'How will we be able to discern that the LORD has not spoken?'**
²² **Whenever a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, and the oracle does not come about or the word is not fulfilled, then the LORD has not spoken it.** The prophet will have spoken presumptuously, so you need not fear him."

Moses questions God for a lack of evidence

Exodus 4.1-9

¹ Then Moses answered, "**Look, they won't believe me and they won't listen to me. Instead, they'll say, 'The LORD didn't appear to you.'**"

² "What's that in your hand?" the LORD asked him.

Moses answered, "**A staff.**"

³ Then God said, "Throw it on the ground." He threw it on the ground and it became a **snake**. Moses ran away from it.

⁴ Then God told Moses, "Reach out and grab its tail." So he reached out, grabbed it, and it became a staff in his hand. ⁵ God said, "I've done this so that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their ancestors—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob—has appeared to you."

⁶ Again the LORD told him, "**Put your hand into your bosom.**" He put his hand into his bosom and as soon as he brought it out it was **leprous, like snow**.

⁷ Then God said, "Put your hand back into your bosom." He returned it to his bosom and as soon as he brought it out, it was restored like the rest of his skin.

⁸ "Then if they don't believe you and respond to the first sign, they may respond to the second sign. ⁹ But if they don't believe even these two signs, and won't listen to you, then **take some water out of the Nile and pour it on the dry ground.** The water you took from the Nile will **turn into blood on the dry ground.**"

God asks Moses at the end Exodus 3 to go back to Egypt and tell the elders of Israel that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will deliver them from the oppression of Pharaoh and bring them out of Egypt to Canaan. Moses feared and argued that they would not believe him. So, in Exodus 4.1-9, God asked Moses to perform 3 signs (miracles): the staff becoming a snake and then back into a staff; Moses' hand

becoming leprous (white or flaky) by tucking his hand into his chest (underneath his clothes presumably) and then back to normal when repeating the instructions; and if the elders would not believe these signs, then turning some water out of the Nile thrown on the ground into blood.

God granted that miraculous signs be produced to “prove” that God really appeared to Moses and sent him.

The Pharisees reject Jesus

John 10.22-42

²² Now Hanukkah was taking place in Jerusalem. It was winter, ²³ and Jesus was walking around in the Temple inside the open porch of Solomon. ²⁴ So the **Jewish leaders** surrounded him and quizzed him, “**How long are you going to keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us so plainly.**”

²⁵ Jesus answered them, “**I have told you, but you do not believe it. The actions that I do in my Father’s name testify on my behalf,** ²⁶ but you do not believe because you do not belong to my sheep. ²⁷ My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, they will never be lost, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ What my Father has given me is more important than anything, and no one can snatch it from the Father’s hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one.”

³¹ Again the Jewish leaders picked up stones to stone him to death.

³² Jesus replied to them, “I have shown you many good actions from my Father. For which of them are you going to stone me?”

³³ **The Jewish leaders** answered him, “**We are not going to stone you for a good action, but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, are making yourself God!**”

³⁴ Jesus replied to them, “Is it not written in your Law, ‘I said, “You are gods” ’? ³⁵ If he called those to whom a message from God came ‘gods’ (and the Scripture cannot be disregarded), ³⁶ how can you say to the one whom the Father has consecrated and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God’? ³⁷ **If I am not doing my Father’s actions, do not believe me. ³⁸ But if I am doing them, even though you do not believe me, believe the actions, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.**” ³⁹ Again they tried to seize him, but he slipped away from them.

⁴⁰ Then he went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing at first, and he remained there. ⁴¹ Many people came to him and kept saying, “John never performed a sign, but everything that John said about this man is true!” ⁴² And many believed in Jesus there.

In John 10.22-42, the Pharisees ask Jesus if he could please tell them directly if he is the Messiah. Jesus says that he had already said so and that he had already demonstrated it. Jesus argued that they should not believe him simply because he says that he is the Son of God (and implicitly making himself equal to God), but because he performed miracles and contextually preached righteously in light of the OT. This gives evidence that he was sent by God and that he was really the Messiah that had to come as prophesied in the OT.

Jesus Appears to the Disciples

Luke 24:36–44

³⁶ While they were all talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and told them, “Peace be with you.”

³⁷ **They were startled and terrified, thinking they were seeing a ghost.**

³⁸ But Jesus told them, “What’s frightening you? And why are you doubting?

³⁹ Look at my hands and my feet, because it’s really me. Touch me and look at me, because a ghost doesn’t have flesh and bones as you see that I have.”⁴⁰ After he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. ⁴¹ Even though they were still skeptical due to their joy and astonishment, Jesus asked them, “Do you have anything here to eat?”

⁴² **They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³ and he took it and ate it in their presence.** ⁴⁴ Then he told them, “These are the words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms had to be fulfilled.”

Luke takes the time to record that the disciples were doubtful that Jesus could really resurrect among the dead that way and that he ate a piece of broiled fish to suggest otherwise. Thomas in John 20.28 did not believe until he approached Jesus to touch the wounds in his hands (or wrists) and feet. Luke mentions elsewhere in **Acts 1.3** that, “**After he had suffered, he had shown himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during a period of 40 days and telling them about the kingdom of God.**”

Paul and woman head covering

1 Corinthians 11:3–16

³ Now I want you to realize that the Messiah is the head of every man, and man is the head of the woman, and God is the head of the Messiah. ⁴ Every man who prays or prophesies with something on his head dishonors his head, ⁵ and every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, which is the same as having her head shaved. ⁶ So if a woman does not cover her head, she should cut off her hair. If it is a disgrace for a woman to cut off her hair or shave her head, let her cover her own head.

⁷ A man should not cover his head, because he exists as God's image and glory. But the woman is man's glory. ⁸ For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; ⁹ and man was not created for woman, but woman for man. ¹⁰ This is why a woman should have authority over her own head: because of the angels.

¹¹ In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man of woman. ¹² For as woman came from man, so man comes through woman. But everything comes from God. ¹³ Decide for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? ¹⁴ **Nature itself teaches you neither that it is disgraceful for a man to have long hair ¹⁵ nor that hair is a woman's glory, since hair is given as a substitute for coverings.** ¹⁶ But if anyone wants to argue about this, we do not have any custom like this, nor do any of God's churches.

I repeat that Paul elsewhere in Acts and in some of his letters make arguments to defend his views not only by using the OT but by using reasoning or philosophy and very rarely by quoting portions from the Greek philosophers. Therefore, Paul is not only relying on biblical authority but sees evidence for his points at other levels of knowledge. Recall that in my blog post “Even the Apostle Paul went through peer review!” (March 16, 2019), Paul argues in **Galatians 1.11 – 2.10** that he is indeed an apostle because Jesus commissioned him in his out-of-body experience (or vision, if it was actually a vision), but Paul adds that he also met with the Jerusalem Apostles to review his understanding of the Gospel and that he was sent by Jesus to preach to the Gentiles; and that he was accepted by them. Therefore, Paul is not only claiming that Jesus told him so, or that the OT says so, but that there is evidence elsewhere for what he is claiming.

Summary

In **Deut. 17 and 19**, God lays out the law that if Israelites sinned in particular ways, stoning to death was necessary. (I will not delve here into the issues of severe ancient Near Eastern laws and violence in the OT). But it had to be done through many witnesses (2 or 3), not just one witness. This was to minimize false reports against others in the community.

In **Deut. 18**, God points out that false prophets should be recognized or distinguished from true prophets. God indicates that false prophets will not have their words become true (and this does not necessarily refer to predictive prophecy of future events) to the people, but that their proclamations will become falsified.

In **Exodus 3-4**, especially 4, God demands Moses to go back to Egypt and tell the Israelite elders that God sent Moses and that God will deliver them. But Moses contends that the elders won't believe him. No kidding. So God acknowledged this point and gave Moses the power to produce 3 miraculous signs (i.e., staff transforming into a snake, the hand becoming leprous and the Nile water that was thrown on the ground turned into blood) to sort of prove that he was indeed sent by God and that God was with him.

In **John 10**, the Pharisees critique Jesus since he claims to be the Son of God and he makes himself God by some of the things that he claims. So, Jesus responds that they should not believe him simply because he says so, but because of all the miracles he had been producing as well as his extraordinary proclamations that matched and fulfilled some Old Testament prophecies; all of this while being poor and humble as opposed to haughty and prideful.

In **Luke 24**, Jesus appeared to his disciples after his resurrection, yet the disciples could not believe it, they were doubtful that it could really be Jesus. Not only Jesus reassured them that it was really him, but he ate a piece of broiled fish and he appeared to them for 40 days—and whether 40 days is to be read literally is beside the point—and that he did not simply appear in-a-flash, but appeared for many days and conversed with them, made them touch his wounds, etc.

In **1 Corinthians 11**, Paul argues that woman should cover their heads while prophesying in public. Now, whether this should be applied in modern churches or

not is a whole debate in itself and I will not address it here. What I want to show is that Paul makes arguments not only from the Bible but from the natural order as well; at least, from his Hellenistic-Jewish, Greco-Roman contexts in the first century. Paul in Acts and in some of his letters elsewhere also make arguments to defend his views not only by using the Bible but by using reasoning or philosophy and very rarely by quoting portions from the Greek philosophers.