



We Can Trust the New Testament

2

Key Theme

- The Bible is inspired by God.

Key Passages

- 2 Peter 1:12–21, 3:14–16; Revelation 22:18–21; Deuteronomy 4:2, 12:32; Proverbs 30:6; Hebrews 10:15–17; 2 Timothy 3:16; 1 Thessalonians 2:13

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Describe how we got the New Testament.
- Explain how ancient manuscripts support the reliability of the New Testament.



Lesson Overview



Come On In

Write on the board, “How can old books help us trust the New Testament?”

Students will review the memory verse by working on the Memory Verse Puzzle and reciting the verse to a friend or to the class.

- Memory Verse Puzzle for each student from the Resource DVD-ROM



Studying God’s Word

The apostles were eye witnesses to the things Jesus did. Jesus promised the apostles that He would send the Holy Spirit, the Helper, to bring to their remembrance all that He said and did. The things they wrote were inspired by God through the Holy Spirit. What they wrote in the Bible is true.

- Study the Prepare to Share section.
- Go Before the Throne.



Activity: Trusting the Text

You will show several video clips of how manuscripts from the past have helped to confirm the trustworthiness of the Bible we have today.

- Trusting the Text video clips on the Resource DVD-ROM
- Student Guides
- Pencils
- Computer and monitor or projector



Prepare to Share

SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the key passages listed above along with this background.

We recognize the New Testament to be the history of the coming of Jesus Christ the Messiah, His teaching and ministry, and the founding and building up of the Church through His apostles. It spans approximately 90 years, beginning shortly before Jesus's birth and ending with the book of Revelation, written while John was on the island of Patmos shortly before he died. But how do we know the New Testament is true? How do we know we can trust the testimony of what is written as God's Word?

First, we find that Jesus empowered the apostles through the Holy Spirit to recall, write, and interpret the life, words, and deeds of Jesus. Jesus said the Helper, the Holy Spirit, would come in His name and would teach His apostles all things and bring to their remembrance the things Jesus said to them (John 14:26). The apostles would receive special revelation and record that truth through the Holy Spirit who would guide them into all truth (John 16:13).

Second, we have it on the authority of the apostles that the words recorded for us are true. They recorded these truths as eyewitnesses. The apostles were ordained by Jesus to spread the message of the gospel, and we have the writings from them and their close associates. Peter verified this emphatically when he wrote that they were eyewitnesses of Jesus's majesty. This is further verified when Peter expressed that they heard the voice of God Himself acknowledge the beloved Son with whom He was well pleased (2 Peter 1:16–18).

The Apostle John also verified himself as an eyewitness to the events he wrote about: "This is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is true" (John 21:24).

Not all of the 27 books of the New Testament were written directly by one of the Twelve Apostles. For example, James, the brother of Jesus, wrote a letter to the church. Mark, who wrote the Gospel of Mark, is mentioned various times in the New Testament, so we know him to be an eyewitness. And the Apostle Peter reflected on Mark as his "son," indicating a close relationship and giving credibility to the words Mark wrote (1 Peter 5:13). Luke, writer of the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts, was not an apostle but a very close companion of the Apostle Paul and travelled with

the other apostles (2 Timothy 4:11). It isn't certain who wrote the book of Hebrews, but the writer verifies that what he spoke of had been confirmed by those who heard the Lord (Hebrews 2:3).

As the New Testament letters began to be gathered and read throughout the church, we find evidence that they were already being described as "Scripture," being included as part of the established Old Testament canon. The Apostle Peter made such a claim about Paul's writings in 2 Peter 3:15–16 when he put Paul's epistles in the same category as "the rest of the Scriptures."

A similar confirmation is seen when Paul, in his letter to Timothy, quoted from Deuteronomy 25:4 and Luke 10:7, indicating that both statements are from the Scriptures (1 Timothy 5:18). Paul apparently considered Luke's writings to be on par with those of Moses! And we should, too. As the Holy Spirit directed these various writers, they recorded these truths to produce the inspired original manuscripts of the New Testament (2 Peter 1:19–21). These writings were then spread throughout Europe, Asia, and Africa as copies were transferred from local church to local church. The collection of writings was acknowledged by Christians and used as a source of teaching by the early leaders—including those we call the Church Fathers. Early in the first and second centuries, there was a small degree of disagreement about which letters and books should be included in the canon—the official list of the inspired texts—but these differences were discussed and resolved as the true writings from the Holy Spirit were made clear and acknowledged.

Now God's Word is closed. We can be confident that the 27 books of the New Testament canon combined with the 39 books of the Old Testament is the completed Word of God. God clearly warns us that we are NOT to add to His Word or take away from what is written (Revelation 22:18–19). This warning from almighty God sits as a capstone at the end of the New Testament—a stone we dare not move.

HISTORICAL/APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND

The Christian faith is not a blind faith—we have much evidence to support the things that we believe. Although we do not have the original manuscripts (the documents actually penned by the authors) of the New Testament, we do have many documents that were copied from those originals. The originals were written

at the direction of the Holy Spirit, and we refer to them as the original inspired manuscripts or autographs. But if all we have today are copies of copies of copies, wouldn't there be a few copying mistakes?

Yes, but it turns out having lots of copies is a good thing. We have so many copies of the New Testament letters and Gospels that we can compare them to one another and come to an understanding of where the errors were made during the copying and what the originals said. Most of the errors, which are called variants, are very easy to correct or are insignificant. For example, sometimes words or phrases got switched (e.g., Christ Jesus vs. Jesus Christ) or there are variant spellings (e.g., similar to the variation in the English spelling of honor and honour). Some areas are more difficult to deal with, but we have literally thousands of documents to help us understand what the original manuscripts written in Greek said. This is called textual criticism and gives us great confidence in the Bible we already trust by faith.

Consider this simplistic example of how textual criticism works: If we found manuscripts A, B, and C, could we determine what the original statement was?

- A: Justin took his friends to the beach.
- B: Justine took his friends to the beach.
- C: Justin took his friends to the sea.

The variants can be examined: beach or sea; Justin or Justine. Since all three include "his," it seems Justin is the correct reading over Justine. Since there are two instances of beach, sea seems to be the error, but it really doesn't change the meaning.

The manuscript copies were made by handwriting on animal skins, papyrus, and various forms of paper developed through the centuries. That means that the originals, written in the same way, would have deteriorated. And the many manuscripts we have are in various states of decay, with only a few being complete. Later, the invention of the printing press allowed the Bible, in its various forms, to be copied much more quickly and with fewer errors, but these are not considered manuscripts since they were not written by hand. There are over 5,800 partial or complete manuscripts in the original Greek language, not to mention around 10,000 in Latin and 9,000 in various languages like Coptic, Armenian, and Syriac.

On top of all this, there are regularly new finds that help us understand the history of the Bible we hold in our hands. One fascinating area of new discovery

came from Egypt. Many masks and other burial items made of papyrus and linen bonded together with plaster (similar to papier-mâché), called cartonnage, have been found. These were decorated in various ways, but they often used old scraps of papyrus that had writing on them. Recently, portions of the Bible have been found by carefully dissolving and separating the sheets in these masks. And these are some of the oldest manuscripts known!

The fact of the matter is, the historicity of the Bible is obvious to anyone willing to fairly investigate it. And by the power of the Holy Spirit, the truth can transform the lives of people who put their faith in Christ. The Bible is uniquely self-consistent and extraordinarily authentic. It has been confirmed countless times by archaeology and other sciences. It possesses divine insight into the nature of the universe and has made correct predictions about distant future events with perfect accuracy. When Christians read the Bible, they cannot help but recognize the voice of their Creator. The Bible claims to be the Word of God, and it demonstrates this claim by making knowledge possible. It is the standard of standards. And we can trust it and the life-giving message of the gospel it contains.

[Note to teacher: When talking about dates around the turn of the first century, many people become confused, thinking the first century would be the period from 100–200, when this is actually the second century. Try to use phrases like "just 50 years after Jesus died" or "within a few years from when the Apostle John died" to help clarify these dates.]



BEFORE THE THRONE

Lord Jesus, your Word is precious to me. I am confident it is true. The passages I read for this lesson reassure me of the truth of the New Testament. They give me detailed reasons for my faith in your Word that I can pass on to my students, family, and friends that may have doubts. Forgive me for entertaining any doubts when I've heard reports about other books outside the canon of Scripture that cast a shadow on the truth of your Word. To you be all glory, omniscient Lord! Thank you for revealing yourself to us through your true Word and for giving us minds to grow in our knowledge of you.

Review

Our last lesson looked at the bridge between the Old and New Testaments, displaying God's faithfulness to His promise to send a Messiah to redeem Adam's race from the curse of sin. Although veiled in many places, the Old Testament was constantly pointing forward to Jesus and His work on the Cross. As we will see throughout our study of the New Testament, there are many references to the Old Testament in the New.

? As you read your Bible since our last lesson, did you come across any passages that you were able to recognize as quotes from the Old Testament in the New Testament?

Discuss various answers, encouraging those who are growing in their understanding of how to read their Bible.

God has been pleased to reveal many glorious truths to us in the Bible. Without this revelation, we would know very little about God and what He expects of us. Creation reveals His eternal power and

divine nature (Romans 1:20), but the incarnate Word described in the written Word gives us a much fuller explanation. The Bible helps us to know Jesus and all He came to earth to accomplish. The sin that came through Adam and passed to everyone alive in the time of the Old Testament was finally dealt with when Jesus came as the promised Messiah to conquer sin and death once for all. That will be the focus of our study of the New Testament.

Our lesson today is intended to encourage you in your faith in the truthfulness of the things recorded for us in the New Testament. We will look at some passages that show us how we got the New Testament. We will also look at some evidence to help us explain the reliability of the New Testament to those who are skeptical. Hopefully, the things we discuss today will help you trust more fully in the message of the text we hold dear.



► Write on the board, "How can old books help us trust the New Testament?"



Studying God's Word

READ THE WORD

? If I asked you, as a Christian, how do you know that the New Testament is true, how would you answer? *Discuss various answers.*

As Christians, we have received the Holy Spirit, and His work in us testifies to the truthfulness of the words of God. Apart from God opening our hearts to the truth of Scripture, as He opened Lydia's heart to Paul's words in Acts 16:14, we could not trust the message and respond in repentance and faith. It is the Holy Spirit's work alongside the truth of Scripture that gives us this assurance.

Let's read 2 Peter 1:12–21 together as we try to answer the question of how we got the New Testament writings. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

2 Peter 1:12–21

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

- ? **Who was writing to whom?** *The Apostle Peter was writing to fellow Christians as described in verses 1 and 2.*
- ? **What reason does Peter give for writing to them in verses 12–15?** *He wanted to remind them of the nature of the truths they had received and give them a written record they can continually refer to.*
- ? **What was about to happen to Peter?** *He was about to die as described in the euphemism of putting off his tent. Extra-biblical histories describe Peter's death at the hands of the Roman Emperor Nero, being crucified upside down. His death was prophesied by Jesus in John 21:18–19, and Peter alludes to this in verse 14.*
- ? **What was Peter trying to establish in verse 16?** *He was establishing his authority as an eyewitness of Jesus on the earth.*
- ? **What contrast did Peter use to make his point in verse 16?** *He was not telling them fables he had invented but was reporting truth as an eyewitness.*
- ? **Which event did Peter use as an example of his witnessing Jesus Christ?** *He mentioned the events at the Transfiguration of Christ (Matthew 17:1–13). Peter was an eyewitness to the Son being honored by the Father.*
- ? **What details did Peter recount about the Transfiguration?** *He mentioned the words from the Father, having heard the voice from heaven and seen Christ's majestic glory in that moment.*
- ? **What does “the prophetic word” refer to?** *This is a reference to the Old Testament and its truth claims, especially those about the Messiah, in light of the similar phrasing in verses 20 and 21 (prophecy of Scripture; prophecy).*
- ? **What does the “prophetic word” do?** *It shines as a light in dark places.*
- ? **How should people respond to the “prophetic word”?** *They should heed it.*
- ? **Does the “prophetic word” confirm the majesty of Christ, or does the majestic appearance confirm the “prophetic word”?** *The experience confirms the Scriptures, not the other way around. Scripture should be used to understand experiences, not the reverse.*
- ? **What words of emphasis are present in verse 20?** *Knowing this first. This is intended to emphasize an important point.*
- ? **Verses 20 and 21 contain another contrast. What is contrasted in these verses?** *There are two negative statements about prophecy contrasted with one positive statement: Scripture is not 1) a private interpretation nor 2) by the will of man but it is from the Holy Spirit through men.*
- ? **Based on verse 21, how did we get the Scriptures?** *The Holy Spirit moved holy men of God to record the words of Scripture.*
- ? **How does Hebrews 10:15–17 help us understand Peter's explanation of how we got the Scriptures?** *This passage attributes the quotes from the Old Testament to*

Hebrews 10:15–17

the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was speaking through Jeremiah to deliver the message, and we have that record.

2 Timothy 3:16

? How does 2 Timothy 3:16 help us understand the way we received Scripture? Paul affirms with Peter that the origin of Scripture is with God, not man.

Discover the Truth

If all Scripture is given by the inspiration of God, and the Holy Spirit moved men to write the Scriptures, then we have a clear answer to the question of how we got the New Testament writings: God the Holy Spirit moved men to write those truths that He wanted to be included in His written revelation to us.

The apostles and others were directed by God the Holy Spirit to record exactly what He wanted to communicate to the church through the ages. These were not simply ideas that Peter wanted to share with the church, though he does make that claim. They were the very words which God moved him to record. Just as any Old Testament prophet, the writings in the New Testament are inspired by God.

The original writings of Scripture were inspired by the Holy Spirit and recorded on scrolls of various types. In our passage, Peter clearly affirms this is true for the Old Testament, and later in this very letter he affirms the same for the writings of Paul. Turn to 2 Peter 3:14–16. *Read that passage aloud.*

Peter equates the writings of Paul to “the rest of the Scriptures.” Peter acknowledged the authority of God in the writings of Paul, his fellow apostle. Jesus had given these men the charge and authority to found the church, and the writings of the New Testament were a very important part of building that foundation (See Ephesians 2:1–3:7).

All of this demonstrates God’s sovereign activity in the world. He is pleased to work through us, as frail and fallible as we can be, to deliver truth. That truth was recorded for us by men, moved by the Holy Spirit, so that we can hear that message and then take it to others. So, the Holy Spirit uses the very words He inspired to be written down to work in the hearts of people to bring them to salvation so that each of those people can spread the message, making disciples of Christ. Then, the implanted Word continues to change us.

1 Thessalonians 2:13 makes this clear: “For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.”



SOVEREIGN

1 Thessalonians 2:13



Trusting the Text

MATERIALS

- Trusting the Text video clips from the Resource DVD-ROM
- Computer and monitor or projector
- Student Guides
- Pencils

INSTRUCTIONS

If these writings were recorded 2,000 years ago, how do we know that the Bibles we hold in our hands actually contain the words the Holy Spirit directed these men to record? Well, there are very important answers to that question that can affirm our faith in God's Word. And these answers can be given to those who don't trust the Bible because of misinformation they have heard in the past about how we received the Bible.

We are going to watch two video clips about the preservation of the Bible. These clips show some amazing new technologies and discoveries that are part of The Green Collection (the family who owns the Hobby Lobby stores) as featured in their "Museum of the Bible" displays. Show the video clips "CCR" and "Text Extraction," and then discuss the clips. The video clips are on the Resource DVD-ROM in both mp4 and wmv file formats.

CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

That is just a tiny peek into a massive amount of manuscript evidence that can be analyzed to help us understand how God has preserved His Word.

The *Codex Climaci Rescriptus* is very special. A codex is simply another word for "book." This book was made from vellum—a prepared animal skin—not paper or papyrus.

? **Why do we only have fragments of the earliest manuscripts of the Bible?** *They were written on materials like animal skins and paper that tend to decay. The oldest texts are typically fragments, but some are more intact. The hot, dry climate of the Middle East has been part of their providential preservation.*

? **Why were texts erased and written over to create a rescriptus?** *The forming of books was very expensive up to the invention of the printing press, so recycling the pages of an old book that was no longer wanted was an inexpensive way to create a new book.*

? **What is so significant about the *Codex Climaci Rescriptus*?** *The underlying text provides a very complete example of early Palestinian Aramaic, the language that was likely spoken by Jesus and many others at the time as well as an old Greek text. There are several instances in the Gospels where the Aramaic words are actually recorded for us (e.g., Matthew 27:46; John 19:13) and translated.*

? **What can these fragments or ancient texts never convince skeptics of?** *The existence of a text doesn't mean that what it says is true. While it can demonstrate that the ideas were being written down very soon after the life of Jesus, it is still a matter of faith to believe the things recorded.*

Can you imagine using your Bible to make a papier-mâché basket or wall hanging out of the pages of your Bible? That is actually another amazing area of research for textual scholars. Using old papyrus, people in Egypt and the surrounding areas would actually make useful objects. This would be like you taking the paper you use around the house (newspapers, shopping lists, old notebooks, etc.) and forming a small garbage can. If a historian were to dig that up in 1,000 years, they could learn all kinds of information about our language and what we knew about and valued.



Revelation 22:18–21

READ THE WORD

It is important that we understand that God's written revelation—the canon of Scripture—is closed. Since the completion of the New Testament, there has not been, nor will there be, more written revelation from God. This does not mean that the Holy Spirit is no longer guiding believers, but it does mean that we do not receive more revelation that should be added to the Bible. Let's read Revelation 22:18–21 to help us understand this idea a bit more. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

- ? **Who is the "I" in verse 1?** *The Apostle John is the author, as clearly stated in 1:1, 1:4, 1:9, and 22:8.*
- ? **Who is this passage directed to?** *John had a very broad audience in view—everyone who hears the words he has recorded.*
- ? **When was this book written?** *The timing is not clearly stated in Revelation, but we know John was in exile on the island Patmos as part of the Roman persecution of Christians (Revelation 1:9). Second century writers affirm that Revelation was written during the reign of Emperor Domitian and place its writing around AD 94–96.*
- ? **What two things does John prohibit in this passage?** *Adding to or taking away from the words he recorded.*
- ? **What are the consequences for adding to the words?** *Adding to the words will bring plagues upon that person. These plagues are described earlier in the book.*
- ? **What are the consequences for taking words away from the prophecy?** *The three consequences are removal from the Book of Life, the holy city, and from the blessings of the book.*
- ? **How should we understand what these three consequences mean?** *These are allusions to being excluded from eternal life in heaven.*
- ? **How does John close the book?** *The closing includes a reminder of the nearness of the Second Coming of Jesus.*
- ? **What follows Revelation 22:21?** *Nothing; this is the close of the New Testament.*
- ? **What cross-references are listed in your Bible for Revelation 22:18?** *Deuteronomy 4:2, 12:32, and Proverbs 30:6 are the most common cross-references. Assign readers to read these verses.*
- ? **How do these passages add to our understanding of Revelation 22:19?** *God has given other warnings against changing His Word. Deuteronomy 4:2 applies specifically to the "statutes and judgments" given to the Israelites as does 12:32. Proverbs 30:6 affirms that the words of man cannot override the words of God. Altogether, these warnings spread through the Bible should give us great pause if we think we want to adjust anything God has revealed.*

Deuteronomy 4:2,
12:32; Proverbs 30:6

? Is there any significance to this warning in Revelation coming at the end of the Bible? *Many have understood this to be a statement of the closing of the canon, though that is not an explicit teaching of the text. In combination with the death of John, the last apostle, and other factors, this is a reasonable interpretation.*

Discover the Truth

God is faithful to preserve His Word for us to benefit from. It has been nearly 2,000 years since John wrote these things in the power of the Spirit—and we can read them today!

There are 12 commands given to John to write what he hears and sees (1:11, 1:19, 2:1, 2:8, 2:12, 2:18, 3:1, 3:7, 3:14, 14:13, 19:9, 21:5). However there are no commands for us to do the same. We are to receive the written words as the very words of God, trusting in them as sufficient for living a life that is pleasing to Him. We can trust the truths recorded in the Bible and call others to do the same. We can trust that the words John recorded are the words God intended us to have. We must never add to or take away from them.



FAITHFUL



Applying God's Word

WHAT YOU HEARD IN THE WORD

God has been faithful to preserve his Word for us. When it comes to the New Testament, we have many reliable and ancient manuscripts that demonstrate the reliability of the Bible we hold in our hands today. God is faithful, and in His sovereignty He has not only delivered His Word to the prophets and holy men before us, but He has kept His Word intact through the millennia. We can trust the Scriptures as sufficient to guide us in life and to show us all that God has for us in Christ. And it isn't a blind faith, but there are thousands of manuscripts that support the trust we have in the Bible. In a few weeks, we will be having a follow-up lesson that will help reinforce some of these ideas, so we can look forward to that.

GOD'S WORD IN THE REAL WORLD

- ? What idea from our lesson today has helped you trust in the New Testament we have in our Bibles? *Discuss various answers.*
- ? We have talked about internal reliability of the New Testament (the writers affirming one another) and external reliability (manuscript evidence). How can you use each of these ideas to share the trustworthiness of Scripture with those who doubt it is reliable? *The internal consistency can show those skeptics who might think the Bible contradicts itself or believe men*

who came much later wrote or assembled the Bible. The manuscript evidence attests to the antiquity of the text and the reliability of it—it has not been changed over the years as many claim.

? **Mormons believe there has been ongoing revelation in modern days (primarily in *The Book of Mormon* and other writings from their prophets). If you mention that Revelation 22:18–19 says nothing can be added to Scripture, they will likely tell you that can't be true since the same warning is given in Deuteronomy and Proverbs. How could you respond?** *Special revelation has ceased with the closing of the canon. Passages like Hebrews 1:1–2 and others demonstrate that the authority given to Jesus and passed to the apostles was the origin of the authority to record Scripture. Any other authority is a false authority. There are no modern prophets with the authority to write Scripture.*

? **We have talked about evidences that confirm the reliability of the New Testament, but will this be enough to convince skeptics that Jesus is Lord?** *While it can be helpful to answer the sincere questions of skeptics, there is no power in intellectual arguments alone. Romans 1:16–17 makes it clear that the proclamation of the gospel is where there is power. We must not leave these arguments for the reliability of manuscripts and texts on their own—people must repent and trust in Christ, not just change their minds about the New Testament.*



MEMORY VERSE

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.



GROUP PRAYER TIME

Be sure to pray with your class before you dismiss them.

- Praise God because we can always trust His Word to be true!
- Thank God for the faithful eyewitnesses who wrote the Bible and for the Holy Spirit who brought to their remembrance just what Jesus said.
- Ask God to help us to be more faithful to read and obey God's Word.