

Can I Really Trust the Bible?

By Phil Vander Ploeg

What is the Bible?

A Library: Law, History, Prophecy, Poetry, Wisdom Literature, Gospel, Letter, Homely, Apocalypse

When we get this wrong: We might read a story in a historical book and think that it is automatically speaking to God's will or character. We might develop a theology on poetry

Divine & Human (like Jesus) - the Bible is God's inspired and inerrant Word spoken through human agents. It contains the personality and perspectives of the authors, while documenting exactly what God wanted to communicate. (i.e. The Gospels are different portraits of the same or similar events)

When we get this wrong: We might see contradictions in the Gospels that are not really there (i.e. Parable of the Seeds)

Has a context - meaning the writings have a time and place in and for which they were written: i.e. Types of Law - Levitical, Legal, Moral. Early interpretations matter

When we get this wrong: We might read our context into the text (Genesis 6). We might misinterpret context sensitive material (i.e. Law and punishment in the OT)

A Responsibility (like the Gospel) - God has given men the responsibility, with His help, of preserving His Word. (There are times in the OT where God's word was lost, Nazi Bible)

When we get this wrong: We may neglect our responsibility, and the Bible will be misunderstood and misinterpreted and sometimes severely misinterpreted.

How do interpret the Bible right?

1. Be a Christian (have the Holy Spirit)
2. Acknowledge the Genre
3. Investigate the Context (Commentaries)
4. Seek the wisdom of others (Commentaries, Community)
5. Go to a church that teaches the Bible and not just Christian ideas.

How do I Know the Bible is True?

1. It was written by Eyewitnesses!

The New Testament was written within the lifetimes of those who lived the events and knew Jesus (2 Pet. 1:16; 3:14-16).¹

- Mark (50's), Matthew & Luke (60's), John (60's or 90's)
- The Jerusalem School
- Papias ("hearer of John and companion of Polycarp") on Hebrew Matthew
- The context of oral culture (written to be memorized)

The Old Testament (except the Creation story which was revealed to Moses by God) was written by eyewitnesses. Its accounts use details and real names which are absent from the other legends of the time (Num. 33).

2. It was written by Reliable People!

The Apostles and prophets laid down their lives for the truths they preached

The only written sources that gives a different depiction of Jesus (Talmud and Gnostic Gospels) were not written until the 3rd century or later (no eyewitness testimony). (talk about the Gospel of Thomas)

The Talmud, a source that scorns Jesus, actually testifies that Jesus and his followers worked miracles and healed the sick.² It must have done so because it couldn't be argued in the opposite.

The Roman historians Josephus, Pliny the Younger, Tacitus, and others also testify to the historicity of Jesus.³

3. It's REAL!

No other ancient book records failures, and especially the failures of the hero. The Bible on the other hand values historical accuracy and therefore records the truth (good and bad).

David and Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11)
Peter's denial of Christ (Matt. 26:67-75)

¹ See *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* by Dr. Richard Bauckham

² See *Jesus in the Talmud* by Dr. Peter Schafer

³ See *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels* by Dr. Craig Keener

Jesus calling Peter Satan (Matt. 16:23)
James thinking Jesus was crazy (John 7:5; Matt. 12:46)

Unlike Gandhi, Muhammad, or the Pharaohs

4. It's Good History! (See Below)⁴

Some Common Fallacies

1. The God of the Old Testament is A Bully (Richard Dawkins)

"The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully."

-Richard Dawkins *The God Delusion*

Richard Dawkins doesn't apply basic interpretive strategies (see above)

1. No Biblical account is comprehensive
2. Genre matters! Historical books record data without speaking to morality or justice
3. Context matters! Background for the flood (Gen. 6) and entrance into the Promised Land (Joshua), OT & NT death penalty.

Israelite Entrance into the Promised Land

Hagiographic Hyperbole

Merneptah Stele – Pharaoh Merneptah's "Total Annihilation" of Israel

The term "utterly destroy" is used in the OT against the Canaanites and also Israel.

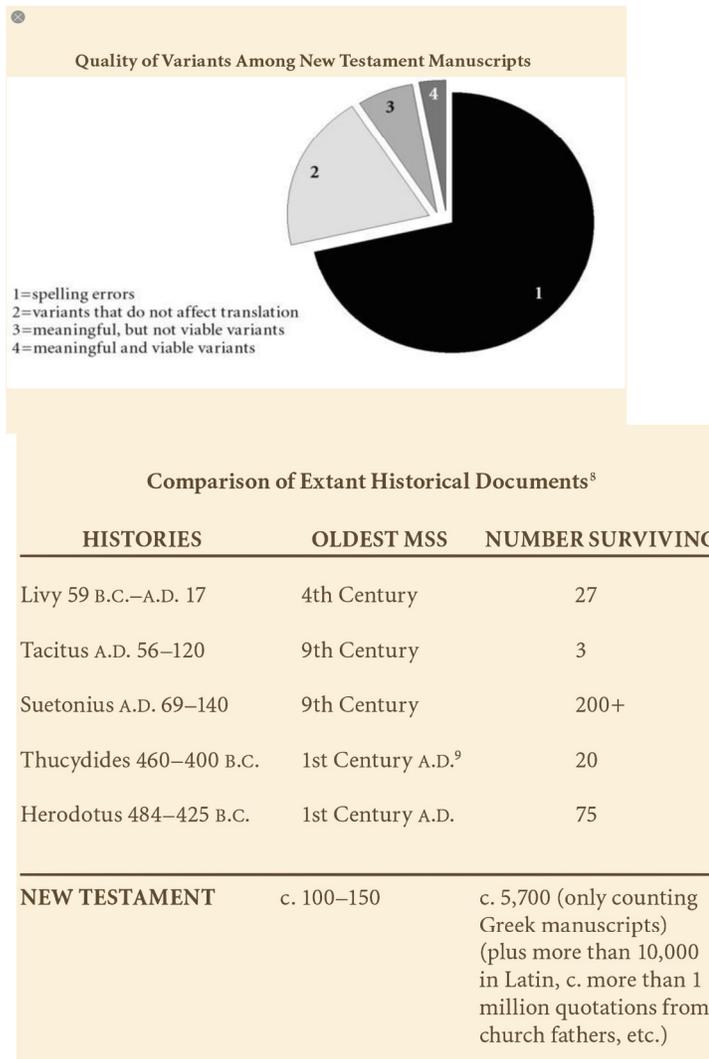
The idea was to drive a society out or to destroy a society's ability to continue

Concerning Laws - There was a justice system in place that interpreted and applied the law, and in many cases, with compassion.

Good Book: *The Devil's Delusion* by David Berlinski

⁴ The Bible claims to be authoritative (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:20-21)

2. There are More Errors in the Greek NT Manuscripts than Words (Bart Ehrman)



Plato was written around 400 B.C. The oldest manuscript we have is from AD 900, leaving a gap of over 1,300 years! And we only have 7 copies!

There are over 5,700 NT manuscripts in Greek, over 10,000 in Latin, and over 1 million quotations from the early church fathers.

So why all the criticism of the Bible when the evidence in favor of its authenticity is almost embarrassing for those using real historical science?⁵

Good Book: *Reinventing Jesus* by Komoszewski, Sawyer, and Wallace (videos)

⁵ Charts taken from *Reinventing Jesus* by Komoszewski, Sawyer, and Wallace

Biased Church Leaders Left Out Some of the Books of the Bible (Elaine Pagels)

False Gospels (Pseudepigrapha, Infancy Narratives)

1. They were much later and therefore less reliable (late 2nd century or later, Marcion's Cannon 140 AD)
2. They were pseudonymous (talk about Mark)
3. They are weird and not consistent with the Biblical Gospels (Thomas & Women)

Good Book: *An Introduction to the New Testament* by Carson & Moo

The Divinity of Jesus was the product of the Fourth Century AD Church

*Testimony from the Bible*⁶

Explicit References to Christ's Deity in New Testament Manuscripts Before the Fourth Century				
	John 1:1	John 20:28	Romans 9:5	Hebrews 1:8
P ⁴⁶ (A.D. 200)			X	X
P ⁶⁶ (A.D. 175–225)	X	X		
P ⁷⁵ (early 3d century A.D.)	X			

Testimony from Christianity's Opponents

- "Greek satirist Lucian of Samosata. Writing around 170, Lucian blasted Christians for their devotion to Jesus, "whom they still worship, the man who was crucified in Palestine because he introduced this new cult into the world."
- Roman philosopher Celsus around 177 wrote: "Now, if the Christians worshiped only one God they might have reason on their side. But as a matter of fact they worship a man who appeared only recently. They do not consider what they are doing a breach of monotheism; rather, they think it perfectly consistent to worship the great God and to worship his servant as God. And their worship of this Jesus is the more outrageous because they refuse to listen to any talk about God, the father of all,

⁶ Chart taken from *Reinventing Jesus* by Komoszewski, Sawyer, and Wallace

unless it includes some reference to Jesus: Tell them that Jesus, the author of the Christian insurrection, was not his son, and they will not listen to you. And when they call him Son of God, they are not really paying homage to God, rather, they are attempting to exalt Jesus to the heights."

- Pliny the Younger governor of Bithynia (a secluded Roman province in Asia Minor, or modern-day Turkey) from about 111-113 in his violent persecution of Christians wrote a letter to the Roman emperor Trajan in 112 stating: "They had met regularly before dawn on a fixed day to chant verses alternately among themselves in honor of Christ as if to a god."
- Platonism was growing as a philosophy in the 1st century, and it taught a fundamental distinction between the physical and the spiritual (ultimate reality). It taught that the physical was inferior and even evil. This led some to adopt the heretical view of Jesus known as Docetism.
- Docetism became popular in the 2nd century and taught that Jesus only appeared to be human but was not in reality.
- The church father Ignatius spoke against Docetism
- The growing popularity of Docetism in the 2nd century is proof that the debate was over Jesus humanity not over his divinity.

Testimony from the Apostolic Fathers

- Clement of Rome, writing at the end of the 1st century viewed Jesus as having an equal standing with God, and also acknowledged Jesus' pre-existence.
- The author of 2 Clement states: "... think of Jesus Christ, as we do of God, as Judge of the living and the dead."
- "The author of the Epistle of Barnabas (written sometime between 70 and 135) goes even further, proclaiming that the preexistent Christ shared creative duties with the Father: For the Scripture speaks about us when he says to the Son: "Let us make man according to our image and likeness, and let them rule over the beasts of the earth and the birds of the air and the fish of the sea." And when he saw that our creation was good, the Lord said, "Increase and multiply and fill the earth." These things he said to the Son."
- Ignatius, writing sometime between 107-110 states: "There is only one physician, of flesh and of the Spirit, generate [born] and ingenerate [unborn], God in man, life in death, Son of Mary and Son of God, first passible [subject to suffering] then impassible [beyond suffering], Jesus Christ our Lord."

Testimony from the Apologists

- "The most prominent early apologist was Justin Martyr (c. 100-165). Justin argued vigorously for the divinity of Christ and his preexistence, existence, featuring proofs from the Old Testament."

- Irenaeus (c. 130-200), Bishop of Lyons (in modern-day France) was a student of sat Polycarp (martyred c. 155), who was in turn a disciple of the apostle John. Irenaeus stated: the Father is God and the Son is God; for He who is born of God is God."
- "Western apologist, Tertullian (c. 160-225), describes the eternal union of the preincarnate Christ with God the Father: The Word, therefore, is both always in the Father, as He says, "I am in the Father"; and is always with God, according to what is written, "And the Word was with God"; and never separate from the Father, or other than the Father, since "I and the Father are one."
- Eastern writers like Origin also argued for Christ pre-existence and divinity but sometimes erred by having too low a view of Jesus humanity.

Good Book: *Reinventing Jesus* by Komoszewski, Sawyer, and Wallace (Wallace Videos)

Why does the Bible Matter?

THESE ARE NOT DEFENSES THEY ARE THE TRUTH

The Truth always matters! (Sex, Oxytocin, Attachment & Happiness)

What you *Really* believe is what you *Really* live!