**3 Reasons You Can Believe the Bible Is the Word of God**

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**By Patrick Morley**

One day I showed our Man in the Mirror “Statement of Faith” to a man having doubts about his Christian faith. Our Statement of Faith covers the usual subjects, like the deity of Jesus, the Virgin birth, the Holy Spirit, the Trinity, and so on. But point #1 deals with the inerrancy of Scripture.

Wanting to understand where he was stumbling, I asked if he would be willing to go through our Statement of Faith and mark each of the ten points as either “believe,” “don’t believe,” or “doubt.”

He responded, “Well, I can, but it’s pretty simple. If I could believe the first one—that the Bible really is the Word of God—then I would believe all of it.”

And there’s the heart of the issue: How can you have enough confidence to believe the Bible really is the Word of God?

My goal is that by the end of this article you will have learned, or been reminded of, three compelling reasons that will give you more than enough confidence to affirm “The Big Idea” that:

It would not be realistic to remember everything you’re about to read. For that reason, I urge you to consider the evidence carefully, make your decision, drive a stake in the ground, and then in the future be guided by the memory of the confidence you had when you finished this article.

**Reason #1: What the Bible Says About Itself**

First, because I think most men *want* to believe the Bible is the Word of God, let’s consider what the Bible says about itself. No political, double talk here: The Bible unambiguously claims to be the Word of God.

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness. ([2 Timothy 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2%20Tim%203.16))

Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation of things. 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. ([2 Peter 1:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2%20Pet%201.20-21))

And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe. ([1 Thessalonians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1%20Thess%202.13))

Bear in mind that our Lord’s patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction. ([2 Peter 3:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2%20Pet%203.15-16))

Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Do not add to his words, or he will rebuke you and prove you a liar. ([Proverbs 30:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov%2030.5-6))

Jesus said, “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.” ([John 17:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John%2017.17))

So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. ([Isaiah 55:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa%2055.11))

Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. ([John 20:30-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John%2020.30-31))

Of course, I could claim to be the king of Norway, but that wouldn’t make it so. Nevertheless, it’s not insignificant that the Bible so clearly claims to be the Word of God.

**Reason #2: The Formation of Canon**

The second reason you can believe the Bible is the Word of God is because of how the Bible came into existence.

[Hebrews 1:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb%201.1) says, “God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways.” They were men like Moses, Samuel, David, Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Paul, and many more—40 in all.

No committee sat down and said, “Let’s write a Bible.” No one assembled 40 authors together for a writer’s conference. Instead, the Bible was organically assembled as inspired human authors each spoke to the unique needs of their own generations. Moses was the first to write, and 1,500 years later disciples like Peter, John, Matthew, Luke, and Paul wrapped up the Scriptures with a flurry that we call the New Testament.

Those men wrote down what God told them to write—usually on a parchment or a scroll made from an animal hide. Sometimes they jotted down direct quotes, like, “I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God” or “If my people would but listen to me.” Other times, they wrote what they experienced, like Nehemiah rebuilding the wall. Or what they felt, like David in Psalms. Or what happened in a previous age, like Moses composing Genesis.

**Old Testament Canon**

Even after the scrolls were copied and circulated, still no one had the idea of a canon. *Canon* is just a technical term for Bible; it means “rule” or “standard.” It’s a fixed list of books that religious scholars consider to be Scripture—“the inspired word of God.”

How did the particular books in our Old Testament become canon? That was based on how much the scrolls were used and how widespread their authority became. The Pentateuch, the writings of Moses and first five books of the Bible, is the most prominent example.

Just like the Bible is read in churches today, the Law of Moses was read every week in local synagogues. “For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath” ([Acts 15:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts%2015.21)).

No one knows for sure, but at some point the idea for a “closed canon” (which means, “That’s all, folks!”) reached a tipping point. Some scholars think that may have happened as early as 300 BC.

**The Septuagint**

That date, or one close to it, had to be the case, since the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek by 200 BC. As it happened, Jews had started speaking Greek and many had lost their ability to read Hebrew. For us, that would be like American Catholics trying to read a Latin Bible.

The story goes that the twelve tribes of Israel each sent six scholars (70-72 in all) to Alexandria, Egypt, to translate the Hebrew to Greek in 70 days. We call it the Septuagint (Latin for “seventy”).

That’s quite remarkable, because all 39 of our Old Testament books are included in the Septuagint (along with several apocryphal books included in Catholic and Orthodox Bibles)!

So our Old Testament has been a fixed list of books since at least 200 BC.

**The Bible of Jesus**

The Old Testament was the Bible that Jesus read and quoted. In fact, some of Jesus’ quotations of the Old Testament match the Septuagint version—which means that Jesus felt comfortable using a translation.

Jesus believed the Old Testament was the word of God. He would often say, “It is written…” or ask, “Have you not read…?”

He also believed the Old Testament was factually true. He referred to Adam, Eve, Abel, Noah, Moses, Lot, Elijah, and Jonah as historical figures. And He said the Scriptures cannot be altered, abolished, broken, or pass away.

Jesus had the distinct impression the Old Testament was all about Him! After the resurrection, He told His disciples, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms” ([Luke 24:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke%2024.44)). Don’t miss that Jesus vouched for the Hebrew Bible!

That’s how the Old Testament came to exist, but how did we get the New Testament?

**New Testament Canon**

After the death of Jesus, His disciples transmitted information about Him orally (“oral tradition”) for approximately 20 years.

However, Christianity was growing into a powerful force. So the apostles and their disciples started to write about Jesus’ life and teachings, and also about the early church. Luke, who penned a gospel and Acts, put it this way:

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught. ([Luke 1:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke%201.1-4))

Toward the end of the first century, a collection of Christian writings took shape and began circulating among the churches. Not all of those writings, however, were of canonical merit. For example, during the Roman persecution, when their oppressors demanded that Christians hand over their Scriptures, some surrendered the Shepherd of Hermas (not “quite” canonical), but hid what they considered their “real” Bibles.

The four gospels as we know them—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—were the most revered by the church. They received wide circulation, along with the book of Acts. So did the writings of Paul, which were collected into a single body of work. Churches also began to archive copies of Paul’s epistles. A fixed list of books was starting to be recognized.

Just so you know, there were plenty of “kooks” back then, as now. For example, a heretic named Marcion proposed a one-gospel New Testament with a “purified” version of Luke (with Marcion doing the purifying) and 10 of Paul’s 13 epistles. He appeared to be revising a list of books already in use. Those kinds of challenges were actually good, because they pushed the orthodox church to clarify the canon.

**“Hey, Why Don’t We Make a New Testament?!”**

Around 180 AD, Irenaeus first mentioned the idea of a “New Testament” to go with the “Old Testament” canon. That was important because Irenaeus was a disciple of Polycarp, who was a disciple of John—the original “eyewitness” John. And Irenaeus was very well respected, so the idea started to catch on.

But it was finally Athanasius, the bishop of Alexandria, who once and for all nailed down the official New Testament. There was a tradition; every Easter, the bishop of Alexandria would send a letter and, among other things, give his take on the “authoritative” books. In his 367 AD Easter letter, Athanasius acknowledged all 27 of our New Testament books. And they were books already in wide use. So the official sync date for the New Testament we use today is 367 AD.

That list was affirmed at synods (official religious meetings) at Hippo in 393 AD and Carthage in 397 AD, both of which were attended by Augustine. After that, the canon was closed with no serious challenges since.

The church didn’t create the canon; they just recognized the canon already in use. And that’s how our New Testament came to exist.

And for those of us who like bullet points, here’s the technical sequence for how the New Testament canon was created:

1. **Apostolic authority:**those who were eyewitnesses
2. **Oral tradition:** knowledge spread through oral repetition
3. **Written tradition:** the oral tradition was committed to writing
4. **Canonization:** the writings became “official” based on—according to theologian J. I. Packer—apostolic authority or authentication, Christ-honoring content in line with existing teaching, and continuous acknowledgement and fruitful use.
5. **Closing of canon**

Would a God powerful enough to inspire the Bible to be written not also be powerful enough to preserve it?

That explains the *formation* of canon, but whatever became of those original animal hides and parchments? That’s what we’ll talk about next—the *transmission* of canon.

**Reason #3:  The Transmission of Canon**

The third reason you can have confidence in the Bible is the scientific accuracy and reliability of how it has been transmitted through the centuries.

We don’t possess any of the 66 original manuscripts of the Bible. All were lost or destroyed long ago, and we have no record of how that happened. On the other hand, we do possess an abundance of handwritten manuscript copies—more than for any other ancient literature by an exponential factor. Yet some of those manuscripts contain human errors made by the ancient scribes who prepared them.

That’s not to say we don’t have an accurate, reliable Bible. We do. But how do we get from “no originals but copies with human errors” to a flawless record of exactly what God wanted to say exactly the way He wanted to say it?

We now graduate from canon formation to canon transmission. The objective is for you to sense the unparalleled scholarly precision and scientific rigor expended to preserve and, where needed, recover accurate copies of the original Old and New Testaments.

This section explains how those original manuscripts of God’s inspired word—what scholars call the “autographa”or original autographs—were preserved and, where copy errors were made, recovered.

**The Transmission and Translation of the Bible**

First, let’s discuss how the Bible has been transmitted from the originals to us today through copies.

Once a Prophet or Disciple published his scroll or letter, the demand for copies was immense. But without printing presses, everything had to be hand copied. So, a publishing industry of professional “copyists,” or scribes, cropped up to duplicate the handwritten manuscripts. Making copies of God’s word was a normal practice, even encouraged.

A copyist might work alone, but it would not be uncommon for a group of scribes to work together, have a supervisor, and create several copies of Bible scrolls at the same time. Seated in, say, a scriptorium, the supervisor would dictate, and the scribes would painstakingly copy it letter by letter, word for word.

Understanding their work as a sacred task, copyists were by nature exceedingly careful. When they finished a document, they would count the number of letters to verify accuracy. Nevertheless, because they were human, mistakes were made, which we’ll cover in a moment.

In addition to making copies in the original manuscript languages—Hebrew for the Old Testament and Greek for the New Testament—there was a demand for translations into other languages, too. First came translating the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek (the previously mentioned Septuagint). Then, as Latin replaced Greek as the international language, both the Old and New Testaments were translated into Latin (the Latin Vulgate).

The first printed Bible was the Guttenberg Bible in Latin. The Latin translations had survived until the Reformation, when Martin Luther translated the Bible into German. Others followed suit, and soon after, the Bible was translated into all the major languages.

**The Most Reliable Old Testament Manuscripts**

We have three main sources for copies of the Old Testament: the Masoretic Text, the Septuagint, and the Dead Seas Scrolls.

The Masoretic Text is the Old Testament in Hebrew. It was preserved by a sect of teachers and scribes, the Masoretes, who lived from the 7th to 11th centuries AD. As self-appointed keepers of the Hebrew Bible, they destroyed copies with errors to “purify” the Bible. And many had already been destroyed along with the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 AD. On the other hand, because of their meticulous practices, the Masoretic Text is considered the gold standard. It has been the base text for most Old Testament translations of the Christian Bible.

The 1947 discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls produced about 500 additional full or partial Old Testament manuscripts. The sect that copied the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran lived from about 200 BC until the fall of the Temple around 70 AD. The Dead Sea Scrolls predate the Masoretic Text by 1,000 years; yet they’re nearly identical, giving further credence to the accuracy of the Masoretic Text.

The Septuagint, the circa 200 BC Greek translation of the Old Testament, also gives scholars another source for comparing texts.

**The New Testament**

In contrast to the paucity of Old Testament manuscripts, there are about 5,000 existing full or partial Greek New Testament manuscripts.

**What Kinds of Errors Are We Talking About?**

Errors—mostly minor and typically related to grammar or spelling—were often re-copied into additional manuscripts, thereby transmitting the error.

We may not have any original manuscripts for books of the Bible, but because of the science of text criticism (described below), we know with certainty where all the mistakes are located.

The mistakes or errors in making copies of the Bible are called “variants.” Most variants are small, like a grammar or spelling error (“Amos” written as “Amon”), dropping a word (“Jesus Christ” in one place is written as only “Jesus” in another manuscript), adding a word or words, perhaps to clarify (“virgin” to improve Mary’s status with Joseph), or the accidental omitting of a word or two (“to him” in “the heavens were opened to him” in [Matthew 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt%203.16)). And sometimes it appears a copyist may have tried to “improve” the manuscript (for smoother reading or theological clarification).

The errors are easy enough to imagine. Suppose I was dictating to you from a book, and I told you and two others to write down the word “to.” You write “to,” the second person writes “too,” and the third writes “two.”  Those are the kinds of problems that could creep into hand-copied manuscripts when humans heard or saw the wrong word.

How many of these variants are there? A widely used estimate of 200,000 New Testament variants is often used. It may be more. More importantly, how big of a problem do these variants present? Not much. As one scholar said, if you took all the “unresolved” variants together, they would equate to about a half page in a 500-page book. Why are variants not a much bigger problem?

**Text Criticism**

Scholars have always engaged in “text criticism,” which is simply the science of comparing manuscripts to verify the most accurate translation.

Because all early Bible manuscripts were hand copied, text critics have identified all these variants, and they have been scrupulously codified and compared. Special scholars’ Bibles list all variants from manuscripts that differ in a table at the bottom of the page. I have one myself on my Logos Bible Software.

The concept is simple. When manuscripts don’t agree, scholars figure out which one is likely the accurate and authentic translation.

The bigger picture is that in the world of biblical studies, because 5,000 Greek New Testaments still exist, scholars have an astonishing amount to compare. As a result, every error, no matter how big or small, has been identified and cataloged.

Critical scholars spend their entire careers pouring over these variants. Thousands of scholars over hundreds of years have invested millions of hours attending symposiums, debating peers, presenting papers, writing for scholarly journals, publishing books, and teaching in seminaries to get this right.

[The Bible is the most scrutinized, authenticated, scientifically and academically studied, carefully documented and transmitted piece of literature in history by an exponential factor—and it happens to make the internal claim to be the written word of God.**CLICK TO TWEET**](https://twitter.com/share?text=The+Bible+is+the+most+scrutinized%2C+authenticated%2C+scientifically+and+academically+studied%2C+carefully+documented+and+transmitted+piece+of+literature+in+history+by+an+exponential+factor%E2%80%94and+it+happens+to+make+the+internal+claim+to+be+the+written+word+of+God.&via=maninthemirror&url=https://maninthemirror.org/2020/08/25/3-reasons-you-can-believe-the-bible-is-the-word-of-god/)

**Conclusion**

The idea behind this article is simple. The more confidence you have in the Bible, the more it will influence what you think, believe, say, and do.

If you can believe God is the ultimate author of Scripture, then it is not hard to imagine that before the first manuscript was ever written, the all-knowing God knew:

* The men He chose to write down His words would reflect their own personalities
* Their original manuscripts would be copied
* Those original manuscripts would be lost
* The copied manuscripts would contain human errors
* Science would ensure His words would be accurately preserved
* Faith would come by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God
* There would be more than enough evidence to conclude the Bible is the Word of God

Because of the reasons we’ve explored, you can have absolute confidence of this:

***THE BIG IDEA:****In the Bible we find a flawless record of exactly what God wanted to say exactly the way He wanted to say it.*

Take note of the confidence you have in this moment that the Bible is the Word of God. Drive a stake in the ground. And let that faith anchor your soul eternally in the grace of Jesus.

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