



Did the things we read about  
in the bible *actually* happen?

# Can we trust the Bible?

Is what we have in the Bible today the same as what was written down 2000 years ago? Has it been changed? Has it been tampered with? A lot of people say it has.

Talking with my friend Bill, he told me of a conversation he had with a fellow who said, "You can't trust the Bible. Too many people down through the ages have tampered with it".



Another friend of mine, Natalie, said that while she was in Turkey a number of Muslim people said to her that the monks in the dark ages (13<sup>th</sup> Century) changed the Bible and included blasphemy about Jesus claiming to be the Son of God. When Nat asked them where they had heard this they said they had learnt it in their religious education - they were taught this at school.

Could it be true? Could the Bible have been tampered with in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century?

If it has been, then we all may as well pack up and go home. But of course the Bible hasn't been tampered with and I would like for us to look at how we can believe with confidence that: First the words in this book have been passed down accurately; they are exactly the words that were originally written and second, the things that the disciples saw Jesus do and the things He said, are a reliable account of what actually happened.



So let us critically examine the accuracy of the Bible the same way an historian or archeologist would examine the authenticity of an ancient document.

Has the Bible been tampered with down through the ages? Have the words and facts changed from those the disciples wrote? A simple way of finding out is to compare the words on these pages with the words on the original autograph copy of Mathew, Mark, Luke and John. That would certainly prove whether or not the Bible has changed. But unfortunately we don't have the autograph, in fact we don't have any autograph documents from any writer of antiquity of that era. The autographs of Socrates, Plato, and Caesar, all the classical authors are no longer with us because the fabric it was written on has long since rotted away.



The New Testament as well as other literature of antiquity, was written on papyrus. Papyrus reeds were grown on the banks of the Nile, and the Egyptians were the great paper makers of ancient times.

They collected the papyrus reeds, sliced them down the middle, criss-crossed the sliced reeds, glued them and pressed them.

The result was a very good paper, but the only problem was it would not last. It rotted away in time.



Even our paper today which is much more durable still only has a relatively short life span. A 1920 marriage certificate we had in the office at one time needed very gentle handling because it was literally falling apart.

When my grandfather died my father was under his house going through a whole bunch of things his father had collected over the years and he came across a tin full of money. There were literally hundreds of pounds in it.

But when He opened up the tin, took out the notes most of them dissolved in his fingers. That's why the Dead Sea Scrolls and other ancient works are displayed in temperature controlled glass cabinets under special lights, because Papyrus does not last.

So what do historians do to verify the accuracy of a document if they can't go back to the original. If the autographs have long since rotted away, how does one know if the gospels we have today are the same as what was originally written. Well there are a number of tests, which can be applied. The first is simply to go back to the oldest surviving copy and compare it with what we have today. Obviously if we can find a really old copy and it's the same as what we have today then we can be confident that the document we have today has not been tampered with, at least from that time till now.

Have we ancient copies of the Bible? Well yes we do. We have many thousands of ancient copies displayed in museums and libraries around the world today. Most of which are between 100 to 300 years after the originals.

The Bibliographical Test is an examination of the textual transmission by which documents reach us.

How reliable are the copies we have in regards to the number of manuscripts and the time interval between the original.

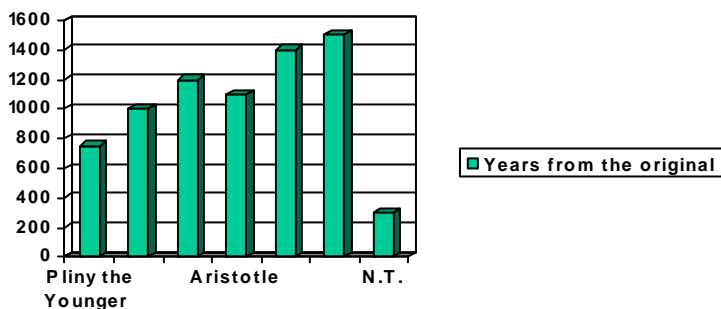
The oldest fragment of the New Testament is a portion of the gospel of John, which can be seen in the John Ryland's University Library in Manchester, England. This manuscript was dated at about 125 AD, only a few decades after John first wrote it. The Chester Beatty Papyri, which is an almost complete copy of the New Testament, was written in A.D.155. Chester Beatty is an American collector of ancient manuscripts and this copy of the New Testament Bible is located in the Beatty Museum in Dublin. There is the Bodmer Papyri II written around



The John Rylands Fragment  
John 18:31-33

about 200 A.D. and the Codex Sinaiticus, which is on display in the British Museum. The Codex Alexandria is another ancient but complete copy of the New Testament. The list goes on and on. All written before 200 A.D. All meticulously checked against the Bible you have in your hands today.

It's very interesting to compare the oldest copies of the Bible with other ancient copies of classical authors. For example: Pliny the Younger, who was a famous Roman statesman, wrote extensively in the first century. We don't have any originals of his letters, of course; they have long since rotted away. But the oldest copy is dated 750 years after the original. With CAESAR'S GALLIC WARS written in 1<sup>st</sup> Century, the oldest surviving copy we have is dated 1000 years after the original. Some of Plato's work was written 1200 years after the original. Some of Aristotle's works were written around 43BC. The closest manuscript we have of Aristotle's works is 1100AD; that's 1400 years after the original. Sophocles 1400 years. Euripedes 1500 years. But with the New Testament we have parts of manuscripts today which are just 50 to 80 years after the original and we have complete manuscripts which are 200 to 300 years after the original.

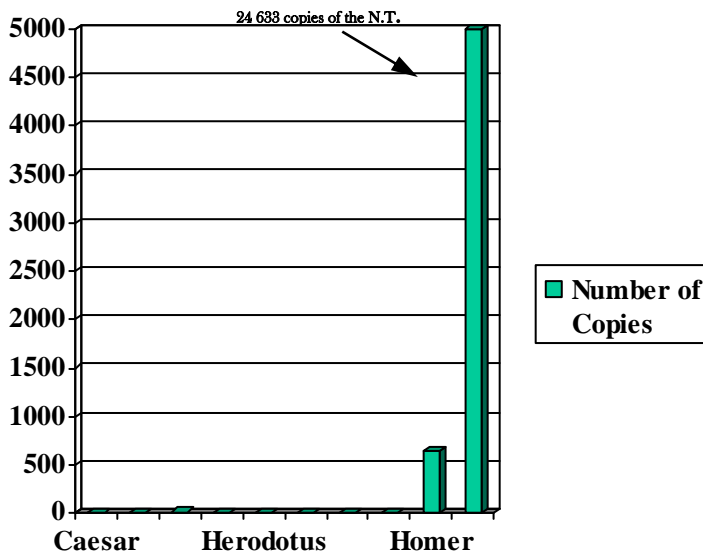


*Chart showing number of years from the oldest surviving copy to the original*

Another important way of verifying the accuracy of the Bible is to have a look at how many copies there are of those ancient manuscripts and how they compare with each other. If all the copies are exactly the same, chances are the copying process has been accurate. As the autograph gospels were being circulated around the world people would make copies of them as they received them. Just like I do when someone hands me a good newspaper article or seminar paper, I

make a photocopy. In those days they had to make a hand written copy. From one end of the world to the other the original autograph gospels were being passed around and each time people received it they would make a copy. So what Historians do is compare all the copies and of course the greater number of copies there are with no discrepancies, the more you can be confident that they are accurate copies of the original.

For example, the oldest copies of CAESAR'S GALLIC WARS in existence today is 10 manuscripts. Now that's not too many, but of course no one anywhere says that Caesar never fought the Gallic wars. A 1000 years are the closest manuscripts from the original. Plato's Tetralogies: 7 Manuscripts. Tacitus the Roman Historian: 20 Manuscripts and then there is Thucydides. Many people consider Thucydides the most accurate historian of antiquity yet there are only 8 manuscripts and those are 1300 years after Thucydides died. Herodotus is 8 manuscripts in a 1300-year time span. Pliny the Younger: 7 manuscripts, Euripides: 9, and for Aristotle there are only 5 of any one work. Homers Iliad has a whopping 643 manuscripts so you can be sure that the copies of Homer's Iliad is a faithful rendering of what Homer wrote. But it still falls well short of the New Testament — 24,633 ancient copies and many of those are



*Chart showing number of ancient copies in existence today*

between 100 and 400 years from the original. There are more ancient copies of the New Testament to compare for discrepancy than any other ancient manuscript on the planet.

But we can also add to this array of evidence the writings of the early church fathers that lived within 150-300 years of Jesus Christ himself. We have still in existence today a staggering amount of letters and sermons of early church leaders which have sections of the scriptures written out. When I deliver my messages I write out sections of scripture in my sermons in the same way the early church Fathers used to write out sections of scripture in their sermons. There are in existence today many sermons and letters from the early church fathers. There are over 86,429 quotations of scriptures, which will re-create the entire New Testament bar about a dozen verses. You can be confident that what you hold in your hand today is what was written down the first time. There are simply no other writings from this period with anything like the support the Bible has. Everyone believes that Julius Caesar came to Britain in 55 BC, but we only have nine manuscripts to support this and the earliest was written 900 years after the event!

*'The interval between the dates of original composition and the earliest extant evidence becomes so small as to be in fact negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed. Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established.'*

Sir Frederic G. Kenyon, former director and principal librarian of the British Museum.

In contrast, we have thousands of manuscripts of the Gospels, most of which were written only two hundred years after the event. But this does not prove that what was written down was accurate, The Bibliographical Test doesn't prove that the account of Jesus' life is the truth. All it proves is that the text we have now is what was originally recorded. The question remains; when writing about the

things Jesus said and did, did the gospel writers embellish the story? Did they really witness 5000 people being fed by 5 loaves and 2 fish? Did Jesus really say that He was God, and more importantly did Jesus really rise from the dead?



One has still to determine whether that written record is credible and to what extent it can be trusted. That is the problem of internal criticism, which is the second test of historicity and something which is employed by historians, and even lawyers today.

The first thing a lawyer or historian would look for in determining credibility are **eyewitnesses**. The gospel writers - where did they hear the story of Jesus? From a friend of a friend of a friend? No, the writers of the New Testament wrote as eyewitnesses or they recorded eyewitness accounts. The gospel of Matthew was written by Matthew, a man who lived, walked and talked with Jesus. Luke begins his gospel this way: *"I have examined everything carefully from those who were eyewitnesses....."*

One of the most critical tests for me is the many eyewitnesses who heard and saw the things that Jesus did. Back in New Testament times the community was a most powerful force in determining truth. And if the disciples dared to add or embellish the words, miracles and resurrection details of Jesus, there were many people still alive who knew Jesus and who would have been very quick to deal harshly with such exaggerators. They knew what Jesus said, they knew where He went, what He did and if the disciples would have dared to add or to take away, there were many antagonistic people ready to correct them.

For example in 1 John 1:3 the apostle John says *"we proclaimed to you what we have seen and heard..."*

In 2 Peter 1:16, Peter is talking to a Jewish audience and he says *"We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty"*.



You know, it is interesting today that a lot of people say to me that back then people were gullible; they couldn't determine between fact and fiction, between stories and truth. Well, let me say that view is not held by anyone who has studied people in the Roman Empire. The people of that era were not stupid. Roman and Jewish engineers were building things, which we still admire today. Roman and Jewish administrators organised and governed brilliantly. From science to law, the people of that era were most definitely not naïve or gullible. They knew the difference between fact and fiction. They knew just as well as we do that virgins don't give birth to babies, dead men stay dead and that walking on water is not a normal human activity. The eyewitnesses of these incidents couldn't explain what had happened, but neither could they ignore the evidence either. Peter says we were eyewitnesses. John says we were eyewitnesses, Matthew says we were eyewitnesses.

In John 20: 30-31 *John says there were many other signs Jesus performed. "We saw them",* he says. "So many miracles that we couldn't write them all down." The evidence for Christianity, by those who witnessed them, was conclusive that Jesus was God. John says the evidence we have seen is sufficient for an intelligent belief.



When Luke wrote the book of Acts he says in the first three verses "Christ appeared to the apostles with many convincing proofs over a period of 40 days." Now that phrase 'convincing proofs' we might describe today as overwhelming evidence, good enough for a court of Law. Essentially Luke is saying, I am not an eyewitness but these men and women are. They lived with Jesus, ate with Jesus over a 40 day period after the resurrection and because of their eyewitness accounts I too am compelled to believe.

Now there is a second important consideration when looking at the reliability of the eyewitnesses. In the presence of some of the most ardent, hostile, knowledgeable witnesses, they often said "*and you yourselves know what we are*

witnesses they said *“and you know what we are talking about because you yourselves have seen or know people who have seen Christ’s miracles.”*

In Acts 2:22 Peter is before a very antagonistic Jewish audience who refuse to accept Jesus as Lord and Saviour and this is what Peter says to them. *“Men of Israel, listen to this; Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through Him, as you yourselves know”*. If that audience hadn’t seen those signs, everything Peter would have said would have been discounted and thrown out. And he would have been lucky to have made it out alive. But what does history show happened — thousands were added to the church. You see, it was presented in front of knowledgeable people and so if Peters’ claims were untrue the very community itself would have corrected it.

In Acts 26:22 Paul is brought to the King and the King says *‘your great learning is driving you mad’*. Paul says *‘I am speaking rationally and truthfully and you yourselves know this, because these things were not done in a corner, you know what I’m talking about’*.

Many people today say they cannot believe because the “Bible is unreliable”, many people say they can’t believe “because the gospel writers account of what happened is not credible”. The very fact that the apostles and disciples appealed to the knowledge of their listeners concerning the evidence they spoke about shows to me that what is written is what happened.

Even the apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:6 *‘and Christ appeared to over 500 and the majority of them are alive right now’*. Paul was saying go and check it out right now. If there was no-one, he would have been executed right then and there.

It’s interesting that people especially the Jewish authority and religious leaders of that time, never denied the details of Christ’s life, His miracles or even the resurrection. They never disputed that, because there were too many witnesses. But they still refused to follow Christ. They couldn’t deny Christ’s existence, His

miracles or His resurrection because there were too many witnesses. But because of their hardness of heart, their stubborn proud spirits, they refused to act on the truth.

Today people refuse to follow Christ because they deny the accuracy of the Bible, Christ's existence, His miracles and the resurrection. Well, I'm sure you will agree, if one looks at the Bible and its claims with a critical eye using good logic and historical methods, it takes a brave man or perhaps a proud and stubborn man, to say there is not enough evidence that Christ is who He claimed to be.

What about you? Have you given yourself totally over to Christ or is your mind still full of doubt? A good look at the reliability of the scriptures show them to be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Jesus is who He is described in the Bible. He is the One sent by God to be the saviour of the world; He died for the sins of the world and rose again. And for those who know they are sinners and want to be made right with God He calls them to make Him Lord and saviour of their lives. The Bible tells us of a time when Jesus confronted some men who were soon to become His disciples and He said to them, "*Come and follow me*". Jesus says the same thing to us today: "*Come follow me*": Will you surrender your will to Him today? I encourage you to do so.

The message  
of the Bible  
has its roots  
in history and  
its basis in  
fact.



Commit yourself wholeheartedly to Christ for  
He is the way the truth and the life.



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