



southwaltonchurchofchrist.com

South Walton Church of Christ in Destin Florida sponsors the following presentation by Evangelist John Morris who serves under the Eldership of the Murray Road Church of Christ of Lee's Summit, Missouri.

### Here is the first lesson in the series: **The Bible: Can It Be Trusted?** Part Four of Six

How is it that the Bible has persisted through time with such integrity? Compared with other ancient writings, the Bible has more manuscript evidence to support it than any 10 pieces of classical literature combined. We have more than 24, 000 partial and complete copies of the New Testament. In other words, down through the years manuscripts have been written, they have been transcribed and they've been gathered up and now they are available for our reading. Witnessing to us that the New Testament we read now is a reliable representation of the original. They're not a mystery, we can go, we can look at them, they're not locked up they're not hidden. And yet, yes, in some of these we have variations. Some will say; "But John, these manuscripts are not reliable; there are some, hundred, hundred fifty thousand variances." But that's a misleading number; 99% of those virtually hold no significance, and you say; "How could that be?"

This is how it can be; many of them are just a missing letter. You have the word "Christ" and perhaps the letter "h" is missing or perhaps the letter "i" is missing and yet it's clear what it means. Sometimes it's just the reversing of two words; instead of Christ Jesus, you have Jesus Christ. Sometimes it's just the absence of one or more insignificant words such as a Greek article which played a far lesser role than the article does in the English language. For more than 99% of the cases the original text of the Bible or the New Testament can be reconstructed to a practical certainty. John Lea, in his book "The Greatest Book In The World" writes this; "With perhaps a dozen or 20 exceptions, the text of every verse in the New Testament may be said to be so far settled by general consent of scholars that any dispute as to its readings must be related rather to the interpretation of the words than to any doubts respecting the words themselves."

But he goes on to compare it to Shakespeare for example, written far more recently; "In every one of Shakespeare's 37 plays there are probably 100 readings still in dispute, a large portion of which materially affects the meaning of the passages in which they occur." John Warwick Montgomery puts it this way; "To be skeptical of the resultant text of the New Testament books is to allow ALL of classical antiquity to slip into obscurity." In other words to say that the Bible is not a reliable representation of the original is to say that nothing we have today is. No documents of the ancient period are as well attested bibliographically as the New Testament. This is not HOOPLAH, this is not made up material, these are facts, these are the real thing. Norman Geisler, in an article entitled; "The New Testament Versus Other Ancient Books" points out; "That no other book is even a close second to the Bible on either the number or early dating of the copies. This is another interesting fact; For most ancient works the date between the original composition and the oldest copy we have is nearly a millennium, a thousand years, and yet with the New Testament, written 2000 years ago we have a fragment within 1 generation from its original composition.

We have whole books of the New Testament within 100 years from the time of their composition. We have the ENTIRE New Testament within 250 years. And even if we didn't have any manuscripts at all, we could read the writings of the church fathers and find that the whole New Testament could be reconstructed, all of it but eleven verses, from material within 150 to 200 years from the time of Christ. There is no other book in the world anywhere close to being as reliable as the Bible insofar as its carrying through time is concerned. The Jewish scribes, when they transcribed the Old Testament were very meticulous.

With their Massora they kept tabs on every letter, every syllable, every word, every paragraph, the scribes copied at A LETTER AT A TIME, and if a mistake was discovered in the scroll, it was thrown away or that portion of it was. Why was such pains-taking effort made on behalf of this book, when there are many other books that made the same claim? Why is it that the Bible has persevered and persisted through persecution when other books like it, or supposedly like it, did not?

In A.D. 303 the Roman Emperor Diocletian issued an edict to stop Christians from worshipping and to destroy their scriptures, the government put its money towards obliterating Christianity. And yet, Eusebius writing in the 4<sup>th</sup> century records that 25 years after Diocletian issued that edict, Constantine, the new Roman Emperor issued a new edict ordering that 50 copies of the scriptures be prepared at the government's expense. The very government that had been trying to destroy it was now upholding it and propagating it.

Voltaire, the famous French infidel, said in 1778 that in a hundred years from his time, Christianity would be swept from existence. 50 years after his death the Geneva Bible Society used his press and house to produce stacks of Bibles. Any country that has consistently fought against Christianity, fought against the Bible, has fallen. We saw it in Nazi Germany, we saw it in the USSR and we will no doubt see more of it, if God lets time go by. The Bible persists, it perseveres, other books like it, have not. Why the Bible? Perhaps the most compelling sort of evidence we have of the Bible's reliability is found in its prophesies however.

In Deuteronomy chapter 18 God told the Jews how they could know whether or not someone who claimed to be a prophet was, in fact, from God. The Jews were going to be coming in to their new "Promised Land", there were going to be plenty of people among the pagans claiming to have the word of God but God says; "Here's how you can know what's from Me and what's not", verse 21: "And if you say in your heart, 'how shall we know the word which the Lord has not spoken?'"

The answer is in verse 22: "When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him." God laid down a very simple rule; "If a man claims to be a prophet, listen to his prediction and see if it comes to pass. If it doesn't come to pass, it's not from Me" very simple.

This verse is very problematic for many of our religious friends. In the authoritative book for the Mormon Church, in "Doctrine & Covenants" section 84 verse 5 we read this prophecy by Joseph Smith in the 1830's, he said; "Verily this generation shall not at all pass away until a house be built unto the Lord" and that house was to be built in Independence, MO, he even marked off the piece of land. And yet that piece of land is still there being mown, it's marked, but there's no temple there and that generation passed long ago. Joseph Smith predicted the end of the world within 58 years of his lifetime and here we are now some 170 years since he made that original prophecy.

Pastor Russell, the one who began the Jehovah's Witnesses movement, predicted that the world would end in 1914, he died in 1916. The Watch-Tower Tract and Bible Society, that ruling body of the Jehovah's Witnesses, said that the world would end in 1975 and they had record conversions in 1974; it's 2008 at the time of this recording.

These individuals have claimed to be from God but according to God's word they are not from God. They have made prophecies and they have not come to pass. When we go to the Bible however we find prophecies that have come to pass precisely as the Lord said they would and in great detail.

**End of Lesson One Part Four**

