



The Week of January 29, 2023 Your Truth? My Truth? The Truth. Conversation Guide

Take-Aways

- **What we should believe:**
 - **About the Bible:** (2 Timothy 3:16-17) I believe the Bible is God's Word. It is true and authoritative and I am committed to living according to its principles and commands.
- **What we should become:**
 - **Identity:** (John 1:12) I have worth and value because I am made in God's image and am His child. As His child, I live my life to bring glory to God and to serve His purposes.
- **How we should behave:**
 - **I study God's Word:** (2 Timothy 2:15) I consistently study the Bible to know God, the truth and find direction for my daily life.

Intro Questions

- Have you ever had someone tell you that the Bible is full of contradictions? Why should we trust the Bible?
- What is exegesis? What is eisegesis? Which should we use when studying the Bible?

Where Do We Find Truth?

2 Timothy 3:16–17

All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

- How does this passage help answer the objection that the Bible is just written by fallible men?
- What is the purpose of scripture?
 - How do we allow scripture to fulfill its purpose in our lives?
- What should be the result of feasting on the Word of God?

Psalm 19:7–9

The instruction of the Lord is perfect, renewing one's life; the testimony of the Lord is trustworthy, making the inexperienced wise. The precepts of the Lord are right, making the heart glad; the command of the Lord is radiant, making the eyes light up. The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever; the ordinances of the Lord are reliable and altogether righteous.

Psalm 119:160

The entirety of your word is truth, each of your righteous judgments endures forever.

Proverbs 30:5–6

Every word of God is pure; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Don't add to his words, or he will rebuke you, and you will be proved a liar.

Romans 15:4

For whatever was written in the past was written for our instruction, so that we may have hope through endurance and through the encouragement from the Scriptures.

James 1:22

But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

2 Peter 1:3

His divine power has given us everything required for life and godliness through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.

- After reading these passages, what does the Bible tell us about itself?
- How can we develop the faith to believe that what the Bible tells us is truth?

But Why Trust The Bible?

When you doubting the veracity of the Bible, looking at the what the Bible says about itself may not be enough. Here is some further information on the Bible to help strengthen your faith in it as our source of truth in this world. The following is from Kenneth Boa's article "How Accurate is the Bible?" at bible.org/article/how-accurate-bible.

The Quantity of Manuscripts

In the case of the Old Testament, there are a small number of Hebrew manuscripts, because the Jewish scribes ceremonially buried imperfect and worn manuscripts. Many ancient manuscripts were also lost or destroyed during Israel's turbulent history. Also, the Old Testament text was standardized by the Masoretic Jews by the sixth century A.D., and all manuscripts that deviated from the Masoretic Text were evidently eliminated. But the existing Hebrew manuscripts are supplemented by the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Septuagint (a third-century B.C. Greek translation of the Old Testament), the Samaritan Pentateuch, and the Targums (ancient paraphrases of the Old Testament), as well as the Talmud (teachings and commentaries related to the Hebrew Scriptures).

The quantity of New Testament manuscripts is unparalleled in ancient literature. There are over 5,000 Greek manuscripts, about 8,000 Latin manuscripts, and another 1,000 manuscripts in other languages (Syriac, Coptic, etc.). In addition to this extraordinary number, there are tens of thousands of citations of New Testament passages by the early church fathers. In contrast, the typical number of existing manuscript copies for any of the works of the Greek and Latin authors, such as Plato, Aristotle, Caesar, or Tacitus, ranges from one to 20.

The Quality of Manuscripts

Because of the great reverence the Jewish scribes held toward the Scriptures, they exercised extreme care in making new copies of the Hebrew Bible. The entire scribal process was specified in meticulous detail to minimize the possibility of even the slightest error. The number of letters, words, and lines were counted, and the middle letters of the Pentateuch and the Old Testament were determined. If a single mistake was discovered, the entire manuscript would be destroyed.

As a result of this extreme care, the quality of the manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible surpasses all other ancient manuscripts. The 1947 discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls provided a significant check on this, because these Hebrew scrolls antedate the earliest Masoretic Old Testament manuscripts by about 1,000 years. But in spite of this time span, the number of variant readings between the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Masoretic Text is quite small, and most of these are variations in spelling and style.

While the quality of the Old Testament manuscripts is excellent, that of the New Testament is very good—considerably better than the manuscript quality of other ancient documents. Because of the thousands of New Testament manuscripts, there are many variant readings, but these variants are actually used by scholars to reconstruct the original readings by determining which variant best explains the others in any given passage. Some of these variant readings crept into the manuscripts because of visual errors in copying or because of auditory errors when a group of scribes copied manuscripts that were read aloud. Other errors resulted from faulty writing, memory, and judgment, and still others from well-meaning

scribes who thought they were correcting the text. Nevertheless, only a small number of these differences affect the sense of the passages, and only a fraction of these have any real consequences. Furthermore, no variant readings are significant enough to call into question any of the doctrines of the New Testament. The New Testament can be regarded as 99.5 percent pure, and the correct readings for the remaining 0.5 percent can often be ascertained with a fair degree of probability by the practice of textual criticism.

The Time Span of Manuscripts

Apart from some fragments, the earliest Masoretic manuscript of the Old Testament is dated at A.D. 895. This is due to the systematic destruction of worn manuscripts by the Masoretic scribes. However, the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls dating from 200 B.C. to A.D. 68 drastically reduced the time span from the writing of the Old Testament books to our earliest copies of them.

The time span of the New Testament manuscripts is exceptional. The manuscripts written on papyrus came from the second and third centuries A.D. The John Rylands Fragment (P52) of the Gospel of John is dated at A.D. 117-38, only a few decades after the Gospel was written. The Bodmer Papyri are dated from A.D. 175-225, and the Chester Beatty Papyri date from about A.D. 250. The time span for most of the New Testament is less than 200 years (and some books are within 100 years) from the date of authorship to the date of our earliest manuscripts. This can be sharply contrasted with the average gap of over 1,000 years between the composition and the earliest copy of the writings of other ancient authors.

To summarize the bibliographic test, the Old and New Testaments enjoy far greater manuscript attestation in terms of quantity, quality, and time span than any other ancient documents.

The Internal Test

The second test of the reliability of the biblical documents asks, What claims does the Bible make about itself? This may appear to be circular reasoning. It sounds like we are using the testimony of the Bible to prove that the Bible is true. But we are really examining the truth claims of the various authors of the Bible and allowing them to speak for themselves. (Remember that the Bible is not one book but many books woven together.) This provides significant evidence that must not be ignored.

A number of biblical authors claim that their accounts are primary, not secondary. That is, the bulk of the Bible was written by people who were eyewitnesses of the events they recorded. John wrote in his Gospel, And he who has seen has borne witness, and his witness is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you also may believe (John 19:35; see 21:24). In his first epistle, John wrote, What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we beheld and our hands handled concerning the Word of life . . . what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also (1 John 1:1, 3). Peter makes the same point abundantly clear: For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty (2 Peter 1:16; also see Acts 2:22; 1 Peter 5:1).

The independent eyewitness accounts in the New Testament of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ were written by people who were intimately acquainted with Jesus

Christ. Their gospels and epistles reveal their integrity and complete commitment to the truth, and they maintained their testimony even through persecution and martyrdom. All the evidence inside and outside the New Testament runs contrary to the claim made by form criticism that the early church distorted the life and teachings of Christ. Most of the New Testament was written between A.D. 47 and 70, and all of it was complete before the end of the first century. There simply was not enough time for myths about Christ to be created and propagated. And the multitudes of eyewitnesses who were alive when the New Testament books began to be circulated would have challenged blatant historical fabrications about the life of Christ. The Bible places great stress on accurate historical details, and this is especially obvious in the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts, Luke's two-part masterpiece (see his prologue in Luke 1:1-4).

The External Test

Because the Scriptures continually refer to historical events, they are verifiable; their accuracy can be checked by external evidence. The chronological details in the prologue to Jeremiah (1:1-3) and in Luke 3:1-2 illustrate this. Ezekiel 1:2 allows us to date Ezekiel's first vision of God to the day (July 31, 592 B.C.).

The historicity of Jesus Christ is well-established by early Roman, Greek, and Jewish sources, and these extrabiblical writings affirm the major details of the New Testament portrait of the Lord. The first-century Jewish historian Flavius Josephus made specific references to John the Baptist, Jesus Christ, and James in his *Antiquities of the Jews*. In this work, Josephus gives us many background details about the Herods, the Sadducees and Pharisees, the high priests like Annas and Caiaphas, and the Roman emperors mentioned in the gospels and Acts.

We find another early secular reference to Jesus in a letter written a little after A.D. 73 by an imprisoned Syrian named Mara Bar-Serapion. This letter to his son compares the deaths of Socrates, Pythagoras, and Christ. Other first- and second-century writers who mention Christ include the Roman historians Cornelius Tacitus (*Annals*) and Suetonius (*Life of Claudius, Lives of the Caesars*), the Roman governor Pliny the Younger (*Epistles*), and the Greek satirist Lucian (*On the Death of Peregrine*). Jesus is also mentioned a number of times in the Jewish Talmud.

The Old and New Testaments make abundant references to nations, kings, battles, cities, mountains, rivers, buildings, treaties, customs, economics, politics, dates, etc. Because the historical narratives of the Bible are so specific, many of its details are open to archaeological investigation. While we cannot say that archaeology proves the authority of the Bible, it is fair to say that archaeological evidence has provided external confirmation of hundreds of biblical statements. Higher criticism in the 19th century made many damaging claims that would completely overthrow the integrity of the Bible, but the explosion of archaeological knowledge in the 20th century reversed almost all of these claims. Noted archaeologists such as William F. Albright, Nelson Glueck, and G. Ernest Wright developed a great respect for the historical accuracy of the Scriptures as a result of their work.

Out of the multitude of archaeological discoveries related to the Bible, consider a few examples to illustrate the remarkable external substantiation of biblical claims. Excavations at Nuzi (1925-41), Mari (discovered in 1933), and Alalakh (1937-39; 1946-49) provide helpful background information that fits well with the Genesis stories of the patriarchal period. The Nuzi tablets and Mari letters illustrate the patriarchal customs in great detail, and the Ras

Shamra tablets discovered in ancient Ugarit in Syria shed much light on Hebrew prose and poetry and Canaanite culture. The Ebla tablets discovered recently in northern Syria also affirm the antiquity and accuracy of the Book of Genesis.

Some scholars once claimed that the Mosaic Law could not have been written by Moses, because writing was largely unknown at that time and because the law code of the Pentateuch was too sophisticated for that period. But the codified Laws of Hammurabi (ca. 1700 B.C.), the Lipit-Ishtar code (ca. 1860 B.C.), the Laws of Eshnunna (ca. 1950 B.C.), and the even earlier Ur-Nammu code have refuted these claims.

Next Steps

- Looking for more? Check out [gotquestions.org](https://www.gotquestions.org/canon-Bible.html) (<https://www.gotquestions.org/canon-Bible.html> has a great article on how the Bible was put together).
- A Doubter's Guide to the Bible. Dickson, John
- Memorize 2 Timothy 3:16-17 and Psalm 119:11.
- Commit to feast on the Word! One of the best ways to strengthen and grow your faith is by faithfully reading the Bible!
 - Create your own plan for daily Bible reading and implement it.
 - Join the Celebration family and read through the book of Luke during the Processing Doubt series (<https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/87>)
 - Search the YouVersion Bible App for a "Through the Bible" reading plan and commit now to read through the entire Bible.