

Class Objective: To reaffirm, renew and expand the believer's understanding of and confidence in the trustworthiness of the Bible.

Class Overview

1. Clarify the role of the Bible in evangelical Christianity
2. Understand the factors that make the study of the Bible's reliability a critical necessity
3. Address the charge of circular reasoning in defending the integrity of Scripture
4. Remember that conversion is not primarily a product of logic but a work of the Spirit
5. Identify common attempts to discredit Scripture
6. Explore alleged contradictions in the Bible
7. Examine the formation of the Bible
8. Describe the history and importance of the copying of the Bible
9. Consider the principles and place of interpretation of Scripture
10. Explain the purpose and value of translations of Scripture
11. Reflect on the ultimate confirmation of the Bible's truthfulness
12. Delineate the practical implications of believing the Bible is trustworthy

Notes

V. Common Attempts to Discredit Scripture

A. Generally speaking, attempts to discredit the Bible could be summarized as follows:

1. The Bible is **morally** objectionable.
 - a) God is presented as a judgmental being who at times orders the slaughter of men, women and children, ordains the torture and death of his own Son and consigns unbelievers to an eternal hell.
2. The Bible is **socially** repressive.
 - a) Women are subjugated to the authority of men in marriage and in the church, human sexual identity is limited to birth gender and sexual contact is restricted to heterosexual marriage.
3. The Bible is **scientifically** inaccurate.
 - a) The world is understood to be created and sustained by divine agency.
4. The Bible is **historically** inconsistent.
 - a) The Bible gives contradictory accounts of creation, the birth of Jesus and resurrection of Jesus. It is also claimed that certain places and events mentioned in the Bible are not corroborated in other historical records.
5. The Bible is **literarily** unreliable.
 - a) Since original manuscripts of the Bible no longer exist, one must rely on copies of copies of copies made over many hundreds of years with their accompanying errors, omissions and alterations.

VI. The Documents Of The Bible Are Reliable

A. The New Testament writers claimed to be eyewitnesses to the events they recorded or to have consulted eyewitnesses to those events.

1. ¹Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, ² just as those who from the beginning were **eyewitnesses** and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, ³ 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, ⁴ that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught. Lk 1:1-4

2. ¹⁶ 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. 2 Peter 1:16

3. ¹ That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have **seen with our eyes**, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—² the life was made manifest, and **we have seen it**, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—³ that which **we have seen and heard** we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. ⁴ And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. 1 John 1:1-4

B. How do the documents of the New Testament compare with other ancient literature?

1. Here is a sampling of ancient writers with their dates of writings and the existing copies of those writings.

Examples of Ancient Literature

2.	Author	date written	earliest copy	span	copies
	Pliny	A.D. 61-113	A.D. 850	750 yrs	7
	Plato	427-347 B.C.	A.D. 900	1200 yrs	7
	Demosthenes	4th Cent. B.C.	A.D. 1100	800 yrs	8
	Herodotus	480-425 B.C.	A.D. 900	1300 yrs	8
	Suetonius	A.D. 75-160	A.D. 950	800 yrs	8
	Thucydides	460-400 B.C.	A.D. 900	1300 yrs	8
	Euripides	480-406 B.C.	A.D. 1100	1300 yrs	9
	Aristophanes	450-385 B.C.	A.D. 900	1200 yrs	10
	Caesar	100-44 B.C.	A.D. 900	1000 yrs	10
	Tacitus	A.D. 100	A.D. 1100	1000 yrs	20
	Aristotle	384-322 B.C.	A.D. 1100	1400 yrs	49
	Sophocles	496-406 B.C.	A.D. 1000	1400 yrs	193
	Homer (Iliad)	900 B.C.	400 B.C.	500 yrs	643

3. NT scholar, F. F. Bruce says: “No Classical scholar would listen to an argument that the authenticity of Herodotus or Thucydides is in doubt because the earliest manuscripts of their works which are of any use to us are over 1,300 years later than the originals.”
4. “The earliest manuscripts of the works of first-century historians such as Josephus, Tacitus, and Suetonius are dated from the 9th to 11th centuries—more than 800 years after the originals were written. . . . When we compare these ancient texts to the New Testament, the difference astonishes. For instance, the earliest New Testament manuscript is from around AD 125, while significant portions of the Gospels are represented in manuscripts from the late 2nd to early 3rd century. Whereas the best ancient historical works have 500 to 800 years between the actual date the work was written and the date of the earliest surviving manuscript, there is less than a 100-year gap between the writing of the Gospels and the manuscripts we possess. This difference cannot be overstated.” Josh Vincent
5. So how do the New Testament documents compare to other ancient literature? “[For translating the New Testament] . . . we have Greek manuscripts—thousands of them, some reaching as far back as the second century. And we have very ancient translations directly from the Greek that give us a good sense of the Greek text that would have been available in those regions where that early version was used. These include Latin, Syriac, and Coptic especially. Altogether, we have at least 20,000 handwritten manuscripts in Greek, Latin, Syriac, Coptic and other ancient languages that help us to determine the wording of the original. Almost 6000 of these manuscripts are in Greek alone. And we have more than one million quotations of the New Testament by church fathers. There is absolutely nothing in the Greco-Roman world that comes even remotely close to this wealth of data. The New Testament has more manuscripts that are within a century or two of the original than anything else from the Greco-Roman world too. If we have to be skeptical about what the original New Testament said, that skepticism, on average, should be multiplied one thousand times for other Greco-Roman literature.” Daniel Wallace, New Testament Scholar
6. What about variations in the manuscripts? Should this give us concern?
 - a) Types of variants
 - (1) Spelling and obvious copying errors, 75% of all variants
 - (2) Changes that can't be translated e.g. word order (this does not affect meaning)
 - (3) Changes that do affect meaning but are not viable (i.e. not supported in other reliable manuscripts and thus are clearly incorrect readings)
 - (4) Changes that are meaningful and viable (less than 1%) i.e. affect meaning of the immediate context and do have viability but none of these affect Christian doctrine. For example: Acts 7:4; Mk 16:9-20; John 7:53-8:11

b) Even Bart Ehrman, a leading New Testament scholar who argues against the reliability of the Bible, recognizes, “Most of the changes found in our early Christian manuscripts have nothing to do with theology or ideology. Far and away the most changes are the result of mistakes, pure and simple—slips of the pen, accidental omissions, inadvertent additions, misspelled words, blunders of one sort or another. . . . Essential Christian beliefs are not affected by textual variants in the manuscript tradition of the New Testament.”

c) “The survival of various manuscripts is regarded as a strength by Christian scholars in establishing a critical text of the New Testament. . . . The existence of a large number of manuscripts in different languages with their origins in widely separated churches yet in substantive agreement with one another is an argument in favor of the integrity of the New Testament.” Michael Nasi Ali

d) “The wide range of variants shows a lack of active standardization of the text and a lack of standardized suppression of variant texts and therefore through the process of textual criticism we can establish with great confidence the wording of the original text.” Amy Orr-Ewing

e) Critical editions of the Bible (as well as some common editions) footnote textual variations. Unlike other religious texts, there is no conspiracy to cover up these variants, they are freely noted and acknowledged.

C. What is the time difference between the original writing of the New Testament documents and the existing copies? (i.e. Do centuries of copying make it impossible to trust the NT?)

1. The cynics view: “No television preacher has ever read the Bible. Neither has any evangelical politician. Neither has the pope. Neither have I. And neither have you. At best, we’ve all read a bad translation—a translation of translations of translations of hand-copied copies of copies of copies of copies, and on and on, hundreds of times.” Kurt Eichenwald, *The Bible: So Misunderstood It’s a Sin*, Newsweek, December 23, 2014

2. OT example: The Great Isaiah Scroll (the oldest complete copy of the book of Isaiah, 24 ft long 11 in high)

a) This scroll was discovered in 1946 in a cave near the Dead Sea. Eventually 11 caves were discovered with a total of 981 documents. Perhaps none were as important for biblical scholarship as the Great Isaiah Scroll. It is the oldest known copy of the complete book of Isaiah.

b) Previous to this, the oldest known complete copy of Isaiah was the Leningrad codex dated 1008 AD. This scroll is dated to at least 100BC. This means that there is 1100 years between the Leningrad Codex and the Great Isaiah scroll! What does it reveal about the accuracy of the copying process over so many centuries?

c) "Of the 166 words in Isaiah 53, there are only 17 letters in question. Ten of these letters are simply a matter of spelling, which does not affect the sense. Four more letters are minor stylistic changes, such as conjunctions. The three remaining letters comprise the word LIGHT, which is added in verse 11 and which does not affect the meaning greatly. Furthermore, this word is supported by the Septuagint (LXX). Thus, in one chapter of 166 words, there is only one word (three letters) in question after a thousand years of transmission - and this word does not significantly change the meaning of the passage." Norman Geisler & William Nix, A General Introduction to the Bible

3. NT example: The oldest New Testament fragment, p52 from John's gospel (ch. 18), dates to approximately 125A.D. putting it at least within two to three decades of the original writing.

a) The oldest complete NT manuscripts are Sinaiticus and Vaticanus dating between 325 and 400 A.D.

4. Copies of New Testament manuscripts are not only far more abundant than other ancient literature, many of them are far closer to the original writing. See and compare the "span" column on the chart of Ancient Literature above.