

# CHAPTER 3: Is the Bible True? (part 1)

## Discovering Answers to Three Questions that Demonstrate Manuscript Integrity

Reference: *Surprised by Faith*, pages 23-37 (fourth edition); pages 33-44 (third edition)

### Getting Focused

- Has the Bible been changed a lot since it was written?
- Were the Gospels written long after the eyewitnesses of Jesus were dead, based on centuries of oral tradition?
- Did a church council decide which books to include in the New Testament hundreds of years after they were written?

Many people don't know what to say when someone alleges that the New Testament of the Bible contains legends, maintaining that it was written long after Jesus' death and not by eyewitnesses to the events described. They have no defense when a work associate claims that the original writings have been altered through errors in copying over the centuries. In this chapter we will discover evidence that enables us to understand these issues and to give answers—evidence that verifies today's New Testament records to be of the highest integrity.

### Making the Discovery

1. A \_\_\_\_\_ is a handwritten copy of a published writing. This was the means of duplication prior to the invention of the Guttenberg printing press in the fifteenth century.
2. An \_\_\_\_\_ is the first or original writing of any work. No originals have been found of *any* ancient literature.
3. To ask if a publication has \_\_\_\_\_ is to ask if it is genuine or true to what was originally written. The New Testament Gospels claim to have originated as autographs in the eyewitness generation of Jesus (first century) and were hand copied over the centuries without major changes in content.
4. There are three questions used to determine the integrity of ancient writings like the New Testament.

**Question 1.** How \_\_\_\_\_ handwritten copies have been found? (More is better, making it possible to detect copyist errors so the text of the original autograph can be restored more accurately.)

**Answer.** The number of discovered handwritten copies of ancient writings varies from 1–1,757, with most writings having fewer than 30. In contrast, the New Testament has more than \_\_\_\_\_ handwritten copies.

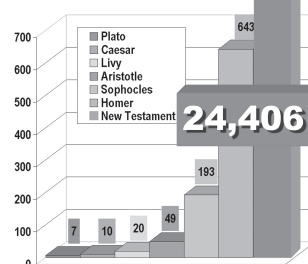
**Question 2.** How \_\_\_\_\_ are these handwritten copies? (Closer to authorship is better since they would have fewer accumulated copyist errors.)

**Answer.** The interval between the date of writing and the earliest known manuscript of other ancient works varies from 300-1,500 years. In contrast, there are full Gospels within 100 years of authorship, New Testament quotes in other writings within 30-50 years, and manuscript fragments of Matthew, Mark and Luke within 15 years of authorship. These are within the \_\_\_\_\_ generation of Jesus—no other ancient writing has this.

**Question 3.** How \_\_\_\_\_ are these handwritten copies? (A low distortion rate is desired, that is, there are few changes that affect the meaning of the text when comparing different manuscript copies.)

**Answer.** The New Testament we use today is reconstructed from ancient texts which have only a 0.2% distortion rate, or are \_\_\_\_\_% without distortion.

**Ancient Manuscripts—  
How Many?**

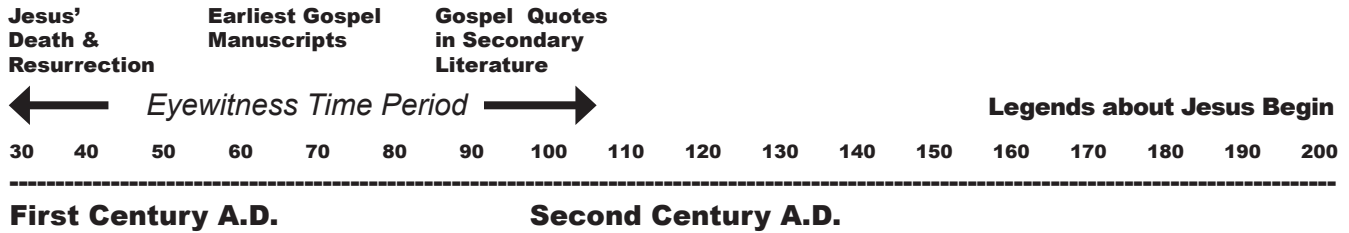


## DISCOVERY #3

**“Ah-ha!”** The New Testament records in our Bible today are essentially unchanged from eyewitness accounts of Jesus!

5. The New Testament has \_\_\_\_\_ integrity than all other ancient writings.

## The Origin of the New Testament



## Application and Reflection

1. **The Bible says** its records of Jesus’ words and actions are from eyewitness sources.

*Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you... so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught (Luke 1:1-4).*

*For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty (2 Peter 1:16).*

A comparison of the New Testament with other ancient literature reveals: (Circle the correct answer for each statement.)

- There are \_\_\_\_\_ manuscript copies.                      a) More            b) Fewer
- There is \_\_\_\_\_ accuracy in copying.                      a) More            b) Less
- There is \_\_\_\_\_ time between the original authorship and earliest manuscript copies.                      a) More            b) Less

It is not well known by many in our society how archaeologists and papyrologists determine how old a manuscript is. If you’re wondering, too, or if someone should ask you, the information below will help.

There are numerous ways to determine the date of a manuscript. A common indicator is the style of writing used by the copyist. There was a period of time where copying was done in all capital letters, another time when they used only small letters, and still other times when copying was done in a cursive style. A general date would be indicated by the style. The absence or degree of punctuation also indicates different time periods.

Another measurement is the writing material itself and how it was processed, whether animal skin such as vellum, or plant source like papyrus rolls and codices (pages as in a book). The technology of the development of writing materials is well known and provides another indicator of age. Further, the writing material can also be submitted to carbon-14 radiometric dating to determine its age.

Finally, artifacts like coins or ceramics which are often found with the manuscripts give an indication of the time period in which the manuscript may have been copied. The methods for determining the dates of ancient manuscripts are quite well-developed today and usually yield confident results.

Does the information about manuscripts surprise you? How widely known do you think the evidence for the integrity of the New Testament is among people you know?

2. **The Bible says** that Jesus’ words are Truth.

*So Jesus was saying... “If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (John 8:31-32).*

It is not uncommon to hear someone state that the decision about which books should be included in the New Testament was made hundreds of years after they were written. What would you say to this? (The discussion below will be helpful to you. It is based on the book *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible*, by R. Laird Harris (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1969) pp. 199-245.)



Which books should be included in the New Testament is the question of canonicity. **The test of canonicity is the test of divine inspiration.** Some books were regarded by the early church as inspired by one and the same Spirit, thereby giving them authority. These were included in the canon (authoritative list) of the New Testament.

What is the test of inspiration, that is, how did the early church know which books were inspired? The Lord Himself established that **apostolicity determines inspiration**, that is, authorship by an apostle or men commissioned by the apostles. The following points summarize the development of the Canon.

1. Jesus Christ claimed full authority for His own words (Matthew 24:35; John 12:48) and they were received by His apostles subsequent to the resurrection as authoritative.
2. Because Jesus Christ had chosen the apostles and promised the ordaining work of the Holy Spirit for a work of revelation in them (John 14:26; 16:12-15) the apostles were conscious that they wrote as men inspired of God and claimed divine authority for their writing (1 Corinthians 2:10-13; 14:37; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21; 3:2,15-16).
3. The early church Fathers acknowledged that the apostles were far above themselves and were linked to the Old Testament prophets as to being authoritative.
4. Therefore, the twenty-seven New Testament books that arose in the last half of the first century A.D. were nearly all clearly known, revered, canonized, and collected well before a hundred years had passed. While it is true that fourth century church councils gave official ecclesiastical confirmation, no church decree made these twenty-seven books into authoritative Scripture. Rather, later church councils merely acknowledged and formalized existing conviction and practice concerning the New Testament canon.

3. **The Bible says** that the ultimate authority of its records is God the Holy Spirit.

*But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God (2 Peter 1:20-21).*

## Looking Ahead

Some people allege that the New Testament writings are like a novel—not historically factual. How can we determine the difference between fiction and historical truth? That will be the discovery in the next chapter.

**Answers to "Fill in the Blanks":** 1. manuscript; 2. autograph; 3. integrity; 4. (Q1) many, 24,600; (Q2) early, eyewitness; (Q3) accurate, 99.8; 5. more; 1. more, more, less