

Can I trust the Bible?

The men that God used to write the Bible were not English! They didn't speak English! Most of them didn't even know that there is a country called England. Yet today we have an English Bible. Can I trust that this Bible is God's Word?

In order to answer this question, we need to find out two things. Firstly, whether the copy of the Bible we have is reliable, and secondly, whether what is written in the Bible is true.

Why is it important that we are certain that the Bible we have today is God's Word?

Let's begin by finding out whether the Bible we have is reliable.

1. Do we have the right books in the Bible?

'The canon of Scripture is the list of all the books that belong in the Bible.' (Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology)

The Old Testament

We are not sure when the list of books in the Old Testament was finalised. What we do know is that by the time of Jesus it was fixed. Jesus and His apostles quoted directly from it (although they didn't refer to it being called the Old Testament).

Complete the table to see this happen and note down the name which they gave to the writings which is now known as the Old Testament.

	What name did they give to the Old Testament?
John 7:38 Acts 8:32	
Matthew 21:42 Acts 17:11	
Romans 1:2 2 Timothy 3:15	

'For we have not an innumerable multitude of books among us, disagreeing from and contradicting one another [as the Greeks have] but only twenty-two books, which contain the records of all the past times; which are justly believed to be divine.' (Josephus, a Jewish historian)

We have 39 books in our Old Testament. **Why does Josephus say that there are only 22 books which are believed to be divine?**

What about the Apocrypha? The Apocrypha is the name given to 14 books written between the Old and New Testament. These books never accepted as Scripture by the Jews or by Jesus and His apostles.

The New Testament

How did the church know which books to include in the New Testament? By asking 3 questions...

- Does it come from an apostle or someone with immediate contact with an apostle (e.g. Mark, Luke)?
- Does it conform to the teachings of the church?
- Are most of the churches using it? Does it have widespread acceptance and usage by churches everywhere?

The God who 'breathed out' (2 Timothy 3:16) his word into the minds of the writers ensured that those books, and no others, formed part of the completed canon of the Bible. (Brian Edwards)

Some of the books of the New Testament had already been accepted as being God's Word before the New Testament had finished being written. **Look up 2 Peter 3:15-16 and note down which books they were.**

By AD180 all the book of the New Testament except for Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude and Revelation had been universally accepted. By end of the fourth century all 27 books had been accepted as being God's Word.

2. Do we have an accurate copy of the Bible?

Sadly we do not have the original copy of any of the books of the Bible (*autographa*). What we do have are copies of what was written down. Can these be copies be trusted?

In the Bible we read of lots of people who accepted that copies of the *autographa* were accurate and authoritative.

Complete the table to find out who some of these people were.

	Who accepted that copies were accurate and authoritative?
Deuteronomy 17:18-20 Nehemiah 8:8	
Acts 17:2	
Acts 17:11	
Luke 4:16-21	

The table below compares the New Testament with other ancient literature which is accepted as being accurate and trustworthy.

Author	Earliest Copy after Original	No. Of Ancient Copies
Homer	?	643
Plato	About 1300 years	7
Aristotle	About 1400 years	5
Caesar	About 950 years	10
Tacitus	About 1000 years	20
New Testament	About 100 years	About 14,000

Why can we be sure that we have the right words in our Bibles?

3. What about our English translations of the Bible?

'Having the best possible translation of the Scripture is important because it helps us to hear God most clearly and therefore know Jesus most intimately' (Mark Driscoll)

It takes committees decades to translate the Bible. Except for corrupt translations of the Bible which undermine the teaching of Scripture like the Jehovah Witness's 'New World Translation', all the translations say the same thing. The main ways of translating the Bible into English are word for word (best examples are ESV and NASB) or thought for thought (which translates the meaning of the verses and not just the individual words; best example is the NIV).

Which way of translating do you think is most accurate? Which translation is closest to what God originally spoke?

