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# Is the Bible Historically Reliable?

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Free media and discipleship resources for pastors, leaders, and growing disciples.

# Is the Bible Historically Reliable?

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We have seen how the Bible demonstrates divine authorship and how it is consistent with science. But if the Bible is true, it must also be historically reliable. In other words, its portrayal of people, places and events must be accurate.

Many skeptics argue that the Bible as we know it has changed over the years, and therefore isn't reliable. For example, how do we know its characters such as Abraham, Moses, David and Jesus Christ actually existed?

Those questions are largely answered by numerous archaeological finds during the past two centuries. Hundreds of archaeological discoveries such as the recent discovery of David's name,<sup>1</sup> as well as ancient manuscripts such as the Dead Sea Scrolls have validated the Old Testament's reliability. Historian Paul Johnson notes,

*It is now possible to see much of the historical writing contained in the books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles as constituting the finest and most dependable history in all the ancient world, on a level with the best work of the Greeks, such as Thucydides.<sup>2</sup>*

Also, on several occasions Jesus and the apostles referred to the Scriptures as the authentic Word of God. Let's look at just a few of them.

- Jesus rebuked Satan during his 40-day temptation in the wilderness by saying, "It is written...." Jesus was clearly referring to the Old Testament Scriptures since the New Testament had yet to be written.<sup>3</sup>
- Jesus affirmed the existence of many Old Testament figures including Adam and Eve, Abraham, Noah, Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, Jonah, Daniel and David.
- Jesus said that the Scriptures referred to him.<sup>4</sup>
- In his prayer to his Father, Jesus said, "Thy Word is truth."<sup>5</sup>
- The apostle Paul said, "All Scripture is inspired by God...."<sup>6</sup>
- The apostle Peter said that God spoke through the prophets to us.<sup>7</sup>

The case for the reliability of the Old Testament Scripture is therefore intricately linked to that of the New Testament. So how compelling is the evidence for the reliability of the New Testament?

Beginning in the 17th century, critical scholars began questioning the Bible for its origins and historicity. Many liberal scholars tried to make a case that the New Testament was written by unknown authors well after any eyewitnesses to Jesus would have been alive. The consensus of these skeptical scholars was that the New Testament was written more than a hundred years after Christ.

But in the 19th and 20th centuries, numerous copies of New Testament manuscripts have been discovered, contradicting the late dates argued by these skeptics. One manuscript dates as early as AD 117. Since this fragment is a copy of John's Gospel, scholars believe the original was likely written while John was still alive during the end of the first century.<sup>8</sup>

Skeptics have also been silenced by the mounting evidence of additional archaeological finds—in all, over 25,000 copies of ancient New Testament manuscripts. Scholars have concluded that the quantity and dating of these manuscripts makes the New Testament the most reliable document in all ancient history.<sup>9</sup>

Based on the manuscript evidence, British paleographer Sir Frederick Kenyon concludes that “both the authenticity and the general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established.”<sup>10</sup>

Paul Johnson notes how the mounting evidence has removed skepticism.

*What is clear beyond doubt is that whereas in the nineteenth century the tendency of history was to cast doubt of the veracity of Judeo-Christian records and to undermine popular faith in God and His Son as presented in the Bible, in the twentieth century it has moved in quite the opposite direction, and there is no sign of the process coming to an end. It is not now the men of faith, it is the skeptics, who have reason to fear the course of discovery.<sup>11</sup>*

In addition to the New Testament itself, over 36,000 letters and documents outside of the Bible substantiate its words.<sup>12</sup> (To read more on the reliability of the New Testament [click here](#))

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## Endnotes