

Can The Bible Be Trusted?



Is It Even Worth Reading?

Sometimes we take it for granted that our entire society was founded by people who read scripture and many who considered it authoritative. Today things have certainly changed. Many of our friends and family don't read scripture at all, and sadly many Christians fail to hear from God through His Word. The question comes down to this: is this thing we call the Bible really just a good book full of good advice? Is it a guide book that is just another tool we can use to live a good life? Or is it God's book, intended to tell us something about how to live for sure, but more than that, to tell us about the nature of our creator and His plan to bring us to Himself? The world has a lot to say about the nature of the book we call the Bible:

Samuel Butler

"The Bible may be the truth, but it is not the whole truth and nothing but the truth."

Mark Twain

"The Bible has noble poetry in it; and some clever fables; and some blood-drenched history; and a wealth of obscenity; and upwards of a thousand lies"

Thomas Paine

"Whenever we read the obscene stories, the voluptuous debaucheries, the cruel and torturous executions, the unrelenting vindictiveness with which more than half the bible is filled, it would seem more consistent that we called it the word of a demon than the Word of God. It is a history of wickedness that has served to corrupt and brutalize mankind."

Elizabeth Cady Stanton

"The Bible and the Church have been the greatest stumbling blocks in the way of women's emancipation."



The Common Doubts of Non-believers

Much of the non-believing world looks at the stories in the Bible and have serious problems based on just a few areas of concern. Some would say that the Bible seems to be similar to other ancient mythologies that we have already discarded as nonsense. Others would say that the Bible is wholly unscientific and cannot be supported by science at all. Many would express concern over what they see as apparent contradictions within the Word of God. And finally, some actually argue that an ancient document, translated over time, has lost its reliability and usefulness. None of these things are true, and if we will just take the time to understand the facts, the truth will give us great confidence in the Word of God.



The Lie

So here is the lie that the world tries to push on us: The Bible is unreliable and untrustworthy, and it cannot be the Word of God. But if the Bible can be demonstrated to be accurate and trustworthy, we are going to have to accept it as the Word of God. The Bible is not just a bunch of clever stories. Let's read 2 Peter 1:16 from The Message paraphrase of scripture:



2 Peter 1:16

"We weren't, you know, just wishing on a star when we laid the facts out before you regarding the powerful return of our Master, Jesus Christ. We were there for the preview! We saw it with our own eyes"

God wants you to understand that He knows that some people believe that the Bible is nothing more than a collection of fairy tales, but He knows better and He has given you a brain so that you can know better too... God wants us to know that the Bible is not just the work of simple humans, and it is not just a useless bunch of stories:



2 Peter 1:16-21

When we told you about the power and the return of our Lord Jesus Christ, we were not telling clever stories that someone had made up. But with our own eyes we saw his true greatness. God, our great and wonderful Father, truly honored him by saying, 'This is my own dear Son, and I am pleased with him.' We were there with Jesus on the holy mountain and heard this voice speak from heaven. All of this makes us even more certain that what the prophets said is true. So you should pay close attention to their message, as you would to a lamp shining in some dark place. You must keep on paying attention until daylight comes and the morning star rises in your hearts. But you need to realize that no one alone can understand any of the prophecies in the Scriptures. The prophets did not think these things up on their own, but they were guided by the Spirit of God.



2 Timothy 3:14-17

Keep on being faithful to what you were taught and to what you believed. After all, you know who taught you these things. Since childhood, you have known the Holy Scriptures that are able to make you wise enough to have faith in Christ Jesus and be saved. Everything in the Scriptures is God's Word. All of it is useful for teaching and helping people and for correcting them and showing them how to live. The Scriptures train God's servants to do all kinds of good deeds.



Bible Is Not Mythology

While God certainly wants us to see the value and reliability of scripture, the world around us continues to put up a series of objections to justify their denial of God's Word. The first is simply that the Bible appears to be just another

source of mythology. They say this because they claim that many of the stories in the Bible resemble Greek Mythology. They also argue that some of the stories in the Bible are similar to other ancient stories and are simply a reflection of ancient thought and myth. And finally, the world still often resists the concept of the miraculous, and point to the presence of miracles to demonstrate the Bible as a collection of fables. But while people might argue that some of the stories have minor resemblances to other mythology (the notion that a God would come back to life, for example) we simply need to show them that very little of what is common to Greek mythology is present in our Bible. You do not see the presence of strange half human creatures (like minotaurs, etc.) or other weird beings. In fact, it is very hard to argue that the plethora of strange gods and creatures has any Christian or Jewish parallel.



The Flood

Yes, there are a few specific stories that are shared by other cultures and the story of a global flood is one such example. This is often used to demonstrate that the Bible is full of shared mythology, but just the opposite is actually true. It should strike us as amazing that so many other cultures share an ancient story of a global flood! In all the world histories there are over 200 stories of a flood. And they come from all over the globe.

From places that are near the homeland of the Jews, like India, Turkey and Egypt, to places in the far east like China and Korea, to places separated and isolated, like Australia and Hawaii, to places on the other side of the planet, like Canada, Alaska, South and Central America. All have flood stories. These stories are very similar and their similarity tells us something very powerful. In 88% of the stories, there is a single favored family, chosen for salvation. In 66% of these the family is warned in advance. In 95% of the stories they are warned of a Global flood, and in 70% of the accounts, they use a boat to escape destruction. In 67% of the stories, there is an effort to save animals on the boat, and in 57% of the accounts the family and boat end up on the top of a mountain. So what accounts for the similarities? The distance between these cultures and the language barriers make it nearly impossible to believe that this is the result of shared mythology. It is far more likely, instead, to be the result of a single truth told by a single set of story teller. Eight men and women who actually got off the boat and survived the flood. The family of Noah.



The Presence of Miracles

Many simply have problems with the presence of miracles in the Bible. But their disbelief in miracles is not what is keeping them from believing in God. It is just the opposite. Look at what these people are saying. They start off by saying that they cannot believe in the supernatural. And they maintain that miracles belong in the realm of the supernatural. Since there are miracles in the Bible, they would argue that the Bible is unbelievable. And for that reason, they argue that the Bible's claims that God exists cannot be true. But this kind of logic is circular. These people are starting off with the belief that there is no supernatural and that nothing supernatural is possible. Well God reigns in the supernatural so what they are really saying is that they do not believe in God to begin with. So it shouldn't surprise us that

they also end up with this position, after all they started with it!

But if there is a God, and this God is responsible for the creation of the world, then could not this same God also be capable of doing far less in our lives. Could he not bend his own rules and laws of nature to accomplish the impossible. And why don't we see these miracles today?



Bible is Not Unscientific

Now there are others who argue that they cannot believe the Bible because they think it is unscientific. They argue that the truth claims of scripture just don't make sense anymore, and that science has disproved much of what is written in God's Word.

But is that really true? Part of the problem is that we sometimes think that the Bible is supposed to be some kind of science manual, designed to explain everything about how we got here. Maybe that comes from hearing that the Bible has all of the answers to life's tough questions. But what kinds of questions? If I am looking for information on how to configure my computer, I don't turn to the Bible. If I'm looking for information about how to tune up my car or motorcycle, I don't turn to my Bible. If I'm looking for advice about how to plant my back yard, I don't turn to my Bible. But some people who want to discredit the Bible, would argue that all scientific answers should be found in the pages of scripture. Scripture is designed as a manual of sorts, but not a science manual. The Bible has been given to us by God so that we can understand who He is, and who He has designed us to be. It is a spiritual manual, and it does explain something of our origin only because our origin (how we got here) has something to do with God's plan for our lives. But don't try to find detailed answers to scientific questions here. That's not what God has given us in the Bible. He certainly could have, but that is not what's important to God. He cares more about our spiritual life than anything else.



The Best Ancient Story

But you should take comfort in the fact that of all ancient creation stories, none withstands the scrutiny of science as does the creation story of Genesis chapter one. Think about it for a second. There are many ancient creation stories and they have virtually all been abandoned as mythology. The world being barfed out of the mouth of a fish, or conceived from two Gods, or breathed from the nostrils of a dragon. You don't see many modern scientists that hold on to ancient beliefs from Greek or other Mythology. But you do see a world filled with men and women who are both Christians and rational scientists. They are not two mutually exclusive realms. In fact, there is an entire field known as creation science, comprised of some of the most influential thinkers of our time.



The Bible is Not Full of Contradictions

Many of your friends are also going to tell you that the Bible is unreliable as an ancient text. Often they are just parroting what they hear other atheists say. They try to argue that anything this ancient has to be corrupted over

time. That's also an argument that Joseph Smith made when concocting Mormonism. But you need to know that the Bible is the most reliable and treasured of all ancient texts, preserved with passion and attention to detail.

Now plenty of people want to argue that the Bible has been corrupted over time, but will blindly accept other ancient histories without question. No one questions the writing of ancient poets or historians or wonders if they have been altered over time, yet these writers have far less to support their accuracy than the Bible.



You Trust the Other Stuff!

Let's take a look at everything that we know about Julius Caesar for example. His personal history is in your textbooks not as theory but as historical fact! Yet, what is known about Caesar was written in approximately 50BC and the first appearance of these documents in the archeological record is not until 900AD! That means that nearly 1000 years went by before we have the first existing document. How do we know that the truth was not altered in that 1000 years? After all we only have 10 copies of this document from that period of time, nearly 1000 years after the first writing. Remember that the fewer the existing documents, the less able we are to verify what we have!

Everyone's heard of Plato, right? Well writings related to Plato occur at approximately 400BC, but the first recovered text is not until 900AD, approximately 1300 years later, and there are only 7 copies in existence. His life story and history are even harder to verify than that of Julius Caesar!

An awful lot of what is known about ancient history is attributed to this man who wrote around 450BC, but the earliest copy of the writings are not traced back beyond 900AD and there are only 8 of these. Again, there is far too much time between the time of writing and first known document to be all that comfortable with the reliability of what we have! It's not much different with the documentation we have that tells us about the life and thoughts of Aristotle. He lived around 350BC and the first document (5 copies) appears around 1100AD. Why should we accept any of this as accurate history?



The Historical Support for the Bible is Better!

But when it comes to the New Testament, we come to realize quickly that we have a huge amount of documentation that first appears very close to the time of its original writing!

1 *A.T. Robertson, the author of the most comprehensive grammar of New Testament Greek, wrote, 'There are some 8,000 manuscripts of the Latin Vulgate and at least 1,000 for the other early versions.'*

2 *Add over 4,000 [Bruce Metzger, professor emeritus of Princeton Theological Seminary and prolific author and Bible scholar, says we now have close to 5,000.] Greek manuscripts and we have 13,000 manuscript copies of portions of the New Testament. Besides all this, much of the New*

Testament can be reproduced from the quotations of the early Christian writers.'

3 **Sir Frederic G. Kenyon**, who was the director and principal librarian of the British Museum and second to none in authority for issuing statements about ancient manuscripts, says, '... besides number, the manuscripts of the New Testament differ from those of the classical authors, and this time the difference is clear gain. In no other case is the interval of time between the composition of the book and the date of the earliest extant manuscripts so short as in that of the New Testament. The books of the New Testament were written in the latter part of the first century; the earliest extant manuscripts (trifling scraps excepted) are of the fourth century—say from 250 to 300 years later. Kenyon continues in *The Bible and Archaeology*: 'The interval then between the dates of original composition and the earliest extant evidence becomes so small as to be in fact negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed. Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established.'



They Were Careful!

And keep in mind that scripture is written like no other ancient document. The Jews and Christians who wrote these documents knew what they were. They were the inspired Word of God. The original scribes and authors meticulously wrote every word while being monitored by additional scribes or the author himself. Every word was considered critical and from God Himself, so every effort was made to write the perfect documents which accurately reflected the heart of God. So the original documents were very heavily scrutinized and constructed.

But is it possible that the documents could have been altered over time and changed in such a way even by unintended error? This may be true of other ancient documents, but remember that scripture was treated differently by the people who were convicted that it was God's Word. The ancient Jews had a very strict system of rules when it came to the transmission and copying of scripture. Here is just a sample:

A synagogue roll must be written on the skins of clean animals, prepared for the particular use of the synagogue by a Jew. These must be fastened together with strings taken from clean animals. Every skin must contain a certain number of columns, equal throughout the entire codex. The length of each column must not extend over less than 48 or more than 60 lines; and the breadth must consist of thirty letters. The whole copy must be first-lined; and if three words be written without a line, it is worthless. The ink should be black, neither red, green, nor any other color, and be prepared according to a definite recipe. An authentic copy must be the exemplar, from which the transcriber ought not in the least deviate. No word or letter, not even a yod, must be written from memory, the scribe not having looked at the codex before him ... Between every consonant the space of a hair or thread must intervene; between every new parashah, or section, the breadth of nine consonants; between every book, three lines. The

fifth book of Moses must terminate exactly with a line; but the rest need not do so. Besides this, the copyist must sit in full Jewish dress, wash his whole body, not begin to write the name of God with a pen newly dipped in ink, and should a king address him while writing that name he must take no notice of him.'

And if you ever wondered if there was a way to test this intricate system, there is. There was a community that lived near the Dead Sea right around the time of Jesus. This group of people were a sect of Judaism and they collected scripture. Now remember that as a small community, we don't know where they got the scripture from, or how many times they themselves copied it, and they may not have been as critical and exacting in their transmission as we have just seen was true for mainline Jews. But they did happen to find a copy of Isaiah Chapter 53 in the scrolls of the caves of Qumran.

'Of the 166 words in Isaiah 53, there are only seventeen letters in question. Ten of these letters are simply a matter of spelling, which does not affect the sense. Four more letters are minor stylistic changes, such as conjunctions. The remaining three letters comprise the word 'light,' which is added in verse 11, and does not affect the meaning greatly. Furthermore, this word is supported by the LXX and IQ Is. Thus, in one chapter of 166 words, there is only one word (three letters) in question after a thousand years of transmission-and this word does not significantly change the meaning of the passage.' (Geisler, Norman L. and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, Chicago, Moody Press, 1968)

That is an amazing testimony to the accuracy of a truly ancient document, and it means that you can have confidence that God has delivered to us the truth of his Word, just as he intended us to receive it! And if that isn't enough, you can also be confident that science and archeology continue to reveal that Biblical History is true and accurate. That can't be said for Mormonism. In fact Mormons have never discovered anything to support their scripture. Much has been discovered that support the writings of our patriarch in scripture:



The Ebla Archive

The discovery of the Ebla archive in northern Syria in the 1970s has shown the Biblical writings concerning the Patriarchs to be viable. Documents written on clay tablets from around 2300 B.C. demonstrate that personal and place names in the Patriarchal accounts are genuine.

The name 'Canaan' was in use in Ebla, a name critics once said was not used at that time and was used incorrectly in the early chapters of the Bible. The word 'tehom' ('the deep') in Genesis 1:2 was said to be a late word demonstrating the late writing of the creation story. 'Tehom' was part of the vocabulary at Ebla, in use some 800 years before Moses. Ancient customs reflected in the stories of the Patriarchs have also been found in clay tablets from Nuzi and Mari. The Hittites were once thought to be a Biblical legend, until

their capital and records were discovered at Bogazkoy, Turkey. Many thought the Biblical references to Solomon's wealth were greatly exaggerated. Recovered records from the past show that wealth in antiquity was concentrated with the king and Solomon's prosperity was entirely feasible. It was once claimed there was no Assyrian king named Sargon as recorded in Isaiah 20:1, because this name was not known in any other record. Then, Sargon's palace was discovered in Khorsabad, Iraq. The very event mentioned in Isaiah 20, his capture of Ashdod, was recorded on the palace walls. What is more, fragments of a stela memorializing the victory were found at Ashdod itself. Another king who was in doubt was Belshazzar, king of Babylon, named in Daniel 5. The last king of Babylon was Nabonidus according to recorded history. Tablets were found showing that Belshazzar was Nabonidus' son who served as coregent in Babylon. Thus, Belshazzar could offer to make Daniel 'third highest ruler in the kingdom' (Dan. 5:16) for reading the handwriting on the wall, the highest available position. Here we see the 'eye-witness' nature of the Biblical record, as is so often brought out by the discoveries of archaeology.



The Reality

In spite of what the world may be trying to tell us, there is a truth about scripture. The Bible can be trusted as history and truth. It is the most historically verifiable and reliable book in existence. But do Christians always live like they believe it is true?



Proverbs 30:5-6

'Every word of God is true. He guards those who come to him for safety. Do not add to his words, or he will correct you and prove you are a liar.'

OK, follow this train of thought: (1) the Bible can be demonstrated to be reliable, (2) so we can believe what we read about Jesus, (3) so we can see that Jesus is God, (4) Jesus said that the Bible is more than reliable, it is the Word of God, (5) since it comes from God, the Bible is infallible! If all of this is true, why doesn't the world turn to this book for direction? It is the one source of infallible truth in our world and it is here for a reason!

All of scripture was given to us for a reason. It's not so we can have a better life, although we certainly will if we follow the words and teaching of God. It's not so we can get rich or be smarter than others. It's not so we can win arguments or think we're more important than the world around us. Scripture is given to us for a better reason. It is here to point us to God and to point us to the God-Man, Jesus Christ. It is a book about REDEMPTION. Going home. Being reunited with God. Becoming His friend once again.



Live Above the Lies

I want you to have confidence in the Word of God, and I want you to know His Plan for your life. So here's the challenge for all of us as we come to grips with God's Word. Trust the Bible enough to examine God's plan to bring

you home. Figure out who Jesus really is...

By the way, you can read a lot more about the nature of the Bible on our 'Power of the Book' page, located [HERE!](#)