

Starting Off on the Right Foot
Essential Commitments of a God-honoring Church
Committed to the Bible – Truth or Tabloid?

Think for a minute about something you're involved in – work, family, hobby
Then think about the commitments necessary to carry it out
Anything you're involved in requires essential commitments of some sort
And every one of those commitments involve trust

Flying – certain commitments are necessary to fly safely, maintain order, reach destination
Trust the manuals and your training
Band – necessary that you commit to playing your part
Trust the music – that it will fit with all the other parts

Anything you're involved in requires essential commitments of some sort
And every one of those commitments involve trust
Otherwise you don't get started on the right foot, proceed in the right direction,
progress at the right pace

Church is no different
A God-honoring church requires essential commitments
Acts 2:42-47 clues us in to some of those
This will be the launching pad for our series to ensure that we start off on the right foot,
committed to the essentials of a God-honoring church – *read it*

First essential commitment for a God-honoring church, is to the Bible
Acts 2:42 says that we need to commit/devote ourselves to the Apostle's teaching
Apostle's teaching is the *whole counsel of God* (Paul, Acts 20:27), found in the 39
books of the OT and the 27 books of the NT in your Bible
Contained/Limited to those books in the OT because . . .
It contains the writings that Jesus and the apostles used and appealed to as
authoritative and essential when they taught
Contained/Limited to the 27 books in the NT because . . .
It contains the written record of the apostles' teaching as determined by the early
church based on apostolic authorship, authenticity of content, acceptance by
churches

Problem – many think it's outdated, filled with errors/contradictions, just stories, tabloid-
like fabrication of people suffering from serious delusion, unnecessary
Could stand up here all day and stomp my foot and say, "Commit to the Bible!"
Just do it – might not go very far if you don't trust it or think it's tabloid

That's why I want to give you 7 reasons the Bible can be trusted as *God's Word*
So that you will be *convinced* initially or more than ever that the Bible is the real deal
Only then will you be committed to knowing it, studying it, living it

7 Reasons the Bible can be trusted as God's Word

1. It's historically accurate

The accuracy of many events in the Bible are confirmed by sources outside of the Bible
Few examples . . .

Fall of Nineveh in Nahum and Zephaniah (2:13-15) –
Recorded on the Tablet of Nabopolassar
Fall of Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon (2 Kings 24) –
Recorded in the Babylonian Chronicles (not a newspaper)
Freeing of Israelite captives in Babylon by Cyrus the Great (Ezra 1&6) –
Recorded on the Cyrus Cylinder
Forcing Jews to leave Rome during the reign of Claudius in A.D. 41-54 (Acts 18:2) –
Recorded by Suetonius
The existence of Jesus Christ –
Recorded by Josephus, Suetonius, Thallus, Pliny the Younger, Lucian, Talmud

These and many more events are referred to in sources outside the Bible . . .
Confirm its historical accuracy and increase our trust in it as the Word of God

2. It's supported by archeology

Archeological evidence supports the reliability and plausibility of the Bible by
confirming existence of places/cultures/structures/landmarks referred to in the text

Just 2 examples where the text was disputed before archeological finds:

- Up until the 1970's, critics said that the accounts of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were fabricated for at least two reasons:
 1. The word for *Canaan* was not used that early
 2. The word for "the deep" in Gen 1:2 (darkness was over the face of the deep), didn't even exist until after Moses was long dead, so he couldn't have written it

Ebla Tablets were found in Northern Syria, over 20k of them, dating 3-500 years
before Abraham, referring to . . . Canaan
They used the word "tehom" – same word for "the deep" that Moses used in Gen

- Hittites, referred to some 40 or 50 times in the Bible, were once thought to be pure legend by critics
Until records of their civilization found, in their capital city, present day Turkey

Just the beginning of biblical cities/structures/places that have been uncovered
Palaces, Cities, synagogues, even houses of significant people

Doesn't mean everything in the Bible has been found; it hasn't
But with the massive and growing amount of archeological evidence that exists . . .
It's no longer intellectually honest to say the Bible is bogus because of a few
outstanding questions or unsubstantiated references

The Bible can be trusted as God's Word because it's supported by archeology

3. Its prophecies have been fulfilled

Messiah – conservatively 65 of them ranging from . . .
Descendant of David and heir to the throne – Is 9&11
Born in Bethlehem – Micah 5:2; Born of a virgin – Is 7:14
Crushed for our iniquities – Is 53; Crucified – Ps 22:16; Zech 12:10; Preceded by a
forerunner – Mal 3:1
Forsaken by God – Ps 22:1; on and on

Some would say these could have been deliberately fulfilled

Not his place of birth, or manner of birth

Nobody would choose the worst/lowliest means of death available – crucifixion

Hard time following Bible's manner of death until 100 BC because crucifixion wasn't practiced or invented yet

If that were all the prophecies, that would be plenty . . .

But there are many more dealing with –

Cities that would be destroyed and rebuilt – Tyre (Ez26)

Nations that would rise and fall in power – Babylon, Egypt, Nineveh, Philistines

Kings – Cyrus, named 200 years before born

Number and detail of fulfilled prophecies is remarkable, and another reason the Bible can be trusted as God's Word

4. **Its manuscripts are many**

OT written from 1450 to 400 BC; Oldest manuscripts we have no later than 100 BC – 300 years removed

NT was written between 45-95 AD

Best and most complete manuscripts date from about 175 AD – 120 years removed

Problem is, with no originals, how can we be confident that what we have is accurate?

- How can we be confident that the OT text in our hands is the same as the one written 3000 years ago?
 1. Confident because we know the Jewish scribal tradition was meticulous and serious about copying
 2. And we can compare the integrity of copies over a long period of time

Up until about 50 years ago, our oldest copy of the OT in Hebrew was from 900 AD

Had earlier Greek translations to compare it to, but not Hebrew

Until 1947 – that's when a Hebrew copy of the OT was discovered, dating from 100 BC

This enabled scholars to compare two Hebrew manuscripts separated by 1000 years of copying – What do you think they found? (Amazing agreement)

Laird Harris (Can I Trust My Bible?) cites the comparison of Is 53 between the two, as a typical example of what was found; he says . . .

A comparison of Isaiah 53 shows that only 17 letters [out of 166 words] differ from the [900 AD text]. Ten of these are mere differences in spelling (like our "honor" and the English "honour") and produce no change in the meaning at all. Four more [of the 17 letters] are very minor differences, such as the presence of a conjunction [like the word "and"] which are stylistic rather than substantive. The other three letters are the Hebrew word for "light." This word was added to the text by someone, in verse 11. Out of 166 words in this chapter, only this one word is really in question, and it does not at all change the meaning of the passage. This is typical of the whole manuscript of Isaiah.

We can be confident that our OT is accurate/reliable as compared to the original text

- The manuscript evidence for the NT is even stronger
Bible is in a class by itself in terms of the number of manuscripts available

5664 manuscripts in Greek, the original language of the NT

9000 Latin manuscripts translated from the original Greek

8000 more manuscripts in 5 other languages

That's 23,000 manuscripts in addition to the fact – the entire NT can be reproduced just from quotes in sermons by the early church fathers in the 1st and 2nd cent's.

Bible is in a class by itself in terms of the relatively short time lapse between the original and the earliest copy

Earliest copies of the NT are only 50 to 75 years removed from the originals

Compare that to other major ancient writers/historians (Homer, Plato, Caesar)

Homer (Iliad) stands out with earliest manuscript 500 yrs removed

643 copies available – compared to 23,000 NT manuscripts

Others – time lapse between the original and the earliest copy ranges from 800 to 1300 years; and the number of copies are between 7 and 20

- No matter what the time lapse is, or the number of manuscripts – if they don't agree, that's a problem
You'd think there would be many discrepancies comparing such large texts copied over 1400 year time span in some cases
The opposite is true – they agree with 99.5% accuracy! (95% accuracy for Iliad)
Vast majority of that .5% is in spelling and word order
No discrepancy in meaning of any doctrinal significance

We can trust the Bibles in our hands to be a reliable copy of the originals because the manuscripts are good and many and accurate

5. **Its message is consistent**

Written by 40 different people in 3 countries, 3 different languages, from widely different social rank, walks of life, and education levels (fisherman, priests, shepherds, kings, tentmakers, tax collectors, butler turned foreman, scribe, and prophets), most of them unknown to each other, over the course of 1600 years . . .

Yet their writings complement and complete one another

You say, "Sure they do, they saw what each other wrote."

Agree on all the difficult ethical and spiritual issues of life that are presented without any collusion (no instant messaging, email, telephones, or even museums)

If there had been collusion, if the writers would have consciously attempted to make their writings agree with others, there would have been a superficial unity, and apparent inconsistencies would have been resolved. The fact that the Bible has unity despite obvious differences in content, style, and perspective is a powerful witness to the independence of each author. [Paul Taylor]

Not only do the different parts of the Bible agree and complement each other, but . . .

A common theme of redemption by a savior is woven all the way through

With no contradictions or discrepancies (difficult passages, yes; but no errors)

The message is consistent and therefore be trusted as the Word of God

6. **Its writers were persecuted**

Matt 24:9 – *They will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake.*

Many who have dared to read it, share it, preach it, and live by it have suffered persecution and death – especially the original writers of the NT

Paul – persecuted (2 Cor 11), James – killed (Acts 12), John – exiled (Rev 1); Early church greatly persecuted/scattered (Acts 8)

But that's not unique – many people have died for what they believed to be true

Look no farther than the suicide bombers today

But this persecution is especially significant for us when it comes to trusting the Bible as God's Word

- Nobody's going to voluntarily die for something that is false or bogus
- NT writers and first generation followers of Christ were in a unique position to know for *certain* whether or not Scriptures and the claims of Jesus, were true

It all came down to whether Jesus rose from the dead, or not

If he rose again – it's all true; If he didn't – it's all false

And since they suffered and died for the message, they must have confirmed its truth by seeing, hearing, and touching the risen Savior

Because nobody willingly suffers and dies for something they *know* to be false

The Bible can be trusted as God's Word because its writers were willingly persecuted

7. **It says so!**

That's right – the Bible says it's the Word of God over 3000 times in various ways

2 Tim 3:16-17 – *All Scripture is breathed out [inspired] by God . . .*

God moved men by his Holy Spirit (1 Peter 1:21) within them, using their unique personalities, perspectives, and situations; to write his very words and thoughts

You say – that's just circular reasoning

Just because the Bible says it's the Word of God doesn't prove that it is

You're correct – if this were the only evidence, you could throw it all away

Want you to see 3 things here . . .

1. No small thing in ANE for a biblical writer to appeal to *one* god for everything
Wasn't the cultural norm in those days; They had gods for everything
2. Even more strange in those times to consistently appeal to a *supreme* god for any length of time – it was always changing, if believed in the first place
3. It would be a problem if all these previous reasons were true, and the Bible said it was *not* the inspired word of God

The fact that it's unique and self-authenticating doesn't make it true

But does confirm the other evidence; indicates radical departure from the status quo

Our first essential commitment to be a God-honoring church is to recognize the Bible as the Word of God . . .

Authoritative and essential for all of life; And the means by which we know God

That's starting off on the right foot