

THE MAIN THING: The Bible is the Word of God. Yet many challenge this truth with statements that it is riddled with errors, myths and contradictions. However, even Archaeology alone can confirm the validity and truth of what is written in God's Word.

PURSUE RELATIONSHIP: *Connect and pray as a group*

1. What factors would give you confidence in a weather forecast?
2. How can you tell who believes a weather forecast?

PURSUE GOD: *Time that is devoted to the Word of God*

Observation and Reflection

1. What would give you confidence in the reliability of the Scriptures?
Recall some archaeological, manuscript or testimonial evidence as presented in the message. (refer to the sermon summary)
2. Read 2 Peter 1:16-2:3 and take three to four minutes to record your impressions and then share them with the group.
3. What questions (who, what, where, when, and how) need more explanation?
Use available research materials (study Bible, etc.) to provide answers.
4. What does this passage teach about the Bible?
5. Summarize the passage in two to three sentences, and share your summary with the group.

Application.

1. How can you use this evidence to increase your confidence in the Scripture?
2. What steps do you need to take to continue your confidence in the Scripture?

Bibliography

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THE WORD (NIV)

2 Peter 1:16–2:3

¹⁶ For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. ¹⁷ He received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." ¹⁸ We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain. ¹⁹ We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. ²⁰ Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. ²¹ For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. ¹ But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves. ² Many will follow their depraved conduct and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. ³ In their greed these teachers will exploit you with fabricated stories. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.

The Bible is either true or false. If the Bible is false we would be foolish to follow it. But if it is true then it deserves our full attention. It is too important to write off solely on the opinions of others - it must be investigated and we must each come to a decision about it. Here we are looking at some of the major evidences for the reliability of the Bible.

Witness #1: The Testimony of Biblical Inspiration and Infallibility, or how do we know that what people wrote in the Bible is from God and therefore true? Did the original writers just make it up? Christians believe the Bible originated in the mind of God, delivering His divine message through people (2 Tim 3:16). That many of the writers died for their message - one that included hard sayings and presented their own weaknesses - serves as strong evidence that they didn't make it up. The New Testament was written from between 15 and 60 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus. The creeds and doctrines were widely circulated during that time. If they were untrue or embellished then a large number of people would have disputed it then because they were there to witness it.

Witness #2: The Testimony of Manuscript Reliability. While the original writings are not around today, many copies were made. Skeptics have suggested that even if the original writings were true, could it not be possible that significant errors or changes have been made since then? Prior to 1947, the earliest Old Testament manuscripts were from the Masoretic Text, dated @900AD. In 1947 the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered, dating between 150BC and 70AD. They contained all of Isaiah and much of the rest of the Old Testament. Comparing the two texts, which had 1000 years between them, the only variations found were mainly spelling differences and no change had any bearing on the essential meaning of the passage. This is the case too for any variants found in the New Testament manuscripts. This is strong evidence that both the Old and New Testaments we have today faithfully and accurately represent what was originally written, and therefore can be trusted.

When it comes to determining how accurate and consistent the writings are, the more copies you have of the ancient handwritten manuscripts the better. Plato and Aristotle are accepted at face value, yet there are only 7 and 49 surviving copies of them respectively. How many copies of the Bible are there? Over 10,000 partial or complete manuscripts of the Old Testament survive, and over 24,000 of the New Testament. It is the best preserved document of the ancient world. As well, the early church fathers (from the 1st to 3rd Century) quoted so often from the New Testament that even if there were no copies of it available, it would be possible to reconstruct all but 11 verses of the New Testament. The Bible is unequalled as well in terms of the time span between the original writings and the first copies that survive. It helps historians discern how closely the copies are aligned with the originals. For Plato, that gap is 1200 years. For the New Testament that gap is 50-75 years of the originals, and whole copies of the New Testament within 225 years.

Witness #3: The Testimony of Archaeology.

"Archaeological work has unquestionably strengthened confidence in the reliability of the Scriptural record." - Dr. Millar Burrows of Yale

"No archaeological discovery has ever controverted [or contradicted] a single, properly understood Biblical reference." - Dr. Nelson Glueck

Does archaeology support what the Bible says? It is filled with many details that are unrelated to its central message. Prior to the 19th Century, skeptics criticized the Bible for containing a litany of so-called facts that were not historically supported. This fueled the mindset that the Bible was full of myths and legends. Over the years, however, archaeologists found cities and civilizations they never knew existed from secular history - but were recorded in the Bible, and much of that 'list' the skeptics had spoken of was confirmed to be real. In some cases where the secular historical record and the Bible disagreed, further discoveries had consistently proven the Biblical account to be accurate. Some examples of archaeology supporting the Bible include the discovery of the existence of the Hittites (referred to in 41 OT chapters), and of Ur, the home of Abraham, and even of King David and Pontius Pilate. The Book of Acts was proven by Sir William Ramsay as being exact down to the minute details - and this from a man who originally set out to disprove Acts!

Despite this, one could still look at this evidence and still choose to live like it wasn't true. People do this with the hazards of smoking or the benefits of exercise. It is one thing to know the truth and another to embrace the truth and live it. In the same way it is one thing to know about and believe in God, but quite another thing to know Him personally and trust Him. Truth is discovered not only by studying the evidence of the past, but also by living/tasting/having a relationship with Jesus in the present. You need to experience God. To do this you need to first face the things that are keeping you from trusting God (pride, fear, hurts, etc). Then you need to take that step and trust Him. What will you do with Jesus and His Word - the Bible? That is too important a decision to ignore as it will affect not just this life but impact our eternity.