

The Authority of Scripture

What we believe about the Bible will determine everything we believe about Jesus. If the Bible is just some book that does not have any relevancy today then we do not have to trust Jesus or anything that he said. So to get a better understanding of the reliability of the Bible and the authority of Scripture, we must begin by asking the question was Jesus a person of history. So let's begin looking at the question of Is Jesus a Historical figure?

Is Jesus a Historical figure?

We have to begin with evidence that points to Jesus being a person of history other than the bible. What are the external evidences that point to Jesus existing in the time the Bible took place

External Evidence

Josephus, Jewish historian, Jew, not a Christian. He wrote in his *Antiquities of the Jews* 18.3.3 this "At this time [the time of Pilate] there was a wise man who was called Jesus. His conduct was good and he was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and the other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. But those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion, and that he was alive; accordingly he was perhaps the Messiah, concerning whom the prophets have recounted wonders." Another fascinating quote that lends to the historicity of Jesus is "Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he [Ananus the high priest] assembled the Sanhedrin of the judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others, [or some of his companions], and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned."

Ten known non-Christian sources mention Jesus within 150 yrs of his life.

Tacitus (115 AD), Roman historian writes, "Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome..."

Pliny the Younger, governor in a Roman province writes to Trajan expressing his concern with how to handle Christians. He writes, "'I asked them directly if they were Christians...those who persisted, I ordered away... Those who denied they were or ever had been Christians...worshiped both your image and the images of the gods and cursed Christ. They used to gather on a stated day before dawn and sing to Christ as if he were a god... All the more I believed it necessary to find out what was the truth from two servant maids, which were called deaconesses, by means of torture. Nothing more did I find than a

disgusting, fanatical superstition. Therefore I stopped the examination, and hastened to consult you...on account of the number of people endangered. For many of all ages, all classes, and both sexes already are brought into danger..."

Internal Evidence

Writings of the Gospels.

Most of the Gospel writers wrote about his Jesus' life within 30 years of his death and resurrection. Some estimates even within 25 years. This is outstanding! We have people writing down the life of Jesus within 25 yrs after his life, death and resurrection. Mark was the first one probably written mid-to-late 50s, then Matthew around late 50s to early 60s, Luke probably written around 62 A.D. and John between 70 and 100 A.D.

Resurrection of Jesus

Perhaps the greatest evidence for the authority of scripture is the resurrection of Jesus. All four gospels and Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 proclaim that Jesus rose from the dead. It's hard for this to be legend because legends take years to develop and they were written down within 20 to 30 yrs of His life, death and resurrection

Also, why would the disciples die for something they knew was a lie?

Manuscripts - Are we sure that what we have in the Bible are not corrupted?

We do not have any *original* written documents of the Bible, we only have copies. Why? because if someone had the original copies, they could have easily changed it. But if there are copies spread across the world, then it becomes hard for one person to alter the Word of God.

So let's look at the reliability of the Old Testament.

The Masoretes developed detailed and stringent disciplines for copying a manuscript. When they would copy the Old Testament text and began writing the name of God, they would not stop until the name was written. If a king walked in the room, the scribe would continue to write until he finished writing the name of God.

Other disciplines of the Masoretes:

NOTHING-not even the shortest word-could be copied from memory; it had to be copied letter by letter

The scribe must count the number of times each letter of the alphabet occurred in each book and compare it to the original.

If a mistake was found, that manuscript was discarded.

A space of three lines had to appear between each book.

DEAD SEA SCROLLS:

The oldest manuscript that we had of the Old Testament was AD 900. In 1947, 223 manuscripts were found that predated the oldest manuscripts that we had at

the time to 125 BC.

Not only that but when they translated the Dead Sea Scrolls. It was 95 percent accurate. The other 5 percent, merely spelling errors, but it did not alter the clear meaning of the text nor did it bring the manuscripts integrity into question.

Since we do have copies of the New Testament, can we even have confidence of knowing what the originals said? Absolutely! Most ancient literature that you've read has come from comparing the manuscripts that survive.

Historians also evaluate the textual liability of ancient literature through two standards: 1.) time interval between the original and the earliest copy; and 2.) how many manuscripts copies are available

It helps that we have a large number of manuscripts written not long after the original. Here's a key for this argument: the more and early manuscripts that you have, it provides more trustworthy testimony and enable a more accurate reconstruction.

So knowing this, how does this help with the New Testament? Norman Geisler says, "the New Testament documents have more manuscripts, earlier manuscripts, and more abundantly supported manuscripts than the best ten pieces of classical literature combined."

More Manuscripts - 5700 hand-written Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. Added on to this there are more than 9000 manuscripts in other languages (Syriac, Coptic, Latin and Arabic). Of these nearly 15,000 manuscripts are complete Bibles, others are books or pages, with a few just being fragments.

Earlier Manuscripts - The New Testament was written soon after the originals.

Example: The earliest undisputed manuscript is a segment of John 18:31-33, 37-38 (known as the John Rylands fragment) Scholars date it between 117-138 A.D. But some argue it is even earlier.

The Iliad has the next shortest gap of about 500 years; most other ancient works 1000 years. But we don't doubt or question the authenticity of those. The New Testament gap is about 25 years and maybe less.

More Abundantly Manuscripts - the church fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Tertullian all quoted the New Testament about 36,289 times that all but 11 VERSES of the New Testament can be reconstructed from their quotations.

So Why the Bible?

- 1.) Portrayals of Jesus, The Bible portrays a picture of Jesus that if wrong then has huge implications for us. But if the Bible does portray Jesus correctly, and there is evidence that confirms this, then that means it is huge for us.
- 2.) We have several writers that have written the Bible over a period of 2000 years, instead of one human writer. And there is also continuity of material.
- 3.) The bible prophesies future events, and 75% of those prophecies have come true.

Prediction of Jesus' coming
the Rise of Cyrus and the Persian Empire
Fall of the Jerusalem in A.D. 70
Daniel 11

Ultimately the Authenticity of the Bible comes down to a faith claim. We accept the authority of the Bible by faith, however, it is not a blind faith. In fact, it is a pretty reasonable faith, that what we have is accurate. If accurate, then the claims the biblical authors make about Jesus and Jesus himself, are true and thus demand authority in our lives.