Defense: How Can You Trust the Bible? Memory Verse: 2 Peter 1:16

May 25th, 2025 Scripture Reading: 2 Peter 1:16-21

**[SLIDE 1]**

Last week we began a new series revolving around the idea of apologetics. How can we, as Christians, defend our faith? How can we provide good reasons for what we believe, and why? We opened with some basic arguments that help establish that there is a God. Now, admittedly, if we can show good reason to believe in God, that does not mean that we have done anything to touch on Christianity specifically. But one step must come before the other. If we can get on the same page with someone and agree that this universe was created by God, then we can move on to helping people understand that this Creator is the God of the Bible; that this Creator has revealed himself through his word. So that is what we turn to today…the Holy Bible. There are some pretty audacious claims that the Bible makes about itself. Hebrews 4:12 says that God’s word is living and active, sharper than a two-edged sword. It separates the soul from the spirit and is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of our hearts. Pretty powerful! 2 Timothy 3:16 -17 says that all scripture is God-breathed or inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for correcting and for training in character. It can equip us to do everything that is good. That description sounds like the best book ever written! But many non-Christians see the Bible as an old book…how can it be trusted? How can you really think it is God’s word? It seems foolish and naïve to trust in some ancient text. I think we could probably agree, but there are some very good reasons to find the Bible as trustworthy, so let’s get into a few of them.

One of the most popular comparisons people make to the Bible is the classic childhood game of telephone **[SLIDE 2]**. That’s the one where everybody lines up, and someone at the beginning of the line whispers a phrase into the next person’s ear, that person then relays the message to the next person and so on and so forth until the last person in line says the phrase out loud for all to hear. And everyone laughs because in the course of transmission, there have been many mistakes and misunderstandings made and the original message has been turned into nonsense. It has been corrupted. People like to argue that the Bible falls into the same category: corrupted nonsense.

But this simply is not the case, because instead of one line of transmission, we have numerous transmissions **[SLIDE 3]** that span far and wide. Many thousands of copies were carefully made and sent to many locations. What we have today is not translated from some previous version of the Bible, rather, it is based on original writings. It’s been translated, not transmitted. That makes a big difference. Biblical scholar Wesley Huff provides another way to think about Scripture. He presents the Bible as a 100,000 piece puzzle **[SLIDE 4]**. Now if you have ever put together a puzzle, you know that it is important to have all the pieces. It is disappointing to get to the final pieces of the puzzle and realize you have a few missing. But what if, as you got toward the end of the puzzle, you realized that instead of missing pieces, you have extra pieces? This might be pretty annoying as well, but this picture reflects the truth of what we have in reality. When it comes to the bible, we are not missing pieces, we actually have too many! We have duplicates and copies. We have extra information. It is still a tough puzzle to solve, but it is not for lack of information. According to Huff, we do not have 100% of the text of the bible, we have 110% of the text of the bible – we have extra pieces we don’t need. Think of Mark’s extra endings included in his gospel or a verse like John 5:4 is a verse that does not appear in all the manuscripts, but it simply adds an extra bit of commentary to the story John is telling. There exist currently over 5,000 Greek manuscripts **]SLIDE 5[** that contain the New Testament in whole or in part. The oldest of these date all the way back to 117 AD. There is no other text in history that enjoys such attestation. When compared to other texts, the numbers are staggering. For example, Homer’s Illiad, an epic poem from the 8th century BC only has 643 copies to it’s name total. James Kennedy writes, “With most ancient writings relatively few copies are available. For one ancient Roman writer, Cattalos, we have only three copies. With the great historian Herodotus, we have only eight copies of his writings. The same can be said of most of the other great ancient writings. We have one, two, three, five or ten copies.” For almost all ancient texts, the average gap between the original composition and the earliest copy is 1,000 years. For the New Testament, it is within one generation. And while most books do not even have enough manuscripts to even compare copies, the New Testament’s many copies are 99% identical. Norman Giesler concludes, “The records of the New Testament are vastly more abundant, clearly more ancient, and considerably more accurate in their text.” For the sake of our time today, I am going to focus on what we find in the gospels. **[SLIDE 6]** Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are books written specifically about Jesus and record what he did and said. This, to me, is the most important part of the Bible because all of the Old Testament points to Jesus and the rest of the New testament is built on Jesus. So, if we don’t have gospels, then we have nothing. From a purely secular, scholarly point of view, the text of the Bible is authentic to the original authors and this is important because the authors of the bible were eyewitnesses to the events of which they write. All four gospels were written in the lifetime of those who would have been eyewitnesses to Jesus and his life. Jesus was crucified around 30 AD and Mark, the first gospel, was written by 65 AD. That’s only 35 years! The others are close behind, around 70 AD. In fact, the New Testament as we have it today was complete around 100 AD. All of it comes together within 70 years of the very events they describe! This is unheard of when it comes to ancient manuscripts. These 70 years are the equivalent to the blink of an eye. And when it comes to historical events, eyewitness accounts are gold.

This is important to acknowledge. The Bible was not written in a vacuum. It did not beam down to us from heaven. It is a product of history **[SLIDE 7]**, and this means that it is messy. The bible was written over 1,600 years by some 40 different authors across three continents. It is a sprawling anthology and yet all these books and letters and histories come together to form a coherent message and, when we take the time to read the Bible, we find that it reveals to us truth about who God is and who we are as well.

And that is maybe our biggest challenge. So many people are familiar with the bible as a book, but they don’t know what it says **[SLIDE 8].** They know some of the stories maybe but they don’t read it for themselves. So when you are in conversation with someone and they say they don’t believe the bible, aks them if they have read it? Make an effort and form a plan with them to read it together. I might suggest the gospel of Mark. It is fairly short and very straight forward. We need to help people see Jesus and allow Jesus to speak for himself. This will allow others to understand the main point: Jesus saves us from our sin.

Let’s take a look at two kinds of evidence that support the authenticity of the Bible. Since what we have in our modern translations are the original words of the original authors, it is a good idea to see what they have to say for themselves. Luke fancies himself to be a historian. He opens his gospel with a statement of his intent. He writes, “Many people have already applied themselves to the task of compiling an account of the events that have been fulfilled among us.” So Luke is not the only one…many people are talking about Jesus and compiling what they know about him. So, if Luke is going to enter into that conversation, he is going to have to make sure that what he writes is truthful and accurate. If he starts making stuff up, he is going to be called out by these many other people. Luke goes on, “They used what the original eyewitnesses and servants of the word handed down to us.” Again, no one is manufacturing stories here. People want to know the truth and they are considering their sources. “Now, after having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, I have also decided to write a carefully ordered account for you most honorable Theophilus. I want you to have confidence in the soundness of the instruction you have received.” We are not sure who Theophilus was, but we are sure that Luke was being careful in his writings to be accurate because he wants to instill confidence in his readers. He is not trying to write a fairy tale or even a religious text. Luke is reporting historical facts. He wants us to believe, not in a story that he is making up, but in what actually happened.

And Luke is a good historian. He is specific, he names names. Let me read for you a section from the Christmas story. We have probably all heard it before but this time, as I read, listen to the historical details. This is from Luke chapter 2. **[SLIDE 9]** “In those days Caesar Augustus declared that everyone throughout the empire should be enrolled in the tax lists. The first enrollment occurred when Quirinius governed Syria.” These are details and names you would not add if you were making things up. He does the same thing in chapter 3: **[SLIDE 10]** “In the fifteenth year of the rule of the emperor Tiberius – when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea and Herod was ruler over Galilee, his brother Philip was ruler over Ituraea and Trachonitis and Lysanias was ruler over Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiphas – God’s word came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness.” So many specific names and guess what, each and every one of them check out when compared to other ancient documents and archeological finds. All of Luke’s details add up.

John admits to a similar goal. In John 20:31 we read, **[SLIDE 11]** “But these things are written so that you will believe that Jesus is the Christ, God’s son…” John is trying to be credible in his account as well. Or take our memory verse, **[SLIDE 12]** 2 Peter 1:16 “We didn’t repeat crafty myths when we told you about the powerful coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Quite the contrary we witnessed his majesty with our own eyes.” He goes on to say that the “no prophecy of scripture came by human will, instead, men and women led by the Holy Sprit spoke from God.” In fact, the whole story comes from God himself! Now that is hard to believe, but where does all the evidence lead? Can we say of the Bible that it is just another text we have from history? Or does it possess a different quality?

Some will object and say that the gospels might reflect some truth about Jesus, but clearly **[SLIDE 13]** legendary elements have been added to make Jesus seem more powerful or amazing. First of all, historically speaking, there is not enough time to develop legendary components. It takes about two generations for historical events to be construed as legendary. The other reason we don’t take the gospels to be legends, is because many of the authors and all of the disciples died for the truth of the story they passed down. Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God. These people did not go to their death based on a lie…they lived and died and wrote the truth. Liars make poor martyrs.

And speaking of this truth, it is nothing short of miraculous that all four gospels **[SLIDE 14]** reflect that same truth about Jesus. We come away from all four with the same coherent picture of Jesus as unquestionably Lord and Savior.

Archaeology plays a huge role in this discussion. **[SLIDE 15]** More and more over the years, as more and more artifacts are discovered, time and again the writings of the bible are confirmed. In fact, New Testament scholar Gary Habermas writes, “We should realize that it is quite extraordinary that we could provide a broad outline of most of the major facts of Jesus; life from ‘secular’ history alone.” The Bible is widely corroborated by other ancient sources. In fact, no archeological discovery can be said to refute information found in the bible.

Sir Frederic Kenyon, a former director of the British museum, where, by the way, some of these important manuscripts are housed, concludes, “The Christian can take the whole Bible in his hand and say without fear or hesitation that he holds in it the true Word of God, handed down without essential loss from generation to generation throughout the centuries.”

We have what was written. **[SLIDE 16]** And if what was written is accurate when it comes to historical information, people and places, then why would we doubt it’s accuracy when it speaks specifically about Jesus?

One last point: Any scrutiny, any critique, any doubt – the bible can take it. And the bible has taken it for 2,000 years. There is no other book that has endured such harsh and widespread scrutiny as God’s word. And yet, it still stands, It has never been disproven, and as time moves on, the case for its trustworthiness only becomes stronger.

Last week, when we looked at evidence for God’s existence, I mentioned that we were building cumulative case. It is not a matter of one sweeping argument that can prove God, but rather it is many good arguments built up upon one another so much so that one must ask, to which theory, to which worldview does the preponderance of evidence point? In the same way, when we are talking about historical documents, we are never talking about absolute certainty, we are talking about probability. Given the information we have, what is most probably true?

The Bible has thousands upon thousands of manuscripts all of which match 99% of the time. It is highly probable that what we read in our bible today is what was originally written. The gospel writers say that they set out to produce an accurate account of Jesus and the events surrounding him. It is highly probable that they got their facts right because so much was riding on their accurate reporting, a report by the way that many died defending. It is highly improbable that the gospels include any sort of legendary development. There was no time or opportunity for this to happen. There is a high proabability of accuracy within the gospels because what they report matches with other ancient texts and documents. Finally, the gospels and all of scripture, despite their variations in authorship and context and location of writing, agree on who Jesus is :**[SLIDE 17]** the Son of God, the Messiah and Savior who was dead on Friday but rose again Sunday morning. These independent sources somehow all got their story straight leaving us with a very high probability, beyond a reasonable doubt that Jesus is Lord.

**[SLIDE 18]** Christianity is unique among all other religions. We do not begin with belief or any sort of statement of faith. Christianity does not spring from a certain teaching. Christianity is rooted in history. Our beliefs and doctrines all begin with historical facts. Without the actual history, Christianity cannot even exist for a moment. The apostle Paul admits as much in 1 Corinthains 15: “If Christ hasn’t been raised, then our preaching is useless and your faith is useless... you are still in your sins…and we deserve to be pitied more than anyone else.” We are people of the book, and the book is a result of actual historical events. We trust in this old book because, over and above any other options, we have good reason to believe in the high probability of its truth, truth that has been given by God himself. Scholar and author Norman Giesler puts it this way, **[SLIDE 19]** “The Bible and the Bible alone contains all doctrinal and ethical truth God has revealed to mankind. And the Bible alone is the canon or norm for all truth. All other alleged truth must be brought to the bar of Holy Scripture to be tested. The Bible and the Bible alone, all sixty-six books, has been confirmed by God through Christ to be his infallible Word.”

It is in this book where we find the words of eternal life and so we trust everything in this life to what it says. Amen.