

Can We Really Trust the Bible?

By Lewis Winkler

Why the Reliability of the Bible is Crucial

I believe that the Bible is God's revelation to man because of its claim to be such, and because of the way it backs up those claims with remarkable accuracy and fulfilled prophecies. In this article, I will attempt to give several basic reasons why believing in the accuracy of the Bible is intellectually sound.

Admittedly, the reliability of the Bible is an arguable pillar of the Christian faith, but only in the sense of degree. Although many Christians have held varying degrees of conviction concerning the Bible's accuracy, true Christians have never denied the fact that the Bible is the final arbiter and source of information about God, man, and salvation. Even Catholics and the Eastern Orthodox, who also deposit divine authority within the traditions of the church, do not reject (at least in *theory*) the authority of the Bible in matters of faith and practice.

I contend that those who claim to be Christians yet reject the Bible as their source of authority are either not Christians, or wade hopelessly in the mire of contradiction. They claim to know Christ, but reject the words that reveal most plainly who He is and why He came to earth. How can someone really know Him, yet reject the primary revelation about Him?

While an entire book could be written on this point alone, suffice it to say that we cannot know anything reliable about the Christian faith without adhering in significant degree to the accuracy of its revelatory document, the Bible. Let us move on then to some evidence for the reliability of the Bible.

The Tests for Document Reliability

To address this issue adequately, let me first establish the way any document of history (the Bible clearly is one) is tested to determine its reliability as a source of truth. According to historian C. Sanders, there are three tests of significance to determine the accuracy of any historical document. They are, 1) The Bibliographical Test, 2) The Internal Test, and 3) The External Test.

The Bibliographical Test

The *bibliographical test* concerns itself with the document that we possess in our hands today. Since none of the original manuscripts have survived, what we have today are copies (manuscripts) handed down through the centuries. The question this test seeks to answer is: "How close to the original are the copies that we have today?"

The way this question is answered is through an examination of two crucial elements. One element is concerned with how many copies (manuscripts) of the document still exist and are available for examination and comparison. The greater the number of copies one has to compare with each other, the better chance one has of accurately reconstructing what the original texts contained, and the better the probability that errors in transmission will be corrected by the many overlapping manuscripts.

The second issue in this test is the issue of time gaps. If you have several manuscripts (copies) of a document, it is vital to consider the period of time between the writing of the original documents and the date of the copies that you possess. All of this will become clearer from the following table comparing the biographical accuracy of the New Testament documents.

Author and/or Title	Date It Was Written	Date of First Copy	Number of Copies	Total Time Gap in Between
Caesar's Gaelic Wars	100-44 B.C.	900 A.D.	10	1000 Years
Sophocles' Plays	496-406 B.C.	1000 A.D.	193	1400 Years
Homer's Iliad	900 B.C.	100 A.D.	643	1000 Years
New Testament	48-90 A.D.	92-130 A.D.	24,633	40 Years

The significance of the Bible's small time gap between the originals and the copies and the number of copies that are available is enormous. Historians like Fredrich Kenyon have had to admit that there simply wasn't enough time for falsely mythological elements and major textual inaccuracies to arise. What this tells us is that what we have in our hands today is virtually the same information that the original writers provided. In short, we can trust that what we have is what they wrote.

As far as the Old Testament is concerned, because the Jews saw the Old Testament for what it is, the very sacred word of God, they used very careful methods to copy manuscripts that had become old and worn out. I wish I had the space to explain in detail, but may I direct you for further research on this matter to William Nix and Norman Geisler's excellent book, *From God to Us*.

The Internal Test

The second test, the *internal test*, seeks to determine the internal consistency of any document. In this test, the benefit of a doubt is always given to the document. Unless something can be clearly shown to be a contradiction, then it is assumed to have some sort of reasonable explanation.

The Bible is truly a remarkable text because it has the following credentials: it was written over a period of 1600 years with 40 different authors in more than 3 different languages. In addition to this (incredibly), it completely agrees with itself on the most controversial subjects imaginable including the nature of God and man, ethics and morality, the way to heaven, etc.

Most of the writers were also eyewitnesses, versus writers who wrote from secondary sources, and they make no ridiculous claims like other holy books. For example, the Hindu scriptures say the following: "The moon is 150,000 miles higher than the sun, and shines with its own light. The earth is flat and triangular, and earthquakes are caused by elephants shaking themselves under it."

In fact, the flat earth debate should have ended years before anyone believed that the earth was flat. Isaiah 40:22 states that God sits above the *circle* of the earth. This was written over a thousand years before the flat earth debate had ever reasonably ended.

Also dealt with in the internal test is the issue of prophesy. In the Old Testament, there were over 300 prophesies dealing with Christ and His coming alone. The chance that Christ could fulfill just 48 of these is 1 in 10 to the 157th power. To put that into perspective, there are only an estimated 10 to the 80th power electrons in the entire universe, yet Christ fulfill all 300 prophesies about Him, many of which He had no control over, like His means and place of birth, His death, lineage, etc.!

Concerning the internal test, I am often told by people that I shouldn't believe in the Bible because it is filled with contradictions. When I ask them to produce an example, most suddenly realize that they cannot point to a single one. They simply parrot back what their teachers have told them in class. At that point I usually take them to a couple of places in the Bible where apparent contradictions are present and explain that there is a huge difference between a true contradiction and an apparent contradiction.

For example, one morning I could run into a group of friends, Lorenzo, Darnell, and Jamal. Later on, I might run into James and tell him I just saw Darnell and Jamal earlier that day. Then perhaps James later runs into Lorenzo and mentions that he saw me. Lorenzo might say that he also saw me this morning. At that point, unless James gathers more information, it might appear that I either lied to James about seeing Darnell and Jamal, or I was contradictory, saying that I saw Darnell and Jamal when I really saw Lorenzo. The fact of the matter is, I saw all of them, but I only told James about seeing Darnell and Jamal, not Lorenzo. There is no contradiction at all.

In the same way, the Bible has such apparent contradictions, which later, with the help of other scripture and information can be shown to be non-contradictory after all.

The External Test

The last test, the *external test*, asks and seeks to answer the question of how well the document coincides with external historical discoveries. Do the Biblical claims of historical, verifiable accounts and events match up with other ancient historical accounts and the archaeological discoveries made in the area?

Chronicling the discoveries that confirm Biblical accounts would take literally volumes of material, but let me just name two to give you an idea.

For many years, people ridiculed the Bible's account of the Hivite people because there had never been any mention or evidence of these people except in the Bible (The assumption was, of course, that the Bible was already wrong because it was the Bible). In 1965, there was a major discovery of a civilization who had been called the Hivites confirming the Biblical accounts once again.

The Biblical account of Jericho describes that when Joshua attacked the city, the walls fell out. This too was ridiculed, for it was common knowledge that when a city is besieged from without, the walls fall in, not out. When the city of Jericho was found, archaeologists noted something very strange. The walls of Jericho had fallen out.

Archaeologist Nelson Glueck said, "It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a Biblical reference." Is it no wonder, then, that the Bible is referred to affectionately by archaeologists as, "The Archaeologist's Handbook?"

For Further Research

I have only barely cracked the lid of a rich treasure chest full of truth that only confirms again and again that the book we place our faith into for truth and knowledge of the Holy One of Israel is an accurate, reliable book about Him. For further research, I recommend starting with the previously mentioned book, *From God to Us*, by William Nix and Norman Geisler.