

INTRODUCTION

2018 is the Year of the Bible. We started 2018 by learning the outline of Old Testament history. The value of Walk Thru the Old Testament was that we got an overview of the timeline of the Bible from Creation to Christ. Last Sunday we experienced the scripture memory presentation from Piercing Word. I was able to watch the service via live streaming late Sunday night in Nairobi. As I watched them quote and sing the Sermon on the Mount, it brought tears to my eyes—maybe part of it was being halfway around the world, but I was certainly blessed.

We're in a three part series, "Can You Trust the Bible?" The Bible has had more influence on our world, and our nation than any book in history. In the first message of this series we explored what Jesus had to say about the Bible. He claimed that what we have is the written record of the Words of God. He claimed that the historical events in the Old Testament were true, and He claimed that the entire Bible is about Him: He's in every book of the Bible. I recited the Jesus in every book from Genesis to Revelation both in Nairobi and to the Massai warriors in Narok. They were on their feet at Psalms; they were shouting when I got to Matthew and by the time I got to Revelation they were standing their chairs yelling, and falling to their faces on the floor ... I think they liked it. They get a lot more excited about truth in Africa, and I like it.

When I was growing up, we sang a song in Sunday School about the Bible. It was pretty simple. It said, "The B.I.B.L.E. Yes, that's the Book for me! I stand alone on the Word of God. The B.I.B.L.E.!" That's great to sing as a kid. But sixty years later, I still believe that the Bible is the Word of God but I believe it for more reasons than a song I sing.

In the last message we began to talk about five proofs that convince us of the reliability of the Bible. We spoke about (1) The Bible's Divine Inspiration. It is God-breathed. And God didn't just breathe life into those men who wrote these words, He still breathes life into us when we read these words. The second proof was (2) The Bible's Eyewitness Confirmation. The New Testament isn't some random collection of myths and legends about a magic worker named Jesus. Actual eyewitnesses wrote this book and they confirmed each other's testimony. I want to give you three more proofs to convince you of the reliability of the Bible.

3. The Bible's Academic Evaluation.

There is a popular lie that says the Bible has been copied and translated so many times that we can't trust it. I have never watched the Television Show, "The View." I have seen snippets of it and I think I'm safe to say they don't share my view of reality. But someone sent me a clip from "The View" a few months ago. Somehow the Bible came up in their discussion and one of the brilliant ladies dismissed the Bible by saying, "Oh, the Bible has been translated and retranslated like over 65 times, so you can't really trust it." And everyone agreed. Really? Are we going to let those television personalities dismiss the Bible with one statement?

Let me approach the Bible from two academic directions. First let's talk about the scientific evidence of the Bible, and then we'll talk about the literary evidence for the Bible. The Bible isn't a scientific textbook, but it contains statements about science. While science tries to tell

us how the world was created, the Bible tells us *why* we were created. There are statements in the Bible that are advanced beyond the scientific knowledge at the time they were written.

For instance, scientists in the past considered that the stars were countable. In 135 A.D. Ptolemy wrote that there were 1,056 stars and in 1620 Johannes Kepler wrote that there were 1,005 stars. Today with the Hubble Space telescope, we know the number of stars can't even be counted. Centuries before, the Bible declared what scientists now know to be true—that the Universe is expanding, and contains more stars than can be counted: Jeremiah, "I will make the descendants of David as countless as the stars in the sky." (Jeremiah 33:22 NIV) Ancient scientists taught the earth was flat, and sat on a table. But the prophet Isaiah wrote, "He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth." (Isaiah 40:22 NIV) And Job wrote that God suspends the earth over nothing. (Job 26:7 NIV)

Dr. Phillip Schaff, Professor at Union Theological Seminary once wrote: "There is no conflict between science and the Bible. It's just that sometimes the theories of science need time to catch up to the truth of the Bible." (*History of the Christian Church*)

Let's consider the literary reliability of the Bible. For the sake of comparison, let's compare the Bible with other ancient literary texts. First, there are many ancient texts without an identified writer. But when an ancient manuscript has an author who is identified, and can be verified in history, it gives greater weight to validity of that writing. Let's just consider one of the New Testament writers. Luke, a Gentile Physician, not only wrote the story of Jesus, but he also kept a record of the growth of the early church. You can tell by his use of vocabulary and syntax that Dr. Luke was a highly educated man. Even to this day, Bethesda Medical Clinic in Tyler gives the coveted Dr. Luke award to physicians who reflect the healing ministry of Jesus.

When Dr. Luke wrote his narrative about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus he began by writing: "Many have undertaken to compile a narrative about the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as the original eyewitnesses and servants of the word handed them down to us. It also seemed good to me, since I have carefully investigated everything from the very first, to write to you in an orderly sequence." (Luke 1:1-3 CSB) That is the preface to a carefully investigated, organized, and reliable account.

When you compare the Bible to other ancient writings, there are two standards that are used by those who determine the literary value of ancient writing. The first is how many written texts or manuscripts exist of all or part of a document. The second is the amount of time that elapsed between the events being described and the earliest written record of those events.

All my life I have heard of the heroics of Homer, the genius of Julius Caesar, and the life and philosophy of Plato and I've never hear anyone doubt the truth of these stories. But when you conduct a literary study, you will find that the New Testament outshines every other ancient literature. We have over 5,800 hand-written Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, and some were written 25-40 years after Jesus' death.

First, let's look at a graph that compares the number of manuscripts of the New Testament with other ancient writings. We have about 5,800 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. If you add the Latin, Coptic, and Syrian manuscripts, that number soars to over 30,000. Coming in second are about 1,800 manuscripts about Homer. And it goes down from there when you look at the number of manuscripts for Julius Caesar and Plato, about 200 each.

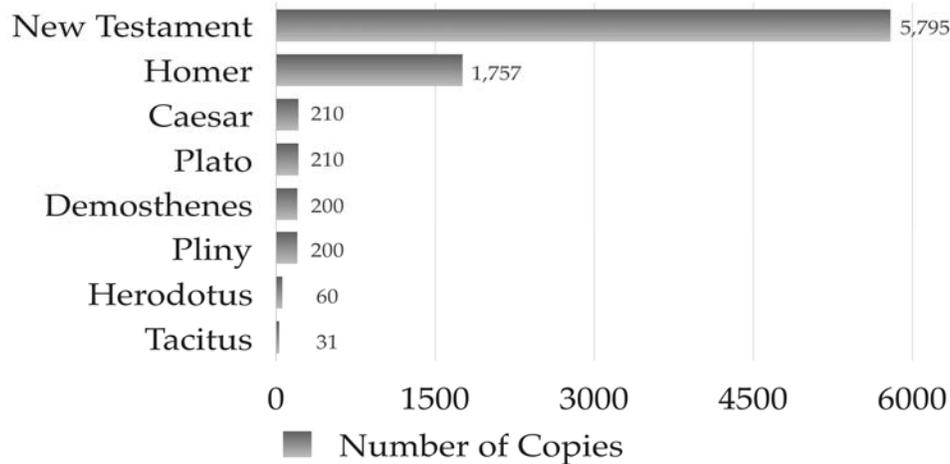


Fig. 1. Copies of Ancient Texts. Used by permission. Brian Seagraves, Christian Apologist, Tallahassee, FL

This next graph shows the elapsed time between the historical events and when they were written down. Again, the Bible wins with events written down 25-40 years after the death of Jesus. People quote Plato all the time, but we don't have an account of his life and words earlier than 1,200 years after his death. Homer comes in second, but nothing was written down until 500 years after his story. But the New Testament accounts started being written 25-40 years after the death of Jesus. That's very important.

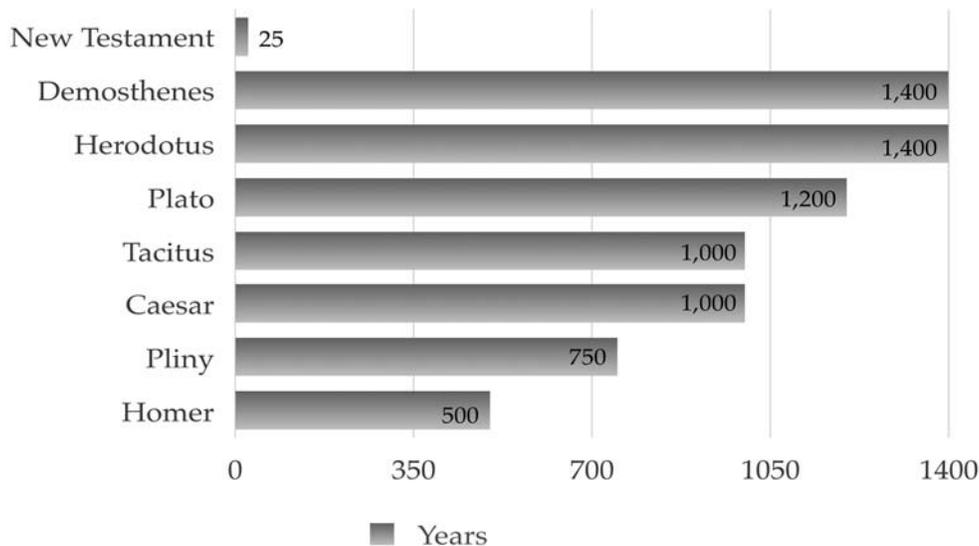


Fig. 2. Time Between Actual Event and Documentation. Used by permission. Brian Seagraves, Christian Apologist, Tallahassee, FL

If the early disciples had published lies about Jesus, people who lived during that time would have objected. Those of my age can remember historical events from 25-40 years ago. If someone wrote a book that said that in 1985 John F. Kennedy was still alive and enjoying retirement in Cape Cod, all of us would say, "Hey, that's false history." We know from eyewitness accounts that he was shot and killed in Dallas on November 22, 1963.

If Matthew, Mark and Luke had published lies about Jesus, there would have been a loud, public outcry about the false reports. But nobody in that age, until now has challenged the truth of what they wrote.

So, the literary integrity of the Bible gets an A+ under academic evaluation. When you apply the same literary standards to the Bible that are applied to other historical literature, you find there is no other writing that can compare with the textual integrity of the Bible.

You may wonder about the Old Testament. For centuries, critics of the Bible complained the text of the Old Testament wasn't reliable. But in 1947 a shepherd boy living near the Dead Sea tossed a rock into a cave and heard a jar break. This led to the discovery of 800 ancient manuscripts which included portions of every book in the Old Testament except Esther. The Dead Sea Scrolls verified the text of the Old Testament is accurate. For instance, before the Dead Sea Scrolls, the oldest surviving manuscript of the book of Isaiah was dated to 900 A.D. But one of the jars contained a complete scroll of Isaiah dating back to 200 B.C. In one discovery, the textual evidence for the Old Testament jumped back over 1,000 years! No other ancient book in the world has the kind of literary integrity the Bible has. It passes the test of academic evaluation.

The fourth proof for the authenticity of the Bible is:

4. The Bible's Amazing Compilation.

The Bible is a book of miracles. There is the miracle of Divine Inspiration, but there is also a miracle divine compilation. When you examine how the 66 books of the Bible were compiled, you cannot ignore the hand of God in this process.

The thing that makes the Bible totally unique is that it was written over a period of 1,600 years by forty different people, in three different languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. Moses was a prince of Egypt writing in the wilderness. Daniel was a prime minister writing from a palace in Iraq. Paul was a prisoner writing from behind bars. Amos was a farmer, Peter was a fisherman, Solomon was a king, Luke was a doctor, and Matthew worked for the IRS!

The way the Bible is compiled is truly a miracle. I could pick forty people in Tyler, who are from the same culture, and speak the same language, and ask them to write a five-page essay on only one subject, the meaning of life. When they have finished I could compare the results. Do they agree with each other? Have they written a cohesive storyline? Of course not! But the Bible was written by forty men who lived in different cultures and different times, and yet the Bible has a consistent theme: God's redemption of lost humanity.

In Hebrews, we read that God used many writers, but the final writer of truth is Jesus. The Bible says, "Long ago God spoke to the fathers by the prophets at different times and in different ways. In these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son." (Hebrews 1:1-2 CSB)

There are still some skeptics of the Bible, who doubt the consistency of the plot of this book. They claim it is just accidental or coincidental that these sixty-six books all tell the same story. Let me illustrate this.

After the American War of Independence and the Second War of Independence, the War of 1812, our ally, France wanted to send us a gift to memorialize our quest for liberty. So they had artists design and build the Statue of Liberty that stands in New York Harbor today.

The French craftsman made the different pieces of the Statute of Liberty. And in 1885, 350 different pieces of the Statue of Liberty were shipped from France to the US. When the parts arrived in America, the workers assembled the pieces to form the statue. This was not unusual because all the parts were cast in the same place and numbered for the reassembly. But suppose the parts of the Statue of Liberty had been cast by forty different men who lived over a period of 1,600 hundred years living in many different cultures. For the parts of the Statue of Liberty to come together as one beautiful monument could only be described as a miracle of God. That's what we have with the Bible.

These writers knew nothing about the other writers, yet when you bring the sixty-six books of the Bible together, you have one cohesive storyline: the Redemption of lost humanity through the death of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God.

The final proof for the reliability of the Bible is found in:

5. The Bible's Enduring Preservation.

The Bible has endured the ages unlike any other book. The Psalmist wrote: "Your word, Lord, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens." (Psalm 119:89 NIV) The Bible has had many enemies through the centuries. Eusebius wrote that in 303 A.D., the Roman Emperor, Diocletian, issued an edict to destroy all Bibles and Christians. It is estimated only fifty copies of the Bible survived this attack. Yet, only a few years later, Diocletian's successor, Constantine, legalized Christianity and ordered additional copies of the Bible to be copied at government expense.

For centuries the Bible was only translated into Greek and Latin. During the years called the Dark Ages, the only copies of the Bibles' hand-copied manuscripts were kept in the churches, and few of them were actually read. The Bible became more of a shrine.

In the early 1300s, scholars like John Wycliffe started translating the Bible into English. The Roman Catholic Church resisted the effort to translate the Bible into such a vulgar language, so they opposed these efforts. In 1408, Wycliffe's hand-copied English Bible was burned. And his body was later dug up and burned for the crime of translating the Bible into English.

Later, men like William Tyndale continued the effort to make the Bible available to common people. Tyndale was appalled at the lack of biblical knowledge, even among the priests. After translating the New Testament into English, Tyndale was arrested as a heretic by the church and on October 6, 1536 he was strangled and then burned at the stake. Like a Bible that survives a house fire and retains a smoky odor, all of our Bibles carry the lingering odor of the sacrifice of John Wycliff and William Tyndale.

Voltaire was a French intellectual. He considered the Bible a worthless piece of literature. He once wrote: "The Bible. That is what fools have written, what imbeciles commend, what rogues teach and young children are made to learn by heart." He predicted that within fifty years of his death there wouldn't be a single Bible left in France. But I love what Corrie ten Boom pointed out about his prediction. She wrote: "Voltaire expected that within fifty years of his lifetime there would not be one Bible in the world. His house is now a distribution center for Bibles in many languages."

The Bible has been attacked, abused, and outlawed; yet it lives on. Dr. Bernard Ramm has written: "A thousand times over, the death knell of the Bible has been sounded, the funeral procession formed, the inscription cut on the tombstone, and committal read. But somehow, the corpse never stays put."

In spite of all the attacks on the Bible, it still stands as the most read and most widely distributed book in the history of the world. Thousands of authors have come and gone, and are long forgotten. But the truth of the Bible will live on forever.

There have been many literary giants throughout history, but none of their works can compare with the Bible. From A to Z, there have been some wonderful writers throughout history, but none of their works compare with the Word of God.

The artistry of Aesop cannot approach the authority of this Account of the Almighty.
The best of Browning does not burn with the brightness of this blessed book.
The charm of Chaucer cannot compare with this collection of the claims of Christ!
The dreams of Dante dwindle beside this dissertation of Deity!
The emotions of Emerson do not equal the excellent expressions of this extraordinary edition!
The fantasies of Frost fail beside the full foundation from the Finisher of our Faith.
The gems of Gandhi give way to the greatness of God's gospel of grace!
The heroics of Homer are humbled by these hope-filled harmonies of heaven.
The imaginations of Irving are insipid beside the inspiring insights of the Infinite One.
The janglings of Joyce are jaded beside this joy-filled Journal of Jesus.
The keenest of Keats can't keep up with the keynote of the King!
The lyrics of Longfellow are lackluster beside the Library of our Living Lord!
The manuscripts of Milton melt beside the magnificent manuscript of our Master.
The notes of Newton are nullified by the noble nature of this New Covenant.
The opinions of O'Neill are overwhelmed by the oratory of the Omnipotent One.
The philosophy of Plato pales beside the Perfection of these pages of Prophecy.
The quotes of Quarles are quaint beside the quality of these quotations.

The rhymes of Ruskin recede before this remarkable record of our redemption.
The stories of Shakespeare shrink beside the supernatural scripture of our Savior.
The tales of Tennyson seem trite beside this tremendous testimony of truth.
The utterings of Updike are undermined by the unveiling of the Unknown.
The virtue of Virgil vanishes beside the vitality of the verses in this volume.
The writings of Wordsworth are weak beside the wonderful witness of this Word.
The exactings of Xenophon are exceeded by the expressions of the Exalted One.
The yarns of Yeats yield to the yearnings of our Yokefellow.
And the zeal of Zola is zero compared to the Zenith of Zion!¹

Can you trust the Bible? You can trust that this is the Word of God. You can trust it today. You can trust tomorrow. And you can trust it for the rest of eternity. The Bible says, "The grass withers, the flowers fade, but the word of our God remains forever." (Isaiah 40:8 CSB)

¹Adapted and expanded from *Songtime*, by Dr. Lewis Lehman

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



David O. Dykes, Pastor
Green Acres Baptist Church
Tyler, Texas
