

## REASONS WHY WE CAN TRUST THE BIBLE ACCOUNT

The Gospel accounts do not stand alone. They receive heavy support from both the writers of the New Testament letters and from the Old Testament prophets, who wrote about the life of Jesus while his coming was still in the future.

Only letters or gospels from apostles [who were eyewitnesses of the ministry and resurrection of Jesus] were accepted or from those closely associated with them.

What we have seen and heard we announce to you also. 1 John 1.3

We have not depended on made up stories in making known to you the mighty coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. With our own eyes we saw his greatness. 2 Peter 1.16

So then, our brothers, stand firm and hold onto those truths which we taught you, both in our preaching and in our letter... With my own hand I write this: GREETINGS FROM PAUL. This is the way I sign every letter; this is how I write. 2 Thessalonians 2.15 and 3.17

Jesus promised that all the apostles' teaching would be directed by the Holy Spirit.

The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and make you remember all that I have told you. John 14.26

Paul's letters appeared first. They can be accurately dated by comparing the details in them with the accounts of Paul's travels in Acts and by references to Paul's letters in the writings of the apostles' immediate successors. Some had been written by 60AD [Paul's first imprisonment at Rome] and the rest by 65AD [Paul's second imprisonment and death]. Written while many still lived who could remember what Jesus said and did, they give an outline of the Gospel which agrees with the accounts given in the Gospels. Also in agreement is the Gospel outline found in Acts and in the other New Testament letters written by Peter, James, John, Jude and the writer to the Hebrews.

I passed on to you what I received, which is of the greatest importance: that Christ died for our sins, as written in the Scriptures [the writings of the Old Testament Prophets]; that he was buried and that he was raised to life three days later, as written in the Scriptures; that he appeared to Peter and then

to all twelve apostles. Then he appeared to more than five hundred of his followers at once, most of whom are still alive, although some have died. Then he appeared to James, and afterwards to all the apostles. Last of all he appeared also to me [Paul]. 1 Corinthians 15.3-8

The Gospels themselves appeared from about 60AD onwards. Mark, who is mentioned in Acts and in the letters, wrote down Peter's preaching. We also have two of Peter's letters. Matthew wrote a list of Jesus' sayings which he later expanded with further material and with material from Mark. Luke who was Paul's companion, did careful research collecting material into which he inserted Matthew's sayings and Mark's account. He also wrote Acts and is mentioned in the letters. John wrote last to provide additional information. We also have his three letters and the revelation given to him. We get a considerable knowledge of Jesus from the selections given, which Jesus said the Holy Spirit would make sure to happen. The Gospels were immediately accepted as accurate accounts of the apostles' teaching at a time when many people could still remember Jesus.

Many people have done their best to write a report of the things that have taken place among us. They wrote what we have been told by those who saw these things from the beginning and who proclaimed the message. And so, your Excellency, because I have carefully studied all these matters from their beginning, I thought it would be good to write an orderly account for you. I do this so that you will know the full truth about everything which you have been taught. Luke 1.1-4

The writings were copied and circulated. The New Testament writers read each others' writings and the letters were read in several places. By 100AD two collections of the books had appeared, the Gospel and the Apostle [Gospels and Acts-letters].

The Scripture says, A worker should be given his pay. 1 Timothy 5.18 quoting Luke 10.7

As you wait for that Day [the return of Jesus], do your best to be pure and faultless in God's sight and to be at peace with him. Look on our Lord's patience [his delay in coming] as the opportunity he is giving you to be saved, just as our dear brother Paul wrote to you, using the wisdom that God gave him. This is what he says in all his letters when he writes on the subject. 2 Peter 3.14-16 referring to Paul's letters.

After you have read this letter, make sure that it is read also in the church at Laodicea. Colossians 4.16

Write down what you see, and send the book to the churches in these seven cities; Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. Revelation 1.11

The Early Church Fathers [immediate successors to the apostles] writing from 100AD onwards quote extensively from the New Testament with comments about contacts with the apostles and about the authors of the Gospels. We have copies of many of their writings. There are also scanty references in Roman and Jewish writings of this time from which a brief outline of Jesus can be gathered.

Then we have early manuscripts [handwritten copies] of the New Testament. They can be dated by the form of the handwriting and by the material written upon. We have fragments from as early as 150AD e.g. the John Rylands fragment of John's Gospel. We have the Chester Beattie and Bodmer manuscripts written between 200 and 300AD containing most of the New Testament. There are the Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus from 350AD containing most of the whole Bible, and several others from the following century. We also have portions from 400AD onwards of the Syriac and Latin translations that were made from the Greek around 150AD. By comparing these and many others we are able to ascertain the original New Testament text extremely exactly.

Archaeology gives further confirmation. The Gospels and Acts show a very exact knowledge of details about people and places of the first century AD which strongly proves that they were based on eyewitness accounts.

The New Testament is written in the form of Greek spoken in the first century. Also in many places the Greek of the Gospels, including Jesus' words and the apostles' speeches in Acts, is a word for word translation from Aramaic, the language of Jesus and his disciples.

The Old Testament books were written by prophets-people who gave a message from God.

Men were under the control of the Holy Spirit as they spoke the message that came from God. 2 Peter 1.21

The true prophet spoke about obeying God and accurately foretold the future. Thus identified, the books of the prophets were added to the previous books, building up the Old Testament until the last prophet Malachi in 400BC.

I was studying the sacred books and thinking about...what the Lord had told the prophet Jeremiah. Daniel 9.2

We can date the writing of Bible books by their references to current events, persons and places and by references to the books by later writers, e.g. in later Bible books. From this we can see the amazingly accurate fulfilment of the Bible's many detailed prophecies of the future. Those about the coming of Jesus were all fulfilled in his lifetime. Many of those about Israel and the surrounding nations have been fulfilled exactly, often many centuries after they were written. Others still await fulfilment as do those about the return of Jesus. No book except the Bible foretells the future with consistent accuracy.

I alone am God and there is no one else like me. From the beginning I predicted the outcome; long ago I foretold what would happen. Isaiah 46.9-10

All the prophets spoke about Jesus, saying that everyone who believes in him will have his sins forgiven through the power of his name. Acts 10.43

Archaeology has shown the extreme accuracy of historical and geographical references all the way through the Old Testament. Very many references to current events, persons, towns, nations, customs and words then in use have been confirmed by archaeological finds, which strongly proves that the events described in the Old Testament have been accurately recorded.

The Old Testament's claim to be the Word of God is endorsed by Jesus himself:

Do not think that I have come to do away with the Law of Moses and the teachings of the prophets. I have not come to do away with them, but to make their teachings come true. Matthew 5.17

From the time of Ezra in the Bible [450BC] the Old Testament has been very carefully copied by the Jews. We have Jewish manuscripts of the Old Testament from 900-1000AD which agree extremely closely with the Dead Sea Scrolls [Jewish manuscripts from the first century BC] and with Samaritan manuscripts from about 1000AD whose text has been handed down separately by the Samaritans from 400BC. There is also the Greek translation made around 250BC handed down by Jews and then by Christians, of which we possess manuscripts from 350AD, which also agrees with the Jewish text. The great similarity found on comparing these

manuscripts proves that our present text is a high quality copy of the original.

The above evidence is adequate to show that the Bible gives us an accurate picture of Jesus.

Maybe you believe that Science contradicts the Bible. Then consider this: The Bible contains over 100 scientific statements, most of them in the fields of Astronomy, Biology, Geology, Physical Geography and Public Health. The accuracy of all these statements has been demonstrated.

Of the vast number of historical statements in the Bible, many have been verified by archaeological finds, and not one has been proved wrong. Some things are disputed and we await further clarification of events such as the Exodus and Conquest of Palestine.

There are many detailed prophecies in the Bible including those about towns and countries all over the Middle East as well as predictions made by Jesus. Many have been fulfilled exactly, often many centuries after they were written. Others still await fulfilment. Not once has the Bible been wrong. No book except the Bible foretells the future with consistent accuracy.

The Old Testament contains hundreds of prophecies about the coming of the Messiah [God's chosen One]. They speak of a Person who is divine, a Person who is to suffer for the sins of others, and a Person who is to rule the world and turn the whole world to God. The predictions are of a Messiah personally distinct from God and yet also the Saviour of men, the Lord and Ruler of all, the Judge of the nations. Almighty, Everlasting-One whom prophecy designates as God. No other book in the world foretells a Person like this.

The witness of the Old Testament is of the greatest value because it has been transmitted by the Jews who were hostile to Christianity. They did not understand how their Messiah could both suffer and rule, so failed to realise that their Messiah was Jesus, the Son of God, who is to come twice-once to suffer and a second time to rule. Thus there is no possibility of the Old Testament text being changed to make it back up Christianity.



We can check the accuracy with which the Jews transmitted the Old Testament text. We know the history of how it was passed down from the time of Ezra the scribe [copyist] in 450BC. We have Jewish manuscripts [hand written copies] from 100BC [The Dead Sea Scrolls] and from 900-1000AD to compare with our present text. We can get another check on the text because a Greek translation was made in 200BC and passed down first by Jews and then by Christians. Also the Samaritans passed down part of the Old Testament [the first five books] independently from the Jews from 400BC.

We don't have any manuscripts for the period before 450BC, but we have some idea of how the Old Testament was written down and collected together from references within it to the writing of parts of it. We are also able to say that the books were written at or soon after the events or prophecies contained in them because the references to historical events, geographical features, customs and current issues are very accurate and correspond with the stated time and place of writing of the book. Also the old words used in the books are the ones expected from the date given. Books of Old Testament Introduction look at these things and the Old Testament books pass their exams with ease!

## EVIDENCE THAT CHRISTIANITY IS TRUE

We can be sure that the New Testament has come down to us as it was originally written because we have many manuscripts going back to 150-200AD with fragments from before then, such as a fragment of John's Gospel dated around 130AD, whose value is to show that the New Testament was written in the first century. We even have non-biblical Greek papyri from which we can show that the New Testament was written in first century Greek. We also have copies of the writings of early Christians from 100AD onwards containing quotations from the New Testament. Practically all the New Testament can be recovered from their writings as quotations. We also have a very valuable check on the text as it was in 150-175AD in the form of translations made at that time, which have survived as later copies. Sir Frederick Kenyon, a leading authority on the reliability of ancient manuscripts, wrote: Any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has been removed. Both the authenticity

and the general integrity of the New testament may be regarded as finally established.

We have more assurance from Archaeology [inscriptions on stones] and written history [copies of ancient writings]. The writings of Luke, his Gospel and the Book of Acts, are full of detail about persons and places. Archaeology has shown an accuracy only possible for an eyewitness or first century writer. Archaeologists consider Luke to be a historian of the first class.

From the Roman historians who wrote on the first century AD we have references to the crucifixion and the early spread of Christianity to Asia Minor and Rome. Although Josephus the Jew wrote a history of the Jews when he was living in Rome at the end of the first century, and which contains references to Jesus and His brother James as well as useful background material on many New Testament events, we won't count his evidence as his writings were transmitted by Christians.

The Jews collected comments on Old Testament laws and passed them down orally from the fall of Jerusalem in 70AD and committed them to writing in 200AD. Of great value because they were transmitted independently of the Christians by hostile witnesses are the remarks about Jesus with references to his unusual birth, his disciples, his miracles, his crucifixion, his claims to be divine, and his promise to return at the end of the age. Incidentally various Jewish writings serve to illuminate words and actions of Jesus in the Gospels by indicating current attitudes and beliefs which Jesus took into account in His answers and actions.

We have the many writings of early Christians from 100AD onwards in which they eagerly discuss all about Christianity as they sought to find out all they could. It is of remarkable significance that the authority of the Gospels is never questioned nor is the fact of the Resurrection disputed, so certain were those things to these writers.

We even have some old manuscripts from 140AD written by a strange sect called the Gnostics which quote from the New Testament books and regard them as authoritative sources on Christianity.

**We can also study the Gospels and New Testament in the way lawyers study documents to prove they are authentic.**

Jesus is unique in all history. No one else has had the perfectly balanced behaviour he had. No one else has taught all the good things and no nonsense, not only morally perfect teaching but also relevant to daily life.

Jesus taught all the things that really matter-about what God is like, about relating to God, and about how to live. No one else has claimed to be divine, to be the Saviour and Judge of all, and that the proof of it was to be his rising again from the dead. The religious, history and wisdom books of the world [apart from the Bible] know of no one like this. Christianity is based on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus-God's self revelation.

Accuracy in collecting the New Testament data is shown by complete agreement everywhere between the multitude of checkable details in the incidents described and what we have been able to find out from other sources. All the historical, geographical and cultural [customs and behaviour] details are correctly represented. Also, the accounts behave like those of really observed events by being full of detail, not easy to exactly harmonise with each other, and yet containing many hidden agreements that are not obvious on first reading them.

We have further confirmation in that the new Testament writers in several places say that either they were eyewitnesses or that they included only the statements of eyewitnesses in their accounts. Their accounts were written down mostly between 50 and 75AD and were the summaries of what they had preached continuously since 30AD. Some of the people who had seen Jesus in 30AD would still be alive in 60AD and many they told would live to 100AD. Living memory is reliable for 50years at least. The time is too short for much change to occur in the memory of the life and teaching of so famous a founder as Jesus. Also his sayings are recorded in a poetic style which would improve memory retention. We have six main authors each contributing his own account and two others contributing a small portion of the New Testament. A remark here on Jesus' miracles may be of interest. Although they are better attested than legendary miracles [done publicly and recorded by people who can be shown to be reliable] miracles are not used as proof of Jesus' deity-they are just as would be expected of God. The proof of Jesus' deity is the Resurrection.



We can check the honesty of the New Testament writers. There is no motive possible for inventing a story about a man who had been crucified rising from death and thus being shown to be divine, then going on to preach that along with demands to live a life of complete honesty in word and deed.



The Apostles started preaching in Jerusalem-the last place on Earth to begin unless the story was true-within a mile of where the Easter events took place. No one was able to disprove the Apostles' claim that Jesus' tomb was empty because he had been raised from the dead and had appeared to them. Their preaching met with great success because everyone in Jerusalem knew that the tomb had been found empty and no one knew why. The Jews or the Romans did not move the body, they would have spoken out if they had. The disciples did not move the body. We know this because they stood up to the severest persecution possible-torture and execution-to take their story all the way from Jerusalem to Rome, so much did they believe it. We know that no one else moved the body [they would have told if they had] because not only were the empty grave clothes left behind forming a body shape with no body inside [also the guard], but He was seen again alive by His followers in ways that allowed of no doubt-He could be seen, touched, heard and could even eat to prove He actually had a body, yet He was also different, he could disappear and was not immediately recognised-in other words He had a new "spiritual" body into which His dead human body had been transformed at the moment of the Resurrection. [As for Jesus not being really dead on the cross, well, four Roman executioners, a spear thrust through His side, the observations of friends who buried Him, the tightly wound grave wrappings and the one and a half ton stone closing the tomb I think puts paid to any idea of His reviving in the tomb and emerging two days later full of life!]. What convinced Paul when Jesus appeared to him was that suddenly he understood why the tomb was empty-that Jesus really had risen from the dead and therefore His claim to be the divine Son of God and the Messiah was true.

During the early years of preaching the presence of hostile witnesses guaranteed that any significant departure from the facts of Jesus' life and ministry would be immediately detected. By the time we get to the writing of the new Testament documents not only were there people around who saw Jesus and heard the early preaching, but the writings themselves bear the marks of amazing self control and soberness-full of honest admissions of failures, and lacking spectacular descriptions of things like the Resurrection itself or the world beyond death, and containing true to life events like two women being the first [after the guard!] to discover the resurrection. Furthermore, the first century was a time of great activity in travel, communication by letter and writing of books, with many intelligent, enquiring people in Jerusalem, Rome and all over the Eastern Mediterranean. It was the worst time in history to pass off as true public events which did not really happen.



We have circumstantial evidence in the shape of Baptism, the Lord's Supper, the change in the day of rest from Saturday [the Jewish Sabbath] to Sunday [The Lord's Day-Easter Morning] and the existence of the first century Church. It is impossible to invent these things and then get people to believe that their predecessors a generation or more before did or knew these things-they can only result from an event that causes them and whose story is then passed on. The Church says it all started from Jesus rising from the dead. We can also believe that all the Pauline letters are genuine [they are the earliest New Testament documents dated from 50AD to Paul's death in about 65AD] because forgeries would be detected during the lifetime of Paul and his associates, while later, say in 100AD, the Church would question the sudden appearance of a new letter. All the Pauline letters were accepted by the early Christian writers. Incidentally, Paul signed his letters, sent them by the hand of a reliable messenger, and had them read out in the church to which they were sent.

We have looked at evidence that the New Testament writers were truthful, had personally witnessed what they were writing about and that what they wrote has come down to us practically unchanged.

The New Testament says: [The Good News was promised long ago by God through his prophets, as written in the Holy Scriptures. It is about his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ: as to his humanity, he was born a descendant of David; as to his divine holiness, he was shown with great power to be the Son of God by being raised from death. Through him God gave me the privilege of being an apostle for the sake of Christ, in order to lead people of all nations to believe and obey-Romans 1.2-5](#)