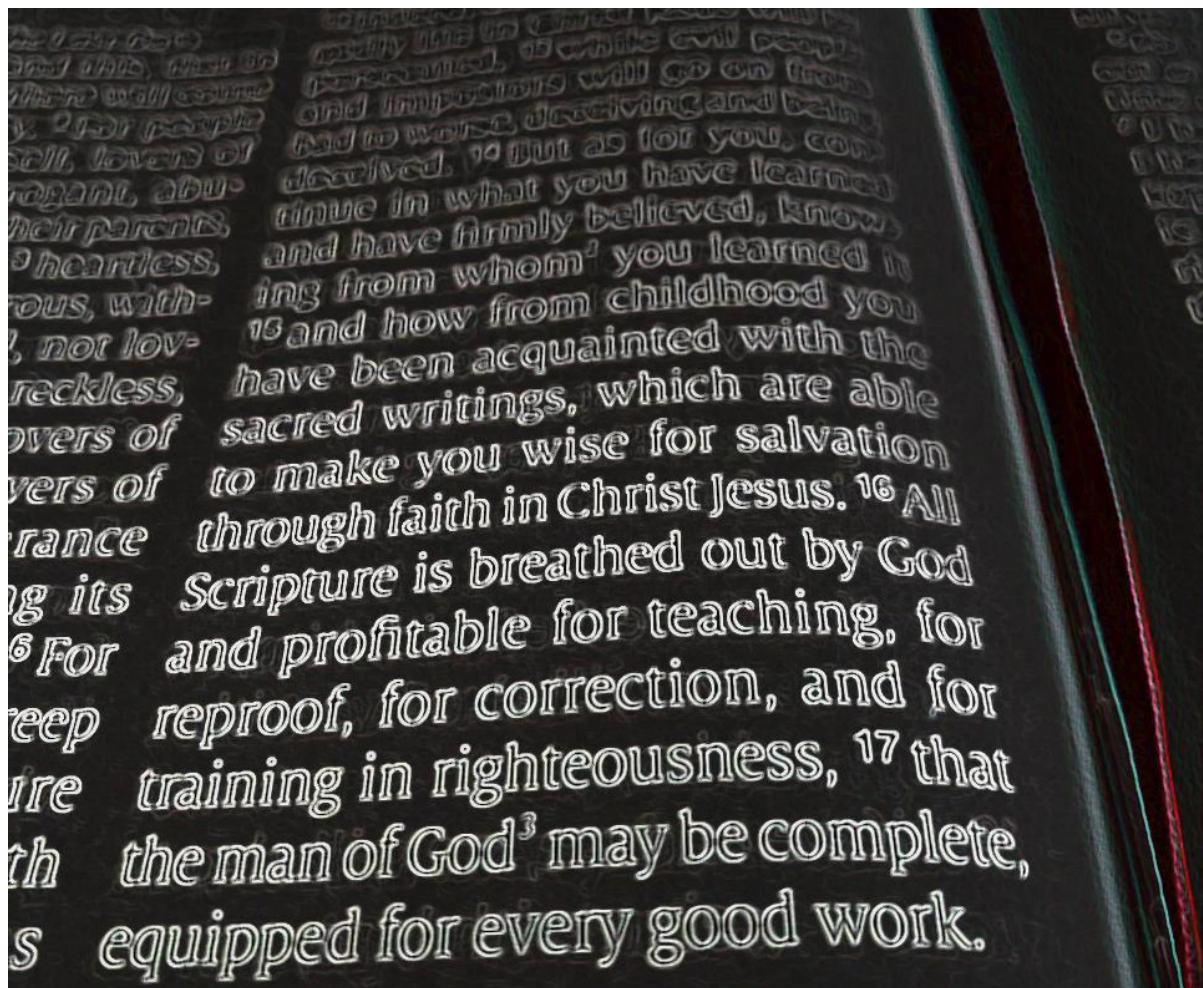

A Layman's Overview of the Accuracy and Authenticity of the Bible

By Ellis Miller



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Acknowledgements

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Preface

When I was around 10 to 12 years old, I had an experience that filled me with faith. I was a child, and as such believed whatever I was told, or what I was told not to believe, in some sort of *go with the flow* way. But after that experience I fully believed in God, in Jesus, and in the Bible which explained who they were. And although I didn't take that path at that time, I couldn't shake that belief.

When I did later walk in the path of Christ, I took for granted the Bibles accuracy, that God had preserved it through time, and it wasn't until I had been a Christian for around 15 years that an atheist colleague of mine asked "You know how the bible was created, don't you?"

I'm still not quite sure what my colleague was referring to, as it sounded like he knew of some controversy that would disprove it. But I took on the challenge and decided to investigate how the Bible was created.

Spoiler alert: I found nothing to disprove the Bible. In fact, studying how the Bible was created did nothing but confirm my faith in it.

My point with this story is, this is how it is for most Christian worshipers. They do not need evidence to believe that the Bible is the preserved word of God to His people, for their faith gives them that.

For some, studying the creation of the Bible builds more faith and gives a deeper and a wider understanding of it, while for others it is just a waste of time, telling them what they already know in their heart. I support both these views. To those who wish to know, and those who simply take it on faith, I say Amen, praise the Lord. Your views are valid.

I'm not anything in Christianity, simply a layman with a curiosity, or even a need to know things. This little overview is taken from my point of view, those things that I find convincing, and is aimed to those who genuinely want to know about how the Bible came to be.

To quote A. W. Tozer: 'The unbelieving mind would not be convinced by any proof, and the worshiping heart needs none.'¹ Hopefully you're somewhere in between.

I do note that there is so much information that it would be as impractical for me to write in-depth about everything as it would be to read something of the length required. My goal is to summarise the information to make it easier to do your own study, if you feel further study is required.

But overall, keep in mind that although there is plenty of evidence to believe, there is enough controversy to doubt. The choice will still be yours.

¹ A. W. Tozer 'Knowledge of the Holy' Chapter 11 - The Wisdom of God

Introduction

'All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.' (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Is that an example of scripture validating scripture? What is scripture? How do we know if it's accurate? And how do we know if it was breathed out by God?

The Bible is the foundation of all Christian beliefs, so those questions are of paramount importance. In this overview I will attempt to answer those questions, and hopefully at the end of it you will have the same confidence in the Bible as I do.

I note that I use the words scripture, canon, and bible interchangeably here to refer to texts written by humans but authored by God.

When it comes to its accuracy and authenticity, most other things in history are taken as fact. But for the Bible it is, as my wife once wrote, 'guilty until proven innocent'. But how much proof could you have for something 1900 to 3500 years old? Surely supporting evidence would be rare. How do you prove people, places, and events that far in the past? One bit of evidence would be rare, let alone more.

That is an important statement to keep in mind as you read through this overview, even though it would be unreasonable to expect a huge amount of evidence, you will see that the evidence is there, and it is compelling.

What is the Bible?

The word bible simply means 'the books', and the Christian Bible is a collection of 66 books which are split into two parts, the Old Testament (the time before Jesus), and the New Testament (the time of Jesus).

Each book of the bible is believed to be inspired by God, that is, God inspired the human author to write what was written. 2 Peter 1:21 says 'For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.'

The Bible stands as the foundation of our understanding of God and His relationship with us.

An overview of the story of the Bible

The Bible gives the account of God creating mankind to have a loving relationship with. However, man rejected God and chose to do things his own way. We read all this within the first three chapters of Genesis. From then on it is about redemption, God calling people back into that relationship with Him, however impossible that might seem.

It follows the chosen nation of Israel, the offspring of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham. It tells

Who was Abraham?

Abraham was a man who trusted God and it was credited to him as righteousness, he is considered the father of the faithful. Because of his faith, God chose him to bring forth a people that would be God's people. Initially the Israelites, then all believers.

how God separated Israel as His own people, teaching them to obey, that they might be His people, and He might be their God. However, Israel rejected Him as their God and turned away from Him. But through God's love and faithfulness to Israel, the story culminates with God bringing about redemption by His own hand to all who would receive it. That is through Jesus Christ.

On a deeper level, however, it is altogether about Christ, the redeemer. In Genesis chapter 3, where man chose to go His own way, God foretold about one who would crush the head of evil, this would be the Messiah, or Christ. From then on, there is reference after prophecy after allegory of one who would come and save people from their sins and restore them to a right relationship with God. This is Jesus Christ the son of God, who was in fact God Himself, the sacrificial lamb, by whose blood we are redeemed.

Did you know?

Sin deserves death. Before Christ, God accepted the blood of a sacrificed animal to cover the sin of the people. But Jesus is called the lamb of God, and through His sacrifice and, His blood, our sins are forgiven, the penalty has been paid.

The story ends with the world being destroyed because of the evil that mankind chooses to do, the return of Christ, and with God starting again with all the redeemed, the way it was intended to be the first time.

What is Canon?

Canon, or biblical canon, is basically another name for the books of the Bible, the sacred texts that are believed to have been written by God.

I use the word canon frequently in this book, and I know that, for some, the word can have strong links to stuffy religions, but I prefer to use it in reference to the Bible because of its specific meaning, which is...

Canon comes from a Greek word meaning 'rule' or 'measuring stick', so when I talk about Canon, I'm talking about a standard that we can all measure things against to know if they are in line with Gods' desire.

The Bible being Canon

The idea of the Bible, being a God given standard that we can measure against, gives us confidence and stability in our faith. Without it there would be many different beliefs with no way to validate them.

Against it we measure our own thoughts and actions, our inclinations that we attribute to God, and even the things we are taught and read (even this overview).



Image 1: A scroll of the Book of Esther

For the Christian, the Bible stands as the foundation and definition for all that is good and right. Examples might be...

The Bible talks about Christians producing fruit, as seen in their character, and even suggests that they judge prophets by their fruit - 'Thus you will recognize them by their fruits' (Matthew 7:20). It even explains what good fruit looks like, and thus gives us a standard by which we can recognise God's people.

In a rebuke to the priests of the time, God said through the prophet Hosea 'My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge' (Hosea 4:6) They didn't have ready access to any sort of scripture, it was up to priests to pass on the knowledge which they weren't doing, and as a result the people were degrading in their morality and being rejected by God. So even this scripture is held up as a standard for what ought to be taught by teachers, pastors, or priests.

Biblical Canon is so entrenched in Christianity that it is impossible to remove. I am confident that in all perversions of the Christian faith, you will find at their centre, that they have changed, added to, removed parts of, or even replaced the Bible.

Testing the Bible

In this overview I am only looking at the standard Christian, or Protestant, Bible.

With the Bible containing 66 different books we could test each book individually, but even if that were possible, it would be very impractical.

The Bible is split into two natural sections, the Old Testament, and the New Testament.

If we can trust the accuracy and authenticity of the section as a whole, I don't believe it is too much of a stretch to trust the individual books in that section.

Therefore, we will look at the old and new testaments individually.

How do we test it?

There are three tests we can do against the Bible to validate it, they are:

1. Are the books accurate? Do they say now what was originally written?
This is called transmission, that is, the transmission of the information from one book or person to another. Here we will confirm that what we read is what was written.
2. Are the books authentic? Do they speak the truth? Were they written by God?
The books inherently claim that they were talking about truth, whether it be narrative, prophecy, or command (an exception to that might be the songs and poems). And being part of Canon, they claim to be written by God. Although this is two completely different areas, we will look at them both in this section.
3. Are the testaments complete?
Because we are looking at the Old or New Testament as a whole, I believe an extra important question to ask is, is it complete? Are there books missing, should some not be there?
My rationale here is, if there are books missing, then that has the potential to change the image of God and His desires for us (what we ought to do). Likewise with extra books.

It looks to be a difficult task to evaluate the Testaments against those tests, but we'll see how we go.



Testing the Old Testament

The Old Testament is comprised of 39 books written by various authors over a period of around 1,000 years, from around 1446 BC to 430 BC.

The scriptures used in the Old Testament are essentially the same as those used in the Hebrew Bible, called the Tanakh, with some differences in terms of punctuation, canonical order, and emphases.

Side Note

Although the Tanakh has the same content, it only has 24 books, compared to the 39 in the Old Testament. But that is because some texts were split into several books, i.e., the 12 minor prophets, called The Twelve in the Tanakh, were split into 12 books in the Old Testament.

A breakdown of the Old Testament

- The first 5 books of the Old Testament were written by Moses, these are also called the Pentateuch or Torah.
 - The first book is Genesis which starts with the creation of the world, then the fall of man, and to the chosen nation of Israel.
 - The second book, Exodus, is the calling of that nation out of a foreign land, where they were slaves, and also teaches about God and His ways.
 - The third and fifth books are about the laws for the nation of Israel, and what is expected of them, as God's people.
 - The fourth book is a narrative of Israel's journey from Mount Sinai to the promised land.
- The next 12 books are all narrative and record the time from entering the promised land to them rejecting God and enduring punishment through exile, then returning to the land again.
- Job, the 18th book, is about one man who, when life got very tough, still trusted God.
- Psalms is a collection of poems and songs written by many authors.
- The books Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are about wisdom.
- Song of Songs is a story, or song, about love.
- The final 17 books are the writings of the prophets.

The Old Testament finishes with the promise of sending Elijah the prophet, who was to come before the Lord. This is significant for the Christian Bible, because, in the very next book, just three chapters away, it mentions John the Baptist, of whom Jesus said 'he is Elijah who is to come'².

How it came about

For the Hebrew Bible, it is largely unknown how the Hebrew texts came to be seen as Canon. It seems to have been a combination of their author, examining the individual books for their consistency with other books, and the books that the Israelite's read, studied, copied, and obeyed. It is believed that in all cases, it was the leaders of the religious community that recognized a text's authority through illumination by the Holy Spirit.

When the Christian Church fathers were collating the books of the Bible, for the Old Testament, they used a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible called the Septuagint. However, the Septuagint was a collection of Jewish books that included more than just the Hebrew Bible. So, the Old Testament originally included 46 books.

In the late 4th century, a scholar named Jerome was tasked with translating the texts into Latin in what is known as the Vulgate, which also includes the New Testament. Instead of using the Greek Septuagint,

² Matthew 11:14

Jerome preferred those texts in the original Hebrew language (otherwise it would be a translation of a translation). In doing so he noted that some of the books were not found in the Hebrew Canon, that is, they were not considered to be inspired by God. But the leaders at the time already considered Canon complete, so they left it as it was.

It stayed that way until the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century, which was a move away from the Catholic Church and its heretical beliefs. The Protestant reformers sided with Jerome and only used those books included in the Hebrew Bible. Although they did keep the order. This is why the Catholic Bible has 46 Old Testament books, in line with the Septuagint, while the Christian or Protestant Old Testament has 39.

That was a very reasonable conclusion, as Jesus is the Hebrew Messiah, and although they have not recognised Him as such, their Bible is the one that points to the historical Jesus³. The apostle Paul also agreed when he said in Romans 3:2, 'the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God'. In my opinion, that confirms that we should use their Bible as our Old Testament.

Is it accurate?

No original manuscripts of any of the Old Testament books currently exist and haven't for a very long time. All we have is copies, and they are very likely to be copies of copies.

At around 516 BC, when the temple was being rebuilt, Ezra, a priest and scribe, started a specialist group of scribes called the Soferim. Their primary job was to preserve Israel's sacred traditions, this included preserving the texts.

Although it seems to be unknown exactly what rules they had for guaranteeing accurate copies when they started, by about 100 BC they are known to have had rules for counting the letters, words, and verses of every book to ensure nothing extra was added and nothing was missing.

The Soferim were believed to be very devout, and as Josh.org points out, "scholars believe these Jewish men were possibly of priestly descent, as most sofer whose geneology is known were priests. As such, the Soferim were intimately acquainted with Scripture and other sacred documents. They likely specialized in the biblical manuscripts they transcribed and the topics they wrote about".⁴

Encyclopaedia Britannica says about them:

Historically, the Soferim are of great importance, not only for having initiated rabbinic studies but also for having fixed the canon of Old Testament Scriptures and, as copyists and editors, for their energetic efforts to safeguard the purity of the original text. The Talmud (the collection of traditions on Jewish religious laws) records 18 changes (tiqqune soferim) that they introduced to preclude misunderstanding of the Scriptures.⁵

After the Soferim, there was the Tannaim, then the Amoraim, and finally the all-important Masoretes. Although those groups deserve a mention in their own right for their diligent efforts to help preserve the

What Temple was rebuilt?

King Solomon, the third king of Israel, built a magnificent temple to God, finishing around 987 BC. This temple was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC, but in 516 BC they were allowed to rebuild the temple again. That second temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD.

³ Jesus said 'You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me' - John 5:39

⁴ <https://www.josh.org/scribes-faithfully-transmit-old-testament/>

⁵ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/sofer>

Hebrew text we have today, I don't feel I need to go into that much detail because the Dead Sea Scrolls are enough to give us confidence that what we read today is what the Soferim wrote.

The Dead Sea Scrolls

The Dead Sea Scrolls (or Qumran Caves Scrolls) are a collection of scrolls and fragments that were found in caves on the northern shore of the Dead Sea. The scrolls are dated to around the 3rd century BC and the 1st century AD and were thought to be hidden in the caves before the destruction of Jerusalem.



Image 2: Qumran cave 4, where ninety percent of the scrolls were found

About them, McClurg says “For a long time, the earliest copies of the Old Testament we had were from the 10th century AD, but the Dead Sea Scrolls allowed us to see manuscripts of some Old Testament books from over 1,000 years before. And the level of agreement between the manuscripts is astounding. This is evidence of how accurate the copying process was. Using the science of textual criticism, we know for certain about 99.5 percent of the original contents of the Bible in the original languages, and in the other 0.5 percent we know what all the options are. Most of this remaining 0.5 percent deals with issues such as spelling of names (for example, Hannah versus Hanna). Most importantly, no substantive issues affecting the Christian faith are affected”.⁶

My point here is that we know there was a system for copying the texts, and the Dead Sea Scrolls proves that it was a near perfect system. The Old Testament is accurate.

I do note that a number of books were written long before 500 BC and I've not been able to find any information about the transmission of text up until the Soferim came to be. That being said, I do know that the Bible does record there being dedicated scribes among the Levites.⁷ And this even earlier than 1000 BC⁸. The Levites were a people dedicated to duties of serving the Lord. I'll do more research and update this overview in a future version.



Image 3: The Isaiah Scroll (1QIsaa), part of the cave scrolls, contains almost the whole Book of Isaiah.

⁶ <https://www.gcu.edu/blog/theology-ministry/dear-theophilus-old-testament-trustworthy> by Andy McClurg

⁷ See 1 Chronicles 2:55, and 2 Chronicles 34:13.

⁸ 1 Chronicles 24:6 mentions a Levite scribe in the time of David – David reigned between c. 1010 BC - 970 BC

Is it authentic?

Now having argued that what we read is what was written by the authors, we now ask, is what they wrote truth or fiction?

There have always been arguments that what was written is not true, but rather that history was written by the victors, some attempt to build morale, or to pump up the nation of Israel. That is, as I said above, guilty until proven innocent. But let's put those arguments aside and look at the facts.

People and Places

The Bible spoke about certain people(s) and places long before they were known to be true in archaeology. In most, if not all cases, it was assumed that the Bible was fiction. Here are just some...

Note the first three heavily quote 'Answers In Genesis', see footnote for website.

- King David was thought to be fiction by critics until 1993, when an inscription was found that claims that the king of Damascus (Ben-Hadad of Syria) killed the king of Israel (that would be Jehoahaz) and the king of the "house of David" (that would be Joash of Judah) (see 2 Kings 13:1-25 for the biblical account). The inscription predates the supposed invention by 200 years. I note it also validates the story in 2 Kings.



Image 4: The Tel Dan Stele

- King Sargon of Assyria: For a long time, the only reference to an Assyrian king by the name of Sargon was found in Isaiah 20:1. However due to the discovery of the great city of Khorsabad, Sharru-kin (Sargon) is now one of the best known Assyrian kings in the ancient world.

- King Belshazzar of Babylon: Despite being called "a figment of the writer's imagination" by German scholar Ferdinand Hitzig in 1850, just 4 years later four identical time capsules were discovered from building works of King Nabonidus of Babylon in which he offers a prayer for himself and "Belshazzar my firstborn son, the offspring of my heart." Today, no one doubts the existence of Belshazzar.⁹

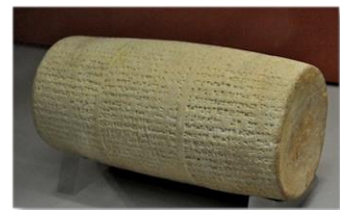


Image 5: Cylinder of Nabonidus

- The Hittites: "Many considered the Hittites to be a fictitious people mentioned only in the Bible. Some even used the Hittite question as evidence of the Bible's fallibility".¹⁰ However, since the late 1900's many archaeological discoveries have proven the Hittites to be a large and powerful people.

For More Information

Expedition Bible on YouTube
(<https://www.youtube.com/@ExpeditionBible>)

The Armstrong Institute of Bible Archaeology
<https://armstronginstitute.org/>

This is but a sample of a huge body of work on the subject of archaeological evidence for the people and places in the Bible. I really do encourage more study on this.

⁹ <https://answersingenesis.org/is-the-bible-true/is-the-old-testament-reliable/>

¹⁰ <https://armstronginstitute.org/954-finding-the-hittites>

There will always be disagreement on anything the Bible has to say, but my point here is that all the examples above were assumed to be wrong until proven otherwise, which it has again and again. At what point do we lay down our disbelief and say that it is, at least, historically accurate?

Prophecies

Even if we agree that the Bible is historically accurate, it doesn't prove that it was written by God. Then again, how could it?

Fortunately enough, God, through the Bible, tells us about future events. Things only God could know. These are called prophecy, and there are a number where we know they must have been written before they came to pass.

I will note here that there are a number of unbelieving scholars who cannot accept that these prophecies were written before they happened, but that is to be expected. If a person has a strong disbelief in a future knowing God, then to them it would be absolutely impossible for these to be written before they occurred.

The coming Messiah

“Some scholars believe there are more than 300 prophecies about Jesus in the Old Testament. These prophecies are specific enough that the mathematical probability of Jesus fulfilling even a handful of them, let alone all of them, is staggeringly improbable—if not impossible”.¹¹

Of those more than 300, there are some very specific references to the person of Jesus, and many which Jesus could not possibly have 'self-fulfilled', such as His birth and Death.

Among those are Jesus being born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14), Him coming out of Egypt (Hosea 11:1, see Matthew 2:13-15), and in Psalm 22 alone, His crucifixion (they pierce my hands and my feet), the mocking (All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads.), and the casting of lots for His clothes (They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment).

Now, admittedly it is mostly the Christian New Testament gospels that verify the fulfilment of these prophecies, and as such we need to ask, how accurate are they? And we will get to that when we look at the New Testament.

Ezekiel's Prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem

It is worth noting here that the Law was harsh for false prophets saying that if the word they spoke does not come to pass or come true, then that prophet shall die (see Deuteronomy 18:20-22).

Even knowing that, as Ezekiel would have, he prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem (in Ezekiel 33), then he doubled down and said, 'When this comes - and come it will! - then they will know that a prophet has been among them' (Ezekiel 33:33)

It did in fact come to pass in 587 BC, we know this. But with that statement in Ezekiel 33:33, everything points to it being written before the destruction of Jerusalem, if it was afterward, he would have been called a false prophet and his writings would never have been given the time of day.

¹¹ <https://www.jesusfilm.org/blog/old-testament-prophecies/>

There is no way that the devout Levites would have accepted Ezekiel's prophecies if they weren't in-fact written before it happened. And they would never have been seen as Canon. Therefore, this must be an example of God inspiring the writing of the Bible.

Still have a little doubt? well Ezekiel goes one step further for you...

Ezekiel's prophecy of the nation of Israel

In addition to Judah losing possession of its land, which it did in 587 BC, Ezekiel also foretold that Israel would get its land back 'I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land.' (Ezekiel 36:24)

From 587 BC until 1948 AD, the land of Israel was not theirs, it was a conquered land, they just lived in it. In 70 AD, after the Siege of Jerusalem, the majority of the Israelites were either displaced or sold all over the Roman world as slaves. After that there was very few that lived in the land. But in 1947 the United Nations voted to partition the land and give part to be the State of Israel. Since the implementation of that in 1948, the State of Israel has seen massive emigration from all over the world, often they came to Israel dispossessed.

2,500 years without the land being their 'own', and they needed to be removed from the land so that they could be gathered back again from all the countries. And it happened. And it has happened in our recent history. There is just far too much that needed to happen for this to be a coincidence.

Why did God do that?

The Israelites are still God's people. It is not that they are righteous, or those that made the decision were good, but God did it for Himself, for the sake of His holy name. He is faithful to His people. See Ezekiel 36:22

The Prophecy of Nahum

The book of Nahum in the Bible contains a clear prophecy of the final destruction of Nineveh¹², the capital of the powerful Assyrian empire.

This is another example of where the writing would never have been accepted after the fact.

It is also worth noting that prophets were not the celebrities, or great men, of their time, they were often hated for what they said, and a lot were even killed¹³. It was not something that would make you wealthy or well liked.

Miraculous Events

How does one verify the miraculous events of the past, what possible evidence could there be?

Here are a couple of interesting facts that seem to line up with miraculous events in the Bible. I write this not as conclusive evidence, but rather to cast doubt on scepticism.

A worldwide flood

Genesis chapters 7 and 8 tells an account of a flood that covered the whole earth and wiped out every living thing on the face of the ground, except those that were on Noah's Ark.

¹² Speaking of the destruction of Nineveh 'Bible Evidence Unearthed at Nineveh' is a good watch <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=34XBkm4QiLo>

¹³ For example, 'Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered' Acts 7:52

For those willing to investigate it, there is plenty of geological evidence that there was at some point a global flood, this is but a sample of that evidence.

- Fossils of sea creatures in rock layers have been found in places like the walls of the Grand Canyon (more than a mile above sea level) and even found in the Himalayas.
- The Great Unconformity is a term used for examples where there was rapid erosion in a layer then the deposition of a fossil-rich sedimentary layer. That is, what should have taken tens of millions of years, seems to have happened very quickly (like days). Thus the name, it doesn't conform. The global Flood still remains the best explanation.
- Some fossil sites show rapid burial of plants and animals which testify of catastrophic destruction and burial.
- Almost every culture has a tradition of a global flood. And in a large majority of the flood accounts, a favoured family was chosen to survive the flood.

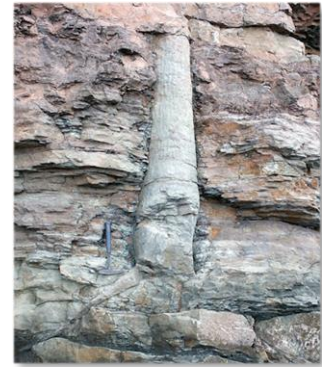


Image 6: A fossil of a tree encased within multiple rock layers

For more information about a global flood

Answers in Genesis:

<https://answersingenesis.org/the-flood/global/worldwide-flood-evidence/>

Institute for Creation Research: <https://www.icr.org/geological-strata/>

To see what image 6 is all about <https://www.icr.org/article/what-are-polystrate-fossils/>

The Red Sea crossing

Exodus chapter 14 gives the account of the Israelite's crossing the Red Sea. They had just left Egypt; the Egyptians were chasing them down to slaughter them and they became trapped between the Egyptian army and the Red Sea.

The account tells of how God parted the Red Sea so that the Israelite's could cross to the other side on dry ground, then how God restored the water over top of the Egyptian army who had tried to follow them, thereby saving them from the Egyptians.

A man named Ron Wyatt went looking for evidence of the site of the Red Sea crossing and what he found was very interesting indeed.

- Wyatt found a beach on the Egyptian side big enough to hold the 2 million or so people, but blocked off on either side, i.e., they would indeed be trapped.
- On that beach was a pillar, not overly interesting until he saw a similar pillar on the other side of the Red Sea which had an inscription that suggested that Solomon (the king of Israel 500-700 years later) had erected the pillars to mark how God had saved them through the Red Sea.
- Wyatt also found parts of chariots in the water to the south of the beach. There were chariot wheels with 4, 6 and 8 spokes, this accurately places them in the 18th dynasty, which is the same time of the Exodus.

If nothing else, that is certainly interesting.

For More Information

https://www.ronwyatt.com/red_sea_crossing

Is it complete?

There is mention of numerous other books in the Bible that are not part of the Old Testament or Hebrew Bible Canon, such as...

- The Book of Jasher, which seems to be a book of songs or poems that is lost to history, is mentioned in Joshua 10:12-13 and 2 Samuel 1:18-27
- 1 Chronicles 29:29 mentions the Book of Samuel the Seer (which is likely to be the books of Samuel), the Book of Nathan the Prophet, and the Book of Gad the Seer
- The Book of the Wars of the Lord is mentioned in Numbers 21:14
- The book of Enoch is mentioned in Jude 1:14-15 (New Testament)

Most, if not all, of those books mentioned in the Old Testament that are not part of it, have been lost to history. As to why they are not part of the Old Testament Canon we will never know. We can only assume that they were not considered to be God inspired by the religious leaders of the time, and therefore not worth the considerable effort of preserving.

The book of Enoch is a little different. It has not been lost to history, and because it was mentioned in the New Testament book Jude, which was written around 65 AD, it must have been known to the Hebrews at the time. However, despite that, it was never part of the Hebrew Canon, nor in the Septuagint (which did include some extra books).

Just because a book is quoted or referenced in the Bible should not instantly make it Canon. It is the same here, my previous reference to the website 'Institute for Creation Research' does not mean that I believe everything they believe; it just means I like what they say on the flood (and intelligent design) and I'm using that to put across my message.

This is similar to the New Testament where Paul quotes the Cretan poet Epimenides in Titus 1:12 and Acts 17:28. In the latter he says '...even some of your own poets have said...' that is, he is using the words of their own poet to put across his message.

It is believed that the reason the book of Enoch was not considered part of the Hebrew Canon is that it is inconsistent with the Torah (the first 5 books). In addition to that it is believed that the book of Enoch was written about 300–200 BC, which is around 2,800 years after Enoch lived, so even though it could have been preserved by oral tradition, its authorship is also in doubt.

The Hebrew Canon is considered closed. So, no other books can be added. There doesn't appear to be any clear records of who determined it closed and why, or even when, but it is considered closed. The current thinking is that the Hebrew Bible was already fixed by the second century BC.

All this can seem a little short on evidence, it was a very long time ago, but we need to realise that the Holy Spirit was involved in its evaluation. If the Holy Spirit wasn't, it would just be a collection of near random, uninspired books. But there is clearly a theme and a truth that shows through all the books of the Old Testament, more so than can be chosen by man. This is especially true when you bring in Jesus, the Messiah, who the Jewish community largely does not believe in. He is all through the Old Testament.

In my opinion there is nothing that is missing from the Old Testament, and there is nothing that should not be included (even Song of Songs, which I don't get). It is perfect in its wholeness.

Testing the New Testament

The New Testament is made up of 27 books written by 9 authors over a period of around 50 years, from around 44 AD to 96 AD.¹⁴

A breakdown of the New Testament

- The first 4 books, called the gospels, are about the birth, life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Matthew and John were eyewitnesses, Mark was on behalf of Peter, and Luke was a researcher with access to the apostles.
- The book of Acts is a narrative of the time directly after the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is also called Acts of the Apostles.
- The next 21 books are all letters (called epistles) written to churches and individuals.
- The last book, Revelation, is a vision that the apostle John got of 'the end'.

How it came about

In the beginning, it was the apostles, those who were eyewitnesses of Jesus during His ministry, who taught the people about this new way. They were the authority.

After the church dispersed out from Jerusalem (where it started), the apostles began to write letters to teach and correct the churches, these letters carried their authority. In addition to the letters, the gospels were written to provide an account of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. All of these were copied and read out in the churches.

Some of the content of the letters specifically addressed false teachings that were starting to appear. I think this is an important point, as false teachings have been a constant throughout the whole of Christianity (even today), thus the need for Canon.

One such false teaching was called Gnosticism, or the Secret Knowledge Movement, which started around

What do Gnostics believe?

Gnostics believe that matter is inherently evil, and spirit is good. This means, to them, that Christ could not have been human, which is evil. They also arrogantly claim to possess a "higher truth", and that salvation is through attaining a secret knowledge.

the end of the first century. Gnosticism is a distortion of the teachings of Christ and the apostles, and was heavily influenced by Greek philosophies.¹⁵

Another false teaching, which was based on Gnosticism, happened around 144 AD and was started by a man named Marcion of Sinope, who was excluded from at least one church for his heresy's. The interesting thing about Marcion's movement is that some of

the apostle's writings showed it as false, so Marcion put together a list of approved books to justify his beliefs, only 11 made the list. This is called Marcion's canon.

The important thing about these false teachings was that in response, the church saw that it needed to collate what was considered scripture into an official list to protect the teachings of

Side Note

The apostle Paul was a late addition and was not an eyewitness like the others but was still called to be an apostle.

Read the account for yourself in Acts chapters 8 & 9

Spotting a false teaching

The centre of Christianity is Jesus Christ, and it is the Bible that testifies about Him. Therefore, a false teaching will likely have a different bible and a different Jesus. Know both and you will go well.

¹⁴ <https://www.biblegateway.com/blog/2016/02/when-was-each-book-of-the-bible-written/>

¹⁵ See <https://www.gotquestions.org/Christian-gnosticism.html>

Christ and the apostles from corruption. Thus, what God had already predetermined through the Gospels and letters that had been copied and shared over the Christian world, the creation of official New Testament Canon had begun.

Each geographical area had an overseer who looked after the church in that area. Also called church fathers, it was they who decided which books their church could use. It was these overseers whose job it was to recognise Canon.

The three rules they used for recognising Canon were...

1. Was it written by an apostle or close companion? - Could it reliably be linked to an apostle?
This is a very good rule, the apostles were chosen by Christ Himself, and this is the closest we can get to an authority. I do note that Matthias replaced Judas Iscariot, as chosen by lot, but even Matthias had been with Jesus since His baptism. And Paul was chosen as an apostle to the gentiles by Christ in a vision.

2. Do churches throughout the known world value the writing? - Was there agreement throughout the churches?

Although a fair rule, this would be the most difficult to achieve, as it's not about the writings themselves, but about their universal acceptance among the overseers. Maybe that is why it took so long to finalise the list.

3. Does it link to what we already know about God? - Does it agree with other writings?

Although this can come across as cherry picking the writings that fit the narrative, I think it is a fair rule because, logically, as you would expect, two apostles speaking the truth from God shouldn't contradict each other. If there is a contradiction you must go with what you trust. That is all this rule does.

Side Note
Although the criteria are more well defined, it is essentially the same rules as was used for the Old Testament.

At the time of Marcion's heresy, at least 20 of the 27 books we have today were common among the churches and fitted the criteria above. However, the complete list of 27 books would take many more years to find agreement among the overseers.

According to Andrews and Wilkins however, "we know ... that Irenaeus of Asia Minor (180 C.E.) fully accepted 25 of 27 books of the New Testament but had some doubt about Hebrews and uncertainty about James. We know that Clement of Alexandria (190 C.E.) fully accepted 26 of 27 books of the New Testament but may not have been aware of 3 John. We know that Tertullian of North Africa (207 C.E.) fully accepted 24 of 27 books but may not have been aware of 2 and 3 John, or Jude. We know that Origen of Alexandria (230 C.E.) and Eusebius of Palestine (320 C.E.) fully accepted all 27 books of the New Testament."¹⁶

In his Ecclesiastical History (320 AD), Eusebius set out the results of research he had conducted into which books were accepted as inspired by different churches around the Roman Empire. His results showed that 22 books were universally accepted and that the last 5 were accepted by the majority of churches, including himself¹⁷. However, it would still take many more years until we see the first evidence of the full list of all 27 books being regarded as Canon, this was found in a letter written by Athanasius, a 4th-century bishop of Alexandria, dated to 367 AD¹⁸.

¹⁶ Edward D. Andrews, Don Wilkins - The Text of the New Testament: The Science and Art of Textual Criticism

¹⁷ <https://www.julianspriggs.co.uk/Pages/EusebiusCanon>

¹⁸ Athanasius' letter is worth a read - <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2806039.htm>

The New Testament was formally canonized during the councils of Hippo (393 AD) and Carthage (397 AD) in North Africa.

The concept of letters and gospel accounts fits very well with the style of the church, with its fast growth, and limited number of apostles. But as could be expected, these letters needed some sort of validity - anyone could write a letter. And that is where the three rules fit very well, they validate the letters as having the required authority.

What Councils?

Called Ecumenical councils, the councils were official gatherings of church leaders from all over the Christian world, where they discussed various issues of theology and church practice and made decisions for all.

Is it accurate?

No original manuscripts of any of the New Testament books currently exist today.

There are, however, over 5,800 complete or fragmented Greek manuscripts dating as early as 125 AD, in addition to those, there are 10,000 ancient Latin manuscripts (translations of the early Greek manuscripts) and 9,300 ancient manuscripts in other languages including Syriac, Slavic, Gothic, Ethiopic, Coptic, Nubian, and Armenian. The New Testament has, by far, more copies than any other book from antiquity. This includes the likes of Plato, Aristotle and Homer.

Differences between the manuscripts

As with all books from antiquity where the originals have been lost, the New Testament manuscripts contain differences between them. There is a science called Textual Criticism which is used to resolve such differences in an attempt to reconstruct the text of the original documents. These differences are called textual variances, and the number of them looks staggering. This is because of the large number of manuscripts, and as more are found (apparently they are still finding manuscripts) that number will only grow. The current estimation is that there are more than 400,000 variances between all the New Testament sources.

Even though that number looks absolutely huge (and is often used to attack the Bible), it is important to differentiate between those variants that are significant and those that are not.

Significant variants are those that are both viable, where the variant could be part of the original text, and those that are meaningful, they change the meaning of the text.

About 70% of all textual variants are neither viable, nor meaningful, like spelling mistakes or just differences in spelling, i.e., John is spelt in two different ways for the same person in the Greek manuscripts.

The best estimates available are that 99.8% of those variants don't affect the text in any meaningful way. It is only the 0.2% that cause disagreement amongst scholars. But it is important to note that none of that 0.2% affect any core Christian doctrine. And as it is with the Old Testament, we know what all the options are, and these are often noted in Bibles.

A Worker Approved by God
¹⁴Remind them of these things, and ¹⁵charge them before **God**¹ ²not to quarrel about words, ³which does no good, but only ruins the hearers. ¹Some manuscripts *the Lord*

Figure 7: 2 Timothy 2:14 from my Bible with an insert showing the variance option. Either God or the Lord.

It is important to point out that even though the number of manuscripts may add to the number of variances, which can look bad, it actually adds to the trustworthiness of the outcome of the Textual Criticism process. As such, we know that the New Testament is the most accurate book from all antiquity, and more than that, because of the sheer number of manuscripts its accuracy is not in doubt. We can be confident that the Bible we read today represents what was originally written.

References and further reading

A good article going a little deeper into the parts of the New Testament, like the Gospels or the book of Revelation <https://faithalone.org/blog/how-many-complete-greek-new-testament-manuscripts-do-we-have/>

B.B. Warfield 'The Formation of the Canon of the New Testament' published in 1892, a short book and worth a read <https://reformed.org/bible/the-formation-of-the-canon-of-the-new-testament-by-b-b-warfield/>

Is it authentic?

Here I will focus on the narratives, that is, the four gospels and the book of Acts, as validating the content of the narratives will be much easier than validating the content of the letters. Plus, I believe it is fair to say that if the narratives are seen to be true and Jesus is who they say he is, then the rest is highly likely to also be true. But first...

Was Jesus a real person?

Jesus is the central figure in the New Testament, without Him there is no New Testament, and no Christianity. Therefore, the very first thing to look at is if Jesus was a real person in history.

The person of Jesus, as spoken about in the gospels, was undoubtedly real. Even if we only look at non-Christian, even hostile, sources we see the following aspects which line up with the gospel accounts.

We see that the person of Jesus...

- came from a village in Judea
- had a father who was a carpenter
- spent time in Egypt as a child
- possessed unusual magical powers/worked amazing deeds (performed miracles)
- was a wise man and a teacher
- was influential/led the Jews away from their traditions
- claimed to be God
- was accused by the Jews
- crucified under Pilate/died for His beliefs
- had followers called Christians (not in the gospels, but in the letters)

Read it for yourself

There is more that I left out, but see for yourself

<https://coldcasechristianity.com/writings/is-there-any-evidence-for-jesus-outside-the-bible/>

The problem is not that Jesus, whom the Christians follow, ever existed, that is as close to a fact as we can get. The problem is whether Jesus is the son of God who rose from the dead, as the New Testament declares.

Are the Gospels accurate?

Luke the Author

Luke was the author of the books Luke and Acts, and I am highlighting him here because, even though he was not an eyewitness of Jesus, he was a researcher and historian, and his writings tie together the gospel accounts and the epistles (letters). If someone was unsure about the accuracy of the New Testament, Luke would be the person they would most likely trust.

“Luke was probably a Gentile (non-Jew) by birth, well educated in Greek culture, a physician by profession, and a companion and loyal friend of the apostle Paul”¹⁹.

Both of Luke's books are narratives (one is of Jesus, and the other is of the time immediately following Jesus's ascension) and were written for a person named Theophilus (whoever that was). As Luke himself puts it...

'Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.' (Luke 1:1-4)

Luke is considered to be a very well-regarded historian, and if he wasn't writing Christian history, he would be placed along with the very greatest of historians.

Luke accurately wrote about times, places, people, titles, cultures, and even ship routes. Lee Strobel, author of *The Case for Christ*, says about him...

'...given the large portion of the New Testament written by him, it's extremely significant that Luke has been established to be a scrupulously accurate historian, even in the smallest details. One prominent archaeologist carefully examined Luke's references to thirty-two countries, fifty-four cities, and nine islands, finding not a single mistake.'

The book goes on to say, 'Here's the bottom line: "If Luke was so painstakingly accurate in his historical reporting ... on what logical basis may we assume he was credulous or inaccurate in his reporting of matters that were far more important, not only to him but to others as well?"'²⁰

Things thought to be false but proven true

Here are just a few of the disputed facts from the Gospels that were initially thought to be false but have subsequently been proven true.

- Luke 2:1-3 mentions a census where people were required to be registered in their ancestral hometown. Critics argued this was fiction as Romans did not require subjects to return to their ancestral homes to be counted. That was until a papyrus was discovered that confirmed the census was required.^{21, 22}

¹⁹ <https://www.biblestudytools.com/luke>

²⁰ Lee Strobel 'The Case for Christ' Part 1, Chapter 5

²¹ <https://www.biblearchaeology.org/research/new-testament-era/4192-a-brief-comment-on-the-census-in-luke-2>

²² <https://smyrnaean.blogspot.com/2021/07/untangling-apparent-contraction-of.html>

- The mention of Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene in Luke 3:1 caused doubt in sceptics for a while as the only known Lysanias had been a king who had been executed some 60 years earlier. That is until they found an inscription on a temple which named Lysanias as the Tetrach of Abila near Damascus.
- John 5:1-9 gives the account of Jesus healing a man at the pool of Bethesda, but the pool was thought to not exist and this was used against John's gospel account, that is, until the pool was discovered in the late 19th century.
- For a while it was believed that the person of Pilate, the governor of Judea mentioned in all four gospel accounts, was not a real figure of history. That was until an inscription was found that read "The Tiberius which Pontius Pilate, the Prefect of Judea dedicated"²³.



Figure 8: The Pilate Stone

I could go on and on about examples that prove the New Testament to be true, but you get the picture.

Differences between the Gospels

There are many minor differences between the gospel accounts, and critics use those differences to cast doubt over the Bibles authenticity, but the truth is quite the opposite.

When police interview witnesses, they expect differences in what they say, this is because each person sees things from their own perspective, for instance, one might notice the brand and colour of a shirt, while the other, not sure about the colour of the shirt, might notice what someone had in their hands.

It's not the differences that you should look at, but rather the similarities, those things that are the same in all accounts. If multiple witnesses had word for word similarities in their accounts, you would think they had colluded. This is how it is with the Gospels.

Each gospel account was written from a certain perspective to convey a message to a specific audience, and as such, they all had a different focus. For instance, it is widely accepted that Matthew was writing for a Jewish audience and his main message was to highlight the Messiah and His kingdom. This would mean he would focus more on a miracle that Jesus performed then on the details surrounding it. The miracle shows Jesus as the Messiah more than the details.

The gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke do have some word for word similarities. This strongly suggests that one was copied from the other, and that is most certainly true.

With Mark being the first book written, it is accepted that Matthew and Luke copied some of Marks material (remembering that Luke was a researcher and acknowledged other accounts). But importantly, not everything was included, and not everything was the same. An example is the Parable of the Tenants²⁴, although the same story in all three, it is written slightly differently, not word for word as other parts. And Matthew even adds an extra bit linking the vineyard to the kingdom of God, as the kingdom was Matthew's focus. So yes, Matthew and Luke did copy from Mark, but only what they felt was needed for their purpose, and even then, they would change things if they felt it was warranted.

²³ <https://answersingenesis.org/is-the-bible-true/is-the-new-testament-reliable/>

²⁴ Parable of the Tenants - Matthew 21:33-46, Mark 12:1-12, Luke 20:9-19

Differences in the accounts can seem like contradictions, but are they truly? Just because I don't understand how two things work together it doesn't mean they contradict each other; it could just mean that I don't understand. And I believe that is how it is for all the differences in the gospels.

For example, let's look at the account of Jesus cursing the fig tree²⁵

In Marks gospel account Jesus cursed a fig tree then the next morning they noticed it was withered. However, in Matthew, the fig tree withered at once. Is that a contradiction?

No, it's just a matter of perspective. For arguments sake, when Matthew saw the fig tree the next morning, maybe he thought that it must have withered straight away, only showing the evidence of it that morning.

I don't know if that is the truth or not, there might be a far better explanation out there, but my main point here is, just because we don't know why, it doesn't make it a contradiction.

If it is true that the Holy Spirit inspired the writers to write what they did (and I believe it is), then the differences show that the Holy Spirit works with a person rather than controlling them. And this of course, as I have said, has worked out for good as the differences show they are telling the truth, everything the same would not be believed at all.

For more on the differences

Here is a page that explains the apparent contradictions quite well
<https://zondervanacademic.com/blog/bible-contradictions-explained>

Other Controversies

There are so many controversies about the New Testament (even just the Gospels) that I won't even attempt to address them. If I did it would just clog up this overview. The fact is that some people just don't like Jesus, they might be atheists or from other religions and cannot accept what the Bibles says about Him. To them the Bible must be false. So, there will always be controversies, but there will also always be answers, if one chooses to look for them.

But if you want, or need, to investigate such things, Lee Strobel's 'The Case for Christ' does address some controversies and is worth a read. Also, 'The Big Book of Bible Difficulties: Clear and Concise Answers from Genesis to Revelation' by Norman L. Geisler and Thomas Howe might provide some answers.

If you do want to investigate what controversies are out there, just make sure you get a balanced view on what you read, that is, look at the controversies from both sides. To paraphrase Proverbs 18:17 *the first argument always seems right until another questions it.*

The honesty of the Gospels

The Gospels include some things that are not overly favourable but were recorded anyway. The question is, why would they do such a thing if it was not true?

The book of Mark is the first written account and is believed to reproduce the preaching of Peter the apostle, and thus carries his authority. Yet it includes parts that are not favourable to Peter, it mentions Jesus rebuking him, even saying that his words or actions were from Satan (Mark 8:33), of Peter being scared and looking a little silly, not knowing what to say (Mark 9:5-7). And finally in Mark 14:66-72 it has

²⁵ Jesus curses the fig tree - Mark 11:12-14, 20, Matthew 21:18-19

the account of Peter denying that he even knew who Jesus was, something which earlier that night he told Jesus would never happen (Mark 14:30), "If I must die with you, I will not deny you" he said.

Peter was an apostle and leader in the Church and could have omitted such things from his preaching to make himself look better, but he didn't because he was telling the whole truth.

The book of Matthew, which was written by Matthew the apostle, who had his name changed from Levi at some point (presumably by Jesus), records very clearly that Matthew, himself, was a tax collector (Matthew 9:9) - tax collectors were very much despised by the Jews, and even when naming the 12 apostles, he calls himself 'Matthew the tax collector' (Matthew 10:3). This is in contrast to both Mark and Luke who never link Matthew the apostle with Levi the tax collector.

Luke 24:1-10 is the account of the empty tomb. This account was given by women, but at that time the testimony of a women wasn't considered reliable. We see this play out in verse 11 'but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them'. This is despite it being the testimony of at least 5 women. If this was a fake account then the narrative (which is also in other gospels) would not have used women as first witnesses, but men. The fact that it was women points to it being true.

Further reading

<https://answersingenesis.org/is-the-bible-true/is-the-new-testament-reliable/>

http://www.bibleone.net/print_SF10.html

<https://www.crossway.org/articles/10-things-you-should-know-about-the-reliability-of-the-new-testament-writers/>

Was Jesus who He said He was?

The Messiah of the Old Testament

In answering if the Old Testament was authentic, I made the point of Jesus fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies about the coming Messiah. As I mentioned, there were more than 300 Old Testament prophecies fulfilled by Jesus. In the table below, I have listed just those about his birth and death, that is, those he could not have self-fulfilled.

Table 1: Prophecies fulfilled by Jesus

Topic	Prophecy	Fulfilled In
Born of a virgin	'Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.' - Isaiah 7:14 (700 BC)	Matt 1:18 Luke 1:31, 34-35
	Notes: Immanuel means God with us, which is one of the many names associated with Jesus - see Matthew 1:23	
Born in Bethlehem	'But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.' - Micah 5:2 (686 BC)	Matt 2:1 Luke 2:4-7
	Notes: John 7:41-42 suggests that the people didn't realise he was born in Bethlehem because He grew up in Galilee.	
Comes out of Egypt	'out of Egypt I called My Son' - Hosea 11:1 (800 BC)	Matt 2:19
	Notes: Matthew 2:13-15 shows how Jesus was taken to Egypt as a small child to escape Herod.	
Betrayed by a friend	'Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me.' - Psalm 41:9 (962 BC)	Matt 26:14-16, 47-50 Mark 14:10-11, 43-46

		Luke 22:4, 47-48 John 6:71, 13:21-30
	Notes: Judas literally ate bread with Jesus - see John 6:13:21-30 and Luke 22:21	
Betrayed for 30 pieces of silver	"If it seems good to you, give me my wages; but if not, keep them." And they weighed out as my wages thirty pieces of silver.' - Zechariah 11:12 (480 BC)	Matt 26:14-15
	Notes: Reading the whole of Zechariah 11 gives more of a sense of it being about betrayal.	
Death is consistent with crucifixion:	'...they have pierced my hands and feet' - Psalm 22:16 (962 BC) '...when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced' - Zechariah 12:10 (480 BC)	Luke 24:40 John 20:25-27
	Notes: The piercing of hands and feet is a well-known fact about crucifixion. Also, John 3:14-15 links Jesus to the bronze snake in Numbers 12, which was <u>lifted-up</u> , and all who looked at it would live.	
He would be mocked	'All who see me mock me; they sneer and shake their heads: "He trusts in the LORD, let the LORD deliver him; let the LORD rescue him, since He delights in him." - Psalm 22:7-8 (962 BC)	Matt 27:29, 41-43 Mark 15:20, 31-32 Luke 22:63, 23:35-37
	Notes: They mocked 'he saved others; he cannot even save himself' suggesting that if He was the Christ (who could save others) He, Himself would be saved. Just a different way of saying what was in Psalm 22.	
They cast lost for His clothes	'They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing' - Psalm 22:18 (962 BC)	Matt 27:35 Mark 15:24 Luke 23:34 John 19:23-24
	Notes: This one is quite specific.	
He would rise from the dead	'For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.' - Psalm 16:10 (962 BC)	Matt 28 Mark 16 Luke 24 John 20
	Notes: Sheol is the place of the dead, and by corruption it means decay. So, it says that He will rise from the dead.	

Is this an example of scripture validating scripture, maybe, but hopefully I've made my point that the Gospels tell the truth.

Further reading

<https://answersingenesis.org/jesus/birth/fulfilled-prophecies-at-the-birth-of-christ/>

<https://www.gotquestions.org/prophecies-of-Jesus.html>

Dying for the truth

Jesus was killed in the most brutal way possible for His belief in who he was. He didn't even try to save Himself, which, in itself, is another fulfilled prophecy 'like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth' (Isaiah 53:7).

But of greater importance than the death of Jesus is His resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a foundational belief in Christianity, as 1 Corinthians 15:14 puts it 'if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain' (I note that Paul, the author of that verse, was beheaded for his belief).

The apostles claimed that they had seen Jesus after He had been raised from the dead, and they went out and proclaimed the gospel of Christ and that Jesus had, indeed, been raised from the dead. Why would they do that? They had just witnessed what the Jewish leaders had done to Jesus in an attempt to stop the movement and would have had some idea of what was ahead of them.

The apostles had nothing to gain from their preaching, only hardship, persecution, and ultimately a gruesome death, and all because of their claim about the resurrection of Christ, which they had seen.

This is not the same thing as dying for your belief...

Side Note

Out of all the apostles, it is said that only the apostle John died of natural causes. The rest were brutally murdered because of their preaching.

The apostles knew the truth about what happened, whether He was or was not resurrected. The only rational explanation is that they had truly witnessed the risen Lord, and they were willing to die because of it.

Would you die for a lie?

The Logic of C.S. Lewis

In his book *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis puts forward his logic as to why Jesus should not be thought of as just a great moral teacher, as some suggest. The same logic applies to the idea that Jesus achieved some sort of higher self, a Christ Consciousness. I'll let Lewis explain it in his own words:

"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."²⁶

Is it complete?

To be complete it must first be closed, that is, nothing further can be added. So, what marks it as closed?

When it came to the Old Testament, knowing it was closed was easy, it spoke about redemption through the coming Messiah, so when the Messiah came the Old Testament was done, complete. Any new writing inspired by God then became the New Testament, but why did that stop?

Side Note

Interestingly, even though the Jewish people don't accept Jesus as their Messiah, their Bible Canon is also considered closed.

The Closure of the New Testament

As I alluded to earlier, when we look at the rules, or criteria, that the overseers used to recognise Canon, we see they all have a single purpose, answering the question, does it have the authority of an apostle? The apostles were chosen by Christ and were taught directly by Him, they were seen as the only ones that had the authority to convey Canon, and that being the case, when they died, Canon stopped.

²⁶ C.S. Lewis 'Mere Christianity', Book 2 - What Christians believe, Chapter 3 - The Shocking Alternative

On a writing called the Muratorian fragment (dated around 170 AD), the writer, when talking about a well-liked and popular book called *The Shepherd*, says “*The Shepherd* was composed quite recently, in our times. So ... it cannot be read publicly for the church, because it is neither among the prophets (for their number has been completed) nor among the apostolic eyewitnesses (for it is after their time)”²⁷

That writer is confirming what we see in the criteria, Canon must have the authority of an apostolic eyewitness. Therefore, the New Testament Canon can only be considered closed.

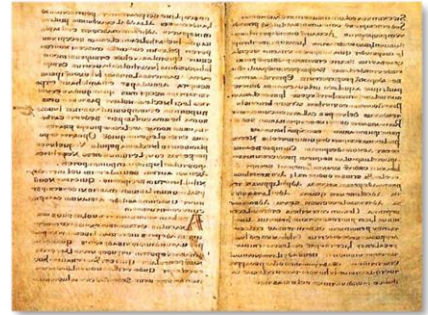


Figure 9: Muratorian fragment is preserved in Milan

Just for arguments sake, if that were not the case, what would mark it as closed. A year, a council of overseers, a pope, or maybe a roman emperor? None of those carry the right authority to close Canon, and what if it hasn't stopped? For one thing, it would mean that everything ever written by a believer for the last, nearly, 2000 years would need to be reviewed as Canon. And that would include web pages and emails (good luck with that).

No, Canon had a purpose. To teach us, yes, but more importantly to set a measuring stick for Christianity. Once that was done, it was closed.

Now let's look at some books that were deemed to not be included in the Bible by the overseers.

The Lost Books of the New Testament

There is a group of at least 39 books²⁸ that are known to have not been included in the New Testament Canon. Some refer to these as the Lost Books of the New Testament.

So, the big question is why were they not included?

The short answer to that is that they simply failed the test, that is, they didn't meet the criteria for being Canon. They were either unable to be linked to an apostle, or they were not consistent with what was already trusted. Remembering of course that, although there was no official Canon, they did have an unofficial one. The four Gospels and some of the epistles of Paul were definitely seen as Canon very early on.

The Gnostic Gospels

It is clear that a lot of the *Lost Books* were written by the Gnostics, whose beliefs differ significantly to the teachings of the apostles and were not compatible with the known Canon at the time, and still aren't.

The Gnostics claimed to have access to 'secret knowledge' through revelation from God. Whether they wrote their books from that so-call secret knowledge, or simply to justify their beliefs, I do not know. What I do know, is that it reiterates the need for Canon, something to measure all knowledge against. God, who delights in truth, will not contradict Himself.

“It was common for anonymous writers in the second century to attribute the name of a popular New Testament figure to their gospel in order to gain credibility” (Matt Slick²⁹). We see this with the Gospel of Judas, Gospel of Thomas, Gospel of Peter, Gospel of Mary Magdalene (also known as the Gospel of Mary), and others.

²⁷ Quoted from 'Christian History Made Easy' by Timothy Paul Jones

²⁸ <https://carm.org/bible-general/an-overview-of-the-lost-books-of-the-new-testament/>

²⁹ <https://carm.org/lost-books/does-the-gospel-of-mary-magdalene-belong-in-the-new-testament-gnostic/>

So, even though these books have big names in the titles (Peter and Thomas were both apostles), the early church could not attribute them to the authority of an apostle.

Let's look at a couple of the more popular ones to see how they stack up.

The Gospel of Thomas

The Gospel of Thomas claims to be written by the apostle Thomas, and dates to around the second century. Even though it was mentioned in early Christian writings, it wasn't found until 1945. Now that we know its contents, we can see that it is clearly a Gnostic writing.

This book fails all three of the criteria for being recognised as Canon. Its date was after the time of the apostles, in his Ecclesiastical History (340 AD), Eusebius categorises the Gospel of Thomas as heretical³⁰, so it wasn't used by the Church, and it contains a lot of sayings that don't line up with the gospels³¹.

The Gospel of Thomas is not Canon.

The Gospel of Judas

It is clear, from its content, that the Gospel of Judas is another Gnostic writing that dates to around the middle of the second century. It talks about secret conversations between Jesus and Judas Iscariot (the one who betrayed Jesus), again it fails all three of the criteria for being recognised as Canon.

In addition to its content, the early Church father Irenaeus, also counts it as being written by the Gnostics, in his book 'Against Heresies' (180 AD).

The writings of the Church Fathers

In addition to those obviously false writings, some other writings were also rejected as being Canon, even though they agreed with all known Canon and could be traced to a close associate of an apostle.

Clement, Polycarp, and Ignatius are called early Church fathers, that is, they were overseers, or bishops in the early Church. It is believed that Polycarp and Ignatius were disciples of the apostle John, while Clement was a disciple of Peter.

These were all known to be great men of faith in the church, and all wrote letters of instruction, but all have been rejected as being Canon.

The reason for their writing being excluded from Canon can only come down to one thing, that they did not have the authority of an apostle. 1 Clement, as it is called, was written some 30 years after Peter was martyred, and Polycarp and Ignatius wrote theirs in the early second century.

As far as instruction goes, the letters may have been valuable to the Church at the time, but they are not considered Canon.

³⁰ <http://www.ntcanon.org/Eusebius.shtml>

³¹ <https://carm.org/lost-books/does-the-gospel-of-thomas-belong-in-the-new-testament/>

Paul's other letter to the Corinthian Church

The New Testament includes 2 letters that Paul wrote to the Corinthian Church, 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians. However, it is believed that he wrote an earlier letter prior to 1 Corinthians³², so, what happened to that letter?

No copies of that letter exist, and it doesn't appear to have been mentioned by any of the early Church fathers. What this shows is that it was never considered to be Canon. It was not copied and shared among the churches, as the other letters were, because if it was, we would likely find evidence of it.

So, we can confidently say that it failed the second criteria, in that, it was not valued among the churches.

Books that shouldn't be included

Having so much information about how the New Testament Canon was recognised, it does mean that we are, in some way, able to weigh up the books ourselves.

Let's now look at some books that had their status as Canon questioned.

Hebrews

First, I'll note that there was a Gospel of the Hebrews which was seen as heretical, here I am referring to the epistle to the Hebrews, which is included in the New Testament.

Some suggest that the author of Hebrews is unknown, if that is the case, then it could be argued that it fails the test by not having the apostolic authority and shouldn't be included. And this was the reason why Hebrews was one of the last to be officially recognised.

The reason it was finally included was because of its content, it is a rich book in terms of theology, and is totally consistent with the rest of the New Testament, and despite it not being officially recognised, it was being used in the churches. So, it fulfilled 2 of the criteria right there.

As for its authority, it was initially counted as an epistle of Paul and many of the writings of the early Church Fathers confirm that, and in its final greetings it mentions visiting them (its intended recipient) with Timothy, who was Paul's close disciple. But there was still disagreement.

In the end, I have to say that it was included because it was God inspired, as the early Church seems to have known. Maybe it is the one anomaly that does not have apostolic authority, but I doubt that. After doing the research for this book, I am confident that it is, at least, Paul's content.

For me, although a layman, this book ticks all 3 boxes, 2.5 if you want to be critical, but still enough to be included.

Other books

I tried to be critical and make a case that maybe Jude or some of the smaller books shouldn't have been included, but upon researching them I really didn't have a case at all. I am confident that all books in the New Testament should be there.

³² referenced in 1 Corinthians 5:9

Putting it all together

The purpose of the New Testament Canon is to act as a measuring stick with which you can judge, among other things, teachings. With that said, the creation of it needed an authority and an end. The apostles chosen by Jesus are the most authoritative and their death is the most logical end.

When it comes to the criteria for recognising Canon, the writings of the Church fathers show the effect of the need for apostolic authorship, while both the missing letter to the Corinthians and the book of Hebrews, show the effect of having widespread value among the churches.

The Gnostic Gospels show both the need for Canon and the need for the criteria for recognising Canon.

In my opinion, this proves that there is nothing that is missing from the New Testament, and there is nothing that should not be included. It is perfect, not only in its wholeness, but also together with the Old Testament.

Scripture Validating Scripture

In the introduction I asked the question if 2 Timothy 3:16-17 was an example of scripture validating scripture, and whether that was ok. Having gone through the New Testament, I believe I am now in a place to answer that question.

It is my belief, and many others, that the New Testament authors did not know that they were writing scripture. They may have seen the other apostles' writings as such, i.e., Paul quotes the gospel of Luke in 1 Timothy 5:18, and Peter mentions Paul in 2 Peter 3:15-16. But even so, it seems clear to me that they were simply writing letters, as their letters contain personal greetings at the beginning and end, which look nothing like the scripture they would have known. The exceptions to this are Matthew, Mark, John, and John's Revelation, and none of those validate scripture.

Although there was an expectation that these letters were authoritative³³ and to be read out in churches³⁴, I believe they just thought they were teaching. Like how I can learn from a book by one of my favourite authors, but that book will never be considered part of the Bible.

Therefore, because they didn't know they were writing scripture, when they validated scripture in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 and 2 Peter 1:21, they weren't aware that they were talking about their own writings, that God had already ordained their writings as Canon, and as such, the New Testament scriptures validating scripture, in my opinion, are acceptable.

But now, having been through it, I'm sure that is of minor consequence.

³³ 1 Corinthians 2:23, 14:37–38

³⁴ Colossians 4:16

Conclusion

This world was created by a loving God, and that God wants us to know Him. But we have rejected God and gone our own way. How do we make up for that? There is nothing we can offer Him, and nothing we can do that will affect Him. That is why God, Himself, made a way, and that way is through Jesus Christ. That is the central message of the Bible.

Along with that message, the Bible stands as a measuring stick, with which to measure our beliefs and actions against. What is good, right, and just, and what is just wrong.

The Gnostic writings showed us how quickly we can be lured away to some corruption of the truth, and that highlights how important it is to have official Canon. In recognising that Canon, the criteria used by the Church Fathers was good, and their selection was right. We have the right Bible.

As has been shown, the Bible text has been accurately preserved, and we can be confident that what we read is what the authors wrote. But more importantly than that, the Bible tells us the truth.

I believe that there is enough evidence to prove that God wrote and preserved the Bible so that we would have a standard by which to know Him.

In the introduction I said that it would be unreasonable to expect a huge amount of evidence, that being said, I think there is. But in the end, like with the Christian faith, there is enough evidence to believe, and enough controversies to doubt. The choice is yours.

This book was to show how accurate and true the Bible is, and I think I've done that, but why don't you read it and see, if it was written by God, maybe you will see that for yourself.

What Next

No Christian writing would be complete without offering a choice to believe.

Do you want to believe?

Maybe you think that you are not good enough, well, you are right, you are not good enough. No matter how much or how little we have sinned in this world, there is no way to make it up to God, He is pure and righteous, and we are not. But that is the point of Christ.

The consequence of our foul rebellion is death, and to be eternally separated from God. But God determined long ago that He would die in our place, that His death would pay the penalty for our sins, and He did that through Jesus Christ.

And that is The Good News, that our sins can be forgiven. That we can be brought into a right relationship with God again, and that through believing in Jesus Christ, the begotten of God, and that He died in our place. Romans 10:9 says, 'if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.'

Sounds easy enough, right?

Or are you scared of what happens next, what you may have to be like, what you may have to give up?

Don't worry about such things, God will deal with them in His good time.

In my life I have given up many of the things I once did, but all those things, when the time came, I wanted to give up, my desires changed. So don't worry, maybe one day you'll have to choose, but the choice won't be as difficult as it is now. Our God is a great God and a wonderful teacher, leading us in gentleness and love.

What to do next?

You've just read about how the Bible is accurate and true, so read it. Start with the Gospels, learn about our saviour. What He taught and what He did.

If you have made the decision above, find other Christians, have fellowship, and learn.

But most of all, trust God, you may go astray, but don't worry, trust Him and submit to Him, and he will always bring you back to the right path.

Whether you made the decision or not, whether you believed what I wrote or not, I pray that God will bless you, and that you will find peace and joy in your journey through life.

Amen