

APOLOGETICS

Session V: Is the Bible Reliable?

INTRODUCTION TO APOLOGETICS: V - IS THE BIBLE RELIABLE?



The Bible Introduction

Up to this point, we have not relied heavily on scripture to support our arguments. This is because the argument for the Bible's authority had not been addressed yet. This may lead many to wonder why we do not start here in our pursuit of apologetics. In fact, some apologists believe that the best way to do apologetics is to begin by establishing the authority of the Bible. They believe that when this is accomplished, everything else (Truth, God's Existence, Jesus and the Resurrection, etc.) falls into place. This course did not start with the Bible as the beginning. This is because a defense of the Bible rests on several presuppositions which had to supported first. Presuppositions such as Absolute Truth, God's existence and miracles to name a few. Having explored questions concerning these topics, or presuppositions, it is now time to explore the reliability of the Bible. This is a must as it the source of much of our information concerning God. As Calvin wrote, "Credibility of doctrine is not established until we are persuaded beyond doubt that God is its Author." So let us turn our attention to the case for Scripture and the Bible.

What is Unique about the Bible?

Even denying the Bible is divinely inspired, it is itself one, if not the most unique books ever written. As a book, it is unique in its continuity with a story that ranges over 1500 years by more than 40 authors with very different backgrounds. It is written in very different places ranging from deserts to a palaces. It was also written in very different situations (war, peace, persecution) and in a variety of styles and languages. The Bible touched on hundreds of subjects yet maintained a single unfolding narrative about the one true living God. The Scriptures, in there circulation have sold more than one billion copies worldwide. There are still more than 10 million copies sold every year. The Bible is unique in its translation as more than 2200 languages and dialects and reaches more than 90% of the world population. In fact, the first translations were already made in 250BC. The Testaments are unique in their survival. In fact, there are more manuscript copies of the Bible than of all the other historical documents combined. The variations between these documents are extremely small, despite the immense time differences of hundreds of years. The Bible has also survived extreme persecution and criticism as many have attempted to destroy the Scriptures and Christianity. People have tried repeatedly to undermine the Bible, to label it as merely man made, to cast doubt on authorship and its dates, to prove it historically inaccurate. None, have succeeded.

NOTES

Define the Term

BI BLE, *n*. [Gr. βιθλιον, βιθλος, a book.] THE BOOK, by way of eminence; the sacred volume, in which are contained the revelations of God, the principles of Christian faith, and the rules of practice. It consists of two parts, called the Old and New Testaments.

The *Bible* should be the standard of language as well as of faith. The word Bible comes from the Greek word biblia, which means "books."



The Bible contains unique teachings not found in any of the other religious texts of the world. It presents prophecy as many were made, many took place exactly as predicted, some are still open but none failed. Other books claim divine inspiration yet none gives predictive prophecy. It presents historical events, people and places reliably. The most influential and cited book in all of literature. All Western societies are strongly influenced by Jesus' teachings even though many people do not believe in Him. Frankly put, regardless of its authorship the Bible is an extremely unique work. It has continued to influence the world 2000 years after the last chapter was written. We hardly know any other that even survived that long, let alone is still being used.

How We Got The Bible

So ok, got it, the Bible is unique. So what? Why does that matter. It doesn't make it divine or anything more than a book written by men. This man be true and if this were the only facts concerning the Bible it would be true. To respond to this we must look at how we got the Bible we see today. We have to inspect the history of the Bible. This is not about divine inspiration quite yet but rather the reliable as a document that states certain facts. Can we trust the text that we read? Are the documents we have really the same as the original text? Is it accurate in what is describes?

Ancient Writings

First we must understand that most of the original scrolls for the Biblical texts were written on papyrus, which lasts longer than today's paper but nevertheless decays. It is important to note that finding a document older than 1000 years in general is a rare event. For this to happen it must have been preserved in a special way. Unfortunately, we don't have any originals at this point, only copies. One of the big questions often given is "If we do not have the originals how do we know we have what was actually written down?" So let us go deeper.

The first 5 books, known as the Pentateuch, were stored in the Ark of the Covenant. During the time of David and Solomon, the books that existed at that time were stored in the temple treasury. The books were carefully cared for by the priests. More books were added during the reign of King Hezekiah, (Psalms, Proverbs, Isaiah, Hosea, and Micah. Around 540 B.C. Ezra re-collected the writings and added other works to the compilation. They were then stored in the Ark that was constructed for the second temple. The Ark was very secure as only the High Priest once a year could enter into the temple where the Ark was located.





Why is this important? It shows the actual caretakers of the Scripture actually cared for and maintained these writing with seriousness. These writings over time were extremely meticulously copied to protect what they believed were inspired writings. Which brings us to the question of human error. If we have copies, and those copies come from man, and man makes mistakes then wouldn't the Bible be full of mistakes...well yes and no...the question is what do we mean by "mistake" let us look at the methodology used in this copying process.

How was the Bible Copied?

As mentioned the early caretakers of the Scripture (Israelites) truly believed the scrolls they had to be the actual Word of God. This belief spurred them to create a copying system to preserve the Scriptures. A coping process that was very specific and taken extremely serious. They understood it would be very easy to make copying mistakes.

They attempted to solve the problem of human errors creeping into the text by creating a set of copying rules. One copy rule was to count the number of words of a completed Old Testament scroll and compare it with the original. Another was that every line on a given page had to be the same in number of words, etc. as the original. When a copy was completed, another person was required to verify the middle letter of both the original and the copy were the same. Many other copy rules were enforced in order to insure accurate transmission of God's word. If even a single error were found the entire work would be discarded as to carefully preserve the text and ensure scribes stayed focused, lest their hours of work be wasted. A copy of God's word was always kept in the temple, inside the Ark of the Covenant. It was ancient Israel's master copy of the Scriptures. Even after the destruction of the temple in 586 B.C., the scrolls containing God's words were preserved. While in Babylonian captivity some Levites, who would eventually take on the title of Scribe, painstakingly copied and distributed the words of God to fellow captives.

As stated before Ezra greatly enhanced and advanced the study of the Bible. Assisted by fellow priests and Levites of the Great Assembly or Synagogue, they completed the final editing and canonization of what we call the Old Testament in the late fifth century B.C. Scribes, even after Jews returned to the land after their captivity, continued the tradition of ensuring the preservation and accurate copying of the Scriptures.





Scribal Errors

As seen above the process scribes went through to ensure an error free Bible was laborious. Never the less there were scribal errors in the Scriptures. Does this mean we have a twisted and distorted Bible? Does it mean the message intended was somehow distorted? No, but let us unpack why this is not the case.

In the process of copying the manuscripts, scribes often made small changes, some of them unintentional and others intentional. For example, early copies of the Greek New Testament were composed in an ancient style in which words were written in all capital letters with no spaces, punctuation, or paragraph divisions. A classic illustration of this style is the phrase "GODISNOWHERE." one of these scribes would have to decide whether the phrase meant "God is now here" or "God is nowhere." Context would determine the meaning of the phrase, so it's not surprising a scribe could occasionally get things wrong. Furthermore, scribes sometimes misspelled words, wrote the same word twice when it should have been written once, or skipped over sections of text because the same words occurred later down the page. These are all examples of unintentional changes.

Other times, however, scribes changed the texts they were copying on purpose. This happened for a variety of reasons. They might make grammatical improvements or liturgical changes, or they might eliminate apparent discrepancies, harmonize passages, or make doctrinal changes. However, even Bart Ehrman, a New Testament scholar who argues against the reliability of the Bible, recognizes, "Most of the changes found in our early Christian manuscripts have nothing to do with theology or ideology. Far and away the 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."

Variations? Let us consider the following examples

Copy 1: God is #ust and the justifier Copy 2: God is j#st and the justifier Copy 3: God is ju#t and the justifier Copy 4: God is jus# and the justifier Original: God is just and the justifier

Copy 1. You Have Won Ten Million Dollars Copy 2. Thou Hast Won 10 Million Dollars Copy 3. Y'all Have Won \$10,000,000



Manuscript Evidence

Many over the years have argued that the words of the New Testament are unreliable due to the large number of variations in New Testament manuscripts. But in fact, the vast number of New Testament manuscripts actually enables us to figure out what the originals said with a great deal of certainty. As Mark Roberts puts it, "Having many manuscripts actually increases the likelihood of our getting back to the original text." Scholars can compare the various manuscripts containing the same passages of Scripture and determine, on the basis of internal and external evidence, which of the manuscripts most likely get the original wording right.

There are presently 5,686 Greek manuscripts (MSS) The closest in comparison from the ancient world to this is the Iliad that has 1,800 MSS. In comparison most manuscripts per document from the ancient world is 10-20. It is also important to not that the New Testament has earlier manuscripts. The manuscripts of Homer have a 400 year gap between the original and the extant manuscripts. Most documents from the ancient world have 1,000 years between the original and extant manuscript. The New Testament has 25 years between the original manuscript and the first extant fragment. And it is just 100 years to the first whole New Testament Manuscript. So if we were to compare the number of New Testament manuscripts to other ancient writings, we find that the New Testament manuscripts far outweigh the others in quantity. In fact, there are thousands more New Testament Greek manuscripts than any other ancient writing. Furthermore the internal consistency of the New Testament documents is about 99.5% textually pure. That is an amazing accuracy. In addition, there are over 19,000 copies in the Syriac, Latin, Coptic, and Aramaic languages. The total supporting New Testament manuscript base is over 24.000.

Almost all biblical scholars agree that the New Testament documents were all written before the close of the First Century. If Jesus was crucified in A.D. 33., then that means the entire New Testament was completed within 70 years. This is important because it means there were plenty of people around when the New Testament documents were written people who could have contested the writings. In other words, those who wrote the documents knew that if they were inaccurate, plenty of people would have pointed it out and yet they did not have this issue.

NOTES



The Dead Sea Scrolls

In the spring of 1947, a Bedouin shepherd boy was searching for a lost goat on the west side of the Dead Sea, about eight miles south of Jericho. When he threw a stone into a hole in a cliff, he was surprised to hear the sound of shattering pottery. Investigating, he was found a number of clay jars containing leather scrolls. Because the jars were carefully sealed, they had survived in excellent condition for over 1900 years. The scrolls made up over 40,000 fragments from which 500 books have been reconstructed. One of the most important contributions of the Dead Sea Scrolls is the numerous Biblical manuscripts which have been discovered. Until those discoveries at Qumran, the oldest manuscripts of the Hebrew Scriptures were copies from the 9th and 10th centuries AD by a group of Jewish scribes called the Massoretes. Now we have manuscripts around a thousand years older than those. The amazing truth is that these manuscripts are almost identical! Here is a strong example of the tender care which the Jewish scribes down through the centuries took in an effort to accurately copy the sacred Scriptures. We can have confidence that our Old Testament Scriptures faithfully represent the words given to Moses, David and the prophets.



So what does the manuscript evidence mean? It means that if the critics of the Bible dismiss the New Testament as reliable information, then they must also dismiss the reliability of the writings of Plato, Aristotle, Caesar, Homer, and many other ancient writers then are taken as accurately depicted. On the other hand, if the critics acknowledge the historicity and writings of those other individuals, then they must also retain the historicity and writings of the New Testament authors; after all, the evidence for the New Testament's reliability is far greater than the others. The Christian has substantially superior criteria for affirming the New Testament documents than he does for any other ancient writing. It is good evidence to suggest that the Bible written is the Bible we have and is essentially the same documents.

The Canonicity

It is important to note that the church did not *determine* what should be in the Bible but rather attempted to discover this. If indeed it was actual God who wrote the books of the Bible, then He would have made sure that we could recognize his authority in the writings. The church did recognize the authority in all the books we have in the Bible today but not in other books. To recognize the books of the Bible as authority the Church applied a threefold test. Many have show great unease at the Church having a selection process for Scripture but the thoroughness of their process should alleviate doubt in this regard.

- 1. The first test of canonicity to verify a book's authority was it's Apostolic Origin.
 - a. To be of Apostolic origin, a document had to have been written either by an Apostle or under the direct and immediate sanction of an Apostle.
- 2. The second test for acceptance into the canon was reception by the primitive church.
 - a. The Gospel writings were widely circulated among first-century congregations, as were all of the New Testament letters. The church, when considering what to include in the canon, took into account how a particular document had been received and quoted as authoritative from early on.
- 3. The third test concerned the compatibility of the doctrine and teaching of these books with the core books.

NOTES



Understanding the Meaning

"The word *Bible* comes from the Greek word *biblos*, which means "book." However, although the Bible is bound up in one volume, it is not a single book but rather a collection of sixtysix individual books. It is a library of books. Since there are so many books that together make up the sacred Scriptures, how do we know that the right books have been included in this collection or library of books? That question falls under the issue of *canonicity*.

We get the word *canon* from another Greek word, *kanōn*, which means "measuring rod" or "norm." To call the Bible "the canon of Scripture" is to say that its sixty-six books together function as the supreme measuring rod or authority for the church. The Bible often has been described as *norma normans et sine normativa*. A form of the word *norm* appears three times in that expression. *Norma normans* means "the norm of norms," and *sine normativa* means "without norm." The Bible is the norm or the standard of all standards, and it is judged by no other standard." R.C. Sproul

46

So what about the Apocrypha?

Reasons to exclude a book are *inaccuracies* (historical. geographical), doctrines that are inconsistent with the other scriptures, lack of divine characteristics (prophecy, teaching, expression of relation to God), focus on legends and folklore.

The *apocrypha* (hidden/concealed books) enjoyed only local and temporary recognition but were excluded very early because they do not meet *all* the acceptance criteria. R. C. Sproul writes about this issue in *Evervone's a Theologian.* He says:

"The Roman Catholic Church embraced the Apocrypha; the Reformation churches, for the most part, did not. The dispute centered on what the firstcentury church and Jesus Himself had accepted as canonical. All the evidence from Palestine indicates that the Jewish Palestinian canon did not include the Apocrypha, whereas many in Alexandria, the cultural center for Hellenistic Jews, did include it. However, more recent scholarship suggests that even the Alexandrian canon recognized the Apocrypha only at a secondary level, not at the full level of biblical authority. So the question remains as to who was *right—the Roman Catholic Church or the Protestants?* In other words, by what authority do we determine what is canonical?

According to the Protestants, each book found in the Bible is an infallible book, but the process undertaken by the church as to which books to include was not infallible. We believe that the church was providentially guided by the mercy of God in the process of determining the canon and thereby made the right decisions, so that every book that should be in the Bible is in the Bible. However, we do not believe that the church was inherently infallible, then or now. By contrast, the Roman Catholic formula says that we have the correct books because the church is infallible and anything the church decides is an infallible decision. In the Roman Catholic understanding, the formation of the canon rests on the authority of the church, whereas in the Protestant understanding, it rests upon the providence of God.

I would commend to you further study of the development of the canon. Let me emphasize in conclusion that even though there was a historical investigation, I believe that the church did exactly what God wanted it to do, and that we have no reason to be anything but fully assured that the right books were included in the canon of sacred Scripture."







Is the Bible really the Word of God?

There are people who accept that the Bible is a reliable and very useful historical document but who reject the idea that it has any authority beyond that. They may accept the moral teachings of Jesus, they draw conclusions from the history of Israel and quite often develop very high ethical standards on the basis that history teaches us insights about good and bad behavior. But when it comes to claims that the Bible shows us the only way to God then they refuse, stating that no book in the world can give us that kind of knowledge. For them, the Bible was written by men and that's it.

However, knowing that the Bible is more than just a word of men is crucial when it comes to matters of faith. After all, the Bible contains not just historical facts, but also a lot of revelation about God and claims to authority about what is good and what is bad, what is right and what is wrong. It does not spell out all the details but focuses on the essential issues, which in turn are sufficient for all the choices we have to make. The fact is the Bible certainly claims to be the inspired word of God. There are plenty of explicit references to that thought out its texts. That being the case lets look at why the Bible is more than a mere "Book".

The church historically has seen that the original Bible alone, of all the written literature in history, is uniquely infallible. You may have also heard the term inerrant. Inerrant means "without or free of errors" whereas Infallible is "that which cannot fail or err." The Church claims that the Bible is both Inerrant and infallible. It is important to note that something can be inerrant yet not infallible. If you took a test and got a perfect score the test was inerrant. This does not mean that you are incapable of ever erring in taking tests just this one happened to all be right. The Bible on the other hand is said to be inerrant and infallible therefore incapable of error. This is important for haven't we already established the Bible has errors? Yes. But what do you mean by errors? The errors described here pertains to the truth of the claims not scribal or grammatical errors. The fact is that there are indeed copyist errors on the biblical documents and they account for many alleged contradictions. Remember, it is the autographs (original writings) that are claimed to be inspired and inerrant, not the copies. The copies we have now are copies of inspired documents. The copies are not themselves "inspired;" that is, they have no guarantee of being 100% textually pure.





PRAIRIE GROVE

CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Proof for Inspiration

There many arguments that lend credit to inspiration of the Bible from God but we will only summarize a few today.

1) **Fulfilled prophecy**. God spoke to men telling them of things He would bring about in the future. Some of them have already occurred. Others have not. For example, the Old Testament contains more than 300 prophecies concerning Jesus Christ's first coming. There is no doubt that these are prophecies from God because of manuscripts dated from before the birth of Christ. These were not written after the fact but beforehand.

2) **The unity of Scripture**. The Bible was written by approximately 40 human authors over a period of approximately 1,600 years. These men were quite diverse. Moses, was a political leader; Joshua, a military leader; David, a shepherd; Solomon, a king; Amos, a herdsman and fruit picker; Daniel, a prime minister; Matthew, a tax collector; Luke, a medical doctor; Paul, a rabbi; and Peter, a fisherman; among others. The Bible was also written under a variety of circumstances. It was written on 3 different continents, Europe, Asia, and Africa. Yet, the great themes of Scripture are maintained in all the writings. The Bible does not contradict itself. There is no way, apart from God the Holy Spirit supervising the writing of the Bible, that this could have been accomplished.

3) **The Bible presents its heroes truthfully** with all of their faults and weaknesses. It does not glorify men as other religions do their heroes. Reading the Bible, one realizes that the people it describes have problems and do wrong just as we do. What made the heroes of the Bible great was that they trusted in God. One example is David, who is described as "a man after God's own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14). Yet, David committed adultery (2 Samuel 11:1-5) and murder (2 Samuel 11:14-26). This information could have easily been omitted from Scripture, but the God of truth included it.

4) **Excruciation Testimonies.** Eleven of the 12 disciples died as martyrs. Many of these deaths were terrible and painful. If the Bible were made up and the resurrection a hoax the Roman and Jewish leadership would have taken great pleasure in even one admission of this from any of the martyred disciples. Yet this did not happen. In fact, quite the opposite happened. In truth what did the New Testament writers have to gain by making up a new religion? They had every motive to say the resurrection did NOT happen! Why would they die for a known lie? Either it happened or it didn't...man is not prone to be tourtured and maintain a lie...

NOTES

ALL SCRIPTURE IS INSPIRED BY GOD AND IS USEFUL TO TEACH US WHAT IS TRUE AND TO MAKE US REALIZE WHAT IS WRONG IN OUR LIVES. IT CORRECTS US WHEN WE ARE WRONG AND TEACHES US TO DO WHAT IS RIGHT.

2 TIMOTHY 3:16



5) **Archaeological findings** support the history recorded in Scripture. Though many unbelievers throughout history have tried to find archaeological evidence to disprove what is recorded in the Bible, they have failed. It is easy to say that Scripture is untrue. Proving it to be untrue is another matter. In fact, it has not been done. In the past, every time the Bible contradicted a current "scientific" theory, the Bible was proven later to be true and the scientific theory wrong. A good example is Isaiah 40:22. All the while that science declared the earth to be flat, the Bible stated that God "sits on the circle [sphere] of the earth."

In Conclusion

Nothing like the evidence found in the Bible exists for any other book of ancient world. The New Testament alone has more manuscripts, earlier manuscripts (25–100 years) and accurately copied (89–99.9%) manuscripts than any other book from the ancient world. If the New Testament is to be rejected for being unreliable, then all other books from the ancient world must be thrown out. New Testament scholars, Roman historians, legal scholars and archeologists have all examined the New Testament and found it to be reliable in their respected fields of study. Hence, the implications are if Jesus said it, Jesus actually said it, if Jesus did it, then Jesus actually did it. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is not just a good story, it actually happened. The implication of the New Testament being historically reliable is that what it says about Jesus' death and resurrection, that he did miracles to prove his claim to be God can be used to show that Christianity is true.

Lastly let me leave you with a logical argument for Scripture.

Charles Wesley proposed the following logical argument: "The Bible must be the invention either of good men or angels, bad men or devils, or of God.

1. It could not be the invention of good men or angels; for they neither would or could make a book, and tell lies all the time they were writing it, saying, "Thus saith the Lord," when it was their own invention.

2. It could not be the invention of bad men or devils; for they would not make a book which commands all duty, forbids all sin, and condemns their souls to hell to all eternity.

3. Therefore, I draw this conclusion, that the Bible must be given by divine inspiration."



