

UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE

A SUMMER SERIES



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Week 1: Three Foundational Qualities

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Quality #1: The Character of the Scriptures

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Quality #1: The Character of the Scriptures

We believe the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, to be the inspired Word of God, without error in the original writings, the complete revelation of His will for the salvation of men and the Divine and final authority for Christian faith and life.

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“[12] Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. [13] And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. [14] The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor 2:12—14).

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“[10] For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, [11] so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it” (Is 55:10—11).

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- A blurred background image showing a person's hands holding an open book, with the text of the book visible but out of focus. The person appears to be wearing a blue shirt. The overall scene is softly lit, suggesting an indoor setting like a library or study.
- **Complete** – “We believe the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, to be...the complete revelation of His will for the salvation of men.”

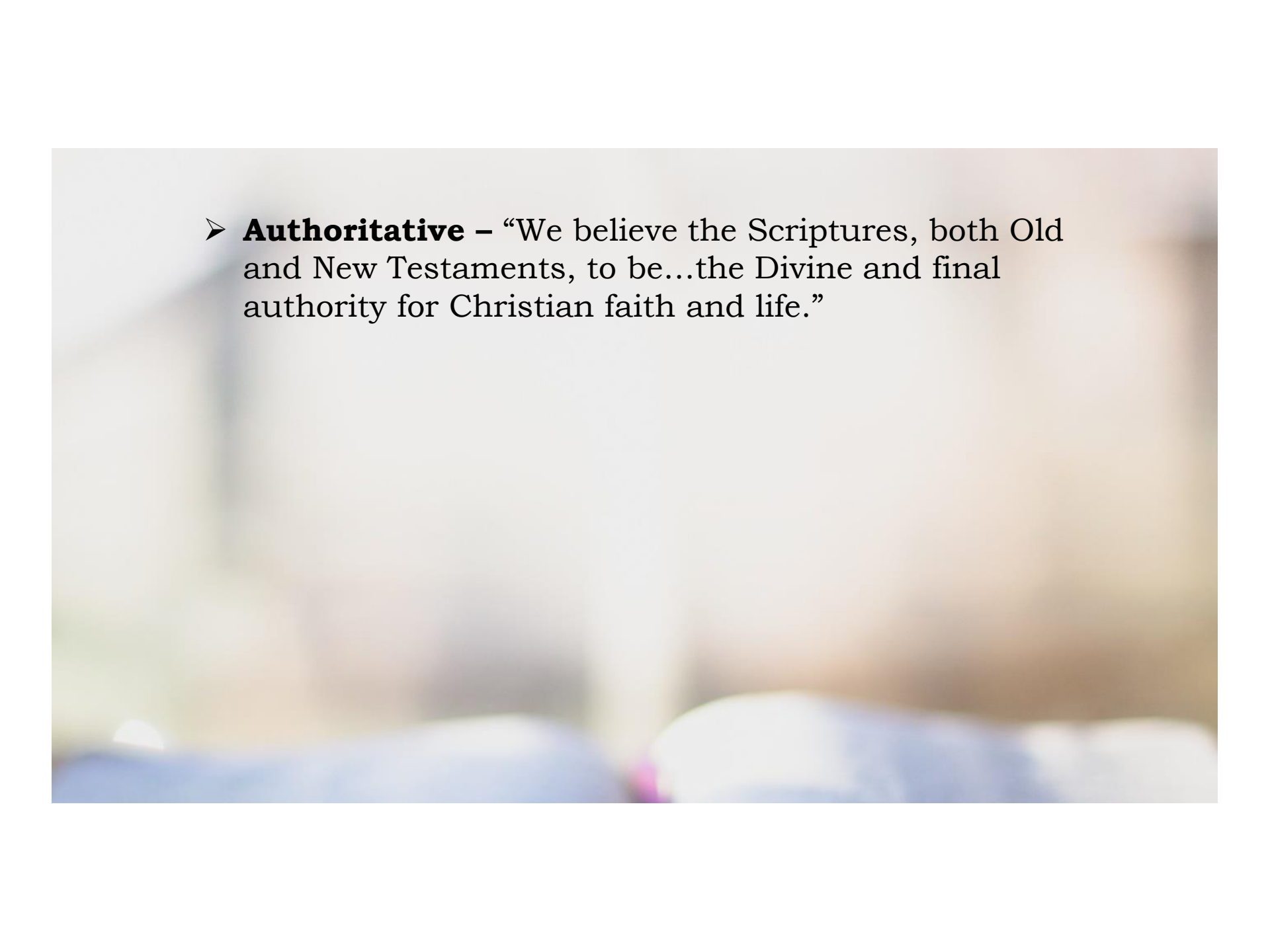
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“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (Jn 3:16).

“[1] Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, [2] but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world” (Heb 1:1—2).

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- A blurred background image showing a group of people, likely in a church or study hall, sitting and reading. The focus is on the text in the foreground, with the background being out of focus.
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“And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers” (1 Th 2:13).

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“Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens” (Ps 119:89).

Quality #2: The Content of the Scriptures



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The Law (5)

The Prophets (21)

The Writings (8)

The Poetical Books (5)

The Gospels & NT History (5)

The Epistles (21)

The Apocalypse (1)

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➤ Preservation

Bibliographical Comparison of Ancient Texts: Evidence for Transmission Accuracy

Author	Work	Life of Author (Date Written)	Earliest Copy	Time Span Orig. to Copy	Number of Copies	Notes
Lucretius	Nature of Things	99-55 BC	825 AD	880 yrs	2	16 disputed papyrus fragments bearing "so few certainly identifiable letters" are claimed to date to the 1st century AD
Virgil	Poetry (Aeneid & Georgics)	70-19 BC	380 AD	400 yrs	9	The earliest 7 are on parchment. All are "incomplete, damaged, or compromised in some way." Later are based on these seven.
Hippocrates	Medical	460-370 BC	590 AD	1000 yrs	17	The oldest is only a partial work and is a palimpsest (over written work). Most compilations are 14th century or later
Thucydides	History of Peloponnesian War	460-404 BC	200 BC	200 yrs	20	Based mostly on eight 10th century AD manuscripts, yet a few 3rd century BC papyri fragments have been found.
Tacitus	Annals (Roman History 14-68 AD)	56-120 AD	850 AD	750 yrs	33	Thirty one of these are 15th century AD manuscripts based on two earlier: one 850 AD, the other 1050 AD.
Aristotle	Ethics, Politics, Poetics	384-322 BC	100 AD	450 yrs	51	The oldest is a papyrus of a single work: "Constitution of the Athenians." Another, circa 850 AD: "Biological Works." Most manuscripts of others aren't until 10-14th centuries AD.
Livy	History of Rome	59 BC-17 AD	400 AD	400 yrs	100	There are also 60 further known direct copies.
Herodotus	History	484-425 BC	90 AD	550 yrs	109	49 Papyrus fragments plus 60 non-papyrus manuscripts.
Josephus	Antiquities & Jewish War	37-100 AD (Completed 93-94)	490 AD	600 years	120	Only 33 of these 120 Greek manuscripts are earlier than the 14th century; a further 170 Latin manuscripts exist, a few dating to the late 5th century AD.
Catullus	Poetry	84-54 BC	1375 AD	1400 yrs	123	Except for 3 almost all date to the 15th century AD and are copies of those earlier three.
Sophocles	Tragedies	496-406 BC	1000 AD	1400 yrs	193	There are a few insignificant small fragments thought 3rd century BC.
Pliny the Elder	Natural History	23-79 AD	490 AD	420 yrs	200	Almost all are from the 14th & 15th centuries, yet one fragment is from the 5th century
Suetonius	Twelve Caesars	69-123 AD (Written 121 AD)	820 AD	700 yrs	200	All manuscripts seem to have been based on a single early 9th century AD manuscript
Plato	Tetralogies	427-347 BC	895 AD	1240 yrs	210	John the Calligrapher's 895 AD copy. (FYI, 2nd century BC fragment of Plato's Republic).
Aristophanes	Plays	450-385 BC (Written after 427)	590 AD	1000 yrs	240	Only 2 are earlier than the 10th century AD. These earliest are fragmentary and only have part of a single work. Most are 11th century or later.
Julius Caesar	Gallic Wars	100-44 BC (Written after 50)	850 AD	900 yrs	251	A majority of these manuscripts belong to the 15th century AD
Euripides	Plays: Incl. Medea & Hippolytus	480-406 BC (Written 431, 428)	400 AD	825 yrs	318	The earliest vellum fragment, of Medea, is very small (seven partial lines). It's not to Medieval manuscripts we have "complete" texts.
Demosthenes	Speeches	384-322 BC	890 AD	1210 yrs	340	A few "rather unhelpful" fragments date to the 1st century BC"
Homer	Iliad	900-800 BC	400 BC	400-500 yrs	1811	1,569 papyrus manuscripts plus 37 early and 188 later parchment, and 17 unclassified (privately held). Considered 95% accurate across the manuscripts.
Various including: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, James, Jude, Paul, Peter	New Testament	50-100 AD	125 AD	30 yrs or less	5838	Original Greek: Roughly 2,926 Minuscules; 322 Majuscules; 128 Papyri; 2,462 Lectionaries. The earliest NT manuscript: P52. Considered 99.5% accurate across the manuscripts.
	Ancient NT Translations	50-100 AD	275 AD	175 yrs	18616	Ancient translation copies in Old Latin (50), Latin Vulgate (10,000+), Coptic (980), Aramaic or Syriac (350+), Armenian (2,587), Georgian (43+), Gothic (6), Ge'ez or Ethiopian (600+), Slavic (4,000+). Many date as early as 200-300 AD.
	Ancient NT Citations (Early Church Father's pre 300 AD)	50-100 AD	96 AD	45 yrs or less	36289	Estimated number of individual citations by so-called Apostolic, Greek, and Latin Fathers in the 1st to 3rd centuries AD.

Compiled from published sources. © 2018 by Brent J. MacDonald, DTI & Lion Tracks Ministries. Chart Version 3 (In the last 50 years the number of known historical manuscripts has greatly increased)

Quality #3: The Comfort of the Scriptures



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“[105] Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. [106] I have sworn an oath and confirmed it, to keep your righteous rules. [107] I am severely afflicted; give me life, O LORD, according to your word! [108] Accept my freewill offerings of praise, O LORD, and teach me your rules. [109] I hold my life in my hand continually, but I do not forget your law. [110] The wicked have laid a snare for me, but I do not stray from your precepts. [111] Your testimonies are my heritage forever, for they are the joy of my heart. [112] I incline my heart to perform your statutes forever, to the end” (Ps 119:105—112).

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- B. They are the Believer’s Defense (vv. 107—110)**
- C. They are the Believer’s Delight (vv. 111—112)**

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