

Is the New Testament Reliable?

John 20:30-31

Some think the bible is just an ancient book written by humans and filled with myths and contradictions. Others think the Bible is just one sacred book among many. However, **is the Bible really true?** Can you trust it to give you accurate information? The Bible claims to be the Word of God, and what will judge us in the last day? **If this is true, we need to listen to every word the Lord has to say!**

In **Luke 6:46**, Jesus Christ says, “*Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?*” Many people say they love the Lord and follow Christ but have never taken the time to read the N.T. *A person who doesn’t read the N.T. is no better off than the person who doesn’t own a N.T.* If we claim to be Christian, then we need not only to read the N.T., but to pay close attention to what it says – for we need to examine our life by its teaching. *How can we do what the Lord tells us, if we don’t know what He told us.* If you love and serve God in this life, you’ll be able to serve Him in the age to come.

The Bible is a unique book, it is unlike any other in history. It is the best-selling book of all time. It has made more impact on American culture and society across the world, than any other book. **But, can we believe the Bible’s claims about Jesus Christ the Savior?** Is He Lord and will He judge us at the end of time? *If we believe this book, the answer is yes*, so the question we need to ask and will examine today is this: **Is the New Testament reliable?**

Occasionally someone says that we don’t know whether Jesus Christ ever really lived or not. But I have to ask these people – is this something you have heard, or have you ever examined the evidence yourself?

If Jesus were not historical, the N.T. is certainly an untrustworthy book; *but since other sources corroborate the facts we know about Jesus, the Bible has credibility.* Gary Habermas, a recognized university professor and historian, in his book **The Historical Jesus**, recorded and examined **45 ancient sources** for the life of Jesus outside the N.T. Some were Christian but many were non-Christian, and some were archaeological. **He found 129 reported facts revealing the life, person, teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.** Dr. Habermas concluded, “**While some believe that we know almost nothing about Jesus from ancient, non-New Testament sources, this is plainly not the case. Not only are there many such sources, ...Jesus is one of the persons of ancient history concerning whom we have a significant amount of quality data. His is one of the most**

mentioned and most substantiated lives in ancient time.” Yes, Jesus really lived, and when you add the books of the N.T., we see how Jesus has changed the world.

The N.T. clearly talks about Jesus, His teaching, His kind acts, His miracles, His death, and His resurrection. **You may well ask**, *“Did they really happen? We weren’t there and we didn’t see those things for ourselves; we can only rely on the testimony of those who were eyewitnesses. Did Jesus really rise from the dead?”* What we are asking now is whether the N.T. documents written by eyewitnesses and people who investigated, **told the truth about Jesus.**

Dr. Harvey W. Everest in his classic book, **The Divine Demonstration**, lists seven criteria used to test historical evidence. He notes that we can judge testimony to be the truth when it meets these seven criteria:

1) The evidence is credible when the witnesses are honest, competent and have opportunity to know. The accounts written shortly after an event are usually more reliable than accounts written hundreds of years later. We want to know the truth from those who were present and heard it firsthand. We can’t trust guesses or opinions. Someone once said, *opinions are merely guessing in the absence of evidence.*

The apostle Peter, who was an eyewitness of Jesus Christ from His baptism to His resurrection said in **2 Peter 1:16-18**, *“For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,” we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.”* The heavenly Father wanted Peter to listen to Jesus, and He wants the same from us. We must hear the message Jesus brings.

Though Luke came on the scene later, he revealed the sources that he used to write his account of the gospel. Luke, in **Lk. 1:1-4** wrote, *“Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.”*

If Peter or Luke or any other writer of the N.T. had written something untrue, there would be hundreds of brothers and sisters who would have challenged their writings. Instead, the early church from the earliest times regarded the four gospel accounts, Acts, and the epistles as trustworthy records of what really happened in their day.

2) Evidence is credible when the witnesses agree in the general statement, although they may differ on minor points. What some say are contradictions in Scripture are not really contradictions but different perspectives of the same events.

Investigators of crime scenes will frequently find witnesses who appear to disagree with each other, but are actually speaking the truth. In fact, though they may emphasize and focus on different points, they actually add important facts in their reports of the events, these facts do not really contradict one another but rather provide their perspective.

In some cases, similar passages are actually talking about different events. **Mt. 5** provides a list of beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount that differ from Luke's version. In **Mt. 5**, Jesus was sitting on a mountain; but **Luke 6:17** says Jesus stood on a level place. You see, these were different occasions, even though the material sounds similar. (*Don't preachers use some of the same material in different ways in different sermons? Don't preachers preach the same sermon in different places, and adapt it to a new crowd?*)

On the day of Pentecost in **Acts 2**, the apostles stood together in Jerusalem proclaiming the facts as eyewitnesses of the Lord's death and resurrection. When Paul defended himself to Agrippa, he noted in **Acts 26:26** that the things that Jesus did were well known and "***not done in a corner.***"

3) Evidence is credible when there is no known motive for faking the information. The apostles and preachers of the first century didn't become rich or honored by men because of their testimony. Peter, who healed a man in the gate of the temple, responded to the beggar, "***But Peter said, 'I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!'***" (**Acts 3:6**). Peter certainly did not heal the man for money.

4) The testimony is reliable when the facts recorded are strongly against the well-being or interest of the narrator. The book of Acts records the persecution of the church and those who suffered for their faith. It records the opposition from the leading Jews. The apostles and early Christians were beaten, imprisoned, and some killed; but they never denied their Lord. They lived difficult lives in order to

preach Jesus as the Christ the risen Lord. History records numerous persecutions by the Romans for centuries, but Christianity not only survived, but it grew during this time period. In the second century, it was commonly said, that, “*the blood of martyrs is the seed of the kingdom.*” One may question many things, but there can be no doubt the apostles and early Christians were true believers!

5) The testimony is reliable when such witnesses are numerous. Jesus made several appearances in the forty days after his resurrection and He demonstrated Himself to be the Son of God by many convincing proofs (**Acts 1:1-3**). The N.T. records at least 15 appearances of Jesus to various people. Paul said that Jesus appeared to more than 500 brethren at one time in **1 Cor. 15:6**. These men knew their words could be tested by others, by merely asking other witnesses. Lies could easily have been spotted, or as we say today, “Fact checked.”

6) The testimony is reliable when the recorded facts and the existing facts are related as cause and effect. When the places, people, culture and circumstances recorded by the authors of the N.T. accurately represented the way things really were. The N.T. is not filled with nameless, mythical people, who could never have lived. Rather, archaeology and secular historical records support the facts found in the N.T. The dates of the N.T. match historical and geographical realities in the world of that era.

7) The testimony is reliable when the facts recorded are sustained by existing monuments, coins, games or other public institutions. The fact that the church itself exists is a marvelous testimony to the resurrection of Jesus Christ and to the truth of the apostles’ teaching.

There would never have been a church had the apostles not believed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The fact that the churches after 20 centuries still meet on the first day of the week to have the Lord’s supper is a testimony to the fact that the events of the N.T. are real.

People have criticized the Bible through the years, but the enduring nature and the power of the Bible itself is a major evidence. Though men have done everything in their power to destroy the Scriptures, they survive stronger than ever! You can find copies of the whole Bible translated into over 670 languages, the N.T. alone into 1,521 languages, and portions in another 1000 other languages. The United Bible Society estimates that more than 5 billion copies of Scripture are currently in print. However, if you add audio and digital copies it would increase that number greatly, no one even knows how many times that has been done.

Wherever the influence of the Bible is strong, morality flourishes; wherever it is weak, selfishness and evil flourish. In any and every age, Scripture has made an impact on the morals and the happiness of the people. I find it of great interest, we want to put Bibles into prisons, but taken out of public schools. Maybe if we left them in the schools, prisons would need far less Bibles.

Why does Scripture have such a great impact? *Because of the powerful words they contain.* Which points to the fact that these words come from the creator of all things – God Himself. The Bible is sacred; it is much more than a mere compilation of human wisdom, Paul in **2 Tim. 3:16-17** teaches us, ***“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”*** *Wherever Scripture goes, people learn the teaching that leads to life eternal. They learn how to love, how to treat people, and how to serve. Scripture teaches the most important lessons of life.* And I find it of great interest, that most (or at least a very large portion) of the world’s charitable organizations, had their roots in a Christian charity.

Scripture also reproves us; *they tell us what sin is and how sin destroys us.* They warn and admonish us to keep us from hurting ourselves and hurting those we love. You might think reproof is a negative thing, **but Jesus told the lukewarm church in Laodicea in Rev. 3:19,** ***“Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.”***

The Scripture corrects us in order to bring us spiritual healing and make us whole. It’s only when a person has been taught and he makes changes to correct his life that he is ready to be trained in righteousness. And God will use him to do good to all people. **Have you let the word of God be a mirror to your soul?**

There are other reasons to trust your Bible, but these are enough to show you just how reliable the Bible really is. **For me, the best reason to trust the Bible, is the Lord Jesus Himself.** *He considered the events of the O.T. to be real history.* Jesus understood Jonah’s three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish as historical. Jesus used the punishment of Lot’s wife as a means to warn his disciples not to turn back (**Lk. 17:32**). There is no evidence that He ever regarded the creation, the flood, the crossing of the Red Sea, or any other O.T. Bible story as a myth or fable. Jesus being the Son of God would have been an eyewitness to these events. We can trust Him to tell the truth.

If we listen to God, hear His word, and obey it, our lives will change!