

Dr. Price Answers Questions About the Word of God and It's Reliability

How should an understanding of doctrine motivate a believer toward action? To be a doer of the Word?

First, one has to know the Word to do the Word. What one believes determines what one does. The Scripture says that the man who fears the LORD will have divine instruction in the choices of life (Psalm 25:12). It also tells us that the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge and wisdom (Proverbs 1:7; 9:10). The term knowledge looks at experiential knowledge – how we relate to other people in relationships such as business and marriage. The term “wisdom” refers to a “skill in living life.” God is the Author of all living things and the Architect of our living. Every day we must make decisions on how to live in God’s world and this is a skill that can only be learned and developed by knowing and applying God’s Word to the situations we encounter. Psalm 119 explains the many ways knowing God’s Word benefits a believer’s life. It says that the Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (vs. 105) and that the way a young man (or woman) can keep themselves pure is by following God’s Word (vss. 9-11). It says that when people slander us the way to avoid resentment is to meditate on God’s Word and let it counsel us as to a right response (vss. 23-24). It says when we experience the trials of life, even when we deserve discipline, that these things enable us to better learn God’s Word (vss. 66-71). It further says that God’s Word keep us from being dishonest in business dealings (vs. 36) and guards us from looking at things that would defile our lives (vs. 37). It will also make us wiser than our enemies and give us more insight than our teachers (vss. 98-100). And it helps us find and keep true friends who value what we value and who can encourage us in our lives (vs. 63). Finally, it tells us that knowing the Word of God gives us great peace and prevents us from getting tripped up in life (vs. 165) as well as producing greater reverence for God Himself (vs. 38). That should be motivation enough to make us want to know the truths (doctrines) of God’s Word.

The Bible—Origin—

What does the Bible say about its Origin?

The Bible declares without apology that it is the inspired, inerrant, and infallible Word of the Living God that has been graciously revealed to men through men by God Himself:

“But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit *spoke from God.*” 2 Peter 1:20–21

“the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” 2 Timothy 3:15–17

“And for this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God’s message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the Word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.” 1 Thessalonians 2:13

How was the Bible preserved over time?

Biblical revelation was written down and passed on from generation to generation. This may have originally been done on clay tablets, then on animal skins known as parchments and then on a type of paper called papyrus. Trained professionals known as “scribes” worked to insure accuracy of transmission. This was a regular job that required them to properly dress, observe ritual cleansing, memorize the text, meticulously prepare for copying the text and then write with the realization that this was God’s Word and human mistakes could be spiritually fatal to readers. A scribe named Ishmael warned his apprentice son in the first-century BC: “My son, be careful in your work for it is the work of Heaven, lest you err either in leaving out or in adding one iota, and thereby cause the destruction of the whole world.” In addition, because the text was considered sacred and copies were expensive, care was taken to safeguard copies and to guard them as the greatest of treasures. The members of the Jewish sect who lived in the desert community at Qumran stored their copies of the Bible in specially made cylindrical jars and hid them in caves. This was in accordance with the instructions God gave the prophet Jeremiah on how to properly preserve a document (Jeremiah 32:14).

How did we get the Old Testament?

The OT came to us from kings, statesmen, sages, prophets and common people such as shepherds and farmers. All were united in the fact that God spoke to them or divinely directed them and superintended by the Holy Spirit to communicate God’s unique revelation. This revelation was first written by Moses, probably in the proto-Sinaitic script, then copied later in ancient Hebrew to match other books that had been written in that script and during and after the exile some books such as parts of Daniel and Ezra were written in Aramaic and the square script inherited from Aramaic was used by the priestly scribe Ezra to rewrite the biblical text about 450 BC. The ancient Hebrew of the Torah was also preserved by the Samaritan community. Around 250 BC the OT was translated into Greek at the request of Ptolemy II and placed in his Library at Alexandria. Copies were made of this translation and circulated by the Hellenistic Jews. In time other translations were made in local languages such as Syriac, Latin and Coptic. The oldest Hebrew text of the Bible is that discovered hidden in caves at Qumran, but our English translations come from a Hebrew text that was preserved by Jewish scribes in Tiberias, Israel, known as the Masorettes, around AD 1,000.

How did we get the New Testament?

The NT, like the OT, was divinely revealed. The Gospels, which are a selective record of the life and ministry of Jesus during His time on earth, were revealed later to the Apostles who Jesus had chosen. These included common people such as fishermen, but also professionals such as a tax collector, a doctor and a Pharisee. The NT was originally written in Koine Greek which was

the common language of the day. It was also later translated into local languages such as Syriac, Latin and Coptic. Careful scribes as well as the Church Fathers helped preserve most of the original readings of the text with over 1 million citations from the NT appearing in their writings.

How did we get the 66 canonical books?

The canon accepted by Protestants consists of 39 books in the OT and 27 in the NT. The OT canon as arranged by Ezra was decided by the mid-5th century BC, and it seems likely that the oldest known Jewish community at Qumran (ca. 3rd century BC – 1st century AD) had a recognized canon. The canon of the NT was probably not decided until sometime in the late 4th century AD, although already in the 1st century there were collections, such as the Muratorian Fragment, of the four Gospels and the Pauline and other Apostolic epistles that reflected a view of canon. The 66 books of the Protestant canon was based on several criteria on this basis books were accepted as having been written by a known prophet or a person approved by God. Their contents were compared and found to be in harmony with previously approved revelation. In the OT Ezra the priest ordered the books based on these principles and perhaps their messianic content. Also, Jesus quoted from or alluded to all of these books as well as did the Apostles that followed Him.

Why were other books not included?

The Western (Roman Catholic) and Eastern (Greek Orthodox) churches included books not found in the Protestant canon. These are books that claim to have been written in the name of an OT or NT figure even though this could not be proven. Because the LXX was the authorized translation of these churches (until the Latin translation of the Vulgate), and they contained some of these apocryphal and pseudepigraphical works, they became part of these expanded canons. Even then, the RCC viewed them as Deutero-canonical, that is, having a secondary authority, but not on par with the recognized 39 books of the OT. The NT apocryphal books were not included because they had information that was either inaccurate or did not agree with accepted canonical books or both. The Protestant criteria for excluding these books was because they could not be proven to have been written by a known OT author who was inspired or by one of the Apostles or someone associated with them. In addition, were these books “orthodox,” agreeing with the teaching of the OT and NT, did they contain contradictions, historical inaccuracies or theological disagreements with the recognized books and were they accepted by the majority of the Church and used in official worship services?

How does this prove that the Bible is the Word of God?

God used godly men to bring His written Word to men in community and He used godly men to recognize and organize His written Word so His Church would have a consistent and unified message to guide and instruct it as it awaited the Living Word’s return. This Bible has demonstrated its divine character by transforming and renewing lives down through the centuries. John Wesley once put it this way with respect to the question of who wrote the

Bible. He said: "The Bible was clearly written either by God, good men, or bad men. Bad men could not have written it, for the Bible is a good book, and fresh waters do not come from a salt fountain; bad men would not have written it, for the Bible strongly condemns sin and sinners, and wicked men would not condemn themselves to hell. Good men could not have written it, and then deliberately said God wrote it: they would no longer be good men; good men would not have written it for the definite purpose of deception, for good men do not deceive. Therefore, the only one left who could have written it is God."

The Bible—Relevancy

What would you say to an unbeliever that says that the Bible is an ancient book and not relevant today?

I would remind such a person that every bit of information that supports our modern academic disciplines as well as our modern technologies came from ancient sources. Knowledge is progressive and cumulative, and the past is what has supplied us with the solutions we have today. The Bible is a time-tested collection of history and wisdom that has informed and inspired millions of people around the world for thousands of years. To say this is irrelevant is to betray an ignorance of the importance of the past and how mankind has come to achieve what it has in the present. However, I would add that this ancient book has demonstrated it has the very present power to solve modern problems, heal modern hurts, and redeem modern lives that are lost and broken. Time has not cause it to lose its truth or its effectiveness in every age and every culture that has used it to gain a relationship with Jesus Christ Who is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8).

The Bible—Reliability

How can we trust that the Bible we have is the actual Word of God?

We have the record of the divine preservation of the Jewish People as promised in the Bible and the preservation of the Bible itself, although the object of repeated attacks and attempts at destruction. But, the most persuasive evidence is biblical prophecy. The OT accurately predicted events, such as the Egyptian captivity and return, the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities, the fall of cities such as Ninevah Tyre and Edom, and the destructions of the First and Second temples. King Josiah was predicted by name 300 years before his birth and Cyrus the great some 150 years before his. More importantly, messianic prophecies which begin in the first book of the Bible to the last concerning the people, tribe, house, place of birth and time and manner of death and resurrection were all historically fulfilled explicitly and exactly. Finally, we have the testimonies of believers through the centuries of God's miraculous deliverances and gracious provisions based on promises made in Scripture.

What archeological evidence exists that supports the Bible's reliability?

For OT concerning the question of the historicity of early Israel, we have the discoveries made at Kh. Qeiyafa and Kh. El-Rai (probably biblical Shea'aryim and Ziklag) that prove there was an empire of David and Solomon. There have been discovered more than 70 biblical names including such famous names as that of King David (from Tel Dan), King Hezekiah and the Prophet Isaiah from bullae found together near the Temple Mount and names of people in the Judean administration and even a figure such as Baruk the scribe of the prophet Jeremiah. For the NT we have over 30 historical figures mentioned in the text including people related to Jesus' trials such as Caiaphas, the High Priest who presided over His Jewish trial and Pontius Pilate who presided over His Roman trial and individuals associated with the Apostle Paul such as Erastus (Rom. 16) at Corinth.

What do the ancient copies and fragments of scripture tell us about the Bible reliability?

The testimony of the Dead Sea Scrolls is most important. While our OT was translated from the Aleppo Codex that contained a Hebrew text from ca. AD 1000, there were questions about the accuracy of textual transmission since the last of the prophetic books was still over a 1,000 years earlier. How do we know we had now what they had then? How many mistakes could the scribes have made? In 1948 the first of the Dead Sea Scroll caves was discovered and within many biblical manuscripts were recovered included a complete copy of the Book of Isaiah. This copy was reliably dated to at least 125 BC, although as a study copy it revealed markings that put its text probably in 250 BC. When compared to the more recent Aleppo Codex the biblical text was discovered to be amazing stable and consistent. This proved that the Jewish scribes had done an extremely careful job of transmitting the text over time and that the text we use today is the same as the oldest known text. This gives us assurance that scribal practice was just as careful in preserving the text from the original to the oldest copy in our hands.

Are there ancient secular writings that speak to the reliability of the Bible?

The Jewish Targums (1st cent. BC) and the sectarian documents among the Dead Sea Scrolls (200 BC-AD 68) reveal OT biblical texts and include historical information that confirms their reliability as historical witnesses. The first-century historian Flavius Josephus traced the history of his Jewish People as revealed in the Bible and wrote about Jesus and the early Christians. Roman writers such as Pliny, Tacitus and Suetonius make mention of the early Christians worshipping Jesus as a divinity and make mention of Jesus trial and crucifixion under Pontius Pilate. Josephus wrote concerning Jewish belief in the Bible's reliability: "We have given practical proof of our reverence for our Scriptures. For although such long ages have now passed, no one has ventured to add, or to remove, or to alter a syllable; and it is an instinct with every Jew, from the day of his birth, to regard them as decrees of God, to abide by them, and if need be, cheerfully to die for them." Josephus Flavius, *Contra Apionem* 1:42

Writings of Antiquity Compared

Author	Book	Date Written	Earliest Copies	Time Gap	No. Of Copies
Homer	Iliad	800 BC	c. 400 BC	c. 400 yrs	643
Herodotus	History	480-425 BC	c. AD 900	c. 1,350 yrs	8
Thucydides	History	460-400 BC	c. AD 900	c. 1,300 yrs	8
Plato		400 BC	c. AD 900	c. 1,300 yrs	7
Demosthenes		300 BC	c. AD 1100	c. 1,400 yrs	200
Caesar	Gallic Wars	100-44 BC	c. AD 900	c. 1,000 yrs	10
Livy	History of Rome	59 BC – AD 17	4 th Cent. (partial) Mostly 10 th cent.	c. 400 yrs c. 1,000 yrs	1 partial 19
Tacitus	Annals	AD 100	c. AD 1100	c. 1,000 yrs	20
Pliny Secundus	Natural History	AD 61-113	c. AD 850	c. 750 yrs	7
H.S. > Apostles	New Testament	AD 50-100	c. 114 (fragments) c. 200 (books) c. 250 (most of NT) c. 325 (complete NT)	+ 50 yrs <u>100 yrs</u> <u>150 yrs</u> <u>225 yrs</u>	5656

Is there anything about modern Israel that would support the reliability of the Bible?

The biblical prophets predicted that one day Israel be preserved by God despite being scattered among the nations of the world. They also predicted that one day Israel would return to the Land, though initially in unbelief and under duress. It predicted that when this happened it would be surrounded by enemies that would seek to invade and destroy it. Today 6 million Jews have returned to the Land as the State of Israel, exiled from eastern Europe and other countries of the Middle east as well as coming out of the Holocaust as refugees. They live today with threats from the Iranians, the Syrians and the Palestinians as well as from many other Islamic countries. They also exist largely as a secular state, not only not believing in Jesus as their messiah, but disbelieving in God altogether. All of this has happened just as the Prophets predicted. Despite being exiled and assimilated into scores of nations, despite experiencing the worse the world has done to any people, the Jewish People remain a distinct people. And the State of Israel exists as the People and in the place where the prophets have further predicted that the Messiah will return and return them to Himself and restore their Land and nation to be a blessing to the rest of the world that turns to God.

How has the Bible stood the test of time?

There has been no book more attacked by critics than the Bible. These critics have questioned every aspect of the Bible including the trustworthiness of its text, the accuracy of its historical references, its scientific compatibility, and more recently its cultural acceptability with respect to contemporary issues. Despite these attacks, no one has ever successfully shown the Bible,

properly interpreted, to be inaccurate with respect to an historical or scientific fact. While our understanding of science changes as does our acceptance of cultural and social morals, the Bible has remained a steadfast and reliable source of spiritual and moral guidance and direction for many different cultures throughout many generations.

What does the New Testament say about its reliability? (eyewitness accounts, authors validate each other?)

The Apostles knew one another and refer to one another in their Gospel accounts. Paul, who was not among the original Apostles chosen by Jesus, is nevertheless affirmed as an Apostle by Peter and his writings are put on par with the rest of the Scriptures (2 Peter 3:16). Thus, the NT is the account of eyewitnesses and those associated with eyewitnesses, such as Luke, who was a first-rate historian and researcher of eyewitnesses. The Apostles even testify that this was the case. John states that those who passed on the historical record of Jesus were eyewitnesses. He wrote: "What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we beheld and our hands handled, concerning the Word of Life ..." (1 John 1:1). Luke also affirms this: "Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word have handed them down to us, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write *it* out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; so that you might know the exact truth about the things you have been taught" (Luke 1:1–4); "to the apostles whom He had chosen. To these He also presented Himself alive, after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over *a period of* forty days, and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:2–3). Paul also states this concerning witnesses to Jesus resurrection: "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as it were to one untimely born, He appeared to me also" (1 Corinthians 15:3–8).