

## Lesson 122

# **We Can Trust the New Testament**

The Holy Spirit guided the disciples to record God's words.

# Overview

## Lesson Focus

The disciples were eyewitnesses of the things Jesus did. Jesus promised the disciples 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.

## Key Passages

John 14:25–26, 19:35, 20:31; 2 Peter 1:16

## Memory Verse

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

## Prepare to Share

### Scriptural Background

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

The New Testament is the history of Jesus Christ the Messiah and the founding of his church. It spans approximately 90 years, beginning shortly before Jesus' birth and ending with Christ's Revelation to John. But how do we know the New Testament is true?

First, the Holy Spirit empowered the apostles to recall, write, and interpret the life, words, and deeds of Jesus. Jesus said the Helper would come 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 and record special revelation through the Holy Spirit who would guide them into all truth (John 16:13).

Second, 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' majesty and heard the voice of God acknowledge the beloved Son with whom he was well pleased (2 Peter 1:16–18). The Apostle John also claimed to be an eyewitness: "This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true" (John 21:24).

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." 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 other Scriptures." A

similar confirmation is seen when Paul quoted from Deuteronomy 25:4 and Luke 10:7, indicating that both statements are from the Scriptures (1 Timothy 5:18). Paul considered Luke's writings to be on par with those of Moses!

The Holy Spirit directed these various writers 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 among local churches. The collection of writings was acknowledged 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 some disagreement about which writings 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).

## Historical/Apologetics Background

Although we do not have the original inspired manuscripts, or autographs (the documents penned by the authors), of the New Testament, we do have many documents that were copied from those originals. But if all we have today are copies of copies, wouldn't there be a few copying mistakes?

Yes, but having lots of copies is a good thing. We have so many copies of the New Testament writings that we can compare them 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 phrases got switched (e.g., Christ Jesus vs. Jesus Christ) or there are variant spellings (like honor and honour in English). Some areas are more difficult to deal with, but we have thousands of documents to help us understand what the original manuscripts 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.

Manuscripts were written on animal skins, papyrus, and various early forms of paper. That means that the originals would have deteriorated and the

manuscripts we have are in various states of decay, with only a few being complete. The printing press allowed copies to be made much more quickly and with fewer errors, but these are not technically considered manuscripts since they were not written by hand. There are over 5,800 partial or complete manuscripts in the original Greek language, around 10,000 in Latin, and 9,000 in various languages like Coptic, Armenian, and Syriac.

New finds regularly help us understand the history of the Bible we hold in our hands. In 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 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 is, the historicity of the Bible is obvious to anyone willing to fairly investigate it. 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 future events with perfect accuracy. The Bible claims to be the Word of God, and it demonstrates this claim by making knowledge possible. And we can trust it and the life-giving message of the gospel it contains.

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