

The Reliability of the Bible

Can We Trust Scripture?
(Apologetics, Week 3)

A Simple Misunderstanding



Introduction: Can We Trust the Bible?

Why do you trust the Bible?

- Many assume it changed over time
- Telephone game vs. historical documents
- The Bible invites investigation, not blind faith

Does the Bible meet the standards we use everywhere else for reliable history?

What the Bible Claims About Itself

- 2 Timothy 3:16 - God-breathed Scripture
- 2 Peter 1:20-21 - Guided by the Holy Spirit
- Hebrews 4:12 - Living and active Word

- Jesus affirmed Old Testament history
 - Quoted Scripture as authoritative
 - Fulfilled prophecy

If we trust Jesus, we trust the Scriptures He trusted

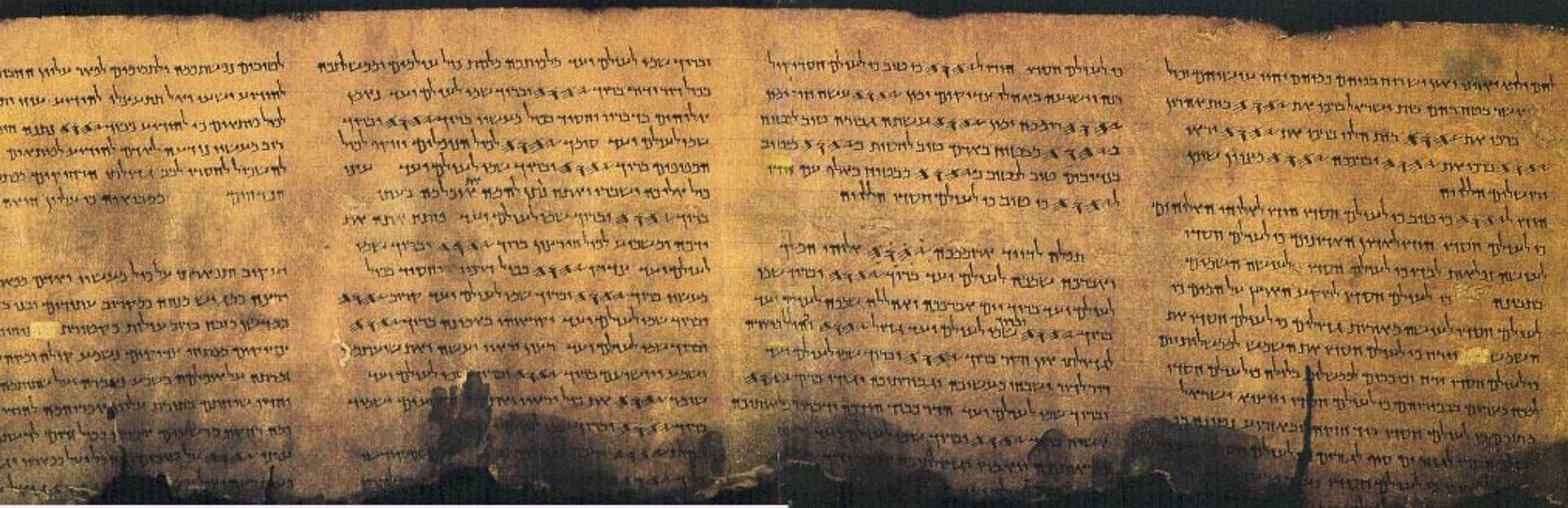
Manuscript Evidence: New Testament

- 25,000+ manuscripts
 - Earliest copies within decades
 - 99.5% textual certainty
 - Far exceeds other ancient works

Work	Earliest Copy	Time Gap	# of Manuscripts
Homer's Iliad	500 BC	~400 years	1,800
Plato	900 AD	1,200 years	7
Caesar's Gallic Wars	900 AD	1,000 years	10
New Testament	125 AD	25-50 years	25,000+

Dead Sea Scrolls

- Old Testament manuscripts (250 BC-70 AD)
 - Pre-date Christianity
 - Isaiah Scroll 99.8% identical
 - Shows incredible preservation



Patristic Quotations

- Early Church fathers, AD 95-400
 - Clement, Polycarp, Tertullian, among others
 - Over 1 million quotations and allusions to the NT
 - Reconstruction of the NT possible from quotations alone

Scholars argue over many things - but not whether we know what the New Testament originally said.

Unity of the Bible

- 66 books
- 40+ authors
- 3 languages
- 1,500+ years

And yet... one unified message of redemption

Early Creed: 1 Corinthians 15:3-8

- Resurrection creed
 - Within a few years of the events
 - Eyewitness-based faith
 - Not legend, but history

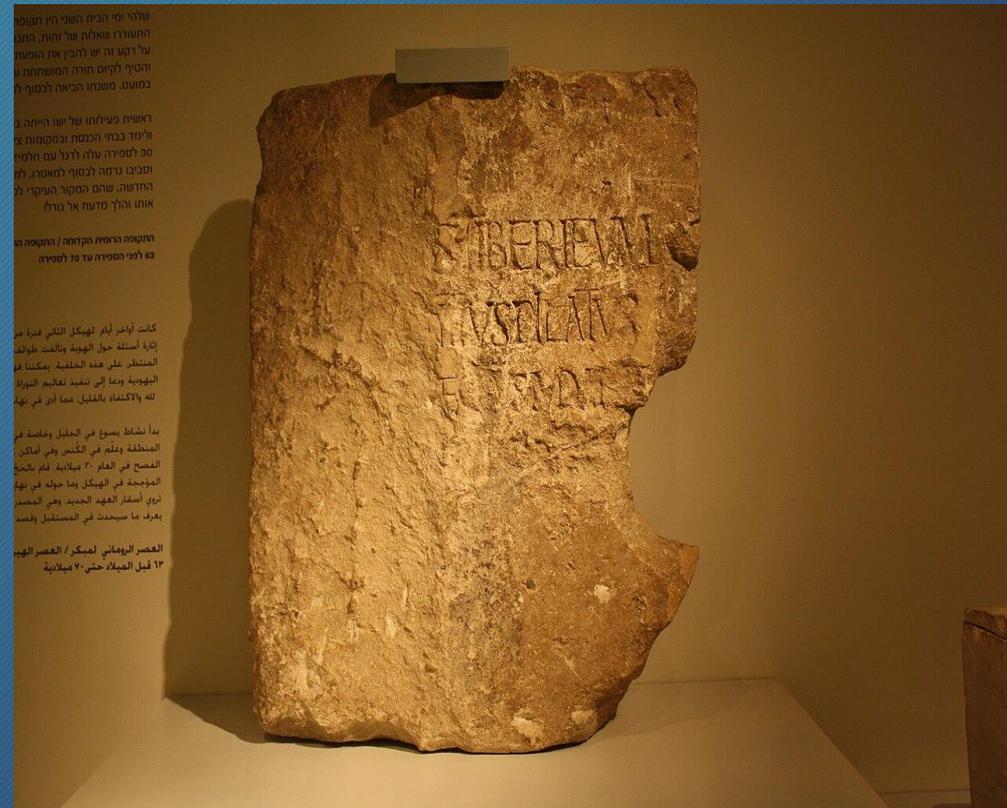
Archaeology Confirms Scripture

- Silence in archaeology \neq contradiction of Scripture
- Archaeology is not omniscient
- Problems with Archaeology:
 - Oral tradition
 - Assuming late authorship = late invention

Archaeology Confirms Scripture

Pontius Pilate stone

- Discovered in Caesarea in 1961, dated to early 1st century AD
- Provides direct, contemporary, non-biblical evidence for a key biblical figure.



Archaeology Confirms Scripture

Tel Dan stele

- Discovered in 1993 in northern Israel; dated to 9th century BC
- Provides independent, non-biblical evidence for the House of David
- Describes a conflict between Aram (Syria) and Israel/Judah, aligning with accounts in 1-2 Kings



Archaeology Confirms Scripture

Pool of Bethesda

- John 5:2 “Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades.”
- Excavated mainly in the 19th and 20th centuries, dates back to at least the 2nd century BC
- Roman pools typically had four sides, not five
- Described as it existed in the 1st century

Archaeology Confirms Scripture

Cyrus cylinder

- Discovered in Babylon in 1879, dated to 539-538 BC
- Records Cyrus the Great's imperial policy toward conquered peoples.

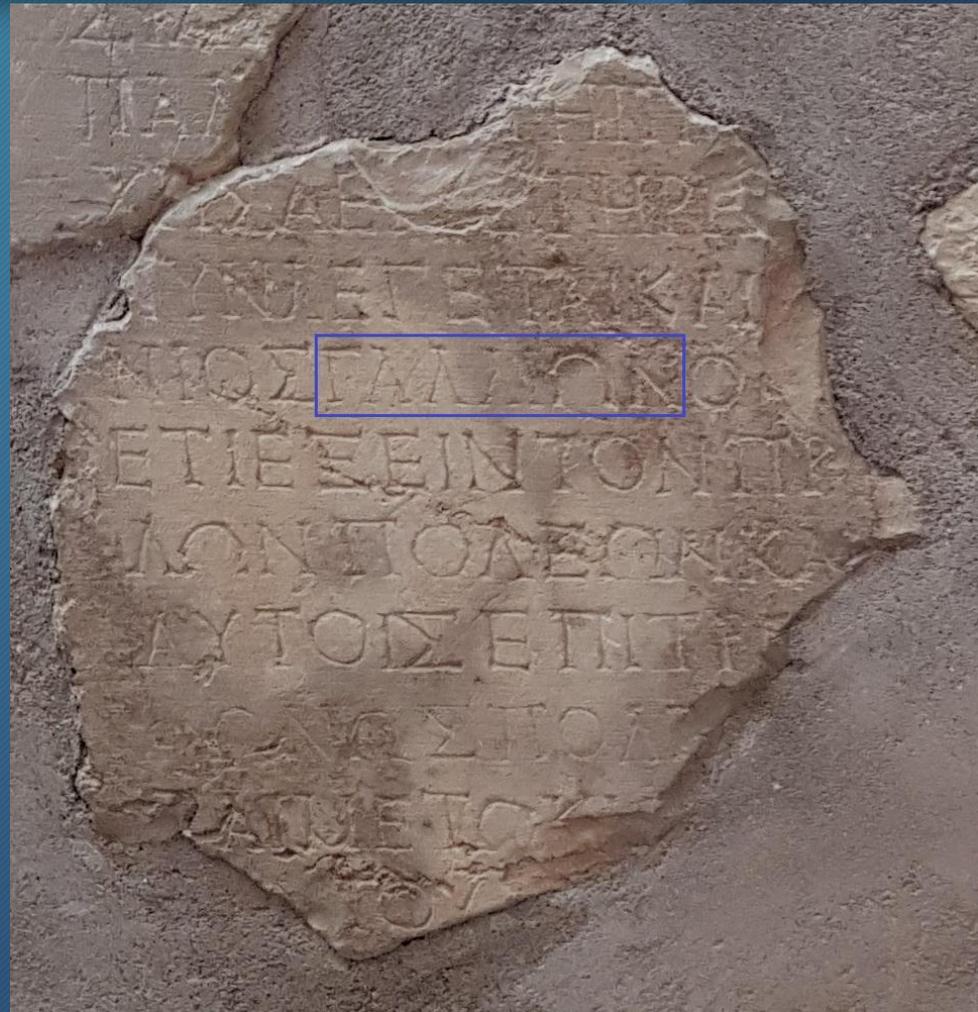
Ezra 1:1-4	Cyrus Cylinder
Allowed deported peoples to return to their homelands	Cyrus pursued a deliberate policy of repatriation
Encouraged them to rebuild their temples	He restored temples and religious practices
Returned sacred objects taken by previous empires	He portrayed himself as a benefactor rather than a conqueror



Archaeology Confirms Scripture

Gallio (or Delphi) inscription

- Discovered in Delphi, Greece in 1905, dated to AD 51-52
- Part of a letter from Emperor Claudius, so an official imperial document
- Acts 18:12-17 Gallio, “proconsul of Achaia”



Non-Christian Sources

- Tacitus - Roman historian
- Josephus - Jewish historian
- Pliny the Younger - Roman governor
- Suetonius - Roman biographer

Even hostile sources confirm key facts of Christianity

Common Objections Answered

- The Bible is full of contradictions
- The Bible has changed over time
- It was written by men
- Miracles are impossible
- There are differences in the manuscripts

Why This Matters

- Faith built on truth
- Build your life on the rock (Matt. 7:24-27)
- We can speak confidently to others
- The Bible withstands examination

Assignment: Read Luke 1:1-4 and Acts 17

Next week...

Jesus... Myth or Messiah?

Discussion

- What evidence from today strengthens your confidence in Scripture?
- How would you answer someone who says, “It’s just an old book”?
- Why is it important that the Bible be historically reliable?
- Which archaeological or prophetic example impacted you most?