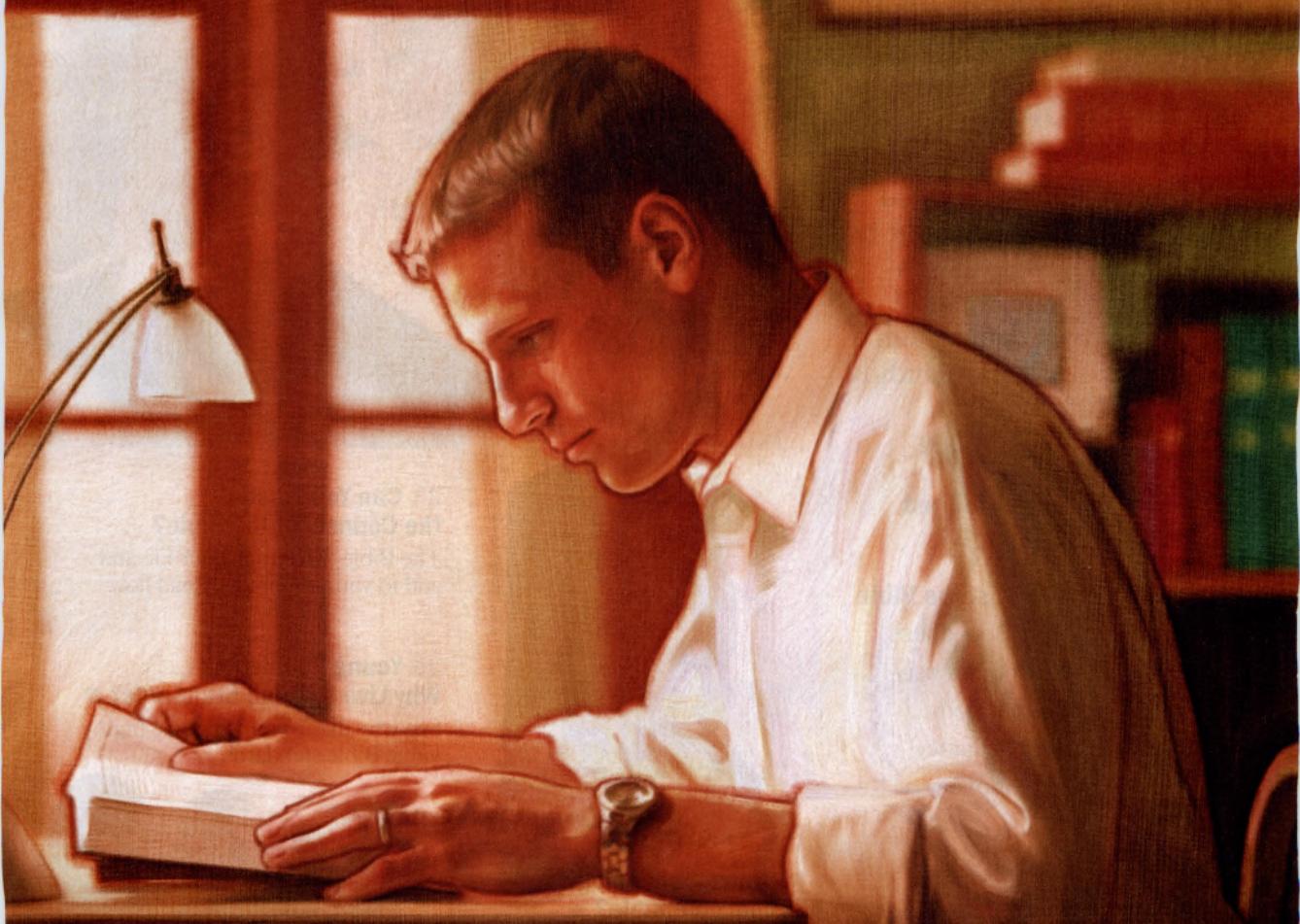


Awake!

NOVEMBER 2007



SPECIAL ISSUE

Can You Trust the Bible?

Awake!

AVERAGE PRINTING 34,267,000
PUBLISHED IN 80 LANGUAGES

SPECIAL ISSUE

Can You Trust the Bible?

The Bible is by far the most widely distributed book in the world. But how can we be sure that its message is from God? Consider evidence from a variety of fields, including history and science.

3 To Trust or Not to Trust

4 A Unique Book

5 Reasons to Trust the Bible

1. Historical Soundness
2. Candor and Honesty
3. Internal Harmony
4. Scientific Accuracy
5. Fulfilled Prophecy

10 The Bible's Viewpoint Who Authored the Bible?

If men wrote the Bible, how can it be called God's Word?

12 How the Bible Came to Us ▼

See how the Bible became mankind's best-known book.



15 Does Archaeology Support the Bible? ▲

Read about amazing artifacts that corroborate the Bible record.

23 Can You Trust the Counsel of the Bible?

The Bible can enrich your life and add to your happiness. Read how.

26 Young People Ask . . . Why Live by Bible Standards? ▼

See why many young people highly value Bible standards.



29 An Enduring Expression of God's Love

In what ways is the Bible much more than a good book?

19 What Is the Bible About?

The Bible has a theme. Do you know what it is?

22 Myth or Fact?

Five myths about the Bible are debunked.

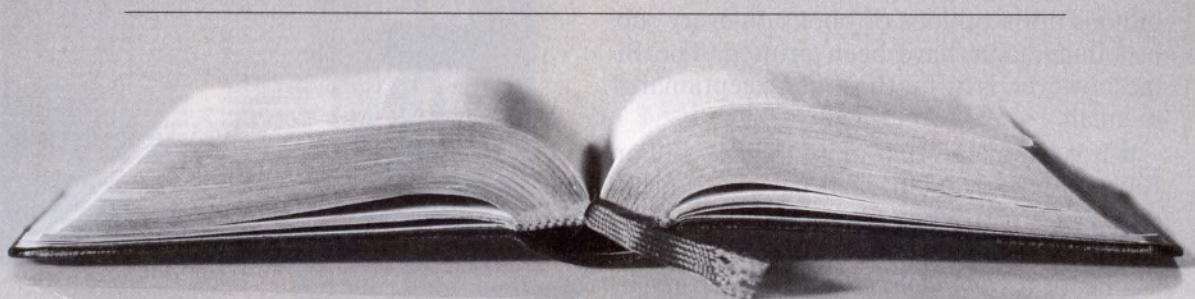
30 Watching the World

31 How Would You Answer?



To Trust or Not to Trust

"Trust not to rotten planks," wrote English dramatist William Shakespeare. Indeed, before stepping onto the wooden planks of a boat, you would want to be sure that the wood was not rotten.



THE words of Shakespeare echo the sentiments of wise King Solomon of ancient Israel, who some 3,000 years ago wrote: "A fool will believe anything; smart people watch their step." (*Proverbs 14:15, Today's English Version*) Yes, only a fool would go through life blindly accepting everything he hears, basing his decisions and actions on frivolous advice or baseless teachings. Misplacing our trust—like stepping onto rotten planks—can lead to disaster. You may wonder, 'Is there any source of guidance that is worthy of our trust?'

Millions of people the world over place their full trust in an ancient book called the Holy Bible. They look to this book to direct their steps. They base their decisions on its advice and pattern their actions after its teachings. Are such individuals stepping, as it were, onto rotten planks? The answer to that question depends

greatly on the answer to another question, Are there sound reasons to trust the Bible? This special issue of *Awake!* examines the evidence.

The purpose of this issue of *Awake!* is not to impose religious beliefs or views on you. Rather, it is intended simply to present the compelling evidence that has convinced millions that the Bible is worthy of their trust. After reading the articles that follow, you can decide for yourself whether the Bible merits your trust.

This subject deserves more than your passing interest. After all, if the Bible is, indeed, a trustworthy source of guidance from our Creator, then you owe it to yourself and your loved ones to consider what the Bible has to say.

First, though, let us mention some outstanding facts about the Bible. At the very least, it is truly a unique book.

A Unique Book

"The Bible is the most widely distributed book in history."—*The World Book Encyclopedia*.

OVER 550 years ago, the German inventor Johannes Gutenberg began printing with movable type. The first major book to come off his press was a Bible.* Since then, billions upon billions of books on every subject imaginable have been printed. The Bible, however, is by far the most exceptional of them all.

- It is estimated that more than 4.7 billion Bibles (in whole or in part) have been printed. That is more than five times the number of copies of the next most widely distributed publication, *Quotations From Chairman Mao*.
- More than 50 million copies of the Bible or portions of it were distributed recently in one year alone. "The Bible is the best-selling book of the year, every year," says a report in *The New Yorker* magazine.
- In whole or in part, the Bible has been translated into more than 2,400 languages. At least some of the Bible is available in the languages spoken by over 90 percent of the human family.
- About half the Bible writers finished their writings before the birth of both Confucius, the renowned Chinese sage, and Siddhartha Gautama, the founder of Buddhism.

* Gutenberg's Bible, also called the 42-line Bible, was a Latin translation and was completed in about 1455.

Awake!®

THIS JOURNAL IS PUBLISHED for the enlightenment of the entire family. It shows how to cope with today's problems. It reports the news, tells about people in many lands, examines religion and science. But it does more. It probes beneath the surface and points to the real meaning behind current events, yet it always stays politically neutral and does not exalt one race above another. Most important, this magazine builds confidence in the Creator's promise of a peaceful and secure new world that is about to replace the present wicked, lawless system of things.



**Gutenberg's
press and a page from
his Bible**

■ The Bible has had a profound influence on the arts, including some of the world's greatest paintings, music, and literature.

■ The Bible has endured bans by governments, burnings by religious opposers, and attacks by critics. No other book in history has faced greater opposition—and survived.

The above-mentioned facts are outstanding, are they not? Of course, impressive details and statistics alone do not prove that the Bible is trustworthy. Next, we will examine **five reasons** why millions of people are convinced that the Bible is worthy of trust.

Awake! (ISSN 0005-237X) is published monthly by Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.; M. H. Larson, President; G. F. Simonis, Secretary-Treasurer; 25 Columbia Heights, Brooklyn, NY 11201-2483. Periodicals Postage Paid at Brooklyn, N.Y., and at additional mailing offices. **Changes of address** should reach us 30 days before your moving date. Give us your old and new address (if possible, your old address label). **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to *Awake!*, c/o Watchtower, Wallkill, NY 12589. © 2007 Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania. All rights reserved. Printed in U.S.A.

1. Historical Soundness

It would be hard to trust a book that is found to contain inaccuracies. Imagine reading a modern history book that dated the second world war to the 1800's or that called the president of the United States a king. Would such inaccuracies not raise questions in your mind about the overall reliability of the book?

NO ONE has ever successfully challenged the historical accuracy of the Bible. It refers to real people and real events.

People. Bible critics questioned the existence of Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea who handed Jesus over to be impaled. (Matthew 27:1-26) Evidence that Pilate was once ruler of Judea is etched on a stone [1] discovered at the Mediterranean seaport city of Caesarea in 1961.

Before 1993, there was no proof outside the Bible to support the historicity of David, the brave young shepherd who later became king of Israel. That year, however, archaeologists uncovered in northern Israel a basalt stone [2], dated to the ninth century B.C.E., that experts say bears the words "House of David" and "king of Israel."

Events. Until recently, many scholars doubted the accuracy of the Bible's account of the nation of Edom battling with Israel in the



Languages: Afrikaans, Albanian, Amharic, Arabic, Bulgarian, Cebuano, Chicewa, Chinese, Chinese (Simplified), Croatian, Czech,[#] Danish,⁺ Dutch,⁺ English,^{+○} Estonian, Finnish,^{+○} French,^{#+} Georgian, German,^{#+} Greek, Hebrew, Hiligaynon, Hungarian, Iloko, Indonesian, Italian,^{#+} Japanese,^{#+} Korean,^{#+} Lithuanian, Macedonian, Malagasy, Malayalam, Myanmar, Norwegian,⁺ Polish,^{#+} Portuguese,^{#+○} Romanian, Russian,^{#+○} Serbian, Sesotho, Sinhala, Slovak, Slovenian, Spanish,^{#+○} Swahili, Swedish,⁺ Tagalog, Tamil, Thai, Tsonga, Tswana, Turkish, Ukrainian, Xhosa, Zulu

[#] Audio cassettes also available.

⁺ CD also available.

[○] MP3 CD-ROM also available.

time of David. (2 Samuel 8:13, 14) Edom, they argued, was a simple pastoral society at the time and did not become sufficiently organized or have the might to threaten Israel until much later. However, recent excavations indicate that "Edom was a complex society centuries earlier [than previously thought], as reflected in the Bible," states an article in the journal *Biblical Archaeology Review*.

Proper titles. There were many rulers on the world stage during the 16 centuries that the Bible was being written. When the Bible refers to a ruler, it *always* uses the proper title. For example, it correctly refers to Herod Antipas as "district ruler" and Gallio as "proconsul." (Luke 3:1; Acts 18:12) Ezra 5:6 refers to Tattenai, the governor of the Persian province "beyond the River," the Euphrates River. A coin produced in the fourth century B.C.E. contains a similar description, identifying the Persian governor Mazaeus as ruler of the province "Beyond the River."

Accuracy in seemingly minor details is no small matter. If we can trust the Bible writers in even small details, should that not bolster our confidence in the other things they wrote?

Publication of *Awake!* is part of a worldwide Bible educational work supported by voluntary donations. Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the modern-language *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures—With References*.

Would you welcome more information? Write Jehovah's Witnesses at the appropriate address: **America, United States of:** Wallkill, NY 12589. **Australia:** Box 280, Ingleburn, NSW 1890. **Britain:** The Ridgeway, London NW7 1RN. **Canada:** Box 4100, Halton Hills (Georgetown), Ontario L7G 4Y4. **Ghana:** P. O. Box GP 760, Accra. **Jamaica:** P. O. Box 103, Old Harbour, St. Catherine. **New Zealand:** PO Box 75142, Manurewa, Manukau 2243. **Nigeria:** P.M.B. 1090, Benin City 300001, Edo State. **South Africa:** Private Bag X2067, Krugersdorp, 1740. **Zambia:** Box 33459, Lusaka 10101. **Zimbabwe:** Private Bag WG-5001, Westgate.

2. Candor and Honesty

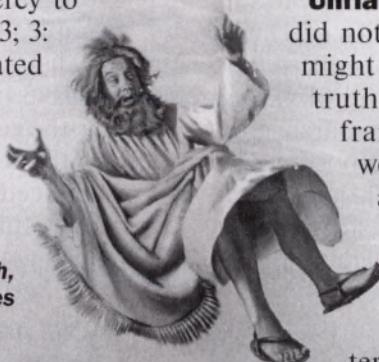
Honesty provides the foundation for trust. A man who has a reputation for honesty may win your trust, but if he lies to you even once, he may lose it.

THE Bible writers were honest men who wrote with openness of heart. Their candor gives their writing the clear ring of truth.

Mistakes and shortcomings. The Bible writers openly admitted their own failures and weaknesses. Moses told of a mistake he made that cost him dearly. (Numbers 20:7-13) Asaph explained that for a time he found himself envying the prosperous life of the wicked. (Psalm 73:1-14) Jonah told of his disobedience and the bad attitude he initially had when God showed mercy to repentant sinners. (Jonah 1:1-3; 3:10; 4:1-3) Matthew freely related that he had abandoned Jesus on the night of Jesus' arrest.

—Matthew 26:56.

Bible writers, such as Jonah, recorded their own mistakes



The writers of the Hebrew Scriptures laid bare the repeated grumbling and rebellion of their own people. (2 Chronicles 36:15, 16) The writers spared no one, not even the rulers of their nation. (Ezekiel 34:1-10) With similar candor, the letters of the apostles reported the serious problems experienced by individual Christians, including responsible ones, as well as by some congregations in the first century C.E.—1 Corinthians 1:10-13; 2 Timothy 2:16-18; 4:10.

Unflattering truth. The Bible writers did not try to gloss over what some might have viewed as embarrassing truth. The first-century Christians frankly acknowledged that they were not admired by the world around them but were looked upon as foolish and ignoble. (1 Corinthians 1:26-29) The writers noted that Jesus' apostles were seen as “unlettered and ordinary.”—Acts 4:13.

The Gospel writers did not color the facts in order to cast Jesus in a more favorable light. Rather, they reported honestly that he was born under humble circumstances into a working-class family, that he did not study at the prestigious schools of his day, and that the majority of his listeners rejected his message.—Matthew 27:25; Luke 2:4-7; John 7:15.

Clearly, the Bible gives ample evidence that it is the product of honest writers. Does their honesty win your trust?

3. Internal Harmony

Imagine asking 40 men from varied backgrounds to write a book, each writing a section. The writers live in a number of lands and do not all know one another. Some do not know what the others have written. Would you expect a book thus produced to be harmonious?

THE Bible is such a book.* Written under even more unusual conditions than those described above, its internal harmony is nothing less than profound.

Unique circumstances. The Bible was written over a span of some 1,600 years, from 1513 B.C.E. to about 98 C.E. Many of the approximately 40 writers thus lived centuries apart. Their occupations were varied. Some were fishermen, others were shepherds or kings, and one was a physician.

A harmonious message. The Bible penmen developed one central theme: the vindication of God's right to rule mankind and the fulfillment of his purpose by means of his heavenly Kingdom, a world government. That theme is introduced in Genesis, expanded on in the books that follow, and brought to a climax in Revelation.—See “What Is the Bible About?” on page 19.

Agreement on details. The Bible writers agreed on even minute details, but often this harmony was clearly unintentional. Note an example. The Bible writer John tells us that when a large crowd came to hear Jesus, Jesus specifically asked Philip where to buy some loaves to feed the people. (John 6:1-5) In a parallel account, Luke says that this took place near the city of Bethsaida. Earlier in his book, John happened to have said that Philip was from Bethsaida. (Luke 9:10; John 1:44) So Jesus naturally addressed his question to one of the men who had lived nearby. The details

Was Jesus' garment purple or scarlet?



agree—but with an obvious lack of intent to make them harmonious.*

Reasonable differences. There are some differences between certain accounts, but should we not expect this? Suppose a group of people witnessed a crime. If each one mentioned the same details using the same words, would you not suspect collusion? Reasonably, the testimony of each would vary somewhat according to his particular angle of view. So it was with the Bible writers.

Consider an example. Did Jesus wear a *purple* garment on the day of his death, as Mark and John report? (Mark 15:17; John 19:2) Or was it *scarlet*, as Matthew says? (Matthew 27:28) Really, both can be correct. Purple has components of red in it. Depending on the observer's angle of view, light reflection and background could have subdued certain hues, giving different casts to the garment.[#]

The harmony of the Bible writers, including their unintentional consistency, further stamps their writings as trustworthy.

* For more examples of such harmony, see pages 16-17 of the brochure *A Book for All People*, published by Jehovah's Witnesses.

[#] For further information, see chapter 7, “Does the Bible Contradict Itself?,” of the book *The Bible—God's Word or Man's?* published by Jehovah's Witnesses.

* The Bible is a collection of 66 books, or subdivisions, starting with Genesis and ending with Revelation.



4. Scientific Accuracy

Science has made great strides in modern times. As a result, old theories have given way to new ones. What was once accepted as fact may now be seen as myth. Science textbooks often need revision.

THE Bible is not a science textbook. Yet, when it comes to scientific matters, the Bible is noteworthy not only for what it says but also for what it does not say.

Free of unscientific views. Many mistaken beliefs gained wide acceptance in ancient times. Views about the earth ranged from the idea that it was flat to the notion that tangible substances or objects held it aloft. Long before science learned about the spread and prevention of disease, physicians employed some practices that were ineffective at best, lethal at worst. But not once in its more than 1,100 chapters does the Bible endorse *any* unscientific views or harmful practices.

Scientifically sound statements. Some 3,500 years ago, the Bible stated that the earth is hanging “upon nothing.” (Job 26:7) In the eighth century B.C.E., Isaiah clearly referred to “the circle [or, sphere] of the earth.” (Isaiah 40:22) A spherical earth held in empty space without any visible or physical means of support—does not that description sound remarkably modern?

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

- Death—Is It Really the End?
- Why Care for Earth’s Environment?
- How Can I Avoid Pornography?



*Far ahead of its time,
the Bible correctly stated
that the earth is circular and
hangs “upon nothing”*

Written about 1500 B.C.E., the Mosaic Law (found in the first five books of the Bible) contained sound laws regarding quarantining of the sick, treatment of dead bodies, and disposal of waste.—Leviticus 13:1-5; Numbers 19:1-13; Deuteronomy 23:13, 14.

Partly as a result of turning powerful telescopes toward the heavens, scientists have concluded that the universe had a sudden “birth.” Not all scientists like the implications of this explanation. One professor noted: “A universe that began seems to demand a first cause; for who could imagine such an effect without a sufficient cause?” Yet, long before telescopes, the very first verse of the Bible plainly stated: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”—Genesis 1:1.

Even though it is an ancient book and touches on many subjects, the Bible contains no scientific inaccuracies. Does not such a book merit, at the very least, our consideration?*

* For more examples of the Bible’s scientific accuracy, see pages 18-21 of the brochure *A Book for All People*, published by Jehovah’s Witnesses.

5. Fulfilled Prophecy

Imagine a weather forecaster who has a long record of being right—every time. If he predicted rain, would you carry an umbrella?

THE Bible is filled with predictions, or prophecies.* Its record, as documented by history, is clear. Bible prophecy is always right.

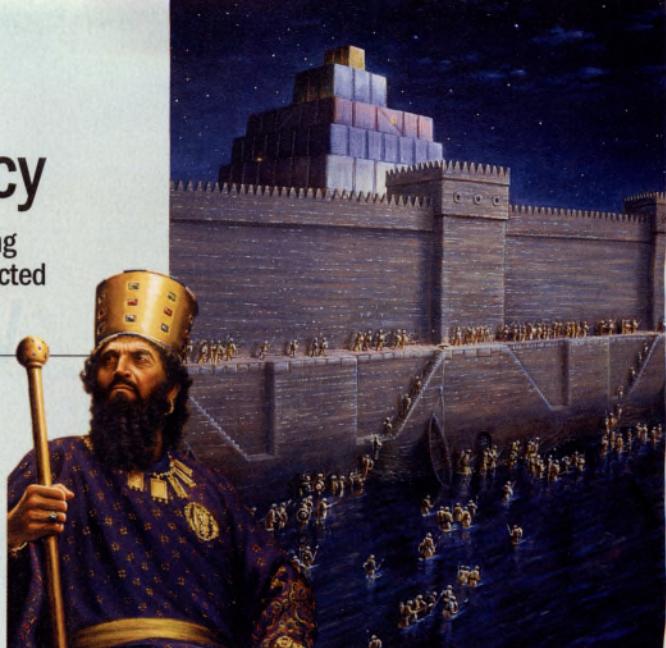
Distinguishing features. Bible prophecies are often specific and have been fulfilled down to the smallest of details. They usually involve matters of great importance and predict the opposite of what those living at the time of the writing might have been expecting.

An outstanding example. Strategically built astride the Euphrates River, ancient Babylon has been called “the political, religious, and cultural centre of the ancient Orient.” About 732 B.C.E., the prophet Isaiah penned an ominous prophecy—Babylon would fall. Isaiah provided specifics: A leader named “Cyrus” would be the conqueror, the protective waters of the Euphrates would “dry up,” and the city’s gates would “not be shut.” (Isaiah 44:27–45:3) Some 200 years later, on October 5, 539 B.C.E., the prophecy was fulfilled in all its details. Greek historian Herodotus (fifth century B.C.E.) confirmed the manner of Babylon’s fall.^{**}

A bold detail. Isaiah made a further startling prediction regarding Babylon: “She will never be inhabited.” (Isaiah 13:19, 20) To predict permanent desolation for a sprawling city occupying a strategic location was bold indeed. You would normally expect that such

* Weather forecasts are likelihoods. Bible prophecy is inspired by God, who can maneuver events if he chooses to do so.

** For more details regarding the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy, see pages 27–29 of the brochure *A Book for All People*, published by Jehovah’s Witnesses.



The Bible accurately foretold that a leader named Cyrus would conquer mighty Babylon

a city would be rebuilt if ruined. Although Babylon lingered on for a while after its conquest, Isaiah’s words eventually came true. Today the site of ancient Babylon “is flat, hot, deserted and dusty,” reports *Smithsonian* magazine.

It is awesome to contemplate the magnitude of Isaiah’s prophecy. What he foretold would be the equivalent of predicting the exact manner in which a modern city, such as New York or London, would be destroyed 200 years from now and then emphatically stating that it *would never again be inhabited*. Of course, most remarkable is the fact that Isaiah’s prophecy came true!*

In this series of articles, we have considered some of the evidence that has convinced millions of people that the Bible is trustworthy. They therefore look to it as a reliable guide to direct their steps. Why not learn more about the Bible so that you can decide for yourself whether you too can trust it?

* For more examples of Bible prophecies and the historical facts documenting their fulfillment, see pages 117–33 of the book *The Bible—God’s Word or Man’s?* published by Jehovah’s Witnesses.

Who Authored the Bible?

THE Bible is frank about who penned its contents. Different parts of this book begin with such phrases as “the words of Nehemiah,” “the vision of Isaiah,” and “the word of Jehovah that occurred to Joel.” (Nehemiah 1:1; Isaiah 1:1; Joel 1:1) Certain histories are identified as the work of Gad, Nathan, or Samuel. (1 Chronicles 29:29) The superscriptions of several psalms identify their composers.—Psalms 79, 88, 89, 90, 103, and 127.

Because humans were used to write the Bible, skeptics say that it is simply the product of human wisdom, like any other book. But is that opinion soundly based?

Forty Writers, One Author

Most Bible writers acknowledged that they wrote in the name of Jehovah, the one true God, and that they were guided by him or by an angelic representative. (Zechariah 1:7, 9) Prophets who wrote the Hebrew Scriptures proclaimed more than 300 times: “This is what Jehovah has said.” (Amos 1:3; Micah 2:3; Nahum 1:12) Many of their writings open with phrases such as “the word of Jehovah that occurred to Hosea.” (Hosea 1:1; Jonah 1:1) Concerning God’s prophets, the apostle Peter stated: “Men spoke from God as they were borne along by holy spirit.”—2 Peter 1:21.

The Bible, then, is a composite but unified book written by many men who acknowledged that the one behind their writings was God. To put it another way, God used human secretaries to pen his thoughts. How did he do this?

Inspired of God

“All Scripture is inspired of God,” explained the apostle Paul. (2 Timothy 3:16) The Greek word rendered “inspired of God” literally means “God-breathed.” That is, God

used an invisible force to influence the minds of human writers, transmitting his message to them. In the case of the Ten Commandments, however, Jehovah himself inscribed the words on stone tablets. (Exodus 31:18) Sometimes God dictated his message directly to human servants. Says Exodus 34:27: "Jehovah went on to say to Moses: 'Write down for yourself these words . . .'"

On other occasions, God caused men to see visions of what he wanted them to record. Thus, Ezekiel said: "I began to see visions of God." (Ezekiel 1:1) Likewise, "Daniel himself beheld a dream and visions of his head upon his bed. At that time he wrote down the dream itself." (Daniel 7:1) The last book of the Bible, Revelation, was transmitted to the apostle John in a similar way. John wrote: "By inspiration I came to be in the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a strong voice like that of a trumpet, saying: 'What you see write in a scroll.'"—Revelation 1:10, 11.

The Human Touch

Divine inspiration did not take away a writer's individuality. In fact, personal effort was required to pen God's message. The writer of the Bible book of Ecclesiastes, for instance, stated that he "sought to find the delightful words and the writing of correct words of truth." (Ecclesiastes 12:10) To compile his historical record, Ezra consulted at least 14 sources, such as "the account of the affairs of the days of King David" and "the Book of the Kings of Judah and of Israel." (1 Chronicles 27:24; 2 Chronicles 16:11) The Gospel writer Luke "traced all things from the start with accuracy, to write them in logical order."—Luke 1:3.

Some Bible books reveal facets of the writer's personality. For example, Matthew Levi,

a tax collector prior to becoming one of Jesus' disciples, paid special attention to numbers. He is the only Gospel writer to record that the price of Jesus' betrayal was "thirty silver pieces." (Matthew 27:3; Mark 2:14) Luke, a physician, accurately recorded medical details. For instance, when describing the condition of some of those whom Jesus healed, he used expressions such as "high fever" and "full of leprosy." (Luke 4:38; 5:12; Colossians 4:14) So Jehovah often allowed writers to express themselves in their own words and style; yet, at the same time, he guided their minds so that the text was accurate and conveyed his message.—Proverbs 16:9.

The End Product

Is it not amazing that some 40 men, writing in a number of lands over a span of 1,600 years, produced a book that is completely harmonious in every respect and that contains a beautiful, consistent theme? (See "What Is the Bible About?" page 19.) This would be impossible if they were not all guided by one Author.

Was Jehovah obliged to use men to pen his Word? No. But his doing so was a manifestation of divine wisdom. Indeed, one of the reasons for the Bible's universal appeal is that its writers convincingly express the full range of human emotions—in King David's case, even the guilt of a repentant sinner who pleaded for God's mercy.—Psalm 51:2-4, 13, 17, superscription.

Although Jehovah used human writers, we can have the same confidence in their work as did the early Christians, who accepted the Holy Scriptures "not as the word of men, but, just as it truthfully is, as the word of God."—1 Thessalonians 2:13.

HAVE YOU WONDERED?

- Who is the Author of "all Scripture"?—2 Timothy 3:16.
- What methods has Jehovah God used to transmit his thoughts?—Exodus 31:18; 34:27; Ezekiel 1:1; Daniel 7:1.
- How are the personality and interests of inspired penmen reflected in what they wrote?
—Matthew 27:3; Luke 4:38.

How the Bible Came to Us

That the Bible has survived untarnished down to our day is nothing less than miraculous. Its writing was completed over 1,900 years ago. It was recorded on perishable materials—paper made of papyrus reeds and parchment made of animal skin—and the original writing was in languages that few people speak today. Also, powerful men, from emperors to religious leaders, tried desperately to eradicate the Bible.



HOW did this remarkable work survive the test of time to become mankind's best-known book? Consider just two factors.

Multiple Copies Preserve the Texts

The guardians of the earliest Bible texts, the Israelites, carefully preserved the original scrolls and made numerous copies of them. Israel's kings, for instance, were told to write "a copy of this law from that which is in the charge of the priests, the Levites."—Deuteronomy 17:18.

Many Israelites loved to read the Scriptures, recognizing them to be God's Word. Thus, the copying of the text was done with extreme care by highly trained scribes. One God-fearing scribe named Ezra is referred to as "a skilled copyist in the law of Moses, which Jehovah the God of Israel had given." (Ezra 7:6) The Masoretes, who copied the Hebrew Scriptures, or "Old Testament," between the sixth and tenth centuries C.E., even counted the letters in the text to avoid errors. Such meticulous copying helped to ensure both the accuracy of the text and the survival of the Bible itself despite desperate and persistent attempts by enemies to destroy it.

For example, in 168 B.C.E., Syrian ruler Antiochus IV attempted to destroy all the copies of the Hebrew Scriptures he could find throughout Palestine. A Jewish history notes: "Any scrolls of the law which they found they tore up and burnt." *The Jewish*

Encyclopedia says: "The officers charged with carrying out these commands did so with great rigor . . . The possession of a sacred book . . . was punished with death." But copies of the Scriptures survived both among Jews in Palestine and those living in other lands.

Soon after the writers of the Christian Greek Scriptures, or "New Testament," finished their work, copies of their inspired letters, prophecies, and historical accounts proliferated. For instance, John wrote his Gospel in or near Ephesus. Yet, a fragment of that Gospel, part of a copy that experts say was made less than 50 years after he wrote his account, was found hundreds of miles away in Egypt. That discovery indicated that Christians in distant lands had copies of what were then recently inspired texts.

The wide distribution of God's Word also contributed to its survival centuries after the time of Christ. For example, as dawn broke on the morning of February 23 in the year 303 C.E., Roman Emperor Diocletian is said to have watched his soldiers smash down the doors of a church and burn copies of the Scriptures. Diocletian thought he could eliminate Christianity by destroying its sacred writings. The next day, he decreed that throughout the Roman Empire, all copies of the Bible be publicly burned. Copies survived, however, and were reproduced. In fact, large sections of two copies of the Bible in Greek that were probably made not long

◀ Masoretic manuscripts

**A fragment containing Luke 12:7,
“... have no fear; you are worth
more than many sparrows”**

after Diocletian's persecution survive to this day. One is in Rome; the other, in the British Library in London, England.

Although no original Bible manuscripts have yet been found, thousands of handwritten copies of the whole Bible or portions of it have survived to our day. Some of them are very old. Did the message contained in the original texts change as it was copied? Scholar W. H. Green stated concerning the Hebrew Scriptures: “It may be safely said that no other work of antiquity has been so accurately transmitted.” Concerning the Christian Greek Scriptures, a leading authority on Bible manuscripts, Sir Frederic Kenyon, wrote: “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.” He also stated: “It cannot be too strongly asserted that in substance the text of the Bible is certain. . . . This can be said of no other ancient book in the world.”

Bible Translation

A second major factor that has helped the Bible to become mankind's best-known book is its availability in many languages. This fact harmonizes with God's purpose that people

of all nations and tongues come to know and worship him “with spirit and truth.”—John 4:23, 24; Micah 4:2.

The first known translation of the Hebrew Scriptures was the Septuagint version in Greek. It was prepared for Greek-speaking Jews living outside Palestine and was completed about two centuries before Jesus' earthly ministry. The whole Bible, including the Christian Greek Scriptures, was translated into many languages within a few centuries of its completion. But later, kings and even priests who should have done all in their power to get the Bible into the hands of the people did the very opposite. They tried to keep their flocks in spiritual darkness by not allowing God's Word to be translated into common languages.

In defiance of Church and State, courageous men risked their lives to translate the Bible into the language of the people. For example, in 1530, Englishman William Tyndale, educated at Oxford, produced an edition of the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures. Despite much opposition, he became the first person to translate the Bible from Hebrew directly into English. Tyndale was also the first English translator to use the name Jehovah. Spanish Bible scholar Casiodoro de Reina was constantly in danger of death from Catholic persecutors as he worked on one early Spanish translation of the Bible. He traveled to England, Germany, France, Holland, and Switzerland as he worked to complete his translation.*

Today the Bible continues to be translated into more and more languages, and millions of copies are being published. Its survival to become mankind's best-known book demonstrates the truth of the apostle Peter's inspired statement: “Grass becomes withered, and the flower falls off, but the saying of Jehovah endures forever.”—1 Peter 1:24, 25.

* Reina's version was published in 1569 and was revised by Cipriano de Valera in 1602.

WHICH TRANSLATION SHOULD I READ?

Many languages have numerous Bible translations. Some translations use difficult, archaic language. Others are free, paraphrased translations that aim for easy reading rather than accuracy. Still others are literal, almost word-for-word translations.

The English edition of the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*, published by Jehovah's Witnesses, was prepared directly from the original languages by an anonymous committee. This version, in turn, has been the primary text used for translations into about 60 other languages. Translators for those languages did, however, make extensive comparisons with the original-language text. The *New World Translation* aims for a literal rendering of the original-language text whenever such a rendering would not hide its meaning. The translators seek to make the Bible as understandable to readers today as the original text was to readers in Bible times.

Some linguists have examined modern Bible translations—including the *New World Translation*—for examples of inaccuracy and bias. One such scholar is Jason David BeDuhn, associate professor of religious studies at Northern Arizona University in the United States. In 2003 he published a 200-page study of nine of “the Bibles most widely in use in the English-speaking world.”* His study

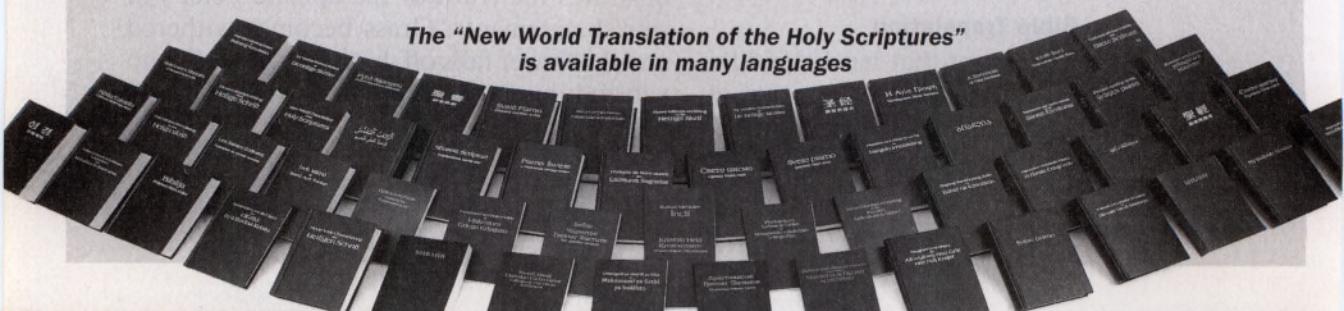
examined several passages of Scripture that are controversial, for that is where “bias is most likely to interfere with translation.” For each passage, he compared the Greek text with the renderings of each English translation, and he looked for biased attempts to change the meaning. What is his assessment?

BeDuhn points out that the general public and many Bible scholars assume that the differences in the *New World Translation* (NW) are due to religious bias on the part of its translators. However, he states: “Most of the differences are due to the greater accuracy of the NW as a literal, conservative translation.” While BeDuhn disagrees with certain renderings of the *New World Translation*, he says that this version “emerges as the most accurate of the translations compared.” He calls it a “remarkably good” translation.

Dr. Benjamin Kedar, a Hebrew scholar in Israel, made a similar comment concerning the *New World Translation*. In 1989 he said: “This work reflects an honest endeavor to achieve an understanding of the text that is as accurate as possible. . . . I have never discovered in the *New World Translation* any biased intent to read something into the text that it does not contain.”

Ask yourself: ‘What is my goal in reading the Bible? Do I want easy reading with less attention to accuracy? Or do I want to read thoughts that reflect the original inspired text as closely as possible?’ (2 Peter 1:20, 21) Your objective should determine your choice of translation.

**The “New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures”
is available in many languages**



Does Archaeology Support the Bible?

FOR Bible students, archaeology is useful, since its findings often supplement their knowledge of life, conditions, customs, and languages in Bible times. Archaeology also provides helpful information on the fulfillment of Bible prophecies, such as those predicting the demise of ancient Babylon, Nineveh, and Tyre. (Jeremiah 51:37; Ezekiel 26:4, 12; Zephaniah 2:13-15) The science has its limits, however. Artifacts must be interpreted, and interpretations are subject to human error and modification.

Christian faith depends, not on broken vases, moldering bricks, or crumbling walls, but on the entire, harmonious body of spiritual truth found in the Bible. (2 Corinthians 5:7; Hebrews 11:1) To be sure, the Bible's internal harmony, candor, fulfilled prophecies, and many other features provide convincing evidence that "all Scripture is inspired of God." (2 Timothy 3:16) That said, consider a number of interesting archaeological discoveries that corroborate Biblical accounts.

A team of archaeologists digging in Jerusalem in 1970 came upon a charred ruin. "The picture was clear to any trained eye," wrote Nahman Avigad, the team leader. "The building had been destroyed by fire, and the walls and ceiling had collapsed." In one room were the **bones** [1] of an arm, its fingers spread, grasping at a step.

Strewn on the floor were **coins** [2], the latest of which dated to the fourth year of the Jewish revolt against Rome—69 C.E. Objects had been scattered before



the building collapsed. "Seeing this," said Avigad, "we recalled Josephus's description of the Roman soldiers looting the houses after the city had been conquered." Historians date the Roman sack of Jerusalem to 70 C.E.

Analysis determined that the bones belonged to a woman in her 20's. "Caught in the fire when the Romans attacked," says *Biblical Archaeology Review*, "a young woman who was in the kitchen of the Burnt House sank to the floor and was reaching for a step near the doorway when she died. The fire had spread so fast . . . that she could not escape and was buried by falling debris."

This scene reminds us of Jesus' prophecy concerning Jerusalem, uttered nearly 40

Society for Exploration of Land of Israel and its Antiquities ▾



Coins: Generously Donated by Company for Reconstruction & Development of Jewish Quarter, Jerusalem Old City

years earlier: “Your enemies . . . will dash you and your children within you to the ground, and they will not leave a stone upon a stone in you.”—Luke 19:43, 44.

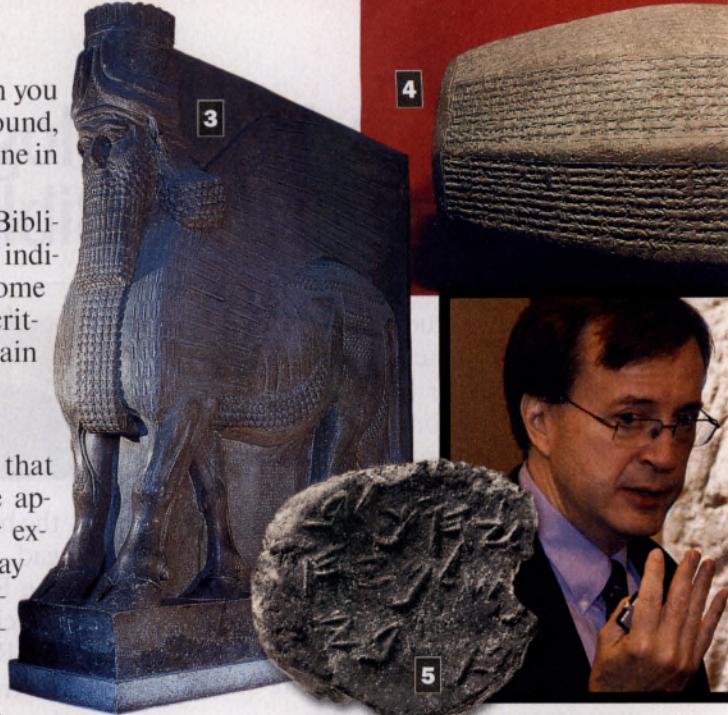
Archaeological finds corroborating Biblical statements also include the names of individuals mentioned in the Scriptures. Some of these finds quashed earlier claims by critics that the Bible writers fabricated certain characters or exaggerated their fame.

Inscriptions of Biblical Names

At one time, prominent scholars held that Assyrian King Sargon II, whose name appears in the Bible at Isaiah 20:1, never existed. In 1843, however, near present-day Khorsabad, Iraq, on a tributary of the Tigris River, **Sargon’s palace [3]** was discovered. It covers some 25 acres. Raised from secular obscurity, Sargon II is now one of the best-known kings of Assyria. In one of his **annals [4]**, he claims to have captured the Israelite city of Samaria. According to Biblical reckoning, Samaria fell to the Assyrians in 740 B.C.E. Sargon also records the capture of Ashdod, further corroborating Isaiah 20:1.

While excavating the ruins of the ancient city of Babylon, in present-day Iraq, archaeologists uncovered some 300 cuneiform tablets near the Ishtar Gate. Relating to the period of the reign of Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar, the inscriptions include a list of names, among which is “Yaukin, king of the land of Yahud.” This refers to King Jehoiachin of the land of Judah, who was taken captive to Babylon at the time of Nebuchadnezzar’s first conquest of Jerusalem, in 617 B.C.E. (2 Kings 24:11-15) Five of Jehoiachin’s sons are also mentioned on the tablets.—1 Chronicles 3:17, 18.

In the year 2005, while digging at a site where they hoped to find the palace of King David, archaeologists came upon an extensive stone structure that they believe was destroyed when the Babylonians razed Jeru-



salem just over 2,600 years ago, during the time of God’s prophet Jeremiah. Whether the structure is the remains of David’s palace is uncertain. However, archaeologist Eilat Mazar did identify one particularly interesting object—a 0.4-inch-wide **clay seal impression [5]** that reads: “Belonging to Yehuchal son of Shelemiyahu son of Shovi.” This impression was evidently made with the seal of Yehuchal (also Jehucal or Jucal), a Jewish official mentioned in the Bible as having opposed Jeremiah.—Jeremiah 37:3; 38:1-6.

Jehucal, says Mazar, is only the “second royal minister,” after Gemariah, the son of Shaphan, whose name appears on a seal impression found in the City of David. The Bible identifies Jehucal, the son of Shelemiah (Shelemiyahu), as a prince of Judah. Prior to the discovery of the seal, he was unknown outside the Scriptures.

Could They Read and Write?

The Bible indicates that the ancient Israelites were a **literate people**. (Numbers 5:23; Joshua 24:26; Isaiah 10:19) But critics disagreed, arguing that Bible history

3: Musée du Louvre, Paris; 4: Photograph taken by courtesy of the British Museum; 5: Gabi Laron/Institute of Archaeology/Hebrew University © Eilat Mazar



was largely transmitted by unreliable oral tradition. In 2005 this theory suffered a blow when ar-

chaeologists working at Tel Zayit, midway between Jerusalem and the Mediterranean, found an archaic alphabet, perhaps the oldest **Hebrew alphabet** [6] ever discovered, incised on a piece of limestone.

Dated to the tenth century B.C.E., the find, say some scholars, suggests “formal scribal training,” a “sophisticated level of culture,” and “a rapidly developing Israelite bureaucracy in Jerusalem.” So, contrary to the critics’ claims, it appears that at least as early as the tenth century B.C.E., the Israelites were literate and would have been able to record their history.

Assyrian Records Lend Further Support

Once a mighty empire, Assyria often appears in the Bible record, and many archaeological finds there attest to the accuracy of the Scriptures. For instance, an excavation at the site of ancient Nineveh, Assyria’s capital, revealed a **sculptured slab** [7] in the palace of King Sennacherib, which depicts Assyrian soldiers leading Jewish captives into exile after the fall of Lachish in 732 B.C.E. You can read the Bible’s account at 2 Kings 18:13-15.

The **annals of Sennacherib** [8], found at Nineveh, describe his military campaign during the reign of Judean King Hezekiah, whom the annals mention by name. Cuneiform records of various other rulers refer to Judean Kings Ahaz and Manasseh, as well as Israelite Kings Omri, Jehu, Jehoash, Menahem, and Hoshea.

In his accounts Sennacherib boasts of his military successes but, significantly, omits any mention of taking Jerusalem. This striking omission adds credence to the Biblical record, which states that the king never laid siege to Jerusalem but suffered defeat at God’s hands. Thereafter, a humiliated Sennacherib returned to Nineveh, where, the Bible says, he was assassinated by his sons. (Isaiah 37:33-38) Interestingly, two Assyrian inscriptions attest to the assassination.

Because of the wickedness of the people of Nineveh, Jehovah’s prophets Nahum and Zephaniah foretold the city’s complete destruction. (Nahum 1:1; 2:8-3:19; Zephaniah 2:13-15) Their prophecies were fulfilled when the combined forces of Nabopolassar, the king of Babylon, and of Cyaxares the Mede besieged and captured Nineveh in the year 632 B.C.E. The discovery and excavation of

its ruins once again corroborated Bible accounts.

Nuzi, an ancient city to the east of the Tigris River and southeast of Nineveh, excavated between 1925 and 1931, yielded many artifacts, including some 20,000 clay tablets. Written in the Babylonian language, they contain a wealth of detail involving legal customs similar to those of the patriarchal era described in Genesis. Texts show, for example, that family gods, often small clay figurines, were a form of title deed, giving their owner a claim to the inheritance. This custom may explain why the patriarch Jacob's wife Rachel took the family gods, or "teraphim," belonging to her father, Laban, when Jacob's family moved away. Understandably, Laban tried to recover the teraphim.—Genesis 31:14-16, 19, 25-35.

Isaiah's Prophecy and the Cyrus Cylinder

The cuneiform inscription on the ancient clay cylinder illustrated here corroborates another Bible account. Known as the **Cyrus Cylinder** [9], this document was recovered at the site of ancient Sippar on the Euphrates, about 20 miles from Baghdad. It speaks of the conquest of Babylon at the hands of Cyrus the Great, founder of the Persian Em-

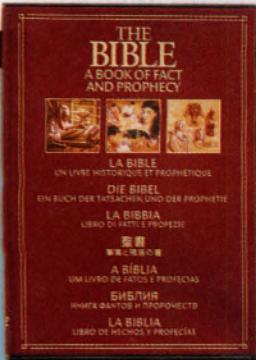


pire. Amazingly, some 200 years earlier, Jehovah, by means of his prophet Isaiah, said of a Medo-Persian ruler who would be named Cyrus: “‘He is my shepherd, and all that I delight in he will completely carry out’; even in my saying of Jerusalem, ‘She will be rebuilt.’”—Isaiah 13:1, 17-19; 44:26-45:3.

Significantly, the cylinder mentions Cyrus' policy—in sharp contrast with that of other ancient conquerors—of returning to their homeland captives held by the previous power. Biblical and secular history testify that Cyrus did release the Jews, who then rebuilt Jerusalem.—2 Chronicles 36:23; Ezra 1:1-4.

A relatively new science, Biblical archaeology has become a major field of study that has yielded some valuable information. And as we have seen, many finds attest to the Bible's authenticity and accuracy, sometimes down to the smallest detail.

▲ Photograph taken by courtesy of the British Museum



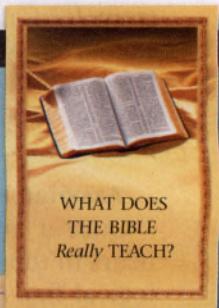
FOR MORE INFORMATION

Can the Bible help you to live a happy and purposeful life? The two-hour DVD *The Bible—A Book of Fact and Prophecy* includes this important topic and presents compelling interviews.—Available in 32 languages.

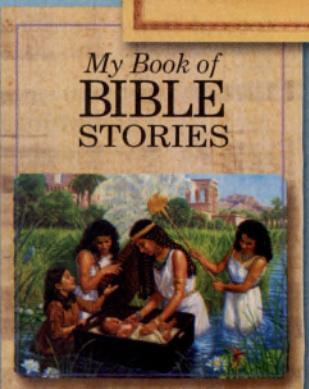


Do you need more evidence that the Bible is free of myth and contradictions? Are the miracles described in the Bible true? Examine the facts in this 192-page book.—Printed in 56 languages.

The 19 chapters in this study aid cover every important Bible teaching and explain God's purpose for the earth and mankind.—Now in 162 languages.



Designed especially for children, this beautifully illustrated book discusses 116 people and events—all in chronological order.—Available in 194 languages.



What Is the Bible About?

SOME view the Bible as a book of history, since it documents thousands of years of God's dealings with humankind. Others regard it as a book of ethics. They point to the more than 600 judicial, domestic, moral, and religious laws and regulations that God gave the nation of Israel. Still others consider the Bible to be a spiritual guidebook that reveals the mind of God.

Actually, all of these descriptions are correct. The Bible says of itself: "All Scripture is inspired of God and beneficial for teaching, for reproofing, for setting things straight, for disciplining in righteousness, that the man of God may be fully competent, completely equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16, 17) Indeed, everything in God's Word—including historical accounts, laws, and spiritual counsel—is valuable.

However, the Bible is far more than an anthology of helpful information. Uniquely, the Bible is a revelation from Jehovah God. It provides practical, divinely inspired counsel for daily life. It also reveals Jehovah's purpose for the earth and for mankind, as well as shows how he will eliminate the causes of human suffering. Most important, the Bible explains that God has been willfully misrepresented and tells how he will settle this universal challenge.

God Is Called a Liar and a Bad Ruler

The Bible states that God created the first humans, Adam and Eve, perfect in mind and body and placed them in an ideal setting. He put them in charge of the earth and the animal kingdom. (Genesis 1:28) As God's children, Adam and Eve had the opportunity to live forever on earth, provided that they obeyed their heavenly Father. He placed only one restriction upon them. "From every tree of the garden you may eat to satisfac-

tion," said Jehovah, "but as for the tree of the knowledge of good and bad you must not eat from it, for in the day you eat from it you will positively die."—Genesis 2:16, 17.

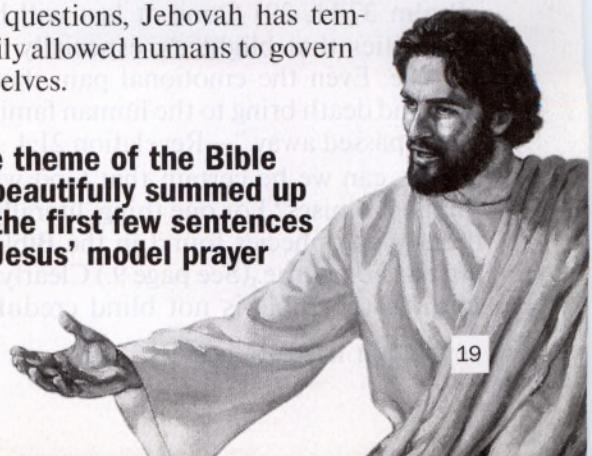
However, a spirit creature identified in the Bible as Satan the Devil said just the opposite: "You positively will not die." (Genesis 3:1-5) In blatantly contradicting God, Satan not only called the Creator a liar but also implied that His way of ruling is wrong—that man could do better without God. Satan convinced Eve that disobedience to God would bring liberation and moral independence. He said she would be "like God"! Satan thus attacked Jehovah's good name and purpose.

That conversation had profound consequences. In fact, Jehovah's purpose to clear his name and reputation is the primary theme of the Bible. This is summed up in Jesus' model prayer—often called the Lord's Prayer or the Our Father. Jesus taught his followers to pray: "Let your name be sanctified. Let your kingdom come. Let your will take place . . . upon earth."—Matthew 6:9, 10.

How God Clears His Name

Satan raised some fundamental issues: Who told the truth—Jehovah or Satan? Is Jehovah's rule over his creation just and good? Does he have the right to expect humans to obey him? Would mankind really be better off ruling themselves? In order to resolve those questions, Jehovah has temporarily allowed humans to govern themselves.

The theme of the Bible is beautifully summed up in the first few sentences of Jesus' model prayer



What has been the result? Since that first lie in Eden, human history has been filled with hardship and suffering, proving that Satan is a monstrous liar and that independence from God leads only to disaster. However, Jehovah in his love and limitless wisdom purposed to clear his name by undoing all the difficulties that began in Eden. He will do so by means of the Messianic Kingdom. What is that Kingdom?

God's Solution—The Kingdom

Millions of people regularly recite the Lord's Prayer. Why not take a moment to reflect on what it means? Consider the words: "Let your kingdom come." (Matthew 6:10) That Kingdom is not merely an abstract condition of the heart, as some have concluded. Rather, as the term "king" suggests, it is a government—a heavenly one in the hands of Jesus Christ, the "King of kings." (Revelation 19:13, 16; Daniel 2:44; 7:13, 14) The Bible teaches that he will rule over the entire earth, establishing lasting peace and harmony among all people and ridding the earth of all wickedness. (Isaiah 9:6, 7; 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10) In this way, God's Kingdom—not any human government—will fulfill Jesus' words: "Let your will take place . . . upon earth."

To ensure the fulfillment of those words, Jesus gave his life as a ransom, redeeming Adam's descendants from sin and death. (John 3:16; Romans 6:23) Hence, under God's Kingdom, all who show faith in Christ's sacrifice will see the effects of Adam's sin reversed and human perfection progressively restored. (Psalm 37:11, 29) Gone at last will be the infirmities that blight us, especially during old age. Even the emotional pain that sickness and death bring to the human family will have "passed away."—Revelation 21:4.

How can we be certain that God will fulfill his promises? For one thing, literally hundreds of prophecies found in the Bible have already come true. (See page 9.) Clearly, then, faith in the Bible is not blind credulity or

wishful thinking but is founded on reason and abundant evidence.—Hebrews 11:1.

Practical Counsel for Our Day

Besides giving us a solid basis for hope in the future, the Bible also helps us to have a happier life today. For instance, God's Word gives unsurpassed practical advice on marriage, family life, human relations, finding happiness, and many other subjects. Consider just a few examples.

■ **Think before you speak.** "There exists the one speaking thoughtlessly as with the stabs of a sword, but the tongue of the wise ones is a healing."—Proverbs 12:18.

■ **Avoid petty jealousy.** "A calm heart is the life of the fleshly organism, but jealousy is rottenness to the bones."—Proverbs 14:30.

■ **Discipline your children.** "Train up a boy according to the way for him; even when he grows old he will not turn aside from it." "A boy let on the loose will be causing his mother shame."—Proverbs 22:6; 29:15.

■ **Be forgiving.** Jesus said: "Happy are the merciful, since they will be shown mercy." (Matthew 5:7) Wise King Solomon wrote: "Love covers over even all transgressions." (Proverbs 10:12) If someone's sin against you is so serious that you cannot simply forgive and forget, the Bible advises: "Go lay bare his fault between you and him alone."—Matthew 18:15.

■ **Avoid the love of money.** "The love of money is a root of all sorts of injurious things, and by reaching out for this love some . . . have stabbed themselves all over with many pains." (1 Timothy 6:10) Notice that the Bible condemns "the love of money," not money itself.

A "Letter" From Our Heavenly Father

The Bible, then, is about many things. As we have seen, it is primarily about God and his purpose. But it is also about us—humanity—and how we can live happily both now and forever under the rulership of God's King-

dom. In a way, the Bible is like a letter from our “Father in the heavens,” Jehovah. (Matthew 6:9) Through it, Jehovah has shared his precious thoughts with us and has revealed both his will and his beautiful personality.

By reading the Bible and meditating on it, we begin to “see” God as he really is. Our

responsive heart is drawn to him in a loving bond of union. (James 4:8) To be sure, the Bible is about more than history, prophecy, and laws. It is also about a personal relationship—our relationship with God. That makes this book truly unique and very precious.—1 John 4:8, 16.

HOW TO READ THE BIBLE

The Bible makes fascinating reading. In fact, its accounts and moral lessons are so well-known that they play a major role in the literature of many languages. The Bible helps us get to know our Creator, Jehovah God. It is also a deep source of practical wisdom. A Bible proverb says: “Wisdom is the prime thing. Acquire wisdom; and with all that you acquire, acquire understanding.” (Proverbs 4:7) How can you benefit most from your Bible reading?

Try to schedule your reading when you are normally most alert. And don’t skim over the material. Your aim should be to fill your mind with God’s thoughts and to assimilate them. After you finish a period of reading, **reflect** on what you have read, and compare it with what you already know. This will deepen your understanding and appreciation.—Psalm 143:5.

Some may wonder, ‘Where in the Bible should I begin reading?’ Of course, you can start at the beginning. However, some first-time readers find it easier to **start with the Gospels**—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—the accounts of Jesus’ life and ministry. Then some proceed to the beautifully written and wisdom-packed poetic books—Psalms, Proverbs, and

Ecclesiastes. After that, your appetite may be whetted for other parts of the Bible. (See below.) And do not adopt the false notion that you only need to read what is commonly called the New Testament. Remember, “*all Scripture is inspired of God and beneficial.*”—2 Timothy 3:16.

A particularly effective way to study the Bible is **topic by topic**. For example, the study aid *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* used by Jehovah’s Witnesses in their public ministry includes such timely subjects as “How to Make Your Family Life Happy,” “Worship That God Approves,” and “Where Are the Dead?”—See the box on page 18.



READING THE BIBLE BY SUBJECT

The origin of life and man’s fall into sin Genesis

The founding of ancient Israel Exodus to Deuteronomy

Action-packed accounts Joshua to Esther

Moving poetry and song Job, Psalms, Song of Solomon

Wisdom for living Proverbs, Ecclesiastes

Prophecy and moral guidance Isaiah to Malachi and Revelation

Jesus’ life and teaching Matthew to John

The establishment and spread of Christianity Acts

Letters to the congregations Romans to Jude



Myth or Fact?

The Christian elder Timothy instructed those interested in worshipping the true God not to pay attention to “erratic nations” and “myths.” (1 Timothy 1:3, 4, *Byington*) Is such caution necessary today? Yes, because wrong ideas about the Bible and its teachings turn people away from true worship. Below are some commonly held ideas about the Bible. Notice the statements from the Bible itself. These can help you to separate myth from fact.

■ Myth: Bible miracles are impossible.

Fact: Humans have much to learn about God’s creation. No scientist can fully explain gravity, precisely define all the components of an atom, or explain the exact nature of time. “Can you find out the deep things of God, or can you find out to the very limit of the Almighty?” (Job 11:7) Since creation is beyond our complete understanding, capable scientists are becoming increasingly cautious about saying that a certain thing is impossible.

■ Myth: All religions lead to God.

Fact: “If you remain in my word,” said Jesus, “you are really my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (John 8:31, 32) If all religions led to God, would their members need to be set free? In fact, Jesus taught that relatively few people are on “the road leading off into life.” —Matthew 7:13, 14.

■ Myth: All good people go to heaven when they die.

Fact: “The meek ones themselves will possess the earth, and they will indeed find their exquisite delight in the abundance of peace. The righteous themselves will possess the earth, and they will reside forever upon it. Hope in Jehovah and keep his way, and he will exalt you to take possession of the earth.” (Psalm 37:11, 29, 34) Only 144,000 faithful humans go to heaven. Their God-given assignment is to “rule as kings over the earth.”—Revelation 5:9, 10; 14:1, 4.

■ Myth: The “Old Testament” is no longer useful for Christians.

Fact: “All Scripture is inspired of God and beneficial.” (2 Timothy 3:16, 17) “All the things that were written aforetime were written for our instruction, that through our endurance and through the comfort from the Scriptures we might have hope.” (Romans 15:4) The “Old Testament,” the Hebrew Scriptures, is a vital source of spiritual instruction and gives us grounds for faith in the “New Testament,” the Christian Greek Scriptures.

■ Myth: Much of the book of Genesis, including the account about Adam and Eve, is allegory.

Fact: Jesus’ genealogy right back to Adam was recorded by the Gospel writer Luke. (Luke 3:23-38) If Genesis were myth, then where in the genealogy would the real names end and the so-called legendary ones begin? Jesus, who existed in heaven before coming to earth, believed what was written in Genesis, including the account of Adam and Eve. (Matthew 19:4-6) Thus, to question Genesis is to undermine the credibility of Jesus himself, as well as that of many Bible writers.—1 Chronicles 1:1; 1 Corinthians 15:22; Jude 14.

Can You Trust the Counsel of the Bible?

'Should I believe what this person is telling me?' You may ask yourself that question when a salesman tries to sell you a used car or when a politician makes promises in an election campaign. You do not want to waste money or time on products and information that have little value.

YOU may likewise wonder: 'Does the Bible contain anything worthwhile for me to learn? If I read and study that book, can I trust that my time and effort will be rewarded?' The key to answering those questions lies in a verse in the Bible itself: "Wisdom stands or falls by her results." (Matthew 11:19, *Phillips*) Yes, the results that people obtain from applying a certain kind of counsel, or "wisdom," prove whether that counsel is worthwhile. The following are the personal expressions of people who took time to learn from the Bible. Their words will help you to determine if you should read and study that unique book.

Questions About Death and the Afterlife

Some time ago, Karen's mother died. From childhood Karen, who lives in the United States, had believed that at death all good people go to heaven. This belief brought her little comfort. She wondered: 'What does my mother look like, now that she is up in heaven? How will I find her when I get there, if I get there? When I die, could I end up somewhere else?'

Karen began a careful study of the Bible with Jehovah's Witnesses. She learned that the dead are not in heaven but are as if in a deep sleep. "They are conscious of nothing at all," states Ecclesiastes 9:5. What, though, about seeing her mother again?

The following clear statement from the Bible gave her comfort and hope: "Do not marvel at this, because the hour is coming in

which all those in the memorial tombs will hear [Christ's] voice and come out." (John 5:28, 29) Karen learned that by means of his Son, the God of the Bible is going to bring the dead back to life right here on earth. "Bible teachings on death and the resurrection make so much sense," she said.

What Way of Worship Is Correct?

When Angela, a Romanian girl, was 14 years old, a Pentecostal minister prayed for her to receive holy spirit, and she began speaking in tongues. Her parents, however, felt that Pentecostal teachings do not agree with the Bible. The family stopped attending services and began to study the Bible with Jehovah's Witnesses.

Disappointed at first, Angela soon saw differences between the practices of her former religion and the teachings of the Bible. For example, she read John 17:3, which states: "This means everlasting life, their taking in knowledge of you, the only true God, and of the one whom you sent forth, Jesus Christ." Angela saw that those who receive God's favor must

**Karen,
U.S.A.**



**Angela,
Romania**



**Dhiraj,
India**

**Gabriel,
India**

first have knowledge of him. "How could I have received God's spirit in such a special way if I knew almost nothing about him?" she asked. Angela says, "I thank Jehovah for helping me to find the way of true worship by means of his inspired Word."

Counsel That Changes Lives

"I had a very hot temper," says Gabriel, a man in India. "When provoked, I would scream, throw things, and even assault people. Bible study helped me to control my temper. Even in tense situations, I now remain calm."

Gabriel had read texts such as Proverbs 16:32, which states: "He that is slow to anger is better than a mighty man, and he that is controlling his spirit than the one capturing a city." Dhiraj, another man who overcame a bad temper, comments, "That same text helped me to see that losing my temper is a sign of weakness, whereas controlling it is evidence of strength."

Philip was a gangster in South Africa. Fighting, robbery, and rough language were part of his way of life. He spent time in jail for his crimes. But despite his lifestyle, Philip longed to know God. After he began a Bible study with Jehovah's Witnesses, he developed the desire to serve God and decided to clean up his life. He stopped his bad practices and cut off contact with his criminal associates. What Bible truths motivated him to make such changes?

Jehovah's Witnesses showed him Jesus' words found at John 6:44. They read: "No man can come to me unless the Father, who sent me, draws him." Philip says, "Jehovah saw something good in me and drew me to his people, this wonderful brotherhood." Philip also took to heart Biblical accounts about Jehovah's mercy toward contrite wrongdoers. "These accounts," says Philip, "helped me to see Jehovah's reasonableness in dealing with imperfect humans who are repentant." —2 Samuel 12:1-14; Psalm 51.

A young Australian man named Wade abused alcohol and drugs, gambled, and had many immoral relationships. Happiness, though, eluded him. One day he had a conversation with Jehovah's Witnesses and accepted a free home Bible study. What did Wade learn?

"I was deeply impressed with the way Jesus treated others," says Wade. "He showed kindness, compassion, and love to all, including children. The more I learned, the more I wanted to be like him. The Bible taught

me how to be a real man and how to change my personality for the better." But what about all the bad things he had done? Wade continues: "The Bible taught me that if I repented of my sins and changed my conduct, God

**Wade,
Australia**

would forgive me. In fact, I could live forever on a paradise earth. Finally, I had a future!" (Matthew 5:5) Wade cleaned up his life and now worships Jehovah with a clean conscience.

The expressions that you have just read come from people who wanted to improve their life. They looked into the Bible to see if its teachings could help them with their problems and answer their questions. The good results they have obtained have convinced them that they can trust the Bible's practical guidance. So can you.

An inspired statement from long ago reads: "Happy is the man that has found wisdom, and the man that gets discernment, for having it as gain is better than having silver as gain and having it as produce than gold itself. It is more precious than corals, and all other delights of yours cannot be made equal to it. Length of days is in its right hand; in its left hand there are riches and glory. Its ways are ways of pleasantness, and all its roadways are peace. It is a tree of life to those taking hold of it, and those keeping fast hold of it are to be called happy."—Proverbs 3:13-18.

HOW THE BIBLE HELPED A PRISONER

A man named Bill was very happily married. But before his first wedding anniversary, he went to prison for wrongdoing that he had committed years earlier.

After the shock of losing his freedom had passed, Bill decided to use the long days ahead fruitfully. "I stayed on my bunk reading and studying the Bible," he says. He also applied what he was learning. "I was kind and friendly to my cell mates, who saw that I did not want to do the bad things they did. They would say about me: 'Bill wants to do his time his way, to get to know God and the Bible. He is not going to cause trouble for anyone.'

"Because of my reputation, the other prisoners kept me out of disputes and other unpleasant situations. The guards came to see that I would not give them a hard time. They ended up recommending me for jobs that allowed me to work away from the main body of prisoners for most of the day. Applying the Bible in my life was a great protection."

Bill attended meetings of Jehovah's Witnesses held in the prison

and actively told other prisoners about the things he was learning. He was baptized as one of Jehovah's Witnesses while serving his sentence. Reminiscing, he says: "I had wasted almost 50 years of my life, and I wanted to make improvements. I am convinced that the only way a prisoner can do that is by applying the Bible's teachings. And the way to learn the Bible accurately is by studying with Jehovah's Witnesses. Theirs is the only religion that teaches the truth of the Bible. It is that simple."

Now out of prison, Bill is actively serving in a congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses in the United States. He and his wife continue to study God's Word and to live by its teachings. They deeply appreciate the thought found at Isaiah 48:17, 18: "I, Jehovah, am your God, the One teaching you to benefit yourself, the One causing you to tread in the way in which you should walk. O if only you would actually pay attention to my commandments! Then your peace would become just like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea."





Why live by Bible standards?

YOU are in the cafeteria eating lunch with two girls at school. One of them is eyeing the new boy.

"You know, he really likes you," the first girl says to you. "I can tell by the way he stares at you. His eyes are, like, all over you!"

"And guess what?" the second girl whispers as she leans toward you. "He's available!"

"Too bad I'm not," the first girl says. "I'd hook up with him in a heartbeat!"

Then the first girl says what you always hate to hear.

Have you ever found yourself in a similar situation—being ridiculed because you try to live by Bible standards? How did you respond?

■ **You confidently defended your moral convictions.**

■ **You felt awkward, but explained your beliefs the best you could.**

■ **You decided your school friends were right—you were missing out on fun!**

Have you ever wondered, 'Is it really worth living by Bible standards?' A youth named

"How come you don't have a boyfriend?"

You knew that was coming. The fact is, you'd like to have a boyfriend. But you've been told it's best to wait until you're ready for marriage before you start dating. If it weren't for . . .

"Your religion, right?" the second girl says.

'Was she reading my mind?' you think to yourself.

"With you it's always Bible, Bible, Bible," the first girl taunts. "Why can't you have a little fun sometimes?"

Deborah thought about that.* "My peers could do what they wanted," she says. "It seemed as if they didn't have to answer to anyone. Bible standards felt restrictive. My school friends' uninhibited lifestyle appealed to me."

Is It Wrong to Wonder?

The Bible writer Asaph went through a period in his life when he wondered whether it was worth living in a way that pleased God. "I became envious of the boasters, when

* Names in this article have been changed.

I would see the very peace of wicked people," he wrote. He even said: "Surely it is in vain that I have cleansed my heart and that I wash my hands in innocence itself."—Psalm 73:3, 13.

Clearly, Jehovah God understands that at times people may question the value of living by his standards. After all, he had Asaph's thoughts recorded in the Bible. In the end, Asaph decided that living by God's laws was the best way of life. (Psalm 73:28) How did he reach that conclusion? Well, Asaph was wise. He made his decision, not because he had suffered any personal calamity, but because he had learned from the mistakes of others. (Psalm 73:16-19) Are you able to do the same?

A Reality Check

Unlike Asaph, King David learned the hard way that those who ignore God's standards suffer harm. David committed adultery with the wife of one of his servants and then tried to cover his tracks. As a result, he hurt others, including God, and suffered severe anxiety. (2 Samuel 11:1-12:23) After David repented, Jehovah inspired him to express his feelings in song and had those words preserved in the Bible for our benefit. (Psalm 51:1-19; Romans 15:4) So it's both wise and Scriptural to learn from the errors of others.

To help you imitate Asaph's example and avoid David's mistakes, consider the comments of some youths from various countries who for a while rejected Bible standards. Specifically, they became involved in premarital sex. Like David, they have repented of their errors and again have a clean standing with God. (Isaiah 1:18; 55:7) Consider what they have to say.

Awake!: What factors influenced your thinking and actions?

Deborah: "I went through school seeing everyone else having boyfriends and girlfriends, and they seemed to be happy. When I hung out with them and saw them kissing and embracing, I felt jealous and lonely. I often allowed myself to spend hours fantasizing about a certain boy I liked. This heightened my desire to be with him and to do whatever it took to fulfill that desire."

Mike: "I read material and watched programs that glorified sex. Talking about sex with my friends heightened my curiosity. Then, when I was alone with a girl, I'd think that I could be physically intimate with her without having sex, that I could stop anytime."

Andrew: "I habitually viewed pornography on the Internet. I started drinking a lot of alcohol. And I attended parties with youths who had little respect for the Bible's moral standards."

Tracy: "When I was 16, being with my boyfriend was all that mattered to me. I knew in my mind that premarital sex was wrong, but I didn't hate it. I didn't intend to start a sexual relationship before marriage, but my emotions overrode my thinking. For a while, my conscience was numb to any feelings of guilt."

Awake!: Did your lifestyle make you happy?

Deborah: "At first, I felt a rush of freedom and was happy that I finally fit in with my peers. But those feelings didn't last. I started to feel dirty, robbed of innocence, empty. I felt a deep sense of regret that I'd thrown away my virginity, something I could never get back. Since then, I have often asked myself, 'Who did I think I was?' And 'Why—why did I ignore Jehovah's loving standards?'"

Mike: "I started to feel like part of me had died. I tried to disregard the effect my actions were having on others, but I couldn't. It

1. It got lost.
2. A person who guides and protects a flock of sheep.
3. He was happy.
4. Malachi, after 443 B.C.E.
5. James, before 62 C.E.
6. Peter, 64 C.E.
7. Rahab—James 2:25.
8. Mark—Colossians 4:10.
9. Peter 5:13.

pained me to realize that in seeking my own pleasure, I was hurting others. I had trouble sleeping. Eventually, the pleasure of immoral sex dimmed, and feelings of pain and shame dominated my thinking.”

Andrew: “It became easier and easier to act on wrong desires. But at the same time, I was consumed with feelings of guilt and was disappointed with myself.”

Tracy: “It didn’t take long for reality to hit me like a brick. Immorality ruined my youth. I thought that my boyfriend and I would have such fun. We didn’t. We ended up causing each other pain, misery, and heartache. I spent night after night sobbing in bed, wishing I’d done things Jehovah’s way.”

Awake! What advice would you give to youths who wonder if the Bible’s moral standards are restrictive?

Deborah: “Your life will not be better if you abandon Bible standards. Think how Jehovah will feel if you follow his advice. And think long and hard about the consequences of ignoring his counsel. Remember, it’s not just about you and what you want. Your actions will affect others. And if you ignore God’s advice, you will damage yourself.”

Mike: “True, your peers’ lifestyle may seem attractive on the surface. But look below the surface before you act. Among the most valuable possessions Jehovah gives you are your dignity and innocence. To throw those gifts away because you can’t control yourself is to sell yourself cheap. Talk to your parents and other mature people about your problems. If you make a mistake, be quick to speak up and correct the situation. If you do things Jehovah’s way, you will gain a real sense of peace.”

Andrew: “When you’re inexperienced, you think your peers’ lifestyle is exciting. Their

attitudes will rub off on you. So choose your friends wisely. Trust Jehovah, and you’ll save yourself a lot of regrets.”

Tracy: “Don’t think, ‘It won’t happen to me.’ My mom sat me down and told me straight that my course of action would end in heartache. I was so insulted! I thought I knew better. I didn’t. Live by Jehovah’s standards, and associate with others who do the same. You will be happier that way.”

**Bible Standards
—Straitjacket or Seat Belt?**

If your peers taunt you for trying to live by Bible standards, ask yourself these questions: ‘Why do they reject the idea of living by the Bible’s moral code? Have they read the Bible themselves and investigated the benefits that come from obeying God’s laws? Have they seriously considered the consequences of ignoring those standards? Or, instead, do they simply follow along with what everyone else is doing?’

You likely know people who just “follow after the crowd.” (Exodus 23:2) Don’t you want to do better than that? How can you? By heeding the Bible’s advice to ‘prove to yourself the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.’ (Romans 12:2) Jehovah is “the happy God,” and he wants you to be happy too. (1 Timothy 1:11; Ecclesiastes 11:9) The standards recorded in the Bible are for your benefit. True, you could view them as a straitjacket that limits your freedom. In reality, though, the Bible’s moral code is more like a seat belt that helps protect a passenger from harm.

Certainly, you can trust the Bible. If you choose to live by its standards, you will not only make Jehovah happy but also benefit yourself.—Isaiah 48:17.

TO THINK ABOUT

- What might make it hard for you to live by Bible standards?
- Why do you need to prove to yourself that living by God’s standards is the best way of life?

More articles from the “Young People Ask . . .” series can be found at the Web site www.watchtower.org/ype

An Enduring Expression of God's Love

THE seven wonders of the ancient world were so named because they evoked awe in the minds of men. Yet, with the exception of the pyramids, these edifices no longer exist. On the other hand, the Bible, although penned by humble men on perishable materials, still exists and has been accurately transmitted down to our very day. We can have the fullest confidence in this unique book.—Isaiah 40:8; 2 Timothy 3:16, 17.

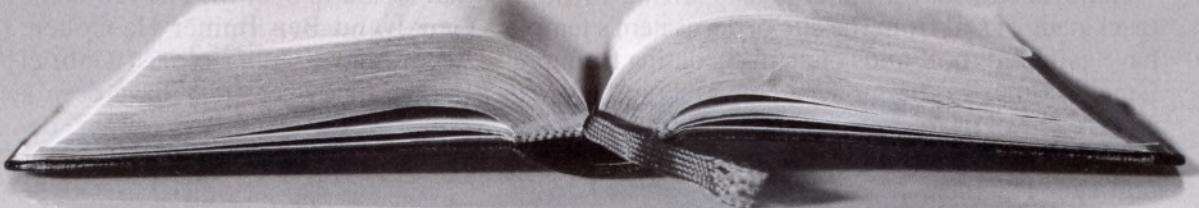
By having his thoughts put in writing, Jehovah God ensured that their transmission would not be left to the flawed memories of men. Additionally, the simple language God's penmen used enables even many with a limited education to read the Bible with understanding. (Acts 4:13) Would you expect any less of the Creator and his inspired secretaries? Besides that, the Bible's wide distribution gives proof of God's great love for his human creation, no matter where people live or what language they speak. (1 John 4:19) To be sure, the wide availability of the Bible does not cheapen it but, instead, elevates it!

The contents of the Bible reveal even more about God's love. As we have seen in the preceding articles, God's Word

explains where we came from, why life is so short and filled with trouble, and how God will remedy this situation by means of his Kingdom government. We have also considered some excellent Biblical advice on how to enjoy a happy and rewarding life even now. (Psalm 19:7-11; Isaiah 48:17, 18) Above all, we have learned how our Creator will clear his name of all the reproach that has been brought upon it by Satan's lies.—Matthew 6:9.

What other book is so rich, so relevant, so practical, and so filled with hope for ailing mankind? Yes, unlike the seven wonders of the ancient world, most of which were constructed to glorify false gods or powerful men, the Bible truly is an enduring expression of Jehovah's unselfish love for his human creation.

If you have not already done so, why not examine the Scriptures for yourself. At present, Jehovah's Witnesses are conducting free Bible studies with more than six million people worldwide. They count it a privilege to help sincere individuals to see for themselves that the Bible really is trustworthy, the inspired Word of God.—1 Thessalonians 2:13.





Oldest Chinese Bible?

"The earliest record about a Chinese translation of the Hebrew Bible is found on a stone stele [left] dating back to 781 CE," says scholar Yiyi Chen, of Peking University. The stone, erected by Nestorian Christians, came to light in the city of Xi'an in 1625. "The Chinese name of the stele is formally translated as 'the Memorial of the Propagation in China of the Luminous Religion from Daqin' (... Daqin being the Chinese term for the Roman Empire)," explains Chen. "Among the characters on the stele, we find Chinese expressions such as 'real canon' and 'translating the Bible.'"

Treasure From a Bog

In 2006, workers digging in an Irish peat bog uncovered a book of Psalms, or Psalter, thought to date back to the

eight century C.E. The Latin manuscript, one of the few survivors of its era, is described as a treasure. The 100 or so vellum pages, in their original binding, are of lavish quality. "The remains of a layer of a concealing mat and a leather carrying-bag suggest that the psalter had been hidden deliberately, perhaps to keep it safe from a Viking raid 1,200 years ago," says *The Times* of London. Although the pages are compacted and have partially rotted, experts are confident that they will be able to separate and conserve them.

Truckloads of History

Reports say that archaeologists sifting through truckloads of soil from the site of Jerusalem's temple have gathered thousands of artifacts dating from pre-Israelite times to the modern era. Among them was

■ The complete *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* is available in 43 languages and 3 Braille scripts; the *New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures* is available in an additional 18 languages and 1 Braille script. As of July 2007, the total printing was 143,458,577 copies.

■ The oldest Bible text known to exist is the so-called Priestly Blessing of Numbers 6:24-26. It was found inscribed on two silver amulets, rolled like scrolls, dating to the late seventh or early sixth century B.C.E.—**BIBLICAL ARCHAEOLOGY REVIEW**, U.S.A.

■ As of December 31, 2006, the number of languages and dialects in which publication of at least one book of the Bible had been registered was 2,426—an increase of 23 over the previous year.—**UNITED BIBLE SOCIETIES, BRITAIN**.

■ Some 28 percent of Americans regard the Bible as "the actual word of God . . . to be taken literally," 49 percent as "the inspired word of God but not everything in it should be taken literally," and 19 percent as a "book of fables."—**GALLUP NEWS SERVICE, U.S.A.**

to the seventh or sixth century B.C.E. that is said to bear the Hebrew name Gedalyahu Ben Immer Ha-Cohen. According to archaeologist Gabriel Barkai, its owner "may have been a

HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER?



EXPLAIN THE PARABLE

1. In Jesus' parable recorded at Matthew 18:12-14, what happened to one sheep?

2. What is a shepherd?

3. How did the shepherd feel when he found what he was looking for?

■ For Discussion:

How is Jehovah like a shepherd?
How are you like a sheep?

(Answers on page 27)

WHEN IN HISTORY?

Name the writer(s) of the Bible books below, and draw a line connecting the book to the approximate date it was completed.



4

Malachi



5

James



6

2 Peter

After 443 B.C.E.
455 B.C.E.

Before 62 C.E.
64 C.E.

WHO AM I?

7. James said that I was declared righteous because I received messengers hospitably.

WHO AM I?

8. I was a cousin of Barnabas, and Peter called me his son.

FROM THIS ISSUE

Answer these questions, and provide the missing Bible verse(s).

Page 8 What did Job say about the earth? (Job 26:__)

Page 11 How did the early Christians view the Holy Scriptures? (1 Thessalonians 2:__)

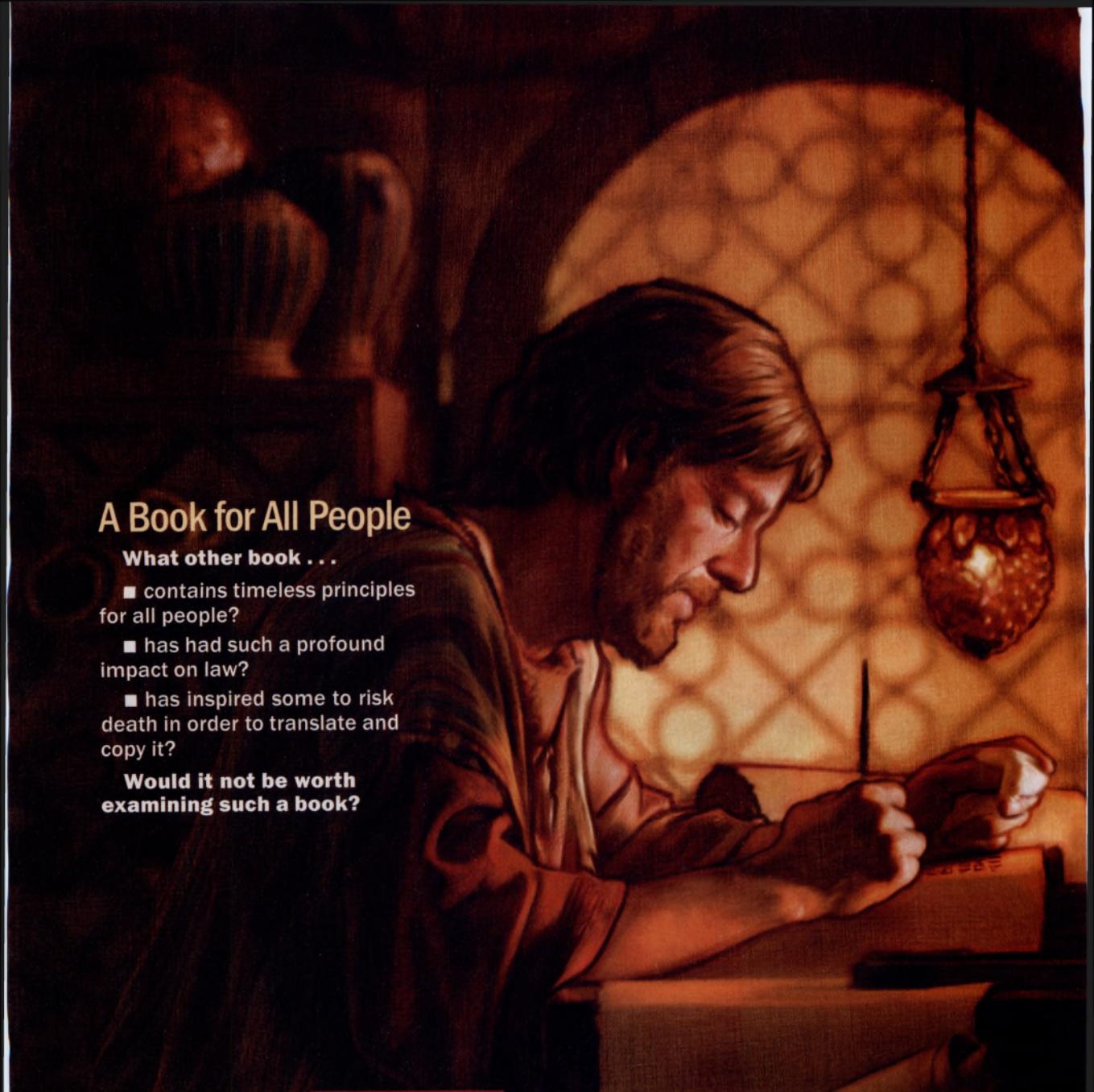
Page 12 What were Israel's kings told to write? (Deuteronomy 17:__)

Page 28 What does the Bible advise you to prove to yourself? (Romans 12:__)



Children's Picture Search

Can you find these pictures in this issue? In your own words, describe what is happening in each picture.



A Book for All People

What other book . . .

- contains timeless principles for all people?
- has had such a profound impact on law?
- has inspired some to risk death in order to translate and copy it?

Would it not be worth examining such a book?

A BOOK
FOR ALL
PEOPLE

