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# How Do We Know that the Bible Is True?

## Apologetics

by [Dr. Jason Lisle](https://answersingenesis.org/bios/jason-lisle/) on March 22, 2011

*A number of Christians have tried to answer this question. Unfortunately, not all of those answers have been as cogent as we might hope. Some answers make very little sense at all.*

The Bible is an extraordinary work of literature, and it makes some astonishing claims. It records the details of the creation of the universe, the origin of life, the moral law of God, the history of man’s rebellion against God, and the historical details of God’s work of redemption for all who trust in His Son. Moreover, the Bible claims to be God’s revelation to mankind. If true, this has implications for all aspects of life: how we should live, why we exist, what happens when we die, and what our meaning and purpose is. But how do we know if the claims of the Bible are true?

## Some Typical Answers

A number of Christians have tried to answer this question. Unfortunately, not all of those answers have been as cogent as we might hope. Some answers make very little sense at all. Others have some merit but fall short of proving the truth of the Bible with certainty. Let’s consider some of the arguments that have been put forth by Christians.

### A Subjective Standard

Some Christians have argued for the truth of the Scriptures by pointing to the changes in their own lives that belief in the God who inspired the Bible has induced. Receiving Jesus as Lord is a life-changing experience that brings great joy. A believer is a “new creation” (2Cor 5:17). However, this change does not in and of itself prove the Bible is true. People might experience positive feelings and changes by believing in a position that happens to be false.

At best, a changed life shows consistency with the Scriptures. We would expect a difference in attitudes and actions given that the Bible is true. Although giving a testimony is certainly acceptable, a changed life does not (by itself) demonstrate the truth of the Scriptures. Even an atheist might argue that his belief in atheism produces feelings of inner peace or satisfaction. This does not mean that his position is true.

### By Faith

When asked how they know that the Bible is true, some Christians have answered, “We know the Bible is true *by faith*.” While that answer may sound pious, it is not very logical, nor is it a correct application of Scripture. Faith is the confident belief in something that you cannot perceive with your senses (Heb 11:1). So when I believe without observation that the earth’s core is molten, I am acting on a type of faith. Likewise, when I believe in God whom I cannot directly see, I am acting on faith. Don’t misunderstand. We should indeed have faith in God and His Word. But the “by faith” response does not actually answer the objection that has been posed—namely, how we know that the Bible is true.

Since faith is a belief in something unseen, the above response is not a good argument. “We know by faith” is the equivalent of saying, “We know by believing.” But clearly, the act of believing in something doesn’t necessarily make it true. A person doesn’t really know something just by believing it. He simply believes it. So the response is essentially, “We believe because we believe.” While it is true that we believe, this answer is totally irrelevant to the question being asked. It is a non-answer. Such a response is not acceptable for a person who is a follower of Christ. The Bible teaches that we are to be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks a reason of the hope that is within us (1Pe 3:15). Saying that we have faith is not the same as giving a reason for that faith.

### Begging the Question

Some have cited 2Tim 3:16 as proof that the Bible is the inerrant Word of God. This text indicates that all Scripture is inspired by God (or “God-breathed”) and useful for teaching. That is, every writing in the Bible is a revelation from God that can be trusted as factually true. Clearly, if the Bible is given by revelation of the God of truth, then it can be trusted at every point as an accurate depiction. The problem with answering the question this way is that it presupposes that the verse itself is truthful—which is the very claim at issue.

In other words, how do we know that 2Tim 3:16 is true? “Well it’s in the Bible,” some might say. But how do we know the Bible is true? “2Tim 3:16 assures us that it is.” This is a vicious circular argument. It must first arbitrarily assume the very thing it is trying to prove. Circular reasoning of this type (while technically valid) is not useful in a debate because it does not prove anything beyond what it merely assumes. After all, this type of argument would be equally valid for any other book that claims to be inspired by God. How do we know that book X is inspired by God? “Because it says it is.” But how do we know that what it’s saying is true? “Well, God wouldn’t lie!”

On the other hand, some Christians might go too far the other way—thinking that what the Bible says about itself is utterly irrelevant to the question of its truthfulness or its inspiration from God. This, too, is a mistake. After all, how would we know that a book is inspired by God unless it claimed to be? Think about it: how do you know who wrote a particular book? The book itself usually states who the author is. Most people are willing to accept what a book says about itself unless they have good evidence to the contrary.

So it is quite relevant that the Bible itself claims to be inspired by God. It does claim that all of its assertions are true and useful for teaching. Such statements do prove at least that the writers of the Bible considered it to be not merely their own opinion, but in fact the inerrant Word of God. However, arguing that the Bible must be true solely on the basis that it says so is not a powerful argument. Yes, it is a relevant claim. But we need some additional information if we are to escape a vicious circle.

### Textual Consistency and Uniqueness

Another argument for the truthfulness of the Bible concerns its uniqueness and internal consistency. The Bible is remarkably self-consistent, despite having been written by more than 40 different writers over a timespan of about 2,000 years. God’s moral law, man’s rebellion against God’s law, and God’s plan of salvation are the continuing themes throughout the pages of Scripture. This internal consistency is what we would expect if the Bible really is what it claims to be—God’s revelation.

Moreover, the Bible is uniquely authentic among ancient literary works in terms of the number of ancient manuscripts found and the smallness of the timescale between when the work was first written and the oldest extant manuscript (thereby minimizing any possibility of alteration from the original).[[1]](#footnote-1) This indicates that the Bible has been accurately transmitted throughout the ages, far more so than other ancient documents. Few people would doubt that Plato really wrote the works ascribed to him, and yet the Bible is far more authenticated. Such textual criticism shows at least that the Bible (1) is unique in ancient literature and (2) has been accurately transmitted throughout the ages. What we have today is a good representation of the original. No one could consistently argue that the Bible’s authenticity is in doubt unless he is willing to doubt all other works of antiquity (because they are far less substantiated).[[2]](#footnote-2)

To be sure, this is what we would expect given the premise that the Bible is true. And yet, uniqueness and authenticity to the original do not necessarily prove that the source is true. They simply mean that the Bible is unique and has been accurately transmitted. This is consistent with the claim that the Bible is the Word of God, but it does not decisively prove the claim.

### External Evidence

Some Christians have argued for the truth of Scripture on the basis of various lines of external evidence. For example, archaeological discoveries have confirmed many events of the Bible. The excavation of Jericho reveals that the walls of this city did indeed fall as described in the book of Joshua.[[3]](#footnote-3) Indeed, some passages of the Bible, which critics once claimed were merely myth, have now been confirmed archeologically. For example, the five cities of the plain described in Gen 14:2 were once thought by secular scholars to be mythical, but ancient documents have been found that list these cities as part of ancient trade routes.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Archaeology certainly confirms Scripture. Yet it does not prove that the Bible is entirely true. After all, not every claim in Scripture has been confirmed archeologically. The Garden of Eden has never been found, nor has the Tower of Babel or Noah’s Ark (as of the writing of this article). So at best, archaeology demonstrates that some of the Bible is true.

Such consistency is to be expected. Yet, using archaeology in an attempt to prove the Bible seems inappropriate. After all, archaeology is an uncertain science; its findings are inevitably subject to the interpretation and bias of the observer and are sometimes overturned by newer evidence. Archaeology is useful, but fallible. Is it appropriate to use a fallible procedure to judge what claims to be the infallible Word of God? Using the less certain to judge the more certain seems logically flawed. Yes, archaeology can show consistency with Scripture but is not in a position to prove the Bible in any decisive way because archaeology itself is not decisive.

### Predictive Prophecy and Divine Insight

A number of passages in the Bible predict future events in great detail—events that were future to the writers but are now in our past. For example, in Dan 2 a prophecy predicted the next three world empires (up to and including the Roman Empire) and their falls. If the Bible were not inspired by God, how could its mere human writers possibly have known about events in the distant future?[[5]](#footnote-5)

The Bible also touches on matters of science in ways that seem to go beyond what was known to humankind at the time. In Is 40:22 we read about the spreading out (expansion) of the heavens (the universe). Yet secular scientists did not discover such expansion until the 1920s. The spherical nature of the earth and the fact that the earth hangs in space are suggested in Scriptures such as Job 26:10 and Job 26:7 respectively. The book of Job is thought to have been written around 2000 BC—long before the nature of our planet was generally known.

Such evidence is certainly consistent with the claim that the Bible is inspired by God. And some people find such evidence convincing. Yet, persons who tenaciously resist the idea that the Bible is the Word of God have offered their counterarguments to the above examples. They have suggested that the predictive prophetic passages were written after the fact, much later than the text itself would indicate. Examples of apparent scientific insight in the Bible are chalked up to coincidence.

Moreover, there is something inappropriate about using secular science to judge the claims of the Bible. As with archeological claims, what constitutes a scientific fact is often subject to the bias of the interpreter. Some people would claim that particles-to-people evolution is a scientific fact. Although creationists would disagree, we must concede that what some people think is good science does not always coincide with the Bible.

The Bible does show agreement with some of what is commonly accepted as scientific fact. But what is considered scientific fact today might not be tomorrow. We are once again in the embarrassing position of attempting to judge what claims to be infallible revelation from God by the questionable standards of men. Again, how can we judge what claims to be inerrant revelation by a standard that is itself uncertain and ever-changing? This would be like using something we merely suspect to be about three feet long to check whether a yardstick is accurate. Using the less-certain to judge the more-certain just doesn’t make sense. At best, such things merely show consistency.

## The Standard of Standards

The above lines of evidence are certainly consistent with the premise that the Bible is true. Many people have no doubt found such evidence quite convincing. Yet, we must admit that none of the above lines of evidence quite proves that the Bible must be the inerrant Word of God. Critics have their counterarguments to all of the above. If we are to know for certain that the Bible is true, we will need a different kind of argument—one that is absolutely conclusive and irrefutable. In all the above cases, we took as an unstated premise that there are certain standards by which we judge how likely something is true. **When we stop to consider what these standards are, we will see that the standards themselves are proof that the Bible is true.**

Putting it another way, only the Bible can make sense of the standards by which we evaluate whether or not something is true. One such set of standards are the laws of logic. We all know that a true claim cannot contradict another true claim. That would violate a law of logic: the law of non-contradiction. The statements “The light is red” and “The light is not red” cannot both be true at the same time and in the same sense. Laws of logic thus represent a standard by which we can judge certain truth claims. Moreover, all people seem to “know” laws like the law of non-contradiction. We all assume that such laws are the same everywhere and apply at all times without exception. But why is this? How do we know such things?

If we consider the biblical worldview, we find that we can make sense of the laws of logic. The Bible tells us that God’s mind is the standard for all knowledge (Col 2:3). Since God upholds the entire universe and since He is beyond time, we would expect that laws of logic apply everywhere in the universe and at all times. There can never be an exception to a law of logic because God’s mind is sovereign over all truth. We can know laws of logic because we are made in God’s image and are thus able to think in a way that is consistent with His nature (Gen 1:27). So, when we take the Bible as our worldview, we find that laws of logic make sense.

But if we don’t accept the Bible as true, we are left without a foundation for laws of logic. How could we know (apart from God) that laws of logic work everywhere? After all, none of us have universal knowledge. We have not experienced the future nor have we travelled to distant regions of the universe. Yet we assume that laws of logic will work in the future as they have in the past and that they work in the distant cosmos as they work here. But how could we possibly know that apart from revelation from God?

Arguing that laws of logic have worked in our past experiences is pointless—because that’s not the question. The question is: how can we know that they will work in the future or in regions of space that we have never visited? Only the Christian worldview can make sense of the universal, exception-less, unchanging nature of laws of logic. Apart from the truth revealed in the Bible, we would have no reason to assume that laws of logic apply everywhere at all times, yet we all do assume this. Only the Christian has a good reason to presume the continued reliability of logic. The non-Christian does not have such a reason in his own professed worldview, and so he is being irrational: believing something without a good reason. The unbeliever has only “blind faith” but the Christian’s faith in the Bible makes knowledge possible.

## The Foundation of Science

Another standard we use when evaluating certain kinds of claims is the standard of science. The tools of science allow us to describe the predictable, consistent way in which the universe normally behaves. Science allows us to make successful predictions about certain future states. For example, if I mix chemical A with chemical B, I expect to get result C because it has always been that way in the past. This happens the same way every time: if the conditions are the same, I will get the same result. Science is based on an underlying uniformity in nature. But why should there be such uniformity in nature? And how do we know about it?

We all presume that the future will be like the past in terms of the basic operation of nature. This does not mean that Friday will be exactly like Monday—conditions change. But it does mean that things like gravity will work the same on Friday as they have on Monday. With great precision astronomers are able to calculate years in advance the positions of planets, the timing of eclipses, and so on—only because the universe operates in such a consistent way. We all know that (in basic ways) the universe will behave in the future as it has in the past. Science would be impossible without this critical principle. But what is the foundation for this principle?

The Bible provides that foundation. According to the biblical worldview, God has chosen to uphold the universe in a consistent way for our benefit. He has promised us in places such as Gen 8:22 that the basic cycles of nature will continue to be in the future as they have been in the past. Although specific circumstances change, the basic laws of nature (such as gravity) will continue to work in the future as they have in the past. Interestingly, only God is in a position to tell us on His own authority that this will be true. According to the Bible, God is beyond time,[[6]](#footnote-6) and so only He knows what the future will be. But we are within time and have not experienced the future. The only way we could know the future will be (in certain ways) like the past is because God has told us in His Word that it will be.

Apart from the Bible, is there any way we could know that the future will be like the past? So far, no one has been able to show how such a belief would make sense apart from Scripture. The only nonbiblical explanations offered have turned out to be faulty. For example, consider the following.

Some people argue that they can know that the future will be like the past on the basis of past experience. That is, in the past, when they had assumed that the future would be like the past, they were right. They then argue that this past success is a good indicator of future success. However, in doing so, they arbitrarily assume the very thing they are supposed to be proving: that the future will be like the past. They commit the logical fallacy of begging the question. Any time we use past experience as an indicator of what will probably happen in the future, we are relying on the belief that the future will be (in basic ways) like the past. So we cannot merely use past experience as our reason for belief that in the future nature will be uniform, unless we already knew by some other way that nature is uniform. If nature were not uniform, then past success would be utterly irrelevant to the future! Only the biblical worldview can provide an escape from this vicious logical circle. And that is another very good reason to believe the Bible is true.

## We Already Know the God of the Bible

Since only the Bible can make sense of the standards of knowledge, it may seem perplexing at first that people who deny the Bible are able to have knowledge. We must admit that non-Christians are able to use laws of logic and the methods of science with great success—despite the fact that such procedures only make sense in light of what the Bible teaches. How are we to explain this inconsistency? How is it that people deny the truth of the Bible and yet simultaneously rely upon the truth of the Bible?

The Bible itself gives us the resolution to this paradox. In Rom 1:18–21 the Scriptures teach that God has revealed Himself to everyone. God has “hardwired” knowledge of Himself into every human being, such that we all have inescapable knowledge of God. However, people have rebelled against God—they “suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (Rom 1:18). People go to great lengths to convince themselves and others that they do not know what, in fact, they must know. They are denying the existence of a God who is rightly angry at them for their rebellion against Him.

But, since all men are made in God’s image, we are able to use the knowledge of logic and uniformity that He has placed within us,[[7]](#footnote-7) even if we inconsistently deny the God that makes such knowledge possible. So the fact that even unbelievers are able to use logic and science is a proof that the Bible really is true. When we understand the Bible, we find that what it teaches can make sense of those things necessary for science and reasoning. God has designed us so that when believers read His Word, we recognize it as the voice of our Creator (Jn 10:27). The truth of the Bible is inescapably certain. For if the Bible were not true, we couldn’t know anything at all. It turns out that the worldview delineated by the Bible is the only worldview that can make sense of all those things necessary for knowledge.

## Conclusion

The truth of the Bible is obvious to anyone willing to fairly investigate it. The Bible is uniquely self-consistent and extraordinarily authentic. It has changed the lives of millions of people who have placed their faith in Christ. It has been confirmed countless times by archaeology and other sciences. It possesses divine insight into the nature of the universe and has made correct predictions about distant future events with perfect accuracy. When Christians read the Bible, they cannot help but recognize the voice of their Creator. The Bible claims to be the Word of God, and it demonstrates this claim by making knowledge possible. It is the standard of standards. The proof of the Bible is that unless its truth is presupposed, we couldn’t prove anything at all.[[8]](#footnote-8)

<https://answersingenesis.org/is-the-bible-true/how-do-we-know-that-the-bible-is-true/>

# Is the Old Testament Reliable?

## Apologetics

by [Brian H. Edwards](https://answersingenesis.org/bios/brian-edwards/) on March 8, 2011

*Must we have blind, unreasonable faith to believe the Bible to be true? Or are there sound reasons that the Bible, and specifically the Old Testament, can be accepted as reliable in every part?*

## Why Read the Bible?

Some years ago, I informed my congregation that over the next few months something would happen in our church that the world would find strange. In the first place, I proposed to preach on a book that was more than 3,000 years old, and second, I knew the whole congregation would be there each week to listen. And they were there—for the 30 weeks as we worked our way through the OT book of Deuteronomy.

Across the world every week, millions of Christians listen to thousands of sermons from the Bible, a book that begins at the dawn of history itself. Why do they listen? The answer is that Christians believe the Bible to be both reliable and relevant to the need of twenty-first century people to learn about their God and how they should live to please Him.

But must they have blind, unreasonable faith to believe the Bible to be true? Or are there sound reasons that the Bible, and specifically for this chapter, the OT, can be accepted as reliable in every part?

## What the Bible Writers Believed

The OT writers believed their message was God-breathed and, therefore, utterly reliable. More than 400 times from Ex 4:22 to Mal 1:4, they declared, in just three Hebrew words, “Thus says the Lord.”

To emphasize this divine authority many of the prophets received God’s message through a powerful experience. For example, the prophet Jeremiah recorded that at the beginning of his ministry, “The Lord put forth His hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me: ‘Behold, I have put My words in your mouth’” (Jer 1:9).

The prophets so identified themselves as God’s spokesmen that they frequently spoke as though God Himself were speaking. In Is 5:1–2 the prophet spoke of God in the third person—He—but in vv 3–6 Isaiah spoke for God in the first person—I. Isaiah had become the actual spokesperson for God. No wonder King David spoke of the word of the Lord as “perfect” (2Sam 22:31; see also Pr 30:5. The NIV translates this word as “flawless”).

The NT writers did not doubt that the OT prophets spoke for God. Peter and John saw the words of David in Ps 2, not as the opinion of a king in Israel, but as the Word of God: “You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David” (Act 4:25, NIV). Similarly, Paul accepted Isaiah’s words as God speaking to men: “The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers” (Act 28:25).

The NT writers were so convinced all the words of the OT Scripture were inspired by God that they even claimed, “Scripture says,” when the words quoted came directly from God. For example, “The Scripture says to the Pharaoh” (Rom 9:17).

Clearly, the Lord Jesus Himself believed the words of the OT were God-breathed. In Jn 10:34 (quoting from Ps 82:6), He based His teaching upon a single phrase: “I said, ‘You are gods.’” In Mt 22:43–44 He quoted from Ps 110:1 and emphasized a single word, “Lord,” to reveal Himself as the Son of God.

## Where Are All the Gods?

The entire history of Israel covered by the OT took place under the shadow of at least four major empires across the Fertile Crescent: Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, and Persia. Their influence is seen throughout the OT record, and the religious life of each of these powers was dominated by a vast pantheon of gods and goddesses. The Egyptian collection included at least 1,500 gods, a number nearly matched by the Assyrians, Babylonians, and Persians. They had gods for the land and sea, hills and valleys, planets and seasons, birth and death, and everything in between. The pantheon of the Greeks and Romans who carried us into the NT was equally numerous. Their collection included the same gods with different names as centuries and empires rolled by.

Map of the Fertile Crescent and the main empires.[[9]](#footnote-9)

In staggeringly marked contrast to this polytheism, the Israelites, from their earliest history, were taught to believe in one God and one alone. Moses fixed this truth in the mind of the nation: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one” (Dt 6:4). Other ancient peoples of the world were polytheistic, so where did this “strange” idea come from? And why did the prophets of Israel hold to monotheism so firmly? The often quoted idea that Israel garnered its religious ideas from the surrounding nations is completely toppled by the fact that Israel stood alone as a people who believed there was only one God, the God of the whole universe. Jonah’s God of “heaven, sea, and land” (Jon 1:9) was a radical idea to the sailors on the Phoenician ship as well as to the citizens of Nineveh.

## Tell It like It Is

Another unique feature of the OT is its ruthless honesty in the records of Israel. In the ancient world, bad things were not recorded. If a king lost a battle, either government spin would turn it into a victory or else the defeat would simply be left unstated in the records. The fifty year struggle between the Egyptians and the Hittites, in which both sides were frequently bested in the fight, is vividly recorded in the temple of Ramesses II at Abu Simbel as a great victory for the Pharaoh. Similarly, when recording the ancient dynasties of Egypt, this king deliberately omitted the dynasty of Amenhotep IV, who was considered the “heretic king” for elevating the god Aten above all others in the pantheon.[[10]](#footnote-10) The Romans followed suit with purposeful omissions from the record, and they had a phrase for it: *damnatio memoria* (the damnation of memory). To record it was to perpetuate it; to ignore it meant that it never happened.

Contrast this with the authenticity of the OT. If Israel lost a battle, it was recorded. When Israel’s hero King David committed a terrible double crime of adultery and murder that was also recorded. Even the godly King Hezekiah, in whose reign a spiritual revival took place, is on record as failing in his latter days and committing an act of foolish pride that brought disaster on the nation in years to come (2K 20:12–18).

Why did the Israelites buck the majority vote of the nations and refuse to censor their history?

## Tell It like It Will Be

The fulfillment of biblical prophecy has always been a great embarrassment to the critics of the Bible, and their only escape route is to believe that the prophecies were written long after the event predicted. One significant problem with this conjecture is that no one has been able to explain how the “prophetic con men” managed to pull off their “deception” so consistently, convincingly, and completely over so many centuries!

One writer on this subject has concluded that “the number of prophecies in the Bible is so large and their distribution so evenly spread through both Testaments and all types of literary forms that the interpreter is alerted to the fact that he or she is dealing with a major component of the Bible.”[[11]](#footnote-11) With that amount available, we can only toe the water here.[[12]](#footnote-12)

The prophets of God challenged the false prophets of the nations to tell something prophetic: “‘Present your case,’ says the Lord. ‘Bring forth your strong reasons,’ says the King of Jacob. ‘Let them bring forth and show us what will happen; let them show the former things, what they were, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them; or declare to us things to come.’” (Is 41:21–22).

The punishment for a prophet who gave false predictions was death. Conversely, the prophet Ezekiel, when prophesying of the coming destruction of Jerusalem, could claim with confidence, “When this comes to pass—surely it will come—then they will know that a prophet has been among them” (Ez 33:33). For an Israelite it was unimaginable that a prophet would write up his “prophecy” after the event! A prophet would be stoned for such deceit.

### The Prophecy of Nahum

The small book of Nahum in the Bible contains a clear prophecy of the final destruction of Nineveh, the capital of the powerful Assyrian empire. If the prophet had written his prophecy after the event, it is hardly likely that the Jews would have been so gullible as to have accepted the retrospective prophecy of a prophet they knew to be still among them.

The argument most favored by scholars who will not accept Bible prophecy is that the author, under the pseudonym of Nahum, wrote many years beyond the lifetime of any who could have witnessed the fall of Nineveh. The problem with this argument is that Nahum records the precise way in which this impregnable city would eventually fall: primarily through fire and water (see Nah 1:10,2:4,6–8,3:8,13,15). Archaeologists have discovered how accurate his descriptions are, and some of the fire-burnt palace reliefs can be seen in the British Museum in London.[[13]](#footnote-13) The city was so utterly destroyed in 612 BC that two centuries after its destruction, the Greek historian Xenophon sat on top of the ruins and had no idea what city it had been. It would be another 2,246 years before the site was positively identified!

Attempts to deny Nahum’s accurate prophecy of the destruction of Nineveh in 612 BC are more difficult to accept than believing real prophecy took place.

### The Prophecies About Christ

The clearest and most challenging evidence of the reliability of the OT is its consistent promise of the coming of the Messiah. Not even the most liberal critic of the Bible will doubt that Mic 5, Ze 9, Ps 22, and Is 53, to take four examples among many, were written centuries before Christ was born. Yet the details of His birth, triumphal entry, Crucifixion, and burial are too close to doubt the connection. The suggestions that either Jesus deliberately arranged to fulfill the prophecies (including His place of birth and the soldiers casting lots for His clothes) or that the accounts were written two or three centuries after the events have themselves long been consigned to the stuff of myth.[[14]](#footnote-14)

## The Voice of Silent Stones

Archaeology is rubbish, but sometimes it turns up gold. Archaeology searches through yesterday’s trash to discover how people lived, worked, fought, and died, as well as what they believed. The mantra that “archaeology disproves the Bible” is simple to refute if only people would check out the evidence. Archaeology is a big subject, so we can focus only on a few illustrations. But remember that the purpose of archaeology, as James Hoffmeier comments, is not to prove the Bible but to improve it.[[15]](#footnote-15) By this he means that archaeology can throw new light on old accounts and help us understand the Bible better.

Many details of the Bible, once rejected as fanciful at best or in error at worst, are now accepted by biblical scholars. Here are three of many.

### David Who?

Critics once claimed King David did not ever exist since they could find no record of him outside the Bible. The common idea was that sometime after the Persians came to power in the sixth century BC, he and Solomon were invented by Jewish scribes in order to boost the morale of the Jews in exile.

In July 1993 at Tel Dan in northern Israel, a broken basalt inscription was found, which is dated by archaeologists to the eighth century BC. The inscription claims that the king of Damascus (Ben-Hadad of Syria) killed the king of Israel (that would be Jehoahaz) and the king of the “house of David” (that would be Joash of Judah). The account is found in 2K 13:1–25. This means that the dynasty of King David was known 250 years before the scribes supposedly invented him in the sixth century BC![[16]](#footnote-16) Few now deny the existence of David as a figure of history.

### The King Who Never Existed

For a long time the only reference to an Assyrian king by the name of Sargon was found in Is 20:1. It was therefore assumed that no such king existed and that the writer had made up the name. In 1843 Paul-Emil Botta, the French vice-consul and archaeologist in Mosul (northern Iraq), uncovered the great city of Khorsabad, and Sharru-kin (Sargon) is now one of the best known Assyrian kings in the ancient world.

### Be Patient, Herr Hitzig

In 1850 German scholar Ferdinand Hitzig wrote a commentary on the book of Daniel and boldly declared that Belshazzar was “a figment of the writer’s imagination.”[[17]](#footnote-17) Hitzig’s reasoning was that the only references in known history to a king called Belshazzar were found in the book of Daniel.

Four years later, the British Consul in Basra, J. E. Taylor, discovered four identical time capsules from building works of King Nabonidus of Babylon in which he offers a prayer for himself and “Belshazzar my firstborn son, the offspring of my heart.” Today, no one doubts the existence of Belshazzar.

Some archaeological discoveries may appear to clash with the biblical record. Yet conclusive archaeology consistently confirms the Bible. For example, evidence of the conquest of Canaan in the time of Joshua is slowly coming to light.[[18]](#footnote-18) Also, the absence of evidence of the Hebrews in the land of Goshen has been answered by the Egyptologist Kenneth Kitchen, who asks what evidence we would expect to find from a people who, 3,500 years ago, lived in mud brick houses in an area frequently flooded. In fact, virtually all Egypt’s administrative records of the Delta area have been lost.[[19]](#footnote-19)

On the other hand, a comparison of the names of foreign kings known from inscriptions and those in the Bible is “impeccably accurate.”[[20]](#footnote-20) In brief, it is simply false to claim that “archaeology disproves the Bible” when every year something new is turned up out of the ground that authenticates the biblical record. While there are still some unresolved issues, nothing in archaeology contradicts the Bible.

## The Big Picture

Oxford lecturer Richard Dawkins dismissed the Bible as “a chaotically cobbled-together anthology of disjointed documents.”[[21]](#footnote-21) Any well taught Bible student will know that far from being “chaotically cobbled-together,” one of the hallmarks of the Bible as a trustworthy book is its progressive unfolding of one great theme from beginning to end.

We know the second part of the Bible focuses on Jesus Christ, but it is not always appreciated that the first part of the Bible is also consistently about Christ. While the OT explores many subjects, the grand theme is Christ. Jesus called attention to the numerous OT passages that spoke of Him (Lu 24:27,44).

The first reference to Christ is made to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Shortly after they fell, God promised that the day would come when the offspring of a woman would crush Satan (Gen 3:15). The whole of the OT nudges history closer to the fulfillment of that promise. We have no space here to explore this in detail,[[22]](#footnote-22) but the record of Noah and the Flood, the life of Abraham and the patriarchs, the accounts of Joseph and Israel in Egypt, the Exodus, Sinai and the moral and ceremonial law under Moses, the monarchy from Saul to Zedekiah, and all the prophets in between, nudge the big picture forward until the climax: “when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son” (Gal 4:4). Every book, even the small ones like Ruth and Esther, plays its part in the big picture.

This perfect harmony of the 39 books in the OT is as unique as it is remarkable and stands as one of the great witnesses to the divine authorship, not only of the books, but of the record they relate.

## What the Wise Men Say

Many able archaeologists and OT scholars, both past and present, have accepted the historical accuracy of the OT record.

Robert Dick Wilson was Professor of Semitic Philology at Princeton Theological Seminary during the 1920s. His knowledge of languages (he learned 26 languages, both ancient and modern) was phenomenal and his understanding of the biblical text equally so. He concluded, “No man knows enough to assail the truthfulness of the OT. . . . I try to give my students such an intelligent faith in the OT Scriptures that they will never doubt them as long as they live.”[[23]](#footnote-23)

Kenneth Kitchen, Professor Emeritus of Egyptology and Honorary Research Fellow at the School of Archaeology, Classics, and Oriental Studies, University of Liverpool, England, has made the point that in the ancient world, “people did not write ‘historical novels’ with authentic research . . . in Near Eastern antiquity, as we do today.”[[24]](#footnote-24)

James Hoffmeier, Professor of OT and Ancient Near Eastern History and Archaeology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, while borrowing a phrase from his mentor Alfred Hoerth that archaeology “improves” rather than “proves” the Bible, nevertheless rigorously defends the historical accuracy of the OT.[[25]](#footnote-25)

Donald J. Wiseman, who, until his death in 2009, was Professor Emeritus of Assyriology at the University of London, has claimed that archaeology, “correctly understood, always confirms the accuracy of the Bible.”[[26]](#footnote-26)

Alan Millard, Rankin Professor Emeritus of Hebrew and Ancient Semitic Languages at the University of Liverpool, wisely reminds us that archaeology can never prove or disprove the important message of the Bible, but it does “provide a good basis for a positive approach to the biblical records” and thus “enable its distinctive religious message to stand out more boldly.”[[27]](#footnote-27)

While archaeology can never “prove the Bible true” in that the Bible’s most important message is about God’s promise of the Savior Jesus Christ, the accuracy of its historical data confirms the integrity of its message.

<https://answersingenesis.org/is-the-bible-true/is-the-old-testament-reliable/>

# Is the New Testament Reliable?

## Apologetics

by [Brian H. Edwards](https://answersingenesis.org/bios/brian-edwards/) on March 15, 2011

*Can we trust the New Testament as a reliable record of what actually happened, and do we possess what was actually written in the first century?*

In the seventeenth century William Googe, preaching at Blackfriars in London, spent 32 years and 1,000 sermons on the NT book of Hebrews. That may appear excessive, but he did this because he and his congregation believed the NT to be both reliable and relevant to their day. It still is. Every week, millions of Christians in tens of thousands of congregations listen to sermons based upon the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ and the work and teaching of His followers. Can we trust the NT as a reliable record of what actually happened, and do we possess what was actually written in the first century?

## What the Writers Believed

Two important verses in the NT are 2Tim 3:16 and 2Pe 1:21. The first tells us where the Scriptures came from—they came from God—and the second informs us how they came to us—through men moved by God. In their immediate context, of course, these verses refer to the OT, but this inspiration is also what these men claimed for themselves and for each other. Let’s quickly examine some of the evidence.

Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians “not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches” (1Cor 2:13), and similarly, Peter encouraged the young churches to recall “the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior” (2Pe 3:2). The translators handled well an unusual form of Greek in these passages; the emphasis is not that the apostles merely passed on the commands that Christ had given during His earthly ministry but that they now spoke the words of Christ Himself.

In his first letter, Peter was even more direct. He claimed that the OT prophets spoke of the coming of Christ by the power of “the Spirit of Christ who was in them,” and then he turned his attention to the apostles “who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven” (1Pe 1:11–12). What the Holy Spirit was to the prophets, so He was to the apostles; the authority of the prophets is equal to the authority of the apostles.

Paul challenged the Thessalonians, “You know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus” (1Th 4:2). Earlier in the same letter, Paul had reminded his readers how they first responded to his message: “When you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God” (2:13).

Because Paul was convinced that his teaching carried the authority of God, he claimed that his preaching was the standard of the truth and that other preachers could be tested and measured by it (Gal 1:6–12). Paul’s gospel was not “according to man,” but was received “through the revelation of Jesus Christ” (Gal 1:11–12; see also Eph 3:3). For this reason obedience to Paul’s teaching became the measure of a spiritual life: “If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord” (1Cor 14:37).

### What’s the Problem?

A few phrases used by Paul present a problem to some. In 1Cor 7:10 he claimed, “Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord.” Paul meant nothing more than that on the particular subject with which he was dealing, Christ had already left instructions—see for example Mt 19:1–9. On the other hand, when Paul declared in 1Cor 7:12, “But to the rest I, not the Lord, say,” he meant that on this part of the subject Christ had nothing directly to say. We can understand v. 25 in the same way. The phrase, “I think I also have the Spirit of God,” found in v. 40, is not a statement of doubt. Paul is either making a mocking jibe at those in Corinth who claimed to be full of spiritual gifts and wisdom (1Cor 14:37), or else he is making a positive statement in the same way that we might affirm the truth of a statement with the positive claim, “I think I know what I am talking about.”

## How Their Letters Were Received

Paul did not expect his letters to be read once and then destroyed. The letter addressed to the Colossian church was to be read and passed on to the church at Laodicea; similarly, the letter he had written to Laodicea (long ago lost) was to be read at Colossae (Col 4:16). The apostle was so insistent that his letter to the Thessalonian church should be read by everyone that he placed them under an obligation to the Lord Himself to make sure that “all the holy brethren” had it read to them (1Th 5:27). There is no doubt that after the death of the apostles, the early church leaders accepted the apostles’ letters, and no others, as equal in authority to the OT.[[28]](#footnote-28)

Peter gave Paul’s letters the same authority as the OT Scriptures (2Pe 3:16), just as Paul gave the words of Christ recorded in the Gospels equal authority with the OT. For example, in 1Tim 5:18 Paul introduced both Dt 25:4 and Lu 10:7 by saying, “the Scripture says.” Therefore, when we use the “all Scripture” in 2Tim 3:16 to refer to both Old and New Testaments, we are following the example of the apostles.

## The Authority Christ Gave to His Disciples

The words of Mt 16:18–19 (and Mt 18:18) have often been the cause of debate and argument, but the passage is straightforward. The promise, “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven,” must be understood in the Jewish context. When scribes were admitted to their office, they received a symbolic key of knowledge (see Lu 11:52). The duty of the scribes was to interpret and apply the law of God to particular cases. When the scribes bound a man, they placed him under the obligation of the Law, and when they loosed him they released him from the obligation.

Similarly, the Lord had been training His disciples to be stewards of His teachings. In this promise in Mt 16:19, He referred to their future writing and preaching as scribes of the NT and promised divine help to His disciples in those tasks. In Jn 14:26 He gave His disciples two promises: a divinely aided understanding and a divinely aided memory. “But the Helper [Counselor], the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.” Jn 16:13 adds to this a divinely aided knowledge: “He will tell you things to come.”

In order that the disciples might recall accurately all that Christ had said and done, instruct the Christian church in the way of truth, and write of things still in the future, Christ promised the help of the Holy Spirit. The apostles would be writing with no less authority than the OT prophets. This is confirmed in Rev 22:6: “The angel said to me, ‘These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place’” (NIV).

## The Authority of Christ Himself

Nowhere did Christ more plainly express His belief in the authority of Scripture than in Mt 5:18: “For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.” Later in His ministry, Jesus applied the same authority to His own words: “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will by no means pass away” (Mt 24:35).

## Written or Oral?

It is often assumed that the records in the Gospels circulated only as oral traditions for some 40 years. One critic’s claim is typical: “It is incontrovertible that in the earliest period there was only an oral record of the narrative and sayings of Jesus.”[[29]](#footnote-29) Thus, it was concluded that the Gospels are not history as we know it. But consider the following:

### Get That Down

Although the Jewish rabbis and Greek and Roman philosophers preferred oral teaching, we know that students of both kept notes of the instruction they received. Notice the “writing tablet” in Lu 1:63. It was also common for civil servants and others (like Matthew, Zacchaeus, and the man in Lu 16:6) to use a “notebook” for their work. This was an early form of book made of parchment sheets fastened together with a primitive spiral bind. The Greek language borrowed the Latin name for it, which is *membranae*. This is exactly the word translated “the books” in 2Tim 4:13. Paul used a notebook.[[30]](#footnote-30)

The Gospels record 21 Aramaic words used by Jesus, and we may therefore assume that Jesus generally taught in Aramaic. Professor Alan Millard comments, “The simplest explanation for the presence of these foreign terms in the Greek text is accurate reporting.”[[31]](#footnote-31) In Galilee, where Hebrew was little used, Jesus may have taught in Greek. A leading Jewish authority on the rabbis of this time concludes, “We would naturally expect the logia [teaching] of Jesus to be originally copied in codices.”[[32]](#footnote-32)

We are not suggesting that all the Gospels were written “on the hoof” as the disciples accompanied Jesus, but it would be natural to expect some listeners to write down His teaching and parables. This would be fully in keeping with what we know of the literacy and note-taking of first century Palestine. There is no reason the Gospel writers would not have had access to written records.

### And Get It Down Now!

The idea that the Gospels and epistles were not written down until two or three centuries after the death of Jesus is yesterday’s “scholarship.” Ignatius, who was martyred around the year AD 115, wrote of the apostles’ letters and the Gospels as the “New Testament.”[[33]](#footnote-33) This was typical of all the early church leaders who acknowledged only the four Gospels for the life and teaching of Jesus. By AD 150 the Muratorian Canon listed the books accepted by the “universal church,” and it includes the four Gospels and all thirteen letters of Paul.[[34]](#footnote-34)

In 1972 a liberal scholar, John A. T. Robinson, published a detailed study of each of the books of the NT and concluded that every one must have been completed before the year AD 70.[[35]](#footnote-35) In addition he condemned the “sheer scholarly laziness” of those who assume a late date for the NT and added, “It is sobering too to discover how little basis there is for many of the dates confidently assigned by modern experts to the NT documents.”[[36]](#footnote-36)

We may confidently claim that the Gospels and letters of the NT were written down by the traditionally accepted authors who lived in the first century.

### Authentic Narratives

The Gospel records bear all the hallmarks of authentic eyewitness accounts. Here are three examples.

Philip told Nathanael about Jesus by stating, “We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph” (Jn 1:45). No one writing in the second or third century would have invented that. Nazareth is not even mentioned in the OT, and the Jews never associated it with the coming Messiah. The most natural introduction would have been “Jesus of Bethlehem”— since that town had strong Messianic connections (Mic 5:2). Besides, why say, “the son of Joseph,” when well before the second century, only the heretics doubted that Jesus was really the Son of God? The only explanation for these “second century gaffes” is that the NT accurately records what Philip actually said.

One day, Jesus visited the home of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha. John reported that “Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil” (Jn 12:3). Why does the author even mention the fragrance of the oil? Surely, there is no great theological truth to be learned from this statement; however, the mention of this detail testifies to the account’s authenticity. C. S. Lewis stated that “The art of inventing little irrelevant details to make an imaginary scene more convincing is a purely modern art.”[[37]](#footnote-37) He added, “As a literary historian, I am perfectly convinced that whatever else the Gospels are, they are not legends. I have read a great deal of legend and I am quite clear they are not the same sort of thing.”[[38]](#footnote-38)

If later writers wanted their readers to believe that Jesus is the Son of God and Lord of life, then His journey to Golgotha appeared to be a disaster. He stumbled and fell and was too weak to carry the crossbeam; and why make up that seemingly despairing cry from the Cross: “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Mt 27:46). So many details of Christ’s final week—the entry into Jerusalem, the beating and Crucifixion, and the claim of a resurrection—opened Christians up to ridicule. The Jews were offended, the Greeks mocked, and the Romans drew graffiti of a donkey-headed man on a cross. Why make it all up?

A witness has a right to be believed unless he is proved to be false. And if the quality of his life matches the high morality of his teaching, then we must have strong reasons before we malign the integrity of his account.

## The Stones Cry Out

As with the OT, archaeology continually confirms the accuracy of the NT historical record.

### Augustus Issued a Decree

The account of the Roman census recorded in Lu 2 is well known. What is not so well known is that it was assumed by some that a Roman emperor would never issue an order for a census where “all went to be registered, everyone to his own city.” Then, a papyrus decree was discovered in Egypt that was an order for a Roman census in Egypt at the time of Trajan in AD 104, which mirrors the order of Augustus recorded in Lu 2. The Prefect Gaius Vibius Maximus ordered all those in his area to return to their own homes for the purpose of a census.[[39]](#footnote-39)

### Pilate Who?

Believe it or not, it was at one time suggested that Pilate was not a real figure of history because the only known reference to him came from the New Testament. Then, in the late 1950s an inscription was found at Caesarea that dedicated a theater built by Pilate to the honor of Tiberias. Although half the stone tablet is destroyed, the rest is clear: “The Tiberius which Pontius Pilate, the Prefect of Judea dedicated.” The stone had been recycled to be used as part of a stairway for the remodelled theater in the third century.[[40]](#footnote-40) But that is not all. The British Museum in London displays a small bronze coin minted by Pontius Pilate while he was governor of Judea; it carries the date of the 17th year of Tiberius, which would be AD 30/31—perhaps the very year of the Crucifixion of Jesus.[[41]](#footnote-41)

### Dr. Luke and the Polytarchs

At the time of Paul’s travels, each city had its own town council, known by different titles from town to town; only a contemporary and careful writer would record them accurately. An example of the accuracy of Luke (the writer of Acts) as a historian was found in 1877 when a block of marble—rescued from becoming builder’s rubble at Thessalonica—proved to be an inscription of the civic leaders in the city sometime in the second century. They are referred to as *polytarchs*. This is exactly the word translated as “rulers of the city” in Act 17:6.[[42]](#footnote-42)

### A Final Word from Sir William

Much more about the stones could be added, but let a scholar have the last word. Sir William Ramsay was a bucket-and-spade archaeologist who spent his life digging around in modern day Turkey, the land of Paul’s travels. He was a bright man with three honorary fellowships from Oxford and nine honorary doctorates from British, Continental, and American universities. He was at one time professor at Oxford and Aberdeen universities, was awarded the Victorian medal of the Royal Geographic Society in 1906, and was a founding member of the British Academy. He was knighted in 1906 for his service to archaeology.

After a lifetime of painstaking research as a historian and archaeologist, this was his conclusion: “You may press the words of Luke in a degree beyond any other historian’s and they stand the keenest scrutiny and the hardest treatment.” He added, “Christianity did not originate in a lie; and we can and ought to demonstrate this as well as believe it.”[[43]](#footnote-43)

<https://answersingenesis.org/is-the-bible-true/is-the-new-testament-reliable/>

**Why Should We Believe in the Inerrancy of Scripture?**

**Apologetics**

by [Brian H. Edwards](https://answersingenesis.org/bios/brian-edwards/) on July 5, 2011; last featured February 16, 2017

*Many people deny that Scripture teaches its own inerrancy, but Brian Edwards shows that, based on Scripture, Christians should absolutely hold to biblical inerrancy.*

**Introduction**

“You don’t really believe the Bible is true, do you?”

The shock expressed by those who discover someone who actually believes the Bible to be without error is often quite amusing. Inevitably, their next question takes us right back to Genesis. But what does the Christian mean by “without error,” and why are we so sure?

**Inspiring or Expiring?**

Let’s start by understanding what we mean when we talk about the Bible as “inspired” because that word may mislead us. The term is an attempt to translate a word that occurs only once in the New Testament, and it’s not the best translation, even though William Tyndale introduced it back in 1526. The word is found in 2Tim 3:16, and the Greek is *theopneustos*. This term is made from two words, one being the word for God (*theos*, as in theology) and the other referring to breath or wind (*pneustos*, as in pneumonia and pneumatic). It is significant that the word is used in 2Tim 3:16 passively. In other words, God did not “breathe into” (inspire) all Scripture, but it was “breathed out” by God (expired). Thus, 2Tim 3:16 is not about how the Bible came to us but where it came from. The Scriptures are “God-breathed.”

To know how the Bible came to us, we can turn to 2Pe 1:21 where we discover that “holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.” The Greek word used here is pherō, which means “to bear” or “to carry.” It was a familiar word that Luke used of the sailing ship carried along by the wind (Act 27:15, 17). The human writers of the Bible certainly used their minds, but the Holy Spirit carried them along in their thinking so that only His God-breathed words were recorded. The Apostle Paul set the matter plainly in 1Cor 2:13: “These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches.”

The word “inspiration” is so embedded in our Christian language that we will continue to use it, though we now know what it really means. God breathed out His Word, and the Holy Spirit guided the writers. The Bible has one Author and many (around 40) writers.

With these two acts of God—breathing out His Word and carrying the writers along by the Spirit—we can come to a definition of inspiration:

The Holy Spirit moved men to write. He allowed them to use their own styles, cultures, gifts, and character. He allowed them to use the results of their own study and research, write of their own experiences, and express what was in their minds. At the same time, the Holy Spirit did not allow error to influence their writings. He overruled in the expression of thought and in the choice of words. Thus, they recorded accurately all God wanted them to say and exactly how He wanted them to say it in their own character, styles, and languages.

The inspiration of Scripture is a harmony of the active mind of the writer and the sovereign direction of the Holy Spirit to produce God’s inerrant and infallible Word for the human race. Two errors are to be avoided here. First, some think inspiration is nothing more than a generally heightened sensitivity to wisdom on the part of the writer, just as we talk of an inspired idea or invention. Second, some believe the writer was merely a mechanical dictation machine, writing out the words he heard from God. Both errors fail to adequately account for the active role played by the Holy Spirit and the human writer.

**How Much Is Inerrant?**

If “inspired” really means “God-breathed,” then the claim of 2Tim 3:16 is that all Scripture, being God-breathed, is without error and therefore can be trusted completely. Since God cannot lie (Heb 6:18), He would cease to be God if He breathed out errors and contradictions, even in the smallest part. So long as we give *theopneustos*its real meaning, we shall not find it hard to understand the full inerrancy of the Bible.

Two words are sometimes used to explain the extent of biblical inerrancy: plenary and verbal. “Plenary” comes from the Latin *plenus*, which means “full,” and refers to the fact that the whole of Scripture in every part is God-given. “Verbal” comes from the Latin *verbum*, which means “word,” and emphasizes that even the words of Scripture are God-given. Plenary and verbal inspiration means the Bible is God-given (and therefore without error) in every part (doctrine, history, geography, dates, names) and in every single word.

When we talk about inerrancy, we refer to the original writings of Scripture. We do not have any of the original “autographs,” as they are called, but only copies, including many copies of each book. There are small differences here and there, but in reality they are amazingly similar. One eighteenth century NT scholar claimed that not one thousandth part of the text was affected by these differences.[[44]](#footnote-44) Now that we know what inerrancy means, let’s cover what it doesn’t mean.

* Inerrancy doesn’t mean everything in the Bible is true. We have the record of men lying (e.g., *Jos 9*) and even the words of the devil himself. But we can be sure these are accurate records of what took place.
* Inerrancy doesn’t mean apparent contradictions are not in the text, but these can be resolved. At times different words may be used in recounting what appears to be the same incident. For example, Mt 3:11 refers to John the Baptist carrying the sandals of the Messiah, whereas Jn 1:27 refers to him *untying* them. John preached over a period of time, and he would repeat himself; like any preacher he would use different ways of expressing the same thing.
* Inerrancy doesn’t mean every extant copy is inerrant. It is important to understand that the doctrine of inerrancy only applies to the original manuscripts.

Inerrancy does mean it is incorrect to claim the Bible is only “reasonably accurate,” as some do.[[45]](#footnote-45) That would leave us uncertain as to where we could trust God’s Word.

**What Does the Bible Claim?**

Is it true, as John Goldingay stated, that this view of inerrancy “is not directly asserted by Christ or within Scripture itself”?[[46]](#footnote-46) Let’s look at what the Bible says about itself.

**The View of the Old Testament Writers**

The OT writers saw their message as God-breathed and therefore utterly reliable. God promised Moses He would eventually send another prophet (Jesus Christ) who would also speak God’s words like Moses had done. “I will raise up for them a Prophet *like you* from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him” (Dt 18:18). Jeremiah was told at the beginning of his ministry that he would speak for God. “Then the Lord put forth His hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me: ‘Behold, I have put My words in your mouth’” (Jer 1:9).

The Hebrew word for prophet means “a spokesman,” and the prophet’s message was on God’s behalf: “This is what the Lord says.” As a result they frequently so identified themselves with God that they spoke as though God Himself were actually speaking. Is 5 reveals this clearly. In vv 1–2 the prophet speaks of God in the third person (He), but in vv 3–6 Isaiah changes to speak in the first person (I). Isaiah was speaking the very words of God. No wonder King David could speak of the Word of the Lord as “flawless” (2Sam 22:31; see also Pr 30:5, NIV).

**The New Testament Agrees with the Old Testament**

Peter and John saw the words of David in *Ps 2*, not merely as the opinion of a king of Israel, but as the voice of God. They introduced a quotation from that psalm in a prayer to God by saying, “who by the mouth of Your servant David have said: ‘Why did the nations rage, and the people plot vain things?’” (Act 4.25).

Similarly, Paul accepted Isaiah’s words as God Himself speaking to men: “The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers” (Act 28:25).

So convinced were the writers of the New Testament that all the words of the OT Scripture were the actual words of God that they even claimed, “Scripture says,” when the words quoted came directly from God. Two examples are Rom 9:17, which states, “For the Scripture says to Pharaoh,” and Gal 3:8, in which Paul wrote, “the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand . . . .” In *Heb 1* many of the OT passages quoted were actually addressed to God by the psalmist, yet the writer to the Hebrews refers to them as the words of God.

**Jesus Believed in Verbal Inspiration**

In Jn 10:34 Jesus quoted from Ps 82:6 and based His teaching upon a phrase: “I said, ‘You are gods.’” In other words, Jesus proclaimed that the words of this psalm were the words of God. Similarly, in Mt 22:31–32 He claimed the words of Ex 3:6 were given to them by God. In Mt 22:43–44 our Lord quoted from Ps 110:1 and pointed out that David wrote these words “in the Spirit,” meaning he was actually writing the words of God.

**Paul Believed in Verbal Inspiration**

Paul based an argument upon the fact that a particular word in the OT is singular and not plural. Writing to the Galatians, Paul claimed that in God’s promises to Abraham, “He does not say, ‘And to seeds,’ as of many, but as of one, ‘And to your Seed,’ who is Christ” (Gal 3:16). Paul quoted from Gen 12:7; 13:15; and 24:7. In each of these verses, our translators used the word “descendants,” but the Hebrew word is singular. The same word is translated “seed” in Gen 22:18. Paul’s argument here is that God was not *primarily*referring to Israel as the offspring of Abraham, but to Christ.

What is significant is the way Paul drew attention to the fact that the Hebrew word in Genesis is singular. This demonstrates a belief in verbal inspiration because it mattered to Paul whether God used a singular or plural in these passages of the OT. It is therefore not surprising Paul wrote that one of the advantages of being a Jew was the fact that “they have been entrusted with the very words of God” (Rom 3:2, NIV). Even many critics of the Bible agree that the Scriptures clearly teach a doctrine of verbal inerrancy.

**Self-authentication**

To say the Bible is the Word of God and is therefore without error because the Bible itself makes this claim is seen by many as circular reasoning. It is rather like saying, “That prisoner must be innocent because he says he is.” Are we justified in appealing to the Bible’s own claim in settling this matter of its authority and inerrancy?

Actually, we use “self-authentication” every day. Whenever we say, “I think” or “I believe” or “I dreamed,” we are making a statement no one can verify. If people were reliable, witness to oneself would always be enough. In Jn 5:31,32 Jesus said that self-witness is normally insufficient. Later, when Jesus claimed, “I am the light of the world” (Jn 8:12), the Pharisees attempted to correct Him by stating, “Here you are, appearing as your own witness; your testimony is not valid” (Jn 8:13, NIV). In defense, the Lord showed that in His case, because He is the Son of God, self-witness is reliable: “Even if I bear witness of Myself, My witness is true . . . ” (Jn 8:14). Self-witness is reliable where sin does not interfere. Because Jesus is God and therefore guiltless (a fact confirmed by His critics in Jn 8:46), His words can be trusted. In a similar manner, since the Bible is God’s Word, we must listen to its own claims about itself.

Much of the Bible’s story is such that unless God had revealed it we could never have known it. Many scientific theories propose how the world came into being. Some of these theories differ only slightly from each other, but others are contradictory. This shows no one can really be sure about such matters because no scientist was there when it all happened. Unless the God who was there has revealed it, we could never know for certain. The same is true for all the great Bible doctrines. How can we be sure of God’s anger against sin, His love for sinners, or His plan to choose a people for Himself, unless God Himself has told us? Hilary of Poitiers, a fourth century theologian, once claimed, “Only God is a fit witness to himself”—and no one can improve upon that.

**Who Believes This?**

The belief the Bible is without error is not new. Clement of Rome in the first century wrote, “Look carefully into the Scriptures, which are the true utterances of the Holy Spirit. Observe that nothing of an unjust or counterfeit character is written in them.”[[47]](#footnote-47) A century later, Irenaeus concluded, “The Scriptures are indeed perfect, since they were spoken by the Word of God and his Spirit.”[[48]](#footnote-48)

This was the view of the early church leaders, and it has been the consistent view of evangelicals from the ancient Vaudois people of the Piedmont Valley to the sixteenth century Protestant Reformers across Europe and up to the present day. Not all used the terms “infallibility” or “inerrancy,” but many expressed the concepts, and there is no doubt they believed it. It is liberalism that has taken a new approach. Professor Kirsopp Lake at Harvard University admitted, “It is we [the liberals] who have departed from the tradition.”[[49]](#footnote-49)

**Does It Matter?**

Is the debate about whether or not the Bible can be trusted merely a theological quibble? Certainly not! The question of ultimate authority is of tremendous importance for the Christian.

**Inerrancy Governs Our Confidence in the Truth of the Gospel**

If the Scripture is unreliable, can we offer the world a reliable gospel? How can we be sure of truth on any issue if we are suspicious of errors anywhere in the Bible? A pilot will ground his aircraft even on suspicion of the most minor fault, because he is aware that one fault destroys confidence in the complete machine. If the history contained in the Bible is wrong, how can we be sure the doctrine or moral teaching is correct?

The heart of the Christian message is history. The Incarnation (God becoming a man) was demonstrated by the Virgin Birth of Christ. Redemption (the price paid for our rebellion) was obtained by the death of Christ on the Cross. Reconciliation (the privilege of the sinner becoming a friend of God) was gained through the Resurrection and Ascension of Christ. If these recorded events are not true, how do we know the theology behind them is true?

**Inerrancy Governs Our Faith in the Value of Christ**

We cannot have a reliable Savior without a reliable Scripture. If, as many suggest, the stories in the Gospels are not historically true and the recorded words of Christ are only occasionally His, how do we know what we can trust about Christ? Must we rely upon the conflicting interpretations of a host of critical scholars before we know what Christ was like or what He taught? If the Gospel stories are merely the result of the wishful thinking of the church in the second or third centuries, or even the personal views of the Gospel writers, then our faith no longer rests upon Jesus but upon the opinions of men. Who would trust an unreliable Savior for their eternal salvation?

**Inerrancy Governs Our Response to the Conclusions of Science**

If we believe the Bible contains errors, then we will be quick to accept scientific theories that appear to prove the Bible wrong. In other words, we will allow the conclusions of science to dictate the accuracy of the Word of God. When we doubt the Bible’s inerrancy, we have to invent new principles for interpreting Scripture that for convenience turn history into poetry and facts into myths. This means people must ask how reliable a given passage is when they turn to it. Only then will they be able to decide what to make of it. On the other hand, if we believe in inerrancy, we will test by Scripture the hasty theories that often come to us in the name of science.

**Inerrancy Governs Our Attitude to the Preaching of Scripture**

A denial of biblical inerrancy always leads to a loss of confidence in Scripture both in the pulpit and in the pew. It was not the growth of education and science that emptied churches, nor was it the result of two world wars. Instead, it was the cold deadness of theological liberalism. If the Bible’s history is doubtful and its words are open to dispute, then people understandably lose confidence in it. People want authority. They want to know what God has said.

**Inerrancy Governs Our Belief in the Trustworthy Character of God**

Almost all theologians agree Scripture is in some measure God’s revelation to the human race. But to allow that it contains error implies God has mishandled inspiration and has allowed His people to be deceived for centuries until modern scholars disentangled the confusion. In short, the Maker muddled the instructions.

**Conclusion**

A church without the authority of Scripture is like a crocodile without teeth; it can open its mouth as wide and as often as it likes—but who cares? Thankfully, God has given us His inspired, inerrant, and infallible Word. His people can speak with authority and boldness, and we can be confident we have His instructions for our lives.

<https://answersingenesis.org/is-the-bible-true/why-should-we-believe-in-the-inerrancy-of-scripture/>

1. See chapters 5 and 12 of Brian Edwards, [*Nothing but the Truth*](https://answersingenesis.org/store/sku/10-2-216) (Darlington, UK: Evangelical Press, 2006). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Josh McDowell and Bill Wilson, *A Ready Defense* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1993), pp. 42–55. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Bryant Wood, “The Walls of Jericho,” *Creation* **21** (2) March–May 1999, pp. 36–40, <http://www.answersingenesis.org/creation/v21/i2/jericho.asp>. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Bryant Wood, “The Discovery of the Sin Cities of Sodom and Gomorrah,” Bible and Spade (Summer 1999), <http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2008/04/16/The-Discovery-of-the-Sin-Cities-of-Sodom-and-Gomorrah.aspx>. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Even this begs the question to some degree. A critic could (hypothetically) argue that some people have the ability to perceive distant future events through some as-yet-undiscovered mechanism (be it psychic powers or whatever). The Christian knows better; he knows that God alone declares the end from the beginning (Is 46:9–10). But the Christian knows this because it is what the Bible says. So, only by presupposing the truth of the Bible could we cogently argue that only God can know the future. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. E.g., 2Pe 3:8; Is 46:9–10. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Babies do not “learn” uniformity in nature. They are born already knowing it. When a baby burns his hand on a candle, he does not quickly do it again because he rightly believes that if he does it again it will hurt again. The baby already knows that the future reflects the past. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. This fact has been recognized and elaborated upon by Christian scholars such as Dr. Cornelius Van Til and Dr. Greg Bahnsen. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Creative Commons Attribution—Share Alike 2.5 Generic, 2.0 Generic and 1.0 Generic license. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See The Egyptian King List in the British Museum, London (EA117). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Walter Kaiser, *Back Toward the Future*. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2003), p. 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. For more detail on this subject, see Brian Edwards, *Nothing but the Truth*. (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2006), pp. 76–96. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Accession no.WA 124785, for example. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. See for example *Redating the New Testament*. John A. T. Robinson. S C M Press. (London) 1976, where Robinson (a liberal critic) concludes the entire NT was completed before 70 AD. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. *The Archaeology of the Bible*. James K. Hoffmeier. Lion Hudson, Oxford (2008). Preface. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. George Athas, *The Tel Dan Inscription*, (London: T & T Clark, 2003). See also K. A. Kitchen, On the Reliability of the Old Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), p. 92. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. *Das Buch Daniel*. Ferdinand Hitzig. Weidman (Leipzig) 1850. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. *The Archaeology of the Bible*. p. 76. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Professor Kitchen comments, “Those who squawk intermittently ‘No trace of the Hebrews has ever been found’ (so, of course, no exodus) are wasting their breath.” Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, p. 246. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Ibid., 62. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (London: Transworld Publishers (Bantam Press), 2006), p. 237. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. For more detail on this theme see Edwards, *Nothing but the Truth* chapter 3, “The Master Plan.” [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Robert Dick Wilson, *Is the Higher Criticism Scholarly?* 1922. See also Wilson, *A Scientific Investigation of the Old Testament*, p. 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, p. 188. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. James Hoffmeier, *The Archaeology of the Bible*. Preface and throughout this excellent volume. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. In private conversion with the author, and this faithfully represents his view. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Alan Millard, *Treasures from Bible Times*. (Lion, 1985), p. 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. W G Kümmel, trans. *Introduction to the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1975), p. 55. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. W G Kümmel, trans. *Introduction to the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1975), p. 55. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Alan Millard, *Reading and Writing in the Time of Jesus* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), p. 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Millard, *Reading and Writing in the Time of Jesus*, p. 142. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. S. Lieberman in Millard, *Reading and Writing in the Time of Jesus*, p. 211. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Ignatius, *Epistle to the Philadelphians* 5, and *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans* 7:4. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Edwards, *Why 27?* pp. 89–90. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. J. A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1972). Conservative Christians agree that all of the NT was completed by the close of the first century AD. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament*. p. 341. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. C. S. Lewis, “What Are We to Make of Jesus Christ?” Essay. 1950. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Papyrus 904 in the British Library, London. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Yosef Porath, “Vegas on the Med: A Tour of Caesarea’s Entertainment District,” *Biblical Archaeological Review*. September/October 2004, p. 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. British Museum accession no. CM 1908.01–10–530. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. British Museum accession no. GR1877.5–11.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. William Ramsay, *The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1915), p. 89. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Bishop Brook Foss Westcott,*The New Testament in the Original Greek* (London, MacMillan, 1881), 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. John Goldingay, *Models for Scripture* (Toronto: Clements Publishing, 2004), 282. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Clement of Rome First letter to the Corinthians XLV. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, XVII.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Kirsopp Lake, *The Religion of Yesterday and Tomorrow*, (Boston, MA: Houghton, Mifflin Co., 1926), 62. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)