

## How Reliable is the Bible?

[2 Peter 1:20-21 HCSB](#) First of all, you should know this: no prophecy of Scripture comes from one's own interpretation, (21) because no prophecy ever came by the will of man; instead, moved by the Holy Spirit, men spoke from God.

The Bible is a unique and remarkable book. It is actually a library of 66 books written over a span of 1,500 years. There isn't another book in history that took that long to write. 40-different authors from every walk of life wrote the Bible. We all know that people from different walks of life have different perspectives on life.

Yet the Bible was written by:

- Kings
- Servants
- Philosophers
- Fishermen
- Poets
- Doctors
- Military Leaders
- Herdsman
- And even a First Century IRS agent

The authors wrote from different places like

- deserts,
- dungeons,
- palaces,
- islands,
- battlefields,
- hillsides,
- and prison cells.

They wrote

- on 3 different continents (Europe, Asia, and Africa)
- in 16 different countries
- in 3 different languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek).

Their writings cover hundreds of controversial subjects yet they speak in perfect unity. This can't be explained by coincidence or by collusion.

Think about it: If we brought up one controversial subject. Let's say, the war in Iraq. If all of us in this room were to write a couple of pages on that subject, do you think we would all have total unity in our opinions? Absolutely not! Yet the Bible, which was written by 40 different people, with various backgrounds, living in diverse places, spoke with perfect unity on a broad range of controversial subjects. The Bible is a unified story of how God worked throughout history to restore His relationship with human race.

- The Old Testament – Someone is coming
- Gospel – He is here
- Epistles – Someone is coming again

Read it cover to cover and you find:

- One hero – the Messiah
- One villain – Satan
- One problem – Sin
- And one solution or purpose – Salvation

The only reasonable answer to the amazing unity is that there was one master architect who designed the book. The Bible is God's Word to the human race.

**Most Popular:** The Bible also enjoys unique long-standing popularity. Since the Bible began to roll off of Guttenberg's Printing Press in 1450 AD it has maintained the #1 spot as the best selling book of all time. It now sells between 30 million and 60 million copies world-wide every year.

**Most Translated:** The Bible is the most translated book in history. The Bible has been translated in over 1,200 languages and still counting as new languages are being added every year.

It is the single most popular book in the world, the most translated book in history and the most smuggled book ever. In some places in the world such as in Communist or Islamic nations, people risk their lives to get their hands on a Bible.

No other book has been as scrutinized, ridiculed, criticized, misinterpreted, banned and burned like the Bible. Kings, emperors, dictators and governments have all tried to wipe it out of existence but it just keeps living on and changing lives.

**ILL:** Noted French philosopher and skeptic **Voltaire** died in 1778. Before he died he said, "Within 100 years the Bible will be a forgotten book." When Voltaire died they auctioned off his home and it was purchased for the headquarters of the French Bible Society. The Bible outlives its pallbearers.

Jesus knew what He was talking about when He said, "Heaven and earth may pass away but my Words will never pass away."

Bernard Rom adds, "A thousand times over the centuries the death knell of the Bible has been sounded, the funeral procession formed, the flowers ordered, the inscription placed on the tomb stone and the eulogy written but somehow the corpse never stays put."

The Bible is also unique in its relevance. There has never been a book like it. It's as relevant today as it was thousands of years ago.

This book will give you timeless answers for:

- Raising kids
- Improving your marriage
- Managing your emotions
- Handling your money
- Breaking bad habits
- Finding fulfillment in life
- Experiencing God's forgiveness
- And receiving eternal life

Despite all of this, some people are still not impressed. They question the reliability of the Bible. So that is the subject we are going to tackle today. Is the Bible reliable? Let me give you reasons you can rely on the Bible

## **I. The Bible is textually credible.**

**A. Number of manuscripts:** Is the text we have reliable? Is the Bible we have today what was written by the original authors? The integrity of any historical document depends on the number of manuscripts we have to examine.

How do the ancient manuscripts stack up?

- Plato's writings 7 (no one questions)
- Aristotle's writings 49 (Again, no one questions)

Outside the Bible the record for most manuscripts belongs to

- Homer's Iliad 647

The Bible is the most documented manuscript in civilization. Guess how many...depending on how you assemble them – 700,000 copies of complete ancient texts!

**B. Old Testament 14,000:** There are 14,000 manuscripts and fragments of the Old Testament dating from 500 to 800 years. It averages only one variation in every 1,580 words and 99% of the time the variation is a spelling variation. That is amazing.

Critics use to say there was 1,300 years between the first copy and the copies we had. People surely made some serious mistakes along the line.

Then there was the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls – In 1947 there was a young Bedouin boy named Mohammad. One day while he was chasing his sheep, he tossed a rock into the cave of Kumran and heard a pot break. He looked into the cave and found what has come to be known as the Dead Sea Scrolls. They had portions or all of every OT book of the Bible.

Before the Dead Sea Scrolls the oldest manuscript we had was dated around 900 AD. But the Dead Sea Scrolls dated 1,000 years earlier. When they were discovered the skeptics said, "Ah ha, now we can see how much error has crept into the Bible over the course of time."

What shocked the academic world, scholars and skeptics is that there was hardly any change at all. They found 95% of the text was perfectly identical and the 5% were primarily spelling variations. The content was essentially perfect.

### **C. The New Testament 24,000**

What about the New Testament? Well, if you think 14,000 manuscripts is good, the New Testament has 24,000!

There are 24,000 copies of the New Testament in different languages from all over the world in Latin, Greek and various other languages. In all of those manuscripts there is less than 1 variation in 1,000 words. Those variations are extremely minor and do not affect the meaning.

Renowned archeologist, Sir William Ramsey – "The Bible writers are of the first rank and should be placed among the greatest historians that have ever lived."

The Bible is the most documented manuscript in the history of ancient civilization and the Bible has more textual credibility than any other ancient document in history.

The text may have been preserved with great credibility but that does not necessarily mean the text is true. How do we know if the Bible is true?

## **II. The Bible is historically credible.**

### **A. What about its controversial figures and cities?**

**1. Pilate** – said to be a figment of the apostle's imagination they dreamed up as a bad guy villain. A helicopter gun ship was flying down the coast of Israel and they noticed a circle in the sand. They began to dig and excavated an entire city called Caesarea Philippi and a magnificent amphitheatre. There was a plaque dedicating it to the man who built it, Pontius Pilate.

**2. Belshazzar** - Daniel writers of Belshazzar the King. Skeptics read that and pointed out that in the Babylonian records there was never a King Belshazzar. The King at that time was Nabonidus. They said, "The Bible is clearly wrong." 1956 a Babylonian chronicle was discovered that revealed Nabonidus left his throne for a 10-year period (the period Daniel wrote about) and Belshazzar replaced him as king. The Bible was vindicated.

**3. Nineveh** - Then there is Nineveh – The book of Jonah says Jonah was sent to the city of Nineveh. There was no other evidence of the city of Nineveh, so skeptics scoffed and said the Bible was making the city up. Then the Archeologists discovered Nineveh.

**4. Sodom and Gomorrah** - The same happened with Sodom and Gomorrah. There was nothing in history to confirm they existed and then we found the foundations of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Time and again the Bible has been proven accurate historically.

**5. Hittites** - The Old Testament refers to a nation of people called the Hittites but historians had a major problem because they said they couldn't find any record of this nation. So, historians say, ah ha, "We have got to question the Bible and the validity of the Old Testament documentation and accuracy." However, in 1906 some archeologists were digging around and unearthed the capital city of the Hittite nation. They kept on digging and they found 40 different Hittite cities. The skeptics had to again admit the Bible was right.

It's as if every time a spade goes into the ground another critic of the Bible gets buried.

There have been over 25,000 archeological discoveries that substantiate the validity of scripture.

Historian Nelson Gluck - "It may be stated categorically that no archeological discovery has ever controverted a Biblical reference."

Archeologist William F. Albright - "There can be no doubt that archeology has confirmed the substantial historicity of the Old Testament tradition."

Albright also said, "The excessive skepticism shown toward the Bible has been progressively discredited. Discovery after discovery has established the accuracy of numerous details."

This isn't true of other religious documents. For example the **book of Mormon** tells of a former civilization that lived in North America from 600 BC to 400 BC. It records the names of tribes, cities, mountains, rivers and coinages used in that civilization. Not one historian or archeologist has been able to produce a single artifact to substantiate what it says.

#### **B. The Bible was written by eyewitnesses**

In 1 John, the Apostle John wrote:

- **1 John 1:1 HCSB** What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have observed, and have touched with our hands, concerning the Word of life--

John is saying – I was there and saw it.

Peter told Mark the story of the life of Jesus and he wrote it down. In 2 Peter he tells us the same thing John did:

- **2 Peter 1:16 HCSB** For we did not follow cleverly contrived myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ; instead, we were eyewitnesses of His majesty.

On the day of Pentecost Peter said to the crowds:

- **Acts 2:22 HCSB** "Men of Israel, listen to these words: This Jesus the Nazarene was a man pointed out to you by God with miracles, wonders, and signs that God did among you through Him, just as you yourselves know.

- **Acts 2:32 HCSB** "God has resurrected this Jesus. We are all witnesses of this. Had these things not really happened – they would have been challenged.

Experts like Craig Bloomberg and William Albright place the writings of the New Testament accounts of Jesus 30-45 years after his death. There were eyewitnesses still alive at the time. If the writers of the New Testament were not telling the truth they would have been discredited immediately, but they weren't because eyewitnesses knew it was true.

Example – What if I told you the most amazing thing happened to me. This weekend Bruce Webber, the coach of the Fighting Illioni basketball team called me and asked if I would join the team for their game against Michigan State in the Final Four. Since I still had four years of college basketball eligibility I agreed to play 25 minutes in yesterday's game. I scored 23 point, pulled down 9 rebounds, dished out 5 assists, and blocked 2 shots and my 180-degree slamdunk over Michigan State's center was on ESPN Sports Center. Needless to say it was a great weekend.

You would find such a story incredible and I'm confident there are many who could stand up to tell me that I was a liar because they saw the game and I absolutely did not play in it.

In the same way, if this incredible story of the Gospels and the Acts were a fabrication, eyewitnesses would have been coming out of the First Century woodwork to call the writers liars. But they didn't, because the eyewitnesses knew it was true.

Luke was a sort of a first century investigative reporter. In Luke's Gospel he tells us that he spent time interviewing numerous eyewitness in writing His Gospel and the book of Luke.

Archeologist Sir William Ramsey - "The Bible writers among the greatest historians that have ever lived."

John Warwick Montgomery – Dean of the Green Leaf Law School – "The evidence of the Bible's historicity are so strong that if you were to apply the federal rules of evidence it would stand up under any court of law as reliable."

### **C. What about the contradictions?**

Sometimes there are apparent contradictions because two authors make statements about something that happened that gives different insights but they are not contradictory. For instance Matthew and Luke wrote different genealogies because one was tracing from Mary and the other from Joseph. Both show either way Jesus was a descendent of David.

Other times the seeming contradictions have to do with literary style – Genesis 1 and Genesis 2.

In the two examples I've given they are not contradictory but complimentary. There are numerous other examples.

The Bible passes the historicity test with flying colors.

### **3. The Bible is scientifically credible.**

The Bible is not a scientific book. It is a book about God restoring a broken relationship with the human race. But when the Bible touches science, the Bible is accurate.

- Roundness of the earth (Isaiah 40:22)
- Almost infinite extent of the sidereal universe (Isaiah 55:9)
- Law of conservation of mass and energy (II Peter 3:7)
- Hydrologic cycle (Ecclesiastes 1:7)
- Vast number of stars (Jeremiah 33:22)
- Law of increasing entropy (Psalm 102:25-27)

- Paramount importance of blood in life processes (Leviticus 17:11)
- Atmospheric circulation (Ecclesiastes 1:6)
- Gravitational field (Job 26:7)

None of these insights are related in technical scientific language but in everyday language. These scientific concepts were in the Bible long before science discovered them. The Bible is even scientifically accurate. It is an extremely reliable book.

#### 4. Prophecy demonstrates the Bible is inspired by God.

- [2 Timothy 3:16 HCSB](#) All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness,
- [2 Peter 1:20-21 HCSB](#) First of all, you should know this: no prophecy of Scripture comes from one's own interpretation, (21) because no prophecy ever came by the will of man; instead, moved by the Holy Spirit, men spoke from God.

In various ways over 3,000 times the Bible declares, "Thus says the Lord". If there were a book that foretold future events with incredible accuracy and has never been wrong, wouldn't you think that book to be inspired? The Bible is that book.

**Ezekiel – Spoke of a city called Tyre.** He prophesied it would be utterly destroyed and never rebuilt. Nebuchadnezzar and Alexander the Great came and reduced the city to rubble and to this day it has never been rebuilt. There isn't even anything on that ground.

Scientist and mathematician Peter Stoner – odds of prophecy of Tyre happening were 1:400 million

Then there are the prophecies about the Jewish people

**Deuteronomy 28** predicted their dispersion

**Jeremiah 24** – The Jews would be persecuted and held in great contempt. I've been to former German concentration camps and the Holocaust museum in Washington, DC – I can tell you the Bible was right in its prediction - 6 million Jews were annihilated in Nazi concentration camps during World War II.

**Jeremiah 31** – The prediction that Israel would be restored as a nation. Against all historical and political odds in 1948 the nation of Israel was restored on its original land.

**Isaiah 53** – Foretelling of Christ in detail – 700 years before he was born. Isaiah tells of:

- His life
- His ministry
- His reaction to judicial proceedings
- His death
- And His burial

That's just the tip of the iceberg.

All of this could not all have happened by chance, it is a mathematical impossibility. And this incredible prophetic accuracy can't be attributed to other religious documents.

Ruber Smith who compiled a personal library of 25,000 volumes wrote, "Islam cannot point to any prophecies of the coming of Mohammed uttered hundreds of years before his birth. Neither can the founders of any cult in this country rightly identify any ancient text specifically foretelling an appearance."

The Bible is uniquely the inspired Word of God.

#### 5. The Bible works in real life.

Unlike any other book the Bible could claim millions of testimonies of changing the lives of people who have read and applied it.

Personally I can tell you the Bible

- Has given me strength when I've felt like quitting
- It has confronted me over my attitudes
- It had convicted me over my sin
- This book has changed my perspective on my past
- Has showed me how to live in the present
- And it's given me hope for the future

I'm at the place in my life that I can't imagine going through one day without the wisdom of the Bible. Most people do not have intellectual issues with the Bible but lifestyle issues with the Bible. If they applied it the Bible would be like a surgeons scalpel and they don't want to submit to the surgery.

That is what the Bible says about itself.

- [Hebrews 4:12 HCSB](#) For the word of God is living and effective and sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating as far as to divide soul, spirit, joints, and marrow; it is a judge of the ideas and thoughts of the heart.

They don't want to think about sin, and repentance, and Heaven, and Hell and judgment. They don't want to hear a Word from God. It would cramp their style. It would rain on the comfortable picnic of their lives. As such they would rather trying to discredit the Bible rather than evaluate it with an open heart and mind.

A little girl shared the story commonly known as "Jonah and the Whale" with an arrogant University professor one day. He challenged her, "Do you believe the story of Jonah and the whale really occurred?" "Oh, yes, I believe it because it's in the Bible." She replied. He said, "Can you prove the story is true?" "Yes, when I get to Heaven I'll ask Jonah." The professor said, "What if Jonah isn't in heaven?" The little girl said, "Well, then I guess you can ask him."

What you believe matters and what you hang your eternal hat on is essential. Today we did an overview of why the Bible is credible.

Ultimately you have to decide where you stand with this book. If the Bible is the inspired Word of God don't you think you should learn what it says about this life and the life to come?

Most people with intellectual problems with the Bible have never read it. Start reading it for yourself and you decide. Get an easy to read translation. Start in Mark or John. Read a chapter per day and really listen with a prayer heart. God, if this is really your Word, speak to me from it. You might be surprised by what you find.

Check out what it says about various areas of your life and begin applying it. I'm totally confident you'll discover that it's true and it works.

One area the Bible certainly right on about is its assessment of us. It nails the human nature. The Bible does an incredible job of describing the human condition and why we have self-destructive tendencies in our lives. It's called sin.

Despite what we may think of ourselves the Bible tells us we have all sinned and deserve God's wrath and judgment but God loved us so much that He sent His Son, Jesus Christ to take the penalty for us on the cross.

## **Altar Call**