Is the Bible reliable?

Apologetics · https://thebiblicalroots.org/answers/is-the-bible-reliable/

Yes—the Bible is historically, textually, and theologically reliable. The documents of Scripture are supported by strong manuscript evidence, confirmed in many places by archaeology, and internally coherent in their message about God's redemptive work (Luke 1:1–4; John 20:31; 2 Tim 3:16). While Christians ultimately receive the Bible as God's Word by faith, that faith is not blind; it rests on substantial historical and rational foundations.

When we ask about reliability, we are really asking three questions: (1) Do we have what was originally written? (2) Are the accounts historically credible? and (3) Is the message internally consistent and trustworthy? On each of these fronts, the Bible stands up remarkably well.

Textual reliability (Do we have the original text?)

The Bible—especially the New Testament—is the best-attested collection of ancient writings in existence. There are over 5,000 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, along with thousands more in other languages. Some fragments date within decades of the original writings. Through the discipline of textual criticism, scholars can compare these manuscripts and reconstruct the original text with a very high degree of confidence. Variants exist, but the overwhelming majority are minor (spelling, word order) and do not affect any core doctrine. As a result, we can say with confidence that what we read today substantially reflects what was originally written.

Historical reliability (Did these events happen?)

The biblical authors present their writings as rooted in real history, not myth or allegory (Luke 1:1–4; 2 Pet 1:16). The New Testament Gospels, for example, were written within the lifetime of eyewitnesses, and they include details that align with first-century geography, culture, and political realities. Archaeological discoveries—such as inscriptions, cities, and cultural practices—have repeatedly confirmed the historical framework of Scripture. Even non-Christian sources (e.g., Tacitus, Josephus) corroborate key elements of the New Testament, including the existence and crucifixion of Jesus.

Internal coherence (Does it hold together?)

The Bible was written over roughly 1,500 years by dozens of authors across different cultures and languages, and yet it tells a unified story—from creation to redemption to new creation. This

coherence is not forced; it emerges naturally from the text. Themes such as covenant, sacrifice, kingdom, and Messiah develop progressively and culminate in Jesus Christ (Luke 24:27; Heb 1:1–2). Apparent tensions or differences in perspective (e.g., between Gospel accounts) are consistent with independent eyewitness testimony rather than coordinated fabrication.

From a theological standpoint, Scripture claims divine origin: “All Scripture is breathed out by God” (2 Tim 3:16). This does not bypass human authorship but works through it—God speaking through real people in real history. Different Christian traditions may articulate the nature of inspiration (e.g., inerrancy, infallibility) with varying nuance, but all orthodox traditions affirm that Scripture is trustworthy in what it teaches.

Key Scriptures to Study

Core teaching passages

2 Timothy 3:16–17 — Scripture is God-breathed and authoritative
2 Peter 1:20–21 — Scripture originates from God through human authors
Luke 1:1–4 — Careful historical investigation behind the Gospel accounts
John 20:30–31 — The purpose of Scripture is grounded in real events

Supporting theological framework

Isaiah 40:8 — God’s Word endures forever
Matthew 5:18 — Jesus affirms the enduring authority of Scripture
Hebrews 1:1–2 — God speaks through Scripture and ultimately through the Son

Clarifying or balancing passages

1 Corinthians 13:12 — Our understanding is partial, not exhaustive
John 5:39 — Scripture points to Christ as its central focus
Acts 17:11 — Believers are encouraged to examine the Scriptures carefully

Objections & Misconceptions

Common Objection: “Hasn’t the Bible been changed or corrupted over time?”
Response: While copyists made minor errors, the large number of manuscripts allows scholars to identify and correct them. No essential Christian doctrine depends on a disputed text. The transmission of the Bible is far more stable than that of any other ancient work.

Common Objection: “The Bible is full of contradictions.”
Response: Most alleged contradictions arise from misunderstandings of context, genre, or perspective. Differences between accounts (e.g., in the Gospels) are typical of independent witnesses and often complement rather than contradict one another.

Common Objection: “The Bible is just a collection of myths.”
Response: The biblical writers consistently root their claims in history, naming real people, places, and events (Luke 3:1–2). Christianity, in particular, stands or falls on historical claims such as the resurrection of Jesus (1 Cor 15:14–17).

Common Objection: “You just have to take it on blind faith.”
Response: Faith in Scripture is not irrational. It is a reasoned trust grounded in historical evidence, textual reliability, and the self-authenticating nature of God’s Word (Rom 10:17).

Why This Matters

If the Bible is not reliable, then its message about God, salvation, and eternal life cannot be trusted. But if it is reliable—and the evidence strongly supports that it is—then its claims demand a response. Scripture does not present itself as optional religious literature; it presents itself as God’s authoritative revelation to humanity.

Practically, this means believers can read Scripture with confidence. When we encounter its promises, warnings, and teachings, we are not dealing with speculation but with truth. The reliability of the Bible undergirds everything else in the Christian life: doctrine, worship, ethics, and hope.

Recommended Resources

Beginner

- *The Bible Project* — “How to Read the Bible” series
- R. L. Solberg, *What God Has Made Clean* (for clear, Scripture-centered reasoning)

Intermediate

- Wes Huff - Can I Trust the Bible? video series
- Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*

Advanced

- Daniel B. Wallace, *Revisiting the Corruption of the New Testament*

- Craig Keener, *Christobiography*