

# CAN WE TRUST THE BIBLE?

**What is the Bible?** The Bible consists of 66 books written by some 40 authors over the course of 1,500 years. It contains 39 Old Testament books (The Torah, the Narrative books, the Wisdom books, the Major and Minor Prophets) and 27 New Testament books (The Gospels and Letters written by the Apostles). From Moses to John, the Bible is a story of stories with an overarching theme of salvation and rescue. From creation and the fall, to the rescue plan, to the story of the people of Israel, to the arrival of a Messiah, to the restoration of all things, the Bible shows astounding consistency in its message and teachings!

Question: **Why do you trust the Bible?** Everyone probably has a different reason.

In terms of apologetics, how must we defend the Bible before the world? What questions are they asking about the Bible? Can we trust the Bible to do what?

Sample questions:

- Can we be sure the Bible we have today contains the actual words and teachings of Jesus and the Apostles?
- Can we trust the Bible to tell the truth about God?
- Can we trust the Bible to teach right and wrong?
- Can we trust the Bible as a unique source of salvation?

We'll come back to these questions later.

For a non-believer to accept biblical answers to these questions, they first must be convinced that the Bible we have today contains the words actually spoken by Jesus, the Apostles, and the prophets. So, **can we make a case for the Bible as a reliable historical document?** Yes!

1. Far and away, the NT is most well attested ancient book! The New Testament we have today is derived and translated from over 5,000 manuscripts. Compare with the Iliad which has around 1,700 copies. From there things drop dramatically. Aristotle, Julius Caesar, and Plato all have less than 50 yet are widely accepted by academia. In addition, the New Testament manuscripts are all much closer to the originals in date. Like the "telephone game", the farther you get from the original source, the less reliable it is.
2. The NT holds up to rigorous textual criticism. The overlay of the thousands of copies produces astounding reliability and filters potential scribal errors.
3. The New Testament is accurate in its historical context. When mentioned by other historians or scrutinized by other historical documents, the NT shines!
4. The NT was extensively and accurately quoted by early church fathers, providing another layer of evidence to its veracity.
5. The NT was freely passed on and widely distributed. It was not controlled.

I believe Christians can make an excellent case for the Bible as a reliable document. Here we have discussed the NT primarily, but the NT itself and similar arguments can also validate the veracity of the OT.

Now, once we make a compelling case for the Bible being an authentic collection of writings by prophets of Yahweh (OT) or apostles of Jesus (NT), **how can we convince others that the things stated or taught in the Bible true?**

I suppose one would think the natural starting place would be to first try to prove God's existence. I've always found this interesting, until the "Enlightenment" in western Europe, almost every culture and ethnic group assumed the existence of a god or gods. There's a whole field of theology that deals with

this, so if you're looking for evidence of God in science, nature, and the universe, just Google "natural theology" or people like Thomas Aquinas. Romans 1 says that all humans are subject to God's judgement because God himself is revealed in creation and the Bible itself starts by assuming God's existence. So, while God's existence might seem to be a controversial claim, it doesn't seem to be the most challenging, especially in terms of our faith. In terms of apologetics, here are some of our best arguments for trusting the Bible to be God's authentic Word, pointing to Jesus, the only source of truth and salvation. **We can trust the Bible because of:**

1. **The Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus**

- a. Jesus Christ was a real person. This can be historically validated.
- b. He was crucified on a Roman cross, died, and was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. This can be historically validated.
- c. He was raised from the dead and appeared to hundreds of followers and their testimony spread across the known world.

Each of these assertions can be independently corroborated, many of the accounts being documented by the Apostles and by historians. So, if we can trust the accounts about Jesus, his teachings, his death and resurrection, the rest is simple. Jesus himself testified to the Old Testament. Jesus himself claimed to be the Messiah, the Son of God, and the only way to the Father.

1. **The Unwavering Testimony of the Apostles**

- a. What makes the Apostles account of the resurrection so compelling is that every one of them suffered and all but one were martyred, none of them recanting their testimony about Jesus!

2. **The Impact of the Bible (Gospel/Teaching)**

- a. The Bible transforms lives, marriages, families, communities, and nations for good. It gives instructions for life that when followed lead to peace, joy, and prosperity.

3. **Personal Testimonies of its Trustworthiness**

- a. How do we know we can trust a product? Reviews tell us what other people actually experienced. What do individuals testify that the Bible or Jesus has done for them? Just like the blind man, healed by Jesus in John 9, we all have a simple story or testimony to God's faithfulness.
- b. The Bible brings salvation and hope even to those who are suffering.

In the end, individual people need to have a personal encounter with Jesus. Most people begin their journey of faith either by hearing the simple gospel or by engaging in relationships with believers. Some are desperate for hope and they respond to the message about Jesus. They are introduced to Jesus directly and enter a relationship with him. Others are intrigued by their Christian friend's way of life, their faith, the love they have for one another, the peace, joy, and hope they experience. They begin to ask questions and eventually are drawn to Jesus.

# Can We Trust the Bible?

## Trusting the Bible as a Verified Historical Collection of Writings

1. There are more **copies** of the New Testament than any other ancient book.
2. The New Testament holds up to rigorous **textual** criticism.
3. The Bible is accurate in its **historical** context.
4. The New Testament was extensively and accurately **quoted** by early church fathers.
5. The New Testament was freely **passed on** and widely **distributed**

## Defending the Bible's Contents as Truthful

We can trust the Bible because of:

1. The evidence for the **resurrection** of Jesus.
  - a. Jesus Christ was a **real** person.
  - b. He **died** on a Roman cross and was **buried** in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea.
  - c. He was **raised** from the dead and appeared to hundreds of followers and their testimony spread across the known world.
2. The **unwavering** testimony of the Apostles.
3. The **impact** of the Bible on families, societies, and cultures.
4. Personal **testimonies** of its trustworthiness.

Additional Notes:

The Christian New Testament was chosen through a process of centuries of reflection, consensus, and councils, and was not the result of a single event:

- **Athanasius's list**

In 367 AD, Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, listed the 27 books that would become the New Testament canon. He used the word "canonized" to describe them.

- **Councils**

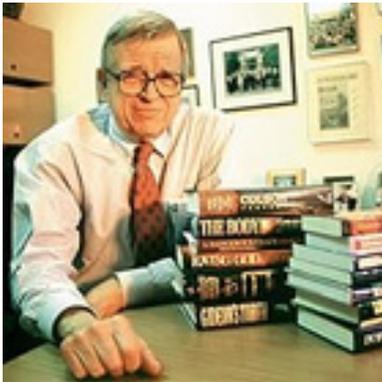
The Council of Rome in 382 AD, the Synod of Hippo in 393 AD, and the Council of Carthage in 397 AD all affirmed the same 27 books as authoritative.

- **Principles**

Councils used principles like whether the author was an apostle, if the book was accepted by the Christian community, and if it contained orthodox teaching to determine if a book was inspired by the Holy Spirit.

- **Consensus**

The canon was based on a consensus of believers that the books were inspired by God.



*"I know the resurrection is a fact, and Watergate proved it to me. How? Because 12 men testified they had seen Jesus raised from the dead, then they proclaimed that truth for 40 years, never once denying it. Every one was beaten, tortured, stoned and put in prison. They would not have endured that if it weren't true. Watergate embroiled 12 of the most powerful men in the world-and they couldn't keep a lie for three weeks. You're telling me 12 apostles could keep a lie for 40 years? Absolutely impossible."*

— **Charles Colson**

Here is a quote from Tacitus (as translated from Latin by A.J. Church in 1876) taken from Annals 15.44:

*“Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus*