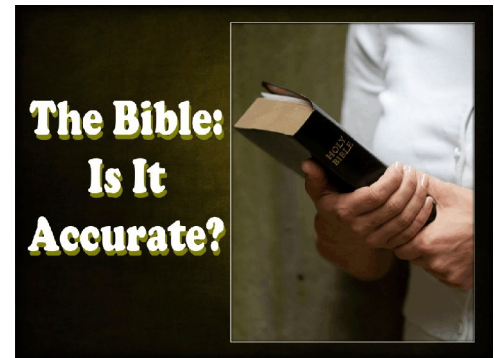


Church of God Sunday School

THE BIBLE — IS IT ACCURATE?



DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** God tells us how important His Word is (Psalm 138:1-2).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** God promises to keep and preserve His words forever (Psalm 12:6-7; Isaiah 40:8).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** God has preserved His words for future generations (Psalm 33:11; Isaiah 59:21).
- ❑ **Thursday:** God will not let His words pass away (Matthew 24:34-35).
- ❑ **Friday:** God's Word will accomplish His purpose (Isaiah 55:8-11).
- ❑ **Saturday:** Do not add or take away from God's Word (Deuteronomy 4:1-2; Revelation 22:18-19).

MEMORY VERSE: *"Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever."*
—Psalm 119:160

Have you ever wondered what the original manuscripts of the Bible might have looked like? We do not know for sure because none of the first manuscripts has survived. Over time, the materials they were written on would have worn out, and copies were made. How do we know those copies were accurate? Could something that was untrue have been added to the Scriptures? These questions could cause people to have doubts about God's Word. If you doubt the accuracy of the Bible, you might doubt the thousands of promises contained in the Bible as well. God does not want you to be confused or doubtful concerning whether the Bible is God's Word or just the words of men. Let us look at some "proofs" of the accuracy of the Bible.

The Reliability of Ancient Jewish Scribes

One way we can be assured of the accuracy of the Scriptures is by studying how the manuscript copies were made. Jewish scribes made it their lifework to study and copy Old Testament Scriptures. When copying, rigid rules helped ensure the new copies were accurate. According to ancient Jewish law, some of these rules were:

- Scriptures must be written on skins of clean animals prepared by a Jew.
- columns could be no more than 60 lines and no less than 48 lines.
- ink must be black, created only by using a special recipe.
- no word, letter, or yod (smallest letter of Hebrew alphabet) was to be written from memory.
- a scribe must sit in full Jewish dress when copying Scripture.
- if spoken to by a king while writing God's name, the scribe was to take no notice of the king.



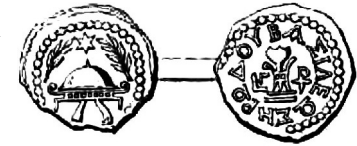
These rules (and many more) reveal how important it was to make copies accurately and in a respectful manner. When a scribe finished his copying, additional precautions were taken to ensure accuracy. Verses, letters, and words of each book were counted. The middle letter, middle verse, and middle word were calculated and compared with the earlier manuscripts. If mistakes were found, the copy was burned, and the scribe started over. Because of this extreme carefulness in copying, the Hebrew Scriptures are considered more reliable than other ancient manuscripts.

Archeology, History, and Science Confirm the Reliability of the Bible

Through the years, critics of the reliability of the Bible have made claims, such as: Moses could not have written the Pentateuch, as writing had not been invented at that time; the Hittites were not real, but had been made up by the Bible writers; King David, King Belshazzar, King Herod, and Pontius Pilate never existed; and the story of Joshua and the Israelites at Jericho could not be true, as Jericho did not exist at that time. These claims (and others) have been disproved by archeological discoveries (for instance: coins with King Herod's name, historical writings speaking of Pontius Pilate, stone fragments called the "Tel Dan inscription" that describe the "house of David," and stone tablets with writing dated before the time of Moses have been found). These discoveries, further proving the stories of the Bible, should strengthen your belief and faith in the Bible!



Tel Dan Inscription



Bible | History Online

Coins of Herod the Great

Can science confirm the accuracy of the Bible? The Creator of the universe is also the Author of all the laws of nature, some of which He included in His Word. Three thousand years ago, ancient societies said that the earth was resting on the backs of several large elephants; God said that the earth "hangeth . . . upon nothing" (Job 26:7). For thousands of years, people believed that the earth was flat; God's Word describes the earth as a "circle [or sphere]" (Isaiah 40:22). Until recent times, the bottom of the ocean was believed to be sandy and shaped like a saucer; God's Word describes the sea as having "mountains" (Jonah 2:6) and "channels [valleys]" (2 Samuel 22:16). In every one of these instances, scientific discoveries have been consistent with God's Word!

Ancient Manuscript Copies

The Bible has more ancient manuscript copies than many other accepted ancient works. Today we have more than 5600 ancient Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. The advantage of such a large amount of ancient manuscripts is that they can be cross-checked for accuracy. Let us compare that number to the manuscripts of a few other ancient writers: Greek philosophers Plato (7 copies) and Aristotle (49 copies); Julius Caesar (10 copies); and Homer's *Illiad* (over 700 copies). Yet, these ancient writings are all recognized as genuine. It is quite possible that you will study these in school. How much more trustworthy is God's Word, the Bible!



What Does the Bible Say?

Do you think it is important to God that His words were written accurately when He gave them to the authors of the Bible? Do you think God also found it important to preserve His words for the generations of people who would live after Bible times? A God who created everything (from the vastness of our solar system to the smallest atom), a God who knows all things, a God who hears every prayer ever prayed surely has kept His hand on His Word through countless copies and translations! God promised to "preserve [His words] from this generation for ever" (Psalm 12:6-7). He is concerned about every one of His words (Proverbs 30:5-6). God warned against adding to or taking away from His words (Deuteronomy 4:1-2; Revelation 22:18-19). Jesus promised that God's words would never "pass away" (Mark 13:31), that they "cannot be broken" (John 10:35).



To the critics who say the Bible is inaccurate, has not been preserved correctly, or has been disproved, the question is, Does God not care enough about His Word to protect and preserve it? Of course, the answer is YES! From the beginning of time, the devil has worked to bring doubt concerning God's Word. When speaking to Eve, he questioned God's commands (Genesis 3:1). When tempting Jesus, the devil twisted God's words (Matthew 4:6). The devil is still trying to make people doubt God's Word. Why? Because he realizes how powerful the Word of God is! If you will read it, believe it, and obey it, it will change your life. There is great power in God's Word! Is it working in your life?



1. Why are Hebrew Scriptures considered more reliable than other ancient manuscripts? _____

2. When scribes copied Scriptures, nothing was to be written from memory, including a *yod*. What is a *yod*? _____

3. In the New Testament, the word for "yod" is *jot*. Use a concordance and find what Jesus said about *jot*. Then write the Scripture on the line below. _____

4. How have archeological discoveries helped prove the reliability of the Bible? _____

5. Why do you think it was important what the Jewish scribes wore when copying the Scriptures?

6. What is the Tel Dan inscription, and why was this discovery important? _____

MATCH THE SCRIPTURES TO THE SCIENTIFIC FACTS	
The Sea Has Currents (Paths)	Isaiah 40:22
The Earth Is a Sphere	Ecclesiastes 1:7
Circulation of the Atmosphere	Psalm 8:8
Air Has Weight	Job 28:25
Circulation of the Earth's Water	Ecclesiastes 1:6

The Dead Sea Scrolls



In 1946 or 1947 a shepherd (said to be searching for a missing goat) made a very important discovery in a cave close to the Dead Sea known as Qumran. This shepherd could not have known the value of what he found that day! In this cave he found jars containing manuscripts. He took some of these manuscripts (scrolls) home to show his family and visitors to his camp. Eventually, he sold a few of the scrolls to an antique dealer for a very small amount of money.

Within a year, these scrolls made their way into the hands of archeologists and scholars, who studied the scrolls and realized the manuscripts were very similar to ancient Biblical manuscripts. This led to further exploration of the area where the first manuscripts were found. Eventually, eleven caves were discovered, containing manuscript fragments, scrolls, pottery, cloth, and wood believed to be over 2000 years old!

As scholars studied these finds, they discovered parts or complete copies of every book in the Old Testament (with the exception of the Book of Esther). One of the original scrolls was a copy of the Book of Isaiah and is called "The Great Isaiah Scroll." This scroll has been dated to about 100 B.C. and is 1000 years older than any of the other Isaiah manuscript copies previously discovered. This was a great opportunity to compare this manuscript with more recent copies of Isaiah and check for accuracy in the multiple copies made since 100 B.C.

The Bible has had many critics, people who say the original content has not been preserved but has been corrupted through the process of copying and translating. So it was with great anticipation that many scholars began to study The Great Isaiah Scroll. Would it prove those critics right or wrong?

After years of study, it was determined that The Great Isaiah Scroll was almost identical to the much newer Isaiah manuscripts. The few variants (differences) were mostly due to spelling differences, and none of these changed the meaning of the Scripture. More than 95 percent of The Great Isaiah Scroll was identical—word for word—to more recent copies!

This amazing discovery should encourage your faith and belief that God's Word has been preserved, just as He promised it would be!

