

The Reliability of the Bible

When people question the authenticity and reliability of the Bible, what are they really asking about?
Possible Questions Behind the Question...

1. How do you know if Bible we have today is the same as the original? (Issue of accuracy of translation and copying)
2. Assuming that the translation/copying is accurate, how do we know if the writers did not make up the stories?
3. How do we know that the Bible is not just a myth that was embellished over time?

To discover whether the Bible is reliable, you need M.A.P.S.

- **Manuscripts** Archaeology Prophecy Statistics

Manuscripts

-How do you know if Bible we have today is the same as the original?
-Issue of accuracy of translation and copying
-Manuscript Evidence, 3 Tests:

Bibliographical

-the textual tradition from the original document to the copies & manuscripts of that document we possess today

External evidence

-what the document claims for itself

Internal evidence

-how the document squares or aligns itself with facts, dates, persons from its own contemporary world

Bibliographical Test

-examines how well the texts are transmitted to us.

1. The number of copies of the original
2. The time gap between the original and the existing copies
3. The degree of accuracy of the copies
- 4.

The Number of Copies ... There are:

- 5,686 hand written Greek N.T. manuscripts
- 10,000 Latin Vulgate
- Close to 25,000 manuscript copies of portions of the New Testament exist today

The Time Interval

The N.T. has earlier manuscripts closer to the time of original composition.

For example:

- John Ryland fragment (117-138 A.D.) - one generation
- Bodmer Papyrus (150-200 A.D.) - whole books
- Chester Beatty Papyri (250 A.D.) - most of the N.T.
- Codex Vaticanus (325-350 A.D.) - nearly all the Bible

Comparing Ancient Manuscripts

Author	Book	Date	Earliest Copy	Gap in Yrs	# of Copies
Homer	Illiad	800 BC	400 BC	400	643

Herodotus	History	480-425 BC	900 AD	1350	8
Thucydides	History	460-400 BC	900 AD	1300	8
Plato		400 BC	900 AD	1300	7
Demosthenes		300 BC	1100 AD	1400	200
Julius Caesar	Gallic Wars	100-44 BC	900 AD	1000	10
Livy	Hist of Rome	59 BC-17 AD	4th C (partial)	400	1 partial
			10th C (almost complete)	1000	19
Tacitus	Annals	100 AD	1100 AD	1000	20
Pliny	Nat History	61-113 AD	850 AD	750	7
N. Testament		50-100 AD	130 AD (fragments)	50	5686
			200 AD (books)	100	
			250 AD (most of NT)	150	
			325 AD (complete NT)	225	

Josh McDowell, *New Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, p. 38

Degree of Accuracy

- New Testament manuscripts agree in 99.5% (5) of the text.
- Most of the discrepancies are in spelling and word order.
- There are two passages that are disputed but no discrepancy is of any doctrinal significance
- Most Bibles include the options as footnotes when there are discrepancies.

For details: www.BibleQuery.org

External Evidence Test

- Do other historical material confirm the reliability of the document
- What other sources apart from the documents under analysis, that substantiate its accuracy, reliability and authenticity

Extra-Biblical Christian Sources

Quotations from early Church Fathers concerning the New Testament

Writer	Gospels	Acts	Pauline	General	Revelation	Totals
Justin Martyr	268	10	43	6	3	330
Irenaeus	1,038	194	499	23	65	1,819
Clement (Alex)	1,107	44	1,127	207	11	2,406
Origen	9,231	349	7,778	399	165	17,992
Tertullian	3,822	502	2,609	120	205	7,258
Hippolytus	734	42	387	27	188	1,378
Eusebius	3,258	211	1,592	88	27	5,176
Grand Totals	19,368	1,352	14,035	870	664	36,289

Taken from Josh McDowell, *New Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, p. 43

Extra-Biblical Secular Sources

Writer	Date	Subject
▪ Cornelius Tacitus	112	Death of Jesus at the hands of Pilate
▪ Lucian	2 nd C	The new cult of Christianity
▪ Flavius Josephus	66	Life/Death of Jesus
▪ Suetonius	120	Christ-The reason for Jews expulsion from Rome
▪ Pliny	112	Christians bound not to sin - Jesus
▪ Thallus	52	Histories-Darkness at Christ's death (eclipse)
▪ Philegon	1 st C	Darkness (Eclipse)
▪ Mara Bar-Serapion	73	Calamities brought by deaths of Socrates, Pythagorus and Jesus

Jewish Source: The Talmud

"On the eve of Passover Yeshua was hanged. For forty days before the execution took place, a herald went forth and cried, 'he is going to be stoned because he has practiced sorcery and enticed Israel to apostasy. Any one who can say anything in his favor, let him come forward and plead on his behalf.' But since nothing was brought forward in his favor he was hanged on the eve of the Passover."

The Talmud, Sanhedrin, 43a (cf. John 11:8, 16)

Internal Evidence Test

- Is written record believable? To what extent?
- Are the authors telling the truth?
- Does the document itself claim to be actual history written by eyewitnesses.

Criteria for Establishing Credibility

Internal Evidence Test

David Hume's criteria for testing the credibility of witnesses

1. Do the witnesses contradict each other?

The witnesses did not contradict each other.

2. Are there a sufficient number of witnesses?

-9 different people wrote the N.T., all eye witnesses or contemporary to the events

-All of these books bear witness to the miracle of the Resurrection.

-In **1 Cor. 15**, Paul mentions there were 500 people who saw Jesus after the Resurrection

3. Were the witnesses truthful?

-Most of them even died for what they taught about Christ (2 Timothy 4:6-8; 2 Peter 1:14).

4. Were they non-prejudicial?

Jesus also appeared to unbelievers like James. (Jn 7:5; 1 Cor. 15:7)

-the greatest unbeliever of the day—a Jewish Pharisee named Saul of Tarsus. (Acts 9:5)

- The witnesses to the resurrection had nothing to gain personally.
- They were persecuted and threatened with death for their stand. (cf. Acts 4, 5, 8)
- The witnesses wrote things that didn't reflect favorably on themselves or their cause:
 - ✦ Disciples arguing about positions of honor in heaven; who would have a seat at Jesus right hand
 - ✦ Peter not eating with those who were uncircumcised
 - ✦ Women found the tomb empty first
 - ✦ Jesus calling Peter Satan

-The early speeches in Acts refer to the knowledge of unbelieving audiences (e. g., Acts 2:22), and

-no historian I know of doubts that Christianity started in Jerusalem just a few weeks after the death of Jesus in the presence of friendly and hostile eyewitnesses.

- They had very little to gain and much to lose for their efforts.
- they were mostly Jewish theists. To change the religion of Israel with its observance of the Mosaic law, Sabbath keeping, sacrifices, & clear-cut non-Trinitarian monotheism would be to risk the damnation of their own souls to hell.
- the apostles lived lives of great hardship, stress, and affliction (see **2 Cor. 11:23-29**) and died martyrs' deaths for their convictions.
- There is no adequate motive for their labors other than a sincere desire to proclaim what they believed to be the truth.

Did the Writers Use Primary Sources?

Luke 1:1-4 ¹ Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, ² just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. ³ Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴ so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

2 Pet. 1:16 We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

1 John 1:3 We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

John 19: 35 The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe.

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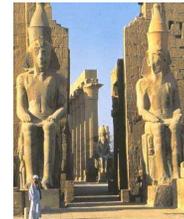
- Manuscripts **Archaeology** Prophecy Statistics
- 1. The Testimony of the Stones

No archaeological evidence has ever refuted the Bible.

Thousands of archaeological finds support the Bible.

Archaeology (N.T.) Archaeological Discoveries:

- Pharaoh Shishak's attack on Israel (1 Ki 14:25-26) confirmed by the walls of the Temple of Amun



Archaeological Discoveries:

- Moab's revolt against Israel (2 Ki 3:4-27) confirmed by the Mesha Inscription.



Archaeological Discoveries:

- In the 19th C, the Bible was accused of being fictitious because no non-Biblical texts have been written about the Hittites. In 1906, digs at Hattushash proved that it was the capital city of the Hittites, silencing the sceptical scholars and archaeologists.



"Pontius Pilate Prefect of Judea" 26-37 AD (Discovered 1961)

Accuracy of Acts

WHOEVER HEARD OF "POLITARCHS"?

Ac 17:6 - CONCERNING THE TERM "RULERS OF THE CITY" (GREEK "POLITARCHS")...

Since the term is not found in the classical literature of the Greeks it was assumed that Luke was wrong to refer to such an office. **HOWEVER...** some 19 inscriptions have now been found that make use of this title; five of these are in reference to Thessalonica!



Archaeological evidence

-Nelson Glueck, a respected Jewish archaeologist claims: "It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever contradicted a biblical reference."

-The Mormon claim for inspiration of the Book of Mormon has been categorically condemned by the Smithsonian Institute because of the fallacies shown by archaeology; this is not so with the Bible.

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- Manuscripts Archaeology **Prophecy** Statistics

Messianic Prophecy

J. Barton Payne in his Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecies (P. 665-670) lists 191 Prophecies that were literally fulfilled in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ:

1. Place of birth (Mic. 5:2)
2. Time of birth (Dan. 9:25)
3. Manner of birth (Is. 7:14)
4. Sold for 30 pieces of silver (Zech. 11:12)
5. Manner of death (Ps. 22:16)
6. People's reactions (mocking, spitting, staring, etc.) (Ps. 22:7,8, 17)
7. His side pierced (Zech. 12:10)
8. Burial in a rich man's tomb (Is 53:9)

The Bible is literally filled with detailed prophecies that have been fulfilled with 100% accuracy. Here is a list of 85 Messianic prophecies (click [here](#) for a more complete list) along with their fulfillment through the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus:

Prophecies of Jesus of Nazareth as Messiah

-The Bible made several prophecies of the complete destruction of cities. Many of the cities it said would be rebuilt and several it claimed would never be rebuilt - The Bible is 100% accurate in both categories as archeology shows

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- Manuscripts Archaeology Prophecy **Statistics**

Statistical Probability

8 prophecies all being fulfilled in the life of Christ:

1×10^{17}

48 Prophecies: 1×10^{157}

(more atoms than there are in the Universe)

Taken from Peter Stoner, *Science Speaks*

What about Canonicity?

Principles for Discovering Canonicity

Canonicity is determined by God and discovered by man

Criteria:

Is the book authoritative - does it claim to be of God?

1. Is it prophetic- was it written by a servant of God? (2 Pet. 1:20-21; Heb. 1:1)
2. Is it authentic-does it tell the truth about God, man, etc.? (Acts 17:11)

4. Is the book dynamic-does it possess the life-transforming power of God? (Heb. 4:12; 2 Tim. 3:16-17)
5. Is this book received or accepted by the people of God for whom it was originally written - is it recognized as being from God?

Remember Jesus himself said that some won't believe "even if someone is raised from the dead?" (Luke 16:31)

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-How could there be such accuracy over a period of 1,400 years of copying?

- 1) The scribes that did the copying had meticulous methods for checking their copies for errors.
- 2) The Holy Spirit made sure we would have an accurate copy of God's word so we would not be deceived.

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-God has revealed Himself in the Bible without error. The Bible itself claims this inerrancy (2 Timothy 3:16-17 (4); Matthew 5:18 (5); etc.)

Historicity of Jesus

-A case in point is the historicity of Jesus. Although many atheists state that Jesus never lived, He is mentioned by many contemporary, non-Christian historians. Let us look at the evidence.

-Scholars have made statements such as, "no serious scholar has ventured to postulate the non-historicity of Jesus ." (11) The latest version of Encyclopedia Britannica says in its discussion of the multiple extra-biblical witnesses:

-"These independent accounts prove that in ancient times even the opponents of Christianity never doubted the historicity of Jesus, which was disputed for the first time and on inadequate grounds by several authors at the end of the 18th, during the 19th, and at the beginning of the 20th centuries." (12)

Scientific evidence

-Recent scientific evidence is adding to the evidence supporting the reliability of biblical chronology from the scriptures. This study demonstrated the reliability of the Biblical record regarding the Egyptian plagues and demise of Jericho.

The Bible's Uniqueness and Unity

-The next proof is the Bible's uniqueness and unity. The Bible was written by over 40 authors who came from just about every walk of life conceivable, including fisherman, kings, a butler, priests, and a tax collector. The 66 books of the Bible were written over a 1,500 year span in three languages on three continents with one theme and no contradictions. C.J. Sharp captures this miracle well:

Survival in the Face of Persecution

-A final indicator of the reliability of the Bible comes from the lengths disciples of Jesus went through to proclaim the gospel. In spite of extreme persecution, people were willing to die for Jesus, who predicted the persecution of the church:

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Three Errors To Avoid

Do not assume inspiration or infallibility of the documents, with the intent of attempting to prove the inspiration or infallibility of the documents. Do not say the bible is inspired or infallible simply because it claims to be. This is circular reasoning.

When considering the original documents, forget about the present form of your Bible and regard them as the collection of ancient source documents that they are.

Do not start with modern "authorities" and then move to the documents to see if the authorities were right. Begin with the documents themselves.

The Scribe

-The scribe was considered a professional person in antiquity. No printing presses existed, so people were trained to copy documents. The task was usually undertaken by a devout Jew. The Scribes believed they were dealing with the very Word of God and were therefore extremely careful in copying.

-During the early part of the tenth century (916 A.D.), there was a group of Jews called the Massoretes. These Jews were meticulous in their copying. The texts they had were all in capital letters, and there was no punctuation or paragraphs. The Massoretes would copy Isaiah, for example, and when they were through, they would total up the number of letters. Then they would find the middle letter of the book. If it was not the same, they made a new copy.

The Dead Sea Scrolls

-In 1947, a young Bedouin goat herdsman found some strange clay jars in caves near the valley of the Dead Sea. Inside the jars were some leather scrolls.

-The Dead Sea Scrolls include a complete copy of the Book of Isaiah, a fragmented copy of Isaiah, containing much of Isaiah 38-6, and fragments of almost every book in the Old Testament. The majority of the fragments are from Isaiah and the Pentateuch (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). The books of Samuel, in a tattered copy, were also found and also two complete chapters of the book of Habakkuk.

-These materials are dated around 100 B.C. The supreme value of these Qumran documents lies in the ability of biblical scholars to compare them with the Massoretic Hebrew texts of the tenth century A.D. If, upon examination, there were little or no textual changes in those Massoretic texts where comparisons were possible, an assumption could then be made that the Massoretic Scribes had probably been just as faithful in their copying of the other biblical texts which could not be compared with the Qumran material.

The Septuagint

-The Greek translation of the Old Testament, called the Septuagint, also confirms the accuracy of the copyists who ultimately gave us the Massoretic text.

The New Testament

The Greek Manuscript Evidence

-There are more than 4,000 different ancient Greek manuscripts containing all or portions of the New Testament that have survived to our time. These are written on different materials.

Versions (Translations)

-In addition to the actual Greek manuscripts, there are more than 1,000 copies and fragments of the New Testament in Syria, Coptic, Armenian, Gothic, and Ethiopic, as well as 8,000 copies of the Latin Vulgate, some of which date back almost to Jerome's original translation in 384 400 A.D.

Conclusion

-no documents of the ancient period are as well attested bibliographically as these in the New Testament.

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The Readability of the Bible

-Scripture was written with us in mind, God wants us to understand it

-if something seems to be literal, it usually is

-the Bible is not a book or riddles