

Authenticity of the Bible

BIBLE BASICS

Myth vs. Reality

For centuries, the Bible has stood as the cornerstone of faith, worship, and moral guidance for billions. Yet, in an age dominated by skepticism and inquiry, questions arise: Can this ancient text, compiled over millennia, truly be trusted? How do we know it has not been altered, misinterpreted, or diluted over time? Is the Bible, as it claims, the inspired Word of God, or is it merely a human artifact?

The Bible is no stranger to controversy. For centuries, it has been revered as the Word of God, yet simultaneously criticized, misunderstood, and attacked. Some dismiss it as a relic of ancient superstition, others accuse it of being manipulated for political gain, and still others declare it incompatible with modern science and morality. These critiques are often fueled by myths—misconceptions that distort the Bible's true nature and purpose. Some of these myths are:

- The texts are fictional and non-factual.
- There are textual inconsistencies.
- There are textual myths.
- It is non-historically accurate.
- There are textual misinterpretations.

The Bible has consistently been attacked most especially the last 200 years. Many objections, many Allegations of Contradictions, Claims of Unreliability, or that even Dismissal as Mythology. Even within other Christian circles, there have been debates about the Bible's interpretation. For instance, the Catholic Church has acknowledged that certain elements within the Book of Genesis, such as the creation story, may contain mythological aspects. This position has further fueled discussions about the Bible's literal versus symbolic meaning.

These challenges to the Bible's authority and authenticity have sparked many ongoing debates among theologians, scholars, and believers. The church today continues to defend the Bible's inerrancy and historical accuracy.

The Weight of Responsibility

The servant is synonymous with sacrifice. Just as Christ gave Himself fully for the sake of humanity, so too must the servant be willing to give of themselves. This sacrifice is not limited to time, though it certainly includes it. A true servant sacrifices comfort, leisure, and even personal preferences to be with God, to grow in knowledge, and to serve His people.

To be a servant is to be a student of God's Word, constantly learning and growing, ready to defend the faith against attacks and to nourish others with the truth. It is to know the spiritual battles that rage in

the hearts of those we serve and to prepare for these battles through prayer, study, and a life of purity. The most dangerous servant is the one who feels no responsibility—the one who is indifferent to the needs of their class, unconcerned with their own spiritual growth, and careless about how their life outside of church reflects Christ. Such behavior is not only sad but spiritually perilous, for it leaves the servant and those they serve vulnerable.

The sense of responsibility is not optional for a servant; it is foundational. A servant who truly feels responsible for their role will naturally desire to make a difference. They will strive to bring others to Christ, not as a duty but as a calling driven by love. To serve is not to punch a spiritual timecard; it is to remain “checked in” until the day we are “checked out” and reunited with God in heaven.

St. Paul exemplifies this sense of responsibility. This one man, through his tireless efforts, his steadfast faith, and his unwavering love, changed not just individuals but entire nations. He bore his responsibility with honesty and courage, enduring hardships and persecutions, yet never wavering in his mission. Paul’s life is a testament to what God can accomplish through one servant who takes their calling seriously.

We, too, are called to bear this responsibility with the same honesty and fervor. We must be ready—ready to face attacks, ready to defend the faith, and ready to serve others in love. Love, after all, is the cornerstone of our defense. Without love, even the most eloquent arguments fall flat, for without God—who is love—we cannot hope to bring others closer to Him.

Ready to give a Defense

The attacks on the Bible, whether through myths or outright rejection, place a solemn responsibility on the shoulders of every Christian servant. The responsibility of the servant extends beyond teaching or leading a class. As stewards of God’s Word, we are called not only to believe in its truth but to defend it with wisdom, grace, and conviction. The attacks on faith are not abstract concepts; they are real, persistent, and diverse. As Christians, and especially as servants, we must be aware of these attacks:

- What are the challenges everyone hears in the world today?
- What are the specific doubts and questions young people face?
- What are the cultural and philosophical arguments that undermine faith?

It is not enough to dismiss these questions or to rely on simple, surface-level logic. The servant must seek educated, well-reasoned answers rooted in Scripture and the teachings of the Church. This requires humility, effort, and a willingness to engage with challenging ideas. The apostle Peter exhorts us: “Always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear” (1 Peter 3:15).

This readiness is not optional—it is a command. In a world filled with skepticism, misunderstanding, and spiritual confusion, every servant must be prepared to stand firm, articulating the truth of Scripture with clarity and compassion.

Eyewitness Accounts

The accounts in scripture are not a myth, they are a reality. The authenticity and credibility of the Bible are deeply rooted in the direct testimonies of its authors. The New Testament, in particular, provides compelling eyewitness accounts from those who encountered, followed, and learned directly from Jesus Christ. These authors did not write based on hearsay or myths; they documented what they saw, heard, and experienced firsthand, often at great personal cost. Their writings reflect their unwavering conviction in the truth they witnessed, a truth that transformed their lives and the world around them.

St. John the Apostle begins his first epistle with a powerful affirmation of the reality of Jesus Christ's life and ministry:

"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life—the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full" (1 John 1:1–4).

St. John emphasizes that their faith was not based on abstract ideas but on tangible realities: they saw Jesus with their own eyes, heard Him speak, and even touched Him. This eyewitness testimony is not just a personal experience but a declaration to others so that they, too, may believe and share in the eternal joy and fellowship with God.

Similarly, St. Luke underscores the importance of eyewitness accounts in his Gospel:

"Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed" (Luke 1:1–4).

St. Luke's purpose is clear: to provide an accurate, well-researched, and orderly account based on firsthand witnesses. St. Peter, too, refutes the idea that the apostles followed fabricated tales or myths: *"For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty" (2 Peter 1:16).*

Why Eyewitness Testimony Matters

In a world filled with competing claims to truth, the Bible stands apart as a historical record based on firsthand accounts. This is a crucial distinction from many other religious and philosophical systems, where truth is often asserted without the backing of direct evidence. The Christian faith is unique in that it rests on God revealing Himself to humanity in a tangible, observable way, with witnesses who documented their experiences for future generations.

Consider this analogy: if hundreds of people described the sky as green and wrote books asserting it, their collective belief would not make the claim true. Truth is not determined by consensus but by

reality. The authors of the Bible did not write based on subjective beliefs; they wrote because they encountered the Truth in Jesus Christ. It is because this Truth is real that we believe, not the other way around.

The credibility of the eyewitness accounts in the Bible is further underscored by their alignment with historical and archaeological evidence. When we trust textbooks, history books, or sociology reports, we do so because they are based on research, firsthand sources, and verifiable facts. The Bible deserves the same level of trust, if not more, because its foundation lies in the testimonies of those who lived the events it describes and were willing to die for the truth they proclaimed.

The Bible constantly attacked

In addressing the authenticity and divine origin of the Bible, numerous critics have raised objections throughout history, challenging its integrity, reliability, and truthfulness. These attacks often arise from various ideological, philosophical, or religious perspectives and have been formulated in different forms. The table below presents some of the most common criticisms leveled against the Bible, highlighting the nature of the challenge along with specific quotes from a variety of figures who have voiced these objections.

These critiques touch on several key areas: claims that the Bible's narratives are borrowed from earlier pagan myths, assertions of its historical and literary unreliability, accusations of human corruption and revision, and criticisms of its theological concepts. Understanding these attacks is crucial for those who seek to defend the faith, as it equips them to respond effectively with knowledge and reasoned arguments.

Type of Attack	Description	Quote
Pagan Myth Borrowing	Claims that the Bible's narratives are plagiarized from earlier pagan myths.	"The Bible is not 'the word of God,' but a steal from pagan sources. Its Eden, including Adam and Eve, were taken from Babylonian accounts; its Flood and Deluge is but an epitome of some four hundred flood accounts." – Lloyd M. Graham
Poor and Literary Historical Quality	Asserts that the Bible is unreliable, superstitious, and poorly written.	"We find collected in this book [The Bible] the superstitious beliefs of the ancient inhabitants of Palestine...historical chronicles as dry as they are unreliable and miscellaneous poems...frequently marked by coarseness." – Max Nordau
Human Origin and Corruption	Argues that the Bible is a human invention that has evolved through translations and revisions.	"The Bible is a product of man...It has evolved through countless translations, additions, and revisions. History has never had a definitive version of the book." – <i>The Da Vinci Code</i> (p. 231)

Primitive Theology	Critiques the central tenets of the Bible, such as the cross, as outdated or barbaric concepts.	“The view of the cross as the sacrifice for the sins of the world is a barbarian idea based on primitive concepts of God and must be dismissed.” – Bishop John Spong
Islamic Corruption Claim	States that the Bible has been corrupted and altered from its original divine form.	“The books now circulated among Christians as the Old and New Testament are not, in their present state, those to which the Koran refers, for they have become corrupted.” – <i>The Missionary Review of the World</i> (Volume 37, Part 2)
Flood Narrative as Myth	Suggests that the biblical flood story is just one of many cultural myths about a deluge, lacking uniqueness.	“In 95 percent of the more than two hundred flood legends, the flood was worldwide; in 88 percent, a certain family was favored; in 70 percent, survival was by means of a boat.” – James Perloff

The Evidence of Age – The Historical Reliability of the Bible’s Manuscripts [Old Testament]

One of the most frequent criticisms leveled against the Bible is that its content has been corrupted or altered over time, casting doubt on its authenticity. A key argument in this critique revolves around the idea that the Bible is too old to be considered reliable. Critics suggest that through the ages, the text could have been distorted beyond recognition. However, a closer examination of the age and preservation of biblical manuscripts reveals compelling evidence that affirms the Bible’s reliability as a historical document.

There are not nearly as many Old Testament manuscripts that still exist as we have today for the New Testament, nor do the ones that exist date very close to the time of the author’s original document. The Old Testament was written sometime between 1500-400 BC. Until recently, with the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the oldest complete Old Testament manuscript was dated about 900 AD. This made a time gap of 1300 years between when the Old Testament was completed (around 400 BC) and the earliest manuscript (around 900 AD).

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947 was a pivotal moment in biblical scholarship. These ancient manuscripts, dating back to approximately 200 BCE to 100 CE, were found in the 1940s and 1950s in a series of caves near the Dead Sea, in what is now the West Bank, near the ancient settlement of Qumran. A young Bedouin shepherd named Muhammad edh-Dhib was tending his flock of goats near the ancient ruins of Qumran. While searching for a lost goat, he stumbled upon a cave in a cliffside, and inside, he found several large clay jars containing rolled-up scrolls. At first, he and his

companions weren't sure of the scrolls' significance, but they eventually brought some of them to a local antiquities dealer.

As the scrolls gained attention, scholars from around the world, especially from institutions such as the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, began examining the texts. In 1952, a group of scholars led by Dr. John C. Trever published the first photographs of the Dead Sea Scrolls. These included some of the more significant manuscripts, such as the Isaiah Scroll, one of the best-preserved and most important scrolls found in Cave 1. The scrolls were soon identified as ancient manuscripts, sparking the interest of scholars, archaeologists, and collectors. In the following months and years, additional caves in the Qumran area were discovered, containing more scrolls and fragments, leading to a much larger and more significant discovery than anyone could have imagined.

The dead sea scrolls include portions of nearly every book of the Old Testament. Remarkably, they were found to closely align with the Hebrew Scriptures we have today. For instance, the Book of Isaiah found in the Dead Sea Scrolls is virtually identical to the version in our modern Masoretic Text, with only minor variations in spelling and word order, which are to be expected in the copying process.

The Dead Sea Scrolls offer proof that the Old Testament texts were transmitted with incredible precision over the centuries. If the Bible had undergone significant alterations or corruptions, the differences between the ancient scrolls and later manuscripts would be substantial, but this is not the case. The consistency of the text underscores the careful preservation and faithful transmission of God's Word across generations.

The Evidence of Age – The Historical Reliability of the Bible's Manuscripts [New Testament]

The age of the New Testament manuscripts is equally impressive. The earliest surviving manuscripts of the New Testament, such as the John Rylands Fragment (P52), date back to the early second century—only a few decades after the original writings. This proximity in time to the original events recorded in the Gospels is crucial, as it allows us to trace the Bible's development with remarkable accuracy.

In contrast, many classical works of antiquity—such as those by Homer, Plato, and Aristotle—exist only in copies that are much more removed from their original versions. The Bible, however, benefits from the wealth of early manuscripts that demonstrate a remarkably short gap between the events and the writings, providing strong evidence of its historical reliability.

Historiography refers to the study of how history is written and the methods used to evaluate historical sources. In the context of the New Testament (NT), historiography provides a framework for evaluating the historical reliability of the texts, their authors, and the events they describe. The criteria of historiography are tools that historians use to assess the authenticity and accuracy of historical writings. These criteria are especially important in evaluating ancient texts, like the New Testament, which are often scrutinized in terms of their historical reliability.

The criteria of historiography are methods used by historians to assess the reliability and authenticity of historical sources. These include:

- **Multiple attestation:** the idea that if an event is confirmed by several independent sources, it is more likely to be true.
- **Early date:** events described closer to the time they occurred are more reliable.
- **Dissimilarity:** if an event or saying is unexpected or out of place for the author's community, it is likely genuine.
- **Contextual credibility:** whether an event fits within its historical and cultural context.
- **Coherence:** whether the account aligns with other known facts.
- **Embarrassment:** if a detail is potentially damaging to the author or group, it is more likely to be authentic.
- **Corroboration:** support from independent sources.

Author	Time Written	Earliest Copy	Time Span	Manuscripts
Caesar	100-44 B.C.	A.D. 900	1000	10
Josephus	A.D. 80	A.D. 950	870	7
Plato (Tetralogies)	A.D. 427-347	A.D. 900	1200	7
Tacitus (Annals)	A.D. 100	A.D. 1000	900	1
Pliny the Younger (History)	A.D. 61-113	A.D. 850	750	1
Sophocles	496-406 B.C.	A.D. 1000	1400	193
Euripides	480-406 B.C.	A.D. 1100	1500	9
Demosthenes	383-322 B.C.	A.D. 1100	1300	200
Aristotle	384-322 B.C.	A.D. 1100	1400	49
New Testament	A.D. 45-100 1	A.D. 125	25-250	5300

The New Testament has been preserved with even greater accuracy. The abundance of early manuscripts—more than 5,000 Greek manuscripts alone—means that scholars can compare different translations and versions to ensure consistency. One of the most significant examples of this consistency is the reliability of the texts from the earliest translations, such as the Latin Vulgate, the Syriac Peshitta, and the Coptic translations. These early versions closely reflect the original Greek New Testament, and their alignment supports the claim that the New Testament text has remained remarkably stable over time.

The reliability of the New Testament manuscripts is also supported by the writings of the early Church fathers. Suppose that the New Testament had been destroyed, and every copy of it lost by the end of the third century (that's 100 years before the Synod of Hippo canonized the New Testament), how much of it could be collected from the writings of the fathers of the second and third centuries? The answer is stunning! All of it except for 11 verses. In contrast to many historical texts, with very early copies, and an abundance of them, while also meeting historiography requirements, the New Testament is the best attested book of antiquity by far!

Bibliographic Evidence - Evidence

Another major critique against the Bible is its alleged inconsistency, given that it was written by over 40 different authors over a span of 1,500 years, in three different languages. Skeptics often argue that

such a vast timeline and range of authors would naturally lead to contradictions and errors. However, a deeper examination of the Bible's internal consistency reveals a striking harmony and coherence that points to its divine origin.

A Unified Message Despite Diverse Authors

The Bible was written across centuries by authors from different backgrounds: kings, fishermen, prophets, scholars, and tentmakers. It was also written in three languages with many literary styles; Hebrew (majority of OT), Aramaic (some of OT) and Greek (NT). Despite their varied professions and the vast temporal gap between them, the Bible presents a unified and consistent message about God's creation, His relationship with humanity, and His redemptive plan through Jesus Christ. This consistency in message across such a diverse group of authors speaks to the Bible's divine inspiration. The diversity of authors alongside the unified message is an argument supporting the authenticity not against it!

Fulfilled Prophecies

One of the most compelling pieces of evidence for the Bible's consistency is the fulfillment of prophecies. Over 300 prophecies in the Old Testament point to events in the life of Jesus Christ, such as His birth, death, and resurrection. The mathematical probability of a single individual fulfilling just eight of these prophecies is staggering. Dr. Peter Stoner, in his book *Science Speaks*, calculated that the chance of any one person fulfilling just eight of the prophecies, based on a variety of variables, is 1 in 10^{17} :

“Let us try to visualize this chance. If you mark one of ten tickets, and place all of the tickets in a hat, and thoroughly stir them, and then ask a blindfolded man to draw one, his chance of getting the right ticket is one in ten. Suppose that we take 1017 silver dollars and lay them on the face of Texas. They will cover all of the state two feet deep. Now mark one of these silver dollars and stir the whole mass thoroughly, all over the state. Blindfold a man and tell him that he can travel as far as he wishes, but he must pick up one silver dollar and say that this is the right one. What chance would he have of getting the right one? Just the same chance that the prophets would have had of writing these eight prophecies and having them all come true in any one man, from their day to the present time, providing they wrote using their own wisdom.”

External Corroboration of Biblical Events

The Bible's internal consistency is also corroborated by external sources. Archaeological discoveries and historical writings support the accuracy of the biblical narrative. The Tel Dan Stele, for instance, contains a reference to the "House of David," affirming the biblical claim that David was a historical figure. Additionally, ancient historians such as Josephus, Suetonius, and Tacitus provide non-biblical testimony to key events in the New Testament, including the existence of Jesus, His crucifixion under Pontius Pilate, and the early Christian movement. The consistency between biblical and secular accounts adds weight to the Bible's historical accuracy.

Source	Discovery or Context	Description
Ernest Sellin and Carl Watzinger	Excavated Jericho between 1907–1909.	Found remains of two walls that they initially suggested supported the biblical account of Jericho's destruction.
Tel Dan Stele	Discovered in 1993 in Tel Dan by Gila Cook under Avraham Biran's team.	A 9th-century BCE inscription detailing that an individual killed Jehoram, the son of Ahab, king of Israel and the king of the house of David, corroborating biblical passages in the Second Book of Kings regarding the lineage of Israelite kings.
Josephus (Titus Flavius Josephus)	First-century Romano-Jewish historian born in Jerusalem.	Wrote about Jesus as a wise man, His works, crucifixion under Pontius Pilate, and resurrection on the third day, corroborating key elements of the Gospel accounts. <i>“There was about that time Jesus a wise man if it be lawful to call him a man for he was a doer of wonderful works a teacher of such man has received the truth with pleasure, he drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles to Him and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principle men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross those that loved him at first did not forsake him. For he appeared to them alive on the third day as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him the historical and the tribe of Christians so named from him are not extinct to this day.”</i>
Suetonius	Roman historian (c. AD 69–122).	Mentions early Christians in <i>Lives of the Twelve Caesars</i> , referencing disturbances caused by "Chrestus," which many scholars interpret as Christ, though brought into question due to a potential textual error.
Cornelius Tacitus	Roman historian and politician (c. AD 56–120). Tacitus is considered to be one of	References Jesus' crucifixion under Pontius Pilate and describes early Christians' persecution under Nero in his <i>Annals</i> (book 15, chapter 44), confirming key Gospel events from a non-Christian perspective.

	the greatest Roman historians.	“Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judæa, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their center and become popular. Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind.- Tacitus on Christ [Annals (written ca. AD 116), book 15, chapter 44.]
Thallus	who’s not a Christian is 1st-century historian, quoted by Julius Africanus, Extant Writings, XVIII in the Anti-Nicene Fathers, vol. VI, 130	Described a "fearful darkness" and earthquakes during Jesus’ crucifixion, which Africanus criticized as inaccurately attributed to a solar eclipse, indirectly corroborating the biblical description of events during the crucifixion. “On the whole world there pressed a most fearful darkness; and the rocks were rent by an earthquake, and many places in Judea and other districts were thrown down in this darkness.” Thallus, in the third book of his History, calls, as appears to be without reason, an eclipse of the sun

Bibliographic Evidence - Translations

The accuracy and consistency of biblical translations over time provide compelling evidence for the reliability of Scripture. Despite centuries of transmission, the Bible’s core teachings and beliefs remain unaffected, with less than 1% of textual variants affecting meaning—and none altering key doctrines. The transmission of biblical texts through translations such as the Septuagint, the Masoretic Text, and the Vulgate demonstrates both the meticulous care of scribes and the enduring preservation of God’s Word.

The Septuagint, meaning "seventy," was translated between the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC and is the earliest known Koine Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. According to tradition, it was produced by 72 scholars—six from each of the twelve tribes of Israel—who worked independently, yet astonishingly

produced identical translations. This consistency was seen as a divine confirmation of the text’s accuracy. The Septuagint not only provided access to the Hebrew Scriptures for the Greek-speaking Jewish diaspora but was also quoted extensively by our Lord Jesus Christ, further affirming its significance.

The Masoretic Text, produced between the 7th and 10th centuries AD, represents the authoritative Hebrew and Aramaic text of the Tanakh for Rabbinic Judaism. The Masoretes, a group of Jewish scholars, were renowned for their meticulous attention to detail, implementing rigorous systems of textual preservation to ensure accuracy. Their work serves as the foundation for most modern translations of the Old Testament.

The Vulgate, translated into Latin by St. Jerome in the 4th century AD, became the official Bible of the Roman Catholic Church. As Latin was the common language of the Western Roman Empire, the Vulgate made Scripture accessible to countless believers for centuries. This translation remains in liturgical use within the Catholic Church today.

Remarkably, the Septuagint, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the Masoretic Text demonstrate an extraordinary level of agreement, despite being separated by centuries and cultural contexts. For example, the Dead Sea Scrolls, which date to as early as the 3rd century BC, align closely with the Masoretic Text and confirm the reliability of the Septuagint. This alignment across manuscripts and translations underscores the divine preservation of Scripture, ensuring that its central message remains intact.

Through these translations, the Bible has transcended languages, cultures, and centuries, continuing to proclaim God’s truth to every generation. Their consistency and integrity testify to the diligent work of those entrusted with preserving the Word of God and to the divine hand guiding its transmission.

Revisiting the Myths

Myth	Claim	Evidence Supporting the Bible
Myth 1: The texts are fictional and non-factual.	Critics argue that biblical stories, characters, and events are entirely fictional and lack any historical basis.	Historical and archaeological evidence, such as the Tel Dan Stele (confirming "House of David"), Josephus' writings, and Jericho excavations.
Myth 2: There are textual inconsistencies.	Critics highlight contradictions between different biblical accounts as evidence of unreliability.	Apparent inconsistencies are often minor and can be explained by varying authors, perspectives, or literary genres, while the core message remains unified.

Myth 3: There are textual myths.	The Bible incorporates myths and legends that critics say lack historical credibility, such as the creation or flood stories.	Stories like Noah's flood align with global flood narratives found in over 200 cultural accounts and convey moral and spiritual truths.
Myth 4: It is non-historically accurate.	Critics claim the Bible inaccurately describes historical events.	Archaeological findings confirm historical details, such as accounts of Egypt, Babylonia, and Persia, and align with biblical descriptions.
Myth 5: There are textual misinterpretations.	Critics argue that historical misinterpretations of the Bible have led to false doctrines or unreliable teachings.	When interpreted in its historical and cultural context, the Bible presents clear and consistent teachings across centuries.
Myth 6: The Bible is a plagiarized work.	Claims that the Bible "stole" from pagan myths, such as Babylonian flood stories or Egyptian customs, and lacks originality.	The Bible provides unique theological depth and a cohesive narrative of salvation history, with differences from pagan myths emphasizing its divine origin.
Myth 7: Translations have corrupted the Bible.	Critics suggest translations and textual transmission have caused significant alterations over time.	Textual evidence, such as the consistency between the Septuagint, Dead Sea Scrolls, and Masoretic Text, demonstrates remarkable preservation of the original message.
Myth 8: Jesus' existence is fabricated.	Claims exist that Jesus is a mythological figure with no historical evidence.	Non-Christian historians such as Josephus, Tacitus, and Suetonius provide corroborating accounts of Jesus' existence, works, and crucifixion.
Myth 9: The resurrection is fictional.	Critics argue that the resurrection of Jesus is an invented story with no factual basis.	Historical accounts (e.g., Josephus and Tacitus) and the transformation of early Christians support the credibility of the resurrection claim.



Review Questions

1. What are some of the myths about the Holy Bible? [Texts are fictional and non-factual, textual inconsistencies, textual myths, non-historically accurate, textual misinterpretations]
2. How many translations were made of the Old Testament? [three: Septuagint, Masoretic, Vulgate]
3. What are the Dead Sea Scrolls? Where were they found? [They are manuscripts found in 1947, which were hidden in a cave to protect them from being destroyed by the Romans. They were at the Qumran caves.]
4. Over how many years was the Old Testament written? [It was written between 1500 and 400 B.C.]
5. What year was the oldest Old Testament manuscript before the Dead Sea Scrolls? [900 AD]
6. If the Holy Bible was destroyed, how much of the Holy Bible can be reconstructed from the church Fathers writing? [All but 11 verses]
7. What does Septuagint mean? [the number 70. Six scholars from each of the 12 tribes of Israel.]]
8. How many authors wrote the Holy Bible? [40 authors]
9. What is the difference between the different Old Testament translations? [Septuagint is in Greek. Masoretic is in Hebrew and Aramaic. Vulgate is in Latin.]
10. Provide some verses from Isaiah 53 that reference the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ? Isaiah 53:5-7 "But He was wounded for our transgression, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed...He was oppressed and He was afflicted; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth."

The Deuterocanonical Books

BIBLE BASICS

Apocrypha vs Deuterocanonical

When one opens the pages of Holy Scripture, the words within are not just text but a divine symphony, resonating with the wisdom and love of God. Yet, as one journeys through the history of Christianity, an intriguing question arises: *How many books are in the Bible?*

Is it:

- **39 Old Testament and 27 New Testament books** as accepted by many Protestant traditions?
- **46 Old Testament and 27 New Testament books** as embraced by the Catholic Church and Orthodox traditions?
- **49 Old Testament and 32 New Testament books** where 32 NT books were considered in the composition NT canon in some locations of the early church
 - Note: Some of the early church canons included 1, 2 Clement, Shepherd of Hermas, Epistle of Barnaba and Didache.
- **46 Old Testament and 31 New Testament books** an unusual count unique to other traditions?

At the heart of this question lies the difference between what is often called the *Deuterocanonical Books* and the *Apocrypha*. For some, these terms are used interchangeably, but in the context of the Coptic Orthodox Church, they bear very distinct meanings.

The Deuterocanonical Books, meaning "second canon," are those texts found in the Greek Septuagint but absent from the Hebrew Bible. These include books like Tobit, Judith, Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach, Baruch, and the Maccabees. These writings have been cherished by the ancient Church, used in worship, and affirmed as Scripture within the Coptic Orthodox tradition. They are considered part of the divinely inspired canon, seamlessly integrated into the life and teachings of the Church.

In contrast, the term **Apocrypha**, meaning "hidden" or "no genuine," traditionally refers to texts that are not included in the canon of Scripture. These writings, while valuable for historical or moral reflection, are not regarded as inspired by the Holy Spirit and are therefore not read in the Church's liturgical life. "Apocrypha" is a misnomer, because the word "Apocrypha" means "concealed" and refers to books that contain hidden superstitions and nonsense contrary to Christian morals which were not accepted by the Church as part of the Canon. While the Protestant Reformation labeled the deuterocanonical books as "Apocrypha," the Coptic Orthodox Church firmly distinguishes between these inspired texts and non-canonical writings.

This difference in terminology and perception of these books has profound implications for how we understand the Scriptures. The Protestant Bible contains 39 Old Testament books, reflecting the Hebrew Bible, while the Coptic Orthodox Bible includes the broader 46 books of the Septuagint. The

New Testament, consistent across all traditions, comprises 27 books, but the richness of the Old Testament differs greatly depending on one's canon.

Canon	Old Testament Books	Notable Differences
Coptic Orthodox	46	<i>Includes Deuterocanonical books like 1 and 2 Maccabees, Tobit, Judith, Baruch, Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach, the Prayer of Manasseh, Psalm 151 and additions to Daniel and Esther.</i>
Catholic	46	<i>Includes Deuterocanonical books like 1 and 2 Maccabees, Tobit, Judith, Baruch, Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach, and additions to Daniel and Esther.</i>
Protestant	39	<i>Excludes Deuterocanonical books, considering them Apocrypha.</i>
Greek Orthodox	49	<i>Includes additional Old Testament books like 1 Esdras, 2 Esdras, 3 Maccabees, and 4 Maccabees (appendix).</i>
Orthodox Tewahedo	46	<i>Includes unique Old Testament books like 1 and 2 Ezra, Book of Enoch, Longer Jeremiah (including Lamentation & Baruch), Josippon, and a longer version of Jeremiah.</i>

Development of the Printed Canon

During the 16th century Martin Luther sought to make the Scriptures accessible to the common people by translating them into their native languages. His translation of the Bible into German was an achievement in this endeavor. However, the process of translation involved critical decisions regarding the source texts to be used.

For the Old Testament, Luther chose to rely primarily on the Hebrew Masoretic Text. This text, meticulously preserved and transmitted by Jewish scholars known as Masoretes, had become the standard Hebrew text of the Jewish community. Luther's decision to use the Masoretic Text was significant because it differed in some respects from the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible that had been widely used by Christians for centuries. In contrast to the Masoretic text, the Septuagint included the Deuterocanonical books. However, Luther, along with other Protestant reformers, questioned their canonical status. They argued that these books were not found in the Hebrew Masoretic Text and, therefore, should not be included in the Protestant Old Testament canon.

Luther's decision to exclude the Deuterocanonical books from his German translation reflected a broader trend in Protestantism towards a more streamlined and focused biblical canon. This emphasis on the Hebrew Masoretic Text as the authoritative source for the Old Testament had significant implications for the development of the Protestant Bible and its subsequent translations.

It is important to note that Luther's approach was not universally accepted within the Protestant movement. Some Protestant denominations, particularly those with closer ties to the Anglican tradition, continued to include the Deuterocanonical books in their Bibles, although often in a separate section. Nevertheless, Luther's translation and his emphasis on the Hebrew Masoretic Text had a profound and lasting impact on the shape of the Protestant biblical canon and the way in which the Bible was understood and interpreted by millions of Christians.

The printing press, a revolutionary invention of the 15th century, played a crucial role in disseminating Luther's German Bible and other vernacular translations. This newfound accessibility to the Scriptures in the common language empowered individuals to engage directly with the biblical text, fostering a sense of personal faith and religious autonomy. The combination of Luther's translation efforts and the printing press had a transformative effect on European society, contributing to the spread of literacy, religious reform, and the rise of individualism.

Categorization of the New Testament Canon

The formation of the New Testament canon, the authoritative collection of Christian scriptures, was a complex and gradual process that spanned several centuries. From the early days of the Church until at least 397 AD, there was significant diversity among different Christian communities regarding which books were considered canonical and which were not.

The Church at Antioch treated the Didache and 1st Clement as "scripture" during this period. However, they rejected several books that are now part of the New Testament canon, including 2 Peter, 2 & 3 John, Jude, and Revelation. The Church at Alexandria, on the other hand, also rejected most of these books, but accepted Jude and the Epistle of Barnabas.

The earliest existing list of canonical books, known as the Muratorian Canon, dates back to the late 2nd century. This list omits Hebrews, 1 & 2 Peter, 3 John, and James, but includes the Shepherd of Hermas and the Apocalypse of Peter. It is noteworthy that these lists were fluid and subject to later Church synods and Councils' standardization.

Eusebius, the renowned 4th Century Church Historian who attended the Council of Nicaea, reported in his History of the Church that Hebrews, 2 Peter, 2 & 3 John, James, Jude, & Revelation were still all "disputed" books. Despite this, he still included 1 Clement in his list of accepted New Testament canon. It is essential to emphasize that although the books we now consider "scripture" were written in the first century, the Church operated without voluminous copies of those scriptures and without consistency between churches for four centuries.

In 367 AD, St. Athanasius of Alexandria listed all of the current New Testament books in his Paschal Letter. However, he continued to quote the Didache as authoritative for the Church. Meanwhile, Rome rejected Hebrews but accepted the Shepherd of Hermas. None of the early Church Fathers or writers referred to a single, uniform set of "Scriptures" as we currently imagine them.

The first official council that accepted the present New Testament canon was a local synod, the Council of Hippo, in 393 AD. The minutes of that council have been lost, but they were read into the record at the Council of Carthage in 397 AD. Canon 24 from that Synod provides a definitive list of the books included in the New Testament canon, including the Gospels, Acts of the Apostles, Epistles of Paul, Hebrews, Epistles of Peter, John, James, Jude, and Revelation. This list excluded non-canonical books such as the Didache and the Shepherd of Hermas. Canon 24 from that Synod reads as follows:

Besides the canonical Scriptures, nothing shall be read in church under the name of divine Scriptures. Moreover, the canonical Scriptures are these: [then follows a list of Old Testament books, including all of the deuterocanonical books]. The New

Testament: the Gospels, four books; the Acts of the *Apostles*, one book; the Epistles of Paul, thirteen; of the same to the Hebrews; one Epistle; of Peter, two; of John, apostle, three; of James, one; of Jude, one; the Revelation of John. Concerning the confirmation of this canon, the transmarine (ie, Rome, across the Mediterranean Sea) Church shall be consulted. On the anniversaries of martyrs, their acts shall also be read.

The acceptance of this canon was not immediate, as some churches hesitated to adopt it. However, the influence of the Council of Carthage gradually led to wider acceptance, and by the end of the 5th century, the New Testament canon as we know it today was firmly established.

Categorization of the Old Testament Canon

The canonization of the Old Testament was not a single event but a gradual process. Within the Orthodox tradition, the Old Testament is understood as comprising two distinct sections: the **First Canon**, “*Protokanonika*”, and the **Second Canon**, “*Deuterokanonika*”, together forming a unified witness to God’s revelation.

The first section of the Old Testament, often referred to as the **First Canon**, corresponds to the books of the Hebrew Bible. These books were written primarily in Hebrew (with a few portions in Aramaic) and include the Torah (Law), the Nevi'im (Prophets), and the Ketuvim (Writings)—collectively known as the **Tanakh**.

1. The Structure of the First Canon:

- **The Torah (Law):** Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.
These foundational books narrate the creation of the world, the calling of Abraham, the formation of Israel, and the giving of the Law at Sinai.
- **The Nevi'im (Prophets):** Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve Minor Prophets.
These books recount the history of Israel’s relationship with God, the role of the prophets, and the call to repentance.
- **The Ketuvim (Writings):** Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Ruth, Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Chronicles.
These diverse writings include poetry, wisdom literature, historical accounts, and apocalyptic visions.

The First canon books were compiled by Ezra the priest and preserved by Jewish scribes and scholars during the post-exilic period. By the time of Jesus, these books were recognized and revered as Scripture by the Jewish community, though disputes about certain texts persisted among different Jewish sects. Neither Ezra nor Nehemiah made mention of the second group (*Deuterokanonika*) as part of the first group, the reason being the books only appeared after Ezra’s death. Because these books, referred to above, were collated after Ezra’s death, the early Christian church considered them as authentic deuterocanonical books.

The Second Canon, known as the **Deuterocanonical Books**, comprises additional writings included in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures). These books were written during the intertestamental period (circa 400–50 BC) in a time of great cultural and religious ferment as Jewish communities lived under Persian, Greek, and Roman rule.

2. The Structure of the Second Canon:

- **Historical Books:** Tobit, Judith, 1 and 2 Maccabees.
These books recount stories of divine providence, heroism, and the struggle for faith amidst persecution.
- **Wisdom Literature:** Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach (Ecclesiasticus).
These works provide profound reflections on the nature of God, morality, and the human condition.
- **Prophetic and Apocryphal Texts:** Baruch, Letter of Jeremiah, additions to Daniel (Susanna, Bel and the Dragon), additions to Esther, Prayer of Manasseh, and Psalm 151.
These texts include prayers, prophetic visions, and narrative expansions that enrich the biblical narrative.

The Deuterocanonical Books were widely accepted by Greek-speaking Jews, who had migrated throughout the Hellenistic world. These texts were included in the **Septuagint (LXX)**, a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures commissioned in Alexandria around the 3rd century BC. The Septuagint became the primary version of the Scriptures for the early Church, especially among Gentile Christians, as Greek was the lingua franca of the Roman Empire.

Martin Luther wrote extensively about getting rid of the deuterocanonical books, because they were not in the then-current Hebrew Old Testament. However, the Hebrew Bible was not formalized until 90 AD, AFTER the Church began using the LXX (Septuagint), and the Hebrew-language Jewish version was chosen, by the Rabbis at Jamnia, specifically to STOP the spread of Christianity.

Usage Justification

The first Synodal decision on the canon of Scripture was made at the Council of Carthage in 397 AD. This council was convened by the Roman emperor Honorius and was attended by over 200 bishops from across the Western Roman Empire. The purpose of the council was to address various doctrinal and disciplinary issues, including the question of which books should be considered part of the Christian Bible.

At the Council of Carthage, the bishops present unanimously agreed to adopt the current list of New Testament books, which had been circulating among Christian communities for some time. This list included the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, the letters of Paul and other apostles, and the Book of Revelation. The council also reaffirmed the use of the Septuagint (LXX) as the Old Testament of the Church. The LXX was a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible that had been made in Alexandria, Egypt, in the 3rd century BC. It included several books that were not found in the Hebrew Bible, such as the books of Tobit, Judith, 1 and 2 Maccabees, and the Wisdom of Solomon. These books, known as the

deuterocanonical books, were specifically named and accepted as part of the Old Testament by the Council of Carthage.

The canons of the Council of Carthage were subsequently adopted by those parts of the Church participating in the 2nd Council of Constantinople in 553 AD. This council, which was convened by the Byzantine emperor Justinian I, reaffirmed the decisions of the Council of Carthage and declared that the LXX, including the deuterocanonical books, was the authoritative Old Testament of the Church.

Thus, from the days of Christ right through the Reformation, the canon of Scripture accepted by the Church included both the New Testament books and the Old Testament books of the LXX, including the deuterocanonical books. This canon remained the standard for both the Eastern and Western Churches until the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century, when some Protestant reformers, such as Martin Luther and John Calvin, rejected the deuterocanonical books as apocryphal and removed them from their Bibles.

Today, the Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church, and many other Christian denominations continue to accept the canon of Scripture as defined by the Council of Carthage and the 2nd Council of Constantinople. These churches believe that the deuterocanonical books are part of the inspired Word of God and that they should be included in the Christian Bible.

Additionally, fathers of the second and third generations, such as Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Dionysius of Alexandria, and Cyprian, as well as fathers of the fourth generation, including St. Basil, St. Gregory of Nazianzus, and St. John Chrysostom, all made equal references to the protocanonical and deuterocanonical books in their writings. These books were found in the Septuagint version, a translation of the Hebrew scriptures into Greek undertaken under the reign of Ptolemy II at Alexandria in 282 BC. The translation was carried out by 72 Jewish scholar-rabbis, indicating that they included the deuterocanonical books alongside the other books, granting them equal status.

In the Gospel of John (Chapter 10:22), Jesus Christ mentioned the Feast of Dedication. This feast was not mentioned in the protocanonical books of the Bible but was recorded in the Book of Maccabees. The Book of Maccabees reveals that Judas Maccabeus initiated this feast when he purified the temple from the profanities of the gentiles and renewed the altar. This serves as clear evidence that the Jews adopted the commemoration of this feast based on the information provided in the Book of Maccabees.

The inclusion of the deuterocanonical books in the Septuagint and their recognition by early church fathers and the Jewish community demonstrate their significance and acceptance as part of the sacred scriptures. These books offer valuable insights into Jewish history, culture, and religious beliefs during the intertestamental period and contribute to a deeper understanding of Christianity's roots and development.

Justification	Explanation
1	The Councils of Hippo (393 AD) and Carthage (397 AD) affirmed the authenticity of the Deuterocanonical books.
2	Early Church Fathers, including Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Augustine, referenced and quoted from the Deuterocanonical books.
3	The early Church considered the Deuterocanonical books beneficial and worthy of being read in

church services, despite some debate.

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|---|---|
| 4 | The Apostolic Canons included the Deuterocanonical books as part of the canonical scriptures. |
| 5 | Traditional churches, such as the Catholic and Orthodox churches, have accepted the Deuterocanonical books as part of the canon. The Council of Trent (1546 AD) formally affirmed their canonical status within the Catholic Church. The Orthodox Church has also consistently included these books in its canon, recognizing their divine inspiration and authority. |
| 6 | The Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, included the Deuterocanonical books, indicating their early acceptance. |
| 7 | The mention of the Feast of Dedication in John 10:22 is linked to the events described in the Book of Maccabees, further supporting the authenticity of the Deuterocanonical books. |

Why then is it not in the Jewish Old Testament?

In 70 AD the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem by the Roman army took place. This event led to a significant shift in Jewish religious and cultural practices. The destruction of the Temple, the central place of worship and sacrifice, necessitated a re-evaluation of Jewish religious life.

Following the Temple's destruction, the various Rabbinical schools in Jerusalem, which had often been in disagreement with each other, found a temporary unity in the face of this crisis. They established a new Rabbinical school in the coastal city of Jamnia (Yavne). This school became a crucial center for Jewish scholarship and the development of Rabbinic Judaism.

In 90 AD, the convening of a Rabbinical Council took place at Jamnia. This council was assembled to address a pressing issue for the Jewish community: the growing number of Jewish converts to Christianity. The rise of Christianity, with its roots in Judaism, posed a challenge to the established Jewish religious authorities. One of the major outcomes of the Council of Jamnia was the finalization of the Old Testament canon. This canon, known as the Masoretic Text, is the authoritative Hebrew text of the Hebrew Bible. The Masoretes, a group of Jewish scribes and scholars, meticulously preserved and transmitted this text over centuries.

It's important to note that the status of the Book of Esther remained a subject of debate even after the Council concluded. However, the Council's decisions regarding the rest of the canon were largely accepted by the Jewish community.

Another significant decision made by the Council of Jamnia was the explicit prohibition of the use of the Septuagint (LXX). The Septuagint had been widely used by Jews in the Diaspora. However, the Christian sect was also effectively using the Septuagint for their missionary efforts, leading to Jewish conversions. The Rabbinical Council, in an attempt to assert their authority and differentiate Judaism from Christianity, rejected the Septuagint. This decision further solidified the use of the Masoretic Text as the authoritative Hebrew text for the Jewish community.



Review Questions

1. What does Apocrypha mean? [hidden or not genuine]
2. What are the Deutoronical Books? [first 2 books of Maccabee, Tobit, Judith, Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach, Baruch, including the letter of Jeremiah, addition to Esther and addition to Daniel]
3. How many first canon (Protokanonika) OT books were recognized by the church vs the Jewish books? [39 vs 24]
4. How many OT books are recognized by the Protestant church? [39, they use the Jewish translation.]
5. At what council was the authenticity of the deuterocanon decided as part of the other books? [council at Hippo 393 AD]
6. Who were the fathers that made reference to the protocanonical and the deuterocanonical books? [Fathers of the second and third generations like Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Dionysius of Alexandria and Cyprian, also fathers of the fourth generation as Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus, Chrysostom.]
7. What was the Rabbinical council of 90 AD, after the destruction of the temple in 70 AD, decision regarding the OT? [The Council specifically forbade the use of the Septuagint – specifically because it was being used so successfully by the Christian sect in converting Jews.]
8. What was the Catholic church decision at the Trent Council in 1546 AD regarding the deuterocanonical books? [Whoever does not accept them will be ex-communicated.]
9. Which feast is mentioned in John's Gospel (Ch. 10:22) that Christ the Lord mentioned? [The Feast of Dedication]
10. The Feast of Dedication is mentioned in which deuterocanonical book? [The Book of Maccabees that Judas Maccabeus was the first to initiate this feast when he purified the temple of the profanities of the gentiles and renewed the altar.]