

How can we trust the Bible Part 2

The Bible is the most important Book that has ever been written. It has consistently been the #1 bestseller for centuries. It was one of the first books ever printed when the printing press was first invented. There is no way to number how many Bibles have been printed throughout the last four centuries. Several different world leaders throughout the ages have tried to destroy the Bible, to no avail. The Bible will not go away. There is a song we like to sing that says this: “The Bible stands and it will forever, far above the works of men. Its pages burn with a truth eternal, and destroy it they never can. The Bible stands though the hills may tumble, it will firmly stand when the Earth shall crumble. I will plant my feet on its firm foundation for the Bible stands.”

We have been talking about how we can know for sure we can trust the Bible. Last week we talked about how the Bible came to be. God spoke to many different men throughout the ages and told them to write down what He wanted He had said. God did not drop the completed Bible out of heaven, or reveal it through angels, but gave it to us through different men.

We offered as proof the fact that since the Bible was written by so many different authors, over 40 in fact, that one might expect there to be major differences between what they reported, or what they thought about God. This is the case when we look at Christianity vs. world religions. For instance, there are major differences between the Koran and the Bible. They cannot have been written by the same God. There are major differences between the teachings of the Bhagavad-Gita and the Bible. They cannot both be revelations of the same God, unless God is inconsistent.

But the Bible, though written by many different men from many walks of life, is unified in its message and never contradicts itself. We believe the Bible, Old Testament and New, is the only revelation of God that has been written down and preserved for us. The unity of this Bible, though written by so many different authors, is one proof that the Bible is God’s Word. If you missed last week’s broadcast about the unity of the Bible, you can download it from our website.

But someone may ask this question: “How can we know that we really have the words of all of those writers? It has been centuries since they were written. In fact, it has been over three millennia since Moses wrote his books. How can we tell we have those words today? Doesn’t it seem more likely that they would be gone by now? Let us look at these questions this morning.

The first proof we will offer today for why we can trust the Bible is this: The Bible has better historical evidence than other ancient documents. As we explore this truth, I invite you to do this, please: Just for this morning, instead of thinking of the Bible as a religious book, think of it as an ancient document. It is prejudiced to accept other ancient writings as authentic and reject the Bible, just because it talks about things with which you happen to disagree or find hard to believe. Scriptures are centuries removed from us, so deserve to be thought of on the same par as other ancient writings. So think of the Bible, the Scriptures, as historical documents: ancient writings that we can look at to get a glimpse of the lives of ancient peoples.

First we must realize one important fact. We do not have the actual piece of paper on which Moses, Isaiah, Matthew, Paul, or John wrote. Those papers are gone, and the evidence points to the fact that at least the New Testament writings had disappeared shortly into the 2nd century. This means that you cannot go to a museum somewhere in the world and find the original Gospel of Luke. It has disintegrated, and has been gone for a very long time. Therefore, we must rely on copies of the Bible to know what the original documents said.

This may sound like a problem at first, since you are probably wondering how accurate those copies could be. It is true: if you would sit down and write out the entire Bible in a notebook, you would probably have some mistakes. There would probably be some differences between the Bible and your notebook. But let me offer these to think upon:

First, the literacy rate among Jewish people, who make up almost all of the writers, has always been very high. Jews took great pride in their children's education. They learned to read and write in the synagogue by people called "Torah teachers," also referred to in our Bibles as "scribes." Therefore, we mustn't think of those who made copies as those who were uneducated and illiterate. They were able men who knew the language with which they were working.

Second, the procedures for creating copies of Scripture were quite remarkable. Allow me to tell you about them. The ones who were in charge of copying the Scriptures were called scribes. As they copied, there were strict rules about how they wrote out the Scripture. They were allowed no more than 30 letters per line as they wrote. No letters were allowed to be written from memory; they had to look at the Bible from which they were copying. If they made a mistake, they were not allowed to scratch the letter out, but had to bury the scroll and not use it. Some of the scribes were so careful to avoid these errors that after the manuscript was completed, another scribe would count certain letters to make sure the manuscript contained the right number. They would count to the middle word to make sure they were the same as the original, and each page had to have the same number of words as the one being copied from. Then another scribe would count the words in the manuscript to double check that it was an accurate copy.

This scrupulous care that was taken often resulted in the labor of a whole year being only one Bible. With the historical evidence of this kind of care, we may be certain we have accurate copies. We can trust that our Bibles are an accurate copy of the originals, even if we don't have them anymore.

Third, we must realize that to those who copied the Bible, it was not merely another book. It was what they believed to be the very words of the living God, whom they worshipped. It was a very special book on which they based their lives. Besides the care they were forced to take, these scribes took good care because the Bible was important to them. You can trust that we have accurate copies of those long-gone originals.

Fourth, scholars have been able to gather all of the existing copies, old and new, and compare them. They look to see how the different manuscripts compare to each other to see how they agree. You might expect different manuscripts to have many different major differences. But this is not true for the copies of the Bible we have. Scholars who have examined the copies we have say that they agree 99 % of the time. They are almost in complete 100% agreement, word for word, letter for letter.

But why isn't it 100%? Of the 1% of the time when the various manuscripts differ from one another, 99% of those differences are obvious spelling errors, where the meaning of the word is obvious. All this means that we have a perfect copy of the original letters that were written, with no major errors. This, in terms of other historical documents, is amazing.

But how many of these extremely accurate copies do we have? Do we have a dozen? Maybe a hundred? The answer may surprise you. Let us, for example, look at the New Testament. The New Testament was written in the Greek language. Over the centuries, different people have found these copies all over the world, many of which are today found in various museums. Scholars today say that we have over 5,800 Greek manuscripts. Now, that doesn't mean that there are 5800 full copies of the New Testament, because most of them are fragments, containing from as little as two verses to whole books. But nonetheless, there are almost 6,000 Greek manuscripts which scholars have used to confirm that we have an accurate copy of what was written by those original writers. 5,800 Greek manuscripts would be impressive enough, but consider this:

Early Christianity was written during the Roman Empire, and so the major language was Latin. Christianity spread all over the world very quickly, and with it went copies and translations of the New Testament. Many early Christians translated their Greek New Testaments into Latin. How many copies of these Latin manuscripts do we have? To date, we have over 10,000 Latin manuscripts. Besides that, there are over 9,300 manuscripts in other languages, such as Ethiopian and Syrian. That brings our grand total to over 25,100 copies of the New

Testament that we have in our hands today to look at. That is 25,000 papers that all say the same thing. This is an astounding number, especially by ancient standards. There is not this much evidence for any other writings in ancient times.

Let me put this in perspective. We have only 7 existing copies of the works of Plato, the ancient Greek philosopher. We have only 10 copies of Caesars *The Gallic Wars*. We have only 7 existing copies of the writings of Pliny. We have 49 existing copies of the works of Aristotle. We have a whopping 643 existing copies of Homer's *The Iliad*, which is considered an ancient classic. This is a large number, but cannot compare to the 5800 Greek manuscripts available to speak to how much we can trust the New Testament.

The reason I asked you to think of the New Testament, not just as a religious book, but as an ancient, historical document, is this: It is an ancient, historical document. Whenever we speak of the Bible, it is easy to quickly dismiss it because you don't believe in God or because you don't think He really said what some believe He said in the Bible. But if you think of it as a historical document, it means that you really can trust it.

Let me explain it this way: No one wonders if Aristotle really said what Aristotle said, because we have copies of his writing. Yet we have only 49 existing copies of what he said, when we have over 5800 Greek copies of the New Testament! No one questions whether we have an accurate copy of *The Iliad*, written by Homer in 800 B.C., so there should be no question about the New Testament, since we have nine times the copies! My plea to you is this: Be fair. Treat the Bible as you would any other ancient document. And when you do, you will see that the Bible, as an ancient document, has unparalleled integrity.

I will answer one objection before I move on. Some may say, "Well, that may be true that there are so many copies, but I cannot trust the New Testament because the writers were biased. They really believed that Jesus was someone special!" Friend, let me say two things: First, EVERY writer is biased. Every writer has an agenda and something that they are trying to prove. To accuse the New Testament writers of this is true, but unfair.

Second, although the Biblical writers were trying to get a religious message across, it is also obvious that they were trying to be historically accurate. On numerous occasions, they took pains to explain what was going on at the time. I hope to examine this in the future. They did not talk about Israel, the Babylonians, Jesus, the Romans, and Jerusalem as an incredible fantasy, but as real life, in which God was doing something special. Read the Bible and see for yourself. This level of bias cannot be leveled against the trustworthiness of the copies of the Bible.

The second proof I would like to offer today is this: The Bible has better historical evidence than other religious documents. Most major world religions have writings they consider sacred, and it is my contention that the Bible has better evidence for being accurate than all the other religious documents that represent the major faiths. I will not be able to examine each of these world sacred texts in any detail, but I would like to point out how the New Testament fares against other religious scriptures.

We talked about the fact that there are more existing copies of the New Testament than any other ancient document. One source states: "The New Testament has been preserved in more manuscripts than any other ancient work..." But let us look at the amount of time that is between the writing of the document and the earliest copy. If we can conclude that there was a small amount of time between the events, the writing, and the earliest manuscript copy that we have, we will be able to tell how accurate the copy really is.

For instance, let's say that I wanted to write a book about the Civil War, which happened almost 150 years ago, without referring to any other sources or pictures. I wanted to write an accurate description of the Civil War based on what I had heard from others. Perhaps I had some war stories passed down from my great-great-great-great grandfather. Would you want to read it to get historical facts about the Civil War? Or would you rather get a book from someone who lived during that time, or immediately after? My stories may be true, but if you want

accuracy, you will be more likely to get a book from someone closer to the source. That is the same difference with the New Testament compared to other writings. I want to look at some facts that will help us see how reliable these documents are. The results are fascinating.

Let us start with Homers *The Iliad*. It was written around 800 BC, but the earliest existing copy we have is from the second century A.D! That means that the time between when Homer wrote it and the earliest piece of paper we have is 900 years! Yet no one questions the authenticity of the story and the writings. Let us go to Plato. Plato the Greek philosopher wrote around 400BC. The earliest existing copy of his writing dates to 900 AD, which puts the gap at 1300 years, yet no one doubts that we have the writings of Plato. Let us look finally at the writings of Aristotle. He lived around 350BC, yet the earliest copy of his writings that we have is from 1100 AD. That means that there is a gap of over 1400 years! How can we tell that that copy is reliable? It would be hard to prove, yet no one doubts that we have the very words of Aristotle.

Compare the copies of the Bible that we have. The earliest copy that we have of the Book of 1 Peter is in the 3rd or 4th century AD. That puts the book of the earliest copy of 1 Peter only 250-300 years from when Peter wrote it in 63AD. The earliest copy of the book of Revelation is dated to the year 275 AD. Most scholars say that John wrote it around 95AD. That puts the gap between the two at 180 years. This does not say that there weren't any copies in between these writings, but only that that is the earliest one that still exists. The Book of 1 Corinthians was written around 55 AD. The earliest copy we have of that is dated around the year 200 AD. That puts the gap between the two at a mere 150 years! Compare that to Homer's 900 years. But there is one New Testament manuscript that is dated at 125AD. This is a copy of the Gospel of John, copied only 35 years after John wrote it, and only 90 years after Jesus walked on the Earth! This is the kind of manuscript evidence for which most scholars of ancient documents would give millions of dollars in their studies.

But our concern is whether the Bible is more trustworthy than other religious books. Let us examine a few examples. The New Testament was written between 10 and 60 years after the death of Christ and the beginnings of Christianity. The earliest copies we have are between 90 and 300 years after the death of Christ. How do other religious writings compare to the Bible?

Gautama Buddha lived in the 6th century BC, but his sayings were not put into writing until the first century AD. Mind you, we are not talking about existing manuscripts, but writing the oral tradition from six centuries previously. The prophet Muhammad is considered by Islam to be the final prophet, the one who wrote God's final revelation, which they believe is the Koran. Muhammad wrote the Koran during his lifetime, which was from 570 to 632 AD, and Muslims consider it sacred writings. But Muslims also consider the sayings of Muhammad as part of their sacred traditions. These, however were not written down on paper until 767 AD, one hundred and forty years after his death. Furthermore, Muhammad wrote in the Koran about things that had happened centuries before, often drawing from the Old and New Testament.

These facts may not prove to you that the Bible is God's Word, but they should at least make you realize that the Bible has better manuscript evidence than any other ancient document. I simply put the question to you: Which would you rather trust? Someone who wrote soon after the event took place, or someone who wrote centuries after the events took place? Which would you rather trust? The writings whose copies date closer to the originals, or the copies that date centuries after?

What about the Old Testament? How reliable is the Old Testament? To this I would first like to say that it has been my focus to talk about the New Testament because these are more recent documents than the Old Testament manuscripts. Writing has evolved over the centuries. Nowadays, writing is very important, and easy to do because of printing and the electronic Age. But a long time ago, passing information orally was very important. In fact, it was the only way you could pass your histories on. For that reason, people also trained themselves to memorize in a way which we today are unfamiliar.

For instance, during Jesus' lifetime, in the first century, all the Jewish boys were taught the entire Old Testament by memory. The Torah teachers would teach it in the synagogues, and the fathers would recite it to them as they worked in the fields. I have a hard time imagining how someone could memorize something as long as the Old Testament, but the culture had trained them to have exceptional memory skills. But writing was still important in the first century, so as we go back in time, memorizing was more important.

I say this to explain how Moses could have known about Adam and Eve, since there was probably 3000 years between them and the Exodus. I would like to state two facts then make a conclusion. Fact #1 is this: the memorization abilities of Moses' day was very strong. But God wanted him to write it down for the following generations. Fact #2 is this: According to the Bible, people lived for many years a long time ago. The Bible says that Adam himself lived 939 years! The conclusion I am drawing is this: while there was a long time in between Adam and Moses, there were not that many people in between the two. I don't have time to delve into it, but 3000 years of time does not have to mean that there were hundreds of people through which the story went before it got to Moses, so that he could write it down.

This is why it is acceptable for there to be a major gap in between Adam and Moses, but not from Muhammad to the writing of his sayings. The culture of the day was more prone to embellishment, and writing was essential. At any rate, just by purely looking at the facts, one would not at all be setting intelligence aside to believe that the Bible really is true, accurate, reliable, and therefore the Word of God.

Next week I would like to look how historically reliable the Bible is. It reports accurately what happened as it happened. This week it was my objective to prove that the Bible is reliable as a historical document, and that it can be safely trusted. The Bible is more accurate than the writings of other major world religions. The Bible is more accurate than any other ancient writing. The Bible, though we only have it in copies, it completely accurate, and pure.

It is at this point that I would like to look at a passage of Scripture. What does God say about His own Words? For what kind of standards does God strive? If you have a Bible, please look at Psalms 12:6-7. It says "The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever." This verse says some very important things.

First, it says that the Bible is pure. The word of God is clean, uncontaminated. It is free from immorality, but it is also free from corruption or tainting. There is nothing about the words of God that are corrupt. How can this be with all of the years of copying? We have already demonstrated the pains that the scribes took to make sure they accurately copied the Word of God, but besides that, ask yourself this question: "If God can make the world by speaking it, can he protect His words from a few haphazard scribes?" I leave the question to you.

Second, this verse compares the purity to silver that has been tried in a fire. This is a perfect illustration. When miners find silver, it doesn't look much like the jewels you might find in a jewelry shop. The refiners put that silver into a furnace and heat it up. The process of heating up that silver brings all of the impurities to the top, and the refiners scoop it off. The result is a purer silver than was there before. But this verse says that the words of God are like silver that has been put in a fire seven times hotter than normal. Refiners say that once a precious metal like gold or silver is heated seven times the normal heat, it is as pure as you can get it, with absolutely no impurities. God Himself says that His standard for His words is perfection.

Third, this passage says that God Himself will keep His words for ever. That word in the Hebrew means to guard or hedge. God is keeping guard over His words. God does not do anything without reason. God had a purpose in revealing Himself to different men, and He has promised to guard the words that He has given. This is the starting point for a Christian. We believe the words of God because we can trust God. All the evidence I have provided this morning is nice, but it merely proves what Christians already know: We can trust the Bible.

Why is it so important that the Bible is trustworthy? I give you once again the words I gave you last week. They are found in Romans 10 and they say this: “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed... For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”

It is important to believe that the Bible is trustworthy because without it, we cannot know the way of salvation. God has said that the only way for man to be saved is by Jesus Christ, and His death on the cross. It is the only way you may obtain forgiveness of sins and therefore entrance into heaven.

You must believe that the Bible is really true and that you can trust what is in it. Friend, do you believe it?

You must read and study the Bible and see what it says about your sin and Jesus Christ. It says that you are a sinner in need of forgiveness, and that the only way you can obtain that forgiveness is through Jesus taking your punishment on the cross. Friend, do you read it?

You must believe that Jesus alone provides a way of salvation. Not baptism, church membership, giving money, having godly parents, or even doing a lifetime of good works. There is absolutely no hope for your soul to escape the place the Bible calls Hell without your trusting the death of Jesus Christ. Friend, do you believe it?

I wonder if there is someone listening to my voice this morning who realizes that you are sinner. You don't need me to explain what it is to disobey God. You know what it is. My dear friend, if you will ask God for forgiveness, He will give it to you. Not because you deserve it, but because Jesus has paid the price for that sin. He has earned your forgiveness. Simply ask Him this morning, where you are sitting, to forgive your sins because of what Jesus did. No ceremony, no magic prayer. Just admit to Him your guilt and ask for His pardon. It's as simple as that. If you feel like you still have questions, please don't hesitate to contact us. You can do so in the following ways:

You can stop by our church building, which is located at 909 West 8th St., by the softball diamonds. You can call us at 732-3321. Or you can e-mail us at church@fbcpr.org. That's church at F B C P R dot O R G. If you would like a free copy of this program or a transcript, you may find it on our website tomorrow, which again is www.fbcpr.org. Please join us again next week for the Way of Truth Radio Broadcast, brought to you by First Baptist Church of Park Rapids, Minnesota.