

## We Can Believe

### Part 5

#### Text – II Timothy 3 : 13 – 17

**Intro** – We have been looking at the Bible, God’s inspired Word.

Today, we delve into the historical validity of the Bible.

We have discovered **Why Believing the Bible matters** and **What the Bible Teaches Us About its Inerrancy**. Today we will consider what **History** teaches us about the Bible’s inerrancy.

#### **I. The Historical Evidence for the Inerrancy of Scripture –**

- When we ask whether an ancient text can be trusted, we are investigating **textual integrity** – the reliability with which an ancient manuscript has been transmitted, copied, and passed down to us through the ages.
  - When it comes to the **New Testament**, textual integrity means the accurate transmission of the words of the N.T., such that the words we have in our New Testament are a faithful representation of the words originally written by the ancient authors.
- **Why is textual integrity important?**
  - If we don’t have textual integrity, we probably don’t have historical reliability.
- Critics of Biblical inerrancy may admit that the original manuscripts may have been accurate, but that the renderings have been messed up and are therefore, flawed.
- The **questions** before us today are, “Can we trust the text that we hold in our hands to be the Word of God?” and “Is what we have historically reliable?”

#### **II. The Case for Textual Integrity –**

- As stated before, the Bible was written in three different languages spanning a period of some 1500 to 1600 years by 40 human authors as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit to write exactly what God wanted to have written for us while maintaining the author’s personality.
- Here are some **reasons** why we can trust the text:
  - 1. The Quantity of Bible Manuscripts –**
    - We do not have the original manuscripts that Moses, Matthew, John, or Paul wrote.
      - The originals are known as **autographs**.
      - What we have are copies of the original autographs. The various copies of the N.T. are known individually as **manuscripts** and collectively as the **Manuscript Tradition**.
      - It is from the Manuscript Tradition that our English translations of the Bible are derived.

- We have an incredible number of N.T. manuscripts, especially in comparison to other ancient documents.
- For example, the Roman historian Tacitus wrote a history of the first-century Roman Empire called the Annals.
  - Tacitus lived from AD 58 – 117. His work, the Annals, would have been written around AD 100, which is, by the way, later than all the N.T. documents.
  - There are only 3 surviving manuscripts of the Annals.
  - The oldest contains only the first 6 books of the Annals and was handwritten in a Benedictine monastery in Germany around AD 850, more than 700 years after Tacitus originally wrote.
    - It's important to remember that no one truly doubts the existence of Tacitus or his writings.
- In contrast, scholars have discovered more than 5,000 Greek manuscripts of the N.T., the earliest manuscripts being partial copies of individual books dating to less than 100 years after the originals were written.
  - There are at least 10, and possibly closer to 20, N.T. manuscripts that date to the second century.
  - We have manuscripts containing the entire text of the N.T. from as early as the 4<sup>th</sup> century.
  - Plus, we have thousands of manuscripts to compare to one another.
  - This is outstanding evidence for the credibility of our Biblical text.

## 2. The Quality of Bible Manuscripts –

- As previously mentioned, the manuscripts we have are not the originals. They are copies of copies.
  - Some critics talk about errors between the various manuscripts.
  - As one writer states: “...the vast majority of those scribal errors are pitifully insignificant.”
    - These copying errors do not affect the doctrinal, historical, or scientific integrity of the Bible.
  - Again, listen to this writer: “Indeed, we ought to expect that the manuscripts containing copies of the N.T. documents would have a large number of copying errors. Copying manuscripts is a difficult, painstaking, and mistake-prone enterprise. If the N.T. was copied by thousands of people over hundreds of years, we should expect there to be discrepancies between the manuscripts. And this indeed is the case. Thousands of scribal errors can be identified in the N.T. manuscripts. However, due to the quality (and quantity) of the N.T. manuscript tradition, we are able to find the copying errors and correct them, ensuring that, in virtually all cases, we have the original wording of the New Testament.”

- New Testament textual critics generally agree that we have recovered 97% of the original wording of the N.T. with near certainty.
  - Important to remember is that places in the N.T. where textual critics are not entirely certain which reading in the manuscript tradition truly reflects the original are insignificant.
  - The New Testament is unparalleled in ancient literature for the quantity and quality of its manuscripts.
  - This is why we can echo the words of Jesus in **Matthew 24:35** – “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.”

### III. The Case for Historical Reliability –

- Has anyone ever asked you if you believe that what is written in the Bible is true; that the places, events, times, etc., were accurate?
  - This is where historical reliability comes in.
- From **Tawa Anderson’s book, “Why Believe,”** I’d like to share 5 arguments that support the historical reliability of the Bible –
  - 1. The Gospels claim to contain eyewitness testimony –**
    - Listen to **Luke 1 : 1 – 4.**
      - Note carefully what Luke states:
        - (1) His Gospel account coincides with the stories passed down by those who were eyewitnesses.
        - (2) He carefully investigated the events surrounding Jesus.
        - (3) He presents his Gospel as an orderly, historical account of Jesus’ life. Luke does not claim to be an eyewitness of Jesus’ life and ministry, but he does claim that he has done his research and consulted those who were eyewitnesses.
    - Luke is not the only Biblical writer who mentions eyewitness accounts – **John 20:30-31; John 21:24-25; I John 1:1-3**
  - 2. The early date of the N.T. Gospels –**
    - The Gospel accounts were written relatively close to the time of the events they relate.
      - Most scholars agree that **Mark** is the earliest Gospel, written between AD 50 – 70.
      - **Matthew & Luke** were written between AD 60 – 85.
      - **John** was written between AD 80 – 95.
      - Jesus was crucified between AD 28 to 33, so the longest possible time span between Jesus’s death and the writing of the last Gospel is less than 70 years!
        - This means that when the Gospels were written and began to circulate among early Christian churches, there would have been hundreds, perhaps thousands, of people alive who themselves had seen and heard Jesus during His earthly ministry.

### 3. The Church has Always Recognized the Eyewitness Status of the Gospels –

- The Christian Church universally has acknowledged them as such.
  - From the first century onward, Christians have recognized that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are historical records of Jesus’s life.
- Within about 100 years, there was an established tradition within Christianity recognizing the four Gospels as authoritative, reliable sources about Jesus.
  - The early testimony of the Church is unanimous and affirms that the Gospels are historically reliable.
- The early church had **3 primary criteria** for documents to be considered inspired by God and worthy of being included in the Bible:
  - (1) Universality – read throughout the ancient church.
  - (2) Apostolicity – written by an apostle or the associate of an apostle.
  - (3) Orthodoxy – conforming to the rule of faith handed down by the early church.
- An example demonstrating these 3 points is found in **Acts 2:42** – “They (early Christians after the Day of Pentecost) were continually devoting themselves to the **apostles’ teaching** and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”

### 4. The Internal Evidence of the Gospels: Incidental Details and Undesigned Coincidence –

- The internal evidence of events and details contained within each Gospel strongly supports their status as reliable eyewitness documents.
- The four Gospels contain multiple examples of incidental details and undesigned coincidences:
  - A. An example of an incidental detail is found in John 5:1-5 –**
    - John states the man had been lame for **38 years**. Instead of rounding up the number of years the man had lived, which was often the case in Jewish literature, John specifically states he was 38 years old.
    - Next, John talks about where the man was healed: at a particular pool (Bethesda) near “the Sheep Gate,” and at an unusual structure of five covered colonnades.
    - Such detail is important as it points to the actual events as being true and reliable.

## B. An Example of an Undesigned Coincidence is found in John 6:1-15 –

- What is an **undesigned coincidence**? This occurs when multiple accounts of the same event complement one another, such that one account raises a question that is then answered by another account.
- For **example**, maybe you're looking at Facebook and you see a picture of a family friend that is out of town. You may recognize where they are but uncertain about why they are there. Your daughter comes home, and you say, "I was just looking at Facebook and saw that the Connors were in Myrtle Beach, I wonder why." Your daughter says, "I just bumped into Ray at Walmart, and he told me it was Ginny's birthday, and they went to celebrate her special day."
- The account in **John 6** tells us about the feeding of the 5,000 by Jesus (this miracle is in all 4 Gospels).
- Think about this narrative:
  - Why would Jesus ask **Philip** about how these people were going to be fed? Philip is not a Peter, James, or John. He's a relatively obscure disciple.
  - As you continue to look at this account in another Gospel, it becomes clear.
  - In first-century Jewish culture, when a visitor came to your home, it was your responsibility to feed them and give them shelter.
  - Why does this matter? John doesn't tell us, but Luke does in **Lk. 9:10-17**.
    - Where is Jesus feeding the 5,000? At **Bethsaida**.
    - Why does Jesus ask Philip about the food required to feed all those people? **Because Philip was from Bethsaida**. Jesus and the disciples are in Philip's hometown.
- These types of undesigned coincidences support the claim that the Gospels individually contain eyewitness testimony and collectively provide a reliable historical record of what occurred!

## 5. External Evidence for the Gospels' Historical Accuracy –

- Here, we want to consider how other ancient documents and discoveries support the concept of the Bible's historical accuracy.
- Two **thoughts** about this:

### A. The Gospel writers cite geographical details –

- The Gospel writers include names of towns, bodies of water, roads, and even directions of travel in their writings.

- These internal details are confirmed by external sources that verify the existence and relationship of the places mentioned by the Gospel writers.

**B. The discipline of archaeology is able to verify numerous details contained in the Gospels –**

- Archaeologists have excavated a site in Jerusalem and have found the pool of Bethesda and the colonnades that used to stand there, which John 5 accurately described!
- Interestingly enough, critics of the Bible’s reliability argued that what John wrote about was inaccurate until it was literally dug up!

**INVITATION** - In 1985, for the first time in more than fifty years, Congress authorized the issue of official US government gold coins.

Beginning in 1986 these new coins came on the market. Each of these American Eagles, as they are known, is guaranteed by the US Mint to contain the stated amount of pure 22 karat gold. They come in 1/10, 1/4, 1/2, and 1-ounce sizes, and buyers from around the world trust these coins because they trust the promises of the United States government that the coins are what they claim to be.

When it comes to Scripture, we have something far more reliable than the guarantee of a government—we have the promises of Almighty God that His Word is perfect and reliable. God promised to preserve His Word for us. That means that, according to the promise of God, we can have complete faith that every word in the Bible is there on purpose.

As Proverbs 30:5-6 reminds us: “Every word of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. Do not add to His words or He will reprove you, and you will be proved a liar.”