

## **Week 9 = Can We Trust the Bible [Evidence For The Scriptures]**

**Can we trust the Bible?** This is the question we tackle today. How can we say for sure if the Bible is the Word of God? Is there evidence for it? Can we be sure we have what was originally written?

Let us again remind ourselves that we believe the Bible to be the Word of God for one reason only- God has been gracious enough to reveal that to us. We did not become the judge and determine it was the Word of God.

Yet, since it is the Word of God, **there is evidence in the world that conforms to this truth.** Let's look at that evidence and see that unless we have a broken epistemology or bad presuppositions, the truth about the Word of God ***is more than enough to convince us that it is inspired.***

When we discuss the Bible and its trustworthiness, it's easiest to start with focusing on the gospels. Our position is this: if we can prove that the gospels record accurately who Jesus is and what He did and said, then the rest of the Bible can be trusted as well.

Why is this so? Three reasons:

1. If Jesus is God as the gospels claim, then we can trust His sovereign grace to guide the preservation of the Bible.
2. Jesus Himself verified the reliability of the OT.
3. Jesus had the same OT as we have today (the LXX commonly used)
4. Jesus confirmed the accuracy of the text, stating that the scriptures cannot be broken. (John 10:35.)
5. Jesus confirmed that God spoke through the scriptures as he had them. (Matthew 22:31)
6. Jesus set His followers to tell about Him, resulting in the NT.

So ***we want to speak of the evidence of the truthfulness of the gospels.***

**Traditionally this has been done by approaching three questions :**

1.) ***Are the gospels authentic?*** That is, are they really written by the people they say they were: eyewitnesses to the events described, people from the first century who lived in Palestine?

2.) ***Is the text pure?*** In other words, do the Gospels we have today accurately reflect what was written by the apostles?

3.) ***Are the gospels reliable?*** Are the contents true? Were the apostles deceived? Were they deceivers?

## Let's start with asking if the gospel are authentic.

1. Early fragments of manuscripts, proving this is an ancient book. We have fragments from John (P52) from between AD 100 and 150, and for Mark (P45) as early as AD 250.
2. The content of the books is authentic.
  - a. If we look at the text we find details that would not have been known by anyone but those who lived there- names of places, distances of travel between places, etc. (see Acts)
  - b. Archaeology continues to affirm the scriptures. The discovery of the name of David ("house of David"), for example in 1993 in Dan (the Tel Dan Inscription) by Jewish archaeologists blew the doors off of skeptic's claims that the OT stories of David were myths. (not relevant to the gospels, but an example.) a NT example would be the Pool of siloam, discovered 2004.
  - c. There is no attempt to harmonize accounts.
3. External evidence. Most of the NT books were quoted, at length, in the early church, and accepted as authentic. (The acceptance of the books by the early church is vital- they did not contradict what they had seen and heard, they confirmed and agreed with them.)

## Next, let's ask- are the gospel's pure?

Do the writings we have today reflect what the authors really wrote down? This is one point that is attacked repeatedly by skeptics. So often I hear the idea that the gospels were "translated over and over and the originals have been lost." (Bart Ehrman example of his bad argument to dissuade- "some barely literate Christian copied, and then copied, and so on, until a WHOLE 150 years after, who knows how much it has changed!")

## Understanding the manuscript evidence and textual criticism

1. **Many and early copies.** There is no work of antiquity as well documented as the Bible. We have far greater and early manuscripts of the NT than we have of any other work. Some 5000 plus decent manuscripts to work from. (You may hear numbers like 24,000, the decent workable and usable important manuscripts are far less. More like 5000). We have portions of the NT from as close to 100 years of it being written, conservatively speaking. The next best ancient works have anywhere between 500-1000 years between the writing and the first copies we have. (men like Ehrman would have to never quote or suggest they know the contents of any ancient work to be consistent!)
2. **Multiple lines of transmission.** (class example of copying Mark, each row passing it back, copying and passing, each row representing a "generation" of the text. Many years from now we have decent copies of the last row, a few from the start, etc- all different lines as they were passed back. We could compare these lines and find the original. The original is contained within the manuscript tradition (The collection of manuscripts that we have.) **NOTE: no one had complete control to make changes!**

This work is called textual criticism. Textual Criticism: examining these "lines of transmission" and putting together the original as the manuscripts are compared. It is an examining of the text to see what errors are where, and how they originated (movable Nu, homeotelleuton, marginal gloss, etc.), and then recreating the original

from the copies. It is important to understand that the vast majority of the errors are not things that effect the meaning of the text at all.

This idea of multiple lines of transmission also means that no one group or person ever had control of the NT so as to change it.

And so we can state that we have the originals **in the manuscript tradition**, and we can be confident that the version we read is so close that the meaning is the same.

### **Lastly, we ask- Are the gospels reliable?**

This is the big one.

It's not that hard to show that we have early and many manuscripts, and that those who followed Jesus really claimed that he did amazing things.

*The question is, did He?*

**Let's put it this way- If the Gospels are not reliable, either the apostles were deceived, or they were deceivers.**

1. **Were they deceived?** In other words, were they somehow **fooled** into thinking that Jesus performed miracles and rose from the dead?

Some skeptics claim that the followers of Jesus, upon His death, **were so overwhelmed with and emotionally distraught that they imagined His resurrection.**

Could this be what happened?

It seems very unlikely-

- a. There were over 500 witnesses over 40 days
  - b. The followers of Christ did not seem to believe it at all!
  - c. They saw Him together, ate with Him, touched Him, etc.
2. **So perhaps they were the deceivers.**

This is by far the most popular route the skeptic takes. **They claim that the apostles simply made it all up.**

But let's examine such a claim.

1- We know that Jesus lived and was known to have done miraculous things **from extra-Biblical sources.**

This is extremely important to realize. Josephus, who was not a believer, documents Jesus. So do hostile sources such as the Talmud.

Julius Africanus writing in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century quotes very early non Christian sources (such as Thallus and Phlegon) that talk about Jesus, and even debate His miracles- but **do not deny them!**

**Julius Africanus writes:**

“Thallus, in the third book of his histories, explains away this darkness as an eclipse of the sun-unreasonably, as it seems to me (unreasonably, of course, because a solar eclipse could not take place at the time of the full moon, and it was at the season of the Paschal full moon that Christ died).”

There is no record of an non-miraculous Jesus!

(also, the non-biblical record of Jesus is indisputable, for instance, see Tacitus, Josephus, and Pliny the Younger).

2- What would they gain from making up such a story?

They faced nothing but persecution and death. They lived in a culture where they knew such claims would alienate them from their families and people, and would result in great persecution. Why do this? There was nothing to gain.

3- the story could easily have been verified by early converts.

Those to whom these books were written could easily have used the proper names and places and sought out the validity of the stories. Why didn't the whole thing just die out when they found these things to not be true? Why record his bodily resurrection that could easily be verified or discounted?

**This is why I asked you those question at the beginning.** Think about how hard it would be to make up such a lie and pass it off for all those around us to believe, having documented specific people and places. And keep in mind that those who believe don't get rich off of it! They get persecution!

4- If made up, why put in all their own failures, or have women be the witnesses at the tomb?

And to all these **the skeptics respond.**

Next week we will look at our response to these attacks: the person of Christ and the resurrection.