

"Trustworthy"

Are the words we have today in scripture really what came from the prophets and the apostles? Can we trust the Bible to tell us the truth? Hello, I'm Phil Sanders, and this is a Bible study "In Search of the Lord's Way." Today we'll explore the trustworthy nature of the scripture.

Welcome to In Search of the Lord's Way! We're here to search the Scriptures for God's will. From the days of Moses, more than 3000 years ago, we have copies of the sacred Scriptures given to us by God. No book in all of ancient literature has been as preserved, as revered, or as translated as has the Holy Bible. Moses wrote in Deuteronomy 29 and verse 29, that "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law." The Bible is a book of truth, of wisdom, of commandments, and of promises. When God gave us this book, He knew just what we needed to live as His children and to have eternal life. Thanks for taking time with us today. We want to be a part of your life each week.

Jesus promised those who believed in him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly disciples of mine, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8 verses 31 and 32). By saying this Jesus assured us we could truly know what the will of God is for our lives and those truths would set us free from sin and from the lies of the world. His insistence that freedom came from abiding in his word causes us to ask if we can rely on the texts of the Old Testament and the New Testament as we have them today.

Psalm 119 verse 89 says, "Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens." My friend, we can trust the Scriptures, because we can trust God and the Lord Jesus. God loves us and has always given us the spiritual guidance and wisdom that we need. We need His truth, His wisdom, His laws, and His promises. We're utterly thankful for the Bible.

Now we offer this study free to anyone who's hungry for the truth. And if you'd like a printed copy of this booklet, "Give Me The Bible," or a CD of our study and you live in the United States, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, you can call our toll-free telephone number. That number is 1-800-321-8633. Now we also have materials free online at www.searchtv.org. The Edmond church will now worship in song, we'll read from Psalm 1, and we'll explore the trustworthy nature of Scripture.

Our reading today comes from Psalm 1. "How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season, And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers. The wicked are not so, But they are like chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the wicked will perish." An important reading from God's holy word. Let's pray together. Oh Father help us to be people who meditate upon Your word, who take it in and understand it and obey it. And Father we're grateful that You have in Your wisdom given it to us. This is our prayer in the name of Jesus, Amen!

We can have confidence that both the Old and the New Testaments are God's sacred writings. We can be confident that what we possess today is what the prophets and the apostles wrote by

inspiration thousands of years ago. The Bible is sacred, and those who wrote and copied the sacred Scriptures with great care gave us what was originally written through the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The greatest reason that we can trust the Old Testament comes from the Lord Jesus Himself; He trusted the sacred writings as the authoritative and unbreakable word of God. In Matthew 4 the Lord Jesus faced down the devil three times with quotations from the Old Testament, from the book of Deuteronomy, saying, "It is written" (He says this in Matthew 4, and verse 4, verse 7, and also in verse 10). Jesus regarded what was written by the authority of God as true and binding. He trusted its truths so strongly that He refused to violate Scripture and yield to temptation.

Again, the Lord Jesus said in Matthew 5 and verse 18, "For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished." When challenged by the Jews, Jesus pointed to the Scriptures written hundreds of years before. He said in John 5 verses 39 and 40, "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life." Because Jesus regarded the Scriptures as the sole standard of spiritual truth, He told the Sadducees in Matthew 22 verse 29, "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God." Jesus here implied that the Scriptures are inerrant and authoritative.

He placed Scripture above the traditions of men in Matthew 15 and also in Mark 7. There was nothing in His mind more important than the need for men to hear and obey the written word of God. In every instance that Jesus cited the Old Testament, He regarded it as utterly true. For these reasons, we can stand with Jesus and hold to the accuracy and the unchanging character of the Old Testament.

Now in his book, *Can I Trust My Bible*, Old Testament scholar R. Laird Harris affirmed that "We can now be sure that copyists worked with great care and accuracy on the Old Testament, even back to 225 BC ... indeed, it would be rash skepticism now to deny that we have our Old Testament in a form that's very close to that used by Ezra when he taught the word of the Lord to those who had returned from the Babylonian captivity." Again, Sir Frederic Kenyon said that "the Christian can take the whole Bible in his hand and say without fear or hesitation that what he holds in it is the true Word of God, handed down without essential loss from generation to generation throughout the centuries."

Now some are questioning whether we'll ever be able to know what the Lord Jesus said or what any biblical author actually wrote. In the book *Five Gospels*, skeptic Robert Funk said, "Even careful copyists make mistakes, as every proofreader knows. So we will never be able to claim certain knowledge of exactly what the original text of any biblical writing was." Bart Ehrman, a skeptic, more recently challenged our ability to know what the Scriptures actually are. In his book, *Misquoting Jesus*, Bart Ehrman argued that the textual variants make knowing what the Bible actually says impossible. But these skeptics are not looking at all the facts. We can know what the New Testament says. And in fact, we have a trustworthy New Testament. It is the most well-attested book of all ancient literature; there is none like it!

Sir Frederic Kenyon, an authority on ancient manuscripts, summed up the status of the New Testament this way: he said, "It cannot be too strongly asserted that in substance the text of the Bible is certain: Especially is this the case with the New Testament. The number of manuscripts of the New Testament, of early translations from it, and of quotations from it in the oldest writers of the Church, is so large that it is practically certain that the true reading of every doubtful passage is preserved in some one or other of these ancient authorities. This can be said, listen to this, this can be said this scholar says, of no other ancient book in the world."

Daniel Wallace, a biblical scholar noted, that “If someone were to destroy all those manuscripts, we would not be left without a witness, because the church fathers wrote commentaries on the New Testament. To date, more than one million quotations of the New Testament by the fathers have been recorded.” Bruce Metzger and Bart Ehrman agree. They said, “If all other sources for our knowledge of the text of the New Testament were destroyed, [the patristic quotations, that is of the early church fathers] would be sufficient alone for the reconstruction of practically the entire New Testament.”

Wallace reflected on how many manuscripts we have from the first few centuries after the completion of the New Testament. He looked at the facts and his conclusion is truly startling! Today we have as many as 12 manuscripts from the second century, 64 from the third, and 48 from the fourth—a total of 124 manuscripts within 300 years of the composition of the New Testament. Now most of these are fragmentary, but the whole New Testament text is found in this collection multiple times. Now if you add all the other manuscripts of the New Testament from later days we now have over 5800 manuscripts! We also have thousands of Latin, Coptic and Syriac versions of the New Testament.

Well now, how does the average Greek or Latin author stack up? If we are comparing the same time period—300 years after it was first composed—the average classical Latin or Greek author has no literary remains. More than that, if we compare all the manuscripts of a particular classical author, regardless of when they were written, the total would still average at less than 20 and probably less than a dozen—and they would all be coming much more than three centuries later. In terms of existing manuscripts, the New Testament textual critic is confronted with an embarrassment of riches. If we have doubts about what the autographic New Testament said, those doubts would have to be multiplied a hundredfold for the average classical Latin or Greek author. When we compare the New Testament manuscripts to the very best that the classical world has to offer, the New Testament manuscripts still stand high above the rest. The New Testament is by far the best attested work of Greek or Latin literature from the ancient world! My friends, that is fact!

Now someone asks at this point, “Well what about all those textual variants?” Now you may have read someone say there are thousands of variants in the New Testament. Well scholars count as a textual variant any place that there is a variation in spelling, wording, word order, or the omitting or adding of words. Scholars count even the most trivial changes. Now even when all the manuscripts agree, if one manuscript differs in the slightest way, this counts as a textual variant.

Daniel B. Wallace again, a scholar of the New Testament said, that “The best estimate is that there are between 300,000 and 400,000 textual variants among the manuscripts. Yet there are only about 140,000 words in the NT. That means that there is an average of between two and three variants for every word in the Greek New Testament (well that’s what some would say).” Well this might perplex some, but raw statistics do not always tell the whole story. Wallace noted, “Now if this were the only piece of data, it would discourage anyone from attempting to recover the wording of the original. But there is more to this story.”

While the original New Testament does indeed contain only about 140,000 Greek words, we must multiply this, many in part, and some in whole, by the number of manuscripts. Currently, we possess 5,814 manuscripts of the Greek New Testament! Wallace reports that the average Greek New Testament manuscript is over 450 pages long. “Now altogether there are more than 2.6 million pages of texts, leaving hundreds of witnesses for every book of the New Testament.” Now when seen this way, that means there would only be at most only one error for every six and a half pages. Now let’s remember at this point that all the Greek New Testament manuscripts were copied by hand, predating Gutenberg’s press, which was first used in 1439.

Now let's say that we had fifty people in a room and we asked them to copy one book of the Bible, Matthew, by hand. Could you write out by hand the whole book without any mistakes of any kind? But if we have fifty people copying the same book, they wouldn't likely make the same mistake at the same place, unless one of them copied that mistake from the other. You see, if we compared all the fifty copies, we could easily spot where someone varied from all the others in spelling, or whether they varied in word order, or in omitting or in adding something. In such a case, we would know the 49 copies were correct and the one made a mistake.

Professor Jack Lewis of Harding University, one of my own teachers said, "While recognizing variants in manuscripts, scholars are reasonably well agreed on what the reading of the bulk of the New Testament should be. The major doctrines of the New Testament about God, Christ, and the church are not based on textually disputed passages. The major duties of man toward God and his fellowman are not solely laid out in textually disputed passages. The questions of which we speak are not new in the church; they have been under debate for centuries; they need not be disturbing to faith." My friend, you can trust the Bible to be the words that God intended for us to know, to believe, and to obey.

New Testament specialist Daniel Wallace notes that although there are about 300,000 individual variations of the text of the New Testament, this number is very misleading. Most of the differences are completely inconsequential--spelling errors, inverted phrases and the like. A side by side comparison between the two main text families (the Majority Text and the modern critical text) shows agreement in a full 98 percent of the time. Now of the remaining differences, virtually all yield to vigorous textual criticism. And that means that our New Testament is 99.5% textually pure. Now in the entire text of 20,000 lines, only 40 lines are in doubt. That's about 400 words, and none of those affects any significant doctrine.

Greek scholar D. A. Carson sums it up: "The purity of the text is of such a substantial nature that nothing we believe to be true, and nothing that we are commanded to do, is in any way jeopardized by the variants." Even a skeptic like Bart Ehrman has had to admit that "most scribes, no doubt, tried to do a faithful job in making sure that the text they reproduced was the same text that they inherited."

Now someone may ask, "Well Phil, why are you discussing this?" Well occasionally some article comes out in a major magazine that suggests the Bible is full of mistakes. And this information misleads many to dismiss the Bible as if it weren't true. But, there simply is no other book in all of ancient literature that is as copied, as correct, and as trustworthy as the Bible! Because the Bible is God's sacred word, those who copied it revered it as the very word of God. They copied it because they knew how important it was for us all to know the will of God. You can trust your Bible to be from God and to teach what God wills for you to know about life and about eternity. Now since the Bible is trustworthy, shouldn't you believe its teaching, follow its commands, and accept its promises? Let's pray together. Oh Father, we're thankful for this wonderful gift, the Bible. And we're thankful that it is trustworthy. And Father we pray that Your will may be done on earth as it is in heaven, as we study from the scriptures. In Jesus name, Amen!

From the beginning God has always provided for us what we needed. The Lord Jesus knew how badly we needed to know the will of the Father. The Lord said in Matthew 24 and verse 35, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away." God has kept this promise. We have the Bible more abundantly available today than ever. Through the centuries authorities have tried burning manuscripts, but the Bible survives. Some have done everything in their power to keep the Bible from

being translated, but the Bible survives and is now completely translated into 531 languages, there's another 2,883 languages that have at least some portion of the Bible. Americans especially have access to the Bible. 88 percent of the American households own at least one copy, with most owning multiple copies. The average is 4.4. The words of Jesus have not passed away my friend; and they will stand longer than heaven or earth.

The word of God is available and trustworthy, now what will you do with it? Will you study God's word or ignore it? Will you hear its precious promises or close your ears? The Bible will only nourish and bless you when you study and meditate on its teaching, and its instructions, and its promises. Psalm 1 verses 1 to 2 says, "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night."

To become a Christian, study the gospel of Jesus Christ found in the New Testament, believe in the Lord Jesus as the Son of God, repent of your sins, and be baptized into Christ Jesus. One is baptized into Christ by being immersed in water for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2 and verse 38). And oh friend, do it today!

We hope that today's study about the bible has stirred you to consider studying the word of God more closely. Now we have a little booklet that has these messages, called "Give Me The Bible." And if you live in the United States and you'd like a free printed copy or a CD of this message, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, you can call the Search office toll-free at 1-800-321-8633. Now you can download these lessons or maybe a newsletter online at our website: www.searchtv.org. We also offer free Bible Correspondence courses, and we'd love for you to take one. Now if you write to us, don't worry, we're not here to get your money. We're here to help you to grow to love the Lord and to get to heaven.

We do ask that you please get involved with a church of Christ. Now we have maps online and other things that can help you to find a congregation in your area. It's on our website, searchtv.org. Maybe you're looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, well let us know, and we'll be happy to help you find one. Well Lord willing, we'll be back next week. So we ask that you keep searching God's Word with us and tell a friend about this program. Let everyone know that you're watching Search and you want them to watch Search too. As always we say to you, God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.