

Is the Bible Reliable?

© Rodney Combs, Ph.D., 2007

Why is it important to know the Bible is true and reliable?

If the Bible is God's word, then whether one believes it or not is a matter of life and death. This isn't just another choice from the McMenu of life. This is important stuff. If it is God's word, if it is true, then its sayings apply to our life. If the Bible is true, and yet the veracity of God's word is doubted, not only will our choices lead us to death, but we will miss out on all the help the Bible gives us to really experience the incredible life he has planned for us.

So, what is the evidence? How can we know the Bible is true? Let me give you the **SUPPORT** you need to confirm your faith and convince others who lack faith.

Scripture—The Bible's own testimony declares its trustworthiness.

The Bible speaks about itself and it says it is God's word. Over 2000 times in the OT alone, the Bible asserts that God spoke what is written. The NT refers to the OT over 40 times as the "Word of God." 2 Tim. 3:16 "*All Scripture is God-breathed.*" Peter declares the writings of his contemporary, Paul, were already considered God's Scripture, "*He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.*" (2 Peter 3:16)

The Bible's own testimony maintains its trustworthiness. Some would say, "Well, big deal. I could write a book and say my book was inspired. That doesn't prove anything." And they would be right. But, the testimony of Scripture is important. Even in our justice system, a person's own testimony about his or her guilt or innocence is valued and important. The Scripture says it is God's reliable Word.

Unity—The unity of the Bible provides evidence of supernatural authorship.

What if I gave you the assignment to collect 10 people from the same area, each of them with the same education level, same cultural background, speaking the same language and tell them to write a one page opinion of the events of the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. What do you think the odds are that all 10 of those pages would express the same opinion and come to the same conclusion without any contradictions? Not very good are they?

Think about the Bible. The Bible is a collection of 66 different pieces of literature. Some of them letters, some pieces of history, some wisdom sayings, others are songs and prayers, some direct teachings, and some are stories. It is a collection of writings from over 40 *different* authors, written over a 1500-year span. The authors had *different* education levels, came from *different* cultures, spoke *different* languages, had *different* backgrounds (for example, there were military leaders, a prime minister, tax collector, cupbearer, fisherman), lived on three *different* continents (Asia, Africa, Europe), wrote from *different* settings (wilderness, prison, island of Patmos) and covered not on one subject but *different* topics, hundreds of critical topics. And yet, when their writings are pressed together, they have a unified theme and they never contradict each

other in any area, whether it is historical details, doctrinal issues, or moral lessons. The Bible is a unity. There are no contradictions. No competing truths. From beginning to end it is the unfolding of God's plan of salvation for people with Jesus as the theme.

And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he [Jesus] explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. (Luke 24:27)

He [Jesus] said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." (Luke 24:44)

The unity of the Bible provides evidence of supernatural authorship. There is no way such variety in writing could produce such consistency and unity without the hand of God. Over 40 human authors, but the only way to reasonably understand the unity is to realize there was one divine author!! This is evidence of the Bible's truthfulness.

Prophecy—The volume and accuracy of fulfilled prophecy support its truthfulness.

This is perhaps the strongest piece of evidence for the truthfulness of the Bible. By "prophecy" I mean when the Bible tells about something that is going to happen in the future, a prediction by God. The sheer number of biblical prophecies that have come true is powerful evidence. Add to that the specific detail of many of those prophecies and you have exponentially powerful evidence.

The Bible itself recognizes that fulfilled prophecy is evidence of the supernatural origin of its prophets. *But the prophet who prophesies peace will be recognized as one truly sent by the LORD only if his prediction comes true (Jeremiah 28:9).* If a prophecy was made that did not come true, then the prophet would be unmasked as inauthentic. *"You may say to yourselves, "How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the LORD?" If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him" (Deuteronomy 18:21-22)*

The Bible is filled with prophecies—most which have already come true. We can prove it. The OT itself has over 2000 predictive prophecies. Therefore, it is filled with opportunities to test and see if the Bible is true. These are not vague generalities like those of modern fortunetellers (i.e., you will find success, a handsome man will soon come into your life). They are specific and testable.

There are three different types of prophecies in the OT:

1. Predictions of the coming Messiah.

Remember, these were written between 500 and 1000 years before Christ came. 456 specific prophecies were made about the Messiah. They include details like that he would be born in Bethlehem, of a virgin, sold for 30 pieces of silver, the silver would be used to buy a potter's field, that he would be silent when accused and buried by a rich man. 456 specific prophecies. A good study Bible will give you a chart of these.

Every one of them came true. The chance of fulfilling 48 of them in one person has been calculated to be 10^{157} . According to Barrel's single law of chance, anything beyond 10^{50} is an impossibility. Not only

does fulfilled prophecy support the truthfulness by showing how what it says is true, but it supports it by showing that God had to be a part of the writing for all these to come true.

2. Predictions dealing with kings and nations in the OT.

There were all sorts of prophecies about kings and nations that came through in past history. There were prophecies about the city of Tyre being opposed by many nations (Ezekiel 26:3), the walls being destroyed and the tower being broken (26:4); that the stones and debris would be thrown into the water (26:12). All which happened precisely as predicted. There are similar prophecies about Simon and Babylon. Here is one interesting example. Isaiah (44:28; 45:1) predicted Cyrus would have the city of Jerusalem and the temple itself rebuilt. He made that prediction in 700 B.C. Babylon was not really a threat to anyone at this time, yet he said God would take them down. He predicted Persia would in turn defeat Babylon, and at that time Persia was barely in existence. Both the city and the temple were standing strong and no one had ever heard of Cyrus. In 586 B.C. both were destroyed and in 539 B.C. the Persian King Cyrus encouraged the Jews to rebuild both. Amazing. All of these fulfilled prophecies provide confidence of the Bible's truthfulness.

Phenomena—The miracles in the Bible validate its reliability.

One of the major reasons Jesus performed miracles was to authenticate his message. That is why the Gospel of John calls them "signs." They were used to point to Jesus. The Bible records some strange signs or miracles. Plagues, seas being opened, healings, and Jesus served a huge buffet with a few fish and biscuits. Even in the biblical story, no one ever questioned whether or not these actually happened.

Listen to this. *"While they were going out, a man who was demon-possessed and could not talk was brought to Jesus. And when the demon was driven out, the man who had been mute spoke. The crowd was amazed and said, 'Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel.' But the Pharisees said, 'It is by the prince of demons that he drives out demons'"* (Matthew 9:32-34). The Pharisees (who were Jesus' enemies) said he was casting out demons by the power of Satan. They didn't say he didn't cast out demons. They sought to kill him because he healed on the Sabbath. The fact that he healed was never in question, just that he did it on the Sabbath.

The Bible is not the only source that Jesus did miracles. There is lots of extra-biblical support for that. The *Talmud* (Jewish commentaries) records that Jesus did miracles and said that it was sorcery. The *Talmud* consists of Jewish traditions handed down from generation to generation. They also didn't question that he did miraculous, just that he did it with evil powers. *Talmud* (A.D. 100-500): *"It has been taught: On the eve of Passover they hanged Yeshu. And an announcer went out, in front of him, for forty days (saying): 'He is going to be stoned, because he practiced sorcery and enticed and led Israel astray. Anyone who knows anything in his favor, let him come and plead in his behalf.' But, not having found anything in his favor, they hanged him on the eve of Passover"* (Babylonia Sanhedrin 43a).

The *resurrection* is the greatest miracle. There has never been any evidence that disproves the fact that Jesus came back from the dead. Think about it. The writers of the Bible prophesy that Jesus will come back from the dead and then it says that he did that. The whole book centers on that event. If that ONE event can be disproved, the Bible is gone. It becomes useless, no longer trustworthy. Surely the writers of the Bible would not have included it if they thought it was historical fiction. Remember, the Bible was written and read during the time that Jesus died. Eyewitnesses were around to disprove the Bible if it were

in fact untrue. This miracle is the greatest phenomenon and no one has ever disproved it. The phenomenons of the Bible validate its reliability.

Others—The testimony of the early church supports its credibility.

Do you think someone could write a book that talked about the miraculous success of the economy in America between 2002 and 2005 and gather a following today? No way. Why? Do you think someone could write a book today about the strength of the levees in New Orleans and go on a speaking tour about how they can easily withstand the power of a direct hit from a category 5 hurricane? No. His success would never get started. His book would be trashed. Why?

There would be enough eyewitnesses still alive to disprove these books. The church of the first century expanded. The Bible was quickly and immediately accepted as God's word. The Gospels were circulated and confirmed as true. The epistles were read and followed. The Bible was quoted and taught and followed by followers of Christ in the early church and that supports its credibility.

Rocks—Archeological finds confirm its accuracy.

Here is the thing about the Bible, if it has one error, it is toast; it is not to be believed. If we read a book on the history of WWI and find a historical error, we can still accept the rest of the book. It could still be true. We understand the author is human, some of his or her sources might have been incomplete, and there may have been some information not yet discovered. So, we understand the rest of the book could have some merit.

Not true with the Bible. If it has some historical errors, some technical flaws, it might also have some doctrinal errors. If we can't trust all of it, we can't trust any of it. It claims to be God's true, reliable word and if some part of it is wrong, then it can't be God's word. As Irwin Lutzer says, "If Moses didn't cross the Red Sea, why should we believe that God gave the Ten Commandments on Sinai? If Abraham did not rescue Lot from tribal kings, as critics used to teach, then we cannot trust the story of God's covenant with Abraham. If the Bible names the wrong Roman ruler when the decree was given for Joseph to return to Bethlehem, why should we believe in the Virgin Birth of Jesus? Remember, it is either all true, or it is riddled with errors." (*You Can Trust the Bible*, 65). The Bible has to be reliable about the things of this earth if we are to believe it about the heavenly, spiritual things.

The ROCKS are the best evidence of the earthly realities.

Archaeology is a study based upon excavation and critical evaluation of the records of the past. The last 50 years have been a heyday for archaeological findings.

We don't have space to list the discoveries nor their significance. Understand this, however, places, cities, tools and instruments, inscriptions, and a host of other things have been discovered that confirm the accuracy of the biblical record. As example, the excavations at Megiddo reveal what was once thought fanciful tales about the thousands of horses the Bible claims Solomon had. They have discovered ruins with thousands of stalls for horses. The walls of Jericho have been discovered in ruins. The pool of Bethesda has been found right where it is said to have been in the book of John. The altar to an unknown god was

found in Athens as Paul had talked about and we could list thousands more. Over 25,000 sites have been found which match the Bible's stories and no sites have been found to prove the Bible wrong. Let me summarize by quoting one scientist's conclusion. Dr. Henry Morris, a Christian apologist and scientist has written, "It must be extremely significant that, in view of the great mass of corroborative evidence regarding the biblical history of these periods, there exists today not one unquestionable find of archaeology that proves the Bible to be in error at any point."

The rocks are crying out that God's word is God's word; it is true and reliable. If the details of history are so precise, the details of doctrine can be trusted as well.

Testimony—A believer's own testimony confirms its authenticity.

We began with the Bible's own testimony, and we end with our own testimony. A person's own testimony is never enough proof. Someone's experience is never solid evidence. However, millions of people have claimed that the Bible has led them to God, that the life he has promised has been found by following his word. If you follow the Bible, you too may find that you are a witness to its truthfulness.

All of this evidence compiled together (along with other pieces of evidence not mentioned) provide overwhelming SUPPORT that the Bible is truthful and reliable in all that it says.