

## **Biblical Authenticity (Reliability)**

### A Bible Overview Information Paper

Before the invention of the printing press in the mid fifteenth century all Bibles were manuscripts which had been copied by hand. So, how do we know the Bible we have today is reliable compared to the original documents?

Scholars evaluate the authenticity of any ancient book by considering the following three questions:

1. How many manuscripts are there?
2. How consistent are they?
3. What is the time span between the existing (or earliest) copies and the originals?

Let's look at how these questions are answered for both the Old and New Testaments.

### **Old Testament-**

Because of the great reverence Jewish scribes held towards the Hebrew Scriptures, extreme caution was taken when copying them: they meticulously copied and checked each letter and counted lines and characters per page making sure they were copying correctly.

In addition, Israel's scribes would ceremonially destroy imperfect copies & even worn ones. Thus, we have relatively few manuscripts. However, the earliest existing manuscripts we have are well supported by ancient Greek and Samaritan translations, Jewish paraphrases, and especially the very significant discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947.

The Dead Sea scrolls were copies done around 100 BC & they included all but one of the OT books! The most important was a complete copy of Isaiah.

- When experts compared this 100 BC copy with the earliest copy they had (dated 900 AD), they found no significant differences!
- Thus, the consistency of the OT manuscripts surpasses all other ancient manuscripts.

## **New Testament-**

1. The number of NT manuscripts is more than any other ancient literature. There are over in 5,000 Greek, 10,000 in Latin, and 9,000 in other languages.

2. The time span for the NT is exceptional. The NT was all written by 100 AD. The earliest copies we have of the originals are 300 AD with one fragment of the Gospel of John dated around 125 AD.

(In contrast, the average gaps for other ancient writings it 1000 years.)

<b>Author</b>	<b>Date written</b>	<b>Earliest copy</b>	<b>Time span</b>	<b>Number of copies</b>
<b>Homer</b>	<b>900 BC</b>	<b>400 BC</b>	<b>500 yrs.</b>	<b>643</b>
<b>Plato</b>	<b>380 BC</b>	<b>AD 900</b>	<b>1300 yrs.</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Aristotle</b>	<b>350 BC</b>	<b>AD1100</b>	<b>1400 yrs.</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Caesar</b>	<b>60 BC</b>	<b>AD 900</b>	<b>950 yrs.</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Tactitus</b>	<b>AD 100</b>	<b>AD 1100</b>	<b>1000 yrs.</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>NT</b>	<b>AD 40-100</b>	<b>AD 125</b>	<b>25-50 yrs.</b>	<b>24,000</b>

3. The consistency (or quality of copies) of the NT manuscripts are also much better than other ancient documents. The thousands of manuscripts may have slight copying variations. Only a few of the differences are of any consequence and none seriously affecting any major doctrines. (Note: differences are not contradictions.)

- Experts say the NT text can be considered 99.5% certain from the original manuscripts.

Conclusion: The Bible is the most authentic ancient document in our possession.

(There is only one Bible. There are many translations from the earliest manuscripts. A translation is only an attempt to take what is said in one language and communicate it in another. We have copies of inspired documents and these are very reliable.)

To seek answers to questions regarding the Bible, try these web sites:

- [GotQuestions?.org](http://GotQuestions.org)
- [Christian Apologetics & Research Ministry- CARM](http://Christian Apologetics & Research Ministry- CARM)