



THE REASON FOR HOPE

WHY TRUST THE BIBLE?

A QUICK RECAP: Apologetic Foundations

Worldviews, Presuppositions and Neutrality

We saw from 1 Peter 3:15 that the Foundation of apologetics is “honouring Christ in all areas of our life” - especially in the way that we think. It means that we think from a Christian worldview that is built on the truth of what God’s word tells us about the way things really are. Our Christian worldview is based on Biblical presuppositions.

We saw also that everyone has presuppositions - beliefs or faith in certain unproven ‘truths’ or axioms which they operate from. This means that everyone has a worldview and that no one is ‘neutral’ - we all have biases or presuppositions that we operate from, and until we address these presuppositions we will never correct the faulty lenses through which we see the things. Therefore, we should recognize at the outset that there is no theologically neutral way to approach the question of scripture. Either we begin from theological convictions from scripture itself, or from some other autonomously constructed model. Ironically, every other model of answering the question must first know what Scripture is before determining how to authenticate it - thus we see the problem of this type of internal bias is unavoidable.

The main issue: Suppression of truth in unrighteousness

We also saw from Romans 1:18-32 that humanity’s ultimate problem is not a lack of information (because God’s self-revelation through creation leaves everyone without excuse) but rather their suppression of the truth because of their unrighteousness. Therefore, our task is to reveal their true problem - the unrighteousness that causes them to suppress the truth - so that we can offer the solution to it: the Gospel.

Don’t put down your sword!

So, the aim of apologetics is always to get at the Gospel - because only the Gospel is the cure for our unrighteousness - it alone is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16). This leaves us at today’s workshop. If the Gospel is the power unto salvation, and we find the Gospel in the Bible, then the logical question is: Why trust the Bible?

It would be inconsistent to say that our method of apologetics must be biblical, and then proceed in this area to argue from unbiblical premises and put down our sword. If the Bible bears the very authority of God himself, to what other standard could it appeal to justify itself? Even when God swore oaths, “he swore by himself” (Heb. 6:13) because there was no higher standard to appeal to than himself! Therefore, for the Bible to be God’s Word, it must be self-authenticating. We must remember that when we are talking about an ultimate authority, the nature of an ultimate authority is that you cannot appeal to another authority other than itself to authenticate it - otherwise, that other authority becomes more ‘ultimate’ than it.

Thus, for ultimate authorities to be ultimate authorities, they have to be the standard for their own authentication. You cannot account for them without using them.
(Michael J. Kruger, Canon Revisited)

So, this claim that the Bible is the Word of God, and thus comes with His own authority, is a very big claim indeed! This does not mean that we argue “the Bible is true because the Bible says it’s true.” But rather, it means that Scripture itself provides the grounds for considering the external data such as the historicity of the accounts, the transmission of the texts, the fulfillment of prophecy, etc. Scripture gives us the framework in which to make sense of these ‘bare facts’ since, as we saw in the last workshop, there is no such thing as an ‘uninterpreted fact.’ So perhaps it may be more helpful to think of it not so much as ‘proving’ scripture, but rather *applying* scripture to the question: why trust the Bible?

OUTLINE: The Winnie the Pooh Defense of the Bible

The study of the reliability and truthfulness of the Bible can be a daunting and massive topic! Many scholars spend their lifetime examining various aspects of the Bible’s message, consistency, origin, transmission and preservation. The scope of this study would be far too large to cover comprehensively in this short workshop. Thus, we need a model that will get us started and build a sure foundation upon which we can continue to learn from.

Barry Cooper, in his book *Can I Really Trust the Bible?* Uses a helpful illustration which we will use as a helpful memory-aid in this workshop. Imagine a scene from Winnie the Pooh:

Pooh-bear is walking in the forest when he stumbles upon a curious looking clay pot under a tree. Intrigued, Pooh walks over the pot and reads a label on it that says, “HUNNY.” Being a honey-loving bear, perhaps with the risk of early-onset diabetes, he thinks to himself, “Hmm... it says it’s honey, but you can never be too sure. Sometimes people put different things into honey pots. I better take a look inside.”

So, Pooh opens up the lid to reveal the pot filled with a golden, shimmery, viscous liquid. “It looks like honey!” exclaims Pooh, “But I remember once my uncle saying that he had seen cheese that was just this colour and consistency. I better test it out myself and see...”

So, he dives face-first into the pot and takes a huge gulp of the golden liquid. “Ahhh yes!!! No doubt, that’s honey!”

This is the approach we will be taking today as we tackle the question, “Why trust the Bible?”

- **READ THE LABEL:** Firstly, we need to look at the label on the pot. What does the Bible claim to be? What does it say about itself?
- **LOOK INSIDE:** Secondly, we need to take a look inside. Does what’s on the inside match what it claims to be? How does it show that it is trustworthy?
- **TASTE AND SEE:** Lastly, we must taste and see. Ultimately, we do not really know honey until we taste and experience it ourselves! Likewise, the Bible calls us to ‘taste and see that the Lord is good!’ (Psa. 34:8)

1. READ THE LABEL: WHAT DOES THE BIBLE CLAIM TO BE?

Psalms 19 | Matthew 22:29-32 | 2 Timothy 3:16-17 | 2 Peter 1:20-21



A Brief Introduction to the Bible

The Bible is divided into two sections: the Old Testament (39 documents, written in Hebrew with a smattering of Aramaic) and the New Testament (27 documents, written in Greek, with a few Aramaic quotes). The word "Testament" is from the Latin *testamentum* meaning 'covenant'. So, the Old Testament is the documents of the old covenant that God has made with His people which outlined the terms of their relationship to Him. Likewise, the New Testament is the new covenant documents given in Christ Jesus of how God relates with us now through salvation by grace through faith in His Son. The documents in the Old Testament were all written before Jesus Christ was born, with the oldest being written about 1500 BC. The ones in the New Testament were all written after Jesus was born, with the latest being written in about AD 90, roughly 60 years after Jesus' crucifixion.

So, the Bible then may be thought of not as one singular book, but as a **library** of books.

Our Bibles today are divided into chapters and verses. But these divisions weren't in the original writings. Moses and the other authors didn't write and label each of their sentences, 'verse 1, 2, 3, etc.' They were added later to help readers find their way around. The chapter numbers were inserted by Stephen Langton, Archbishop of Canterbury early in the 13th century. The Old Testament verse numbers were added by Jewish scribes around 900 AD, and the New Testament verse numbers by a French printer called Robert Estienne in the 16th century. The headings we have in our modern Bibles were added in later by various publishers to help the reader categorize sections of scripture. These are all just reading aids on the text of scripture - but they are not inspired or original to the biblical text.

This is important to understand, as sometimes the verse and chapter divisions or section headings may not necessarily reflect the best grouping of the original text.

A. GOD'S SELF-REVELATION (PSALM 19)

God reveals Himself to us in:

I. **CREATION** - also called "General Revelation"

As we saw in the previous workshop, all of creation testifies to God's handiwork. As a painting reveals the qualities of its painter, so God's world speaks about Him. This is the point of Psalm 19:1, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork." Creation is God's 'book' revealing Him to everyone.

Even if we were to burn all the Bibles and drown every preacher - God's creation would still make the knowledge of Him plain to everyone so that they are without excuse (especially for drowning all those poor preachers!). This is what the first six verses of Psalm 19 emphatically proclaim. This is why the Bible doesn't try to prove God's existence as Creator. It assumes that is unmissable as the giant flaming fireball hanging over our heads in the sky every day (v.6)!

II. **SCRIPTURE** - also called “Special Revelation”

What the Bible is then, is the way God has ordained for us to get to know Him personally - not just from ‘afar’ through creation. General revelation - the world we live in - only tells us enough to be left without an excuse (Rom. 1:20). Creation doesn’t tell us enough for saving knowledge. For that we need special revelation - we need God to speak to us in words we can understand. In our sinfulness, we reject the true God and exchange the knowledge of Him for created things (what the Bible calls idolatry). For us not to just go on making idols of a god that we imagine (Rom. 1:22-23) in our fallenness, we need God to speak to us who He really is and how we can be made right with Him.

This is what the second bit of Psalm 19 (v. 7-11) tells us about the Bible. It draws attention to the fact that the Scriptures (here in reference to the OT) are from God - “the law of the Lord... statutes of the Lord... precepts of the Lord... etc.” Note also the descriptions of God’s word in Psalm 19 - it claims to be: perfect, sure, right, pure, clean, true, precious, desirable and able to instruct and warn. Note also the effects of God’s word - it claims to be able to revive the soul, make wise, rejoice the heart, enlighten, endure, be sweeter than honey (enjoyable), and result in a great reward for the one who listens to it.



TAKE AWAY: The Bible is God’s special self-revelation to us, revealing who He is by telling us in writing what He said, has done and promises to do.

B. GOD SPEAKING TO US (MATTHEW 22:29-32)

Ultimately, the Old Testament (OT) claims to be God’s word:

...in the first five books of the Old Testament alone, you’ll see phrases like “God said” about 700 times. There are nearly 4,000 such claims in the Old Testament as a whole.
(Barry Cooper)

What did Jesus think of the Old Testament (the Bible of the first century)?

Over and over Jesus is quoted as saying and responding to people with, “It is written... it is written...” then quoting the OT. He repeatedly appeals to God’s written word in the OT. In his mind, there is no higher authority than God’s written word. According to Jesus, everything written about him in “the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms” (a common way of referring to the OT according to how the books were grouped in the Tanak - the Jewish scriptures) had to take place. Why? Because it is written in scripture and is completely trustworthy, it must come to pass. This is what he means in John 10:35 that, “scripture cannot be broken.” Jesus didn’t only talk about the authority of scripture, he also showed it in how he lived.

MATTHEW 22:29-32 - Jesus holds the Jewish leaders accountable to what was written in Exodus 3:6 as if God had personally spoke it directly to them.

[See Matthew 22:29-32] Listen again to what the Lord said to the Sadducees: “Have you not read what was spoken to you by God?” Consider the oddity of this phrase: Generally, after “have you not read,” we would expect the next phrase to be “what was written to you?” When we see “what was spoken

to you,” we expect to have heard it in the context of “Did you not hear?” But Jesus mixes these terms: “Have you not read what was spoken to you by God?” ...When the Lord asked His opponents if they had read what God said to them, He was making reference to the reading of the Scriptures; He went on to cite from Exodus 3:6. ...Though the words they’d read had been penned more than a thousand years earlier, still God spoke in the reading of those words. Jesus held them accountable for the words of Scripture as if God Himself had spoken those words directly to them!
(James White, Scripture Alone, pg 62)

According to Jesus, God’s written word (the Bible) is faithfully accurate, powerful, trustworthy and authoritative. Not only that, but people are held accountable to God’s written word as if He had spoken it directly to them!

2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17 says that scripture is ultimately the product of **GOD** not man and they are **SUFFICIENT** to fully equip us for every good work.

Paul in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says that,

“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.”

The term sometimes translated “God-breathed” (θεόπνευστος - *theópneustos*) is speaking of the origin of the Scriptures. It is saying that they are not, first and foremost, in a primary sense, human in their origination but rather find their origin in God - as if He breathed them out. Think of it as when you hold your hand up to your mouth and exhale - that breath you feel is you-breathed. That’s what this term is communicating. Perhaps a better word would be ‘God-expired’. Scripture is like that, “breathed out by God,” not just the product of man.

Note also the purpose of God’s breathed out words:

“So that the man of God may be artios (ἄρτιος),” a Greek term translated as “fully qualified,” “proficient,” “fully ready,” “complete,” and “capable.”
(James White, Scripture Alone, pg 54)

This passage tells us that scripture’s purpose is to equip the believer for every good work in such a way that they lack nothing. It is speaking to the sufficiency of the scriptures. This is why we must test every claim by the scriptures. As the 17th - century theologian John Owen put it, the “mask of pretended revelations and interior inspiration” has been used by Satan to mislead people throughout history. It’s a loving gesture of God’s grace, then, that he has provided Scripture as “a constant aid and guide.”

2 PETER 1:20 says that the meaning of scripture is *NOT* a matter of one’s own private interpretation. God meant to say something specific to us and intends for us to rightly understand His message.

2 Peter 1:20-21 says,

“knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

Peter is saying that the meaning of the Scriptures is not a matter of one’s private interpretation because:

Scripture is not the opinions of the prophets but the very words of God. Peter's emphasis is upon denying the human origin of the prophetic word, for he goes on to say, "No prophecy was ever made by an act of human will." ...It is not the men themselves who are "inspired" but the Scriptures, the result of this divine initiative in revelation.

(James White, *Scripture Alone*, pg 58-59)

All of this to say that it is the Bible, the scriptures themselves, which are God's very words to us. God used men to write the scriptures under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. However, in using them, He also used their own styles and linguistic abilities so that it did not destroy the human authors' personalities as if they were a robot taking dictation. The product of this process though was exactly what God wanted to communicate to us - so much so that we can truly see the Bible as God's very words to us.

What scripture is claiming is that when we read or hear the Bible preached, it is God speaking to us. We better listen up!

This is what the Bible shows of itself. This connection of simultaneous divine and human qualities of God's word (the Bible) finds many similarities to the divine and human union in the Word of God (cf. John 1:1) - Jesus Christ - who is both, at the same time, truly God and truly man.



TAKE AWAY: The Bible is God speaking directly to us. Properly interpreted, its commands are binding on us, and it is sufficient for salvation and to equip us for every good work.



FURTHER RESOURCES: The Bible and its Authority

- [Scripture Alone: Exploring the Bible's Accuracy, Authority and Authenticity](#) by James R. White
- [Sola Scriptura: The Protestant Position on the Bible](#) edited by Don Kistler

2. LOOK INSIDE: **DOES THE BIBLE MATCH ITS CLAIMS?**

Internal Consistency | Fulfilled Prophecy | Faithful Preservation



So, having looked at what the Bible claims to be, now we turn to take off the lid and peer into the honeypot. Does the Bible look like what it claims to be? Since the Bible says that it is God's very Word to us - authoritative, inerrant, infallible, perfect, etc... then we should expect the internal and external qualities of the Bible to match that. What would we expect of a book which makes such claims as the Bible does of itself?

There are many things we could look at to show Scripture's self-authentication as God's Word. But in this workshop, we're going to look mainly at three (3).

A. Internal Consistency - if the scriptures are ultimately the product of One Divine Author, then their message collectively should be consistent with each other.

B. Fulfilled Prophecy - if the scriptures are supernatural, we should expect them to evidence a supernatural

quality about what they predict.

C. Faithful Preservation - if the scriptures are God's own words, He will preserve them for us so that we can be confident that what we have and read today is really what He meant for us to have.

While we cannot take an in-depth examination of each of these categories, we will look briefly at each of them and recommend further resources if you'd like to dig deeper.

A. INTERNAL CONSISTENCY (GENESIS - REVELATION)

If the Bible is ultimately the product of One Divine Author, then its collective message should be consistent across all of its books.

Imagine a radio with 66 stations. As you flick rapidly between them, you notice something very odd. The songs sound different—country and western collides with hip hop collides with opera—but each new singer is developing the same storyline.

The Bible contains 66 documents. Approximately 40 authors from varying times, backgrounds and places, who wrote in three different languages, in various genres, often writing centuries apart over a period of about 1,500 years.

Consider that for a moment. What if multiple authors had each written a single page of this workshop? What if each author wrote in different genres, in different centuries and in different countries, with no "master plan" for them to consult? What is the likelihood that it would make any sense at all? Yet the Bible has a single theme running all the way through it:

The Bible tells the unified, coherent story of humanity's creation by God, subsequent rebellion against God, and God's gracious rescue/redemption of His people.

Such a consistent message over such a vast range of time and places is like flicking between 66 different radio stations and finding that each is advancing the same story, a grand symphonic drama that grows in beauty as it develops.

That's the amazing thing we're talking about when we say that the scriptures claim to have one consistent message, with one consistent purpose. For example in John's Gospel it says:

"Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." (John 20:30-31)

This was Jesus's own claim when he rebuked the pharisees:

"You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life." (John 5:39-40)

And when he opened up the scriptures to the disciples on the Emmaus road:

"And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself." (Luke 24:27)

The Bible's consistent message is an amazing testimony to its trustworthiness when we consider the sheer breadth of the Bible's authors, topics, genres and times. **No other book, either in antiquity or today, can even come close to this sort of a claim.** Every other religious text is either compiled by one author or governing authority, or it has major inconsistencies and contradictions within it.



CHALLENGE: THE BIBLE IS FULL OF CONTRADICTIONS

“The Bible is full of contradictions!” is a popular criticism we hear today to discredit its trustworthiness. *However, is this true?*

Something which contains a genuine contradiction cannot be true even in principle. It is not possible to have a sunny night, a married bachelor, dry water, a true falsehood, a square circle and so on. Thus, the claim that the Bible contains contradictions is a serious challenge indeed. For if the Bible has even one real contradiction, then it cannot be completely true.

Aside from the fact that a majority of the people who levy this claim have never done any serious study on the topic themselves, there are many instances we could point to that demonstrate this to be plainly false. Time and space do not allow for answering every single allegation of contradiction in the Bible, but we will look specifically at one and then point to further resources.

DEFINING TERMS: WHAT A CONTRADICTION IS NOT...

Inspired by atheist writer, Sam Harris’ (ironically named) ‘Reason Project’, the “Skeptics Annotated Bible” alleges to have found thousands of contradictions in the Bible. However, upon closer examination, the majority of these ‘contradictions’ are simple misunderstandings about how to read scripture and take into account the genre of various books. Many of their cited ‘contradictions’ predominantly show their atheistic/humanistic biases against the possibility of anything supernatural and their own distaste Christian teaching and ethics. This confirms what scripture says about the predisposition of the unbeliever to God’s truth as one who suppresses that knowledge because of their unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18).

Some examples of ‘contradictions’ they cite include perceived discrimination against homosexuals (problem with Christian ethics), discrimination against women (dislike of Biblical gender roles), scientific absurdities (anti-supernaturalism) and historical/numerical inaccuracies (not allowing that some Biblical writers intentionally use symbolic or round numbers). However, no substantial grounding is offered as to why and how they can even begin to validly critique these things from an atheistic worldview. Where is the basis for ethics, or ruling out supernaturalism at the outset? This is simply a reflection of bias and precommitments to a naturalistic view of reality.

Aside from the claim of contradictions, most objections to the Bible are not actually problems at all from a logical perspective. For example, suppose that someone claims, “The Bible can’t be trusted because it contains accounts of miracles, and miracles are clearly impossible.” This argument is not rationally sound because it begs the question. Clearly, an all-powerful God as described in the Bible would be capable of doing miracles. Thus, by merely assuming that miracles are impossible, the critic has already dismissed the possibility that the Bible is true. His argument is circular. The critic is essentially arguing that the Bible is false because the Bible is false.

(Dr. Jason Lisle)

Someone’s personal bias against supernaturalism, or distaste of certain things in the Bible because of their own presuppositions and worldview does not count as a contradiction.

It is simply a faulty assumption on their part. Such criticisms of the Bible only serve to expose the bias of the critics, who because of their antagonistic disposition, are all too eager to jump on any perceived contradiction or distaste in order to justify their preconceived notions. These criticisms are only compelling to those who do not love truth, but rather suppress it because of their unrighteous rebellion (Rom. 1:18).

The Clarity of Scripture

Much of what is claimed to be a contradiction in scripture is simply a misunderstanding of scripture itself. However, this does not mean that scripture is unintelligible or impossible to understand. The Westminster Confession of Faith says it like this:

All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all (2 Pet. 3:16): yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation are so clearly propounded, and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them (Psa. 119:105, 130).
(*The Westminster Confession of Faith*, 1.7)

Basically, the confession is saying this - there are some parts of scripture that are hard to understand and which we must read and study carefully to rightly interpret. However, the essential message of salvation is so clearly taught in scripture that even the simplest of persons can understand it through regular means of reading and understanding. You don't need to be a scholar to understand the phrase: "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12) So, as we look at some alleged claims of contradictions, we must remember the big picture - the main message of scripture is clear and easily understood by all.

3 TYPES OF FLAWED 'CONTRADICTIONS':

- **Flawed theology** : Sometimes, what is cited as a 'contradiction' by skeptics is simply a poor understanding of Christian theology.
- **Flawed translations** : Sometimes, alleged 'contradictions' are simply a matter of imperfect or heretical translations (eg. Jehovah's Witnesses - New World Translation).
- **Flawed interpretation** : Some alleged 'contradictions' are a matter of misunderstanding the meaning of the text in its right context.

Let's look briefly at some examples of each of these...

1. FLAWED THEOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING

Sometimes, what is cited as a 'contradiction' by unbelievers is simply a poor understanding of Christian theology. Here are a few examples:

Paul vs James: Romans 4:2-3 teaches that Abraham was justified by faith alone, not by works. However, James 2:21, 24 teaches that Abraham was justified by works and not by faith alone. Do we have a contradiction here? We do have a case of "A and not A at the same time," but the relationship differs. Romans 4 is teaching about justification before God; by faith alone Abraham was considered righteous before God. But James 2 is teaching about justification before men (James 2:18); by works (as a result of faith) Abraham was considered righteous before men. There is no contradiction here. It is simply a misunderstanding of the context and a right theology of justification - that we are justified before God by faith alone, however, the proof of that justification (before men) is that our lives would be lived out as holy and committed to good (sanctification).

The Trinity: "How can God be both one and three?" But upon inspection we can see that there is no contradiction because, again, the relationship differs. The Bible teaches that God is one in a certain sense, and three in a different sense. Specifically, there is one God (Isaiah 45:5-6, 18, 22), and yet there are three persons who are God: the Father (Galatians 1:1), the Son (John 20:31), and

the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3–4). It may seem counterintuitive that God is one in nature/substance and three in persons, but there is no logical contradiction here because we make a distinction between the category of “being” and “person”. If we were saying that God is three of the same sense, while also being one of the same exact sense - then that would be a logical fallacy. However, Christians don’t believe that. We believe God is one in essence or being, and three in person. Simply stated, God is one WHAT, and three WHOs. (For further study on the Trinity, the book *The Forgotten Trinity* by James White is an excellent resource!).

Old & New Covenant: “This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised.” — Genesis 17:10

“...if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing.” — Galatians 5:2

Again a misunderstanding of theological categories. Genesis is reference to the Old Covenant between God and national Israel - of which circumcision was the sign of the covenant. In the New Covenant, the signs of the covenant are baptism and the Lord’s supper. In context, Paul is combating the problem of legalism - trying to earn salvation by works of the law.

These examples show us why it is important for us to study theology and know what and why we believe! Remember our definition of apologetics from the first workshop: apologetics is knowing what you believe, why you believe it and being able to communicate that in an effective and gracious way.

2. FLAWED TRANSLATIONS

Sometimes, alleged ‘contradictions’ are simply a matter of flawed translations. As anyone who speaks multiple languages will know, it is difficult to translate some things exactly from one language to another because of the difference between the languages. *Sometimes there’s not an exact word that fits the original.* For example:

Some critics cite Leviticus 11:13–19, where we find words like these in our English translations: “And these you shall regard as an abomination among the birds; they shall not be eaten, they are an abomination: the eagle . . . and the bat.” However, we know today that bats are not ‘birds’ - they are winged mammals. The translation process is not infallible, so we must consider what the original Hebrew author intended. The Hebrew word translated bird—owph—actually means “fowl or a winged creature.” Of course bats are winged creatures.

Other times, it’s a flaw in the quality of the translation. Different Bible translations have different levels of quality based on the skills of the translators and the access to early manuscripts of the Hebrew & Greek texts. For example, the KJV is an older translation which was based on some less reliable manuscripts (due to the fact that there weren’t as many manuscripts available to the KJV translators in the 17th century as we have today) - and as a result, some of its translations are not as accurate as modern ones.

For example, in the KJV, 2 Kings 24:8 says that Jehoiachin was 18 years old when he became king. However, in 2 Chronicles 36:9, it says that he was 8 years. This is a simple copyist error: the Old Testament manuscripts were copied by hand, from century to century, small and inconsequential errors found their way into the biblical text. In ancient Hebrew, the numbers 8 and 18 would have been differentiated by a very small mark. No matter how meticulous the scribes were, it would be understandable if one misread the number and recorded the wrong number on the new manuscript. A correction to this error is reflected in modern translations like the ESV, where both texts say “18 years old” because the modern translations are based on better and more manuscripts than the KJV which show us that the reading “8 years old” is actually a mistake.

Another example would be heretical translations such as the New World Translation used by the Jehovah’s Witnesses. This translation intentionally distorts the text of scripture to obscure and deny the deity of Christ. For

example, in John 1:1, their translation says the Word was 'a god' instead of the what the original text says: the Word was God.

While 'flawed translations' are often used as an attack against scripture, if we understand the process of transmission and translation, we see that this is not a problem at all. We will come back more to this topic of Bible translations later.

3. FLAWED INTERPRETATION

An example of this is the claim that the Bible teaches that the earth is stationary, which contradicts the fact that the earth moves around the sun. Indeed, this misunderstanding was even propagated by some in the church for some time before Galileo and Copernicus. In this case, the biblical passages (such as Psalm 93:1, 96:10) have been taken out of context. These are poetic passages indicating the world has been established by God and will not deviate from His plan. These poems are not attempting to develop an astronomical model, and say nothing about physical motion. In fact, the Psalmist also says, "I shall not be moved." (Psalm 16:8). Clearly the author does not intend that he will be physically stationary—rather he means that he will not deviate from the path God has created for him. We must understand that the Bible uses different genres when we interpret - one does not interpret poetry the same way as history.

In these brief examples, we see that the problem was actually that the unbeliever misunderstands the scriptures. So, our response should be to teach and correct that misunderstanding in a gracious and compassionate way. Remember that we too were at one time ignorant, and we are constantly learning and increasing in our knowledge and understanding of scripture. At the end of the day, there have been no genuine contradictions found in the Bible which would pose a legitimate threat to Christian faith in it as the Word of God.

To learn more about how to properly interpret and understand scripture, check out our [**READ SCRIPTURE WORKSHOP**](#) on our website!



TAKE AWAY: God's word is totally consistent. The perceived 'contradictions' in scripture are not actually contradictions when understood properly.



FURTHER RESOURCES: The Consistent Message of the Bible

- [The Whole Message of the Bible in 16 Words](#) by Chris Bruno - This accessible overview of biblical theology traces the development of sixteen key themes from Genesis to Revelation, showing how each theme contributes to the one main storyline of Scripture.
- [Keeping Faith in an Age of Reason: Refuting Alleged Bible Contradictions](#) by Jason Lisle - Each answer is as concise as possible, so that the book is not overly cumbersome. Many Christians have heard the claim that the Bible has contradictions and they would like to be better equipped to answer the critic. This book is for them!
- [Seeing Christ in All of Scripture](#) - Interpreting the Bible can be a challenge. Seeing Christ in All of Scripture is designed to help people understand the beautiful, Christ-centered structure of the Bible. This concise compilation of essays provides a unique and practical tool for personal or group Bible study.
- [The Bible Project](#) - online animated videos that explain the Bible's message.

B. FULFILLED PROPHECY (OLD TO NEW TESTAMENT)

If the Bible is the God's word, we should expect it to evidence a supernatural quality about what it predicts.

There are many instances of prophecy in the Bible - too many to go through all here. However, the most compelling, and indeed - the focus of Biblical prophecy are the prophecies concerning the Messiah. It is the one uniting theme of the whole Bible - therefore, it makes sense to look to that as our primary witness to the Bible's trustworthiness.

I. MESSIANIC PROPHECY (Prophecies about Jesus)

By various estimates, Jesus Christ fulfilled over **300** specific prophecies about the Messiah in his birth, life, death and resurrection. This is the whole point of the Bible: to point to Jesus Christ as the long awaited Saviour of the world!

Here is a partial summary of the prophecies in the OT that are fulfilled in Jesus in the NT.

The Messiah would:

- **be born of a virgin** (Isa. 7:14 | Matt. 1:22-23 & Luke 1:31-35)
- **have been the object of a murderous plot to kill him as a baby** (Jer. 31:15 | Matt. 2:16-18)
- **be the son given to us who is called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, etc** (Isa. 9:6-7 | Luke 1:32-33 & 79, Acts 10:36)
- **be born in Bethlehem** (Mic. 5:2 | Matt. 2:1-6, John 7:40-43)
- **be a descendant of David** (2 Sam. 7:12-16; Matt. 1:1, Luke 1:32-33 & Acts 15:15-16)
- **be called out of Egypt** (Hos. 11:1 | Matt. 2:13-15)
- **be preceded by a prophet/messenger like Elijah** (Isa. 40:3-5, Mal. 3:1 & 4:5-6 | Matt. 3:1-3, 11:10-15, 17:9-13, Luke 1:16-17, John 1:22-23)
- **do prophesied redemptive acts** (Isa. 61:1-2 | Luke 4:17-21)
- **perform signs of healing** (Isa. 35:5-6 | Matt. 11:4-6)
- **be a prophet like Moses** (Deut. 18:15-19 | John 6:14, 7:40, Acts 3:22 & 7:37)
- **be called God's Son** (Psa. 2:1-12 | Luke 3:22, Acts 4:25-28, 13:33, Heb. 1:5 & 5:5)
- **be the light for the nations** (Isa. 42:1-7 | Matt. 12:15-18, John 8:12)
- **come come riding on a donkey** (Zech. 9:9 | Matt. 21:1-7)
- **bear the title 'Son of Man'** (Dan. 7:13-14 | Matt. 9:6, 12:8, 13:41, Luke 9:22, John 1:51 & 3:13-14)
- **be the rejected cornerstone** (Psa. 118:22-24 | Matt. 21:42, Luke 20:17-18, Acts 4:9-12, Eph. 2:20, 1 Pet. 2:6-8)
- **be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver** (Zech. 11:12-13 | Matt. 26:14-15 & 27:3-10)
- **be pierced one whom they look upon and mourn** (Zech. 12:10 | John 19:31-37, Rev. 1:7)
- **be the suffering servant** (Isa. 52:13-53:12 | Matt. 8:16-17, 20:28, 26:28, 27:59-60, John 12:37-38, Acts 8:32-35, Rom. 10:16, 1 Pet. 2:21-25)
- **be the ultimate Passover Lamb** (Exo. 12:1-51 | John 1:29, 1 Cor. 5:7-8, 1 Pet. 1:19)
- **be forsaken and pierced but vindicated** (Psa. 22:1-31 | Matt. 27:39-46, John 19:24 & Heb. 2:12)
- **be lifted up** (Num. 21:6-9 | John 3:14-18)
- **be resurrected** (Psa. 16:8-11 | Acts 2:22-32 & 13:35-37)
- **bring a new covenant** (Jer. 31:31 | Matt. 26:28, Heb. 8:6-13 & 9:15)

Notice how many of these fulfilled prophecies would be impossible if Jesus was merely a human trying to fit the role (such as where he was born, his genealogy, John coming before him to prepare the way, Herod's persecution, etc). Furthermore, many of these prophecies were written centuries before Christ and are fulfilled precisely as predicted.

Those who claim that the New Testament writers forged the accounts to fit the OT prophecies cannot account for the fact that they did so at the sacrifice of any earthly gain and sure persecution and death. There was no advantage to them for testifying as they did to Jesus as the Christ (and also including embarrassing details about themselves). People don't fabricate false tales that don't advantage them and then willing go to brutal executions for the sake of that lie! Their witness was also written early enough that it could be corroborated by other eyewitnesses who were alive at the time and the earliest historical accounts we have (even from non-Christians) confirms the veracity of the historical events.

II. THE SUFFERING SERVANT OF ISAIAH 52-53

It would be great if we could all memorize such a list of Messianic prophecy - and it would be a good goal to set! However, for practical purposes, this may be too lofty a goal for an introductory workshop. So, let's take a closer look at one of the most compelling OT Messianic passages - the suffering servant in Isaiah 52-53.

If someone familiar with the story of Jesus from the NT were to hear Isaiah 52-53 read to them may think that it was from the New Testament. (If you're not familiar with Isaiah 52-53, you should take the time to read it in full) The descriptions of the Messiah being marred beyond human resemblance (52:14), having no form or majesty, being despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, bearing our griefs, smitten by God, pierced for transgressions, crushed for iniquities, by whose wounds we are healed, and upon whom the iniquity of us all are laid (53:1-6).

This passage is so clearly a Messianic prophecy about Jesus Christ that many critical biblical scholars thought that it was impossible it could have been written originally by the prophet Isaiah and had to have been the product of a later scribe adding it in to fit Jesus. The fact that there was no early manuscripts of this passage of Isaiah posed the most difficulty to orthodox biblical scholars and the genuineness of this passage continued to be doubted.

However, in 1947, a group of Bedouin shepherds threw a rock into a cave while they were looking for a lost sheep. Hearing the sound of breaking pottery, they stumbled upon some old scrolls housed in jars hidden in a cave in Qumran. This discovery would turn out to be one of the biggest finds in Biblical scholarship because the scrolls they found turned out to be what are now famously called the Dead Sea Scrolls.

The collection of scrolls include various ancient hebrew Jewish religious texts - one of which happened to be 'The Great Isaiah Scroll'. One of the passages of Isaiah which was preserved in this scroll was Isaiah 52-53 and when compared to our modern versions, the text was found to be virtually the same. This scroll is the oldest copy of the book of Isaiah and was dated to between 356-103 BCE (meaning the original would have been written much earlier) - well before Jesus's birth - proving conclusively that Isaiah did indeed predict the suffering servant and sending literally hundreds of years of critical 'scholarship' to the flames.

In 1947, that all changed when a group of Bedouin shepherds stumbled upon a collection of scrolls hidden in a cave in Qumran. This was the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Great Scroll of Isaiah found here was dated between 356 - 103 BC!

"The Word of God remains eternal. Those who have tried to bury it only find out that the Bible rises up to outlive its pallbearers."
(Ravi Zacharias)



TAKE AWAY: The Bible's prophetic claims are very accurately fulfilled. The many specific Messianic prophecies which are fulfilled in Jesus Christ are compelling evidences of its truth.



FURTHER RESOURCES: Fulfilled OT Prophecy in the NT

- [The Unfolding Mystery: Discovering Christ in the Old Testament](#) by Edmund Clowney - Beginning with Adam and Eve and closing with the last of the prophets, Dr. Clowney takes a fascinating walk through the Old Testament, revealing Christ in places where he is usually overlooked.
- [A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New](#) by G.K. Beale - In this comprehensive exposition, a leading New Testament scholar explores the unfolding theological unity of the entire Bible from the vantage point of the New Testament. Offering extensive interaction between the two testaments, this volume helps readers see the unifying conceptual threads of the Old Testament and how those threads are woven together in Christ.
- [Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament: Exegesis and Interpretation](#) - This concise guide by a leading New Testament scholar helps readers understand how to better study the multitude of Old Testament references in the New Testament. It focuses on the "how to" of interpreting the New Testament use of the Old Testament, providing students and pastors with many of the insights and categories necessary for them to do their own exegesis. Brief enough to be accessible yet thorough enough to be useful, this handbook will be a trusted guide for all students of the Bible.

C. FAITHFUL PRESERVATION CANON & TRANSMISSION

If the Bible is God's word, He will preserve it for us so that we can be confident that what we have and read today is really what He meant for us to have.

The last internal quality we will look at in this workshop to see if the Bible seems to be what it claims to be will be the preservation of the Biblical text.

- Because the biblical books were written so long ago, and were copied so many times, how can we know that the text we have today is even the same thing as was originally written?
- How can we even be sure that we have all the books - what if some were lost or not included for various reasons?
- What about the Catholic and Orthodox bibles that have other books of the apocrypha?

To these questions we will now briefly turn, again acknowledging that we cannot cover this comprehensively here, but there will be additional recommended resources for further study.

I. THE BIBLICAL 'CANON': *How do we know what is supposed to be in the Bible?*

The term 'canon' - from the Greek word κανών (kanón) - simply means "measuring rod or standard." It refers to the standard by which you assess something, or determine the limits of something. When we use it in terms of the Bible, we mean the limits of the books that belong in the Bible. It is the collection of books that we consider divinely authoritative that deserve to be in our Bibles.

Figuring out what books are 'canonical'

There have been various attempts to answer the question of canon such as a community-view or historical-critical view that determine what books should be in the canon by human authorities bestowing canonical status on the books. However, this will not be the approach taken here. The problem with these approaches is that they make either the church or pragmatic usage the determining role of what books are considered part of the canon - making canonicity, and by extension the Bible, merely a product of man (which as we saw in the first section is not what it claims to be of itself).

An example of these types of approaches would include the Roman Catholic view of scripture - that the Roman Catholic church through its papal magisterium pronounces certain books as canonical and thereby give them scriptural status. However, this obviously puts the 'church' over the Bible instead of God's word over the church. This type of model makes it impossible to reform the church by His Word, because if the church determines what His word is, then it cannot be reformed by that which it gets to define. This sort of approach also would mean that no biblical canon could exist until either they were being used by a religious community or until the dust of history settled to show which books ended up 'winning out'. Instead, the church did not form the canon of scripture, but rather God's word - scripture itself - formed the church. It is because of scripture that we have the message of the Gospel by which God saves His people, and we have the guidelines for the institution and operation of the church.

Ultimately, the question of canon is a theological one. It is a question of the intrinsic qualities of the books of the Bible. If they are what they say they are - the very Word of God - then they bear ultimate authority and thus would be self-attesting to their truthfulness and authority. Their canonicity and authority would be something intrinsic to them even from the time the ink was written on the parchment of the original autographs. So, the canon would exist from the very time the Spirit inspired the originals to be written - not as some later human invention.

3 Qualities we should expect of 'canonical' books:

1. **Divine Qualities** : The book bears the marks of divine majesty, purity, integrity, consistency with the rest of scripture, and are powerful to convert and build up.
2. **Apostolic Origins**: The book can be reliably be traced back to the pen of an apostle or a close associate, and faithfully communicates the apostolic message.
3. **Widespread Reception**: Historically, the book was widely received and recognized as scripture by the corporate, global church body.

Let's take a look more closely at each of these qualities.

.....

1. DIVINE QUALITIES

The Westminster Larger Catechism asks the question:

Q. 4. How does it appear that the Scriptures are of the Word of God?

A. The Scriptures manifest themselves to be the Word of God, by their majesty (Hos. 8:12; 1 Cor. 2:6-7, 13; Psa. 110:18, 129) and purity (Psa. 12:6 & 119:140); by the consent of all the parts (Acts 10:43 & 26:22), and the scope of the whole, which is to give all glory to God (Rom. 3:19, 27); by their light and power to convince and convert sinners, to comfort and build up believers unto salvation (Acts 18:28 & 20:32; Heb. 4:12; Jam. 1:18; Psa. 19:7-9; Rom. 15:4): but the Spirit of God bearing witness by and with the Scriptures in the heart of man, is alone able fully to persuade it that they are the very word of God (John 16:13-14; 1 John 2:20, 27).

Think of how ridiculous it is to propose that, the Lord of Glory, the Creator of heaven and earth and all that is within them, the omnipotent, omnipresent, only Judge and Sovereign of all should have to justify His existence to the ones He has created. Just as all of creation declares His glory as His handiwork they evidence their Maker, so too God's Word has an intrinsic quality of declaring the glory of the Lord in their majesty and message - they bear the marks of His handiwork. John Piper calls this quality of scripture, the 'peculiar glory' of the word of God. This quality of scripture is seen by those who humbly apply themselves to study it.

"If the heavens declare the glory of God and therefore bear witness to their divine creator, the Scripture as God's handiwork must also bear the imprints of his authorship."
(John Murray)

Because we have already touched on one of those "Divine qualities" of scripture which manifest themselves to us in fulfilled prophecy, we shall not spend further time here on it. Only the Sovereign Lord of history can 'declare the end from the beginning' (cf. Isa. 46:10) and the scriptures, as His word, bear record of this truth. However, other ways that the scriptures show their Divine qualities are in their majesty. When one considers the amazing truths they proclaim, they are not the sorts of inventions that people would come up with.

Who would invent such a God as ours? One who is totally uncontrollable and terrible in might? One who sovereignly predestines and elects on the basis of sheer grace, not of any actual or foreseen merit? They show it in their purity - that God's laws and standards are morally perfect and pure - beyond even our highest human moral aspirations, going even to the heart and intentions of people. They show it in the consistency of all the parts and the scope of the whole of redemptive history - as all weaving together a tapestry of a grand narrative far bigger and more marvellous than any human dare to dream.

They show it in their power to convert sinners and create a people of God who are 'zealous for good works' (Tit. 2:14). They show it in their abilities to comfort, build up, rebuke and sanctify the believer (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The teachings of Scripture prove to bring wisdom (Ps. 119:98; 2 Tim. 3:16), give joy to the heart (Neh. 8:8-12; Ps. 119:111), provide "light" to the dark paths of life (Ps. 119:105), give understanding to the mind (Ps. 119:144), give peace and comfort (Ps. 119:50), expose sin and guilt (2 Kings 22:11-13; Acts 2:34-37; Heb. 4:12-13), and lead to prosperity and blessing (Ps. 1:1-3).

Jonathan Edwards said it this way:

"The gospel of the blessed God does not go abroad a-begging for its evidence, so much as some think: it has its highest and most proper evidence in itself... The mind ascends to the truth of the gospel but by one step, and that is its divine glory."
(Jonathan Edwards)

Jesus said it this way:

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.” (John 10:27)

Since all the scriptures testify to Christ (John 5:39), his sheep will hear his voice in the Scriptures through the majesty, purity, consistency, scope and power of their message. ***Notice how all of these qualities are only available to be seen by the one who applies themselves to read and understand scripture? This is why we cannot put down our sword!*** Even in giving an answer to our unbelieving friends and family - lead them to the Word itself. Scripture is a means of grace to transform people's lives. It is powerful, sharp and Spirit-empowered. It is in exposure to God's word that its self-attesting power can bear itself upon a person's conscience and bring conviction of its truthfulness.

2. APOSTOLIC ORIGINS

New Testament scholar, Michael J. Kruger writes,

Not only did the apostles themselves write many of these New Testament documents, but, in a broader sense, they presided over the transmission of the apostolic deposit and labored to make sure that the message of Christ was firmly and accurately preserved for future generations, through the help of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:1–4; Rom. 6:17; 1 Cor. 11:23; 15:3; Gal. 1:9; Phil. 4:9; Col. 2:6–8; 1 Thess. 2:13–15; 1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 1:14; 2 Pet. 2:21; Jude 1:3). Thus, the New Testament canon is not so much a collection of writings by apostles, but a collection of apostolic writings—writings that bear the authoritative message of the apostles and derive from the foundational apostolic era (even if not directly from their hands).

(Michael J. Kruger, Canon Revisited)

Many early Christian writings testify to this fact. For example, the letter of 1 Clement, written very early (somewhere around c.96AD) says:

“The Apostles received the Gospel for us from the Lord Jesus Christ, Jesus the Christ was sent from God. The Christ therefore is from God and the Apostles from the Christ.”

(1 Clement 42:1-2)

Part of what determined the apostolic origins of a book was the fact that it could reliably be traced back to the apostolic time of the first century. There are simply not many other writings outside of the NT which can be dated to that time, and thus there aren't many legitimate candidates for canonicity other than the books of the NT which we have today. The reason why we have confidence today of the apostolicity of the books of the NT canon is because the earliest Christians used this criteria (as well as others) to screen the books they were considering as scripture. Since the apostles were Christ's chosen spokespersons of the new covenant, if a book's origin and content could not be traced back to the apostolic era and the pen of an apostle or a close associate of the apostles, it was simply not regarded as genuine scripture.

“We have learned from none others the plan of our salvation, than from those through whom the Gospel has come down to us, which they did at one time proclaim in public, and, at a later period, by the will of God, handed down to us in the Scriptures, to be the ground and pillar of our faith.”

(Irenaeus, Against Heresies 3.1.1 - c.130-202 AD)

This criteria for the NT canon also finds its mirror in the OT Jewish canon, which although there is not space here to explore in detail, also bore similar marks of divine qualities and 'apostolicity' in that they came from genuine OT prophets as received and preserved by the Jewish people. The Jews had a very sharp and precise knowledge of what were their scriptures and what were just other writings.

3. CORPORATE RECEPTION

Corporate reception does not mean that the Church defines or determines what the biblical canon is, as Roman Catholics argue. Rather, it means that the church receives or recognizes which books are canonical. This is connected with the previous two attributes. The church over time recognizes the voice of the Shepherd in the books of scripture through their divine qualities and apostolic origins. Thus, the role of the church in recognizing the canon is more like a thermometer than a thermostat. A thermometer recognizes the temperature of a room, whereas a thermostat determines the temperature of a room. The church simply recognized what the canon was by its self-attesting qualities to those who received it by the Spirit's testimony.

Corporate reception also does not mean absolute unity regarding the canon of scripture for primarily two reasons: availability of scriptures (you cannot receive what is not available to you - some books took a bit of time to be circulated after they were written) and the distorting effects of sin and our fallen nature. However, what it does mean is that throughout the ages, though there may be some pockets of differing opinions, the church as a whole experienced predominant unity around the canon.

Therefore, the recognition of the Canon of scripture is a corporate affair. Abraham Kuyper argues that the testimony of the Holy Spirit is not just a private affair but works corporately, producing a

"communion of consciousness not merely with those round about us, but also with the generation of saints from former ages . . . [through which] the positive conviction prevails, that we have a graphically inspired Scripture." (Abraham Kuyper, Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology, 561-562)

This corporate reception of the canonical books is evidenced by the historical record we have of the writings of the early church. Many of the early church fathers - bishops, pastors, etc - wrote letters and commentaries on the scriptures and cited the books that were authoritative as scripture. Some even produced lists which reflected the books that they knew to be divinely inspired, such as the Muratorian Fragment (c.180AD) which contains a list of 22 out of the 27 books of the NT.

Other more complete lists such as found in Athanasius' Festal Letter, which lists all 27 books of the NT, were published as the books of the NT continued to be circulated, copied and distributed. The church corporately recognized something distinct in these books which were not present in other books. Thus, the canonical books became the most widely used and copied books over other writings to an order that is not even comparable. It is impossible in the space here to go over all of the process of the gradual corporate reception of the entirety of the canon, but many great works have been produced that document and explain the process (see the resources for this section).

As an example of applying this model to recognizing canonical books, if we want to know whether, say, 1 John is canonical, then we can apply the various components of the model. When it is examined, we can see that John's first letter bears the attributes of canonicity.

- **It bears divine qualities:** for example, it is a powerful writing, bears the beauty of the gospel message, and also stands in harmony with other scriptural books (this latter point has to do with the issue of "orthodoxy," which will be discussed more below).
- **It has clear apostolic origins:** for example, we have good historical reasons to date it to the redemptive-historical time period and to link it to the apostle John (including textual similarities to both the Gospel of John and Revelation).
- **It has been received by the corporate church:** Not only has it been widely affirmed throughout the history of the church, but it was also recognized at the earliest stages in the development of the canon and was even included in the second-century Muratorian fragment.

And in all of these attributes, the Spirit is at work helping the believer rightly recognize their presence and validity.

“Because these three attributes imply one another, they work together as a unit—as a web of mutually reinforcing beliefs. Any given attribute not only implies the other two, but is also confirmed by the other two.”

(Michael J. Kruger)



CHALLENGE: WHAT ABOUT THE APOCRYPHA?

Biblical Critic, Bart Ehrman, declares the biblical canon to be an “invention” of the dominant Christian factions of early Christianity designed to suppress (or oppress) other factions of the church with different theological convictions. The past 150 years have been filled with sensational discoveries of apocryphal materials that various scholars have argued should be included in the biblical canon. Some examples are: the Gospel of Peter, the Nag Hammadi codices (including the Gospel of Thomas), the Secret Gospel of Mark, and the Gospel of Judas. Why aren’t these books in our Bibles?

DEFINITION: APOCRYPHAL

From the Greek, *ἀπόκρυφος* (apokryphos), meaning “obscure.” These are books of doubtful authenticity and thus considered non-canonical.

Some examples of apocryphal books are: Maccabees, the Gospel of Peter, the Nag Hammadi codices (including the Gospel of Thomas), the Secret Gospel of Mark, and the Gospel of Judas.

Why aren’t these books in our Bibles?

None of the apocryphal books fit the standards of the self-evident qualities that the genuine books of the Bible displayed. They did not show divine qualities - they contained fantastical stories which were unsubstantiated and non-historic. For example, the Gospel of Peter in its account of the resurrection has a giant Jesus come out of the tomb with his head in the clouds, and then following him out is a giant walking, talking Cross! They contained contradictions, false prophecy and/or heretical doctrines. For example, the Gospel of Thomas (which is often argued to be legitimate by critical liberal scholars) says at the end of it that every woman who desires to enter the kingdom of God must become a man! These clearly show themselves to be in direct opposition to the clear and consistent teaching of the legitimate scriptures.

They did not have clearly apostolic origins. They could not be traced legitimately either to the pen of an apostle or a close associate of an apostle, nor was their message consistent with the apostolic teaching which was passed down - (what is commonly called the rule of faith - *regula fidei*) - “the faith once for all delivered to the saints.” (Jude 3) Finally, they were not received by the corporate body of the church in a way that showed their self-attestation and Spirit confirmed truthfulness. Many of them were used only by fringe or heretical sects such as Gnosticism. For both apocryphal books of the OT and after the NT times, the books were never grouped together by bodies of believers and churches with what was known to be sacred scripture.

I don’t want to totally vilify all of the apocryphal and other writings - some were genuinely orthodox and helpful to be read, such as The Shepherd of Hermas or The Didache. Some were recording legitimate historical events, such as the Maccabees which record the accounts of the Hasmonean dynasty in the time between the OT and NT. However, the early church distinctly separated them as something else - either as helpful books to be read, or as heretical books to be avoided. You can learn more about them in the recommended resources for this section.

None of the apocryphal books bore the 3 **interconnected** qualities of genuine canonical books.



TAKE AWAY: The Biblical canon of books we have today are self-attested by their divine qualities, apostolic origins and corporate reception. What we have is what God intended.

II. TEXTUAL TRANSMISSION: *How do we know what we have is what was originally written?*

The last aspect, as we're taking a look inside to see if the Bible looks like what it claims to be (does this look like honey?), is going to be the preservation of the text of the Bible itself. How can we be sure that the text we read today in our Bibles faithfully represents what was written so many years ago? If the biblical books were copied over and over, wouldn't they become corrupt - sort of like a game of telephone where a message is passed down over and over and at the end winds up like nothing resembling the original? Isn't this what happened to the Bible?

The Bible claims that God's word stands forever (Isa. 40:8), and Jesus even claims that heaven and earth would sooner pass away than even one of the smallest marks of his words (Matt. 5:18, 24:35 & Luke 21:33). That is quite the claim! Does it stand up?

Time and space do not allow for an in-depth analysis of all 66 books of the Bible here. However, I will make some summary statements and then give a few examples of responses to challenges in this area, then direct you to further resources if you're curious to learn more.

Preservation of the Old Testament (OT)

The Jews were very diligent with the copying and transmission of their holy writings. They had a high reverence for the text of the Word of God which drove them to be fiercely meticulous in the copying and handling of the manuscripts - so much so that with certain Jewish scribes, if a copy was found to have the slightest error, it would be completely destroyed so as to not dishonor God's word. This amazing preservation of the text of the OT is confirmed in the previous example of the Dead Sea Scrolls (among many other places).

The traditional Hebrew and Aramaic version of the OT which we have preserved today is called the Masoretic Text. Its earliest manuscripts date from around the 9th century and the famous 10th-century Aleppo Codex (a codex is a book form of manuscripts with pages instead of a scroll) can be viewed today in the Israel Museum, Jerusalem. When the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered, some which date from around 408 BC (there is a wide range of dates for each of the scrolls, but most are within the first 2 centuries BC and the first century AD), the similarity of their text with that of the Masoretic text was remarkable!

For example, the Scroll of Isaiah was found to be 95% the same, with the 5% difference being mainly obvious scribal mistakes which made no difference to the meaning of the text.

That is a level of preservation which is unrivaled in the majority of ancient texts! The comparison of the traditional Masoretic text with the Dead Sea Scrolls, and also the corroboration of the text of the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the OT which was used in the first century) and Jewish Targums (OT translation in Aramaic) gives us tremendous confidence that the text of the OT we have today in our Bibles faithfully represents what was originally written.

Preservation of the New Testament (NT)

The evidence we have for the preservation of the New Testament is simply staggering - especially when compared to any other similar work of antiquity.

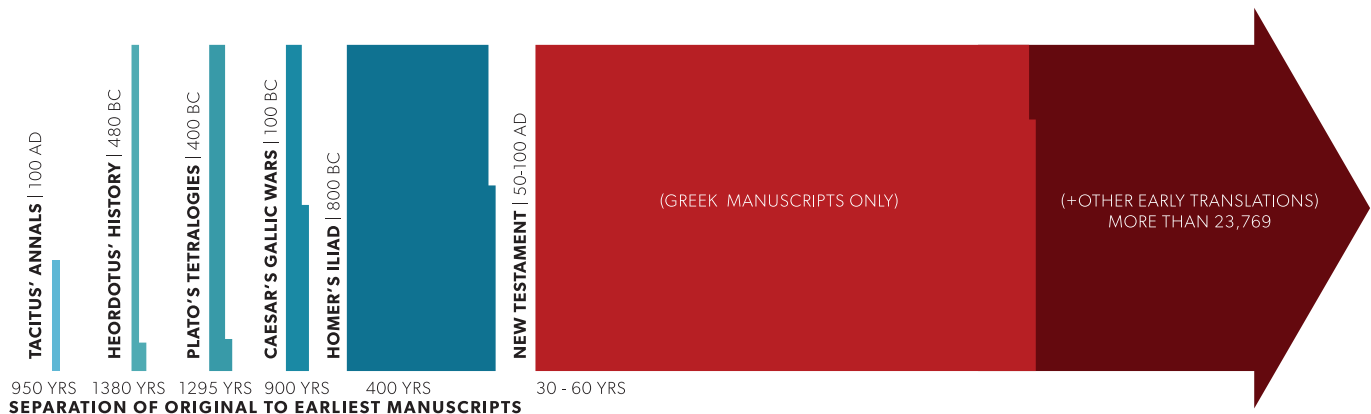
There are over **5700** Greek hand-copied manuscripts containing either parts or all of the NT. The average size of a NT manuscript is over **450** pages. Some of the earliest manuscripts are dated possibly to within **30 - 60** years of the originals

So let's put that in context by comparing it with the best attested other ancient works from around the same time period. Tacitus' Annals was written around 100 AD and our earliest copy is from around 850 AD (750 years after it was written), and there are only 33 copies of it! Compare that with the abundance of NT manuscripts that it puts things into perspective. Even if we took one of the best attested ancient works - Homer's Iliad (some of you may have read it if you took ancient literature courses in college). The Iliad was probably written somewhere around 800 BC, and the earliest copy we have is 400 BC with the majority of copies written much later. There are a whopping 1757 copies of the Iliad - but that still does not come close to comparing with the NT in terms of quantity and early dating of those copies.

Also, this is only dealing with Greek copies of the NT. If we were to start adding up other early copies into other languages such as Syriac, Coptic, Latin, etc. (remember there was an intense missionary zeal with the early church to spread the Gospel to all the world - cf. Matt. 28:19-20) the number is so high, we don't even have an accurate count. It is somewhere in the tens of thousands - some approximates are around 23,769 known copies of NT manuscripts!

For helpful visual chart, see:

<https://www.challies.com/articles/has-the-bible-been-preserved-for-us-today/>



Simply stated, no other work of antiquity has the same level of manuscript evidence to support the faithful transmission of the text as the New Testament documents. If we were to include the number of other early manuscripts in other languages, the number would be in the tens of thousands - not to mention all the quotes of the NT in the writings of the early church. In fact, the Bible's wealth of manuscripts arguably created the techniques of an entire field of scholarship called Textual Criticism - which studies the transmission and variations of ancient texts.



CHALLENGE #1: WHAT ABOUT THE VARIANTS?

Aren't there more textual variants than there are words in the New Testament? How can we have any confidence about the text if there are that many 'mistakes' in the copies?

Indeed there are some 200,000-300,000 textual variants - more than the total number of words - this sounds like a serious problem on the surface!

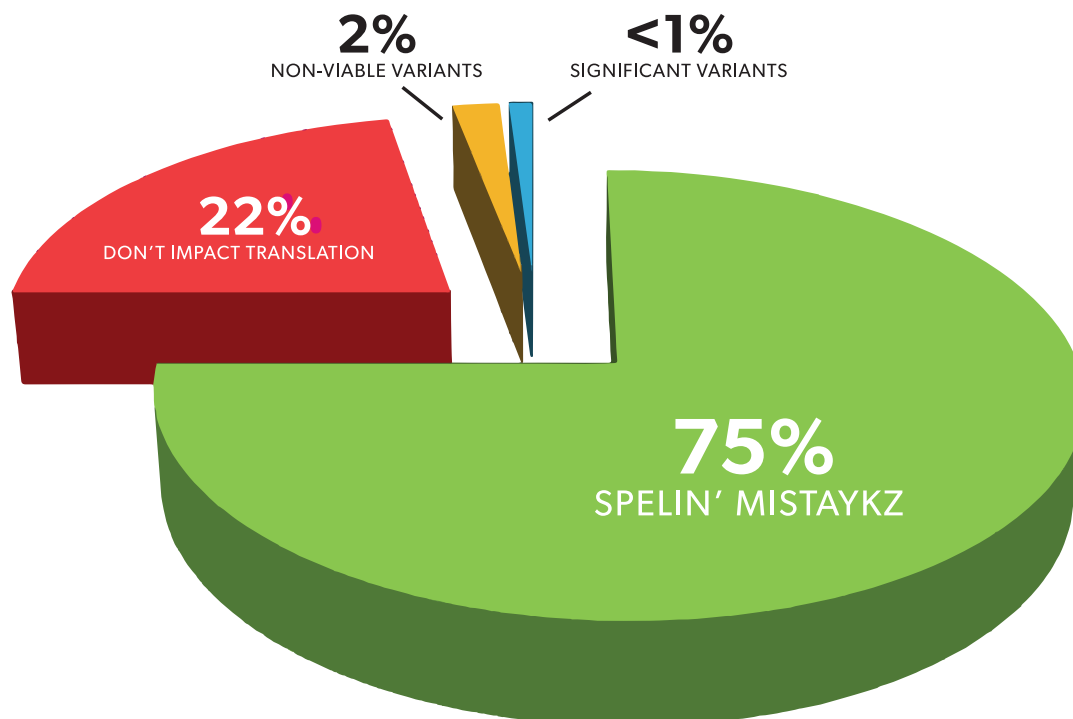
However, we need to understand what counts as a 'variant'. Any misspelling, omission of punctuation or accidentally skipping a word or line, etc - these all count as unique variants. The reason we have so many variants is simply because we have so many copies! The majority of the variants in the manuscripts are inconsequential and most of them are so minor they can't even be translated. 75% of variants are in spelling, and another 22% don't impact translation at all. In fact, this is what the skeptical Bart Ehrman himself has to admit:

"To be sure, of all the hundreds of thousands of textual changes found among our manuscripts, most of them are completely insignificant, immaterial, of no real importance for anything other than showing that scribes could not spell or keep focused any better than the rest of us...

...In fact, most of the changes found in our early Christian manuscripts have nothing to do with theology or ideology. Far and away the [sic] most changes are the result of mistakes, pure and simple—slips of the pen, accidental omissions, inadvertent additions, misspelled words, blunders of one sort or another"

(Bart D. Ehrman, Misquoting Jesus)

The reason we have so many variants is simply because we have so many copies!



No major doctrine of scripture depends on a variant reading. The majority of variants in the manuscripts are inconsequential: 75% of variants are in spelling, and another 22% don't impact translation at all. The total number of variant readings that actually have any significance amount to less than 0.5%! All of this to say, the historical record clearly shows us God's providential hand in preserving His word - truly, His word stands forever and shall not pass away.



CHALLENGE #2: WHAT ABOUT MISSING VERSES?

If you've been an observant reader of your Bibles, you've probably noticed little footnotes at the bottom which say, "other manuscripts read this way..." or perhaps you've noticed missing verse numbers?

Let's look particularly at a missing verse example. Try to find John 5:4 in your Bible. If you have a modern translation like the ESV, you probably would not see it. The text jumps from verse 3 to verse 5. If you have a KJV or NKJV though, you'd probably see the verse there. What happened?

Well, as was noted prior, the KJV was based on a later and less reliable manuscript collection called the Textus Receptus. In those manuscripts, verse 4 appears. However, modern translations have available to them much earlier and better manuscripts of the original text and they show that the verse was not in the original text. This is why it was removed. Is this a problem? Let's look at the verse from the KJV. It says:

"For an Angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had."

Now, I don't know about you - but absolutely no significant part of my theology depends on this verse! The verse appears in later manuscripts probably as an explanation by a scribe in the margin of a copy he was working on about the water in which the lame would go bathe in hopes of healing. It may have come from an old legend or tradition of the time which eventually ended being copied over by later scribes - eventually finding its way from a marginal note into the main body of the text. However, because of the wealth of manuscripts we have, we are able to determine that it was not original. When we look at the earliest and most reliable manuscripts, we see that this verse was not in the original - so it must have been added in some time later.

These sorts of additions are not a problem since we have so many manuscripts available to compare. In fact, this sort of pattern of 'additions' is actually one of the reasons we have such confidence that nothing was lost. The tendency of scribes copying the biblical texts were to err on the side of copying everything for fear of taking away from scripture. So, if they were unsure about something, they rather keep it in than leave it out - just to be sure that they weren't taking away from God's word. This leaves textual scholars a great 'paper trail' to figure out which readings were added in and which were original.

Because we have access to more accurate and early manuscripts than the KJV translators in the 17th century, we have been able to determine verses which were not original.

Perhaps the most significant variant to theology occurs at Romans 5:1 - where there the text says ἔχομεν - "we have" peace with God... there are early variants that read ἔχωμεν (the difference of only one letter in Greek) which would be translated "we may have" peace with God. So, do we have peace with God, or might we have peace with God?

Even in this case, the translation either way would not make much difference since the whole context surrounding the verse clearly tells us that Paul is meaning that we *HAVE* peace with God because of Jesus Christ's atoning work on the Cross! The variant is simply explained by the fact that the two letters in Greek sound similar and are easily mixed up if a scribe is copying a manuscript by having someone read it to them and writing down what they hear.

An Embarrassment of Wealth of Evidence

The problem we have with the NT is not actually that we are missing parts of it - but rather that we have too much! Think of it like a puzzle. If you had a 1000 piece puzzle, but you empty the puzzle box to find 1050 pieces

- you obviously have 50 pieces too many. This is what it is like with the NT, we have more readings or pieces and the job of Biblical scholars of textual criticism is to sort out which pieces are the extras. What we have is an embarrassment of wealth of evidence that testifies to the text of the Bible. With that said, there are very few spots where this occurs - in fact, there are 16 places - and none of them are about any important doctrine.

The fact that our Bibles have these footnotes about various manuscript readings shows us that we have nothing to hide. All the evidence is there for someone to look into every available variant if you wanted to. Critical editions of the Greek and Hebrew Testaments are constantly being updated with new data from manuscript finds. All of this information just serves to strengthen our confidence in the biblical text - it is truly a mountain of evidence that testifies to God's providential preservation of His Word! ***So, why do people still doubt?***

"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 ever dreams of questioning ...if the New Testament were a collection of secular writings, their authenticity would generally be regarded as beyond all doubt."

(F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*, pg 10)

NT scholar F.F. Bruce puts his finger on the real problem - the same one we have been pointing to in this workshop series - the internal presuppositions and biases of people.

Jesus made a similar verdict:

"And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil." (John 3:19)

One can study this area of Textual Criticism much more - but the overall consensus is that the Bible we have today accurately reflects what was originally written and what God intended us to have.



TAKE AWAY: The historical record of manuscripts show how the biblical text has been faithfully transmitted to us in a way that shows God's providential preservation of His Word.



FURTHER RESOURCES: Faithful Preservation of the Bible

- [Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books](#) by Michael Kruger - Exploring the history of the New Testament text from a theological perspective, Michael Kruger helps Christians understand the facts behind their faith and the legitimacy of the New Testament Scriptures.
- [The Canon of Scripture](#) by F.F. Bruce - This is the classic work on the canon of scripture by F.F. Bruce. This book is at once learned and readable. It is one of the most comprehensive accounts of the biblical canon taking into account modern discoveries and literature.
- [The King James Only Controversy: Can You Trust Modern Translations?](#) by James R. White - traces the development of Bible translations old and new, investigating the differences between versions like the NIV, NASB, and NKJV and the Authorized Version of 1611. Written with the layperson in mind, it is enlightening reading for all Christians.
- [Inerrancy and Worldview: Answering Modern Challenges to the Bible](#) by Vern Poythress - Groundbreaking, worldview-based defense of scriptural inerrancy offers a positive case for the Bible's trustworthiness while implicitly critiquing modern materialist worldviews.

3. TASTE AND SEE! EXPERIENCE ITS GOODNESS!

Psalms 34:8 | Hebrews 4:12 | James 1:22-25 | Psalm 119:103 | Isaiah 55:1-11



God's word calls us to "**taste** and **see** that the Lord is good!" (Psalm 34:8)

We have read the label on the honey pot of what the Bible claims to be. We have taken a look inside the honey pot and seen that the various internal attributes of the Bible confirm its claims and show its self-attesting authority through its internal consistency, fulfilled prophecy and faithful preservation. This is exactly what we should expect of God's Word. However, there is one more thing.

God's Word is effectual. Isaiah 55:11 says,

"so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it."

The ultimate reason why we can personally trust God's word is because it is powerful to transform us. God's word brings conviction of sin.

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)

This book reads us! If we look into it but never obey it - it is like looking into a mirror and seeing your dirty reflection, but never doing anything about it (James 1:22-25). However, God's word not only diagnoses our problem - that we're sinful and cannot save ourselves - it also gives us the only solution. That by grace through faith in Jesus Christ's saving work on the Cross (Eph. 2:8) we can be saved!

A. TASTE & SEE PERSONALLY

Ultimately, this book must not just be studied at a distance. We cannot approach it like any other book if it is claiming to be the very words of God. We must taste of it! We must listen to the call of the Psalmist to 'taste and see that the Lord is good!' (Psa. 34:8) Only then can we agree with him in saying, "How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey in my mouth." (Psa. 119:103) This is the call of God himself through His Word to us:

"Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant..."

...Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." (Isaiah 55:1-3, 6-7)

This is why we must personally come to taste God's word for ourselves. Have you tasted His goodness in His Word? Is it your daily bread - your constant sustenance? This is why we must call others to taste of it as well!

B. BRING OTHERS TO TASTE & SEE

Any apologetic that fails to bring people to the only fount of living water and salvation - God's Word - is one not worth using. As we have seen before, only the Gospel is the power unto salvations (Rom. 1:16).

In the final analysis, it is the Spirit empowered Word that authenticates itself in the hearts and minds of His people. His word is objectively true. The problem is that people in their unrighteousness suppress the truth (Rom. 1:18) and that in the case of unbelievers, the god of this world has blinded their minds so they cannot see the light of the Gospel (2 Cor. 4:4). The scriptures contain the only spiritual truth that leads to eternal life and these truths are folly to the natural man apart from the work of His Spirit.

The reason some refuse to believe the Scriptures is not that there is any defect or lack of evidence in the Scriptures (the indicia are clear and objective) but that those without the Spirit do not accept the things from God (1 Cor. 2:10-14).
(Michael J. Kruger, Canon Revisited)

Thus, our part in trying to convey the trustworthiness of the Bible to our unbelieving friends is not just a matter of throwing a bunch of facts at them. Apart from an internal work of the Spirit in their lives all of our efforts are in vain. You cannot overcome the internal distorting influence of their sinful nature, nor the blinding of the enemy, nor the inticements of the world. So we circle back to our first workshop - what is most important in apologetics is the Word and prayer!

Call people to taste of His word and pray that the Spirit would enlighten their eyes to see the glory of Christ in them.



TAKE AWAY: So we must taste and see personally (Isaiah 55:1-11) and lead others to taste and see also (2 Corinthians 5:20; Romans 1:16).



FURTHER RESOURCES: Experiencing the Bible's Truthfulness

- [A Peculiar Glory: How the Christian Scriptures Reveal Their Complete Truthfulness](#) by John Piper - examines the Bible's "self-authenticating" nature and unique ability to showcase God's unmatched glory that enlightens the eyes of our hearts to know that the Bible is the Word of God.
- [Reading the Bible Supernaturally: Seeing and Savoring the Glory of God in Scripture](#) by John Piper - explores how to read the Bible in light of its unique ability to reveal God's glory in a way that informs our minds, transforms our hearts, and ignites our love.

OTHER RESOURCES: Biblical Scholars with Video Lectures on YouTube

- [Dr. James R. White](#) - Christian apologist, author & New Testament scholar
- [Dr. Michael J. Kruger](#) - Professor of New Testament & Early Christianity (RTS)
- [Dr. Daniel B. Wallace](#) - Professor of New Testament Studies (DTS) and Director of the Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts