

Can I Trust My Bible?

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Introduction:

A. The Bible, the written word of God, is the basis of our faith & how we live our lives!

1. It is by hearing the word of God that our faith is established (**Rom. 10:17**)
2. Think about what all the Bible means to us! (Song: Give Me The Bible)
3. Since we do not possess any of the original documents, sometimes we ask ourselves?
 - a. How do I know that the Bible is actually from God? If it is, how do I know that is exactly what God intends for me to have and live by?
 - b. How do I know that the things it teaches and claims are really true and accurate?
 - c. What is it that truly distinguishes the Bible from other books? Especially those books which people claim are from God?

B. It is crucial that Christians have a firm and deep rooted in the fact that the Bible is from God, is accurate, and is complete!

1. We have an inherit obligation and urgent need to be able to give a defense for the hope that is in us! (**I Pet. 3:15**) → Where do we learn of this hope and how to obtain it?
2. When your kids ask, "Why do you believe in the Bible?" it is not good enough to simply answer, "It's from God" → They see through that to your lack of foundation!
3. If not now, at some time you will have questions about the Bible and how we got it

I. The Bible Stands As Its Own Witness!

A. The unique nature of the Bible stands as a witness to its origin:

1. Even with its great diversity in writing, perfect unity is maintained throughout the Bible:
 - a. It was written over a period of about 1500 years by some 40 different individuals from different parts of the known world and with different backgrounds!
 - b. Even in controversial subjects, the writers don't disagree or teach contrary truths!
 - c. Other books (i.e. The Book of Mormon and Koran) have a great amount of contradictions and errors throughout them! They've been changed often!
2. Over those 1500 years those 40 people recorded many prophecies, all of which were fulfilled! As opposed to some who claim this ability, they never got it wrong!
3. The way the nature of its teachings and characters sets it apart:
 - a. Sin is always condemned and righteousness is always commanded
 - b. It deals with the changing of the inner man – Not just the outer man
 - c. Although ancient, its teachings are still relevant and shaping lives today
 - d. It does not hold back when discussing the weaknesses of its main characters
 - e. What man would have ever invented Jesus the way the Bible portrays Him?
4. The Bible maintains one consistent theme: God's Plan For Redeeming Man
 - a. From Genesis to Revelation you can read & watch this plan unfold (**Is. 46:9-10**)
 - b. Its about God restoring back to man the glory man lost when he first sinned!
 - c. Some have said that the Bible is History: The theme is His-Story → Jesus is coming, Jesus is here, and Jesus is coming back
5. As man makes discoveries he affirms that what the Bible says is accurate!
 - a. It harmonizes w/every scientific fact! Even those unknown at the time of its writing!
 - 1) Men didn't know the earth was round, water cycles, and paths in the sea, yet the Bible writers speak of these! How'd they know?
 - 2) Makes me wonder what we can still discover by reading God's word!
 - b. Things only found in the Bible are affirmed as archaeologists discover remains!
 - c. Archaeologists have used the Bible as a "treasure map" to discover ancient cities!

B. The Bible stands as its own witness in that it claims inspiration!

1. Paul based our response to God's word based upon its inspiration: (**2 Tim. 3:16-17**)

- a. Inspiration: “Supernatural influence exerted on the sacred writers by the Spirit of God, by virtue of which their writings are given Divine trustworthiness”
- b. More more literally the word means: “God Breathed” → Breathed out by God
- c. Paul makes the claim that what the Old Testament writers wrote down were actually the words of God → Thus they carry divine authority behind them!
2. These didn’t originate with man, but they spoke as moved by the H.S. (**2 Pet 1:19-21**)
 - a. Peter was wanting to emphasize that they had fallen prey to “cunningly devised fables” but they were witnesses to Jesus Christ and had the word confirmed
 - b. Peter, the rest of the apostles, and those men of God of old did not spoke of their own will and volition, but rather spoke under the direction of God!
3. The Bible makes the claim for itself that its words are far greater than those of Greek and Roman mythology and far greater than the words and ideas of mere man!

C. The Bible stands as its own witness in that it will never fade away!

1. The Bible testifies to the fact that the words of God will always exist!
 - a. Jesus promised that His words would never pass away! (**Mark 13:31**)
 - b. While men’s physical existence fades like the grass and the flower, God’s word will endure forever! (**I Peter 1:22-25**)
 - c. **Illustration**: Poem – The Anvil
2. If God has given us by inspiration His will, surely He has the power to preserve it and would see to it that His word was preserved!
 - a. **Illustration**: God promises of Christ’s coming – He worked through men and events in history in order to bring it about – His hand is clearly seen!
 - b. If God did this with the Christ’s lineage, it certainly would not be past Him to use men and events to make sure that His word was preserved as well!

II. The Reliability & Preservation Of The Old Covenant Scriptures:

A. The Old Testament scriptures were preserved through the meticulous work of scribes:

1. Since the original texts of the Old Testament writers would not last forever there arose a great need for scribes among God’s people: (**Ezra 7:6**)
 - a. They were specially trained in the art of writing, they were specialists in the law, and they were given the responsibility of guarding the text of God’s word!
 - b. They took their job seriously! They understood the implications of getting it right!
 - c. A tiring job! Lightfoot says, “*One scribe tells of completing his manuscript ‘with great sweat and toil.’ Others just exclaim ‘The end of the book – thanks be to God.’*” (pg. 31)
2. As scribes copied the originals and then the copies of the originals and so, great care was given to make sure that they were completely accurate!
 - a. Even if they felt a letter was too small or too large they still copied it exactly
 - b. If a scribe found an extra letter in a word he would not change its spelling
 - c. The scribes refused to alter the text – When they felt something needing fixed they simply made a note above the text but would not change the text itself!
3. The scribes had a close relationship with the copies of God’s word, the Jewish leaders, and the people → They rose to a place of prominence among the Jews! (**i.e. Luke 23:10**)
 - a. Because of their relationship with God’s were they were often involved in religious discussions and decisions – Who’d know what the law said better?
 - b. When copies of God’s word were discovered, it was the scribes who were called
 - c. The scribes were present when God’s word was read and discussed publicly
 - d. When important events took place, scribes were called to come and record them
4. **Lightfoot**: “*From the Jewish standpoint, any manuscript that had been carefully copied and carefully checked with an authentic exemplar was as accurate as any other copy.*” (Pg. 130)

B. Eventually the scribes put the books written by the inspired men of the Old Covenant together to form “The Holy Scriptures,” but how do we know they got it right?

1. Sometimes you will hear people refer to what is called the “Canon of Scripture”
 - a. Its basic meaning is “reed” → We use the English word “Cane”

- b. A reed was used in ancient times a measuring rod – Canon came to mean a standard or rule and eventually was used to refer to a list or index
 - c. When applied to the Bible it simple means the books that are accepted as scripture
- 2. During the time of Jesus the canon of the Old Covenant had already been established:
 - a. It's clear from the way Jesus and His apostles spoke of them that they had already been established (**John 7:38; Matt. 21:42; Rom. 1:2; 2 Tim. 3:15**)
 - b. The Old Testament had been completed 400 years before Christ and by the 1st Century they had been “canonized” – Jesus & His apostles endorsed this!
- 3. Jesus gives witness to the scope of what Old Testament books He recognized when He spoke of their categories: Law of Moses, Prophets, & the Psalms (**Luke 24:44**)
 - ➔ The Hebrew Scriptures were divided that way: Law, Prophets, & the Writings
- 4. Jesus further speaks of their extent: (**Matthew 23:35**)
 - a. The blood of Abel is recorded shed in Genesis 4 and Zechariah in 2 Chronicles 24
 - b. At first glance it would seem Jesus is excluding much of the Old Testament; however, the Jewish order had Chronicles placed at the end!
- 5. Josephus, a first century Jewish historian, shows which books were recognized then:
 - a. He tells that the number of books having divine authority in the OT is 22
 - b. First and seconds are grouped as one Judges and Ruth are placed together and Jeremiah with Lamentations – The minor prophets were all one book.
 - c. Their 22 books were completely identical to the 39 books that we study from today!
 - d. He also contends that the time be limited from Moses to Artaxerxes (420 BC)
- 6. Throughout the years ancient scrolls have been discovered which contained bits and pieces of the O.T. text confirming these books:
 - a. The Dead Sea Scrolls, which predate the life of Christ, are the most popular today
 - b. These scrolls and others that have been discovered affirm the O.T. as we know it!

C. Someone might ask, “But what about the books of the Apocrypha?”

- 1. These books are those that you might find in a Catholic Bible but not in any others:
 - a. Esdras, Maccabees, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, Religious Romance, Tobit, Judith, Baruch, Epistle of Jeremiah, Additions to Esther, Song of Three Young Men, Susanna, Bel and the Dragon, Prayer of Manasseh
 - b. These books were never recognized by the Jews as God given scripture!
- 2. While Jesus and the other N.T. writers quote from virtually all of the Old Testament, they never recognize the existence of the Apocrypha or quote from them!
- 3. **Quote:** Lightfoot says, “*These books do not evidence intrinsic qualities of inspiration. Great portions of these books are obviously legendary and fictitious. Often they contain historical, chronological, and geographical errors.*” (How We Got The Bible pg. 168)
- 4. Finally, these books were written during the time between the Old and New Testaments!
 - a. During these 400 years we have what is often termed “The 400 Years of Silence” where there was no recorded communication between God and man!
 - b. Note: (**Amos 8:11**) ➔ Anything written during this “famine of hearing the words of the Lord” must be rejected as inspired scripture!
- 5. While they do have historical value they have no place alongside God’s inspired word!

III. The Reliability & Preservation Of The New Testament Scriptures:

A. The Need For The Creation Of Manuscripts:

- 1. Initially the apostles letters were read in the public assemblies accompanied by eye witness accounts and oral teaching: (**Col. 4:17**)
 - a. It would not be long though before those apostles and eye witnesses would die off
 - b. There arose a need for written accounts that could be read and taught long after those eye witnesses were gone, thus we have the gospels (**John 20:30-31**)
- 2. Their appreciation of their letters and their recognition of Heaven’s authority backing them prompted the 1st Century Christians and those later to make copies of them:
 - a. Manuscripts are word for word copies of the originals in the original tongue – Greek
 - b. It seems to be nothing short of the providence of God that the NT was originally

- written in Koine Greek – a language known throughout the known world!
- c. This language soon became a dead language (no longer used), thus God's revelation would remain in a fixed and unchangeable form! (Unlike our language where word's meanings can change – such is “gay”)
 3. Like with the Hebrew O.T. texts, none of the original NT texts have been discovered

B. If none of the signed originals still exist today one might wonder how we have come to possess our New Testaments today: The Answer Is In The Ancient Manuscripts!

1. While we don't have the original copies we do have a multitude of manuscripts!
 - a. There are in excess of 5,300 discovered manuscripts of the New Testament!
 - Note: Many secular writings of that day are accepted as genuine and accurate while only having a few manuscripts available!
 - b. The manuscripts of God's word date as early as 125 AD!
 - 1) This puts them only 30-60 years after the completion of God's word!
 - 2) Note: There's a gap of over 900 years for the accepted secular writings
2. Of the 5000+ manuscripts, three are recognized as being the best and most important:
 - a. **The Vatican Manuscript (350 AD)**: Considered by many to be the most valuable
 - 1) Originally contained the entire Bible written from beginning to end in Greek
 - 2) It's now missing the first half of Genesis and Hebrews 9 to the end, the letters to Timothy, Titus, and Revelation
 - 3) The N.T. texts today in the original Greek rely greatly upon this manuscript
 - b. **The Sinaitic Manuscript (350 AD)**:
 - 1) This manuscript was discovered at a monestary on Mt Sinai in 1859
 - 2) It is the oldest complete copy of the New Testament that is known today
 - c. **The Alexandrian Manuscript (400's AD)**:
 - 1) It has 1st and part of 2nd Clement added at the end of the NT – These are copies of sermons from the second century (Church Fathers)
 - 2) Only 10 leaves are absent from its OT but much from the new has been lost
3. As more manuscripts have been discovered with time its interesting to note that their discovery have not caused any need to alter what we have as God's word!

C. Restoring With Accuracy And Completeness The Original New Testament Text:

1. The Greek copies we have of the New Testament are actually “restored” text:
 - a. It's where people have take all of the pieces, the manuscripts, and put them back together to create a copy of the original → The older manuscripts are best
 - b. Two options: Select one manuscript and go solely by it or compare and bring together many of the very best manuscripts to set the standard text
 - c. The second has always been used in restoring the NT in its original language
 - d. Our versions (the good ones!!!) are translations of the restored Greek NT text
2. Since the original words were inspired and not the activity of the scribes, how do we handle the variations and errors found in the manuscripts?
 - a. What if you were told there were over 200,000 errors in the NT text?
 - 1) This is arrived at by adding up all the variations in all known manuscripts
 - 2) If one slight variant appeared in 4,000 manuscripts this would amount to 4,000 errors! This is how you can quickly arrive at 200,000 errors
 - b. “If the large number of manuscripts increases the total of variations, at the same time it supplies the means of checking them” (Lightfoot pg. 96)
 - c. Many of these variations are simple oversights or copying mistakes by the scribes and make no difference whatsoever on the purity of the text
3. “Textual Criticism” deals with studying and deciphering the differences in manuscripts:
 - a. When a difference was observed, the more difficult reading is preferred since scribes sometimes would simplify the text he was copying
 - b. The quality is preferred over the quantity → If newer manuscripts differed from the earlier ones, newer readings would be rejected (more copied... more errors)
 - c. In parallel texts, like with the gospels, different readings would be preferred since

- each gospel approaches the life of Christ from a different angle
4. Since the different manuscripts sometimes were missing some books and even had others appended at the end, how do we know which ones are inspired scripture?
 - a. Just like with the Old Testament, there are apocryphal books that some want to add in with the inspired NT books → Which belong?
 - b. The apocryphal books do not possess the character of inspiration as the others do
 - c. *“Anyone who has doubts about the New Testament canon should take the time to read of of the New Testament apocrypha”* (Lightfoot pg. 171)
 - 1) Infancy story of Thomas: When a child bumps his shoulder, Jesus strikes him dead
 - 2) Gospel Of Peter: Three men come out of Jesus’ tomb with a cross following them; the head of two of them reaches to heaven, the head of the other overpasses the heavens
 - 3) Protevangelium of James: Mary is brought up in the temple, dedicated as a virgin from the age of three
 - 4) Acts of John: John, on finding bedbugs in his bed at an inn, commands the bugs to leave and behave themselves
 - 5) Acts of Paul: Paul baptizes a lion, who later spares him from death in the amphitheater at Ephesus
 5. Those responsible for reconstructing it used many different sources in their reconstruction and took great care in making sure they got it right!

Conclusion: “The grass withers and the flower fades away, but the word of the Lord abides forever.” (I Peter 1:24-25). I can trust in God’s word because it has been completely and accurately preserved!