

Foundations 12 THE RELIABILITY OF THE BIBLE. Can we trust the Bible?

The reliability of the Bible is based upon the following evidence.

1. Archeological evidence.

The Bible mentions hundreds of cities, structures and other archeological facts. Never in the thousands of years that people have been digging, has anything been found that contradicts any biblical account. *It may be stated categorically that no archeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference.*¹

2. Historical evidence.

Not one of the hundreds of historical events mentioned in the Bible is refuted by any of the historians of the New Testament era. Even secular historians of the time of Christ do not refute Biblical history. For instance, Josephus, a Jewish historian of the time of Jesus, wrote a lengthy historical treatise that corroborates many New Testaments events.

3. Textual evidence.

One of the most powerful tests for determining the reliability of a modern text is to compare it with an ancient copy of the same text. The higher the degree of agreement between ancient and modern texts the greater the reliability.

There was relatively little question about the authenticity of the Old Testament text until the middle of the twenty century. The accuracy of our modern Old Testament text was confirmed by a remarkable discovery in 1947 by a shepherd boy trying to scare some of his goats out of a small cave. When he threw a pebble into the darkness he heard the sound of the pebble hitting something brittle. When he went into the cave to investigate, he found several clay jars that contained one of the most important archeological discoveries of all time, the Dead Sea Scrolls.

The Dead Sea Scrolls comprise over 200 individual scrolls, including the entire book of Isaiah and portions from all the other Old Testament books except Esther. The scrolls date to about 70 A.D. Before this time the most recent Old Testament texts dated to around 1100 A.D. The Dead Sea Scrolls bridged a gap of over a thousand years. Comparison of the texts of the Dead Sea Scrolls with our modern texts did not reveal any errors in doctrine. The amazingly high degree of agreement between our modern texts and the text of the Dead Sea Scrolls proved that the transmission of the text for that missing millennia was accurate. Therefore our modern Old Testament text is indeed, reliable.

¹ Don Stewart, *You Be the Judge*, Here's Life Press, p. 48.

The New Testament text was originally written during the first century A.D. Our most modern manuscripts date to around 120 A.D. The interval period between the original manuscripts and the first generation copies of the New Testament texts (which we possess) is so small as to be considered inconsequential by experts in the field of textual criticism. *Sir Frederic Kenyon, who was the director at the British Museum and second to none in authority and issuing statements about manuscripts concludes, "The interval...between the dates of original composition and the earliest extant evidence becomes so small as to be in fact negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed. Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established."*² The gap between the original writings of the New Testament and the texts we possess is so small as to be considered extraneous.

Additionally, there are over 5,300 early Greek manuscripts of the New Testament in existence today. The agreement of these texts with each other (in addition the small gap between them and the original texts) also supports the conclusion that our modern New Testament text is indeed accurate and therefore reliable and trustworthy. *"There is no body of ancient literature in the world which enjoys such a wealth of good textual attestation as the New Testament."*³

4. Internal evidence.

The Bible was written over a period of 1400 years in three languages (Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic) by 40 authors on 3 continents yet does not contain any errors in doctrine. This is amazing when one considers the unity of the writings. Many of the authors were not contemporaries of each other, had no overriding means or incentive to agree with each other and did not even speak the same language. In spite of these factors the Bible completely agrees with itself. *"The Bible is a marvelous unified whole. There are no contradictions or inconsistencies within its pages....It quickly becomes apparent that no human being(s) could have orchestrated the harmony of the teachings of the Scripture. The divine authorship of the Bible is the only answer."*⁴

It is also remarkable when one considers the nature of the writings. No where would one expect to find a document that is so self condemning, so painfully honest and so unique in story line. Any human attempt to gather this number of writers under these conditions would result in a text that contradicts itself to the extent it would be laughable and not worth reading, certainly not believable. However, the Bible agrees with itself. Testimony to its divine authorship. *"No where*

² Josh McDowell, *More Than a Carpenter*, Living Books Publisher, p. 48.

³ F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, May 2003.

⁴ Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, Moody Press, Chicago, Ill. Page 155

*does Scripture in one place declare erroneous what it gives in another place, and this holds true for even the smallest details.”*⁵

Ask three people to each write the name, birthplace and occupation of an imaginary person on a separate piece of paper. Then share the answers. They will not all agree. More than likely they will all disagree. Despite the three contemporaries being in the same room at the same time using the same language they disagree. The bible has complete unity about all it speaks of yet was written by 40 people, over 1,4000 years on three continents in three languages.

5. Prophetic evidence.

Much of the Bible is predictive in nature. One of the strongest reasons for accepting the reliability and inspiration of the Bible is the fulfillment of predictive prophecy. Not one prediction in the Scriptures has ever proven to be false. God's ability to *make known the end from the beginning* (Isaiah 46:10) is one of the strongest pieces of evidence supporting the reliability of the Bible. *Only I can tell you what is going to happen even before it happens. Everything I plan will come to pass, for I do whatever I wish. (Isaiah 46:10 NLT)*

There are over 300 predictions about Messiah in the Old Testament. Jesus Christ has fulfilled over 100 to date. The rest will be fulfilled in the coming ages. These predictions were all made between 1,400 years and 400 years before his birth. Many of them center on issues that he had no control over. Events such as the place, lineage and nature of his birth (Genesis 22:18, Micah 5:2, Isaiah 7:14), the nature, means and details of his death (Isaiah 53) and the fact of his resurrection, (Psalm 16:10).

The chance of Jesus fulfilling just eight prophecies of the Old Testament is one in 10^{17} . This is illustrated by taking 100,000,000,000,000,000 silver dollars and laying them on the state of Texas. They would cover the entire state two feet deep. Now, mark one of these silver dollars and stir up the whole mass all over the state. Blindfold a man and have him pick just one dollar out of the entire pile. The chances of him getting the marked silver dollar the first time is the same as that of the prophets writing the Messianic prophecies and having just **eight** of them come true in one man. The chance that Jesus could fulfill 48 prophecies is one in 10^{157} . By comparison, the estimated number of electrons in the entire known universe is about 10^{79} .⁶ Mathematically speaking, anything that extends beyond 10^{50} is considered to be impossible.

⁵ Rene Pache, *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture*, Moody Press, 1980. p. 122.

⁶ McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, Thomas Nelson Pub., 1993, p. 167.