

2 Peter 1:16–21

How Do We Know the Bible Is True?

The Summit Church

MPS: We can trust the Bible because it is historically reliable, internally consistent, and prophetically accurate. (And Jesus trusted it!)

INTRODUCTION

2 Peter 1...the book(s) right *after* James. *I thought we are in James?* We'll be returning to James next weekend, but I promise 2 Peter will make sense in a minute. *BTW, haven't PJD and BL been crushing this James series? Wow.* While you're turning there...

A few weeks ago we visited my parents back in GA. You always get a little nostalgic when *visiting your hometown*. In the car, my wife and I started talking about **all the things we were taught as kids that weren't actually true.** For instance:

- **Cracking your fingers gives you arthritis.** The sound is just popping gas. If yours pop, you got some gassy hands.
- **Swimming after eating will make you cramp.** That was just a giant ruse so adults could have some down time.
- **D.A.R.E. had me thinking that ppl would be offering me drugs all the time...** like I'd have to be running away from people in vans offering me drugs every time I went on a walk.

Things we were taught that aren't actually true—in today's society there's an **increasing number of people** who think we should add **"the Bible is the Word of God"** to the list of things we were taught growing up that aren't actually true.

- We live in a day and age where **deconstruction, doubt,** and **disillusionment** have become the new form of **enlightenment.**

PJD said it last week: go over to the halls of academia at Duke and UNC, and there they'll tell you that **Jesus isn't the Son of God** and the **Bible is a joke.** Instead you'll hear things like:

- *You know the Bible is so **outdated** and **regressive**.*
- *And of course it can't be trusted **historically** or **scientifically**.*
- *I mean, how can you really trust something that's so **full of contradictions** and **errors**.*
- *Besides, what we have today is not the same as what was written then cuz, you know, **Constantine** and **King James** and **councils full of overzealous monks** changed it to fit their agenda and the whole thing is one giant **cover up for power**. (I mean, we've all seen the **Da Vinci Code**, right?!)*

In the 1700s, French Philosopher **Voltaire** summed up his view of the Bible this way: **"The Bible. That is what fools have written, what imbeciles commend, what rogues teach and young children are made to learn by heart. . . A hundred years from now the Bible will be a forgotten book."**

Arguably the most important thing we do every single weekend at TSC is open this book. Every weekend we devote over half of our service to the teaching and preaching of this book. So I thought this weekend we could take a step back and ask: *Why should we choose to believe the Bible? How can we know it's true and reliable? Can we know if it's true?* When James tells us to **"be doers of the Word,"** *why should we trust the Word in the first place?*

Listen: if you **know someone** asking these questions—or if **you're here today asking** these questions—people are right to ask these

questions. Because if the Bible is true, it has **implications for every aspect of our lives**. If I'm telling you to STAKE YOUR LIFE AND ETERNITY on something, you're *right* to test its legitimacy.

Now, I'd love to say I'm smart enough to have come up with all the stuff I'm about to tell you, but that's not true at all. I'm sharing stuff with you today that I've gathered from **historians, pastors, theologians, apologists, and Bible scholars**. If you wanna dive deeper into all of this, we're gonna be sending a list of resources in our **Summit Weekly email** and **social media** where you can **nerd-out as much as you want to**.¹

Why should we trust the Bible? Let's start by looking at what the Bible says about itself:

What the Bible Says About Itself

In 2 Peter, the Apostle Peter is writing to **defend himself and the other Apostles** against the charge that their stories are **mere exaggerations** designed to **beef up their religious authority**:

2 Peter 1:16–21:

¹⁶For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (we didn't make these stories up), **but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty** (we literally saw all of this). . . .²⁰knowing this first of all, that no prophecy

¹ Resources:

- McLaughlin, *Confronting Christianity*
- Neil Shenvi, *Why Believe*
- NT Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*
- Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the New Testament*
- Strobel, *Case for Christ*
- Kruger, *Canon Revisited*

of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. ²¹For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

- (Avi: "That's the whole thing? If all you do is read it and then explain it, why do sermons take so long?")

"Men spoke from God as they were carried along by the HS." That Greek word "carried along" is *Fero*. It's the word you used for **how a ship sailed**...the wind would "*fero*" the ship. As men wrote, God was *fero'ing* their words to their destination.

- But God did this in a way as to retain the author's **personalities, styles, and perspectives** (for example: if I had been chosen to write a Bible book, mine would be filled with **snarky humor, sports analogies, and bunch of "y'all's"** since I'm from N.GA). Peter sounds like Peter; Paul sounds like Paul...but each word is **carried along by the HS**, assuring God's word comes out **infallible** and **inerrant**.

The Scriptures, as **2 Timothy 3:16** says, are literally, **"God-breathed // breathed out by God."**

- Right now, my **breath**, conditioned by my **mind**, is hitting my **vocal chords** and producing **words**—my words are "me-breathed" right now (you're like, "*We know...you say so many of them and you say them so fast.*").
- What we have in the Bible is "God-breathed"—his **mind**, his **heart**, his **thoughts**, his **breath** given to us in the **written word through the writers of the Bible**.

So that's the Bible's claim for where this all came from. **You may or may not agree with that claim**, but just taking this book on its own terms that's what we have.

But let's take a few steps back and answer the most basic question:

What Is the Bible?

We tend to think of the Bible as **one big book**, but the Bible is actually a **collection of 66 books**. These 66 books were written by 40 authors, in 3 languages (Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic), across 3 continents (Asia, Africa, Europe), over a span of 1500 years, and it tells one united story.

- If you wanted a one sentence summary, here it is: the Bible is **God's love letter to mankind about how we can have a relationship with our Creator through the finished work of Jesus Christ.**

If you're unfamiliar with the story of the Bible, lemme give you the cliff notes:

- **Creation:** how + why God created the world // all good
- **Fall:** how it became broken
- **Redemption:** God's plan to fix it
- **Restoration:** picture of events to come and eternity future

That's what the Bible *is* . . . but let's also be clear about what it *isn't*...

What It Isn't

The Bible is not a science, astronomy, or biology book. It's **not wrong** and it **contains insights into them** (even though it often speaks in **poetry** or **phenomenological** language) but its primary focus is not to be a primer on those things. It's not trying to answer things like:

- *Is the universe infinite? If so, how is it expanding?*
- *Does the Upside Down from Stranger Things exist? Is time travel possible? Were Doc and Marty onto something?*

The Bible is not about how to get rich, be happy, get successful, or how to live your best life now.

- It's not about "slaying your Goliath" or "marching around your Jericho" or "walking on unworried waters."
- Yes, it contains **general wisdom** and **principles** about how to be **good stewards, find joy, be blessed, and live a satisfied life**...but it's primary purpose is not giving **investment strategies** and promising **dopamine hits**.
- If you turn it into that, you are misusing it.

The Bible isn't just a collection of moral teachings or ethics.

- Again, certainly contains those, but that's not the main point.

Lastly, **the Bible doesn't contain all the answers to life questions or mysteries of the universe.** (regardless of what the billboard told you)

- *Do aliens exist? Did they steal the dinosaurs?!*
- *When you forget a thought, where does it go?*
- *If you have a cold hot pocket, is it just considered a pocket?*
- *Do penguins have knees?*

It doesn't answer those things because that's not the focus; it's about **God** and **his plan for the universe** and **your part in it**.

That's a quick overview of what the Bible *is* and what it *isn't*. But it still raises the question: **Why should we trust it?**

- 1 Peter 3:15 says we should **always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.**

Bad Responses

Especially in the South, I think we tend to give some **not-so-great-answers** when someone asks us why we believe the Bible. We say things like:

1. ***Well you just gotta believe!*** But then they're like, *why believe something I'm not sure is true?*
2. ***The Bible says it's true.*** *The Bible says it; I believe it; that settles it! "If KJV was good enough for Jesus it's good enough for me!"* Don't say that. **Quoting the Bible to prove the Bible assumes the Bible is true, which is the whole point of contention in the first place.** To the skeptic, it's **circular reasoning** at best and **illogical** at worst.
3. ***I was raised that way.*** If your validation for the truth of the Bible is cuz you were "raised that way" then how is that any more valid than the **Muslim who grew up in Pakistan**? By that logic we're all just **products of our environment**—even spiritually.
4. ***I tried it and it worked for me.*** If ever there were a motto for our modern day: *My truth is my truth. I tried it and it worked for me.* If this one held water then every **Crossfitter, Orange Theorist, and Essential Oils salesperson** could claim their religion as truth, right? (*Y'all, I don't care how many times PJD tells me to rub coconut oil on my feet at night, I'm just not doing it. He tried it and it worked for him...and that's fine.*)

Now, I'll tell you personally I tried the Bible and it has worked for me. That's generally how life goes with God if you live on his terms. But that's the **fruit** of a life standing on God's Word; not the **foundational** reason we believe in it.

Here's what I'm saying, Summit: I don't want us to live with **blind faith** or even some kind of **ignorant certainty**...I want us to have an **informed faith**: **Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.** We're not after **blind faith** here; we're after **biblical faith**...not faith that **checks its brain at the door.**

Here's why we can trust the Bible:

We can trust the Bible because it is historically reliable, internally consistent, and prophetically accurate.

We're gonna **nerd out a little bit and unpack this together.** Put your **thinking cap on** and **lean in with me** and I promise this is gonna blow your mind.

1) The Bible Is Historically Reliable

2 Peter 1:16, 20: ¹⁶For we did not follow cleverly devised myths. . . .
²⁰knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation.

If you're trying to figure out if something in the past happened as someone said it did, there's two main things you look for: **evidence** and **eyewitness testimony.**

We have four kids...3 y/o son is still learning what's acceptable when playing...when my 5 y/o daughter comes dramatically running in the room yelling, "Elijah HIT me!" Of course I take that seriously...but I still wanna know:

- *Where's the evidence? Bite mark? Does he look guilty? When and where did this occur?*

- *Were there any eyewitnesses? Did your sisters see this happen?*
- (Usually the **evidence** points to the fact that her 3 year old brother decided he wanted to play with **a toy she forgot even existed** until 10 seconds ago he decided to play with it and then **when she tried to take it back from him** he took a swing. Rinse, repeat that about 10x per day—*the boy with the fist in the playroom...mystery solved.*)
- When I'm looking to verify something I'm told, I look for **evidence and eyewitnesses.**

Reliable Evidence

Over and over again, year after year, more and more archaeological evidence is found solidifying the **historical reliability** of the Bible. I could give you a list a mile long, but through excavations we've uncovered:

- The city of **Jericho**
- **Athens theater**
- **Pool of Siloam**
- **Herod's temple**
- Book of Acts lists:
 - 39 countries, 54 cities, 9 islands
 - All substantiated through archaeological discoveries
- The list goes on and on...

Nelson Glueck, a non-Christian archeologist: **"I've been accused of teaching [that the Bible is the Word of God]. I want it to be understood that I have never taught this. All I have ever said is that in all of my archaeological investigation I have never found one artifact of antiquity that contradicts any statement of the [Bible]."**

We have *mounting* **reliable historical evidence** that what the Bible says is true. In addition to **evidence**, we also have reliable **eyewitness testimony** to the events in the Bible.

Reliable Eyewitnesses

This is why Bible authors often mentioned the names of people they had talked to...it'd be like saying, **"If you don't believe what I'm telling you, go ask so-and-so: they saw it too!"** If I'm attempting to perpetuate something I know isn't true, I don't tell you to do follow up research with other random people! For instance:

- When Paul was talking about the resurrection of Jesus he said, **"Then [after Jesus was raised from the dead] he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive..."**²
- It's why Peter said ¹⁶**For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.**

We can trust the Bible because it is historically reliable: we have **evidence** and **eyewitness accounts**.

But, oh, I hear the argument: *Well we still can't be sure that what we hold today is the same as what they actually wrote back then. What happened was that individuals doctored the Bible up and made it say what they wanted it to say and it's been changed and translated so many times. In fact, we don't even have any of the originals! It's like the telephone game: what started as "Jesus talked while out in the water" ended up as "Jesus walked on water." Therefore, we can't fully trust this thing in our hands today.*

² 1 Corinthians 15:6

Y'all, this is one of my favorites...because not only is the Bible historically reliable, but it's also **internally consistent**...

2) The Bible Is Internally Consistent

The Jewish scribes who copied the Bible were known to be **the most meticulous on the planet**, so the copies we have are **incredibly consistent** from copy to copy.³

Consistent Copies

Outside of the Bible, we have many historical writings that are **used and accepted in culture and academia** that are both **scarce in number** and their copies are **hundreds/thousands of years** apart from the original. Look at how the Bible stacks up against them:

BOOK	# OF COPIES	GAP BETWEEN ORIGINAL & EARLIEST COPIES
Plato	7	1,300 years
Caesar, <i>Gallic Wars</i>	10	1,000 years
Homer, <i>Odyssey</i>	3	2,000 years
New Testament	5,800+	<100 years

³ In fact, they were so meticulous about this, when they copied something they knew how many letters should be in the Torah. So when they were done copying they would go to the middle letter then count backwards and forwards. If it was *one* letter off they would throw the whole scroll out and start over.

To date we have **more manuscript evidence to support the Bible** than any ten pieces of classical literature combined.⁴ Basically, if you want to be skeptical about the Bible then **you have to be skeptical of everything written in classical antiquity**.⁵

This thing has been **accurately copied, transmitted, and shared** through the ages, far more than any other ancient document.

If that's not enough, let's do a group think here for a minute: one pastor explains **what would've had to happen for someone (or even a group of someone's) who wanted to doctor up just the NT to make it say what they wanted it to say**. Here's the short version:

1. They would've had to **find over 6000 manuscripts** or portions of manuscripts, change all of them to make them say the same thing, not show their ink work, get them back to where they stole them from, and not tell anyone what they did.
2. Not to mention that in the **first few centuries** the Bible was **translated into Syriac, Coptic, and Latin**. So they would've had to find all 6000 manuscripts, along with the Syriac, Coptic, and Latin manuscripts and do the same thing to make all *those* match what they previously doctored.
3. Then we have the **early church fathers** who have this habit of writing about the NT, to the point that **scholar Bruce Metzger** says "If all we had of the NT was the quotations, citations, and commentaries from church fathers we could produce over 95% of the NT just from their writing."

⁴ "We have over 5,800 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, with an astounding 2.6 million pages of biblical text." Sheri Bell, "Testing the Historical Reliability of the New Testament." Josh McDowell Ministry. January 10, 2018. <https://www.josh.org/historical-reliability-new-testament/>

⁵ John Warwick Montgomery: "To be skeptical of the resultant text of the New Testament books is to allow all of classical antiquity to slip into obscurity, for no documents of the ancient period are as well attested bibliographically as the New Testament"

For someone to have doctored up the NT alone they would've had to find 6k manuscripts... the Syriac, Coptic, Latin manuscripts and do the same thing...then find all writings of early church fathers, change those to match all the lies two layers ago, get those put back, and not get caught.⁶

- I'm just gonna say if you believe all that: C'mon man.

What all of this shows is that we should have **incredible confidence** that the words we hold in our hands today (copies) are the same God wanted us to know back then (original). **Isn't that awesome?**

Not only does the Bible have **consistent copies**, it also has **consistent congruence**.

Consistent Congruence

Pastor Robby Gallaty helped me see this: Cross reference image

- This image helps us conceptualize all of the connections in the Bible.
- Cross references are links between verses, connecting locations, people, phrases, etc. found in different parts of the Bible. **Darker the line, the more connections.**
- Psalm 119—all about the Bible—dead center
- 63,779 connections in the Bible
- If this were written by ONE person we'd say "that's a MASTER composer" because it's all connected together—like a Quentin Tarantino film: he knows the ending so he can adjust the middle as needed.
- Instead, this book was written by 40 authors, 3 languages, 3 continents, 1500 years...the entire book tells **one united story**.

⁶ Baucham, *Why I Choose to Believe the Bible*

- (If I took 40 of you at church this morning and just asked you to write about what happened in service you probably wouldn't all agree!)

This doesn't just show that the Bible is reliable; it also shows just how **elegant** and **beautiful** it is as a **piece of literature**. This **cohesion** and **congruence** point to God's handiwork.

The Bible in your hand is **historically reliable, internally consistent**...and now here's the most mind blowing to me: it's **prophetically accurate**.

3) The Bible Is Prophetically Accurate

Amongst other things, **prophecy** is what sets the Bible apart from other religious books. Prophecy = telling the future is a precise way. Again v21 ²¹For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

While other books like the **Koran**, the **book of Mormon**, and even the **Hindu Veda** claim **divine inspiration**...none of them contain **predictive prophecy**.⁷ It's one of *the* things that sets the Bible apart.

Hundreds of specific prophecies and predictions have **been literally fulfilled**. Just looking at prophecies about the Messiah—there's over 300 of them (and they weren't like fortune cookies: *He'll be a nice guy who enjoys food, campfires and trips to the lake*). These were specific prophecies...things like:

- Born in Bethlehem (700 years before Jesus was born)
- Born of a virgin
- Escape to Egypt (Herod was seeking him)

⁷ Geisler/Nix, GIB '86, 196

4) The Bible Is Jesus Approved

- Ride a donkey into Jerusalem
- Teach in parables (*hear but not understand...*)
- Set captives free
- Will be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver
- Die by crucifixion (Propheesied 1000 years before Jesus was born. Written about in detail in Psalm 22 by a man who had not once seen crucifixion in his life cuz it wouldn't be invented for another 400 years!)⁸

Just to show you how crazy this is: Christian Mathematician **Peter Stoner** (obviously from Denver) says: “The chance that any man might have...fulfilled **eight prophecies is one in 10 to the 17th. That would be 1 in 100,000,000,000,000,000.**”

- He said if we took silver dollars and laid *them on the face of Texas, they'd cover the whole state 2 feet deep.*
- *Now mark ONE of these silver dollars, blindfold a man, slingshot him into Texas, and tell him he's gotta find that one marked silver dollar...What chance would he have of getting the right one? . . . That number right there.*
- Just for kicks and giggles, **the probability of 48 coming true is 1 x 10¹⁵⁷**
- Jesus himself fulfilled over **300** specific prophecies.

We can trust the Bible because it is **historically reliable, internally consistent, and prophetically accurate.** And there's one reason which is honestly the most important: we can also trust the Bible because it is **Jesus approved.**

Ultimately, we can trust the Bible because **we trust Jesus who trusted it.** Throughout his life, Jesus upheld the Bible⁹:

- When he was tempted...Jesus **appealed** to it.
- When his religious opponents tried to catch him...Jesus **rested** on it.
- When he experienced unrelenting, excruciating pain on the cross...Jesus **quoted** it.
- When he preached to crowds...Jesus **upheld** it.

Not only did he **uphold** it; he also **fulfilled** it:

- **Matthew 5:17-18**, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.”

As important as this book is, **it's not an end in itself**...because it doesn't point to itself. The purpose of the Bible isn't just to know more about God—it's purpose is to point us to Jesus. The whole thing is about him!¹⁰

- In the Old Testament, Jesus is **predicted**
- In the Gospels, Jesus is **revealed**
- In the Acts of the Apostles, Jesus is **preached**
- In the Epistles, Jesus is **explained**
- And in the book of Revelation, Jesus is **expected** as we await his return to make all the sad things come untrue.

⁸ Psalm 22: 1; 6-8; 12-18

⁹ Cooper, *Can I really trust the Bible?*, 16.

¹⁰ Begg, *Why Bother With the Bible?*

The purpose of the Bible is that it would point beyond itself *to Jesus that we might come to him for life.*

- **Romans 10:17**, “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ” . . . the very Word that is able “to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.”¹¹
- The Bible contains the greatest news in the world: **the gospel message which is the power to save!**

PJD has shared this before, but there’s a great story from our friend David Platt about the power of the Bible¹²:

- He knew of a M in a city who was giving out copies of the NT. A guy commented on how good the paper was and how it would be perfect for rolling cigarettes...so he asked if he could have a copy.
- The M said, “Tell you what: I’ll give you this book, with all its new paper, and you can use it for that, IF you’ll promise that before you use a page that way you’ll read what’s on it.” The Guy kinda chuckled, shrugged, and agreed to the terms.
- The M came back a month later and saw the same guy and asked if he’d kept his promise...Guy said, **“Well, I read and smoked my way through Matthew. Then I smoked my way through Mark and Luke. Then I started to smoke my way through John, but I got to chapter 3 and read vs. 16 and everything made sense: I realized God loved me so much, Jesus died for my sin, and I’ve asked him to forgive me and become Lord of my life.”**
- I wouldn’t necessarily recommend that method of evangelism, but I’m telling you **the Word has power to bring life**; the Word does the work.

¹¹ 2 Tim 3:15

¹²  The Word of God and the Spirit of God in the Mission of God by David Platt

It was by this Word...

- God **created** everything.
- **Raised Jesus** from the dead
- **Gave sight** to the blind...
- It is by this Word God **releases you from the power of sin, guilt, shame.**
- It’s by this Word that God generates **life**, creates **faith**, produces **change**, **frightens** the Devil, causes **miracles**, heals our **hurts**, builds our **character**, transforms our **circumstances**, imparts **joy**, infuses **hope**, and releases **power**.
- By the Word God **redeems, reconciles, restores, and renews.**
- The Word is **light, life, and salvation.**
- Summit Church, as Deuteronomy 32:47 says, **these are not just idle words, they are our life.**

So the obvious question is: do we really believe that?! **BTW, a great place to start would simply be finding a Bible reading plan...download our app. I just don’t understand ppl who say this is the Word of God but don’t read it.**

- I know of a UNC religion professor who asks a great question to incoming freshmen in his class: *How many of you believe the Bible is the Word of God?* Most hands go up.
- *How many of you have read it all the way through?* Just about every hand goes down.
- He then points out the discrepancy (dare I say hypocrisy) and says, *“See, you don’t ACTUALLY believe it’s the Words of God; if you did, you’d have read it.”*

Conclusion

So, as **Voltaire** posited: is the Bible for fools? Imbeciles? Rogues? Has it been forgotten?

- Ironically after Voltaire died the very house where he **lived and wrote that statement** became a center for the distribution of Bibles across the world. God in his humor, right?
- *The grass withers, the flowers fade, philosophers die, but the word of the Lord endures forever.*

So when someone asks you why you choose to believe the Bible, tell them: I choose to trust the Bible because it is historically reliable, internally consistent, prophetically accurate, and Jesus my Savior upheld it. . . and if you wanna add a little sugar on it: **btw, I tried it and it worked for me.** Amen?

STAND: MISSIONAL BLESSING

James 1

²²But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. . . ²⁵But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

Summit, you've **heard** the word...now be a **doer** of it. And may God bless you in your doing. You are sent.