

**Basic Christianity**  
**From An Urban Perspective Unit 2**  
**Week 3: Is the Bible Trustworthy?**

**Is the Bible Trustworthy?**

The Bible is the most influential book in human history. It claims to be a message from God to humanity:

**“All scripture is *inspired by God* and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.” – 2 Timothy 3:16**

**The term “inspired” means “*God-breathed*.” In other words, God is the source of the message.** But not everyone believes this is true. **Today people have many questions about the Bible:**

Discussion: What kinds of questions/criticisms have you heard about the Bible? Do you have any questions or doubts of your own?

*Isn't the Bible simply the writings of primitive men?* Rudolph Bultmann once said that “nobody who uses an electric light can believe in the New Testament world of demons and spirits.”

*How can I possibly believe what it says in the Bible?* Isn't it full of errors? Doesn't it contradict what we know from science?

*Hasn't the Bible changed over time?* As the books of the Bible passed from one generation to the next, didn't the people who copied them make mistakes or insert their own ideas? How can we know the Bible we have is like the original? (Telephone game)

*Can't you interpret the Bible any way you want to?* Look at how differently people see the same passages. How can we agree on what it says?

Can the Bible be trusted?

**Thankfully, God has given us good reasons to believe that he has actually spoken to us in the Bible.**

**1. The Bible has *fulfilled* prophecy.**

Read Isaiah 53:1-12.

Sound familiar? Who do you think Isaiah is describing? (The students should be able to recognize that the passage is about Jesus.)

**We have a complete scroll of Isaiah, found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, that was *written* 200 years before Jesus lived!** (Show a picture of the scroll of Isaiah)

**There are over 300 prophecies in the Old Testament that predict different aspects of Jesus' life, including where he would be born (Micah 5:2), how he would die (Psalm 22), and when he would die (Daniel 9).**

How would you explain predictions or prophecies that came true? This is one reason why we believe God has spoken in the Bible.

## 2. The Bible tells a *unified* story.

**The Bible is a collection of books written by over 40 *different* people from all walks of life over a 1500 *year* span.** They lived in different parts of the world at different times in history and spoke different languages. **Amazingly, when all of their books are put together in the Bible, they tell a single, unified story.** How did that happen unless God was working through them to communicate to us?

**“God’s secret plan has now been revealed to us; it is a plan centered on Christ, designed long ago according to his good pleasure.” – Ephesians 1:9**

**And this *plan* extends to you! You are part of God’s story and have an important role to play in his plan.**

**“For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.” – Ephesians 2:10**

## 3. The Bible is historically *reliable*.

**It is amazing that the Bible has withstood centuries of serious historical scrutiny. Yet, we are unable to find a single instance of clear historical inaccuracy.**

>> Limit historical evidence to events surrounding the life of Christ and events in the book of Acts about Paul.

**There is also plenty of evidence for Jesus outside of the Bible. For example:**

**The Jewish historian Josephus, writing for the Roman government around 93 A.D. mentions Jesus. He describes how James, the brother of Jesus, was stoned to death. James wasn’t smoking weed; he was pelted with stones until he died. For more on this, see Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book XVIII, ch. V, p. 20 and Book XX, ch. IX, p. 140.**

**Tacitus, in his book *Annals*, in book 15, paragraph 44. says that Jesus died under Pilate as a Roman criminal. His followers believe him to have resurrected from the dead.**

## 4. The Bible doesn’t contradict itself. (optional... only cover if brought up in class)

One of the most common things people say is that the Bible is full of contradictions. To be honest, I haven't yet found anyone who could produce one. This does not mean, of course, that there aren't passages that we really need to think through. But the next time someone tells you the Bible contradicts itself, ask them to show you what passage they have in mind. Usually, they are just repeating what they’ve heard other people say.

## How did we get the Bible?

### 1. How were the books *selected*?

The Bible is a collection of 66 books. But many more books than that were written by Jews and Christians. Who decided which ones should be included in the scripture and which ones shouldn't? Deciding which should be included in the scripture is based on authorship. Who wrote the document?

**Books connected to *prophets* were accepted into the Old Testament.**

**Moses was a prophet and he wrote the first five books of the Bible, called “the Law.” Jesus called the entire Old Testament “the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 5:17) which means that prophets were involved in writing the rest of the Old Testament books. So the entire thing is the product of prophets. When it was clearly established that a text was of prophetic origin, it was included in the Old Testament.**

**New Testament books had to be written by or connected to an *apostle*.**

**The apostles either wrote or supervised the writing of all four gospels and all the letters in the New Testament. Jesus gave them authority to speak and write on his behalf. Early Christians rejected books when they were unsure about the author.**

### 2. Has the Bible *changed over time*?

If you give someone a message, and they repeat it to someone else, who then repeats it to someone else, the message often changes. This is how false rumors spread. As each generation passed the Bible down to the next, did the message of the Bible get distorted?

**Actually, we have good reason to accept our Bible as a *reliable* copy of what was originally written.**

**Masoretic scribes: These copiers of the Old Testament had techniques that insured that each scroll was *identical* to the old one. They knew the exact number of words in each book; they knew the middle word and middle letter in each book. If there were any errors whatsoever, the scroll was burned and the scribe started all over.**

***Dead Sea scrolls:* Found in 1947, these scrolls contain complete manuscripts of the Old Testament, dated from between 200 BC to 70 AD. When we compare these scrolls to other Old Testament documents (Masoretic Text) copied 1000 years later, there is no significant difference between these texts.**

***Early copies of the New Testament letters:* The Gospel of John was written in 95 A.D. We have found copies of this same book that date to about 120 A.D., only 25 years after the original was written. What's the point? When a copy is made soon after the original is written, there is less chance that the original words will be corrupted.**

**Early leaders of the church (the church fathers) *quoted* extensively from the New Testament in the century after Jesus lived. Their quotations match the same words in our New Testament. This gives us additional data to show that the New Testament has not been corrupted.**

**Memory Verse: 2 Timothy 3:16**