

IS THE BIBLE RELIABLE? PART 1: THE BIBLIOGRAPHIC TEST

I. INTRODUCTION

The Bible is said to be the “Word of God.” But many documents and books claim the same thing. How can we be sure that what we have is reliable, accurate, authoritative or true and does not change? We can talk about all of the evidence for the Scriptures, which is important to know, but all of the evidence won’t convince you or anyone else of its truth claims. Ultimately, the Holy Spirit opens our understanding to believe by faith. Faith is in evidence and not a blind leap in a chasm in the dark. Faith is only as good as that which it is placed in. Why study this subject?

1. While we do not need to be an expert in this subject, it is good to know some basics about it. This helps strengthen our faith in the Bible.
2. The world says the Bible is unreliable. It helps us be able to defend the reliability of Scripture.
3. It answers some of our questions, and helps us to be able to answer others questions about this topic. We, and others ask questions about the reliability of the text, that need to be answered.
4. The devil tells you the Bible is unreliable and takes it out of context. This helps give us confidence, and helps us learn to study it in context, so we are not deceived.

The Bible is a theological and living book, showing Gods work of redemption, and was written in history.

II. GROUP DISCUSSION

What is the Bible?

Written over a _____ year period

By about _____ writers

In 3 _____

On 3 _____

1 Author _____

One theme: The _____ of God in the salvation of sinful humanity through Christ.

How do you know it’s accurate and reliable?

There are 3 tests done to find out how reliable an ancient document is. These tests are: 1) Bibliographical Test, 2) External Test and 3) Internal Test. The first one we will be discussing is the *Bibliographic Test*.

“The bibliographical test examines manuscript reliability and for more than a generation, Christian apologists have employed it to substantiate the transmissional reliability of the Bible. The bibliographical test compares the closeness of the Old and New Testament’s oldest extant manuscripts to its autographs (the date each book was originally penned) and the sheer number of the Biblical extant manuscripts with the number and earliness of extant manuscripts or other ancient documents like Homer, Aristotle,

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Herodotus and so on. Since the Bible outstrips every other ancient manuscript in sheer number and earliness to the autograph, then the Old and New Testaments have a solid basis to evaluate how accurately they have been transmitted.” Josh McDowell and Clay Jones - <https://www.josh.org/wp-content/uploads/Bibliographical-Test-Update-08.13.14.pdf>

Outline: (A) Bibliographical Test, (B) Ancient Documents, (C) Old Testament, (D) New Testament

III. IS THE BIBLE RELIABLE?

- A. Bibliographical Test
 - a. Date of Original
 - b. Date of Earliest Copies
 - c. Number of Manuscript Copies
- B. Ancient Documents

Information from: *Reasoning from the Scriptures Ministries & The New Evidence* and updated from: <https://www.josh.org/wp-content/uploads/Bibliographical-Test-Update-08.13.14.pdf>

Author	When Written	Earliest Copy	Time Span	# Copies
Caesar (<i>Gallic Wars</i>)	100-44 BC	900 AD	950 yrs	251
Plato (<i>Tetralogies</i>)	427-347 BC	900 AD	1200 yrs	210
Sophocles	496-406 BC	1000 AD	1400 yrs	193
Aristotle	384-322 BC	1100 AD	1400 yrs	49*
Demosthenes	383-322 BC	1100 AD	1300 yrs	340**
Homer (<i>Illiad</i>)	800 BC	400 BC	400 yrs	1800

*Of any 1 work / **Some based on 1 copy

IV. GROUP DISCUSSION

- C. Old Testament
 - a. Copying
 - i. Old Testament Writings

Torah 1450 BC, Joshua 1400, Judges 1400-1050, Ruth 1000, 1 & 2 Samuel (1 book in Hebrew OT) 930's-720's, 1 & 2 Kings 1015-550, 1 & 2 Chronicles 450, Ezra and Nehemiah 450-400, Job 1900/1450,

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Psalms 1450-450, Proverbs 970-700, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon 970-940, Major and Minor Prophets 800-425 BC.

- ii. The Scrolls
 - 1. Meticulous
 - 2. Reverential
- iii. The Name of God
- b. Number of Manuscripts for Old Testament – Thousands
- c. Dead Sea Scrolls & Masoretic Text
 - i. Masoretic Text – 900's AD

The Masoretes were Jewish scholars who preserved the OT in 500-950AD.

- ii. Dead Sea Scrolls – 150-200 BC
- d. “Scrolls” Mentioned in Scripture
 - i. Deuteronomy 17:18-20
 - ii. Joshua 1:6-8, 8:30-35 – The Law
 - iii. 2 Kings 22:8-13 & 2 Chronicles 34:14-21 – The Law found
 - iv. Ezra 7:6-10 & Nehemiah 8:1-3 – The Law read
 - v. Luke 4:16-22 – Jesus reads Isaiah 61:1-2

D. New Testament

- a. New Testament Writings

Written from about 40 AD to about 100 AD.

- b. Manuscripts
 - i. Numbers – 24,000 +

Greek Manuscripts for NT:

Uncials – uppercase, square letters on vellum from 3 rd -10 th centuries	307
Miniscules – small, cursive letters 9 th -10 centuries	2,860
Lectionaries – collection of readings used in public worship & private readings	2,410
Papyri – “paper” portions of NT	109
Additional discoveries (as of 2014)	<u>152</u>
	Subtotal 5,686

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Manuscripts in Other Languages - Translations:

Latin Vulgate	10,000 +
Syriac	350 +
Slavic	4,101 and many others...

ii. Dates – 100's AD - 400 + AD

c. Ryland's Fragment: P52 – Around 100 AD

Bodmer Papyri 150-300AD - Johns Gospel (150-200) includes 104 leaves of 1:1-6:11, 6:35b-14:26 and fragments of 40 other pages and most of Luke's Gospel, earliest copy of Jude and the 2 letters of Peter.

Chester Beatty Papyri 200'sAD - portions of all Gospels, Acts, Epistles, and Revelation. A *codex* is a book of bound manuscripts. *Codex Vaticanus* early 300'sAD earliest near Bible and complete NT, very accurate; *Codex Sinaiticus* 350AD nearly complete NT and over half of OT; *Jerome's Latin Vulgate* 400's AD.

Tatian was a Christian who lived in the mid 2nd century - about 165AD. He wrote the "*Diatessaron*," or the *harmony of the four parts*, which is the first harmony of the Gospels known.

"How high do you think the stack of New Testament manuscripts would be? Think about this – of just the 5,800+ Greek New Testament manuscripts – there are more than 2.6 million pages. Combining both the Old and New Testament (the Bible) and there are more than 66,000 manuscripts and scrolls.

Do you think it would hit a ten foot ceiling? A 4-foot stack of manuscripts for the average classical writer compares to over one mile high of New Testament manuscripts and 2 1/2 miles high for the entire Bible." Josh McDowell and Clay Jones, p. 12 - <https://www.josh.org/wp-content/uploads/Bibliographical-Test-Update-08.13.14.pdf>

V. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS AND CHALLENGE

This one aspect (among others) shows the authenticity and reliability of the Bible. In accordance with this common test, **the Bible excels every other ancient document combined!** Though we understand Scripture by faith, our faith is not foolishness, but verifiable. The best way to verify our faith practically is to lovingly obey what God says in His word. Take God at His word and you will find He is true to it.

NEXT TIME: The External Test