



— WHY YOU CAN —

**TRUST THE**

**BIBLE**

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**Understanding the Evidence**  
**Building Confidence in God's Word**

— MIKE CHENEVEY —

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# WHY YOU CAN TRUST THE BIBLE

## 1. The big question: Does the Bible have errors?

People often say, “The Bible has errors.” But we need to slow down and ask: **What do they mean by “error”?**

When Christians talk about inerrancy, they usually don’t mean:

- every detail is written with modern scientific precision, or
- every copy made by hand over the centuries is perfect.

**Inerrancy means this:**

**In the original writings, the Bible does not teach anything false.**

God does not lie, so God’s Word does not lie.

**True doesn’t always mean “hyper-precise”**

A statement can be true without being super technical.

For example, the Bible sometimes talks about the sun rising. Technically, we know the earth rotates. But people still say “sunrise” today, and it’s not a lie. It’s normal human language.

Another example:

“I went to college in Ohio.”

That’s true, even though it doesn’t tell you the city or the year. It’s true, just not detailed.

So the question isn’t, “Is every sentence written like a science textbook?”

The question is, **“Is what the Bible affirms actually true?”**

**Why this matters**

If we decide the Bible is not fully truthful:

- How can we truly trust God’s promises?
- If “small errors” are acceptable, how do we decide which parts are true and which aren’t?
- It puts us in the role of judge over Scripture; acting like our limited viewpoint is higher than God’s Word.

## 2. If the originals were true, what about copies?

A fair question is:

**How do we know today's Bible matches what the authors originally wrote?**

We do not have the original physical pages (the “first copies”) for the books of the Bible. What we have are **many handwritten copies**—thousands of them—made across many centuries and in many places.

These copies exist in multiple languages, including:

- Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic
- Latin, Syriac, Coptic, and more

Because people copied by hand for many centuries, **small differences** showed up between manuscripts. That is normal for ancient documents.

This is where **textual criticism** comes in.

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## 3. What is “textual criticism”?

**Textual criticism** is the careful study of Bible manuscripts to figure out which wording is most likely the original.

It's often called “lower criticism,” not because it's unimportant, but because it deals with **real, physical evidence** (actual manuscripts and their differences), not speculation.

The goal is simple:

- Compare many manuscripts
- Note the differences
- Decide which wording best matches the original

Important note: since we don't have the original pages, scholars can't claim 100% certainty in every case. But they can make very strong conclusions by using evidence and careful methods.

## 4. What is a “variant”?

A **variant** is just a difference between manuscripts.

Most variants are:

- spelling changes,
- word order changes,
- small missing words like “the,”
- or repeated words.

In other words: **most variants don’t change the meaning.**

### Two main kinds of variants

#### A) Unintentional changes (accidents)

These happen when someone copying makes a simple mistake, like:

- repeating something twice,
- skipping a line,
- misspelling a word,
- mixing up similar-looking letters.

#### B) Intentional changes (on purpose)

Sometimes a copyist tried to “help” the text by:

- adding a note from the margin into the text,
- making grammar smoother,
- making one Gospel sound more like another,
- adding traditional phrases that were commonly said in church.

Even then, the key point is this:

**Most changes are small, and most do not affect core Christian doctrine.**

## 5. Some variants matter more than others

### Inconsequential (doesn't change meaning much)

Example idea:

One manuscript might say, "and he said," while another says, "and he said to him."

That difference is real, but it doesn't change what the passage means.

### Consequential (changes who is being referred to)

Sometimes a variant can change the meaning more clearly. For example, a text might read "to David" in one copy and "to the enemies of David" in another. That's a more meaningful difference.

Textual critics pay special attention to these larger ones, but they are far fewer than the tiny ones.



## 6. "There are hundreds of thousands of variants!" — should we panic?

You may hear big numbers like "200,000–500,000 variants" for the New Testament.

That sounds scary until you understand what that number means:

- The New Testament has **thousands of manuscripts**.
- If one small spelling difference appears in 2,000 manuscripts, that can be counted many times.

So large numbers often reflect:

- the *huge number of manuscripts*, and
- the *counting method*.

The encouraging part is this:

**Most of these differences are minor and don't affect the message.**

## 7. Why do Bible translations differ? (KJV vs. NIV and others)

Older English Bibles (like the King James Version) were translated using the best manuscripts available at the time, often **later copies**.

In the 1800s and beyond, scholars discovered some **much earlier manuscripts** (closer to the time of the originals). Many modern translations (like the NIV and others) use a broader collection of manuscripts, including those earlier ones.

That's why you sometimes see:

- a verse in the KJV that is missing or bracketed in the NIV,
- or a footnote saying "some manuscripts include..."

This isn't proof the Bible is unreliable. It's proof translators are being honest about the manuscript evidence.



## 8. How does the Bible compare to other ancient writings?

When you compare the New Testament to other ancient books, the New Testament stands out because:

- There are **far more copies** of it than other ancient works.
- Some copies are **much closer in time** to the original writing.

For many famous ancient authors, the earliest copies we have are **hundreds to over a thousand years after** the originals were written. With the New Testament, copies appear much earlier by comparison.

The big idea:

**The New Testament is one of the best-attested works from the ancient world.**

## 9. A simple way to think about it

Here's the takeaway in everyday terms:

- **God's Word is true.**
- Humans copied the Bible by hand for centuries, so **small differences** happened.
- Scholars compare thousands of manuscripts to find the best original wording.
- **Most differences are minor** and don't change the message.
- Modern Bible footnotes often show transparency, not uncertainty.
- The Bible is extremely well preserved compared to other ancient writings.

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**If you are interested in diving deeper on these subjects, I recommend the following resources:**

My more comprehensive book entitled, "The Integrity of the Bible" on <https://Uncomplicatedfaith.life>

F.F. Bruce, The Canon of Scripture, (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988).

Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, Second Edition: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Co., 2020).

Bruce Metzger, The Text of the New Testament: its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

## Common Objections and Short Answers

People often hear strong claims against the Bible.

Here are some of the most common objections, along with short, clear answers.

### 1. “The Bible has too many errors to be trusted.”

Short answer:

Most differences in Bible manuscripts are small copying variations such as spelling, word order, or repeated words. The vast majority do not change the meaning of the text or affect core Christian doctrine.

### 2. “We do not even have the original writings, so we cannot know what the Bible said.”

Short answer:

We do not have the original physical writings, but we do have thousands of ancient manuscripts, some of which were written within one generation of the apostles and early church. By comparing them carefully, scholars can identify the original wording with a very high level of confidence.

### 3. “The Bible has been changed too many times over the centuries.”

Short answer:

The Bible was copied by hand for many centuries, so small differences appeared, but that is not the same as corruption. Because there are so many manuscripts, those differences can be studied and evaluated rather than hidden.

### 4. “There are hundreds of thousands of variants in the New Testament.”

Short answer:

That number sounds alarming until you understand that it reflects the huge number of manuscripts and the way variants are counted. One small spelling difference repeated in many manuscripts may be counted many times.

**5. “Different Bible translations prove the text is unreliable.”**

Short answer:

Translation differences usually reflect translation choices and manuscript evidence, not a broken Bible. In many cases, footnotes and brackets show that translators are being honest and transparent about the evidence.

**6. “If copyists made mistakes, how can the Bible still be trusted?”**

Short answer:

Copyists did make mistakes, which is normal in handwritten transmission. But because the manuscript evidence is so rich, scholars can compare many copies and recognize where those mistakes occurred.

**7. “Textual criticism means scholars are just guessing.”**

Short answer:

Textual criticism is not random guessing. It is the careful study of manuscripts, wording, context, and historical evidence to determine the reading most likely found in the original text.

**8. “If there are variants, then the message of the Bible is uncertain.”**

Short answer:

Most variants are minor and do not change the message. The central teachings of the Christian faith do not depend on one uncertain passage or disputed wording.

**9. “Modern translations remove verses, so the Bible must be changing.”**

Short answer:

Modern translations do not remove verses to weaken the Bible. In many cases, they reflect earlier manuscript evidence and show their reasoning in footnotes so readers can see what is going on.

## **10. “The Bible cannot be trusted because it was written so long ago.”**

Short answer:

Age alone does not make a document unreliable. In fact, compared to other ancient writings, the New Testament is the best-attested text in the ancient world.

### **Key takeaway**

Questions about copies, variants, and translations are real, but they do not erase the truth or trustworthiness of Scripture.

## Key Scriptures to Revisit

These passages help ground confidence in the truth, trustworthiness, and enduring nature of God's Word.

### **2 Timothy 3:16–17**

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.”

Scripture comes from God and is given for our good.

### **Psalm 19:7**

“The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul.”

God's Word is not flawed or empty. It is perfect in what God intends it to do.

### **Psalm 12:6**

“The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times.”

This verse emphasizes the purity and trustworthiness of God's words.

### **Psalm 119:160**

“The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever.”

God's Word is true as a whole and stands over time.

### **Proverbs 30:5**

“Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.”

The truth of God's Word is connected to the safety and confidence believers find in Him.

### **Isaiah 40:8**

“The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.”

Human life is temporary, but God's Word endures.

## Key Scriptures to Revisit

### **Matthew 5:18**

“For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.”

Jesus speaks with deep confidence about the lasting authority of Scripture.

### **John 17:17**

“Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.”

Jesus does not merely say that God’s Word is helpful. He says it is truth.

### **Hebrews 4:12**

“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword...”

God’s Word is not dead information. It is active, powerful, and penetrating.

### **2 Peter 1:20–21**

“No prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation... but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

Scripture ultimately comes from God, even though it was written through human authors.

## **Reflection**

Which of these verses most strengthens your confidence in the Bible, and why?

## **Group Leader Discussion Guide**

This guide is designed to help leaders use Why You Can Trust the Bible in a Bible study, small group, Sunday school class, or one-time discussion setting.

### **Purpose of this guide**

The goal is not to turn the group into scholars.

The goal is to help people:

- understand the main issues clearly
- think carefully about common objections
- grow in confidence in the trustworthiness of Scripture
- talk about these questions in a calm, faith-building way

### **Before you begin**

As the leader:

- read through the booklet before your discussion
- highlight the sections you most want to emphasize
- decide whether your group will cover the material in one meeting or several
- welcome honest questions without making people feel embarrassed
- keep the tone calm, clear, and grounded in Scripture

### **Suggested Format for a Study Session**

#### **Opening Prayer**

Ask God for wisdom, clarity, and confidence in His Word.

## **Brief Introduction**

Start by asking:

- What are some common things people say against the Bible?
- Have you ever heard someone say the Bible has errors or cannot be trusted?
- Why do you think those claims affect people so deeply?

## **Walk Through the Main Ideas**

Guide the group through these key points:

- what inerrancy means
- why copies differ
- what textual criticism is
- what variants are
- why translation differences exist
- why these issues do not cancel confidence in Scripture

## **Reflection and Discussion**

Use the questions below to help people process what they read.

## **Closing Prayer**

Pray that God would strengthen trust in His Word and help the group stand firm with wisdom and grace.

## Discussion questions

1. When people say, “The Bible has errors,” what do they usually mean?
2. Why is it important to define what counts as an error before accepting that claim?
3. What was most helpful to you in the explanation of inerrancy?
4. Why does the fact that we do not have the original physical writings not automatically weaken confidence in the Bible?
5. What is textual criticism, and why is it helpful rather than threatening?
6. What kinds of variants are most common in Bible manuscripts?
7. Why do most variants not change the meaning of the text?
8. Why can large numbers of variants sound more alarming than they really are?
9. What are some reasons Bible translations may differ?
10. How does comparing the Bible to other ancient writings strengthen confidence in Scripture?
11. Which section of the booklet answered a question you have heard before?
12. What part of this study most strengthened your confidence in the Bible?

## Tips for group leaders

- Keep bringing the group back to the main point: small manuscript differences do not overturn the truth of God’s Word.
- Do not rush past honest concerns. Let people voice them.
- Avoid turning the discussion into an argument. Aim for clarity and confidence.
- Remind the group that questions do not need to lead to fear.
- Emphasize that modern footnotes often show honesty and transparency, not weakness.
- End by pointing people back to Scripture itself, not only to arguments about Scripture.

## Optional closing challenge

Invite each person to finish this sentence:

“One reason I have more confidence in the Bible after this discussion is...”

## **About the Author**

Mike Chenevey has spent over thirty years as a pastor, church planter, associate pastor, small group leader and director of adult teaching ministries serving multiple congregations. He holds a Bachelor of Science degree in geology from University of Mount Union in Alliance, Ohio, a Master of Science degree in geology from University of Nevada, Reno, and a Master of Divinity from Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Mike has worked as a mining geologist, an Information Technology and Geographic Information System consultant, and an account manager. He has been married to Kristina for over thirty-three years. They have three grown sons, two daughters-in-law, and two granddaughters.