

# Why Trust the Bible?

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## Introduction

- A. Perceptions of the Bible
- B. “Trust”: Key questions about the Bible:
  - 1. Does it have authority?
  - 2. Is it true?
  - 3. Are the ancient biblical texts authentic?
  - 4. Are the current biblical texts reliable?
  - 5. Is it worth following?

### I. The Bible claims to be “inspired” by God.

- A. God’s reality is revealed in two main ways:
  - 1. In his *world* (Ps. 19:1-4; Romans 1:19-20).
  - 2. In his *Word*: the message revealed by God; the Scripture inspired by God; and the Son given by God (1 Thess. 2:13; Hebrews 1:1-3; 2 Tim. 3:15-17).
- B. Paul: 2 Timothy 3:15-17 “All Scripture is inspired by God.”

“... from childhood you have known the **sacred writings** which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. **All Scripture is inspired by God** and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. [“inspired”: *theopneustos* = God breathed] (NASB)

- C. Peter
  - 1. Peter says the writers were “carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:20-21).

<sup>20</sup> knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. <sup>21</sup> For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (ESV)

- 2. Peter includes Paul’s writings among “other Scriptures” with authority (2 Pet. 3:16).
- D. Jesus:
  - 1. References to “it is written” (e.g., Matt. 4:4,6,10; Lk. 4:4,8; 22:37).
  - 2. The Scriptures reveal truth from God (Matt. 22:23-33).
  - 3. The word of God is written and “Scripture cannot be broken” (Jn. 10:34-35)
  - 4. Jesus closely connects what David writes *in Scripture* to the *Spirit* (Matt. 22:41-46; Ps. 110:1).

[Jesus] said to them, “How is it then that David, *in the Spirit*, calls him Lord, saying, “The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet”? If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?” (Matt. 22:43-45; cf. Ps. 110:1; emphasis added).

- E. The Holy Spirit will guide the apostles to *remember* what they had been taught (Jn. 14:16-17, 25-26; 16:12-13; Lk. 12:11-12; Mk. 13:11).

## II. The Bible offers a *single* love story of God's message.

- A. Old Testament: 39 books.
- B. New Testament: 27 books.
- C. The O.T. *points to* Jesus and the N.T. *presents* Jesus. [See CHARTS on the event webpage.]
- D. God's love story is about Jesus and YOU.

## III. The Bible is *historical*.

- A. The **bodily resurrection of Jesus** from the dead (1 Cor. 15:3-8, 14-19; Matt. 28; Luke 24; John 20; Mark 16; Acts 2).
  - 1. It was predicted.
  - 2. It was preached *within 50 days* of the event.
  - 3. It was preached *in Jerusalem* where it happened.
  - 4. It was preached *in spite of* severe persecution and execution.
- B. Some **archaeology** connections.
  - 1. Old Testament
    - a. Black Obelisk of Shalmanezar (Assyrian king) refers to Jehu (king of Israel) [c. 840 BC].
    - b. Prism of Sennacherib (Assyrian king) refers to Hezekiah (king of Judah) as a "caged bird." (2 Kings 19; 2 Chron. 32; Isa. 36-37) [c. 701 BC].
    - c. Cylinder of Cyrus (king of Persia) refers to the return of the Jews to Jerusalem from Babylonian captivity (Ezra 1:1-3 (Ezra 6:1-5; 2 Chron. 3:23; Isaiah 44:28). [c. 539 BC].
  - 2. New Testament.
    - a. The Pilate Stone (Lk. 3:1).
    - b. The Pool of Bethesda (Jn. 5:2).
    - c. The Caiaphas Ossuary (Caiaphas mentioned in Mathew, Luke, John, and Acts).
- C. Early **literary testimony *outside* the New Testament**.

Gary Habermas (a N.T. historian): At least 39 different ancient sources outside the N.T. provide over 100 facts just about the Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.
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- 1. **Josephus** (AD37-100): Jewish historian.
  - a. Revolt of Judas (Acts 5; *Jewish War* 2.118).
  - b. Pilate condemned Jesus to the cross (*Jewish Antiquities*, 18:3).
  - c. Execution of John the Baptist (Mk. 6; Matt. 14; *Jewish Antiquities* 18.116-119).
  - d. James, the brother of Jesus, killed. (*Jewish Antiquities* 20.200; cf. Matt. 13:55; Mk. 6:3).
  - e. Death of King Agrippa (Acts 12:21-23; *Jewish Antiquities*, 18.3).
- 2. **Tacitus** (56-117): Roman Senator. Speaks of the **death of Jesus**.
- 3. **Seutonius** (69-122): Roman biographer. Refers to **expulsion of Jews from Rome** (cf. Acts 18:1-2).

## IV. The Bible is **TRUE** when *properly* interpreted.

- A. The Bible includes different literary types (e.g., narrative, ancient biography, poetry, prose). [See the event webpage for a link to a video on "Literary Styles" by The Bible Project.]
- B. God's message in Scripture "progressed" through time. He reveals new, but not contradictory, information through history (Heb. 1:1-3; Jeremiah 31:31).
- C. The Bible is not a science book, though it offers implications for science (e.g., creation > Big Bang cosmology; intelligence *precedes* the appearance of life > DNA and the problems of explaining the origin of life; created "in God's image" > the exceptional qualities of humans).

- D. Focus on what the texts meant to the *original* audience; then allow it to *instruct* us (Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11; 2 Tim. 3:15-17).

## V. The New Testament is based on *EYEWITNESS* testimony. [See CHART: “Earliest N.T. Books & Events”]

- A. 1 John 1:1-4 We have heard, seen, and touched.
- B. 2 Peter 1:16-21 We were eyewitnesses.
- C. The crucial role of the **Apostles** as **eyewitnesses**.
  - 1. Apostles must be eyewitnesses (Acts 1:1-5, 21-22).
  - 2. The Apostles preached the resurrected Christ, which they had personally witnessed (Acts 2:14-36; 3:12-26; 4:5-12; 5:29-32; 10:34-43).
- D. **The Apostle Paul** became an **eyewitness** of the resurrected Jesus and preached the resurrection (e.g. Acts 9:1-30; Acts 26:1-23).
  - 1. In the **book of Acts** (by Luke): 13:16-43; 17:1-3, 16-33; 21:37-40; 22:1-21; 23:1-11; 24:10-21; 26:1-29).
  - 2. In Paul’s letters.
    - a. **Galatians** (1:1, 11-12) [AD 48-53]
    - b. **1 Thessalonians** (1:9-10; 4:14) [AD 51]
    - c. **1 Corinthians** (15:1-4) [AD 55]
- E. There was an early oral tradition to be remembered.
  - 1. **Maintain** the “**traditions**” (1 Cor. 11:2; 15:1-4; 2 Thess. 2:15; 3:6,14). [c. 55 AD]
  - 2. **Remember** what was spoken (2 Peter 3:1-2; Jude 1:17).

## VI. The Testimony of Mark and Luke (Not Apostles nor Eyewitnesses, but ...).

- A. **Mark** and his Gospel. [John Mark in Acts 12:25; 15:37,39; Barnabas’s cousin in Col. 4:10]
  - 1. A traveling companion with **Peter** and **Paul**. (Acts 12:25; 13:2-5; Col. 4:10; Philemon 24; 1 Pet. 5:13)
  - 2. **Papias** (c. 125): Mark “had become the interpreter of Peter.” (Papias was a close associate of Polycarp who was a disciple of the apostle John.)
  - 3. **Irenaeus** (c. 170): Mark was “a disciple and interpreter of Peter.” [Irenaeus was Polycarp’s disciple; Polycarp was John the apostle’s disciple.]
- B. **Luke** and His Gospel and the book of Acts (Acts 16:10,13,16; 28:1-2,10,16; Philemon 24; Col. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:11).
  - 1. Luke: A frequent traveling companion with PAUL.
  - 2. Luke: The author of the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts (Lk. 1:1-4; Acts 1:1-2).

Luke 1:1-4 Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, <sup>2</sup> just as those who from the beginning were **eyewitnesses** and ministers of the word have **delivered them to us**, <sup>3</sup> it seemed good to me also, **having followed all things closely for some time past**, to **write an orderly account for you**, most excellent Theophilus, <sup>4</sup> **that you may have certainty** concerning the things **you have been taught**. (ESV)

## VII. The New Testament has reliable manuscript evidence.

- A. Typical skeptic claims:
  - 1. “We have no original manuscripts of any New Testament book. All we have are copies. And the copies we have of the Greek New Testament exhibit over 200,000 variations. So, we cannot even know what the “originals” said.”
  - 2. “The New Testament Gospels are filled with contradictions.”

B. What about all the **copies**?

1. We have no *original* manuscripts [“autographs”] of the NT—only copies (about 5,600).
2. The copies purportedly contain 200,000 to 400,000 variations.

**Bart Ehrman:** “Not only do we not have the originals, we don’t have the first copies of the originals. We don’t even have copies of the copies of the originals, or copies of the copies of the copies of the originals.... And these copies all differ from one another, in many thousands of places” (Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why*, 10).

3. How do we determine the original? >> **Textual Criticism.**
4. Comparing N.T. manuscripts with other ancient writings.

**Greek N.T. Manuscripts and Other Ancient Writings**

(circa and rounded dates)	Original Source Date	Earliest Available Manuscript(s)	Time Elapse (from Original)	Number of Manuscripts
Homer’s <i>Iliad</i>	900 BC	c. 415 BC	485 yrs.	+1,900
Livy’s <i>History of Rome</i>	25 BC	4 <sup>th</sup> Century AD	325+ yrs.	c. 475
Josephus, <i>Antiquities of the Jews</i>	93 AD	>800 AD	700+ yrs.	20
NT Greek Manuscripts	50-100 AD	130 AD	35-80 yrs.	c. 5,600
(However, over 5,000 of these NT Greek manuscripts date to the 10 <sup>th</sup> century AD or later.)				

5. **Erasmus:** a 16<sup>th</sup> century example. [See CHART: “Greek N.T. Manuscript Timeline”]
  - a. Erasmus (1516) published the first New Testament in Greek.
  - b. He (and the King James Version in 1611) only had **7 manuscripts** for their work, none of them older than 900 AD.
  - c. Erasmus had only **2 manuscripts for the Gospels**, and neither was older than 1100 AD.
  - d. With a 1,000 gap between the completion of the original N.T. books and the earliest Gospel manuscript Erasmus possessed, **how do we know whether Erasmus had accurate Gospel manuscripts?**

6. **Today:**

- a. We have about 5,600 Greek manuscripts.

“We now have nearly a thousand times more manuscripts than were used by Erasmus in his first edition ...” (Peter Williams, *Can We Trust the Gospels?*).

- b. Now, the N.T. Greek manuscripts go back nearly 900 years *earlier* than what Erasmus had!
- c. We have about **124 Greek manuscripts within 300 years** of the NT writings. Typical classical Greek and Roman authors have 0 manuscripts within 300 years of their writings.
- d. We have **65 papyri within 200 years** of the N.T. writings.
- e. We have **10 papyri within 100 years** of the N.T. writings.
- f. The oldest papyri (P52) dates between 125-175 AD (from John 18). This would be within 35-85 years from the likely date of the Gospel of John.

C. **What have we learned** in 400+ years since Erasmus?

1. There are many variations in the copies (200,000+ among the 5,600 Greek manuscripts).
2. **But, 70%** of the variations are *spelling* differences.
3. **Less than 1%** of the variations are *meaningful* (may affect our understanding) and *viable* (with substantial and multiple manuscript testimony).
  - a. e.g. 1 Thess. 2:9 “the gospel of Christ” instead of “the gospel of God.”

- b. e.g. 1 John 1:4 “**our** joy” vs. “**your** joy.”

Bart Ehrman’s “confession”: “**The vast majority of these hundreds of thousands of differences are completely and utterly unimportant and insignificant and don’t matter at all.** By far the most common differences simply show us that scribes in the ancient world could spell no better than most people can today (and the scribes didn’t have spell-check!) If we really want to know what the apostle Paul had to say about the importance of Jesus’ death and resurrection, does it matter to us how he spelled the word ‘resurrection’? Probably not.” *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings* (Oxford, 2016), p. 23. [emphasis added]

4. Only TWO passages longer than two verses are now questionable.
  - a. John 7:53–8:11 (the woman caught in adultery).
  - b. Mark 16:9-20 (some post-resurrection appearances of Jesus and Mark’s version of the Great Commission).
  - c. See notes on these verses in some modern English translations (e.g., ESV).
5. No major Christian doctrine is adversely affected by these 200,000+ variants!

**Bart Ehrman:** “The position I argue for in *Misquoting Jesus* does not actually stand at odds with Prof. Metzger’s position that the **essential Christian beliefs are not affected by textual variants** in the manuscript tradition of the New Testament” (*Misquoting Jesus*, 252) [2007 paperback edition with Appendix; emphasis added].

6. The explosion in the *number* of manuscripts and the quality of *older* manuscripts allow us to be *even more confident in the reliability of the text of the New Testament.*
- D. What about all the purported **contradictions**?
1. Skeptics emphasize purported Gospel “incompatibilities” or “contradictions.”
  2. Case study: The *number* of women at the tomb and *who* did they see?

Matthew 28:1 [ESV]	Mark 16:1, [ESV]	Luke 24:10 [ESV]	John 20:1 [ESV]
<p><b>Mary Magdalene</b> and the <b>other Mary</b> went to see the tomb ...</p> <p>But <b>the angel</b> said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified.</p> <p><b><sup>6</sup> He is not here, for he has risen,</b></p>	<p>When the Sabbath was past, <b>Mary Magdalene, Mary</b> the mother of James, and <b>Salome</b> ...</p> <p><b><sup>5</sup> And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe ...</b></p> <p><b><sup>6</sup> ... You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here.</b></p>	<p><b><sup>10</sup> Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary</b> the mother of James and the <b>other women</b> with them who told these things to the apostles,...</p> <p><b><sup>4</sup> While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men</b> stood by them in dazzling apparel....</p> <p><b><sup>5</sup> ... the men said to them, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? <sup>6</sup> He is not here, but has risen.</b></p>	<p>Now on the first day of the week <b>Mary Magdalene</b> came to the tomb early ... [She then tells Peter &amp; John and returns with them to the tomb.]</p> <p><b><sup>11</sup> But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. <sup>12</sup> And she saw two angels in white,...</b></p> <p>[She then sees Jesus.] <b><sup>18</sup> Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”—and that he had said these things to her.</b></p>

3. Responses:
  - a. Differences do not necessarily mean “contradictions.”
  - b. Most purported “incompatibilities” or “contradictions” have very plausible, if not relatively simple, resolutions.

- c. This does not mean that we can definitively resolve *every* apparent difference.
- d. The differences are *in the details*, which is a characteristic of good witnesses. If witnesses all agreed on every detail, we would suspect collusion or a conspiracy.
- e. Even *IF* we concede *inconsistencies in details*, this would not, by itself, invalidate the primary claims of the Gospels about Jesus.

### **VIII. Summary on Why We Can Trust the Bible.**

- A. Its ultimate source is God, so it has *authority* for everyone.
- B. It offers an amazing love story that's *relevant* to you.
- C. Its authors wanted to, and were capable of, giving *true* descriptions of events.
  - 1. It is a historical book that centers on the death and resurrection of Jesus.
  - 2. It has significant archaeological confirmation.
  - 3. The four Gospels are based on eyewitness testimony.
- D. The New Testament books were written relatively soon after the life of Jesus (from AD48-95).
- E. The biblical manuscripts have been reliably transmitted through the centuries.

### **Some Discussion and Reflection Questions**

1. What point in this lesson was most important to you in helping you trust the Bible?
2. What did you learn that was totally new or different to you?
3. What would you say to someone who claimed that the stories about Jesus were just fabricated many decades after his life?
4. What do *you* think about the apparent inconsistencies in the Gospel accounts? Does the truth of Christ's resurrection require our being able to resolve the "details"? Why or why not?
5. What questions do you still have about trusting the Bible?