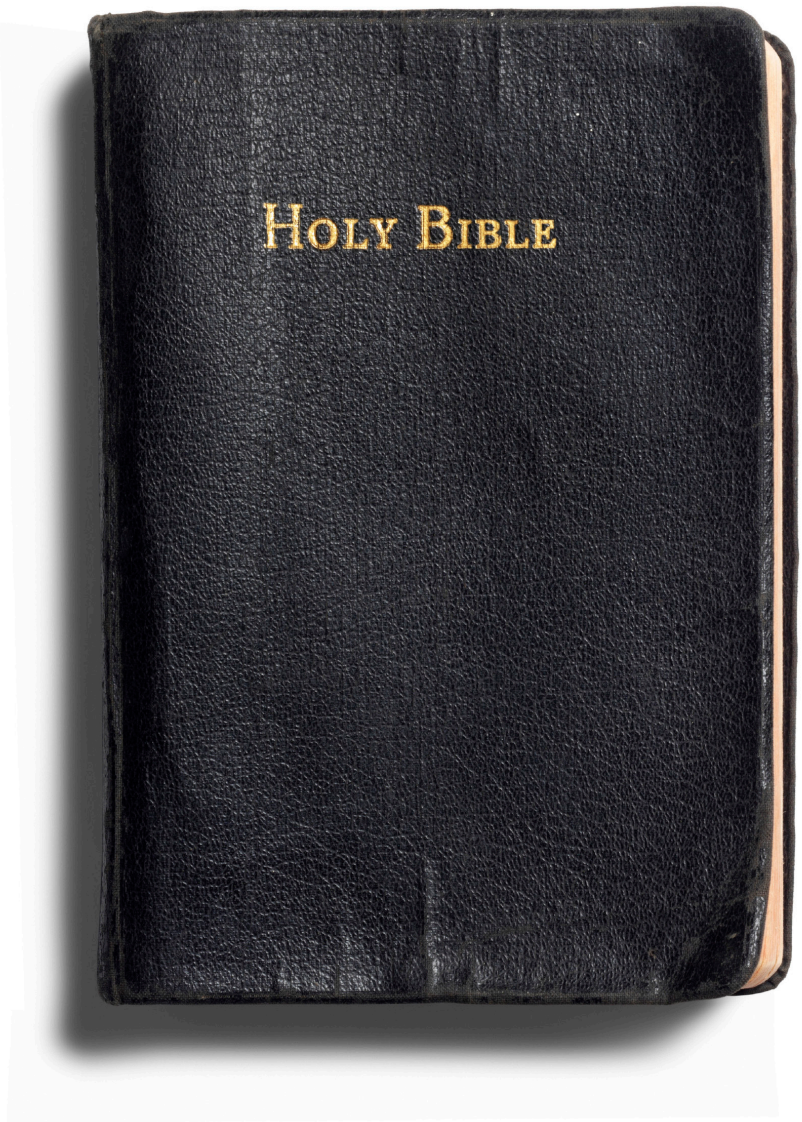
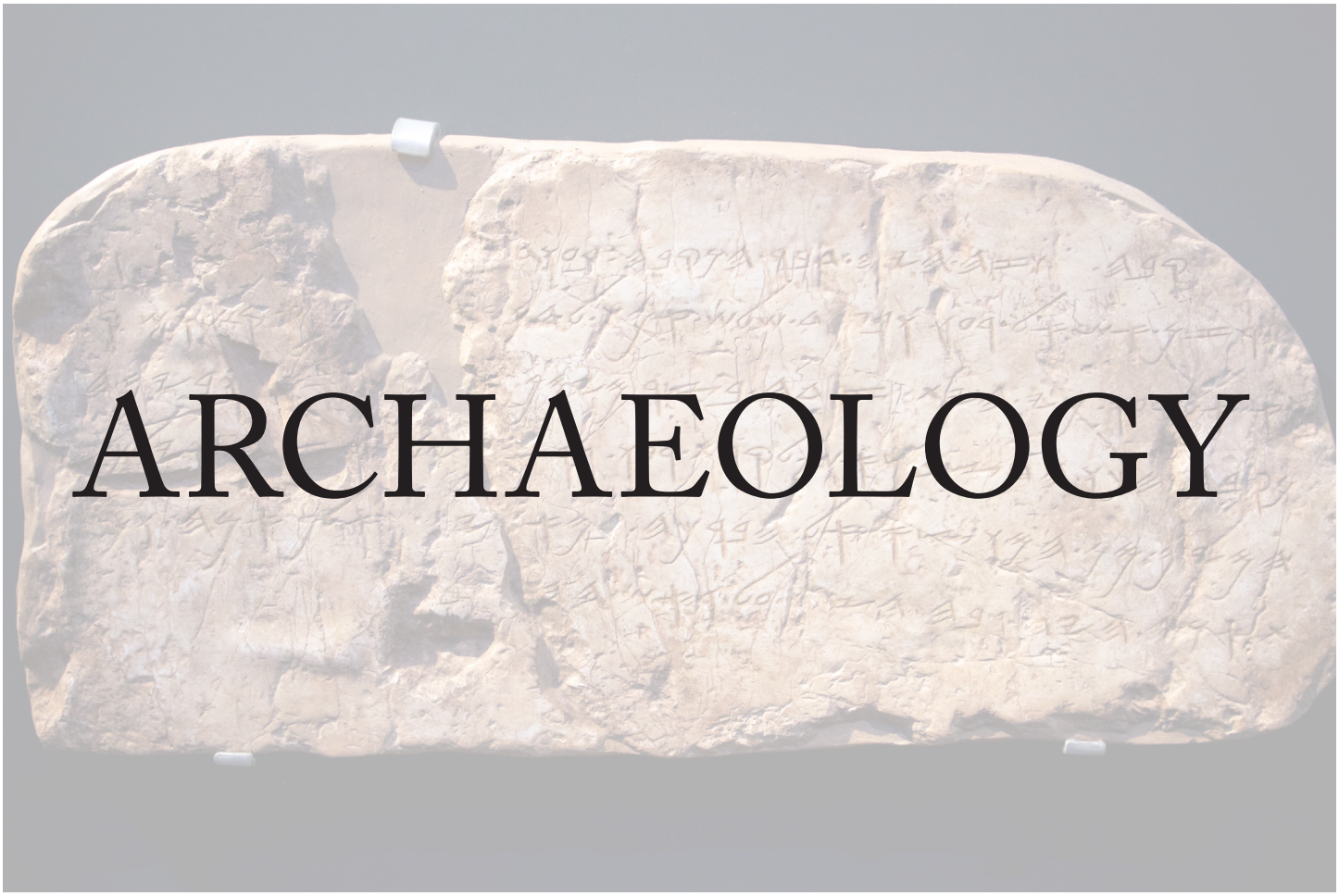


Is the Bible True?

INSIDE:

- Archaeology
- Dead Sea Scrolls
- What History Tells Us
- Fulfilled Prophecy
- Consistency of the Bible's Internal Evidence

Article Reprint Series From **LifeHopeandTruth.com**



ARCHAEOLOGY

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The Bible claims to answer the big questions of life. How can we know it is accurate? Let's examine five proofs of the truth of the Bible.

Three of the most important questions in life are: Where did I come from? Who am I? And where am I going? These questions cut to the heart of humanity.

Where would you go to find the answers? Can you look to a friend, a politician, a minister? Or is there another source where you can find the answers to life's most difficult questions?

The Bible claims to have the answers—answers that are not available anywhere else.

But how can you know if the Bible is true? After all, in recent years it has been rejected by many as nothing more than a collection of myths. And our modern educational system rejects the Bible as a basis for truth. So, who should we believe?

A best seller

Year in and year out, the Bible is the world's best-selling book. Guinness World Records says: "Although it is impossible to obtain exact figures, there is little doubt that the Bible is the world's best-selling and most widely distributed book." *The Economist* magazine estimated in 2007 that there are more than 100 million Bibles printed each year. George Barna, a well-known American researcher, reports that 92 percent of American households have at least one Bible and most have two or three.

But popularity and a large volume of sales don't make something true! How can you prove that the Bible is true?

First of five proofs of the Bible

This is the first of five articles that will focus on five basic proofs of the Bible: archaeology, the Dead Sea Scrolls, secular history, fulfilled prophecy and the consistency of statements found within the Bible. While books have been written about each of these proofs, we hope this foundational information will help you prove the truth of the Bible to yourself.

Archaeology

Archaeology is defined as the "scientific study of material remains (as fossil relics, artifacts and monuments) of past human life and activities" (merriam-webster.com). Archaeology should either confirm the biblical record or refute it.

Since archaeology is a science, it is intended to reflect fact and not conjecture. But like everything else, preconceived ideas, politics and personal agendas can get in the way. It is true that there are disputed facts between the Bible and archaeology, but there is a substantial and growing body of archaeological evidence supporting the biblical account that should not be ignored.

If archaeology can confirm the existence of major characters and verify major events as recorded in the Bible, then we have an objective proof of authenticity. There are archaeologists who reject the Bible and make the claim that many accounts recorded in Scripture never happened. These individuals are called minimalists and their position is that the biblical story must be read as fiction unless it can be confirmed by archaeology. Another group is referred to as maximalists and their position is just the opposite—the biblical story is more or less correct unless archaeologists prove that it is not.

Let's consider examples where the facts are agreed to by all sides. What do you know about Hezekiah's tunnel, Jerusalem's second wall and the death of the Assyrian King Sennacherib? The stories that surround these events are fascinating and can be found in the books of 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles and Isaiah.

Hezekiah's dilemma

The Bible tells the story of Hezekiah, a king of Judah, and his conflict with Sennacherib, a famous Assyrian king. This story is also confirmed in the minutest details by archaeology and history.

Hezekiah was a godly king who was instrumental in removing idolatry from Judah (2 Kings 18:1-4). Early in his reign he witnessed the captivity of Israel (the northern 10 tribes) at the hands of the Assyrian king, Sargon II (verses 9-12). Following this victory over Israel, the Assyrians forced the cities of Judah to pay tribute to avoid the same fate.

Hezekiah's decision to stop paying tribute to the Assyrians resulted in a massive attack by King Sennacherib (verses 7, 13). This caused Hezekiah to change his mind. He decided to pay the Assyrians their tribute by taking gold and silver from his palace and from the temple. He even removed the gold from the temple doors to satisfy Sennacherib's demand (verses 15-16).

But it still wasn't enough, and Sennacherib sent his armies to surround Jerusalem, demanding the surrender of the city.

Fortifying Jerusalem with a second wall

In the midst of this crisis, Hezekiah offered up a heartfelt prayer to God (2 Kings 19), and the prophet Isaiah told him that Sennacherib would not succeed and that Jerusalem would not fall at that time (verses 32-34).

In preparation for Sennacherib's invasion, Hezekiah had also fortified the city and built a second wall around the northeast portion of Jerusalem (also called the Broad Wall) that was quite massive. It was 20 feet wide and more than 10 feet high in places. This wall was to protect the city's freshwater supply, as well as the Jews who, over time, had moved outside the main wall of the city (2 Chronicles 32:1-5).

But for many years modern maps of ancient Jerusalem did not show this second wall. It wasn't until excavation began in Jerusalem after the 1967 Six-Day War that amazingly a second wall was discovered—exactly as the Bible recorded.

Isaiah 22:9-11 tells us: "You also saw the damage to the city of David, that it was great; and you gathered together the waters of the lower pool. You numbered the houses of Jerusalem, and the houses you broke down to fortify the wall. You also made a reservoir between the two walls."

And archaeology verifies these facts: Hezekiah built a reservoir and a tunnel at the only freshwater source for Jerusalem, the Gihon Spring. He also built a second wall to protect this source. And he tore down houses that were in the way and in one place actually built the wall through a house. The spring and reservoir were located "between the two walls."

Hezekiah's tunnel

Hezekiah constructed a tunnel to bring freshwater into Jerusalem in preparation for an invasion by the Assyrians. This is recorded in 2 Kings 20:20: "Now the rest of the acts of Hezekiah—all his might, and how he made a pool and a tunnel and brought water into the city—are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?"

In 2 Chronicles 32:30 we read: "This same Hezekiah also stopped the water outlet of Upper Gihon, and brought the water by tunnel to the west side of the City of David."

The Bible says that Hezekiah diverted the water so that it would flow from the east to the west. Archaeology confirms that the water in Hezekiah's tunnel flows from east to west. In fact, you can walk through the tunnel today and witness for yourself the direction of the water flow.

Sennacherib's campaigns and death

The siege of Jerusalem and the Judean campaign of Sennacherib are recorded on three clay artifacts—known today as the Taylor Prism (after the name of its discoverer, Colonel R. Taylor), the Oriental Institute Prism and the Jerusalem Prism.

On the six inscribed sides of the prism, King Sennacherib recorded eight military campaigns undertaken against various peoples who refused to submit to Assyrian rule. The text records Sennacherib's account of what happened in his military campaign against Judah. He records victories over 46 fortified cities, but does not mention Jerusalem among them.

Hezekiah is identified by name as the king of Judah and is referred to as a prisoner in his own city. The text reads: "Himself I made a prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a cage. I surrounded him with earthwork in order to molest those who were leaving his city's gate."

In 2 Chronicles 32:9 we find a record of Sennacherib conquering the city of Lachish, near Jerusalem. This victory is confirmed on a giant wall relief that was discovered in the ruins of ancient Nineveh. From there Sennacherib sent his army to surround Jerusalem, but the historical and archaeological records are deafeningly quiet as to what happened at Jerusalem.

There seems to be a good reason for this absence of information. Notice the account of what happened in 2 Chronicles 32:21: "Then the LORD sent an angel who cut down every mighty man

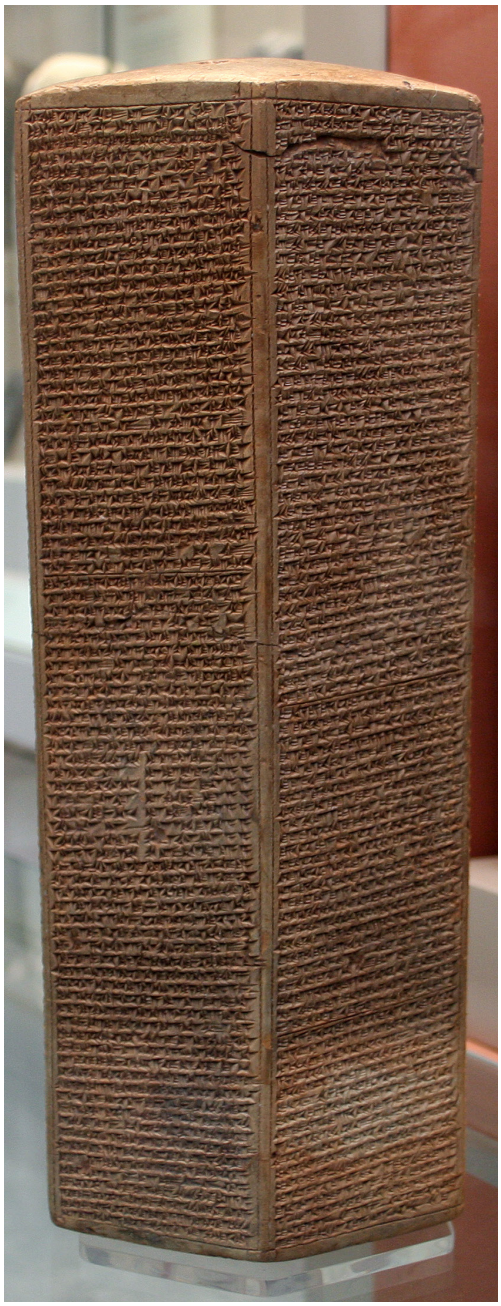


Photo: The Taylor Prism/Wikimedia Commons

"Himself I made a prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a cage."

—Sennacherib, regarding Hezekiah of Judah

of valor, leader, and captain in the camp of the king of Assyria. So he returned shamefaced to his own land. And when he had gone into the temple of his god, some of his own offspring struck him down with the sword there."

This defeat is not recorded by the Assyrians nor can it be confirmed by archaeology; but the death of Sennacherib is recorded; and it happened exactly as the Bible says. Assyrian records tell us that Sennacherib was attacked and killed by two of his sons while he was in the temple of Nisroch in 681 B.C.

This happened almost 20 years after the siege of Jerusalem, and the Bible records it in 2 Kings 19:37, even naming the two sons who killed Sennacherib and a third son, Esarhaddon, who became king in his place. This is all confirmed in the annals of the Assyrian King Esarhaddon.

An archaeologist's conclusion

One of the greatest Jewish archaeologists of the 20th century was Nelson Glueck (1900-1971), who even appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine in 1963. He wrote the following about the authenticity of Scripture when compared to archaeology: "It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a Biblical reference. Scores of archaeological findings have been made which confirm in clear outline or in exact detail historical statements in the Bible. And, by the same token, proper evaluation of biblical descriptions has often led to amazing discoveries" (***Rivers in the Desert,*** 1960, p. 31).

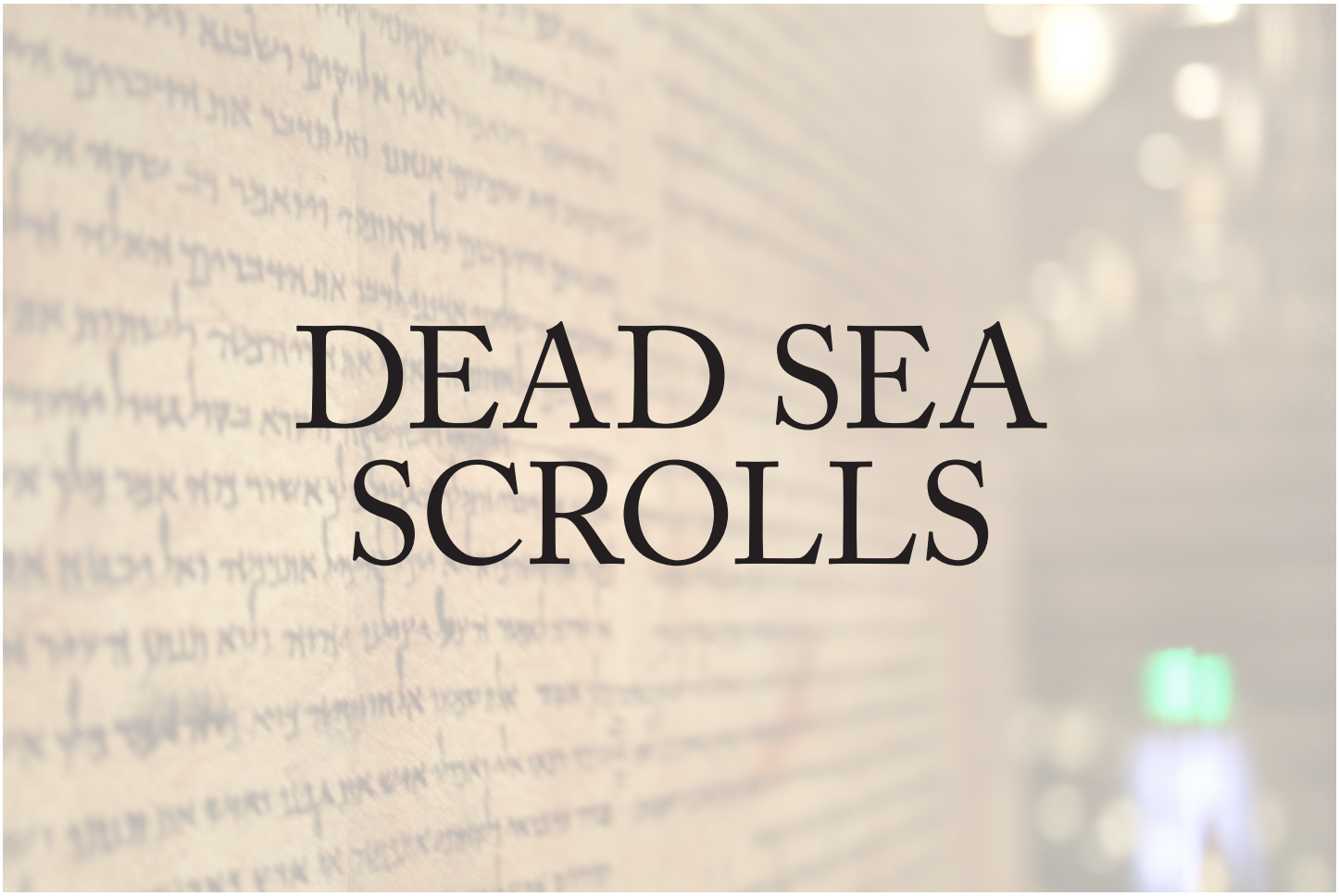
The story of Hezekiah's tunnel and second wall, the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem and the death of King Sennacherib are only a few of the scores of biblical accounts that have been confirmed by archaeology. While there are archaeologists who reject the Bible as authentic, the record of archaeology, taken as a whole, supports the biblical text.

More than 30 years ago, James Mann wrote the following in an article for *U.S. News and World Report:* "A wave of archaeological discoveries is altering old ideas about the roots of Christianity and Judaism—affirming that the Bible is more historically accurate than many scholars thought" ("New Finds Cast Fresh Light on the Bible," Aug. 24, 1981).

So, if the Bible has an accurate historical record, might it also be correct in its answers to the big questions about life? There is much objective evidence to support a belief that the Bible is accurate and contains the answers to man's most perplexing questions: Where did I come from? Who am I? And where am I going?

In the next article we will look into the Dead Sea Scrolls, arguably the greatest biblical discovery of our time, and see what they add to our question, "Is the Bible true?"

For more about archaeological evidence for the accuracy of the Bible, see our LifeHopeandTruth.com articles "How Do We Know the Bible Is True?" and "Biblical Archaeology."



DEAD SEA SCROLLS

Photo: KOREphotos/CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

The Dead Sea Scrolls tell a remarkable story and provide evidence that the Bible is true. What do you need to know about these amazing documents?

How can we prove that the Bible is true and inerrant?

The doctrine of inerrancy, as commonly understood, states: "Inerrancy is the view that when all the facts become known, they will demonstrate that the Bible *in its original autographs* and correctly interpreted is entirely true and never false in all it affirms, whether that relates to doctrines or ethics or to the social, physical, or life sciences." This statement was articulated in the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy 1974.

Many churches list this as one of their fundamental beliefs. But what does it mean? Is the Bible true, or is it simply a compilation of myths?

Let's examine that question further. This article will examine the second of five proofs, showing how the Dead Sea Scrolls confirm that the "Holy Scriptures" (2 Timothy 3:15-17) have been preserved extraordinarily accurately for thousands of years. We believe this is clear testimony to God's involvement in this book He inspired to serve as our guide.

The greatest archaeological find of the 20th century

The Dead Sea Scrolls are universally proclaimed as the greatest archaeological find of the 20th century. The first scrolls were discovered quite by accident by a young Bedouin shepherd in the Qumran area near the Dead Sea in 1947. When tossing a rock into an open cave in the cliffs just above the Dead Sea, he heard the sound of a breaking pot.

Upon investigation, he and his fellow Bedouins discovered several clay jars that contained rolled-up scrolls. They took four of these scrolls to Bethlehem for testing. An antiquities dealer by the name of Kando confirmed their authenticity and purchased the original four scrolls for $150. He then sold them to Archbishop Samuel, head of the Syrian Orthodox Monastery of St. Mark in Jerusalem.

The Bedouins did not fully realize the value of their discovery and subsequently sold three additional scrolls to another antiquities dealer for an equivalent amount. This all took place in 1947.

The news breaks

Such a historic find could not be kept quiet for very long. When in 1948 Hebrew University Professor Eliezer Lipa Sukenik heard through an Armenian antiquities dealer of the scrolls' discovery, he promptly looked into it.

He met secretly with the antiquities dealer in the British military zone near the Jerusalem border. The dealer provided a fragment for the professor to examine. Professor Sukenik realized that he was viewing an authentic ancient writing.

He wrote in his diary: "My hands shook as I started to unwrap one of them. I read a few sentences. It was written in beautiful biblical Hebrew. The language was like that of the Psalms, but the text was unknown to me. I looked and looked, and I suddenly had the feeling that I was privileged by destiny to gaze upon a Hebrew Scroll which had not been read for more than 2,000 years."

In 1954 an ad appeared in the *Wall Street Journal* for the four manuscripts that had been sold to Archbishop Samuel. At that time the scrolls were in a Syrian Orthodox Church in New Jersey. Recognizing the great value of these scrolls, the Israeli government purchased them through an American intermediary.

From New Jersey, the scrolls were taken to Hebrew University for examination and safekeeping. They remained there until 1965 when the Shrine of the Book was built in Jerusalem to house the historic documents.

Digging deeper

It wasn't long after the initial discovery that word began to spread in the archaeological community that these original seven scrolls, all taken from one cave, contained biblical texts along with other writings. This prompted further excavation of the Qumran area and more scrolls were found in 10 nearby caves.

The treasure trove, now known as the Dead Sea Scrolls, includes a small number of near-complete scrolls and tens of thousands of fragments, representing more than 900 texts in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek.

The scrolls consist of two general types: the biblical text (including partial or complete copies of all the books of the Hebrew Scriptures with the exception of the book of Esther) and nonbiblical texts (including letters, hymns, prayers, calendrical texts and legal documents).

Today you can view the scrolls at the Shrine of the Book in Jerusalem, or you can go online to the Leon Levy Dead Sea Scrolls Digital Library. The Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) is responsible for maintaining the scrolls and providing access for those who are interested.

Assurance of accuracy

What is so special about these scrolls, and how do they help us prove the Bible is true? Until the discovery of the scrolls, the oldest manuscripts of the Hebrew Scriptures dated from the 10th century, about 2,500 years after the time of Moses. How can we be assured of the integrity of a document after so much time?

Considering the carefulness of the copyists is one way to be assured of the accuracy of the preservation of the Bible.

We believe that the Jews were given the responsibility for preserving the Hebrew Scriptures. The apostle Paul wrote: "What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God" (Romans 3:1-2).

The Hebrew Scriptures that make up the Old Testament were preserved by a group of Jewish scholars called Masoretes. Their manuscripts are known today as the Masoretic Text. The Masoretes were meticulous in their preservation, so when a copy became worn, a new copy was created. Once its accuracy was confirmed, they would destroy the old one. Because of that, the oldest of these manuscripts available today is the Aleppo Codex, dating from A.D. 935.

The Masoretes became known as "counters," since this was one of the methods they used to make sure the copy was an exact duplicate. They counted the words and the letters in each one to confirm the accuracy of the new one. This practice continued for more than 400 years (from A.D. 600 to 1000).

But how can we prove that a copy from 935 faithfully represents the original writings? The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls provides important confirmation.

The Dead Sea Scrolls are generally dated from around 200 B.C. to A.D. 68. This is more than 1,000 years older than any manuscripts of the Hebrew Old Testament that we had before their discovery. Because of their age and close similarity with the Masoretic Text, we now have an objective basis for determining that the biblical text used in our modern copies of the Old Testament is accurate.

From what we know, the Qumran community that stored the Dead Sea Scrolls was composed of Jews who had departed from the primary Jewish community. By choice, they appear to have been outcasts. The quality and care taken with the writing varies greatly among the copies. But still these ancient manuscripts have proven very helpful.

Scrolls support the accurate preservation of the Bible

Norman Geisler is the author of several books on the subject of inerrancy: *Inerrancy,* 1978; *General Introduction to the Bible,* 1986; and *From God to Us,* 2012. Dr. Geisler says the Dead Sea Scrolls provide the best external evidence showing the validity of the Masoretic Text, proving that this text type was in fact accurately preserved over a period of about 1,000 years from the first century to the 900s A.D.

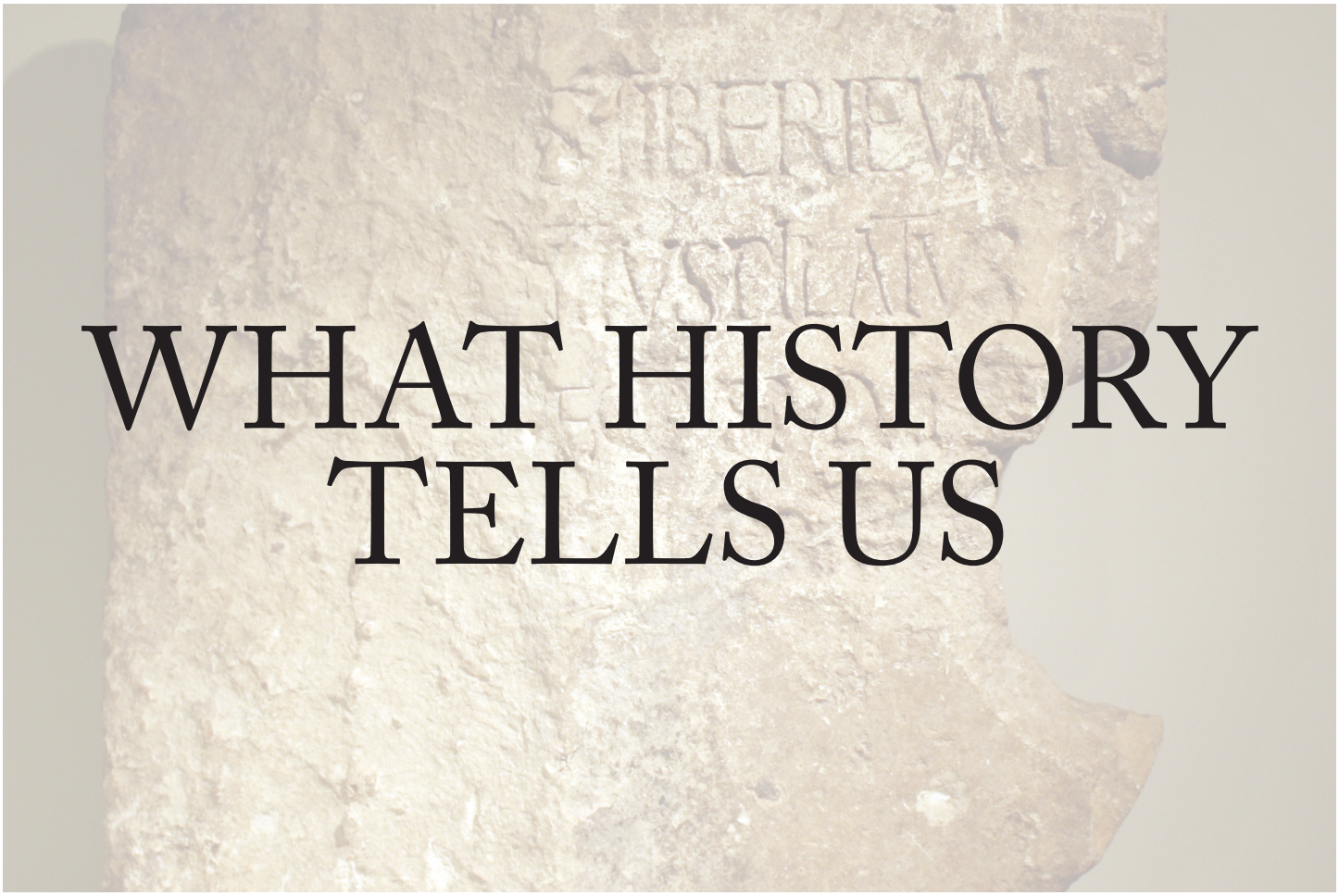
He concludes that we can be confident that the texts used to copy the Dead Sea Scrolls were of the same tradition or family as used in the Masoretic Text. He provides evidence from comparative studies of the Isaiah scroll revealing that a word-for-word identity exists in 95 percent of the text. That is a very high rate of similarity for documents that were copied 1,000 years apart.

Other scholars have commented on the similarities between the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Masoretic Text. Hebrew scholar Millar Burrows writes, "It is a matter of wonder that through something like one thousand years the text underwent so little alteration. As I said in my first article on the scroll, 'Herein lies its chief importance, supporting the fidelity of the Masoretic tradition'" (*The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 1955).

The Dead Sea Scrolls provide an objective confirmation of the authenticity of the Masoretic Text, which is the basis for our modern copies of the Old Testament. Although we live in 2015, we can go back in time 2,000 years and read from the scroll of Isaiah discovered by a shepherd boy in a cave above the Dead Sea.

Is the Bible true? The Dead Sea Scrolls help tell us yes!

Read more about how the Dead Sea Scrolls help confirm the accuracy of the Bible in the Life, Hope & Truth articles "How Do We Know the Bible Is True?" and "Dead Sea Scrolls."



WHAT HISTORY TELLS US

Photo: Wikimedia Commons

Roman and Jewish historians were no fans of Christianity, but they give evidence of the historical accuracy of the Bible, including the life of Jesus Christ.

In a 2014 Gallup poll, more than 1,000 American adults were asked which of three statements best represented their view of the Bible. The choices (and the percentage that selected them) were:

1. The Bible is the actual word of God and is to be taken literally, word for word (28 percent).

2. The Bible is the inspired word of God, but not everything in it should be taken literally (47 percent).

3. The Bible is an ancient book of fables, legends, history, and moral precepts recorded by man (21 percent).

The same Gallup survey from the 1970s produced very different results. Then 40 percent believed the Bible was the literal Word of God. This dropped to 37 percent in 1984 and 28 percent in this latest survey.

That is a major drop among those who believe the Bible is the Word of God and to be taken literally. Of course, it is still true, based on the survey, that the majority of Americans consider the Bible to be inspired. But there's been a shift from viewing the Bible as the literal Word of God to seeing it as a book one can read for inspiration, but not a guide for truth or for moral conduct.

Evidence for more than 100 biblical characters in secular history

In this article we will go outside the Bible and see if there is enough evidence from secular history to help confirm its authenticity.

The Bible is not written as a history book, but it is a book that contains much history. Many historical figures are identified in its pages. Among the most conservative lists, there are more than 100 biblical characters that can be conclusively identified within secular history.

Among those 100 characters, here are a couple Old Testament figures who are easily identified by secular historical sources:

Shishak, pharaoh of Egypt, is mentioned in 1 Kings 11:40 and 14:25. There are numerous inscriptions and historical records for this pharaoh. The record of his campaign against Pales-

tine (dated as 924 B.C.) is inscribed on the exterior south wall of the temple of Amun at Karnak in Thebes, and it conforms to the biblical account. There is no doubt about authenticity.

Hophra, another pharaoh of Egypt, is mentioned in Jeremiah 44:30. History confirms that he was indeed the pharaoh of Egypt during the time of the prophet Jeremiah and King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Hophra's defeat by Nebuchadnezzar in 572 B.C. and subsequent replacement by a general named Ahmes are confirmed in Babylonian records.

The New Testament has its own list of historical characters, such as:

Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate, Herod, his brother Philip, Annas and Caiaphas are all mentioned in Luke 3:1-2 in connection with the beginning of John the Baptist's preaching, which introduced Jesus Christ. Tiberius is found on numerous Roman coins and lived from 42 B.C. to A.D. 37. Herod the tetrarch of Galilee and his brother Philip, the tetrarch of Iturea, are mentioned by Josephus, the famous Jewish historian of the first century.

There is a stone inscription dedicated to Pontius Pilate that reads: "Pontius Pilate, prefect of Judea." In archaeology it is called the Pilate Stone, and it is in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.

Annas and Caiphas are both mentioned by Josephus as being among the Jewish high priests of the first century.

Evidence for Jesus Christ

Being able to confirm more than 100 biblical characters in secular history is impressive and provides a remarkable proof for the validity of Scripture. But what about the central figure of the Bible, Jesus Christ? Does history confirm that such a man lived, performed miracles, died by crucifixion and was resurrected from the dead?

Among those that mention Christ are two famous Roman historians. Both wrote in the second century and were born within 50 years of the death of Christ.

Tacitus confirms Christ as the founder of Christianity

Publius Cornelius Tacitus was a prominent Roman senator who was born in A.D. 56. His most famous historical work, *Annals,* was published in 115/116. Tacitus confirms the connection between Christ and Pilate and agrees with the biblical record that this took place during the reign of Tiberius.

Here is a quote from Tacitus (as translated from Latin by A.J. Church in 1876) taken from *Annals 15.44*:

"Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judæa, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular."

Tacitus was no fan of Christ or Christianity. Most scholars believe this is an accurate rendition of what Tacitus wrote. Notice that he confirms the existence of Jesus Christ as the founder of the Christian movement. He confirms that Pontius Pilate was the governor (or procurator) who convicted Christ and condemned Him to crucifixion (Matthew 27:2-22). He also confirms that all this happened during the reign of Tiberius Caesar (Luke 3:1). All the characters and dates line up with the Bible.

Pliny confirms the existence of Christ

Pliny the Younger, whose full name was Gaius Plinius Caecilius Secundus, was a Roman senator and was appointed governor of Bithynia and Pontus in A.D. 110. In his position as governor, he wrote numerous letters to Emperor Trajan asking for advice. A letter that is relevant to this article is found in his last and 10th book of letters, and it contains references to Christians and Jesus Christ.

During this time period many accused Christians of being cannibals. Pliny decided to make a thorough investigation. To his surprise, he discovered that the accusation was incorrect.

"They declared that the sum total of their guilt or error amounted to no more than this: they had met regularly before dawn on a fixed day to chant verses alternately among themselves in honor of Christ as if to a god, and also to bind themselves by oath, not for any criminal purpose, but to abstain from theft, robbery and adultery, to commit no breach of trust, and not to deny a deposit when called upon to restore it" (*Letters* 10.96.7-8, translator B. Radice).

Pliny was also no fan of Christians, but in his writings he mentions them as being interrogated, convicted and even killed for being followers of Christ.

These two famous Roman historians leave no doubt as to the origin of the religion and its first martyr, Jesus Christ.

The Jewish historian Josephus

Arguably the most famous Jewish historian of this time period was Flavius Josephus. He is best known for two works, *The Jewish War* and *Antiquities of the Jews.* He wrote both of them in Greek to apparently appeal to educated people.

The Jewish War doesn't mention Jesus except in a few disputed versions, but *Antiquities of the Jews* mentions Jesus twice. While there is some dispute over these passages, few scholars reject them outright. There are two statements within the longest account, called the *Testimonium Flavianum,* that attract the most controversy: "*... if indeed one ought to call him a man*" and "*He was the Messiah.*" The question is whether Josephus, a Jew, would write such statements or if these were inserted by Christians at a later date.

Here is the *Testimonium Flavianum* as it appears in virtually all copies of Josephus' writings:

"Around this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, *if indeed one ought to call him a man.* For he was one who did surprising deeds, and a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. *He was the Messiah.* When Pilate, upon hearing him accused by men of the highest standing among us, had condemned him to be crucified, those who in the first place came to love him did not give up their affection for him, for on the third day, he appeared to them restored to life. The prophets of God had prophesied this and countless other marvelous things about him. And the tribe of Christians, so called after him, have still to this day not died out" (*Antiquities of the Jews,* 18.3.3 §63, emphasis added).

While some question the credibility of this account, the fact is that all surviving manuscripts written in Greek contain the same version of this passage, with no significant differences.

Opponents and martyrs

Can you prove from secular history that Jesus Christ existed? The answer is yes! In fact, there is no evidence from any ancient writer who seriously argued that Jesus did not exist. Robert Van Voorst, a modern scholar and theologian, in his book *Jesus Outside the New Testament* wrote, "No pagans and Jews who opposed Christianity denied Jesus' historicity or even questioned it" (2000, p. 15).

Another fact that should not be ignored is that literally thousands of Christians in the first century, including most of the 12 apostles, gave their lives as martyrs. One does not give his life for something that he knows to be a lie. And these Christians, of all people, were in the best position to know whether Jesus Christ was a real person.

Amazingly accurate

Is the Bible true? The fact is that secular history corroborates the existence of more than 100 biblical characters and provides clear evidence for the existence of Jesus Christ, the central figure of the Bible.

The Bible is a collection of 66 books written by more than 40 authors over a period of more than 1,500 years, and yet it is amazingly accurate when it comes to the historical record. This fact alone supports a single and divine origin.

In the next article we will analyze fulfilled prophecy as another proof that the Bible is true.

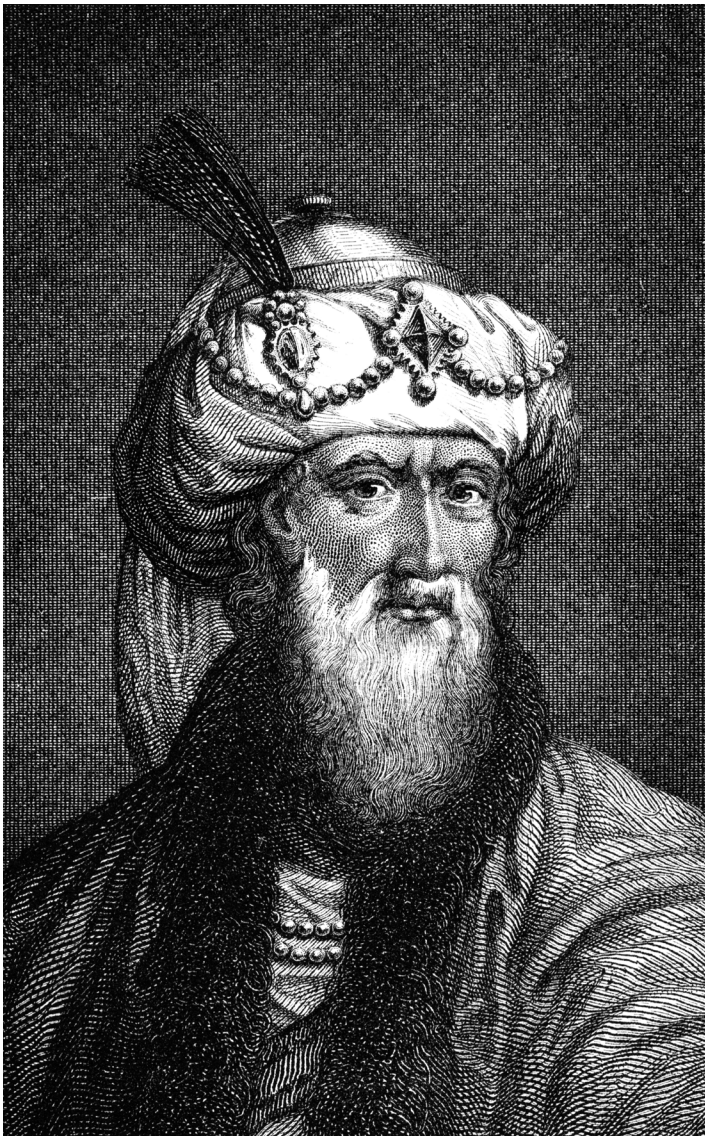


Photo: iStockphoto.com

"Around this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one ought to call him a man. For he was one who did surprising deeds, and a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. He was the Messiah."

—disputed quote from Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*



FULFILLED PROPHECY

Photo: Wikimedia Commons

Can you confirm the validity of the Bible by taking specific prophecies and determining if they have been fulfilled exactly as written?

What is prophecy? "The foretelling of future events, by inspiration from God. ... A true prophecy can come only from God; and is the highest proof of the divine origin of the message of which it is a part" (*American Tract Society Bible Dictionary*).

Based on this definition, a large chunk of the Bible qualifies as prophecy. There are 16 named prophets who authored Old Testament books: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi.

Moses, the author of the first five books of the Bible, is also called a prophet (Deuteronomy 34:10). King David had a seer or prophet by the name of Gad (2 Samuel 24:11). Nathan the prophet confronted David over his sin with Bathsheba. And there were others—Ahijah, Jehu, Elijah, Elisha, Shemaiah, Oded and Samuel—who were identified as prophets.

Some scholars estimate that a third of the Bible is prophecy. How could a human being predict future events and have them fulfilled exactly as he said without God's involvement?

In this article, let's take a look at just three of the estimated 2,500 prophecies in the pages of the Bible and determine if they were indeed fulfilled.

1. Jeremiah's 70-year prophecy

Let's begin with the famous 70-year prophecy found in Jeremiah 25:11-12: "'And this whole land shall be a desolation and an astonishment, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. Then it will come to pass, when seventy years are completed, that I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity,' says the LORD; 'and I will make it a perpetual desolation.'"

Here we have a very specific prophecy reported by Jeremiah that gives a length of time for the Babylonian captivity of the Jews and the desolation of the land. This should be fairly simple to prove one way or another.

First, consider the 70 years of captivity. As our article "Daniel 9: The 70-Year Prophecy of

Jeremiah" explains, "The first deportation of Jews to Babylon (which included Daniel and his friends Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego) began the 70 years of captivity. Bible commentaries identify this as occurring between 607 and 605 B.C. Various sources say the date of the return of the Jews to Jerusalem occurred between 539 and 536 B.C."

What about the 70 years of desolation of the land? Around 586 B.C. King Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem and the temple built by Solomon. After the destruction of the city, he took more of the Jews into captivity. This can easily be confirmed by history.

Most dates from this period of time are difficult to nail down exactly, but historians agree to the range of 587-585 B.C. for the destruction of Jerusalem. And the date of 586 B.C. is the most widely accepted, which would place the conclusion of 70 years as 516 B.C.

What happened in 516? According to historians, this is the year that the rebuilt temple was dedicated. Finally, after 70 years, the Jews once again could sacrifice and worship at a temple in Jerusalem.

But some will say that this prophecy was written after the 516 date. Is that true? There is solid historical evidence that Jeremiah wrote his book years before the dedication of the second temple in Jerusalem.

2. Prophecy about Bethlehem

Our next prophecy is found in Micah 5:2: "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting."

In the New Testament we read of a group of wise men who came to Herod looking for the Messiah. After they left Jerusalem, Herod gathered the experts to ask where the Messiah would be born. They quoted Micah's prophecy, declaring that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. "And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. So they said to him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet'" (Matthew 2:4-5).

Micah wrote his prophecy around 700 B.C., and the events recorded in Matthew took place in 4 B.C. Notice the string of events that had to occur to fulfill this prophecy. When an angel told Mary she would give birth to the Messiah, she was living in Nazareth (a city in Galilee) and betrothed to Joseph (Luke 1:26-27). As she approached her due date, Joseph took her to Bethlehem, a city far from Galilee.

Since Mary and Joseph lived in Nazareth, the odds of them being in Bethlehem for Christ's birth were quite small. This was a direct fulfillment of Micah's prophecy and further proof that the Bible is true.

3. Prophecy of Cyrus before he was even born

Our third prophecy is even more incredible. In Isaiah 45:1 we read about a man named Cyrus. "Thus says the LORD to His anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have held—to subdue nations before him and loose the armor of kings, to open before him the double doors, so that the gates will not be shut: I will go before you and make the crooked places straight; I will break in pieces the gates of bronze and cut the bars of iron."

Isaiah wrote in the eighth century B.C., but Cyrus was not born until the sixth century B.C., approximately 200 years later. How could Isaiah name Cyrus before he was even born?

History records that Cyrus the Great was the founder of the Persian Empire. He reigned from 559 to 530 B.C., during which time he united the Medes and the Persians into a formidable world empire. He was a warrior and fought many battles, but one of his most famous was the conquering of the city of Babylon, which was thought to be impossible because of the thick walls that surrounded the city.

But Cyrus used subterfuge. Here is the story of that battle from the online Ancient History Encyclopedia:

"By the year 540 BCE, Cyrus captured Elam and its capital, Susa. Cyrus moved into Babylonia and fought the Battle of Opis in or near the strategic riverside city of Opis on the Tigris, north of Babylon. The Babylonian army was routed, and Cyrus conquered Babylon [539 B.C.] without any significant resistance. Herodotus explains that to accomplish this feat, the Persians diverted the Euphrates river into a canal so that the water level dropped 'to the height of the middle of a man's thigh,' which allowed the invading forces to march directly through the river bed to enter at night."

Isaiah's prophecy was very specific, even mentioning the double doors and gates that would "open before him." All of this around 200 years in advance! Isaiah went on to prophesy that Cyrus would permit the Jews to return and rebuild Jerusalem. Consider the fact that when Isaiah wrote about this, the Jews were not even in captivity and Babylon was not yet a major world power.

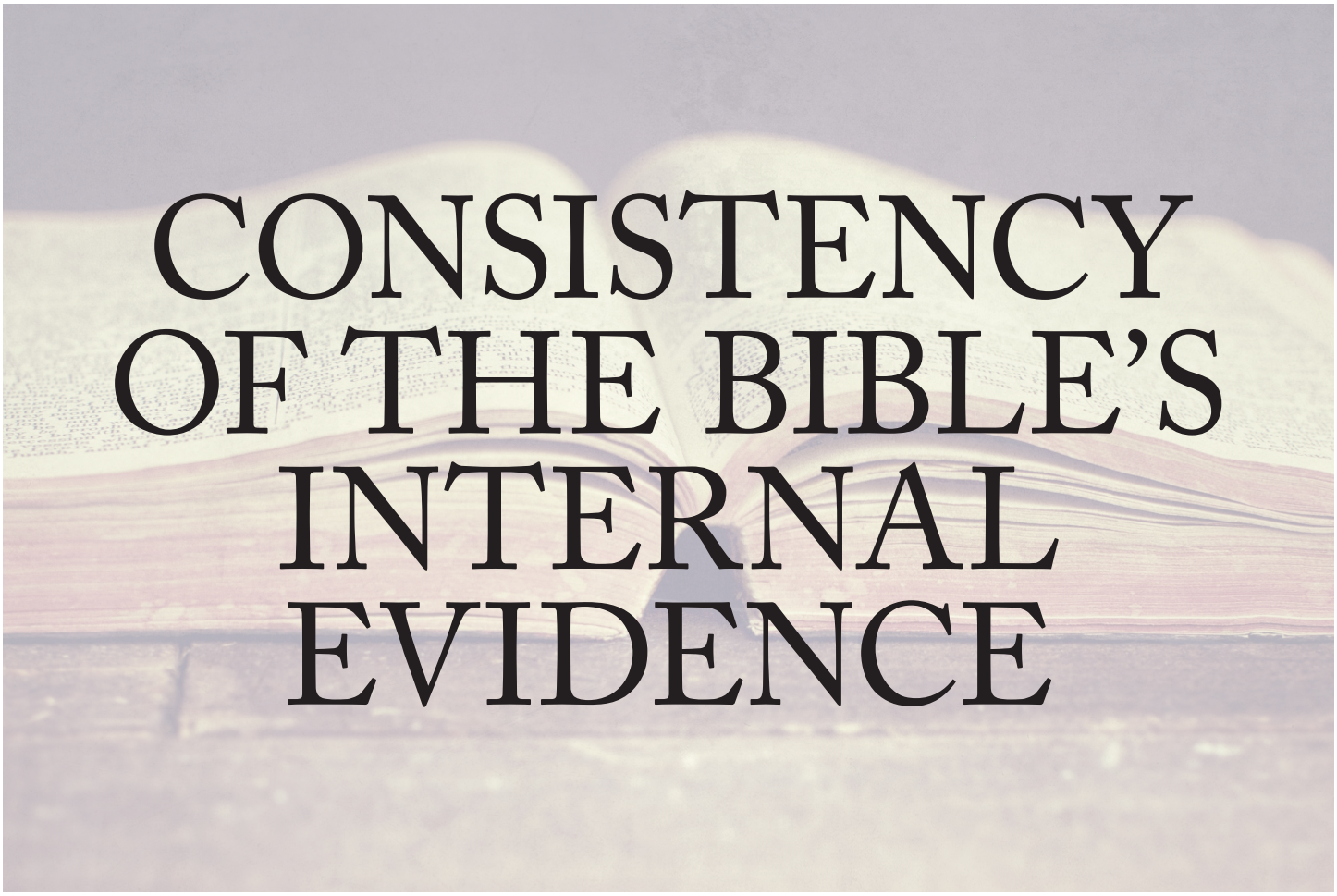
- Isaiah 44:28: "Who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd, and he shall perform all My pleasure, saying to Jerusalem, "You shall be built," and to the temple, "Your foundation shall be laid."'" The fulfillment of this prophecy is recorded in the books of 2 Chronicles and Ezra.
- Ezra 6:3: "In the first year of King Cyrus, King Cyrus issued a decree concerning the house of God at Jerusalem: 'Let the house be rebuilt, the place where they offered sacrifices; and let the foundations of it be firmly laid, its height sixty cubits and its width sixty cubits.'"

What an amazing fulfillment of prophecy! And so specific! In 2 Timothy 3:16 we read that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God." Only God could have provided the Old Testament prophets with the inspiration to write prophecy and then have it come to pass. Just imagine the series of events that had to happen for Cyrus to be born, become the king of Persia, conquer the greatest city in the world (Babylon), and permit the Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the city and the temple!

These are only three of many prophecies found in the Old Testament, but they illustrate an important principle: The Bible is the authentic Word of God! It is true!

In the next article we will explore the internal evidence proving the Bible is true. Keep in mind that the Bible as we have it today consists of 66 books, written by approximately 40 different authors over a period of about 1,500 years. It would seem highly unlikely that this many authors could write over such a long period of time with a simple, consistent message without God's involvement.

For more about fulfilled prophecy, see our Life, Hope & Truth articles "Fulfilled Prophecy" and "Fulfilled Prophecy Is Evidence of God's Existence."



CONSISTENCY OF THE BIBLE'S INTERNAL EVIDENCE

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Critics ask, "How can you believe a book that is filled with contradictions?" As a believer in the Bible, how would you answer that question?

The website 1001biblecontradictions.com says: "This website could just as well have been called 'Against fundamentalism.' My purpose is to expose a large number of contradictions and discrepancies in the Christian Bibles to disprove fundamentalist claims that every word in the Bible is true."

But is the Bible really filled with contradictions? Or will careful examination show a remarkable consistency despite all the odds against it?

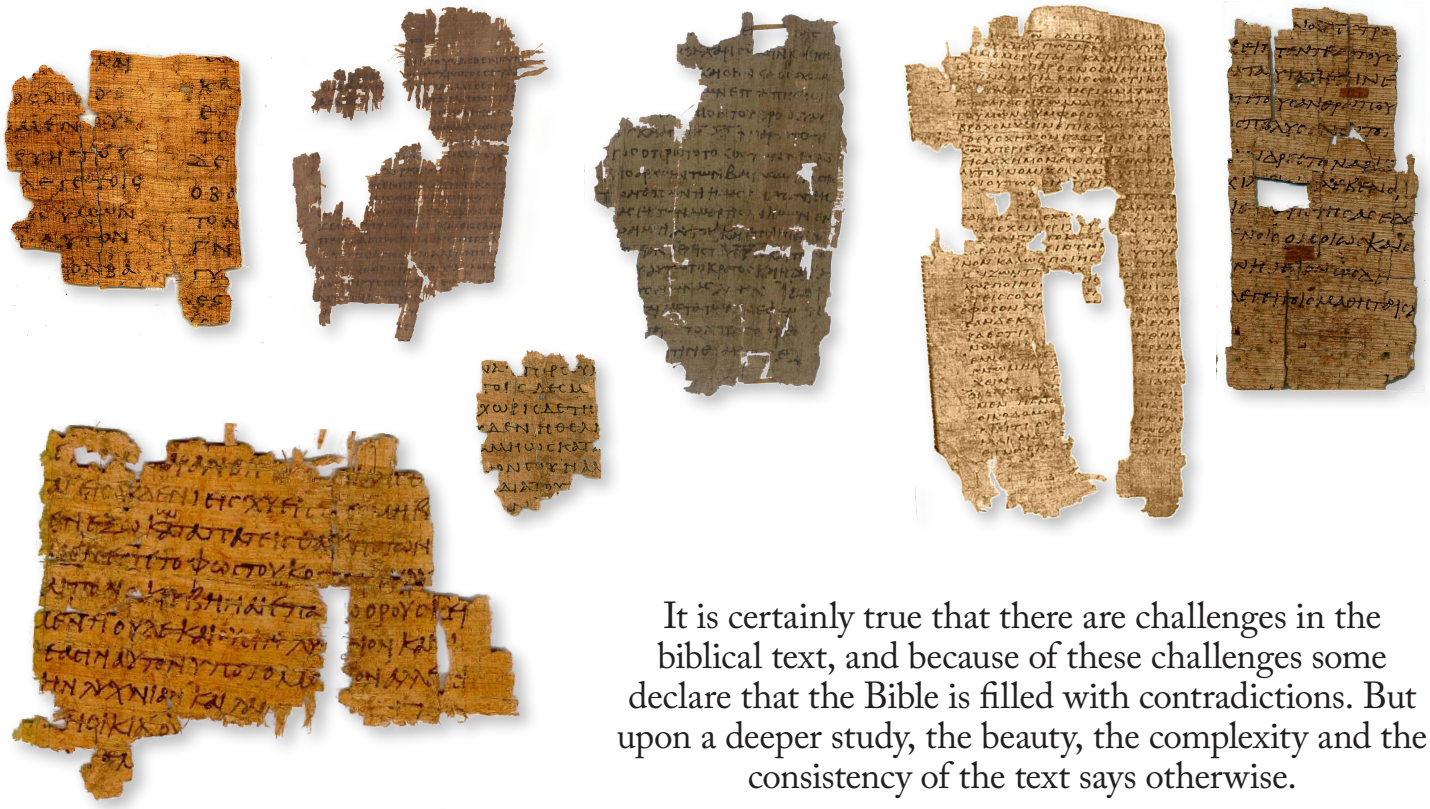
So far, this series of articles has focused on sources outside the Bible. What about the Bible itself? This final article will focus on the internal evidence proving the consistency of Scripture. Skeptics will dismiss the use of the Bible to prove its own legitimacy, but when combined with the previous four proofs, the fact that the Bible as a collection of ancient documents is consistent in its message is further proof that it is indeed true.

Consistency against the odds

J. Philip Hyatt, a professor of the Old Testament at Vanderbilt University from 1944-1972, identified some of the challenges to maintaining the accuracy of the biblical text across the millennia:

"It should be obvious from this history of the text that a period of a thousand years or more elapsed between the completion of the latest book of the [Old Testament] and most of the [manuscripts] on which modern study is based. During this time the text was repeatedly copied and recopied by hand. When one thinks of the errors that may arise even with the use of modern typewriters and composing machines, it is not difficult to realize why errors arose in this repeated copying by hand. Errors could arise from failure to read a text properly, failure to hear correctly when manuscripts were written from dictation, fatigue, failure to understand what one was writing, and even sheer carelessness" (*Encyclopedia Americana,* Vol. 3, 1984, p. 658).

Our modern Bible has 66 books, 39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament. These 66 books were written by more than 40 different authors from all walks of life—shep-



Photos: Wikimedia Commons

It is certainly true that there are challenges in the biblical text, and because of these challenges some declare that the Bible is filled with contradictions. But upon a deeper study, the beauty, the complexity and the consistency of the text says otherwise.

herds, farmers, tentmakers, physicians, fishermen, priests, prophets and kings—over a period of more than 1,500 years.

The Bible was written in three primary languages: Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. But these were not always the languages spoken by the primary characters. For example, Jesus and His disciples most likely spoke Aramaic the majority of the time, but the Gospels were preserved in Greek.

In spite of all these obstacles—copyist errors, translation issues, different spoken vs. written language—the degree of continuity and consistency found in the Bible is actually quite remarkable.

This evidence backs up Jesus Christ's declaration: "Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35).

The apostle Paul also authoritatively referred to Old Testament passages many times, such as: "For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness'" (Romans 4:3).

Compared to other ancient classics

In spite of the number of authors and the volume of writing, the Bible, when it comes to internal agreement, exceeds what one could expect from any other ancient document.

Consider the example of the *Iliad* written by one author, Homer, sometime around 900 B.C. There are 643 known ancient copies of the *Iliad,* and the oldest dates from 400 B.C. But not a single copy is 100 percent in agreement with the others. On its website Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry rates the agreement among the copies of Homer's *Iliad* as 95 percent.

The New Testament has been preserved in almost 6,000 known Greek manuscripts. The agreement among these manuscripts is rated as 99.5 percent. The degree of difference is extraordinarily small. "If the critics of the Bible dismiss the New Testament as reliable information, then they must also dismiss the reliability of the writings of Plato, Aristotle, Caesar, Homer" (CARM). The degree of difference in each case is greater in these ancient classics than in the ancient manuscripts composing the Bible.

Five ways of resolving alleged contradictions

The fact is that most of the alleged contradictions in the Bible are easily resolved, and those that remain may have more than one logical explanation. The answers primarily fall into five categories:

1. Copyist errors.
2. Translation errors—different words chosen by different translators.
3. Numerical issues, often resolved by simply checking the context for each entry.
4. The context of the passage.
5. The use of literary devices in the passage, as opposed to a real event.

For more on this, see our Life, Hope & Truth article "Contradictions in the Bible?"

Resolving alleged contradiction in the creation accounts

One example of an alleged contradiction and its resolution is the creation account recorded in Genesis 1 and 2. Critics claim that in Genesis 1:24-27 man is created after the animals. But in Genesis 2:18-19, it appears that man is created prior to the animals.

Actually, there is harmony between the two accounts without any contradiction. Chapter 1 and continuing through the first four verses of chapter 2 focuses on the order of the creation events. But then chapter 2 provides additional details for the events that occurred on day 6. Chapter 2 does not state that

man was created before the animals. The account of creation in chapter 2 has to do with naming the animals—without addressing the order of creation.

Genesis 1 mentions the creation of man as the last of a series without providing a lot of details. In Genesis 2 man is the center of interest and more details are given about him and the circumstances surrounding his creation. In other words, chapter 1 is an outline, a skeleton, if you will; and chapter 2 provides details, or flesh for the skeleton. There is no contradiction.

What about Peter's triple denial?

Another alleged Bible contradiction is the account of Peter's triple denial of Christ in conjunction with the crowing of a rooster. Skeptics charge that Mark's account contradicts the other Gospel accounts.

In this example you must read the text carefully to see what is being said and what is not being said. You must also allow for the possibility that the accounts are complementary before assuming they are contradictory.

The passages to examine are found in Matthew 26, Mark 14, Luke 22 and John 13. Interestingly this is one event that appears in all four Gospels, all written at different times. Matthew, Luke and John quote Jesus as saying that Peter would deny Him three times before the rooster crowed. This is found in Matthew 26:34; Luke 22:34; and John 13:38.

Mark writes: "Jesus said to him, 'Assuredly, I say to you that today, even this night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times" (Mark 14:30).

In all four accounts we have the same number of denials listed—three; but in Mark's account the third denial comes before the rooster has crowed for the second time. So which is it—once or twice? Mark records that the first crowing of the rooster occurred *after* Peter's first denial, but the third denial occurred *before* the rooster crowed, which is exactly what we read in Matthew, Luke and John.

In this case one should not assume that there is a contradiction because three of the Gospel writers mention one crowing, while Mark mentions two. The truth is that Peter denied Christ three times *before* the crowing of a rooster. Matthew, Luke and John do not concern themselves with the number of times the rooster crowed, but the fact that Peter's third denial came in advance of a crowing of a rooster. There is no contradiction among the four accounts.

The challenging, true and life-changing Word of God

It is certainly true that there are challenges in the biblical text, and because of these challenges some declare that the Bible is filled with contradictions. But upon a deeper study, the beauty, the complexity and the consistency of the text says otherwise. It is a remarkable book. (See more on this in our Life, Hope & Truth article "Who Wrote the Bible?")

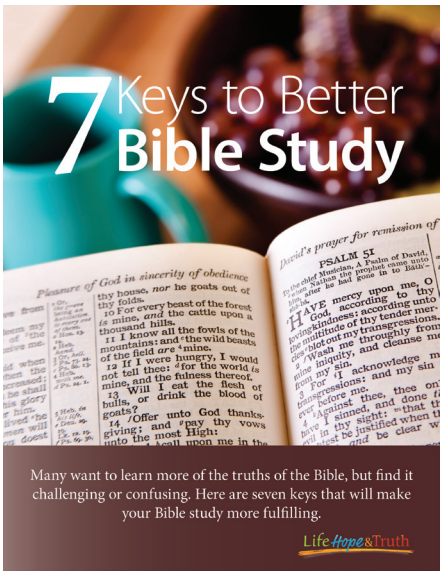
Let's go back to the beginning of this series and read 2 Timothy 3:16 again. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God." The Greek word for the phrase *by inspiration of God* is *theopneustos,* which literally means "God breathed." Paul explained to Timothy that the true author of the Bible is none other than God Himself.

Is the Bible true? Absolutely, it is! In this series, we've touched on five out of many proofs: 1. archaeology, 2. the Dead Sea Scrolls, 3. secular history, 4. fulfilled prophecy and 5. the consistency of the text itself.

When reading the Bible, read it for what it says and not what people claim it says! By doing so, you will discover the truth of the Bible; and in that truth, you will discover a way of life that is very different from what is taught today, even among Christians.

Being a Christian is more than acknowledging Scripture—it is living by Scripture. The Bible is true, but that fact alone will not make you a better person. Living by its precepts will! The Bible is the true Word of God!

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We encourage you to download our free study guide *Seven Keys to Better Better Bible Study* at the Learning Center on LifeHopeandTruth.com

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LifeHopeandTruth.com exists to fill a critical void in this world: the lack of understanding about the purpose of life, the lack of realistic hope for a better future and the lack of truth!

Neither religion nor science has satisfactorily addressed these issues, so people today are of divided opinions, confused or, worst of all, don't care anymore. The ancient words of the prophet Isaiah ring so true today: "Truth is fallen in the street." Why? Is it because God was right when He warned that humans are inclined to reject Him and usually choose not to know Him?

We are here for people who are searching for answers, who are ready to prove all things or who are hungry for more than what they've been taught most of their lives about God, the Bible, the meaning of life and how to live. We want to help you truly understand the good news of the gospel and fulfill Jesus Christ's admonition to "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness."

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