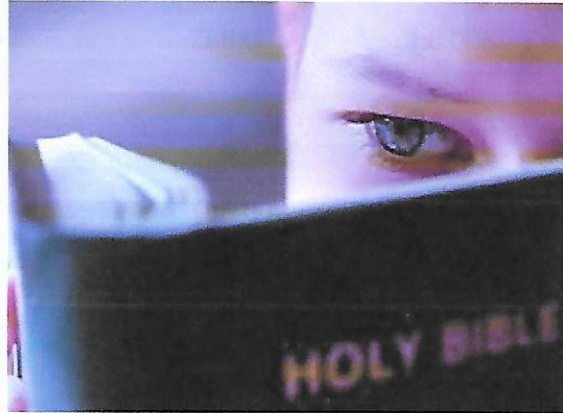


Prove to me that the Bible manuscripts are reliable



OK! Let's give it the same tests for reliability as any other historical document. There are four such tests:

1...**bibliographic** – since we don't have the original documents, how reliable are the copies we have in regard to the number of manuscripts we have and the time interval between the original and the earliest copies? The closer the time interval, the more accurate the documents tend to be.

2...**internal evidence** – are there contradictions or known historical errors in the documents?

3...**external evidence** – do other historical materials confirm or deny the documents events?

In fact, the Bible encourages testing. In 1st Thessalonians 5:21, it says to test everything and hold unto that which is good. Let's look at just the New Testament for now.

Regarding test#1, the bibliographic test, let's look at some of the most authenticated ancient documents and compare them to the New Testament.

Manuscripts

Author	Book	Datw Written	Earliest Copies	Time Gap	# of copies
Homer	Iliad	800 B.C.	400 B.C.	400 yrs	643
Herodotus	History	480-425 B.C.	900 A.D.	1,350 yrs	8
Thucydides	History	460-400 B.C.	900 A.D.	1,300 yrs	8
Plato		400 B.C.	900 A.D.	1,300 yrs	7
Demosthenes		300 B.C.	1100 A.D.	1,400 yrs	200
Caesar	Gallic Wars	100-44 B.C.	900 A.D.	1,000 yrs	10
Livy	History of Rome	59 B.C.-17 A.D.	4th century partial mostly 10th century	400 yrs 1,000 yrs	1 partial 19
Tacitus	Annals	100 A.D.	1100 A.D.	1,000 yrs	20
Pliny Secundus	Natural History	61-113 A.D.	850 A.D.	750 yrs	7
New Testament	Greek manuscripts	50-100 A.D.	114 A.D.(fragment) 200 A.D.(books) 250 A.D.(most of NT) 325 A.D.(complete NT)	50 yrs 100 yrs 150 yrs 225 yrs	5,686
New Testament	Non-Greek manuscripts				19,284
New Testament	Total manuscripts				24,970

The more documents that we have of a work, the more chance there is that there will be disagreement between the various copies. This is NOT true of the New Testament copies. They are about 99.5% in agreement. This can be said of no other ancient document.

The closer the time interval between the original & the earliest copy of a document, the more accurate the document tends to be. As you can see, *the time interval for the New Testament is far less than the other ancient documents above.*

It is apparent that the New Testament stands head-and-shoulders above all the other most authenticated ancient documents.

Even if we didn't have any copies of the New Testament, we could virtually reconstruct it from the early church fathers quoting of it. Again, this can be said of no other ancient document in existence.

Early Church Father Quotations of the New Testament

Column1	Column2	Column3	Column4	Column5	Column6	Column7
Writer	Gospels	Acts	Pauline letters	General letters	Revelation	Totals
Justin Martyr	268	10	43	6	3	330
Irenaeus	1,038	194	499	23	65	1,819
Clement	1,107	44	1,127	207	11	2,406
Origen	9,231	349	7,778	399	165	17,992
Tertullian	3,822	502	2,609	120	205	7,258
Hippolytus	734	42	387	27	188	1,378
Eusebius	3,258	211	1,592	88	27	5,176
Grand Totals	19,368	1,352	14,035	870	664	36,289

Regarding test#2, the internal test...did what's written about really happen? Or are there contradictions or known historical errors in the Bible? Consider these points...

- the disciples couldn't afford to risk inaccuracies, which would at once be exposed by people only too glad to do so, specifically the Jews.
- the disciples appealed to common events that the average person knew about... things like the feeding of the 5,000, the Sermon on the Mount, John the Baptist baptizing people in the Jordan River.
- despite the popular rumor, there are no errors or contradictions in the Bible.

Some people say, "But what about all the errors and contradictions in the Bible?"

This is one of the most asked, least understood questions about the Bible. They have heard this question effectively asked often but not effectively answered. So they think they can stump you with this question. If you ask the person what errors and contradictions they have in mind, they usually don't know. But you need to be prepared to answer it if they do know of some. At this point, it would be good to mention that you're not the Bible Answer Man and that you may have to get back with them on it. None of us have all the answers in our head but we believe that they are out there. So if you just get the person's email address, you can get back to them with your answer. If they give it to you, great! If they don't give it to you, they're not interested in hearing an answer and you've just saved yourself a lot of time, trouble and frustration. There's nothing more frustrating than trying to prove something to somebody who doesn't want it proven to them.



Christians claim that there are no errors or contradictions in the original manuscripts (MS), which we don't possess. Don't worry as almost no ancient MS is an original. They're almost all copies.

Because there are thousands of hand-written copies (as only a few copies of any other historical document), remember there was no printing press at this time, the Bible has a much greater chance of error than any other historical document. Just because there are some copyist errors, doesn't mean that the Bible is full of errors and contradictions.

There are usually three types of errors/contradictions;

- spelling or word order errors
- numerical errors
- interpretation errors

Some New Testament MS's spell John with one 'N' while others spell it with two 'N's'. This may be related to how John is spelled in that particular language. Other errors are word order differences., which are usually due to translating from one language to another. These are not really 'errors' at all. If you compare the earliest MS copy with the latest one, *the Bible is 99% word-for-word accurate.*



An example of a numerical error is as follows; in the Masoretic text of 2nd Chronicles 2:22, it says Ahaziah was 42 years old, yet 2nd Kings 8:26 says he is 22 years old. He couldn't have been 42 (a copyist error) or he would have been older than his father. It's important to keep in mind that even with this one error, 100% of the meaning of the text comes thru. There are only a very small handful of these numerical errors. Also, not one major or minor

doctrine is changed because of these copyist errors. This can be said of no other ancient historical document.

An example of an interpreting error is as follows; in Matthew 28:2, he says an angel came down to Jesus' tomb but Luke 24:4 says two angels came down. This is why police like to get more than one perspective on an accident or crime. If two people said the exact same words, the police would suspect collusion between the two witnesses. Saying two different but complementary things is not the same as saying two contradictory things. Matthew did NOT say that ONLY one angel came down. He was emphasizing what an angel said to the women. Apparently, he didn't see the need to mention the other angel, whereas Luke (who by just about every historians viewpoint is a consummate 1st century historian) did. One account does not contradict the other account, but supplements it.

All of these alleged errors/contradictions are easily answered by...

- looking carefully at the text in question
- looking up the text in a commentary or in a book of Bible difficulties
- knowing a little bit about translating from one language into another

No ancient document comes close to the Bible for this high level of accuracy. So, if the person bringing up these 'errors & contradictions' is going to believe in any ancient historical accounts at all, they have to believe in the Bible if they're being logically & rationally consistent.

Dr. Gleason Archer learned over 30 languages (most of them from the Middle Eastern ancient world), taught for over 30 years in the field of biblical criticism and earned a law degree (giving him a thorough grounding in the field of legal evidences) said this...

"I have dealt with one apparent discrepancy after another and have studied the alleged contradictions between the biblical record and the evidence of linguistics, archaeology and science, my confidence in the trustworthiness of Scripture has been repeatedly verified and strengthened...There is a good and sufficient answer in Scripture itself to refute every charge that has ever been leveled against it." **The allegations of errors are usually based on a failure to recognize basic principles of interpreting ancient literature.**

While we cannot answer every single question brought up about the Bible, neither can the critic answer everything about their philosophy of life. The fact that we can answer just about every 'seeming' error or contradiction is far superior to any other religion or philosophy of life.

Regarding test#3, the external test...are there other historical materials that can confirm or deny the biblical events or people?

There are many non-Christian writings that confirm New Testament history, such as

- 1..Tacitus, a Roman considered one of the accurate 1st century historian
- 2..Suetonius, chief secretary to Roman Emperor Hadrian
- 3..Josephus, a Jewish priest, general and historian who confirms many, many Bible people and events including stating that Jesus was the Messiah who rose from the dead.
- 4..Thallus, who talks about the “darkening of the skies” and an earthquake when Jesus was crucified.
- 5..Pliny the Younger, a Roman administrator
- 6..Trajan, a Roman Emperor
- 7..Jewish Talmud, saying Jesus was crucified at Passover
- 8..Lucian of Samosata, a Greek writer who was very critical of Jesus, His crucifixion and Christianity
- 9..Mara Bar-Serapion, a Syrian writer
- 10..The Gospel of Truth, a gnostic document that confirms that Jesus was a historical person
- 11..The Acts of Pontius Pilate, an apocryphal document describing Jesus crucifixion.
- 12..All of the gnostic, pseudepigraphon and apocryphal writings. Who would write about a person that didn’t exist?
- 13...the Dead Sea scrolls

There are also many Christian writings...

The many early church fathers who kept very detailed records, which can be verified by other ancient documents. Church fathers like Ignatius, Polycarp, Tatian, Clement of Rome, Irenaeus & Papias. Most of these early church fathers were martyred for their beliefs. Who would die for a lie, knowing it was a lie?

By using the same manuscript tests that other reliable ancient historical documents use, the Bible (specifically the New Testament) is more reliable than all of them by a longshot. If you’re going to say the Bible is not reliable, then to be consistent, you have to say that all of the ancient historical documents that we base our historical accounts on is not reliable. I doubt many people would be willing to say that.

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(great introductory article)