

DOCTRINE OF THE BIBLE

How Do We Know the Bible is Reliable?

Lesson #11

The December 18, 1995 cover of Time Magazine asked the question, Is the Bible Fact or Fiction? ¹ Below are some of the things Time magazine reported to be true.

Was Abraham a myth? He was the father of Judaism, the man who was willing to kill his son Isaac just because God told him to. But years of searching have convinced all but the most conservative experts that Abraham and the rest of the Patriarchs, were inventions of the Bible s authors .

Was there a Moses? Charlton Heston notwithstanding, many scholars contend that Moses was a legendary hero created by the Hebrews to instill a feeling of national identity and solidarity. Apart from the Bible there is no evidence that such a man ever lived.

Did the Exodus really happen? If they really spent 40 years wandering in the desert after fleeing Egypt, the Israelites should have left at least a few traces. But though scientists have evidence of human occupation in the Sinai dating to the Stone Age, nothing suggests that the Israelites were ever there.

Did Joshua Conquer The City of Jericho? The walls of this Canaanite city did come tumbling down say most historians , but centuries before Moses protegee could have arrived.

This is just a sampling of what unbelievers and liberal so called Bible experts and scholars are saying about the Bible. It is for this reason that many unbelievers and even Christians are unsure about the Bible s reliability. The unbelieving world has so relentlessly attacked the veracity of the Scriptures that even Bible believing Christians are having their faith shaken. It is for this reason that we are examining the reliability of the Bible.

We have already discovered that the text of the Bible is reliable having less than one half of one percent of its variants being disputed. With 99.5 percent accuracy the text of the Bible is more reliable than any other ancient writing. But can we really trust content of the Bible? Are the stories of the Bible true? Assuming that the original text of the Bible has been preserved, can we trust what the Bible teaches us about history? How can a person know for certain that the Bible, which is the foundation of Christianity, is reliable? In this study we will look at arguments for the reliability of what the Bible teaches us and seek to understand the central reason why unbelieving liberal scholars have relentlessly attacked the Scripture. We will also look at the only sure way to be convinced that the Bible is true.

I. THE NECESSITY OF A CHRISTIAN WORLD VIEW

Like most fields of study, there are philosophical ideas and presuppositions that must be considered before examining the reliability of the Bible. Everyone has presuppositions and the presuppositions among Christians and non-Christians are often radically different. Examine the statements below. Put a check mark next to those statements that you believe are critical when seeking to understand the reliability of the Bible.

¹From an article by J. W. Moore, Is the Bible Historically Reliable, pgs. 1-2, <http://www-personal.si.umich.edu/~rim/bible.htm>.

- A. All religions must be examined, the best religion chosen, and the writings of the best religion should be accepted as reliable and followed.
 - B. The Bible must first be proven to be the Word of God before you can speak of it as the Word of God and argue from it.
 - C. We must trust that people are able to be objective enough to sort through all the facts about the Bible and come to the correct conclusion about the Bible's reliability.
 - D. We must presuppose the Bible is God's Word and argue from it.
 - E. We must prove that God exists before discussing the reliability of the Bible.
 - F. We must presuppose that God exists before discussing the reliability of the Bible.
 - G. We must assume the Bible is not true unless proven right.
 - H. We must assume the Bible is true unless proven wrong.
 - I. We must assume the Bible is true and all men are liars, every time someone discovers the Bible is in error, we must believe they are wrong and not the Bible.
 - J. Once we are convinced the Bible is true and God exists, we can believe and trust the Bible.
 - K. Once we place our faith in Jesus Christ and are saved, we then are able to know that the Bible is true.
 - L. We should assume that the Bible may have small textual, historical, and scientific errors.
 - M. We should assume that the doctrine, history, and promises of the Bible have no error at all.
 - N. We should realize and accept that archeologists have discovered that some of the places and people mentioned in the Bible never existed and some of the events in the Bible never occurred.
 - O. Scientists, archeologists, and researchers have the ability to verify everything in the Bible through scientific methods.
 - P. Scientists, archeologists, and researchers do not have the ability to verify everything in the Bible because you cannot measure and repeat supernatural events with natural means.
1. What presuppositions mentioned above should be accepted?

2. What do the statements above tell us about why people have different views on the Bible and its reliability?

3. Let's say that you had a group of people who all agreed that the correct presuppositions above were true, does that mean that they would all agree on everything the Bible teaches? Why or why not?

II. WHAT DO WE MEAN BY RELIABLE

Before we discuss the reliability of the Bible, let's first define what we mean by reliable so that there will be no confusion about what we are talking about.

- A. Webster defines reliable as, ***suitable or fit to be relied on, dependable, giving the same result on successive trials.***² This is the definition that we will use throughout the study. We are studying whether or not the content of the Bible, the people, places and events mentioned in the text are true according to God's moral perfection, historically accurate, and true experientially within the bounds of what the Scriptures promise and teach.

- B. Reliability is not to be confused with or rejected because of:
 1. Thoroughness or comprehensiveness of subjects addressed
 2. Use of modern day vocabulary and terms
 3. Understanding things in light of modern thought
 4. Failure to meet up with the expectations of fallen man
 5. Failure to meet up with the theories of fallen man
 6. Failure to agree with the conclusions of fallen man
 7. Inability to be measured, repeated, or proven true with scientific methods
 8. Inability of promises made in the Bible to perform or come true on our time table

²Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, pg. 696.

9. Inability on our part to understand and interpret the Bible correctly

III. **EXAMPLES OF THE BIBLE S UNIQUENESS WHICH ARGUE FOR ITS RELIABILITY**

Before looking at arguments for the Bible s reliability, it must be understood that no arguments for the Bible s reliability are compelling. What I mean by that is though there may be strong arguments for the uniqueness and reliability of the Bible, these arguments cannot save, sanctify, and regenerate an unbeliever. Since faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ is prerequisite for truly understanding God s Word, arguments like those below fail to be compelling since they can neither save or regenerate an unbeliever. It is for this reason they are not compelling proofs. They are merely evidences which can be used to encourage believers or give an answer to unbelievers, but the gospel is the power of God for all who believe. The Bible teaches that we must first believe in order that we may know the truth.

A. **The Bible has always been a best seller**

The Bible has survived through time as a continual best seller even though it has been constantly under attack by those who want to discredit it as false and untrustworthy. Millions of copies have been and are still being sold. It has been read by more people and translated into more languages than any other book. If the Bible is so unreliable, then why do so many people own, read, and trust in it?

B. **The Bible condemns all men but is still read by millions**

The Bible is unique among all other books in that it condemns all men as sinners who are hopelessly lost and who can do nothing to save themselves. The Bible states over and over again that all men are sinners, corrupt, and totally wicked, deserving of God s eternal wrath. The main character (Jesus) condemned every person who has ever lived as full of evil and wickedness, hopelessly lost, and headed for eternal hell fire. The Bible s view of man is totally opposite of the world s view and yet millions still read it and trust it to be true.

C. **The Bible has a very narrow view of salvation but people still believe it is true**

Jesus boasted that He was the Way, the Truth, and the Life and that no one could come to the Father but through Him. The Bible teaches that there is only one way to heaven and that it is only in Jesus name that we can be saved. The Bible teaches that no one deserves to go to heaven, nor do they deserve a chance to go to heaven, nor can they earn their way to heaven. Not only that, the Bible teaches anyone who does not accept the Bible s one way of salvation will perish in hell and suffer eternal torment in the lake of fire. The Bible s teaching on how to get to heaven is diametrically opposed to every other religion in the world. Every other religion in the world teaches that heaven can only be attained through the works of man. The Bible teaches that only Christ s work can save someone from their sin and that we can do nothing to save our self.

Though the Bible condemns all other religions as Satanic and demonic and demands repentance and submission of all men, to the Lord Jesus Christ, it remains a best seller, trusted by millions through the ages as the very Word of God.

D. The Bible portrays the faults of its heroes but it is still trusted

Unlike any other religious books, the Bible constantly describes and condemns the faults of its greatest heroes and leaders. For example, Adam and Eve, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David, Solomon, Elijah, Jeremiah, the Apostle Peter, and many others have their faults and weaknesses recorded for all to read about in the pages of the Bible. This is unprecedented when it comes to any ancient literature. Usually the key figures are portrayed only in a positive light. Yet even though the Bible reveals the sins and weaknesses of its greatest heroes, it is still a best seller and trusted in by millions.

E. Flawless unity in the content of the Bible argues for the Bible's reliability

The Bible was written over 1,500 years; records parts of history for at least 5,000 years; has over 40 authors, from different professions, walks of life, and locations, who wrote in different times, on different continents, in different situations, in three different languages, during a time span of over forty generations, and yet all the authors agree with each other. This is even more amazing when you consider that the Bible addresses very complex and controversial issues such as morals, ethics, history, the future, and spiritual matters. Yet it has perfect unity. It is difficult to even find ten people from any given position who can agree on any one issue. As one person argued, If the Bible isn't true and reliable, then where is that piece of literature that is? The Bible stands alone in a class apart from all other writings. This is a strong argument for the divine nature and reliability of the Bible.

F. The Bible is quoted more than any work as an authoritative source of truth

The Bible has been quoted more than any other book. Even among the earliest writers the Bible was the most often quoted book. In fact, if all the Bibles on the face of the earth were destroyed, the entire Bible could be easily reconstructed from quotations found in other works. Why would a book be quoted by so many people as an authoritative source of truth if it were unreliable?

IV. THE PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF SALVATION VERIFIES THAT THE BIBLE'S CLAIMS ARE TRUE

Anyone who believes in what the Bible says about the person and work of Jesus Christ, repents of their sin, and submits their life to Jesus as Lord and Savior is radically and forevermore changed. This is promised in the Scriptures and has been experienced by all believers throughout the ages. True Christians experience peace, forgiveness, lack

of guilt, a desire to obey, hope for the future, an increased sensitivity to sin, an increased desire to do what is right, a desire to read the Bible, a hunger and thirst for righteousness, a desire to pray, worship, and praise God. They undergo a supernatural change and life transformation that continues until they die. Their world view is radically altered and they understand the Bible like never before. They love things that before they hated and they hate things that before they loved. The longer they walk with the Lord they see the depth of their sin and no matter how much they serve Christ, they never feel like they have served Him enough. The testimonies of countless numbers of believers testify that salvation through faith in Jesus Christ permanently and totally freed them from life dominating sins. No other book has or can transform people like the Bible.

V. **MIRACULOUS PRESERVATION OF THE BIBLE ARGUES FOR ITS RELIABILITY**

The Bible is the most studied book in the history of the world. Men have continually scrutinized the Bible, sifted through its teachings, compared its texts, and examined its ancient Biblical texts. Yet, after hundreds of years of close investigation the same conclusion is reached. The Bible is accurate and can be trusted as a reliable document (see Lessons #4 & #10 for a detailed discussion of this).

- A. Example: When our modern day Hebrew version of Isaiah, which was based on the Masoretic text passed down from the 10th century AD, is compared with the ancient Hebrew text of Isaiah found in Qumran, written about 150 BC, the texts are virtually identical to each other showing no corruption for over a thousand year time period and through countless copying and recopying of the text.
- B. H. L. Hastings wrote: Infidels for eighteen hundred years have been refuting and overthrowing this book, and yet it stands today as solid as a rock. Its circulation increases, and it is more loved and cherished and read today than ever before. Infidels, with all their assaults, make about as much impression on this book as a man with a tack hammer would on the Pyramids of Egypt. When the French monarch proposed the persecution of the Christians in his dominion, an old statesman and warrior said to him, Sire, the Church of God is an anvil that has worn out many hammers. So the hammers of infidels have been pecking away at this book for ages, but the hammers are worn out, and the anvil still endures, if this book had not been the book of God, men would have destroyed it long ago. Emperors and popes, kings and priests, princes and rulers have all tried their hand at it; they die and the book still remains.³

VI. **FULFILLED PROPHECY VERIFIES THE RELIABILITY OF THE BIBLE**

- A. The Bible has predicted with perfect accuracy thousands of events and happenings throughout history, especially in the life of Jesus. No other religion has or will produce a book which predicts the future with flawless precision. No other religion has prophecies of their greatest person written hundreds of years before His arrival with exacting detail and flawless exactness like the Bible does about Jesus. There is no explanation for the Bible's ability to predict the future

³H. L. Hastings quoted in *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, pg. 21.

except that its author is the supernatural, all knowing, and all powerful God of creation. While men and demons may be able to guess at the future and be right some of the time, only God is able to predict the future with never failing accuracy.

VII. ARCHEOLOGY ARGUES FOR THE RELIABILITY OF THE BIBLE

- A. Archeology continues to discover ancient sites, mentioned in the Bible, which before used as arguments against the Bible's reliability. The Bible has proven over and over again to be geographically accurate. Evidence found in archeological sites and digs agree with the Bible's statements about wars, cultures, and civilizations. Archeology has uncovered ancient writings that agree with and verify what the Bible says is true. Archeology confirms the many events and the time periods mentioned in the Bible as accurate. (Lesson #16 will be devoted to Archeology and the Bible)

VIII. HISTORY VERIFIES THE RELIABILITY OF THE BIBLE

- A. History has verified that the many claims of the Bible are true. Many have believed in the central message of Jesus as Savior and have been changed. Unbelievers have agreed that many of the Bible's claims are accurate. History has proven the Bible's ability to predict the future without error. History has proven that God is actively preserving the ancient texts. Even unbelieving historians, like Josephus, knew and verified that Jesus existed. Josephus discussing the crucifixion of Jesus in April 3rd, AD 33 and the events that followed in his work *Antiquities XVIII, iii 3* said:

Now, there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ; and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him; and the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day.⁴

IX. SCIENCE VERIFIES THE RELIABILITY OF THE BIBLE

- A. The Bible is not a scientific book. But when it does speak of certain phenomena, they are scientifically accurate. A few examples are given below.

⁴ Josephus, Flavius, and William Whiston. *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*. Ant XVIII, iii 3. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996, c1987 (Libronix Bible Software).

1. Physics, as a field of study, has always operated on the premise that all things in the universe consist of time, energy, space, and matter. This premise has been the foundation of the study of physics for years. Yet this information is found in the first verse of the Bible i.e., **In the beginning** (Time), **God** (energy), **created the heavens** (space) and **the earth** (matter), (Gen. 1:1).

B. The **hydrological cycle** is described in texts such as (Job. 37:6, 9-12; 17; Deut. 32:2; Isa. 55:10). Job 37:6, 9-12 says:

For to the snow He says, Fall on the earth, And to the downpour and the rain, Be strong. Out of the south comes the storm, And out of the north the cold. From the breath of God ice is made, And the expanse of the waters is frozen. Also with moisture He loads the thick cloud; He disperses the cloud of His lightning. And it changes direction, turning around by His guidance, That it may do whatever He commands it On the face of the inhabited earth.

c. The earth is described as **a sphere and round not flat** in texts such as Job 26:10 and Prov. 8:26-29. Proverbs 8:26-29 says:

26 While He had not yet made the earth and the fields, Nor the first dust of the world. 27 When He established the heavens, I was there, When He inscribed a circle on the face of the deep, 28 When He made firm the skies above, When the springs of the deep became fixed, 29 When He set for the sea its boundary, So that the water should not transgress His command, When He marked out the foundations of the earth;

D. The Bible says **the earth is hung on nothing**, contrary to what many have believed throughout history.

Job 26:7 He stretches out the north over empty space, And hangs the earth on nothing.

E. The Bible predicts the life span of man. As of 1996 the average life span of a male in America was 73 and the average life span of a female 79 years old. Moses wrote in 1446 BC:

Psa. 90:10, As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years, Or if due to strength, eighty years, Yet their pride is but labor and sorrow; For soon it is gone and we fly away.

X. **THE BIBLE CLAIMS FOR ITSELF THAT IT IS RELIABLE**

The Bible itself claims over and over again that it is true and reliable (e.g. II Sam. 7:28; Psa. 19:7; 119:151, 160; John 17:17).

Psa. 119:160 The sum of Thy word is truth, And every one of Thy righteous ordinances is everlasting.

XI. THE RELIABILITY OF THE BIBLE IS AN ALL OR NOTHING REALITY

If the Bible isn't completely true, then the prophets, Jesus, and the apostles who wrote the scriptures were all liars, because they said it was reliable and true. If you admit to some of the Bible being unreliable, you have to admit that all of it is unreliable. You can't have the Bible be full of errors and at the same time be reliable too. It is either reliable or not. Those who wrote the Bible claimed it was God's Word and hence true, reliable, and trustworthy.

XII. PEOPLE HAVE DIED RATHER THAN DENY THE RELIABILITY OF THE BIBLE

Throughout the history of the Bible many have died torturous deaths as martyrs rather than doubt the truth and reliability of the Bible.

XIII. FAITH IS THE ONLY WAY WE CAN KNOW FOR SURE THAT THE BIBLE IS RELIABLE

What do all the above arguments prove? Nothing! Someone who has ruled out the possibility of a divine creator cannot even consider the possibility of the Bible being God's true and reliable Word. The reason an unbeliever cannot accept the reliability of the Bible is that as soon as he does he is a self-condemned hypocrite. He must admit there is a Holy God and that he is guilty before that God and deserves to be judged. These thoughts are terrifying to him so he rules out the possibility that they can be true. As Jesus said to Nicodemus the Pharisee in John 3:19-20, **And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.**

When it comes right down to it we believe the Bible is true by faith. **Hebrews 11:1** defines faith as **the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen**. No one can prove the Bible is true. The above arguments may be encouraging to someone who has already placed their faith in the reliability of the Bible but they are not conclusive or compelling evidence. When the above arguments are filtered through the world view of sin-cursed men they do not persuade them, but seem foolish. The Bible teaches that we must have faith in order to please God (Heb. 11:6). After we place our faith in Jesus as our Savior and Lord He gives us His Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit testifies in our hearts that the scriptures are true. So evidences may encourage Christians but nothing but the Holy Spirit and the Word of God will persuade an unbeliever to trust in God's Word. The scriptures teach that you must first have faith and believe before you can know the truth (1 Cor. 2:14). So don't try to use the information above to try and prove to unbelievers that the Bible is true, because it won't work. No, first preach to them the gospel which is the power of God for all who believe (Rom. 1:16), and if they repent and believe in Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior, then encourage them with what you have learned in this lesson.

For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him?

Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one. For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he will instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ.

I Cor. 2:11-16