

# THE BIBLE VS. EVOLUTION

Visual  
#3-1

## LESSON 3. IS THE BIBLE RELIABLE?

**KEY SCRIPTURE:** “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear...” 1 Peter 3:15 (NKJV)

### Preparing to Teach the Lesson:

We have seen that there are only three books in the world that specifically claim to be the revealed word of Almighty God: the Bible, the Qur’an, and the Book of Mormon. We looked at problems with the first two. However, the fact that the the other books do not have valid credentials as the Word of God does not automatically mean that the Bible does. We need to examine it on its own.

### Today’s Aim:

At the conclusion of this lesson, students should have a firm grasp on why the Bible has valid credentials as the revealed Word of Almighty God, and on why the discrepancies between different Bible versions should not shake our confidence in it.

### Introducing the Lesson:

Unfortunately, few of those who call themselves Christians are prepared to defend why they believe that Christianity is right and all the other religions of the world are wrong. Many have the attitude that it doesn’t matter what you believe as long as you are sincere, or that all religions are just different paths to the same God. However, we saw in the last lesson that neither of these is true.

Visual  
#3-2

1. Only three of the world’s so-called holy books specifically claim to be divinely **inspired**: the Bible, the Qur’an, and the Book of Mormon.
2. All the “holy books” in the world **contradict** each other. If any of them is right, all the others must be wrong.
3. The Bible was written over the space of about 1600 years by about **40** human authors.
4. The Old Testament was written almost entirely in **Hebrew**, with a few passages in Aramaic (same alphabet, different vocabulary).
5. The New Testament was written in the common language of its day, Koine **Greek**.

Visual  
#3-3

Visual  
#3-4

Though the Bible has been translated into hundreds of languages, in this class we will deal only with the English versions.

Whenever words are shown in italics in any version, it usually means that the words are not present in the original language but were added by the translators to aid in understanding. For instance, in Jn. 1:8 (KJV), “He was not that Light, but *was sent* to bear witness of that Light,” the phrase “was sent” was added by the translators.

Any time we see the word “LORD” in all capital letters in the Old Testament, it means that the Hebrew text uses God’s personal name, YHWH. Out of respect for the Name, the interpreters render it “LORD” instead. (When the word is not in all caps, it is usually a translation of the Hebrew word “Adonai.”)

### Bible versions that ignore the Hebrew and Greek texts.

Some cults such as the Watchtower (Jehovah's Witnesses) have their own Bible versions in which words have been added, deleted, or changed so as to support the cult's doctrine. For instance, the Watchtower's *New World Translation* changes every occurrence of cross or crucifixion to "torture stake" or "impalement."

There are also politically motivated versions, such as the gender-neutral *The New Testament and Psalms: An Inclusive Version* (1995 Oxford University Press), from which all references to male or female were removed. .

It is not our purpose here to deal with cultic or political versions such as these.

### Versions that attempt to be faithful to the Hebrew and Greek texts.

Visual  
#3-5

There are almost always several ways to translate from one language to another. We can translate every word literally, or else try to convey the sense of what is said. For instance, if someone asks in Spanish "Como se llama usted?" the literal word for word meaning is "How yourself call you?" However, this is an awkward translation. Instead, you would probably just say "What is your name?" Likewise, there are often several ways to translate from Greek or Hebrew to English.

#### 6. Different types of Bible versions.

- a. Many versions (KJV, NKJV, NIV, NASB and many others) attempt to be as close as possible to a **word-for-word** translation from the Greek and Hebrew texts.

Some insist that the King James is the only trustworthy version. This will be discussed below.

- b. At least one version, the Amplified Bible, seeks to give the sense of the original by adding as many **explanatory** words as needed.
- c. Other versions (e.g., the *Living Bible* and *The Message*) are **paraphrases** rather than translations.

They seek to present the author's interpretation of what the text means. They may be useful to those who have never read the Bible before, but they are usually not considered suitable for scholarly study.

#### 7. Has the Bible been copied and recopied so many times that we cannot be sure that what we have is what was originally written?

Visual  
#3-6

##### a. Old Testament Manuscripts.

- **Jesus** and those of His day accepted the first five books of the Bible as the work of Moses. Besides receiving direct inspiration from God, he might have also used some of the oral tradition passed down from his ancestors.
- Even in modern times, oral traditions are usually extremely accurate.
- Writing was no problem for **Moses**. It was invented no later than the Ebla Kingdom, many centuries before him.

Even though not many ancient Hebrew manuscripts of the Old Testament have survived to the present, we can be confident that their contents are accurate.

Visual  
#3-7

- Until the 1940's the oldest known Hebrew text was the Massoretic Text, dated to about 980 A.D. Then the **Dead Sea** Scrolls were discovered, dating about a thousand years earlier. During that time only a few letters difference accumulated between the DSS and the MT.

The scribes who copied the Hebrew manuscripts had elaborate regulations to make sure they did not make any mistakes.

Visual  
#3-8

- They were not allowed to write a single letter from memory.
- They counted not only the verses but even the number of letters in the original and the copy.
- They counted the number of occurrences of each letter.
- They counted the middle verses and letters of major sections of the text, and of the whole Old Testament.
- They had rules for how many letters wide and how many lines high each column could be.
- They had regulations for the exact amount of space between letters and between sections of the text. 10

Visual  
#3-9

They usually destroyed flawed copies, but because of the scarcity of written material they sometimes allowed them to be used to teach students to read. This may explain some of the spelling variations between the Massoretic Text and the Dead Sea Scrolls. We have no way to know if the latter were perfect copies or were rejected because of spelling.

The Jewish scribes were so confident of the accuracy of a copy that they saw no need to keep originals that had deteriorated due to age. Thus, the scarcity of extremely old manuscripts need not lessen our confidence in the Old Testament. Even though there are a very small number of variant readings, none involves any question of doctrine.

Visual  
#3-10

- The Torah (first five books of the Old Testament) was also preserved in Yemen. In over a thousand years of copying, a total of **nine** letters out of 304,805 were changed.
- The Hebrew text was translated into a Greek version known as the Septuagint about 250 B.C. Differences between the Hebrew and Greek are very **small**, usually having to do with numbers.

For instance, the Septuagint and the Massoretic Text differ by exactly 100 years on some of the ages of the patriarchs at the time they fathered their firstborn sons in Genesis 5.

**No** doctrines of Christianity or Judaism are affected by any of the variant readings.

Regardless which ages are correct, the age of the earth still adds up to only a few thousand years, not millions or billions.

Visual  
#3-11

- Followers of Christ accept Him as the final authority. He said, "...assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot [the smallest Hebrew letter *yodh*] or one tittle [the smallest pen stroke used to distinguish one Hebrew letter from another] will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Matt 5:18 (NKJV)

Since Hebrew is the only language that uses jots and tittles, this would be meaningless in other languages. It is a guarantee from Jesus that the Hebrew text of the Torah, at least, would be preserved accurately.

Visual  
#3-12

The Hebrew Bible can be viewed online at [https://www.chabad.org/library/bible\\_cdo/aid/8165](https://www.chabad.org/library/bible_cdo/aid/8165). It has the same contents as the Protestant Old Testament, though arranged a bit differently. By the time of Jesus the contents of the Hebrew Bible were settled except for the Book of Esther, which was finally accepted as inspired about 70 A.D. After the destruction of Jerusalem in that year, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai obtained permission from Rome to reassemble the Jewish Sanhedrin to settle once and for all which books should be included in the Hebrew canon. This "Council of Jamnia" settled the dispute about Esther, but neither added nor removed any books. They merely reaffirmed what the Jewish people had accepted for centuries. From the beginning, Christians accepted the Hebrew Bible, though the system of chapters and verses is a little different.

- Jesus disagreed with the lack of understanding of Jewish scholars about the meaning of the Scriptures, but He never disagreed about which books were accepted as **Scripture**.

b. New Testament Manuscripts.

The New Testament was written in the common language of its day, Koine **Greek**.

Those who wish to read it in its original language can find classes in Koine Greek at many churches and seminaries.

Visual  
#3-13

Long before the bishop of Rome began to claim authority over other bishops (4th century), Christians had already decided what books were considered **Scripture**.

Until that time, no one city claimed authority over the rest. The Council of Nicea in 325 was the first official council of the Christian churches throughout Europe and Asia. It was not convened by any particular bishop, but by the Emperor Constantine. In 381 the First Council of Constantinople was convened by the Roman Emperor Theodosius. The Catholic Church claims it was under the authority of Damasus, who claimed to be the "universal bishop," or pope. Regardless who called the assembly,

- Even if no one had compiled a list, we could reconstruct almost the **entire New Testament** from the writings of second and third century Christian writers.

Some have claimed that such a reconstruction might include all but eleven verses. It is very difficult to justify such a precise number. Nevertheless, we could reassemble almost all of it because there are estimated to be over a million New Testament quotes in early Christian writings.

- In the year 180 A.D., Irenaeus listed 21 of the 27 New Testament books as Scripture.
- Either Origen or his translator Rufinus listed all 27 books of the New Testament as early as 250.

- In 303, the Edict of Diocletian ordered the destruction of the sacred books of Christianity under penalty of **death**. This forced Christians to decide which books were worth dying for.

The well-known Council of Nicaea was convened in 325 not by religious leaders, but by the Emperor Constantine. It did not deal with the canon of Scripture.

- In 367, Athanasius of Alexandria listed the **27** books of the New Testament. He was followed shortly afterward by Augustine and Jerome.
- The councils of Hippo (393) and Carthage (397) did not add any books to the New Testament, but merely put their stamp of approval on which books were accepted as inspired.

The Councils did not establish the canon. They merely acknowledged what was already accepted.

- How can we tell that the New Testament we have is what was originally written?

Certain tests are commonly used to determine the trustworthiness of an ancient manuscript.

(1) Date of Composition, (2) Date of Oldest Surviving Copy, (3) Time Lapse Between Composition and Oldest Surviving Copy, (4) Number of Copies, and (5) Agreement between Copies.

- We have more manuscript evidence for the **New Testament** than for any other ancient manuscript. The commonly estimated numbers <sup>2</sup> of other ancient documents accepted as authoritative:

Document	Date Written	Earliest Copy	Time Lapse	# Copies
Herodotus	488-428 B.C.	900 A.D.	1300 yrs.	75
Thucydides	460-400 B.C.	900 A.D.	1300 yrs.	20
Tacitus	100 A.D.	1100 A.D.	1000 yrs.	20
Caesar's <i>Gallic War</i>	58-50 B.C.	900 A.D.	950 yrs.	9-10
Livy's <i>Roman History</i>	59 B.C. - 17 A.D.	900 A.D.	900 yrs.	27
Homer's <i>Iliad</i>	ca. 700 B.C.	13th century	2,000	643

The oldest *partial* copy of the *Iliad* dates about 500 years after the original. Even though there is such a large gap between the date of composition and the oldest surviving manuscripts, the existence of 643 ancient copies is enough to persuade scholars that the *Iliad* is reliable.

Document	Date Written	Earliest Copy	Time Lapse	# of Copies
New Testament.	by 100	325	225	24,000+

- There is no known single volume containing the complete New Testament from the first three centuries, but there are over **24,000** ancient manuscripts or fragments. About 5,000 are Greek, 10,000 Latin, and the rest translations into other languages. The manuscripts in other languages agree almost completely with the Greek texts from which they were translated.

Visual  
#3-16

Many of the ancient manuscripts are stored in libraries in England, Ireland, Scotland, Egypt, and Rome and are available for scholars to view.

Visual  
#3-17

ii. Why are there variant readings in the New Testament?

- Early manuscripts were written on extremely durable material such as parchments, papyri, or animal skins. These could last **hundreds** of years.
- The manuscripts were copied by **hand** and sent to various churches. The copyists may have inadvertently changed spelling or word order, or repeated words in a chapter.

For the first few centuries, the New Testament was written on individual scrolls. These were sent to various areas where they were recopied and further distributed. If a copyist accidentally made a change,

- All later copies made from that scroll would contain the new variant.

Before the scrolls were compiled into book form (codices), several different manuscript families developed based on the individual manuscripts available in different areas. The most notable were the Byzantine (or Antiochian) and Alexandrian families.

Visual  
#3-18

- Beginning in the fourth century, the scrolls were assembled into books called **codices**.

The earliest almost complete codex is Sinaiticus, dated to the early fourth century. The second oldest is Codex Alexandrinus, dated to the fifth century.

- The three manuscript families (Textus Receptus or **TR**, Majority Text or M, and Critical Text) on which modern Bible versions are based developed out of the early families.

The King James, NKJV, and several other English and foreign language versions are based on the Textus Receptus (TR). At the time the TR was assembled in the 1600's, it was almost identical to the Majority Text (M), compiled from the majority of ancient manuscripts. However, in the centuries since then, many older manuscripts have been discovered. The M depends primarily on the number of manuscripts regardless of age, whereas the TR puts greater weight on the oldest manuscripts.

- The TR and the Majority text have several hundred trivial variants such as **spelling**. None of them affects any New Testament doctrines.

In the last few centuries, many more ancient manuscripts have been discovered in monasteries, libraries, and even trash piles. Scholars who love the Lord and are dedicated to studying His Word have been studying them and trying to come as close as possible to what the original documents said.

- A third group of manuscripts, the Critical Text, has been compiled into the Nestle-Aland and United Bible Society texts (abbreviated **NU**). The NU uses the oldest available manuscripts, some of which were not discovered until recently.

The NU is the basis of translations such as the NIV, ESV, and others.

Visual  
#3-19

Some claim that there are as many as 200,000 variant readings in the New Testament. This is very deceptive. If a single word is spelled differently in one family of 2,000 manuscripts compared with another family of 2,000 manuscripts, critics report that there are 4,000 variants. Actually, there is only one.

Most variations are word order (Jesus Christ vs. Christ Jesus), spelling variations, or phrases duplicated in a chapter. For instance, some manuscripts of Mk. 1:1 include "Son of God," while others do not. However, Jesus is explicitly identified as the Son of God in the same chapter in v. 11.

When we take these types of variants into account, less than  $\frac{1}{2}$  of one percent of the New Testament is uncertain. That is, 995 out of a thousand words are certain.

Though there have been many arguments about which is the best Bible version, there is less than  $\frac{1}{2}$  of 1% difference between what we might consider the best and the worst manuscripts. No variant readings affect any of the doctrines of Christianity.

There are around 138,000 words and almost 8,000 verses in the New Testament. Just a handful of the verses appear in the TR but not in the NU.

In the first few centuries of Christianity, manual copying of the scrolls was going on in many disconnected places around the known world.

Visual  
#3-20

- Some claim that the copyists of the manuscripts compiled into NU deliberately **omitted** certain verses.
- Others think that the copyists of the documents included in the TR accidentally copied verses from one book to another, or copied **foot-notes** as if they were part of the text.

There is no way to know for sure, but:

- Making deliberate changes would have required extensive **travel** in the early centuries to all the locations where the manuscripts were being copied.

If changes were deliberate, someone would have had to go to all the widely spread locations where copying was done and change many of them before the TR was compiled. Most scholars think it is highly unlikely that anyone could have done such a thing.

Out of the almost 8,000 New Testament verses and 138,000 words, there are only a handful of variants of more than a few words not found in all the manuscript families:

Mt. 17:21, Mt. 18:11, Mt. 23:14, Mk. 7:16, Mk. 9:44, Mk. 11:26, Mk. 15:28, Mk. 16:9-20, Lk. 17:36, Lk. 22:43 - 44, Lk. 23:17, Jn. 5:4, Jn. 7:53-8:11, Acts 8:37, Acts 15:34, Acts 24:7, Acts 28:29, Rom. 16:24, and 1 Jn. 5:7.

With the following single exception, none of the omissions or additions changes any aspects of Christianity.

Visual  
#3-21

iii. Significant variants:

- Mark 16:9-20 (miraculous signs)

refers to casting out demons, speaking in unknown languages, handling serpents without harm, drinking deadly things without harm, and laying hands on the sick. Even if we were to ignore this passage,

All of the concepts included except drinking **poison** are found elsewhere in the New Testament.

You shouldn't deliberately drink poison anyway.

- Mt. 17:21 - Prayer and **fasting**. (Taught throughout the New Testament.)

Jesus was able to cast out a demon that the apostles had been unable to. All versions say that it was because of their lack of faith. NU also adds, "Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting." Whether the verse should be in this place or not, prayer and fasting is taught throughout the New Testament.

- Mt. 18:11 - "For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost." TR includes the verse, whereas NU omits it. However, the verse is also found in Lk. 19:10. No **doctrines** change if it is left out.
- Mt. 23:14 - condemnation of scribes and Pharisees

The verses immediately before and after in both TR and NU record Jesus' condemnation of hypocritical scribes and Pharisees. Adding or leaving out this verse makes no difference in the meaning.

- Mk. 7:16 - "If any man have ears to hear, let him hear." Found **2** other places in the New Testament.

This sentence is found in at least 5 other places in Mark, as well as three times in Matthew and twice in Luke. Leaving it out or including it here does not change the meaning.

- Mk. 9:44, 46, 48 (the worm dies not and the fire is not quenched) Some manuscripts have "Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched" in only verse 48, whereas other manuscripts also have it in verses 44 and 46. There is no difference in the **meaning**.
- Mk. 11:26 - "But if ye do not **forgive**, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses." The same principle is expressed in Mt. 6:12. Leaving it out here would not change any Christian doctrine.
- Mk. 15:28 - "And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, And he was numbered with the transgressors." This is not an exact quote from any Old Testament passage. Some think it was a **footnote** in an early manuscript that was accidentally incorporated into later copies. It does not change the sense of the passage at all.
- Lk. 17:36 - "Two men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left." The same phrasing is used in Matt 24:40, so including or deleting it here does not make any difference in **doctrine**.
- Lk. 23:17 - Pilate's custom of releasing a prisoner. Mt. **27:15** says the

Visual  
#3-22

Visual  
#3-23



Visual  
#3-24

same thing. Including or leaving out this verse makes no difference in meaning.

- Jn. 5:4-5 (the pool of Bethesda)

tells of a paralyzed man whom Jesus healed at the pool of Bethesda. The latter part of verse 4 and all of verse 5 are found in TR, showing the common belief that the first person into the pool after an angel stirred up the water would be healed. NU does not contain any reference to an angel stirring up the water, but nevertheless tells of the man's healing at the hands of Jesus.

Whether the water was stirred by an angel or not, Jesus **healed** the man.

- Jn. 7:53-8:11 (the woman caught in adultery)

is omitted in some manuscripts.

Even if we were to never use this passage again, the principles of repentance and **forgiveness** are found throughout the New Testament.

- Acts 8:37 (the Ethiopian eunuch)

TR tells us that Philip told the man he could be baptized if he believed in Jesus with all his heart. NU omits this verse and simply says that Philip baptized him.

Other passages (e.g., Acts 10, Acts 16:33, Acts 19:5) also show that belief was required before **baptism**.

- Acts 15:34 - Does Silas's decision to stay in a particular region change any **doctrines**?
- Acts 24:7 - Does it matter whether Lysias used force to rescue Paul?
- Acts 28:29 - "And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves." Does it make any difference if the hearers kept discussing Paul's preaching when they **left**?
- Rom. 16:24 - "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen." Paul wrote this in many of his letters. Including or omitting it here does not change the **meaning**.
- 1 Jn. 5:7 (the Father, Word, and Holy Spirit)

Visual  
#3-25

is not found in most ancient manuscripts.

Even if we ignore the verse, the **three** persons of the Godhead are seen throughout the New Testament.

For instance, at Jesus' baptism we see the Father speaking to the Son while the Holy Spirit descends on Him: "And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased." (Luke 3:22)

All the other New Testament variants consist of no more than a few words.

All in all, there is less than ½ of 1% **difference** between the manuscripts considered the best and those considered the worst.

How significant is the fact that there are a handful of variants of more than a few words between manuscript families? Suppose you had a building composed of tens of thousands of bricks and noticed that a handful of them were a slightly different color. You wouldn't knock down the whole building. Likewise, would you throw out the whole New Testament because of these variant readings?

Visual  
#3-26

It is not true that translators of versions based on NU deliberately leave out words to support their doctrines. The differences are not because of **malice**, but because the words sometimes vary slightly between the two ancient manuscript families.

Except in cultic or political versions, variant readings do not occur because the translators maliciously changed the text to fit their doctrines. The variants are found in the manuscript families they used, some of which are many centuries old. No one could have deliberately changed all the texts used to produce any particular manuscript family unless centuries ago they were able to travel to all the libraries and monasteries where the ancient texts were kept. Talk about a conspiracy theory!

Visual  
#3-27

Sinners are not saved because they use a particular version of the Bible. We are saved by believing that Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried, rose from the dead, and is alive now and forever, and by surrendering to Him as absolute Lord of our lives. (1 Cor. 15:1-4, Rom. 10:9)

Any non-cultic version of the New Testament can lead us to this knowledge. People in foreign lands who have never had a Bible don't argue about which version the missionary brings them!

If you are most comfortable with the King James, by all means use it. If you prefer NIV, Amplified, or some other version, use it.

It is better to read a Bible version you are **comfortable** with than to not read it at all.

Or you can use a parallel Bible that shows multiple translations side by side.