

How Reliable is the Bible Record?

When you talk on the telephone, your voice turns into a coded signal. This signal is transmitted to the other end, and then decoded for your listener to hear. The voice that is heard sounds like you. It says exactly what you said, and no one doubts it is really you.

You can talk with someone next door, or on the other side of the world. Do you ever wonder if the words you hear are exactly what is being said? Do you ever question whether the caller is in fact the person he or she claims to be? Of course not. You know that the transmission of the words is completely reliable, and you trust their source. What you are most concerned about is their message.

Your direct line from the Creator

The ordinary telephone accurately transmits words over thousands of miles.

Has the all-powerful Creator accurately transmitted his words over thousands of years? Or is the Bible a collection of ancient religious writings full of inaccuracies?

The science of archaeology has come of age in the twentieth century. Archaeological discoveries have consistently shown that the people, places and events described in the Bible are historically true, and that the Word of God has in fact been transmitted to us reliably.

The same words 2,000 years later

Wadi Qumran (near the north end of the Dead Sea) *Spring, 1947*

A 15 year old Bedouin following a stray goat throws a stone into the small opening in a rock face.

He hears the sone hit something inside the cave, which apparently cracks and breaks.

Curious but apprehensive, He comes back later with a friend.

After wriggling through the opening, they make out several jars in the dim light. They are disappointed to find that the jars contain only a few old inscribed leather scrolls. Scarcely the gold treasures they had hoped for!

The boy takes home one of the old pieces of leather, thinking it might be

good for making sandal straps.

It hangs in his home for two years, until his uncle takes it to a dealer in antiques.

This old piece of leather was one of the most sensational discoveries of modern biblical archaeology - a complete copy of the book of Isaiah, 2,000 years old! The manuscript coincided almost word for word with the text* on which our King James Version of the Bible, the most commonly used edition, is based. (Isaiah was a Jewish prophet who lived about 700 BC. The Old Testament book named after him contains his writings.)

This chance discovery led archaeologists to other scrolls hidden in the caves of Qumran. They found parts of all Old Testament books except Esther. As well, they uncovered the religious writings of the Essenes, a strict Jewish sect who lived at Qumran from before 100 BC until the Romans destroyed it in 69 AD.

As the story of the Dead Sea Scrolls unravelled, excitement grew. Here was indisputable evidence that the Old Testament writings have remained essentially the same for over 2,000 years!

The Challenge of the Scrolls

Thirteen relatively insignificant differences between the book of Isaiah we now have and the scroll over 2,000 years old! Such accurate transmission of words in unheard of in human writings.

Compare this to the writings of

Shakespeare, which are only about 300 years old. In every one of Shakespeare's thirty-seven plays there are approximately 100 readings still in dispute, a large number of which have a direct bearing on the meaning of the passages where they appear.

During the past 150 years, critics have scrutinized the Bible. They have created an atmosphere of unbelief and promoted the idea that the Bible is only as true as any ancient mythology. Yet, though the works of Shakespeare have received less investigation, they yield much more evidence for doubt. In fact, the Bible stands up very well to close examination.

Many people who pride themselves on their education like to think it is unreasonable to believe in the Bible, that only a naive, unquestioning mind could accept its message. The Bible has been the subject of such intense scrutiny because of the implications of its message.

Archaeology cannot be said to "prove" the Bible. Promises, miracles, and God's relationship to man, for example, are outside the realm of the scientific method. Nevertheless, God does not expect you to have blind faith or to stake your life on a bood of myths. He challanges you to ask for proofs-and to the seeding mind He provides plenty of evidence.

"Produce your cause, saith the Lord; bring forth your strong reason, saith the King of Jacob."

Isaiah 41, verse 21

The apostle Peter reinforces that there is no need to fear putting the Bible to the test, when he writes in

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the New Testament: “We have not followed cunningly devised fables...” (you may want to read this whole passage in II Peter 1, verses 6 to 21.)

You can be sure God has controlled the transmission of His own Word. After all, He created the mind that created the telephone! The Scrolls attest of the fact that our Bible is a trustworthy book.

Their challenge is the message they offer.

Human literature or divine revelation?

The recommended readings for this lesson direct you to some of the most beautiful literature in the English language.

A well-known inscription on a statue at the United Nations headquarters in New York is based on Isaiah 2: “...they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks...”

Isaiah 2, verse 4

For a vision of what lies beyond the turmoil of today’s world-wide problems read Isaiah 11. Here the prophet describes a time of true peace on earth after the return of Christ.

Isaiah’s prophecy of Christ’s birth and future kingship resounds in Handel’s “Messiah”:

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.”

Isaiah 9, verse 6

Is this merely inspiring poetry, passed down with special care over a period of about 2600 years? Is it only meant to be enjoyed like any good book?

It is the Creator Himself who speaks through Isaiah to the people of the day, and to us. The very content of the message attests to its divine origin:

• Prophecies given well before the fact and fulfilled prophecies foretelling

political events, the future of Israel and other nations, the coming Messiah.

• Constant repetition of words like “the LORD saith”, “thus saith the LORD”.
• and-significantly-out-right condemnation of the Jewish nation, who include the book in their sacred scripture!

Why would a people choose to write (and preserve) descriptions of itself as self deprecating as these, which appear from the beginning to the end of the book?

“Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward.”

Isaiah 1, verse 4

“For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue hath muttered perverseness.”

Isaiah 59 verse 3

Archaeologists rarely find self-condemnation, or even self-criticism, in the records of ancient peoples. The Egyptian pharaohs, for example, wiped defeats and failures out of their annals. Self-praise, often to the point of exaggeration, is far more representative of the ancient records.

Why is the Old Testament so full of what looks to be self-condemnation? Because it gives us God’s words, His judgement of his people and not their own judgement of themselves.

How did Isaiah know so much about Jesus?

Imagine you have to pick up a celebrity you have never met before at a crowded airport. How would you find him?

Likely, you would have a good picture of him in your mind from photos in the newspaper or on television. You would recognize him instantly.

The Jews in Old Testament times were expecting a “celebrity”, a prom-

ised Messiah who would be their king sent by God. Through their scriptures, God had given them a picture of this Messiah so that when he came they would recognize him.

If you have not already read Isaiah 53, turn to it now in your Bible and read it through.

These words were written about 700 years before Christ was born.* Yet they provide an amazingly detailed description of his life, death and resurrection.

After you have read Isaiah 53, look up the New Testament passages in the above chart and you will begin to appreciate the completeness of the prophecy. If you are familiar with the New Testament gospel accounts, you will find many more points than we have noted here.

It’s a hard chapter to explain away.

The Jews, to avoid the obvious reference to Christ, have interpreted the “man of sorrows” as being their own persecuted people. But consider Isaiah’s sustained condemnation of the “sinful nation” of Israel whose “lips have spoken lies”. Does he suddenly change his mind and compare the same nation to a righteous man who “had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth”? In reality, Isaiah seems to draw a contrast between the nation of Israel and the suffering servant of Isaiah 53.

There is only one reason to deny that this prophecy applies to Christ. The alternative is to admit that God spoke through the prophet, that the passage genuinely foretells the work of Christ and is the inspired Word of God.

The inspired Word of God

What does the Bible offer you, more than a popular novel or poem?

Let the apostle Paul answer this question, from his New Testament letter to Timothy:

“...the holy scriptures...are able to

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make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”

II Timothy 3, verses 15 to 17

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God.” God is the speaker, the source of the Bible message. This is a claim that no other book can honestly make.

The Bible is not just a collection of musings and speculation about the meaning of life. It gives solid, factual information on what God has in store for the world and for you. It provides standards to live by, and encouragement in times of need.

It is the Truth.

*Even for the sceptic who does not accept the traditional date for the prophecy, the Dead Sea Scrolls provide undisputed evidence that the writing dates to at least 100 years before Christ.

VERSES FROM ISAIAH 53

•verse 3 - rejected by his own people, the Jews

•verse 5- died for our sins

•verse 7 - silent and submissive before his captors

•verse 12 - condemned as a criminal

FULFILLMENT IN JESUS CHRIST

•John 1, verse 11 “his own recieved him not”

•Romans 5, verses 6-10 “Christ died for the ungodly”

•Mark 15, verses 2-5 “Jesus...answered nothing”

•Mark 15, verses 27-28 “with him they crucify two thieves”

Recap

The science of archaeology has demonstrated the accuracy and reliabilty of the Bible record.

The Bible is more than just good litreature. It is the inspired Word of God.

Recommended Bible Readings

Read these chapters in Isaiah after your first time throught the lesson content: Isaiah 1,2,9,11, and 53.