

Course Outline

Week Objection

- 1 No one really knows what the Bible says because the original manuscripts are lost.
- 2 The Bible has been copied so many times, with so many variations, there's no way to know what was originally scripted.
- 3 The books of the Bible were chosen arbitrarily by councils of men in highly political processes. As a result, they left out some very good books – perhaps some equally inspired writings.
- 4 It's silly to assume that one book – the Bible – contains all of God's truth and that other great writings, from the Vedas to the Book of Mormon, do not come from God.
- 5 The Bible is full of contradictions.
- 6 The Bible can't be true because it depicts a different God in the Old and New Testaments.
- 7 There are so many translations of the Bible today, it's impossible to know which translation is the right one.
- 8 There are so many Christian denominations today, it's clear that Christians can't agree on what the Bible teaches.

Objection 1: No one really knows what the Bible says because the original manuscripts are lost.

The second part of this statement is true: The “autographs,” or original manuscripts, written on a variety of degradable surfaces from parchment to papyrus, no longer exist. But the remarkable number of copies, dating back in some cases to within a generation of their authorship, makes the first half of this objection false. In fact, we have tremendous confidence in the reliability of the Bible because of its manuscript trail. No other book from the ancient world has more, earlier, or better copied manuscripts than the Bible. (The word “manuscript” is used to denote anything written by hand, rather than copies produced from printing presses.)

Do copies count?

Craig L. Blomberg writes, “In the original Greek alone, over 5,000 manuscripts and manuscript fragments or portions of the NT have been preserved from the early centuries of Christianity. The oldest of these is a scrap of papyrus containing John 18:31-33, 37-38, dating from A.D. 125-130, no more than forty years after John’s Gospel was most probably written” (“The Historical Reliability of the New Testament,” *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, pp. 193-94). Andreas J. Kostenberger adds, “The total tally of more than 6,000 Greek mss., more than 10,000 Latin Vulgate mss., and more than 9,300 early versions results in over 25,000 witnesses to the text of the NT” (“Is the Bible Today What Was Originally Written?” found in www.4truth.net).

So how does the Bible stack up against other ancient manuscripts? According to scholar F.F. Bruce, we have nine or 10 good copies of Caesar’s *Gallic Wars*; 20 copies of Livy’s *Roman History*; two copies of Tacitus’ *Annals*; and eight manuscripts of Thucydides’ *History*. The most documented secular work from antiquity is Homer’s *Iliad* with 643 copies. But the New Testament, with its thousands of Greek manuscripts alone, is the most highly documented book from the ancient world (*The New Testament Documents, Are They Reliable?*, p. 16).

Is older better?

Generally speaking, the older the manuscripts, the better. The oldest manuscript for *Gallic Wars* is roughly 900 years after Caesar’s day. The two manuscripts of Tacitus are 800 and 1,000 years later, respectively, than the original. The earliest copies of Homer’s *Iliad* date from about 1,000 years after the original was authored around 800 B.C. But with the New Testament, we have complete manuscripts from only 300 hundred years later. Most of the New Testament is preserved in manuscripts fewer than 200 years after the original, with some books dating from a little more than 100 years after their composition and one fragment surviving within a generation of its authorship. No other book from the ancient world has as small a time gap between composition and earliest manuscript copies as the New Testament.

How careful were the copy makers?

Scholars of almost every theological stripe attest to the profound care with which the Old and New Testament documents were copied. For the New Testament, for example, the books were copied in Greek, and later translated and preserved in Syriac, Coptic, Latin and a variety of other ancient European and Middle Eastern languages.

The New Testament is the most accurately copied book from the ancient world. Textual scholars Westcott and Hort estimate that only one-sixtieth of its variants rise above “trivialities,” which leaves the text 98.33 percent pure. Noted historian Philip Schaff calculates that of the 150,000 variants known in his day, only 400 affected the meaning of a passage; only 50 were of any significance; and not even one affected an article of faith (*Companion to the Greek Testament and English Version*, p. 177).

Sir Frederick Kenyon, a New Testament authority, writes, “The number of manuscripts of the New Testament, or early translations from it, and of quotations from it in the oldest writers of the Church, is so large that it is practically certain that the true reading of every doubtful passage is preserved in some one or other of these ancient authorities.... This can be said of no other ancient book in the world” (*Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts*, p. 55).

More will be addressed on the topic of textual variations in our next lesson.

How about hostile witnesses?

Eyewitnesses and contemporaries of Jesus wrote the New Testament. For example, Luke probably wrote his gospel around 60 A.D., before he penned Acts. Since Jesus died around 33 A.D., this would place Luke only 27 years after the events, while most eyewitnesses – and potentially hostile witnesses – were still alive and could have refuted Luke’s record. The apostle Paul speaks of more than 500 eyewitnesses of the resurrected Christ when he wrote 1 Corinthians, which critics date around 55-56 A.D. John and Peter add similar testimonies (1 John 1:1-2; 2 Peter 1:16).

In short, while it’s true we are lacking the “autographs” of scripture, we have sound reasons to be confident that what we read today has been faithfully preserved through thousands of copies, many of them written in close chronological proximity to the time they were originally penned. “If we compare the present state of the New Testament text with that of any other ancient writing, we must ... declare it to be marvelously correct. Such has been the care with which the New Testament has been copied – a care which has doubtless grown out of true reverence for its holy words.... The New Testament [is] unrivaled among ancient writings in the purity of its text as actually transmitted and kept in use” (Benjamin B. Warfield, *Introduction to Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, pp. 12-13, quoted in *The Case for Christ* by Lee Strobel, p. 70).

Next: The Bible has been copied so many times, with so many variations, there’s no way to know what was originally scripted.

How Do I Know the Bible is True?

Objection 2: The Bible has been copied so many times, with so many variations, there's no way to know what was originally scripted.

Mormons and Muslims allege that the Bible's documents were substantially corrupted in their transmission, but there is overwhelming evidence that proves these claims false. Scholars of almost every theological persuasion attest to the profound care with which the Old and New Testament documents were copied and preserved.

To begin, it's important to know that the texts of the Old and New Testaments were written – under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit – by some 40 authors over a period of more than 1,500 years. With thousands of ancient copies in existence, it is a monumental task to establish the accuracy and truthfulness of these manuscripts. Textual criticism is the science of examining the books of the Bible and their origins. “It has to do with the reliability of the text, that is, how our current text compares with the originals and how accurately the ancient manuscripts were copied,” according to Paul E. Little in *Know Why You Believe*.

The Old Testament

Let's begin with the Old Testament, copies of which were written on clay and wooden tablets, papyrus and parchment, even pottery pieces and beaten metal fragments. Scribes, or copyists, were devout Jews with the highest professional standards and the utmost dedication to dealing with the Word of God. Their habits included wiping a pen clean before writing the name of God, copying one letter at a time, and counting the letters of both the original and the copy. If there were discrepancies, the copy was destroyed.

The earliest and most complete copy of the entire Hebrew Old Testament dates from around 900 A.D. and is known as the Masoretic text. All of the present copies of the Hebrew text we have today are in remarkable agreement with this text. But even earlier texts have now been found. The discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls in 1947 resulted in the earliest manuscript copy yet of the complete book of Isaiah. Later discoveries at the Dead Sea unearthed fragments of every book in the Old Testament except Esther. Since these scrolls date from a group of dedicated Jews living at Qumran from about 150 B.C. to 70 A.D., the discoveries closed the gap in the age of manuscripts by about 1,000 years. A careful comparison of the Qumran manuscripts with the Masoretic texts shows remarkable similarity.

Other texts fortify our confidence in the reliability of the Old Testament manuscripts. The Septuagint is a Greek translation of the Old Testament dating from about the third century B.C. For a Hellenized Hebrew culture whose people often knew only Greek, the Septuagint became a bridge for understanding the Hebrew history and theology of the Old Testament. In addition, the Syriac version of the Old Testament, written in the Aramaic language of Syria, followed, as did a Samaritan version. With all of these texts existing in 200 B.C., what does it mean for the accuracy of the Scriptures?

R. Laird Harris writes: “We can now be sure that copyists worked with great care and accuracy on the Old Testament, even back to 225 B.C. Although some differed among themselves, it was so little, we can infer that still earlier copyists had also faithfully and carefully transmitted the Old Testament text. Indeed, it would be rash skepticism that would now deny that we have our Old Testament in a form very close to that used by Ezra when he taught the Law to those who had returned from the Babylonian captivity – about B.C. 457 (Ezra 9-10)” (“How Reliable is the Old Testament Text?” in *Can I Trust My Bible*, p. 124).

The New Testament

For the New Testament, the original documents were written and copied in Greek, and later translated and preserved in Syriac, Coptic, Latin and a variety of other ancient European and Middle Eastern languages. In the Greek alone, more than 5,000 manuscripts and manuscript fragments of the New Testament have been preserved from the early centuries of Christianity.

As William Lane Craig explains, “The oldest of these is a scrap of papyrus containing John 18:31-33, 37-38, dating from A.D. 125-130, no more than forty years after John’s Gospel was most probably written. More than thirty papyri date from the late second through early third centuries, including some which contain good chunks of entire books and two which cover most of the gospels and Acts or the letters of Paul. Four very reliable and nearly complete NTs date from the fourth and fifth centuries” (“The Historical Reliability of the New Testament,” *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, p. 194).

While it’s true there are variations among the manuscripts, the vast majority have to do with changes in spelling, grammar, and style, or accidental omissions or duplications of words or phrases. Only about 400 variants have any significant bearing on the meaning of the passage, and most of these are noted in the footnotes or margins of modern translations and editions of Scripture. The only textual variants that affect more than a sentence or two are John 7:53-8:11 and Mark 16:9-20.

William Lane Craig further writes in *Reasonable Faith*, “Neither of these passages is very likely to be what John or Mark originally wrote, though the story in John (the woman caught in adultery) still stands a fairly good chance of being true. But overall, 97-99% of the NT can be reconstructed beyond any reasonable doubt, and no Christian doctrine is founded solely or even primarily on textually disputed passages” (p. 194).

Consider these statements from renowned Bible scholars:

- The New Testament is the most accurately copied book from the ancient world. Textual scholars Westcott and Hort estimate that only one-sixtieth of its variants rise above “trivialities,” which leaves the text 98.33 percent pure. Noted historian Philip Schaff calculates that of the 150,000 variants known in his day, only 400 affected the meaning of a passage; only 50 were of any significance; and not even one affected an article of faith (*Companion to the Greek Testament and English Version*, p. 177).
- Sir Frederick Kenyon, a New Testament authority, writes, “The number of manuscripts of the New Testament, or early translations from it, and of quotations from it in the oldest writers of the Church, is so large that it is practically certain that the true reading of every doubtful passage is preserved in some one or other of these ancient authorities.... This can be said of no other ancient book in the world” (*Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts*, p. 55).
- Many of the apparent discrepancies in the gospels, Acts and the writings of Paul – minor as they are – disappear once we judge ancient historians by the standards of their day rather than ours. As Craig L. Blomberg writes, “In a world which did not even have a symbol for a quotation mark, no one expected a historian to reproduce a speaker’s words verbatim” (“The Historical Reliability of the New Testament,” *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, p. 207).
- “The point is simply that the textual evidence for what the NT authors wrote far outstrips the documentation we have for any other ancient writing, including dozens which we believe have been preserved relatively intact. There is absolutely no support for claims that the standard modern editions of the Greek NT do not very closely approximate what the NT writers actually wrote” (Blomberg, p. 194).
- “If we compare the present state of the New Testament text with that of any other ancient writing, we must ... declare it to be marvelously correct. Such has been the care with which the New Testament has been copied – a care which has doubtless grown out of true reverence for its holy words.... The New Testament [is] unrivaled among ancient writings in the purity of its text as actually transmitted and kept in use” (Benjamin B. Warfield, *Introduction to Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, pp. 12-13, quoted in *The Case for Christ* by Lee Strobel, p. 70).

To summarize, even though there are some discrepancies in copies of ancient Bible manuscripts, the overwhelming number of variations is trivial, such as transposed letters. No discrepancy threatens any Biblical doctrine. Modern equivalents of these minor variants would be the difference between the English words “honor” and “honour,” or receiving a notice in the mail saying “You may have already w-n a million dollars.” The meaning of these sentences is profoundly clear.

For these and other reasons we have not discussed here – archaeological and other scientific evidence, for example – we can be confident that the English translations we hold in our hands come from reliably consistent Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic documents that have been copied meticulously since the originals were penned. We also may take comfort in the knowledge that the same Holy Spirit who inspired the “autographs” of Scripture has taken care to preserve these texts and arrange the “canon” (Lesson 3).

Next: The books of the Bible were chosen arbitrarily by councils of men in highly political processes. As a result, they left out some very good books – perhaps some equally inspired writings.

How Do I Know the Bible is True?

Objection 3: The books of the Bible were chosen arbitrarily by councils of men in highly political processes.

As a result, they left out some very good books – perhaps some equally inspired writings.

These oft-repeated charges are unfounded. They deny the supernatural inspiration and preservation of Scripture and instead emphasize the efforts of men who, it is argued, wanted only to maintain control over the early church. In truth, the Holy Spirit authored all of Scripture through the pens of human agents and decided which books belong in the canon. Councils of Christian leaders met in the fourth century and made important decisions about the Bible based on evidence supporting the books' inspiration and authority. Let's look more closely at how the 66 books we hold in our hands today became known as the Bible.

To begin, let's define two terms. First, the "canon" of Scripture. The word "canon" comes from the Greek *kanon* and means measure or rule. Simply put, "The canon of Scripture is the list of all the books that belong in the Bible," according to Wayne Grudem in *Systematic Theology* (p. 54). Next, the word "Bible," which derives from the Greek word *biblion* (book); the earliest use of *la biblia* in the sense of "Bible" is found in 2 Clement 2:14 around 150 A.D.

The Old Testament

The earliest collection of written words from God is the Ten Commandments, which establish the beginning of the biblical canon. The Lord Himself wrote on two stone tablets and gave them to Moses to deliver to the people (Ex. 31:18, 32:16). Moses wrote additional words to be placed by the Ark of the Covenant (Deut. 31:24-26), and there is strong evidence that he wrote the first five books of the Bible (see Ex. 17:14, 24:4, 34:27; Num. 33:2; Deut 31:22; Luke 24:27).

After Moses' death, Joshua added to the collection of God's written words (Josh. 24:26). Later, other Israelites, usually those who held the office of prophet, wrote as the Lord inspired them. The last books of Old Testament history – Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther – were completed in the fifth century B.C. In fact, after about 435 B.C. there were no further additions to the Old Testament canon. "The subsequent history of the Jewish people was recorded in other writings, such as the books of the Maccabees, but these writings were not thought worthy to be included with the collections of God's words from earlier years," writes Grudem (p. 56).

Looking at Jewish literature outside the Old Testament, we see a consistent pattern of belief that the divinely authoritative words of God had ceased after 435 B.C. Rabbinic literature expressed the conviction that after the latter prophets – Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi – died, the Holy Spirit departed Israel. The Qumran community (the Jewish sect that left behind the Dead Sea Scrolls) awaited a prophet whose words had the authority to supersede existing regulations. Josephus, the greatest Jewish historian of the first century A.D., believed no more “words of God” were added to Scripture after 435 B.C. In *Against Apion* he wrote, “From Artaxerxes to our own times a complete history has been written, but has not been deemed worthy of equal credit with the earlier records, because of the failure of the exact succession of the prophets” (1.41).

In the New Testament, there is no dispute between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders over the extent of the canon. Jesus and the New Testament authors quote portions of the Old Testament as divinely authoritative nearly 300 times, but not once do they cite any books of the Apocrypha or any other writings as having divine authority. The council of Jamnia late in the first century featured discussions about the Old Testament canon, but it’s difficult to determine whether a definitive list was produced. The earliest Christian list of Old Testament books that exists today is by Melito, bishop of Sardis, dating to 170 A.D. None of the books of the Apocrypha is listed.

The Apocrypha

What about the Apocrypha (the Greek word means “things that are hidden”), a collection of seven books and another seven or eight additions to existing books of Jewish history and tradition written from the third century B.C. to the first century A.D.? The Jews never accepted these books as Scripture, but throughout the early history of the church there was much debate about whether they should be included in the canon. Jerome, in his Latin Vulgate translation of the Bible completed in 404 A.D., included the Apocrypha, although he argued they were not “books of the canon” but merely “books of the church” that were helpful to believers. In fact, it was not until 1546 A.D., at the Council of Trent, that the Roman Catholic Church declared the Apocrypha to be part of the canon (with the exception of 1 and 2 Esdras and the Prayer of Manasseh). Grudem comments, “It is significant that the Council of Trent was the response of the Roman Catholic Church to the teachings of Martin Luther and the rapidly spreading Protestant Reformation, and the books of the Apocrypha contain support for the Catholic teaching of prayers for the dead and justification by faith plus works, not by faith alone” (p. 59).

The argument against these books includes the following: 1) The Jews never accepted the books as Scripture and did not include them in their Bible; 2) any acceptance the books enjoyed was local and temporary; 3) no major church council included these books in Scripture; 4) many of the books contain errors; 5) some books include teachings that contradict Scripture; 6) neither Jesus nor the New Testament writers quoted from the Apocrypha even though they quoted from the Old Testament hundreds of times; 7) the

Christian churches that accepted these books did so many centuries after the canon was closed.

The New Testament

Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, compiled a list of the 27 books we now know as the New Testament in 367 A.D. He also was the first person in the church to use the word “canon.” The councils of Carthage (393 A.D.) and Hippo (397 A.D.) fixed the final list of New Testament books, but it’s important to note that the question of which books were truly “Scripture” was being addressed long before this. Even more important, Christians believe the Holy Spirit, who inspired (“breathed out”) the autographs of all Scripture, also managed its preservation and organization (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21).

Four developments prompted the church to act to “close” the canon: 1) heretics began circulating false writings; 2) counterfeit books, falsely written under the name of apostles, began to appear; 3) Christianity spread to new lands, and missionaries needed to know which books should be translated into the native languages; and 4) the edict of Diocletian (A.D. 303) ordered the destruction of the Christians’ sacred writings and threatened death for those who refused; believers needed to know which books were worth dying for.

The early church used a number of criteria to discern which books belonged in the canon:

- Was there evidence or claims of inspiration?
- Was the book written by an apostle or an associate who preserved the apostle’s teaching – the only exceptions being granted to James and Jude, brothers of Jesus who became followers after His death and resurrection?
- Was the book written while the apostles were still alive?
- Was the book generally accepted and used by the church and in continuous use in worship services?
- Was the book in agreement with accepted and undisputed Scripture?

How do we know, then, that the 66 books in the Bible are the “closed canon” of God’s written word? First, we may be confident in the faithfulness of God, who loves us, revealed Himself to us, and wants us to have His words, which are our life (Deut. 32:47; Matt. 4:4). The punishments God warns will befall those who add to or take away from his word (Rev. 22:18-19) are evidence that the Lord places a high value on the correctness and completeness of His written revelation to mankind. Further, “The preservation and correct assembling of the canon of Scripture should ultimately be seen by believers ...not as part of church history subsequent to God’s great central acts of redemption for his people, but as an integral part of the history of redemption itself” (Grudem, p. 65).

E.J. Young writes, “When the Word of God was written, it became Scripture, and as it had been spoken by God, it possessed his absolute authority. Therefore, it was the Word of God and was canonical. That which determines the canonicity of a book, therefore, is the fact that the book is inspired of God” (“The Canon of the Old Testament,” in *Revelation and the Bible*, ed. C.F. Henry, p. 156).

Finally, there are two factors at work in the process by which the canon was established. First is the activity of the Holy Spirit in inspiring, organizing, and preserving God’s Word, and confirming in our spirits that His Word is true. Second is the historical record of how carefully God’s Word was recorded, copied, preserved and shared. Yes, human beings were involved in the writing of Scripture and in the councils that argued for and against their inclusion in the canon. But ultimately, the God who hangs the stars in space and calls them by name (Isa. 40:26) has no problem guiding the means by which His very words are given to His most precious creation: mankind.

How Do I Know the Bible is True?

Objection 4: It's silly to assume that one book – the Bible – contains all of God's truth and that other great writings, from the Vedas to the Book of Mormon, do not come from God.

In addressing this objection, we must begin with the claims of the documents themselves. The Bible specifically and repeatedly declares itself to be the written Word of God, while the Vedas do not. Even the Book of Mormon is called “another testament of Jesus Christ,” dangerously ignoring a Biblical mandate not to add to or take away from the Scriptures (Rev. 22:18-19). While many religious writings contain moral and ethical truths, some of which are consistent with Scripture, only the Bible claims to be God's written and complete revelation to mankind. “To begin with,” writes Paul E. Little, “the Bible itself claims to be the inspired Word of God. While these claims alone are not final proof, they are a significant body of data that cannot be ignored” (*Know Why You Believe*, p. 75).

Consider as well that the Bible answers life's most important questions: Is there a God? How did the universe come to be? What's my purpose in life? Why is there so much evil in the world, and what's being done about it? Is there life after death? Are heaven and hell real? Can I know my eternal destiny? And so on. The Bible's claim to be the Word of God is backed up by unparalleled textual, archaeological, and historical evidence. Most compelling, however, is the testimony of the Holy Spirit, who authored the Scriptures and who confirms in our human spirits the truth of God's Word.

It's also important to keep in mind that God has revealed Himself to mankind in three primary ways: creation, Christ, and Scripture. All people can observe creation, as the Psalmist did, and conclude that there is a divine designer behind all things (Ps. 8:3-4). And the apostle Paul wrote that God will hold us responsible for the revelation He has given us of Himself in nature (Rom. 1:18-23). At the same time, God became flesh in Jesus the Christ and declared not only to have the truth, but to *be* the truth (see John 1:1-3, 14, 17; 14:6). The testimonies of creation, of Jesus, and of the Bible are in complete harmony in declaring the truth of God's revelation to us.

Four attributes of Scripture

In *Systematic Theology*, Wayne Grudem writes that the ways in which the Bible teaches us about itself may be classified into four attributes:

1. The authority of Scripture. “The authority of Scripture means that all the words in Scripture are God’s words in such a way that to disbelieve or disobey any word of Scripture is to disbelieve or disobey God” (Grudem, p. 73).

- All the words in Scripture are God’s words. This is what the Bible claims for itself. In the Old Testament, for example, the phrase “thus says the Lord” appears hundreds of times. Sometimes God is quoted directly; at other times, a prophet speaks at God’s command. In the New Testament, several passages indicate that all of the Old Testament writings are God’s Word (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20-1). In addition, there are two places in the New Testament where New Testament writings are called “Scripture” (1 Tim. 5:18; 2 Peter 3:16). The Bible employs the phrase “The Word of God” 394 times in the Old Testament to refer to itself, plus it uses various synonyms such as *law, statutes, precepts, commands, ordinances, and decrees*, according to J.D. Douglas in *The New Bible Dictionary*.
- Jesus recognized the Scriptures as authoritative. To cite but two examples, He states emphatically in Matt. 5:18, “For I assure you: Until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or one stroke of a letter will pass from the law until all things are accomplished.” And in John 10:35 He says “the Scripture cannot be broken.”
- We are convinced of the Bible’s claims to be God’s words as we read the Bible. The Holy Spirit, who inspired all of Scripture, speaks in and through the words of the Bible to our hearts and confirms their truth. Writes Grudem, “In a world free from sin, the Bible would commend itself convincingly to all people as God’s Word. But because sin distorts people’s perception of reality, they do not recognize Scripture for what it really is. Therefore it requires the work of the Holy Spirit, overcoming the effects of sin, to enable us to be persuaded that the Bible is indeed the Word of God and that the claims it makes for itself are true” (p. 79).
- To disbelieve or disobey any word of Scripture is to disbelieve or disobey God.
- God cannot lie or speak falsely. Paul writes in Titus 1:2 of “God, who cannot lie.” And Heb. 6:18 says “it is impossible for God to lie.”
- Therefore all the words in Scripture are completely true and without error in any part. Since the words of the Bible are God’s words, and because He cannot lie, we may be confident that there is neither untruthfulness nor error in the Bible.

The authority of Scripture includes the inerrancy of Scripture. “The inerrancy of Scripture means that Scripture in the original manuscripts does not affirm anything that is contrary to fact,” writes Grudem (p. 90). Put another way, “In the original manuscripts, the thoughts God wanted written were written. The words the writers used were guarded by God” (Little, p. 83).

- Since the Bible is God’s Word, it always tells the truth. “God is not a man who lies, or a son of man who changes His mind” (Num. 23:19).
- The Bible is inerrant yet speaks in the ordinary language of human beings. The Holy Spirit inspired 40 men over a period of more than 1,200 years to record His written revelation to mankind. These men used their own thoughts, expressions and writing styles yet were so guided by the Holy Spirit as to record exactly what God placed upon their hearts. “God worked through the instrumentality of human personality but so guided and controlled the people that what they wrote is what he wanted written” (Little, p. 77).
- The Bible is inerrant yet includes “loose” or “free” quotations. For example, written Greek at the time of the New Testament had no quotation marks or equivalent kinds of punctuation, and an accurate citation of another person needed only to include an accurate representation of the content of what the person said.
- To the charge that the Bible is only authoritative for “faith and practice” it may be argued that the Bible repeatedly affirms that all Scripture is profitable for us and all is God-breathed (2 Tim. 3:16-17); it is pure (Ps. 12:6); it is perfect (Ps. 119:96); and it makes no restrictions on its application to our lives.

2. The clarity of Scripture. “It would be a mistake to think that most of Scripture or Scripture in general is difficult to understand. In fact, the Old Testament and New Testament frequently affirm that Scripture is written in such a way that its teachings are able to be understood by ordinary believers” (Grudem, p. 105).

- The Bible frequently affirms its own clarity. Moses, for example, tells the people of Israel: “These words that I am giving you today are to be in your heart. Repeat them to your children. Talk about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up” (Deut. 6:6-7).
- The New Testament writers frequently state that the ability to understand Scripture rightly is more a moral and spiritual ability than an intellectual one (see 1 Cor. 2:13-15; 2 Cor. 3:14-16, 4:3-4; Heb. 5:14; James 1:5-6).
- “The clarity of Scripture means that the Bible is written in such a way that its teachings are able to be understood by all who will read it seeking God’s help and being willing to follow it” (Grudem, p. 108).
- There are two causes for disagreements over the clarity of Scripture: 1) we may be seeking affirmations where Scripture is silent; and 2) we may be wrongly interpreting Scripture. This is no reflection on Scripture; it is a reflection on us.

- Scholars play an important role in understanding Scripture. They may teach Scripture clearly, explore new areas of understanding the teachings of the Bible, defend the doctrines of Scripture against attacks, and supplement the study of Scripture for the benefit of the church.

3. The necessity of Scripture. “The necessity of Scripture means that the Bible is necessary for knowing the gospel, for maintaining spiritual life, and for knowing God’s will, but is not necessary for knowing that God exists or for knowing something about God’s character and moral laws” (Grudem, p. 116).

- The Bible is necessary for salvation in this sense, writes Grudem: One must either read the gospel message in the Bible for itself, or hear it from another person. Even those believers who came to salvation under the old covenant did so by trusting in the words of God that promised a Savior to come (p. 117).
- The Bible is necessary for maintaining spiritual life. For example, Jesus, quoting Deut. 8:3, said, “Man must not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4). And Moses spoke to the Israelites concerning the words of God’s law, “they are your life” (Deut. 32:47).
- The Bible is necessary for certain knowledge of God’s will. If there were no written Word of God, we could not gain certainty about God’s will through other means such as conscience or wise counsel; while they might provide a general sense of God’s will, they do not spell out in detail God’s perfect and holy standards, and we are left with the best that our sinful and fallen natures can ascertain.
- General revelation – the knowledge of God’s existence, character, and moral law – comes to all people through creation. But Scripture nowhere indicates that people can know the way of salvation through general revelation. It takes special revelation – God’s words addressed to specific people, as well as the revelation of Christ through His incarnation and finished work on the cross – to know these truths.
- “The Bible never views human speculation apart from the Word of God as a sufficient basis on which to rest saving faith,” writes Grudem. “Such saving faith, according to Scripture, is always confidence or trust in God that rests on the truthfulness of God’s own words” (p. 124).

4. The sufficiency of Scripture. “The sufficiency of Scripture means that Scripture contained all the words of God he intended his people to have at each stage of redemptive history, and that it now contains all the words of God we need for salvation, for trusting him perfectly, and for obeying him perfectly” (Grudem, p. 127).

- We can find all that God has said on particular topics, and we can find answers to our questions. It is possible to study systematic theology and ethics and find answers to our questions.

- The amount of Scripture given was sufficient at each stage of redemptive history. At the time of Moses' death, the first five books of the Old Testament were sufficient for God's people. And for Christians today, the Old and New Testaments are sufficient for us during the church age.
- This does not imply that God cannot add any more words to those he has already spoken to His people. Rather "it implies that man cannot add on his own initiative any words to those that God has already spoken. Furthermore, it implies that in fact God has not spoken to mankind any more words which he requires us to believe or obey other than those which we have now in the Bible" (Grudem, p. 129).
- The sufficiency of Scripture reminds us that we are to add nothing to, or take anything away from, the Bible.
- It tells us that God does not require us to believe anything about Him or His redemptive work that is not found in Scripture.
- It tells us no modern revelations from God or man are to be placed on a level equal to Scripture in authority.
- It reminds us that nothing is sin that is not forbidden by Scripture either explicitly or by implication.
- It tells us that nothing is required of us by God that is not commanded in Scripture either explicitly or by implication.
- Finally, the sufficiency of Scripture reminds us that we should emphasize what Scripture emphasizes and be content with what God has already revealed to us in His Word.

In summary, there are countless good and moral writings that have been left with us since ancient time, many of which agree in part or in full with Scripture. These may be read for encouragement, comparison, study, or a variety of other reasons. But only the Bible makes the unique claim to be the full written revelation of God. It is authoritative, clear, necessary, and sufficient.

How Do I Know the Bible is True?

Objection 5: The Bible is full of contradictions.

When someone raises this objection, a reasonable first response is, “Show me one.” Often, the person cannot do so. However, it must be acknowledged that there are numerous places in Scripture where there are seemingly conflicting testimonies and apparent contradictions. If the Bible comes from God, and if God neither lies nor makes mistakes, how do we reconcile these Bible difficulties?

The law of non-contradiction

First, we should examine the Bible the same way we examine other documents, using the traditional rules of logic and reason. A good place to start is by applying the law of non-contradiction, which maintains that “nothing can both be and not be.” For example, it cannot be day and night in the same place at the same time. Therefore, if a passage of Scripture violates the law of non-contradiction, its trustworthiness is undermined. At the same time, two statements may differ without being contradictory.

For example, in Matthew’s Gospel we read that Jesus meets two blind men (Matt. 20:29-34). Mark and Luke, however, mention only one blind man. Are these contradictory statements? Not necessarily. If Jesus meets two men, He certainly meets one. In addition, when the three Gospel accounts are read in their entirety, it becomes clear that Bartimaeus picks up an unnamed blind companion during the time Jesus visits Jericho. Finally, “Matthew was concerned to mention all who were involved in this episode (just as he alone of the Synoptists recorded the fact that it was really two maniacs that met Jesus on the territory of Gadara [Matt. 8:28], whereas both Mark and Luke speak only of one demoniac possessed by the Legion demons)... As for the second blind beggar, neither Mark nor Luke finds him significant enough to mention” (Gleason L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, p. 333).

By the way, apparent contradictions such as this actually provide supporting evidence for the veracity of the eyewitnesses. They show that the New Testament writers didn’t “get their story straight” in order to concoct a hoax. Just as four eyewitnesses to an auto accident would report what they saw from their different vantage points, so the four Gospel writers sought to communicate to their readers the details they felt were most important. Their testimonies are consistent even though their stories are different.

Translation and context

Next, we should consider translation and context. Some Bible passages appear contradictory because of the nuances of Bible translation. A case in point: The Book of Acts has two accounts of Paul’s conversion experience. Acts 9:7 (KJV) says the men journeying with Paul hear a voice but see no one. Acts 22:9 (KJV) says they did not hear the voice. The two passages appear contradictory, but the Greek clears it up, as do some modern translations. The construction of the verb is different in each account. W.F. Arndt explains: “In Acts 9:7 it (the verb ‘to hear,’ *akouo*),

is not the same in both accounts. In Acts 9:7 it is used with the genitive, in Acts 22:9 with the accusative. The construction with the genitive simply expresses that something is being heard or that certain sounds reach the ear; nothing is indicated as to whether a person understands what he hears or not. The construction with the accusative, however, describes a hearing, which includes mental apprehension of the message spoken. From this it becomes evident that the two passages are not contradictory” (*Does the Bible Contradict Itself?* quoted in “Bible Contradictions – Appearance or Reality?” found in www.allabouttruth.org.)

Some additional considerations

There are other considerations that may help clear up Bible difficulties:

- **Time.** Some seemingly contradictory statements are separated by years – even hundreds of years – and must be seen in their proper time frames. For example, Gen. 1:31 records that God was satisfied with creation, while Gen. 6:6 says He was sorry that He made man. Contradictory? No. Keep in mind that hundreds of years, including the fall of man, came between the first and second statements.
- **Context.** A careful study of the chapters and books in which the apparent contradictions occur often reveals subtle differences that aid understanding.
- **Sense.** Words and phrases can be used literally or figuratively. For example, Matt. 11:14 identifies John the Baptist as Elijah, yet John denies being Elijah (John 1:21). Contradiction? No. In Matthew, Elijah is described as the spiritual antitype of the great prophet (see also Luke 1:17).
- **Quotations.** Many references to Old Testament passages are not word-for-word quotes in the New Testament. Rather, they are paraphrases or summaries. Many of the apparent discrepancies in the gospels, Acts and the writings of Paul – minor as they are – disappear once we judge ancient historians by the standards of their day rather than ours. As Craig L. Blomberg writes, “In a world which did not even have a symbol for a quotation mark, no one expected a historian to reproduce a speaker’s words verbatim” (“The Historical Reliability of the New Testament,” *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, p. 207).
- **Understanding.** Some critics assume that passages they can’t explain cannot be explained by anyone. But lack of understanding does not necessarily imply errors in transmission.
- **Perspective.** When two or more writers provide separate accounts of the same events, differences in names, numbers, and conversations may be accounted for by each writer’s perspective: What did he see? Who did he interview? What was most important to record? Who is the audience to whom he wrote? Should numbers be exact or rounded?

Rick Cornish summarizes: “Skeptics play a constructive role. Their challenges force us to study and sometimes reevaluate our interpretations. But until they improve their own game, we need not worry about their accusation that ‘the Bible is full of errors and contradictions.’ It’s not” (5 *Minute Apologist*, p. 68).

How Do I Know the Bible is True?

Objection 6: The Bible can't be true because it depicts a different God in the Old and New Testaments.

Critics argue that the God of the Old Testament is distant, vengeful and harsh, engaging in genocide and punishing the innocent. Meanwhile, they say, the God of the New Testament is loving, kind and gracious, eager to forgive. Further, His Son Jesus is a gentle, meek, selfless and all-too-human being who speaks in adoring terms of His Father in Heaven. Complicating things further, the God of the Old Testament is described as one (Deut. 6:4) while the New Testament hints at a triune Godhead consisting of three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. How can the Gods of the Old and New Testaments be reconciled as one?

God's nature and progressive revelation

First, it's important to note that this objection reveals a basic misunderstanding of what the Old and New Testaments reveal about the nature of God. The writers of www.gotquestions.org put it very well: "The fact that the Bible is God's progressive revelation of Himself to us through historical events and through His relationship with people throughout history might contribute to people's misconceptions about what God is like in the Old Testament as compared to the New Testament. However, when one reads both the Old and the New Testaments it quickly becomes evident that God is not different from one Testament to another and that God's wrath and His love are revealed in both Testaments."

For example, the Old Testament in many places describes God as "a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and rich in faithful love and truth" (Ex.34:6; see also Num. 14:18; Deut. 4:31; Neh. 9:17; Ps. 86:5, 15; 108:4; 145:8; Joel 2:13). In the New Testament, God's love for mankind is manifested more fully in the sending of His Son, Jesus Christ, who died for us (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8; 1 Cor. 15:3-4). Or, consider that in the Old Testament, God deals with the Israelites much as a loving father deals with his children, punishing them for their idolatry but delivering them when they repent of their sins. In much the same way, the New Testament tells us God chastens Christians for their own good. Hebrews 12:6, quoting Proverbs 3:11-12, says, "[f]or the Lord disciplines the one He loves, and punishes every son whom He receives."

God's wrath – and jealousy

But what about God's wrath – and jealousy? Both the Old and New Testaments tell us that God delivers judgment on the unrepentant. He orders the Jews to completely destroy a number of people groups living in Canaan, but only after allowing them hundreds of years to repent (see, for example, Gen. 15:13-16). In addition, God's order to destroy the

Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites and others has a divine purpose: “so that they won’t teach you to do all the detestable things they do for their gods, and you sin against the Lord your God” (Deut. 20:18).

When the Old Testament describes God as “jealous” (see Deut. 4:24, for example), the word translated “jealous” (*qanna*) also means “zealous.” God’s jealousy “is an expression of His intense love and care for His people and His demand that they honor His unique and incomparable nature” (*Apologetics Study Bible*, p. 273). In the New Testament, Paul tells us that “God’s wrath is revealed from heaven against all godlessness and unrighteousness of people who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth” (Rom. 1:18). Jesus Himself often had harsh words for hypocrites (see Matt. 23) and even acted violently against them (John 2:15). He spoke more about hell than heaven, and He is depicted as an angry and wrathful judge in verses foretelling His return (Rev. 19:11-16). Put simply, a God who loves what is good must necessarily hate what is evil.

A Redeemer for a wrecked human race

Throughout the Bible we see a God who patiently and lovingly calls people into a relationship with Him. The entire human race is wrecked by sin, resulting in spiritual and physical death and separation from our Creator (Rom. 3:10, 23; 6:23; Eph. 2:1). Paul writes that the whole world groans beneath the weight of sin (Rom. 8:22). But from the moment Adam and Eve rebelled against God, He provided a way for that broken fellowship to be restored. He began with a promise of a Redeemer (Gen. 3:15); instituted a sacrificial system in which an innocent and spotless animal would shed its blood to atone for – or temporarily cover – man’s sin; and then He sent His Son, the Lamb of God, to take away the sin of the world (John 1:29; 3:16). When one reads the entire Bible, it becomes abundantly clear that the God of the Old and New Testaments does not change (Mal. 3:6; Heb. 13:8).

Is God one – or three?

Finally, what about the one God of the Old Testament and the triune God of the New Testament? There is no contradiction here. While the Bible emphatically declares that there is one true and living God (Deut. 6:4; James 2:19), the Old Testament hints at the triune Godhead, and the New Testament more fully reveals one God in three persons (see Gen. 1:1-2, 26; 3:22; 11:7; Isa. 6:8; Matt. 3:16-17; John 1:1, 14; 10:30; Acts 5:3-4; Col. 1:16; 2:9; Heb. 1:8; 1 Peter 1:2). An ancient saying sums up the difficulty of comprehending the Trinity but the necessity of believing in it: “He who would try to understand the Trinity would lose his mind, and he who would deny the Trinity would lose his soul.”

How Do I Know the Bible is True?

Objection 7: There are so many translations of the Bible that it's impossible to know which one is right.

It's true there is an alphabet soup of Bible translations available today, from the KJV to the NJB and the TNIV to the HCSB. This has led some people to ask, "Which version is right?" and others to conclude that because there is so much variation between translations, none of them is correct. Keep in mind, however, that the *autographs*, or original documents, of Scripture are inerrant – not the subsequent copies and translations. Just because there are dozens of English translations that differ in varying degrees from one another, we have a high degree of confidence that the source documents from which these versions come are accurate representations of the autographs.

Andreas J. Kostenberger writes: [T]he task of translating the Bible from its source languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek) into a receptor language such as English involves many issues related to the nature of language and communication.... The goal, of course, is the production of an English version that is an accurate rendering of the text written in such a way that the Bible retains its literary beauty, theological grandeur, and, most importantly, its message" ("Is the Bible Today What Was Originally Written?" found in www.4truth.net).

General translation classifications

There are four general classifications of Bible translations: formal equivalence, dynamic equivalence, optimal equivalence, and paraphrase.

Formal equivalence. Often called a "word-for-word" or "literal" translation, the principle of formal equivalence "seeks as nearly as possible to preserve the structure of the original language. It seeks to represent each word of the translated text with an exact equivalent word in the translation so that the reader can see word for word what the original human author wrote" (The Apologetics Study Bible, p. xviii). Advantages of formal equivalence include: (a) consistency with the conviction that the Holy Spirit inspired not just the thoughts but the very words of Scripture; (b) access to the structure of the text in the original language; and (c) accuracy to the degree that English has an exact equivalent for each word. Drawbacks include sometimes awkward English or a misunderstanding of the author's intent. The only truly formal equivalence translation is an interlinear version that tries to render each Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek word with an English equivalent without changing the word order. Translations that *tend* to follow a formal equivalence philosophy are the King James Version (KJV); the New American Standard Bible (NASB); the English Standard Version (ESV), and The Amplified Bible (AMP – a word-for-word translation that features additional amplification of word meanings).

Dynamic equivalence. Often referred to as “thought-for-thought” translation, dynamic equivalence attempts to distinguish the meaning of a text from its form and then translate the meaning so that “it makes the same impact on modern readers that the ancient text made on its original readers” (The Apologetics Study Bible, p. xviii). Strengths include: (a) a high degree of readability; and (b) an acknowledgement that accurate and effective translation requires interpretation. Drawbacks include: (a) the meaning of a text cannot always be neatly separated from its form; (b) the author may have intended multiple meanings; and (c) difficulty in verifying accuracy, which may affect the usefulness of the translation for in-depth study. Examples of translations that *tend* to employ dynamic equivalence are the New International Version (NIV); the Contemporary English Version (CEV); and the Good News Translation (GNT – formerly Today’s English Version [TEV] and Good News Bible [GNB]).

Optimal equivalence. Optimal equivalence as a translation philosophy recognizes that form cannot be neatly separated from meaning and should not be changed unless comprehension demands it, according to The Apologetics Study Bible: “The primary goal of translation is to convey the sense of the original with as much clarity as the original text and the translation language permit. Optimal equivalence appreciates the goals of formal equivalence but also recognizes its limitations” (pp. xviii – xix). The theory is to translate using formal equivalence where possible and dynamic equivalence where needed to clarify the text. The main advantage of optimal equivalence is the combination of accuracy and readability. The only drawback is that some people prefer either a more formal equivalence or dynamic equivalence translation. Translations that employ optimal equivalence include the Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB); the NET Bible; and God’s Word.

Paraphrase. Paraphrased versions of the Scriptures are loose translations that are highly readable and contemporary but lack the accuracy of word-for-word translations and at times add meaning beyond what a thought-for-thought translation would allow. “These translations place primacy on clarity and are willing to skip some of the finer nuances in the text to make sure the reader is getting the main point of each verse,” notes Ray Clendenen, associate editor of The Apologetics Study Bible. Examples of paraphrased translations include The Living Bible (TLB) and The Message.

Today the Bible is translated into more than 2,000 languages, covering more than 90 percent of the world’s people – and 1,000 new translations are in the works, according to Rick Cornish in *5 Minute Apologist*. As far as English translations go, there are good reasons for so many of them. “One reason relates to the original language,” writes Cornish. “As more manuscripts are discovered, scholars learn those ancient languages better and correct previous misunderstandings. A second reason is the changing nature of modern languages. What made sense in one generation makes less sense in the next and eventually, no sense or the wrong sense” (*5 Minute Apologist*, p. 73).

How Do I Know the Bible is True?

Objection 8: There are so many Christian denominations today, it's clear that Christians can't agree on what the Bible teaches.

The Handbook of Denominations in the United States (12th Edition) lists more than 200 Christian denominations in 17 broad categories, from “Baptist Churches” to “Community and New Paradigm Churches.” If Jesus prayed that His followers would be one (John 17:11), and if there is to be “one body and one Spirit ... one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Eph. 4:4-5), why can't Christians get along? Even within denominations such as the Southern Baptist Convention there have been major splits over issues such as the inerrancy of Scripture and the role of women in the church. Doesn't all this contentiousness prove a fatal flaw in the Bible, since even people who study it and say they believe it can't agree on what it teaches?

First, it should be noted that many of the disagreements among Christians are over matters of conscience, such as which day of the week to worship, dietary restrictions, or which translation of the Bible to use (see Rom.14:1-23; 1 Cor.10:23-33), or they focus on lesser points of doctrine, such as church polity or the manner in which missions activities are organized and funded. “The point of these divisions is never Christ as Lord and Savior, but rather honest differences of opinion by godly, albeit flawed, people seeking to honor God and retain doctrinal purity according to their consciences and their understanding of His Word” (“Why are there so many Christian denominations?” found in www.gotquestions.org).

Second, it should be acknowledged that Christians often have engaged in petty squabbling, internal power struggles and political wrangling, resulting in unnecessary divisions in the body of Christ, not to mention damage to the church's reputation. The New Testament implores believers to be gracious toward and forgiving of one another (Eph. 4:32); clearly, this has not always been the case.

Christian denominations generally developed out of a desire for fellowship and joint ministry between individual churches – a biblical concept (Acts. 11:27-30), according to Charles Draper (“Why So Many Denominations?” *The Apologetics Study Bible*, p. 1709). In addition, denominations many times began as renewal movements. The Reformed movements of the 1500s sought to restore the doctrines of the sovereignty of God and justification by faith to the church, which had all but abandoned these biblical teachings. In time, some Presbyterians drifted toward liberalism and new conservative Presbyterian groups emerged to preserve the Reformed teachings. Baptists came along within the Reformed tradition. Pentecostals and Charismatics formed new unions based on their view of the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts.

There is a rich diversity among Christian denominations, and the differences between them often are not as wide as they appear. This is not to say that all differences are minor, or that all should be set aside for the sake of unity, for in Scripture Christian unity is the product of God's Spirit working in the hearts of regenerate people and anchored in the truth of God's Word.

Some separations are, in fact, necessary. In the New Testament, many false teachers are disciplined or leave the churches (see 1 Tim. 1:18-20; 1 John 2:19). In addition, the apostle Paul warns the church that false teachers will rise to prominence in the church in the days before Christ's return (2 Tim. 3:1-9). The church today should be on guard against those who preach "another Jesus ... a different spirit ... a different gospel" (2 Cor. 11:4). For example, Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses claim to be Christian in their theology and practice, yet both organizations deny the central teachings of Scripture, particularly those having to do with the person and work of Christ, the person and work of the Holy Spirit, and the gospel.

In fact, it is important to differentiate between: (1) denominations within the body of Christ; (2) cults (or counterfeit forms of Christianity); and (3) non-Christian false religions. Southern Baptists, Presbyterians and Lutherans, for example, are Christian denominations. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania (Jehovah's Witnesses) are cults (religious organizations whose members claim to be Christians and who use the Bible and Christian terms, yet who deny the central beliefs of historical Christianity). Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism are non-Christian false religions.

Within Christian denominations, diversity is a good thing, but disunity is not, according to Gotquestions.org: "If two churches disagree doctrinally, debate and dialogue over the Word may be called for. This type of 'iron sharpening iron' (Proverbs 27:17) is beneficial to all. If they disagree on style and form, however, it is fine for them to remain separate. This separation, though, does not lift the responsibility Christians have to love one another (1 John 4:11-12) and ultimately be united as one in Christ (John 17:21-22)."

So what is a believer to do when looking for a church home? "The most important thing to do is to examine a church's teaching and practice to see if it is consistent with Scripture," writes Charles Draper in *The Apologetics Study Bible*. Gotquestions.org adds the following recommendations: "Pick a church on the basis of its relationship to Christ, how well it is serving the community. Pick a church where the pastor is preaching the Gospel without fear and is encouraged to do so. Christ and His church [are] all about your relationship to Him and to each other. As believers, there are certain basic doctrines that we must believe, but beyond that there is latitude on how we can serve and worship; it is this latitude that is the only good reason for denominations. This is diversity and not disunity. The first allows us to be individuals in Christ, the latter divides and destroys."

