

The Reliability of the Word of God

I IS THE BIBLE AN UNRELIABLE DOCUMENT?

We have an amazing God who passed on to us His written word. In this one book, God has provided everything He wants us to know about Him and how we can have a relationship with Him.

God is the one who caused the Bible to be written (2 Timothy 3:16;
2 Tim 3:16-17 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

2 Pet 1:21 For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

And through it He speaks to us today just as He spoke to people in ancient times when those words were first given. The Bible is to be received as God's words to us and revered and obeyed as such. As we submit to the Bible's authority, we place ourselves under the authority of the living God.

The Bible is not the product of man but is rather God-inspired. The biblical Greek word for inspiration literally means "God-breathed." Because Scripture is breathed out by God-because it originates from Him-it is true and inerrant.

And yet God used man to write it down.

The original documents of the Bible were written by men, who, though permitted to exercise their own personalities and literary talents, wrote under the control and guidance of the Holy Spirit, the result being a perfect and errorless recording of the exact message God desired to give to man. Hence, the writers of Scripture were not mere writing machines. God did not use them like keys on a typewriter to mechanically reproduce His message. Nor did He dictate the words, page by page. The biblical evidence makes it clear that each writer had a style of his own.

This seems in Character with God who seems bent on involving man in just about everything He is doing here on Earth. **When God created the animals, He had the man name them** *Gen 2:19 Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name.*

When God wanted to judge a nation, he often used another nation to do it. *Hab 1:5 -6 "Look at the nations and watch-- and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told. I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwelling places not their own.*

And today **God employs man in the ministry of reconciliation: Reconciling man to God.**

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2 Cor 5:18

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth who was promised to the apostles to teach and guide them into all the truth

John 16:13 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.

The New Testament writers may even have been aware that their writings were inspired by God.
1 Cor 2:13 This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.

In this passage Paul (who wrote over half the New Testament) affirmed that his words were authoritative because they were rooted not in fallible men but infallible God (the Holy Spirit).

The Apostle Peter later equates Paul's writings with scripture

2 Pet 3:16 He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.

II WHERE DID WE GET THE BIBLE?

Early on the church came to accept the four canonical gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John). Century's later when the books formally recognized, history reveals there were only twelve other gospels in circulation during this general time, and these were clearly not "inspired Scripture." There were also Gnostic gospels that emerged later, but these are too late to be counted.

Watch the dates

Jesus ascended about AD 30 and the church began on Pentecost with 120 people. This number some swelled to the thousands, but persecution drove the church into other area. Soon missionary journeys started and there were churches all over the Romans empire. By AD 50 some of the apostles began writing letters, followed by gospels, ending with John. By and end of the first century even liberal theologians agree, all the books of the new testament were in place.

The four gospels in our present Bible were chosen for good reason. First, early in church history, four centers of Christianity emerged: Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexander, and Rome. These centers of Christianity used the four gospels in our present Bible.

William Foxwell Albright, one of the world's foremost biblical archaeologists, said:

"We can already say emphatically that there is no longer any solid basis for dating any book of the New Testament after about AD 80, two full generations before the date between 130 and 150

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given by the more radical New Testament critics of today.” (Albright, RDBL, 136)

Many liberal scholars are being forced to reconsider earlier dates for the New Testament. The late Dr. John A. T. Robinson, no conservative himself, shocked the scholarly world when he came to some startling conclusions revealed in his ground-breaking book *Re-dating the New Testament*. His research led to his strong conviction that the whole of the New Testament was written before the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. (Robinson, RNT)

CONSERVATIVE DATING

Paul's Letters AD 50-66 (Hiebert)

Matthew AD 70-8 (Harrison)

Mark AD 50–60 (Harnak)

AD 58–65 (T.W. Manson)

Luke AD early 60s (Harrison)

John AD 80–100 (Harrison)

LIBERAL DATING

Paul's Letters AD 50–100 (Kümmel)

Matthew AD 80–100 (Kümmel)

Mark AD 70 (Kümmel)

Luke AD 70–90 (Kümmel)

John AD 17 (Baur)

AD 90–100 (Kümmel)

Confirmation of the first century composition of the New Testament portion of the Bible comes from many of the early church fathers and evangelists.

Christian leaders who lived between AD 95 and 170 consistently point to the reliability of the New Testament Gospels. Following is a sampling.

1. Clement. **Clement was a leading elder in the church at Rome.** In his epistle to the Corinthians (c. **AD 95**), he cites portions of **Matthew, Mark, and Luke**, and introduces them as the actual words of Jesus.

2. Papias. **Papias, the bishop of Hierapolis in Phrygia** and author of *Exposition of Oracles of the Lord* (c. **AD 130**), **cites the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John**, presumably as canonical. He specifically refers to John's Gospel as containing the words of Jesus.

3. Justin Martyr. **Justin Martyr, foremost apologist of the second century (AD 140), considered all four Gospels to be Scripture.**

4. The Didache (AD 100). **The Didache, an ancient manual of Christianity that dates between the end of the first century and the beginning of the second century, cites portions**

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of the three synoptic Gospels and refers to them as the words of Jesus. This manual quotes extensively from Matthew's gospel.

5. Polycarp. **Polycarp, a disciple of the apostle John, quotes portions of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and refers to them as the words of Jesus (c. AD 150).**

6. Irenaeus. **Irenaeus, a disciple of Polycarp (c. AD 170), quoted from twenty-three of the twenty-seven New Testament books, omitting only Philemon, James, 2 Peter, and 3 John.13**

7. **The Muratorian Fragment dates to about AD 175, and lists the four canonical gospels. Indeed, it lists 23 of the 27 books in the New Testament.**

8. **Papyrus 45, dated around AD 200, has all four canonical gospels together. Clearly, there are many early sources dating between AD 95 and 150 that refer to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John as containing the actual words of Christ. History is therefore on the side of the New Testament Gospels.**

“Even if we didn’t possess the early documents, they could be reconstructed from the quotations from the early church fathers.” Bruce Metzger author *The Text of the New Testament*.

By 393 there was a council at Hippo Regis and 397 at Carthage the whole church accepted the 27 books of the New Testament.

HASN'T THE BIBLE CHANGED?

Some have suggested that Roman Emperor Constantine dictated the books of the Bible. The Truth of the Matter:

Constantine financed a church council to determine if the deity of Christ was eternal, the church already accepted his deity. Constantine had nothing to do with the Bible which was canonized in the Councils around AD 397. Constantine died in 337.

THE CANON

The basic rules that guided recognition of the canon are as follows, listed in question format:

1. Was the book written or backed by a prophet or apostle of God? This is the single most important test. The reasoning here is that the Word of God which is inspired by the Spirit of God for the people of God must be communicated through a man of God.14 Deuteronomy 18:18 informs us that only a prophet of God will speak the Word of God. Second Peter 1:20-21 assures us that Scripture is only written by men of God. In Galatians 1:1-24 Gal 1:1 Paul, an apostle--sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead--the apostle Paul argued support for the Book of Galatians by appealing to the fact that he was an authorized messenger of God, an apostle.

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2. Is the book authoritative? In other words, can it be said of this book as it was said of Jesus, "The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law" (Mark 1:22 Mark 1:22 The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law.). Put another way, does this book ring with the sense of, "Thus saith the Lord"?

3. Does the book tell the truth about God and doctrine as it is already known by previous revelation? The Bereans searched the OT Scriptures to see whether Paul's teaching was true (Acts 17:11 Acts 17:11 Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.). They knew that if Paul's teaching did not accord with the Old Testament canon, it could not be of God. Agreement with all earlier revelation is essential (Gal. 1:8 Gal 1:8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!).

4. Does the book give evidence of having the power of God? The reasoning here is that any writing that does not exhibit the transforming power of God in the lives of its readers could not have come from God. Scripture says that the Word of God is "living and active" (Hebrews 4:12 Heb 4:12 For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.). Second Timothy 3:16-17 2 Tim 3:16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 2 Tim 3:17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. indicates that God's Word has a transforming effect. If the book in question did not have the power to change a life, then, it was reasoned, the book could not have come from God.

5. Was the book accepted by the people of God? In Old Testament times, Moses's scrolls were placed immediately into the Ark of the Covenant (Deuteronomy 31:24-26). Joshua's writings were added in the same fashion (Joshua 24:26). In the New Testament, Paul thanked the Thessalonians for receiving the apostle's message as the Word of God (1 Thessalonians 2:13). Paul's letters were circulated among the churches (Colossians 4: 16 Col 4:16 After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea.; 1 Thessalonians 5:27 1 Th 5:27 I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers.). It is the norm that God's people-that is, the majority of them and not simply a faction-will initially receive God's Word as such.

In the interest of accuracy, I will note that there were some books that were doubted for a time, but not for long. The books that were doubted for a time were Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, and Revelation.

Hebrews was doubted because the author of the book was unknown. However, the book

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eventually came to be viewed as having apostolic authority, if not apostolic authorship.

James was doubted because of its apparent conflict with Paul's teaching about salvation by faith alone. The conflict was resolved by seeing the works James speaks of as an outgrowth of real faith.

Second Peter was doubted because the style of this book differs from that of 1 Peter. It seems clear, however, that Peter used a scribe to write 1 Peter (see 1 Peter 5:12). So a style conflict is not really a problem.

Second and 3 John were doubted because the author of these books is called "elder," not "apostle." However, Peter (an apostle) is also called "elder" in 1 Peter 5:1. So it seems clear that the same person can be both an elder and an apostle.

Jude was doubted because it refers to two noncanonical books-the Book of Enoch and the Assumption of Moses. This objection was eventually overcome because even Paul quoted from pagan poets (see Acts 17:28 and Titus 1:12). Moreover, Jude enjoyed early acceptance by most of the early believers.

The Book of Revelation was doubted because it teaches a thousand-year reign of Christ. Since there was a local contemporary cult that taught the same, it was reasoned that Revelation must not be true Scripture. However, because many of the earliest church fathers believed in a thousand-year reign of Christ too, this objection was eventually seen as being without merit.

One thing is certain. The biblical canon was firmly established long before Constantine's time.

Our Bible is reliable

2 Peter 1:16 *"We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty."*

1 John 1:1 affirms, *"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched-this we proclaim concerning the Word of life." So convinced were these and other eyewitnesses that they ended up giving their lives in defense of what they knew to be true.*

III RELIABILITY OF ANCIENT TEXTS

Archeology is a true friend of the Bible. In no case has an archeological discovery contradicted a biblical fact, but rather always serves to support the veracity of the Bible.

It is highly revealing that **William Ramsey**, a well-known historian and archeologist, set out to prove that Luke was not a reliable historian. **He set out to show that both the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts (which Luke also wrote) were both unreliable in terms of chronology,**

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places, names, and events. After a lifetime of study, he came to the conclusion that he had been utterly mistaken. He found Luke to be a first-rate historian whose work was flawless. (See his book, *The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament*, page 81.)

This is not surprising, since Luke—a medical doctor committed to accuracy—speaks of his methodology right at the start of his gospel: "Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught."

Earlier I noted that scholar William Ramsey set out to prove, through many years of research, that Luke was not a reliable historian, either in his Gospel or in the book of Acts (which he also authored). Following his exhaustive study, Ramsey concluded that Luke was a first-rate historian in terms of geography, people, place names, and the like. And, as noted earlier, Luke's Gospel is dated at A.D. 60. Recall that Luke's Gospel is mentioned as Scripture in I Timothy 5:18, and I Timothy is dated at A.D. 63. Hence, Luke's gospel was recognized as Scripture within three years of its writing—hundreds of years before most of the Gnostic gospels.

There is so much more that could be said. The above is sufficient, however, to demonstrate that Christianity and the Bible are backed by true historical evidence.

* The Chester Beatty papyrus (P45) dates to the 3rd century A.D., and contains the four Gospels and the Book of Acts (chapters 4-17). (P = papyrus.)

* The Chester Beatty papyrus (P46) dates to about A.D. 200, and contains ten Pauline epistles (all but the Pastorals) and the Book of Hebrews.

* The Chester Beatty papyrus (P47) dates to the 3rd century A.D., and contains Revelation 9:10-17:2.

* The Bodmer Papyrus (P66) dates to about A.D. 200, and contains the Gospel of John.

* The Bodmer Papyrus (P75) dates to the early 3rd century, and contains Luke and John.

* The Sinaitic uncial manuscript dates to the 4th century, and contains the entire New Testament.

* The Vaticanus uncial manuscript dates to the 4th century, and contains most of the New Testament except Hebrews 9:14ff the Pastoral Epistles, Philemon, and Revelation.

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- * The Washingtonianus uncial manuscript dates to the early 5th century, and contains the Gospels.
- * The Alexandrinus uncial manuscript dates to the 5th century, and contains most of the New Testament.
- * The Ephraemi Rescriptus uncial manuscript dates to the 5th century, and contains portions of every book except 2 Thessalonians and 2 John.
- * The Bezae/Cantabrigiensis uncial manuscript dates to the 5th century, and contains the Gospels and Acts.
- * The Claromontanus uncial manuscript dates to the 6th century and contains the Pauline epistles and Hebrews.
- * The Itala version (versions were prepared for missionary purposes) dates to the 3rd century.
- * The Vulgate version dates to the 4th century and later.
- * The Syriac version dates to the 2nd to 6th centuries.
- * The Coptic version dates to the 3rd and 4th centuries.
- * The Armenian version dates to the 5th century.
- * The Georgian version dates to the 5th century.

There are also some 86,000 quotations of the New Testament from the early church fathers and several thousand Lectionaries (church-service books containing Scripture quotations used in the early centuries of Christianity). In fact, there are enough quotations from the early church fathers that even if we did not have a single manuscript copy of the Bible, scholars could still reconstruct all but 11 verses of the entire New Testament from material written within 150 to 200 years from the time of Christ.

Archeology confirms rather than disproves the Bible

IV WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT JESUS?

All these proofs aside, the most important question is who is Jesus Christ? Even Jesus, himself, addressed this question: Mat 16:13 (NIV) When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" The New Testament writers themselves fully recognized that Jesus was absolute deity.

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One point of evidence is the Apostle Paul's assertion in *Colossians 1: 16: For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.* (See also Psalm 102:25-27)

Titus 2:13 while we wait for the blessed hope--the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ,

John 20:28 Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

Jesus Himself made that assertion:

John 14:6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Jesus is who he said He is.