

Bible How's

Session 2: How do I know I can trust my Bible?

We are going to discuss this morning the issue of **the reliability of the Scriptures**. Reliability in and of itself does not prove the claims of Scripture.

- John in his gospel claims that Jesus is God over and over again.

Demonstrating that the Bible is reliable will not prove John's claims. The value of reliability shows up in the way that it supports the assertion that Bible is the inspired Word of God. When we use the word inspiration in regards to the Bible we are not saying that John was inspired to write what he did like a musician might be inspired to write a song.

What we are saying is that the Bible is inspired by God himself and on that basis it is His authoritative Word, without error in its original manuscripts. By claiming the Bible is inspired we are saying that God spoke to the writers of Scripture; men such as Moses, David, John and Paul, by the power of the

Holy Spirit moving them to record his word exactly as desired so that it 100% accurately reflects his truth.

- 2 Timothy 3:16

The issue of reliability has a direct impact on supporting or undermining inspiration. From a negative standpoint if it can be shown that the Bible is not reliable then the great claim of inspiration and the authority that goes along with it crumbles. **So, if the Bible is shown to be historically inaccurate** in what it states then its claims of divine inspiration fall apart. Traditionally, there are key areas we look to in order to verify the Bible's reliability.

1. Manuscript evidence.
2. Archaeological evidence.
3. Historical evidence.
4. Outside testimony.
5. Eyewitness testimony.
6. Internal evidence.

Manuscript evidence:

- No one possesses the original manuscripts recorded by the authors of the Bible.
- So we do not have John's original handwritten gospel.
- What we do have are copies of the copies of the original.
- The problem with not having the originals is that it leaves the Bible open to the claim that whatever was in the original has been changed over time.
- This is not just a problem for the Bible. It is an issue for all ancient documents where the original no longer exists.
- Because we don't have the original the more copies you have of a particular writing that comes from different times and places, the better. This allows you to compare and contrast those copies with each other to see if there are

discrepancies between them or if they are in agreement with each other.

- Additionally, the closer in time you come to the original writing the better, since there is less time for those copies to be altered.

The importance of the Qumran discoveries.

- Qumran was a settlement located about 13 miles outside of Jerusalem along the shores of the Dead Sea in the desert wilderness.
- Qumran was a dwelling place for a small Jewish religious group, known as the Essenes. They were a separatist group who focused on holiness. They formed around 100 B.C. but then were never heard from again after 70 AD when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem.
- In 1947 a shepherd was throwing stones into cave mouths. He heard something break.
- This led to the most important manuscript discovery in Biblical history.

- Inside the various caves around this area large numbers of ancient scrolls were discovered, including entire copies, portions or fragments of every book in the O.T. except Esther.
- The most important discovery of all was one of an entire copy of the **book of Isaiah** (66 chapters).
 - On display at a place called the '*Shrine of the Book*' in Jerusalem.
 - 24 feet long 12 inches or so high.
- **Why was the Isaiah scroll discovery so important?**
 - Prior to this discovery the oldest known copy of the book of Isaiah in anyone's possession was from 900 AD.
 - Isaiah however, lived 700 years before the time of Christ.
 - That means there was a 1600 year gap between when Isaiah would have written

his book and the earliest known copy of that scroll.

- Isaiah is significant to Christians because it contains many prophecies about Christ (7, 9, 53).
- Prior to this discovery critics would argue that since the earliest copy we had of Isaiah was from 900 AD, we should not trust its authenticity, particularly where the prophecies about Christ were concerned.
 - The critics contend that the prophecies about Christ were inserted into the text at a later date after Jesus, to make it look as though Isaiah prophesied about Jesus when in fact he didn't.
 - The Isaiah scroll discovered at Qumran has been dated back to around 125 BC, which meant you had a jump of 1000 years in your manuscript evidence. This copy from Qumran was 1000 years closer to the original writing.

- What was discovered was that there was no difference in the text between the copies despite 1000 years of time elapsing.
- This also destroyed the argument that later followers of Jesus inserted prophecies about him into Isaiah's text since this scroll was written 125 years before Jesus was even born.
- This discovery does not prove those prophecies. What the Qumran scroll does prove is that in 1000 years the text had not changed at all. And now the gap between the original writing to the first copy had shrunk from 1600 years to 600 years.
- Furthermore the copy of Isaiah's scroll at Qumran had to be copied from an older copy itself since this is what scribes did. They copied from one trusted scroll to another in an exact and precise manner.

New Testament manuscript evidence.

- There is more abundant and accurate manuscript evidence for the N.T. **than for any other book on the ancient world.** Typically most ancient writings are validated on the basis of less than a dozen copies of the original manuscript.
 - **Annals of Imperial Rome:** written by the Roman historian Tacitus. There is only one manuscript copy in existence for his first 6 books.
 - **The Jewish War:** written by the 1st century historian Josephus. A total of 9 manuscript copies are known to exist.
- Where the N.T. is concerned there are some **5800 Greek manuscript copies** that contain most of the N.T., entire books, parts of books, individual verses.
- There are **8000 manuscripts written in Latin.**

- The total of all ancient manuscripts rises to **24,000**.
- The closest any ancient writing can come to the N.T. in terms of manuscript evidence is Homers, “The Iliad” which has some 643 manuscript copies (Some double the number).
- These 24,000 copies come from different years and different centuries as well as from different parts of the world. When compared with and against each other scholars of all stripes agree that there is a 99.5 % agreement rate which is astonishing.
 - Not from a printing press.
 - These are handwritten copies.
- Most of the differences are minor and deal largely with spelling and punctuation. What is agreed upon is that no doctrine in the Bible is changed in any way by any textual disagreements.

The dating of the original autographs.

The farther away you are in time from the original events, such as the resurrection, the greater the possibility for there to be errors and distortions to creep in. When it comes to the original copies there are ways to figure out when they were written.

- **Acts:** Writers in the 1st century tell us that Paul was put to death about 65 AD. And yet Luke who wrote this book ends it with Paul still in prison which means that Luke wrote Acts when Paul was still alive. So Acts would have been written around 62 AD. Keep in mind that Jesus died and rose in 33 AD, so Acts, which tells us much about Christ, was written only 30 years after the events when many eye witnesses and participants of the events connected to Christ were still alive to verify what Luke wrote.
- **Mark:** Many scholars believe Mark was written about 50 AD which would have been only 17 years after the death and resurrection of Christ.

Other books such as Matthew, Luke and 1 Corinthians were written during this time.

The closer we come in time between the original writings and the original events the better because there is less time for faded memories and errors. However a few things must be kept in mind.

- The oral tradition was extremely strong during this time due to many people not being able to read.
- The events themselves were so monumental that they would not be forgotten (War veterans – *I can remember it like it was yesterday*). But the writers of Scripture had an advantage in that they were inspired by God to remember accurately.

Comparing the dating of N.T. manuscripts with those of other ancient writings.

- For most other ancient documents there is a gap of at least 700 years between the events and the earliest manuscripts. For others it is as much as 1200 years.
 - **Annals of Imperial Rome by Tacitus (1 copy)** were written around 116 AD. The only copy we have dates to 850 AD
 - **The Jewish Wars written by Josephus** are from the 1st century. The earliest copy we have is from the 10th century.
 - When it comes to the N.T. though we have fragments of the book of John that date to within 30 years of the original.
 - Most of the copies we have of the N.T. date to within 120 years of the original writings.
 - Would it be better to have earlier copies? Of course, but the N.T. has more reliable evidence for its accuracy than any other ancient document and far, far more copies.
 - What manuscript evidence does is it shows the incredible consistency of the Biblical

record that cannot be naturally explained. How can 24,000 handwritten manuscripts from different places in the world and different centuries be 99.5% in agreement with each other?

Archaeological Evidence

- Archaeology does not prove whether or not Jesus is God. What it can do is verify historical records. If the Bible is what it claims to be, the Word of God - then we would expect it to be historically accurate.
- There are a number of places where the historical accuracy on the New Testament has been called into question, particularly in the Gospels. Over the years critics have claimed that the writers were just wrong in what they said.
 - In **Luke 3:1** he speaks of Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene. Critics said that Lysanias was not a tetrarch but a ruler of Chalcis ½ a

century earlier (Off by title, time and place). However an inscription was found from the time of Tiberius that names Lysanias as tetrarch of Abilene. What archaeology proved is that there were two Lysanias.'

- The same challenge exists with the census that Luke speaks about in relationship to Christ's birth. Critics said this could not have happened because Quirinius did not begin ruling Syria until AD 6, where Jesus was born in AD 3.
- Once again archaeology discovered proof that there was another Quirinius who reigned until just after the death of Herod.
- Pontus Pilate: Referenced in different ancient writings but other than those references no definitive proof of his existence had been found. Then in 1961 during excavation near the theater in Caesarea (Where Paul was held prisoner) a limestone block was unearthed that bore

Pilates names and said that he was the
“prefect of Judea.”

- **John** mentions details of a number of places; the pool of Bethesda and Siloam, Jacobs well and the stone pavement where Pilate judged Jesus and the identity of Pilate. For years critics blasted the Bible because no evidence of these places or people had been located. However recent archaeological findings have backed up what John said.
- **The ‘Kings Game’** in the Roman Garrison.
 - Mt. 27:28
- What we see through these limited examples is that archaeology far from disproving the Biblical record has always supported what has been recorded. No archaeological discovery has ever contradicted the Biblical account but instead has supported it in exacting detail.
- Contrast this with Mormonism which has the worst archaeological record imaginable. Joseph

Smith the founder of Mormonism claimed that the Book of Mormon was the most correct book on the face of the earth.

- Yet when put to the test no Book of Mormon cities have ever been located. No book of Mormon person, place, nation or name has ever been found. No book of Mormon artifacts, Scriptures or inscriptions have ever been found.

Outside Sources

- The historical reliability of the N.T. can also be tested on the basis of the testimony of those who were not supporters of Christianity. These were people who were often hostile to Christianity and yet they corroborate certain things the N.T. claims.
- Overall at least 17 non-Christian writings record more than 50 details concerning the life, teachings and resurrection of Jesus.
- **Historians** such as Tacitus, Suetonius and Thallus all speak about Jesus.

- **Jewish sources** such as Josephus and the Talmud speak about him.
- **Governmental officials** such as Pliny the Younger and the Roman Emperors Trajan and Hadrian describe early Christian beliefs and practices.

What can we learn about Jesus from the testimony of these sources?

- He was a Jewish teacher.
- Many people believed he performed miracles and exorcisms.
- Some believed he was the Messiah.
- He was rejected by the Jewish leaders.
- He was crucified under Pontius Pilate during the reign of Tiberius.
- Despite the shameful nature of his death his followers believed he was still alive.
- All kinds of people in the city and countryside; men, women and children, slave and free worship him as God.

Eyewitness testimony

- One of the unique features speaking to the reliability of the N.T. is the number of eye witnesses who either share their experiences or are cited as witnesses.
 - So we have eye witness testimony to Christ's ministry coming from Matthew, Peter and John.
 - We have Luke referencing his sources who were witnesses.
 - We also have the experiences of Mary that are recorded for us.
 - There are multiple eyewitnesses to Jesus death who are named – John, the Mary's, Joseph of Arimathea.
 - When it comes to the resurrection hundreds of witnesses are referenced along with specific names of those who saw Jesus over a period of 40 days.

- We also have this testimony coming from people who were willing to die for the truth of what they saw.