



BIBLE CONFIDENCE

Investigating the Bible

A careful, repeatable way to examine biblical questions with honesty, context, and confidence

KEY SCRIPTURE

"Now these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so." — Acts 17:11 WEB

Simple · Clear · Scripture-grounded

THE SHORT ANSWER

Investigating the Bible means asking a clear question, reading the relevant passages in context, examining the available textual and historical evidence, comparing reasonable explanations, and allowing the evidence to shape the conclusion. Honest investigation is neither blind acceptance nor automatic suspicion.

A Faith That Can Welcome Honest Questions

Questions about the Bible are not automatically signs of unbelief. Scripture records people asking God for understanding, testing claims, remembering His acts, and examining testimony. The Bereans were commended because they received the message eagerly and examined the Scriptures daily (Acts 17:11).

This guide offers a practical method for investigating a biblical question without beginning with a predetermined verdict. It does not promise that every question will be easy or that every piece of evidence will be complete. It does show how to ask better questions, handle sources fairly, and distinguish what is known from what is inferred.

FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH

Christian faith is not faith without reasons. Evidence does not replace the work of the Holy Spirit or remove the need for trust; it helps clarify whether confidence rests on truth rather than wishful thinking (Luke 1:1–4; John 20:30–31; 1 Corinthians 15:3–8).

What this guide will help you do

01

Define a clear question

Turn a broad concern into a focused question that can actually be investigated.

02

Read the biblical evidence carefully

Study complete passages in their literary, historical, and canonical contexts.

03

Evaluate outside evidence wisely

Use manuscripts, archaeology, history, and scholarship according to what each source can genuinely show.

04

Reach a proportionate conclusion

State what the evidence supports, what remains uncertain, and what further study may be needed.

Investigation Is a Posture Before It Is a Process

A sound method can still be misused when the investigator is careless, defensive, or determined to prove a preferred answer. A faithful investigation begins with humility: the willingness to discover that an assumption may need correction.

- Pray for wisdom, honesty, patience, and teachability (James 1:5).
- Name the question without exaggerating it.
- Refuse to treat doubt as shameful or skepticism as automatically intelligent.
- Listen to the strongest responsible explanation on more than one side.
- Distinguish evidence from interpretation and possibility from probability.
- Remain willing to say, “The available evidence does not settle every detail.”

A SIMPLE GOAL

The purpose is not to make the Bible agree with a preferred conclusion. The purpose is to understand what the biblical writers communicate and to evaluate relevant claims truthfully.

Ask the Right Question

Large questions become manageable when they are made specific. “Can the Bible be trusted?” contains several different questions: Is the text preserved? Are the authors historically credible? Is the canon recognizable? Are apparent contradictions reconcilable? Does the message cohere? What happened to Jesus?

Turn a concern into an investigation question

- Too broad: Is the Bible reliable? Better: What evidence shows whether the wording of Isaiah was transmitted faithfully?
- Too broad: Archaeology proves the Bible. Better: What does the Babylonian Chronicle contribute to understanding Jerusalem’s fall?
- Too broad: The Gospels contradict. Better: Do the resurrection accounts make mutually exclusive claims, or do they report complementary details?
- Too broad: People chose the Bible. Better: What historical and theological factors shaped recognition of the New Testament canon?

HELPFUL DISTINCTION

A question should be open enough to allow correction and narrow enough to identify relevant evidence. A conclusion stated before the investigation is not an investigation.

Seven Steps for Investigating Any Biblical Question

01

Define the claim

Write the exact question or claim in one sentence. Identify unclear terms.

02

Gather the relevant passages

Read complete units of thought, parallel accounts, and passages that may qualify the first impression.

03

Establish context

Identify author, audience, genre, historical setting, purpose, and location in the Bible's unfolding story.

04

Identify the kind of evidence needed

Decide whether the question is textual, historical, literary, theological, archaeological, philosophical, or a combination.

05

Consult responsible sources

Prefer primary evidence and qualified scholarship. Note agreements, disagreements, dates, and assumptions.

06

Compare explanations

Ask which explanation accounts for the most evidence with the fewest forced assumptions.

07

State a careful conclusion

Summarize what is well supported, what is probable, what remains possible, and what is still unknown.

The process is repeatable. New evidence or a better reading of the text may require revisiting an earlier step. Revising a conclusion in response to better evidence is intellectual honesty, not failure.

Let the Bible Speak on Its Own Terms

A biblical statement cannot be understood responsibly without asking what kind of writing it is and what the author is doing. A Psalm uses poetry; Proverbs normally describes wise patterns; a Gospel narrates and interprets the life of Jesus; a letter addresses real circumstances; apocalyptic writing communicates through visions and symbols.

Questions to ask of every passage

- What comes before and after this passage?
- Who is speaking, and to whom?
- What problem, event, or question is being addressed?
- What genre is this, and how does that genre communicate?
- Which words or ideas repeat?
- Does another biblical passage address the same event or theme?
- How does this passage fit the Bible's unfolding story centered in Jesus?

AVOID THE ISOLATED-VERSE MISTAKE

A sentence lifted from its context can be made to support almost anything. Read the paragraph, chapter, book, and relevant biblical connections before drawing a conclusion.

Investigate the Text and Its Manuscripts

The original biblical writings no longer survive as physical artifacts. The text is known through handwritten copies, ancient translations, and quotations. Textual criticism compares these witnesses to identify the earliest recoverable wording. The term describes careful comparison, not hostility toward Scripture.

What manuscript evidence can show

- How widely and early a reading is attested.
- Where scribes made ordinary copying changes, such as spelling differences, word order, repeated lines, or omitted lines.
- Which reading best explains the origin of the alternatives.
- How the wording was transmitted across places, languages, and centuries.

Most textual variants are minor and make little difference to meaning. A smaller number affect a sentence or passage and should be studied openly. Modern translations often identify major variants in footnotes. No central Christian doctrine depends only on a disputed textual reading.

EXAMPLES TO EXPLORE

The Dead Sea Scrolls provide Jewish biblical manuscripts from before and around the time of Jesus. Codex Sinaiticus preserves most of the Greek Old Testament and the complete New Testament from the fourth century. These witnesses do not answer every question, but they make transmission open to investigation.

Investigate History and Archaeology

The Bible presents God acting in real history. Historical investigation can examine people, places, rulers, customs, inscriptions, conflicts, and material remains. Archaeology is especially useful for reconstructing settings and testing particular claims.

Use historical evidence with restraint

- An artifact may illuminate a biblical setting without proving every theological claim in the passage.
- Absence of discovered evidence is not automatically evidence that an event did not occur.
- A proposed identification should not be treated as certain when specialists disagree.
- Ancient royal records may contain propaganda and should be read critically, just as other sources are.
- Archaeology can confirm, challenge, clarify, or remain silent; silence must not be exaggerated.

EXAMPLES TO EXPLORE

The Babylonian Chronicle records Babylon's campaign and the capture of Jerusalem in 597 BC. The Cyrus Cylinder describes Cyrus's policy of restoring displaced peoples and sanctuaries. Neither artifact retells the biblical books, but each helps place biblical events within the wider ancient world.

Investigate How the Biblical Books Were Recognized

Canon refers to the recognized collection of books received as Scripture. Christians believe God inspired Scripture; communities in history still had to recognize, receive, copy, read, and preserve particular writings. The theological claim and the historical process should be distinguished without separating them.

Questions worth asking

- Was a writing connected to a prophet, apostle, or authorized apostolic witness?
- Did its teaching cohere with the rule of faith already received from Scripture and the apostles?
- Was it used broadly and continuously among early believers?
- Was it read publicly as Scripture in worship?
- How early is the evidence for its acceptance, discussion, or rejection?

Recognition was not identical in every place at the same moment. Some books were received very early and broadly; a smaller number were discussed longer. Later councils did not grant inspiration to previously ordinary writings. They formally acknowledged the collection already received through a long process of use and discernment.

KEEP THE CLAIM PRECISE

“Church leaders invented the Bible at one meeting” does not fit the historical evidence. Neither does the claim that every detail of the canon process was immediate or free from discussion.

Investigate Coherence Across Scripture

The Bible contains many books written by many human authors across centuries, yet its central movement is remarkably coherent: creation, human rebellion, God's covenant promises, Israel's story, the coming of Jesus, His death and resurrection, the mission of His people, and the promised restoration of all things.

Coherence does not mean every writer uses the same vocabulary or emphasizes the same details. Unity includes development. Later revelation clarifies earlier promises, and the New Testament identifies Jesus as the fulfillment toward which the Law, Prophets, and Writings point (Luke 24:27, 44–47; Hebrews 1:1–3).

Test coherence fairly

- Compare whole arguments, not merely shared words.
- Distinguish development from contradiction.
- Notice differences in covenant setting and audience.
- Allow later biblical writers to explain how earlier Scripture is fulfilled.
- Do not erase genuine tension or force every detail into a simplistic formula.

Investigate Apparent Contradictions

A contradiction occurs only when two claims cannot both be true in the same sense and at the same time. A difference is not automatically a contradiction. Parallel accounts may select different details, arrange material thematically, summarize speech, or describe the same event from different vantage points.

A contradiction checklist

1. Write the two claims precisely, without adding assumptions.
2. Read both passages in full context and identify genre and purpose.
3. Check whether the statements concern the same person, event, time, and sense.
4. Consider selection, perspective, ordinary approximation, translation, and chronology.
5. Ask whether a reasonable reconciliation is possible, not whether every detail can be reconstructed with certainty.
6. State the result honestly: resolved, plausibly reconcilable, still difficult, or genuinely unresolved.

IMPORTANT

A possible reconciliation shows that contradiction has not been established. It does not prove that the proposed reconstruction is exactly what happened. Confidence should match the strength of the evidence.

Investigate Jesus and the Resurrection

Christianity stands or falls with Jesus Christ, especially His death and resurrection. Paul wrote that if Christ has not been raised, Christian faith is futile (1 Corinthians 15:14–19). Investigation should therefore give careful attention to the earliest testimony about Jesus.

Core historical questions

- Was Jesus a real first-century Jewish teacher who was crucified under Pontius Pilate?
- How early is the testimony that He died, was buried, was raised, and appeared to witnesses?
- What did the first disciples claim to have seen?
- How should the empty tomb traditions, appearances, and transformed proclamation be explained?
- Which explanation best accounts for the relevant evidence?

Historical reasoning cannot force personal allegiance, but it can examine whether the resurrection claim arose late as legend or appears at the beginning of Christian proclamation. The invitation of the Gospel is not merely to admire evidence but to repent, believe, and follow the risen Jesus (Mark 1:15; John 20:30–31).

Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?

QUESTION

What historical explanation best accounts for the earliest Christian testimony that Jesus died, was buried, was raised, and appeared to witnesses?

1. Gather the primary biblical evidence

- 1 Corinthians 15:1–8
- Mark 15–16
- Matthew 27–28
- Luke 23–24
- John 19–21
- Acts 2:22–36; 9:1–19

2. Establish context

First Corinthians was written to an existing church and preserves a received summary of the gospel centered on Jesus' death, burial, resurrection, and appearances. The Gospel accounts provide fuller narratives with both shared and distinct details. Acts records resurrection proclamation at the center of early Christian preaching.

3. List the principal evidence

- Jesus was crucified and died.
- His followers proclaimed that God raised Him bodily.
- Multiple individuals and groups were named as witnesses to appearances.
- The proclamation arose early, not centuries later.
- Former opponents such as Paul became witnesses and messengers.

4. Compare explanations

Possible explanations include bodily resurrection, deliberate deception, visionary experiences, mistaken identity, legendary development, or some combination. Each proposal should be tested against the full body of evidence rather than one isolated fact.

5. State a proportionate conclusion

The New Testament presents the bodily resurrection as the explanation proclaimed by the earliest witnesses and as the foundation of Christian faith. Alternative explanations must account for the early, multiple, and costly nature of that testimony. The historical case does not remove every question, but it makes the resurrection claim worthy of serious consideration rather than casual dismissal.

The Babylonian Exile and Return

QUESTION

How do biblical and ancient Near Eastern sources illuminate Judah's exile to Babylon and the later return under Persian rule?

1. Gather the primary biblical evidence

- 2 Kings 24–25
- 2 Chronicles 36
- Jeremiah 25; 29; 39; 52
- Daniel 1
- Ezra 1–6
- Isaiah 44:24–45:7

2. Establish the historical setting

Babylon expanded westward, imposed control on Judah, deported portions of the population, and destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in 586 BC. Persia later conquered Babylon. Ezra presents Cyrus authorizing the return and temple rebuilding.

3. Examine relevant outside evidence

- The Babylonian Chronicle describes Nebuchadnezzar's 597 BC campaign and capture of Jerusalem.
- Babylonian administrative tablets illuminate the presence of Judean exiles in Mesopotamia.
- The Cyrus Cylinder reflects a broader Persian policy of restoring sanctuaries and displaced communities.

4. Compare what the sources claim

The sources overlap without being identical. The Babylonian record emphasizes imperial events. The Cyrus Cylinder presents Persian royal policy. The biblical books interpret exile as covenant judgment and return as God's faithfulness. Historical overlap supports the setting; the theological meaning comes from Scripture's own witness.

5. State a proportionate conclusion

Available evidence strongly situates the exile and Persian-era return within the known history of the ancient Near East. External sources do not prove every theological claim, but they challenge the idea that the setting was invented without connection to real rulers, policies, and events.

Brief Answers to Frequent Concerns

Does archaeology prove the Bible?

Archaeology can confirm settings and particular historical details, challenge interpretations, or leave questions open. It cannot place every theological claim under a trowel. Use it as relevant evidence, not as a slogan.

Do manuscript variants mean the Bible was changed?

Variants show that hand copying produced differences and that those differences can be compared. The abundance of witnesses exposes the history of transmission rather than hiding it.

Is faith opposed to evidence?

Biblical faith is trust in God based on who He is and what He has done. It is not a refusal to think. Evidence can support belief, while saving faith remains a personal response to God's grace.

What if scholars disagree?

Disagreement may concern evidence, methods, assumptions, or the confidence assigned to a conclusion. Identify the actual point of disagreement and prefer arguments that explain evidence carefully and fairly.

What if an answer is not found?

Some questions remain open because evidence is incomplete or the Bible does not address the desired detail. An unresolved question should be named honestly without turning uncertainty about one detail into certainty that the whole message is false.

What Weakens an Investigation

01

Beginning with a verdict

Collecting only evidence that supports a preferred conclusion produces confirmation bias.

02

Using social media as the final authority

Short videos and posts may identify a question but rarely provide enough context, documentation, or expertise to settle it.

03

Treating all sources as equal

A primary inscription, a peer-reviewed study, a popular article, and an anonymous post do not carry the same evidential weight.

04

Arguing from silence

What has not been discovered may matter, but silence rarely proves as much as either side wants it to prove.

05

Overstating certainty

“Possible,” “probable,” and “well established” are not interchangeable.

06

Ignoring spiritual posture

Pride can distort both defense and criticism. Investigation should be marked by truthfulness, courage, and humility.

How to Choose Trustworthy Resources

Prefer sources that

- Identify the author and relevant qualifications.
- Cite primary evidence and allow claims to be checked.
- Distinguish fact, interpretation, and speculation.
- Represent opposing views accurately.
- Acknowledge uncertainty and correct errors.
- Use current scholarship while remaining aware of older evidence and debates.

Build a balanced research stack

- The biblical text in more than one reliable translation.
- A Bible dictionary or handbook for basic context.
- A responsible commentary from a recognized series.
- Primary historical sources or museum records when available.
- Qualified scholars who disagree, read in their strongest form.

DIGITAL CAUTION

A professional design, large audience, or confident tone does not make a claim reliable. Trace important statements to the evidence behind them.

Investigation Worksheet

Question to investigate

Why the question matters

Key terms that need definition

Primary biblical passages

Historical and literary context

Kind of evidence required

Strongest evidence supporting the claim

Strongest evidence challenging the claim

Leading explanations and their strengths

Leading explanations and their weaknesses

Provisional conclusion and confidence level

Questions still open and next research step

An Intermediate Framework for Cumulative Reasoning

Most significant biblical questions are not settled by one dramatic artifact or one clever argument. A cumulative case asks how several independent lines of evidence fit together. The strongest explanation normally has broad explanatory scope, explanatory power, historical plausibility, and fewer unsupported assumptions.

01

Separate data from explanation

List the observations before deciding what they mean.

02

Weight evidence by quality

Early, independent, well-attested evidence normally deserves more weight than late or derivative claims.

03

Distinguish prior probability from prejudice

Background knowledge matters, but philosophical assumptions should be named rather than smuggled into the conclusion.

04

Test explanatory scope

Ask how many relevant facts an explanation covers.

05

Test explanatory power

Ask whether the explanation makes the evidence expected rather than surprising.

06

Watch for ad hoc rescue moves

Repeated unsupported additions weaken an explanation even when they keep it technically possible.

07

Understand textual decisions

External evidence, internal evidence, scribal habits, and the reading that best explains the alternatives are considered together.

08

Treat canon as historical and theological

Historical recognition can be studied while inspiration remains a claim about God's action.

09

Read progressive revelation carefully

Later Scripture develops and clarifies earlier revelation without making God's earlier word false.

10

Calibrate the verdict

The conclusion should be no stronger and no weaker than the evidence warrants.

INTERMEDIATE PRACTICE

Choose one question and write a one-page cumulative case. Include the principal data, two or three competing explanations, the criteria used to compare them, and a conclusion that clearly identifies remaining uncertainty.

What Should Be Concluded About Jesus?

Investigation matters because truth matters. Yet the Bible's central invitation is not merely to accumulate facts. Scripture presents the living God who created humanity, exposes sin, keeps His promises, and offers reconciliation through Jesus Christ.

- God is holy, loving, just, and Creator of all things (Genesis 1:1; Isaiah 6:1–5).
- Humanity has sinned and cannot repair the separation from God by effort or religious performance (Romans 3:23; 6:23).
- Jesus is the eternal Son who became human, lived without sin, died for sins, and rose bodily from the dead (John 1:1–18; 1 Corinthians 15:3–4).
- Salvation is God's gift, received by grace through faith, leading to a new life of following Jesus (Ephesians 2:8–10; Romans 10:9–13).

A RESPONSE

Turn to God in repentance and trust Jesus Christ. Ask honest questions, examine the evidence, and do not stop short of the Person to whom the evidence points (John 5:39–40; 20:30–31).

Helpful Starting Points

Primary biblical texts should remain central. The following public collections provide direct access to several items mentioned in this guide:

- The Leon Levy Dead Sea Scrolls Digital Library — deadseascrolls.org.il
- Codex Sinaiticus Project — codexsinaiticus.org
- British Museum: Babylonian Chronicle — britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W_1896-0409-51
- British Museum: Cyrus Cylinder — britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W_1880-0617-1941

A resource can be useful without being correct in every conclusion. Compare claims with Scripture, check citations, and consult more than one responsible source when a question is significant.

SHARING NOTE

This guide may be shared freely for personal, church, or small-group use. It is intended to support—not replace—careful reading of Scripture. Please do not sell, alter, or present the material as an authority equal to the Bible.

THE GOAL

Everything Points Back to Scripture

The purpose of this study is not to end every question. The purpose is to provide a faithful way to pursue truth—carefully, honestly, and with an open Bible.

Every manuscript, artifact, historical claim, and scholarly argument has limits. God’s Word deserves neither careless dismissal nor careless defense. It deserves patient attention, truthful reasoning, and humble obedience.

THE GOAL

Everything points to God. Everything points to Jesus. Everything points back to Scripture.