



BIBLE CONFIDENCE

The Bible on Trial

A careful examination of the claims, evidence, witnesses, and verdicts surrounding Scripture

KEY SCRIPTURE

"Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts. Always be ready to give an answer to everyone who asks you a reason concerning the hope that is in you, with humility and fear." — 1 Peter 3:15 WEB

Simple · Clear · Scripture-grounded

THE SHORT ANSWER

The Bible has faced questions about its text, history, authors, canon, apparent contradictions, moral teachings, and central claims about Jesus. Those questions deserve careful examination. The evidence does not make every question disappear, but it shows that Scripture is rooted in recoverable texts, real history, early testimony, and a unified message centered on Jesus Christ.

Why Place the Bible “on Trial”?

The title of this study uses a courtroom as a teaching picture. The Bible is not literally a defendant standing before a modern court, and historical or theological claims cannot always be evaluated by the same rules used in a criminal trial.

Still, the courtroom picture is helpful. It encourages clear charges, relevant evidence, credible witnesses, careful cross-examination, and a verdict proportionate to the facts.

Questions about Scripture should not be hidden. Luke investigated events carefully before writing his Gospel. The Bereans examined the Scriptures daily. Paul identified witnesses to Jesus' resurrection. John recorded signs so readers could consider who Jesus is.

FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH

Christian confidence does not rest on the claim that every difficult question already has a simple answer. It rests on the character and acts of God revealed through Scripture and centered in Jesus Christ.

What this guide will help you do

01

State the charges clearly

Identify what is actually being claimed instead of responding to a vague accusation.

02

Examine the evidence fairly

Consider manuscripts, history, archaeology, literary context, testimony, canon formation, moral questions, and the Bible's unified message.

03

Test competing explanations

Ask which explanation accounts for the most evidence without unnecessary assumptions.

04

Reach a careful verdict

Distinguish what is established, probable, possible, uncertain, or unsupported.

The Purpose Is Truth, Not Merely Winning

A courtroom can become a place where each side tries only to defeat the other. That attitude produces a poor investigation. The purpose is not to collect impressive facts for an argument. The purpose is to determine whether a claim is true.

- Christians should not exaggerate evidence or pretend that every difficult passage is easy.
- Skeptics should not assume that every supernatural claim is automatically false before the evidence is considered.
- A question should not be dismissed because it feels uncomfortable.
- An explanation should not be accepted merely because it protects a preferred conclusion.
- Uncertainty should be acknowledged where evidence is incomplete.
- Conclusions should change when a better understanding of the evidence requires correction.

A FAIR HEARING

Read statements in context. Define terms. Distinguish evidence from interpretation. Represent opposing positions accurately. Consider the earliest and strongest evidence. Refuse to treat possibility as proof. Keep the conclusion proportionate to the evidence.

Understanding the Courtroom Picture

The charge

A charge is the specific claim being tested. “The Bible cannot be trusted” is too broad to investigate as one charge. It may contain separate accusations concerning transmission, history, canon, contradictions, miracles, the resurrection, or morality. Each accusation requires different evidence.

The evidence

- Biblical manuscripts and ancient translations
- Quotations by early Jewish and Christian writers
- Inscriptions, coins, buildings, and artifacts
- Nonbiblical historical writings
- Literary structure and genre
- The date and origin of testimony
- Independent or multiple sources
- The explanatory power of competing conclusions

The witness

- How close was the witness to the event?
- Was the testimony early or late?
- Did the witness have access to relevant information?
- Is the central testimony consistent?
- Is it supported by other evidence?
- What might the witness gain or lose by making the claim?

A witness does not become unreliable merely because the witness has beliefs. Every witness has a perspective. The important question is whether the testimony is truthful and well supported.

The verdict

Historical conclusions may be virtually certain, highly probable, more probable than not, plausible but uncertain, possible but weakly supported, unlikely, or unsupported. A responsible verdict does not claim more certainty than the evidence allows.

“The Biblical Text Was Changed”

THE ACCUSATION

The Bible was copied by hand for centuries. Therefore, the original message must have been lost or deliberately altered.

The original physical manuscripts are no longer known to exist. The wording is studied through surviving handwritten copies, early translations, and quotations. These witnesses contain textual variants—differences such as spelling, word order, repeated or omitted lines, clarifying additions, and harmonization with parallel passages.

The existence of variants does not mean that the entire text is uncertain. Because many manuscripts survive, scholars can compare witnesses from different places and centuries. Most variants are minor. Reliable translations usually identify significant examples in footnotes. No central Christian doctrine depends only on a disputed textual reading.

A quick example: Mark 1:2

Some later manuscripts introduce Mark 1:2 with “in the prophets.” Earlier and stronger evidence reads “in Isaiah the prophet.” The quotation combines Malachi 3:1 with Isaiah 40:3. A copyist may have changed the wording because the quotation draws from more than one prophet. The variant does not alter Jesus’ identity, John the Baptist’s message, or Christian doctrine.

Exhibit A: The Dead Sea Scrolls

The Dead Sea Scrolls contain Jewish biblical manuscripts copied before and around the time of Jesus. They show both careful preservation and ordinary textual variation. They do not prove that no word ever changed, but they show that the text was not freely reinvented across the centuries.

Exhibit B: Codex Sinaiticus

Codex Sinaiticus is a fourth-century manuscript containing most of the Greek Old Testament and the complete New Testament. It allows direct comparison with other ancient manuscripts and later copies.

VERDICT

The Bible was copied, and copying produced identifiable variations. The claim that the original message disappeared is not supported by the manuscript evidence. The large and diverse body of witnesses allows the wording to be examined rather than guessed.

“The Bible Contradicts Itself”

A contradiction exists when two statements cannot both be true in the same sense, at the same time, and under the same conditions. A difference is not automatically a contradiction.

1. Determine whether both passages address the same event, person, time, and circumstance.
2. Identify the genre and read the full context.
3. Ask whether either writer claims to provide every detail.
4. Consider selection, perspective, summary, ordinary approximation, and chronology.
5. Test whether both statements can be true without forcing the text.
6. State whether the issue is resolved, plausibly reconcilable, difficult, or unresolved.

A quick example: One angel or two?

Matthew 28 emphasizes one angel at Jesus' tomb. Luke 24 describes two men in dazzling clothing. Matthew does not say that only one angel was present; he focuses on the angel who rolled away the stone and spoke. Luke supplies the additional detail that two messengers were present. Mentioning one person does not automatically deny the presence of another.

This explanation demonstrates compatibility; it does not prove every detail of the exact sequence. Harmonization should not invent unsupported information.

VERDICT

Some biblical passages are genuinely difficult, but many alleged contradictions disappear when context, genre, perspective, ordinary language, and authorial purpose are examined. Difference alone is insufficient to prove contradiction.

“The Bible Is Myth Disconnected from History”

The Bible repeatedly locates its message within history. It names rulers, cities, empires, battles, journeys, religious practices, and political changes. Archaeology cannot prove every sentence, and many ancient events leave little material evidence. Still, biblical history is open to investigation.

Exhibit A: The Babylonian exile

Second Kings, Second Chronicles, Jeremiah, Daniel, and Ezekiel describe Babylon’s rise, Judah’s defeat, and the exile. The Babylonian Chronicle records Nebuchadnezzar’s campaign and Jerusalem’s capture in 597 BC. Administrative texts also provide evidence of Judean exiles in Mesopotamia.

Exhibit B: Cyrus and the return

Ezra describes Cyrus authorizing a return and the Jerusalem temple’s rebuilding. The Cyrus Cylinder describes a broader Persian policy involving restored sanctuaries and displaced peoples. It does not mention Judah directly, but its policy fits the wider setting presented in Ezra.

Exhibit C: People, places, and government

- Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome
- Jerusalem, Nazareth, Capernaum, Corinth, and Ephesus
- Kings, governors, priests, and local officials
- First-century burial practices
- Synagogues, temples, roads, ports, and marketplaces

VERDICT

The claim that the Bible has no meaningful connection to history is unsupported. Its historical claims should be evaluated according to genre and the available evidence.

“Church Leaders Invented the Canon”

Canon refers to the recognized collection of writings received as Scripture. Inspiration concerns God’s action in giving Scripture. Recognition concerns how God’s people identified, received, copied, read, and preserved those writings.

The Old Testament

The Law, Prophets, and other sacred writings were received and used within Israel before Jesus’ time. Jesus and the apostles treated Israel’s Scriptures as authoritative.

The New Testament

Apostolic teaching circulated before the collection was complete. Gospels and letters were copied, shared, read publicly, and used in instruction. Recognition considered apostolic connection, agreement with the received faith, early and widespread use, and public reading.

Some books were recognized early and broadly; a smaller number were discussed longer. Later councils did not turn ordinary books into inspired Scripture. They formally acknowledged a collection already received through a long process.

VERDICT

The claim that one council suddenly invented the Bible does not fit the evidence. Canon recognition was a historical process involving use, discussion, and discernment—not merely a late political decision.

“The Bible’s Message Is Hopelessly Disunited”

The Bible contains real diversity: different authors, settings, audiences, genres, vocabulary, and covenant situations. Unity does not require every writer to sound alike.

The unfolding story

7. God creates all things good.
8. Humanity rebels against God.
9. Sin brings guilt, corruption, suffering, and death.
10. God begins a covenant mission through Abraham’s family.
11. Israel receives God’s Law and promises.
12. The prophets announce judgment and future hope.
13. Jesus comes as Messiah and Son of God.
14. Jesus dies for sins and rises from the dead.
15. The gospel goes to all nations.
16. Jesus will return, evil will be judged, and creation will be restored.

Progressive revelation

Later Scripture develops and clarifies earlier revelation. Sacrifice prepares readers to understand atonement. Davidic kingship prepares readers for the promised King. The prophets deepen hope for a new covenant and restored creation. The New Testament identifies Jesus as the fulfillment toward which these promises and patterns move.

VERDICT

The Bible contains diverse voices and developing revelation, but its central story is coherent—from creation and rebellion through promise, redemption, and restoration in Jesus Christ.

“The Gospels Cannot Be Trusted”

The Gospel writers wanted readers to believe that Jesus is the Messiah and Son of God. Their purpose is not hidden. Conviction does not prove dishonesty. The questions are whether they had access to information, handled it responsibly, and preserved the central testimony.

Early Christian proclamation

Paul's letters, written before the Gospels reached their final forms, already proclaim Jesus' identity, crucifixion, burial, resurrection, appearances, and saving work. First Corinthians 15:3–8 preserves a received summary placing these events at the center of early proclamation.

Agreement and difference

- Jesus was a first-century Jewish teacher who proclaimed God's kingdom.
- He performed works understood as signs and miracles.
- He gathered disciples and faced conflict with authorities.
- He was crucified under Pontius Pilate.
- His tomb was found empty.
- His followers proclaimed that He appeared alive.

The Gospels differ in selection, arrangement, wording, and emphasis. Those differences require interpretation, but they also show that the accounts were not four mechanically identical copies.

VERDICT

The Gospels are theological testimonies, but theological purpose does not make them historically useless. Their early roots, first-century setting, multiple perspectives, and shared central claims make them serious historical sources.

“The Bible Teaches or Approves What Is Morally Wrong”

A moral objection differs from a textual or historical objection. A historical question asks whether an event happened. A logical question asks whether claims contradict. A moral question asks whether an action was right or consistent with God’s character.

Begin with the type of passage

The Bible honestly records murder, betrayal, abuse of power, idolatry, warfare, family conflict, and political corruption. Description is not automatically approval.

- Is the passage describing an event or commanding an action?
- Who is speaking and who is addressed?
- Is the action presented as faithful, sinful, regulated, tolerated, or judged?
- Is the instruction universal or tied to a particular covenant setting?
- How does the passage fit the surrounding book and whole Bible?
- How does Jesus reveal and fulfill God’s character and purposes?

The conquest accounts

Joshua’s conquest accounts are among Scripture’s most difficult passages. The conquest is presented as divine judgment, not racial superiority. Israel is also judged when it rebels. The command belonged to a unique covenant setting and must never be used to justify modern violence, ethnic hatred, or territorial conquest. Questions about ancient victory language, scope, and historical details deserve careful study.

Imprecatory psalms

These prayers ask God to judge enemies and defeat evil. They direct judgment to God rather than authorizing personal revenge. They should be read alongside Scripture’s teaching that vengeance belongs to God, Jesus’ command to love enemies, and the biblical hope that evil will finally be judged.

Servitude and slavery

The biblical world included several forms of servitude. They were not identical to modern race-based chattel slavery, though ancient slavery could involve severe exploitation. Scripture condemns kidnapping, recognizes enslaved people as human beings before God, commands just treatment, declares spiritual equality in Christ, and asks Philemon to receive Onesimus as a beloved brother. The subject requires historical context and moral honesty.

Does Jesus correct the Old Testament?

Jesus reveals God’s character perfectly but should not be placed against the God of the Old Testament. Jesus affirmed Scripture, spoke of judgment, demonstrated mercy, fulfilled the Law and Prophets, gave His life for sinners, and commanded love for enemies.

VERDICT

The Bible contains morally difficult passages that require context and humility. The evidence does not support using them to justify vengeance, racism, oppression, abuse, or modern religious violence. The whole biblical story reaches its clearest revelation in Jesus Christ.

PART NINE

The Central Hearing: The Resurrection of Jesus

Christianity rests on the claim that God acted in history by raising Jesus from the dead. Paul states that if Christ has not been raised, Christian faith is futile.

The principal evidence

01

Jesus died by crucifixion

Roman crucifixion was a brutal execution. The Gospel accounts agree that Jesus died and was buried.

02

The message appeared early

First Corinthians 15 presents resurrection testimony as something Paul had already received and passed on.

03

Individuals and groups were named

The New Testament names Peter, the Twelve, James, Paul, women at the tomb, and larger groups.

04

The empty tomb is embedded in the tradition

All four Gospels report that the tomb was found empty, with women as the first witnesses.

05

The disciples' proclamation changed

The disciples moved from fear and confusion to public proclamation that Jesus was alive and Lord.

06

Former opponents became witnesses

Paul opposed the Christian movement, and James was not portrayed as a disciple during much of Jesus' ministry. Both became prominent witnesses.

What Best Accounts for the Resurrection Evidence?

The disciples lied

Suffering does not prove that a belief is true, but it matters when considering whether witnesses knowingly fabricated their own testimony.

Jesus survived crucifixion

This proposal must account for Roman execution practices, the testimony concerning Jesus' death, and how a severely injured survivor could produce the conviction that death had been conquered.

The appearances were visions or grief experiences

This proposal must account for the variety of individuals and groups, the physical character of the Gospel accounts, the empty-tomb tradition, and the conversion of opponents.

The story became a legend

This proposal must account for the early testimony preserved in Paul's letters and the fact that resurrection proclamation appears at the center of the earliest recoverable Christian message.

The body was moved

This may attempt to explain the empty tomb but does not by itself explain the appearances, early proclamation, or conversion of opponents.

Jesus rose from the dead

This is the explanation proclaimed by the New Testament witnesses. It accounts for Jesus' death, the empty tomb, appearances, early proclamation, and transformed witnesses. It also requires openness to God acting supernaturally in history.

A CAREFUL VERDICT

Historical investigation cannot repeat the resurrection in a laboratory. It can examine the earliest testimony and compare explanations. The bodily resurrection is the explanation proclaimed by the earliest witnesses and the one that brings the principal lines of evidence together.

Cross-Examining the Investigation

Every investigator has assumptions

- What evidence would be allowed to challenge the present conclusion?
- Is a miracle being rejected because evidence is weak or because miracles were ruled out in advance?
- Is an explanation accepted because it is strong or because it feels safe?
- Are opposing arguments presented in their strongest form?
- Has uncertainty been mistaken for disproof?
- Has possibility been mistaken for probability?

The burden of proof

The person making a claim should provide reasons for it. “The resurrection happened” requires support. “The resurrection could not have happened” also contains an assumption requiring examination.

The danger of impossible standards

Ancient history rarely provides complete archives or testimony from every participant. The Bible should not receive a lower standard because it is sacred or a higher standard because it is religious.

Common Questions

Does this study prove every biblical event?

No single guide can examine every event. Each question should be investigated according to the relevant passages, historical setting, genre, and available evidence.

Does archaeology prove the Bible?

Archaeology can support historical settings and particular claims, raise questions, or remain silent. It cannot directly prove inspiration, forgiveness, or divine purpose.

What about events with little outside evidence?

Many ancient events are known from limited sources. Absence of outside confirmation does not automatically make an event false. Consider what evidence should reasonably be expected to survive.

What if a question remains unanswered?

A question may remain unresolved because evidence is incomplete or Scripture does not provide the desired detail. Continue studying and allow the conclusion to remain provisional when appropriate.

Is faith still necessary?

Yes. Evidence may show that belief is reasonable. Faith is the personal response of trusting God, receiving His grace, and following Jesus.

Evaluating the Sources

A primary source comes directly from the period or evidence being examined: manuscripts, inscriptions, coins, artifacts, and ancient writings. A secondary source interprets primary evidence: commentaries, historical studies, lectures, documentaries, and articles.

- Who created the source?
- What qualifications or access does the author have?
- When was it produced?
- Does it cite evidence that can be checked?
- Does it distinguish fact from interpretation?
- Does it acknowledge uncertainty?
- Does it represent opposing positions accurately?
- Has it been corrected when errors were found?

DIGITAL CAUTION

A large audience, polished design, emotional story, or confident voice does not make a claim reliable. Significant conclusions should be traced to Scripture, primary evidence, and responsible scholarship.

The Bible on Trial Worksheet

Charge or question being examined

Meaning of key terms

Primary biblical passages

Relevant literary and historical context

Kind of evidence needed

Evidence supporting the charge

Evidence challenging the charge

Strongest explanation supporting the charge

Strongest explanation challenging the charge

Assumptions that may influence the investigation

What is well established

What remains uncertain

Provisional verdict and confidence level

Next research step

An Intermediate Framework for Evaluating the Case

01

Distinguish legal proof from historical reasoning

Modern courts use formal rules. Historical investigation explains past events through surviving sources and material evidence.

02

Use inference to the best explanation

Compare explanatory scope, power, plausibility, coherence, and dependence on unsupported assumptions.

03

Build a cumulative case

Textual preservation, history, archaeology, early testimony, canon, unity, and the resurrection may be stronger together than separately.

04

Evaluate testimony without dismissing perspective

Selection and interpretation do not equal invention. Test access, proximity, consistency, corroboration, genre, and purpose.

05

Distinguish discrepancy from contradiction

Accounts may differ without being mutually exclusive. Harmonization should not invent unsupported details.

06

Examine beliefs about miracles

If God exists, miracles are possible. The historical question is whether sufficient evidence supports a particular claim.

07

Understand methodological naturalism

Investigating natural causes first is a method; declaring supernatural action impossible is a philosophical conclusion.

08

Calibrate confidence

Attach confidence to each conclusion rather than treating every question as equally certain or equally doubtful.

09

Distinguish theological claims from historical access

History can examine crucifixion and resurrection proclamation; divine purposes such as atonement are revealed through Scripture's theological testimony.

10

Evaluate moral objections completely

Identify the action, context, covenant setting, broader biblical teaching, moral standard, and relationship to Jesus.

11

Remain open to correction

Be firm where evidence is strong and humble where it is limited. Continued study may clarify or correct a conclusion.

INTERMEDIATE PRACTICE

Choose one charge and prepare a two-page case file: define the charge, identify the primary passages and evidence, state the strongest objection, compare at least two explanations, and give a verdict with a confidence level and one open question.

The Final Verdict

What does the evidence support?

- The biblical text has been preserved through a transparent and examinable manuscript tradition.
- The Bible contains diverse literary forms rooted in real historical settings.
- Its many books communicate a coherent unfolding story.
- Its canon was recognized through an extended historical process.
- Its central testimony about Jesus arose early.
- Its morally difficult passages deserve contextual examination rather than dismissal or misuse.
- The death and resurrection of Jesus stand at the center of the Christian message.

The verdict of this study

The Bible deserves to be read, investigated, and taken seriously. Not every question has been settled, yet the cumulative evidence provides substantial reason for confidence that Scripture has been faithfully transmitted, is historically grounded, communicates a unified redemptive message, and truthfully directs readers to Jesus Christ.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

The most important question is no longer only, “Can the Bible survive examination?” The most important question is, “What response does the truth revealed in Scripture require?”

What Should Be Concluded About Jesus?

- The eternal Word who became human
- The promised Messiah
- The Son of God
- The sinless Savior
- The crucified and risen Lord
- The King who will return

The gospel announces

God is holy, loving, just, and Creator of all things. Humanity has sinned and cannot restore fellowship with God through moral effort or religious performance. Jesus lived without sin, died for sins, and rose bodily from the dead. Salvation is God's gift, received by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

A RESPONSE

Turn to God in repentance and trust Jesus Christ. Continue asking honest questions. Examine the evidence carefully. Read the Bible in context. Do not stop with facts about Jesus when Scripture invites every reader to know and follow Him.

Helpful Starting Points

Primary biblical passages

- Luke 1:1–4
- Luke 24:1–49
- John 1:1–18
- John 20:1–31
- Acts 2:22–36
- Acts 17:10–12
- Acts 26:22–29
- 1 Corinthians 15:1–28
- 2 Timothy 3:14–17
- 1 Peter 3:13–17

Helpful public collections

- 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 may be helpful 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, rebrand, 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 turn every Bible conversation into a debate. The purpose is to encourage careful thinking, honest investigation, and deeper confidence in the truth.

Evidence matters because truth matters. Truth matters because Jesus matters.

THE GOAL

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