The Reliability of Scripture

I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.
~ Matthew 5:18 ~

Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. 21 For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.
~ 2 Peter 1:20-21 ~

All Scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness.
~ 2 Timothy 3:16 ~

Why is this subject important? It is important because if we cannot trust the accuracy of the historical record as communicated in Scripture then why should we trust the areas that make imperatives about how we should live our lives? If the Bible cannot be trusted in some areas, it cannot be trusted in any areas.

When people assert that they don’t believe the Bible they must be asked, “Do you understand the message of the Bible?” Usually they do not. Those who think they do will often present a highly distorted view.

M-A-P-S\(^1\) have been provided to help us understand why the Bible is reliable. This acronym will hopefully help you remember the four main points that any skeptic needs to consider when studying the reliability of Scripture.

\[ \boxed{\begin{align*}
M & \quad = \text{Manuscripts.} \\
& \quad \text{The documents that demonstrate the reliability of both the Old and New Testaments are, without a doubt, the most highly studied and scrutinized texts of all antiquity. Critics, who thought contradictions and errors would be in abundance throughout the more than 24,000 documents, have never found more than minor scribal errors (copying mistakes), none of which have any bearing on the message or truth claims made throughout the Bible. Anyone looking at the facts would have to, at the very least, conclude that the Bible we presently hold in our hands is an accurate copy of}
\end{align*}} \]

\(^1\) This helpful acronym is from the Christian Research Institute’s website, [www.equip.org](http://www.equip.org).
what was written over a 1,500-year span (between 1,900 and 3,400 years ago, approx.) by more than 40 different authors.

Three lines of evidence:

1. Bibliographic test – this examines the transmission of the Old and New Testaments throughout the centuries from the original autographs to what we presently hold in our hands. The three parts of this test are:
   a. Quantity of manuscripts
   b. Quality of manuscripts
   c. Time span of manuscripts

2. The Internal Test – this examines what claims the Bible makes about itself. In this test one examines the truth claims made throughout Scripture as well as studying the continuity and harmony of what it proclaims.

The Bible is unique in its continuity. Here is a book:\(^2\)

1. Written over a 1,500 years span.
2. Written over 40 generations.
3. Written by over 40 authors from every walk of life including kings, peasants, philosophers, fishermen, poets, statesmen, scholars, physicians, etc.:
   a. Moses, a political leader, trained in the universities of Egypt
   b. Peter, a fisherman
   c. Amos, a herdsman
   d. Joshua, a military general
   e. Nehemiah, a cupbearer
   f. Daniel, a prime minister
   g. Luke, a doctor
   h. Solomon, a king
   i. Matthew, a tax collector
   j. Paul, a rabbi
4. Written in different places:
   a. Moses in the wilderness
   b. Jeremiah in a dungeon
   c. Daniel on a hillside and in a palace
   d. Paul inside prison walls
   e. Luke while traveling
   f. John on the island of Patmos
   g. Others in the rigors of a military campaign
5. Written at different times:
   a. David in times of war
   b. Solomon in times of peace
6. Written during different moods:
   a. Some from the heights of joy
   b. Others from the depths of despair
7. Written on three continents: Asia, Africa, and Europe
8. Written in three languages:
   a. Hebrew – the majority of the Old Testament

\(^2\) Ibid., p. 16.
b. Aramaic – a few small portions of the Old Testament. Aramaic was the common language of the near east until the time of Alexander the Great (6th century B.C. – 4th century B.C.)
c. Greek – the international language at the time of Christ.

9. Its subject matter includes hundreds of controversial subjects. A controversial subject is one which would create opposing opinions when mentioned or discussed.

a. Biblical authors spoke on hundreds of controversial subjects with harmony and continuity from Genesis to Revelation. There is one unfolding story: “God’s redemption of man.”

* Josh McDowell illustration: Take ten authors, all from one walk of life, one generation, one place, one mood, one continent, one language, and just one controversial subject. Would the authors all agree? No, of course not. What you would end up with is a conglomeration, not a unified argument. Then consider the unified teaching of Scripture.

3. The External Test – this examines the verification of the historical events claimed in Scripture. This not only includes basic historical information, but also fulfilled prophecy. The Bible contains hundreds of prophecy’s that have already been fulfilled. Scripture holds itself to the highest of standards in regards to prophecy (see Deut. 18:21-22).

Important terms related to the inspiration of Scripture:

• Verbal inspiration – God-Breathed (2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Peter 1:20-21)
• Plenary inspiration – Every word, not just portions.
• Inerrancy – Without mistake in the original autographs.

“”The competence of the New Testament documents would be established in any court of law.”\(^3\)

~ John Warwick Montgomery ~

* THINK: If God created all things, is sovereign over all of them, and knows the end from the beginning, would He not also ensure the protection of His Word? Do you think God can be thwarted? Or worse, do you think He would allow false information in His Word to throw us a “curveball” so we would be confused, which would cause Him to laugh when we fell for His “trick”? Of course not!

A = Archeology.

If the Bible could hold up under intense archaeological scrutiny – considering the thousands of references to historical events, geographical locations, kingdoms, and people – would it not lend incredible credibility to the truth claims it makes concerning how one should live?

The Testimony of Sir William Ramsay
Sir William Ramsay, was educated at Oxford and a professor at both Oxford and Cambridge. He received gold medals from Pope Leo XII, the University of Pennsylvania, the Royal Geographical Society, and the Royal Scottish Geographical Society, and was knighted in 1906. He was, at one time, a great skeptic of Christianity. He had the desire to prove that the Bible was fraudulent.

He had spent years deliberately preparing himself for the announced task of heading an exploration expedition into Asia Minor and Palestine, the home of the Bible, where he would "dig up the evidence" that the Book was the product of ambitious monks, and not the book from heaven it claimed to be. He regarded the weakest spot in the whole New Testament to be the story of Paul's travels. These had never been thoroughly investigated by one on the spot.... Equipped as no other man had been, he went to the home of the Bible. Here he spent fifteen years literally "digging for the evidence". Then in 1896 he published a large volume on Saint Paul the Traveler and the Roman Citizen.

The book caused a furor of dismay among the skeptics of the world. Its attitude was utterly unexpected, because it was contrary to the announced intention of the author years before....for twenty years more, book after book from the same author came from the press, each filled with additional evidence of the exact, minute truthfulness of the whole New Testament as tested by the spade on the spot. The evidence was so overwhelming that many infidels announced their repudiation of their former unbelief and accepted Christianity. And these books had stood the test of time, not one having been refuted, nor have I found even any attempt to refute them.

By 1958 "over 25,000 sites from the biblical world have been confirmed by some archaeological discoveries to date." Forty-five years later, the list is longer. Interested individuals, be they believers or skeptics, should spend some time studying Dr. Clifford Wilson’s 17-volume survey, Archaeology – The Bible and Christ. Dr. Wilson closes volume 17 by stating the following:

"It is remarkable that where confirmation is possible and has come to light, the Bible stands investigation in ways that are unique in all literature. Its superiority to attack, its capacity to withstand criticism, its amazing facility to be proved right after all, are all staggering by any standards of scholarship. Seemingly assured results ‘disproving’ the Bible have a habit of backfiring. Over and over again the Bible has been vindicated. That is true from Genesis to Revelation, as we have seen in this book.”

---

6 Joseph P. Free, revised and expanded by Howard F. Vos, Archaeology and Bible History (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), p. IX.
7 Published by Pacific Christian Ministries, P.O. Box 311, Lilydale 3140, Victoria, Australia, and available from Pacific International University and Archaeology Center, P.O. Box 1717, Springfield, Missouri, 65801 (417-831-7515).
Prophecies. The Bible is unique in that no other book has literally hundreds of prophecies foretold, hundreds of years before the historical events, and fulfilled in the tiniest of details. Critics of the Bible had attempted for many years to discredit the Bible by stating that the prophecies made by the authors were written after the event(s) occurred. Of course, as time marched on, the Bible was proven reliable and the skeptic proven wrong. Archaeology unearthed evidence that proved the Biblical passages were written long before the events occurred. In Isaiah 48:3-7, God tells man in essence, ‘not only have I proven Myself in the past, but pay attention and I will continue to prove myself in the future with information that could not be known outside of my prophesying them.’

I foretold the former things long ago, my mouth announced them and I made them known; then suddenly I acted, and they came to pass. 4For I knew how stubborn you were; the sinews of your neck were iron, your forehead was bronze. 5Therefore I told you these things long ago; before they happened I announced them to you so that you could not say, ‘My idols did them; my wooden image and metal god ordained them.’ 6You have heard these things; look at them all. Will you not admit them?  ‘From now on I will tell you of new things, of hidden things unknown to you. 7They are created now, and not long ago; you have not heard of them before today. So you cannot say, ‘Yes, I knew of them.’

Approximately 27% of the entire Bible contains prophetic material, most of which has already come true and some, which remain to be fulfilled. 8Considering the Isaiah passage, along with Deuteronomy 18’s conditions for prophecy, the Bible sets itself up to be studied thoroughly and tested completely. Deuteronomy 18 demands that a prophet to be correct 100% of the time. If they are not, they are to be stoned. They are false prophets. Can a false prophet ever accurately predict a future event? Yes. This is described in Deuteronomy 13:1-3, 5.

♦ **Old Testament Illustration:** The prophet Isaiah, writing about 700 B.C., names Cyrus and the king who will say to Jerusalem that it shall be built and that the Temple foundation shall be laid (Isaiah 44:28). At the time of Isaiah’s writing, the city of Jerusalem was fully built and the entire Temple was standing. Not until more than 100 years later, in 586 B.C., would the Temple be destroyed by king Nebuchadnezzar. After Jerusalem was taken by the Babylonians, it was conquered by the Persians in about 539 B.C. Shortly after that, a Persian king named Cyrus gave the decree to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. This was around 160 years after the prophecy of Isaiah. 9

♦ **New Testament Illustration:** Since Christ is the culminating theme of the Old Testament and the Living Word of the New Testament, it should not surprise us that prophecies regarding Him outnumber any others. Many of these prophecies would have been impossible for Jesus to deliberately conspire to fulfill — such as His descent from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Gen. 12:3; 17:19; Num. 24:21-24); His birth in Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2); His crucifixion with criminals (Isa. 53:12); the piercing of His

---

hands and feet at the crucifixion (Ps. 22:16); the soldiers’ gambling for His clothes (Ps. 22:18); the piercing of His side and the fact that His bones were not broken at His death (Zech. 12:10; Ps. 34:20); and His burial among the rich (Isa. 53:9). Jesus also predicted His own death and resurrection (John 2:19-22).10

“The most amazing drama that ever was presented to the mind of man – a drama written in prophecy in the Old Testament – is the narrative of Jesus the Christ. One outstanding fact, among many, completely isolates Him. It is this: that one man only in the history of the world has had explicit details given beforehand of His birth, life, death and resurrection; that these details are in documents given to the public centuries before He appeared, and that no one challenges, or can challenge, that these documents were widely circulated long before His birth; and that anyone and everyone can compare for himself/herself the actual records of His life with those ancient documents, and find that they match one another perfectly. The challenge of this pure miracle is that it happened concerning one man in the whole history of the world.”

~ D.M. Panton ~

Statistics.

What is the probability that a book written by some 40 different authors (from all different educational backgrounds and occupations), over a period of more than 1,500 years, covering hundreds of controversial subjects, could be consistent in itself (the internal test discussed in the manuscript section), and meet every challenge posed by skeptics for more than 2,000 years? NONE! Unless it was true! When one considers the immense number of detailed prophecies made throughout both the Old and New Testaments – knowing full well it has been clearly demonstrated the dating of the manuscripts, and the manuscripts themselves are authentic – could even a hardened skeptic deny the statistical verdict: The Bible is the Word of God, Jesus Christ is the Messiah, He was resurrected from the dead, and that which the Bible talks about is true? The answer is a resounding NO!

What are some statistics that help demonstrate the Bible to be the Word of God?

♦ The existence of the Jew. The Jews have been conquered numerous times throughout their existence. After the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem in A.D. 70, they were displaced from their homeland for over 1,900 years. Yet against all odds, the State of Israel was reborn in 1948. Through all of this Israel never perished nor lost its national identity. History has demonstrated that any people who leave their homeland will, after about 5 generations, lose their national identity by being absorbed into the new culture. But the Jews have inexplicably (to men) kept their national identity. Think of all the nations who at one time persecuted Israel – Moabites, Edomites, Philistines, Ammonites, and Babylonians. No one talks

10 Hank Hanegraaff, Biblical Reliability. www.equip.org
about a Swedish Moabite, a Russian Edomite, or a Polish Babylonian. No, all those nations lost their identities. But they do talk about Swedish Jews, Russian Jews, and Polish Jews. What about Egypt? Is Egypt even remotely similar to the Egypt of 2,000 years ago? The only thing similar is some historical structures, which still stand. Do they still worship Ra the sun god? Or any of their other false gods of the past? Egypt still stands, but it does not resemble ancient Egypt in any way. But again, one could ask, “Have you ever heard of a Swedish Egyptian, Russian Egyptian, etc.?”

♦ Predicting the birthplace of the Messiah. Would it be difficult to predict the future concerning the exact birthplace city of a man who would be U.S. president 700 years from now? That’s exactly what Micah did when he prophesied that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2).

♦ Predicting the death of the Messiah. How difficult do you think it would be to indicate the precise kind of death that a new, unknown religious leader would experience a thousand years from today? Could you invent and predict a new method of execution not currently known, one that won’t be invented for hundreds of years? That’s what David did in 1000 B.C. when he wrote Psalm 22.

♦ Predicting 8 prophecies concerning 1 person. Governments used prearranged identification signs to identify their covert agents. Soviet double agent “Condor” was a WW II traitor. He gave atomic secrets to the Russians, then fled to Mexico after the war. His conspirators arranged to help him by planning a meeting with the secretary of the Russian ambassador in Mexico City. Proper identification for both parties became vital.

“Condor” was to identify himself with six prearranged signs. These instructions had been given to both the secretary and “Condor” so there would be no possibility of making a mistake. They were: (1) Once in Mexico City, the Russian spy was to write a note to the secretary, signing his name as “I. Jackson.” After three days (2) he was to go to the Plaza de Colon in Mexico City and (3) stand before the statue of Columbus, (4) with his middle finger placed in a guide book. In addition, (5) when he was approached, he was to say it was a magnificent statue and that he was from Oklahoma. (6) The secretary was to give him his passport.

The six prearranged signs worked. Why? With six identifying characteristics it was impossible for the secretary not to identify “Condor” as the proper agent. If that is true, think how impossible it would be not to identify the Messiah if there were not merely six, but more than 400 signs.

For further reading on the reliability of the Biblical documents:
- F.F. Bruce, The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?
- Josh McDowell, Evidence That Demands A Verdict.
- R.C. Sproul, Objections Answered.
- John Ankerberg & John Weldon, Ready with an Answer.
- Norman L. Geisler, When Skeptics Ask.

For further reading on difficult passages and so-called contradictions in the Bible:
- Walter Kaiser, Hard Sayings of the Bible.
- Gleason Archer, Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties.
- Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, When Critics Ask.