

Foundation Study 12: The Reliability of the Bible

Can We Trust the Bible?

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

- 1. Archeological evidence.** The Bible mentions hundreds of cities, structures, and other archeological facts yet, “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 contest biblical history. For instance, Josephus, a Jewish historian of the time of Jesus, wrote a lengthy historical treatise that corroborates many New Testament events.²
- 3. Textual evidence.** One of the most powerful tests for determining the reliability of any 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 a relatively little question about the authenticity of the Old Testament text until the middle of the twentieth century. The accuracy of the modern Old Testament text was confirmed by a remarkable discovery in 1947 by a shepherd boy trying to scare his goats out of a small cave. When he threw a pebble into the darkness, he heard the sound of the pebble hit 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.

¹ Don Stewart, *You Be the Judge* (San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life Press, 1983), 48.

² G.J. Goldberg, The Flavius Josephus Home Page, accessed October 17, 2018, <http://www.josephus.org>.

The Dead Sea Scrolls comprise over two hundred individual scrolls. These include the entire book of Isaiah and portions from all but one (Esther) of the Old Testament books. The scrolls date to about AD 70. Before this time, the most recent Old Testament texts dated to around AD 1100. The Dead Sea Scrolls bridged a gap of over a thousand years. Comparison of the texts of the Dead Sea Scrolls with the oldest existent texts did not reveal any errors in doctrine. The amazingly high degree of agreement between those texts and the text of the Dead Sea Scrolls, proved that the transmission of the text for the missing millennia was accurate! Therefore, the modern Old Testament text is indeed, reliable.

The original New Testament text was written during the first century. The most modern manuscripts date to around AD 120. The interval between the original manuscripts and the first-generation copies of the New Testament texts (the ones that we possess) is so small as to be considered inconsequential by experts in the field of textual criticism. Sir Frederic Kenyon, director at the British Museum and second to none in authority and issuing statements about manuscripts, concluded, "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."³

Additionally, there are over 5,300 early Greek manuscripts of the New Testament in existence today. The agreement of these texts with one another (and 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. F. F. Bruce says, "There is no body of ancient literature in the world which enjoys such a wealth of good textual attestation as the New Testament."⁴

³ Josh McDowell, *More than a Carpenter* (Carol Stream, IL: Living Books, 1986), 48.

⁴ F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003).

4. Internal evidence. The Bible was written over a period of 1,400 years in three languages (Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic) by forty authors on three continents yet, does not contain any errors in doctrine. This is amazing when one considers that many of the authors were not contemporaries of one another, had no overriding means or incentive to agree with one another, and did not even speak the same language. In spite of these factors, the Bible 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.”⁵ “To account for such an amazing book with its continuity of development on natural means would demand a greater miracle than inspiration itself.”⁶

It is also remarkable when one considers the nature of the writings. Nowhere would one expect to find a document that is so self-condemning, so painfully honest, and so unique in storyline. Any human attempt to gather this number of writers under these conditions would result in a text that contradicted itself to the extent it would be laughable and not worth reading, certainly not believable. However, the Bible is in complete agreement with itself, giving testimony to its divine authorship: “No-where does Scripture in one place declare erroneous what it gives in another place, and this holds true for even the smallest details.”⁷

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 is one of the strongest pieces of evidence supporting the reliability of the Bible.

⁵ Enns, *Moody Handbook*, 155.

⁶ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Major Bible Themes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976), 12, Kindle.

⁷ Rene Pache, *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1980), 122.

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)

There are hundreds of predictions about the Messiah in the Old Testament. Jesus Christ has fulfilled over a hundred 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).

Jesus fulfilled over a hundred Old Testament Messianic prophecies; however, the chances that any one person could fulfill even forty-eight is 1 in 10^{157} . By comparison, the estimated number of electrons in the entire known universe is about 10^{79} .⁸ “Accidental fulfillment of these prophecies is simply beyond the realm of possibility.”⁹

Summary

The Bible is incredibly evidential. The Christian faith is not a blind leap into nothingness. It incorporates reason, requires logic and encourages thoughtfulness. It’s a belief system that stands the test of any objection or challenge. It welcomes tough inquiries and invites hard questions. The number of verifiable facts regarding the Bible are overwhelming. They prompt a response, or as Josh McDowell says; it is “evidence that demands a verdict.”¹⁰

⁸ Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 2017), 167.

⁹ David Reagan, “Applying the Science of Probability to the Scriptures, Do Statistics Prove the Bible’s Supernatural Origin?” Lamb & Lion Ministries, accessed January 12, 2018, <http://christinprophecy.org/articles/applying-the-science-of-probability-to-the-scriptures>.

¹⁰ McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict: Life-Changing Truth for a Skeptical World*, (Nashville, TN, Thomas Nelson, 2017), cover.