

***Thy Word Is a Lamp Unto My Feet: The Bible for Today***  
***The Bible Is Reliable***

Lesson #4 for April 28, 2007

Scripture: Matthews 5:17,18; 24:35; John 10:34,35; Romans 8:34; 1 Corinthians 15:6,12-19; Galatians 3:22; 2 Timothy 3:16; James 2:23; 1 Peter 1:25.

1. If God wants us as individual Christians to become more like him, does he take personal responsibility for revealing himself to us? In what form? Is it important that we have a clear picture of his character and his government?
2. If we do not have accurate information about God, are we truly free? Can we make reliable decisions about him and about our relationship with him?
3. In your mind what are the biggest challenges that the Bible faces today? Our main question for this week: Can we trust ***the words*** of scripture? Are ***the words*** an accurate presentation of what God originally gave to the prophets, apostles, and Bible writers?
4. History is littered with the writings of Bible critics, skeptics, atheists, and agnostics who have raised questions and believed that they would be able to destroy the Bible and its reliability. Where are they today? The Bible is thousands of years old. How can it survive even modern attempts to destroy its credibility? What evidence do we have for trusting the manuscripts that are available today?
5. What is the Devil's attitude toward the Bible? What would he like to do with this evidence (the Bible)? What approaches has Satan used to try to destroy God's book? Despite his many attempts, the Bible is now circulated in more languages and there are more copies of the Bible than any other book in history! So if you were the Devil, what would you do at this point to try to discredit the truths and the message of scripture?
6. The scriptures themselves say in many places that God's word will survive forever. (Matthew 5:17,18; 24:35; John 10: 34,35; 1 Peter 1:25) If Satan had succeeded in destroying the Bible completely so that no copies were available today, God's Word would have been disproved. Obviously, the opposite has taken place.
7. Christians have often quoted scripture as proof of the fact that the Bible itself is reliable. **Because a book says that it can be trusted, does that make it trustworthy?** How many other documents do you know that make similar claims? We must turn to other evidence to support such claims if we want to be rational.
8. So why do you trust the Bible? Why do you believe that ***the words*** of the Bible are a reliable guide for your life? What kinds of evidence do we have available today? What are your biggest questions and/or doubts about the Bible, its history, and stories?
9. **Are there some parts of scripture that you have more questions about than others?** Would you feel more comfortable among scientific friends if Genesis 1-11, the story of Jonah, and a few other miraculous stories in scripture were left out? Modern evolutionists and biblical critics would like to discredit Genesis 1-11 as being myth. Would your Bible be just as reliable a book without those "prehistory" chapters?
10. The Bible writers were persecuted, tortured, banished, thrown into pots of boiling oil, even crucified upside down, and killed for their insistence on the truthfulness of what they had written. **Would any human being go through that kind of experience in defense of something he knew was not really true? Would anyone die for a known lie?**
11. We know that the Bible has been copied by hand many times; it has been translated into many languages; and at this time in history, we do not have even one single copy that is original. What questions does this raise in your mind?
12. I'll be honest with you... when I first found out that there are no surviving originals of the New Testament, I was really skeptical. I thought, if all we

have are copies of copies of copies, how can I have any confidence that the New Testament we have today bears any resemblance whatsoever to what was originally written?—Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1998), pp. 58, 59.

How do you feel about Mr. Strobel's thoughts? Does it bother you that we have nothing but distant copies of any of the biblical writings?

13. The real question is this: **Does God take ultimate responsibility for making sure that his will, his character, and his government are correctly represented in his Word (the Bible) as we know it today?** Ellen White has stated:

God has faithful witnesses, to whom He committed the truth, and who preserved the Word of God. The manuscripts of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures have been preserved through the ages by a miracle of God.—Ellen G. White, letter 32, 1899.

14. There are many devout Christians today who believe that the Bible is “verbally inspired.” By this they mean that each word is exactly the way God intended for it to be, perhaps, in some cases, even dictated by God. At first glance this may seem to be a very humble and honest approach to God's Word. But, if you should open the scriptures and point out to those who believe in verbal inspiration some apparent contradictions in scripture, they will resolve them simply by saying that these contradictions have arisen during copying and translation. What they, in effect, are saying is that *they know what the original said* and what God intended for us to learn. These people, therefore, are actually placing their own judgment as to what is truth above that of God's Word itself. Many people down through history have placed their own judgment in a position superior to scripture and have, sooner or later, made a shipwreck of faith.
15. If you were to face an honest inquirer about the Bible and about your faith in Christianity, what would you offer as the most convincing reasons and evidence for the reliability of scripture?
16. One of the most convincing evidences about the reliability of scripture is its consistency and interdependence from beginning to end. Events prophesied in the Old Testament came true in the New. Last week we considered some of those prophecies. Look again at a few examples:

Isaiah 53:12

Luke 22:37; Mark 15:28

Isaiah 60 1:1,2; 58:6

Luke 4:18,19

Psalms 41:9

John 13:18; Matthew 26:23; Mark 14:18-20; Luke 22:21 and compare John 17:12 (see also the recently “rediscovered” Gospel of Judas)

Psalms 22:18

John 19:24; Matthew 27:35; Mark 15:24; Luke 23:34

Psalms 14:3

Romans 3:10-12; Galatians 3:22

Does comparing these Old Testament prophecies with their fulfillments in the New Testament increase your faith? Why?

17. Up until 60 years ago, the oldest copies of the Old Testament available to us were copies made about 900 A.D. That means that there was a period of at least 1300 years between the last prophet of the Old Testament and the oldest document that was available. Then the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered and slowly pieced together. The entire book of Isaiah was found in a single scroll. Most of the books of 1&2 Samuel were found. Over time major portions of the Old Testament were reconstructed so that today you can purchase a translation directly from the Dead Sea Scrolls with most of the Old Testament present. The Dead Sea Scrolls are dated from 150 B.C. down through 70 A.D.; and the words, for all practical purposes, are identical with the copies we had from a thousand years later. **What does that teach us about the care with which these manuscripts were copied?**
18. **While there are still a number of words that we are not sure what the ancient meaning**

**was, we can state with certainty that the scriptures, as we have them from the Old Testament, are the words that the original authors wrote. No other ancient document has been copied so many times and so reliably as the Bible.**

19. But what about other ancient types of “scriptures”? What about the *Koran* or the *Veda*? Certainly those documents are held in high respect by their followers. Are they also a reliable basis for faith in the one true God? Muslim believers are so certain that the Arabic words written by Mohammed are inspired that they will tell you that no translation into any other language is acceptable. It must be read in the original Arabic!
20. **Should true Christians insist on reading the Bible only in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek?**
21. Another question that has challenged Christians and Jews down through the centuries is the question: **Do we have the right books?** Do we know which books are inspired by God and which are not? There are many other books that have claimed to be inspired but yet have been rejected. **Do we just accept the decision of others in the past or should we study these books and decide for ourselves?**
22. The Hebrew Old Testament is divided into three sections: the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. "The Law" or "the Law of Moses": Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. "The Prophets": Joshua, Judges, 1&2 Samuel, 1&2 Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi. "The Writings" or the "Hagiographa (Holy Writings)" or "the Psalms": Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs (Song of Solomon), Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, 1&2 Chronicles.
23. Do the New Testament writers and Jesus give us any clues about which portions of the Old Testament writings they regarded as inspired? Look at some of Jesus' comments about the books and writings of the Old Testament. John 5:39,40; 10:34 (Psalm 82:6); Luke 24:27,44. Compare Acts 24:14 and Matthew 5:17,18. Sometimes the entire scriptures were referred to simply as "The Law and the Prophets" and even occasionally just as "The Law."
24. Read Revelation 22:18,19. John was writing about the book of Revelation which he was about to complete. Do these words apply to all of scripture or only to his book? **Virtually all scholars agree that these words were originally intended to include only the book of Revelation. Would their message also be true about the rest of scripture?**
25. We have already discussed the fact that the Old Testament scriptures, as preserved by the Jewish people, were copied very carefully. Over a period of more than a thousand years, there were virtually no changes found in the original text. The New Testament scriptures have quite a different history. We have literally hundreds of thousands of copies of various length or portions of the New Testament.  
  
According to scholars Norman Geisler and William Nix: "The New Testament, then, has not only survived in more manuscripts than any other book from antiquity, but it has survived in a purer form than any other great book—a form that is 99.5% pure."—Strobel, p. 65.
26. In addition to these thousands of copies of portions of the New Testament, there are many additional manuscripts from the early Church fathers between the years of A.D. 90 and 160 that were originally prepared as Bible lessons to be read in the apostolic churches. They show evidence that the early Church leaders were very familiar with the New Testament as we know it and have quoted almost the entire New Testament in those lessons. This provides additional evidence for our study of the New Testament documents.
27. Do you believe that this amount of evidence is adequate to confirm your trust in the words of scripture as we have them today? If not, what would it take? If one cannot trust this amount of evidence, what document from any source can be trusted? Do you agree with the biblical passages such as Isaiah 40:6-8; Matthew 24:35; John 10:34, 35; 1 Peter 1:25 which clearly

state that God's word shall last forever?

28. Think over the whole of scripture. Which portions of scripture have been challenged the most seriously by critics? 1) the story of creation and the flood, 2) the book of Daniel with its long time prophecies, 3) the miraculous aspects of the Bible such as creation, the flood, the virgin birth, the resurrection, the miracles of Jesus, etc. **Isn't it amazing that these are exactly the portions of scripture which set forth the proofs of divinity!** As we have noted before, Isaiah 40-55 makes it very clear that the primary evidences that distinguish a true God from all the pretenders are 1) his ability to create, 2) his ability to predict the future, 3) his ability to perform supernatural acts!
29. **Let us look now briefly at the resurrection.** How important is the resurrection to your understanding of Christianity and the message of scripture? Read Romans 8:34 and 1 Corinthians 15:12-19. Paul felt very certain that the resurrection was a core part of the gospel message. Without it, the gospel would lose its impact. **If Jesus were still in the grave, it would be evidence that he is not God, that he has little or no power to do anything for us in our day, and his life is little more than "a good example" for us to follow.**
30. Read Matthew 27:51-28:20; Mark 16:9-14; Luke 24:35-53; John 20:19-31. While these different gospel accounts are not exactly the same, do you find any serious contradictions? Do they all unequivocally testify to the resurrection of Jesus from the dead? Is such a resurrection from the dead after three days completely preposterous, as many claim? If so, and the whole thing is a made-up story, why were the disciples still preaching it and writing about it scores of years later and even willing to die for the truthfulness of those accounts?
31. **Christianity—in contrast to most other major religions in the world—is a religion based firmly in historical fact. The historical details recorded in all of scripture—insofar as they can be verified—are truthful. Christianity, then, is a "scientific," verifiable religion!**
32. Concerning the resurrection, the disciples and the later apostles not only wrote as if they believed the story but spoke of it so convincingly that thousands, perhaps millions, of others were willing to die for it as well! Remember that one of the Gospels was written by a Greek physician who had no firsthand experience with the actual events themselves! What do you think convinced that scientist of the truthfulness of the account?
33. Read 1 Corinthians 15:6. Paul, in effect, was challenging those who questioned the truthfulness of the resurrection story to go and talk to some of the eyewitnesses! Those are not the words of a person who had doubts about the resurrection or knew that the account was false!
34. How do we relate and how should we relate to people who have serious questions about the reliability of scripture? Or people who disagree with us in the interpretation of scripture?
35. In our day, what can we do to strengthen our faith? Do you believe we have adequate evidence for the reliability of scripture? Have you investigated this issue adequately to your own satisfaction? What further questions do you have?
36. If the scriptures are reliable and accurately represent God's message for us even in our day, are we taking it seriously in our own lives?
37. Let us admit that God will never, and does not intend to, remove every possibility for doubt. God is not in the business of compelling people to believe. But he certainly provides adequate evidence on which to base our faith. (SC 105.2; Ed 169; 2MCP 672.1; 1SM 27.3; 5T 69.0)

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