

Is the Bible Reliable?

Using the same criteria by which we judge other historical works, not only is the Bible reliable, it is more reliable than any other comparable writings. Reliability is a question of truthfulness and accurate copying. Writings that are historically and factually correct and that have been faithfully preserved over time would be considered reliable. Higher levels of historical verification and better confidence in transmission make it easier to determine whether an ancient work is worthy of trust. By those measures, we can consider the Bible reliable.



ARCHAEOLOGY

As is true with any historical work, not every single detail in the Bible can be directly confirmed. The Bible cannot be called unreliable simply because it contains parts which cannot be confirmed or have not yet been confirmed. What's reasonable is to expect it to be accurate where it can be checked. This is the primary test of reliability, and here the Bible has a stellar track record. Not only have many of its historical details been confirmed, but certain portions that were once in doubt have been verified by later **archaeology**.

For example, archaeological finds in the 1920s confirmed the presence of cities much like Ur, described in **Genesis 11**, which some skeptics doubted had existed so early. Engravings discovered in an Egyptian tomb depict the installation of a viceroy in a manner that exactly matches the biblical description of the ceremony involving Joseph (**Genesis 41:39-42**). Clay tablets dating to 2300 BC have been found in Syria strongly supporting Old Testament stories, vocabulary, and geography. Skeptics doubted the existence of the **Hittites (Genesis 15:20; 23:10; 49:29)** until a Hittite city, complete with records, was found in Turkey. There are dozens of other Old Testament facts supported by archaeological discovery.

More importantly, no facts presented in the Old or New Testaments have been shown false. This historical reliability is crucial to our trust in other statements made in Scripture.

Even the "miraculous" occurrences of Genesis have evidential basis we can appeal to today. Ancient Babylonian records describe a confusion of language, in accordance with the biblical account of the **Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9)**. These same records describe a worldwide flood, an event present in literally hundreds of forms in cultures all over the world. The sites where Sodom and Gomorrah (**Genesis 19**) once sat have been found, displaying evidence of fiery and violent destruction. Even the plagues of Egypt and the resulting Exodus (**Exodus 12:40-41**) have **archaeological support**.

This trend continues in the New Testament, where the names of various cities, political officials, and events have been repeatedly confirmed by historians and archaeologists. Luke, the writer of that gospel and the **book of Acts**, has been described as a first-rate historian for his attention to detail and accurate reporting. In both the Old and New Testament writings, the Bible proves reliable wherever it can be checked.

ACCURATE COPYING

Accurate copying is also an important factor in the Bible's reliability. New Testament writings were composed within a few decades of the events they describe, far too early for legend or myth to overtake actual history. In fact, the basic framework of the gospel can be dated to a formal creed just a few years after the crucifixion of Jesus, according to Paul's description in **1 Corinthians 15:3-8**. Historians have access to a tremendous number of manuscripts, proving the New Testament was reliably and quickly copied and distributed. This gives ample confidence that what we read today correctly represents the original writing.

The Old Testament, as well, shows all evidence of being reliably transmitted. When **the Dead Sea Scrolls** were discovered in the 1940s, they were 800 years older than any other available manuscripts. Comparing earlier and later manuscripts showed a meticulous approach to transmission, once again adding to our confidence that what we have today represents the original texts.

Those factors all give objective reasons to consider the Bible reliable. At the same time, it's critically important to examine those same factors in other texts we use to write our history books. The Bible has more empirical support, a shorter time between original writing and surviving copies, and a greater number of source manuscripts than any other ancient work, by far.

For example, there are 251 copies of the works of Julius Caesar, the earliest from 950 years after he wrote, with no way to know how well those copies represent the originals. There are 109 copies of the works of the historian Herodotus, the earliest from 1,400 years after he wrote. Archaeologists have found 1800+ manuscript copies of the works of Homer, allowing us a 95 percent confidence in the original text.

For the New Testament, there are currently more than 24,000 manuscripts, with most early copies anywhere from 200 to 300 years later, and some less than 100 years later. This gives a better than 99 percent confidence in the contents of the original text.

IN SHORT...

We not only have objective reasons to claim the Bible is reliable, but we cannot call it unreliable without throwing out almost everything else we know of ancient history. If the Scriptures don't pass a test for trustworthiness, no records from that era can. The Bible's reliability is proven in both its historical accuracy and its accurate transmission.

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