

# Is the Bible Reliable Enough to be Believed? Ray Weedon, RTB Knoxville, TN Chapter

## Introduction

God in His great grace has revealed truth to us. Scripture is objectively true in all that it affirms. Our faith is not a “blind leap” as many say and believe. The objective evidences of Scripture’s authenticity and reliability are:

### 1. The Textual Evidence

There is a common cultural belief that throughout the years, translation errors have accumulated to such an extent that what we have now for our translations of Scripture have little resemblance to the “Original Autographs.”

The Original Autographs are what were inspired by God. None of them are available today. Is that a problem for the truthfulness of our current translations of Scripture?

The accuracy of a modern text to its original autograph is evaluated for all writings based on several key tests of the text. Two of these principle tests are:

- A. The time gap between the original autograph and the earliest available manuscript.
  - B. The number of early manuscripts that reflect a high degree of consistency in textual content.
- A. How does Scripture compare to other ancient documents that are routinely used by scholars to establish historical narratives as fact regarding the time gap between the original autographs and the earliest available manuscript?

Author	Date Written	Earliest Copy	Time Gap	Number of Copies
Caesar, Roman emperor	1 <sup>st</sup> Century BC	900 AD	1000 yr	10
Livy, Roman historian	1 <sup>st</sup> Century BC	4th Century	400 yr	20
Tacitus, Roman historian	≈ 100 AD	1100 AD	1000 yr	20
Thucydides, Greek historian	5 <sup>th</sup> Century BC	900 AD	1400 yr	8
Herodotus, Greek historian	5 <sup>th</sup> Century BC	900 AD	1400 yr	8
Demosthenes, Athenian orator/statesman	4 <sup>th</sup> Century BC	1100 AD	1500 yr	200
Homer, Greek poet	9 <sup>th</sup> Century BC	None	Unknown	643
New Testament	50 – 100 AD	130 - 150 AD	30 to <100 yr	> 5,600 Greek >10,000 Latin
Quotations from the Church Fathers	95 – 450 AD	150 AD	50 – 350 yr	>1,000,000

Dating of the original sources of NT manuscripts:

- Most NT autographs date to within 20 to 32 years of Jesus death and resurrection.
  - The exceptions are the writings of John which occurred between 50 to 60 years after the resurrection of Jesus. (Remember that John was charged with caring for Mary, the mother of Jesus from the cross. See John 19:25-27)
- B. Textual variants are the differences between various texts of New Testament manuscripts. Critics will say that these ancient texts are filled with close to a million textual variants, so how could we possibly know what the “original autographs” actually said?

Let’s consider a possible textual variant in Ephesians 1:7 which reads “***In him** we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace.*” (ESV)

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Let's think about this graphically. Suppose that we have 48 manuscripts of this section of the New Testament. In this verse alone, we find 5 textual variants. This is a big problem! In these 48 manuscripts, we see:

*In him; In Jesus; In him; In him; In him;  
In him; In him; In him; In him; In the Lord; In him; In him; In him; In him; In him; In hm; In him;  
In him; In him; In him; In him; In him; In him; In him; In Christ; In him; In him; In him; In him;  
In him; In Jesus Christ; In him; In him;*

Most textual variants are similar to these examples:

- The variants do not change the intent of the passage.
- The evidence is overwhelming that the “original autograph” almost certainly was written with “In him” as the correct text.
- Since the original Greek manuscripts were written in all capitals, it is reasonable to suggest that the term “In him” could have been misinterpreted and therefore the copyist of these four manuscripts wanted to clarify who was being written about and changed it for clarity.

### 2. The Historical Evidence

Writings by historians during and immediately after a period of history in question serve as evidence regarding the accuracy of our knowledge of the period in question. There are a number of historical accounts that address Jesus ministry and the 1<sup>st</sup> century growth of the Church that are rarely mentioned by Bible critics and our cultural spokesmen in discussing the 1<sup>st</sup> century of the Church.

Confirmation of NT facts with ancient secular (non-Christian) historical sources:

- Jewish historian Josephus (37-100 AD): Jesus lived and ministered; he was crucified, and some say he was resurrected.
- Roman historian Tacitus (55-116 AD): Torture and crucifixion of Christ and his followers.
- Greek Satirist Lucian (170 AD): Crucifixion of Christ and his followers.
- Roman historian Suetonius (≈ 120 AD): Expulsion of Christians from Rome in 49 AD (Acts 18:2)
- Pliny the Younger (62 -112 AD) Execution of Christians in Bithynia in 112 AD
- Samaritan historian Thallus (≈ 52 AD): Darkness fell over the land when Christ was crucified.
- Phlegon of Tralles (2<sup>nd</sup> century AD): Darkness over the land when Christ was crucified.
- Letter of Mara Bar-Serapion (73 AD): Compares Jesus to Socrates and Pythagoras.
- Jewish Talmud commentary (70 – 200 AD): Yeshu was hanged on eve of Passover.

Many essential facts of Jesus life and the early church are recorded in unbiased writings of these historical authors.

### 3. The Archeological Evidence

There are many archeological documents of apparently low importance that actually contribute substantially to the authentication of the Scriptures. These are business, legal, and personal documents that mention facts mentioned in Scripture.

- **Business documents** such as 1) business contracts; 2) shipping manifests; 3) sales and tax records; 4) loans and debts; etc.
- **Legal documents** such as 1) court records of evidence and judgments; 2) naming of witnesses and defendants; 3) wills and inheritance records; 4) property deeds and transfers; etc.
- **Personal documents** such as 1) letters; 2) diaries; 3) personal records and notes; 4) genealogies; etc.



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for the entire age of the universe, then the likelihood of life being formed by natural processes would be 1 in  $10^{100,000,000,000}$  which means there is no chance at all.

There are currently no scientifically viable theories regarding the origin of life in the scientific community.

### 5. The Transformative Evidence

Throughout the history of the Church there is overwhelming anecdotal evidence that men's lives are transformed by the Christ of Scriptures in ways that are beyond normal or reasonable psychological explanations. The biographies of Christian believers throughout history provide a powerful apologetic. These transformations are beyond human ability to explain.

### Conclusion

Our faith is a testable objective faith. God does not require "blind faith," but has given us objective evidence for our faith.

### Related Quotes

"...the laws of physics...seem themselves to be the product of exceedingly ingenious design. There is for me powerful evidence that there is something going on behind it all. It seems as though somebody has fine tuned nature's numbers to make the Universe. The impression of design is overwhelming."

Paul Davies, Atheist/Agnostic Astronomer

"The medieval theologian who gazed at the night sky through the eyes of Aristotle and saw angels moving the spheres in harmony has become the modern cosmologist who gazes at the same sky through the eyes of Einstein and sees the hand of God not in angels but in the constants of nature. - - When confronted with the order and beauty of the universe and the strange coincidences of nature, it's very tempting to take the leap of faith from science into religion. I am sure many physicists want to. I only wish they would admit it."

Tony Rothman, Theoretical Physicist

"If we need an atheist for a debate, I go to the philosophy department. The physics department isn't much use."

Robert Griffiths, Mathematical Physicist