

# The Bible Is Dependable



## SABBATH—APRIL 21

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** Matthew 5:17, 18; 24:35; John 10:34, 35; Romans 8:34; 1 Corinthians 15:6, 12-19; Galatians 3:22; 2 Timothy 3:16; James 2:23; 1 Peter 1:25.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “Use the truth to make them holy. Your [God’s] word [the Bible] is truth” (John 17:17, NIV).

**KEY THOUGHT:** Why would God give us His Word and not give us evidence (proof) to help us trust His Word?

**MARK TWAIN ONCE SAID THAT RUMORS OF HIS DEATH HAD BEEN MADE BIGGER THAN TRUTH.** One could say the same about the Bible. More than once, people have announced that the Bible would one day be dead. For example, a few hundred years ago, an American patriot<sup>1</sup> named Thomas Paine said “The Bible will be destroyed. Within 100 years Bibles will be found only in museums or in dusty corners of secondhand bookstores” (adapted). He was wrong!

Critics of the Bible come and go. But the Bible remains. Some criticisms toward the Bible have long been forgotten. But the Bible remains. Great thinkers, who questioned the writings of Moses or Isaiah, are not known anymore. But Moses and Isaiah are still being read all over the world today.

For the past few weeks, we have looked at parts of the Bible that should give us more faith in the Bible. This week, we continue to see how dependable the Bible is. Thousands of years ago people did not have copy machines and scanners to make copies of the Bible. So, how dependable is the Bible today? How can we know if the Bible is dependable and correct? Let us find some answers.

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<sup>1</sup>patriot—a person who shows great love for his or her country.

**SUNDAY—APRIL 22****THE EVIDENCE (Matthew 5:17, 18)**

The Bible shows the whole plan of salvation. In the Bible, everyone can find the path to eternal<sup>2</sup> life. No wonder Satan hates the Bible. Many people have seen how Satan has tried for hundreds of years to destroy the Bible. But too many Bibles have been printed. So it is impossible for Satan to destroy the Bible. But Satan tried a new method: If he could not destroy the Bible, he could make people not believe in the Bible. The result is something called higher criticism.<sup>3</sup> Higher criticism has been very successful in destroying faith in the Bible as God's Word. For many scholars,<sup>4</sup> the Bible is just another old-fashioned book. They believe the Bible is full of historical interest. But they do not believe that the Bible is God-inspired.

**What do the following verses say to us about how dependable the Bible is? Matthew 5:17, 18; Matthew 24:35; John 10:34, 35; 1 Peter 1:25.**

There is one problem here. We are using what the Bible says about itself to show how dependable it is. That is circular reasoning. How can we use the Bible to prove itself when we are asking how dependable it is?

But God has given us plenty of rea-

sons to trust the Bible. He has given us enough evidence (proof) so we can trust what the Bible says. We do not have to believe the Bible just because the Bible tells us to believe. God gives us reasons to trust in the Bible as His Word. But, in the end, we have to go by faith. The bottom line is that we can trust the Bible, because God has given us many good reasons to trust it.

**Suppose someone were to ask you, "Why do you trust the Bible? Why do you think the Bible is God's Word? Why do you live according to what the Bible says?" How would you answer, and why?**

**MONDAY—APRIL 23****THE OLD TESTAMENT  
(Galatians 3:22)**

**What do the following verses tell us about how the writers of the New Testament see the Old Testament? What message is in these verses for us? Mark 15:28; Luke 4:21; John 13:18; John 17:12; John 19:24; Galatians 3:22; 2 Timothy 3:16; James 2:23.**

As we saw last week, Bible prophecies give powerful proof to the Bible's truthfulness. The fulfillment of these prophecies shows how the Old Testament and the New Testament

<sup>2</sup>eternal—forever; without beginning or end; lasting forever.

<sup>3</sup>higher criticism—a way of studying the Bible that tries to determine who wrote a Bible book and when the Bible book was written. Lower criticism tries to determine the original (first) version of a Bible book.

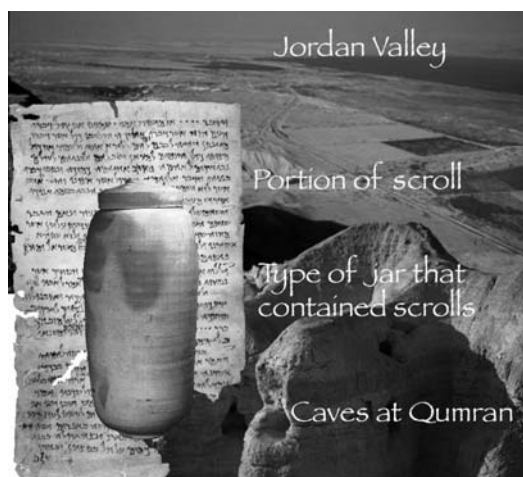
<sup>4</sup>scholars—thinkers who study and research the Bible for a living.

are dependable. Each Testament works to help make the other Testament dependable.

But there is even more. For many years, Bible critics have told us not to trust the Bible. After all, there are no complete copies of the Hebrew Old Testament dated earlier than around A.D. 900. Certainly, with people copying the Old Testament by hand, we would think that many errors got into the Old Testament. So, how can we trust the Old Testament?

Then, in early 1947, the world learned about what has been called “the greatest archaeological<sup>5</sup> discovery of the century.” In caves near the Dead Sea, very old jars were found holding the Dead Sea Scrolls. Many of the scrolls were dated from about 150 B.C. to A.D. 70. This means these Bible editions were more than one thousand years older than many of the other known editions. The find included the earliest copy yet known of the complete book of Isaiah and parts of almost every book in the Old Testament. The books of Samuel were also found, along with two complete chapters of Habakkuk.

In comparing<sup>6</sup> the Dead Sea Scrolls with the other manuscripts, scholars were surprised to find just how correct our modern Bibles are. In most cases, there were just little spelling differences. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls has given us great external (outside) evidence



In 1947, the Dead Sea Scrolls were found. They showed us how dependable the Bible is.

(proof) on just how dependable the Old Testament is.

**How much sense would it make for God to give us the Bible if it were not dependable? Or for God not to give us reasons to trust the Bible’s dependability? Should we not be able to trust the Bible in the same way we trust the God of the Bible?**

## TUESDAY—APRIL 24

### THE NEW TESTAMENT (Revelation 22:18, 19)

**What does Revelation 22:18, 19 say about how seriously God takes the Bible?**

“I will be honest with you. . . . When I first found out that there are no

<sup>5</sup>archaeological—the science of digging up relics (old things) that have been buried under the ground for many years.

<sup>6</sup>comparing—showing how things are the same.

originals [first copies] of the New Testament, I was really doubtful. I thought, If all we have are copies of copies, how can I have any faith in the New Testament?” —Adapted from Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1998), pp. 58, 59.

Strobel asks a good question! Here, too, we have to ask, Would God not leave us a dependable way to know His will? Would He not give us reasons to trust in the Bible?

Yesterday’s lesson showed that the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls helps us to see how dependable the Old Testament is. Can we find the same evidence (proof) for the New Testament?

One of the most surprising things about the New Testament is the fact that so many copies of its manuscripts are still around. There are so many more of them than other old-time manuscripts. God has left us with many manuscripts that support the correctness of the New Testament we have today. According to scholars<sup>7</sup> Norman Geisler and William Nix: “The New Testament has survived in more manuscripts than any other book from the past. But it also has survived in a purer form than any other great book—a form that is 99.5 percent pure.”—Adapted from Strobel, p. 65.

Then, too, there is so much external (outside) evidence for the New Testament. There are many quotations and notes from the early copies

of the New Testament found in writings, sermons, and letters of the early church fathers. The Apostolic<sup>8</sup> Fathers (between A.D. 90 and 160) showed that they were very familiar with most of the books of the New Testament. This external evidence were the reading lessons used in public church services. By the middle of the twentieth century, more than eighteen hundred of these reading lessons had been listed in groups. They closely show the New Testament as we have it today. So, these early church manuscripts give us many reasons to trust that the New Testament we have is correct and dependable.

**How firm is your faith in the Bible as God’s Word? Also, ask yourself this question: “If I cannot trust the Bible, what can I trust?”**

### WEDNESDAY—APRIL 25

#### INTERNAL (INNER) EVIDENCE (PROOF): PART 1 (Romans 8:34)

**What other evidence can help us trust the Bible?**

**Think about the New Testament story of Jesus. Of all the things that happened to Him, which event<sup>9</sup> is of greatest importance to the whole Christian faith? Romans 8:34, 1 Corinthians 15:12-19.**

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul makes it

<sup>7</sup>scholars—thinkers who study and research the Bible for a living.

<sup>8</sup>apostolic—the church during the time of the apostles. The apostles were Jesus’ disciples who preached the gospel after He went back to heaven.

<sup>9</sup>event—a thing that happens.



**Jesus' resurrection is so important to our faith.**

very clear how important Jesus' resurrection<sup>10</sup> is to our faith. For example, Christ died for our sins, as our Substitute.<sup>11</sup> But His death would have been for nothing if He had not risen from the dead. That shows how important His resurrection is to all who believe.

It is one thing for the Romans to have crucified a Jew. They crucified Jews all the time. But it would have been another thing for that Jew to have risen from the dead. That is exactly what the New Testament writers said Jesus did.

**What do all these verses have in common? Matthew 27:51–28:20; Mark 16:9-14; Luke 24:35-53; John 20:19-31.**

All these stories may be different. (Some New Testament writers recorded things that others did not record.) But all the stories say that Jesus rose from the grave.

<sup>10</sup>resurrection—return to life after dying.

<sup>11</sup>substitute—someone who takes another person's place. Jesus is our Substitute, because He died for our sins.

<sup>12</sup>Gospel—the Gospels are the New Testament books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Some people refuse to accept the idea that anyone could be raised from the dead after three days. It is crazy, they say. Perhaps someone who tells such a story has a sick mind or is under the influence of drugs.

Now, that might be a reasonable guess if only one person were saying that Jesus rose from the dead. But in this case, four people claim that Jesus rose from the dead. It is one thing for all four Gospel<sup>12</sup> writers to be crazy. But for all four to be crazy in the same way? These four writers could not be under the influence of drugs, could they? It would not make sense!

**Read again 1 Corinthians 15:12-19. Why is Jesus' resurrection so important to our faith? Would God ask us to believe in something like this and not give us plenty of evidence to believe it? Explain your answer.**

#### **THURSDAY—APRIL 26**

#### **INTERNAL (INNER) EVIDENCE (PROOF): PART 2 (Acts 9:1-8)**

Yesterday, we learned that some people think the disciples were crazy when they talked about Jesus' return to life. We also saw how it made no sense to believe that the disciples were crazy. But some people do not believe Jesus returned to life. So they say the disciples invented the story of Jesus' return to life.

**From what you know about the life of Jesus' early followers, why does inventing the story of Jesus' resurrection not make any sense? Read Luke 21:16, 17; John 16:2.**



**People attacked the disciples for believing Jesus rose from the dead.**

What reason would the disciples have for inventing a story about Jesus' resurrection? Were they looking for power? Honor? Money? No! Their own people rejected<sup>13</sup> them. Their religious leaders rejected them. And they were persecuted<sup>14</sup> by just about everyone. So the disciples never gained worldly power, influence, or money as a result of Jesus' resurrection. Instead, they lost everything the world had to offer, because they preached the gospel of Christ.

Some have argued that the disciples hoped to gain personally by making up a story about Jesus' return to life. Then something went wrong with their plans, but because they had already commit-

ted themselves to the story of the Resurrection, they had no choice but to keep preaching it. The only problem is that the Gospels were not written until many years after the Resurrection. If the disciples had hopes that through the made-up story of Jesus' resurrection they were going to get rich or powerful, they learned early this was a useless hope.

**What is Paul saying in 1 Corinthians 15:6 that gives even more evidence for Jesus' resurrection?**

Paul is telling people that after Jesus' resurrection, He appeared to more than five hundred people, "most of whom are still living." Paul has so much faith in Jesus' resurrection that he invites people to talk to those among the 500 who are still alive. Another reason Paul was certain about Jesus' resurrection was because he, himself, had seen the risen Jesus (Acts 9:1-8).



**Jesus spoke to Paul on the road to Damascus.**

<sup>13</sup>rejected—not accepted.

<sup>14</sup>persecuted—to be attacked for believing in Jesus.

**Why do you have faith in Jesus? What can you do to strengthen your faith? What activities are likely to weaken your faith?**

### FRIDAY—APRIL 27

**ADDITIONAL STUDY:** “The Languages, Manuscripts, and Canon<sup>15</sup> of the Old Testament,” pp. 25–45, in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1.

“God has faithful witnesses<sup>16</sup> who have accepted the truth and protected the Bible. The manuscripts of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures have been protected through many hundreds of years by a miracle of God.” —Adapted from Ellen G. White, Letter 32, 1899.

Along with the Dead Sea Scrolls, two other very old manuscripts support the correctness of the people who copied the Old Testament. One of these is the Greek translation of the Old Testament called the Septuagint. Another is the manuscript that was protected by the Samaritans<sup>17</sup> who live today in Nablus, Palestine. No wonder R. Laird Harris, an Old Testament scholar, wrote, “We can now be sure that the people who copied the Old Testament manuscripts worked with great care and correctness, even back to 225 B.C. At that time there were two or three kinds of original copies of the Old Testament available for copying. These differed among themselves so

little that we can say that people who copied the Old Testament at even earlier times than this had also faithfully and carefully copied the Old Testament manuscripts. It would be foolish for us to say that we do not have our Old Testament in a form very close to that used by Ezra when he taught the Law to those who had returned from Babylon.”—Adapted from R. Laird Harris, *Can I Trust My Bible?* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1963), p. 124.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ❶ Russian Leo Tolstoy wrote the book *Anna Karenina*. Could you imagine Tolstoy willing to face jail, and maybe even death, because he insisted that the whole story was true, while he knew he had made it all up? How does this comparison<sup>18</sup> help us understand why the disciples would not have made up the story of Jesus’ resurrection?
- ❷ However much evidence (proof) God has given us to trust the Bible, there is always room for doubt. There are always unanswered questions. What can you as a class do to help those in your church who are struggling with questions about the dependability of the Bible?
- ❸ As a class, go over your answers to Sunday’s final question. What can you learn from one another?

<sup>15</sup>canon—books of the Bible.

<sup>16</sup>witnesses—people who believe in God and who share the good news of His salvation with others through words and actions.

<sup>17</sup>Samaritans—people who come from Samaria.

<sup>18</sup>comparison—showing that things are the same.