

# FIVE REASONS WHY YOU CAN TRUST THE BIBLE



**CAN YOU TRUST THE BIBLE?** On the one hand, more people than ever throughout the world believe that the Bible is the Word of God. On the other hand, the Bible is also more harshly criticized than ever by atheists and followers of other religions. For that reason, we need to know why we can trust the Bible.

## 1 YOU CAN TRUST THAT THE BOOKS OF THE BIBLE WERE COPIED RELIABLY.

As most people know, the books of the Bible were copied by hand for many hundreds of years before the printing press was invented. When scribes made these handwritten copies, they made mistakes. As a result, the existing copies or manuscripts of the Bible contain numerous differences. People often assume that in the process of copying and re-copying the Bible, many passages were permanently changed and even lost. This seemed quite plausible a couple of hundred years ago, because nearly all the manuscripts of the Bible were copied about 800 or more years after the last books of the Bible were written.

But in the past two centuries archaeologists and other scholars have found *thousands* of earlier biblical manuscripts. Most famously, a large number of biblical manuscripts were discovered in the middle of the twentieth century in caves near the Dead Sea, not far from Jerusalem. These Dead Sea Scrolls date from the time of Jesus and even before Him—almost a thousand years earlier than the Old Testament manuscripts known before this discovery. The differences between the Dead Sea Scrolls and the later manuscripts of the Hebrew Old Testament text are almost entirely minor verbal differences. Archaeologists have also found papyrus manuscripts of the New Testament dating from the second and third centuries AD, just a century or two after the books were originally written.



The Isaiah Scroll, designated 1QIsaa and also known as the Great Isaiah Scroll, is one of the seven Dead Sea Scrolls that were first recovered by Bedouin shepherds in 1947 from Qumran Cave 1.

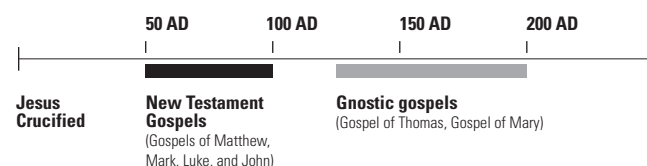
As more manuscripts have been discovered, what scholars have found is that nothing in the Bible was “lost” in the process of copying. The majority of the “differences” among the manuscripts are spelling variations. Actual verbal changes are almost always very minor. Scribes would add a word here or there, or more rarely a sentence, so that what we have in the biblical manuscripts is slightly *more*, not less, than what was originally in those books. Scholars generally have no trouble “weeding out” those slight additions, leaving us with an extremely reliable text for the Bible.

It turns out, then, that the texts of the books of the Bible that Christians have used and translated for almost two thousand years were very reliable all along. You can trust that what you’re reading in the Bible is what the original authors wrote—translated into your language.

## 2 YOU CAN TRUST THAT WE HAVE THE RIGHT BOOKS IN THE BIBLE.

The collection of books that are accepted by Christians as belonging in the Bible is known as the *canon of Scripture*. The idea of a canon, or set list of books that should be accepted as Scripture, is also under attack today. When scholars studied the thousands of biblical manuscripts discovered in past two centuries, they also found a number of Jewish and Christian books that are not part of the Bible. Some critics of the Bible argue that these newly discovered writings were “suppressed” by the early church. They suggest that these other books have just as much right to be considered scripture as the books that “made it” into the Bible. On this basis, critics often question the very idea of a canon of Scripture.

The most famous of these books that are not in the Bible are books about Jesus commonly called the “Gnostic gospels”—for example, a book called the Gospel of Thomas and another called the Gospel of Mary. Other “gospels” were named for individuals like Peter, James, Philip, and even Judas! The titles of these works give the impression that these “gospels” are just as trustworthy as the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. But that’s not true at all. Nearly all scholars date the four New Testament Gospels to the period between about AD 50 and 100—within the lifetimes of the apostles. On the other hand, most scholars date the Gnostic gospels to the *second* century, between roughly AD 125 and 200. That is too late for any of them to have been written by people who knew Jesus personally. No scholar thinks that Thomas, Mary, or those other persons had anything to do with writing the “gospels” named after them.



The careful study of the Gnostic gospels and similar books show that the early church did the right thing by rejecting those books from being included in the Bible. As long as most of these other books were lost, it was easy to wonder if we were missing something that belonged in the Bible. Now that we have a lot of those books, we can see that we had the best and most trustworthy books in the Bible all along.

# 3

## YOU CAN TRUST THAT THE GOD REVEALED IN THE BIBLE CREATED THE WORLD.

**Many people today mistakenly think that modern science has shown that the Bible is unreliable,** especially in what it says about God creating the world. However, if there is a conflict, it's not between science and the Bible, but between the way some people interpret the scientific evidence and the way some people interpret the Bible. Such apparent conflicts have cropped up throughout the modern era because of faulty assumptions on both sides. Four hundred years ago, many Christians mistakenly thought the Bible taught that the earth was stationary at the center of the universe. Actually, that idea that the earth was at the center of the universe came from pagan Greek science, *not* from the Bible.

**In the nineteenth century, many scientists speculated that the universe had always existed and therefore didn't need to be created.** Those who were looking for an atheistic view of the universe thought that science was on their side. The bigger the telescopes got, the bigger the universe appeared. It was natural to guess that the universe simply went on in all directions forever—that it was both infinitely large and infinitely old—so that the universe was literally “everything” and had no Creator.

**But this atheistic picture of the universe was shattered in the twentieth century.** Astronomers found that the universe is expanding in all directions, like a balloon inflating, which indicates that the universe originated at a single point some time ago. Scientists also discovered that the universe is “fine-tuned” to function as a stable environment in which it's possible for things like planets, plants, and people to exist. *Life itself* is also fine-tuned: all living things are composed of complex molecules that store as much information (essentially, instructions as to how the molecules should work together) as a large library of books. Many scientists grudgingly admitted that the evidence implies some sort of Creator, even if they continued to search for ways around that evidence.

**So, modern science confirms the biblical worldview taught in Genesis:** that the universe was made by a Creator (God); that the world has not always existed; and that life on earth was designed by God. The details of when and how God did these things are still controversial, but the evidence definitely supports belief in the kind of God that the Bible describes.

# 4

## YOU CAN TRUST THE BIBLE'S ACCOUNTS OF WHAT GOD DID IN THE PAST FOR OUR SALVATION.

**Skeptics typically demand proof for everything the Bible,** such as whether the people mentioned in the Bible existed. This is an unreasonable demand; you shouldn't worry that the Bible can't be trusted if we can't prove that everything in it happened.

**Although we can't prove everything in the Bible from outside sources, we have quite a bit of information from archaeology and other ancient writings confirming much of what the Bible says.** This is especially true in the Gospels, which are our main sources of information about Jesus. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, skeptics dismissed the Gospels as fables, legends, or myths—even going so far as to argue that Jesus never existed. However, recent careful studies of the Gospels in the light of other ancient writings from the same time period show that the skeptics are wrong. The Gospels are not myths, but biographies or historical accounts about Jesus based on eyewitness testimonies. There is no good reason to doubt that Jesus was a Jewish man from Galilee who was a well-known teacher and healer. Even non-Christian historians agree that Jesus died by crucifixion on the orders of the Roman governor Pontius Pilate.

# 5

## YOU CAN TRUST THE BIBLE'S REPORTS THAT JESUS ROSE FROM THE DEAD.

**For most of the past two centuries, skeptics could get away with dismissing the resurrection of Jesus on the grounds that miracles simply don't happen.** Belief in miracles seemed contrary to our usual experience of the world. However, this argument against miracles was always flawed, because it wrongly assumed that miracles should be as common in every society and in every period of time as they were in the life of Jesus. Miracles happen in every age, but they're exceptional, unusual events. We shouldn't be surprised that miracles were more prominent in the life of Jesus if He was, as He claimed, God's unique Son.

**Once we move past prejudices against miracles in general, the evidence for the Resurrection becomes compelling.** It's a historically certain fact that Jesus was crucified. It's also historically certain that a very short time later His followers were convinced that He had risen from the grave. Their experiences of seeing Jesus alive from the dead are facts acknowledged by almost all scholars. A year or so later, a Pharisee named Saul (Paul) who had persecuted believers in Jesus testified that Jesus had appeared to him also. Paul went on to preach the Christian message to Gentiles—people who Paul, as a Pharisee, had regarded as unclean. The best explanation for these facts is that Jesus did indeed rise from the dead.

**Yes, you can trust the Bible!**

***The evidence that the Bible can be trusted has never been greater.*** We have surprising evidence from the sciences that God created the world and from historical scholarship that Jesus Christ died on the cross and rose from the grave. No scripture of any other religion has so much evidence in its favor. The Bible is trustworthy because the God it reveals to us—the God who made the world and raised Jesus from the dead—is worthy of your trust.

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