

THE BIBLE: CAN YOU TRUST IT?

Why do you believe that the Bible is the Word of God?

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INTRODUCTION TO BIBLICAL INERRANCY RELIABILITY OF THE BIBLE

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INTRODUCTION TO BIBLICAL INERRANCY

What would it take to convince you that the Bible is truly the Word of God? I.e. that it is inspired. At least two conditions must be met:

1) Historically and Textually Accurate. It must be accurate in a historical sense. (How can we trust it when it speaks of spiritual things if it is wrong when it speaks of historical things?). Here, we're really asking two questions:

- a. Is our Bible today an accurate copy of what was originally written? (Do we have what they wrote?)
- b. Is there reason to believe that what they wrote actually happened? (Were they credible witnesses?)

2) Supernatural Content and Proofs. It must be more than an accurate history book. It must have supernatural content and proofs rooted and verified in history. (e.g. Messianic Prophecies and the Resurrection).

BIBLICAL INERRANCY: HOW RELIABLE IS THE BIBLE?

More than any other religion, Christianity is based upon a book. It is also true that Christianity is based upon a relationship with a Person – namely Jesus Christ – but the primary means by which we come to know this Person is through His written word. **After accepting Christ, the most important decision you will make is concerning the inerrancy of scripture. If you are going to grow in the faith then you must base your worldview on the scriptures and not through your limited experience. In large measure, this is what living by faith means.** The value then of the bible to the growing disciple of Christ cannot be overestimated. As Deut. 32:47 says, "They are not just idle words for you, *they are your life.*" One of the key tenants of scripture is that it is the word of God; that though written through the hands of men, it is actually God's words communicated to us i.e. it is *inspired*.

CONSIDER: The bible is not just one book, but **66 books** written over a **1500 year** time span, on **three continents** (Europe, Asia, and Africa), in **three different languages** (Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic), through the hands of at least **40 authors of various backgrounds** (Kings, prophets, fishermen, shepherds, tax collectors, poets, statesmen, military leaders, and more) and under very **different climates** (palaces, dungeons, islands, hillsides, battlefields, and in times of poverty and plenty). Yet, the bible fits together into one consistent story. You can't understand the New Testament without the background of the Old Testament and visa versa. The Old Testament speaks of the coming Messiah and the New Testament shows the Messiah to be Jesus Christ. There is no other book like it. How does it all fit together so well? Because it is *inspired* i.e. it is really the work of the Holy Spirit.

One of the hallmarks of the inspiration of scripture is that it is *inerrant*. **Simply put, that in the original manuscripts the Bible always tells the truth and that it tells the truth in everything that it talks about.**

What will you decide? Is God's word inerrant or not? If you decide (as many do) that it is not, then your faith will be mediocre at best. Impotence of ministry and pain as you seek to answer life's questions will plague you forever. And they will remain unanswered for you have no standard of reference. **Your view of scripture is a reflection of your view of God.** If you have a small fallible view of scripture, you will have a small view of God and your faith will be feeble. On the other hand, if you find scripture to

be inerrant and settle the question in your mind, you will be greatly rewarded. Your faith will grow along with your view of God. That is my prayer for you: that you will have a big view of scripture and therefore a big view of God. I have some good news for you! No one is asking you to accept the inerrancy of the Word based on blind faith. Investigate! Question! Seek! Knock! Matt. 7:7-8 "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened." It's the truth and it will stand your questioning. After 2000 years, you are not going to come up with the question that will bring the Christian faith down! Look into the overwhelming evidence for the authenticity of scripture and the evidence for its inspiration. **No book ever written has the sheer mass of evidence to support its claims as does the Bible.** Let's look at just a few of these evidences.

How can we be sure that the Bible we have in our hands is anything like what was originally written? An honest skeptic may sincerely ask, "It has been copied over and over, isn't it riddled with errors? Why do you believe that the Bible is the very word of God? How can your heart accept what your mind rejects?" How would *you* answer?

Military historian C. Sanders lists and explains the "tests" that may be used to determine if an ancient writing is historically accurate. These are the bibliographical, internal and external evidence tests. What are these tests and what happens when we apply these tests to the Bible? How does the Bible compare with other ancient literature?

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL EVIDENCE: This is testing how well the text was copied and transmitted from the original to us today. It also examines how long a time interval exists between the original writing and the earliest copies and how many ancient copies there are.

Remember that the Bible was originally written before the days of Xerox machines and printing presses and even before the existence of paper! The earliest copies were written on papyrus which was made from reeds. This stuff disintegrated over time and therefore the scriptures had to be copied over and over. Many of these copies or "manuscripts" have been found. How do they compare with what we have today? How long after the original writing were these copies made?

New Testament

There are now more than 5,300 known Greek manuscripts of the N.T. with over 10,000 Latin Vulgate (early Latin Bibles) and at least 9,300 early versions. Put them all together and we have more than 24,000 ancient copies of at least portions of the N.T. in existence. *No other ancient work comes even close to this degree of manuscript evidence.* The second best showing of any ancient work is Homer's Iliad with only 643 copies that still survive. Compare:

Author/Work	When Written	Earliest Copy	Time Span	# Copies
Caesar	100-44 B.C.	900 A.D.	1,000 yrs	10
Plato <i>Tetralogies</i>	427-347 B.C.	900 A.D.	1,200 yrs	7
Tacitus	100 A.D.	1100 A.D.	1,000 yrs	20
Pliny the Younger	61-113 A.D.	850 A.D.	750 yrs	7
Thucydides	460-400 B.C.	900 A.D.	1,300 yrs	8
Suetonius	75-160 A.D.	950 A.D.	800 yrs	8
Herodotus	480-425 B.C.	900 A.D.	1,300 yrs	8
Sophocles	496-406 B.C.	1000 A.D.	1,400 yrs	193
Catullus	54 B.C.	1550 A.D.	1,600 yrs	3
Euripides	480-406 B.C.	1100 A.D.	1,500 yrs	9
Demosthenes	383-322 B.C.	1100 A.D.	1,300 yrs	200
Aristotle	384-322 B.C.	1100 A.D.	1,400 yrs	49
Aristophanes	450-385 B.C.	900 A.D.	1,200 yrs	10
Homer <i>Iliad</i>	900 B.C.	400 B.C.*	500 yrs	643
New Testament	40-100 A.D.	125 A.D.**	25 yrs	> 24,000

* The earliest complete manuscript of Homer's Iliad dates from the 13th century.

** Portions of the N.T. have now been found that date *from within the first century*. Many scholars now believe that the N.T. scriptures were completed before 80 A.D.

Some of the oldest manuscripts that we have today include a papyrus fragment named **P52**: which includes a few verses of John 18 (31-34, 37-38) and dated around 110-125. Realize that this is only 20-30 years removed from the original. An even earlier manuscript is **P46 (the Chester Beatty Papyrus II)** containing all of Paul's epistles except the Pastorals, and has recently been dated *in the late first century*. Imagine, an entire collection of Paul's epistles only 20 or 30 years after he originally wrote them. Others include the **Oxyrhynchus Papyri** discovered in 1898 and containing 35 manuscripts containing portions of the N.T., the **Bodmer Papyri** purchased from an Egyptian dealer in the 1950's and 1960's. It consists of most of John, 1 and 2 Peter, Jude and most of Luke and dated c.175-200. In the last century alone over 100 papyrus manuscripts have been discovered.

In addition, Codexes (early books made from specially prepared animal skins) have been found that are not quite as ancient as the papyrus fragments, but even more complete. Some of the more noteworthy include: **Codex Sinaiticus**— discovered by Constantin von Tischendorf in St. Catherine's Monastery at the foot of Mt. Sinai and dating from A.D. 350. It includes the entire N.T.

Codex Vaticanus— present in the Vatican's library at least since 1481 but not allowed to be viewed until the middle 1800's. It dates from A.D. 325 and includes both the O.T. and the N.T. except the last part from Hebrews 9:15 to Revelation.

What does this tell us?

1. The time interval between the writing of the N.T. books and their copies is so short as to be negligible. This is important, since it puts to death the idea that the writings about Jesus were a gradually evolving "legend". Legends generally take time (e.g. Santa Claus vs. St. Nicholas) since if the claims are made too soon they will be quickly dispelled by eyewitnesses and known accounts.
2. No other ancient work has been so well represented in manuscript evidence as the N.T. We have more copies of the N.T. to examine than any other ancient work. Therefore, if there are changes in the text over time, we can find them.

So how does our N.T. compare with the original manuscripts?

First, it is interesting to see how other ancient manuscripts stack up. Homer's Iliad was also considered a "sacred" work and great pains were taken to keep it textually pure, yet the Iliad that we have today differs in at least 5% of its content with the oldest manuscripts. Likewise, scholars are convinced that they possess the true text of the major Greek and Roman writers, yet our knowledge of their writings is based on a mere handful of documents usually copied hundreds or even a thousand years after the original, making it impossible to tell for certain how accurately they compare to the original.

In contrast, the N.T. is incredibly reliable. Despite being copied over and over by hand and translated into the languages of the world far removed from the original Greek, there are fewer than 400 words that are in question besides trivial differences. *This equates to a text that is 98.33 to 99.5% pure and without doubt as to its textual accuracy.* Even of the relatively few words that are in question, none cause doubt on any passages of scripture that pertain to an article of faith or precept.

Phillip Schaff in *Comparison to the Greek New Testament and the English Version* states, "Not one of the variations altered an article of faith or a precept of duty which is not abundantly sustained by other and undoubted passages, or by the whole tenor of Scripture reading."

Geisler and Nix state, "only one-eighth of all the variants had any weight, as most of them are merely mechanical matters such as spelling or style. Of the whole then only about one-sixtieth rise above trivialities or can in any sense be called 'substantial variations.' Mathematically, this would compute to a text that is 98.33% pure."

Sir Frederick Kenyon (one of the great authorities of N.T. textual criticism) states, "No fundamental

doctrine of the Christian faith rests on a disputed reading...It cannot be too strongly asserted that in substance the text of the Bible is certain. The number of manuscripts of the N.T., of early translations from it, and of quotations from it in the oldest writers of the Church, is so large that it is practically certain that the true reading of every doubtful passage is preserved in some one or other of these ancient authorities. *This can be said of no other ancient book in the world.*"

Copyist Mistakes

This is not to say that there have not been *any* mistakes found in the copy of the Bible that we have today. For example in the KJV (which was not based on the most ancient manuscripts we have today), 2 Kings 8:26 gives the age of King Ahaziah as 22 whereas 2 Chronicles 22:2 says 42. The later number appears not to be correct since it would make him older than his father. This is apparently a copyist error, but it does not alter the inerrancy of the original. Several things should be noted about these apparent copyist errors:

- First, these are errors in the copies, not the originals.
- Second, they are minor errors (usually having to do with spelling of names and numbers) which do not effect *any* doctrine of the Christian faith.
- Third, these copyist errors are very few in number.
- Fourth, usually by the context or other portions of scripture we know which one is in error (as above).
- Fifth, no other ancient manuscript can even begin to be scrutinized as has the Bible because of its great textual evidence.

Finally, the concern in pointing out these trivial apparent errors is that they will plant seeds of doubt in your mind about the rest of scripture. Actually, they should do just the opposite since the rest of scripture *is* known and found to be completely accurate when compared to the vast number of ancient manuscripts. These trivial errors are it! 99% of the Bible is completely accurate and no foundational doctrine rests on a disputed passage. John 3:16 is the same; Rom. 8:1 is the same; Rom. 12:2 is the same; Rev. 3:20 is the same, etc!

Old Testament

The Hebrew O.T. was completed about 400 B.C. Until the recent (1947) discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls, the oldest complete manuscript of the O.T. was dated around A.D. 900. This created a time gap of some 1,300 years. Portions of the Dead Sea scrolls now date to before the time of Christ (100 - 200 B.C.) which places them extremely close to the original documents and every book of the O.T. except Esther has been found. Once again, the accuracy of the scripture is incredible. Noted authority Gleason Archer notes, "Even though the two copies of Isaiah discovered in Qumran Cave 1 near the Dead Sea were a thousand years older than any dated manuscripts previously known, they proved to be word for word identical with our standard Hebrew Bible in more than 95% of the text. The other 5% of variation consisted chiefly of obvious slips of the pen and variations in spelling...[like the English word "colour" instead of "color"] they do not affect the message of revelation in the slightest."

Geisler and Nix discuss the exactness of the Isaiah scroll (125 B.C.) compared with the next oldest manuscript of the text known prior to the discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls dating from A.D. 916 some 1,000 years later: "Of the 166 words in Is. 53, there are only 17 letters in question. Ten of these are simply a matter of spelling, which does not affect the sense. Four more letters are minor stylistic changes, such as conjunctions. The remaining three letters comprise the word "light" which is added in verse 11, and does not affect the meaning greatly. Furthermore, this word is found in the Septuagint and another of the Dead Sea scrolls. Thus, in one chapter of 166 words, there is only one word (three letters) in question after 1,000 years of transmission – and this word does not significantly change the meaning of the passage."

The overwhelming weight of evidence is clear: you can have complete confidence that the Bible we have today is a profoundly accurate text as handed down from generation to generation and conveys precisely the same words and meaning as the original documents. The surety that we have in this can be said of no other ancient work in the world.

Our Bible's Accuracy and Reliability are Unparalleled.

INTERNAL EVIDENCE: The bibliographical test has only determined that the text we have now was essentially what was originally recorded. What we have, is what they wrote. We still have to show that what was written was from credible sources and at least should be considered. Is it reasonable to believe them? Here we look at the text itself. What was written? Who wrote it? Were they in a position to know what they were talking about? Does the text contradict itself? Is it accurate and consistent?

Much of what we cover and study can be applied to the internal evidence test. But consider: The writers of the N.T. were eyewitnesses of the events or related the accounts under the direction of the eyewitnesses. This closeness to the events is an extremely powerful and effective means of certifying the accuracy of their story.

But how do we know they weren't lying?

- We have already seen that the New Testament accounts of Jesus were circulating within the lifetimes of those alive at the time of His life. These people could easily confirm or deny the accuracy of the accounts.
- They not only said, "Look, we saw this"; or "We heard that"; but in addition they turned the tables around and right in front of adverse critics said, "You also know about these things...You saw them; you yourselves know about it." One had better be careful when he says to his opposition, "You know this also," because if he isn't right in every detail, it will be shoved right back down his throat. (See Acts 2:22, Acts 26:24-28, Jesus used this Himself in John 18:20-21).

Acts 2:22 "Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, *as you yourselves know.*

Acts 26:24-26 At this point Festus interrupted Paul's defense. "You are out of your mind, Paul!" he shouted. "Your great learning is driving you insane." 25 "I am not insane, most excellent Festus," Paul replied. "What I am saying is true and reasonable. 26 *The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner.*

John 18:20 "I have spoken openly to the world," Jesus replied. "I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. *I said nothing in secret. 21 Why question me? Ask those who heard me. Surely they know what I said.*"

- Also, the writers of the N.T. are brutally honest. They record many incidents that mere inventors would have concealed: e.g. the competition of the disciples for high places in the Kingdom, their flight and cowardice after Jesus' arrest, Peter's denial, the unbelief of the disciples at first of Jesus' resurrection. The disciples are consistently portrayed as fairly dull and stubborn with little faith. Overall, the whole writing has the ring of authenticity – warts and all.
- They had nothing to gain and everything to lose by claiming what they did about Christ. First century Christianity was not a lucrative "gold mine" as it is today for some televangelists. By persisting in their claims all the New Testament writers suffered persecution and all but John were martyred.

Our Bible is Consistent.

EXTERNAL EVIDENCE: Are there references other than the Bible which substantiate its accuracy, reliability, and authenticity? Here we examine whether extrabiblical authors confirm or deny what was written in the Bible. The early church fathers of the first and second centuries (Polycarp, Eusebius, Iranaeus, Ignatius, Justin, Origen, and others) provide volumes on the historicity of the events in the N.T. But what about non-Christian authors?

Tacitus

The second century Roman historian Tacitus confirms that Christianity was founded by a man named Christus, whom he says was “put to death as a criminal by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea, in the reign of Tiberius.” Tacitus also described how Nero blamed “the persons commonly called Christians who were hated for their enormities” and were “punished by the most exquisite tortures.”

Lucian of Samosa

A second century satirist, he spoke scornfully of Christ as “the man crucified in Palestine because he introduced this new cult into the world.”

Pliny the Younger

Governor of Bithynia in Asia Minor (A.D. 112), Pliny was writing to the emperor Trajan seeking counsel as to how to treat the Christians. He explained that he had been killing both men and women, boys and girls. There were so many being put to death that he wondered if he should go on killing all of them or only certain ones.

Thallus

Thallus was one of the earliest non-Christian writers to mention Christ (A.D. 52). Only a fragment of his writing is known, but it explains away the darkness that occurred at the time of the death of Christ as an “eclipse”. Thus, we see that the darkness that fell upon the land at the time of Christ’s crucifixion was well known and required a naturalistic explanation from those non-believers who witnessed it. By the way, even contemporaries of Thallus rejected the eclipse hypothesis since an eclipse does not take place at the time of a full moon and Christ died during the Paschal full moon.

Josephus

Born in A.D. 37, Josephus is known as a premier Jewish historian and gives great insight into the history of Judaism. Josephus records the rise of Christianity and in a hotly contested text from a document dated from the second century he writes,

- “Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was the Christ, and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him; for he appeared before them alive again the third day; as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And the tribe of Christians so named from him are not extinct to this day.”
- The Arabic text of this passage reads: “At this time there was a man who was called Jesus. And his conduct was good and he was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. And those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion and that he was alive; accordingly, he was perhaps the Messiah concerning whom the prophets have recounted wonders.”

In fact, the Encyclopedia Britannica not only uses 20,000 words to describe Jesus, but concerning the testimony of the many independent secular accounts of Jesus of Nazareth, it records “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.”

Our Bible is Based Squarely on History.

ARCHEOLOGY: Over and over apparent “errors” in the Bible were found to be accurate as shown by archeological discoveries. Here are only a few examples:

Ebla Kingdom Proofs.

Tradition states that Moses is the author of the Pentateuch (the first 5 books of the Bible) which were written about 1,400 B.C. However, proponents of the “Documentary Hypothesis” claimed that this was impossible since 1,400 B.C. was a time prior to all knowledge of writing. In 1968, archeologists discovered the Ebla tablets in modern day Syria. Ebla was a city of 260,000 people at its height of power in 2,300 B.C. nearly 1,000 years *before* the time of Moses. Not only did they find writing, but since 1974, 17,000 tablets have been unearthed in Ebla.

Undaunted, the critics of the Bible claimed that though writing may have existed, the priestly code and laws recorded by Moses were far too developed to have been done by such a primitive people. However, some of the tablets discovered in Ebla were law codes which demonstrated elaborate judicial proceedings and case law. Many are similar to the Deuteronomy law code.

A more specific example of how the Ebla discoveries have supported the Bible relates to Genesis 14, which for years has been considered historically unreliable. The victory of Abraham over Chedolaomer and the Mesopotamian kings has been described as fictitious and the five cities of the plain (Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Zoar) as legendary. Yet the Ebla archives list all five cities of the plain and on one tablet the cities are listed in exactly the same sequence as Genesis 14.

Israel’s Origins

Genesis derives the origin of the Israelites from Mesopotamia which is just what archeological data show. Albright states that it is, “beyond reasonable doubt that Hebrew tradition was correct in tracing the Patriarchs directly back to the Balikh Valley in northwestern Mesopotamia.”

King David

For years, scholars considered David to be a myth since they do not believe the Bible unless it is confirmed by other sources i.e. ancient Philistine or Aramean records. Until recently, King Ahab was the earliest biblical character appearing in secular historical records. In the summer of 1993, archeologists discovered an ancient Aramean inscription at the biblical city of Dan in northern Israel referring to the “House of David”. The biblical account (1 Kings 15:16-22) describes how Israel and Judah were at war with one another and the king of Judah took gold and silver from the temple to bribe the Arameans to fight on his side. It worked. The Arameans agreed and fought against Israel and took the city of Dan. The inscription describes the Aramean victory over Israel and refers specifically to the king of Israel and the “House of David”.

One Language

According to scripture, “The whole earth was of one language and one speech” (Genesis 11:1) before the tower of Babel. Today, many philologists believe that all languages were derived from a common source.

Jericho’s Walls

During the excavation of Jericho (1930-1936) Garstang found something so startling that a statement of what was found was prepared and signed by himself and two other members of the team. What they found was that the ancient walls of Jericho had fallen *outwards* from the city and down flat, forming a ramp for the invading army. Garstang says, “there remains no doubt: the walls fell outwards so completely that the attackers would be able to clamor up and over their ruins into the city.” This is unusual because when a city is attacked its walls do not fall outwards, they fall inwards. Yet, in Joshua 6:20 we read “The wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city every man straight ahead, and they took the city.”

Furthermore, the Bible states that Joshua and his men did not steal the grain of the city, because God told them to destroy the city but not to loot it (Josh. 6:17). The Bible also describes how the city was burned after it was taken (Josh. 6:24). Interestingly, examination of the fossilized food supplies indicates that the city fell after a very short siege and that the invaders did not steal the food supplies. Instead, they scattered

the grain and burned it along with the city, an action that archeologist Bryant Woods calls “unique in the annals of Palestinian archeology.”

Examples of biblical accounts once thought erroneous but later confirmed by extra-biblical records:

Campaign into Israel by Pharaoh Shishak (1 Kings 14:25-26), recorded on the walls of the Temple of Amun in Thebes, Egypt.

Revolt of Moab against Israel (2 Kings 1:1; 3:4-27), recorded on the Mesha Inscription.

Fall of Samaria (2 Kings 17:3-6, 24; 18:9-11) to Sargon II, king of Assyria, as recorded on his palace walls.

Defeat of Ashdod by Sargon II (Isaiah 20:1), as recorded on his palace walls.

Campaign of the Assyrian king Sennacherib against Judah (2 Kings 18:13-16), as recorded on the Taylor Prism.

Siege of Lachish by Sennacherib (2 Kings 18:14, 17), as recorded on the Lachish reliefs.

Assassination of Sennacherib by his own sons (2 Kings 19:37), as recorded in the annals of his son Esarhaddon.

Fall of Nineveh as predicted by the prophets Nahum and Zephaniah (2:13-15), recorded on the Tablet of Nabopolassar.

Fall of Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon (2 Kings 24:10-14), as recorded in the Babylonian Chronicles.

Captivity of Jehoiachin, king of Judah, in Babylon (2 Kings 24:15-16), as recorded on the Babylonian Ration Records.

Fall of Babylon to the Medes and Persians (Daniel 5:30-31), as recorded on the Cyrus Cylinder.

Freeing of captives in Babylon by Cyrus the Great (Ezra 1:1-4; 6:3-4), as recorded on the Cyrus Cylinder.

The existence of Jesus Christ as recorded by Josephus, Suetonius, Thallus, Pliny the Younger, the Talmud, and Lucian.

Forcing Jews to leave Rome during the reign of Claudius (A.D. 41-54) (Acts 18:2), as recorded by Suetonius.

The **Hittites** were once thought to be a Biblical legend, until their capital and records were discovered at Bogazkoy, Turkey.

Many thought the Biblical references to **Solomon's wealth** were greatly exaggerated. Recovered records from the past show that wealth in antiquity was concentrated with the king and Solomon's prosperity was entirely feasible.

It was once claimed there was no Assyrian king named **Sargon** as recorded in Isaiah 20:1, because this name was not known in any other record. Then, Sargon's palace was discovered in Khorsabad, Iraq. The very event mentioned in Isaiah 20, his capture of Ashdod, was recorded on the palace walls. What is more, fragments of a stela memorializing the victory were found at Ashdod itself.

Another king who was in doubt was **Belshazzar**, king of Babylon, named in Daniel 5. The last king of Babylon was Nabonidus according to recorded history. Tablets were found showing that Belshazzar was Nabonidus' son who served as coregent in Babylon. Thus, Belshazzar could offer to make Daniel “third highest ruler in the kingdom” (Dan. 5:16) for reading the handwriting on the wall, the highest available position. Here we see the “eye-witness” nature of the Biblical record, as is so often brought out by the discoveries of archaeology.

Luke the Historian

At one time it was conceded that Luke missed the boat entirely in describing the events surrounding the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:1-3). Critics argued that there was no census, that Quirinius was not governor of Syria, and that everyone did not have to go back to their ancestral home. Later, archeological discoveries found that indeed the Romans did have a regular census every 14 years and that one occurred around the time of Jesus' birth, an inscription was found in Antioch showing that Quirinius was governor at this time, and a papyrus found in Egypt gives directions on performing the census including the return to their ancestral home.

Luke writes of a riot in Ephesus within a theater (*Ecclesia*) as Paul had a run in with the silversmiths whose living was making silver statues to Artemis (Acts 19:23). In fact, archeologists have found the theater (which could seat 25,000) that Luke speaks of and there were silver statues of Artemis to be placed there during a full session of the Ecclesia.

Luke states that a riot broke out in Jerusalem because Paul took a Gentile into the temple. The temple has been found and inscriptions around it read in Greek and Latin, "No foreigner may enter within the barrier which surrounds the temple and enclosure. Anyone doing so will be personally responsible for his own death."

Even certain words of Luke were thought to be inaccurate but again Luke was found to be right. Luke refers to Philippi as a "part" or "district" of Macedonia. He uses the Greek word *meris*. Scholars disagreed with his usage of this word until excavations found that the very word, *meris*, was used to describe this very district.

Luke was also not felt to be technically correct in using the word *praetors* in referring to the Philippian rulers. "Scholars" felt that two *duumvirs* would have ruled the city. However, as usual, Luke was right again. Findings now show that the term *praetor* was employed by the magistrates of a Roman colony.

Other N.T. Finds

For centuries, *The Pavement*, the court where Jesus was tried by Pilate and *The Pool of Bethesda* were known only in the New Testament. Excavations of the Old City of Jerusalem have now discovered these sites.

Ossuaries. Recently, three key ossuaries have been found that attest to N.T. accounts:

1) Critics used to doubt that Jesus was ever nailed to a cross, insisting that John's Gospel was indulging in fantasy rather than fact in claiming such. No longer! In 1968, at a suburb of northern Jerusalem, the ossuary of Yohanan ben Ha'galgol was discovered. While otherwise unknown, this man had been **crucified**, as the seven-inch iron spike still transfixing his heel bones offers mute testimony.

"Joseph, son of Caiaphas"



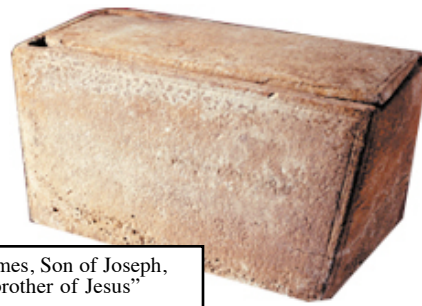
2) In November 1990, the bones of the first Biblical personality ever discovered came to light in another ossuary, which was magnificently carved with perfect fluting along the edges and two great whorls adorning its face. Clearly, this bone box must have been adorned for an important person. And, indeed, on the other side was his name, incised twice in Aramaic: Iosef bar-Caiapha, or "**Joseph, son of Caiaphas**," the high priest who indicted Jesus before Pontius Pilate on Good Friday, a major Biblical figure and another stunning discovery.

3) A stone burial box had come to light in Jerusalem that may have contained the bones of Jesus' half-brother James. An Aramaic inscription on the artifact reads: Ya'akov bar-Yosef akhui diYeshua, "**James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus**." After several years in court as the "forgery trial of the century" the case against the authenticity of the James ossuary has collapsed and it appears to be authentic. Was this the James of the Bible and half-brother of Jesus? The odds of this same sequence of names would be highly unlikely for any other reason. E.g. with only one exception, only the

father is usually listed along with the deceased. That Jesus is mentioned as his brother would be very unusual unless he was famous.

What Archeologists Say

Nelson Glueck, the renowned Jewish archeologist, wrote: “It may be stated categorically that no archeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference.”



William F. Albright states: “There can be no doubt that archeology has confirmed the substantial historicity of Old Testament tradition.” Elsewhere, he says, “The excessive skepticism shown toward the Bible by important historical schools of the 18th and 19th centuries, certain phases of which still appear periodically, has been progressively discredited. Discovery after discovery has established the accuracy of innumerable details, and has brought increased recognition to the value of the Bible as a source of history.”

Henry M. Morris observes, “It must be extremely significant that, in view of the great mass of corroborative evidence regarding the Biblical history of these periods, there exists today not one unquestionable find of archeology that proves the Bible to be in error at any point.

Archeology Confirms the Historical Accuracy of the Bible.

SURVEYING THE COMPETITION

It’s politically correct these days (especially on college campuses) to assert that “all religions lead to God”. It’s like climbing a mountain, we may all be going up a different path but in the end we’ll all end up at the top together. “Tolerance” has come to mean not that you disagree with someone yet respect them as a person, but that you now must endorse their belief system as equally valid. This way of thinking at first appears open minded and generous but is really a modern Western cultural bias. If you go to the Middle East, or Africa, or South America, and you try to make this kind of “feel good” claim about all religions they’ll just laugh at you, and rightly so because they understand the Law of Non-contradiction. They would understand that when you say “I believe that the Bible is the Word of God” that you are simultaneously saying that the Koran is *not*, the Bagavid Gita is *not*, the Book of Mormon is *not*. Why? Because they all make absolute truth claims. Jesus said, “I am THE way THE truth, and THE life. NO ONE comes to the Father except through me.” Muslims say, “There is no God but Allah and Mohamed is his prophet.” The Mormons believe that “As man now is God once was and as God now is man may become.” Logically, all these views could be wrong, but they can’t all be right. They’re mutually exclusive.

Sometimes you hear someone say that they have examined all the religions of the world and decided that religion X is true. Actually, that’s impossible. I suspect that what they did was examine *some* of the religions in the world and read *some* selections of *some* of their sacred writings and decided in favor of those that appealed most to them. I’m not going to claim that I have done the impossible – i.e. exhaustively studied all sacred writings in the world. But neither have I avoided looking at them either and I will hope to show that when it comes to trying to decide which if any can reasonably lay claim to being THE Word of God, there are really only a few left standing in the room.

First of all, the way you detect a counterfeit is to study the real thing. At the U.S. Mint you can watch millions of dollars rolling off the printing presses and there are people who are watching this endless stream of bills flying past them and every once in awhile they pull a sheet of bills off the conveyor and throw them in the trash. You know how they became so good at picking out counterfeits? They studied a perfect dollar bill intently. They didn’t try to memorize all the different counterfeits.

As we have already seen, the Bible has abundant evidence to support its claim as being the Word of God. The Bible has overwhelming manuscript and bibliographical evidence, internal and external evidences, and the confirmation of archeology is encyclopedic. I’m convinced of the absolute veracity of the Bible. I can

now apply the same tests to other scriptures that claim to be the Word of God and see how well they stand up.

Secondly, though the number of sacred writings is huge, you don't really have to read and study every one to decide if they are from God, i.e. literally the *vox dei* that the Bible claims. Why? *Because very few sacred writings actually claim to be the Word of God.* Many of the world's religions have sacred writings but their use varies within any given religion¹:

- To be chanted or recited
- To give instructions to a priesthood
- To provide illustrations in stories of the religion in question
- To be the object of worship or veneration in its own right

And there are other reasons as well. Let's take a very brief overview of the major sacred writings in the world just to give you an idea.

The Qur'an (Islam)

- The main teachings of the Qur'an are the unity of God, the Last judgment, and rules for the Islamic community.
- Textual integrity is probably good being a relatively recent (Muhammad A.D. 570-622) document. However, there is little opportunity to investigate this since Caliph Uthman, third in line as Muhammad's successor, gathered up and destroyed all versions he did not agree with. Examination of earliest manuscripts by those scholars outside of Islam is very restricted. Even so, some textual variations are known.
- There is no good reason to deny that the the Qu'ran reflects Muhammad's teachings, however, there is no good reason to believe that they are inspired either especially in comparison to the N.T. which has the corroboration of Jesus who authenticated His claim by the resurrection.

The Avesta (Zoroastrianism)

- A complex set of writings that arose over centuries in the history of Zoroastrianism. It contains prayers, recitations, and magic incantations.
- The oldest manuscripts come from about 1200 A.D. (Zoroaster lived in the 6th century B.C.) therefore impossible to test textual integrity.
- 75% of the original Avesta has been lost
- Avestan is an ancient language and much of it is uninterpretable
- The early writings espouse monotheism and righteousness similar to the O.T. Later writings become very speculative and bizarre.
- There is no reason to suggest inspiration.
- The "Paris Hilton" of sacred writings – famous for being famous. Followers actually do not adhere, read, or completely understand their sacred text.

The Adi Granth (Sikhism)

- Collection of hymns and poems
- The original is kept in the "Golden Temple" of Amritsar, India (good textual integrity)
- Object of veneration in its own right (it is literally put to bed with silk sheets at night)
- Contains beautiful poetry but does not claim to be divine inspiration

The Vedas (Hinduism – its earliest phase)

- There are 4 vedas which are a collection of hymns, ritual sayings, and magic formulas
- There are no ancient manuscripts to test textual integrity. However, the books specify no historical incidents so it really makes no difference.
- Hindus must accept the Vedas as inspired though they do not need to know what is in them, understand them, practice what they teach, or worship the gods referred to in them.
- The Vedas are polytheistic, focused on the sacrifices offered to its many gods and later on various forms of magic.
- This is the kind of religion specifically condemned in the Bible
- There is no reason to accept the Vedas as inspired

The Upanishads (Hinduism – middle phase)

- Devotional philosophical works to supplement the Vedas

¹ From "Why I am A Christian" Geisler and Hoffman eds. P191-201. Baker Books. 2001.

- Originals date around 500 B.C. but nothing was written down until 1656 therefore there is nothing to test textual integrity as nothing was written down until then.
- Mystical and philosophical in nature but a product of human creativity and no reason to think they are inspired.

The Bhagavad Gita (Hinduism – later phase)

- Part of a much larger work the Mahabharata which is a story about a struggle between two branches of a family. The Gita tells the story of the god Krishna, acting as a chariot driver, instructing the archer Arjuna that he can gain salvation by devoting himself to Krishna and performing the duties of his caste.

The Pali Canon (Buddhism – early Theravada stage)

- Also called the Tripitaka (three baskets) because it has three divisions: rules for Buddhist monks, teachings of the Buddha, and analysis of Buddhist teachings.
- Textual accuracy is lost. It has been added to over the centuries and oldest wood block versions are from the 13th century (first writings are from the 5th century B.C.)
- There is no real parallel with the Bible or claim for inspiration.

The Lotus Sutra (Buddhism – later Mahayana version)

- Later teachings of Buddha. Promotes universalism and the basis of beliefs of later Buddhism.
- This is a patchwork of texts added to over the centuries. Textual integrity is impossible to determine but since it does not claim inspiration, it makes no difference. It is virtually certain that it did not come from the Buddha himself as it claims however.
- Buddhism provides a smorgasbord of philosophical beliefs to suit anyone.
- Since the Lotus Sutra contains a clear historical falsehood, namely that it came from the Buddha himself, it clearly is not inspired.

The Daodejing (Taoism – Chinese popular religion)

- A short collection of sayings commending Daoist philosophy of *wu-wei* (“actionless action”). The idea is that performing as few deliberate actions as possible, the Way (dao) will manifest itself and provide virtue (de).
- Although a very philosophical text, it has become the major text for the Daoist religion which focuses on magic, alchemy, ancestor worship, and personal deities none of which is mentioned in the daodejing.
- Has good textual accuracy dating back to 200 B.C.
- Hard to consider this inspired when it professes a worldview in which gods have no role and whose religion does not practice its teachings.

The Analects/Conversations (Confucianism)

- Presents the teachings of Confucius of the 6th century B.C.
- When the Han dynasty came to power in 200 B.C., the Analects became the official dogma and Confucianism the official dogma of China.
- It is a manual on leading a virtuous and humanitarian life.
- The Analects have been the basis for Asian behavior and culture for more than 2 millenia.
- The Analects is not a religious book. There is no real mention of heaven, god, or the spiritual realm.
- Followers of Confucianism revered the Analects as coming from the master himself but did not see it as divine revelation and neither should we.

Japanese Writings: Kojiki, Nihongi, Amatsu Norito (Shintoism)

- Short books important for Shintoism the indigenous religion of Japan.
- It is a collection written down of Japanese oral traditions in 712 A.D.
- It is a collection of prayers and legitimizes Japanese culture especially the descent of the Emperor from the sun goddess.
- Members of Shintoism consider these writings as “sacred” but do not think of them as divinely inspired.

The Book of Mormon (Mormonism)

- First of 5 sources of divine revelation, the Book of Mormon describes Christ in the Americas and the early people’s of North America.
- First transcribed by founder Joseph Smith in the mid-1800’s it has still undergone over 5000 changes in the text making textual accuracy astonishingly poor despite such a recent document.

- Gives historical details including continent wide wars and cities and towns in N. America *none* of which have been corroborated by archeology or early American history.
- Most of the supposed “witnesses” that claimed to have seen the golden plates upon which Joseph Smith transcribed the Book of Mormon later recanted of their story.
- Curiously, the plates were written in “Reformed Egyptian” (unknown language at the time of Smith). However, after the Rosetta Stone was discovered and the Egyptian Language deciphered, Joseph Smith’s own copies of Egyptian hieroglyphics and his translation were compared and he was found to be completely in error.
- Whole passages of the King James Bible are at times quoted but the rest of the work is a clear fabrication. These clear fabrications make Mormonism a cult rather than a legitimate religion and the Book of Mormon is not inspired.

I want to emphasize here that I do not wish to convey disrespect for these writings or the people behind them. There is truth in many of the writings, beautiful poetry, and culturally they are priceless and historically interesting. However, my purpose here is to decide which, if any, can lay claim to not just human invention but Divine inspiration. As you can see from the above, very few even claim to be inspired. Realistically, I would say it comes down to three: The Qu’ran, the Book of Mormon, and the Bible. First, after more serious investigation which I will not go into here, their presentations of God are all extremely different and mutually exclusive. Therefore, logically they could all be wrong but they can’t all be right. The Qu’ran has questionable textual accuracy² and lacks any good reason to back up its claim as divine inspiration as the Bible does by Jesus’ fulfillment of Messianic prophecies and the resurrection. The Book of Mormon is woefully deficient in textual accuracy and clearly a fraud. As to Joseph Smith’s claims of receiving the golden plates from an angelic source, most of his own witnesses recanted of ever seeing the plates before they died. Again, there are no supernatural content or proofs to make one think of the Book of Mormon as divinely inspired.

CONCLUSION: THE BIBLE STANDS ALONE

What does all this prove? Does this *prove* that the Bible is the Word of God? Not yet. It does prove that the Bible is an ancient document that has been extremely well preserved and is textually, historically and archeologically accurate i.e. it fulfills the first of the two criteria (it is accurate in a historical sense) that are necessary to convince us that the Bible is indeed the Word of God. Among all ancient sacred writings, the Bible alone has the most evidence to support its claim of being inspired. Indeed, there are none to compare with the Bible – it has no peer.

To regard the Bible as unreliable is to discard *all* ancient literature for none can compare to the reliability of scripture. Apply the same tests and same degree of scrutiny to any other form of ancient literature or religious works and they will not stand up nearly as well as the Bible.

But don’t stop here. Remember the second evidence for divine inspiration: supernatural content and proofs. Look for yourselves into the evidence for the resurrection and messianic prophecy. The evidence is overwhelming. But this is only the beginning, once you decide that the Creator of the universe has spoken is there *anything* in life more important than reading what He said?

² See Chad VanDixhoorn, Truth Unchanged, Texts Unchanging? The Text of the Bible and the Text of the Quran: A Brief History. This is an unpublished document available online: <http://us.geocities.com/umaximov/chad.htm>

WE CAN TRUST IT!!!

The Anvil? God's Word.

Last eve I passed beside a blacksmith's door
And heard the anvil ring the vesper chime:
Then looking in, I saw upon the floor
Old hammers, worn with beating years of time.

"How many anvils have you had," said I,
"To wear and batter all these hammers so?"
"Just one," said he, and then, with twinkling eye,
"The anvil wears the hammers out, you know."

And so, thought I, the anvil of God's word,
For ages skeptic blows have beat upon;
Yet though the noise of falling blows was heard,
The anvil is unharmed...the hammer's gone.
— Author Unknown

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