

Sermon for July 20, 2025
Why the Bible Can and Should Be Trusted

Good morning. Today I'd like to talk about why we can and should trust and have faith in the Scriptures. We'll discuss where the texts for them come from, how they were translated and what the Scriptures say about themselves. We'll talk about how they relate to each of us differently and yet convey the message that God wants us all to hear.

There will be some rather academic parts to a significant portion of today's message. I hope you'll stay with me as we analyze the sources of the Bible as we know it. There are, of course, many different translations available to us today. Personally, I grew up in a Baptist church using the King James version but now prefer to use the NIV study Bible. I still have the New Testament I received in basic training in the Army when I was drafted to serve in Vietnam. My study Bible resembles the "Rainbow Bible" as I have used so much highlighter and made so many notes over the years. I kind of hope you too have a Bible that is also marked up with your notes and impressions and that its pages are somewhat wrinkled or even maybe a little torn. I hope you'll bear with me as I go into my teacher mode. I pray that after today you may find your Bible just a little more precious. Keep it close. Dust off the dust if necessary and marinate on it as it is the written Word of our Creator God. Christ himself was the Word incarnate. He came that we might believe and receive salvation. In Matthew 5:17, Jesus, a Jew himself, is quoted as saying, "Do not think I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." We must remember that our Lord came into the world at a time of great turmoil where the Romans held an iron fist over Judea. The Bethel Series describes this period, when God chose to come to earth, as the "Fullness of Time". Jesus claimed to be the Messiah, the Son of God. As such, he aroused the ire of the Jewish hierarchy and the suspicions of Rome. It was all part of God's plan to reclaim His people and bring them and us salvation.

Let's begin by acknowledging that our belief in God's Word begins with an underlying faith. The foundation of faith rests upon Jesus and the Bible, which is the Word of God. John:1-5 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." The Bible's trustworthiness is essential in a world of changing values. Following, we'll explore some of the

reasons we can have confidence and faith in the reliability of Scripture, based on evidence and its authority.

Many of you are aware that I have taught or led several cycles of the Bethel Series, a two-year course covering the entire Bible from Genesis to Revelation. My sense is that many who engaged in this course found their faith strengthened by this in-depth study. Most of us are very familiar with many individual Bible stories and may have grown up being taught these stories by our parents or in Sunday school. Examples would be stories about “the Fall”, Noah and his obedience to God, stories of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (considered the foundational patriarchs of Judaism, Christianity and Islam). Jacob becomes Israel after wrestling all night with a divine figure, believed to be God. The name Israel means one who struggled with God and prevails. We encounter the selling of Jacob’s son, Joseph, to a caravan of traders from Egypt, the Exodus, and the encounter of the Israelites with God at Sinai from the Old Testament. Notice here we have history describing nothing less than spiritual encounters, and miracles with God literally saving His people from slavery in Egypt, then guiding them through the desert to Sinai and eventually to the borders of the Promised Land. We also know what happened then. They doubted God’s promises of a land of milk and honey and were banished to wander in the desert for 40 more years before the next generation, led by Joshua, was finally allowed to enter the Promised Land.

We cling to New Testament stories such as the Virgin Birth, Jesus calling his disciples from their ordinary lives to later become “Fishers of Men”, the story of Saul, who persecuted followers of “The Way”, and his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, after which he became Paul, an ardent follower and the greatest evangelist and missionary of all time. We are witness through Scripture to the Gospels written to tell us of the “Good News” that Jesus came to save the world from itself and through His death, burial and resurrection, provide a path for us to receive forgiveness and eternal life in the New Heaven and New Earth worshipping at the feet of Jesus.

These stories all serve as an excellent foundation for our growing faith, yet it’s important for us to be able to put these stories into the context of the “Whole Story”. That is the story of creation, redemption and salvation and everything in between. That’s where our commitment to reading Scripture, and staying in the Word, comes in. There are a variety of ways for us to do that. Regardless of what avenue we choose, knowing the whole story is critical to our growth and being disciplined in faith. There are courses such as Bethel, “Reading through the Bible in

One Year”, and many others. I encourage you to avail yourself of whichever method will work for you.

We know that the Bible contains many different types of literature. These include history, poetry, simile, metaphor and allegory as well as legal, narrative, wisdom, biographical, prophecy and apocalyptic. Some parts can be taken literally at face value. Others require more interpretation and introspection.

There have been many studies done to determine when various books of the Bible were written. Analysis of historical records and events such as the Exodus from Egypt help to set a time of around 1400 BC when Moses wrote the book of Genesis. Historical events that are well documented also allow us to determine dates for many other books of Scripture. An example of this is the exile forced on Israel by Nebuchadnezzar II, King of Babylon which occurred in 586 BC. Cyrus the Great, King of Persia (today’s Iran), allowed the Jews to return to Israel in 537 BC and build the second temple. While there is scholarly debate about the dating of the Book of Daniel, the traditional dating is during the exile in the 5th century BC.

The Bible itself claims divine inspiration. This is supported by its consistency despite having 35 to 40 authors writing over approximately 1,500 years. These authors came from diverse backgrounds including kings, prophets, fishermen, tax collectors and scholars, which suggests a single divine authorship.

In 2nd Timothy 3:16-17 the Apostle Paul says, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” The more we stay connected to God’s Word, the greater our devotion and discipleship is likely to be. When we drift away from His Word, we tend to rely on self. I don’t know about you, but I’ve found my intimacy with God struggles when I am away from His Word. My experiences have taught me that I need Him right by my side at every turn in life. He has always been there, even when I failed to recognize it. I recall several years ago, in one of my first sermons, more of a testimony, that when I returned safely from flying missions for a year over North Vietnam and Laos, I asked myself why I came home safely when 7 of my friends didn’t. The answer I arrived at was that God had more for me to contribute to the Kingdom. Gratitude is a great motivator. I learned that every time I use language that includes “self” I find that I may have taken my eyes off Jesus. It took me a long time in my Christian Walk to realize and totally attribute anything I may have, or that I have accomplished, to God’s mercy, grace and generosity. It is He who made all things possible. I pray that you too have grown in

your faith to a point that you give all the glory to our Father in Heaven and Jesus Christ.

The Bible includes many historical references supported by external evidence. Archaeological discoveries at sites such as Jericho in the West Bank of Israel and Nineveh, the capitol of the Ancient Assyrian Empire, which is Northern Iraq today, align with biblical accounts. Discoveries such as the Tel Dan Stele, dating to the 9th century BC, found in Northern Israel in 1993, which mentions the House of David and the Pilate Stone provide extra-biblical evidence for biblical figures like King David and Pontius Pilate. I had a chance to see the Pilate stone when I visited Israel and Caesarea in 2019.

Non-Christian writers, including Josephus and Tacitus, also mention Jesus and early Christians. Luke, who spent much time with the Apostle Paul and accompanied him on some of his journeys, is noted for his historical accuracy.

The Bible's meticulous manuscript transmission supports its textual reliability. Thousands of Greek manuscripts for the New Testament exist, allowing for verification. The Dead Sea Scrolls confirmed the consistency of Old Testament texts dating back centuries. Early New Testament fragments also closely link to the originals. Jewish scribes used rigorous methods to ensure accuracy when copying the Old Testament. The accuracy of the New Testament manuscripts is estimated to be very high.

Here is where I hope I don't lose you. Although many of these sources are used to help provide accuracy and consistency, there are two major sources of manuscripts. These are Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus. They both date to roughly the 4th century. To help you understand what a Codex is, it consists of hundreds of pages written on parchment. Or put another way, a Codex is an ancient book made of stacked hand-written parchment pages sewn together to create a book.

Codex Sinaiticus was discovered in Saint Catherine's Eastern Orthodox Monastery at the foot of Mt Sinai in 1859. It is a large Codex of some 400 pages. It contains about half of the Old Testament as well as the Septuagint or Greek version containing the majority of the New Testament. These and other Greek texts as I'll describe in a moment formed what became known as the Textus Receptus (or the Received Texts) and were the main source reference for many New Testament translations during the Reformation period including the Authorized or King James Version.

Codex Vaticanus was first catalogued in the Vatican Library in 1475. It is believed that both manuscripts had been housed in Caesarea at some point during the 6th or 7th centuries AD. It is also believed that Codex Vaticanus has heavily influenced the translation work of modern Bibles, including to some extent the King James Bible. The King James Bible also used many other Greek references for its translation.

We also have the Dead Sea Scrolls, stumbled on by Bedouin shepherds in a cave in Qumran in the Judean desert on the northwestern shore of the Dead Sea in 1947. They include fragments of every book of the Hebrew Bible except Esther. They are mostly written in Hebrew, but also some Aramaic and Greek. While fragmentary, they offer the oldest record we have of portions of Old Testament Scripture. These scrolls date from the 3rd century BC to the first century CE. There are some 15,000 scrolls and scroll fragments. The only complete book found there over the nine-year period of discovery was the Great Isaiah Scroll dating to 120 BC.

These scrolls and other extra-biblical records such as commentaries, hymns, and prayers were preserved by being stored in large clay jars in the arid and dark environments found in the caves. There were 11 caves where portions of the Scrolls were discovered. I saw the entrances to the caves on my 2019 trip to Israel.



The Bible's accurate prophecies, particularly about Jesus and historical events, suggest its divine origin. The Old Testament contains over 300 messianic prophecies fulfilled in Jesus. Micah 5:2 says, "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." This predicted the Messiah's birth in Bethlehem. Isaiah 53 describes his suffering. Prophecies about the fall of Babylon and the destruction of Jerusalem were also fulfilled.

While the Bible is not a science textbook, it accurately records natural phenomena. Ecclesiastes 1:7 describes the hydrologic cycle; "All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. To the place the streams come from, there they return again," and Job 26:7 speaks of the Earth being suspended in space, "He spreads out the northern skies over empty space; He suspends the earth over empty space," aligning with our scientific understanding.

Despite its diverse authorship and long writing period, the Bible maintains a remarkable internal consistency and presents a unified message. It consistently presents God's character and redemptive plan. Its honest portrayal of human flaws also adds to its credibility.

The Bible's impact on individuals and nations is a powerful testament to its trustworthiness. It has transformed countless lives, offering hope and purpose. It has also influenced literature, law, ethics, and history. It was a great influence in the lives of our forefathers, the framers of our Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. A lot has been written about their beliefs, but the vast majority were devout Christians. There were exceptions such as Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin and James Madison who held Deist beliefs or were more skeptical of organized religion. In general, they believed that a supreme being had to have created the universe. They derived this belief from what in theology is called general revelation. That is to say, when we observe the miracle of all that is created, it is illogical to simply assume that it just happened but rather had a guiding or creative force behind it, in other words, a supreme being. We know "that supreme being" as the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The Bible is trustworthy due to its divine inspiration, historical and textual reliability, prophetic accuracy, consistency with science, internal unity, and life-changing impact. It is a reliable guide for understanding God and living a life that honors Him.

The following is a quote from comedian George Carlin. "I was thinking about how people seem to read the Bible a lot more as they get older, and then it dawned on me — they're cramming for their final exam."

Although his comment was meant as a joke, it reverberates as all too true. We don't typically spend enough time in God's Word. Shouldn't we? After all, it is the Word of our Creator. All we need for abundant life is conveyed through His Word. John 10:10 says, "The thief comes to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full." It is in our nature to feel self-reliant, yet when we pause and reflect, too often when things seem like they are going well, we fail to thank Jesus for it. Typically, it is when we struggle that we are quick to turn to God asking for help. We might say to ourselves, "God, if only You will do this or that for me, or get me through this crisis, then I promise to be better, to seek you more, to live more as You have instructed me in Your Holy Word."

I'll finish with this quote from 2 Timothy 4:1-5 which was quoted this week when John MacArthur, beloved teacher and theologian passed from this earthly life to spend eternity with our Lord and Savior:

4 In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: ² Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. ³ For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. ⁴ They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. ⁵ But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.