
Dealing With Objections: Can I Trust the Bible?

“And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’” -Matthew 28:18-20

Group Discussion: As you think back on your pre-Christian or even Christian life, what concerns have you had regarding whether the Bible is completely trustworthy?

Many non-Christians, and a number of Christians for that matter, struggle to trust the reliability of the Bible. They usually see it as a collection of fictional stories, or they see it as a mix between historical truth and fiction. You will know when you encounter one of these individuals, because they will often point to “Errors” and “Contradictions” in the Bible as reasons why they cannot trust in Jesus. So, how can we respond with grace and truth so that this does not become a stumbling block to believing in the gospel?

Our first step is to discern why this particular individual does not trust the Bible. This can be done by simply asking, “Why is it that you have a hard time believing/trusting what the Bible says?” People discount God’s Word for a variety of reasons: errors, contradictions, miracles, lack of original manuscripts, etc. Once we know where the doubt stems from, we are then able to speak truth to that doubt.

Tip: As you share the gospel more and more, you will run into people who use the unreliability of the Bible as an excuse for not believing in Jesus, when in reality there is a deeper reason (“I do not want to die to myself”, “I do not believe God is good because of...”, etc.). Therefore, before you go to the extent of showing the reliability of the Bible, it may be helpful to ask a follow up question of, “If I were to show you that we can trust what the Bible says, would you then put your faith in Jesus?” If they answer, “No,” then find out what the real reason is.

Most of the answers you will receive from non-Christians will fall into two categories: misunderstandings on what is meant by inerrancy and the actual trustworthiness of what is recorded. We will begin with the former and finish with the latter.

Christians affirm that the Bible is the inspired and inerrant Word of God, but many non-Christians take that to mean something that Christians do not intend. Wayne Grudem provides this helpful definition on inerrancy:

“The Bible, when correctly interpreted in light of the level to which culture and the means of communication had developed at the time it was written, and in view of the purposes for which it was given, is fully truthful in all that it affirms.” –Wayne Grudem

Now that statement has a lot of qualifications, but here is why:

1. Sometimes the Bible uses ordinary language to describe natural phenomena (sun rises) or to give approximation to numbers (100,000 soldiers vs. 99,597), but the writers are inerrant as far as they aim to be precise
2. Sometimes the Bible uses loose or free quotations, which are still allowed under inerrancy so long as what is actually reported is not false
3. Sometimes the Bible uses rough grammar, but so long as the statement itself is true, the grammar does not affect inerrancy
4. Sometimes the Bible reports false statements or lies made by humans, but so long as what is reported is true, this does not affect inerrancy

Most of the so-called “errors” in the Bible can be explained through a clearer definition on what is meant by inerrancy. However, that still leaves non-Christians with the potential claim that there are contradictions in God’s Word, so how do we respond to those. We can either take one of two routes. The first involves asking them to show you specific instances in the Bible where they feel a contradiction exists, and then through careful study, explaining what each of those passages mean.

The second involves giving a summary statement such as, “I would be happy to look at specific examples with you if you have them, but most contradictions can be explained by taking into account a different intended audience, or viewing the same event from a different perspective. For example, Matthew says that Judas died by hanging himself and Luke says Judas died by falling headlong and having his insides come out. So which is it?

In reality, it’s simply two different perspectives on the same event. Judas probably hung himself, eventually the rope snapped, he fell headlong, and his insides came out. It’s not different than someone having a heart attack in the middle of the night. Some would say they passed away due to a heart attack, and someone else would say they passed away in their sleep.

In summary, so-called errors and contradictions can often be easily explained away to clarify any misunderstandings on inerrancy.

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. How confident do you currently feel in regards to your ability to explain apparent contradiction to a non-believer? What are some resources you can use to help explain what the passage truly means? |
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The greater challenge for us is to show that the Bible is in fact reliable or trustworthy. This is where we attempt to construct a grand overall case for trusting the Bible through several individual points.

First, **there is internal evidence from the Bible affirming that it is God's Word.** Jesus (Luke 24:44), Paul (1 Thess. 2:13, 2 Tim. 3:14-16), and Peter (2 Peter 1:16-20) together affirmed that the Old Testament, the Gospels, and the Epistles are all God's Word. And since God cannot lie (Heb. 6:18), that affirms that all of these words from these authors are inspired, true, and therefore reliable. Furthermore, the confirmation of prophecies that were made several hundred years earlier also gives internal evidence that the Bible is reliable.

Secondly, **there is external evidence from archaeological discoveries, historical research, reality, and non-Christian writers that affirm what the Bible teaches.** There are several archaeological discoveries that confirm the cities the events mentioned in the Bible, as well as the Flood in Genesis. There are historical documents that affirm the reigns of kings, emperors, and other political leaders mentioned in the Bible, as well as the various wars that ensued. As for reality, the truths taught in the Bible tend to best explain the way the world works. Sin often leads to paths of more destruction. We do discover it to be true that it is more blessed to give than to receive. God does answer our prayers according to His will. Christians often do have more hope in the midst of suffering.

Finally, in regards to non-Christian writers, there are several of these historians who confirm events mentioned in the Bible, particularly the Gospels. These include Julius Africanus, Pliny, Suetonias, Tacitus, and Josephus. Josephus was a Jewish historian of whom it was never recorded that he became a follower of Jesus. Nevertheless, he wrote this:

“About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one ought to call him a man. For he was one who wrought surprising feats and was a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. He was the Messiah. When Pilate upon hearing him accused by men of the highest standing amongst us, had condemned him to be crucified, those who had in the first place come to love him did not give up their affection for him. ON the third day he appeared to them restored to life, for the prophets of God had prophesied these and countless other marvelous things about him. And the tribe of the Christians, so called after him, has still to this day not disappeared.”

Thirdly, **there are more than 5,700 ancient Greek manuscripts containing all or parts of the New Testament, significantly more than any other historical document.** Even though we do not have the original manuscripts, we do have copies of these texts within 10-30 years of the events taking place. This, too, is significantly better than other historical documents such as Homer (500 years of separation), Caesar (1,000 years), and Plato (1,250 years), yet rarely do we see anyone questioning the reliability of those copies.

Fourthly, **99% of these copies are in agreement with one another.** Most differences are related to punctuation, spelling, or flipping the order of words (Christ Jesus vs. Jesus Christ). None of these disagreements affect the major doctrines of Christianity.

Fifthly, **there is strong evidence that confirms the resurrection of Jesus as a reliable fact.** This evidence includes the fact that the tomb was empty, the Roman guards would have lost their lives if the body was stolen, Jesus appeared to more than 500 eyewitnesses many of whom died for testifying to his life and resurrection, the apostles lives were changed, women were the first recorded eyewitnesses at a time when an author “making up” a story would have used men to validate the story, Jewish believers changed the long-held Sabbath day from Saturday to Sunday, and a few non-Christian historians verified facts surrounding the resurrection.

Finally, **the work of the Holy Spirit to change lives affirms what is taught in the Bible.** The aim of the Bible is that people would read it, believe it, and be saved and changed as they put their trust in Jesus. That is exactly what we see over and over for those who believe these words to be true.

2. Which of the above points is most convincing for you that the Bible is trustworthy in all that it says?

Go Make Disciples

Think back to any other objections to the reliability of the Bible that you have heard in the past. If you do not already have a response to these objections, do some research or seek out a believer who can help you prepare a truthful and gracious response to them.

Praying This Week

- Thank God for giving us His Word.
- Ask God to work in us to believe even more that His Word is true.
- Ask the Spirit to give us opportunities to help non-Christians trust that the Bible is true.