

"The New Testament is Reliable"

Why should we believe the Bible? Are the events and messages described in the New Testament reliable? Hello, I'm Phil Sanders, and this is a Bible study "In Search of the Lord's Way." Yes, we can believe! Stay tuned.

Welcome to In SEARCH of the Lord's Way! We're here to search the Scriptures for God's will. We want to build your faith, give you hope, and deepen your love for God and for others. Throughout the centuries, the Bible has had its critics and skeptics, yet the Bible remains the best-selling book of all time. It contains within its pages God's message to all people for all time. Scripture has given hope, comfort, and encouragement to millions who've read its pages and believed them. We hope you haven't set your Bible aside and forgotten it. Thanks for taking time with us today. We want to be a part of your life each week.

Some think the Bible is just an ancient book written by humans and filled with myths and contradictions. Others think the Bible is just one sacred book among many. However, Is the Bible really true? Can you trust it to give you accurate information? The Bible claims to be the Word of God, and what will judge us in the last day. Now, if this is true, we need to listen to everything the Lord has to say!

Jesus Christ said in Luke 6:46, "Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" Many people say they love the Lord and follow Christ but have never taken the time to read the New Testament. A person who doesn't read the New Testament is no better off than the person who doesn't own a New Testament. I hope you're paying close attention to the teaching found here and examining your life by its teaching. Let the written word of God work in your heart and soul; let it shape your life. If you love and serve God in this life, you'll be able to serve Him in the ages to come.

We offer this study free, on believing the New Testament is reliable. If you'd like a printed copy or a CD of our study and 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. We also have materials free on our website at www.searchtv.org.

The Edmond church will now worship in song, we'll read from John 20:30 to 31, and explore how the New Testament is reliable.

Our reading today comes from the gospel according to John chapter 20 verses 30 and 31. And here Jesus is being talked about and why He came and why the book was written. Let's look at this passage.

Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.

Oh, what a wonderful blessing that is, to know about Jesus and to have life in His name. Let's pray together. Father, we're thankful for the New Testament. That teaches us about Jesus Christ. How He lived and what He expects of us. Oh Father, we're thankful for His love and for all the good things that have come from Him. Help us always Father to do Your will. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

The Bible is a unique book, unlike any other book in all of history. It's the best-selling book of all time. It's made more impact on America culture and society across the world, than any other book. But, can we believe the Bible's claims about Jesus the Savior? Is He Lord and will He judge us at the end of time? If we believe this book, the answer is yes, so this question is most, most serious.

Occasionally someone says that we don't know whether Jesus Christ ever really lived or not. When I hear someone say that, however, I wonder if they are merely repeating what they 've heard or if they 've examined the evidence for themselves.

If Jesus were not historical, the New Testament is certainly an untrustworthy book; but since other sources corroborate the facts we know about Jesus, the Bible has credibility. Gary Habermas, a recognized university professor and historian, in his book *The Historical Jesus* recorded and examined 45 ancient sources for the life of Jesus outside the New Testament. Some were Christian but many were non-Christian, and some were archaeological. He found 129 reported facts revealing the life, person, teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Dr. Habermas concluded,

"While some believe that we know almost nothing about Jesus from ancient, non-New Testament sources, this is plainly not the case. Not only are there many such sources, ...Jesus is one of the persons of ancient history concerning whom we have a significant amount of quality data. His is one of the most mentioned and most substantiated lives in ancient times." Yes, Jesus really lived, and when you add the books of the New Testament, we see how Jesus has changed the world!

The New Testament clearly tells about Jesus, His teaching, His kind acts, His miracles, His death, and His resurrection. You may ask, well, "Did that really happen? We weren't there and we didn't see those things for ourselves; we can only rely on the testimony of those who were eyewitnesses. Did Jesus really rise from the dead?" What we're asking now is whether the New Testament documents written by eyewitnesses and people who investigated, told the truth about Jesus.

Dr. Harvey W. Everest in his classic book, *The Divine Demonstration*, lists seven criteria used to test historical evidence. He notes that we can judge testimony to be the truth when it meets these criteria:

First, the evidence is credible when the witnesses are honest, competent and have opportunity to know. Now, the accounts written shortly after an event are usually more reliable than accounts written hundreds of years later. We want to know the truth from those who were present and heard it firsthand. We can't trust guesses or opinions. Someone has said opinions are merely guesses in the absence of evidence.

The apostle Peter, who was an eyewitness of Jesus Christ from his baptism to His resurrection said in 2 Peter 1:16 to 18, "For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well- pleased"— and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain." The Father wanted Peter to listen to Jesus, and He wants the same from us. We must hear the messages Jesus brings.

Though Luke came on the scene later, he revealed the sources that he used to write his account of the gospel. Luke wrote in Luke 1:1 to 4, "Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things that you have been taught."

Now, if Peter or Luke or any other writer of the New Testament had written something untrue, well, there would be hundreds of brothers and sisters who would have challenged their writings. Instead, the early church from the earliest times regarded the four gospel accounts, Acts, and the epistles as trustworthy records of what really happened in their day.

Second, evidence is credible when the witnesses agree in the general statement, although they may differ on minor points. What some say are contradictions in Scripture are not really contradictions but different perspectives of the same event. Now, investigators of crime scenes will frequently find witnesses who appear to disagree with each other but are actually speaking the truth. In fact, though they may emphasize and focus on different points, they actually add important facts in their reports of the events, facts do not really contradict one another but rather provide their perspective.

In some cases, similar passages are actually talking about different events. Matthew 5 provides a list of beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount that differ from Luke's version. In Matthew 5, Jesus was sitting on a mountain; but Luke 6 and verse 17 says that Jesus stood on a level place. You see, these were different occasions, even though the material sounds similar.

On the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, the apostles stood together in proclaiming the facts as eyewitnesses of the Lord's death and resurrection. When Paul defended himself to Agrippa, he noted in Acts 26:26 that the things that Jesus did were well known and "not done in a corner."

Third, evidence is credible when there is no known motive for imposture or faking. The apostles and preachers of the first century didn't become rich or honored by men because of their testimony. Peter, you'll remember told the man that he healed at the gate of the temple, "I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene—walk!" (Acts 3 and verse 6). Well, when they healed this lame man, they certainly didn't do it for money.

Fourth, the testimony is reliable when the facts recorded are strongly against the well-being or interest of the narrator. The books of Acts records the persecution of the church and those who suffered for their faith. It records the opposition from the leading Jews. The apostles and early Christians were beaten, imprisoned, and some killed; but they never denied their Lord. They lived difficult lives in order to preach Jesus as the Christ and risen Lord. History records numerous persecutions by the Romans for centuries, but Christianity survived and grew. In the second century, it was commonly said that, "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the kingdom." One may question many things, but there can be no doubt the apostles and early Christians were true believers!

Fifth, the testimony is reliable when such witnesses are numerous. Jesus made several appearances in the forty days after his resurrection and He demonstrated himself to be the Son of God by many convincing proofs (Acts 1:1 to 3). The New Testament records at least fifteen appearances of Jesus to various people. Paul said that Jesus appeared to more than 500 brethren at one time (1 Cor. 15:6). He knew what he wrote could be tested by others to be true.

Sixth, the testimony is reliable when the recorded facts and the existing facts are related as cause and effect. You see, the places, people, culture and circumstances recorded by the authors of the New Testament accurately represented the way things really were. The New Testament is not filled with nameless, mythical people, who could never have lived. Rather, archaeology and secular historical records support the facts found in the New Testament. The dates of the New Testament match historical and geographical realities in the world of that era.

Now, seventh, the testimony is reliable when the facts recorded are sustained by existing monuments, coins, games or other public institutions. The fact that the church itself exists is a marvelous testimony to the resurrection of Jesus Christ and to the truth of the apostles' teaching.

There would never have been a church had the apostles not believed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The fact that churches after twenty centuries still meet on the first day of the week to have the Lord's supper is a testimony to the fact that the events of the New Testament are real.

People have criticized the Bible through the years, but the enduring nature and the power of the Bible itself is a major evidence. Though men have done everything in their power to destroy the Scriptures, they survive stronger than ever! You can find copies of the whole Bible translated into 670 languages, the New Testament alone into 1,521 languages, and portions in another 1,000, other languages. The United Bible Society estimates that 5, more than 5 billion copies of Scripture are currently in print. However, if you add the audio and digital copies found on computers, phones, and tablets, why, nobody knows how many copies exist throughout the world.

Wherever the influence of the Bible is strong, morality flourishes; wherever it's weak, selfishness and evil flourish. In any and every age, Scripture has made an impact on the morals and the happiness of the people. According to John Richard Green in *A Short History of the English People*: he said,

"No greater moral change ever passed over a nation than passed over England during the years which parted the middle of the reign of Elizabeth from the Long Parliament. England became a people of the book, and that book was the Bible. It was read at church and read at home, and everywhere its words, as they fell on ears which custom had not deadened, kindled a startling enthusiasm."

He continued, "As a mere literary monument, the English version of the Bible remains the noblest example of the English tongue. But far greater was the effect of the Bible on the character of the people. Elizabeth might silence or tune the pulpits, but it was impossible for her to silence or tune the great preachers of justice and mercy and truth who spoke from the Book. The whole temper of the nation felt the change. A new moral religious impulse spread through every class."

Well, how can Scripture have such a great impact? It's powerful, because Scripture is from God Himself. The Bible is sacred; it's more than a human product. 2 Tim. 3:16 to 17 says that, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." Wherever Scripture goes, people learn the teaching that leads to life eternal. They learn what is good and right. They learn how to love, how to treat other people, and how to serve. Scripture teaches the most important lessons of life.

The Scriptures also reprove us; they tell us what sin is and how sin will destroy us. They warn and admonish us to keep us from hurting ourselves and hurting those we love. You might think reproof is a negative thing, but Jesus told the lukewarm church in Laodicea in Revelation 3 and verse 19, "Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent." Parents who love their children lovingly reprove them to keep them safe.

The Scriptures correct us in order to bring us spiritual healing and make us whole. You know, it's only when a person has been taught and he make changes to correct his life that he is ready to be trained in righteousness. And God will use him to do good to all people. Have you let the word of God be a mirror to your soul, so that you can become what God created you to be?

Let's pray together. Oh Father, help us to be good readers and listeners to the words You have given us in the New Testament and the Old Testament as well. And Father, help us to be more and more like You. To love You and to do Your will. In Jesus name, Amen.

There are other reasons to trust your Bible that we'll explore another day. For me, the Lord Jesus settled the question of the reliability of the Bible. He considered events of the Old Testament to be real history. Jesus understood Jonah's three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish as historical. Jesus used the punishment of Lot's wife as a means to warn his disciples not to turn back (Luke 17:32). There is no evidence that He ever regarded the creation, the flood, the crossing of the Red Sea, or any

other story of the Bible as a myth or fable. Now, as the Word who lived from the beginning, Jesus is an eyewitness in the position to know. We can trust Him to tell us the truth!

The Lord Jesus said in John 7:17, "If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself." If we'll listen to God, hear His Word, and obey it, our lives will change! We'll know God speaks the truth. We need to believe again, to repent of our sins, and to come to the Lord for answers. Perhaps we have great problems because we've tuned out the Bible and listened to our lusts and desires. We got what we wanted but not what we needed. Read the Bible, meditate on it, memorize it, love it, obey it, and share it! It can change your life.

And if you are not a committed Christian, become one. Believe with your heart, repent of your sins, confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and be baptized in the name of the Lord. And God will forgive your sins, He'll give you a new life, and make you His child.

We hope that today's study about the credibility of the New Testament has deepened your trust in Scripture and in the resurrection. If you live in the United States and want 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, that we're presenting each week, or a newsletter online at our website: www.searchtv.org. There's also a schedule of our programs and there's also a map with the location of churches that are in your area. You can watch SEARCH anytime on YouTube! Just subscribe to our channel, "SearchTVMinistry." We also offer free Bible Correspondence courses. Just ask us for one and we'll be glad to send you one for free. Now don't worry, we're not here begging for money or trying to sell anything. We're here to help you get to heaven.

Get your heart focused on God today by worshiping at church. There's probably a church of Christ that's in your area. And if you're looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we'll be happy to help you find one. We want you to be able to go and the folks that are there are going welcome you and be glad that you came. Well we'll be back next week, Lord willing. So keep searching God's Word with us and tell your friends about Search. Let them know you're watching and encourage them to watch too. As always, God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.