

My first Nigerian friend was Joe Oldudaja. We met at Wheaton Graduate school. For fun, Connie and I had him over for lunch one day and played 'Bible Trivia.' I thought I knew the Bible well.

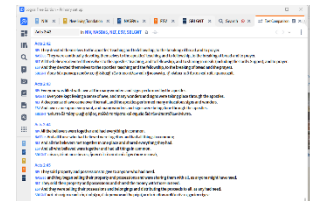
- I had a lot of Bible courses in Bible school.
- I read through the Bible each year, and I passed all three diagnostic exams for graduate school on the first try.

But Joe blew me away. It seemed as if he knew all the brothers, sisters, and cousins of even obscure OT figures – amazing. Afterwards, another friend said, 'never play Bible Trivia with an African, they know their Bible.'



To give you some idea of time frame, it was 1985 and I had just bought a Macintosh. There was a 128k Macintosh, but this was the 'Fat Mac,' a whopping 512k of memory. It pioneered a significant step forward in computing using a mouse and icons. It popularized personal computing.

Today, I use a Bible software that no futurist could have imagined in 1984. Here, I have five translations open and can just click on any Greek word to get its meaning, history, and usage. I can easily search for any passage. I even carry the same software around on my phone.



However, I would still be afraid to play Bible Trivia with Joe. There is a difference between having access to information and having it deep within us. Paul encouraged to, 'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly (Col 3:16 ESV).' Meaning, **healthy Christians** should have a love for the Bible.

But skeptics have a lot of questions about the Bible, such as ...

- How do we know the Bible came from God?
- How was the Bible written?
- Is the Bible historically reliable?
- Are we supposed to take the Bible literally?

Today, we are continuing our short series, *a skeptic's guide to faith*. **These messages** are a little different because my audience are those who are skeptical of the Christian faith.

- Let's 'Be merciful to those who doubt (Jd 22 NIV). **Let's** listen and help them past their doubt.
- I encourage you to bring your friends who doubt or who are skeptics.
- We are to 'Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect (1Pe 3:15 NIV).'

Our journey has been to answer some big questions. We started with ...

A Skeptic's Guide to Faith

How can we trust that Jesus rose from the dead?

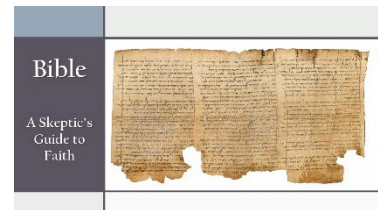
How do we know there is objective truth?

'How do we know there is an afterlife?' **Before Mother's Day** we examined the question ...

'If God exists, why is there evil?'

Today, we will not be able to answer all the questions skeptics have about the Bible. My goal is to answer the question, 'Is the Bible true?'

Bible
A Skeptic's Guide to Faith



(This picture is of Papyrus 46, the Chester Beatty II papyrus. It is the last bit of Romans on the left and a portion of Philippians on the right. It is from 175-225 A.D.)

Before answering the question 'is it true?' there are some things I must state upfront.

First, we should recognize that **It is ancient literature**. It was written a long time ago.

- The OT has portions that could be **as old as 1500 B.C.** – that's 3700 years ago!
- And the NT **as old as 40 A.D.** – that's nearly 2000 years ago.
- It was **written in three languages**.
- It is going to be different – cultures and situations were different than ours.

Second, It is **not like modern history**, *nor* is it like an ancient myth.

- It does **stand up well** to historical and scientific analysis.
- Our **Evangelical friends** often use terms like *inerrant* and *infallible* (our doctrine, too), but you cannot measure it by today's scientific measures. Because ...

Third, It has a **spiritual component**. It is *more than* ink on paper ...

- It is the writings of those who received a revelation or experienced God.
- Consider: 'For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. *It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires* (He 4:12 NLT).'
- 'It is the only book possessing the ability to read you as you read it with an open heart and mind.'¹ There is an interaction with the Holy Spirit helps if you read it with an open heart.
- It must ultimately be received by faith.

We will discover that the Bible proves itself true not only on the page, but in the lives it changes.

Here are of the easy questions about the Bible.

1. Questions About the Bible.

1. How was it written?

Unlike most books with a single author written in a particular time, the Bible is a collection of writings by various authors over 1800-1900 years. It is not like God writing the 10 commandments on stone. These men and women had remarkable experiences and revelations from God and tried to put them into words.

Human writers were inspired by the Holy Spirit.

- We believe that the Holy Spirit helped these human authors write with spiritual authority: 'You must realize that no prophecy in Scripture ever came from the prophet's own understanding,²¹ or from human initiative. No, those prophets were moved by the Holy Spirit, and they spoke from God (2Pe 1:20-21 NLT).'
- My sermons are not on the same level, but I can understand how they were 'moved on by the Holy Spirit' to write. I script out my sermons and sometimes I sense the Holy Spirit nudging me in a particular way or giving me a thought I had not seen before.
- The Holy Spirit did not dictate every word because we can see their different personalities and education coming through.

¹ F. David Farnell, 'Are the Gospel Accounts Reliable?', in *The Harvest Handbook of Apologetics*, Joseph M. Holden, ed. (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishing, 2018) 129-33 (133).

- We believe there was inspiration from God to convey the ideas that God wanted to be passed down to us. 'All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. ¹⁷God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work (2Ti 3:16-17 NLT).' You can read a book that makes you laugh, or cry, or that entertains you, but only the Bible convicts you of right and wrong and informs us of God's big plan for humanity.

Jesus affirmed scripture. Let me clearly say, Jesus is God's Revelation – He is the Logos, the Word of God in creation. He is God on earth to save us and tell us His plan for humanity.

- However, the Bible is our primary source of The Revelation – Jesus.
- Jesus affirmed the OT as Scripture. And even said, 'Until heaven and earth disappear, not even the smallest detail of God's law will disappear until its purpose is achieved (Mt 5:18 NLT).'
- Jesus prophesied that there would be further revelation. 'The Holy Spirit - he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you, Jn 14:26.
- Specifically, that the apostles would be 'guided into truth' by the Holy Spirit, Jn 16:13.

2. How was it compiled?

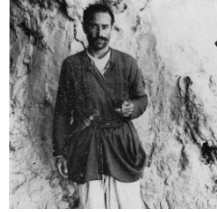
- The 39 OT books were likely accepted in the first century. Early in the first century, the current OT books were well established as Scripture.
- The 14 Apocryphal books were somewhat accepted. These are somewhat fanciful writings between the OT & NT. They were accepted by the Syrian and Roman churches, 'however, these books were never accepted by the Jews as Scripture.'²
- The 27 NT books were accepted in the 4th c.
- The Gnostic writings were never accepted. They contain doctrine that the early church rejected as heresy.

How reliable are our modern Bibles?

3. How Reliable are Modern Bibles?

² Norman L. Geisler and Frank Turek, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 155.

Between late 1946 and early 1947, Muhammed edh-Dhib, a shepherd, was looking for a lost in the desert of Qumran. This hilly and rocky area has many small limestone caves alongside the Dead Sea. Muhammed tossed a rock into one of the caves in which he suspected his goat might have gone. His rock struck and broke pottery.



It took several years for this discovery to become widely known. Some tried to profit from it, some tried to politically suppress it, but in the end as many as 1,000 books were found. Unfortunately, some vanished without a trace. Still, there remains 870 separate scrolls. 'Their ... centuries in the earth have reduced the vast majority of them to bits and pieces, mere scraps, some no longer than a fingernail.'³ The jewel of the find is an intact book of Isaiah from 180 B.C.



We are confident that we have accurate ancient manuscripts, especially compared with other ancient documents.

Time & Manuscript Gap.⁴

- New Testament - 25-40 years after Jesus lived (5,800 manuscripts)
- Homer – 400 years after Homer lived (1,800 manuscripts)
- Plato – 1,200 after Plato lived (7 manuscripts)

Our contemporary Bibles are a lot more accurate than before the discovery of the DSS. But there is a continuum: from nearly a strict word for word translation with the NASB, to individual expressions from Eugene Peterson's *The Message* and Brian Simmons *Passion Translation*.

Strict Translation	Dynamic Equivalent	Paraphrase
NASB	NIV, ESV, CEV	Message, Passion

But what skeptics really want to ask is ...

4. Are there discrepancies and errors?

³ Michael Wise, Martian Abegg, Jr., & Edward Cook, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 5.

⁴ Geisler, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist*, 226.

There are 150,000 minor variants⁵ among the 5,800 manuscripts and fragments. Most of these are very minor, such as the inclusion or omission of an 'and' or a 'the,' or various spellings of words.⁶

There are only three places where the DSS have changed our English Bibles, here is one of them:

- 'And when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, *with three bullocks* (1Sa 1:24 KJV).' – based on a limited number of manuscripts.
- 'And when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, along with *a three-year-old bull* (1Sa 1:24 NIV).' – based on a large number of accepted manuscripts, and a Dead Sea Scroll (4Qsama).⁷

We should not confuse error with imprecision. Here, for example, the basic point is the same, she sacrificed bulls or a 3-year-old bull on behalf of Samuel. All things considered, none of the variants change doctrine and most are extremely minor.

Remember, we have ...

- Early eyewitnesses
- Multiple eyewitnesses
- Corroborating evidence from secular history and archaeology
- Enemies who attest to certain facts
- And some of the things written are embarrassing to the authors

And the Biblical writers sought to be accurate: 'Many people have set out to write accounts about the events that have been fulfilled among us. ²They used the eyewitness reports circulating among us from the early disciples. ³Having carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I also have decided to write an accurate account for you, most honorable Theophilus, ⁴so you can be certain of the truth of everything you were taught (Lk 1:1-4 NLT).'

We are going to pause now for Claudia Cano's testimony.

Claudia's Testimony

⁵ Geisler, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist*, 229.

⁶ Hunter Bullock, 'How Different Are the Dead Sea Scrolls from Modern Bibles? A Side-by-Side Comparison', *Bible Study Magazine* (Jan/Feb 2022), 40-43.

⁷ John D. Meade, 'The Three Places the Dead Sea Scrolls Have Changed our English Bibles', *Bible Study Magazine* (Jan/Feb 2022), 33-35 (33).

Imagine reading an article in the news. You are happy that there are no spelling or grammar errors - but does finding no grammar or spelling errors make the article itself true? No.

Here is the hard question: *how do we know it's true?*

2. Reasons to Believe Scripture is True.

Eight *internal reasons* to believe the NT is true:⁸

1. The writers included embarrassing details about themselves. Most of us would never write that we were dim-witted, cowardly, or doubted. The only brave ones were the women.
2. The writers included embarrassing detail and difficult sayings of Jesus. His family thought he was out of his mind, and Jesus told people to eat his flesh and drink his blood. Any editor would strike those immediately.
3. The demanding sayings of Jesus. For example, the high morals of the sermon on the mount – be perfect (Mt 5:48). Do not store up treasure and take up your cross and follow me. Leave everything behind.
4. Careful citations. There were no quotation marks at that time in Greek, but the writers were careful to distinguish their words from Jesus'.
5. Resurrection details. Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Sanhedrin, the women as the first witnesses, and the plot among the Pharisees that Jesus' body was stolen are all details that they would not have inserted into the story if they were making it up.
6. Confirmation of secular historians. More than 30 people mentioned in the NT are confirmed in secular histories. For years, secularists cast doubt on some political titles Luke uses, until archeology confirmed the title.
7. Readers are encouraged to verify the facts with eyewitnesses. Paul says, over 500 people saw the risen Jesus, implying go check it out.
8. Changed lives. The first followers abandoned Judaism and their 1,500-year-old tradition to follow Jesus. They adopted new beliefs and were willing to suffer persecution or even martyrdom for their belief.

The Bible proves itself true not only on the page, but in the lives it changes.

⁸ Largely from Geisler, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist*, 275-92.

There are more reasons we could add, like **fulfilled prophecy**, but let's will move on.

Big picture reasons. Two *philosophical* reasons ...

1. It provides the best foundation for a fair civil society.
 - The Bible has proven to be a great foundation for human flourishing.
 - For example, Israel changed from an unruly bunch of former slaves into a civil nation when God handed down the 10 commandments at Mount Sinai.
 - As Paul said, 'I would never have known that coveting is wrong if the law had not said, "You must not covet (Ro 7:7 NLT)."'
2. It answers life's biggest questions. It is the only big story that answers, the questions ...
 - Where did I come from?
 - What's wrong with the world?
 - How can it be fixed?

I know today has sounded **more like a lecture** than a sermon, but there is **one more category** that confirms the Bible as God's word, it speaks personally to us. There is a supernatural component to it.

It speaks to our spirit.

The Bible proves itself true not only on the page, but in the lives it changes.

It is a 'living word.' This is why I am doing the testimonies in the middle of the message. There is **spiritual communication** back and forth when we read God's word – it speaks to us and our inner spirit – communication between author and reader.

- 'Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life (Jn 6:68 NIV).'
- Words of eternal life. Words that bring life.

It is an enduring word. Jesus said, 'Heaven and earth will disappear, but my words will never disappear (Mk 13:31 NLT).'

And here we are nearly two thousand years later discussing it. *Why?*

Because it There are many in this room who can point to a changed life because of reading and believing God's word. The Bible ...

- **Encourages** the downcast. 'Encourage one another with these words (1Th 4:18 NIV).'
- Helps us **overcome temptation**. Three times, when tempted, Jesus replied 'It is written ... (Lk 4:4, 8, 12 NIV).'
- **Builds faith** in God. 'Faith comes from hearing ... the word about Christ (Ro 10:17 NIV).'

- **Reveals God's love** for us. It says, 'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (Jn 3:16 NIV).'

Let's commit to reading or listening to the Bible. Let's be like Joe Oldudaja and get God's word into us. 'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly (Col 3:16 ESV).'

Read it with an open mind and heart and it will bring change. 'It will accomplish what I (God) desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it (Is 55:9 NIV).'

The Bible proves itself true not only on the page, but in my changed life.

Pray.