

# The Firm Foundation of Scripture

Text: Proverbs 30:5-6; Matthew 24:35

By Pastor Trent Boedicker

Sometimes people ask us for evidence. I recently applied for a passport, as in preparation for the mission trip I am planning to participate in this April. First, there is an application to be completed, and then you need to make an appointment at the proper government office. I went to the title bureau in Kenton and the people were very helpful and friendly. There are certain documents that you are required to bring. It would be nice if they just took your word for it, that you are who you claim to be. But issuing a passport is kind of a big deal. They don't want people traveling around the world pretending to be someone they're not, so they ask for proof. I had to make a copy of my driver's license and submit an original birth certificate. The people in the office collected everything, and sent it away to some government agency where they verified everything is correct, and then about four weeks later I received my brand new, official passport in the mail. Apparently, the evidence I submitted checked out, proving that I am who I claim to be, so this spring when it comes time to board the plane to Thailand I'll be good to go.

It is natural for someone to ask, "Is there evidence that the Bible truly is what it claims to be?" Last week we talked about how the Bible is more than the words of men, it is the inspired Word of God. The passage we read from 2 Timothy 3:16 told us, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness..." That means this is no ordinary book. It is not just good advice or words of wisdom, but Holy Spirit guided the human authors in such a way that while they wrote in their own language and in their own style with their own words, the end result is the message God wanted us to have: authoritative, trustworthy, free from error.

That's an extraordinary claim, and it's not the only place where a statement like this is made. We see it again and again throughout the Old and New Testament, including our passage this morning, in Proverbs 30:5. "Every word of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him." If we were to back up to the beginning of the chapter, verse 1 attributes this section of the book to an individual named Agur. We don't know much about him, except that he was a godly man, full of wisdom, who taught others to follow the Lord. His name means "gatherer," and so some have suggested this may be another title that refers to King Solomon who was a gatherer of wisdom.

Whoever Agur might have been, he acknowledges his dependence on God's Word telling us that apart from the Lord he would be a foolish person, without understanding. This seems like a strange way to begin a sermon. If I started a message by saying "surely I am more stupid than any man," you'd probably ask yourself why you're here. But he makes these comments to impress upon his readers our need to listen to God, rather than leaning on our own intellect and understanding. It is easy for a person to imagine we have it all figured out, we have all the answers. We have reason and experience to help us make sense of the world. Why do we need the Scriptures? Agur tells us that our own intellect isn't enough, but we need the truth of God's Word to guide us. He expresses his confidence in the Bible, telling us that every word of God is tested, flawless and pure.

I'm sure there were skeptics in his day who questioned the teaching of Scripture, just as there are in our world today. They tell us that the Bible is no different from any other religious book. They argue that it is nothing more than a book of myths and legends, and only the most naïve would embrace it's message as truth. Perhaps you have heard these criticisms. You've seen documentaries on TV where so-called scholars attack the Bible. Maybe you have friends who have laughed at your faith wondering why you believe. Maybe there have been times when you've wrestled with doubts of your own, and have worried that if you dig deeper and ask the tough questions you might be disappointed in the answers you find. Our passage tells us that we don't need to be afraid to ask those tough questions, because "every word of God is tested." If we weigh the evidence, we will discover just how reliable the Bible truly is.

That's what I want to do this morning: examine the evidence. Those who are willing to explore the Bible's claims, with an unbiased heart, will walk away with a greater appreciation for the reliability of God's Word.

## **Exhibit A: The Bible contains fulfilled prophecy.**

Turn to Isaiah 46:9–10 (NASB95)

*Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, 'My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure.'*

Throughout the Bible God gives his people a glimpse into the future. It may have been events that were going to happen soon, a few years down the road. Other times, he showed them things that would happen much later in time, hundreds if not thousands of years after the prophet lived. There are many reasons God included prophecy in the Bible. It gives us hope, knowing that nothing will ever surprise the Lord or catch him off guard, because he knows the end from the beginning. We don't have to live in fear of tomorrow or worry about the challenges that will face down the road. The one who holds the future holds us in his hands. But another reason for prophecy is to bolster our faith in God's Word, showing us that these words really are faithful and true.

So how many predictions does the Bible contain? There are a ton, more than you might expect. Someone has figured that 27% of the Bible was prophetic when it was written. He told Abraham and Sarah that they would have a son in their old age. He told Moses that he was going to deliver his people out of slavery and lead them to the Promised Land. He told David that his son would build a temple in Jerusalem. He told Jeremiah that his people would be exiled to Babylon for 70 years. He told Isaiah that foreign king named Cyrus would allow the Jewish people to return their homeland. He told Daniel that a series of kingdoms would rise and fall on the earth, and made specific predictions about the Babylonian, Persian, Greek, and Roman empires. These prophecies were so detailed that skeptics argue the book of Daniel must have been written centuries after the events took place, because no one who could have possibly known how history would unfold. Of course, there is no reason other than their bias against the

supernatural to date the book so late. But the skeptics are right about one thing. No human being could have predicted what would happen, unless God revealed it to him.

There is a phrase that is repeated several times throughout the OT, “Then you will know that I am the Lord...” (Ezek. 6:13). He tells his people what was about to happen, so that when it did happen their skepticism and doubt would be wiped away and they would realize there really is a God who is powerful and mighty, faithful and true.

One author says,

“There are some 1,817 prophecies of some nature in the Bible at the time the author wrote the Scripture. A prophecy is pre-written history. Only God knows the future and the reason that God knows the future is because [he is] God... God’s not looking down the tunnel of time to see anything because God already knows everything.”<sup>1</sup>

Maybe you’re not convinced. “Yes. But there are plenty of psychics and fortune tellers out there who also claim they can predict the future. You give them \$20 dollars and they make some vague statement like “You will see the color blue when you meet your true love.” What does that mean? Will she be wearing a blue dress or carrying a blue purse, or driving a blue car? Hey, the sky is blue today, maybe she is the one!” Everybody knows that psychics are unreliable. I guess not everybody or they would be out of business. It’s a scam, a trick, they make some general statement that is likely to come true, and even then half of the things they say never happen.

But the Bible is different. It contains specific prophecies that couldn’t possibly be a coincidence. And the predictions contained in Scripture are always fulfilled.

Let’s look at just a couple of examples. Of those 1,800 prophecies, many point to the life and death and resurrection of Jesus.

Take for instance the birthplace of Jesus. The Lord could have chosen any city or any place, for the Messiah to be born, and he didn’t need to tell the people where it would be, but he told them in advance so that when it came to pass we could say, “Aha! It happened just as the Scriptures predicted.” **Micah 5:2** (NASB95) reads, “*But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Too little to be among the clans of Judah, From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity.*”

What’s remarkable about this prediction is that this town wouldn’t have seemed a likely place for an important ruler to be born, let alone the King of kings and Lord of lords. If a person living in Israel in Micah’s day had ventured a guess on where the Messiah would come from, they would have likely expected Jerusalem, a large city with lots of people, where the royal family lived. Bethlehem was a small and insignificant town. Yes, it’s where David was from, but David started out as a humble shepherd boy. What are the odds of a king greater than David coming from the same place? Nearly 750 years would go by, after the days of Micah, and what happened? Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem, just as the prophet predicted.

Not only was the birth of Christ predicted, but the death of Jesus is also foretold in the OT. **Psalm 22:16-18** (NASB95) reads, *“For dogs have surrounded me; A band of evildoers has encompassed me; They pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones. They look, they stare at me; They divide my garments among them, And for my clothing they cast lots.”* This was a psalm written by David, more than 1000 years before the birth of Christ. He wouldn't have understood what all of this meant, or that the Messiah would suffer and die a horrible. He couldn't have known the manner in which Jesus would be executed, but God guided the pen of David to describe the crucifixion with specific details. Jesus was surrounded by a band of evildoers, as the angry crowd followed from the city to a nearby hill outside the walls of Jerusalem hurling insults and abuse along the way. His hands and feet would be pierced, as soldiers fastened his limbs to the cross with metal spikes. Soldiers stood below gambling for his clothes. These aren't random details you would come up with out of nowhere. The only reasonable explanation is that these are the words of God.

Remember, there are more than 300 predictions concerning the life of Christ in the OT, and every one of them was fulfilled in perfect detail. Someone has said,

*“Mathematicians have calculated the odds of Jesus fulfilling only 8 of the Messianic prophecies [would be] 1 out of 10<sup>17</sup> (a 1 followed by 17 zeros). This is equivalent to covering the entire state of Texas with silver dollars 2 feet deep, marking one of them, mixing them all up and having a blindfolded person select the marked one at random the first time.”<sup>ii</sup>*

Those are pretty amazing odds. If you don't believe the Bible is God's Word you have the difficult task of explaining how all of these predictions could be fulfilled purely by coincidence. It just so happened he drove the moneychangers out of the temple, as Psalm 69 describes. It just so happened he would enter Jerusalem riding on a donkey while the crowds sang songs of praise, as Zechariah 9 predicted. It just so happened he was betrayed by a close friend for 30 pieces of silver, as Jeremiah and Zechariah wrote. He just so happened to suffer a criminal's death, though he was innocent, as Isaiah 53 describes. If we were only talking about one or two predictions, maybe you could call it a coincidence. But it is one after another after another that came to pass exactly as the OT predicted. The evidence is not on the side of the skeptic, when it comes to fulfilled prophecy.

This alone makes a pretty compelling case, but there is more.

## **Exhibit B: The Bible is verified by history.**

Turn to Luke 1:1. Luke 1:1-4 says,

*<sup>1</sup> Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, <sup>2</sup> just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, <sup>3</sup> it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; <sup>4</sup> so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.*

Luke begins his gospel by telling us that he had personally interviewed eye witnesses and carefully gathered relevant information to present an accurate summary of the life of Jesus. It is certainly more than history. The gospels introduce us to Jesus, leading us to personal relationship with God. But these books of the Bible record historic events that actually took place at specific period in time.

The entire Bible unfolds our history as human beings, from the first humans to walk the earth, the rise and fall of ancient civilizations, to the founding of Israel as a nation, to the coming of Messiah, to the spread of Christianity throughout the world. The Bible is not merely a historic document, but it does record real events, many of which have been verified by archeology. I want to mention one example from the OT, before returning to the ministry of Christ.

Critics of the Bible are always claiming that the events described in the Bible happened so long ago there is no way of proving that the things actually happened. They complain, “There’s no record that king so-and-so ever existed or that such an event ever happened.” And then lo and behold some discovery is made in the Middle East that connects to the Bible.

If you take a trip to London, and visit the British Museum, one of the artifacts you may encounter is the Taylor Prism. It is named after the British official who acquired the artifact in 1830. It was discovered in Nineveh, (in the northern part of modern day Iraq) which was the capital of the Assyrian Empire and it dates back to around 700 BC. The Taylor prism is a clay cylinder with six sides bearing an inscription on each surface. The text records the military campaigns of Sennacherib, king of Assyria who ruled from 705-681 BC. The document describes his conquest of the land of Israel, how he captured 46 cities in Judah, and laid siege to Jerusalem, how the king of Judah paid tribute of silver and gold. Part of the inscription says,

“As for the king of Judah, Hezekiah, who had not submitted to my authority, I besieged and captured forty-six of his fortified cities, along with many smaller towns, taken in battle with my battering rams. ... I took as plunder 200,150 people, both small and great, male and female, along with a great number of animals including horses, mules, donkeys, camels, oxen, and sheep. As for Hezekiah, I shut him up like a caged bird in his royal city of Jerusalem. I then constructed a series of fortresses around him, and I did not allow anyone to come out of the city gates. His towns which I captured I gave to the kings of Ashod, Ekron, and Gaza.”<sup>iii</sup>

These are events that are described in the Bible, in 2 Kings 18-19, 2 Chronicles 32, and Isaiah 36 and 37. We are told, “*Now in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and seized them... Hezekiah gave him all the silver which was found in the house of the Lord, and in the treasuries of the king’s house.*” (2 Kings 18:131-15). Of course, the Bible goes on to give us more information about that event, which Sennacherib conveniently leaves out in his prism. He may have pinned Hezekiah in like a caged bird, but he wasn’t able to defeat him, because Hezekiah prayed to the Lord and God miraculously delivered his people even though they were badly outnumbered and outmatched. This was a real person, and these were real events, that took place in history just as the Bible

describes. The skeptic may not accept that God delivered Hezekiah from the army of Assyria, but he cannot deny that Hezekiah lived and these battles took place.

This is just one piece of history you can find in museums that connects with the Bible. I love reading about these things, and wish we had time to talk about the Cyrus cylinder, or the Black Obelisk of Shalmanesar, or countless other discoveries that have been made. Go look it up!

As impressive as these discoveries are, the most important event in the Bible is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. What does history have to say about this?

We have what's called extrabiblical testimony. This is what other people were saying about Jesus and his followers, people who were not believers but who lived when these events took place and wrote about what they saw.

One of those sources was a man named Flavius Josephus. He was a priest, and official, and an author who lived from 37-100 AD. He wrote a 20 volume history called Antiquities. In his writing he mentions Jesus, John the Baptist, and James the brother of Jesus. In one section he says,

“At this time there was a wise man who was called Jesus. His conduct was good, and [he] was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and the other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. And those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion and that he was alive; accordingly, he was perhaps the Messiah concerning whom the prophets have recounted wonders.”<sup>iv</sup> (Cold Case Christianity, p.195-196)

Remember, this is not someone who was a Christian. He has no compelling interest in these events, other than the fact that he was alive at this moment of history, when the apostles lived, and the gospel was being preached throughout the Roman Empire. He's just reporting what he saw. And he's not the only one. We have records of Roman officials describing the activity and beliefs of early Christians. We have philosophers referencing the teaching of Jesus and mentioning his death. Someone has said there are at least 10 different sources within 150 years of these events from people who not Christians but nevertheless confirm the events described in the Bible

In the book Case Christianity, author J. Warner Wallace calls this reluctant testimony. He was a homicide detective who became a Christian after examining the claims of the Bible. He compares this evidence to an experience he had as a police officer. He talks about investigating a murder, and when they arrived at the scene they interviewed everyone in the building. One gentleman told them he didn't know anything, he wasn't there when things went down, and didn't have anything to tell them. Well, they came to find out in the course of the investigation that he was there and had seen a lot more than he wanted to admit. And so they interviewed him a second time and he finally came clean. “Okay, okay, I was there, but I didn't do it. This is what I know.” He wasn't trying to help their investigation. He didn't have anything to gain from it, but nevertheless his reluctant testimony helped them solve the case.

History gives us reluctant testimony from people who were not believers and who had no reason to confirm details recorded in the NT. When we gather the facts, there is a mountain of historical evidence that tells us Jesus lived and died and his disciples gave their lives to proclaiming the resurrection. Any who claims Jesus never existed doesn't know what they're talking about. No serious scholar denies that Jesus of Nazareth walked the earth. They might not believe that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God, who rose from the dead. But they do not deny his existence.

## **Exhibit C: The Bible has been faithfully preserved through the biblical manuscripts.**

Go to Matthew 24:35 (NASB95). Jesus gave his disciples the assurance that his message and teaching would continue on forever. *"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away."*

That's a pretty amazing promise, because we know that nothing in this world stays the same. What were once great cities on the earth have been reduced to rubble. So how do we know that the words of the Bible will endure? How do we know that the verses we have today are the same as the original authors wrote thousands of years ago? We don't have the piece of parchment Paul used to write the book of Romans in his own handwriting. So how do we know that the message hasn't undergone a number of revisions over the centuries as copies were made? That's what the skeptics claim. Are they right? Let's examine the evidence. I think you will be amazed by how the almighty God has preserved his word.

The OT manuscripts were passed down through the generations by faithful scribes who copied the books of the Bible by hand. This was tedious work, but they took it seriously, understanding that these were the sacred Scriptures, and so they developed a system of strict rules to ensure accuracy. They counted the number of letters in each book. They marked the middle verse and middle letter in the Scriptures. Apparently the letter aleph occurs 42,377 times in entire OT. That's how particular they were. They knew those kinds of details. If the word count for the new copy didn't match the original, they started over. Can you imagine, getting to the end and realizing: "Oh, no. I'm off by five words... [rip]. Better get a new bottle of ink."

I worked as quality inspector at a factory one summer while I was in college. My job was to measure the parts coming off the line before they were loaded on trucks. There were very specific dimensions that were required for it to be a good part. If it were off by even a fraction of a millimeter, we weren't allowed to ship it out. When I inspected the parts, I would put a green sticker on the bin if measure up. If it didn't measure up, I would put a red sticker on the bin and send back to the line. It didn't happen very often, but there were times when the machine operators were not very happy with me because I told them the parts needed to be redone, but that was the procedure we were required to follow. The company didn't want to produce bad parts.

The OT scribes followed a similar process that ensured accuracy of God's Word. Skeptics have claimed that if we ever find a really old manuscripts of the OT, it would look very different from what we have today but as it turns out we had a chance to test that theory. You may have heard of the Dead Sea Scrolls. This was an ancient library that belonged to a religious community living in wilderness of Judea around 150 years before Christ. The community died out, a long time ago, and no one ever found the relics they left behind, until a Bedouin herdsman stumbled upon a cave with clay pots that contained ancient scrolls. Among those documents were books of the OT, including an entire copy of Isaiah. These manuscripts were 1,000 years older than any existing manuscript of the OT at the time. When the scholars compared it with the book of Isaiah in our Bible, guess they found? It was virtually identical. The only differences were matters of spelling and grammar that didn't change the meaning of the text in any way.

What about the NT? The evidence is overwhelming. We have more than 5,000 Greek manuscripts that contain either the entire NT or portions of it, many of which are very early, copied not long after the originals were written.<sup>v</sup> The manuscripts have been given names, and one of them is called Codex Sinaiticus, because it was discovered in a monastery on Mt. Sinai. It is oldest complete NT, and also contains half of the OT. It dates to around 350 AD. Another is manuscript is known as the Chester Beatty Papyrus, and it contains all of the letters of Paul. It dates back to 180 AD. These are early manuscripts, but there are others that even older. A fragment containing a section from the Gospel of John dates to about 125 AD, which means the copy was made 50-60 after the gospel was originally written.

How do these manuscripts compare to our NT? They are virtually identical. There are slight differences here and there in matters of spelling or grammar or the kinds of typos you are I would make if we were copying the entire NT by hand, but not a single doctrine or article of faith is affected.

If you compare the NT with other ancient documents, there is no comparison. One author explains

...the evidence is overwhelming. There are 5,366 manuscripts [of the NT] to compare and draw information from, and some of these date from the second or third centuries. To put that in perspective, there are only 643 copies of Homer's Iliad, and that is the most famous book of ancient Greece! No one doubts the text of Julius Caesar's [book] Gallic Wars, but we only have 10 copies of it and the earliest of those was made 1,000 years after it was written. To have such an abundance of copies for the New Testament from dates within 70 years of their writing is amazing.<sup>vi</sup>

## **Conclusion –**

I know I've given you a lot of information today. But then again, I feel like I had give a lot of information when I was applying for my passport. They wanted evidence that I am who I claim to be, and I gave it to them. And maybe you have been searching for evidence that the Bible is what it claims to be... the Word of God. I hope you have found some of it here today. We've just barely scratched the surface. If you are really interested in learning more, I



encourage you to dig deeper. There are so many good resources out there to help point us in the right direction.

When you hear the arguments of the skeptics, don't take their word for it. And don't just take my word for it. Put it to the test, and see that the Bible can stand up to every critique that has been leveled against it. We need to be ready to answer our friends and neighbors and family members who wonder why we believe God's Word. This a good place to start, but if you really want to know that the Bible is God's Word there is no better test than opening it and reading it for yourself, allowing the Lord to speak to your heart.

Proverbs 30:5. "Every word of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him."

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.ligonier.org/blog/fulfilled-prophecy-demonstrates-divine-inspiration-scripture/>

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.faithfacts.org/search-for-truth/maps/fulfilled-prophecy-as-evidence>

<sup>iii</sup> Powell, D. (2006). *Holman QuickSource Guide to Christian Apologetics* (p. 194). Nashville, TN: Holman Reference.

<sup>iv</sup> Wallace, J. Warner "Cold Case Christianity," p.195-196

<sup>v</sup> Powell, D. (2006). *Holman QuickSource Guide to Christian Apologetics* (p. 155). Nashville, TN: Holman Reference.

<sup>vi</sup> Enns, P. P. (1989). *The Moody handbook of theology* (pp. 174–175). Chicago, IL: Moody Press.