

## Why Believe The Bible

The starting point for discovering the meaning of the Bible is to ask, what's the Authors' intentions:

What do the Gospel writers state as their purpose?

Luke 1:1–4 (NLT) Many people have set out to write accounts about the events that have been fulfilled among us. 2 They used the eyewitness reports circulating among us from the early disciples.\* 3 Having carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I also have decided to write a careful account for you, most honorable Theophilus, 4 so you can be certain of the truth of everything you were taught.

- Luke is writing for people who do not have first hand experience of having seen Jesus do miracles.
- He has written his Gospel so that skeptical people can a trustworthy account on which to base their response to Jesus Christ...Like a reporter recording eyewitnesses

John 20:30–31 (NLT) <sup>30</sup> The disciples saw Jesus do many other miraculous signs in addition to the ones recorded in this book. <sup>31</sup> But these are written so that you may continue to believe\* that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life by the power of his name.

John is the beloved disciple who lived with Jesus & experienced the life transforming power of the Son of God. He knew the person & events. He writes so that other people can have life in his name.

### Questions to ask about the author's stated intention:

1. It is possible that the author is genuine motives but has been deceived and is passing on mistaken information?
2. Is it possible that the author knows the information they are writing down is false and they are intentionally trying to deceive the reader?
3. Is it possible that the author has genuine motives and that, he has recorded what actually happened?
4. How do we decide among these three possibilities?

**Inductive Reasoning: *Observing patterns and using those specific observations to make generalizations; drawing inferences from the information you have.***

We must ask inductive (or external) questions:

- Does the text of a Gospel make sense of the world external to it?
- Do the historical and archaeological references fit with the data available to us from the period?
- Does the text diagnose and adequately speak to the human condition?
- Does the text have the “ring of truth”?

**Deductive Reasoning: *Drawing specific conclusions that logically follow from established premises and known facts.***

**We must ask deductive (or internal) questions about the Bible's internal workings:**

- Does the text we are reading hold together?
- Is it internally coherent?
- Does it contradict itself?
- When we do step inside the reality of the text does it make sense as a whole?

**Canon: *"Measuring rod;" the officially accepted books of Scripture.***

## **II. How Was the Canon Recognized?**

Questions about the canon are ultimately questions of authority.

The church Over a period of 300 years, did not choose the cannon. Over the period the books of the New Testament were universally recognized as God's Word. The church councils took place in 393 A.D. and 397 A.D. to **confirm** what was God's Word rather than to choose it

The existence of early manuscripts in the same form that we have them today in different languages from different geographical locations shows that the recognition of a canon was not dependent upon a church council.

**Justin Martyr: *One of the first Christian apologists; was born a pagan and studied philosophy prior to his conversion to Christianity.***

- Justin Martyr, who lived from 110-165 A.D.: *"On the day called Sunday there is a gathering together to one place of all those who live in cities or in the country and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read as long as time permits"*
- Origen: *An early Christian scholar, theologian and one of the best known fathers of the church who lived from approximately 185-254 A.D.*
  - The Greek father Origen who was born in 185 A.D. refers to the books of the New Testament in a way that exactly corresponds with our present canon.
- Eusebius: *Early church bishop who is considered to be the father of church history. He lived from around 275-339 A.D.*

Three categories identified by Eusebius:

- Books universally acknowledged as Scriptural (homologoumena)
- Books which are some (antilegoumena) disputed as Scriptural
- Books which should be rejected as heretical (notha)

**Heresy: *A departure from the true, accepted teaching; in the Christian faith, any teaching that distorts the Scriptures.'***

- The church councils met to officially recognize what had already been acknowledged in the church, now spread across a wide geographical area.
- Official acknowledgement was necessary because of the emergence of
- Heresies (Gnosticism) which changed the basic message of Christianity.

*Gnosticism: A heresy prominent during the time of the early church (and enjoying a*

*resurgence in the 21st century) that sought salvation through obtaining hidden knowledge and mystical experiences rather than through the revealed Word of God.*

### III. Are the Manuscripts Reliable?

- Has the Bible been changed? Do the documents we have reliably represent the original manuscripts?
- *Comparing the manuscripts of the Gospels with other ancient manuscripts*

“There is no body of ancient literature in the world which enjoys such a wealth of good textual attestation as the New Testament.” F. F. Bruce

If you reject the reliability of the New Testament on the basis of the manuscript tradition, you lose all of classical antiquity if you apply the same rules to other texts.

*The New Testament has 24,000 manuscripts to compare.  
(show manuscripts graphic)*

<u>Author:</u>	<u>When Written:</u>	<u>Earliest Copy:</u>	<u>Time Span:</u>	<u># of copies:</u>
<i>Caesar</i>	<i>100-44 BC</i>	<i>AD 900</i>	<i>1,000 years</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Plato</i>	<i>427-347 BC</i>	<i>AD 900</i>	<i>1,200 years</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Tacitus</i>	<i>AD 100</i>	<i>AD 1100</i>	<i>900 years</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Thucydides</i>	<i>460-400 BC</i>	<i>AD 900</i>	<i>1,300 years</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Herodotus</i>	<i>384-322 BC</i>	<i>AD 900</i>	<i>1,300 years</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Aristotle</i>	<i>450-385 BC</i>	<i>AD 900</i>	<i>1,400 years</i>	<i>49</i>

This is a list of some of the most important and trusted documents of antiquity. The closest one to the NT in sheer numbers is

<i>Homer (Iliad)</i>	<i>900 BC</i>	<i>400 BC</i>	<i>500 years</i>	<i>643</i>
<i>New Testament</i>	<i>AD 40-100</i>	<i>AD 125</i>	<i>25 years</i>	<i>24,000</i>

When it comes to the accuracy of knowing what was in the original texts of the books of the Bible, no other literary piece comes close.

**So, what about all those translations? Well, there's only one.**

Instead of translating the Bible from Hebrew to Syriac to Latin to Old English to English, translators go straight to the original Hebrew and Greek texts and translate straight into English and all other modern languages.

**What about the Old Testament?**

#### **The Dead Sea Scrolls**

“In February or March of 1947 a Bedouin shepherd boy named Muhammad was searching for a lost goat. He tossed a stone into a hole in a cliff on the west side of the Dead Sea about 8 miles south of Jericho. To his surprise he heard the sound of shattering pottery.

Investigating, he discovered an amazing sight. On the floor of the cave were several large jars containing leather scrolls wrapped in linen cloth. Because the jars were carefully sealed, the scrolls had been preserved in excellent condition for nearly 1,900 years.” (They were placed there in 68ad)

**Dead Sea Scrolls: 40,000 inscribed fragments, both biblical writings as well as commentaries on the Old Testament and other theological writings, from which more than 500 books have been reconstructed; discovered in 1947.**

### **What do they show about the manuscripts of the Old Testament?**

- Before the discovery of the scrolls the oldest manuscript was copied approximately 1300 years after the writing of the complete Old Testament. The problem was then how accurate were these manuscripts in relation to what was originally written.
- Because the text had been copied many times, could it be trusted? One of the Dead Sea Scrolls had a complete copy of Isaiah in Hebrew. It is dated by paleographers around 125 B.C. with the Masoretic text being 1000 years later.

### **MASORETIC TEXT: *The complete Hebrew manuscript of the Old Testament relied upon by Jews and Christians***

◆ The accuracy is astonishing for an ancient manuscript and is word for word identical with our standard Hebrew Bible in 95% of the text. The 5 percent of variation consists in minor variations of spelling. To give an example:

*Of the 166 words in Isaiah 53 there are 17 letters in question. Ten of these are a matter of spelling which does not affect the sense. Four are minor stylistic changes, such as conjunctions. The remaining three letters comprise the word “light” which is added in verse 11 and does not affect the meaning greatly. In fact, the use of “light” here is supported by two other ancient manuscripts.*

**Septuagint: *The Greek translation of the Old Testament, which dates from the 3rd century B.C.***

Both manuscripts of the Old and New Test. stand up to rigorous scrutiny!

### **A. Is the Content of the Bible Reliable: Can a Skeptic Trust It? Are the Gospels any different than mythology?**

- A. The question of miracles and the supernatural
- B. To be absolutely sure miracles do not occur, one would have to claim absolute knowledge.
- C. The context in which the miracles are presented is realistic.
- D. The men involved in the miracles are fishermen—down to earth types!
- E. Those who observe the miracles have ordinary reactions to the

supernatural they were frightened.

## B. The question of intentional deception

- A. Could the stories in the Gospels have been deliberately invented by Jesus's followers after his death?
- B. There are a number of ways of answering this question:
  - A. Why would the disciples portray themselves in such a bad light?
  - B. Why is there so much in the New Test. about the cost of Christianity?
  - C. Why would they go on and be killed for their teachings?

“ If anything is clear from the Gospels and the Acts it is that the apostles were sincere. They may have been deceived, if you like, but they were not deceivers. Hypocrites and martyrs are not made of the same stuff.”  
John Stott

- ◆ The question of internal coherence and contradiction
  - Ask for specific examples.
  - Actually read a Gospel.
  - Compare the true Gospels to a false Gospel such as the Gospel of Thomas. The coherence of the true Gospels shines through.
- ◆ The question of historical corroboration: *Reporters of that day, historians*
  - Josephus
  - Thallus
  - Tacitus
  - Suetonius
  - Pliny Secundus

### THALLUS:

*Greek writer who traced the history of Greece and its relations with Asia from the Trojan War to his own day in 52 A.D. None of his manuscripts survive, but he is quoted by Julius Africanus in 221 A.D.*

Writing in 221 A.D., Julius Africanus quotes Thallus, who gives a skeptical explanation of the darkness that happened at Jesus' death, denying the theological significance of the darkness at Jesus' crucifixion but giving external corroboration that the darkness was a historical fact.

**Conclusion:** The recognition of the canon was a process marked by integrity and accountability. There is overwhelming evidence for the reliability of the manuscript tradition. The Bible is trustworthy even in its miraculous content.

At the end of the day, you're being invited to engage with a person