How do we know that the Holy Bible is the true and *ONLY* Word of God?

Confirmation by Jesus Himself

In Luke 11:51 and again in Luke 24:44 Jesus Christ confirmed the Old Testament as a genuine accounting of the Word of God as recorded in the books of Moses, the prophets, and the Psalms:

Therefore also the Wisdom of God said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute, so that the blood of all the prophets, shed from the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, it will be required of this generation.

Luke 11:49-51 (ESV)

Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God.

Luke 24:44-53 (ESV)

Historical Evidence

One of the best reference books I have seen that clearly and distinctly explains the historical evidence for the readability of the New Testament books is, *"The Best of Josh McDowell -- A Ready Defense,"* (Life Publishers, ©1990 Josh McDowell and Bill Wilson.) In his book, McDowell states that:

"...there [is] more evidence for the reliability of the New Testament than for almost any ten pieces of classical literature put together." (p.42) He continues... "I believe that the historical reliability of the Scripture should be tested by the same criteria used on all historical documents.

Military historian C. Sanders lists and explains the basic principles and tests of historiography:

1) Bibliographical test
2) Internal evidence test
3) External evidence test

Biographical Evidence - the Textual Transmission

The bibliographical test is an examination of the textual transmission by which documents reach us. In other words, since we do not have the original documents, how reliable are the copies we have in regard to the number of manuscripts (MSS) and the time interval between the original and existing copies?

F.E. Peters points out that 'on the basis of manuscript tradition alone, the works that made up the Christians' New Testament were the most frequently copied and widely circulated books of antiquity.' There are now more than 5,300 known Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. Add over 10,000 Latin Vulgate and at least 9,300 other early versions and we have more than 24,000 manuscript copies of portions of the New Testament in existence. No other document of antiquity even begins to approach such numbers and attestation. In comparison, the Iliad, by Homer is second with only 643 manuscripts that still survive." (p. 43)

Josh McDowell continues to elaborate on the relative short time span between the composition of the manuscripts and the dates surrounding the events recorded in the New Testament (from 90 - 300 years). This compares to the 500 + years of reference to other documents of antiquity that exist without challenge as to their authorship.

Manner of Transcription & Accuracy among Copies

Another standard of evidence of authenticity involves the method the Hebrews used during the copy process. The Talmudists (the scribes responsible for cataloging the civil and canonical law) incorporated an established copy process that virtually eliminated any possibility of error. In addition to using a particular type of animal skins, bindings, and ink color, the size of columns and length of rows used in their work were strictly enforced. Transcription from memory was prohibited.

Again quoting from Josh McDowell's book: "[9] No word or letter, not even a yod (editor: i.e., the smallest of the Hebrew letters) must be written from memory, the scribe not having looked at the codes before him... [10] Between every consonant the space of a hair or thread must intervene; [11] between every new parashah, or section, the breadth of nine consonants; [12] between every book, three lines. [13] The fifth book of Moses must terminate exactly with a line; but the rest need not do so. [14] Besides this, the copyist must sit in full Jewish dress; [15] wash his whole body, [16] not begin to write the name of God with a pen newly dipped in ink, [17] and should a king address him while writing that name, he must take no notice of him."

Additionally, McDowell quotes Gleason Archer (a Bible scholar, author, teacher -- 1916 - 2004):

"Even though the two copies of Isaiah discovered in Qumran Cave 1 near the Dead Sea in 1947 were a thousand years earlier than the oldest dated manuscripts previously known (A.D. 980), they proved to be word for word identical with our standard Hebrew Bible in more than 95 percent of the text. The 5 percent of variation consisted chiefly of obvious slips of the pen and variations in spelling." (p. 49)

Internal Evidence

Having established the accuracy of the transmission (copying) process through the ages, let's take a look at the 2nd aspect of the Manuscript Test of Authenticity -- >what criteria is used to determine the credibility of a document? The standard method by which a document is classified as "truthful" is related

to the author's accounting of events and the accounting of the same events by other authors. If we look closely at the content of each of the books of the New Testament, we cannot find discrepancies in the accounting of the events, life, and instruction of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. McDowell quotes F.F. Bruce, former Rylands Professor of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis at the University of Manchester:

"The disciples could not afford to risk inaccuracies (not to speak of willful manipulation of the facts), which would at once be exposed by those who would be only too glad to do so. On the contrary, one of the strong points in the original apostolic preaching is the confident appear to the knowledge of the hearers: they not only said, 'We are witnesses of these things;' but also, 'As you yourselves know ' (Acts 2:22) Had there been any tendency to depart from the facts in any material respect, the possible presence of hostile witnessed in the audience would have served as a further corrective.

Historian Will Durant, who has spent his life analyzing records of antiquity, says the literacy evidence indicates historical authenticity regarding the New Testament: 'Despite the prejudices and theological preconceptions of these evangelists, they record many incidents that mere inventors would have concealed -- the competition of the apostles for high places in the kingdom, their flight after Jesus' arrest, Peter's denial, the failure of Christ to work miracles, in Galilee, the references of some auditors to His possible insanity, the future, His moments of bitterness, His despairing cry on the cross; no one reading these scenes can doubt the reality of the figure behind them.'" (p. 53)

External Evidence

The final test to determine the authenticity of any document requires it to be compared to contemporary writings of the same period that recorded the same events. Documents used in this comparison include historians and acquaintances or disciples of the apostle John -- Eusebius (librarian of Papias, Bishop of Hierapolis (A.D. 130) and Iraneus (Bishop of Lyons in A.D. 180 and student of Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna). Both of these historians' accounts of the events surrounding the life of Jesus are identical to the scribes of the New Testament.

Summary

In summary, the evidence for the true authenticity and genuineness of both the Old and New Testament is unique and further confirms the work was scribed by men, but born of the Holy Spirit.