

## KNOWLEDGE

### *The Bible: Is it Reliable?*

**The Bible:** The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God's revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. It reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried. All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation. From <<http://www.sbc.net/aboutus/basicbeliefs.asp>>

### Arguments "Against" the Reliability of the Bible

#### *Issues related to:*

#### ***Integrity***

- The Bible has been altered/doesn't include all of the books (i.e. other "gospels")
- The Bible was written too long after the events actually occurred
- The Bible wasn't written in English/ has been corrupted through translation
- The Bible's authors aren't known for sure

#### ***Inerrancy***

- The Bible is full of inconsistencies/ contradictions

#### ***Accuracy***

- The Bible isn't true/historical (fiction)
- The Bible has been disproven by science
- The Bible's authors were biased so we can't trust them

#### ***Inspiration***

- The Bible was written by man, not God

#### ***Interpretation***

- The Bible can be interpreted differently by different people

### Next Week: The Bible: Is it Reliable?

#### **Integrity (Translation), Accuracy & Inerrancy**

1. Research the arguments and evidence in support of the Bible (**translation, accuracy, inerrancy**)
  - a. What kind of evidence do we have in support of the Bible's integrity?
  - b. Which are the best arguments and why?
  - c. Should we avoid any arguments and why?
2. Research the arguments in opposition to the Bible (**translation, accuracy, inerrancy**)
  - a. Are there additional arguments against the Bible's integrity to add to the list?
  - b. What are the most common arguments and how do we refute them?
  - c. Any other observations about the nature of arguments against the Bible that we should note?

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*"I keep reverting to my basic question: how does it help us to say that the Bible is the inerrant word of God if in fact we don't have the words that God inerrantly inspired, but only the words copied by the scribes – sometimes correct and sometimes (many times!) incorrectly? What good is it to say that the autographs (i.e. the originals) were inspired? We don't have the originals!" – Bart Ehrman (evangelical turned skeptic)*

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**The Church, without a reliable authority, is like a crocodile without teeth. It can open its mouth as wide as it likes, but who cares?**

## The Bible's Reliability: Notes & Discussion

INTEGRITY --- AUTHENTICITY --- UNITY

**Q.** Is the text as we have it today identical to what was originally written? If not, what has changed and how? Why does it matter?

1. **None** of the original manuscripts (OT or NT) are still in existence.
2. This is **the same** situation as every other ancient work of literature.
3. Scholars use **copies** to **reconstruct** the original text.

Textual Criticism
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How many manuscripts do we have to work with?</li> <li>How early are the manuscripts we have?</li> <li>How important are the textual variants among these manuscripts?</li> </ul>

*How many manuscripts do we have to work with?  
How early are the manuscripts we have?*

### NEW TESTAMENT

Author <sup>1</sup>	Date Written	Earliest MSS	Time Span	No. MSS
Caesar's "Gallic Wars"	100–44 BC	AD 900	1,000 yrs	10
Plato	427–347 BC	AD 900	1,200 yrs	7
Thucydides	460–400 BC	AD 900	1,300 yrs	8
Tacitus	AD 100	AD 1100	1,000 yrs	20
Suetonius	AD 75–160	AD 950	800 yrs	8
Homer's "Iliad"	900 BC	400 BC	500 yrs	643
New Testament*	AD 40-100	AD 125	25-50 yrs	> 24,000

<sup>1</sup> "Should we trust the Bible?", Creation Ministries, International, <http://creation.com/trust-the-bible>, (January 9, 2016)

\*Some **5,800+** of those NT manuscripts are available in the original Greek<sup>1</sup>.

## What are some of the earliest NT manuscripts (fragments) we have?<sup>2</sup>

- John Ryland fragment containing John 18:31-33, 37-38, 130 A.D. in Egypt (~29 year span)
- Bodmer manuscript containing most of John's gospel 150-200 A.D. (~130 year span)
- Magdalen fragment from [Mat. 26](#) believed by some to be within a few years of Jesus' death
- Gospel fragments found among the Dead Sea Scrolls dated as early as 50 A.D.

## Evidence of Early and Accurate Gospel Writings<sup>1</sup>

- **Oral** teaching methods of the time
- **Embarrassing** / unflattering details
- No mention of early church **controversies**
- In 1 Corinthians 15, written circa AD 55, Paul reminds them of something **he said 15 years earlier**
- Legends require a time gap of more than **2 generations**
- Authors claim to be, or rely on, **eye-witnesses**
- Enough writings of early Church Fathers that quote the NT to reconstruct it **entirely**
- No **contradictory** writings to the Gospels from the same period of time

### OLD TESTAMENT<sup>3</sup>

- Jewish scholars took **extreme care** in copying and preserving Scripture.
- The **Dead Sea Scrolls** discovered in 1947 are dated from the third century B.C. to the first century A.D. These manuscripts predate by 1000 years the previous oldest manuscripts. They represent every Old Testament book except Esther (as well as non-biblical writings).

## *How important are the textual variants among these manuscripts?*

### Illustration of Bible text manuscript tree and variant readings<sup>4</sup>

The following diagram illustrates manuscript corruptions in the Biblical texts that are produced, for whatever reason, and copied down to later manuscripts. The purpose of the illustration is to show how errors are copied down from one manuscript to another, how they are counted, and how we can determine the correct reading. (There are about **200,000** variant readings of the NT).

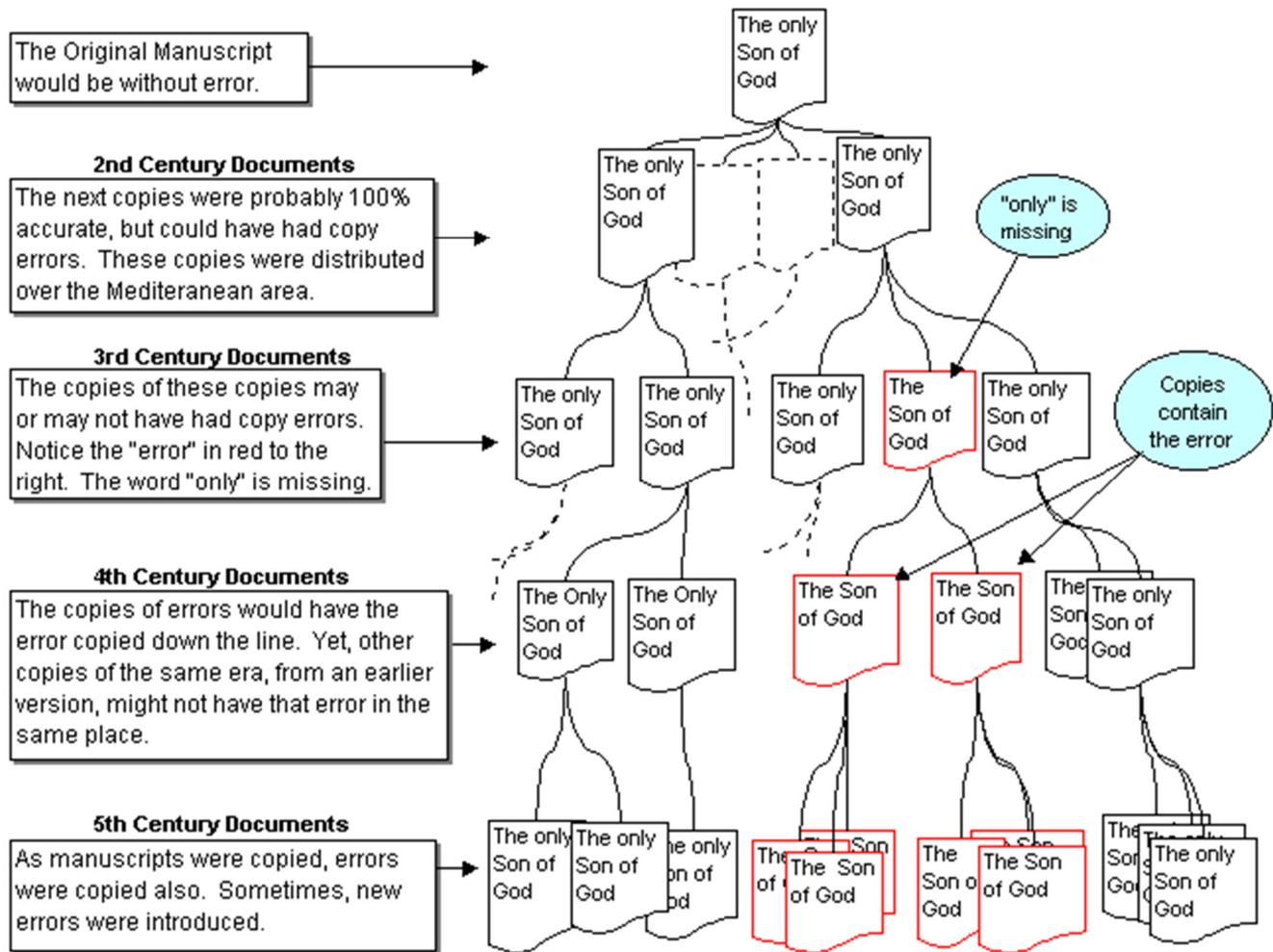
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<sup>2</sup> "Manuscript evident for the Bible: An outline," Faith Facts, <http://www.faithfacts.org/search-for-truth/maps/manuscript-evidence>, (January 9, 2016)

<sup>3</sup> "Manuscript evident for the Bible: An outline," Faith Facts, <http://www.faithfacts.org/search-for-truth/maps/manuscript-evidence>, (January 9, 2016)

<sup>4</sup> "Illustration of Bible text manuscript tree and variant readings", Christian Apologetics & Research Ministry, <https://carm.org/bible-text-manuscript-tree>, (January 9, 2016)

In this example of the 26 existing manuscripts (represented by solid black and red sheets), nine of them have a textual problem where a phrase was incorrectly copied. **Therefore, in this illustration, we would have a total of nine variants in 26 manuscripts. But, it is really only one.**



*NEW TESTAMENT*

- Approximately **99.5%** textually pure. This means that of all the manuscripts in existence that they agree completely that percentage of the time. Of the variants that occur, mostly are easily explainable and very few have any effect on the meaning of passages. In all, no New Testament doctrine is affected by any variant reading.<sup>5</sup>

*OLD TESTAMENT*

- There is word for word identity in more than **95%** of the cases, and the remaining variation consists mostly of slips of the pen and spelling.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>5</sup> "Illustration of Bible text manuscript tree and variant readings", Christian Apologetics & Research Ministry, <https://carm.org/bible-text-manuscript-tree>, (January 9, 2016)

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"The evidence for our New Testament writings is ever so much greater than the evidence for many writings of classical authors, the authenticity of which no-one dreams of questioning. And if the New Testament were a collection of secular writings, their authenticity would generally be regarded as beyond all doubt."<sup>6</sup> – NT Scholar F. F. Bruce

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## Q. Is the text as we have it today complete?

### Old Testament

- **39** books
  - Jewish scriptures (Mosaic law, history, poetry/wisdom, prophets)
  - Most written in **Hebrew** (some Aramaic)
  - Completed between ~1450-400 BC

### New Testament

- **27** books
  - New Covenant (4 Gospels, Acts of the Apostles, letters, Revelation)
  - Written in **Greek**
  - Completed between ~50-90 AD

### ***How did we get the 66 books (Canonicity)?***

- Canon – “an officially accepted list of books”
  - From the Greek **kanon** meaning “reed” (as used as a measuring stick, a standard)
  - **Recognizes** that which has been inspired from its inception
  - “It is the simple truth to say that the New Testament books became canonical because no one could stop them doing so.”<sup>7</sup>
- Reasons for establishing a canon
  - **Prophetic** – valuable and must be preserved
  - **Clarity** – needs of the early church, heretics, spurious writings
  - **Missions** – need to translate it into other languages to share it
- Tests for inclusion in the canon
  - **Authority** - Was the book written by a prophet of God / apostle of Jesus?
  - Rule of Faith – agreeing with the **revelation** of God, universally accepted
  - Traditional – seen as **Scripture** from the time of their writing
  - **Transforming** – had the presence of God’s power
- Old Testament Canon
  - Well-established by 150 BC
- New Testament Canon
  - Documented in 4<sup>th</sup> century AD
  - Church Councils (council of Nicea in 325 AD, of Synod of Hippo in 393 AD)

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<sup>6</sup> Bruce, F., *Are the New Testament documents reliable?* The Inter-Varsity Fellowship, London, UK, p. 19, 1956.

<sup>7</sup> William Barclay, “The Case for Christ,” by Lee Strobel, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1998

## What about the "missing / lost books" of the Bible?

- Over 100 "books" not included in the New Testament
  - They are not **inspired**
  - They are not part of the **Hebrew OT**
  - They were written 2-6 **centuries** after the events they depict
  - Their recognition was never more than temporary or **local**
  - Most were just appended to other manuscripts or only mentioned
- The "Apocrypha"<sup>8</sup>
  - From the Greek word **apokruphos** meaning "**hidden**" or "concealed"
  - ~16 books found in the Greek OT but not in the Hebrew OT
  - Written between **400 B.C.** and the time of Christ
  - Rejected as being inspired by the Protestant Church and Jews
  - 7\* accepted as canonical (OT) in the **Roman Catholic** Church (& others) ~ 1546
  - Not considered canonical in Protestant churches because
    - They include many historical and geographical **inaccuracies**
    - They teach doctrine that is false or **contrary** to inspired Scripture
    - As literature they don't follow the same **style** as inspired Scripture
    - They are not **quoted** in the NT (of 260+)
    - **Jesus** refers to the OT canon in Luke 11:51 (Abel to Zechariah)
    - Also directly **rejected** by many early Church Fathers
- The "Gospel of Thomas"<sup>9</sup>
  - Found in Egypt in 1945 and claims it contains 'the secret words which the living Jesus spoke and Didymus Judas Thomas wrote down.'
  - Rejected as canonical because it
    - Includes 114 sayings attributed to Jesus but no **narrative** of what He did
    - Written about 140 AD
    - Includes many things completely foreign to, and **inconsistent** with, the New Testament Gospels (pantheism, anti-women views)

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*"The bottom line is that these gospels were not lost to the early church; early Christians knew about them and rejected them for good reasons." ~ Jonathan Morrow*

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<sup>8</sup> "The Apocrypha: Is it Scripture?", " , Christian Apologetics & Research Ministry, <https://carm.org/apocrypha-it-scripture> (January 10, 2016)

<sup>9</sup> Strobel, Lee. "The Case for Christ", p. 67-69, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1998