

## KNOWING GOD: LESSON 7 IS THE NEW TESTAMENT RELIABLE?

John 17:3

### I. INTRODUCTION: I

1. **2** The general theme of our last six lessons has been **KNOWING GOD**.
  - A. If we are truly going to **KNOW GOD**, it is essential for us to know that our search to know Him is not some “pie in the sky” activity.
  - B. We need to be sure that our faith is **not** based on wishful thinking!
 

**\*\***“Faith is the great cop-out, the great excuse to evade the need to think and evaluate evidence. Faith is the belief in spite of, even perhaps because of, the lack of evidence.”  
— Richard Dawkins
  - C. Therefore, it is essential to examine and determine whether the NT is a reliable document.
2. **\*\*** Furthermore, in 1 Peter 3:15, all Christians are commanded to be ready to give a “defense” for the reason of their hope in Christ: **1 Pet. 3:15**: “*But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and 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*”
  - A. The word “defense” is from **apologia**, which means “a speech in defense of what one has done, or of the truth in which one believes.” (cf. Acts 22:1; 1 Cor. 9:3)
  - B. **\*\*** Quite frequently non-believers attack the veracity of the New Testament and claim that it is unreliable and cannot be trusted.
 

“The Bible has noble poetry in it; and some clever fables; and some blood-drenched history; and a wealth of obscenity; and upwards of a thousand lies.” Mark Twain
  - C. Therefore, in order to prepare ourselves, as Peter instructed, and be ready to defend our faith; we must be able to defend the reliability of the New Testament.
3. **3** In this lesson we want to consider four very important issues:
  - ① **\*\*Does the Christian faith have an intelligent and rational basis?**
  - ② **\*\*Is the New Testament a historically and geographically reliable document?**
  - ③ **\*\*Was the New Testament written before the end of the first century?**
  - ④ **\*\*How does the reliability of the NT compare to other books of antiquity?**
4. **\*\*** Careful consideration and an understanding of these 4 questions will accomplish three goals:
  - ① Strengthen our faith in God’s word, for in it alone is God completely revealed (1 Cor. 2:6-13). Without faith in God’s word we cannot come to know Him (Rom. 10:17).
  - ② Strengthen our faith in Jesus Christ, Immanuel, God with us, our God and Savior (Matt. 1:23; Tit. 2:13; 2 Pet. 1:1).
  - ③ Prepare us so that we might be able to do the very thing Peter exhorts: **1 Pet. 3:15**: “*But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and 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;*”
5. **4** The New Testament: Is it reliable? Is it a vain effort to make that determination? **\*\*Rom. 10:6-8**: “*But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, ‘Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down from above) 7 or, “‘Who will descend into the abyss?’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). 8 But what does it say? ‘The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart’ (that is, the word of faith which we preach):*”

## II. DISCUSSION:

I. **5** Rational faith? Does the Christian faith have an intelligent and rational basis?

A. **\*\*** God's word appeals to the heart and the mind:

**Matt. 22:36-38:** "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" 37 Jesus said to him, 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' 38 'This is the first and great commandment.'"

**Jn. 8:32:** "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."; cf. Jn. 17:17

B. **\*\*** Contrary to what many "intellectuals" believe, one does not have to commit **intellectual suicide** in order to have Biblical faith!

"Faith is believing what you know ain't so." —Mark Twain

C. In some respects, Mr. Twain was correct. His definition of "faith" is one of the legitimate definitions listed in Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary:

**Faith:** "firm belief in something for which there is no proof"

D. I would argue that, in reality, that is "blind faith"; but the type of faith spoken of in the Bible is not this "blind faith." Notice what is said of faith in the Bible:

**\*\*Heb. 11:1:** "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

**Acts 1:3:** "to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God."

**\*\*Jn. 20:30-31:** "And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name."

**2 Pet. 1:16:** "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."

E. **6** A more exact definition for the Bible type of faith is given by Webster when he defines the most common synonym for faith...**belief**:

"conviction of the truth of some statement or the reality of some being or phenomenon especially when **based on examination of evidence**" (emphasis mine, cvt)

F. Many people (intellectually bigoted) ridicule Christians for their faith. However, let's consider the facts:

**\*\***Did you know that the **scientific method** is based on our second definition of faith?! (Trust me, I know these things! I spent 6.5 years of my life obtaining a master's degree and doctoral degree in the biological sciences!) Here's the process in a nutshell:

**Step #1:** Develop a hypothesis of what you believe to be true.

**Example:** Cows will give more milk on diet A versus diet B.

**Step #2:** Design an experiment to test your hypothesis.

**Example:** Feed diet A to 30 cows and diet B to 30 cows.

**Note:** Modern scientific experimentation involves sophisticated, tried and tested, experimental designs so that the investigator removes as much bias as possible from the experiment (e.g., differences due to cow breed, age, stage of lactation, etc.)

**Step #3:** You conduct your experiment using the appropriate experimental design and collect the data.

**Example:** Feed diets A and B to your 60 cows according to the experimental design and measure each cow's milk production (also milk composition!).

**Step #4:** Analyze your data using accepted mathematical and statistical techniques appropriate to your experimental design.

**Example:** Apply these methods to the milk production data you collected in your experiment from the 60 cows fed diets A and B.

**Step #5:** Based on the results of the analysis you determine which diet produces more milk.

**Example:** Your analysis determines that, on average, diet A produces 10 lbs. more milk per cow per day than diet B. So, you conclude that diet A is the superior diet for farmers to feed their dairy cows.

**VERY IMPORTANT POINT:** The scientist's conclusion that diet A produces 10 lbs. more milk than diet B is **NOT** determined with **ABSOLUTE CERTAINTY**. It is determined at some level of **PROBABILITY** that the differences in milk production from feeding diet A versus diet B were a **true** difference due to the two different diets fed and is not due to experimental error (i.e., uncontrollable factors).

**In essence, the scientist is saying, "Based on the evidence that I have gathered and analyzed I BELIEVE diet A produces more milk than diet B.**

G. \*\* It is extremely rare that anything can be proven to be **ABSOLUTELY** true; for example, in the sense that one can prove that:  $1 + 1 = 2$ .

- (1) The scientist cannot offer 100% air-tight proof that his hypothesis is true. He can only offer evidence that at some level of probability it is true. (I want to make it perfectly clear: I am not demeaning honest scientific investigation. It is a wonderful and powerful tool and our world is a much better place because of it.)
- (2) The Christian cannot offer 100% air-tight proof that God exists and that the Bible is God's will for man. The Christian can only offer evidence that must be **HONESTLY** considered.
- (3) Thus, make no mistake about it: Whether you are an atheist, agnostic, or a Christian you operate on **FAITH** each and every day!

H. \*\* **CONCLUSION:** Both the Bible believer and the scientist base their FAITH on the same logic: a thorough examination of EVIDENCE.

- (1) The Christian's faith is NOT a *blind* faith, on the contrary, it is a belief based on solid evidence!
- (2) The real question is this: "Is the evidence for belief in God and His word reasonable?"

**In order to determine if the evidence is reasonable, we must first answer the question...**

2. **7** Is the Bible reliable? Is the Bible a *historically* and *geographically* accurate document?

A. God's word is not written like a fairy tale: "A long, long time ago, in a faraway land..."

B. \*\* The Bible appeals to history and geography and provides accounts of real events that happened in real places.

\*\*\*"The facts backing the Christian claim are not a special kind of 'religious' fact. They are the cognitive, informational facts upon which all historical, legal, and ordinary decisions are based."

Clark Pinnock, Christian Theologian and Apologist

**\*\*Lk 2:1-5:** “And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2 This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. 3 So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city. 4 Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, 5 to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child.”

**\*\*Lk. 3:1-2:** “Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, 2 while Annas and Caiaphas were high priests, the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness.”

- (1) **\*\*** Notice Luke mentions **times, places, people** and **events** that can be “checked” out.
- (2) For example, we can verify from secular historians and geographers that:
  - ☛ Caesar Augustus (also known as Octavius) succeeded Julius Caesar and began supreme rule in Rome in 31 B.C. He began a periodic census in 23-22 B.C. and that this census took place every 14 years. The census of which Luke speaks probably took place around 6-4 B.C.
  - ☛ Quirinius was a governor of Syria contemporary with Augustus. Secular history records that he was appointed governor of Syria twice, first around 7 B.C. (which would coincide with the census ordered by Augustus in Luke 2) and then a second time around 6 B.C.
  - ☛ A place called Syria exists, as well as Galilee, Nazareth, and Bethlehem. These can all be verified by consulting any reputable geographical textbook.
  - ☛ Secular history records that Annas and Caiaphas were high priests. The name “Annas” is a contracted form of Ananias (Acts 4:6) and secular history tells us he was appointed high priest by Quirinius about 7 A.D. Caiaphas was Annas’s son-in-law.
- (3) **8** What’s the significance of these historical facts?
  - (a) **\*\* Historical method:** Our modern legal system is built on weighing the evidence given by witnesses and determining the witness’s **veracity** (trustworthiness).
  - (b) **\*\*** If a witness provides testimony that we know is false, for example, speaks of people, places and events that we know do not exist (e.g., Dorothy, Oz, melting of the wicked witch of the West) then it calls into question the validity of every portion of their testimony.
  - (c) However, if a witness provides testimony that we can verify (Caesar Augustus, Roman census, Quirinius governor of Syria, Annas and Caiaphas high priests, geographical accuracy of countries, regions, cities, etc.) then we **CANNOT** dismiss their testimony about things we cannot as readily verify (e.g., life, deeds, death, burial, resurrection of Jesus, etc.).
- (4) **9** Testimony of archaeological and historical research:
 

**Sir William Ramsay:** regarded as one of the greatest archaeologists who ever lived. Trained in Germany in the mid-nineteenth century, Ramsay believed the book of Acts was written in the mid-second century A.D. **\*\***He was so firmly convinced of this belief that he was determined to prove it. Through his studies he eventually completely reversed his beliefs as he uncovered incontrovertible evidence in his research. Ramsay said:

**I**“I may fairly claim to have entered on this investigation without prejudice in favour of the conclusion which I shall now seek to justify to the reader. On the contrary, I began with a mind unfavourable to it, (i.e., Acts written in first century A. D., cvt) for the ingenuity and apparent completeness of the Tübingen theory had at one time quite convinced me. It did not then lie in my line of life to investigate the subject minutely; but more recently I found myself brought into contact with the Book of Acts as an authority for the topography, antiquities and society of Asia Minor. It was gradually borne upon me that in various details the narrative showed marvelous truth. In fact, beginning with a fixed idea that the work was essentially a second century composition, and never relying on its evidence as trustworthy for first century conditions, I gradually came to find it a useful ally in some obscure and difficult investigations.”

**I**“Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy; he is possessed of the true historic sense; he fixes his mind on the idea and plan that rules in the evolution of history, and proportions the scale of his treatment to the importance of each incident. He seizes the important and critical events and shows their true nature at greater length, while he touches lightly or omits entirely much that was valueless for his purpose. In short, this author should be placed with the very greatest of historians.”

- (5) At one time historians and archaeologists all believed the New Testament was wrong concerning (these are just a few examples):
- ☛ Luke’s account of the events surrounding the birth of Jesus (census, governorship of Quirinius, people did not have to return to their ancestral home for census, etc.).
  - ☛ Luke’s account that Lystra and Derbe were in Lycaonia and Iconium (Acts 14:1-6).
  - ☛ Luke’s account that Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene (Lk. 3:1).
  - ☛ Paul’s statement that Erastus was the city treasurer of Corinth (Rom. 16:23).
  - ☛ The existence of the court where Pilate tried Jesus, “*The Pavement*” (“*Gabbatha*,” Jn. 19:13) was thought never to have existed, it prompting one “scholar” to comment: “It’s a myth. See, it (Bible, cvt) is not historical.”
  - ☛ The pool of Bethesda (Jn. 5:2) was thought to be a figment of John’s imagination.
- (6) However, subsequent research by well-qualified and scholarly-recognized historians and archaeologists has completely **vindicated** the New Testament!
- (a) Historians and archaeologist now agree that all these events and places are **real!**
- (b) Luke, John, Paul and the other New Testament writers had their facts **straight!**
- “It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference. ...the almost incredibly accurate historical memory of the Bible, particularly so when it is fortified by archaeological fact.”

Nelson Glueck, noted Jewish archaeologist

**C. CONCLUSION:** The NT is completely reliable in every historical and geographical detail.

- (1) The accuracy of the New Testament’s historical and geographical information has been independently and impartially verified.
- (2) This independent and impartial verification was made by investigators with the highest professional credentials and by many who were even antagonistic to the Bible’s veracity.
- (3) This witness imparts the highest credibility and reliability to all the testimony of the NT.

**But we also need to answer the question...****3. 12** New Testament written before 100 A.D.? Was the NT written before the end of the first century?

- A. We have already stated that the Bible can be checked against the record of its historical and geographical information.
  - (1) No credible, independent source has discredited this aspect of the Bible's **reliability**.
  - (2) This fact alone makes the Bible one of the most **reliable** books of antiquity.
- B. However, during the last century, and even now, some "scholars" claim the Gospels and book of Acts were not written before 200 A.D. This is a very important question that must be answered.
- C. Think of the ramifications if these "scholars" were correct; it would mean:

(1) **\*\*** Jesus was a liar!

**\*\*Jn. 14:26:** "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." (KJV)

**Jn. 15:26:** "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me." (KJV)

**\*\*Jn. 16:8:** "And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment."

**Jn. 16:13:** "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come."

(2) **\*\*** The writers of the New Testament were not inspired:

**\*\*1 Cor. 2:13:** "These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches..."

**Gal. 1:11-12:** "But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. 12 For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ."

**\*\*Eph. 3:3-5:** "how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, 4 by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), 5 which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets:"; 2 Tim. 3:16-17

(3) **13** The Gospels and Acts were not written by eyewitnesses!

**\*\*Lk. 1:1-4:** "Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, 2 just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, 3 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, 4 that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed."

**Acts 1:21-22:** "Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, 22 beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection."

(4) **\*\*** The NT writers were liars/frauds who misrepresented themselves as eyewitnesses!

- (a) **\*\*** Luke, the author of Acts claims to have been present during some of the events described in that book. For example, the use of "we" in Acts 16:9-13:



*“And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’ 10 Now after he had seen the vision, immediately **we** sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called **us** to preach the gospel to them. 11 Therefore, sailing from Troas, **we** ran a straight course to Samothrace, and the next day came to Neapolis, 12 and from there to Philippi, which is the foremost city of that part of Macedonia, a colony. And **we** were staying in that city for some days. 13 And on the Sabbath day **we** went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and **we** sat down and spoke to the women who met there.”*

- (b) **\*\*** Peter claims to have been an eyewitness of the “transfiguration”:

**2 Pet. 1:16-18:** *“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. 17 For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’ 18 And **we** **heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.**”*

**START**(5) **\*\*** Makes God a liar!

**\*\* 1 Cor. 15:13-15:** *“But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. 14 And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. 15 Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up — if in fact the dead do not rise.”*

- (a) If the skeptical scholars are correct in their assertions, the New Testament becomes a forgery of unknown authorship.
- (b) It turns the Bible into the most damning fraud ever perpetrated on the human race in the entire history of mankind!
- (c) It would mean that the Bible is **worse** than worthless!
- (d) Instead of the scorn due all frauds; the Bible would be, considering its claims and promises, only worthy of being totally erased from existence!
- (e) Every copy of the New Testament should be gathered together and thrown into a fire! Totally erased from human history!

D. Is there any credible evidence that the NT was written before the close of the first century?

(1) **14 Internal evidence:**

- (a) **\*\*** The ending of the book of Acts:

☛ Acts ends abruptly with Paul imprisoned awaiting trial:

**Acts 28:30-31:** *“Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, 31 preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.”*

☛ This suggests Luke wrote Acts during this actual time, before Paul finally appeared before Nero (emperor from Oct. 54-June, 68 A.D.).

☛ This places the time of writing at about 62-63 A.D., meaning Acts and Luke’s Gospel (which was written first, compare Act 1:1 with Lk 1:1-4) were written within thirty years of ministry and death of Jesus.

- (b) **\*\*** Destruction of Jerusalem: It is very conspicuous that none of the Gospel writers mentions the actual destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

- ☛ Matthew, Mark & Luke all record Jesus' prophecy concerning the event and that it would take place within that current generation (Matt. 24:1-35; Mk. 13:1-31; Lk. 21:5-33).
  - ☛ Secular history records (e.g., Josephus) that in 70 A.D. Jerusalem with its temple was destroyed, **exactly** as the gospel writers recorded that Jesus foretold!
  - ☛ However, **every** single book of the NT is silent in reference to this event as having happened!
  - ☛ Such seems very unlikely if the gospels (or any portion of the NT) had been written **after** 70 A.D.
  - ☛ If written post-100 A.D., even fraudulent writers would have surely placed great emphasis on the destruction of Jerusalem.
  - ☛ Since Jesus' prophecy of that event is an important verification of His claim to be the Son of God; it's hard to imagine any writer after 70 A.D. would not make mention of the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy.
  - ☛ These facts have prompted many scholars to conclude that **ALL** of the books of the New Testament were written prior to 70 A.D. (e.g., John A. T. Robinson, in his book *Redating the New Testament*).
- (c) **\*\*** No mythologizing of the apostles:
- ☛ Surely if they were frauds, the apostles would have done more to burnish their own reputations.
  - ☛ Surely if they were frauds, the apostles would have boasted of great and heroic deeds on their part.
  - ☛ There is not even a hint in any NT book of the writers striving to elevate themselves (1 Tim. 1:15; Mk. 14:72).
  - ☛ The total absence of such lends great credibility to their writings.
- (2) **15** **Early New Testament manuscripts**: Most of the early New Testament manuscripts were written on papyrus. Here are a few examples:
- (a) **\*\*** **John Rylands manuscript**:
- ☛ This is oldest fragment of the NT contains only a portion of the Gospel of John, dated 130 A.D. Only contains five verses, Jn. 18:31-33, 37-38, but reads exactly the same as the Greek text today!
  - ☛ "Because of its early date and location (Egypt), some distance from the traditional place of composition (Asia Minor), this portion of the gospel of John tends to confirm the traditional date (i.e., first century, cvt) of the composition of the gospel." (*General Introduction to the Bible*, Geisler & Nix)
- (b) **\*\*** **Bodmer Papyrus II**:
- ☛ Contains portions of the Gospel of John, dated 150-200 A.D.
  - ☛ Contains fourteen full chapters of John, and portions of the last seven chapters.
  - ☛ Also originally discovered in Egypt.
- (c) **\*\*** **Chester Beatty Biblical Papyri**:
- ☛ p<sup>45</sup> contains all four gospels and Acts, dated early third century (200-250 A.D.).
  - ☛ p<sup>46</sup> contains ten of Paul's epistles, dated about 200 A.D.



☛ p<sup>47</sup> contains the book of Revelation, dated about middle of 3<sup>rd</sup> century (250 A.D.).

(3) **16 Patristic writings:** The “Church Fathers” lived in the early days of Christianity and some were even contemporaries with the apostles or with people who were apostolic contemporaries.

(a) **\*\* Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians** (“non-inspired writing dated 120 A.D.).

☛ Polycarp was a personal acquaintance of the apostle John.

☛ He quotes from the synoptic gospels (i.e., Matt. Mk. Lk.), Acts, Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Hebrews, 1 Peter, and 1 John.

(b) **\*\* Letters of Ignatius** (wrote seven “non-inspired writing dated very early 2<sup>nd</sup> century, one citation says around 115 A.D.)

☛ Ignatius wrote these letters to several churches in Asia Minor.

☛ In the letter he quotes from Matthew, John, Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus

(c) **\*\* Epistle of Clement of Rome to the Corinthians** (“non-inspired”, dated 95 A.D.)

☛ Epistle was written to encourage the church to respect their elders.

☛ Clement quotes from the synoptic gospels, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, Titus, Hebrews, and 1 Peter.

(4) **\*\* Conclusion of scholars:**

“We can already say emphatically that there is no longer any solid basis for dating any book of the New Testament after 80 A.D.”

—W. F. Albright, biblical archaeologist

“In my opinion, every book of the New Testament was written between the forties and eighties of the First Century A.D.”

—Nelson Glueck, President of the *Jewish Theological Seminary* in the *Hebrew Union College*, a renowned Jewish archaeologist)

**\*\***“If the ancient preachers who lived between A.D. 70-200 quoted extensively from the New Testament, it means that the New Testament had to be complete, already circulating among the Christians, and accepted as Scripture long before they quoted it. It also means that we can compare the New Testament that we read in the twenty-first century to the quotes that such preachers produced in those early years. What we find when we compare the two is that they are virtually identical.”

—“Quotable Quotes,” Kyle Butt, *Apologetics Press*, 2002.

**\*\***“...there are more than 36,000 New Testament quotations present in writings of early church fathers who wrote prior to the council of Nicaea in 325 A.D.”

—From: [datingthenewtestament.com](http://datingthenewtestament.com)

**Note:** there are 7,957 total verses in the New Testament.

E. **Conclusion:** The New Testament was in existence and well-known and well-circulated geographically **before** the end of the first century A.D.

(1) The New Testament was written in the same generation in which the events it records took place.

(2) It was written and circulated in time for the people mentioned in the writings to deny them! (Recall Clifford Irving’s spurious biography of Howard Hughes!)

**But we also need to answer the question...**

4. **17** The New Testament as a book of antiquity: How does the *reliability* of the NT *compare* to other books of antiquity? How does the NT stack up as a historical document?

A. Do you find it interesting that secular historians, scholars, and intellectuals do not question:

- ☛ **\*\***That **Plato** lived or question the veracity of his writings (428-348 B.C., Greek philosopher and follower of Socrates, founded the “Academy,” wrote “*The Republic*,” “*Statesman*,” “*Parmenides*,” etc.),
- ☛ That **Aristotle** lived or question the veracity of his writings (384-322 B.C., Greek philosopher and student of Plato, tutor of Alexander the Great, wrote “*Organon*,” “*Ethics*,” “*Politics*,” etc.),
- ☛ That **Demosthenes** lived or question the veracity of his writings (384-322 B.C., Athenian orator [“*On the Crown*”] and statesman),
- ☛ That **Thucydides** lived or question the veracity of his writings (460-395 B.C., Athenian historian, “*History of the Peloponnesian War*”),
- ☛ That **Pliny** lived or question the veracity of his writings (62-114 A.D., Pliny the Younger, Roman author and administrator, “*Letters*” give a valuable account of contemporary upper-class Roman life),
- ☛ We could name dozens upon dozens of similarly notable ancient historical figures and their writings that the historians, scholars, and intellectuals of this world **DO NOT** question either their existence or the credibility of their writings.

B. One could rightly say these literary works are some of the most foundational documents upon which western civilization is based!

- (1) The literature of these ancients are venerated!
- (2) Entire departments of the world’s greatest universities are devoted to their study.
- (3) No serious scholar doubts their veracity.

C. **18** How do scholars judge the reliability of ancient writings? For example, the writings of Plato, Aristotle, Demosthenes, Thucydides, Pliny, etc. **AND** the **NEW TESTAMENT**?

- (1) Scholars use what is called the **bibliographical test** in the examination of the textual transmission of ancient documents.
- (2). First, we might ask why is the **bibliographical test** necessary?
- (3) Because, whether one speaks of the writings of Plato, Aristotle, Demosthenes, Thucydides, Pliny, etc. or the NT none of the autographs (originals) are still in existence.
- (4) All that is in existence are copies of the autographs. These copies are called manuscripts (abbreviated MSS). In the case of all ancient writings, the text we read and use has been reconstructed from these copies (MSS).

D. The **bibliographical test** is used to judge the reliability any ancient MSS. The purpose of the bibliographical test is to determined:

- (1) **\*\*** Are the MSS a faithful representative of the original (autograph)?
- (2) **\*\*** Are the MSS free of changes, errors, or collusion?

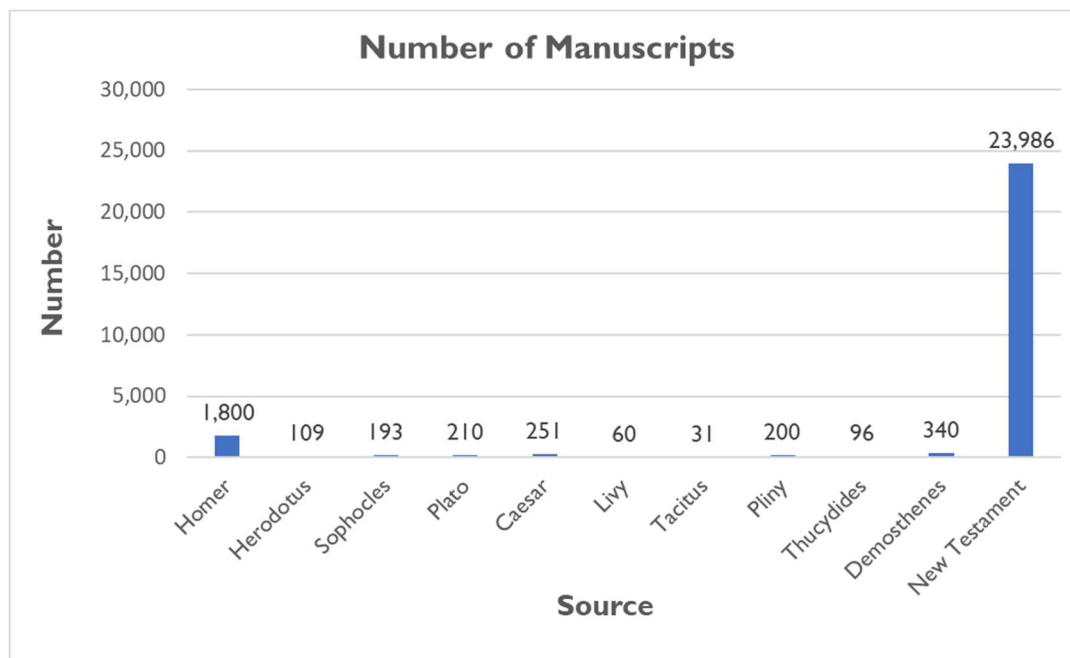
**\*\***“One problem I constantly face is the desire on the part of many to apply one standard or test to secular literature and another to the Bible. One needs to apply the same test, whether the literature under investigation is secular or religious.”

—Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*

E. **19** Two primary questions raised in the **bibliographical test**:

(I) **\*\* Number of copies: How many copies of the document are available?**

- ☛ Obviously, the more copies, the better,
- ☛ Also, more copies means more “cross-checks” can be made to see if the copies are in “agreement.”
- ☛ How does the New Testament compare to other ancient writings? **20**



**NOTE:** The most up to date count of New Testament manuscripts is from the blog of Sean McDowell (*Bringing Truth to a New Generation*):

“We list the numbers for other classical works and specific biblical manuscripts in the updated *Evidence*. But here are the key manuscript updates: Greek Manuscript total 5,856; Earliest manuscript: AD 130 (John Rylands Papyrus: P<sup>52</sup>); Non-Greek Manuscripts (Armenian, Latin, etc.): 18,130+; Total Manuscripts: 23,986 (What Is the Most Recent Manuscript Count For the New Testament?, Bringing Truth to a new generation, March 15, 2018: <https://seanmcdowell.org/blog/what-is-the-most-recent-manuscript-count-for-the-new-testament>)

Author	Word	Date Written	Earliest MSS	Time Gap	Old #	New #
Homer	Illiad	800 BC	400 BC	400	643	1,800+
Herodotus	History	480-425 BC	100 AD	1350	8	109
Sophocles	Plays	496-406 BC	200 AD	100-200	100	193
Plato	Tetralogies	400 BC	895 AD	1300	7	210
Caesar	Gallic Wars	100-44 BC	800 AD	950	10	251
Livy	History of Rome	59 BC – 17 AD	425 AD	400	19	60
Tacitus	Annals	100 AD	850 AD (1 <sup>st</sup> half)	750-950	20	31

			1100 AD (2 <sup>nd</sup> half)			
Pliny the Elder	Natural History	49-79 AD	400 AD (frag.) 1450 AD	400 (750)	7	200
Thucydides	History	460-400 BC	200 BC 1100 AD	200 (1350)	8	96
Demosthenes	Speeches	300 BC	100 BC (frag.) 1100 AD	1100 (1400)	200	340
Greek NT		50-100 AD	130 AD or less	50	5366	5838

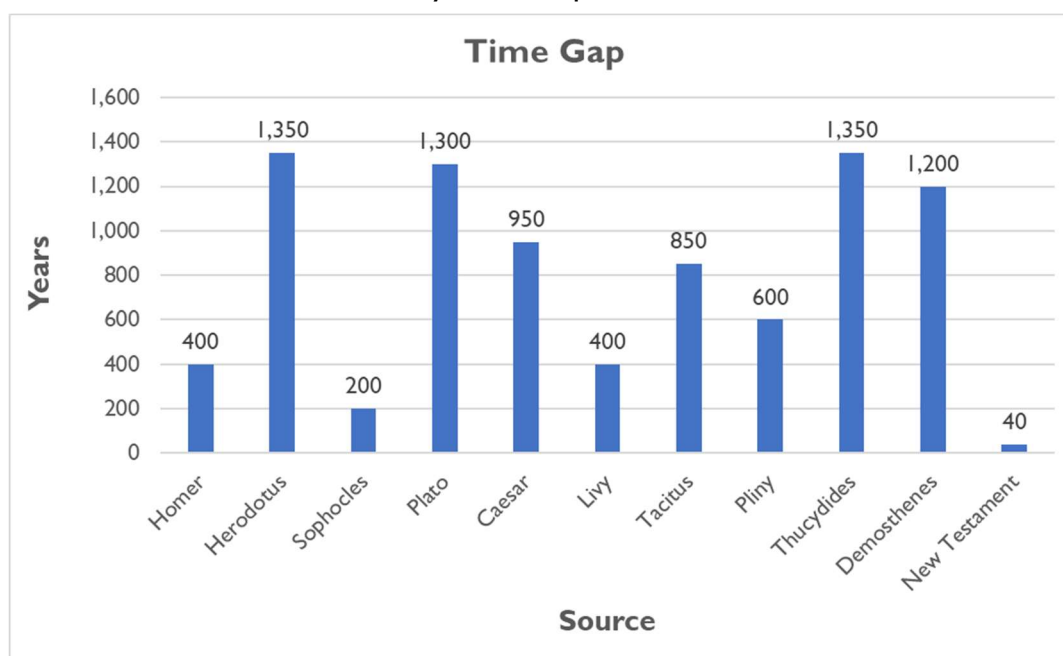
**Source:** *The Bibliographical Test*, Dr. Josh D. McDowell & Dr. Clay Jones; updated 8/13/2014.

(2) **Where were the copies found?**

- ☛ If they all came from one place, collusion may have been possible,
- ☛ But if they are from places far removed by time and location, collusion is unlikely.
- ☛ New Testament MSS have been found in a wide variety of places: Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Turkey, Greece, Italy.
- ☛ Such varied locations would make **COLLUSION** nearly impossible!

(3) **21 Time span: What length of time passed between the writing of the original to the writing of the earliest copies?**

- ✓ The more distant the copies are in time from the original, the more potential for changes in the text that we could not detect,
- ✓ The shorter the interval of time between the copies and the original would increase our assurance in the reliability of the copies. **22**



**NOTE:** The time interval between the autographs and the most ancient copy of the complete New Testament is 245 years. This assumes the New Testament was complete by 80 A.D. and is

based on the MSS known as the “Codex Vaticanus” dated 325 A.D. This Greek MSS contains nearly all the Bible (Old and New Testaments) except Mk. 16:9-20 and Jn. 7:53-8:11. This MSS and the Greek MSS “Codex Sinaiticus” (350 A. D.) are considered by all reputable New Testament scholars as the two most valuable MSS of the New Testament. We have already noted that there are fragment New Testament MSS and quotations of the New Testament that are within 15-50 years of the autographs.

(4) **23** Manuscripts accurate? **How much variance exists between the copies?**

- (a) If the various MSS are filled with significant differences in wording, then it would not be possible to know what the original author wrote!
- (b) **\*\*** But if the variances in the MSS are few and minor, then the process of copying over the years has been faithful to the original!
- (c) **\*\*** According to Philip Schaff (noted New Testament textual scholar) there are about 150,000 “alternate or various readings” among the New Testament MSS.
- (d) On first consideration this seems to cast considerable doubt on the reliability of the New Testament.
- (e) However, we need to consider the following. The vast majority of these “errors” or “various readings” fall into two categories:
  - ① **\*\*Spelling changes:** for example, over the years the spelling of Greek words changed. We experience the same thing in the English language, for example, “favour” versus “favor”, “Saviour” versus “Savior”, etc.
  - ② **\*\*Word order:** for example, “the Lord Jesus Christ” versus “Christ Jesus the Lord”.
- (f) Due to the existence of so many NT MSS and the way “errors” are counted it may appear to the “uneducated” that the New Testament is filled with errors.
- (g) But consider this: if the correct rendering by scholars is considered to be “*the Lord Jesus Christ*” and 5,000 MSS contain the “alternate” word order “*Christ Jesus the Lord*” this is considered to be 5,000 errors, or “various readings”! Any reasonable person can readily see this is not problematic to the reliability of the New Testament.
- (h) **24** Most NT scholars agree that there is only really one passage that is classified as a **substantial variation**: **\*\*Mark 16:9-20**:
  - ☛ **\*\***Two of the oldest and best MSS (Codex Sinaiticus, 350 A.D. and Codex Vaticanus, 325 A.D.) do not contain these verses.
  - ☛ **\*\***However, a host of other reliable manuscripts contain these verses and Irenaeus (early Christian writer) quotes these verses early in the second century and attributes Mark as their author.

**\*\***“Whatever the correct view, it is important to note the truthfulness of this passage is not in dispute. The main events of Mark 16:9-20 are recorded elsewhere, so at any rate we are not in danger of forfeiting heavenly treasure. The variant readings in the manuscripts are not of such a nature that threaten to overthrow our faith. Except for a few rare instances we have an unquestioned text, and even then one principle of faith or command of the Lord is not involved.”

Neil R. Lightfoot, *How We Got the Bible* (p. 39)
- (i) Most good modern translations note these minor differences among the most important MSS in their footnotes.

## F. 25 Conclusions of the scholars:

\*\*\*“There is no body of ancient literature in the world which enjoys such a wealth of good textual attestation as the New Testament.”

— F. F. Bruce

*New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*

\*\*\*“The evidence for our New Testament writings is ever so much greater than the evidence for many writings of classical authors, the authenticity of which no one dreams of questioning. And if the New Testament were a collection of secular writings, their authenticity would generally be as beyond all doubt.”

— F. F. Bruce

*New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*

“...in the variety and fullness of the evidence on which it rests the text of the New Testament stands absolutely and unapproachably alone among ancient prose writings.”

— F. J. A. Hort, 19<sup>th</sup> century NT Greek scholar  
(e.g., *The New Testament in the Original Greek*)

“Since scholars accept as generally trustworthy the writings of the ancient classics even though the earliest MSS were written so long after the original writings and the number of extant MSS is in many instances so small, it is clear that the reliability of the text of the N. T. is likewise assured.”

— J. Harold Greenlee, *Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism*

\*\*\*“No fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith rests on a disputed reading. ...It cannot be too strongly asserted that in substance the text of the Bible is certain: especially is this the case with the New Testament.”

— Sir Frederick Kenyon, early 20<sup>th</sup> century  
biblical scholar and palaeographer

“After trying to shatter the historicity and validity of the Scripture, I came to the conclusion that they are historically trustworthy. If one discards the Bible as being unreliable, then he must discard almost all literature of antiquity.”

— Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*

## G. Conclusion:

- (1) The New Testament is unquestionably the most reliable book of antiquity.
- (2) In fact, when we objectively apply the bibliographic test to the New Testament and other ancient writings; the New Testament’s veracity and reliability not only surpasses these other “well-accepted” writings of antiquity; its reliability and veracity is in actuality “light years” ahead of them.
- (3) When we pick up a copy of the New Testament that has been faithfully translated from the accepted MSS we hold in our hands the most trustworthy and reliable ancient book in existence.

\*\*\*“To be skeptical of the resultant text of the New Testament books is to allow all the classical works of antiquity to slip into obscurity, for no documents of the ancient period are as well attested bibliographically as the New Testament.”

John Warwick Montgomery, Christian apologist and recipient of 11 earned degrees including PhD, ThD and LLD



**III. CONCLUSION: 26**

1. As Christians we don't have to hang our head in shame when asked for the basis of our faith.
2. \*\* Our faith is based on the most accurate, reliable and well-documented book EVER handed down to us from antiquity.
3. Our faith is based upon the evidences provided by a book that scholars have proven accurate in every detail.
4. To not believe the New Testament one must either:
  - A. Reject the irrefutable evidence we have just cited testifying to the New Testament's reliability and authenticity, or,
  - B. Conclude that the writers of the New Testament were liars, frauds, and deceivers! But such a belief would force one to...
    - ✓ \*\* Believe the New Testament was the most carefully orchestrated lie in history,
    - ✓ \*\* Believe these liars, frauds and deceivers were able to author a book setting forth the world's highest standard of morality and loftiest of human goals,
    - ✓ \*\* Believe that the New Testament authors suffered extreme hardship, poverty, persecution and martyrdom for what they knew to be a lie!
5. You tell me: Based on the evidence is it more reasonable to accept or reject the NT record?

Some of the material in this sermon was  
gleaned from Mark Copeland's website  
*Executable Outlines* ([www.exeout.com](http://www.exeout.com))