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Why Christianity Seems Silly to Intelligent People #1 of 5:

Stone Tablets in Cyberspace?

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I cut my thumb, and had to put on a ... a ... a what? A Band-Aid.
And I have a bit of a head cold, and I was about to sneeze, and I reached for that little box and grabbed a ... a ... Kleenex.
And my kids and I were swimming, and afterwards I hate that feeling of water in my ears, so I was in the bathroom cabinet trying to find a ... a ... Q-Tip.

And what we've demonstrated in these past 60 seconds is how brainwashed we all are. It's not technically a Band-Aid, it's an adhesive bandage.
It's not a Kleenex, it's a tissue.
It's not a Q-Tip, it's a cotton swab.
But we call it by its most common brand name.
In each case, the leading brand.
The brand that down through the years has done the most successful job of selling us.

Maybe your view of the Bible has been imprinted the same way.
If you're a perfectly intelligent person, and Christianity sometimes seems sort of silly to you,
it's possible that some of the doubts you've had about Christianity are related to this thing called the Bible.
But maybe our culture has sold you a certain view of the Bible, and without your even realizing it, you bought it.

Now you might say Wait a minute, Doug...
We're not idiots; we don't just buy whatever they sell us.
But you know what? We are busy — and in this age of information overload, it is impossible to sort out the tidal wave of information that comes at us day after day.
So our brain takes short cuts.
When you were a child helping Mommy in the kitchen, and she said here, wrap this in Saran Wrap — then for the rest of your life, that see-through stuff that I can never quite keep from clinging to itself before I get it around that bowl of leftover spaghetti — no matter what brand name you've bought — is Saran Wrap.
“Oh, look, here's a new kind of Saran Wrap.”
Your brain still takes the shortcut. It categorizes this product under the heading “Saran Wrap.”

Maybe your view of the Bible has been imprinted this way.
The first impression you ever got of the Bible — what was it?
Sunday school? Flannelgraph stories? Maybe you got the idea that the Bible was a

bunch of interesting stories for children — but not very applicable to your life as a grownup.

Or maybe your first impression was that the Bible was a mysterious piece of furniture in your house — a big black book that sat on a coffee table, every once in a while Mom dusted it, you could never *never* set anything on it — but you never opened it, you never read it, you never used it. Why should you?

Or maybe your first impression of the Bible was from parents or teachers who had already written it off — “*Pfft!* The Bible! Right! Those wacko right-wing Bible-thumpers! Bible-thumping Christians! Bible-thumping preachers!”

So of course you had no interest in exploring what such a repulsive thing actually says.

One way or another, each of us was imprinted with a view of the Bible.

Each of us starts out with a prejudice, a bias.

That’s a pretty strong word, but it’s basically accurate.

Based on your unique perspective, you may have some doubts about the Bible.

Perfectly reasonable doubts, depending on what you’ve been taught, or whatever view has been impressed on you.

For the next 20 minutes or so, I’m going to challenge you to try to suspend your bias.

Look at the Bible with an open mind.

Let’s think for ourselves.

Let’s not let our brains take those usual short cuts.

And let’s see what we can discover about the Bible *objectively*.

One of the most common doubts about the Bible is this:

1. “Hey, it’s not historically true.”

It’s a religious book, it can’t be counted on to be historically accurate.

But do you understand how history is written? How it’s proven?

I called up my college history professor in Springfield, Missouri, to find out.

He’s an award-winning professor in the field.

I said “Dr. Holsinger, how do you know that a historical fact is really fact?”

He said there’s only one answer: the documents.

You look at the documents from, say, the 14th Century.

You compare them to other documents from the 14th Century.

Yeah, but how do you know they’re really from the 14th Century?

Well, the archeologists dig places up — like they find old scrolls in caves, they recognize the age of the stuff around the scrolls, they compare the writings in the scrolls with other scrolls from the same era.

If it seems like a 14th Century scroll, but in the middle of the text it starts talking about Britney Spears, you can be suspicious.

But archeologists and historians devote their whole careers, their whole lives, to being suspicious,
to checking and re-checking,

to settling their doubts,
to being sure that old stuff is really what they think it is.

* * *

Well, then, what does archeology tell us about the Bible?
What do the documents we've found in archeological digs reveal about the Bible?
It's a crock, right? That's what I've heard.

Actually, just the opposite is true.

Archeology actually confirms the Bible record in greater and greater detail.

For starters, I have 70 pages of tiny type detailing just the most prominent archeological discoveries that confirm the historical accuracy of Scripture.
I could read it all to you, but we'd be here till next week.

But in lieu of reading these 70 pages aloud, let me boil them down for you.
The 20,000 Great Nuzi Tablets — the excavations of Sir Leonard Woodley — the Ras Shamra Tablets — and hundreds of other archeological findings specifically confirm the text of Scripture.

Here's what the archeologist William F. Albright says:

"Discovery after discovery has established the accuracy of innumerable details [in the Bible] and has brought increased recognition to the value of the Bible as a source of history."

Renowned Jewish archeologist Nelson Glueck writes,

"It may be stated categorically that no archeological discovery has ever contradicted a biblical reference."

If even a single archeological expedition found something contradictory to Scripture, you could be reasonably tempted to write off the whole Bible from a historical standpoint.

But that hasn't happened.

The more we dig, the more we find that the Bible, as a book of history, is true.

In fact, one historian has said it's almost easier to "prove" the existence of Jesus as an actual personality in history than it is to prove the existence of Napoleon as a personality in history —
because the archeology, the documentation, is so overwhelming.

So it's not realistic to write the Bible off because it's historically inaccurate.

* * *

But then perhaps you've said to yourself,

2. "Hey, I'm not going to take anything on faith. I want a truth I can know."

Let's examine this thinking.
What's your middle name?

Now prove it.

You want to show me a birth certificate?

How do I know it isn't forged?

You want to produce witnesses who saw you being born, and saw your birth certificate being filled out?

How do I know they're not lying?

**The practical truth is, there are only two ways to substantiate anything as fact:
A. firsthand experience — or B. faith.**

Everything in the documents of history, we are accepting by faith as the accurate expression of other people's firsthand-witness experiences.

Everything in the textbooks we studied as schoolchildren and college students, we are accepting by faith as the accurate expression of other people's firsthand-witness testimony.

Everything in our day-to-day lives, we have no choice but to accept by faith as the accurate expression of other people's firsthand witness.

So it's not really fair, is it, for me to say I won't explore the Bible objectively because it's faith, not fact?

It would be more fair to say that the Bible as a historical book is no more "faith" than any schoolbook, and every bit as much "fact."

I have a friend in Indiana. She told me,

3. "I just can't believe the Bible is accurate because down through the centuries, as it was copied and re-copied, they had to make errors."

Maybe you've said this same thing to yourself.

On the other hand, history tells us that the Jewish scribes who copied the Scriptures for centuries devoted their lives to accuracy.

They had an insatiable drive for accuracy, they considered it their God-given responsibility,

down to the counting of words, line upon line, checking and re-checking their work.

And the archeologists keep finding older and older handmade copies of the Scriptures.

In the most recent research I've read, the archeologists have found manuscripts that were actually written about 300 years after the occurrence of the events described in the Bible.

With the devotion of those who copied the text, and the care they took preserving the text, that span of time in historical terms is very small.

But then, let's ask about these oldest manuscripts of the Scriptures.

When we compare them to our latest copies, how do they match up?

Scholars have found that the originals do indeed match our copies.

The more ancient documents the archeologists find, the more accurate the Scriptures prove to be.

In less than 5% of the entire Scriptures, they can identify variations in spelling or grammar, but never in substantive matters of meaning.

You know, part of me says I wish there was an original manuscript — not a copy that goes back to within 300 years of the events.

But what does this mean, really?

I used to work in Andover, Massachusetts.

I could go to the park and read a monument that talks about the history of Andover, founded in 1634.

I believed that monument to be true.

Now let's say that back in the same year Andover was incorporated, a fellow wrote a story — and then he entrusted this story to his son, telling him,

“Copy this story absolutely verbatim, and hand it down from generation to generation so it's never lost, and never changed.”

And down through the years the original gets lost, and maybe even the first copy gets lost,

but there's always the latest copy still on hand —

until today, when we read the story, we can be quite confident that the story hasn't changed.

Today we have loads of literature and history from the 1600's that we accept as accurate, even though the original manuscripts have been lost.

That's all the more faith it takes to trust in the Bible's fidelity to the original manuscripts.

And hey, we accept this kind of gap with books other than the Bible.

For example, just about everything we know about the Peloponnesian War comes from the history of the war written by Thucydides, who lived in about 400 BC.

But the earliest copy of any of Thucydides' manuscripts dates from around 900 AD — that's 1,300 years later!

And we're OK with that.

We don't say, Hey, I don't believe that Peloponnesian War stuff — we don't have any original manuscripts! All the copies are 1,300 years old!

No. We accept the historical fact because the documentation is so solid.

Plus — ironically, historians also have a load of non-biblical manuscripts that were actually written during Bible times,

and these documents corroborate the biblical record.

And we trust these historical documents completely.

So why is it that we can readily embrace the other documents, but we seem to resist the Scriptures from the same era of history?

Could it be because the other documents don't claim to be a guidebook for our lives?

4. The Bible makes the preposterous claim that it is a valid guidebook for our everyday lives.

The Bible tells us that it's not just a historical record — although we know from our own study that the history in the Bible is accurate.

The Bible says it's not just a bunch of interesting stories — although the stories are incredible.

In this book you'll find tremendous true stories, fantastic fables, reprints of people's private letters, there's sex and violence — because it's a book for real people.

The Bible also says it's not just a bunch of prayers and hymns and pretty poetry — although the prayers and hymns and poetry in the Bible are so spectacular there are whole college courses devoted to them; and the Pulitzer Prize a few years ago went to a guy named Jack Miles who wrote a bestselling book which reviews the entire Old Testament as a piece of literature.

But beyond all of this, the Bible claims — more than 2,600 times in the space of about 1,600 pages — to be a practical guidebook for our everyday lives.

And let's face it, we tend to have a problem with that.

Our biggest problem with the Bible isn't with the archeology.

The problem isn't with the historical documentation.

The problem is with *us*.

The problem is with our perspective.

Because we don't *want* a guidebook for our lives!

We don't want to be told what to do.

We don't want to *need* a guidebook.

We want to think of ourselves as knowing everything we need to know.

What if I try to construct a tent, so I can take my family camping?

(I'll probably lose some credibility with some people by admitting this, but I've never been camping in my life.

My idea of "roughing it" is a 3-star hotel.)

So here's this tent, and I try to put it together on my own.

It's way too confusing and frustrating for me, so finally I ask someone who has built one before.

And when I try to take their advice but I don't really understand it, then maybe I ask someone who has actually read the directions for *my* kind of tent.

And when that still doesn't do the trick for me, maybe I finally take out the directions myself, and read part of them — but not all of them.

Do you see how we do the same thing when it comes to our owner's manual, the Bible?

Many of us try to put our lives together without consulting the Bible at all.

Some of us look for advice from other sources, but not from the Bible.

We may ask someone, "How did you get through this kind of situation in your life?"

Some of us are willing to listen to someone else tell us about what the Bible says.

We listen to a preacher, or we pick up a book in the bookstore.

We're asking, in essence, "What did the directions say when you built *your* tent?"

And some of us read part of the Bible, but not all of it — so we take little pieces of it out of context, and find it doesn't work.

How many of us have sat down and read this book cover to cover?

All 1,600 or so pages of it?

How many of us have gotten a hold of what the Bible itself calls “the whole counsel of God”?

Our commitment to you here at The Compass is that we will teach you the Bible — not just our spin on it, but to the best of our ability, what it really says, against the backdrop of what *all* of it says.

* * *

Okay, so maybe you've said to yourself, I could stand to check out a practical guidebook for my everyday life — *if* it were really from God.

5. But come on, the Bible can't be what they call “inspired”; it can't really be what God said, because it was written by too many people over too long a period of time.

And, if you've felt this way, you've got your facts right.

The Bible was penned by 40 or so individuals who lived on three different continents and wrote in three different languages.

They came from every conceivable walk of life, from kings to peasants, from philosophers to fishermen, from poets to politicians.

They lived and wrote over the space of about 1,600 years.

And over 1,600 times throughout Scripture, we read that these are not the words of a man, but rather the Word of God.

The authors use phrases like “The Lord says...” “The Lord spoke to me saying...” or “The word of the Lord came to me saying...”

Now I would be suspicious of this.

It is a very bold claim.

If I were being challenged to believe such a thing, I would want some kind of — *sign*. Some kind of evidence that this is really true.

Does God resent me for feeling this way?

No, on the contrary, he has built into the Bible — and into the historical record — a proof.

Here's how it works:

For centuries and centuries, God inspired various people to write predictions and claim they came from God.

If all the predictions came true, you could reasonably say, “Yup, that was God all right.”

If any of the predictions turned out to be bogus, you could reasonably say, “Ha! Gotcha!”

I would call this a very tough test.

Especially if you look at the sheer number of predictions — you often hear them referred to by the biblical term “prophecies”: there are hundreds upon hundreds of predictions, especially in the Old Testament.

And it’s an even tougher test if you look at the historical record and realize that the predictions were *not* made by one guy, sitting at a desk for, say, one month or one year — but rather, these predictions were made by a bunch of different writers, being inspired by God in radically different periods of history, in different cultures, in different circumstances.

But that’s what God did.

And one by one, the predictions began coming true.

The Bible makes about 1,000 predictions, including major historical events: like the total devastation of the coastal Lebanese city of Tyre (predicted in detail a full 240 years in advance), the trashing of the big temple at Jerusalem (predicted in detail 40 years in advance), the movement of the Jewish people out of Palestine — and then returning to form a nation (that happened in 1948), and many others.

And not one prediction turned out to be wrong.

Everything the Scriptures claimed turned out to be true.

The odds against all these predictions coming true are astronomical — and yet they did. This is the best single piece of evidence that the Bible really is the Word of God — that he really did tell certain people, somehow, supernaturally, what to write down, and they did it, and it was true.

You can tell yourself that the Bible must not really be the inspired Word of God because it was written by so many people over so long a time; but actually, if you look at the historical record, you come to the conclusion that the Bible almost *has* to be the inspired Word of God, because it was written by so many people over so long a time. How else can you explain so many incredible coincidences?

Compare the Bible’s batting average to that of, say, the late Jeane Dixon. She was probably the most famous prognosticator of the past century, yet she had hundreds of busted predictions. She said World War III would start in 1958. She said the Vietnam war would end in 1966. She said John Kennedy would lose his bid for the presidency. And on and on.

If the Bible made even one mistake in predicting the future, you could shrug it off as easily as we shrugged off Jeane Dixon.

But since the Bible’s been batting 1.000 for all these centuries ... it makes me wonder if it isn’t right about me, too.

* * *

6. Or maybe you've said to yourself, "I can't believe the Bible. There are too many contradictions."

If you feel this way, I don't know what to say to you — except, Read the whole thing. Don't give yourself the luxury of taking one passage out of context.

In **Luke 6:38**, Jesus says, **"Give, and it shall be given unto you."**

I've heard preachers take offerings using that verse of Scripture.

But what's the context? Is he talking about money?

Romans 8:28 says, **"All things work together for good..."**

Isn't that nice?

But what's the context?

You know, that's not even the whole sentence.

Jonah was swallowed by the whale, right?

The Bible doesn't say that.

The three Wise Men followed the star to find the Baby Jesus, right?

The Bible doesn't say that.

You've got to read the book. **The whole book, taken together and not in pieces, is amazingly consistent.**

Here's the real question: If the Bible really is the blueprint for my life, then what?

If God really created me according to a design, and that design is expressed in this book, then what?

If there's a part of my life that's broken, not working, it must be out of kilter with the blueprint.

That means I must be able to find something in this book about me and my struggle.

If I'm hurting, and if there was healing available for me in this book, wouldn't I want to get at it?

God loves you.

He wrote this book for your sake.

When he looks at you, his heart overflows with love.

It's to your benefit to learn what the Bible actually says and how it applies to you, how it can help you.

I have a friend in Eastern Europe named Luda.

Someone gave Luda a Bible about 12 years ago.

She read it all the way through. It took her two years.

She says, after those two years, her life started all over again.

She was focusing especially on the part of the Bible where Jesus says, in **John 3:3**, that it's not just that your life can start over again, it's that your life *has* to start over again.

She became a different person.

And she began teaching the principles of Scripture to her husband Oleg.

Lee Strobel, an award-winning journalist with the *Chicago Tribune*, set out to disprove the claims of Christianity.

He read the Bible through.

What caught his attention especially was the part of the Bible that says, in **Psalm 119**, that living by the Scriptures makes you different,

it makes you strong, it makes you confident, it makes you clean.

Today you know what Lee Strobel does with his journalistic talent?

Teaches the Bible.

Because it totally changed his life.

It gave him instructions for the broken parts of his life.

My wife Kristina had no background in the Bible.

She grew up in a completely non-religious household.

She's an intellectual.

She wanted to know the truth.

She tried a whole bunch of different ways of living.

But she was still empty inside.

I met her, I liked her, I thought, "I would love to marry this woman. But she's operating out of one owner's manual, I'm operating out of another."

I bought her a Bible. Actually I bought her three Bibles — three different translations.

I said, "Here, read one of these. Whichever one you like the best."

She started reading the Bible.

She started asking questions about what it said: What does this mean, what does that mean?

She forced the Bible to stand on its own intellectual footing.

The day came when she realized,

This book is true.

It's talking to me about myself.

It's almost like the book knows me.

And all alone, in her tacky little apartment in Mesa, Arizona, she said,

"God, if what you've said in this book is true, then I'll accept a relationship with you.

That's what's missing in my life."

She was focusing especially on the part of the Bible that says, in **Acts 4:12**, that God

came to earth in the form of a man called Jesus, and a relationship with Jesus is the only way to find peace with God.

And her life changed — radically.

I witnessed it.

And then there's me.

I grew up with the Bible.

We read it every single day in my parents' home, without fail.

I learned all the stories of the Bible as a kid in an old-fashioned Sunday school. We went to church three times a week.

But I let preachers tell me what it said.
I let churches and religious organizations put their spin on it for me.
I didn't inspect it for myself; I didn't look at it objectively; I didn't think for myself.
And in the process, I never understood what this book really is.
I didn't understand that it is a practical guidebook for my everyday life.

So I tried to live my own way.
My life was a broken-down mess by the time I came to a screeching halt and said, "Wait a minute. Nothing else has worked. I'm gonna try that old book.
I'm gonna see what it really says.
I'm gonna treat it like a practical guidebook for everyday living.
I'm gonna sink or swim on this old book.
If it's a lie, I'll be washed up — but I'm washed up anyway.
And if by some miracle it's true, I'll have a better life.
That was almost 20 years ago.
I may not be able to persuade you about the archeology, or the historical evidence, or the prophecies coming true, or anything else.
But I can tell you with absolute, unshakable confidence, I am a witness to the truth of this book.
To the extent that I've let God lead me through it, I have lived by it;
to the extent that I have lived by it, God has nourished me through it.
And to the extent that I've ignored it, life has boomeranged on me.
That's what happened to me.
And I believe that's what's happening to you — whether you realize it or not.

7. To the extent you're living by the principles in this guidebook, your life is flourishing.

To the extent you're ignoring the principles in this guidebook, your life is sputtering.

Not because of what any church says, or what any preacher says, but because of how God designed you.

Are you willing to find out what the Bible really says?

These days the Bible has been translated into plain, ordinary English. It's not hard to read. It's just hard to accept. Because we want *not to need* directions. But we do need directions. We need the Bible.