

Why Should We Trust the Bible?

An Analysis by Robert Jackson

Very often, we start having all kinds of doubts about the Bible's validity – maybe we read something in a book or saw something on TV that goes against the Bible, and we're confused about what the truth really is. The right response to this kind of situation is to *search* with eagerness for answers (1 Thessalonians 5:21). I have composed this short analysis to shed some light on doubts concerning the Bible's validity.

Introduction: Some Preliminary Considerations

- **Be God's Friend:** The most important thing in delving into this kind of apologetic theology is our mindset – our attitude to it. As Disciples, we've always got to be friends with God (John 15:15). Friends give each-other the benefit of the doubt. Even when the evidence is strong, it always *hard* to convince someone that a trusted friend of theirs has done something against them. We may eventually be persuaded that it's true, but not without a fight! Don't throw out your faith – give the Bible the benefit of the doubt until you're sure of all the facts.
- **Be positive:** It's not wrong to question – it's essential. An unquestioning faith is a dead faith – because it has ceased to grow. I don't think I'm alone when I say that the times my faith has grown the most is the times I've asked the most questions – and found answers. In fact, the questions we have are *so* important that what matters is that we have the perseverance and eagerness to keep searching until we do find the answers. Much of Scripture was simply written to answer people's questions! (Luke 1:3, 1 Corinthians 7:1a). The truth *is* out there, so be positive in your search for answers.
- **Distance Yourself:** Are there people who've doubted every inch of the Bible? Have elaborate arguments been constructed to "prove" that the Bible is false, untrustworthy, contradictory and corrupt? Absolutely! Don't be alarmed by the mere existence of every form of doubt and derision – we should expect this! (1 Timothy 4:1) Don't be affected by people or arguments simply because they question things that you hold dear – test the arguments first! See if they are accurate, and be earnest. Here's a good question to ask (I use it a lot!): "Do I honestly believe that there aren't any disciples out there who have come across this before, and found answers?" Just because *you* have been taken back by something does not mean that there aren't disciples who've heard it all before, and *do* have answers!

My advice is this: Be eager, and never believe Satan's lie that matters which disturb us "aren't important". Never just "shelve" your doubts, because every time you do, you're one step closer to shelving God altogether! The more we test and approve our faith, the more quickly we will gain an unshakeable confidence in God and His Word.

1. God – The Alpha

Now we go on to ask if the Bible is valid. The Bible constantly claims to be God's Word (eg, 1 Peter 1:20-21), and its authors invariably claim to speak God's words, not their own. Hence, with these kinds of claims, we must admit the following:

[For the Bible to be true, God must exist, and he must have spoken to us.](#)

The Bible (wisely) never attempts to prove God's existence, it *assumes* that God exists. If you don't believe in God, you could not possibly believe in the Bible. Do you believe in an all-powerful creator of the universe? If you do, then you are ready to approach logically and rationally the claims that the Bible makes. If not, then you may as well be reading a foreign language! (I will not attempt to prove that there is a creator behind this universe, because if you don't believe it than it is unlikely that any amount of argument will persuade you otherwise.)

The first thing that the Bible implies about God is that *he has spoken to us*, since the Bible claims to actually communicate to us the message of God. It is logically obvious that unless you are prepared to believe that God has spoken, you can not ever be convinced that the Bible is true. I point this out because there are a great many people who've read the Bible and even written books on it who simply don't believe that God has spoken. Hence, they do everything they can to discredit it – not due to any shortcoming of Scripture, but due to their own unwillingness to believe in a Creator!

It is not possible to prove logically that God has spoken; He may or may not have. The view that God exists but has not spoken is called Deism – which says that God created the world and got everything in motion, but would never break his own rules of science by intervening – God is a watchmaker who plays no role in his creation. (Too bad for all those people who look at the creation and say “This is faulty – I want to return it to the manufacturer.”) When atheists and desists argue against the Bible, they are revealing more about their own world-view than any failures or inadequacies in the Bible itself.

Christianity presupposes that God would not leave the world in the state that it is in (and has been in for some time now). It puts forward that God has intervened miraculously in his creation to reveal his will to us, and even provide us with a Saviour. If you are unwilling to entertain the notion that God has spoken, then you are unwilling to even look at the Bible – if you read it, I guarantee that it will all be nonsense, since you are refusing to accept even the possibility that it is from God – and that negates even the remotest chance that the Bible is true.

As I've already said, the Bible assumes that God exists and that God has spoken. In order to even entertain the Bible, you must be willing to entertain these possibilities. If you're not, then there's simply nothing more I can say. If you are, then further discourse can take place.

2. The Nature of Revelation

If God has spoken, then what form would that revelation take? We would be quite reasonable in forming certain logical expectations of God's words. To begin with, they

must be *intelligible* to man, or else God's speaking would be profitless! For it to be intelligible, then, it would need to come through human language. It would presumably be *persistent* through time, or else it would only be of benefit to the very few. Hence, it would be reasonable to assume that God's revelation would most likely be written.

The work would need to be *accurate* – any error would mean that it could not possibly be from God! This includes scientific, historical and logical errors, as well as contradictions – God's speaking must have none of these.

It must be *supernatural*, which basically means that it must attest to its divine origin, with pretty consistent evidence against it being a mere work of man. It must likewise be *universal*, applying to all people of all cultures.

Just as importantly as anything else, there can be no doubt that God's revelation must be *distinct* from everything else – everything that man has written of his own accord. It needs to be clear what is and is not a part of the revelation. If God failed in making His revelation clearly distinct, then He would have failed to speak clearly to man! This is obviously unacceptable.

Closely related to it being persistent, it must be *preserved* accurately and entirely. There can be no doubt that God would keenly preserve His revelation through time. Any text that has been irredeemably corrupted has surely not been preserved by God!

We would expect God's word to be *authoritative*, and never unsure of where its authority lies. It will speak powerfully and to the point, without exception. And, finally, we would do well to assume that God's word is *practical* – it must work, if indeed it is from God!

All right, if you've stayed with me this far, you've seen that, if God has spoken, then we could reasonably have a series of expectations as to the nature of this revelation. So now, we can approach the Bible itself.

3. Why we can trust the Bible

To put it simply, the Bible is the only collection of works which not only fulfils all of our expectations for the revelation of God, but it fulfils them ultimately, skilfully and perfectly. For an ancient work composed over 1000 years, spanning three continents and more than six world empires, and written in three different languages by scores of people from cupbearers to Kings, the Bible has unsurpassed unity and incredible accessibility and relevance to all people of all cultures today. It is a unity not only because it never contradicts itself, but because every author and every book gives exactly the same message about God, man, the world, the future, and everything else.

Rather than continue making generalisations about the Bible, I'll give a rapid overview of how the Bible fulfils our above expectations, and then follow up with four more sections (and two Appendices!) which expand on some specific aspects of the Bible's validity.

- **Intelligible:** People who charge the Bible with being impossible to understand tend to be those who've never made much effort, or who are purposely trying to

confuse issues. The truth is that the Bible is incredibly accessible to all people today. See "7. Translation: God's Word to Us", later on, for more on this.

- **Persistent:** God's Word was recorded on papyrus from the outset, ready to be copied and preserved for later generations.
- **Accurate:** This is obviously a huge kettle of fish! See the Next section, "Can We Believe the Bible's History" for more. (See Appendix A and B for more material relating to this. If you like reading, I would recommend "True and Reasonable", by Douglas Jacoby and "Reasons for Belief" by John Oaks.) The result of all of my investigations into the Bible's accuracy is that, not only is the Bible true and harmonious on every account, it actually *defines* what is true in every subject that it deals with. Wherever it touches on science, it is scientifically accurate; wherever it gives history, it is historically precise, and so on. Nothing comes close to God's Word!
- **Supernatural:** Aside from having divine accuracy in many matters, and attesting to numerous miracles, Biblical prophecy is so startling and accurate that it has no parallel, no one would dare be as specific as the Biblical prophets about events in the future! And yet, without fail, every one of the literally hundreds of prophecies has been fulfilled.
- **Universal:** Once again, the Bible wins out - God's word is speaking to people and transforming their lives from Australia to Azerbaijan, Mexico to Madagascar!
- **Distinct:** See "5. Canonisation: The Distinctness of Scripture", later.
- **Preserved:** See "6. Transmission: The Preservation of Scripture", later.
- **Authoritative:** Without fail, the Bible speaks with authority. It never apologises for the bold statements it makes, and always makes clear that its authority lies in its divine origin, and not with man.
- **Practical:** It does work! Disciples the world over, and all through history, are living proof of this fact.

4. Can we believe in the Bible's history?

A great deal of the Bible is historical narrative, not only in books such as Judges, Samuel and Acts, but there is also narrative in books such as Isaiah, Jeremiah and Galatians. If we accept the Bible as God's Word, then we must accept every historical account as true – a real, actual fact. Fortunately, the Bible, as a historical document, is impeccably preserved, and filled mostly with eyewitness accounts of many verifiable historical events. Never does the Bible tell us of an event that is known to be untrue, or which could not possibly be true. Rather than continue with generalities, I'll give a number of specific examples which show the reliability of Biblical history:

4.1 The Central Event

Perhaps the most significant, and one of the most outrageous, event which the Bible calls us to believe is that Christ was raised from the dead. Everything which I say in Appendix B applies to the Resurrection, and more, because there is no way to explain

the events surrounding Christ unless He was raised. The Christians claimed that He was raised, this is well-recognized. So was the tomb empty or occupied? If He was in the tomb, then either they went to the wrong tomb (meaning that sooner or later someone would have found Him) or they hallucinated the whole thing – very unlikely, given 1 Corinthians 15:6! If the tomb was empty, then perhaps Jesus had survived the cross (the Swoon Theory) but how then could you explain John 19:32-33 – there's no way you could defend this idea. This only leaves one other possibility: That Jesus' body was removed. But by who? If the disciples did it, then they would have died for a lie. Who else would have? There's no plausible explanation! Jesus rose from the dead. (This argument is detailed in endless apologetic books, such as "True and Reasonable" by Douglas Jacoby.) The evidence for it is compelling, to say the least!

4.2 Jericho

There is scarcely any event in the Bible that has been attacked like Joshua 6. But the truth is that all the recent archaeological evidence is pointing more and more in the Bible's favour. (I am here following Walter Kaiser, in "Hard Sayings of the Bible", page 182.) Only out of date ideas and finds can be used to discredit the Jericho narrative. One of the latest excavations shows a flattening of Jericho at around 1450-1400 BC – the exact time of Joshua. There was an outer stone wall 12 feet high and an inner embankment of mud brick 18 feet high. At the top of the embankment was another wall, below which lay the houses of the city's outcasts – Rahab would have lived there. The outer wall collapsed into piles of bricks. There is even evidence of a massive earthquake causing this fall – which measured 8.0 on the Richter scale. Such a quake would have collapsed the mud brick walls over the outer (stone) wall, forming a ramp for the Israelites to enter on. There is evidence of a short siege, and no looting – all of which accords exactly with Joshua's account. In fact, Joshua 6:20 hints at what the archaeologists now think is most likely – the walls fell due to the aftershocks of an earthquake – a perfectly appropriate way for God to work!

4.3 Biblical numbers

I'll admit that there are some instances where numbers in the Bible have been corrupted. 1 Chronicles 19:18 says "7000 charioteers", 2 Samuel 10:18 has "700" – yet they refer to the same event. Somewhere down the line, there was an error in transcription. Should that shake our faith? Hardly – the Hebrew numbers had a mere pen stroke difference between them – the error is in fact so small that they give no implication of any more significant errors having been made. Most of the time, Biblical numbers are trustworthy, even if they don't seem that way! Compare Nehemiah 7 and Ezra 2. Thirty three family units appear in both lists with 153 numbers – 29 of which are not the same in the two accounts. It may seem that they were copied incorrectly. But there is a real possibility that the two lists reflect different situations. Ezra's list was taken when the people assembled *in Babylon*, and Nehemiah took his *in Judea* after the walls were built. The differences are easily accounted for; and they actually show that the lists are genuine, because the numbers would have changed as people died or changed their minds and turned back. So much for numbers!

4.4 Prophecy

As Deuteronomy 18:22 says, if any Biblical prophecy is wrong, then the Lord has not spoken; it is not God's Word, and we may as well go to the pub! (1 Corinthians 15:32)

Many scholars say that biblical prophecies are so accurate that they "must" have been written after the event – hence proving their own atheism/deism. This would date Daniel at 167 BC – hundreds of years after the Bible claims it was written. But the truth is that biblical prophecies were written before they were fulfilled, and have always come true. One example of a supposed "unfulfilled" prophecy is Jonah 3:4 – that Nineveh was to be destroyed. But this ignores Jeremiah 18:7-10! God had *already* made clear that if they repented, they would be spared, and that's exactly what happened. In any case, Nineveh did eventually go back its old ways, and it *was* then destroyed. To give one more example, Ezekiel 26:7-14 prophesies that Tyre will be destroyed, seemingly by Nebuchadnezzar, but Ezekiel 29:18-20 admits that the evil king failed to capture the city. So what about the prophecy? Well, Ezekiel 26 only said that Nebuchadnezzar would ravage the city (which he did do – there was a long and bloody siege), and in v12 there is a sudden shift to "they" – no longer referring to the same King. It was Alexander the Great and his Greek army who fulfilled this verse by capturing the Tyrenians some 200 years later. Without fail, Biblical prophecy is fulfilled!

So where do we “draw the line” with Biblical narrative? Well, the more we investigate the Bible's history the more we find affirmation of what we should have known all along: God does not lie – his Word is without error and infallible; the history of the Bible is no exception!

5. Canonisation – The Distinctness of Scripture

There is continuing controversy among Jews as to the authority and inspiration of their various Talmuds – at least one of which has been hopelessly corrupted, but all of which are technically accepted as God's Word, as they so often claim to be! The inspiration of the Bible is a continual thorn to Muslims, who cannot deny the Koran's claims that it is from God, but nor can they deny the many contradictions which exist between the Bible and the Koran. The overwhelming mass of Hindu scriptures have scarcely even been read, let alone analysed!

Protestant churches stand quite alone among all religions in being able to attest to a clean, defined and harmonious canon. The "canon" is the "contents" page of the Bible – the list of books that have been accepted as God's Word. The process of figuring out the canon is called, not surprisingly, canonisation.

Canonisation is a long and complex process – and a truly fascinating aspect of Biblical history, as well as an incredibly important one! If you're interested in studying it out, I'd recommend "The Journey from Texts to Translations" by Wegner. I obviously won't be going into it here, but I will say this:

If we accept that God must have been behind the composition of the Bible then we have no choice but to accept that God guided canonisation.

As I said earlier, a God who speaks, but then doesn't delineate His revelation, is an incompetent God! Be reasonable on this one, I urge you! How could God go to all the effort of inspiring His word, and then let canonisation fail? It is a ridiculous idea, and needs to be thrown out of court.

6. Transmission – The Preservation of Scripture

We don't have the original scrolls written by Moses, or Paul – or any Biblical author, actually. All we have is copies which have been transmitted over many centuries. I'll give just one specific example to show just how incredibly reliable Biblical transmission has been. For more details, see "True and Reasonable" (Appendix 1) and "The Journey from Texts to Translations" (Part 3).

I will freely admit that, until the late 1940's, the earliest comprehensive Old Testament manuscripts that we had were from the 11th Century AD. This is, at best, 15 centuries *after* the books were actually written. I'll also admit that it takes some faith to believe that the Hebrew Scriptures had been preserved accurately over this time scale, but this faith would not have been an irrational one! The scribes preserving the manuscripts were Jews (a scholarly group called the Masoretes), and they *really did* believe that they were dealing with the Word of God! If they made a mistake, they'd start the whole section over again. If they made a mistake on God's name, they'd burn the whole scroll and start over again, even if the scroll was already 15 metres long!

However, in the middle of the 20th Century the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered – Hebrew manuscripts from the 2nd Century BC (and onwards until about the 2nd Century AD). Many Old Testament books, such as Isaiah, were found *in entirety*. Portions of *every* Old Testament book, except Esther, were also found. Let's focus on just one of the hundreds of scrolls found: The Isaiah scroll, an amazingly well preserved 8 metre long scroll containing all of this incredibly significant prophetic work. This manuscript is about 12 centuries earlier than earliest Isaiah manuscript that we had previous to its discovery! So, we can ask the question:

What changed in all that time? Just how accurate was the transmission over more than a millennium? The answer: Next to nothing was different – a few characters, a few insignificant words here and there – that's it! A good example of just how minor the changes are is recorded in the NIV footnote to Isaiah 53:11 – you can see for yourself how minor the changes are!

Not one doctrine, not one historical event, was cast into doubt! Isaiah was written in the 7th Century BC. We know with irrefutable proof that its transmission from about the 2nd Century BC right up until today has been impeccable. So what about that first 500 years that is still unaccounted for? If anything, its transmission over those years would have been even more painstaking, because the ancient Jews had an amazing reputation as scribes, and, once again, they really did believe that they *were* dealing with God's Word. This is just one of the literally hundreds of historical proofs that the transmission of the Bible has been *par excellence*, without parallel in any ancient text.

7. Translation – God's Word to Us

God loves translation. Jesus spoke in Aramaic, but the Gospels record a translation of what He said into Greek, so that the entire world could understand His words. Not only that, but the New Testament authors tended to quote from a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible – The Septuagint. God honoured the Septuagint translators by

incorporating *their* work into *His* Word! God loves translation, and honours it when it's well done.

No one today is fluent in Classical Greek or Classical Hebrew, although a great number of people have studied the languages very closely. Both languages are widely spoken today (they are the national languages of Greece and Israel, respectively!), but in a different form – languages change over time. Hence, almost everyone approaches the Bible through translations, such as the NIV or NASB, or a translation in Chinese, Swedish or Russian! No book is more translated than the Bible – the figures are staggering; the Bible has been translated into hundreds upon hundreds of languages!

No translation is perfect, but because we know so much about the original languages, and because there is constant scholarly analysis being done, we can have great confidence in the modern translations which we have. They all draw on the relevant manuscripts, such as the Dead Sea Scrolls (except the NKJV - the only modern translation which is based on inferior texts), and they all record uncertain readings in footnotes. This is not the place for me to survey the major translations and suggest which are the best for different needs, but I will say this:

[The level of scholarly work that goes into modern translations means that we are being unreasonable if we refuse to trust them.](#)

A translation is not technically God's Word (only the original manuscripts were really God's Word), but, if done well, then we can have confidence that it is a *faithful rendering* of God's Word to us, and that is all we need! The excellence of Biblical translation has made it the most accessible book to all people around the world.

Conclusion: The Good Book

Anyone who knows that there's a God and knows that He has spoken ought to yearn to hear His voice. And anyone who yearns to hear God's voice can't do better than to investigate the Bible. It stands alone among all religious texts as the one which perfectly and authoritatively fulfils everything that God's Word needs to be, and ought to be. As the Bible itself continually prophesies, there will always be people who discredit it. Such people sometimes fall into the category people who don't want to repent of their sin, and so seek to justify themselves by slandering God's Word (2 Timothy 3:1-7; 2 Peter 2:10-12). Such people have been so staggeringly influential in society today that we would do well to understand their arguments, so that we can refute them, and thereby deepen our own faith, and well as help others.

Appendix A: The Synoptic Problem

I sometimes tend to think that the "Synoptic Problem" exists mainly because medieval European scholars had far too much time on their hands, but it does raise a question that most New Testament readers do think about: Why is there so much similarity in the gospels, especially the first three? Matthew, Mark and Luke are called the "synoptic" Gospels (literally, the "seen together" gospels), and the fact that they seem to borrow

from each-other, but also differ from each-other, in a complex framework is called the "synoptic problem". Take Matthew 8:1-4, Mark 1:40-45 and Luke 5:12-16 – the same event, with some identical wording, but also some variation. How can this be explained?

Endless solutions have been proposed, many of which reject any concept of divine inspiration. The best solution, however, is amazingly simple: The "living contact" theory. The three Evangelists all knew each-other, and corroborated, probably on more than one occasion, and this personal contact, as well as shared memories, accounts for the similarities. However, they actually *wrote* their Gospels after they had hung out, and after doing some further research of their own, which accounts for the differences. See "New Testament Survey" by Merrill Tenney, page 139-145, for more details.

Most other views emphasise the existence of other source documents and traditions, but no evidence of this can be found – and all such speculation is unnecessary when we realise that they could all have met together. The Gospels were written in the individual styles of the Evangelists, which is why we cannot simply say that they were mechanically dictated by God – he drew on their experiences, knowledge and personality. And now, with this explanation, the Synoptic Problem can be solved.

Appendix B: The Accusation of Gospel Fabrication

The idea that Christ's divinity "developed" is one of hundreds of ideas which basically claim that the early church fabricated historical fictions in order to create a better, more powerful message, or simply so that they could better justify their devotion to Christ. Here are some of the other views that exist (I include them so that you won't be as shocked when you come across them):

- Jesus didn't die on the cross, Judas died in His place (this is the official view of Muslims). Only later did the church invent the idea that Jesus Himself actually died.
- Jesus didn't die on the cross; He just passed out, and later revived when in the cool of the cave. (The Swoon Theory – incredibly popular today).
- Just like any other rabbi, Jesus was married – and He chose Mary Magdalene as His wife. The celibacy of Christ was later made up. This view is gaining popularity among liberals, feminists and anti-Catholics the world over!
- Mary was not a virgin; she and Joseph had already slept together.
- Mary was not a virgin; she was raped by a Roman soldier (this view is actually taught in Bible Colleges, and "Life of Brian" posits a slight variation on the theme).
- Jesus went to India (or America, or Peru, or Iraq...)
- Jesus never claimed that He was God.
- Above all else, *Jesus was just a good moral teacher...*

All of these views, and hundreds like them, are based on the assumption that the New Testament authors were following cleverly invented stories about Jesus, and perpetuating myths which had developed about this "very special man". There is one (main) fatal flaw with these ideas:

Legends take generations to develop. If Jesus was in living memory, everyone would have known that all of this was a lie.

If I started saying "Winston Churchill was a miracle worker who called everyone to the move to the UK and follow him", then who would believe me? Winston Churchill is still in *living memory* – everyone would know that I was making it up. No matter how well construed my story is, no matter how many dull people I do convince, no matter how good looking I am, I'll never get anywhere!

By contrast, all kinds of myths and legends surround people like Vlad Dracula – and all these developed after *generations* – well after the true Vlad was no longer in living memory, and only legends and stories remained. There's no other way it could have happened! As Paul says:

The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner.
– Acts 26:26

During the time that the NT was being written, Jesus was not some obscure man who you could have invented stories about – He was known of by people from all over! The Gospels, of course, were written well within *one generation* of Christ – Mark could have been written as early as AD 45 – less than 15 years after Jesus' death! The most conservative dating of the last Gospel, John, is AD 85 (many scholars would date it at around AD 65, however) – which is only 40 years after Christ's death. John, and all his contemporaries (Christian, Roman and Jewish) were all around at the time of Christ. If he was making it up, even the smallest thing, everyone would have seen straight away that it was a lie.

But was that result? In fact, contemporary Roman and Jewish historians agree with him. Not only that, people kept converting to Christianity! There is no way that anything could have been fabricated in such a short time scale; it's simply impossible.

There is another key flaw which I would like to draw your attention to:

Who would die for a lie?

Take Matthew, for instance: he was stabbed to death for being a Christian. At any time during his trial and execution, he could have denounced Christ, and been set free, but he never did – he died for what he believed in – what he wrote in his Gospel. Who would die for what they knew was a lie? What kind of person could be so ludicrous? You may say, "Well, lots of Muslims die for their faith – and we say they're wrong." Yes, but they are placing their faith in *the Koran*, not first hand experience. They are trusting in what they have read and heard, not what they've seen. Matthew had actually *been with* Jesus throughout His ministry – he'd personally experienced and seen everything. Unlike the Muslim martyr, he would have *known* himself to have been dying for a lie. Do we really believe that's what happened? (See "True and Reasonable" by Douglas Jacoby and "More than a Carpenter" by Josh McDowell for more.) All can do is appeal to reason, because, as Paul says,

What I am saying is true and reasonable. – Acts 26:25