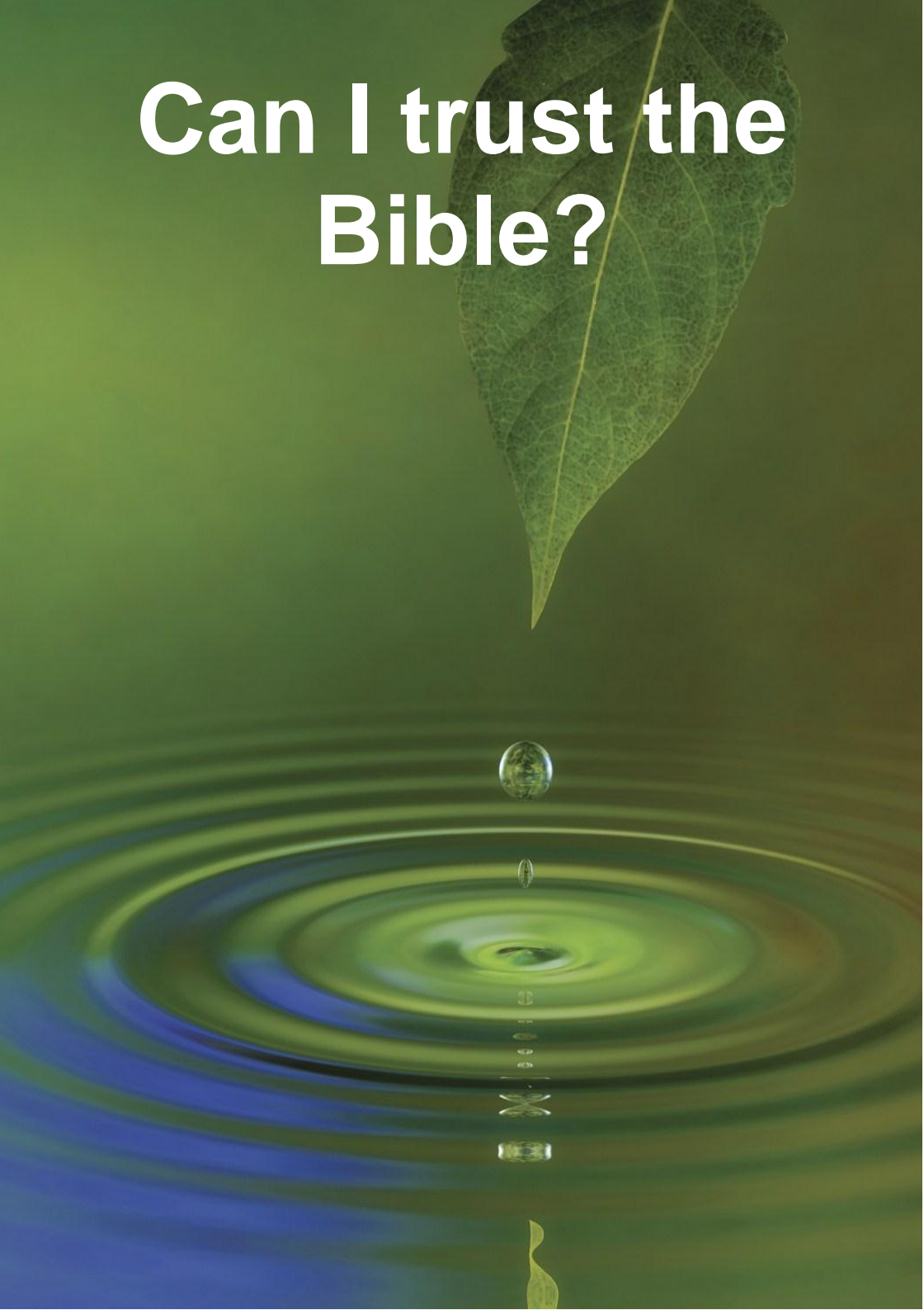


Can I trust the Bible?



Can I trust the Bible...?

In his bestselling novel, “The Da Vinci Code”, Dan Brown alleges that the Bible is an unreliable manuscript, put together at the gathering of church leaders in 325AD at the Council of Nicaea, in order to promote a religious agenda. He writes:

“The Bible did not arrive by fax from heaven... the Bible is a product of man not of God. Man created it as a historical record of tumultuous times, and it has evolved through countless translations, additions and revisions.”

This is historically inaccurate, as even a cursory reading of history will affirm.

What follows are 10 reasons why I believe the Bible is a very significant book indeed, a book that ought to be read and heeded, a book that is the foundation of the Christian faith. These ten reasons, taken individually may not seem much, but together they are very persuasive!

1. The Bible’s Claims about itself

The Bible repeatedly claims to be Word of God. We have within it this clear statement: *“...all scripture is God-breathed...”* 2 Timothy 3:16

The apostle Peter explains that being “God breathed” means that God guided the thoughts of men that as they wrote, that they wrote the thoughts of God (2 Peter 1:20-21).

The Bible, because it is the Word of God, also claims to be truth, for example: *“Every word of God is flawless!”* Proverbs 30:5

2. The Lord Jesus Christ’s Claims about the Bible

Jesus accepted Old Testament people and events as true history. He accepted the global flood of Noah’s day, and used it as a warning of the certainty of future judgement.

Jesus used even the tiny details recorded the Old Testament scriptures as He argued with his critics, proving their understanding of God to be wrong.

3. Other Bible Writers' Claims about other parts of the Bible

Daniel accepted the prophet Jeremiah's words as true because they came from God. Paul accepted the Old Testament as true, and Peter recognised that Paul's letters, although difficult at times to understand were never-the-less the very words of God.

But wait a minute... isn't that just used the Bible to prove the Bible? It doesn't feel right! Just because the Bible claims within itself to be the Word of God, and true and trustworthy, that doesn't mean it is! Absolutely! So we let's look at other evidences for the Bible's uniqueness, of which there is plenty...

4. The Unity of the Bible

The Bible is a mini library made up of 66 individual books. It was written by 40 authors (including a king, servant, shepherd, priest, tax collector, lawyer, fisherman, prophet), over 1,400 years, on 3 continents (Europe, Asia & Africa), and in 3 languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek). But it has **one** message: Jesus Christ and the salvation God offers through Him.

5. Textual Preservation

Most people accept the historicity of Julius Caesar. Why?

His life is recorded in historic documents: Livy's "History of Rome" of which there are 20 copies from the 4th century AD, Tacitus' "Histories & Annals" of which there are 2 copies from the 8th century, and Julius Caesar's "Gallic Wars" of which there are 10 copies from the 9th century.

Compare this with the documentary evidence for the gospels recording the life and ministry of Jesus Christ: there are 2,300 manuscripts dating from the 2nd century AD. We have to conclude that Jesus' life is the more reliably attested!

These documents are not only numerous, but have been reliably copied over many centuries. The rabbinic method of copying required a word count of each original page and then of the newly

copied page. If there was a discrepancy in that count then the copy was destroyed and a new one started. This ensured accuracy.

But surely the “Chinese whispers” effect must have come into play over the centuries?! Well it was finally possible to carry out a definitive test after a remarkable find in Qumran on the shore of the Dead Sea in 1949. A shepherd boy discovered caves that contained thousands of scrolls that were subsequently dated to the 1st century AD. They are known as the “Dead Sea Scrolls”. The hoard contained full and partial copies of every Old Testament book (except Esther), and an entire scroll of book of Isaiah.

When the content of these documents was compared with the then oldest copies of the Old Testament, dated to the 6/7th Centuries, it was discovered that NO significant differences existed. This is a remarkable fact, confirming that the Bible had been accurately copied over several hundred years.

This is no surprise to me since they were being copied by men who loved the words they were transcribing. They knew the words they were copying to be the Word of Life, so they would have paid extra careful attention.

6. Historical Accuracy

Many archaeological finds are being discovered that endorse what the Bible says.

The Tel Dan Stele (dated circa 900–850 BC) is extra-Biblical evidence for the life and reign of King David.

The Nabonidus Cylinder (dated circa 550BC) reveal that Nabonidus, the last emperor of Babylon, spent the last 10 years of his reign in retirement in the desert, leaving the day-to-day running of his kingdom to his son, Belshazzar. This affirms that Daniel 5, a chapter that many historians had believed to be wrong (because it claims that Belshazzar was the last emperor), is in fact right!

And the New Testament...?

Several ancient authors record the same events as recorded in the Bible. They are listed in the table below.

<p>Suetonius 49 AD “Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he [Claudius] expelled them from Rome”</p>	<p>Acts 18:2-3</p>
<p>Tacitus 64 AD “Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilate, and a deadly movement broke out not only in Judea... but also in Rome”</p>	<p>Luke 3:1 Matt 27:2 Luke 23:2 Mark 11:6 Acts 1:4 & 28:14</p>
<p>Josephus 93 AD - Antiquities Annas... “convened the judges of the Sanhedrin and brought and brought before them a man named James, the brother of Jesus who was called the Christ, and certain others”</p>	<p>Acts 2:36 Gal 1:19</p>
<p>Josephus 93 AD - Testimonium Flavianum “About that time there lived Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one ought to call him a man. For he was one who wrought surprising feats and was a great teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and Greeks. He was the Messiah. When Pilate, upon hearing him accused by men of the highest standing among us, had condemned him to be crucified... On the third day he appeared to them restored to life, for the prophets of God had prophesied these and countless other marvellous things about him. And the tribe of Christians so called after him, has still to this day not disappeared.”</p>	<p>John 20:30-21 Mark 8:29 Luke 23:2-3 Luke 23:26ff Mark 16:1ff</p>
<p>Pliny 112 AD “...it was their habit on a fixed day to assemble before daylight and recite by turns a form of words to Christ as a god...”</p>	<p>Acts 20:7 1 Cor 12:3</p>

At every turn, where it can be tested against history, the Bible is found to be reliable. Respected Jewish archaeologist Nelson Glueck has therefore noted:

“It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a Biblical reference!”

7. Scientific Accuracy

The Bible has always claimed certain “scientific” truths that scientists are only now affirming for themselves. For example:

Astronomy: Everything has a beginning – including the universe!!

Anthropology: We do not share common ancestry with apes, but all humanity has a common parent!!

Biology: The blood cycle in the body is essential for life.

Geology: A catastrophic flood is the best way to explain global rock formations.

8. Prophetic Accuracy

Daniel 7, for example, predicts the rise and fall of 4 empires. They match, in surprising detail, the empires of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome.

Many Prophets predicted the fall and destruction of ancient cities such as Tyre, Edom, Nineveh and Jerusalem. All came to pass.

The Old Testament is full of prophecies about the coming of “The Messiah” – God’s servant who would save God’s people from their true enemy. These predictions dealt with when and how the Messiah would be born, how he would conduct his life, and how he would die. All were found to be true in the life of Jesus Christ.

9. Social Impact

If the Bible did not exist... if the Bible were not deemed to be true... then (for example) John Milton wouldn’t have had a basis for *Paradise Lost*, Michelangelo wouldn’t have had a theme for “The Sistine Chapel”, Handel wouldn’t have had inspiration for “The Messiah” and William Wilberforce wouldn’t have laboured to abolish the Slave Trade.

10. Personal Impact

When men and women have read the Bible their lives have been changed dramatically. Consider:

Augustine was a brilliant 4-5th century scholar who used his great intellect to devise ways in which he could indulge in wickedness. But sadly for him he found no peace for his tortured soul, until he read, and responded to these words from the Bible:

“Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.” Romans 13:13-14

John Newton was forced to reconsider his own life when he saw his helplessness during a storm at sea. He remembered words from his youth:

But since you rejected me when I called and no one gave heed when I stretched out my hand, since you ignored all my advice and would not accept my rebuke, I in turn will laugh at your disaster; I will mock when calamity overtakes you - when calamity overtakes you like a storm, when disaster sweeps over you like a whirlwind... "Then they will call to me but I will not answer; they will look for me but will not find me. Proverbs 1:24ff

But he also went on to discover God’s amazing saving grace, and wrote one of the greatest hymns ever written.

11. So what...?

The Bible may be a reliable trustworthy document, but how ought it to impact our lives?

If you are a Christian... will you read it and live by what it says all your days?

“Here then, is the real problem of our negligence. We fail in our duty to study God's Word not so much because it is difficult to understand, not so much because it is dull and boring, but because it is work. Our problem is not a lack of intelligence or a lack of passion. Our problem is that we are lazy.” R.C.Sproul

If you are not a Christian... and if you are willing to accept this evidence... for how long will you persist in unbelief?

“We must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek Him.” Hebrews 11:6

Read the Bible to encounter God, and **ask** God to help you understand what you read.

This booklet began life as a sermon, part of a series preached in autumn 2011 tackling big questions have about God, faith and life.
We hope you find it helpful.

The original sermon can be listened to on the church website:

www.allhallows-church.org.uk

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