

FOUNDATION OF FAITH!
THE BIBLE
NEW TESTAMENT TEXT

This morning, as we continue in our Foundation of faith series, we are looking at the Bible. And specifically we are going to focus on the New Testament Text this morning. You see, as with the Old Testament text, many like to downplay the New Testament and say that it is not accurate, we can't trust it, there are a lot of false information in there and tragically, many people believe that including some Christians. Remember what we saw last week as we looked at the Old Testament text and how accurate it was. We will see the same this morning as we look at the New Testament text.

With the attack on the authenticity of the Scriptures and what the Scriptures really mean, what they are really saying, many have developed their own theology in what they believe. They think they know better than God and can give us a more clear insight into what God meant than God Himself. As foolish as that is, and many will not look at it like that, that is what many are doing and have done. Let me give you a few examples to show you what I mean and then we will look at the New Testament to see how trustworthy, how accurate it really is.

The first illustration to show you what I mean is from Peter Gomes, who is a gay minister. Peter Gomes wrote a book called, "The Good Book." In a short paraphrase of this book we read, "After tracing the Scriptures' history and addressing basic questions ('What can be believed about the Bible?'), this eloquent preacher tells us what the good book really says about racial equality, women's rights, and homosexuality, too often, he observes, 'The battle for the Bible . . . is really the battle for the prevailing culture.'" The writer says that, "Gomes helps us reconcile this holy text with what we know of ourselves and our world, interpreting its parables for a new generation and reclaiming its wisdom for those who would use it as a 'moral thesaurus.'"

Isn't that interesting! God did not get it completely right and so we must interpret what God is saying, what He means to fit the culture we are living in today. Make no mistake about it, he is telling us that each generation must interpret the Bible according to what is taking place in a society of that time. Adultery, homosexuality, which was seen as a sin against God some 40 years ago and yet today, it is accepted as a normal lifestyle. Thus, we must update our interpretation of the Bible to fit in with the morals of our time. And if that is the God you serve, one who has to be corrected and updated because He did not get it right the first time, then that is a God I do not want to worship. He is not worthy to be worshiped.

But folks, that is not the God we worship, that is not the God of the Bible that this man is speaking of. We worship an all knowing God and what He wrote to the people of that day applies to us today. God is unchanging and if you think our society is better because we have negated God's Word or updated it to fit our culture today, take another look. We are not better, we are worse off.

And don't miss the bigger picture here. If God's Word has to be updated and reinterpreted then this must not really be the Words of God but the Words of man instead! What we have here is nothing more than fables, stories and if they are used properly, interpreted properly, then they can help us to have a life that is filled with happiness. There is no guilt, no condemnation, we are free to live in sin with no repercussions for our actions or so we think!

Another writer and pastor, Rob Bell, an Emerging Church leader also downplays what God's Word has to say. He makes people question what they believe by using slick videos and manipulating words. This is from Rob Bell's book, *Velvet Elvis: Repainting the Christian Faith*. He wrote,

“[The Bible] has to be interpreted. And if it isn't interpreted, then it can't be put into action. So if we are serious about following God, then we have to interpret the Bible. It is not possible to simply do what the Bible says. We must first make decisions about what it means at this time, in this place, for these people.”

- Rob Bell, *Velvet Elvis: Repainting the Christian Faith*

So it really is not what God means, what God says, but we must make the decision on what it means to us, during the time we are living in. Isn't that interesting? Now some may argue that there is nothing wrong with going by your feelings, what is in your heart. I totally disagree. First of all we are told in Jeremiah 17:9, "**The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?**" If that is true, and it is, why are you going to put your trust in your own deceitful, your desperately wicked heart instead of what a holy and righteous God is telling you? It is foolish to do that!

You see, what we have in our hands, the Bible is like an infallible, a dependable chart for our lives to follow, as this story illustrates for us. We are told,

A ship's mate once challenged a chaplain with the question, "How is it that you are always talking to my men about Jesus Christ? Did you ever see Him?" "No, I never did." "Then how can you tell a man to trust in someone you have never seen? I can't see any sense in that." "Well," replied the chaplain, "when you head for a place of refuge in a storm, what sense is there in telling your men to let go the anchor when they cannot see the ground? On what principle do you trust your ship and your life to ground you have never seen and never can see?" "Oh," said the mate, "we go by our chart." "Exactly," replied the chaplain, holding up his Bible, "and I, too, go by a chart, and it is an infallible one, while yours is not. It tells me of the only sure ground of my salvation - the atoning work of Christ upon the cross. My faith, like your anchor, takes hold of this unseen but real ground, and so rides out the storm of life in peace and safety."

- Source Unknown

Now you may not like this but the reality of negating God's Word or making it say what you want it to say will cause your life to be shipwrecked upon the rocks of this world. You have nothing to guide you and in the end, you will be eternally lost, separated from God because, like Frank Sinatra sang, "I did it my way!"

And please understand where Rob Bell and many of these Emerging Church leaders are coming from. Rob Bell tells us that "This is not just the same old message with new methods, we're rediscovering Christianity as an Eastern religion, as a way of life." And so to do this we must reinterpret what the Bible has to say and make Jesus into some kind of mystic instead of All-Mighty God! And that is what happens when you move away from trusting the Scriptures, you lose the direction you are suppose to go, you are way off course!

In saying all that, kind of laying the foundation for our topic this morning of the New Testament Text and is it reliable, turn to Psalm 119:137-144 and let's see what the Scriptures have to say. We are told, "**Righteous are You, O Lord, And upright are Your judgments. Your testimonies, which You have commanded, Are righteous and very faithful. My zeal has consumed me, Because my enemies have forgotten Your words. Your word is very pure; Therefore Your servant loves it. I am small and despised, Yet I do not forget Your precepts. Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, And Your law is truth. Trouble and anguish have overtaken me, Yet Your commandments are my delights. The righteousness of Your testimonies is everlasting; Give me understanding, and I shall live.**"

This new theology of interpreting the Scriptures any way we want, to make the Scriptures fit our sinful lifestyle is just the opposite of what David said. We see David telling us that the Word of God is pure, not contaminated. The Word of God is truth, not filled with lies or fables. And the Psalmist is not going to rely on his own wisdom to understand the Words of God, but asks God to give him wisdom, to open his eyes to the truth. Why does he do that? Because he realizes that mans heart is wicked and we will try to find anyway to justify our actions, our sinful behavior, even using God's Word, the Bible!

If you doubt that, listen to what Paul had to say in Romans 6:1-2 as Paul tells us, **“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?”** Paul was dealing with a problem that crept into the church. People were living in sin, saying, “See how much more grace God has extended to us when we sin even more!” Wrong heart, and again, they used the Scriptures to justify their sinful lifestyle. Paul did not condone their behavior, but told them to get right with God, perish the thought of being involved with more and more sin to show the grace of God. For that matter, we are already sinful enough, and we should shout “Praise the Lord!” for the great salvation that He has extended to us.

And today, we are not even seeing sin as sin but we justify the wrong behavior by reinterpreting the Scriptures. God will not accept that and if you refuse to see that now, you will stand before Him one day in your own sinful righteousness that you thought was fine, you didn't see it as sin. And as you stand before a holy and righteous God in that condition, you will then recognize your sin. Why wait till then when it is too late, come to Jesus now and hate sin as God does, don't embrace sin!

And David talks about his enemies. Who are the enemies of David? Those who have forgotten the Words of God! And this is interesting to me. You see, the Hebrew word for "**have forgotten**" is SHAKACH, (shaw-kakh') and it speaks of mislaying something, to be oblivious to it, and that is exactly what we are seeing in the church today. Leaders who "**have forgotten**" the Word of God! They have become oblivious to it, ignorant to it; they have become unconscious to what God is saying. And those that are the leaders today who are teaching this, they are our enemies. We do not befriend them and let them speak from our pulpits or school rooms! Why is that? Isn't that unloving? Absolutely not, it would be unloving to the sheep that God has entrusted to you; to the people God has placed in your hands to lead and then let false doctrine be preached from the pulpit or class room! Because we stand up for the truth and don't let heresy in, we expose it and those who are teaching it, and that truly shows that we love our sheep!

Now this morning we are finishing up on looking at the Scriptures and showing how accurate they are even though they have been copied for thousands of years. Last week we saw the reliability of the Old Testament Scriptures, how accurate it has been preserved. We compared the scroll of Isaiah, found in a cave in the Qumran community back in 1947 that dates to 100 B. C., with a text of Isaiah from 916 A. D. And of those 1292 verses, 37,044 words, the integrity of the text has held up over a 1,000 year time span. We saw that 95% of the text is identical, and the 5% variation were mostly variations in spelling and did not change the context of the text one bit!

This morning we are going to look at the evidence for the New Testament's reliability, its accuracy in transmittal over the years. And I think you will see, as we finish, the Scriptures are reliable. And in knowing that, also understand that "God says what He means and means what He says."

You see, the way many modern theologians, and lay people, view the Bible is so twisted today. This statement is from The Interpreters Bible, and is concerning the Gospel of Mark. It reads, "To all intents and purposes we must study the Gospel as if it were anonymous like most of the books of the Bible, not a product of personal literary authorship. **The book, Mark, cannot have been written by an eyewitness.** It is a compendium (a complete listing of subject matter) of church tradition, not the personal observations of a participant."

Now that is a pretty bold statement to make and they say it with such certainty and yet, as much as they like to say things like that, to discredit the Bible, the Scriptures refute what they are saying. And think about this, why put together a study Bible and then say that what you are reading is not accurate, it is not true, it is just a bunch of tradition and none of it is written by eyewitnesses! How sad and yet, notice what Peter tells us in II Peter 1:16, **“For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty.”**

Did you hear that? It is the opposite of what we just read from The Interpreters Bible! Notice what Peter is telling us. He did not seek after some fairy tale, some fable and then wrote about them. These were things that he saw with his eyes. He was an eyewitness to the events and then he wrote them down for all to read. He walked with Jesus, He saw Jesus in all His glory on the Mount of Transfiguration, He saw the resurrected Lord, and Peter is sharing those things which he witnessed.

We also see the apostle John and he too tells us that he is writing of the things that he saw. John puts it this way in I John 1:1-4 as he said, **“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life; the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us; that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.”**

In other words John is saying that what he is writing from and what the other writers are writing from are from first hand experience. They heard Jesus speak. They saw Jesus with their eyes. They gazed steadfastly upon Him. They touched Jesus. And what they saw and heard they are declaring to us so we too can enjoy that fellowship with the Father and our joy will be full!

One more verse just to show you what the Scriptures have to say regarding the Word of God and that is from Paul in II Timothy 3:16-17, verses that we are very familiar with. Paul wrote, **“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”**

Paul tells us that **“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God”** and that phrase **“given by inspiration of God”** in the Greek is THEOPNEUSTOS, (teh-op'-nyoo-stos) and it literally means “God-breathed.” All Scripture comes from God. Now some would argue that point, but that is the reality. Paul is not just speaking of the Old Testament here, but from Genesis and ultimately through the book of Revelation. In I Timothy 5:18 Paul quotes out of the Gospel of Luke stating that it is Scripture. In II Peter 3:16 Peter tells us that Paul’s writings are part of the Scriptures. And thus, the entire Bible is God’s Word to us!

Paul tells us that God's Word is "**profitable**" or helpful for us and he lists four ways that it is helpful to us:

- **DOCTRINE** – God's Word tells us what is right.
- **REPROOF** – God's Word tells us what is wrong.
- **CORRECTION** – God's Word tells us how to get right when we have gone astray.
- **INSTRUCTION IN RIGHTEOUSNESS** – God's Word tells us how to stay right.

God's Word makes us complete, it equips us for service. Why are so many Christians struggling so much in their faith? Because they do not believe God's Word is God's Word and thus, they don't have what is profitable for their life. What they do have is the philosophies and the ways of the world and how is that working out? It is not working out. You see, the early church believed that the Word of God was sufficient for their spiritual growth, it was sufficient for them to live out their faith by.

Thus, as you read God's Word, as you apply it to your life, by the power of God's Spirit, a believer will be able to meet the demands of righteousness, he will know what God desires of him and he will be able to stand strong, not for salvation but as evidence that a person is saved. Thus, Satan leads pastors and people away from God's Word because God's Word is living and it is powerful and it will transform our lives if we allow it to. Paul's warning to Timothy and to us is to be students of the Word of God if you want to stand strong against the perilous times and the perilous men that have come in and are coming in these last days! What a powerful lesson for us!

Now some may be thinking, “But how reliable is the New Testament since we don’t have any of the original manuscripts?” That is a great question and we are going to look at 4 areas that speak to that question. First of all we will look at ***THE NUMBER OF MANUSCRIPTS WE HAVE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT***. Secondly, we will look at ***THE VARIATION BETWEEN THE DIFFERENT MANUSCRIPTS***. Thirdly, we will look at ***THE SHORT TIME SPAN FROM THE EVENTS TO THE ORIGINAL WRITINGS AND THE MANUSCRIPT COPIES***. And lastly, we will look at ***THE HISTORICAL ACCURACY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT***. My prayer as we finish up this morning is that you will have seen how that both the Old Testament and the New Testament are very accurate and we can trust them. Again, don’t believe me, just look at the evidence that we have before us today!

1. THE NUMBER MANUSCRIPTS WE HAVE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

When people say that the New Testament is not accurate I wonder how many of those people realize the number of manuscripts that we have of the New Testament! You see, we have over 24,000 manuscript copies of the New Testament in existence today. We have 5,300 known Greek manuscripts. There are over 10,000 Latin Vulgate manuscripts. We have over 9,300 other early versions of manuscripts of the New Testament.

Now let’s put that into perspective for a minute! No other document of antiquity even comes close. Caesar, who lived 100-44 B. C, we have only 10 manuscripts of his writings with the earliest copy from 900 A. D. Do you see that there is a time span of 1,000 years from when he wrote it to the earliest copy we have!

Then there is The Iliad, by Homer, which is the closest in number of manuscripts to the New Testament in regards to documents of antiquity. The Iliad was written around 900 B. C. and we have 643 manuscripts in which the earliest copy is from 400 B. C. or a 500 year time difference. Compare that to the New Testament manuscripts and we have over 24,000 copies, The Iliad manuscripts are not even close!

Again, let's put this into perspective in regards to what we have. The New Testament has about 20,000 lines of text, of that only 40 lines (or 400 words) of the New Testament are in doubt. Of that, only about one-sixtieth can be called "substantial variations." Think about that for a minute. That would give us a text that is approximately 98% perfect, pure!

And think about this for a minute. The New Testament is not based upon one Scripture, but the totality of the Scriptures. Thus, if something is in question, we can check in other Scriptures to see if it is right or not! Again, only 40 lines or 400 words of the New Testament's 20,000 lines of text are in doubt!

Let me share with you some of the oldest New Testament manuscripts we have. Some you may recognize, some you may not.

- **JOHN RYLANDS** - Fragment p⁵² dates to 100-140 A. D., and contains John 18:31-33, and John 18:37-38.
- **BODMER POPYRUS** - p⁶⁶ dates to 150 A. D. and contains a large portion of the Gospel of John.
- **CHESTER BEATTY POPYRI** - p⁴⁵ dates to the early 3rd century and contains 1/7 of the Gospels and the book of Acts.
- **CODEX SINAITICUS** - This Greek manuscript dates to the 4th century, found on Mount Sinai and contains most of the New Testament, except for Mark 16:9-20 and John 7:53-8:11, and over half of the Old Testament.

- ***CODEX ALEXANDRINUS*** - This manuscript dates to the 5th century and contains most of both Old and New Testaments. The New Testament is missing most of Matthew, II Corinthians, and part of the Gospel of John.

And please listen to what Dockery, Mathews and Sloan wrote regarding the Scriptures and why we can trust them. They wrote, “It must be said that the amount of time between the original composition and the next surviving manuscript is far less for the New Testament than for any other work in Greek literature. . . . Although there are certainly differences in many of the New Testament manuscripts, not one fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith rests on a disputed reading.” (Dockery, Mathews, Sloan; Foundations for Biblical Interpretation, p. 182).

How many of you have been taught that or have heard that before? I am sure not many because that is information that does not come out especially when people are trying to negate the Word of God. But, as you can see, the evidence speaks for itself!

You see, there are plenty of manuscripts that testify of the authenticity of the Scriptures. Listen carefully to what J. Harold Greenlee said as he was speaking on the early church writers in regards to their quoting of Scripture. He wrote that they “Are so extensive that the New Testament could virtually be reconstructed from them without the use of New Testament manuscripts.”

You see, you could destroy every Bible, every manuscript, and you could still reconstruct all but 11 verses of the New Testament. Again, how many of you knew that? I am sure not many and yet that is the evidence that is out there and is not being taught!

We have over 36,000 quotations from the early church writers. No other writing of antiquity even comes close to the documentation of the New Testament. In fact, there is more evidence for the reliability of the New Testament than any 10 pieces of classical literature put together. If anyone would like to say that the New Testament is not reliable, then we might as well toss out *ALL* literature of antiquity! And no one is going to do that and yet they have no problem in tossing aside the New Testament as well as the whole Bible!

2. THE VARIATION BETWEEN THE DIFFERENT MANUSCRIPTS

Now please keep in mind that we need to take into consideration that up to 500 years ago, all documents were printed by hand. And yet, when you look at the minor variations between all the texts of the New Testament, they do not change the meaning or substance of our faith. New Testament scholar F. F. Bruce put it this way. He said, “The variant readings about which any doubt remains . . . affect no material question of historical fact or of Christian faith and practice.” Again, did you know that? I doubt if most of you have heard that before and the reason being is people want to negate the Word of God, but the evidence speaks for itself!

Several years ago there was a group and they still may be around today, called The Jesus Seminar, whose founder, Robert Funk, along with the rest of the group, dispute a majority of the New Testament. Listen to this from an August 4, 1997 issue of U. S. News & World Report. We read, “Applying both conventional methods of text analysis and other more disputed rules of evidence, the Seminar scholars eventually concluded that no more than 20 percent of the sayings - and even fewer of the deeds - attributed to Jesus in the New Testament Gospels are authentic. Among the castoffs are the Lord’s Prayer, the sayings of Jesus on the cross and His claims to divinity, the virgin birth, most of Jesus’ miracles, and His bodily resurrection. . . . The Seminar has turned its attention to revising the Christian creeds and canon and evaluating the authenticity of the writings of St. Paul. . . . This new Christianity, says Funk, would among other things emphasize Jesus as a teacher rather than a divine being. It would replace the Eucharist with a common meal, emphasize forgiveness and freedom from punishment and piety, and endorse ‘protected recreational sex among consenting adults.’”

Now isn’t that interesting. First of all they are saying that Jesus is just a teacher and not God, He was not virgin born, did no miracles and did not rise from the dead! And they call themselves The Jesus Seminar, why not The Deniers of Jesus because that is what they are doing! By negating the divinity of Jesus they can then change what this teacher has said to fit what they want him to say! Remember what I said earlier, that we want to justify our sin and thus, to do that we have to negate what the Scriptures teach. And that is exactly what the Jesus Seminar and the Emerging Church, as well as other groups are doing and have done! May Christians wake up and take a stand for what they believe in instead of caving in to these destroyers of the faith!

Now one of the voting members of this Jesus Seminar is Paul Verhorven, director of Basic Instinct and Showgirls, just to give you an idea of where their theology is coming from. And instead of looking at the evidence and evaluating the Bible according to the evidence, these so-called scholars are ignoring the evidence of the New Testament manuscripts. Why would they do this? Yes, to justify their sin as I have said and in doing so they are promoting a “New Christianity,” one that is free to do whatever they want without any fear of consequences. There is no surrender to God, but they are only out to satisfy self. They ignore what the Bible has to say, and thus, this is not Christianity, for Jesus said in John 14:15, **“If you love Me, keep My commandments.”** Notice that He didn’t say for us to do whatever we want or to negate His commandments but to keep them!

Now I realize that I don’t have any credentials like some of these men but just to respond to their false claims, listen to what Sir Frederic Kenyon, one of the great authorities in the field of New Testament textual criticism, had to say regarding the New Testament manuscripts, and he does have the credentials. He said, “One warning already referred to, must be emphasized in conclusion. No fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith rests on a disputed reading. . . . It cannot be too strongly asserted that in substance the text of the Bible is certain: especially in 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 writing 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 of no other ancient book.”

Now here's the thing. Please, please do not let these people, like the Jesus Seminar members, like the Emerging Church cause you to doubt your faith. They are fools! They truly are blind and are causing many to follow after their lies. It is as Jesus said of the religious leaders of His day and it truly fits in with some of the religious leaders of our day. We are told by Jesus in Matthew 15:14, "**Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch.**" Instead of listening to their lies, open your mind, and look at the evidence that God has given to us, for it speaks loud and clear that the texts are accurate, and there is negligible variations in the various texts that have been found that don't change any doctrine!

Let me close this section on the variation between the New Testament manuscripts with these words from Ravi Zacharias. He wrote, "In real terms, the New Testament is easily the best attested ancient writing in terms of the sheer number of documents, the time span between the events and the document, and the variety of documents available to sustain or contradict it. There is nothing in ancient manuscript evidence to match such textual availability and integrity." (Ravi Zacharias, *Can Man Live Without God?*, p. 162). Case closed!

3. THE SHORT TIME SPAN FROM THE ORIGINAL AND THE MANUSCRIPT COPIES

Now this is important because the longer the timeframe from the events to the original writings and the manuscript copies, the more there is for there to be errors. Again, that is from a worldly view, a view that does not believe in the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. But let's just look at what we have and see if what some believe is true, is the timeframe from the event to the writings so far down the line that it could have been remembered wrong.

Now we did discuss this last week when we looked at the Dead Sea Scrolls, and this morning I want to talk about a fragment of manuscript that was found in cave number 7, fragment number 5. This is important because it shows us how close from the event to the writing occurred. On this fragment were the Greek letters "nu, nu, eta, sigma", and it was thought that this was the common Greek version of the form "egennesen," which means to "beget" or "be father of." The root of this word appears in our English word "generate" or "generation."

There was a man, in fact a scholar by the name of Jose O'Callaghan who tried to match these words with a Biblical passage from the Old Testament, but nothing seemed to fit. As he pondered this over and over in his mind, over a period of time, he thought of a word that may fit, Gennesaret. But the only problem was that this was a New Testament word. How could fragment number 5 be from the New Testament when this was suppose to be a Jewish separatist sect that lived in the area of Qumran, by the Dead Sea?

You see, the word “Gennesaret” is an Aramaic place name brought into the vocabulary of the early Greek-speaking Christians because of its role in the ministry of Christ. So O’Callaghan opened his Bible to Mark 6:53, which reads, “When they had crossed over, they came to the land of *Gennesaret* and anchored there.” To his shock, fragment 5 fit perfectly into the text!

On March 18, 1972, as the news media heard what he discovered, that fragment number 5 was part of the Gospel of Mark, and was part of the Dead Sea Scrolls, newspapers begin to print this remarkable story. The New York Times reported, “If O’Callaghan’s theory is accepted, it would prove that at least one of the Gospels, that of St. Mark, was written only a few years after the death of Jesus.”

Well, it didn’t take long for the critics of the Bible to rise up and try to refute O’Callaghan’s claims. The problem with their complaining is that this document was dated before his revelation, and it was not dated by him. And we do know one thing for certain, that the people living in the Qumran community were destroyed before the fall of Jerusalem in A. D. 70. That means if the crucifixion of Christ occurred in A. D. 32, the Gospel of Mark was not written long after that. Thus, within a 20-30 year time frame, we have a document from Mark’s Gospel! It was not written 100’s of years after the events, like some would have you believe. Now there is some dispute about this but many believe that what was found was a portion of the Gospel of Mark!

Not only that but we also see that the Gospel of Matthew has an early date to it. On December 24, 1994, the *Times* of London ran a front-page story entitled “Oxford papyrus is ‘eyewitness record of the life of Christ.’” The article reported the claim that three papyrus fragments of Matthew’s Gospel in Magdalen College, Oxford, date to the mid-first century A. D. Instead of having been written a generation or more after Jesus’ death, as is - or was - the scholarly consensus, Matthew’s Gospel was written within a decade or so of the crucifixion by someone who was there at the time, so the article said. This, of course, would indeed be astounding and worthy of the treatment the *Times* gave it. Now they don’t want to say that it was Matthew, why? Because then it would be an eyewitness account of what took place!

Not only were the Gospel’s of Matthew and Mark written early, but the book of Acts was written before the death of Paul, for the book of Acts ends with Paul still alive. And good evidence shows that Paul died in the Neronian persecution about 67 A. D. Thus, since Acts was the second half of a treatise written by Luke to Theophilus, Luke must have been written around 60 A. D.

Also, all of Paul’s letters would have to be written before his death, obviously, and he died in 67 A. D. Thus, we see only a 30 year time span from the death and resurrection of Christ, to all of Paul’s letters being completed.

Here’s the thing. Don’t trust Biblical history if you don’t want to. You want to listen to someone who is not a Christian, not from the Bible. Well then, listen to the testimony of this unbeliever, for it speaks volumes.

Speaking of Ceisus, a man living in the second century who hated Christianity, Bishop Fallows writes, “This unbeliever, although he caused great annoyance to the believers in Christ living in his day, and seemed to be disturbing the foundations of the Christian faith, rendered more real service to Christianity than any father of undisputed orthodoxy in the Church. He admits all the grand facts and doctrines of the gospel, as they were preached by the Apostles, and contained in the acknowledged writings, for the sake of opposing. He makes in his attacks eighty quotations from the New Testament, and appeals to it as containing the sacred writings of Christians, universally received by them as credible and Divine. He is, therefore, the very best witness we can summon to prove that the New Testament was not written hundreds of years after the Apostles were dust; but in less than a century and a half had been received by the Christian Church all over the world.” Again, this was from the second century and the words from the New Testament were already written down and copied!

The eminent archaeologist, William F. Albright, concluded in an interview with Christianity Today, from January 18, 1963, “In my opinion, every book of the New Testament was written by a baptized Jew between the forties and the eighties of the first century A. D.” I agree, except for the book of Revelation which I believe was written 90 to 100 A. D.

Lastly, in this section, we read in the Bible and Archaeology, Sir Frederic G. Kenyon who makes these very interesting comments. He states, “The interval then between the dates of original composition and the earliest extant [existing] evidence becomes so small as to be in fact negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed. Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established.”

May we not lose sight of what we hold in our hands, it is the Word of God breathed from the mouth of God to us!

4. THE HISTORICAL ACCURACY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

What about the historical accuracy of the New Testament, do we find it to be historically accurate? You bet we do, like no other religious book! Back in the Nineteenth Century it was widely believed that the New Testament was an invention of the Second Century church, but as we have discussed, they were in error with this kind of thinking. Sir William Ramsay, who began his historical research toward the end of the Nineteenth Century, was taught that the New Testament was not historically reliable.

As a young historian, Ramsay was determined to develop an independent historical/geographical study of First-Century Asia Minor. To his dismay, there was little usable information regarding this area and that period of time. So, reluctantly, he consulted the book of Acts for help. What he discovered was remarkably accurate and true to First-Century history and topography. Isn't that interesting, he went to the Bible to see what was taking place during that period of time, historically speaking.

Don Stewart, in speaking of Ramsay, stated, "Since many historical details, national boundaries, and government structures in Asia Minor were different in the second century from what they had been in the first, it is reasonable to conclude that the actual author of Luke and Acts was a first-century author, not a second-century one."

"Acts 14:1-6, for example, was in historical dispute for many years. The passage implies that Lystra and Derbe were cities in the district of Lycaonia but Iconium was in a different district. Later Roman writers such as Cicero contradicted the passage, asserting that Iconium was also in Lycaonia. For years this was used to show the historical unreliability of Acts."

"In 1910, however, Sir William Ramsay discovered an inscription declaring that the first century Iconium was under the authority of Phrygia from A. D. 37 to A. D. 72. It was only during these years that Iconium was not under the authority of Lycaonia. Not only did this discovery confirm the accuracy of the statement in Acts 14, it showed that whoever wrote this passage knew what district Iconium was in at that time. That places the author as an eyewitness to the events."

Not only that, but think about this for a minute. One of the richest men in America, John D. Rockefeller was believed to have seen that the Bible spoke of where oil in the Middle East was located, such as the presence of tar pits (Gen 14:10) – which made him an oil magnate. Not bad for someone who does not trust the Word of God and yet became a millionaire by taking what the Bible had to say and he struck oil!

Thus, as we look at the New Testament we find we have manuscript copies that support the text. There are minor variations in the various New Testament texts, but they do not change any foundational doctrines of the Christian faith and practice. That the time span from the actual events to the original writings was some 10 to 50 years, and the copies of the originals were done shortly after. And lastly, the historical record of the New Testament is so accurate that it shows the writer had to be around during the time frame he was speaking of.

Yes, we don't have any of the original writings of the New Testament or of the Old Testament, but what we do have is an accurate record of both the Old and New Testament from the various manuscripts that have been discovered. Don't let these so-called higher critics have you doubt God's Word, for it gives us life by pointing us to the giver of life, Jesus Christ. It gives us hope by pointing us to the giver of hope, Jesus Christ. We are strengthened by the Word, encouraged by the Word, see the character of God through the Word, our heart is revealed to us through the Word, and-so-on. It is as the Psalmist said, "**How sweet are Your words to my taste, Sweeter than honey to my mouth! . . . Therefore I love Your commandments More than gold, yes, than fine gold!**" Psalm 119:103, 127.

Listen to these words, not from a Christian publication, nor from Christian writers, but from Time magazine, dated December 30, 1974. We read, “After more than two centuries of facing the heaviest scientific guns that could be brought to bear, the Bible has survived - and is perhaps better for the siege. Even on the critics’ own terms - historical fact - Scriptures seem more acceptable now than they did when the rationalists began the attack.”

Is the Word of God important to us? You bet it is and that is why Satan is using all his schemes to get us to not trust it, he will even use the church to promote this lie! The sad thing is, many fall prey to this and their lives are a mess because of it, there is no hope, no real direction for their life and they do as they please and that just does not work. Let me show you how important the Word of God, the Bible was to one group.

Many of you have heard of the Pony Express, a fascinating part of the history of the American West. The Pony Express was a private express company that carried mail by an organized relay of horseback riders. The eastern end was St. Joseph, Missouri, and the western terminal was in Sacramento, California. The cost of sending a letter by Pony Express was \$2.50 an ounce. If the weather and horses held out and the Indians held off, that letter would complete the entire two-thousand-mile journey in a speedy ten days, as did the report of Lincoln’s Inaugural Address.

It may surprise you that the Pony Express was only in operation from April 3, 1860, until November 18, 1861 – just seventeen months. When the telegraph line was completed between two cities, the service was no longer needed.

Being a rider for the Pony Express was a tough job. You were expected to ride seventy-five to one hundred miles a day, changing horses every fifteen to twenty-five miles. Other than mail, the only baggage you carried contained a few provisions, including a kit of flour, cornmeal, and bacon. In case of danger, you also had a medical pack of turpentine, borax, and cream of tartar. In order to travel light and to increase speed of mobility during Indian attacks, the men always rode in shirtsleeves, even during the fierce winter weather.

Now here is what fascinates me about the Pony Express. The managers of the Pony Express believed that the Bible was so important that they presented a special full size Pony Express Bible to each rider when they signed up to join this very unusual company. Now keep in mind their overwhelming concern for reducing weight and yet every rider carried a full size Pony Express Bible as part of his regular gear. Was it important to them? They would not leave home without it! They trusted it or why bring it along with them, it was that important to them. May God's Word be that important to us!

As I close this morning let me leave you with these words from Paul in Hebrews 4:12-13, **“For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.”** May we never forget that, the Word of God is living and it is not only living but it is powerful in our lives if we allow it to be! It will get right to the heart of the matter and with the help of the Holy Spirit, as we surrender our lives to Him; He will transform us and renew our minds, making us more like Christ. Is the Word of God important? You bet it is and we can trust it because it is **TRUTH** and it is by this **TRUTH** that we are **SAVED** and **SANCTIFIED!** May you not leave home without it!