

**Sun., Aug. 16:**

Message Series: FAQs: Your Questions Answered with Biblical Facts

Message Series Theme Verse: Psalm 119:130

Message: "FAQs #7: Is the Bible Trustworthy? (Part 2)"

Memory Verse:

"Whatever was written in the past was written for our instruction so that we could have hope through endurance and through the encouragement of the scriptures." -Romans 15:4

Scripture: Isaiah 55:8-11

Blurb: The Bible is trustworthy and reliable, as verified by manuscript evidence, textual criticism and archeology. This Sunday there's a lot of heady information as we learn about how these sciences support the Bible. Yet what we really learn is that it's not really about the Bible. It's about the God of the Bible. We open our lives to God's living Word, to make us new. The Bible speaks God's words of life!

*Prep: Greeters outside, doors propped open.*

*Every other pew roped off.*

*Offering plates available as people leave.*

**OPENING MUSIC:** *Glory to Glory* -Sanctify

**WELCOME** -Pastor David

**MEMORY VERSE** -Pastor David

"Whatever was written in the past was written for our instruction so that we could have hope through endurance and through the encouragement of the scriptures." -Romans 15:4

**WORSHIP MUSIC SET** -Sanctify (acoustic)

*How Firm a Foundation*

*Surrounded (Fight My Battles)*

*Show Me How to Live*

Worship Prayer -Pastor Andrew

**GENERATIONAL BRIDGE:** "Bible FAQs" -Pastor Andrew

**OFFERING & PRAYERS:** -Pastor Andrew

Please leave your offerings in the box as you leave.

**MESSAGE:** FAQs #7: "Is the Bible Trustworthy?" (Part 2)

**PP#1:** FAQs: Your Questions Answered with Biblical Facts

Is the Bible Trustworthy? (Part 1)

"God's word is living, active, and sharper than any two-edged sword. It penetrates to the point that it separates the soul from the spirit and the joints from the marrow. It's able to judge the heart's thoughts and intentions." Hebrews 12:4

Frequently Asked Questions: Your Questions Answered with Biblical Facts. Is the Bible Trustworthy? Part 2! Hebrews 12:4 “God’s word is living, active, and sharper than any two-edged sword. It penetrates to the point that it separates the soul from the spirit and the joints from the marrow. It’s able to judge the heart’s thoughts and intentions.”

**PP#2: Is the Bible Trustworthy?**

1. I have found it to be true and inspired by God.
2. Countless others have found it to be trustworthy.
3. Validation - prophecy fulfilled

Part one of this message was last week. We *can* know that the Bible is trustworthy, reliable, and true. The most powerful reason you can share is that you have personally found the Bible to be true and inspired by God. God speaks to you through it. It’s true for you. That’s your strongest defense, even though most skeptics will roll their eyes at you when you claim that. Yes, you can offer lots more objective defenses and proofs for the Bible as God’s reliable word, and I’m going to share some of those today, but it is always your personal testimony, your own witness, that will inspire others to give it a try in faith. We are not trying to get others to accept certain beliefs. We are inviting others into a life-giving relationship. Most arguments about the Bible’s reliability don’t go anywhere. It requires a leap of faith to embrace it. In the end, without an openness to God, skeptics about the Bible remain skeptics, but those moved to give faith a try discover new life in God’s word.

Sometimes, however, skeptical people might decide to give God a try when we can at least dispel the claims that the Bible is unreliable. When we can point out that the Bible is actually exceptionally trustworthy, then, maybe, some folks may finally make the leap of faith. So, we need to be able to back up our personal testimony about the Bible with objective proofs as well.

Last week I gave you two objective arguments for the Bible’s reliability. The first is that the Bible has the strongest testimony of any book in human history. Fourteen billion Christians have attested that it is God’s reliable word. And then, there is the astounding internal validation that in the person of Jesus, whose story was recorded by many different people, all of the 2,000 prophecies foretold in the Old Testament about the Savior have come true. And, the New Testament authors weren’t academics who wrote their letters proof-texting the Old Testament. They recorded what actually happened, and it was others who made most of the connections that it fulfilled the prophecies. Read the Gospel of Mark, for example, the earliest written Gospel. Mark doesn’t even point out which prophecies were fulfilled.

**PP#3: Is the Bible Trustworthy?**

4. Original source material: The Bible stands alone!

So, let’s go after the biggie: the Bible is too old and questionable to be reliable. Now, to really unpack this, we need to better understand the science of ancient manuscripts. We make false assumptions when we think about it like we do modern books. For modern books, if you ever have a question about a copy, simply compare it to the original. Take the Declaration of Independence, for example. Want to know if your copy is truly what it original said? Go to Washington D.C. to our nation’s Archives, and look at it.

The problem is that we really can’t do that with nearly any document before the printing press, say 1500. Most originals of ancient texts didn’t survive the Dark Ages. There are only copies. Take, for example, the famous Greek philosophers: Plato, Socrates, Aristotle. We’ve all read them. But have we? How do we know what we are reading is reliable? None of their original writings survive. Do we question their integrity?

The earliest surviving copies of Plato and Aristotle date from A.D. 850, that's 1,200 years *after* the originals were written! There are only 210 copies of Plato, and dating from A.D. 900; yet a whopping 1,000 copies of Aristotle...but again, all dating 1,200 years after being written. Let me tell you, scholars brag about having such an amazing and robust textual heritage for these texts.

How about Roman histories? Pliny the Elder, who wrote in A.D. 50, has 200 manuscripts, with the earliest copy dated A.D. 1000. Impressive! Julius Caesar's firsthand account of the Gallic Wars—we're talking 50 B.C.—we have 250 manuscripts, the earliest copy dated A.D. 1000.

These are exceptionally well established manuscripts, mind you. But the granddaddy of them all is Homer's *Iliad*, the history of the Trojan War. It has a mind-blowing 1,757 manuscripts, with one copy—are you ready to be impressed?—dating from only 400 after the first writing. And there's a second surviving copy from 800 years after date, dating from A.D. 200.

That's impressive when it comes to manuscript documentation of ancient texts. Yet these are the best. Many have just a dozen, most just a handful, surviving from before the last 1,000 years.

So, how does the Bible compare? Well, the New Testament has...are you ready?...25,000 surviving copies from before A.D. 300, that's within 250 years from writing. But of those, over 6,000 copies date from before A.D. 200. We're talking 50-150 years after original. And every century after that, the number of surviving copies increases exponentially. In the world of ancient textual manuscripts, there is no text that's even in the same universe of manuscript documentation as the Bible.

**PP#4: Is the Bible Trustworthy?**

4. Original source material: The Bible stands alone!

5. Accuracy of copying: 99.5%

Okay, so, how about, amid this overwhelming avalanche of surviving manuscripts, how about *accuracy* of the text? Can we assess the accuracy of the copying over the years among ancient texts? Well, one way is to compare the early copies that survive. Most ancient texts have lots of variations and discrepancies. The ancient Mesopotamian text *Gilgamesh Epic*, for example, has dramatically different plot lines in the few surviving early copies. Same with *The Enuma Elish*.

Because the Bible had such a high volume of copying, that gave it better reliability—people could compare available texts and identify errors when they copied it—but it also provided more opportunities for mistakes, right?

Modern rigorous textual criticism has shown that the Bible has a far superior accuracy than any other ancient text...again, nothing else comes close. The New Testament has a 99.5% accuracy for details in individual words. The Old Testament has over 98% accuracy. Scholars agree that our modern Bibles have 100% accuracy in conveying the plot, content and meaning of the original writings.

The Bible, however, has a unique modern proof in the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. After WWII, hundreds of copies of ancient Jewish writings were found in clay jars in caves in Israel near the Dead Sea. The amazing thing was that these manuscripts dated from 200 B.C. to A.D. 68 (the time of the apostles). Remember, most ancient texts didn't survive the first millennium, so it was quite a discovery to find texts hidden for 2,000 years! All of the Old Testament books, except Esther, were represented. So, for the first time, scholars of textual criticism could compare recent surviving copies of biblical books with those preserved from 500-800 years earlier.

**PP#5: Isaiah 53:11**

Later text: "After his deep anguish he will see light, and he will be satisfied. Through his knowledge, the righteous one, my servant, will make many righteous, and will bear their guilt."

Dead Sea text: "After his deep anguish he will see, and he will be satisfied. Through ...."

For example, before the Dead Sea Scrolls, the earliest complete copy of the Book of Isaiah dated from about A.D. 400. In the Dead Sea Scrolls, the great Isaiah Scroll was dated about 400 B.C. So, scholars could now compare two ancient texts 800 years apart. What they found was unthinkable. After 800 years of copying, the newer scroll had only minor discrepancies. Take chapter 53 for example. Of the 166 strokes or characters, only 17 were not identical. Ten of those was a matter of word spelling, which changes over time. Four were minor stylistic changes, such as conjunctions, that also change in language development. The remaining 3 variations made up the word “light” that was added in verse 11. As you can see, it doesn’t even affect the meaning of the text. So, 800 years of hand copying, and only one minor change of no significance. The Dead Sea Scrolls blew the socks off the academic world in proving anew the reliability of the ancient texts of Scripture. Yes, there are some other variations among some of the ancient biblical texts. But again, according to the science of textual criticism, and comparing the thousands of surviving manuscripts, no ancient text even comes close to the reliability of the Bible! It is literally a miracle.

**PP#6: Is the Bible Trustworthy?**

4. Original source material: The Bible stands alone!
5. Accuracy of copying: 99.5%
6. Verifiability of archeology: All evidence concurs!

Then there is archeology...this is one of my favorites! I actively follow biblical archeology, and it’s one of my monthly periodicals.

Over and over again science has claimed that archeology does not support the history described in the Bible. And yet, in reality, archeology has verified the Bible over and over again.

First of all, nothing archeologically, nothing!, has ever been found that directly contradicts the Bible. The rulers of all the various nations, their capitals, other cities, countries, wars, have shown to match up with the Bible. Now, there is a lot of confusion, because names are often different. And it is exceptionally difficult to keep track of dates before the Roman Empire streamlined everything. Ancient texts place events within the reign of kings, and place kings in relation to events...which don’t really translate from text to text when different authors use different names for people and places.

At best, archeology has claimed a lack of corroborating evidence for the who and whats of the Bible, thus claiming that something in the Bible could not have happened, or couldn’t be true.

**PP#7: Image of The Merneptah Stele, AKA the Israel Stele or the Victory Stele of Merneptah**

For example, is there verification of the Kingdom of Israel in records by other ancient kingdoms around? In world history, mind you, Israel was a tiny kingdom among ancient superpowers. For decades archeologists claimed that there was almost no archeological evidence showing that Israel even existed before 800 B.C. See, the bible can’t be true! But...then...in 1896, an Egyptian Victory Stele was found in Thebes dating from 1203 B.C. and it mentioned Israel. Arguments from silence don’t stand.

**PP#8: Image of Dr. Wood pointing to bricks from:**

<http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2008/06/The-Walls-of-Jericho.aspx>

Archeologists have been excavating Jericho extensively. Is there any evidence that the “walls came-a tumbel’n down?” Excavations in the 1930s verified that indeed Jericho had been destroyed about 1400 B.C., right at the time of Joshua’s invasion. Yet, Kathleen Kenyon then famously reported in the

1950s that due to lack of imported pottery shards, Jericho had been destroyed 150 years earlier, and not during the time of the biblical story. So, the Bible has to be wrong. But then, in 1999, Bryant G. Wood used newer methods to analyze pottery shards, and was able to demonstrate that the destroyed walls did date from 1400 B.C. And interestingly, the walls had collapsed *outward*, not inward as you would expect if attacked by an invading army. Archeologists concluded it must have been destroyed by earthquake.

**PP#9:** *Image from site:*

[http://cdn.sci-news.com/images/enlarge/image\\_2371e-Khirbet-Summeily.jpg](http://cdn.sci-news.com/images/enlarge/image_2371e-Khirbet-Summeily.jpg)

Some historians have argued that there is no archeological evidence of civilization in Israel during the Iron Ages, when the judges ruled Israel. Then, in 2014 six official clay seals (or bullae) dating from the time of the Judges were discovered in Gaza, providing evidence of organized government during that time.

**PP#10:** *Image from site:*

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tel\\_Dan\\_Stele#/media/File:IMJ\\_view\\_20130115\\_191738.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tel_Dan_Stele#/media/File:IMJ_view_20130115_191738.jpg)

Another hotly debated person is King David, who had no archeological mention outside the Bible until modern times. Then, in 1992 a stele was found in Tel Dan, northern Israel, dating to the 9<sup>th</sup> century BC. The broken fragment tells, in Aramaic, of a king boasting of his victories over the king of Israel and of the “House of David.”

There’s so much more! There was no archeological evidence of Sodom and Gomorrah in Israel, no cities that had shown the kind of destruction as told in the Bible. Then, recently, as the Dead Sea shrank, behold, ruins of a city were found fitting its description. It had been underwater for ages.

**PP#11:** *Image of Hittite war chariot at:* <http://www.ancient.eu/chariot/>

For ages the only evidence of the mighty warring Hittite empire was the Bible. Scholars used to tease Bible believers about the mighty—but invisible!—Hittites. Then, in 1834, it’s mighty capital was unearthed in Turkey. Today, the Hittites are so well established that secular history books recognize them as as one of the great superpowers of the ancient Middle East in the Late Bronze Age.

Same with the Assyrian king named Sargon, recorded in Isaiah 20:1. Sargon’s palace was then discovered in Khorsabad, Iraq, and on the ruined city’s walls was recorded the exact biblical event mentioned in Isaiah 20, his capture of Ashdod. And then, fragments of a stela memorializing the victory were found at Ashdod itself.

There was no evidence of Belshazzar, “king” of Babylon, named in Daniel 5. The last king of Babylon was Nabonidus according to recorded history. Then, tablets were found showing that Belshazzar was Nabonidus’ son who served as *co-regent* in Babylon. Daniel 5:16 said that Belshazzar made Daniel “third highest ruler in the kingdom” ... 1. King father, 2. King son, 3. Daniel!

**PP#12:** *My picture of the Pilate stone in Caesarea Maritima.*

Ooo...just one more. In the New Testament, it gives the name of the Roman leader, the prefect, in Israel during the time of Jesus. His name is what? Pontius Pilate! Now, the Romans kept meticulous records, many of which have been copied and survive. Suspiciously, however, no Roman record mentions Pontius Pilate. Certainly someone of his office would be mentioned, right? So, this proves that the Bible’s story of Jesus must be fabricated.

Well, in 1961, archeologists were restoring the theater in Caesarea Maritima, on Israel's coast. They turned over one of the stones that had been used in a 4<sup>th</sup> century addition of a staircase. On the underside of the stone was the inscription of Pontius Pilate, named as the prefect of Judea, commemorating an event right around the time of Jesus' death.

Okay, enough! Archeology, over and over again, has only verified the Bible's trustworthiness. Yes, there are still some archeological holes and problems, but just give it some time. Like all the rest, they will be resolved.

Original manuscripts, historical criticism, and archeology, all offer convincing proofs that the Bible is reliable and trustworthy.

But this brings me back to why this is such a divisive question. Why is the Bible still not treated as reliable by modern scholars? It's evidence is overwhelming. Most of secular science, it seems, is looking only for something to disprove the Bible, and ignoring its massive validation.

It's not a matter of evidence, you see. It's a matter of faith.

It's not really about the reliability of the Bible. It's about the reliability of the God the Bible reveals. The Bible's main point is that God is reliable, and trustworthy, and true. And to accept that would mean that this God is real. And then, that means you have a decision to make. What will you do about Him? Will you live as though He is real, that He has a claim on your life, that you must choose Him and follow Him? That is too much! If we ignore science and continue to claim that the Bible is full of myths, then we can continue to be in charge of our own lives, and do things our way. And then we can continue to believe the lie that we're doing just fine without Him!

**PP#13:** "God's word is living, active, and sharper than any two-edged sword. It penetrates to the point that it separates the soul from the spirit and the joints from the marrow. It's able to judge the heart's thoughts and intentions." Hebrews 12:4

Hebrews 12:4 says, "God's word is living, active, and sharper than any two-edged sword. It penetrates to the point that it separates the soul from the spirit and the joints from the marrow. It's able to judge the heart's thoughts and intentions." It messes with our lives, our plans, how we want to do things our way and be in charge. God's word is living, because God is living, and He comes to penetrate our innermost being.

**PP#14:** Isaiah 55 (CEB)

8 My plans aren't your plans, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. 9 Just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my plans than your plans. 10 Just as the rain and the snow come down from the sky and don't return there without watering the earth, making it conceive and yield plants and providing seed to the sower and food to the eater, 11 so is my word that comes from my mouth; it does not return to me empty. Instead, it does what I want, and accomplishes what I intend.

Look at Isaiah 55—you know, validated as accurate over 800 years of transcription! Verse 8, "My plans aren't your plans, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. 9 Just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my plans than your plans. 10 Just as the rain and the snow come down from the sky and don't return there without watering the earth, making it conceive and yield plants and providing seed to the sower and food to the eater, 11 so is my word that comes from my mouth; it does not return to me empty. Instead, it does what I want, and accomplishes what I intend."

God's ways are not like ours. God's plans can't be constrained by human science. And I love this proclamation preserved in Scripture: just like the water cycle that God created waters the earth, so does God's word, coming out of God's mouth, coming to the earth, preserved in the writings of Scripture, revealed by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to all who read it with eyes of faith, water and renew the world. It accomplishes what God intends. We can argue about it all day long. But in the end, there are only two questions that matter.

One: Do you think there is any possibility that the Bible, with all its weighty proofs, shows any evidence of God's existence?

Two: What are you going to do about the God of the Bible?

As Christians, we testify that God has changed our lives and made us whole. The Bible is where we hear our God speaking those words of life that water and renew us.

**PP#15:** "These two things are unchangeable because it is impossible for God to lie. Therefore, we who have fled to Him for refuge can take new courage, for we can hold on to His promise with confidence." -Hebrews 6:18

"Whatever was written in the past was written for our instruction so that we could have hope through endurance and through the encouragement of the scriptures." -Romans 15:4

We invite everyone to join with us, as we proclaim what Hebrews says in 6:18, God has given us both His promise and His oath. "These two things are unchangeable because it is impossible for God to lie. Therefore, we who have fled to Him for refuge can take new courage, for we can hold on to His promise with confidence."

Regardless of what the current winds claim about our Bible, cling to it. Only it offers us what is really real. It speaks of our true refuge, the reason for our courage. We can hold onto it with confidence, because our unchangeable and never-lying God holds us in His promises.

"Whatever was written in the past was written for our instruction so that we could have hope through endurance and through the encouragement of the scriptures." -Romans 15:4

The Bible points to our hope, and gives us endurance.

Amen.

**CLOSING SONG:** *You Are Good* -Sanctify

**ANNOUNCEMENTS** -Pastor David

This Wednesday: Kid's Summer Bash!

Next week's message: Is Jesus the only Way of Salvation?

Next week: Outdoor worship! Bring lawn chair and hat.

**MEMORY VERSE** -Pastor David

"Whatever was written in the past was written for our instruction so that we could have hope through endurance and through the encouragement of the scriptures." -Romans 15:4

**BENEDICTION** -Pastor David

**CLOSING MUSIC** -Sanctify