

# Is the Bible really God's Word and is it reliable?

## Critical Question #1

### The Bible is unique:

- Diversity and consistency
- Historical accuracy
- Manuscript integrity
- Basis for authority

*"There is no body of ancient literature in the world which enjoys such a wealth of good textual attestation as the New Testament"*

**F.F. Bruce, MA, DD**  
The New Testament Documents, are They Reliable?

*"The interval, then, between the dates of original composition and the earliest extant evidence becomes so small as to be in fact negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed. Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established."*

**Sir Frederic G. Kenyon**  
former director and principal librarian of the British Museum,

### What do you base your beliefs on?

Anyone who is at all interested in looking at the Bible for answers has to eventually deal with the issue of its authenticity and authority as a sacred text. In other words, is the Bible really God's true and authoritative Word to us today that we must believe if we're going to believe the truth about God, about ourselves, about our world, and about what we must do to be acceptable to God? These are, of course, issues of ultimate importance for anyone who is at all sensitive about the issues of their life and soul and who desires to know what is really true from what is not true.

- How do you know what to believe?
- Can we—should we—base our beliefs on the Bible?
- Are there really enough intelligent, defensible reasons to distinguish the Bible's writings from other religious texts?

Of all the writings of history—whether secular or religious—the Bible is absolutely unique in its authenticity and authority and therefore reliable as foundation for our belief system of what is true.

#### 1. The Bible is unique in its diversity and consistency.

The Bible is not really one book as much as a collection of 66 different books by over 40 different authors who wrote from 3 different continents (Africa,

Asia, and Europe). It's divided by the Old Testament (the 39 books written in ancient Hebrew between 1500 to 400 years before the life of Jesus) and the New Testament (the 27 books written in ancient Greek between 12 to 57 years after the life of Jesus).

The Bible is comprised of many different types of literature: historical books, poetic and prophetic books, judicial books, and letters. Yet with all this incredible diversity there is a consistency and continuity—its compelling storyline and themes are consistent throughout.

#### 2. The Bible is unique in its historical accuracy.

Of all the various religious beliefs and their sacred texts in the world, none have more thoroughly based themselves on history than does the Bible. Every other religious system before or since Christ has avoided any significant interaction with history. Not so with the Bible.

The claims of the Bible are fixed in the space and time of history—throughout its pages it gives dates, names, specifies locations. The Bible anchors itself within known and verifiable world history throughout its pages. And for this reason, the Bible has been held to much more stringent standards of critical evaluation—a price it gladly pays. This is what makes the Bible—unlike any other religious text—

open for discussion and verification.

And while archaeology cannot prove the authority of the Bible as the Word of God, new archeological discoveries do continue to give credence to the Bible's historical accuracy. One interesting example is how earlier scholars doubted the biblical account of Jericho's walls falling as a miracle for the ancient Israelites (see Joshua chapter 6), since no previous record or evidence had been found of ever there being a city called Jericho. But in the 1930s, archeologists not only discovered the ruins of the ancient city of Jericho, but also, strangely, that its walls had fallen outward (not inward as one would expect from an outside attack). This is just one example of how the Bible has been shown by many archeologists and historians to be an accurate historical account.

William F. Albright, known for his reputation as one of the great archeologists, states: "There can be no doubt that archaeology has confirmed the substantial historicity of Old Testament tradition" (*Archaeology and the Religions of Israel*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1956; p. 176). He later adds: "Discovery after discovery has established the accuracy of innumerable details, and has brought increased recognition to the value of the Bible as a source of history" (*The Archaeology of Palestine*, Rev. ed., Pelican Books, 1960; pp. 127-128).

#### 3. The Bible is unique in its manuscript integrity.

Thousands of ancient manuscripts of the Hebrew and Greek biblical texts have survived over thousands of years. In fact, the Bible has more ancient manuscript evidence than do any other ancient texts—whether secular or religious. The 20<sup>th</sup> century discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls (ancient Jewish religious texts, including Old Testament manuscripts, preserved in ancient clay jars and buried 2,000 years ago in a cave in the arid desert near the Dead Sea) have demonstrated the accuracy of existing Old Testament Hebrew manuscripts. And there are now discovered more than 5,300 ancient Greek manuscripts of the New Testament.

This provides a trustworthy basis of historic and tex-

*“to be skeptical of the resultant text of the New Testament books is to allow all of classical antiquity to slip into obscurity, for not documents of the ancient period are as well attested bibliographically as the New Testament”*

**John Warwick Montgomery**

tual authenticity of our current Hebrew and Greek biblical manuscripts. And this is something that really does make the Bible’s manuscript integrity unique compared to other religious writings.

#### **4. The Bible is unique in its basis for authority as the Word of God.**

Now, let’s admit from the start that it is a kind of circular reasoning to claim the Bible to have authority as God’s Word based upon the Bible’s claim for its own authority. Yet it’s important that the Bible does, in fact, claim its own absolute authority as God’s Word.

To get a bit philosophical here for a moment, it’s important to realize that all arguments for absolute authority of *any* source must ultimately rest on some kind of self-attesting, circular kind of argument for its own authority. Otherwise its authority would not be an absolute or ultimate authority. In simpler terms—to claim that we must base our beliefs about God, ourselves, our world, etc. on the Bible, we must then see whether or not the Bible clearly states, in fact, that we must do just that. And that is indeed what we find clearly stated in the Bible.

#### ***The Bible claims its own absolute authority—***

From its very beginning, the Bible’s authors claimed to speak with the authority of God. In the Old Testament, an introductory phrase out of the mouths of God’s prophets and the Bible’s authors appears hundreds of times; “Thus says the Lord.” The prophets of the Old Testament were actually claiming to be unique messengers from the God of the universe, and they were claiming that their words were the absolutely authoritative words of God.

Of course, that’s a big claim. But what gave people the confidence that what a prophet was saying or writing after the phrase, “Thus says the Lord,” was in fact the Word of the Lord? How could they know? And how can we know today?

#### **Old Testament**

The Bible says that Moses was its first author—that Moses wrote the first five books of the Old Testament (Genesis through Deuteronomy). God appeared to Moses and told him he was going to send him back to Egypt to free the Israelites from their slavery. In Exodus chapter 4:1-5, Moses asked God, “What if they do not be-

lieve me or listen to me and say, ‘The Lord did not appear to you?’” In other words Moses was asking; “God, how will people know and believe I’m actually speaking for you?”

And God’s answer was to show Moses his new ability and authority to do extraordinary miracles. Moses’ authority to speak for God, and later write Scripture for God, would be demonstrated by the miracles God would perform through him in the sight of all the people—both the Egyptians and the Israelites.

Now God’s answer to Moses’ question is also a significant answer to our question. From the beginning of when the Bible was first starting to be written, there was a very demonstrative and public witness and verification of God’s Word through his prophet Moses. It’s why the Bible was first received as God’s Word to begin with. God made it clear not only to Moses, but to a whole nation, that this was his Word to be believed and obeyed. And it’s also important to understand that no other sacred writing has this kind of basis—the extraordinary and public miracles through its authors—for its claim to authority.

#### **New Testament**

And the authority of the New Testament is based on the same principle. In the New Testament we read of Jesus performing extraordinary miraculous signs and wonders as a sign that he spoke with the authority of God. Jesus’ many miracles were done in the presence of large crowds of people over a period of three years, which is why he had such large followings and eventually why

#### **Unique in its continuity**

- Written over 1600 years
- Written over 60 generations
- Written by over 40 authors from every walk of life including kings, peasants, philosophers, fishermen, poets, statesmen, scholars, etc.
- Written in different places including prison, desert, palace, traveling, caves, and military campaigns.
- Written over 3 different continents: Africa, Europe, Asia
- Written in 3 different languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek

the authorities had him executed.

Everyone either saw or knew someone who saw Jesus' miracles, so much so that later Peter was able to stand before thousands of people in Jerusalem and say to them; "Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know" (Acts 2:22).

The authors of the New Testament were the band of Jesus' apostles. And they were also enabled by God to do many extraordinary miracles that would authenticate their authority to teach and write books of the Bible as Jesus' authoritative messengers. As the Bible states, "Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it" (Mark 16:20). Over and over again for a period of 20 to 30 years, as the apostles taught and wrote the books and letters of the New Testament, the Bible says that God

"confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders" (Acts 14:3). It's the same basis of authority as God gave to Moses.

The status to the books of the New Testament of being God's inspired Word was not simply something ascribed in later centuries by church authorities but, rather, was an inherent claim of the writings themselves, and was therefore accepted as such from the start by Christians.

The apostle Paul wrote that his words were the very Word of God. He wrote, "When you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe" (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

And the apostle Peter said it this way; "Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its own origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the

Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:20-21).

The Bible clearly claims its own absolute authority as God's Word to be believed.

***No other sacred text has the authoritative basis that the Bible has.***

All of this is what separates the Bible from any other religious text said to be sacred. Whether it's The Koran, or the Bhagavad-Gita, or The Book of Mormon, or any other religious text said to be sacred and authoritative, what makes the Bible so unique is that it's authority as God's Word is based on the publicly witnessed miracles of its authors.

Whether by Moses, or the prophets of the Old Testament, or by Jesus and his apostles in the New Testament, only the Bible claims to be written on the authority of it's authors having their message authenticated by extraordinary miracles witnessed by large numbers of people.

***How can we know for certain that the Bible is the authoritative Word of***

***God for us today?***

Certain proofs of the Bible's uniqueness can certainly provide a sense of *confirmation* (that we are within our intellectual rights to be believers in the Bible), but they do not, in and of themselves, establish *conviction*. Just because the Bible is unique in so many ways—in its *diversity and consistency*; in its *historical accuracy*; in its *manuscript integrity*; or even in its *basis for claiming its own authority*—none of these unique qualities really prove beyond any doubt that the Bible is the Word of God.

Our ultimate conviction that the words of the Bible are God's words comes only when the Holy Spirit speaks in and through the words of the Bible into our own hearts as we read and hear them for ourselves.

Read the following page and notice the authority Jesus claimed regarding what he said.

### **What archaeological discovery has had the all-time greatest Biblical impact?**

"Probably the Dead Sea Scrolls have had the greatest Biblical impact. They have provided Old Testament manuscripts approximately 1,000 years older than our previous oldest manuscript. The Dead Sea Scrolls have demonstrated that the Old Testament was accurately transmitted during this interval. In addition, they provide a wealth of information on the times leading up to, and during, the life of Christ.

—Dr. Bryant Wood, archaeologist,

## **Dead Sea Scrolls**

In the spring of 1947, a Bedouin shepherd boy was searching for a lost goat on the west side of the Dead Sea, about eight miles south of Jericho. When he threw a stone into a hole in a cliff, he was surprised to hear the sound of shattering pottery. Investigating, he was found a number of clay jars containing leather scrolls.

Because the jars were carefully sealed, they had survived in excellent condition for over 1900 years. The scrolls made up over 40,000 fragments from which 500 books have been reconstructed.

One of the most important contributions of the Dead Sea Scrolls is the numerous Biblical manuscripts which have been discovered. Until those discoveries at Qumran, the oldest manuscripts of the Hebrew Scriptures were copies from the 9th and 10th centuries AD by a group of Jewish scribes called the Masoretes.

Now we have manuscripts around a thousand years older than those. The amazing truth is that these manuscripts are almost identical! Here is a strong example of the tender care which the Jewish scribes down through the centuries took in an effort to accurately copy the sacred Scriptures. We can have confidence that our Old Testament Scriptures faithfully represent the words given to Moses, David and the prophets.

## Jesus teaches on how to live

Matthew 7:1-29<sup>1</sup>

[1] "Don't pick on people, jump on their failures, criticize their faults—unless, of course, you want the same treatment. That critical spirit has a way of boomeranging. It's easy to see a smudge on your neighbor's face and be oblivious to the ugly sneer on your own. Do you have the nerve to say, 'Let me wash your face for you,' when your own face is distorted by contempt? It's this whole traveling road-show mentality all over again, playing a holier-than-thou part instead of just living your part. Wipe that ugly sneer off your own face, and you might be fit to offer a washcloth to your neighbor.

[6] "Don't be flip with the sacred. Banter and silliness give no honor to God. Don't reduce holy mysteries to slogans. In trying to be relevant, you're only being cute and inviting sacrilege.

[7] "Don't bargain with God. Be direct. Ask for what you need. This isn't a cat-and-mouse, hide-and-seek game we're in. If your child asks for bread, do you trick him with sawdust? If he asks for fish, do you scare him with a live snake on his plate? As bad as you are, you wouldn't think of such a thing. You're at least decent to your own children. So don't you think the God who conceived you in love will be even better?

[12] "Here is a simple, rule-of-thumb guide for behavior: Ask yourself what you want people to do for you, then grab the initiative and do it for them. Add up God's Law and Prophets and this is what you get.

[13] "Don't look for shortcuts to God. The market is flooded with surefire, easygoing formulas for a successful life that can be practiced in your spare time. Don't fall for that stuff, even though crowds of people do. The way to life—to God!—is vigorous and requires total attention.

[15] "Be wary of false preachers

who smile a lot, dripping with practiced sincerity. Chances are they are out to rip you off some way or other. Don't be impressed with charisma; look for character. Who preachers are is the main thing, not what they say. A genuine leader will never exploit your emotions or your pocketbook. These diseased trees with their bad apples are going to be chopped down and burned.

[21] "Knowing the correct password—saying 'Master, Master,' for instance—isn't going to get you anywhere with me. What is required is serious obedience—doing what my Father wills. I can see it now—at the Final Judgment thousands strutting up to me and saying, 'Master, we preached the Message, we bashed the demons, our God-sponsored projects had everyone talking.' And do you know what I am going to say? 'You missed the boat. All you did was use me to make yourselves important. You don't impress me one bit. You're out of here.'

[24] "These words I speak to you are not incidental additions to your life, homeowner improvements to your standard of living. They are foundational words, words to build a life on. If you work these words into your life, you are like a smart carpenter who built his house on solid rock. Rain poured down, the river flooded, a tornado hit—but nothing moved that house. It was fixed to the rock.

[26] "But if you just use my words in Bible studies and don't work them into your life, you are like a stupid carpenter who built his house on the sandy beach. When a storm rolled in and the waves came up, it collapsed like a house of cards."

[28] When Jesus concluded his address, the crowd burst into applause. They had never heard teaching like this. It was apparent that he was living everything he was saying—quite a contrast to their religion

teachers! This was the best teaching they had ever heard.

## Jesus Encounters Satan

Matthew 4:1-11<sup>1</sup>

[1] Next Jesus was taken into the wild by the Spirit for the Test. The Devil was ready to give it. Jesus prepared for the Test by fasting forty days and forty nights. That left him, of course, in a state of extreme hunger, which the Devil took advantage of in the first test: "Since you are God's Son, speak the word that will turn these stones into loaves of bread."

[4] Jesus answered by quoting Deuteronomy: "It takes more than bread to stay alive. It takes a steady stream of words from God's mouth."

[5] For the second test the Devil took him to the Holy City. He sat him on top of

the Temple and said, ["Since you are God's Son, jump." The Devil goaded him by quoting Psalm 91: "He has placed you in the care of angels. They will catch you so that you won't so much as stub your toe on a stone."

[7] Jesus countered with another citation from Deuteronomy: "Don't you dare test the Lord your God."

[8] For the third test, the Devil took him on the peak of a huge mountain. He gestured expansively, pointing out all the earth's kingdoms, how glorious they all were. Then he said, "They're yours—lock, stock, and barrel. Just go down on your knees and worship me, and they're yours."

[10] Jesus' refusal was curt: "Beat it, Satan!" He backed his rebuke with a third quotation from Deuteronomy: "Worship the Lord your God, and only him. Serve him with absolute single-heartedness."

[11] The Test was over. The Devil left. And in his place, angels! Angels came and took care of Jesus' needs.

*These words I speak to you are not incidental additions to your life, homeowner improvements to your standard of living. They are foundational words, words to build a life on."*

Jesus

<sup>1</sup> "Scripture quotations from THE MESSAGE. Copyright (c) by Eugene H. Peterson 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group."