

Is The Bible Reliable? — Seven Questions:

1. Does the Bible claim to be uniquely inspired by God?

A. The Bible claims that it is uniquely inspired

1. [2 Timothy 3:16](#) – “All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.”

2. [2 Peter 1:20, 21](#) – “Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

B. The writers claimed to be inspired

1. David ([2 Samuel 23:2](#) – “The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me”)

2. Jeremiah ([Jeremiah 2:1-2](#) – “Thus says the Lord”)

3. Paul ([1 Thessalonians 4:1,2](#) – “commandments...by the authority of the Lord Jesus”)

4. John ([Revelation 1:1](#) – “The revelation of Jesus Christ...to his bondservant John”)

C. Jesus claimed that the scriptures were inspired ([Matthew 5:18](#); [Luke 24:44](#) – “all fulfilled”).

Note: The Forms of Inspiration

God directly revealed parts of scripture to some writers (prophets in particular) who spoke exactly the words God gave them (Moses – [Deuteronomy 4:2](#); Isaiah – [Isaiah 59:21](#); Paul—[Galatians 1:12](#), etc.).

God otherwise superintended the writing of men who wrote exactly what God intended. They used their own styles and expressed their thoughts freely knowing what they meant. Yet, through the Holy Spirit, God at the same time determined the content and controlled the accuracy of all they wrote. This is the miraculous aspect of inspiration.

2. What other evidence is there that the Bible is inspired by God?

A. Supernatural Change

The Bible causes supernatural change in people’s lives when its message about sin and salvation is accepted. A visit to any Bible-believing church will give plenty of examples.

B. Fulfilled Prophecy

C. The Bible contains many prophecies recorded and then later fulfilled. Here are some examples:

1. Israel's Rebirth as a Nation after being dispersed many centuries ago was predicted by the Bible ([Isaiah 11:11](#) – written circa 750 B.C.; [Ezekiel 37:1-14](#) – written circa 600 B.C.). For almost 2,000 years (since A.D. 70) the nation of Israel did not exist. Then, on May 15, 1948, Israel became a nation. In 1967 (The Six-day War) its area quadrupled and Jerusalem became Jewish property.
2. The Destruction of the city of Tyre was predicted in detail by Ezekiel ([Ezekiel 26](#) – written circa 600 B.C.). In 332 B.C. Alexander the Great completed the destruction begun by others. Each detail Ezekiel predicted was fulfilled.
3. Four great successive world kingdoms (Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome) were specifically prophesied and described by Daniel ([Daniel 2 & 7](#) – written about 535 B.C.). Each detail was fulfilled as these empires rose and fell in the coming centuries.
4. Over 300 prophecies in the Old Testament describe the details of Christ's birth, life, death and resurrection. The odds of even a few of these coming true in one person are staggering – much less 300 of them.

D. The Distribution and Indestructibility of the Bible

1. The Bible is far and away the world's "best seller." By 1932 it was computed that 1 billion copies of the Bible had been published. By the 1960's it is estimated that over 2 billion were published. Currently, a total of 3-4 billion is reasonable. No other book is even close.
2. The Bible has been translated into well over 1000 languages, representing about 90% of the world's population.
3. Throughout the centuries, various enemies have tried to destroy the Bible (Diocletian Edict, circa A.D. 300). Voltaire, the French philosopher and skeptic, predicted in the 18th century, that the Bible and Christianity would soon be obsolete. In 1828, fifty years after his death, the Geneva Bible Society was using his press and his house to publish Bibles.
4. Jesus had predicted, "Heaven and earth will pass away but my words will not pass away" ([Mark 13:31](#)).

E. Archeology supports the Bible

1. Numerous archaeological finds have supported the Bible's accuracy. Otherwise unknown places, events and dates have proven to be historically accurate. Nelson Glueck, a leading

Jewish archaeologist said, “It can be categorically stated that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference” (Rivers In The Desert, Farrar, Strauss and Cudahy. 1959. P.31). This does not prove inspiration, but it confirms the credibility of writers who also claim that they wrote with God’s authority.

F. A Logical Argument for Inspiration

Charles Wesley proposed the following logical argument:

“The Bible must be the invention either of good men or angels, bad men or devils, or of God.

1. It could not be the invention of good men or angels; for they neither would or could make a book, and tell lies all the time they were writing it, saying, “Thus saith the Lord,” when it was their own invention.
2. It could not be the invention of bad men or devils; for they would not make a book which commands all duty, forbids all sin, and condemns their souls to hell to all eternity.
3. Therefore, I draw this conclusion, that the Bible must be given by divine inspiration.”

(Robert W. Burtner and Robert Chiles, A Compend of Wesley’s Theology, Abingdon Press. 1954. p.20)

3. Hasn’t translating the Bible over and over ruined its reliability?

No. The English translations we have are not the end of a long chain of translations; they are translated directly from Hebrew (O.T.) and Greek (N.T.) originals.

Not	But
Hebrew —Greek —Latin —English	German —English —Hebrew —Greek

The reason we have many different English translations is that scholars have continually updated them to incorporate new linguistic research and to keep up with changes in modern English.

4. How do we know that we have what Moses, David, Jesus, or Paul really said or wrote?

Since there were no copy machines, the texts that the human authors wrote had to be recopied by hand as they wore out or as more copies were needed. Here’s how the text was preserved so accurately.

Old Testament – The Jewish people had scribes who were in charge of the manuscripts. They were so meticulous about doing it perfect that they counted all the paragraphs, words and even letters so they would know if they had copied correctly. They even knew the middle letter of each book so they could count back and see if they had missed anything.

The oldest complete copy of a Hebrew Old Testament in museums today are dated about A.D.1000. That’s a long time after the originals were written (1450-400 B.C.), so one could question if after many centuries of copying we really have the original words. That’s where the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947 is so helpful. These well-preserved texts date back to 100 B.C. Amazingly, there is virtual agreement between the Dead Sea Scrolls and those dated 1,100 years later! This proves we can trust the Hebrew copies of the Old Testament that are existing today.

Example of Isaiah: Virtually identical through all the years of copying.

Written 700 B.C. by Isaiah	Copies found among Dead Sea Scrolls 100 B.C.	Complete Hebrew Manuscripts A.D. 1000	Today’s Bible
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New Testament – The reliability of the New Testament Greek texts is even more certain than the Old Testament texts. The New Testament was written A.D.45 – A.D.90. Some fragments of Greek texts exist that date back to A.D.120 and A.D.150. That’s only 35-100 years after the originals that Paul, John, Luke and others wrote! Another big help is that there are 4000-5000 New Testament Greek manuscripts existing today. By comparing these many copies, scholars can weed out possible copying mistakes. Compare these two factors of Date and Number of existing manuscripts and copies with other literature that historians consider accurate:

Manuscript	Date of Oldest Manuscript Existing	Copies
Plato	1,200 years later	7
Cesar	900 years later	10
Herodotus	1,300 years later	8
Aristotle	1,400 years later	5
New Testament	Only 35-100 years later	4,000-5,000

5. Doesn't the Bible contradict itself?

No. The Bible was written over a period of 1,600 years by about 40 authors on three continents in two major languages. The writers included an Egyptian-trained scholar (Moses), a general (Joshua), Kings (David, Solomon), a farmer (Amos), a fisherman (Peter), a tax-collector (Matthew), and a rabbi (Paul), but amazingly they present a consistent viewpoint of life and set of facts.

Can you imagine 40 different writers today from such different backgrounds agreeing on any subject today? But in all its 66 books, the Bible is self-consistent on such significant issues as where we come from (special creation by God), why we're here (to serve and glorify God) and where we're going (eternal life or eternal judgment).

Critics allege that there are many discrepancies in the Bible. But the *seeming* discrepancies in particular details can generally be explained in one of the following ways:

- a. Logical explanations – Sometimes two seemingly contradicting statements are both actually true. When Matthew refers to one angel at Jesus' tomb and John describes two, there's no contradiction. Where there's two there's one. Matthew wasn't counting. He just described what one of the angels said.
- b. Copyist's mistakes – There are occasions where existing manuscripts (Greek or Hebrew) disagree on certain words or phrases. A few times when two books of the Bible record the same event a number has been changed. It's not hard to imagine that someone copying the manuscript by hand (not the original inspired author) miscopied a number, name or accidentally inserted some margin note into the text.
- c. Interpretive misunderstanding – Critics sometimes allege that Jesus and Paul or Paul and James disagree on something. But those are dubious claims based on what an interpreter thinks a verse means. The burden of proof is on those who claim to see disagreement. Seemingly contradictory statements can be shown to harmonize well by understanding the contexts in which they were written.

6. How do we know the right books are in the Bible? It was just people who decided, wasn't it?

Yes and No. It was human councils such as the one led by Athanasius in A.D.367 which listed the 27 books in our New Testament today. But they didn't determine which books were inspired; they merely recognized the supernatural character those books already had. The following tests were used to conclude that a book or letter was indeed scripture (tests of "canonicity").

- a. Is it authoritative (Does it claim or exhibit God's authority – "Thus saith the Lord")?
- b. Is it prophetic (Is it written by a known "man of God"- [2 Peter 1:20](#))?
- c. Is it authentic (Is it consistent with other revelation of truth)?
- d. Is it dynamic (Is it shown to be life-changing)?
- e. Is it received (Is it accepted and used by believers)?

(Norman L Geisler & William Nix, A General Introduction to the Bible, pp. 137-144)

7. How do you know if you're interpreting the Bible right? So many different groups claim to follow the Bible.

There are three basic approaches to Bible interpretation.

- a. Used by cults. Cults use the Bible to try to prove views they already have. The real authority of their view is always some single leader who has his or her ideas in writing. The cult considers those writings as equal in authority (actually greater) than the Bible. They then lift some Bible verses out of context to support their views.
- b. Misunderstood by liberal scholars. Scholars who don't accept the authority and inspiration of scripture interpret the Bible in purely human terms. They feel free to call the Bible "wrong" on issues if society's standard is different. So they also take the liberty to water down statements that they deem unacceptable. (The seriousness of sin; the need to trust in Christ for salvation, etc.)
- c. Taken literally in its historical and grammatical contexts. Conservative Bible scholars who take the Bible at face value consistently arrive at the same interpretations on major issues. Some detailed interpretations will always vary, but the major messages are clear. Literal interpretation simply means "take it as it was meant." A figure of speech is taken that way. A grammatical form is assumed accurate. What a term or phrase meant at the time in history is worth researching and then understood accordingly. This view let the Bible speak for itself.

(Resource by Sid Litke)