

Is the Bible Reliable? God's Trustworthy Canon

The Bible ... is it true and reliable?

Introduction

The Bible stands as one of history's most significant books, containing what believers hold to be the spoken words of the Creator. It holds the distinction of being the best-selling, most quoted, most published, most circulated, most translated, and most influential book in human history. Despite its monumental impact globally, many people today lack understanding of what the Bible actually is and how it came to be assembled.

For believers, the Bible is far more than a historical record—it is the bedrock of our faith.

Through its pages, we come to know who God is, what He has done, and how we are to live in response to Him. Yet, in a culture filled with doubt and competing voices, many wonder: can we really trust the Scriptures to be accurate and true?

This summary examines two fundamental questions: What is the Bible? And how was the Bible acquired?

What is the Bible?

Definition and Structure

The Bible represents the canon of Scripture, where “canon” means the standard or rule of sacred writings. It serves as God's law and decree given to humanity, accepted by the church as the divinely-inspired Word of God.

The Bible consists of:

- **66 books** written by more than **40 different authors**
- **Two main sections:**
 - **Old Testament:** 39 books
 - **New Testament:** 27 books
- **Time span:** Written over approximately **1,500 years**
- **Languages:** Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek

Unique Characteristics

Despite being written by numerous authors across centuries—most of whom never knew each other—the Bible maintains remarkable consistency throughout. The Old Testament authors were largely unacquainted with one another, while the New Testament authors had some knowledge of each other. Yet their writings combine to form one coherent narrative. The Bible's uniqueness stems from being a direct gift to humanity from the Creator, containing fundamental truths about both this life and the life to come.

How Was the Bible Acquired?

Divine Authorship

God is identified as the ultimate author of the Bible, with the Old Testament alone containing more than 2,000 assertions that God spoke the words recorded within its pages. The process of divine inspiration is described in 2 Peter 1:20-21: ***“But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”***

The 66 books are described as divinely inspired—literally **“God-breathed”** according to 2 Timothy 3:16—and therefore rightfully belong in the biblical canon.

Canon Selection Criteria

Given the numerous writings circulating among early believers, careful criteria were established to determine which books belonged in the **Old Testament** and **New Testament** Scripture. Both Jewish rabbis and early church fathers followed detailed principles:

1. **Apostolic or Prophetic Authorship:** Was the book written by a recognized prophet or apostle of God? This included consideration of miraculous signs and wonders or association with Jesus Christ.
2. **Scriptural Harmony:** The writing could not disagree with or contradict previous Scripture, with Moses’ first five books setting the foundational standard.
3. **Spiritual Significance:** Did the book teach, edify, and equip believers’ lives? The Word of God must be **“living and active”** as described in Hebrews 4:12.
4. **General Acceptance:** Was it accepted by the consensus of Hebrew scholars and church leaders as inspired? The Old Testament was accepted in 167 B.C., and the New Testament in A.D. 397.

The Old Testament

Composition and Timeline

The Old Testament contains 39 books written by approximately 32 different authors. Moses authored the Pentateuch (first five books) around 1405 B.C., which received immediate acceptance as they were collected and preserved beside the Ark of the Covenant (Deuteronomy 31:24-26).

Malachi represents the final Old Testament book, written around 430 B.C. Hebrew scholars assembled and accepted the complete Old Testament canon as inspired Scripture by approximately 167 B.C., having verified that all books met the established criteria.

The New Testament

Authorship and Dating

The New Testament comprises 27 books written by eight different authors. The collection and recognition process began in the first century of the Christian church, with some books being recognized as inspired Scripture very early.

Key characteristics:

- Every New Testament book was written by an eyewitness to Jesus or someone closely connected to an eyewitness
- All books were written within the first century
- **First book:** James (written by Jesus' brother) around A.D. 45
- **Last book:** Revelation by John around A.D. 95
- **Official certification:** A.D. 397 at the Council of Carthage

The Apostle Paul, who authored two-thirds of the New Testament, recognized Luke's writings as equally authoritative to the Old Testament. Similarly, Peter acknowledged Paul's writings as Scripture.

Historical Reliability Evidence

Manuscript Evidence

Critics often challenge the Bible's historical reliability, but evidence strongly supports its trustworthiness. [The New Testament's manuscript evidence](#) far exceeds that of other ancient documents:

New Testament Statistics:

- Approximately 5,600 completed manuscript copies exist
- Some copies were made less than 100 years after the original
- Accuracy rate: 99.5%

Comparison with Other Ancient Works:

- **Plato:** Only 7 copies, the earliest copied 1,200 years after the original
- **Caesar:** 10 copies, 1,000-year gap
- **Aristotle:** 49 copies, 1,400-year gap
- **Homer's Iliad:** 643 copies, 500-year gap

The New Testament's superior manuscript evidence makes it far more reliable than other ancient documents that scholars readily accept as authentic.

Archaeological Confirmation

The New Testament mentions people, places, and events that have been [confirmed through archaeological discoveries](#), further supporting its historical accuracy.

Prophetic Evidence

Fulfilled Prophecy

One of the strongest pieces of evidence for biblical inspiration comes from **fulfilled prophecy**. Unlike other religious books, the Bible contains numerous prophecies that have been precisely fulfilled, with more fulfillments anticipated.

Notable Old Testament Prophecies About Jesus:

- **Crucifixion details:** Psalm 22:12-18 describes crucifixion 1,000 years before Jesus' birth
- **Birthplace:** Micah 5:2 prophesied Bethlehem (fulfilled in Matthew 2:1)
- **Virgin birth:** Isaiah 7:14 (fulfilled in Matthew 1:18, 25)
- **Pierced side:** Zechariah 12:10 (fulfilled in John 19:34)

Statistical Analysis

Peter Stoner's mathematical analysis in "**Science Speaks**" demonstrates the impossibility of coincidental fulfillment:

- Probability of one person fulfilling just **8 prophecies**: 1 in 10^{17}
- Probability of fulfilling **48 prophecies**: 1 in 10^{157}

To illustrate the 8-prophecy probability: imagine covering Texas with silver dollars two feet deep, marking one coin, mixing thoroughly, then blindfolding someone to find that specific coin—the same odds as the prophecies being fulfilled by chance.

Scientific Accuracy

Though not primarily a science textbook, the Bible demonstrates remarkable accuracy when addressing **scientific topics**, often preceding scientific discovery by centuries:

The Hydrologic Cycle

The water cycle wasn't theorized until the first century B.C., yet the Bible described it much earlier:

- Job 36:27-28 describes water evaporation and precipitation
- Ecclesiastes 1:7 explains water's cyclical return to the sea

Astronomical Knowledge

Around 600 B.C., Jeremiah wrote that "**the stars of the sky cannot be counted**" (Jeremiah 33:22). Modern astronomy estimates 70 sextillion stars (7×10^{22}), with the actual number potentially infinite.

Ocean Currents

Matthew Fontaine Maury, the father of modern oceanography, was inspired by biblical passages to chart ocean currents:

- Psalm 8:8 mentions “*paths of the seas*”
- Isaiah 43:16 refers to “*a path through the mighty waters*”

Earth’s Shape and Position

Long before scientific consensus, the Bible indicated:

- **Spherical earth:** Isaiah 40:22 describes God sitting “*above the circle of the earth*”
- **Earth suspended in space:** Job 26:7 states God “*hangs the earth on nothing*”

Conclusion

The cumulative evidence strongly supports the Bible’s reliability across multiple disciplines:

1. **Historical reliability** confirmed through superior manuscript evidence
2. **Prophetic accuracy** demonstrated through fulfilled predictions
3. **Scientific precision** in descriptions of natural phenomena
4. **Internal consistency** despite multiple authors across centuries
5. **Divine inspiration** is evidenced through the careful canonization process

When examining all available evidence—manuscript reliability, prophetic fulfillment, scientific accuracy, and historical confirmation—the conclusion emerges that the Bible can indeed be trusted as the inspired Word of God. Its unique characteristics, careful preservation, and demonstrated accuracy across diverse fields of knowledge support its claim to divine authorship and reliability for matters of faith and practice.