

THE WORD OF GOD:
A GUIDE TO GRASPING THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

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> **"The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward." (Psalm 19:7-11)**

We believe that the Bible is the very Word of God, inspired and authored by God (2 Tim. 3:16) and written down by men used of God (2 Pet. 1:21). Because God is the divine Author of Scripture *(a term used interchangeably with the "Bible" and "Word of God")* there are certain things that are then true about the Bible:
1) Scripture is **infallible**, meaning it is always effective, never failing, and trustworthy
2) Scripture is **inerrant**, meaning it is incapable of containing errors, &
3) Scripture has **authority** in our lives, meaning it has the power and right to lead, guide, and direct us at all times.

This resource is designed to help point to the truth and authority of Scripture, in order to help make the study of God's Word important to each believer. Once you understand who God is and know that you can trust His Word, being connected to Jesus becomes something we long for, rather than something that we must constantly be reminded to do.

EMERGING TRENDS:

We believe that this topic is of the utmost importance because it is foundational to our life and growth in Jesus—if we don't trust God's Word, then we are less likely to seek Him first. We are also living in a time when studies are showing that the importance and trust of Scripture is rapidly decreasing among Christians.

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While there are staggering numbers from the Barna Group detailing how many Americans have a Bible but don't often read it[5], even more frightening are the statistics among those who profess to be Christians. According to a different study conducted by Pew Research[8]:

- **only 45% of U.S. Christians reported reading their Bible once a week**; this means that 55% read their Bible just a few times a month at most *(with 33% of this number saying they seldom or never read it)*
- **only 39% of U.S. Christians believe that the Bible is the Word of God and trustworthy for everyday life**; this means that 61% of those that profess to be a Christian don't trust the Word of God, with some not even believing the Bible *is* the Word of God

While believing the truth of Scripture is always important, these numbers show that it is now vital to point to the Bible's truth and authority. The authority of God's Word isn't something for us to "prove", but simply something for us to point out and help people understand through the power and influence of the Holy Spirit.

THE MOST COMMON ARGUMENT:

When people try to show or confirm that events or details recorded in Scripture are true, the most common argument used by people who don't trust the Bible is to point to the use of **Circular Reasoning,** or using the Bible to prove the Bible. These people would then consider the information untrustworthy or invalid. For example, people argue that the claim of the Bible's authority is based on a statement like this:

> We believe Scripture is true because Scripture claims to be true.
> We believe Scripture's claims to be true because Scripture is true.

While this statement *is* enough to establish authority because of what God says about His Word, human reasoning requires more information. Because **Circular Reasoning** seems to find holes in the Bible, we now have a great responsibility.

OUR RESPONSIBILITY:

When the Bible is challenged or discredited, or even when we struggle to fully believe, it becomes our responsibility to dig a little deeper to try and find the truth. This process of seeking the truth is hard and sometimes confusing, but it is worth the effort because of the confidence we have once we know for certain.

It is in this process that our reason and faith will connect with each other: we must look at the available evidence with an open mind, but we must also trust that the Holy Spirit will use that evidence to teach and enlighten us as we need it. Nothing will make sense if we try to work apart from the Holy Spirit; we need Him to work.

As we try to point to the authority of Scripture, it becomes our responsibility to:

1) See what the Bible says about itself &

2) Look for evidence to back up what it says, both **outside** the Bible (using secular history and methods) and **inside** the Bible (using the rest of Scripture).[7]

STEP 1: WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT ITSELF

This is the starting point in establishing the authority of Scripture

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."
2 Timothy 3:16-17

"For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart."
Hebrews 4:12

The Bible clearly positions itself as the divine, inspired, active, literal Word of God. The Bible is claiming to be the ultimate authority, given that it comes from God, which means that it is also saying that Scripture is true. The Bible says that God is true (Tit. 1:1-3), and that the Bible is God's Word (2 Tim. 3:16), so it would then make sense that the Bible is saying it is also true (John 17:17). Now that we know and see what the Bible says about itself, we can begin to look for evidence that backs up that position in order to confirm that Scripture is true and point to its authority.

STEP 2: LOOK FOR EVIDENCE

This process looks both outside and inside the Bible to confirm what the Bible says about itself

OUTSIDE THE BIBLE:

By saying "**outside** the Bible", we simply mean any piece of evidence that looks at history first and Scripture second. This process doesn't take Scripture completely out of the equation, but simply uses secular history and methods to help confirm that events and details recorded in Scripture are true. One of the best places to start in looking for outside evidence is with **Manuscript Evidence**.



Sometimes called "the Bibliographic Test"[6], **Manuscript Evidence** is a secular process that plays a major role in pointing to the accuracy of any given piece of literature, helping create trust that what we have recorded is what was actually written by the original author. This "test" looks at specific information regarding a piece of literature to determine accuracy and is comprised of 3 elements[1]:

1. **Time Span**, or the amount of time that passed from when something was originally written to when the first copy was discovered. This information is useful because it points to the ability to eliminate errors in future copies.

The smaller a **time span**, the more likely that early mistakes were found before being copied too often, making it easier to trust what we have today.

2 **Quantity**, or the number of manuscript copies we have available today. This information is useful because it gives a wider range of copies to examine. The more copies there are, the more likely there will be differences between them; this helps to weed out obvious mistakes such as transcriber error or added information.

3 **Quality**, or how well each of the available copies match each other. This information is helpful because it is the best way to determine whether or not a piece of literature is trustworthy today. If there are lots of copies but they don't match each other well, it's hard to know which one is correct or what the original author was trying to say. Similarly, even if a piece has a short period of time from writing to discovery, the ultimate sign of whether or not copies are correct is based on how well they match.

In analyzing this data, we will only look at the evidence for the New Testament. This focus is based on the fact that the New Testament speaks of events and writing from the Old Testament, so if the accuracy of the New Testament can be established, then that will affirm the accuracy of the Old Testament.

The table on the following page shows manuscript evidence of several works of literature, all of which are presented as the legitimate, authentic work of the original author.[6, 10, 11] Some information is unavailable due to a lack of published, scholarly study, making it impossible to include on this table.

Most of these works of literature are affirmed by secular sources as true and are no longer questioned because of the manuscript evidence available for them. It's important to keep that in mind as we compare those works to the New Testament.

Author & Work	Date Written	Earliest Manuscript	Time Span *(in years)*	Quantity	Quality
Homer, *Iliad*	800 BC	c. 400 BC	400	1,800	95%
Herodotus, *History*	480-425 BC	1st C. AD	1,350	109	Unavailable
Sophocles, Plays	496-406 BC	3rd C. BC	200	193	Unavailable
Plato, *Tetralogies*	400 BC	895 AD	1,295	210	Unavailable
Caesar, *Gallic Wars*	100-44 BC	9th C. AD	950	251	Unavailable
Pliny, the Elder, *Natural History*	49-79 AD	5th C. AD	400	200	Unavailable
Various Authors, **New Testament** Manuscripts *(Greek)*	50-100 AD	130 AD	30	5,838	99.5%*

**The remaining 0.5% can be traced to simple grammatical errors*

Based on this evidence, if each of the secular examples listed are treated as true and authentic, then the New Testament (and therefore the Old Testament as well) must be considered accurate, legitimate, and authentic to what the original authors wrote. This means that we can trust and be confident that what we have translated today is what was written back then. This confidence in the text also helps us trust other pieces of evidence from history that support Scripture.



Another great source of evidence from **outside** the Bible that helps establish the truth of Scripture is **Archaeology**. We have to be careful not to say that archaeology "proves" the Bible, because that would put archaeology above the Bible[4], but there have been numerous findings throughout history that help confirm what is recorded in the Bible is true and actually happened.

Answers in Genesis (an organization dedicated to helping people understand the truth of the Bible) has compiled lots of information on this topic, and has even said that, "Thousands of facts in the Bible are not capable of verification because the evidence has long since been lost. However, it is remarkable that where confirmation is possible and has come to light, the Bible survives careful investigation in ways that are unique in all literature."[4]

Below is a short, and non-comprehensive, list of archaeological discoveries that have confirmed what is recorded in Scripture[4]:

- Documents that detail the census that took place when Quirinius (or Cyrenius) was Governor of Syria: **the same census that caused Joseph and Mary to go to Bethlehem, where Jesus was born (Luke 2:1-7)**
- Papyrus records that detail part of Jesus' trial before Pilate: **as recorded in John 18:31-33, 37-38**
- The Cyrus Cylinder, *named for King Cyrus of the Medes and Persians*, details the conquest and defeat of Babylon, as well as the Cyrus Decree that released the Jews from captivity: **Babylon's defeat was prophesied in Isaiah 13:1-3 and the Cyrus Decree is recorded in 2 Chronicles 36:22-23 and Ezra 1:1-4**
- Various documents that detail Adad-Nirari III, who was the King of Nineveh *most likely during the time of Jonah*, making major changes to economic and social systems; There is also evidence that the King's palace was next to a structure that's translated name is "The Prophet Jonah", which seems to point to honoring Jonah: **Scripture shows where Nineveh repented and changed as a result of Jonah's warning in Jonah 3:2-10**

INSIDE THE BIBLE:

Now that we've seen clear evidence from **outside** the Bible that helps confirm that events and details recorded in Scripture are true, we'll turn our focus and look **inside** the Bible. By saying "**inside** the Bible" we simply mean any piece of evidence that looks at Scripture first and history second.

There are several areas that we will examine, but a great place to start is to look at the various **Prophecies Recorded & Fulfilled** within God's Word:

The Bible contains nearly 2,500 prophecies. Nearly 2,000 of those have already been fulfilled with no errors whatsoever, with the remaining 500 or so speaking of the future and future events.[9] Rather than go through a list of each prophecy that has been fulfilled, we will simply look at three categories: 1) Destruction of Empires, 2) Exile & Return of Israel, & 3) Jesus' Death.[7]

1

Destruction of Empires: Throughout history, empires have both risen and fallen at various times. Several such empires were prophesied to fall in Scripture, only for Scripture to be proven true in history:

- **Nineveh**: Destruction is prophesied in Nahum 1:1, 14, likely written betwen 663 and 612 BC; Defeated by the Babylonians in 611 BC, *roughly 1-50 years later* [3]

- **Edom**: Destruction is prophesied in Obadiah 1:1-2, likely written in the 9th Century BC; Defeated by the Nabateans in the 5th Century BC, *roughly 400 years later* [3]

- **Babylon**: Destruction is prophesied in Isaiah 13:1-3, likely written between 739 and 681 BC; Defeated by the Persians in 539 BC, *roughly 150-200 years later* [3]

- **Tyre**: Destruction is prophesied in Ezekiel 26:1-3, likely written between 593 and 565 BC; Defeated by Alexander the Great and the Greeks in 332 BC, *roughly 200 years later* [3]

Exile & Return of Israel: As a result of sin and in punishment for that sin, God sent the people of Israel into exile, but promised to bring them back again to the land He had given to them after 70 years of captivity. Both the **Exile** of Israel and their **Return** were prophesied in Scripture and verified in history:

- **Exile:** Prophesied in Jeremiah 24:4-7 & 25:8-11, *this portion* likely written in 630 BC; Fulfilled in 607 BC after Babylon defeated Israel, *roughly 23 years later* [3]

- **Return:** Prophesied in Jeremiah 25:12-14 & Isaiah 11:11-12, likely written in 630 BC & between 739 and 681 BC, respectively; Fulfilled in 537 BC *(70 years of captivity)* after Persia defeated Babylon and King Cyrus released Israel (found in 2 Chronicles 36:22-23), *roughly 100 years later from Jeremiah and 150-200 years later from Isaiah* [3, 4]

Jesus' Death: There are roughly 300 prophecies made about Jesus that He perfectly fulfilled in His life here on Earth. However, not all of them have secular, historical data to verify them, so we will simply look at this one area:

- **Crucifixion:** Prophesied in Psalm 22:16, likely written in 900 BC; Fulfilled in 29 AD when Jesus was crucified by Romans, *roughly 930 years later* [2]

Similar to **Prophecies Recorded & Fulfilled**, another important group of information from **inside** the Bible that helps point to its authority is **What Others Said About Scripture.** Recorded throughout God's Word are instances where it became clear that people considered Scripture to be true and from God Himself. We'll look at just 3 instances: 1) Taught by the Apostles, 2) Declared by Jesus, & 3) Authenticated by the Spirit[7]

Taught by the Apostles: Remember first that the Bible positions itself as the divine, inspired, active, literal Word of God; this is what it says about itself. Throughout the New Testament, the apostles consistently taught that Scripture was in fact true, useful, and from God.

One of the first areas that highlights this teaching is *Their Understanding of Old Testament Writings*[7]: As the apostles wrote to various churches and people groups in the 1st Century, they often referenced Old Testament texts, quoting them and making the claim that the text was true. We can see this in the following example, where Paul writes, "For the Scripture says..." when quoting the passage from Exodus, as if it is a fact:

> "But for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth."
> Exodus 9:16
>
> "For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, 'For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.'"
> Romans 9:17

Other Examples: Gen. 12:1-3 & Gal. 3:8; Ps. 2:1 & Acts 4:24-26; Ps. 45:7 & Heb. 1:5-9

Another area in Scripture that highlights this is *Their Understanding of Their Own Writings*[7]: Beyond their understanding, knowledge, and assertions of Old Testament writings being Scripture, the apostles seemed to also understand that their own writings were divine, not because of themselves, but because of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

It's clear in the following examples that the apostles were aware that the Lord was in command of their writing and that their writing was also Scripture.

"If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord."
1 Corinthians 14:37

"And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures."
2 Peter 3:15-16



Declared by Jesus: Jesus Himself made references to Old Testament writings during His life on Earth, much like the writings of the apostles. He directly quoted the Old Testament at times and always treated these words as Scripture, true, and trustworthy.

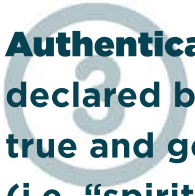
"I said, 'You are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you;"
Psalm 82:6

"Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your Law, 'I said, you are gods'? If he called them gods to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be broken— do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'?""
John 10:34-36

Other Examples: Deut. 8:3 & Matt. 4:4; Gen. 2:24 & Matt. 19:3-6; Matt. 5:17-18

In order to deny the inspiration of Scripture, one would have to deny Jesus' integrity. To say that Scripture isn't true, isn't from God, or isn't reliable, you would have to call Jesus a liar because He took a clear stand in favor of God's Word:

> "And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself."
> Luke 24:25-27
>
> "Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,"
> Luke 24:44-45



Authenticated by the Spirit: In addition to being taught by the apostles and declared by Jesus Himself, the truth of Scripture is authenticated, or shown to be true and genuine, by the Holy Spirit, who teaches and interprets the Word of God (i.e. "spiritual truths") for us:

> "And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned."
> 1 Corinthians 2:13-14

CRITICAL CONCLUSION

There is a logical outcome and response based on all the presented evidence

Based on all the presented evidence in this resource (which only scratches the surface of available information), both **outside** and **inside** the Bible, the most logical outcome is that: the Bible *is* in fact true, what it says about itself is accurate, and therefore **it is the Word of God.**



No other piece of literature in history has more accurate **Manuscript Evidence**,[1, 6, 10, 11] more supporting discoveries in **Archaeology**,[4] or more **Prophecies Recorded & Fulfilled**,[2, 9] than the Bible.



Based even on standards of the secular world, **the Bible is the most accurate and trustworthy book in history**, which means what it says must be considered true and therefore authoritative.

Because of the established authority of Scripture, there are several things that we can know and be sure of as a result[7]:

- The Bible is given by God
- God exists and is exactly who He says He is (for more information on the nature and character of God, see our "Who is God?" Resource)
- Jesus really did die and rise again on your behalf, and God really does love you
- The Bible is useful for everyday life and it is worth studying
  - It leads us to a greater knowledge of God
  - It is vital in our staying connected to Him
  - It is a powerful, living weapon to use in our fight against spiritual darkness

REFERENCES:

Listed below are the articles, speeches, and studies that were used to compile the data contained in this Resource. All can be accessed through a simple web search, and each source has been studied and confirmed to be credible, meaning you can trust the work each has done:

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8. Pew Research, "State of the Bible 2019"

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10. Matt Slick, "Manuscript evidence for superior New Testament reliability"

11. Robert Velarde, "Is the Bible Reliable?"