

Is the Bible just a bunch of myths?

- Myths can be true, or myths can be false: the Greek word *mythos* simply means “sacred story.”
- If the Bible contains truth, how do we know when to take it literally, and when to take it symbolically?
- Language about things and events that have been witnessed is meant literally; language about spiritual realities or non-witnessed things/events is meant symbolically

Symbolic	Literal
Genesis 1-3	Pentateuch, Joshua, Judges
Job, Ecclesiastes	Kings, Chronicles
Prophetic books (mixed)	Gospels
Parables of Jesus	Acts of the Apostles
Revelation	Epistles

Peter Kreeft excerpt
(Sal and Chris)

Key Points to Remember

- All books, biblical or not, must be interpreted according to their literary genre
- The Bible was written well before the period when historical exactness was expected
- The Bible has more to back it up than many of the other books that we call historical:
 - oral tradition as a “fact-checker”
 - archaeology doesn’t contradict the Bible
 - secular history doesn’t contradict the Bible
 - number of manuscripts
 - age of manuscripts

Sir Frederic Kenyon, in *The Story of the Bible*, notes that "For all the works of classical antiquity we have to depend on manuscripts written long after their original composition. The author who is the best case in this respect is Virgil, yet the earliest manuscript of Virgil that we now possess was written some 350 years after his death. For all other classical writers, the interval between the date of the author and the earliest extant manuscript of his works is much greater. For Livy it is about 500 years, for Horace 900, for most of Plato 1,300, for Euripides 1,600." Yet no one seriously disputes that we have accurate copies of the works of these writers.

However, in the case of the New Testament we have parts of manuscripts dating from the first and early second centuries, only a few decades after the works were penned.

Not only are the biblical manuscripts that we have *older* than those for classical authors, we have in sheer numbers far more manuscripts from which to work. Some are whole books of the Bible, others fragments of just a few words, but there are literally thousands of manuscripts in Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Coptic, Syriac, and other languages. This means that we can be sure we have an authentic text, and we can work from it with confidence.

- But how do we know that the Bible is inspired?
 - We've proven that the Gospels are historical and that Jesus Christ rose from the dead, thus demonstrating his divinity
 - The Gospels, as purely historical documents, tell us that Christ founded his Church on the Rock of Peter, the first Pope
 - We can safely deduce that the Church, against which the gates of Hell will not prevail (Mt. 16:18), is preserved from doctrinal error by the Holy Spirit (Jn. 16:12-14)
 - The Bible comes from the Church, not vice-versa!
- The Canon of Scripture was formally established at the Councils of Hippo (393) and Carthage (397)
- It was again confirmed at the Councils of Florence (1441) and Trent (1556)

- The Councils have repeatedly rejected spurious writings like the Apocalypse of Peter (heterodox), the Epistle of Barnabas (anti-Semitic), the Infancy Gospel of James (uncorroborated claims), the Gospel of Thomas (quasi-Gnostic), the Third Letter to the Corinthians (false authorship), the Gospel of Judas (Gnostic)

Also, let's not forget that Jesus and St. Paul frequently quoted the Old Testament, which is a pretty strong indication that the Old Testament was inspired. Why would they quote uninspired works?

Cardinal Newman put it this way in an essay on inspiration first published in 1884: "Surely then, if the revelations and lessons in Scripture are addressed to us personally and practically, the presence among us of a formal judge and standing expositor of its words is imperative. It is antecedently unreasonable to suppose that a book so complex, so unsystematic, in parts so obscure, the outcome of so many minds, times, and places, should be given us from above without the safeguard of some authority; as if it could possibly from the nature of the case, interpret itself. Its inspiration does but guarantee its truth, not its interpretation."

"How are private readers satisfactorily to distinguish what is didactic and what is historical, what is fact and what is vision, what is allegorical and what is literal, what is [idiomatic] and what is grammatical, what is enunciated formally and what occurs, what is only of temporary and what is of lasting obligations? Such is our natural anticipation, and it is only too exactly justified in the events of the last three centuries, in the many countries where private judgment on the text of Scripture has prevailed. The gift of inspiration requires as its complement the gift of infallibility."

The reality of an infallible, teaching Church—leads one naturally to an answer to the problem that troubled the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:30-31): How is one to know which interpretations are correct? The same Church that authenticates the Bible, that attests to its inspiration, is the authority established by Christ to interpret his word.