

An Acceptable Truth

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Many people won't accept what the Bible says because they often have "difficulty" believing that the translators "got it right" or that what is written in today's Bible is truly what the original authors actually penned. But if this were simply an intellectual exercise, involving any other historical document, there would be no hesitation at accepting the text at face value. Homer's history of the fall of Troy is perfectly acceptable on the basis of some 400 or so Greek relics and manuscripts which archaeologists have unearthed. In comparison, archaeologists and scholars have discovered over 5,000 Greek relics and manuscripts from various and multiple locations around the world which verify and attest to the authenticity of the New Testament. Yet many people still continue to attack, criticize, question, or ignore the New Testament because of its textual "unreliability."

Consider these excerpts from the preface to the New King James Version of the Bible (1984):

There is more manuscript support for the New Testament than for any other body of ancient literature. Over five thousand Greek, eight thousand Latin, and many more manuscripts in other languages attest the integrity of the New Testament. There is only one basic New Testament used by Protestants, Roman Catholics, and Orthodox, by conservatives and liberals. Minor variations in hand copying have appeared through the centuries, before mechanical printing began in A.D. 1450. Some variations exist in the spelling of Greek words, in word order, and in similar details. These ordinarily do not show up in translation and do not affect the sense of the text in any way.

...the great majority of existing [complete] manuscripts are in substantial agreement. Even though many are late, and none are earlier than the fifth century, most of their readings are verified by ancient papyri, ancient versions, and quotations in the writings of the early church fathers. This large body of manuscripts is the source of the Greek text underlying the King James Bible. It is the Greek text used by Greek-speaking churches for many centuries, presently known as the Textus Receptus, or Received Text, of the New Testament.

Since the latter nineteenth century the theory has been held by some scholars that this traditional text of the New Testament had been officially edited by the fourth-century church.

Recent studies have caused significant changes in this view, and a growing number of scholars now regard the Received Text as far more reliable than previously thought. In light of these developments, the New King James New Testament has been based on this Received Text.

Readers may be assured that textual debate does not affect one in a thousand words of the Greek New Testament. Furthermore, no established doctrine is called in question by any doubts about the correct reading in this or that text. The Christian can approach his New Testament with confidence.

In closing, let readers be encouraged to approach the Bible "not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe." (1 Ths. 2:13) The same Holy Spirit who originated the Scriptures must also make them clear to the reader, for the truths they contain "are spiritually discerned." (1 Cor. 2:14) It is through the work of the Spirit of life that the Word of life accomplishes its purpose in human hearts and minds. May God teach us His life-giving truth as we submit to Him, that He alone may be glorified.

Consider also the following reasoning excerpted from Josh McDowell's *More Than a Carpenter*:

We can appreciate the tremendous wealth of manuscript authority of the New Testament by comparing it with textual material from other notable ancient sources.

This history of Thucydides (460-400 B.C.) is available to us from just eight [manuscripts] dated about A.D. 900, almost 1,300 years after he wrote. The [manuscripts] of the history of Herodotus are likewise late and scarce, and yet, as F.F. Bruce concludes, "No classical scholar would listen to an argument that the authenticity of Herodotus or Thucydides is in doubt because the earliest manuscripts of their works that are of use to us are over 1,300 years later than the originals."¹

Aristotle wrote his poetics around 343 B.C. and yet the earliest copy we have is dated A.D. 1100, nearly a 1,400-year gap, and only five [manuscripts] are in existence.

Caesar composed his history of the Gallic Wars between 58 and 50 B.C. and its manuscript authority rests on nine or ten copies dating 1,000 years after his death.

When it comes to the manuscript authority of the New Testament, the abundance of material is almost embarrassing in contrast. After the early papyri manuscript discoveries that bridged the gap between the times of Christ and the second century,² an abundance of other [manuscripts] came to light. Over 20,000 copies of New Testament manuscripts are in existence today. The Iliad has 643 manuscripts and is second in manuscript authority after the New Testament.

Sir Frederic Kenyon, who was the director and principal librarian at the British Museum and second to none in authority in issuing statements about manuscripts, concludes: "the interval then between the dates of original composition and the earliest extant evidence becomes so small as to be in fact negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed. Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established."³

The New Testament Greek scholar J. Harold Greenlee adds: "Since scholars accept as generally trustworthy the writings of the ancient classics even though the earliest [manuscripts] were written so long after the original writings and the number of extant [manuscripts] is in many instances so small, it is clear that the reliability of the text of the New Testament is likewise assured."⁴

The application of the bibliographical test⁵ to the New Testament assures us that it has more manuscript authority than any piece of literature from antiquity. Adding to that authority the more than 100 years of intensive New Testament textual criticism, one can conclude that an authentic New Testament text has been established.

We must accept the Bible as it being exactly what it claims to be: God's Word. It contains everything that we need for life and godliness. (2 Pet. 1:3; 2 Tim. 3:16) Even the very structure of the Bible speaks loudly of its divine authorship. It is not one book; it is 66 different books written in 3 languages by over 40 writers of various backgrounds who lived in three separate continents and in different times. The books of the Bible required over 1500 years to write and were not usually officially recognized as authentically divine until they had demonstrated divine characteristics and

results for approximately 100 to 300 years. If you were to take over 60 medical books by over 40 different authors from 3 continents in 3 languages with a 1500 year span of time and tried to treat a patient with the compiled knowledge you would gain, you would kill the patient. Yet the Bible, dealing with wildly controversial subjects such as the nature and purpose of God and the nature and destiny of man, is completely harmonious.

In addition to studying the Bible in English, the divine authorship of the Bible can be visibly demonstrated to students of Hebrew by the very structure and design of the text. For instance, in the first five books of the Bible (the Hebrew Torah), every 50th letter in the Hebrew forms the same word. In another example when you take the meaning of the names of Adam, Seth, etc. through Noah (Gen. 5:3-32), there is embedded within this Hebrew genealogy a wonderful presentation of the redemptive plan of God. This is highly technical and is too much to go into here. But the point is that every line, squiggle, dot and space in the Hebrew and Greek text speaks of the divine Authorship of the Bible - no mere human, no matter how genius, could have conceived of such intricate detail and still get the point across. It is also interesting to note, in this context, that Jesus Himself promised that heaven and earth would pass away before even a jot or tittle - minor marks of Hebrew punctuation - of His words would pass away. (Mt. 5:18)

Another internal support for the divine origin of the Bible is the honest portrayal of both the good and bad sides of its "heroes." The sins of David are laid out beside his triumphs (compare 1 Sam. 17 with 2 Sam. 11). The misplaced self-confidence of Peter is as blatantly portrayed as is his inspired understanding of Christ's identity (compare Mt. 16:13-23; 17:1-5; 26:31-35, 69-75). If this were a merely human document, man would be glorified. But since the Bible is a divine document, God is glorified and man is presented accurately and objectively, warts and all.

The divine authorship of the Bible is also demonstrated in its accuracy in several fields of knowledge. The first of these is historical accuracy as is evidenced by archaeological substantiation. The Bible records the Hittite culture as having existed thousands of years ago. Archaeologists and critics, up until about 100 years ago, spurned the idea of there ever having been any such a culture as the Hittites - that is, until archaeologists dug up the remains of the Hittites. Up until about 50 years ago, critics ridiculed the idea of there ever having been a Pontius Pilate - that is, until they dug up a stone in Israel with his name carved on it and which confirmed his reign as governor of Judea during the same time period as Christ.⁶

The divine authorship of the books of the Bible, especially of the New Testament but also of the Old Testament, is also demonstrated in the manner of the deaths of the writers. All of the New Testament writers and all of the original apostles were persecuted and executed for their testimony about Christ (except the apostle John who miraculously survived the tortures and persecutions and died of old age). They could have easily gotten out of the torture and persecution by simply denying Christ or by admitting that their testimony was a lie. They did not do so and it is not likely that anyone, let alone the multitudes upon multitudes (see 1 Cor. 15:6; also John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*) who have suffered for their beliefs in the Bible, would die for something that was not true. No one dies a horrible death when he could easily avoid it. No, the truth of the Word of God was more important to them than their very lives.

The second area where the Bible is accurate is in the area scientific knowledge. The Bible is not a scientific book by any means but where it does makes a statement that is scientifically verifiable, science and the Bible are in complete agreement. The Bible describes dinosaurs which no one knew or believed to exist before their remains were unearthed in the early 1800s. (Job 40:15-24) The Bible, written millennia before space travel and modern scientific research, speaks of the earth

as being global and hanging on nothing as well as describing the water evaporation cycle. (Isa. 40:22; 55:10; Job 26:7-8; Psa. 135:7) Today's physicists are just discovering that the universe is not infinite but that it is expanding. They have discovered a wall of galaxies which they say resemble a curtain. This is also found in the Bible, written thousands of years ago when Isaiah said, "He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in." (Isa. 40:22) Wherever the Bible speaks on a scientifically verifiable matter, science and the Bible are in agreement.

The third area where the Bible demonstrates its divine Authorship is in the area of prophecy - the foretelling of future history with complete accuracy before the event takes place. Jeremiah and Daniel were prophets who foretold of such world leaders as Alexander the Great, Antiochus IV and Cyrus of Medo-Persia. Daniel's prophecies are so accurate that modern "scholars" attempt to attest the book of Daniel to some pseudonymous writer some years after the events had taken place. Unfortunately for these "scholars," the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, also contains the book of Daniel - and it was also translated before many of the events which Daniel prophesied about occurred. In addition to these "minor details," there were over 350 Old Testament prophecies given about the Messiah who was to come. Jesus Christ fulfilled every single one of them and this is historically documented both within and outside of the New Testament. The odds of this literal fulfillment of hundreds of specific prophecies happening by chance are impossible.

Also the very style, the eloquence, the simplicity, the objectiveness, the depth of meaning contained in such few words, and the eternal perspective demonstrated throughout, all point toward divine Authorship. The Bible is not some religious exploration of life by brilliant men nor is it some simple set of religious rules and regulations laid down by a pious few. It is a divine revelation of the identity and purpose of God, a Being who dwells outside of the realms of time and space as we know and understand and experience them.

But the supporting evidence for the divine Authorship of the Bible goes far beyond its own internal claims. The one who comes to believe in the Bible is not asked to throw away his brain and make some leap of blind faith. No, he is called to intelligently pursue a reasonable and rational, albeit spiritual, faith in an invisible but always-present God who is intimately involved in all affairs of humankind.

Supporting evidence of the Bible can be found in the fact that the nation of Israel exists again. No other culture has been torn away from its homeland for millennia and maintained its cultural identity. God promised in the Bible that Israel would return and they have begun to do so. (see Ezek. 36:7-12 for example)

And the last proof, but in no way the least, is the subjective experience of all those who have truly put their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as He is depicted in the Bible. Their lives are transformed, often from gross, sinful behavior to selfless devotion to God and their fellow man. My personal testimony of the life-changing power of Christ joins in with the chorus of literally countless millions who have placed their very lives and the destiny of their eternal souls into His more than capable hands.

Each of these reasons for believing in the Bible, if alone, would probably be insufficient to cause anyone to believe in the Bible. But when one looks at the overall picture, it is easy to see that there is ample evidence to put one's trust in the Bible as God's divine Word.

But where most people begin to have difficulty with the Bible is in its one overall theme: Man is sinful and requires a Savior to reconcile him to holy God and preserve him from eternal judgment and destruction. It is quite unlikely that a book written by mere human beings would contain the doctrine of the total depravity of man (that is, that man is flawed and deficient in his very

nature. See Rom. 3:10-18 for the clearest compilation of Old Testament quotes; top) for it is in the nature of man to think the best possible of himself in any given situation. No, merely-human documents most often portray the supposed goodness of man and loudly proclaim his presumed ability to overcome in every situation without the assistance of God or anyone else at all. Nor would a man-originated document insist upon placing one's faith in God to avoid eternal damnation in a painful, eternal Hell.

The theme of the Bible is unique: a morally perfect and selfless God gives His own Son as the propitiation, that is, the satisfaction or meeting of the guilty verdict that is placed on man. (Rom. 3:21-26; Heb. 2:17; 1 Jn. 2:2; 4:8-10) That is, God the righteous judge, pronounces a guilty verdict upon sinful mankind. (Rom. 3:23) The sentence: eternal separation from God, the source of all life. (Rom. 1:18) The remedy: Christ becomes our sin and dies in our rightful place of condemnation. (Rom. 5:6-9; 2 Cor. 5:21) Our salvation: we believe in the historical, finished work of Christ (1 Cor. 15:1-8; Jn. 3:16-21; Rom. 10:9-13) and through that belief God's Holy Spirit transforms our self-centered, sinful lives into lives devoted to Him in righteousness and goodness. (Tit. 2:11-14; Eph. 2:1-10; Rom. 12:1-2) This is the unifying theme that can be found, with diligent study, throughout the entirety of the 66 books of the Bible.

Even when presented with such intellectual proofs as are listed above, many still refuse to accept the Bible because of what it says about the state of humanity and the exclusivity of Jesus Christ as the only means of eternal salvation:

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Rom. 3:23)

The light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God. (Jn. 3:19-21)

Jesus said of Himself:

“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” (Jn. 14:6)

The New Testament says that there is a holy and separate, perfect and powerful God who will bring His creation to account one day. He will welcome some of His creation into blissful eternal fellowship with Him through Jesus Christ while condemning the rest to a terrifyingly eternal, excruciatingly painful separation from the Father of life because of their rejection of Jesus Christ. The Bible presents this awful truth about the depravity of mankind and, because it requires a spiritual response, many will not accept what it says.

No other so-called “sacred” writings will stand up to the scrutiny that this essay has subjected the Bible to. The writings of Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and other Mormons fall far short on almost every one of the above tests of accuracy and validity. The Bhagavad-Gita of the Hindus has nothing which compares and the Quran of the Muslims, while containing much language that is similar, fails on many of the above tests. The New Age movement has no “sacred writings” and accepts just about anything that allows them to do whatever they want to do. It is only the Bible who has its roots firmly fixed in both provable, historical events and superior spiritual experience, which

has been able to withstand every attack in every generation. No other book has been so assaulted in every age and yet continually and abundantly demonstrated its divine Authorship.

Mark Twain is reported to have said, "It's not what I don't understand about what the Bible says that bothers me; it's what I do understand that bothers me." It isn't the "errors" in the Bible that disturb men, it is the truth contained therein that irritates their conscience and rubs against their self-willed sinful nature. Man chose to rebel against God in the garden of Eden and men and women have been choosing to do similarly ever since. No religion, not even Judaism (which is the only religion that is not man-originated), can enable a human to attain to the sinless perfection of God. God alone was able to make a way to redeem mankind so that they can enjoy His company and fellowship for all of eternity.

This still remains the Bible's central truth:

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." (Jn. 3:16-18)

God is a real Being who can be known for who He is. The Bible reveals Him to be a morally perfect Being in whose presence no moral imperfection can exist. He is also a God of love, mercy and compassion. At creation, God gave man an eternal soul that has the ability to choose between good and evil, right and wrong, obedience and rebellion. The original or first man chose to rebel and we have inherited the consequences of his choice. Due to this eternal nature of our soul, each one of us is now faced with our own choice to make: Do I believe that the Bible is God's Word and that it requires a responsive action on my part? Or do I dismiss it as ancient mythology and merely-moral analogies and suggestions?

Our eternal fate hangs on our decision to believe or to not believe. What do we treasure most? Do we want to find the Eternal God of Goodness, Love, Beauty and Truth? Can we believe that such a Divine One would first have the power to inspire men to write an accurate compilation of His plan of redemption and that such a Divine One would then have the ability to intervene in our history to preserve such a message of light and hope throughout all of men's attempts to alter that message? Or do we want to maintain our own list of dirty, selfish deeds done in the secret darkness of our soul and never experience the refreshing light that brings forgiveness for our wrongdoings? Do we really want to continue to remain under the rule and power of the prince of darkness who brings only hate, death and destruction wherever and to whomever he can?

What do I lose if I give my life to God? I lose only a life that is destined for eternal destruction. What do I gain if I give up a life already tainted and corrupted by evil and weakness and surrender my life to Jesus Christ? I gain eternal and abundant life. A man who died before the age of 30 while trying to take the gospel to a savage South American Indian tribe said, "The man is not a fool who gives up that which he cannot keep, to gain that which he could never keep." (Jim Elliot, 1949).

Jesus said,

"Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door. If anyone enters

by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.” (Jn. 10:7-11)

His name is Jesus. He is only a heart’s cry away. Or, put another way, even though we may have taken a thousand or a million steps to get away from Him, it is only one step to get back to His grace. We must tell Him what we have done wrong and let Him tell us what to do. We must read of Him and His teachings in the Old and New Testaments in a translation which is solidly based on the original Hebrew and Greek texts. We must hold fast to the truth contained in the pages of the Bible and disregard anything that contradicts His written Word. The Bible is His love letter to my lost and dying soul with whom He unfathomably desires to have eternal fellowship. More simply put: The Bible is His love letter to me.

It is my prayer that you, the reader, and He spend eternity together. If you have never done so before, I encourage you to express your heart’s cry to God. When you truly call out to God in desperate need, He will hear and answer your heart’s cry.

¹ F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* (Downers Grove, Ill. 60515: Inter Varsity Press, 1964), pp. 16 f. p. 33.

² Namely, the John Ryland manuscript, A.D. 130; the Chester Beatty Papyri, A.D.155; and the Bodmer Papyri II, A.D. 200. The discovery of these manuscripts has literally obliterated any possibility that the story of Christ is some hand-me-down conglomeration of legends, myths and fables. One hundred years is not enough time - the time between Christ’s death and resurrection in circa A.D. 32 and the earliest manuscripts unearthed by archaeologists - for there to have developed an oral tradition such as some have imagined there to be. The evidence much more clearly points to the fact that eyewitnesses, aware that oral traditions would develop, wrote down their eyewitness accounts so as to preserve for all who would come after the historical truth about Jesus Christ.

³ Sir Frederic Kenyon, *The Bible and Archaeology*. (New York: Harper and Row, 1940), pp. 288,289.

⁴ J. Harold Greenlee, *Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), p. 16.

⁵ Military historian C. Sanders lists and explains the three basic principles of historiography - the bibliographical test, the internal evidence test, and the external evidence test - in his book *Introduction to Research in English Literary History*. (New York: MacMillan Company, 1952), pp. 143 ff.

⁶ For the details and references of these claims, I refer you to the wonderful work of Josh McDowell who has spent over twenty years researching the claims of Christ and of the New Testament. His findings can be found in *More Than a Carpenter* and in *Evidence That Demands a Verdict, Vols. 1 and 2* as well as other writings by him.

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