

Is the Bible Trustworthy?

I. What the Bible Claims About Itself

Before asking whether the Bible is trustworthy, it helps to define what we mean by that claim. The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (1978) puts it this way:

"Scripture, in its entirety, is free from all falsehood, fraud, or deceit... It speaks truly in all it affirms, when interpreted according to its intended sense and literary genre."

Two qualifiers in that statement matter enormously and are easy to miss.

First, inerrancy applies to the original texts (the autographs), not to every later copy. Christians do not claim that every copy of the bible is without error.

Second, truth claims must be read "according to intended sense and literary genre." When Psalm 91:4 says "He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust:" no reader, ancient or modern, is meant to conclude God is a bird. Psalms is poetry; poetic and figurative language is not a lesser or less true form of communication, but it communicates differently than a chronicle or a legal code does. Reading Genesis, Psalms, Proverbs, and the Gospels all with the same flat, literalistic expectations is a category error the biblical authors themselves never intended.

Scripture repeatedly makes claims about its own authority. Paul tells Timothy

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God[b] may be complete, equipped for every good work." - **2 Timothy 3:16 (ESV)**

Peter writes that

"Knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. ²¹ For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." - **2 Peter 1:20-21 (ESV)**

Jesus affirms the OT's abiding authority down to its smallest details:

"For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished." - **Matthew 5:18 (ESV)**

and he treats Scripture as unbreakable:

"...and Scripture cannot be broken" - **John 10:35 (ESV)**

This is a claim of divine authorship exercised through, not despite, real human authors - the biblical books retain each writer's vocabulary, style, and personality (compare the elegant Greek of Luke-Acts to the rougher, more repetitive Greek of Mark, or Paul's argumentative style against James's proverbial one). Notably, the New Testament itself treats a Gospel text as Scripture on par with the Old Testament: Paul, quoting both Deuteronomy 25:4 and a saying recorded in Luke 10:7, writes *"For the Scripture says... and, 'The laborer deserves his wages'"* (1 Timothy 5:18) — placing Luke's Gospel in the same authoritative category as Torah within a single generation of its writing. Some have claimed that 1 Timothy is quoted some other source

that Luke also had access to - but the claim in 1 Timothy 5:18 is that it is written Scripture – if something were scripture to the church, it would have been preserved. This strongly suggest Luke's gospel is being quoted. In 2 Peter 3:15–16, Peter places Paul's writings along side of the other Scriptures.

II. How Did We Get Our Bible?

The Old Testament Canon

The Hebrew Scriptures were recognized in three groupings and arranged differently than most protestants group them:

1. Torah (The Law)

The Torah consists of the five books of Moses:

1. Genesis
2. Exodus
3. Leviticus
4. Numbers
5. Deuteronomy

2 Nevi'im (The Prophets)

The Prophets were divided into **Former Prophets** and **Latter Prophets**.

Former Prophets

These are historical books interpreted through the lens of prophecy.

- Joshua
- Judges
- Samuel (1 & 2 Samuel counted as one book)
- Kings (1 & 2 Kings counted as one book)

Latter Prophets

- Isaiah
- Jeremiah
- Ezekiel
- The Twelve Minor Prophets (counted as one book)

The Twelve are:

- Hosea
- Joel
- Amos
- Obadiah

- Jonah
- Micah
- Nahum
- Habakkuk
- Zephaniah
- Haggai
- Zechariah
- Malachi

3. Ketuvim (The Writings)

These books include poetry, wisdom literature, and later historical works.

The traditional Jewish order is:

- Psalms
- Proverbs
- Job

The Five Scrolls (*Megillot*)

- Song of Songs
- Ruth
- Lamentations
- Ecclesiastes
- Esther

Then:

- Daniel
- Ezra–Nehemiah (one book)
- Chronicles (1 & 2 Chronicles counted as one book)

Notice something interesting:

Daniel is not in the Prophets in the Hebrew Bible. It is in the Writings.

This is the structure Jesus himself references: *"everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled"* (**Luke 24:44**). By the first century, Jewish historian Josephus (*Against Apion* 1.8) describes a settled collection of 22 books (corresponding to the 39 books of the Protestant OT, differently divided and counted) as already fixed and unchanged for centuries, explicitly contrasting this with Greek literature's constant revision. The books were recognized, not voted into existence by a later council, based on criteria including

prophetic/Mosaic authorship, consistency with previously recognized revelation, and widespread reception and use by the covenant community over time.

The New Testament Canon

A common popular myth (echoed in fiction like The Da Vinci Code) claims the New Testament canon was decided by a vote at the Council of Nicaea (325 AD). This is simply not what the historical record shows - Nicaea addressed the nature of Christ (the Arian controversy), not the canon, and the books later recognized as canonical were already functioning as authoritative Scripture in the church's worship and teaching well before any council addressed the list formally.

The core criteria the early church applied, consistently attested across early sources, were:

- **Apostolic origin** - written by an apostle or a close associate recording apostolic testimony (e.g., Mark recording Peter's preaching; Luke as Paul's companion).
- **Orthodoxy** - consistency with the apostolic "rule of faith" already taught and received.
- **Catholicity** - widespread, not merely local or sectarian, acceptance and use across the churches.

The Muratorian Fragment (generally dated at c. 170-200 AD) already lists most NT books as recognized Scripture. By Athanasius's Easter Letter of 367 AD, we have the earliest surviving list matching exactly our present 27 New Testament books - and this letter reflects existing consensus rather than creating it; the councils at Hippo (393) and Carthage (397) that later ratified this list were affirming what was already broadly received, not imposing a new decision by ecclesiastical fiat.

Why Not the Apocrypha?

The Apocrypha (Tobit, Judith, Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach, Baruch, 1-2 Maccabees, and additions to Daniel and Esther) are included in Catholic and Orthodox Bibles but excluded from Protestant and Jewish canons, for several reasons:

- They were never part of the Hebrew canon recognized by the Jewish community that produced and preserved them - Josephus's list above excludes them. Although Hebrew and Aramaic copies of some deuterocanonical books have been found, there is no evidence they were accorded the same canonical status as the books of the Hebrew Bible within mainstream Palestinian Judaism. There is no known proposal where any Jewish person ever even suggested that one of the books be included in the Jewish canon. There was no debate about them. The protestants 39 books of the Old Testament correspond to the ones that the Jews themselves recognized as Scripture.
- Jesus and the New Testament authors, who quote the Old Testament roughly 300 times, never once quote any Apocryphal book as Scripture, despite the Apocrypha being available and known in the first century (some NT authors do allude to Apocryphal ideas or language, which is different from citing them with scriptural authority).
- Several Apocryphal books contain internal historical and geographical errors (e.g., Judith's account has significant chronological confusion about Nebuchadnezzar's reign) and some, like 2 Maccabees 12:43-45, explicitly acknowledge they are historical narrative or moral instruction rather than claiming prophetic inspiration.

- Judith 1:1: Claims Nebuchadnezzar ruled from Nineveh (Assyrian capital destroyed in 612 BC), but he was Babylonian king from Babylon post-605 BC. Tobit 1:5,14: Dates events to Assyrian king Shalmaneser (727-722 BC) while placing Nineveh's fall under Sennacherib inconsistently with Assyrian chronology. It claims that Tobit was alive when the Assyrians conquered Israel (722 BC) and when Jeroboam revolted against Judah (931 BC). That's a 209-year lifespan, but the account claims he died when he was just 158 years old.
- The apocrypha does not claim to be Scripture.
 - They did not see themselves as prophets speaking God's Word
 - *"So they tore down the altar and stored the stones in a convenient place on the temple hill **until there should come a prophet to tell what to do with them.**" - 1 Maccabees 4:45–46*
 - *"So there was great distress in Israel, **such as had not been since the time that prophets ceased to appear among them.**" – 1 Maccabees 9:27*
 - *"...the Jews and their priests decided that Simon should be their leader and high priest forever, **until a trustworthy prophet should arise.**" – 1 Maccabees 14:41*
 - Maccabees claim to be editing existing works
 - *"All this... has been set forth by Jason of Cyrene in five volumes; **we shall attempt to condense into a single book.**" – 2 Maccabees 2:23*
 - The books do not use the common prophetic language of "Thus saith the Lord" and instead admit human frailty in the writing and asks the reader to judge if it is poorly done or not
 - *"If it is well written and appropriately composed, that is what I wanted; **if it is poorly done and mediocre, that was the best I could do.**" - 2 Maccabees 15:38–39*
 - Their formal canonization in Catholic tradition came relatively late and defensively — the Council of Trent (1546) formally affirmed them as canonical specifically in reaction to the Protestant Reformation, centuries after the books themselves were written, rather than reflecting an unbroken, universally-held conviction of their canonicity. That is not to say that the books were not read or considered autoreactive by Catholics before then, just that formal recognition of them was late.

This isn't a claim the Apocrypha is worthless — many Protestant traditions have historically valued these books for historical and devotional reading (this was Luther's view) — only that they were never received by the covenant community as carrying the same prophetic authority as the Hebrew Scriptures.

Why Not Accept the Gnostic Texts as Scripture?

Texts like the Gospel of Thomas, Gospel of Judas, and Gospel of Philip, sometimes presented in popular media as suppressed "alternative Gospels," were excluded for substantive historical and theological reasons, not because of a power struggle to suppress "inconvenient information" as books by Dan Brown have popularly claimed:

- **Late dating:** the earliest complete Gnostic gospel manuscripts date to the mid-to-late 2nd century at the earliest (Thomas is the most debated, with some sayings possibly reflecting earlier tradition, but its final form and distinctively Gnostic material is generally dated well after the four canonical Gospels, which have manuscript and internal evidence pointing to composition within living memory of eyewitnesses, roughly 60-95 AD). Therefore they do not meet the criterion of being written by an apostle or someone close to an apostle.
- **Pseudonymous, not authentic, apostolic attribution:** scholars widely regard the naming of Thomas, Philip, or Judas as later attribution rather than genuine authorship - a common practice in the ancient world for lending a text borrowed authority. There is the story of Acts of Paul that demonstrates how serious the idea of falsely writing in an apostle's name was to the early church
 - "But if certain writings falsely claiming Paul's name are brought forward... let them know that **the presbyter in Asia who composed that document, as if he were adding something of his own to Paul's reputation, was convicted and, after confessing that he had done it out of love for Paul, was removed from his office.**" - Tertullian (c. AD 200). In *On Baptism* 17
- The Gnostic texts had little support in the early church for inclusion in the canon of Scripture.
- Theological incompatibility: Gnostic texts typically teach salvation through secret esoteric knowledge (gnosis) available to an elite, a dualistic rejection of the material world as evil, and often a docetic Christology (Christ only seemed to have a physical body) — all directly contradicting the apostolic teaching already well-established in the first century (1 John 4:2-3 explicitly makes denying Christ's physical incarnation a test for a false spirit; John's Gospel opens with "the Word became flesh," John 1:14).
- They were rejected by the same broad, geographically diverse consensus process described above — not a single council's decree, but the sustained non-reception of these texts as Scripture by mainstream churches across the Mediterranean world from a very early date, attested by writers like Irenaeus (c. 180 AD), who explicitly names and rebuts Gnostic teaching as a deviation from what churches everywhere had received.

III. Did Jesus Believe the Old Testament?

Yes, unambiguously, and this matters because it grounds Christian confidence in the OT in Jesus's own explicit teaching, not merely inherited tradition.

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished." (Matthew 5:17-18)

"Then he said to them, 'These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.'" (Luke 24:44)

Jesus treats OT narratives many modern readers question historically as straightforwardly real: he references Noah and the flood as a real past event prefiguring his own return (Matthew 24:37-39), Jonah's three days in the great fish as a sign of his own resurrection (Matthew 12:39-41),

and Adam and Eve's creation "from the beginning" as the basis for his teaching on marriage (Matthew 19:4-5, quoting Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 together). He quotes from all three sections of the Hebrew canon (Law, Prophets, Writings) as authoritative, and affirms specific disputed authorship claims his contemporaries debated, such as Davidic authorship of Psalm 110 (Matthew 22:41-45). This consistent pattern — treating the OT as historically reliable, prophetically authoritative, and binding in its moral demands until fulfilled in himself — is the foundation for why Christians receive the OT canon as Scripture at all.

IV. How Can We Trust the Text If We Don't Have the Originals?

No original autograph of any biblical book survives — this is true of every ancient document, not a special problem for the Bible. What matters is how well later copies allow scholars to reconstruct the original wording, and here the New Testament is uniquely well-attested compared to any other ancient text.

- **Quantity: over 5,800 Greek New Testament manuscripts survive**, plus roughly 10,000 Latin Vulgate manuscripts and thousands more in Syriac, Coptic, Armenian, and other early translations — **collectively over 25,000 manuscript witnesses**. Compare Homer's Iliad, the best-attested classical text, at around 1,900 manuscripts, or Julius Caesar's Gallic Wars at fewer than 10.
- **Early dating:** the John Rylands fragment (P52), containing a portion of John 18, dates to roughly 125 AD by most scholars — within a generation of the Gospel's likely composition (c. 90s AD), and complete NT manuscripts (Codex Vaticanus, Codex Sinaiticus) exist from the 4th century, versus a typical 800-1,000+ year gap between composition and earliest surviving manuscript for most classical texts.
- **Agreement across witnesses:** Textual scholars — including critics of inerrancy — broadly agree the wealth of manuscript evidence allows reconstruction of the original wording **with well over 99% confidence**, and no viable textual variant affects any major Christian doctrine. Any given doctrine taught from a disputed passage is also taught clearly elsewhere in undisputed text.
- The evidence of what the original text said is affirmed by the original church fathers also: "Besides textual evidence derived from New Testament Greek manuscripts and from early versions, the textual critic has available the numerous scriptural quotations included in the commentaries, sermons, and other treatises written by early Church fathers. Indeed, so extensive are these citations that if all other sources for our knowledge of the text of the New Testament were destroyed, they would be sufficient alone for the reconstruction of practically the entire New Testament.." — Bruce Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament* (Metzger, and in later editions Metzger & Ehrman), 4th ed., Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 126

Even without the 25,000 manuscripts of the bible that have been found, if we just had the works of the Early Church Fathers we could reconstruct the vast majority of the bible from their quotes alone.

Ehrman's "400,000 Differences" — Why This Isn't the Bombshell It Sounds Like

Bart Ehrman, an agnostic/atheist scholar, has popularized the figure that there are more textual variants among New Testament manuscripts than there are words in the New Testament — often cited as around 400,000 variants (between 200,000 – to 400,000). The number itself is not

disputed by conservative textual scholars; what's misleading is the impression the raw number creates without context.

- The count is large precisely because we have so many manuscripts, not because the text is unstable. If only one manuscript of the NT had survived, there would be zero variants to count — and zero ability to check anything against anything else. The large variant count is a byproduct of unusually abundant evidence, not a sign of corruption; ironically, a text with fewer surviving copies would show a smaller, falsely reassuring variant count precisely because there would be less material available to compare. With over **25,000 manuscripts** — **that's about 16 per document on average (400,000 / 25,000)**. **And errors are grouped generally around certain verses. If a verse had an early misspelling — it will appear in later copies, etc.**
- The overwhelming majority of these variants are trivial: spelling differences (e.g., a movable Greek letter nu), word-order changes that don't affect meaning in Greek's flexible syntax, and obvious scribal slips instantly identifiable as errors. Wallace and others estimate that variants which are both meaningful (affecting translation) and viable (with a real claim to being original) make up a small fraction of the total — commonly cited estimates run around **1% or less**.
- Ehrman himself, in his more technical academic work (as distinct from his popular-level books), **has acknowledged that no core Christian doctrine hangs on a disputed textual variant** — his broader argument is more about theological nuance and scribal tendencies than about the text being unreliable or unrecoverable.

The Longer Ending of Mark 16:9-20 — What It Actually Demonstrates

Most textual scholars, including conservative evangelical ones, conclude Mark 16:9-20 was not part of Mark's original text — it's absent from the two earliest and most reliable complete manuscripts (Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus, both 4th century), it's flagged with scribal notes of doubt in other manuscripts, its vocabulary and style differ noticeably from the rest of Mark, and the earliest church fathers (Eusebius, Jerome) explicitly note that the most accurate Greek copies available to them lacked it.

Rather than being a liability, this is one of the strongest available demonstrations of how transparent and self-correcting the manuscript tradition actually is. This addition, made at some point in the 2nd century, did not manage to slip into the textual record undetected — it left clear, traceable fingerprints: an abrupt seam at verse 8, a vocabulary shift, absence from the earliest and best witnesses, and open acknowledgment of doubt by early Christian scholars centuries before modern textual criticism existed. Every modern translation (ESV, NIV, NASB, etc.) flags this passage with a clear textual footnote precisely because the tradition preserved the evidence needed to catch it.

If a full twelve-verse addition, made early in the copying process, left this much of a paper trail and was this identifiable roughly 1,900 years later, it demonstrates how difficult it would be for a substantive, doctrine-altering corruption to be quietly and permanently inserted into the entire manuscript tradition without leaving comparable traces. The system's transparency about its one clearly flagged large addition is evidence for, not against, its overall reliability.

What about the Old Testament?

Unlike the New Testament's manuscript case, which rests on sheer abundance, the Old Testament's strongest textual evidence comes from a direct time-machine comparison. Before 1947, the oldest complete Hebrew manuscript of Isaiah dated to only the 10th century AD. The discovery of the Great Isaiah Scroll (1QIsa^a) among the Dead Sea Scrolls — dated to roughly 125 BC, over a thousand years earlier — allowed scholars to compare a Second Temple-era copy directly against the medieval Masoretic Text for the first time. The result: the scroll is about 95% identical to the Masoretic Text, with the remaining variants being almost entirely differences in spelling and minor scribal slips rather than substantive changes in wording or meaning. Conservative scholar Gleason Archer summarized the two Qumran Isaiah copies as "word for word identical with our standard Hebrew Bible in more than 95 percent of the text," with the small remainder consisting of spelling variations and obvious copying errors. A millennium of hand-copying, and the text had no significant changes.

V. Why Are There Differences in the Gospels?

Differences among independent accounts of the same events are exactly what courtroom testimony, journalism, and historiography expect from genuine, non-collaborated eyewitness sources — identical wording across four authors would itself be more suspicious, suggesting collusion rather than independent testimony. Several specific categories account for the differences found across the Gospels and other Scripture:

- Transcription errors: simple copying slips, such as the name confusion between David and Elhanan as Goliath's killer (2 Samuel 21:19 vs. 1 Samuel 17), most plausibly explained as an early scribal error, omitting the words "brother of". The most common variants are transposed letters, addition of letters, omission of letters, repeating a phrase, or skipping a phrase — the exact kind of mistakes you would make if you copied a long document by hand.
- Precision differences: rounded versus exact numbers (e.g., a count given as "about five thousand" in one place is not in conflict with a more precise figure elsewhere) — ordinary, expected variation in any historical reporting.
- Time differences: the reported hour of Christ's crucifixion varies between Mark ("the third hour," Mark 15:25) and John ("about the sixth hour," John 19:14) — plausibly explained by different time-reckoning conventions in Jewish versus Roman usage. Similarly, the two different regnal-year systems used across Kings versus Chronicles reflect the distinct dating conventions of the (previously separate) Northern and Southern Kingdoms.
- Paraphrase — *ipsissima vox* vs. *ipsissima verba*: ancient historiography did not require verbatim quotation (*ipsissima verba*, "the very words") the way modern journalism does; ancient authors often preserved the true substance of what was said (*ipsissima vox*, "the very voice") in their own wording. Compare the divine voice at Jesus's baptism recorded slightly differently in Matthew 3:17 ("This is my beloved Son") and Mark 1:11 ("You are my beloved Son") — same substance, different grammatical framing, and the same phenomenon appears in the slightly varied wording of the cross's inscription across all four Gospels (Matthew 27:37; Mark 15:26; Luke 23:38; John 19:19).
- Chronological reordering for topical or theological purposes: ancient biography routinely arranged material topically rather than strictly chronologically. Whether the temple was cleared once (as apparent harmonizers argue) or the placement of the anointing at

Bethany, or whether Matthew's calling preceded or followed the calming of the storm in his own Gospel's compressed arrangement (compare Matthew 8-9's topical grouping of miracles against Mark and Luke's more chronological ordering of the same events) — these reflect deliberate literary arrangement, a normal and accepted ancient historiographical practice, not error.

- Anabasis/catabasis (rising and falling structure): Matthew and Luke record Jesus's three wilderness temptations in different orders — plausibly because one author arranged the sequence for geographical or thematic climax (a literary "rising action" toward the temple) rather than strict chronological reporting.
- Compression: Matthew's account of the centurion's servant (Matthew 8:5-13) has the centurion himself approach Jesus directly, while Luke 7:1-10 has him send Jewish elders and friends as intermediaries. This reflects standard ancient (and modern) narrative convention of attributing an action to the principal person responsible for it, even when it was carried out through intermediaries — much as we might say "the president built a hospital" though he laid no bricks himself.
- Literary spotlighting: Matthew mentions two blind men healed near Jericho (Matthew 20:29-34) where Mark and Luke mention one (Mark 10:46-52; Luke 18:35-43) by name (Bartimaeus) — plausibly because Mark and Luke focus narrative attention on the more prominent or named figure without denying a second person was present. The same pattern explains why all four Gospels mention women at the tomb generally, while John's narrative focuses in on Mary Magdalene specifically (John 20:1-18).

None of these categories describes a factual contradiction about what actually happened — they describe the same, expected range of variation any competent historian would anticipate from multiple, independent, non-collusive eyewitness sources describing real events using the conventions of their own time and culture, not ours.

The gospels are closest to Greco-Roman Lives (biographies). These used the literary features above. They can be seen in Plutarch, Suetonius, Xenophon, and Tacitus. So how do we know this was how they thought biographies should be written? The ancient work “How to Write History” by Lucian of Samosata says so. You can also see these principles of writing found in the *Progymnasmata* ("preliminary exercises"), the standard rhetorical textbooks used throughout the Greek and Roman world to educate boys in reading, writing, and public speaking.

VI. Why We Shouldn't Read the Bible as a Modern Scientific Text

Scripture routinely uses observational, everyday language rather than technical scientific terminology — and this is not a flaw, since it was never intended as a science textbook. When the Bible speaks of "the rising of the sun" (Ecclesiastes 1:5) or the "four corners of the earth" (Isaiah 11:12), it's using the same phenomenological language modern speakers still use without embarrassment — meteorologists today still print "sunrise" and "sunset" times, without implying the sun orbits the earth.

A classic example that people often mention is this one:

Again he said, “What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? ³¹ It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. ³² Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade.” – Mark 4:30-32 (ESV)

People will sometimes claim “Well, botany shows us that the mustard seed is not the smallest seed.” This misunderstands how the text is used. It is not giving a botanical scientific determination on the size of mustard seed itself. To understand the meaning keep these points in mind:

- 1) “As small as a mustard seed” was an idiomatic expression that just meant that something was really really small – its not making a literal Guinness world record claim (smallest proven seed).
- 2) The expression in verse 31 “on earth” – can mean “all of creation”, but it can mean “on the ground” or it can refer to the “farmer’s field”. In this context it is just talking about the seeds used in Judah to plant in fields.
- 3) The mustard seed does grow to be the largest garden seed with trees between 8 to 10 feet tall.

VII. Any Archeological evidence to support the Bible?

The Bible is one of the best-attested ancient texts in terms of people, places, and geopolitical events.

Over 80 Biblical figures have been confirmed from archeological finds.

- 53 from Hebrew Bible (according to historian Lawrence Mykytiuk)
- 30 from New Testament

Old Testament Kings and Rulers

- David (king, ~1010–970 BC; Tel Dan Stele mentions "House of David").
- Hezekiah (king, ~715–686 BC; royal bulla and Siloam Tunnel inscription).
- Jeroboam II (king, ~790–750 BC; seal of servant Shema at Megiddo).
- Omri (king, ~885–874 BC; Mesha Stele and Black Obelisk).
- Ahab (king, ~874–853 BC; Kurkh Monolith, Battle of Qarqar).
- Jehu (king, ~841–814 BC; Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III depicts him paying tribute).
- Sennacherib (Assyrian king, besieged Jerusalem; his annals and Lachish relief).
- Tiglath-Pileser III (conquered regions; Nimrud Tablet mentions Judah).
- Sargon II (captured Ashdod; Prism A inscriptions).
- Esarhaddon (Assyrian king; multiple prisms).

Prophets, Officials, and Others

- Isaiah (prophet; bulla possibly linking to royal steward).
- Baruch (scribe to Jeremiah; clay bulla).
- Hilkiah (high priest; bulla from City of David).

- Gemariah (official under Jehoiakim; bulla).

New Testament Figures

- Pontius Pilate (prefect; Caesarea inscription).
- Sergius Paulus (proconsul; Cyprus inscriptions).
- Erastus (Corinth official; pavement inscription, Romans 16:23) – widely accepted by scholars now
- Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12; Caesarea coins).
- Caiaphas (high priest; ossuary with bones).

If you include non-Christian texts like Josephus, Tacitus, Babylonian chronicles, and Assyrian annals the number of confirmed biblical figures grows to over 100, as these sources name additional kings, emperors, and officials matching biblical timelines and roles.

Confirmed Places

Excavations pinpoint dozens of sites matching biblical descriptions.

Category	Examples
Cities/Towns	Jerusalem (City of David walls), Lachish (siege ramps), Megiddo (gates, stables), Hazor (destruction layers), Samaria (Omri's palace), Capernaum (Peter's house, 1st-century synagogue), Nazareth (1st-century houses), Bethsaida (El-Araj digs), Pool of Siloam (John 9), Pool of Bethesda (John 5).
Structures	Siloam Tunnel (Hezekiah, 2 Kings 20), Pilate's Praetorium (Caesarea), Bema Seat (Corinth, Acts 18), Moses' Seat (Korazin synagogue).
Regions	Philistia (Saba'a Stele), Edom/Moab (Nimrud Slab), Hittite lands (excavations confirming Genesis 23).

Confirmed Events

Artifacts corroborate specific incidents.

Conquests and Sieges Examples

- Megiddo (Josiah vs. Pharaoh Neco II, 609 BC): Egyptian pottery, Greek vessels, and destruction layers confirm foreign military presence matching 2 Kings 23 and 2 Chronicles 35. Siege of Lachish (701 BC; Sennacherib's reliefs show Judahite captives).
- Fall of Samaria (722 BC; Sargon II Prism).
- Babylonian Siege of Jerusalem (597/586 BC; Nebuchadnezzar Chronicle, Lachish Ostraca letters pleading for aid).
- Cyrus' Conquest of Babylon (539 BC; Nabonidus Chronicle)

Digs confirm Bible details once dismissed:

- Hittites (Genesis 23; once called myth, confirmed 1906 excavations).
- Pontius Pilate inscription (1961, verifies Gospel prefect).
- Tel Dan Stele (1993, mentions "House of David," proving king's historicity).
- Pool of Siloam (John 9; excavated 2004, exact location). no proven errors in testable history.

VIII. Fulfilled Prophecy as Evidence

Beyond textual reliability, the Bible's predictive accuracy across centuries is one of its strongest evidences — though intellectual honesty requires noting where the argument's force depends on contested dating questions, addressed below.

Cyrus, Named 150 Years in Advance

"who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd, and he shall fulfill all my purpose'... Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped..." (Isaiah 44:28; 45:1)

Isaiah names the Persian king Cyrus roughly 150 years before his reign, and Cyrus's decree permitting the Jewish exiles to return and rebuild the temple is independently recorded in Ezra 1:1-4 and corroborated by the Cyrus Cylinder, an actual Persian artifact describing Cyrus's general policy of allowing exiled peoples to return home and rebuild their temples. Some claim a later date but the greatest argument against a late addition is that such an addition calling an enemy of Israel as someone used by God would be like switching out an avid New York Yankee fan's wardrobe for Boston Red Sox clothing. Would they notice? Yes. Well, the same would apply to the popularly read Isaiah scrolls. If just one person noticed the addition, the many scrolls in numerous locations would have been consulted immediately and the forgery would have been called out.

Tyre's Judgment

"I will make you a bare rock. You shall be a place for the spreading of nets... and I will scrape her soil from her and make her a bare rock." (Ezekiel 26:4-5, 14, condensed)

Ezekiel prophesied against Tyre roughly 586 BC. Nebuchadnezzar besieged and largely destroyed mainland Tyre shortly after; Alexander the Great, some 250 years later in 332 BC, famously built a causeway to the remaining island fortress using the rubble of the old mainland city — literally scraping its remains into the sea, matching the prophecy's specific imagery in a striking way. But wait! Doesn't a city called Tyre exist near the same coastal site in Lebanon today? Doesn't this show that the claim "you shall never be rebuilt" (implied in the passage's broader context, e.g. v.14, 21) wasn't fulfilled. The powerful mainland city-state of Tyre rebuilt where it was, and it never regained the power that it had. Yes, there is a modern city called Tyre, as there are many cities called "Sale" in different states. Yet Tyre does not occupy the same location and its stature does not equate to the previous Tyre. It would be like comparing Salem Massachusetts to Salem Virginia. The original Jamestown settlement, differed from the Jamestown of the 17th century, the original was destroyed, relocated, and rebuilt, but you would not say they are the same place.

Others have argued that since Tyre was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar that means the prophecy wasn't fulfilled. However, the text did not make the claim that it would be destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar.

Memphis and Egypt's Idols

"I will destroy the idols and put an end to the images in Memphis." (Ezekiel 30:13)

Memphis (Noph) was one of ancient Egypt's great religious and political capitals, dense with temples and idols. Ezekiel's prophecy, alongside similar judgment oracles against Egypt (Isaiah 19), anticipated the long-term decline of Egypt's political power and religious centers — the once-great city of Memphis is today largely ruins, its temples and monuments gone or relocated to museums, its former grandeur and imperial religious significance permanently ended, unlike other ancient capitals that retained continuous prominence.

Jesus's Death and Resurrection

"He was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities... although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth... yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him." (Isaiah 53:5, 9-10, condensed)

"They have pierced my hands and feet... they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots." (Psalm 22:16, 18)

"For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption." (Psalm 16:10)

Isaiah 53 describes a suffering servant figure who bears others' guilt, is executed alongside criminals, and yet is vindicated afterward, written centuries before crucifixion existed as a Roman practice; Psalm 22 describes specific execution details (pierced hands and feet, division of garments by lot, mockery matching Matthew 27:39-43) centuries before crucifixion was invented as a method of execution; Psalm 16 anticipates bodily resurrection rather than ordinary decay, a text Peter explicitly applies to Christ's resurrection in his Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:25-31). Skeptics raise the objection that early Christian authors may have shaped their narrative details to match known prophetic texts but this doesn't account for the specific execution details in Psalm 22 (written roughly 1,000 years before Christ, centuries before crucifixion existed) or for the multiple, independent lines of Isaiah 53 tradition already circulating in intertestamental Jewish messianic expectation prior to Jesus's life.

IX. Unity Amid Diversity

The Bible was written over roughly 1,500 years, by more than 40 authors, across three continents, in three original languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek), spanning genres from law and poetry to history, prophecy, and letters — yet it maintains a single, coherent redemptive narrative arc: creation, the fall, God's covenant promises, redemption through Israel and ultimately through Christ, and the promise of final restoration. This coherence across such radically different authors, eras, and circumstances, without any single human editorial hand overseeing the whole project, is itself an argument many find compelling for the Bible's claim to a single divine author working through many human ones.

X. The Bible's Transformative Power

Beyond the historical and textual case, Scripture's ongoing, transformative effect across radically different eras, cultures, and individual lives — described in Scripture itself as "living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword" (Hebrews 4:12). It's message continues to reshape individuals and cultures across two millennia and virtually every culture on earth in a way few other ancient texts have.

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