

## Can We Trust the Bible?

By Al Felder

*“Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.” (Matthew 24:35)*

When you read the Bible it becomes clear that it teaches God’s word will endure forever. Jesus, as well as the inspired writers, made statements that implied God will preserve His word. He has caused it to be written down and passed on for generations so that all mankind may read it. Bible critics claim that this is not the case. They say that the Bible has been changed over the years and lost its original meaning. For just a little while we would like to examine this claim and ask, “Can we trust the Bible?”

Last year *Newsweek* ran a cover story criticizing the accuracy of the Bible. The article was titled, “The Bible: So Misunderstood It’s a Sin” by Kurt Eichenwald. In this article the author stated that without the original manuscripts, all we have are translations filled with errors. *“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.”*<sup>1</sup> Mr. Eichenwald believes that what we have today is not the same as the originals.

As we begin to consider this attack against the Bible I believe that there is an important point that we should consider regarding how the Bible was written.

*“<sup>1</sup>And it came to pass in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, that this word came unto Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, <sup>2</sup>Take thee a roll of a book, and write therein all the words that I have spoken unto thee against Israel, and against Judah, and against all the nations, from the day I spake unto thee, from the days of Josiah, even unto this day. <sup>3</sup>It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the evil which I purpose to do unto them; that they may return every man from his evil way; that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin. <sup>4</sup>Then Jeremiah called Baruch the son of Neriah: and Baruch wrote from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the Lord, which he had spoken unto him, upon a roll of a book.” (Jeremiah 36:1-4)*

In this instance we find that the inspired author dictated to a scribe who in turn wrote down the words that were spoken. We find, therefore, that there were occasions in which scribes were used to write down the word of God. Thus, we find an example in the Bible of the scriptures being written by an uninspired scribe. I see no difference in an uninspired scribe copying the written word of an inspired author or writing down the inspired word directly from the inspired author.

---

<sup>1</sup> Euchenwald, Kurt. 2014. The Bible: So Misunderstood It's a Sin. *Newsweek*. December, 2014.

If you continue to read this account there is another important point to consider. *“<sup>22</sup>Now the king sat in the winterhouse in the ninth month: and there was a fire on the hearth burning before him. <sup>23</sup>And it came to pass, that when Jehudi had read three or four leaves, he cut it with the penknife, and cast it into the fire that was on the hearth, until all the roll was consumed in the fire that was on the hearth.”* (Jeremiah 36:22, 23) The King destroyed the original manuscript by cutting it up and burning it in the fire. After this, God caused another copy to be made. Thus, we find in scripture God causing His word to be preserved. These are all things that Mr. Eichenwald and other critics deny are possible.

Mr. Eichenwald, as well as other Bible critics, has a very common misconception. They believe that the Bible was written in one language, translated to another language, and so on until it was finally translated into the English language. According to this line of thinking, the Bible that we have today has been corrupted so much that it is nothing like the original. We will notice some facts, however, that prove this is not the case.

When it comes to the Old Testament, we can read what Jesus and the Apostles had to say about it. *“And said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.”* (Luke 24:44) The Law is the first five books of the Old Testament (Genesis – Deuteronomy). The Prophets consist of (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Minor Prophets). The psalms, or writings, contained (Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Esther, Ecclesiastes, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles). Jesus referred to the entire Old Testament scriptures.

God inspired men of old to write these books over a 1,000 year period. He began with Moses around 1450 B.C. and concluded with Malachi around B.C. 420. It is recorded that Ezra collected all of the inspired books around 400 B.C. and had them copied by scribes.<sup>2</sup>

The Jewish historian Josephus (A.D. 37-100) made reference to this collection of inspired books. *“For we have not an innumerable multitude of books among us, disagreeing from and contradicting one another as the Greeks have, but only twenty-two books, which contain the records of all the past times; which are justly believed to be divine.”<sup>3</sup>* The twenty-two books referred to are the exact same as our 39 today. The reason for the difference in number is due to the fact that many books, such as Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles, were counted as one instead of two.

The scribes were a special group of priests who were charged with making new copies of the scriptures as the older copies wore out. They had a very meticulous process that they went

---

<sup>2</sup> Hodge, Ken Ham and Bodie. 2012. *How Do We Know the Bible is True?* Green Forest, AR : Master Books, 2012. pp. 242, 243.

<sup>3</sup> —. 2012. *How Do We Know the Bible is True?* Green Forest, AR : Master Books, 2012. p. 242.

through when it came to copying the scriptures. The number of words were counted and other procedures were followed to ensure that the text had been copied accurately. In fact, such great care was taken during this process that the scribes believed that a newer copy was more accurate than an older copy. This is the exact opposite of what we would think today. After the copy was made the older text was placed in a clay jar and buried. The scribes did not believe that they had the right to destroy the word of God.

Around 200 B.C. the Pharaoh of Egypt requested that the Old Testament be translated into Greek. He desired a copy for the famed Library of Alexandria. He invited 72 scribes from Israel to undertake this work and it took them 70 days. The translation became known as the Septuagint, a word that means 70 in the Greek language. This was the Bible of the early Church and many New Testament authors, including Jesus, quoted from it.

The earliest complete copy of the Old Testament is the Massoretic Text A.D. 900. It was completed by Jewish scribes called the Massorettes. In 1947 a shepherd boy discovered a cave near the Dead Sea while looking for a lost goat. The cave contained copies of Old Testament books which dated back to 100 B.C. When these books were compared to the Massoretic Text they confirmed the careful copying of the Jewish scribes for over 1,000 years.

When it comes to the New Testament, there are many critics who claim that the gospels and epistles were written long after the first century. However, there is some internal evidence from the Bible that leads many Biblical scholars to believe that the gospels and epistles were written prior to A.D. 70.

First of all, the scriptures are silent regarding the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70. *“And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? Verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.”* (Matthew 24:2) Jesus prophesied about the destruction of Jerusalem, but the New Testament books make reference to the Temple and other structures that were still standing when they were written. The book of Acts, which is a history of the early church, makes no mention of such an event happening. The reason is because these books were written prior to this event.

Second, Paul quoted the Gospel of Luke. *“For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, the laborer is worthy of his reward.”* (1 Timothy 5:18) The last part of the verse is a quote from Luke 10:7, *“And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give: for the laborer is worthy of his hire.”* This is the only place in the Bible where this statement is found. Paul quotes it and refers to it as scripture letting us know that the Gospel of Luke was being circulated by this time.

In regards to the New Testament, the earliest complete copies of the Greek manuscripts are within 300-400 years of the originals (Codex Sinaiticus – Mt. Sinai, Codex Alexandrinus – Alexandria in Egypt, Codex Vaticanus – Rome). There are many copies of single books and fragments that date much earlier. Within the Dead Sea Scrolls scholars have identified

fragments from Mark, Acts, Romans, 1 Timothy, 2 Peter, and James.<sup>4</sup> All of these manuscripts date no later than A.D. 68. Altogether there are around 5,700 Greek manuscripts anywhere from a few years to 400 years of the originals.

There are scholars who have devoted their entire life to studying these manuscripts. They follow a process called textual criticism. Each word of every manuscript of Old and New Testament is meticulously compared. Conflicting readings are cataloged and analyzed. Then, a set of procedures are applied to each variation in order to establish which reading is correct.

Out of all the Greek manuscripts that exist (5,700), there is a 99.5% agreement. When every letter of every word is examined in each manuscript and they are all placed together, they only vary from one another ½ of a percent. What is even more amazing is that when you consider this ½%, you will find that it consists of minor word alterations. For example, in 1 John 1:4 one text has “our joy” while the rest have “your joy”.<sup>5</sup> The difference in the Greek is just as close as it is in the English. There are no variations within the Greek manuscripts that affect any doctrine of the faith.

A true translation of the Bible today does not come from a translation of a translation. Instead, a translation is made into the English language from the original Greek using the available manuscripts. There are, however, some things we need to consider when choosing a version of the Bible. Beware of translations that are the work of one person or one religious group. The reason for this caution is bias that may be inserted into the translation due to personal beliefs. The best translations are produced by a large group of scholars from different backgrounds who check each other’s work to prevent bias. Also, beware versions that do not go back to the original language but simply paraphrase another translation. Some of the best translations are King James, New King James, American Standard, and New American Standard.

Another issue that I would like to deal with is the idea that not all of the inspired books are included in the Bible. There are critics who believe that there are inspired Old and New Testament books that should be included in the Bible. For the Old Testament you have the Apocrypha and for the New Testament you have the Gnostic Gospels.

The Apocrypha consists of 15 books that were written after Malachi and before the birth of Jesus. These books are never quoted or referred to by Jesus or any of the inspired writers. The Jews did not view these books as being inspired. In fact, the books themselves acknowledge the fact that during this time period there was no prophet in the land (1 Maccabees 9:27). The books also contain false teachings such as praying for the dead (2 Maccabees 12:46). They were not viewed as scripture until the Roman Catholic’s placed them in their Bibles in 1546 after the Council of Trent.

---

<sup>4</sup> Edwards, Brian H. 2007. *Why 27?* Webster, NY : Evangelical Press, 2007. p. 191.

<sup>5</sup> —. 2007. *Why 27?* Webster, NY : Evangelical Press, 2007. p. 174.

The Gnostic Gospels are nothing new. Gnosticism is a heresy that existed before the close of the first century. The word Gnosis is Greek for knowledge. They took this name because they believed in personal enlightenment beyond what the actual scriptures teach. The Gnostics rejected the Old Testament because they believed that it as well as the physical world were the creation of an evil god who opposed the spiritual world. Gnostics also believe that Jesus did not really die on the cross. They believe that Simon of Cyrene took his place.

There are many warnings in the New Testament about such writings. *“That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand.”* (2 Thessalonians 2:2) In this verse Paul warns his readers about false writings that bear his or any other Apostle’s name.

The Gnostics were interested in the obscure and trying to fill in the gaps. The Gospel of Thomas deals with the infancy of Jesus. However, it contains historical inaccuracies and it provides no valuable information. In the fourth century someone wrote the Epistle to the Laodiceans. *“And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.”* (Colossians 4:16) This was an attempt to fill this gap.

The 27 books that make up the New Testament were not chosen by men. These books carried their own authority. *“For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.”* (1 Thessalonians 2:13) These were the books that had apostolic approval and were written by an Apostle or a close associate of an apostle (Mark, Luke, James, Jude).

In closing, we have the completed word of God today. *“Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.”* (Jude 3) The original language reads the faith which was once and for all delivered. In other words, God has said all that He is going to say. The Bible is complete and we are expected to abide by its teachings.