

Matthew 7:24-27

I think we all realize the importance of a good foundation. We know that to be true in construction. If you are to have a strong sturdy building, then it must be built on a solid foundation. The same is true for a highway. This is why the road building crews spend so much time getting the roadbed ready for the road surface. We know this to be true in education. Our teachers realize that education begins with teaching the basics as a foundation and then you build from there. If that foundation is not there, then the child will not excell very well.

Jesus understood the importance of a solid foundation on which to build our lives. *(Matthew 7:24) Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: (25) And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. (26) And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: (27) And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.* Your life will never really amount to much or have much eternal value unless it's built on a righteous foundation identified for us in this text. . That solid foundation is THE WORD OF GOD. But how did we get the WORD that we have today?

To begin the Bible was written over a span of 1500 years, by 40 writers. Unlike other religious writings, the Bible reads as a factual news account of real events, places, people, and dialogue. Historians and archaeologists have repeatedly confirmed its authenticity. Using the writers' own writing styles and personalities, God shows us who he is and what it's like to know him.

The Bible not only inspires us, it explains life and God to us. It answers many questions about life. It shows us how to live with purpose and compassion. It tells us how to relate to others.

Archaeologists have consistently discovered the names of government officials, kings, cities, and festivals mentioned in the Bible — sometimes when historians didn't think such people or places existed. For example, the Gospel of John tells of Jesus healing a cripple next to the Pool of Bethesda. The text even describes the five porticoes (walkways) leading to the pool. Scholars didn't think the

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pool existed, until archaeologists found it forty feet below ground, complete with the five porticoes.

Many of the ancient locations mentioned by Luke in the Book of Acts have been identified through archaeology. In all, Luke names thirty-two countries, fifty-four cities and nine islands without an error.

Archaeology has also refuted many ill-founded theories about the Bible. For example, a theory still taught in some colleges today asserts that Moses could not have written the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible), because writing had not been invented in his day. Then archaeologists discovered the Black Stele. "It had wedge-shaped characters on it and contained important laws, historical inscriptions, or religious and political decrees from ancient civilizations. This writing was pre-Abraham (2,000 B.C.) and preceded Moses' writings by at least three centuries.

Some people have the idea that the Bible has been translated "so many times" that it has become corrupted through stages of translating. That would probably be true if the translations were being made from other translations. But translations are actually made directly from original Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic source texts based on thousands of ancient manuscripts. The accuracy of today's Old Testament was confirmed in 1947 when archaeologists found "The Dead Sea Scrolls" along today's West Bank in Israel. "The Dead Sea Scrolls" contained Old Testament scripture dating 1,000 years older than any manuscripts we had. When comparing the manuscripts at hand with these, from 1,000 years earlier, we find agreement 99.5% of the time. And the .5% differences are minor spelling variances and sentence structure that doesn't change the meaning of the sentence.

When it comes to the New Testament, written between 50-100 A.D, there are more than 5,000 copies. All are within 50-225 years of their original writing.

Further, when it came to Scripture, scribes (monks) were meticulous in their copying of original manuscripts. They checked and rechecked their work, to make sure it perfectly matched. What the New Testament writers originally wrote is preserved better than any other ancient manuscript. We can be more certain of what we read about Jesus' life and words, than we are certain of the writings of Caesar, Plato, Aristotle and Homer.

Four of the writers of the New Testament each wrote their own biography on the life of Jesus. These are called the four gospels, the first four books of the New

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Testament. Two of the gospel biographies were written by the apostles Matthew and John, men who knew Jesus personally and traveled with him for over three years. The other two books were written by Mark and Luke, close associates of the apostles. These writers had direct access to the facts they were recording. At the time of their writing, there were still people alive who had heard Jesus speak, watched him heal people and perform miracles. So the early church readily accepted the four gospels because they agreed with what was already common knowledge about Jesus' life.

In the early years after Jesus' death and resurrection there was no apparent need for written biographies about Jesus. Those living in the Jerusalem region were witnesses of Jesus and well aware of his ministry. However, when news of Jesus spread beyond Jerusalem, and the eyewitnesses were no longer readily accessible, there was a need for written accounts to educate others about Jesus' life and ministry. The early church accepted the New Testament books almost as soon as they were written. It's already been mentioned that the writers were friends of Jesus or his immediate followers, men to whom Jesus had entrusted the leadership of the early church. The reports in the New Testament books lined up with what thousands of eyewitnesses had seen for themselves.

When other books were written hundreds of years later, it wasn't difficult for the church to spot them as forgeries. For example, the Gospel of Judas was written by the Gnostic sect, around 130-170 A.D., long after Judas' death. The Gospel of Thomas, written around 140 A.D., is another example of a counterfeit writing erroneously bearing an apostles' name. These and other Gnostic gospels conflicted with the known teachings of Jesus and the Old Testament, and often contained historical and geographical errors.^{7ff}

In A.D. 367, Athanasius, (a·thuh·**nay**·shuhs) the bishop of Alexandria, formally listed the 27 New Testament books (the same list that we have today). Soon after, Jerome and Augustine circulated this same list. These lists, however, were not necessary for the majority of Christians. By and large the whole church had recognized and used the same list of books since the first century after Christ.

Not only do we have well-preserved copies of the original manuscripts, we also have testimony from both Jewish and Roman historians. The gospels report that Jesus of Nazareth performed many miracles, was executed by the Romans, and rose

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from the dead. Numerous ancient historians back the Bible's account of the life of Jesus and his followers:

Cornelius Tacitus (A.D. 55-120), an historian of first-century Rome, is considered one of the most accurate historians of the ancient world. An excerpt from Tacitus tells us that the Roman emperor Nero *"inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class... called Christians. ...Christus [Christ], from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus...."*

Flavius Josephus, a Jewish historian (A.D. 38-100), wrote about Jesus. From Josephus, *"we learn that Jesus was a wise man who did surprising feats, taught many, won over followers from among Jews and Greeks, was believed to be the Messiah, was accused by the Jewish leaders, was condemned to be crucified by Pilate, and was considered to be resurrected."*

Even the Jewish *Talmud*, certainly not biased toward Jesus, concurs about the major events of his life. From the *Talmud*, *"we learn that Jesus was conceived out of wedlock, gathered disciples, made blasphemous claims about himself, and worked miracles, but these miracles are attributed to sorcery and not to God."* This is remarkable information considering that most ancient historians focused on political and military leaders, not on obscure rabbis from distant provinces of the Roman Empire. Yet ancient historians (Jews, Greeks and Romans) confirm the major events that are presented in the New Testament, even though they were not believers themselves.

In 2 Peter 1:20-21 we read, ***Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. (21) For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.*** In other words, according to the Bible, its stories and messages were not dreamed up by human minds but rather received from God by the men who wrote them. The text itself tells us that while men actually penned the Scriptures - men such as Moses, David, and Paul - the words and ideas they wrote were given to them directly by God at different times through history and thereby recorded.

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It wasn't until A.D. 400 that all 66 books were translated into Latin and combined into one volume. Commonly known as The Vulgate, Jerome is credited as having translated both Old and New Testaments from the original Hebrew and Greek texts. From then on, the Bible continued to be translated into various languages and printed for everyday people to read.