

ANSWERS TO THE NEW CRITICS

# Why Trust *the* BIBLE?

Was the Bible  
tampered with?

How do we know  
the Bible was  
copied accurately?

ROSE  
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# Can the Bible Be Trusted?

Before the invention of the printing press, scribes copied the Scriptures by hand for more than one thousand years—

- ◆ without eyeglasses
- ◆ by the light of candles
- ◆ using quill pens and ground charcoal mixed with gum and water to scratch the sacred words of Scripture on rough papyrus and vellum

## What if these scribes got it wrong?

Some recent bestselling books—such as Bart Ehrman’s *Misquoting Jesus*—argue that the scribes *did* get it wrong. Here’s a summary of recent claims about the surviving manuscripts of the Bible: “Not only do we not have the originals [of the biblical manuscripts], we don’t have the first copies of the originals. We have only error-ridden copies, and the vast majority of these are centuries removed from the originals and different from them in thousands of ways. Mistakes multiply and get repeated; sometimes they get corrected and sometimes they get compounded. And so it goes. For centuries. In some places, we simply cannot be sure that we have reconstructed the text accurately. It’s a bit hard to know what the words of the Bible mean if we don’t even know what the words are.”<sup>1</sup>

Thousands of people read and believe these attacks on the Bible. Still, millions of people continue to trust the Bible as an authoritative, written record that conveys consistent and reliable truth about God. So which is it?

Does the Bible still convey the truths that the original authors intended? Or were the ancient texts changed with such reckless abandon that contemporary biblical scholars are left with manuscripts so “error-ridden” they can’t even be certain what the texts originally meant?

With these questions in mind, let’s look at the history of the biblical texts to see what the historical record actually tells us!

### Here’s what we’ll find:

- ◆ The Bible can be trusted.
- ◆ We can know what the Bible says.
- ◆ We can be confident that our Bible today is faithful to the original manuscripts, despite differences that exist in ancient copies.

GOSPEL	DATE (APPROXIMATE)	SOURCE
MARK	AD 65	Peter, written by Mark
MATTHEW	AD 75	Matthew
LUKE	AD 75	Luke, a companion of Paul
JOHN	AD 90	John

Some scribes after the New Testament era may have altered texts that placed women in prominent positions. For example, in Romans 16:7, someone named Junia—a name that appears to be feminine—is said to be “significant among the apostles,” but a later scribe seems to have turned “Junia” into “Junias,” a man’s name.<sup>28</sup> In the most ancient manuscripts of Acts 18:26, a woman named Priscilla is the primary teacher of Apollos. Centuries later, a copyist switched the order of names, placing the name of Priscilla’s husband first. These kinds of changes are, however, obvious and easy to identify.

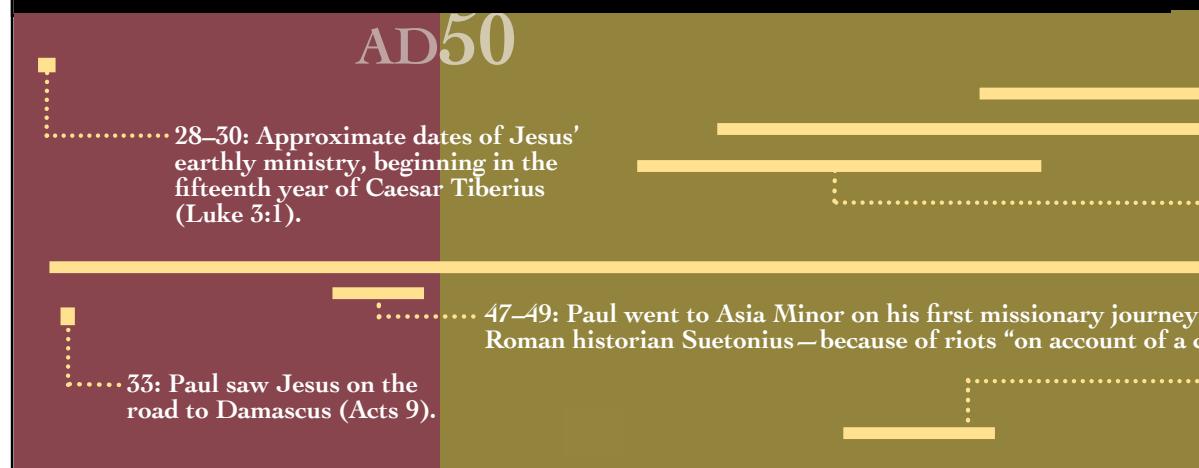
WORKS OF PLATO	NEW TESTAMENT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Written around 400 BC</li> <li>Only seven copies have survived</li> <li>The earliest surviving manuscript was copied between AD 800 and 900—more than 1,200 years after the original documents were written</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Written between AD 60 and 100</li> <li>More than 5,700 portions have survived</li> <li>Complete manuscripts of the New Testament have survived from the late third or early fourth centuries—less than three centuries after the original documents were written</li> <li>Hundreds of fragments and manuscripts have survived from the second, third, and fourth centuries</li> </ul>

Even in the very few cases that remain uncertain, the problem is not with the texts themselves. The difficulty is with the choices of individuals to twist biblical texts to sanction negative attitudes toward women, Jews, or non-believers. In any case, the claim that the Bible as we have it today has been modified for the purpose of opposing women, Jews, and pagans has no substantive foundation in the actual texts.

### ■ What the skeptics claim:

“Many of our cherished biblical stories and widely held beliefs concerning the divinity of Jesus, the Trinity, and the divine origins of the Bible itself stem from both intentional and accidental alterations by scribes.”<sup>29</sup>

### TIME LINE



## ■ What history actually tells us:

This claim is simply not true. Firm belief in the divinity of the Jesus, the threefold nature of God, and the divine origins of the Bible emerged among Christians before the New Testament was even completed. None of these beliefs depends on disputed or altered passages in the Bible. It is true that one verse that mentions the Trinity was not originally present in the biblical text: The last half of 1 John 5:7—a text that, in some later manuscripts, reads, “There are three that testify in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Spirit, and these three are one”—doesn’t appear in the most ancient New Testament manuscripts. But the doctrine of the Trinity does not depend on this verse. God’s nature as three-yet-one is affirmed just as clearly in Matthew 28:19, where Jesus commanded his followers to baptize in the *name* (singular) of the Father, Son, and Spirit. Similarly, the most ancient copies of 1 Timothy 3:16 declare, “Great is the mystery of godliness; he was manifested in the flesh,” while a few later texts read, “*God* was manifested in the flesh.” But, again, the doctrine of the deity of Jesus does *not* depend on this text; the deity of Jesus is clearly affirmed in several undisputed texts, including John 20:28, where Thomas recognized Jesus as Lord and God. No essential Christian belief is affected by any variant in the biblical manuscripts.



(Courtesy of the Schøyen Collection, Oslo and London)  
The sermons of the third-century theologian Origen of Alexandria clearly recognized the authority of the New Testament writings.

# Who Chose the Books in My Bible?

## ■ What the skeptics claim:

“Many Christians today may think that the canon of the New Testament simply appeared on the scene one day, soon after the death of Jesus, but nothing could be farther from the truth. As it turns out, we are able to pinpoint the first time that any Christian of record listed the twenty-seven books of our New Testament as *the* books of the New Testament—neither more nor fewer. . . . In the year 367, Athanasius wrote his annual pastoral letter to the Egyptian churches under his jurisdiction, and in it he . . . lists our twenty-seven books, excluding all others.”<sup>50</sup>

AD 100

.....57–62: Paul arrested in Jerusalem, spent two years in Roman custody before appealing to Caesar (Acts 21–28).

.....journey. In AD 49, Caesar Claudius expelled all Jews from Rome—according to int of a certain Chrestus,” probably a reference to Jesus Christ (Acts 13–15).

.....66–70: After years of enduring oppression from Roman governors, the Jews revolted. Their rebellion resulted in the destruction of the Jewish temple in AD 70.

## ■ What history actually tells us:

This statement leaves out several key facts about the selection of the New Testament books. It is true that Athanasius was the first author to list the exact same twenty-seven books that we find in the New Testament today. Yet, from the beginning, Christians unanimously accepted the four Gospels, Acts, Paul's letters, and the first epistle of John. Although disputes about a few New Testament books lasted into the fourth century, widespread agreement about which writings were authoritative existed among Christians from the first century onward. The primary standard for deciding which books were authoritative emerged long before the fourth century—and the standard *wasn't* the word of a powerful bishop. Hints of this standard can, in fact, be found in Christian writings of the first century AD. The basic idea was this: *Testimony that could be connected to eyewitnesses of the risen Lord was uniquely authoritative among early Christians.*<sup>31</sup> From the beginning, authoritative testimony about Jesus Christ had to have its source in eyewitnesses of the risen Lord. Even while the New Testament books were being written, the words of people who saw and followed the risen Lord carried special weight in the churches (see Acts 1:21-26; 15:6—16:5; 1 Corinthians 4—5; 9:1-12; Galatians 1:1-12; 1 Thessalonians 5:26-27). The logic of this standard was simple: The people most likely to know the truth about Jesus were eyewitnesses who had encountered Jesus personally or their close associates.

Although debates continued into the fourth century about a few writings—including the letters of Peter, John's second and third letters, and the letters of James and Jude—Christians universally agreed at least as early as the second century on the authority of no fewer than nineteen of the books in the New Testament—and these are the writings that reflect some of the most essential truths about Jesus. Even if this score or so of books had been the only documents that represented eyewitness testimony about Jesus, every vital truth of Christian faith would remain completely intact. What directed this process was the conviction that these writings must be rooted in reliable, eyewitness testimony about Jesus Christ.

AD 150

.....c. 60-c. 135: Papias of Hierapolis was a disciple of John, the author of the Gospel; Papias recorded several ancient traditions about the origins of the Gospels.

.....c. 35-c. 117: Ignatius of Antioch was a disciple of John, the author of the Gospel; he wrote seven letters to churches as he traveled to Rome to suffer martyrdom during the reign of Emperor Trajan. In these letters, he quoted sayings that are found in Gospels of Matthew and Luke as well as Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, Colossians, and 1 Thessalonians.<sup>36</sup> These quotations demonstrate that early Christians treated these texts as authoritative.



When deciding which Old Testament writings to accept, Christians embraced the same listing of books as the Jewish people. When the Septuagint—a popular Greek-language version of the Jewish holy writings—was translated around 200 BC, the translators had included some Jewish writings which never appeared in the Hebrew Scriptures and which Jewish rabbis rejected around AD 90 at the Council of Jamnia (Yavneh). The Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches recognize these additional books from the Septuagint as authoritative; these writings appear in the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Bibles as “deuterocanonical” or “apocryphal” books.

### ■ What the skeptics claim:

Among the earliest Christians, “there was no agreed-upon canon—and no agreed-upon theology. Instead, there was a wide range of diversity: diverse groups asserting diverse theologies based on diverse written texts, all claiming to be written by apostles of Jesus.”<sup>32</sup>

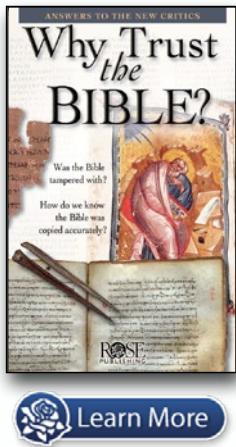
### ■ What history actually tells us:

Among the people who walked and talked with Jesus, a consensus emerged very early regarding both the identity of Jesus and all but a few biblical books. It’s true that there *were* several divergent sets of beliefs that circulated within the earliest churches. It’s also true that debates about a few biblical books lasted beyond the first and second centuries. Yet the persons who actually walked and talked with Jesus agreed about the nature of Jesus even before the New Testament was completed. Consensus about all but a few New Testament books was reached by the mid-second century, probably earlier. According to the records found in the New Testament—the only writings about Jesus that were written early enough to be connected to eyewitnesses of Jesus—Jesus was human and yet divine, he was the messianic king predicted in the Hebrew Scriptures, he was physically raised from the dead, and it is only by trusting in him that anyone can enjoy the life that God created humanity to live, both now and in eternity (see Jn. 20:28-31; 1 Cor. 15:1-7; 1 Jn. 2:22; 4:1-3). According to the eyewitnesses of Jesus, to deny such truths as these was to exclude oneself from fellowship with Jesus Christ and with his followers (see 1 Jn. 4:1-6).

AD200

.....c. 69–c. 155: Polycarp of Smyrna was a disciple of John, the author of the Gospel. In 155 or 156, Polycarp suffered martyrdom for his faith.

.....130–202: Irenaeus of Lyons repeated the same traditions that Papias reported nearly a century earlier, adding, “The heretics boast that they have many more gospels than there really are. ... But there are only four authentic gospels. These alone were written by Jesus’ true followers.”



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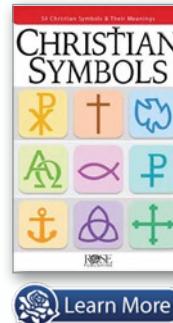
## Why Trust The Bible?

*Why Trust the Bible* pamphlet answers 6 questions brought up by recent books and TV shows about the reliability of the Bible, including "Was the Bible changed?" Or "Was the Bible edited?" Or "Are there thousands of Bible errors?"

The Bible can be trusted.

This pamphlet equips believers to defend assaults against the Bible and to defend the faith. A time line reveals the development of key writings, the emergence of the biblical canon, and more. This great reference tool proves that the Bible can be trusted!

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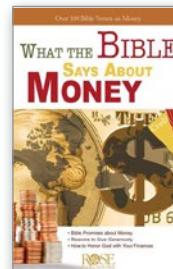


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## Christian Symbols

From the symbol of a fish to the cross, Christians for centuries have used pictures and symbols to communicate key and powerful truths about the Bible. But, where did these symbols come from? Why are they important? Enjoy clearly seeing 50 of the most common Christian symbols at a glance!

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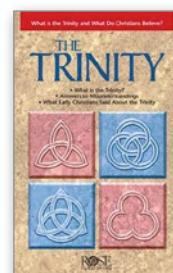


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