

# The Credibility of the Bible

Christianity began with the ministry of Jesus Christ, whose life and message changed the world. Jesus, who himself was a Jew, not only claimed to be the Messiah promised in the Old Testament, the Jews' Holy Scripture, but far beyond that—he claimed to be the Son of God. And he calls every person in every age to be his follower.

We cannot experience him today as his contemporaries did, but we have the testimony of the first disciples, who were together with him day and night. The New Testament contains eyewitness reports and describes the life of the first Christians. Therefore, the credibility of the Bible, especially of the New Testament, is of fundamental importance to Christianity and to all people.

Although the Bible has the potential to change lives, people are often motivated to criticize the Bible because it challenges their own lifestyle. Time after time to this day, it has been wrongly interpreted and has often been misused for selfish purposes by people and organizations who called themselves Christians. Nevertheless, this should not keep us from studying it and verifying its content and credibility.

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## ⚓ 1 The New Testament Is Credible Because of Its Content

### ⚓ 1.1 The Uniqueness of Jesus' Teaching

#### ⚓ 1.1.1 Morality

Jesus' teaching on morality surpasses the teaching of any other "teachers of humanity". Let us take his teaching on adultery as an example. In the Gospel of Matthew chapter 5 verses 27–29, Jesus says:

You have heard that it was said, “You shall not commit adultery.” But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. (*Matthew 5:27-29*)

Even Buddhists teach that every desire should be annihilated. But this is a very general way of saying it. For Buddhists it is about the obliteration of man’s complete sensibility and personality, the abandonment of all values, whether positive or negative. Their aim is to irrevocably dissolve man and his personality, which is to reach the state of Nirvana. Just as in other religions, an attempt is made to methodically bring about some improvement in life.

In contrast, Jesus specifically addresses the problem of hidden sins and even considers having lustful thoughts to be of the same severity as committing adultery. He shows that sin begins in our thoughts and that this is the point where regret must begin. He exposes the things that are inside a person and assesses them with unparalleled strictness. He calls us to change in words that could not be clearer, even if they are to be understood figuratively in this passage.

To a certain degree, doctrines of morality are found in every religion because people are able to distinguish good and evil with their conscience. The measure with which Jesus assesses deeds, words and thoughts is unique in that it exposes the hearts of people. He demands a change in one’s attitude and thoughts, the very things which form the base for moral conduct. He emphasizes the importance of being free from evil and capable of doing what is good.

Going beyond morality and ethics, Jesus even calls us to love our enemies.

### ✚ 1.1.2 Love Your Enemies

You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.” But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. ...You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (*Matthew 5:43-48*)

In the Old Testament, besides the passages which speak of rejecting one’s enemies, we also find passages that require the Israelites to love strangers who wanted to reside among them and told them to be kind towards their enemies. Jesus’ commandment to love our enemies, however, surpasses everything that was known until then. Loving our enemies means much more than showing kindness and forgoing revenge and hatred. This kind of love enables us to forgive even our greatest enemies and desire the best for them.

Note that Jesus was the first to teach this, among other points. Others later tried to emulate many things he taught in order to join him in his splendour.

Jesus is not content with a list of rules aimed at pleasing God. He calls all people to align their standards with the absolutely good God. The demand to be as perfect as God may sound absurd. But we cannot just dismiss Jesus as insane; his life and teaching is just too sober, realistic and practical.

“Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves

son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." (*Matthew 10:37-39*)

Jesus' message does not follow man-made standards nor does it promise mere earthly harmony and happiness. His aim was not to bring about political or social peace. In contrast to other teachers of wisdom, he not only shows a new path of knowledge but asserts his divinity by claiming to be the highest authority, calling us to devote ourselves unconditionally to himself.

## ⚓ 1.2 The Effect of the New Testament on Humanity as a Whole and on Individuals

Jesus' public appearance caused an irrevocable faction within the people of Israel and subsequently the whole of mankind. Jesus claimed to be the Messiah promised in the Old Testament and to be the saviour of the world. From the outset Jesus' followers were persecuted by the Jews. Even in later times Christians were driven out and, whenever possible, murdered by the enemies of truth because of their faith in Jesus.

This polarization testifies to the influence Jesus and his message has had on people from the first century up to the present day. Jesus' teaching has changed the world like no other religious system. From the very beginning, Jesus' statements were copied, imitated or even distorted and used in a negative way under the pretence of his authority. Pseudo-Christianity arose at a very early stage. Even if it is not Christianity in its genuine form, the influence of pseudo-Christianity on culture, art, science and politics in the Euro-Asian regions, and in many ways the whole world, shows the significance of Jesus and his message.

The person of Jesus caused an unequalled fascination in man. The whole of Judea was on the move, seeking to listen to his words and see his miracles. When Jesus was no longer able to ward off crushing crowds, he withdrew to remote places. The Jews who received his words in their heart and understood his message radically changed their lives and began to follow Jesus as their Lord without compromise. The same also happens today. People who believe in his words will experience the effect and power of his message in their own lives. His words are not characterized by thoughts beautifully expressed, but rather pose a challenge to peoples' lives. Jesus wants to reach their hearts and calls them to go the very way he went. His salvation sets us free from a life formed by sin. And the voice of Jesus does not cease. Countless books have been written about him since his death. Throughout history, people have been trying to find the authentic interpretation of his message and to gain a better understanding of the historical Jesus.

The confrontation with his teaching requires people to take a stand, which those who seek the truth cannot simply thrust aside. Even this phenomenon alone supports the credibility of his teaching.

## ⚓ 1.3 The New Testament Is Historically Reliable

From a historical point of view, the New Testament reliably describes the middle of the first century in its four Gospels, the book of Acts, and its epistles. It is in agreement with other historical sources written by Jewish and Roman authors such as the Talmud, works of the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus and of the Roman historians Tacitus and Suetonius. It describes and mentions geographical, cultural and social circumstances which, astonishingly, have been confirmed again and again by archaeological findings.

### ⚓ 1.3.1 Archaeological Findings

The discovery of the pool of Siloam in Jerusalem mentioned in John's Gospel (John 9:7) serves as an example. While working on a new sewer line in the Autumn of 2004, labourers uncovered stone steps

estimated to be 2,400 years old and the remains of a reservoir which was fed by water from the Gihon Spring through Hezekiah's tunnel at the time of Jesus. This 525 meter long tunnel, which one can still walk through today, was built around 700 BC by Hezekiah, the king of the southern kingdom of Judah. Through this construction archaeologists were able to confirm the description given in the Old Testament. The Siloam pool, which is estimated to be 2,500 square metres in size, served as a reservoir for Jerusalem's inhabitants during Jesus' time. Within some plaster, archaeologists found a coin dating from the time of the Hasmoneans, minted about 50 years before the birth of Christ. The youngest coin in the debris above the water canalization is dated to the time briefly before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 AD.

During an excavation of the theatre in Caesarea in 1961, an inscription with the title "Pontius Pilatus Praefectus Judaeae" was discovered. This inscription shows that the New Testament is not the sole evidence of the existence of Pilate in history, who was the Roman governor of the province of Judea. Apart from these, we still have the "Antiquities of the Jews" written by Flavius Josephus in 93 AD and the "Annals" by Tacitus in 116 AD.

The Gallio inscription found in Delphi, Greece, which was first made public in 1905, contains a letter from Emperor Claudius to the town of Delphi. Its introduction enumerates the titles of Caesar, making it possible to date the letter to the beginning of 52 AD. This inscription, written in Greek, mentions Gallio as the proconsul of Achaia, confirming the information given in the book of Acts chapter 18 verse 12.

### 📌 1.3.2 Historical Data In The New Testament

The New Testament contains not only one, but four historical reports about the life of Jesus. We may find some contradictory details in these Gospels. However, this does not speak against their credibility, but on the contrary supports their reliability. From a historian's point of view, reports that do not match word-for-word strongly indicate that they have not been modified or harmonized at a later time. If four people, some being eyewitnesses themselves, were to write down the words and works of Jesus, and, also considering that they had different audiences in mind, it is quite natural that their individual and different viewpoints are noticeable in their reports. Luke especially endeavoured to follow all things carefully and mentioned many events that can be historically verified. This is illustrated in Luke's Gospel chapter 3 verse 1 which contains many historical facts:

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John.... (Luke 3:1)

Surprisingly, two high priests are mentioned here. This is not a mistake; Luke is merely describing an interesting historical situation. Although the incumbent high priest at that time was Caiaphas, his predecessor Annas, who had already stepped down, was still quite influential. The book of Acts (Acts 4:6) and John's Gospel confirm this. John recounts Jesus being first brought to Annas after his arrest, and not to the official high priest (John 18:13). The actual chronological succession of the high priests is recorded in "The Jewish War" by Flavius Josephus, a Jewish historical writer, and agrees with the account of the New Testament. Annas' power beyond his term in office is confirmed as a credible fact by reputable theologians like F. F. Bruce, former Rylands Professor of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis at the University of Manchester. [1]

Many such details strengthen the credibility of the New Testament, which was written down in its entirety within 40 years of Jesus' death. Mark's Gospel was penned about a decade after Jesus' death and resurrection. The authors of the New Testament were either eyewitnesses or first-generation Christians who

knew Jesus' disciples personally. In this regard the New Testament is unique when compared to the scriptures of other religions (read more in section "3.2 The Written Tradition").

## 🔗 1.4 The Falsification Hypotheses

The hypothesis that the Bible has been falsified has been formulated in various ways. Some assert that Jesus' disciples portrayed their Lord in an idealized and glorified manner at a later date. In reality quite the opposite is true: the Gospels are characterized by a sober description of Jesus' ministry. They portray Jesus as a man with emotions and fears. Just before his arrest, Jesus, in his anxiety and dismay, prayed for strength that he might bear the suffering to come (*Mark 14:33-36*). It may be too piteous a scene for a Messiah, but it was true-to-life and real. He was not the strong, glorious man who has everything under control.

Others propose that the apostles had invented the whole story so that they could take on the most important positions within the new movement, receiving glory and honour. But how can we harmonize this with the fact that the apostles were persecuted from the beginning, who even had to pay the price of death for their belief in Jesus? Surely it is possible for people to be misled into lies and false doctrines, even to the conviction of dying for them. However, hardly anyone is ready to die for his own sins, especially one who is utterly arrogant and not willing to admit what he has made up and lied about. If the apostles had had such traits, they would not have written so negatively about themselves, nor would they have allowed the Gospel writers to do so. In the reports of the Gospels the twelve apostles are those whom Jesus often rebuked for their stubbornness and unbelief. They are described along with their weaknesses, sins and lack of understanding.

The motives of people who delude and deceive others can only be wickedness, which cannot remain hidden their whole lives long. From the beginning of Christianity, lying has been considered a grave sin. Christians are required to live their lives honestly and openly, being always ready to be questioned—the apostles were of course not exempt.

Some claim that Jesus' disciples refused to admit their mistake of having thought that their master, who finally had to die as an outcast on the cross, was the Messiah and saviour, and even made up the story of his resurrection. We find no base for this claim whatsoever. The disciples were completely surprised when Jesus unexpectedly rose from the dead. Even as Jesus appeared to them, they thought they had seen a ghost instead of believing that he was really present. At this point, one could only object by saying that all this was devised by an accomplished falsifier. However, considering the situation of the Jews in the first half of the first century, when they expected a political Messiah, proclaiming that a crucified man was the Messiah was absolutely unimaginable. Crucifixion was the punishment for unsuccessful rebels or slaves who tried to run away from their masters. No one could think of associating the Messiah with either. It was never Jesus' aim to be a political Messiah. However he showed through his resurrection that he is indeed the Messiah, a spiritual one though. It was difficult for the Jews to change their conception of the Messiah. It was no different for Jesus' disciples.

If we look at Paul's life, the hypothesis that the disciples had invented Jesus' resurrection similarly turns out to be untenable. Saul the Pharisee (later called Paul) rejected Christianity as a Jewish splinter group and fervently persecuted the Church. He probably regarded the Christians' reports about the appearances of the resurrected Jesus as pure fantasy. However, he became convinced of the truth of this claim when Jesus appeared to him, leading to his conversion to Christianity. Now some supporters of the falsification hypothesis attempt to find a way out by saying that Paul became a Christian only because of his bad conscience for having persecuted the Christians and agreeing to stoning a Christian. This thought is likewise untenable, even by just considering it psychologically. As a Christian, the apostle Paul made enormous

sacrifices and, according to extra-biblical tradition, even died as a martyr. As a competent Pharisee, he chose rather to bear the dishonour as a Christian (one should bear in mind the situation of those days) than to have a career with bright prospects within Judaism—all this just because of his bad conscience? Besides that, he emphasized that he had lived his life in all good conscience (2 Timothy 1:3, Acts 23:1). While persecuting the Christians, he had thought he was offering service to God, but later recognized his spiritual blindness.

The Christians were fiercely opposed by the Jews from the beginning. The belief in Jesus Christ as the Messiah could not have survived in a Jewish environment without being anchored in the historical facts of Jesus' life and ministry. The hypotheses that the New Testament was falsified do not bear up against the historical facts nor are they logical in themselves. No reasonable motive of the falsifier can be named. The culprit would not have been able to go after his selfish aims such as gaining special privileges, since he must have felt obliged to follow Jesus' teaching of strictly renouncing all egotism, riches, honour and pride. He must have been aware that the following statement, where Paul declared himself to be a servant, would have to apply to himself as well:

For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. (2. Corinthians 4:5)

## ⚓ 1.5 The Teaching of the Trinity Cannot Have Been Invented

The teaching of the Trinity is one of the new revelations about God's nature proclaimed by Jesus, even though he himself did not use this term. It does not oppose Jewish monotheism but speaks of one God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit—one God in three persons.

Throughout their history, the Jews had to defend their belief in Yahweh as the only existing God and Creator of the Universe against the influence of other nations. This belief played and still plays a central role in their lives. They considered every attempt to tamper with this belief a sacrilege.

On the surface it could seem that the teaching of the Trinity is an attack on this belief. The vehemence with which the Jewish religious leaders rejected Jesus makes this obvious. If the occupying Roman forces had permitted it, the Jews would have taken it into their own hands to carry out the death penalty, because he claimed to be divine and thus, in their eyes, was blaspheming God. The teaching of the Trinity is not simply a further development of the Jewish faith; it presents a completely new and additional revelation to the Jewish faith.

The most renowned scholars throughout the centuries have been engaged in accurately formulating this doctrine and understanding its depth. Obviously, the ability to comprehend the Trinity is limited by the capacity of the human mind. This shows the outstanding intellect the one who first announced this teaching must have had. This also shows that the opinion that Jesus' disciples made up the teaching of the Trinity in order to portray their master in a special way is simply untenable. This teaching was not generally dismissed as complete nonsense either. On the contrary, the depth of the understanding of God's being which Jesus' words reflect has often aroused amazement. The authority and persuasiveness with which Jesus taught and spoke of God is unequalled.

## ⚓ 2 The New Testament Is Trustworthy Because Jesus Is Trustworthy

## 📌 2.1 The Life of Jesus Confirms His Words

What a teacher teaches is reliable only if he lives according to his message. The eyewitnesses of Jesus Christ attested his faultless life. His adversaries, whose influence and honour among the Jews began to wane, were not able to accuse him of any transgression against the law of Moses, which was binding for the Jews, or of any sin. They repeatedly tried to lead him into making some false or contradictory claims through their cunning questions. However, they failed despite all their sophistication. Rather they were challenged through Jesus' answers. He kept the whole of Israel on their toes. Even the political leaders like the Jewish ruler Herod Antipas and the Roman governor Pontius Pilate had to concern themselves with him. Therefore we may certainly expect the Jews who rejected Jesus and wanted to discredit him to gladly denounce him for any of his wrong moves openly. But that did not happen.

Jesus did not merely call people to obedience; he himself led his disciples as an excellent example. As for living a modest and self-controlled life, he applied the same standard to himself as he did to others. Much to their surprise, Jesus washed his disciples' feet, which was considered the work of a slave. He did this in order to set an example of a serving attitude for them. His disciples were with him daily for more or less two and a half years and were often put to shame by his love. Jesus' way of life along with his words convicted them then, and still does the same today.

## 📌 2.2 Jesus Performed Miracles and Healings

Jesus became known first of all for his miracles and healings. According to the Gospels he healed the sick, the lepers and the lame, gave the blind sight, liberated the possessed, and raised the dead. This has never happened before. Even the Jews who were hostile towards him did not deny this. This is attested by a statement found in the Babylonian Talmud: [2]

*On the eve of the Passover Yeshu (Jesus) was hanged...because he practised sorcery and enticed Israel to apostasy.*

These miracles cannot be denied, since some other explanations would be needed for them. Did Jesus perform magic then?

Jesus' adversaries supposed that he used tricks and they tried to expose him as a deceiver.

As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth...[Jesus] made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud...[the blind man] went and washed and came back seeing. The neighbours and those who had seen him before as a beggar were saying, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" Some said, "It is he." Others said, "No, but he is like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." ...They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a Sabbath day.... The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight, until they called the parents of the man...His parents answered, "We know that this is our son and that he was born blind." ...So for the second time they called the man who had been blind.... He answered them, "I have told you already.... Why do you want to hear it again?" And they reviled him.... (John 9:1-28)

The way Jesus healed the man born blind was utterly provocative because he had made mud with his saliva and soil taken from the ground. According to the tradition of the Pharisees and the scribes, it was forbidden

to carry out any unnecessary activity on Sabbath. Human traditions were not important for Jesus, but the need of the people was. Since it involved a man blind from birth, the Pharisees were not able to argue that his sight was probably restored by chance just as it was lost. They had to resort to refuting Jesus by accusing him of using two men who looked alike. The whole situation shows that the Pharisees were relentlessly trying to dispel the slightest doubts in themselves that this man was a different one and not the one born blind. Although all things indicated a miraculous healing, they refused to acknowledge it. If they had uncovered a deception, all of Jesus' disciples would have had left him and these stories would not have been passed on to us.

### ✚ 2.3 Jesus' Resurrection Was Not Made Up

The miracle most doubted by many is the unique miracle of the resurrection of Jesus—nothing comparable is reportable about anyone else. As mentioned above in section 1.4, a falsification by Jesus' disciples can be ruled out because their Lord's resurrection came as a surprise even to them and no reasonable motive can be found for having invented the story.

After the shameful death of Jesus, his disciples were in despair. They had expected an earthly messianic king who would lead the Jewish people to repentance and oppose the godless Gentiles. In this situation, there was no sign of the boldness and conviction with which these men who had simple professions (e.g. fishermen), later on proclaimed the Gospel even to the leading Jews (*Acts 5:27-33*). They were so afraid of the Jews that they stayed behind locked doors (*John 20:19*). When Mary Magdalene told them about Jesus' appearance, they did not believe her (*Mark 16:9-11*) but considered it a silly joke (*Luke 24:11*). When Jesus appeared to some of the apostles for the first time, they thought they had seen a ghost (*Luke 24:37*). Thomas, one of the twelve apostles, who was not present then, did not believe even his closest friends, but was convinced of it only after seeing Jesus with his own eyes (*John 20:24-29*).

Some suppose that there is an intelligent falsifier behind all this, who intends to present a realistic and historically correct story. Such a person would remove any cause for dubiousness among his readers. This is why it is an indication for a historian that a text has been falsified if he finds any harmonization. But this is just what we do not find in the four Gospels. The manner in which the resurrected Jesus appeared is not presented in an identical way in the Gospels. We even find some incongruous statements. Luke writes that Jesus appeared to two of his disciples on their way to Emmaus which they gladly reported to the apostles in Jerusalem (*Luke 24:33-34*). The apostles believed them. On the other hand, Mark reports that they did not believe them (*Mark 16:12-13*). Here, Luke, who gave an account of the matter in detail, was right. Mark mentioned this event with just one sentence; he probably did not have details about it. An accomplished falsifier would never allow such a mistake to slip in. This rather shows how conscientiously the authors wrote down their own experience with Jesus as well as the reports of other eyewitnesses to the best of their knowledge.

There were still many eyewitnesses alive during the time when the Gospels were written down. For the Jews who rejected Jesus and Christianity, nothing would have been easier to do against the Christians than to refute Jesus' resurrection. Should they have succeeded, the belief in a resurrected Christ would never have persisted.

A falsifier wants to persuade his readers, and deliberately looks for ways to reach his aim. He will use clear and understandable arguments. Now according to the Gospels Jesus first appeared to a woman called Mary Magdalene (*Mark 16:9* and *John 20:14*). She had formerly been demon-possessed and had been healed only through Jesus, which makes her anything but a reliable witness for outsiders. Women were not counted as witnesses among the Jews, only men were. Even to this day women are not accepted as witnesses in rabbinic court cases in orthodox Judaism. Additionally, the Gospels were written primarily to the Jews. To



believe that a falsifier would make up a story in which the resurrected one first appears to a woman requires a great deal of fantasy.

## ⚓ 3 The Reliability of the New Testament Transmission

### ⚓ 3.1 The Oral Tradition

A decisive factor for Jesus' words and deeds to be reliably passed down orally is the ability of his disciples to remember them exactly. As children of this age, we can hardly imagine being able to memorize long speeches or texts. Through media such as books, TV and computers we have become so used to having information at our fingertips that we are no longer dependent on our memories. But the human memory is capable of remarkable things. One example is the following:

*The volume of the tradition of Irish bards today may easily amount to over 100,000 words. In contrast the Gospel of Mark only has about 11,000 words. [3]*

Jesus' disciples entirely changed their lives because of his ministry. He became the centre of all their actions. This resulted in a great desire to remember all his words and deeds and to accurately pass them on. People are able to remember things especially when they are interested in and pay close attention to them.

For about two and a half years his disciples were with Jesus (whom they called teacher, e.g. *Mark 10:35*) almost every day. Since they were taught by him and were always present while he was speaking to the people, they were able to naturally commit his message to memory. They were used to repeating and memorizing things in their homes, synagogues and schools. This enabled them to reliably preserve things transmitted orally. During Jesus' lifetime they had already been sent out to proclaim the advent of the kingdom of God (*Luke 10:1-12*). Even at this early stage they had to apply what they learned from their teacher. All this helped them later on to proclaim Jesus in a reliable and trustworthy manner.

### ⚓ 3.2 The Written Tradition

All the writings of the New Testament were composed before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70. With Jesus being crucified in AD 30, the timespan for its composition was only 40 years. Though it began by oral transmission, the Christians soon started to pass on the message in written form as well. This shows the intention of the first Christians to preserve the true account of the events about Jesus for those coming after them.

We may assume that the people who copied the New Testament in the following centuries were just as diligent in correctly passing on the tradition with fidelity. The Bible, and here especially the New Testament, was and still is the sole binding foundation of the Christian faith.

The oldest extant manuscript was found in Egypt around 1920: Papyrus 52 (P52), which contains several verses of John's Gospel and was produced about AD 125. A whole array of papyri were produced in the 2nd and 3rd centuries, which already contain a large part of the New Testament. Papyrus was a kind of writing material that was produced from the fibres of the papyrus plant, which grew in the Nile Delta of Egypt.

The oldest uncial manuscripts, which were entirely written in Greek upper case letters, date back to the fourth century AD, and contain all the scriptures of the New Testament. They were written on parchment, a material made of animal skin. The most famous of these are Codex Vaticanus, Sinaiticus, Epharaemi Rescriptus and Alexandrinus.

Around 800 AD a new script was developed which rather used cursive lower case letters. This was called the minuscule script. The so-called lectionaries are liturgical books that contained the texts of the New Testament in the sequence in which they should be read according to the liturgical calendar.

The papyri, uncials and minuscules were not stored in one common place–this would have made it easy to manipulate the text. On the contrary they were copied and used in very different places of the whole Mediterranean region. Similarly, the historical background of how important manuscripts were found shows that a deliberate modification of the text with the aim of eliminating any inconsistencies is inconceivable. For example, the German theologian Konstantin von Tischendorf discovered the very old Codex Sinaiticus, one of the most important manuscripts of the New Testament, in the library at Saint Catherine’s Monastery (Sinai Peninsula) although the local monks had not been aware of its existence beforehand. This does not support the hypothesis of a planned manipulation, especially when considering that this Codex has become one of the main sources of the New Testament text.

The following table [4] gives us an overview of the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. Note that more than 19,000 other manuscripts containing translations into other languages are not included here.

<b>Extant Greek Manuscripts</b>	<b>Number of Manuscripts</b>
Papyri	129
Uncials	323
Minuscules	2931
Lectionaries	2465
<b>Total</b>	<b>5848</b>

The significance of these abundant manuscript findings can be best recognized through a comparison with other ancient texts. The following compilation [5] impressively contrasts the New Testament and other classical works.

<b>Author</b>	<b>Date of Composition</b>	<b>Oldest Copy</b>	<b>Interval Between Composition and Oldest Manuscript</b>	<b>Number of Extant Manuscripts</b>
Homer (Iliad)	800 BC	400 BC	400 years	643
Demosthenes	383-322 BC	AD 1100	1300 years	200 (all copied from the same manuscript)
Sophocles	496-406 BC	AD 1000	1400 years	100
Tacitus (Annals)	AD 100	AD 1100	1000 years	20
Caesar (Gallic War)	100-44 BC	AD 900	1000 years	10

Aristophanes	450-385 BC	AD 900	1200 years	10
Euripides	480-406 BC	AD 1100	1500 years	9
Thucydides (History)	460-400 BC	AD 900	1300 years	8
Suetonius (De Vita Caesarum)	AD 75-160	AD 950	800 years	8
Herodotus (History)	480-425 BC	AD 900	1300 years	8
Plato (Tetralogies)	427-347 BC	AD 900	1200 years	7
Pliny Secundus (Natural History)	AD 61-113	AD 850	750 years	7
Aristotle	384-322 BC	AD 1100	1400 years	5 (of his best surviving work)
Catullus	54 BC	AD 1550	1600 years	3

Bruce Metzger, the chairman of the Revised Standard Version committee and co-editor of the Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece (a Greek edition of the New Testament) compared the New Testament with Iliad, which is second only to the New Testament with regard to transmission:

*“The quantity of New Testament material is almost embarrassing in comparison with other works of antiquity”, he said. Next to the New Testament, the greatest amount of manuscript testimony is of Homer’s Iliad, which was the bible of the ancient Greeks. There are fewer than 650 Greek manuscripts of it today. Some are quite fragmentary. They come down to us from the second and third century AD and following. When you consider that Homer composed his epic about 800 BC, you can see there’s a very lengthy gap. [6]*

We should also note here that there is no variation in the manuscript text from different times. After 40 years of research, Professor Kurt Aland, one of the most reputable New Testament textual critics and the editor of the Nestle/Aland Novum Testamentum Graece, ascertained the following:

*The transmission of the New Testament text is outstanding, better than that of any other writings of antiquity. The chance of finding manuscripts that essentially change its text is equal to zero. [7]*

We as Christians are very grateful that we have such reliable information about Jesus and the first Christians. The diversity of testimonies attesting the credibility of the New Testament, both in regard to its composition and to its transmission, encourages us to deal with the Word of God with constant enthusiasm. We would also like to invite you to read the Bible in order to get to know Jesus.

If you would like to get to know our lives as Christians and to test if what we say is reliable, feel free to [contact](#) us. We look forward to hearing from you.

## Information about ancient manuscripts and links to some photos

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### Related Links

- [Why Jesus?](#)
  - [Was Reincarnation Removed from the Bible?](#)
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### Footnotes

1. F. F. Bruce, *New Testament History*, 1969.
2. Tractate Sanhedrin 43a, *Babylonian Talmud*, The Soncino Press, London, 1935.
3. Rainer Riesner, *Jesus als Lehrer*, 1984, p. 451, free translation.
4. [Manuscript workspace](#). Accessed: 8th of December 2015. The total number of the manuscripts can be obtained by a mouse click on the "browse" button. Since the papyri P33 and P58 as well as P64 and P67 originate from the same Codex respectively, we consider the correct number to be 129 instead of 131.
5. F. W. Hall, *Belege für die Texte der führenden klassischen Verfasser*, and Norman L. Geisler/William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, p. 408.
6. Bruce Metzger, quoted in *The Case for Christ: A Journalist's Personal Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus*, Lee Strobel, 1998, Zondervan, p. 60.
7. Kurt Aland, *Das Neue Testament zuverlässig überliefert. Die Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Textes und die Ergebnisse der modernen Textforschung*, Reihe: Wissenswertes zur Bibel, Stuttgart 1986, S. 28, free translation.

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