

# How Accurate Is The Bible?

How accurate is the Bible? That is a question many have asked after talking with a Mormon or after hearing a college professor declare the Bible to be filled with inaccuracies and therefore not trustworthy. It is understandable that the cults are motivated to discredit the Bible, and it is understandable that an unbelieving professor stepped outside of his expertise. But how should we respond to 400,000 variants in the Bible? Can we really trust the Bible? To answer our question, we need to start by understanding the One who wrote the Bible. We need to understand the character of God.

**WHAT IS GOD LIKE?** The character of God is the only real reason we can trust the Bible to speak the truth. Most critics are not aware they have a faulty assumption that colors their view of the Bible. Here is how most people view God.

*You thought that I was just like you . . . (NASB) Psalm 50:21*

God speaks boldly in this verse. He is not like us. He does not make mistakes. He does not need the Encyclopedia Britannica, the Library of Congress, or a news reporter to help Him understand something or to collect information. He already knows everything and the book of Numbers tells us why we can trust Him when He speaks or writes,

*God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent; Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good? (NASB) Numbers 23:19*

and,

*. . . in order that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie . . . (NASB) Hebrews 6:18*

**GOD WROTE THE BIBLE.** 2 Timothy 3:16 tells us that God wrote the Bible,

*All Scripture is inspired by God . . . (NASB) 2 Timothy 3:16*

The word “inspired” comes from a Greek word which means “God-breathed.” That is, God “breathed” the words that were to be written. He wrote all 66 books, all 1189 chapters and all 31,173 verses of the Bible. This is an easy task for an omnipotent, omniscient God. He is not like us - He does not grow tired (Isaiah 40:28), and He does not sleep (Psalm 121:4). He does not lie (Numbers 23:19)! That is why we can trust what He wrote.

## *The Mystery of God*

For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,” declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.

(NASB) Isaiah 55:8-9

*The sum of Thy word is truth, And every one of Thy righteous ordinances is everlasting. (NASB) Ps. 119:160*

**THE VOICE OF GOD.** How do we know the Bible was written by God? Several years ago, I asked a Christian friend why he believed the Bible was true. He told me that he knew

God was real by the experiences he had and by how God had helped him. I told him the Hare Krishnas, Mormons, Jehovah’s Witness members of the occult, Muslims and Hindus all believe their god is the true one because of their experiences. He had not thought about that. If experience is the test of truth, then are we all correct? If so, we have a problem. How do we then know that God is speaking to us in the Bible?

The answer is already given to us in the Bible. Listen to

Deuteronomy 18:20-22,

*But the prophet who shall speak a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he shall speak in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.’ “And you may say in your heart, ‘How shall we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?’ “When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him. (NASB) Deut. 18:20-22*

Fulfilled prophecy is the signature that God has spoken in the Bible. The Bible is the only sacred book that contains future predictions that have come true. It is a very unique book with 737 prophecies recorded in about 8,500 verses. That is about 25% of the Bible. The prophecies occur in both the Old Testament and New Testament. The Old Testament prophets, the New Testament apostles, and Jesus Christ all made predictions about the future. They have all come true except for those which are yet future. The Bible is also a book of history whose facts are being proven to be true with almost every archeological finding. The Bible is accurate when it speaks to history; and when it makes predictions, they come true. It is Truth.

**MYSTERY OF AUTHORSHIP.** God did not write the Bible as we do a letter. He used two authors.

*... for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. (NASB) 2 Peter 1:21*

This verse tells us that God the Holy Spirit “moved” human authors to write the Bible. The Greek word for “moved”

comes from the root word PHERO which means “to carry,” “to bring” or “to bring along.” This means the Holy Spirit “brought” men along. He caused men to write what He wanted them to write. The different books of the Bible had different authors who used their own style, language and grammar, but the Holy Spirit “carried” them in their writing. What they wrote was what the Holy Spirit wanted to be written. Here is an example,

*You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: “Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? (NIV) Acts 4:25*

Who spoke through David? The answer is the Holy Spirit! At the end of one book the apostle Paul wrote, we are given a hint that the influence of the Holy Spirit on the writer was, at times, hard to detect,

### *The Signature of God*

The Bible contains a number of fascinating proofs that absolutely authenticate the Scriptures as the ... authoritative Word of God. The evidence from hundreds of fulfilled prophecies form one of the strongest and most obvious proofs of divine inspiration.”

Grant R. Jeffrey  
The Signature of God

*... and I think that I also have the Spirit of God. (NASB) 1 Cor. 7:40*

Paul appears to not be sure. In his other books he does not make this comment. This is remarkable because it implies on the other occasions he knew the Holy Spirit

was guiding him, but this time he was not completely sure. The Holy Spirit did not dictate the message, but yet He was guiding the apostle. Who were the authors? The answer is men and the Holy Spirit.

**BOOKS OF THE BIBLE.** Some have wondered if any books in the Bible do not belong and if any are missing. The answer to our question comes to us directly from Jesus Christ Himself.

*OLD TESTAMENT.* At the time of Jesus’ life, the only scriptures that existed were the Jewish scriptures - the Tanakh. Jesus quoted from them. He taught them. He believed them. Here is an example. Jesus is speaking,

You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me; (NASB) John 5:39

He also considered them to be authoritative and lasting,

Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished. (NASB) Matthew 5:17-18

Notice that Jesus refers to the Law and the Prophets. These are two sections of the Jewish scriptures called the Tanakh. The Tanakh was the Jewish version of the Old Testament scriptures that existed at the time of Christ. It still exists today. The Tanakh was divided into three sections: The Law, The Prophets and the Writings. Jesus clearly recognized it as being authoritative. Near the end of the gospel of Luke, Jesus made a significant statement about the scriptures. He endorsed the entire Tanakh. That is, He endorsed *The Law*, *The Writings* and then He referred to the *Psalms*, which is the largest book in *The Writings*.

Now He said to them, “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” (NASB) Luke 24:44

In Luke Jesus refers to the prophets being murdered from Abel to Zechariah.

. . . from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the house of God; yes, I tell you, it shall be I charged against this generation. Luke 11:51 (NASB)

When Jesus did this He once again endorsed the entire Tanakh or the Old Testament scriptures as we know them. Notice that Abel appeared in the book of Genesis which is the first book in *The Law*, which is Genesis. Zechariah appears in the last book of *The Writings*, which is 2 Chronicles. That is, Jesus endorsed all of the Old Testament as we know it. Later in Luke 16:29 Jesus endorsed *The Law* and *The Writings* once again.

During His ministry, He also endorsed *The Twelve* or the minor prophets when He referred to Jonah being in the belly of a great sea monster and alluding to him being there three

## *The Jewish Scriptures (Tanakh)*

The Law	The Prophets	The Writings
Torah (Pentateuch) Genesis Exodus Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy	Former Prophets Joshua Judges Samuel (1 & 2) Kings (1 & 2)  Latter Prophets Isaiah Jeremiah Ezekiel The Twelve (Minor Prophets)	Poetry Psalms Proverbs Job  Five Rolls Song of Songs Ruth Lamentations Esther Ecclesiastes  Historical Daniel Ezra-Nehemiah Chronicles (1 & 2)

days and nights (Matt. 12:40-41), In short, Jesus recognized the Jewish scriptures from Genesis to Chronicles as real and authoritative.

The Dead Sea Scrolls have proven to modern critics that the Tanakh, as we know it today, has not changed since the time of Christ. In fact, the Dead Sea scrolls predate Christ by about by 100-150 years. So when He referred to The Law and The Prophets and The Writings, He referred to the Tanakh we have in A.D. 2001.

*NEW TESTAMENT.* Many are under the impression that there was a great debate about which books should be added to the New Testament. The truth is the apostles affirmed and confirmed the contents of the New Testament during their lifetime. The great church debates were largely attempts to remove certain books or challenges to the inspiration of certain books. This is common in our culture and even among many Christians.

If we look carefully at the New Testament we discover that apostles were actively reading and determining which writings were authoritative. Maybe the most significant statement about the New Testament actually comes from Jesus,

*But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into*

*all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. (NASB) John 16:13*

Here Jesus tells the apostles that the Holy Spirit will guide them into truth: that is, He will reveal truth to them. This was required since Jesus wanted His church to be built on the apostles,

*. . . having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, (NASB) Ephesians 2:20*

So Jesus endorses His apostles through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. As the years elapsed, the apostles wrote the majority (81%) of the New Testament and their companions and Jesus' brothers wrote the balance. It must have been a surprise to them to discover that Paul the apostle would write just about half of the books.

The New Testament reveals that the writings of the apostles and others were passed around for all to read (Colossians 4:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:27). The apostle Peter reveals that the letters were reviewed and evaluated as to whether they were inspired. Peter reviewed Paul's writing. Listen to this,

## *Human Authors of the New Testament*

Books	The Apostles	Companions	Jesus' Brothers
Matthew	Matthew		
Mark		John Mark	
Luke		Luke	
John	John		
Acts		Luke	
Romans-to-Philemon	Paul		
Hebrews	-	-	-
James			James
1 & 2 Peter	Peter		
1, 2 & 3 John	John		
Jude			Jude
Revelation	John		

... just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction. (NASB) 2 Peter 3:15-16

That is, Peter considered Paul's letters to be scripture ("the rest of the scriptures"). So Peter endorsed Paul and Paul endorsed Luke when he writes,

For the Scripture says, "YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING," and "The laborer is worthy of his wages." (NASB) 1 Tim. 5:18

The first part of that quote is from Deuteronomy 25:4 - from the sacred scriptures. The second part is from a passage which is found ONLY in Luke 10:7. Now notice that Paul

refers to both as scripture. Paul considered the writings of Luke to be equal to that found in Deuteronomy.

How did the apostles know about Matthew, Mark, Luke or Paul's letters? Romans 16:22; 1 Corinthians 5:9; Colossians 4:16 and 1 Thessalonians 5:27 all reveal that the writings of the New Testament authors were distributed for all to read. In summary, the New Testament documents were actively being evaluated regarding their inspiration.

*EARLIEST NEW TESTAMENT.* The earliest list of all of the New Testament books is found in a manuscript called the Muratorian fragment (A.D. 150-170). It is damaged. That is why it is called a fragment. The beginning has been torn off

and references to some books are missing. The author of the document gave a running account of the development of the New Testament. In the document, all of the New Testament books are listed except for Matthew, Mark, Hebrews, James, 1 & 2 Peter and 3 John. Matthew and Mark are probably missing due to the tear since the author of the Muratorian refers to the "third book of the gospel." So only Hebrews, 1 & 2 Peter and 3 John are missing from the list. Were they part of a torn piece too? We do not know. It should be noted that the "missing" books were already recognized by other authors. *The Epistle of Barnabas*, which was written by Clement of Rome (A.D. 70-79), quotes Matthew and alludes to 2 Peter.<sup>1</sup> In A.D. 95-97, Clement of Rome quotes a number of books, including Matthew, Mark, Hebrews and 1 Peter as being authoritative.<sup>2</sup> Ignatius (A.D. 110-117) also

quotes a large variety of books including Matthew, Mark, James and 1 Peter.<sup>3</sup> The Muratorian Fragment includes other books but clearly states they were not received. This

### Quote From The Muratorian Fragment

The third book of the gospel: according to Luke . . . The fourth gospel is by John, one of the disciples . . . The Acts of the apostles having been written in one book. Addressing the most excellent Theophilus, Luke includes one by one the things done . . . " It is necessary for us to give an argued account of all these, since the blessed apostle Paul himself . . . writes to seven churches in the following order: first to the Corinthians, second to the Ephesians, third to the Philippians, fourth to the Colossians, fifth to the Galatians, sixth to the Thessalonians, seventh to the Romans . . . John also writes to seven churches in the Apocalypse . . . to Philemon, one to Titus and two to Timothy in love and affection . . . But the letter of Jude and the two superscribed with the name of John . . ."

reveals that the books of the New Testament were recognized very early.

*CONCLUSION.* The New Testament was written by the apostles who were equal to the Old Testament prophets (Eph. 3:5; 2 Peter 3:2). Both were moved by the Holy Spirit to write what God wanted written. The New Testament is endorsed by fulfilled prophecy and by the apostles. The apostle John was the last apostle alive when he wrote his smaller epistles and Revelation. By this time the New Testament books had been identified and endorsed.

1. Clement of Rome. Epistle of Barnabas.

2. Clement of Rome. Corinthians.

3. Ignatius. Ephesians.5.

It is wrongly believed that the books of the New Testament were not identified until the Council of Nicea (A.D. 325). But the discussion above demonstrates that the contents of the New Testament were already known near the death of the Apostle John (A.D. 100-110). Since it is obvious that the apostles were identifying which books were scripture, the Apostle John wrote the last book. Subsequently, the inspiration of some of the books was challenged and defended by the early church councils.

**ALL THOSE ERRORS.** The original manuscripts written by the prophets and the apostles under the guidance of the Holy Spirit were without error. We call these original books are called autographs. As the apostles letters were distributed and copied, errors were made in the copying process. Subsequently, more errors were made in the copying process over the centuries. Most of the errors are simple spelling errors, missing words or grammatical errors. Some intentional changes were made by the human copiers in an attempt to clarify the meaning of a passage. In a few rare cases, it is clear someone tried to change the meaning to reflect a doctrinal opinion.

At first, this would appear to be a problem for the modern day reader since we do not know which manuscripts are the most accurate. You may be asking how accurate is the Bible? And how should we understand 400,000 variants in the Bible? How many variants are there in the Bible? What is a variant?

*OLD TESTAMENT VARIANTS.* The Old Testament copies have very few variants since the Jewish rabbis had very strict rules about copying accuracy. In fact,

the rabbis would destroy copies if there were too many errors. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls was a major event. It provided Biblical scholars with proof that the Old Testament contained 39 books and provided thousands of manuscript fragments. Prior to that, the Christian community had only three partial copies and one complete copy. With recent discoveries of Aramaic cursive copies, we now have copies dating from 250 B.C. By comparing all of these Old Testament copies, differences between the documents have been identified. These differences are called variants. There are very few variants in the Old Testament compared to the New Testament which has 400,000. Of the Old Testament variants, only sixteen are of any significance.

*NEW TESTAMENT VARIANTS.* The New Testament has approximately 400,000 variants between 5,800 Greek manuscripts and 10,000 Latin manuscripts. In addition to the manuscripts, we have enough quotes from all of the early fathers to completely write the New Testament except for about 11 verses. Now that is amazing.

*WHAT IS A VARIANT?* A variant is any difference between manuscripts. Let's illustrate! Say you have three manuscripts and discover that one word is misspelled in all three manuscripts. That will be counted as three variants. But if you

only found two misspellings, you will only have two variants and so on. So a single misspelling, such as a missing accent mark, across 500 manuscripts would be counted as 500 variants. Spelling errors and missing words account for the vast majority of the 400,000 variants.

Before we go further, we need to know how the various manuscripts are used to

### Variants in the New Testament Manuscripts

- 24,633 Manuscripts
  - 5,800 Greek manuscripts
  - 10,000 Latin manuscripts
  - 9,324 Manuscripts in other languages  
(Syriac, Slavic, Gothic, Ethiopic, Coptic and Armenian)
- 36,289 Patristic Quotes

**Total = 400,000 variants**  
**10,000 places in the Bible**  
**400 words**

**99.8% accuracy<sup>1</sup>**

1. Westcott & Hort. *The New Testament in the Original Greek*. 2 edit, II.2.

## Criteria For Selecting Ancient Bible Manuscripts

Rule	Reason
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Older manuscripts are preferred.</li> <li>2. The more difficult reading is preferred.</li> <li>3. The shorter reading is preferred.</li> <li>4. The reading which best explains all variants is preferred. . . .</li> <li>5. The reading with the widest geographical separation is preferred.</li> <li>6. The reading conforming to the author's style is preferred.</li> <li>7. The reading which reflects no doctrinal bias is preferred.</li> </ol>	<p>Copyists create more errors with time. Copyists typically improve the reading. Copyists typically improve the reading.</p> <p>Errors in one geographical area are not propagated to other areas. Copyists have their own style. Some copyists add their own viewpoint.</p>

determine how the Bible should read. Linguistic scholars start by selecting a group of the high quality manuscripts to use in their Bible translation. They do not use all of them because the manuscripts have already been catalogued and evaluated. They use rules to determine which manuscripts are more trustworthy. For example, older manuscripts are considered to be more reliable since they should be less subject to additions. Later manuscripts tend to have multiple additions and copying errors.

The linguistic scholars apply these rules to all of the man-

uscripts and identify every spelling error, every letter and word that is omitted, every vowel that is wrong and even grammatical errors. So just one Greek word can account for multiple variants as the different manuscripts are compared.

*ARE VARIANTS SIGNIFICANT?* The New Testament has 400,000 spelling, grammatical, and omission variants. These variants occur in only 10,000 places in the New Testament. This may seem high, but this is small when we compare this to the New Testament with its 184,590 words or 838,380 letters. Of those 10,000 places, only 400 words are in question.

### Manuscript Variants from John 3:16

Thus for loved God the world so as the Son Οὕτως γὰρ ἠγάπησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν κόσμον ὥστε τὸν υἱὸν Οὕτως γὰρ ἠγάπησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν κόσμον ὥστε τὸν υἱὸν Οὕτως γὰρ ἠγάπησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν κόσμον ὥστε τὸν υἱὸν <u>Οὕτω</u> γὰρ ἠγάπησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν <u>κόσμου</u> ὥστε τὸν υἱὸν <u>αὐτοῦ</u> τὸν μονογεῆ εἰδωκεν	the only one gave τὸν μονογεῆ εἰδωκεν τὸν μονογεῆ εἰδωκεν τὸν μονογεῆ εἰδωκεν τὸν μονογεῆ εἰδωκεν
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← spelling error

← added word

that all the believing into Him not perish but have ages. ἵνα πᾶς ὁ πιστευὼν εἰς αὐτὸν μὴ ἀποληταὶ ἀλλὰ ἐχὴν αἰώνιον. ἵνα πᾶς ὁ πιστευὼν εἰς αὐτὸν μὴ ἀποληταὶ ἀλλὰ ἐχὴν αἰώνιον. ἵνα πᾶς ὁ πιστευὼν εἰς αὐτὸν μὴ ἀποληταὶ ἀλλὰ ἐχὴν αἰώνιον. ἵνα πᾶς ὁ πιστευὼν εἰς αὐτὸν μὴ ἀποληταὶ ἀλλὰ ἐχὴν αἰώνιον.	mss B mss W <sup>sup</sup> mss w mss τ
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Of those 400 words, only 50 are significant and none of them affect anything we believe. This translates to a Bible that is 99.8% accurate. There is no other ancient book in existence with so many copies and with so little error. The Bible is really unique. The Bible is very accurate! The Bible very accurately reflects what the Prophets and the apostles wrote.

**TODAY'S ENGLISH BIBLES.** We have been describing the original Hebrew and Greek translations of the Bible. The question we need to ask now is, "How accurate are the English translations to the original languages? The answer depends on which translation we are talking about.

The New King James Version (NKJV) is the best Bible for Bible study, with the New American Standard Bible (NASB) being next. For Bible study you want a Bible that is as close to the Greek language as possible. The NKJV and NASB do that. I do not recommend the New International Version. Here are the reasons why:

*ENGLISH BIBLES VS GREEK EXAMPLE.* In order to explain, we will start with a passage from the New Testament and then compare the English translations to the Greek text. The scripture below is Acts 14:23. The English words have already been substituted for the Greek words.

#### LITERAL GREEK (NA27)

Having appointed and them every church elders, praying with fastings they committed them to the Lord in whom they believed.  
Acts 14:23

Now we will compare the different Bibles,

#### NASB

And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

#### NIV

*Paul and Barnabas* appointed elders for them in each church and with prayer and fasting committed them to the Lord in whom they had put their trust.

#### LIVING BIBLE

*Paul and Barnabas* also appointed elders in every church and prayed for them with fasting, turning them over to the care of the Lord to whom they trusted.

#### AMPLIFIED BIBLE

And when they had appointed *and ordained* elders for them in each church with prayer and fasting, they committed them to the Lord in Whom they had come to believe [*being full of the joyful trust that He is the Christ, the Messiah*].

#### THE SECRET NEW KINGDOM BIBLE

They chose elders for each church, by praying and giving up eating for a certain time. These elders had trusted the Lord, so *Paul and Barnabas* put them in the Lord's care.

#### KING JAMES

And when they had ordained elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they had believed.

#### NEW KING JAMES

So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

#### GOD'S WORD

They *had the disciples* in each church choose spiritual leaders, and with prayer and fasting they entrusted the leaders to the Lord in whom they believed.

The red highlights show substantial deviation from the original Greek.

*COMPARISONS.* The NASB, KJV and NKJV are very close to the actual wording of the original Greek version of the book of Acts. This is typical for these Bibles. The other Bibles differ substantially.

The last one, God's Word, is the worst because it says the disciples of each church selected the elders and that is not true. The Greek does not say that. The actual Greek word



for “appoint” means “to select.” The translators of this Bible used an older, out of date meaning (400 B.C.) of the word which meant “to elect by show of hands.” The translators either did not know the word had changed meaning by the time of Christ or they wanted to convey the thought that a congregational form of selecting leaders was biblical. This is an old, erroneous meaning historically given to this verse.

The NIV, The Secret Kingdom New Testament Bible, and Living Bible added to the Word of God when they add the words, “Paul and Barnabas.” These words are not in the Greek. They did this to make the Bible more readable. Unfortunately, they are adding their own opinions. For some who want to study the Word of Truth, this is unacceptable. This example is typical of these Bibles.

A knowledge of the original languages is needed by someone who seriously desires to know what the Bible really says.

It will take study, but the benefits are rewarding.

The best Bibles for Bible study from those compared above are the New American Standard and the New King James Version. Since this article was originally written the English Standard Bible (ESV) was published. It is superior to all other Bibles for Bible study.

**CONCLUSION.** Jesus said,

“For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished” (NASB) Matthew 5:18.

We should thank God for keeping His Word pure and we should ask the Holy Spirit to help us understand what He has so carefully preserved.

To Him be the glory forever and ever.