



## You Can Trust the Bible

The Bible is the world's oldest book, and it's been the world's most popular book since long before publishers started keeping best-seller lists. The world's various Bible societies sell or give away more than 20 million copies each year.

As much as scholars have scrutinized the Bible's every word during the past several thousand years and as much as they've probed into biblical archaeology and history and the ancient languages in which it was written, you'd think by now they'd have reached some unanimity as to its origin, meaning, and reliability.

However, exactly the opposite is true. Some people believe God dictated the Bible's every word. Others say it's nothing more than a collection of ancient oral traditions. Some believe its stories record absolutely true history; others that it's a collection of myths and legends.

So, can you trust the Bible? Following are three reasons why the answer to that question is Yes.

## Archaeology

At one time or another, skeptics have questioned the historicity of nearly every story in the Bible. However, archaeological evidence has confirmed one after another of these stories. Here are two examples.

Daniel's Belshazzar. Daniel reports that Belshazzar was the king of Babylon at the time of the nation's overthrow by the Persians. Until the late 1800s, all the other Babylonian king lists that had been discovered said Nabonidus was the last king of Babylon—leading many scholars to conclude that Belshazzar was a fictional character whom Daniel invented. However, ancient documents have demonstrated conclusively that Belshazzar shared the throne with his father Nabonidus.

One scholar made the following striking statement: "Of all the non-Babylonian records dealing with the situation at the close of the Neo-Babylonian empire, the fifth chapter of Daniel ranks next to cuneiform literature in accuracy so far as outstanding events are concerned." (1)

## **The four Gospels.**

Increasingly, archaeological discoveries support the historical statements made by the writers who chronicled the life of Jesus. For example, John mentions a building called Bethesda in Jerusalem that housed a pool.(2) Archaeological excavations have uncovered a building that precisely matches John's description.

Archaeologists have also found what is probably the luxurious home of Caiaphas, the high priest who presided over Jesus' trial by the Sanhedrin.(3) It includes a courtyard, where Peter would have denied Christ three times, and a mansion large enough to have held the trial. Archaeology shows that the Bible is real history and not just myths.

## **Prophecy**

Faith in the Bible is also confirmed by several of its prophecies, one of them in particular. The ancient prophet Daniel predicted the very year that Jesus began His ministry. According to Daniel 9:25, "From the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah [Jesus] the Prince shall be seven weeks, and three-score and two weeks." That's a total of 69 weeks, or 483 days. Scholars generally agree that Daniel's weeks should be understood as "weeks of years" a day representing a year, for a total of 483 years.

The Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and carried most of its citizens captive to Babylon. Later, three Persian kings issued decrees permitting the Jews to return to their homeland. The decree that comes closest to meeting the requirements of Daniel's prophecy was issued by Artaxerxes in 457 b.c. Simple mathematics shows that Daniel's 483 years ended in a.d. 27.

Jesus was anointed for His ministry at the time of His baptism. In his Gospel, Luke gives us detailed chronological information that indicates that Jesus was baptized in a.d. 27. (4) So, Daniel predicted the very year that Jesus would begin His ministry! This is powerful evidence that we can trust the Bible as a message from God, not just from human beings.

## Personal experience

However, impressive as archaeology and prophecy are in confirming the trustworthiness of the Bible, the most important evidence is the difference the Bible has made in the lives of so many people.

The Bible tells of a God who loves us, who is “compassionate and gracious, . . . maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.”(5) God also helps us gain the victory over the addictions and bad habits that would otherwise destroy our lives.

Paul said that the gospel—the good news about Jesus—is “the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” so that “the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.”

*And this really is true.* People all over the world have found that when they turn their lives over to God, He places within them a power that makes it possible for them to live closer each day to the ideal life that the Bible holds out for them. That is the greatest evidence that, yes, you can trust the Bible.

## How to Understand the Bible

If you’re unfamiliar with the Bible, the following suggestions will help you to understand it.

- Read Bible stories. Most of the Bible’s stories are found in about a dozen books. The Old Testament story books include Genesis, Exodus (first half), Joshua through Esther, and Daniel. In the New Testament, the stories are found in Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts. Reading these parts of the Bible through several times will give you a good grasp of what happened when.
- Read for spiritual growth. The Bible’s most important lessons are spiritual. As you read, then, look for ways the Bible’s teachings can help you to become more compassionate, fair, and honest.
- Read prayerfully. The Bible writers wrote under the guidance of God. Since God is the Bible’s Author, He can help you understand it. So, ask for His help each time you pick up the Bible to read it.
- Read consistently. Start a habit of reading a portion of your Bible every day. Also, most Christian bookstores carry Bible study guides that can help you understand what the Bible means.

1) Raymond P. Dougherty, *Nabonidus and Belshazzar*, 216

2) John 5:2

3) Matthew 26:57, 58

4) Luke 3:1

5) Exodus 34:7