**You Can Trust and Understand the Bible**

Background: Joe S. told me that he has seen some of you having a “good” problem. You have been listening to BEMA podcasts, which are helpful, but these have both supplied cool info and raised questions and even doubts. So…

I. You can trust the Bible.

II. You can understand the Bible.

I. You can trust the Bible.

Here is why you can trust the Bible

A. Because the autographs/original writings are inspired by God.

B. Because the original text has been faithfully transmitted to us.

2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.

Fine, but that is a statement and is meaningless by itself. How do I KNOW this?

Psalm 119:160 All your words are true; all your righteous laws are eternal.

1 Thessalonians 2:13 And we thank God continually because, when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God.

2 Peter 1:19-21 Men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

This passage hints at WHY we know the Scriptures are inspired. “We have the prophetic word made more certain.” (v. 19)

Why, Peter?

Because we saw the entire Old Testament expectation fulfilled before our eyes.

Matthew 5:17 I came to fulfill the Prophets.

Because the Messiah/Jesus was indeed born in Bethlehem. (Micah 5:2)

Because the Messiah/Jesus was indeed from Galilee—the land of Zebulun and Naphtali, and a Nazarene/branch. (Isaiah 9:1-2, 6, branch/nazer/Nazareth Isaiah 11:1, Jeremiah 23:5, Jeremiah 33:15, and Zechariah 3:8 and 6:12)

Because the Messiah was despised and rejected, he did not open his mouth when accused, he was pierced, and he was assigned a grave with the wicked (plural) and with the rich (singular) in his death, and because he saw the light of life (was resurrected). (Isaiah 53)

Because the Messiah/Jesus was born of a virgin. Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son… (Isaiah 7:14)

Because the Messiah/Jesus was pierced in his hands and feet, and his garments were gambled over. (Psalm 22:16-18)

Because the Messiah/Jesus rode in triumph as a king into Jerusalem on a donkey—actually on a cold, the foal of a donkey. (Zechariah 9:9)

Because the Messiah/Jesus was betrayed for how much? Oh yeah, for 30 pieces of silver, and the money was used to buy a potter’s field. (Zechariah 11:12-13)

And much more. What about all those types, prefigures and foreshadows (From Shadow to Reality).

And what about the thousands of public miracles which, as Peter said, “as you yourselves know” (Acts 2:22)

And what about the greatest miracle of all, which fulfilled multiple prophecies, for example when Jonah was resurrected on the third day, or when Isaac was received back as from the dead on the third day.

I KNOW the Bible is inspired by God because Jesus was raised from the dead on the third day, as had been prophesied multiple times.

If Jesus was raised from the dead, that solves a lot of problems for me.

What about this textual variant?

What about Genesis? I don’t know, but one thing I know is that Jesus was resurrected from the dead.

B. Because the text has been faithfully transmitted to us.

OK, sure, the originals were inspired, but what about all the copying errors, and what about the “fact” that Constantine changed the New Testament. As my Muslim friends so confidently proclaim, the Bible is corrupt. What about interpolations like John 5:3-4 or 1 John 5:7-8, and what about the ending of Mark Mark 16:9-20?

Answer: Some of this is true, and some of it is bold-faced lies, but here is the conclusion: Our Hebrew Old Testament is remarkably reliable, and our Greek New Testament is more than 99% a reflection of the original, some would say more like 99.8%.

VERY briefly.

The NT is the best attested ancient book BY FAR, with the OT the second-best attested ancient book.

NT: 5700 Greek Manuscripts

1. Rylands Papyrus Rylands Library, Manchester, England. Approx.. AD 125 John 18:31-33, 37-38.

2. Sackler Library: John 18:36-19:1 and Matthew 21:34-37 from AD 150

3. Magdalen Library manuscript of Matthew 3:5, 26 AD 175

4. Chester Beatty Papyri Several manuscripts and fragments. Chester Beaty Museum, Dublin, Ireland and U of M, Ann Arbor, Michigan. Approx. AD 200.

P45 Fragments of Mathew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts from very early 200s AD

P46 Rom 5:17-6:3,5-14, 8:15-25, 27-35, 10:1-11, 22, 24-33, 35, 16:1-23, 25-27. All of Heb. 1 & 2 Cor., Eph., Gal., Phil., Col., 1 Thess 1:1, 9-10, 2:1-3, 5:5-9, 23-28. AD 200

P47 Revelation Ch 9-17 3rd Century.

5. Bodmer Papyri A number of NT fragments, as early as AD 200, now in the Vatican Library, discovered by Martin Bodmer in 1952 in Egypt.

P66 AD 200 manuscript if the entire book of John. Does not include Jn 7:53-8:11 (woman caught in adultery) or Jn 5:3b-4 (angels stirring the waters)

P72 Jude, 1,2 Peter, 3rd century P75 Most of Luke, John approx. AD 200

7. Codex Vaticanus. AD 300-350. Nearly complete Greek Old and New Testament.

8. Codex Sinaiticus Approx. AD 350. Found by Tischendorf at St. Catherine’s Monastery on Mt. Sinai in 1844. In British Library Complete Greek Bible.

9. Codex Alexandrinus Approx AD 400. Nearly complete Greek Old and New Testaments.

B. Quotes from early Church Fathers. These are relevant both for accuracy and reliability of the text and for questions about the canonization of the NT.

1. Letter of Clement of Rome. About AD 95. Quotes from Matthew, Mark Luke, Acts, Romans 1 Corinthians, Hebrews, James, 1,2 Peter.

2. Ignatius, bishop of Antioch. Died about AD 107. Quotes from Matthew, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, 1,2 Corinthians, Galatioans, Ephesians, 2 Thess, 1,2 Timothy, Hebrews, James, 1 Pet., Revelation

3. Polycarp writing to the Philippians in AD 120 quotes from Matthew, Mark, Luke, Acts, 1,2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, 1,2 Thessalonians, 1,2 Timothy, Hebrews, 1 Peter, and 1,3 John

4. Irenaeus. AD 180. Quotes or alludes to every NT book.

Summary: It has been claimed that we could reproduce virtually the entire New Testament simply from piecing together quotes from the Church Fathers from the second and third centuries. This is not an exaggeration.

With the science of textual criticism, our Greek New Testament is somewhere between 99 and 99.9% reliable, depending on what expert you believe.

No time now to talk about textual criticism, but using 5700+ Greek manuscripts and NT quotes we can produce a fantastically reliable Greek New Testament.

Reliability of the Old Testament

A. The Masoretic Text.

B. The Dead Sea Scrolls.

C. The Septuagint and Other Translation

A. The **Masoretic Text**. Produced by conservative Jewish scholars around 800 AD

1. **The Cairo Codex** (*Codex Cairensis).* A codex of the former and latter prophets dated at 895 AD.

2. **The Leningrad Codex of the Prophets.** This codex includes Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the twelve minor prophets. It is dated at 916 AD.

3. **The Leningrad Codex** (*Codex Babylonicus Petropalitanus)* This is the oldest Hebrew copy of the entire Old Testament. It was copied in 1008 AD.

OK, but there is that 1400+ year gap!

B. The Dead Sea Scrolls.

First discovered in 1948 by an Arab boy looking for a lost goat.

Many are biblical documents, from every OT book except Esther.

Entire Isaiah scroll 100 BC A second major Isaiah scroll from about 150 BC

1952 RSV Isaiah made 13 minor changes to the Masoretic, based on the DSS.

To get a feel for how significantly the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls moved the date of the earliest available manuscripts toward the time of the books actually having been written, consider the graph below.



 Last Oldest Oldest available

OT book Dead Sea manuscript before

written Scroll Dead Sea Scrolls

 F. F. Bruce:

The new evidence confirms what we already had good reason to believe—that the Jewish scribes of the early Christian centuries copied and recopied the text of the Hebrew Bible with utmost fidelity.

II. You can understand the Bible.

Psalm 119:105 Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light for my path.

I am not saying you do in fact understand the Bible to the level you ought to right now, but I am saying that you can and you will if you put in the work.

Fine, so the original Hebrew Aramaic and Greek texts are inspired and faithfully transmitted, so how does that help me, because:

A. I do not speak Hebrew or Greek. And

B. I live two millennia after the events, and I am so culturally isolated from the ancient Jewish world of the OT and Jewish/Greek world of the NT. (here is where BEMA comes in)

About BEMA, lets take a deep breath and relax. What they are teaching is really fairly basic stuff. Not to boast, I promise, but the reason I do not spend time watching their stuff is because, honestly, it is fairly basic stuff that any teacher would know.

So, why did I not know this stuff?

Honestly, because as a fellowship we have remained fairly shallow in regard to teaching kinds of things.

No one ever told me that…

OK, well probably someone should have. Shame on them. But more shame on you! You should have been doing this all along.

But this is changing, and that is a good thing.

Here is what I believe:

We have so many resources for understanding both the ancient Greek and Hebrew languages and the cultural, historical and religious background, especially of the New Testament, that we can understand the words of Paul, Luke, John and Peter as well as or perhaps even better than the original hearers of these writings.

And you do NOT need to know Greek or Hebrew to access this information.

You simply need to be willing to read and access the information.

And can I suggest you do more reading than podcast listening?

David: Psalm 119:97 Oh how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.

Psalm 119:72 The law from your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold.

1. Take the long view of this and be patient. You are a busy person, but if you have David’s love for the Scripture, you will get there.

2. Study hermeneutics. (go to [www.evidenceforchristianity.org](http://www.evidenceforchristianity.org)) https://evidenceforchristianity.org/class-on-hermeneutics-by-dr-john-oakes/

3. Read commentaries.

4. Learn about history and culture of the ancient Near East.

5. Learn how to ask questions. Learn how to ask the right questions.

a. essential, vs important vs not important.

b. command, principle, example (classic example 2 Cor 6:14 yoked with…

6. Remember this: The Bible is 100% absolutely and completely inspired by God. When you run across a difficult question, keep this FACT in your pocket.

7. Be careful. Be discerning. Stay humble. (example of a brother in Dallas who went way overboard on the BEMA thing)

The Bible is reliable.

You can understand the Bible