

How Can we Believe the Bible is Authentic?

The Bible has been translated so many times throughout history, there is no way it is still true. There are other books written during Jesus' time that should have been included in the Bible.

If you have ever thought either of those objections about the Bible being true (I sure did before God made Himself known to me!) please read this article. I hope it will teach you why we can trust in the Bible.

Convictions

I believe the Bible is the Word of God, fully inspired and without error in the original manuscripts, written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and that it has supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct.

I think it is pretty easy to understand and affirm that the original manuscripts were without error when penned by the original authors. You may disagree with them being true in the sense of being inspired by God, which I understand. If you didn't disagree then we you would believe them inspired by God and real and we would be having a very different conversation!

What I want to explore, and I think we can agree on, is that all the letters in the Bible where at one time completely correct and written by an original author, this has nothing to do with claiming them to be fact or fiction. There is no arguing that they were written a long time ago by an author.

With that established, I want to explore why we can take a Bible today and be confident it is accurate compared to what the original authors wrote. I am not arguing what they wrote is true or not, just that we can know that what we read today is what they wrote thousands of years ago.

I am going to only talk about the New Testament for sake of time. There are two arguments people usually bring up to discredit the accuracy of the Bible. They either point out the books in the Bible where selected by a group of people and there is no way to determine if they chose rightly. Maybe some books should have been added and/or some taken out. The second argument goes something like this: the Bible has been translated and translated and translated throughout history there is no way to prove mistakes haven't been made. Let's explore those two arguments.

How Were Bible Books Chosen?

First it is important to see that the writers of the New Testament recognized that canonical scriptures (that is, a "set" of scripture) did exist. This is important to know because them knowing that they existed, means that they could understand that their writing had the possibility to become part of a new set.

And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all *the Scriptures*. Luke 24:27

And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from *the Scriptures*. Acts 17:2

So we see that Jesus and Paul affirmed that there was a set, finished group of scriptures—they were talking about the Old Testament. We see the first sign that events or teachings were taking place that could expand on the canon of Scripture in the life of Jesus. Jesus was deemed to have authority equal to and beyond the Old Testament Scriptures.

“You have heard it said, ‘an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’ [Old Testament quote] ***But I say to you***, do not resist him who is evil; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also.” Matthew 5:38-39

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, ***in these last days has spoken to us in His Son***, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. Hebrews 1:1-2

The point here is that Jesus' teachings would inevitably lead to an expansion of the canon of the early church. Not only did he point in this direction but he also prepared the early church to expect further teaching through his authorized apostles and inspiration.

"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. John 16:12-14

After Jesus' death we had the Apostles teachings. Paul saw the apostolic teaching as the unrepeatable foundation of the church and saw his own words and teachings as the expression of the Lord's words. If the teachings of the apostles was unrepeatable, then when it was over it could be considered canon, or a set.

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ***built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets***, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, Ephesians 2:19-20

If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, ***let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment***. 1 Corinthians 14:37

Even between different authors of the New Testament the apostles said that each others writings were adding to the canon of scripture.

as he [Paul] does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the OTHER Scriptures. 2 Peter 3:16

We have seen that Jesus' words carried the same weight as scripture and that He gave the same authority to His chosen apostles who instructed the early church as if their commands were the Lord's commands. So, it was obvious that the canon of the Scriptures was going to be expanded. What remained for the early church to do was discern which writings were the fulfillment of Jesus' promise to the apostles.

The first list that is known to proclaim all 27 books of the NT is in the Festal Letter of Athanasius, who was the bishop of Alexandria in AD 367. The list was affirmed by the Synod of Hippo in 393.

So the big question! How do we know these people selected the correct books or letters? There were other letters and books out there that were up for consideration. First, take in this fact. The members of the council were not wishy-washy Christians. Lots of the members have suffered serious and terrible persecution under Emperor Licinius or after his reign ended. If someone's faith is meaningless and they are facing intense physical persecution they will not count it joy to be counted worthy to suffer for the Gospel. They took what they were doing serious.

And it is very important to know that the Council, or church, did not create, or establish, the authority of these books. After the council decided which books should be part of the New Testament, this was not the time where everyone started thinking, "Oh my gosh, we better start reading this stuff and do it and anything else not included is false!" The authority of the books of the New Testament was ALREADY affirmed and in practice in the church. The books were being used and shared between the churches, they were using them to lay the foundation for their ministries and churches, and they were already viewed as authoritative. People would travel for miles to read and copy Paul's or Peter's or other writers of the Bible's letters. This wasn't done for other writings that were around at the time.

The Church Council during the Synod of Hippo did not give the 27 books in the New Testament any authority that they did not ALREADY possess, they simply recorded their established authority and canonicity/completeness.

Translations and Potential Mistakes

So, how did we get the Bibles we are holding and how can we be sure they have not been messed up? Some would say, "The Bible we have is a translation of a translation of a translation. Translators were human and there is no way to show there are no errors." Let's look at how we got the Bible sitting in our hands today.

We do not have any actual pieces of parchment that a Biblical New Testament writer wrote on. There are no original copies. The first printed Greek New Testament was not printed until 1516. Before that all copying was done by hand.

When churches received letters from Paul or other writers of the New Testament the originals were kept with that church. Members from other churches would come and copy down the letters and bring them back to their church. The copying process was taken serious. If a mistake was made during the process the entire copy was destroyed. Some Old Testament recounts say that on their huge scrolls of animal skin if they messed up they would destroy the one they were working on and the completed one it was touching. It was no joke; the people viewed it as the Word of God and treated it with its due respect.

So you got these letters being copied and when the Council agreed on what books to include in the canon, as I just described, they went to work finding the original wording. Would this be difficult? I do not know if they had the original letters (I imagine they did given only a few hundred years had passed), if they did there is not doubt it was accurate. This takes us then to how can we know we STILL have the original text. Well it is quite simple.

Historical Bible Evidence

Today there are over 5,000 manuscripts of the New Testament with the oldest being from around 130 AD. No other subject from history can compare to this. Look at other writings from the era taken as history and fact.

Caesar's Gallic Wars: 10 manuscripts, oldest is 900 years after the event.

Roman History of Livy: 20 manuscripts, oldest is from around 400 AD.

Histories and Annals of the Roman historian Tacitus: 2 manuscripts, one is from the 9th century and the other from the 11th century.

These writings are considered generally accurate accounts of history. If you have learned about Rome in school or watched a TV show on it, information is guaranteed to have come from these.

We have over 5,000 manuscripts of the New Testament! With the earliest complete copy of the New Testament being from around 350 AD, called the Codex Sinaiticus found on Mount Sinai.

Think about that. We can go and look at (if it was allowed) the New Testament in Greek from 350 AD. This is where statements like "the original translators must have got this wrong," or "the Bible has errors because it has been translated from a translation and someone made a mistake," become so obviously foolish for a couple reasons.

If we really thought the original translators got something wrong all we have to do is check. We take the part we think must be wrong, grab our 350 AD Bible and look and go, "well, they got it right."

There are some variant readings where any doubt still remains among critics, but they have zero affect on historical fact or Christian faith and practice. For example Revelation 1:5, “and has loosed us from our sins by his blood.” Loosed is most likely bathed. It still doesn’t affect the theological principle that Jesus’ blood is the only thing that cleanses our sins.

The Bible is NOT translated from a translation. It is the original text. How can we know there are no errors in the copies since there are no originals? Easy! Say there are 200 copies of Matthew from around 200 AD. Someone today could take those 200 copies and compare every single one of them to each other. If say 5 had sections that were different from the rest AND the mistakes were different from each other it would be easy to say, “those are mistakes!” Is this the case? Yes! But given the large number of manuscripts to compare and the vast harmonization between them any errors stand out like a sore thumb.

We can, TODAY, take a translation and look and the original Greek (the completely inspired Word of God) and say it is correct.

Conclusion

There is history and fact and proof, I think, that the Bible is accurate to this day to the original inspired text. But for me it is not needed. To me it is this easy:

My council will stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose. Isaiah 46:10

I know that you [God] can do all things, and no purpose of yours can be thwarted. Job 42:2

God says He will do what He says. Period! This is one of the ways the Bible describes God’s love is described in the Bible.

Every Word of God proves true... Proverbs 30:5

All Scripture is breathed out by God... 2 Timothy 3:16

The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever. Psalm 119:160

You cannot tell me the books in the Bible shouldn’t be there or others should. The early church already established what books belonged in the Bible by using them to guide their lives. As should you! You cannot tell me the Bible is messed up from being translated so much. I can grab a copy of the 350 AD Bible, compare it to mine, and see they match. A book written only 300 years after the original letters were written with such a huge support of other historical manuscripts cannot be proven false.

Here is what I think, because this is how I was. You are believing and telling yourself anything it takes for you to convince yourself the Bible is not true. The reason you are doing this is because you don’t want to be accountable to what it says! The Bible is what

the original authors wrote. They wrote about Jesus Christ. Who is the Son of God, who is the only way to God, who died for our sins, who absorbed all of God's wrath, who rose again on the third day, so that whosoever believes in Him will have His righteousness credited to you and you will be saved. That is what the original authors wrote. It is up to you to decide if they were telling the truth.

Any questions? Let us know!

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