

EVIDENCE

Is *The Bible* to be trusted -
what is the **Evidence** ?

Which is more reliable -
The History of
Jesus Christ
or the History of
Roman Emperor
Julius Caesar ?

By Peter Bluer

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Evidence - Accuracy and reliability of the Bible Manuscripts

by Peter Bluer

The problem today is that people have opinions about the scriptures, and yet, do not know anything about their origin and transmission. The New Testament is constantly under attack and its reliability and accuracy are often contested by individuals. But, if these persons want to set aside the New Testament, then **‘they must’** also disregard other ancient writings: for example, those by **Plato, Aristotle, and Homer.**

Now the reason for this is that the New Testament documents are **better preserved** and **more numerous** than **any other ancient writing.** Because the copies are so numerous, they can be cross checked for accuracy.

This checking process, **‘textual criticism’** as it is called, has determined that the biblical documents are extremely consistent and accurate. There are presently **6000** Greek manuscripts in existence today of the New Testament. If we were to compare the number of New Testament manuscripts to other ancient writings, we find that the New Testament manuscripts far outweigh the others in quantity.

As you will see, there are thousands more New Testament Greek manuscripts than any other ancient writing. The internal consistency of the New Testament documents is about **99.5%** textually pure. That is an amazing accuracy.

In addition there are over **19,000** copies in the Syriac, Latin, Coptic, and Aramaic languages. The total supporting New Testament manuscript base is over **24,000.** The New Testament documents were all written before the close of the first century and Matthew, Mark, Luke, Acts and the epistles were written before AD 70.

This is important because it means there were plenty of people around when the New Testament documents were penned who could have contested the writings. In other words, those who wrote the documents knew that if they were inaccurate, plenty of people would have been around to point it out.

We have absolutely no ancient documents contemporary with the first century that contest the New Testament texts.

Furthermore, we have a fragment of the gospel of John that dates back to around **57 years** from the original writing. This is extremely close to the original writing date.

This is simply unheard of in any other ancient writing and it demonstrates that **the Gospel of John is a first century document.**

The accompanying chart on page 4 compares the New Testament time spans with Homer's Iliad where the closest copy from the original is 500 years later. Undoubtedly, that period of time allows for more textual corruption in its transmission. How much less so for the New Testament documents ?

If the opponents of the Bible dismiss the New Testament as unreliable information, then they must also dismiss the reliability of the writings of **Plato, Aristotle, Caesar, Homer,** and the other authors mentioned in the chart .

On the other hand, if the critics acknowledge the historicity and writings of those other individuals, then they must also retain the historicity and writings of the New Testament authors; after all, the evidence for the New Testament's reliability is far greater than the others.

The Christian has substantially superior criteria for affirming the New Testament documents than he does for any other ancient writing.

It is good evidence on which to base the trust in the reliability of the New Testament. To help appreciate the firm basis on which the Text of the Bible is set, I will quote from the ' **Books and Parchments** ' by Prof F F Bruce Page 171

“ We have seen in Chapter IX how the text of the Hebrew Old Testament, despite the lateness of extant manuscripts,

is much more securely attested than might have been thought.

The New Testament, however, is in a very much better case. I may be permitted to quote here words that I have written elsewhere:

Perhaps we can appreciate how wealthy the New Testament is in manuscript attestation if we compare the textual material for other ancient historical works. See Table Page 6

For Caesar's Gallic War (composed between 58 and 50 B.C.) there are several extant MSS, but only nine or ten are good, and the oldest is some 900 years later than Caesar's day. Of the 142 books of the Roman history of Livy (59 B.C.-A.D. 17), only 35 survive; these are known to us from not more than twenty MSS [manuscripts] of any consequence, only one of which, and that containing fragments of Books III-VI, is as old as the **fourth century.**

Of the fourteen books of the Histories of Tacitus (c. A.D. 100) only four and a half survive; of the sixteen books of his Annals, ten survive in full and two in part. The text of these extant portions of his two great historical works depends entirely on two MSS, one of the ninth century and one of the eleventh. The extant MSS of his minor works (Dialogus de Oratoribus, Agricola, Germania) all descend from a codex of the tenth century.

The History of Thucydides (c. 460-400 B.C.) is known to us from eight MSS, the earliest belonging to c .A.D. 900, and a few papyrus scraps, belonging to about the beginning of the Christian era. The same is true of the History of Herodotus (c. 480-425 B.C.).

Yet no classical scholar would listen to an argument that the authenticity of Herodotus or Thucydides is in doubt because the earliest MSS of their works which are of any use to us are over

1,300 years later than the originals ” .

Now there are about **24000** manuscripts of the New Testament and **86000** quotations from the early church fathers in existence at the present time. What does this mean ? The general public accepts without question the history of the Persian, Greek and Roman Empires without a quibble. It is **just not known** by the general public that the written history of these empires are **copies hundreds of years** later than their originals.

The Hebrew text when copied, had its letters and words counted, and the utmost care was taken because the scribes deemed it a heinous sin to make a mistake. The very existence of the Hebrew vowel pointing system above, below and around the text is a testimony to the care of the Hebrew Text. Turning again to the ‘ **Books and Parchments** ’ page 115

“ It must not be thought that in their devotion to traditional interpretation these Masoretes took liberties with the sacred text. On the contrary, they treated it with the greatest imaginable reverence, and devised a complicated system of safeguards against scribal slips. They counted, for example, the number of times each letter of the alphabet occurs in each book; they pointed out the middle letter of the Pentateuch and the middle letter of the whole Hebrew Bible, and made even more detailed calculations than these. ‘everything countable seems to be counted’, says Dr. Wheeler Robinson; and they made up mnemonics by which the various totals might be readily remembered. ”

As regards the New Testament there are thousands of manuscripts and because there are thousands, they can be put into families, recensions and the errors can be eliminated by very careful study.

See '*A history of Textual Criticism of the New Testament*' by Marvin R Vincent. 1899

The Dead Sea scrolls show the fidelity of the Hebrew text because they are a 1000 years earlier than the Masoretic text.

The following charts were adapted from three sources:

1. *Christian Apologetics*, by Norman Geisler, 1976, p 307;
2. the article "*Archaeology and History attest to the Reliability of the Bible,*" by Richard M. Fales,
3. The Evidence Bible, Compiled by Ray Comfort, Bridge-Logos Publishers, Gainesville, p 163; and 3. *A Ready Defense*, by Josh Mcdowell, 1993, p45

Author	Date Written	Earliest Copy	Time Span Original - copy	Number of Copies
Lucretius	55-53 B.C.	1000 AD	1000 yrs	2
Pliny	61-113 AD	850 AD	750 yrs	7
Plato	427-347 BC	900 AD	1200 yrs	7
Demosthenes	4th Cent BC	1100 AD	800 yrs	8
Herodotus	480-425 BC	900 AD	1300 yrs	8
Suetonius	75-160 AD	950 AD	800 yrs	8
Thucydides	460-400 BC	900 AD	1300 yrs	8
Euripides	480-406 BC	1100 AD	1300 yrs	9
Aristophanes	450-385 BC	900 AD	1200 yrs	10
Caesar	100-44 BC	900 AD	1000 yrs	10
Livy	59 BC-AD 17	1500AD	1500 yrs	20
Tacitus	circa 100 AD	1100 AD	1000 yrs	20
Aristotle	384-322 BC	1100 AD	1400 yrs	49
Sophocles	496-406 BC	1000 AD	1400 yrs	193
Homer (Iliad)	900 BC	400 BC	500 yrs	643
New Testament	50-100 AD	130 AD	< 100 years	5600

Papyri	Contents	Written	Date	Span	Location
p⁵² John Rylands Fragment ³	John 18:31-33,37-38	Circa 68 AD	Circa 125 AD	57 yrs	John Rylands Library, Manchester, UK
P⁴⁶ <i>Chester Beatty Papyrus</i>	Rom 5:17,6:3,5-14; 8:15-25, 27-35, 37-9:32; 10:1-11, 22, 24-33, 35-14:8,9-15:9, 11-33; 16:1-23, 25-27; Heb; 1 & 2 Cor, Eph,Gal, Phil, Col; 1 Thess 1:1,9-10; 2:1-3; 5:5-9, 23-28	50's-70's	Circa 200 AD	Approx 150 yrs	Chester Beatty Museum, Dublin & Ann Arbor, Michigan, University of Michigan library
P⁶⁶ <i>(Bodmer Papyrus)</i>	John 1:1-6:11,35-14:26; fragment of 14:29-21:9	70's	200 AD	Approx 130 yrs	Cologne, Geneva
P⁶⁷	Matt 3:9,15; 5:20-22, 25-28		Circa 200	Approx 130 yrs	Barcelona, San Lucas. Evangelista, P. Barc.1

3."Deissmann was convinced that p52 was written well within the reign of Hadrian (A.D. 117-38) and perhaps even during the time of Trajan (A.D. 98-117)" (Footnote #2 found on pg. 39 of *The Text of the New Testament*, by Bruce M. Metzger, 2nd Ed. 1968, Oxford University Press, NY, NY). Bruce Metzger has authored more than 50 books. He holds two Masters Degrees, a Ph.D. and has been awarded several honorary doctorates. "He is past president of the Society of Biblical Literature, the International Society fo New Testament Studies, an the North American Patristic Society." -- From, *The Case for Christ*, by Lee Strobel, Zondervan Publishers, 1998, Grand Rapids, MI: pg. 57.
www.carm.org/evidence/textualevidence.htm

BIBLE'S RELIABILITY

by Ron Rhodes

Manuscript Evidence for the New Testament

There are more than **24,000** partial and complete manuscript copies of the New Testament. These manuscript copies are very ancient and they are available for inspection now. There are also some **86,000** quotations from the early church fathers and several thousand Lectionaries (church-service books containing Scripture quotations used in the early centuries of Christianity).

Bottom line: the New Testament has an overwhelming amount of evidence supporting its reliability. The Variants in the New Testament Manuscripts Are Minimal In the many thousands of manuscript copies we possess of the New Testament. Indeed, a look at the hard evidence shows that the New Testament manuscripts are amazingly accurate and trustworthy.

Many of these variants simply involve a missing letter in a word; some involve reversing the order of two words (such as "Christ Jesus" instead of "Jesus Christ"); some may involve the absence of one or more insignificant words.

Really, when all the facts are put on the table, only about **50** of the variants have any real significance - and even then, no doctrine of the Christian faith or any moral commandment is effected by them. For more than ninety-nine percent of the cases the original text can be reconstructed to a practical certainty.

Even in the few cases where some perplexity remains, this does not impinge on the meaning of Scripture to the point of clouding a tenet of the faith or a mandate of life.

Thus, in the Bible as we have it (and as it is conveyed to us through faithful translations) we do have for practical purposes the very Word of God, inasmuch as the manuscripts do convey to us the complete vital truth of the originals.

By practicing the science of textual criticism - comparing all the available manuscripts with each other - we can come to an assurance regarding what the original document must have said. Let us suppose we have five manuscript copies of an original document that no longer exists.

Each of the manuscript copies are different. Our goal is to compare the manuscript copies and ascertain what the original must have said.

Here are the five copies:

Manuscript #1: Jesus Christ is the Savior of the whole worl.

Manuscript #2: Christ Jesus is Savior of the whole world.

Manuscript #3: Jesus Christ s the Savior of the whole world.

Manuscript #4: Jesus Christ is th Savior of the whle world.

Manuscript #5: Jesus Christ is the Savor the whole wrld.

Could you, by comparing the manuscript copies, ascertain what the original document said with a high degree of certainty that you are correct ? Of course you could. This illustration may be extremely simplistic, but a great majority of the variants are solved by the above methodology. By comparing the various manuscripts, all of which contain very minor differences like the above, it becomes fairly clear what the original must have said.

Most of the manuscript variations concern matters of spelling, word order, tenses, and the like; no single doctrine is affected by them in any way. We must also emphasize that the sheer volume of manuscripts we possess greatly narrows the margin of doubt regarding what the original biblical document said.

The New Testament Versus Other Ancient Books

By comparing the manuscript support for the Bible with manuscript support for other ancient documents and books, it becomes overwhelmingly clear that no other ancient piece of literature can stand up to the Bible. **Manuscript support for the Bible is unparalleled !**

There are more [New Testament] manuscripts copied with greater accuracy and earlier dating than for any secular classic from antiquity.

Rene Pache adds, “ *The historical books of antiquity have a documentation infinitely less solid.*”

Dr. Benjamin Warfield concludes, “ *If we compare the present state of the text of the New Testament with that of no matter what other ancient work, we must...declare it marvelously exact.*”

Norman Geisler makes several key observations for our consideration:

No other book is even a close second to the Bible on either the number or early dating of the copies. The average secular work from antiquity survives on only a handful of manuscripts; the New Testament boasts thousands.

The average gap between the original composition and the earliest copy is over 1,000 years for other books.

The New Testament, however, has a fragment within one generation from its original composition, whole books within about 100 years from the time of the autograph [original manuscript], most of the New Testament in less than 200 years, and the entire New Testament within 250 years from the date of its completion. The degree of accuracy of the copies is greater for the New Testament than for other books that can be compared. Most books do not survive with enough manuscripts that make comparison possible.

From this documentary evidence, then, it is clear that the New Testament writings are superior to comparable ancient writings.

“The records for the New Testament are vastly more abundant, clearly more ancient, and considerably more accurate in their text.”

Support for the New Testament from the Church Fathers

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, in addition to the many thousands of New Testament manuscripts, there are over **86,000** quotations of the New Testament in the early church fathers. There are also New Testament quotations in thousands of early church Lectionaries (worship books). here are enough quotations from the early church fathers that even if we did not have a single copy of the Bible, scholars could still reconstruct all but 11 verses of the entire New Testament from material written within 150 to 200 years from the time of Christ.

Manuscript Evidence for the Old Testament

The Dead Sea Scrolls prove the accuracy of the transmission of the Bible.

These scrolls discovered at **Qumran in 1947**, we have Old Testament manuscripts that date about a thousand years earlier [**150 B.C.**] than the other Old Testament manuscripts then in our possession [which dated to **A.D. 900**]. The significant thing is that when one compares the two sets of manuscripts, it is clear that they are essentially the same, with very few changes. The fact that manuscripts separated by a thousand years are essentially the same indicates the incredible accuracy of the Old Testament’s manuscript transmission.

A full copy of the Book of Isaiah was discovered at Qumran.

Even though the two copies of Isaiah discovered in Qumran Cave 1 near the Dead Sea in 1947 were **a thousand years earlier than the oldest dated manuscript previously known** [**A.D. 980**].

They proved to be word for word identical with our standard Hebrew Bible in more than 95 percent of the text.

The 5 percent of variation consisted chiefly of obvious slips of the pen and variations in spelling.

From manuscript discoveries like the Dead Sea Scrolls, Christians have **undeniable evidence that today's Old Testament Scripture**, for all practical purposes, is exactly the same as it was when originally inspired by God and recorded in the Bible. Combine this with the **massive amount of manuscript evidence** we have for the New Testament, and it is clear that the Christian Bible is a trustworthy and reliable book. The Dead Sea Scrolls prove that the copyists of biblical manuscripts took great care in going about their work.

These copyists knew they were duplicating God's Word, so they went to incredible lengths to prevent error from creeping into their work. **The scribes carefully counted every line, word, syllable, and letter to ensure accuracy.**

God's Preservation of the Bible The Westminster Confession declares:

“The Old Testament in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek, being immediately inspired by God and, by His singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentic; so in all controversies of religion, the Church is finally to appeal unto them.”

The fact is, the God who had the power and sovereign control to inspire the Scriptures in the first place is surely going to continue to exercise His power and sovereign control in the preservation of Scripture.

Actually, God's preservation work is illustrated in the text of the Bible.

By examining how Christ viewed the Old Testament, we see that He had full confidence that the Scriptures He used had been faithfully preserved through the centuries. Because Christ raised no doubts about the adequacy of the Scripture as His contemporaries knew them, we can safely assume that the first-century text of the Old Testament was a wholly adequate representation of the divine word originally given.

Jesus regarded the extant copies of His day as so approximate to the originals in their message that He appealed to those copies as authoritative. The respect that Jesus and His apostles held for the extant Old Testament text is, at base, an expression of the confidence in God's providential preservation of the copies and translations as substantially identical with the inspired originals.

Hence, the Bible itself indicates that copies can faithfully reflect the original text and therefore function authoritatively.

From the Preface of the RSV 1952. *‘The Evidence for the texts of the Books of the New Testament is better than for any other ancient book, both in the extant manuscripts and in the nearness of the date when the book was originally written’*

You should now watch the DVD or read the Seven Unusual Numbers booklet. This will give you the unassailable evidence that you need which proves that the Bible is indeed the true revelation to Mankind. It shows by Prime Numbers that the words in **Hebrew of Genesis 1.1** and the **Greek words of John 1.1** are the exactly the right number of words and letters that there should be. No more and no less !

Now what can we say about the Messiah - Jesus Christ ?

The Religions of Ancient Rome could not compete with the promise of the God of Israel -
the promise of Eternal life in the Kingdom of God
and with the entrance into his Kingdom having been paid for by the blood of His Christ - **His own Son.**

The Promise is the free gift of eternal life.

You cannot work for it. John 6.29

They said to Jesus,

“ What must we do, to do the works of God ?”

Jesus answered them,

*“ This is the work of God, that you believe
in him whom He has sent.”*

All the Prophets from Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah
never spoke like this Man !

The Prophets all confessed their Sins but this man never gave the slightest hint that he was a sinner, for in Christ the

*“ **whole fullness of the Deity dwells bodily** ”* Col 2.9

Also He made the most amazing statements
that no Prophet had ever uttered:

Jesus said to them

“ you will die in your sins unless you believe that I am He ”

“ I say to you, If any one may keep my word, by no means will he taste death in the [coming] age ” John 8.24, 51

“ I am the Resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, [at the resurrection of the dead]

and whoever lives [again, in this resurrection]

and believes in me shall never die ” John 11.25

To see the Evidence for why the Bible is True watch the DVD.

*This small booklet is
part of a book.*
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373

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373

'A Proof Set in Stone'
by Dr Peter Bluer, PhD, BSc (hons)

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