



Is the  
Bible True?



# One of the World's *Most Popular Books*

**O**n March 16, 1985, journalist Terry Anderson was kidnapped from the streets of Beirut, Lebanon. As a political pawn he was held hostage for 2,454 days. During this excruciating ordeal Mr. Anderson showed remarkable courage, although frequently stretched to near his breaking point.

On the first day of his confinement his abductors hustled him at gunpoint from his car into theirs, then took him to a half-built apartment building. There they blindfolded him and chained him to a cot.

During his first 24 days in chains, bound and restrained like an animal, he struggled to find a way to maintain his sanity. Realizing the need to summon courage and strength from somewhere, he asked his captors for a Bible.

In his memoirs Mr. Anderson related the result of that request: "The next day, late in the afternoon, the English-speaking guard came in and threw a heavy

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object on the bed. I reached for it, felt the smooth covers of a book. The guard came around to the head of the bed. 'Good?' 'Yes, very good, thank you.'

"I cautiously pulled my blindfold up a bit, until I could see the book . . . A Bible, the Revised Standard Version. I caressed it gently . . . I read the title page, the publishing and copyright information, the notes of the editors, slowly, carefully. Then: Genesis. 'In the beginning . . .'" (Terry A. Anderson, *Den of Lions*, Crown, New York, 1993, pp. 14-15).

How often in crises have men and women turned to the Bible for help? The value of the Word of God is acknowledged at such moments of unease, uncertainty and apprehension.

## **A perennial best-seller**

The Holy Bible is regarded by millions as the written Word of the one and only true God. Indeed, the Bible claims this distinction for itself. In the eyes of many others it is highly regarded as a collection of some of the world's greatest literature.

The nonprofit American Bible Society has, in more than 180 years of its existence, distributed approximately as many Bibles as there are people in the world—some five billion.

Millions of Bibles, reflecting numerous translations, are sold every year. Translations exist in more than 2,000 languages and dialects.

The Bible is especially popular wherever English is spoken. It is "the most widely known book in the English-speaking world . . . No one in the English-speaking world can be considered literate without a basic knowledge of the Bible" (E.D. Hirsch Jr., Joseph F. Kett and James Trefil, *The Dictionary of Cultural Literacy*, Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, 1988, p. 1). So within the English-speaking world, even where religions other than Christianity dominate, a basic knowledge of the Bible is essential if one is to be considered an educated citizen.

"Literate people in India, whose religious traditions are not based on the Bible but whose common language is English, must know about the Bible to understand English within their own country. All educated speakers of American English need to understand what is meant when someone describes a contest between David and Goliath or whether a person who has the 'wisdom of Solomon' is wise or foolish . . ." (ibid.).

Americans in particular attribute great influence to the Bible. In a survey by the Library of Congress and Book-of-the-Month Club, readers were asked what book had most influenced their lives. The Bible topped the list. In a 1938 Gallup poll the Bible was considered the most



***The Bible, although it is one of the world's most-read books, is at the same time one of the least understood.***

interesting of all books read that year. It was rated by a majority as more-interesting reading than the 1930s novel *Gone With the Wind*. However, in more secular Britain this is not the case. In a similar British survey the Bible came in 35th in a field of 50 books.

The Bible is quoted by statesmen, politicians, philoso-

phers, poets and even orbiting astronauts. People from all walks of life have found in its pages just the right words for innumerable situations. Its insights often provide the right accompaniment for moments of awe and inspiration, stress and anguish, confusion and doubt.

### The Bible neglected

However, for all of the attention given to the Bible, its value is underestimated. When we probe a little deeper we find the Bible being lauded, even revered, yet a book whose contents are often little read and even less understood.

Much of the world is biblically illiterate. Anecdotes abound about the abysmally low awareness of what the Bible says. This was illustrated in one quiz when some respondents guessed that Sodom and Gomorrah were lovers and that the Epistles were the wives of the apostles. Further, many people cannot name one, let alone all

four, of the Gospels. Others cannot identify Jesus Christ as the deliverer of the Sermon on the Mount.

Far too many neglect to take the Bible seriously. They fail to recognize the Bible for what it is: the handbook for humankind, provided by God for our journey through life. It is a source to be consulted in every life situation, with guidelines for triumph and adversity, joy and sorrow, prosperity and poverty, confidence and doubt.

The Bible itself asserts its divine authority; it claims to be the very Word of God. It declares an understanding of mankind's purpose: to attain the awesome destiny planned for us by our Creator. It offers guidance, encouragement and direction at every turn.

But can the Bible withstand scrutiny? Is it true just because it claims to be true? Can you—*should* you—believe it?

In the chapters that follow, we will see whether the Bible stands as the very Word of God.



# The Bible in the *Modern World*

If the Bible is the authoritative Word of God, what should we expect to find in it? Should it give us all the information we might ever find useful? Should we disregard all other books and consider the Bible the only reliable source of knowledge on every subject?

Some have viewed the Bible in this light, thinking of it as the complete source of all important knowledge, an exhaustive textbook or encyclopedia. The Bible, however, makes no such claim. It is largely silent on thousands of topics. A well-rounded education should include the study of many subjects—health, business, economics, the sciences and history—that are not detailed in the Bible. God's Word does not discuss *every* aspect of human knowledge. It does, however, excel in the spiritual realm.

### Significant human discoveries

Able and talented people through the ages—believers of the Bible as well as skeptics—have gained expertise and understanding in many disciplines. Some have conducted scientific experiments. Others have recorded what man has learned through trial and error. Through simple observation many have discovered, or recognized the existence of, the natural laws that govern the universe. Their research has helped us understand our world.

For example, researchers have discovered the existence of principles of health that govern the functioning of our bodies. They have added enormously to the body of knowledge and to human longevity.

The written works of men are useful, but we need to realize that the Bible fills a void that no other book can fill: It reveals the purpose for which human beings have been created. Although many other books contain kernels of wisdom, this book reveals as no other the wisdom and

understanding inspired *from the mind of God Himself*.

This book contains eternal truths *we could not discover on our own*. When we understand the Bible's true spiritual significance, all other books pale before it. By reading and applying its revealed knowledge, we can reap immeasurable benefits both now and forever. ". . . Godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come" (1 Timothy 4:8).

The Bible is God's gift to mankind, the absolute authority and ultimate judge of human behavior and morality. It reveals the way mankind should walk (Psalm 119:105), as taught by the Being who created man (Genesis 1:26-27).

It discloses the way of life that brings happiness. As King David, the author of many of the Psalms, wrote: "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly . . . but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night . . . Whatever he does shall prosper" (Psalm 1:1-3). Here David refers to God's law as revealed in the Bible as the proper way to live.

### What kind of book is the Bible?

What kind of instruction from God does humanity need? When God created mankind, He instilled in us a high degree of intelligence, curiosity and capacity for learning. He gave each of us a mind that can gather and store knowledge and pass it on to succeeding generations. Through time humans have used this intelligence to observe, describe, discover and build. People have used their minds to record vast amounts of knowledge.

God did not need to give man a book that contained information he could learn on his own. Instead, God gave man a mind with which he could acquire and develop an

abundance of useful knowledge. What man needed was a book containing information he could never discover alone—knowledge that must be *divinely revealed*.

That is the information God has provided. That is precisely what the Bible is. It is a book of spiritual truth. But it also contains information about the material world. God's unfolding of spiritual truths to real, physical humans took place in real, physical settings and among actual, historical events.

The Bible, then, provides us a great deal of physical, as well as spiritual, knowledge. It relates information on material matters such as the ordering of the physical world. It gives us information on the orderly functioning of society. It addresses basic principles of success in occupational and financial matters. It imparts guidelines of nutrition and health.

The Bible describes many types of personal relationships. It addresses principles of psychological and mental health. It provides rudimentary information that touches on the physical sciences. But it does not treat any of these areas exhaustively, because God has given us the ability to search out these matters ourselves.

## Harmony of Bible and science

The word *science* means knowledge, emanating from the Latin *scientia*, derived from *scire*, “to know.”

Mankind's store of scientific knowledge is impressive, but we should realize the limits to our knowledge. Perhaps the most vivid example of man's ability to increase knowledge is found in what is known as “Moore's Law.” In 1979 Gordon Moore, cofounder of Intel Corp., predicted that “microprocessor power would double every 18 months for the foreseeable future . . . Dr. Moore was right” (*MacUser*, November 1996, p. 25).

Moore's Law demonstrates man's ability to multiply knowledge exponentially. As new information is gathered, recorded, verified, analyzed and compared, prior knowledge must be reevaluated in light of new discoveries. Scientific theories long assumed to be fact routinely crumble in the face of new findings.

Although not a science book, the Bible *contains* scientific knowledge. The information included in the Bible is true and verifiable, and harmonizes—once all the facts are known—with scientific knowledge. Jesus Christ said of God the Father, “Your word is *truth*” (John 17:17).

## Humanity's Bias Against the Supernatural

**W**hole segments of society are biased against the Bible. As historian Paul Johnson put it: “It is a striking fact that, at the end of the twentieth century, the vast majority of people in the world still believe in a god . . . But it cannot be denied, also, that the Promethean spirit, the spirit of those who believe they can do without God—or that they can find substitutes for God—is also strong today, perhaps stronger than ever before” (*The Quest for God*, Harper-Collins, New York, 1996, p. 18).

Prometheus was the mythical Greek figure who, it was claimed, defied the gods by stealing fire from Zeus, the chief god, and giving it to mankind. Mr. Johnson defines the “Promethian spirit” as one of men and women “believ[ing they] can do without God.” It is a spirit of pride, trust in human wisdom and understanding, and resistance and defiance of things supernatural, including the Bible.

For centuries the Western world accepted the Bible as the inspired Word of God. It stood unquestioned as the foundation of all knowledge, including the sciences. However, scientific advancements and expanding education led to widespread questioning of religious authority and skepticism of Scripture itself.

Historian James Hitchcock described this slow but massive shift: “From the beginning of the European universities in the twelfth century, theology had been the ‘queen of the sciences,’ and religion had been seen as at the center of reality. Now [in the seventeenth century] thinkers like Descartes [1596-1650] ‘protected’ religion by putting it off to one side . . . Religion was not openly attacked nor, for the most part, was it disbelieved. It just ceased to be important . . .

“[But] if the seventeenth century still treated Christianity with respect, the eighteenth century opened a frontal attack on it. The philosophers . . . were self-

proclaimed apostles of an ‘Enlightenment.’ This term implies the existence of prior darkness, largely the result of Christianity, which was equated with superstition and ignorance. In their mental world there was no room for mystery or the supernatural . . . There was no divine providence or miracles—God did not ‘interfere’ in his creation. Nor did he reveal himself to his people, in the Scriptures or through the church” (James Hitchcock, *What Is Secular Humanism?*, Servant Books, Ann Arbor, 1982, pp. 36-37).

The growth of such an outlook is echoed by Paul Johnson, who wrote that this attitude has been “growing with dramatic speed over the past 250 years” (Johnson, p. 18). Skepticism of the Bible as the inspired Word of God accelerated in the 19th century, and critics at universities practically stood in line to question and criticize the Bible on philosophical, theological, historical and textual grounds.

Such thinking heavily influences higher education—including many seminarians—to this day. Not only do such critics question the Bible; often they refuse to listen to its defenders and even reject out of hand hard scientific evidence *supporting* the Scriptures. The net effect is that many *profess* a belief in a God but don't really know Him, and in many cases they have fundamental doubts about His Word. Because of such doubt, recognized or not, much of the supposed Christian world is largely unaware of even basic Bible knowledge.

Most people approach the Bible, either knowingly or unknowingly, with a built-in doubt of its veracity. If we really want to know the truth, we should at least temporarily lay aside such skepticism and examine the Bible with an open mind. One wonders how many nonbelievers in God would remain nonbelievers if they read and studied the Scriptures and examined the evidence *supporting* its accuracy and authenticity.

The apostle Paul noted that God cannot lie (Titus 1:2). If these statements are accurate, we should expect nothing but accuracy from the Holy Scriptures.

As we examine the Bible for accuracy, we will see that when God's Word speaks we should listen. Although some skeptics will never be fully satisfied, we will see that the Bible has proven to be accurate and true to those willing to objectively view all the evidence. The Bible harmonizes with true knowledge. Apparent contradictions in Scripture are just that: only *apparent*. The whole scientific record has not yet been discovered by man. There is much yet to be learned.

In some areas of scientific analysis, the physical evi-

dence simply no longer exists, or major parts of it remain to be found. This is particularly true in archaeology. Many events described in the Bible occurred before humankind had developed reliable and enduring written records, and still other events took place even before humans existed. Historical records alone can neither prove nor disprove the biblical accuracy of such events. We will demonstrate, however, that evidence unearthed to date does harmonize with and verify portions of the biblical record.

Scientists and laymen alike will continue to examine the evidence in our physical world and in the scientific record. As they do this, the harmony between Scripture and science will grow increasingly apparent.



## The Bible and *Astronomy*

**T**o be the Word of God, the Bible must be true. This should be self-evident. In recent centuries, however, we find that some scholars and scientists have made discoveries that, with superficial consideration, seem to contradict the Bible. Such findings have sent tremors through the Christian world.

An example was a discovery by the Polish astronomer Copernicus, who in the early 16th century concluded that the Western world's prevailing view of the universe was incorrect. It was an article of faith in the Middle Ages that the earth was the center of the universe, around which all other heavenly bodies revolved.

Historian William Manchester centuries later wrote that "the world was [believed to be] an immovable disk around which the sun revolved, and . . . the rest of the cosmos comprised heaven, which lay dreamily above the skies, inhabited by cherubs, and hell, flaming deep beneath the European soil. Everyone believed, indeed knew, that" (William Manchester, *A World Lit Only by Fire*, Little, Brown and Co., Boston, 1993, p. 89).

Copernicus, after years of observing the skies and consulting mathematical tables, arrived at a radically different conclusion: The earth is not a disk about which the sun rotates; it is a sphere traveling around the sun. His discovery brought shock and alarm to many religious authorities.

His view was about as welcome to the educated mind during the Middle Ages as the plague. Upon Copernicus's presentation of his evidence to influential men in education and religion, his reward was jeers and ridicule. The established church branded Copernicus as an apostate for challenging the conventional wisdom of the day.

How did this conflict arise? The churchmen had taken their views from Ptolemy, a Greek astronomer living in Egypt, who had decreed in the second century that the earth was the center of the universe (*ibid.*, p. 116).

Ptolemy was correct on one important point. It seems he "knew that the earth was a sphere . . ." (Carl Sagan,

*Pale Blue Dot*, Random House, New York, 1994, p. 17). Others had previously deduced this as well. "More than three hundred years before the birth of Christ, Aristotle had determined that the planet must be a sphere; after an eclipse he had pointed out that only an orb could throw a circular shadow on the moon" (Manchester, p. 230).

Organized religion of the second century accepted Ptolemy's geocentric view but ultimately rejected his belief that the earth was spherical. Theologians chose instead to "endorse the absurd geographical dicta of *Topographia Christiana*, a treatise by the sixth-century monk Cosmas . . . who . . . held that the world was a flat, rectangular plane . . ." (*ibid.*).

Copernicus was later joined in his heresy by others. The astronomer Galileo confirmed the findings of Copernicus but recanted under threat of torture. But their scientific findings could not be restrained forever. The result was a loss of the monopoly that religion had over men's minds. The Copernican discovery triggered the greatest credibility crisis that church authorities of the Middle Ages had to face. In defending their position, they presented human opinion, which could be—and was—overturned by scientific observation and experimentation.

Belief in the Bible and ecclesiastical authority would never be the same. Now a movement had begun that would eventually, in the minds of many, discredit the Scriptures as a legitimate source of authority.

### Misunderstanding the Scriptures

In reality the Bible was not disproved at all. The *misguided interpretations* that men had attached to certain scriptures were discredited. It was not the Bible that stood corrected, but *man's assumptions* about what the Bible said.

Ptolemy's erroneous view had been injected into theology in the second century. There is no evidence that Christ or the apostles believed in this view of creation.

Religious leaders from the second century on were in

error about the earth's place in the scheme of things because of a misunderstanding of various scriptures. They misunderstood Psalm 93:1, which says that "the world is established, so that it cannot be moved." This verse does not conflict with the fact that God has placed the earth in a solar orbit.

We could say that this verse verifies what man has learned from the study of astronomy: that the earth's behavior is fixed and predictable. God set the earth in its orbit about the sun and, as the psalm notes, it will not go careening out of its place in the heavens because God has determined its orbit and controls the forces that keep earth in its proper place.

### The Bible ahead of its time

When the Renaissance dawned, scholars who awoke to the structure of the solar system were centuries behind the Bible in basic knowledge of the structure of the universe. One might wonder how people could have remained in the dark for so long. We must realize that with the arrival of the Dark Ages man sank deep into an intellectual and moral morass that lasted from about A.D. 400 to 1000. During this time "intellectual life . . . vanished from Europe. Even Charlemagne, the first Holy Roman emperor and the greatest of all medieval rulers,

was illiterate." It was a period of "almost impenetrable mindlessness" (Manchester, p. 3).

The belief that the earth is not the center of the universe died hard. In some places this new truth was not accepted by religious leaders for more than 300 years after Copernicus's discoveries. Tremors were felt throughout organized Christianity because many believed that the astronomical reality cast doubt upon the veracity of the Bible.

In reality it did no such thing. It was not the Bible that was found wanting; it was the *interpretation* that had been adopted by religious authorities. The facts merely confirmed what the Bible had said all along.

### The age of the universe

Man's misguided theory of the structure of the universe was the first major astronomical controversy that pitted science against religion. Many more controversies followed. One of the most hotly debated concerned the age of the universe.

Astronomers see evidence that the universe is many billions of years old and generally believe that it came into existence between 10 and 20 billion years ago through an event commonly called the Big Bang. Some biblical literalists, on the other hand, dogmatically maintain that the universe is only about 6,000 years old. They

## Earth's Age: Does the Bible Indicate a Time Interval Be

**W**e are introduced to the account of the creation of the earth in Genesis 1:1-2: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep."

The original Hebrew wording, combined with a comparison to other passages of Scripture, has led some to conclude that a considerable time interval is indicated

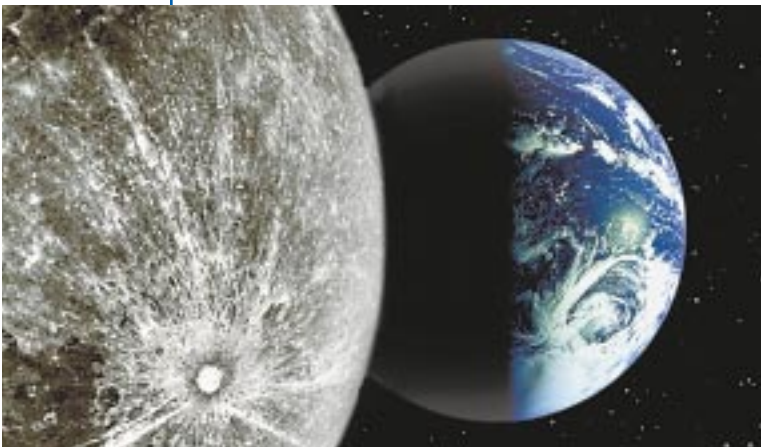
years old—which most scientists consider an impossibility.

Do other passages, as well as history, shed any light on this question?

Some scholars propose that Genesis 1:2 can or should be translated "Now the earth *became* without form, and void . . ." as opposed to the common rendering "The earth *was* without form, and void . . ." Others dismiss this idea entirely. They assume the original Hebrew word *hayah* must be translated "was" and then assume the earth was originally created in this disorderly way.

However, as can be seen from many Bible helps, both translations of the term are possible. Only the context of the chapter and book can determine which one is correct. Gleason Archer, professor of biblical languages, comments: "It should be noted in this connection that the verb *was* in Genesis 1:2 may quite possibly be rendered 'became' and be construed to mean: 'And the earth became formless and void.' Only a cosmic catastrophe could account for the introduction of chaotic confusion into the original perfection of God's creation. This interpretation certainly seems to be exegetically tenable . . ." (*A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1974, p. 184).

In a footnote Archer adds, "Properly speaking, this verb *hayah* never has the meaning of static being like the copular verb 'to be.' Its basic notion is that of becoming or emerging as such and such, or of coming into being . . . Sometimes a distinction is attempted along the following lines: *hayah* means 'become' only when it is followed by the preposition *le*; otherwise there is no explicit idea of becoming. But this distinction will not stand up under analysis. In Gen[esis] 3:20 the proper rendering is: 'And Adam called the name of his wife Eve, because she *became*



*Is the earth only 6,000 years old? Many assume that is what the Bible says, but the original wording of Genesis 1 allows for a much earlier creation.*

between these two verses. If such an interval is indeed intended, there is no discrepancy between the Bible record and scientific discoveries indicating that the earth is up to several billion years old. If, on the other hand, there is no such gap, then the earth itself must be only around 6,000

arrive at this figure by calculating the chronological benchmarks in Genesis and other books of the Bible.

Astronomers are correct in responding that this view is insupportable. They offer evidence, gathered from viewing the heavens by powerful telescopes, that support their position. Asks one, “How is it that there are astronomical objects more than 6,000 light-years away?” (Sagan, p. 28). A light-year is the distance that light, moving at 186,000 miles per second, travels in one year.

It is obvious there are light-years between some religious people and science on this issue. Some advocates of the biblical record reason around such evidence by stating that the seeming age of the universe (and of the fossil and geological evidence of the earth itself) is “simply part of ‘an appearance of age’ that God built into the universe.” Many people, including some theologians, properly respond that this “raises the problem of a God engaged in deception” (*U.S. News & World Report*, Dec. 23, 1991, pp. 59-60).

Yet the arguments are unnecessary. The truth is that the Bible *does not contradict scientific evidence*, and science does not disprove the biblical record. The point missed by most people on both sides of the argument is that the Bible *does not say* when the universe was created.

According to the Bible, Adam was the first man

(1 Corinthians 15:45; 1 Chronicles 1:1), and adding the figures in the biblical genealogies yields a date of about 6,000 years ago for Adam’s creation.

However, the Bible does not state that the creation of mankind and the creation of the universe occurred *at the same time*. The age of the universe is simply not stated in the Bible. It may well have been 10 or 20 billion years ago. The Big Bang is simply the most popular of the theories advanced to explain the creation of an enormous and majestic universe without acknowledging God and the biblical record. The theory’s advocates admit that the universe came into being at a specific moment (even though they cannot explain the origin of the material from which the Big Bang supposedly proceeded).

So the Bible agrees with scientists’ findings that there was a specific moment of creation.

### In the beginning

Let’s turn to Genesis 1 and see what the oft-misunderstood creation account really says.

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters (Genesis 1:1-2, New International Version).

## Gap Between the First and Second Verses of Genesis?

the mother of all living.’ No *le* follows the verb in this case. So also in Gen[esis] 4:20: ‘Jabal *became* the father of tent dwellers.’ Therefore there can be no grammatical objection raised to translating Gen[esis] 1:2: ‘And the earth *became* a wasteness and desolation’ (ibid.).

Some scholars also argue against translating *hayah* “became” instead of “was” in Genesis 1:2 because they assume this interpretation came about only recently, after geology revealed the strata of the earth to be very old. Thus they consider this explanation a desperate attempt to reconcile the Genesis account with modern geology. The explanation that there existed an indefinite period between the initial beautiful creation described in Genesis 1:1 and the earth becoming waste and void in verse 2 has been called, sometimes disparagingly, “the gap theory.” The idea was attributed to Thomas Chalmers in the last century and to Cyrus Scofield in this century.

Yet this interpretation that the earth “became” waste and void has been discussed for close to 2,000 years. The earliest known recorded controversy on this point can be attributed to Jewish sages at the beginning of the second century. The Hebrew scholars who wrote the Targum of Onkelos, the earliest of the Aramaic versions of the Old Testament, translated Genesis 1:2 as “and the earth was laid waste.” The original language led them to understand that something had occurred which had “laid waste” the earth, and they interpreted this as a destruction.

The early Catholic theologian Origen (186-254), in his commentary *De Principiis*, explains regarding Genesis 1:2 that the original earth had been “cast downwards” (*Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Christian Literature Publishing Co., Buffalo, 1917, p. 342).

In the Middle Ages the Flemish scholar Hugo St. Victor

(1097-1141) wrote about Genesis 1:2, “Perhaps enough has already been debated about these matters thus far, if we add only this, ‘how long did the world remain in this disorder before the regular re-ordering . . . of it was taken in hand?’” (*De Sacramentis Christianae Fidei*, Book 1, Part I, Chapter VI). Other medieval scholars, such as Dionysius Peavius and Pererius, also considered that there was an interval of time between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2.

According to *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, the Dutch scholar Simon Episcopius (1583-1643) taught that the earth had originally been created before the six days of creation described in Genesis (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1952, Vol. 3, p. 302). This was roughly 200 years before geology discovered evidence for the ancient origin of earth.

These numerous examples show us that the idea of an interval between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2 has a long history. Any claim that it is of only recent origin—that it was invented simply as a desperate attempt to reconcile the Genesis account with geology—is groundless.

Perhaps the best treatment on both sides of this question is given by the late Arthur Custance in his book *Without Form and Void: A Study of the Meaning of Genesis 1:2*. Dr. Custance states, “To me, this issue is important, and after studying the problem for some thirty years and after reading everything I could lay my hands on *pro* and *con* and after accumulating in my own library some 300 commentaries on Genesis, the earliest being dated 1670, I am persuaded that there is, on the basis of the evidence, far more reason to translate Gen. 1:2 as ‘But the earth had become a ruin and a desolation, etc.’ than there is for any of the conventional translations in our modern versions” (1970, p. 7).

The first statement in this account refers to God's initial creative act. No exact time is given as to when this took place. What is evident, from comparing this passage with other scriptures, is that between verses 1 and 2 something happened to render the earth "formless and empty."

Isaiah 45:18 tells us that God "did not create [the earth] to be empty, but formed it to be inhabited . . ." (NIV). The initial creation was followed by destruction and chaos.

The NIV's alternate reading for verse 2 is, "Now the earth *became* formless and empty . . ." This indicates a time difference between the original creation described in verse 1 and the time leading to the creation of man beginning in verse 2.

We are not told exactly when the initial creation took place. But the Bible hints that the original creation was followed by widespread destruction brought about by the rebellion of Lucifer, who became Satan (Isaiah 14:12-15). Thus the account of Genesis 1:3-31 is apparently a description of a *restoration* of the earth just before the creation of man (Psalm 104:30). Biblical genealogies indicate that this occurred approximately 6,000 years ago, though nowhere does the Bible tell us the date when God made Adam and Eve.

God's Word does reveal that initially there was no physical creation—no earth, no solar system, no galaxies. The apostle Paul describes this as "before time began" (Titus 1:2). Then, by divine command, God created the universe.

Science tells us something similar. "These days most cosmologists and astronomers back the theory that there was indeed a creation . . . when the physical universe burst into existence in an awesome explosion popularly known as the 'big bang' . . . *The universe did not always exist*" (Paul Davies, *God and the New Physics*, Touch-

stone, New York, 1983, pp. 10-11, emphasis added).

Both of these accounts, one from science and one from the Bible, speak of an instantaneous origin of the physical creation.

### Why was the universe created?

Science cannot of itself tell us why the earth and the physical creation exist. Wrote Carl Sagan: "Why it happened is the greatest mystery we know. *That* it happened is reasonably clear" (*Cosmos*, Random House, New York, 1980, p. 246).

But the Bible tells us why! "You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created" (Revelation 4:11). Psalm 115:16 adds, "The heaven, even the heavens, are the LORD's; but the earth He has given to the children of men."

God created all things. He set aside the earth as a place of habitation for man, for the working out of His purpose. His magnificent plan is ultimately to bring "many sons to glory" (Hebrews 2:10), to offer sonship to all people through His Son Jesus Christ. This is the wonderful reason God brought the creation into existence by His command. The Bible explains God's plan in considerable detail—as well as that plan's implications for us. (For a more complete explanation, please request our free booklet *What Is Your Destiny?*)

The Bible holds true in its description of the origin of all things. In response to the statement that God in the beginning created the heavens and the earth, one skeptical scientist stated, "But no one was there to see it" (Davies, p. 9). Not true: *God was there*. There was no human being there to refute it, and there is no one who can refute it today. No man or woman has disproved the Bible. But there is a mountain of evidence to show it *is* true.



## The Bible and *Archaeology*

**A**rchaeology is the study of the material remains of past people's lives and activities. It involves the excavation and systematic study of their weapons, tools, cookware, inscriptions and other objects and remains. Biblical archaeology is a smaller subset of the broader field of archaeology, limited to the study of ancient civilizations in the ancient Near and Middle East, the geographical setting of the events recorded in the Bible.

Modern biblical archaeology is a fascinating and sometimes controversial subject. Its aim, in general, is to compare the findings of archaeology to the writings of the Bible. Biblical archaeologists seek to establish the historicity, or the lack thereof, of the people, places and events of the Bible.

For many centuries the events of the Bible were accepted as an accurate history. The great sagas of the

Bible were approved as true and accurate down to the smallest details. However, with the arrival of the "Enlightenment" of the 17th and 18th centuries, this outlook began to change. Scholars began to exalt human reason and scientific exploration above the Bible, mounting a frontal attack on Scripture.

Biblical heroes and other towering personalities, as well as their life experiences, came to be considered by many scholars as mere myths. The existence of mighty empires, some of which were recorded in the Bible as having ruled for centuries, was doubted or even denied. Skepticism became the rule of the day among "critical" scholars.

Where previous generations had taken the Bible at face value, now a supposedly enlightened generation viewed it with doubt. The net effect was to deal a staggering blow to the credibility of the Bible in the minds of many people.



## Cyrus of Persia: The Words of a Prophet Come to Pass

The cylinder of Cyrus (538 B.C.), king of Persia, records his conquest of Babylon and policy of religious tolerance. He decreed that the Jewish exiles taken captive by the Babylonians in 587 B.C. could return to their land and rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. These events were a remarkable ful-



fillment of Isaiah's prophecy a century and a half earlier that God would use Cyrus to "perform all My pleasure, even saying to Jerusalem, 'You shall be built,' and to the temple, 'Your foundation shall be laid.'" God also foretold that Cyrus would "build My city and let My exiles go free" (Isaiah 44:28; 45:13).

Earlier, when the Bible was translated into several languages in the post-Reformation era after the comparative illiteracy of the Middle Ages, the Bible had become for many people their one and only textbook of ancient history. They regarded it as the unerring Word of God.

But, after the tinkering of critical scholars, the Bible began to be viewed as suspect by many historians. Englishman Arnold Toynbee summed up their view when he referred to the Old Testament as merely "human compositions of varying degrees of religious and historical merit." He further stated that those who accepted it as factual were "set[ting] a religious premium on an obstinate stupidity" (*A Study of History*, Vol. 10, Oxford University Press, New York, 1957, p. 260).

Given this mind-set, archaeologists who sought to excavate and evaluate the ruins of past ages and to report the credibility of the Bible in an honest manner faced an uphill struggle. Science in general had grown biased against the Bible, with some archaeologists themselves among the leading critics.

### The testimony of history

Sir William Ramsay, an English historian and prolific writer, was a product of a mid-19th-century education and of this pervasive antibiblical bias. He believed the historical accounts in the book of Acts had been written, not in the time of the apostolic Church, but in the mid-second century. If Sir William were right, Acts could not have been written by Luke, the traveling companion of the apostle Paul.

Luke claimed to have been with Paul as the two men trudged over the cobblestoned roads of the Roman Empire. He wrote as one who watched as Paul was used by God to bring a young convert back to life after a fatal fall (Acts 20:8-12). Ramsay was skeptical of the historicity of Luke and the historical record of Acts and set out to disprove it.

After many years of detailed study of the archaeological evidence, Ramsay came to a disconcerting conclusion: The historical and archaeological evidence came down solidly in favor of Luke's having written the book of Acts in the first century, during the time of the apostles. Rather than Luke being a historical fraud, Ramsay concluded that there are "reasons for placing the author of *Acts* among the historians of the first rank" (Sir

William Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen*, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1925, p. 4).

Ramsay became convinced of Luke's reliability because Luke wrote about the work of the early Church as it was intertwined with secular events and personalities of the day. In Luke's Gospel account we are introduced to Pontius Pilate, Herod the Great, Augustus and other political players. In Acts we meet an even larger assemblage, including Sergius Paulus, Gallio, Felix, Festus and Herod Agrippa I and II.

Luke not only writes about these people, but he mentions details, sometimes relatively minute facts, about them. "One of the most remarkable tokens of [Luke's] accuracy is his sure familiarity with the proper titles of all the notable persons who are mentioned . . . Cyprus, for example, which was an imperial province until 22 BC, became a senatorial province in that year, and was therefore governed no longer by an imperial legate but by a proconsul. And so, when Paul and Barnabas arrived in Cyprus about AD 47, it was the *proconsul* Sergius Paullus whom they met . . ." (F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, 1973, p. 82).

Luke mentions other particulars about the offices and titles of officials of the Roman Empire. In every case he gets it right, as confirmed by archaeological discoveries *many centuries later*. As Ramsay discovered, to show such accuracy required that the author be well versed at the time in the intricacies of politics of the day. Few of us could do as well if quizzed about the exact official titles of national and international political figures today.

### Accuracy: a test of credibility

Such fine details of the historical setting make the Bible interesting, but they also put an author, such as Luke, to the test—and the Bible along with him. If he makes a mistake in his reporting, then his work loses credibility. How does Luke survive the test?

Bruce, professor of biblical studies, says of Luke's work: "A writer who thus relates his story to the wider context of world history is courting trouble if he is not careful; he affords his critical readers so many opportunities for testing his accuracy. Luke takes this risk, and stands the test admirably" (*ibid.*).

Some scholars maintain that Luke was wrong in his

report of a Roman census around the time of the birth of Jesus Christ (Luke 2:1-3). They argued that Quirinius was not governor at this time because he was given this position several years later. Critics also argued that there was no census then and that Joseph and Mary were not required to return to their native Bethlehem. Later archaeological evidence clearly demonstrated that the events described by Luke were possible (Bruce, p. 86). It turned out that those who had challenged the biblical account had done so without all the facts.

Bruce goes on to observe that, when we see Luke's habitual accuracy demonstrated in details that have been historically verified, there is ample reason to accept his credibility in general.

### Much yet to be discovered

A relatively small part of the remains of the biblical world has been excavated. Of some 5,000 known sites of

archaeological significance in Palestine, only about 350 have been excavated, and of these only about 2 percent have been extensively excavated. Of those that have been excavated, it is a fact that the entire Bible holds a remarkable track record of accuracy when compared with the finds unearthed through archaeology.

Much of the Old Testament came under heavy assault from the guns of the anti-inspiration scholars when the winds of doubt swept through the 19th century. Speaking of this time and its effects, archaeologist Kenneth Kitchen wrote: "Time and again in Old Testament studies, we are told that 'history knows of no such person' as, say, Abraham or Moses, or . . . the battles of Genesis 14, for example. However such phrases are totally misleading. They simply cover the ignorance not of 'history' personified but of the person making this claim" (K.A. Kitchen, *The Bible in Its World*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, 1978, p. 48).

## The Mighty Assyrian Empire Emerges From the Dust

Perhaps archaeology's most dramatic find among the treasure troves of the past was the discovery of the remains of the ancient Assyrian Empire.

Assyria first appears as an empire early in the second millennium B.C. The remains of a ziggurat, or temple tower, from that era still stand near the site of its ancient capital.

In the ninth century B.C., Assyria developed into an aggressive and powerful empire. By this time, about 40 years after the reign of Solomon, Israel had split into two distinct kingdoms: Israel and Judah (1 Kings 12:16-24). Led by able and ruthless monarchs, the Assyrians began to menace and eventually conquer their neighbors. They eventually subjugated the whole of the Fertile Crescent from Mesopotamia to Egypt. By the late eighth century they crushed the kingdom of Israel.

About this same time they also invaded the southern kingdom of Judah, conquering its major cities and besieging its capital, Jerusalem (Isaiah 36:1-2). The Bible records the boastful words of the arrogant Assyrian monarch, Sennacherib, as he tried to intimidate and humiliate Hezekiah, king of Judah (Isaiah 36:4-10).

Did this really happen, or is it a fable? Remember, many scoffers at one time disputed even the existence of the Assyrian Empire. But it was no myth. As the debris of centuries was removed from Nineveh, the capital, dramatic proof of the Assyrian invasion was laid bare.

Assyrian records of these events quote King Sennacherib of Assyria boasting of his devastating invasion of Judah: "Forty-six of [Hezekiah's] strong walled towns and innumerable smaller villages . . . besieged and conquered. . . . As for Hezekiah, the awful splendor of my lordship overwhelmed him" (Erika Bleibtreu, "Grisly Assyrian Record of Torture and Death," *Biblical Archaeology Review*, January-February 1991, p. 60). Of Judah's king, Sennacherib noted that he had made Hezekiah "a prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a cage" (Magnus Magnusson, *Archaeology and the Bible*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1977, p. 186).

The biblical record agrees with Sennacherib's account

of the Assyrian invasion and notes the desperation of the kingdom of Judah as the Assyrians laid siege to Jerusalem, their last surviving stronghold. However, the Bible continues the story where the Assyrian records are silent. With Jerusalem facing imminent destruction, the people of Judah, led by King Hezekiah, prayed fervently to God (Isaiah 37:15-20) and were miraculously delivered against overwhelming odds.

Sennacherib, the warrior king, had bragged about his humbling of Hezekiah, trapping him in Jerusalem as he surrounded and prepared to storm the city.

Although Sennacherib painstakingly recorded the cities he captured and destroyed, one city is conspicuously absent: Jerusalem.

The Assyrians, like other great empires of the time, left no records of their military defeats. A disaster befell them as they waited to storm Jerusalem's walls.

"And it came to pass on a certain night that the angel of the LORD went out, and killed in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred and eighty-five thousand; and when people arose early in the morning, there were the corpses—all dead. So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and



*"In the days of Pekah king of Israel, Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria came," says 2 Kings 15:29. The fierce monarch's portrait, carved in stone, was found in his palace at Nimrud 26 centuries later. When he ascended the throne in 745 B.C., the kingdom of Israel's days were numbered as successive Assyrian invasions took Israel into captivity.*

Dr. Kitchen's statement shows that the historicity of Old Testament personalities and their worlds cannot be buried. It is important to note that scholars at one time doubted the existence of empires, of entire populations and of many of the Bible's central characters. In the face of a growing mountain of evidence, skeptics have many times been forced to recant their earlier claims.

### Events verified by archaeology

Some scholars have taken a deconstructionist view of many other events of biblical history. Examples of this were the existence of the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob), the Exodus and the conquest of Canaan under Joshua. They rejected the biblical view because no clear archaeological evidence was known to exist.

Many archaeologists took this position because of a scarcity of evidence, outside of the biblical record, that the Israelites were ever in the land of Egypt. As one

scholar asserted, "Not one historical reference to the presence of the Israelites has yet been found there" (Magnus Magnusson, *Archaeology of the Bible*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1977, p. 43).

Some even claim that Israel was not a significant power during the days of the Egyptian dynasties. They believe Israel was no more than a loose amalgamation of impotent tribes.

The objective evidence, however, points to a different conclusion. Proof of the existence of Israel as a nation and its warring with Egypt exists on a temple wall at Karnak, site of the ancient Egyptian city of Thebes. The pharaoh Merenptah is depicted as warring with Israel. This is "the oldest known visual portrayal of Israelites" (Frank Yurco, "3,200-Year-Old Picture of Israelites Found in Egypt," *Biblical Archaeology Review*, September-October 1990, p. 22).

Another ancient object that intertwines biblical and

went away, returned home, and remained at Nineveh" (2 Kings 19:35-36).

Sennacherib himself would later ignominiously die at the hands of two of his sons. "Now it came to pass, as he was worshiping in the temple of Nisroch his god, that his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer struck him down with the sword . . ." (verse 37).

Sennacherib's son Esarhaddon took his father's place, but the Assyrian Empire soon peaked and fell into decline. Assyria had been an instrument to punish Israel for its

repugnant sins (Isaiah 10:5-6). In turn, the Assyrians were punished for their sins (verse 12). Nineveh, the capital city, fell to the Babylonians in 612 B.C. About 50 years after its acme, this voracious empire collapsed and virtually vanished from history.

By the time of Jesus Christ and the apostles, no physical evidence of Nineveh could be seen. Lucian of Samosata (A.D. 120-180), a Greek writer, lamented: "Nineveh has perished. No trace of it remains. No one can say where once it existed" (Magnusson, p. 175). Such a lack of visible remains led some scholars of the 19th century to express skepticism that Nineveh or any part of the Assyrian Empire even existed, much less dominated a significant part of the world.

Indeed the only historical source in those days that verified the existence of the empire was the Bible. The Old Testament histories and prophecies spoke about Assyria. Jesus proclaimed the existence of Nineveh as a historical fact (Matthew 12:41). Yet some scholars disputed the testimony of Jesus and the prophets; that is, until "one spectacular decade in the middle of the nineteenth century . . . [when] Austen Henry Layard and Paul Emile Botta rediscovered in northern Iraq the ancient remains of three Assyrian cities [including Nineveh] and evidence of the military panoply that had crushed all resistance from the Tigris to the Nile. The Assyrian empire . . . in all its awesome power had been resurrected through archaeology" (Magnusson, p. 175).

The skeptics were silenced. There was nothing they could say. The excavations at Nineveh and other cities in the area yielded a staggering wealth of historical evidence including "tens of thousands of tablets" containing "an immense amount of data" (*The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1962, Vol. 1, "Assyria and Babylon," p. 275).



*"And in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and took them," reads 2 Kings 18:13. This relief from Sennacherib's place at Nineveh shows the Assyrians' furious assault on the Jewish stronghold of Lachish. Assyrian troops advance on ramps leading to the city walls, from which the desperate defenders shoot arrows and hurl stones and firebrands. At lower right, prisoners leave the city, passing impaled captives. The Assyrian invasion was miraculously halted at Jerusalem.*

## The 'House of David' Verified in Inscriptions

For many years some critics have asserted that many biblical figures, including King David, are nothing more than myth. But in 1993 a dramatic find again forced Bible critics to retreat. A team of archaeologists digging in northern Galilee "found a remarkable inscription from the ninth century B.C.E. [before the common era] that refers both to the 'House of David' and to the 'King of Israel'" ("David Found at Dan," *Biblical Archaeology Review*, March-April 1994, p. 26).

This discovery was sensational enough to make the front page of *The New York Times*. The inscription also shows that Israel and Judah were important kingdoms in the ninth century B.C., disproving the position of scholars who claimed Israel and Judah were never nations of significance and even disputed that there had ever been a united monarchy under David.

Although this is one more piece of evidence that refutes the arguments of those who have rejected biblical history, we must realize it is impossible to verify every biblical event through archaeology. Much of the original evidence no longer exists. Many perishable materials have long since disappeared. Looking for physical evidence of a particular person is like looking for a needle in an enormous haystack.

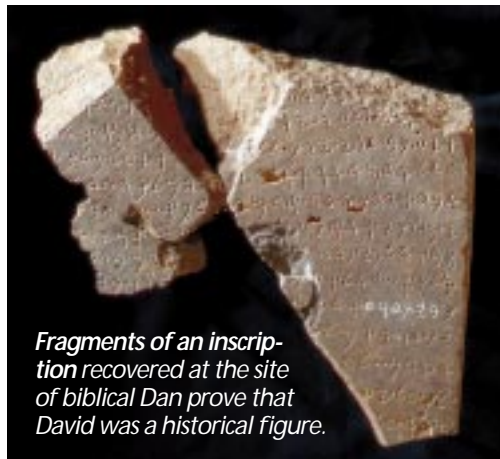
In spite of those difficulties, David joins many

other kings of Israel and Judah whose names were recorded in inscriptions of neighboring nations, among them Ahab, Ahaz, Ahaziah, Hezekiah, Hoshea, Jehoiachin, Jehu, Joash, Manasseh, Menemhem, Omri, Pekah and Uzziah.

We must keep in mind the relatively small amount of the archaeological record that scientists have uncovered. Excavations will, without a doubt, continue to uphold the events of the Bible. In spite of the relative paucity of evidence that has been uncovered, that which has been found has supported the Bible.

British historian Paul Johnson observes a shift in thinking concerning even the most ancient events recorded in the Bible: "... The science of modern archaeology and historical philology actually provides verification of the most ancient biblical texts. Whereas... throughout the nineteenth century and

almost up to the Second World War, systematic criticism of the Old Testament texts tended to destroy their historicity, and to reduce the Pentateuch, in particular, to mere myth or tribal legend, the trend over the last half-century has been quite in the opposite direction... Archaeological discovery provides now a firm historical background to the patriarchal society described in the Book of Genesis" (Paul Johnson, *The Quest for God*, p. 12).



Fragments of an inscription recovered at the site of biblical Dan prove that David was a historical figure.

Egyptian history was discovered by the archaeologist Sir Flinders Petrie in 1896. It is known as the "Israel Stele" because "it contains the earliest known mention of Israel..." (ibid., p. 26). The stele is a black granite pillar that contains boastful inscriptions commissioned by Pharaoh Merenptah about his victories in battles, including some with Israel. The stele dates from 1207 B.C. (ibid., p. 27).

The biblical account of Israel's journey from Egypt to Canaan after the Exodus is recorded as well. The Bible provides place names that figure prominently in the Israelite journey. Numbers 33 supplies a detailed listing of sites on the route of the Exodus. Detractors have disputed the historical record, denying that these settlements existed at this early period in history because archaeological remains have not been found for the time in question.

One of these is the settlement of Dibon (Numbers 33:45). No archaeological remains have been found at that site that date earlier than the ninth century B.C. Does this mean there was no city there when the people of Israel traversed that area?

Recently some scholars have seen the need to recant their claim that Dibon could not have existed at the time of the Exodus. Egyptian records verify the existence of

Dibon during this time. Lists of ancient Egyptian routes mention Dibon as a stop along one of the routes through that area. Not only did Dibon exist in that day, but it was significant enough to occupy the attention of Ramses II, who "sacked the city in the course of a military campaign in Moab" during that time (Charles R. Krahmalkov, "Exodus Itinerary Confirmed by Egyptian Evidence," *Biblical Archaeology Review*, September-October 1994, p. 58).

The city of Hebron also figured in the conquest of Canaan. "So Joshua went... and all Israel with him, to Hebron; and they fought against it" (Joshua 10:36). Although some critics have asserted that no city existed at Hebron during this time, the Egyptian map lists tell otherwise. A list of cities that Ramses II ordered to be carved on a temple wall in Amon lists Hebron (*Biblical Archaeology Review*, September-October 1994, p. 60).

Other place names on the Israelites' journey are mentioned in Egyptian records, including the River Kishon, where the Israelite fighters under Deborah and Barak defeated a superior force (Judges 5:19-21).

Some scholars have gone so far as to maintain that "nothing in the Bible before the Babylonian exile can lay

claim to any historical accuracy” (André Lemaire, “‘House of David’ Restored in Moabite Inscription,” *Biblical Archaeology Review*, May-June 1994, pp. 31-32). Yet time after time scholars have had to backtrack from earlier statements as additional archaeological evidence came to light.

### Does archaeology prove the Bible?

What should we say about the biblical record thus far? The skeptic can always point to elements that have yet to be specifically verified. But we should never forget that specific parts of the Bible assuredly *have* been upheld by archaeological discoveries. The burden of proof is on the skeptics. In the wake of such evidence as that shown in this chapter and available in numerous other books, it is up to them to prove their case.

Frank E. Gaebelien, an eminently qualified author and general editor of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, has remarked that “the attitude of suspended judgment toward Bible difficulties . . . is constantly being vindicated, as archaeology has solved one Biblical problem after another,

and as painstaking re-examination of discrepancies has finally led to answers” (*The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1979, Vol. 1. p. 31).

In view of this, the doubter might do well to reconsider his position and commit his life to serving God. If he waits until every minute issue or question that pertains to scribal error or cultural differences is resolved in his own mind, he might ignore or reject a call from God Himself. He could be depriving himself of the blessings available to those who have committed themselves to learning and following God's way of life.

The objective use of archaeology has demonstrated the truthfulness and technical accuracy of the Bible. This chapter has demonstrated some of the factual evidence that verifies the biblical record. More will continue to be discovered. As archaeologist Nelson Glueck has concluded, “no archaeological discovery has ever been made that contradicts or controverts historical statements in Scripture” (*ibid.*).

The Bible is the inspired Word of God, and its accuracy continues to be validated by the spade of archaeology.



## The Bible and *Science*

Earlier centuries saw little conflict between the Scriptures and science. It was common for scientists and churchmen alike to view the Bible and science as in complete agreement. If an apparent discrepancy came to light, the Bible was considered more trustworthy, but the two were widely accepted as harmonious.

But the harmony that once existed between the Bible and the scientific community has largely dissolved. As biblical misinterpretations and assumptions—along with religion in general—have been discredited, people have increasingly turned almost exclusively to science and human reasoning for answers. As a result, people in general have much more confidence in science and scientific pronouncements—verified or not—than in God's Word.

A brief look at the world around us shows us that science has indeed been enthroned in our culture. Religion, in comparison, has been forcibly dethroned. A recent demographic study concluded that, of the 40 hours a week of free time the average American is said to have, a typical woman allots about 15 hours to television and only a single hour to religion; among men the time devoted to religion is even less. Technology and entertainment have conspired to knock religion off its pedestal.

Where the usual approach in the past was to let the Bible take precedence over scientific discoveries, now the situation is reversed. “There developed in the nineteenth century what has been called ‘scientism.’ This holds that only science has the key to truth and that whatever is not scientific is false” (Hitchcock, p. 44). Today

the typical academic will elevate a biology text or theory far above the Bible.

What are the implications of this approach?

One significant reality is that science alone cannot offer us a law or moral standard to tell us *how to live*. Instead, it teaches only that man is ultimately only another animal and that the survival of the fittest is the rule in nature.

We have seen this approach tragically played out in history. Genocide has been perpetrated more than once in this century. Our scientific achievements now make widespread genocide a terrifying possibility. Conventional, nuclear, chemical and biological weapons can annihilate entire populations.

When the scientific community replaced the church in the pantheon of humanity's gods, it promised a utopia of peace, prosperity and plenty that religion had failed to bring about. But, sadly, the scientific world has provided its share of frightening contributions to the witches' brew of world troubles. Not only has it failed to produce a peaceful world, but it has given us the nightmarish problems of industrial, chemical and nuclear pollution, among many others. Scientific technology has indeed benefited us in many ways. But it has contributed immensely to the frightening array of stresses, sicknesses and fears we face today.

### Basic biblical solutions to human problems

The Bible describes the wrong type of fear as a form of enslavement. It also reveals how we can be freed from

fear (Hebrews 2:14-15). It tells us that there is no fear in love (1 John 4:18). The book of Psalms depicts God's servants turning to Him to calm their anxiety. "In the multitude of my anxieties within me, Your comforts delight my soul" (Psalm 94:19). King David took his anxieties to God (Psalm 139:23-24).

The Bible shares many examples of people who found comfort during their disquiet in the face of death and other sorrows because they found in the Scriptures the solution to these problems. The Bible is a practical book, and it addresses our greatest needs and weaknesses.

God's Word provides answers to the greatest of problems. We have already seen that the Bible has an excellent track record in its historicity and accuracy. But how about its instruction, which, if followed, affects our everyday lives? How do we know that the information in the Bible is true? Must we take it on faith alone?

The Bible is certainly to be understood and accepted by faith. However, it is not an unreasoning, blind faith. The Bible nowhere requires us to commit intellectual suicide to be able to believe it is God's Word. When properly understood, the Scriptures are eminently sensible, consistent and logical.

This booklet provides compelling evidence that the

Bible is true, and many other books offer additional evidence in much greater detail. Belief in God's Word doesn't have to be mere hope; it can be based firmly on fact when all the evidence is considered.

Andrew Dickson White, 19th-century historian, took issue with those who would assert that the Bible is a scientific text. Mr. White was correct in that the Bible is not a science textbook. But it *contains* scientific truth. It is scientifically accurate.

Sadly, many people have come to view science and the Bible as contradictory. Although at times they appear to disagree, when we carefully weigh all the evidence before reaching a conclusion, scientific discoveries often verify the biblical account.

We must keep in mind that science itself is far from perfect; new discoveries regularly modify and in some cases overturn assumptions previously regarded as fact. Scientists have long proven other scientists to be wrong.

A close look at the evidence shows that the Holy Scriptures proclaim and impart knowledge that man, through his own scientific research, has only recently

discovered. This knowledge is basic, but it would have vastly improved humanity's lot had it been properly understood and applied.

Let's consider some truths that were recorded in the Bible thousands of years ago but that were only recently rediscovered and confirmed by other sources as being scientifically supportable.

## Health and medicine

Although the Bible contains relatively little that pertains to health and medicine, it does give fundamentally sound advice that is taken for granted by most people.

The foundation of good health is an adequate sanitary code. The Bible reveals the fundamentals of such a code in the book of Leviticus. This book "deals with public hygiene, water supply, sewage disposal, inspection and selection of food, and control of infectious disease" (*New Bible Dictionary*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, 1996, "Health, Disease and Healing"). Although we take this knowledge for granted, these principles came to be understood and accepted by scientists only in recent centuries.

Most of these principles were disregarded during the Middle Ages in Europe. Why? Simply because the Bible was not generally available. The consequences of so few people having the knowledge it offered were catastrophic.

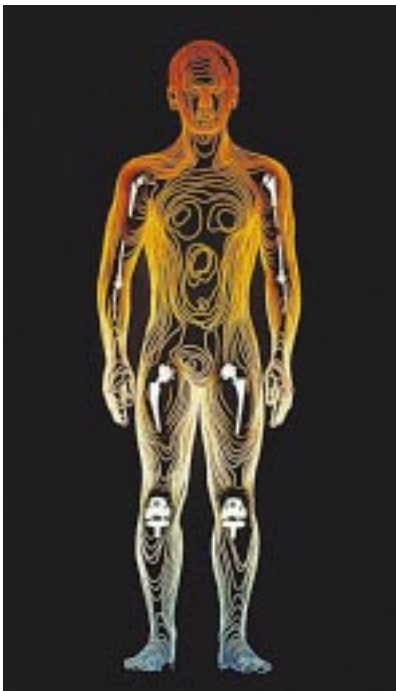
The dreaded black death of the Middle Ages thrived in the unsanitary conditions of medieval Europe. The plague first appeared there in 1347 "when a Genoese fleet returning from the Orient staggered into Messina harbor, all members of its crews dead or dying from a combination of bubonic, pneumonic, and septicemic plague strains" (Manchester, p. 34). The resulting plague plagues of that century are estimated to have killed up to a fourth of the Continent's population.

The plague revisited Europe periodically for several hundred years. It was common practice in the cities of the Middle Ages to allow garbage and sewage to accumulate on the streets. This filth provided an abundant food source for a burgeoning rat population, which served as host to the fleas that bore the plague organisms.

The people who practiced the sanitary guidelines described in the Bible were affected much less severely. The Jewish population, which was much better acquainted with the Scriptures during that time, suffered far less because of its practice of biblical principles of cleanliness. One of the Jews' saving practices was that of quarantining those suspected of being infected with the disease.

In fact, "the origin of the word 'quarantine' is the Jewish use of the period of 40 days of segregation from patients with certain diseases . . . adopted by the Italians in the 14th century because of the relative immunity of Jews from certain plagues . . . The biblical outlook on the sick, and on health in general, . . . is perhaps more up to date than is generally realized" (*New Bible Dictionary*, "Health, Disease and Healing").

Had people known and used the biblical principles of public health when the black death struck, the epidemic could have been controlled or eliminated. Fatalities would no doubt have been only a fraction of what they were.



*Science can tell us a great deal about our bodies and remedy many illnesses and injuries. But science cannot tell us why we exist and what the future holds for humanity.*

Hundreds of thousands of lives could have been saved.

The Bible contains other practical health guidelines. For example, it shows by example how a wound should be treated and dressed. The story of the Good Samaritan tells us that he applied wine and oil to the victim's wounds, then bound them up to protect them while they healed (Luke 10:34). The wine served as a disinfectant and the olive oil as a soothing lotion.

As *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* observes: "Olive oil has certain curative qualities and is still used in modern medicine." The mixture of the wine and oil provided a disinfectant with which the Samaritan treated the victim (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1986, "Oil"). These procedures were largely forgotten for centuries until rediscovered in recent decades.

If similar techniques had been known and used even as recently as the American Civil War, the death rate could have been much lower. In that war "more than *one half* of the men who died were not killed in action; they simply died of camp diseases: typhoid fever, pneumonia, dysentery, and childhood diseases like measles and chicken pox." Thousands perished from relatively minor battle wounds that became infected. "Nothing was known about how and why wounds became infected . . . The number of men who simply got sick and died, or who got a minor scratch or cut and then could do nothing to check the infection was appalling" (Bruce Catton, *Reflections on the Civil War*, Berkeley, New York, 1982, p. 43).

Numerous other examples bear out the truth of biblical principles recorded thousands of years ago. Proverbs 17:22 tells us that "a merry heart does good, like medicine." A generally cheerful and optimistic outlook promotes good health.

Scientific research verifies this simple truth. A 27-year

study conducted by Duke University "found that people who reported . . . despair, low self-esteem, lack of motivation . . . were 70 percent more likely to have a heart attack" (*Portland Oregonian*, June 20, 1996). Additional



*The Bible contains practical health laws and principles that, after being virtually forgotten, were rediscovered only in recent decades.*

studies have shown that prolonged unresolved hostility is a significant contributor to heart attacks.

### Men of God and science

True science and the Bible do not conflict. There is no need for advocates of either side to engage in a protracted war with the other. Open-minded study reveals that science and Scripture complement and often uphold each other, as the examples in this booklet demonstrate.

Humankind has a need for the Bible and science. We can discover certain tenets of truth only from the source of divine revelation, the Bible. We should also study to increase our scientific knowledge to improve

## When the Bible Seems to Disagree With Science

**W**hat should we do when the Bible appears to disagree with science?

In the last few centuries man's inquisitive nature has teamed up with his increasing ability to record, analyze and pass on what he has learned, resulting in a staggering increase of knowledge. Amazingly, the Bible foretold this knowledge explosion as a hallmark of modern society long before our technological and scientific advances could have been imagined (Daniel 12:4).

Some people believe that much of recently acquired knowledge disagrees with the Bible, particularly in the areas of biology, anthropology, geology and astronomy. It is precisely this perception—of science contradicting Scripture—that has led many people to doubt the veracity and authority of the Bible.

At first glance we see what appears to be a collision course of revelation with science. We think we must choose between physical, scientific evidence and the claims of Scripture. Our resulting quandary may distress us. But the Bible itself encourages us to find answers, to review all the relevant information before reaching a conclusion (Proverbs 18:13).

We find that *true* scientific knowledge does not disagree with the Bible. Nor does the Bible contradict proven scientific discoveries. We address some of those assumed conflicts in this booklet.

Although God's Word encourages us to learn and discover the truth, it also urges us to keep an open mind. Many people assume that the Bible says certain things that it doesn't really say. Others hold fast to a mind-set prejudiced against the Scriptures because of what they imagine is a mountain of evidence contradicting the biblical record.

Sadly, it will be difficult for such people to give the Bible a fair hearing. But they should emulate the noble and open-minded approach of the people of the city of Berea as recorded in the book of Acts. The Bereans were "more fair-minded" than those in other areas. As a result, "they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11).

We hope you will similarly search out the truth, objectively examining the evidence to see whether the Bible is indeed what it claims to be: the inspired Word of God.

our lot and better understand our world.

Some scientists and theologians have recognized that the two disciplines need not stand in opposition. Several centuries ago, when modern science was still in its infancy and before some of its overzealous proponents declared war on the Bible, many reasonable men saw the value of both. During that time “proponents of scientific inquiry would often argue that God had revealed Himself in two books—the book of His words (the Bible) and the book of His works (nature). As one was under obligation to study the former, so too there was an obligation to study the latter” (John Hedley Brooke, *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives*, Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 22).

A study of one—the Bible—is essential. A study of the other is helpful. Men of God have always exalted the Word of God first, but they have not feared science. They have known that the creation and the existence of physical laws were proof of God’s handiwork.

Solomon, king of Israel, was a man of remarkable learning. The Bible describes him as having great interest and understanding in scientific disciplines. Solomon understood the movement of the prevailing winds about the earth and the hydrological cycle that brings rain (Ecclesiastes 1:6-7). He was a horticulturist, creating a great assortment of vineyards, gardens and orchards (Ecclesiastes 2:4-5). He was something of a botanist and zoologist, understanding plants, animals, birds, insects and fish (1 Kings 4:33). He was a student of psychology, sociology and human relations, as demonstrated by the subject matter of the book of Proverbs.

But Solomon eventually realized that all his scientific, material knowledge did not bring him satisfaction. His life grew hollow and unsatisfying. His concentration on scientific knowledge, without proper emphasis on God’s spiritual knowledge and understanding, rendered life meaningless (Ecclesiastes 1:16-18). He concluded, after much retrospection, that a man must put the knowledge of God first: “This is the end of the matter: you have heard it all. Fear God and obey his commandments; this

sums up the duty of mankind” (Ecclesiastes 12:13, Revised English Bible).

### Moses and Daniel

Moses is another example of a man trained in the physical sciences but blessed with spiritual understanding. Moses was educated “in all the wisdom of the Egyptians” (Acts 7:22). With the guidance of God he could separate the good from the bad, and undoubtedly his early education was of great help in his life of fulfilling God’s calling to lead his fellow Israelites out of Egyptian slavery and to govern a nation.

Other men of God were educated in the intellectual pursuits of their day. The prophet Daniel was a brilliant student brought up in the royal academy of the Babylonians (Daniel 1:4). The Babylonian Empire of Daniel’s day dominated the world and was scientifically advanced, particularly in astronomy.

Daniel apparently saw no conflict between the scientific truths the Babylonians had discovered and the knowledge of God that he had held from his youth. Indeed, he thrived, serving rulers of the Babylonian and Medo-Persian empires as a high-ranking government official. Daniel’s education did not undermine his faith in God. He knew God’s Word to be true and inviolable and saw no conflict between scientific knowledge and Scripture.

We must study the Scriptures to gain eternal life (John 5:39). But, as time and inclination allow, we should study the physical sciences as well. In so doing we will gain a deeper appreciation of the world our Creator has made and increase our faith and understanding of Him.

The apostle Paul understood that man stands to learn a great deal about His Creator by observing His creation: “Ever since the creation of the world, his invisible nature—his eternal power and divine character—have been clearly perceptible through what he has made. So they have no excuse . . .” (Goodspeed’s American Translation). *The Wall Street Journal* put it this way: “If a little science takes one away from God, a great deal of science brings one back to him” (Oct. 10, 1994).



## The Bible and *Prophecy*

**I**n what other well-known book can we not only find the future predicted, but also the record of the fulfillment of those predictions when they came to pass many hundreds of years later? There can be no more dramatic proof of the truth of the Bible than fulfilled prophecy.

Although the fulfillment of many Bible prophecies lies yet in the future, numerous predictions have been fulfilled, as can be demonstrated in the historical record. If we can confirm fulfilled prophecy—especially in small

detail—this evidence would be hard to ignore.

As with the historical evidence recorded by many biblical authors, God through prophecy gives us ample opportunity to disprove the Bible if it can be shown to be inaccurate. Isaiah, Daniel and others recorded many pronouncements, some in great detail, and God invites us to check His record through them.

Speaking through Isaiah, God challenges doubters to prove Him: “For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from



the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand . . .’” (Isaiah 46:9-10).

The ancient Israelites frequently resorted to false prophets and empty oracles to gain special insight about the future. Their trust in these sources amounted to vain idolatry.

### God’s challenge to the skeptics

God Himself says that prophecy is a proof of the true God: “Let these idols come forward and foretell the future for us. Let them declare the meaning of these past events that we may reflect on it; let them predict the future to us that we may know what it holds. Declare what is yet to happen; then we shall know you are gods” (Isaiah 41:22-23, REB).

The best and brightest minds are perplexed about what is happening in the world, including how to solve problems that have defied solution for generations. God, however, knows the solutions, and He has recorded for us exactly how our intractable problems will be solved. He knows how the human experience will end.

God recorded prophecies and their fulfillments in the Bible as proof of the inspiration of Bible prophecy. If He can foretell events centuries in advance, then see that they are brought to pass, we have irrefutable proof of His existence and that the Bible is indeed His inspired Word for us. If God can bring *some* of His prophecies to pass, it becomes obvious that it is within His power to see that *all* the Bible’s recorded prophecies are brought to pass.

Let us consider how difficult it is to foretell the future. Did any human prognosticators foresee the rapid collapse of the Soviet Union? Did any seers have a premonition that the Berlin Wall would crumble so suddenly? These dramatic events caught the world by surprise.

On the other hand, during the Persian Gulf War of 1991 some self-proclaimed prophets foresaw this as Armageddon in the making. The prophesied Armageddon *will* occur, but this was not it. Specific aspects of the real Armageddon, as revealed in the Bible, were lacking in the Persian Gulf War. Those who had a solid grasp of biblical prophecy understood that this crisis did not include all the factors required for the final crisis at the close of the age.

Such a major crisis *will* occur. Exactly *how* it will develop cannot be foretold in detail by man. History is full of world-shaking events that have caught the most able statesmen by surprise. The brightest world leaders will be confounded when the stage is finally set for the actual Armageddon.

The potential for dramatic shifts in world events increases as the world’s technological revolution continues to lunge forward. Events will astonish humankind as never before. Much of the world faces the future with fear and apprehension—and rightfully so, especially as wars, terrorism, iniquity and immorality increase. No one knows all the twists and turns that will take place in the years ahead.

### How much can we know?

How much can a Christian really know about the

future? People have sometimes made brazen predictions in the past, especially during crises and other tense times. The book of Daniel prophesied events fulfilled many centuries ago as well as occurrences yet to be fulfilled. God instructed Daniel to “shut up the words, and seal the book until the *time of the end*; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase” (Daniel 12:4). This verse indicates that certain major prophecies will be understandable as the end approaches.

God’s Word tells us that a vast number of prophecies will find their complete fulfillment with the return of Jesus Christ to the earth, the resurrection of the dead, and the establishment of a reign of peace for 1,000 years (see 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; Revelation 5:10). It seems likely that some of the major events leading up to that time will be understood by the people of God just before and during their fulfillment (Daniel 12:9-10; Amos 3:7).

The understanding of some major prophetic events is crucial as a guide to comprehending where we stand chronologically in God’s plan. The Bible is the lone trustworthy guide in these matters. It foretold much of what we know as history. Similarly, it can help us understand what will *yet* happen.

The purpose of this chapter is to address some prophecies that have already been fulfilled. This can help us see even more clearly that the Bible is indeed the Word of



*Is Bible prophecy all bad news? Many assume so, but the focus of Bible prophecy is the gospel—the good news—of the coming Kingdom of God. Just as many Bible prophecies already fulfilled are sure, so is the surety of Christ’s return to establish that kingdom.*

God, a trustworthy source that can help us understand issues critical to our future. Bible prophecy has rightly been called “history written in advance,” as we will see.

### Key prophecies

The prophecies of Daniel provide important keys to establishing the accuracy of Bible prophecy. Many of his prophecies are so detailed and specific that, if they stand demonstrably proven, even the most biased mind will be at a loss to refute them.

In fact, some skeptics have not challenged the *content* of Daniel’s prophetic accuracy. Rather than admit that his words are indeed inspired, they have labeled his book a fraud. They claim that it was not written by Daniel in the

sixth century B.C., as we can tell by events written of in the book, but was penned by an unknown author sometime after 200 B.C., long after many of the events prophesied in the book came to pass. This, critics allege, is the reason for the book's startling prophetic accuracy.

Perhaps the best-known incident in the book of Daniel features Daniel in the lion's den (chapter 6). Daniel's testimony challenges the critics. But let's first consider the nature of the critics' approach. They dispute Daniel's



*The prophet Daniel recorded several startlingly precise prophecies. They proved to be so detailed and accurate that some critics have long argued they were written not before, but after, the events took place.*

authorship because he refers to himself in the early chapters in the third person, as if writing about someone else. However, as Gleason L. Archer Jr. points out in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, this "was the custom among ancient authors of historical memoirs . . ." (Vol. 7, p. 4). In relating some of his experiences Daniel did write in the first person (Daniel 7:15; 8:15; 9:2; 10:2).

The identity of Daniel's critics is significant as well. The first person to question the authenticity of

Daniel's authorship was the Greek scholar and historian Porphyry, who lived A.D. 233-304. He is labeled by historians as a Neoplatonist, which means he subscribed to the doctrines of the Greek philosopher Plato rather than the Bible. "Porphyry is well known as a violent opponent of Christianity and defender of Paganism" (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th edition, Vol. 22, p. 104, "Porphyry").

Since Porphyry was an enemy of Christianity, his objectivity is open to question. He had no factual basis for his opinion, and his view contradicted the testimony of Jesus Christ, who referred to Daniel as the author of the book (Matthew 24:15).

The biblical scholar Jerome (A.D. 340-420) refuted Porphyry's contention. Thereafter no one took Porphyry's remarks seriously again until many centuries later. ". . . He was more or less dismissed by Christian scholarship as a mere pagan detractor who had allowed a naturalistic bias to warp his judgment. But during the time of the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century, all supernatural elements in Scripture came under suspicion . . ." (*The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 7, p. 13).

Some of today's scholars with liberal leanings have recycled these centuries-old arguments. Old Testament historian Eugene H. Merrill says their beliefs are built upon feeble evidence. "[Daniel's] rhetoric and language are eminently at home in the sixth century [B.C.] . . . It is only on the most subjective and circular lines of

evidence that the man and his writing have been denied historicity . . ." (Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1996, p. 484).

### Phenomenal prediction and fulfillment

The accuracy of Daniel's prediction of remotely distant events is spectacular. For example, he wrote the "70 weeks" prophecy in the "first year of Darius" (Daniel 9:1, 24). The first year of Darius was about 539 B.C. In this amazing utterance, "Daniel predicts the precise year of Christ's appearance and the beginning of his ministry in A.D. 27" (*The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 7, p. 9).

A second remarkable prophecy recorded by Daniel is his interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream in chapter 2. In the second year of his reign the Babylonian king had a troubling dream that none of his counselors could explain. Babylonian culture placed considerable emphasis upon dreams, and Nebuchadnezzar was convinced that this one was of great importance (Daniel 2:1-3).

His dream gives us a "disclosure of God's plan for the ages till the final triumph of Christ" and "presents the foreordained succession of world powers that are to dominate the Near East till the final victory of the Messiah in the last days" (*The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 7, pp. 39, 46).

Without prior knowledge of its content, Daniel explained the details of the dream to Nebuchadnezzar: "You, O king, were watching; and behold, a great image! This great image, whose splendor was excellent, stood before you; and its form was awesome. This image's head was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay" (Daniel 2:31-33).

Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar that his Babylonian Empire was represented by the head of gold (verses 37-38). The silver, bronze and iron-and-clay components of the image, or statue, represented three powerful empires that were to follow mighty Babylon (verses 39-40).

This interpretation provided an astounding preview of history. Nebuchadnezzar's dream occurred and was interpreted by Daniel about 600 B.C. The image represented, in symbolic form, the sequence of great empires that would dominate the civilized world's political scene for centuries.

"The silver empire was to be Medo-Persia, which began with Cyrus the Great, who conquered Babylon in 539 . . . This silver empire was supreme in the Near and Middle East for about two centuries" (*The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 7, p. 47).

"The bronze empire was the Greco-Macedonian Empire established by Alexander the Great . . . The bronze kingdom lasted for about 260 or 300 years before it was supplanted by the fourth kingdom" (*ibid.*).

"Iron connotes toughness and ruthlessness and describes the Roman Empire that reached its widest extent under the reign of Trajan" (*ibid.*). Trajan reigned A.D. 98-117, and the Roman Empire itself ruled for many centuries.

The fourth empire was depicted as having 10 toes. The feet and toes were composed partly of iron and

partly of clay, as verse 41 explains. “Verse 41 deals with a later phase or outgrowth of this fourth empire, symbolized by the feet and ten toes—made up of iron and earthenware, a fragile base for the huge monument. The text clearly implies that this final phase will be marked by some sort of federation rather than by a powerful single realm” (ibid.).

### Another dream adds important details

Additional aspects of this succession of world-ruling empires were revealed to Daniel in a later dream. This time the four empires were represented by four beasts: a lion (Babylonian Empire), a bear (Persian Empire) and a leopard (Greco-Macedonian Empire), and a fourth beast described as “terrible” and unlike the other three (Daniel 7:1-7).

Notice what verse 7 says about this fourth creature: “After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong. It had huge iron teeth; it was devouring, breaking in pieces, and trampling the residue with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns.” What does this description mean? It is a reference to the great power of Rome, which crushed all who opposed it. “Thus the superior power of the colossus of Rome . . . is emphasized in the symbolism of this terrible fourth beast” (*The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Vol. 7, p. 87).

What is the meaning of the 10 horns? The ultimate fulfillment of this part of the prophecy is yet in our future. “The ten horns appear to refer to an end-time revival of the Roman Empire . . .” (ibid., p. 25).

This concurs with Daniel 2:44, which obviously indicates that the second coming of Christ will occur in a time during which vestiges of the fourth beast, or kingdom, still exist: “And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.”

The greater part of these prophetic events, as detailed by the two dreams, has already been fulfilled. Their detailed completion affirms the divine inspiration of the Bible. The odds of any person foreseeing this on his own defy credibility. “. . . There is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days” (Daniel 2:28).

### The Bible’s most detailed prophecy

Daniel 11 records another phenomenal prophecy. The chronological setting is given in Daniel 10:1 as the “third year of Cyrus king of Persia.” A “man,” no doubt an angel (Daniel 9:21), came to tell Daniel what would occur in the “latter days” (Daniel 10:14).

The prophecy that follows is the most detailed in all the Bible. The third year of Cyrus was more than 500 years before the birth of Christ. Yet this prophecy foretells events that began to occur almost immediately and will continue until the return of Christ. The initial stages of the prophecy confirm the Bible because they have already been fulfilled, as can be verified by a study of the

Persian and Greek empires. No man could foresee such fine historical detail.

Some elements of what follows are intricate, requiring close attention. But a comparison of the prophetic words with the historical record makes them clear.

### Protracted political intrigue

The first 35 verses of Daniel 11 give an account, written years in advance, of the intrigue between two political entities—the “king of the South” and the “king of the North.” In secular history, the king of the South is often referred to as Ptolemy. This dynasty ruled from Alexandria in Egypt. The king of the North ruled from Antioch in Syria under the name Seleucus, or Antiochus.

With this in mind, we will provide commentary on the prophecy. The reader may consult Gleason L. Archer’s research in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Vol. 7, which we quote below, or other reliable reference works for a more complete account. Please read in your own Bible the verses we cite, and remember that these details were foretold far in advance of their occurrence.



*The empire of Alexander the Great was prophesied by Daniel well before Alexander rose to conquer most of the known world.*

**Daniel 11:2:** The “three more kings” are *Cambyses*, the elder son of Cyrus; *pseudo-Smerdis*, an impostor who passed himself off as Cyrus’s younger son, who had been secretly killed; and Darius the Persian. “The Persian king who invaded Greece was . . . Xerxes, who reigned 485-464 B.C.” (*The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Vol. 7, p. 128).

**Verses 3-4:** “Verse 3 introduces us to . . . the rise of Alexander the Great” (ibid.). The language in verse 4 “clearly suggests that this mighty conqueror was going to have a comparatively brief reign . . . In seven or eight years he accomplished the most dazzling military conquest in human history. But he lived only four years more; and . . . died of a fever in 323 . . .” (ibid.) Alexander’s kingdom was divided “among four smaller and weaker empires” (ibid., p. 129). Alexander’s infant son

was murdered in 310. Alexander's uncle was assassinated in 317. "Thus there were no descendants or blood relatives to succeed Alexander himself" (ibid.). So his kingdom was not divided among his posterity (verse 4).

Alexander's generals warred for control of his empire. The ensuing struggles for domination eliminated all but four, who became heads of the four divisions of his empire. The four were *Cassander*, reigning in Greece and the West, *Lysimachus* in Thrace and Asia Minor, *Ptolemy* in Egypt and *Seleucus* in Syria. Of these four, two—Ptolemy and Seleucus—expanded their rule and territory. These were the kings of Egypt and Syria, respectively.

The machinations that follow relate to these two. They are referred to as the king of the South (Ptolemy) and the king of the North (Seleucus) because of their location relative to Jerusalem.

**Verse 5:** "The king of the South was to be Ptolemy I" (*The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 7, p. 130). The biblical expression "one of his princes" refers to Seleucus. He had originally served under Ptolemy. In the intrigue after Alexander's death, Seleucus ultimately gained control over Syria and became king of the North. Seleucus eventually wielded more power than Ptolemy. The dynasty of the Seleucid line was to continue until 64 B.C.

### The Laodicean war

**Verse 6:** A state of tension and hostility existed between the king of the South and the king of the North. Ptolemy I died in 285 B.C. In 252 the two powers attempted a treaty under which *Berenice*, the daughter of Ptolemy II, was to marry *Antiochus II*, the king of the North. *Laodice*, the first wife of Antiochus II, was angry because he had divorced her. In retaliation, she manipulated a conspiracy from her place of banishment. She had Berenice and her infant son assassinated. "Not long afterward the king himself [Antiochus II] was poisoned . . ." (ibid.).

Laodice established herself as queen, because her son *Seleucus II* was too young to rule. The prophecy "she [Berenice] shall be given up" refers to the coup that Laodice engineered to effect the execution of Berenice. Some nobles who had supported Berenice as queen were also brought down.

**Verses 7-9:** Retaliation followed. A series of military actions, which came to be known as the Laodicean War, resulted. Ptolemy II died soon after Laodice killed his daughter, Berenice. *Ptolemy III* sought to avenge his sister's death. He attacked the king of the North and captured the Syrian capital of Antioch. Verse 8 describes the recapture by Ptolemy of "long-lost idols and sacred treasures" (ibid., p. 131) that had been stolen from Egypt by Cambyses in 524 B.C.

Peace was concluded between Ptolemy III and Seleucus II in 240, and hostilities ceased until 221,

when Ptolemy III died.

**Verses 10-12:** The sons of Seleucus II attacked the king of the South after their father died. One of these sons, *Seleucus III*, reigned for only three years. His military activity was relatively minor. He died by poisoning. Another son, *Antiochus III* (the Great), did "overwhelm and pass through." He conquered Palestine.

*Ptolemy IV*, the king of the South, retaliated (verse 11) and defeated the larger army of Seleucus III at the Battle of Raphia. After his victory Ptolemy turned to a life of debauchery during which he slaughtered tens of thousands of Jews in Egypt (verse 12). Through all this he weakened his kingdom.

**Verses 13-16:** The phrase "at the end of some years" refers to an incident when, 14 years after his defeat, Antiochus III came against *Ptolemy V*, still a young boy. (Ptolemy IV had died in 203.) The Egyptian provinces were in turmoil because of the wretched life of Ptolemy IV. Many of the people—including Jews sympathetic to the king of the North—joined with Antiochus against the king of the South. The rebellion was ultimately crushed by the Egyptian general *Scopus* (verse 14).

Scopus also rebuffed the forces of Antiochus during the winter of 201-200. The king of the North responded with another invasion. He captured the city of Sidon ("a fortified city"), where Scopus surrendered. Antiochus acquired complete control of the Holy Land, the "Glorious Land" (verse 16).

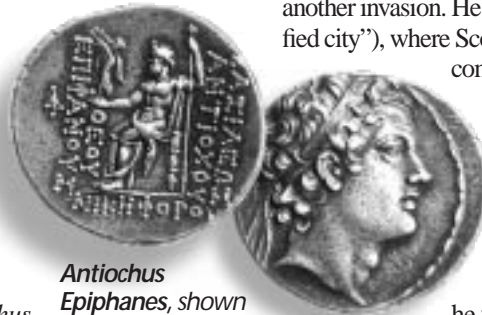
**Verse 17:** The Revised English Bible reads: "He [the king of the North] will resolve to advance with the full might of his kingdom; and, when he has agreed terms with the king of the south, he will give his young daughter in marriage to him, with a view to the destruction of the kingdom; but the treaty will not last nor will it be his purpose which is served."

Having defeated Scopus, Antiochus desired to gain control of Egypt itself. He gave his daughter, *Cleopatra*, to Ptolemy V in marriage. He believed she would betray the interests of her husband in favor of her father. Cleopatra frustrated the plans of Antiochus by siding with her husband.

**Verses 18-19:** In his frustration, Antiochus attacked islands and cities bordering on the Mediterranean. The inhabitants of some of these appealed to Rome for aid. Rome responded by attacking Antiochus and inflicting defeat on his forces. The Romans deprived him of much of his territory and took several hostages to Rome, including Antiochus's son. Rome exacted heavy tribute of him (verse 18).

Antiochus returned in disgrace to his stronghold, Antioch. Unable to pay the heavy fees exacted by the Romans, he attempted to plunder a pagan temple. His action so enraged local inhabitants that they killed him, bringing him to an inglorious end (verse 19).

**Verse 20:** According to 2 Maccabees 3:7-40, Antiochus's other son, *Seleucus IV*, was also unable to pay the taxes (2 Maccabees is an apocryphal book that



**Antiochus Epiphanes**, shown here on a silver coin of his reign, outlawed many of the Jews' religious practices and desecrated the Jerusalem temple by sacrificing swine on the altar.

reports on these events). Seleucus sent a Jew, *Heliodorus*, to plunder the temple at Jerusalem. Heliodorus went to the holy city but obtained nothing. Seleucus was later poisoned by Heliodorus, and so killed, “but not in anger or in battle.”

### Antiochus Epiphanes

**Daniel 11:21-35:** These verses speak of the infamous *Antiochus Epiphanes*, the brother of Seleucus IV, who had earlier been taken hostage to Rome. He was a “tyrannical oppressor who did his utmost to destroy the Jewish religion altogether” (*The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Vol. 7, p. 136).

Antiochus passed laws that forbade the practice of the



*The Jewish priest Matthatias triggered a rebellion against Antiochus Epiphanes when he violently resisted the king’s enforced idolatry.*

Jewish religion, under penalty of death. He was a man of incredible cruelty. On his orders “an aged Scribe, Eleazar, was flogged to death because he refused to eat swine’s flesh. A mother and her seven children were successively butchered, in the presence of the governor, for refusing to pay homage to an image. Two

mothers who had circumcised their new-born sons were driven through the city and cast headlong from the wall” (Charles F. Pfeiffer, *Between the Testaments*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1974, pp. 81-82).

**Verse 31:** This refers to the momentous events of Dec. 16, 168 B.C., when a crazed Antiochus entered Jerusalem and killed 80,000 men, women and children (2 Maccabees 5:11-14). He then desecrated the temple by offering a sacrifice to a pagan god, Jupiter Olympus. This outrage was a forerunner of a comparable event that Jesus Christ said would occur in the last days (Matthew 24:15).

**Verses 32-35:** This is the story of the indomitable will and courage of the *Maccabees*, a family of priests who resisted Antiochus and his successors. The Maccabees’ revolt against the Syrian king was triggered when “Matthatias, the leading priest in the city of Modein . . . , after killing the officer of Antiochus who had come to enforce the new decree concerning idolatrous worship . . . , led a guerrilla band that fled to the hills . . .” (*The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Vol. 7, p. 141).

Matthatias was aided in his cause by five sons, most notably *Judas*, nicknamed *Hammer*. Many of these patriots died in this cause, but their heroics ultimately drove the Syrian forces from the country.

At this point Daniel’s prophecy takes on a different tone, shifting to “the time of the end” near the end of

verse 35. To quote Archer (*The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Vol. 7, p. 143): “With the conclusion of the preceding pericope [extract] at v. 35, the predictive material that incontestably applies to the Hellenistic empires and the contest between the Seleucids and the Jewish patriots ends. This present section (vv. 36-39) contains some features that hardly apply to Antiochus IV, though most of the details could apply to him as well as to his latter-day antitype, ‘the beast.’”

Liberal and conservative scholars “agree that all of chapter 11 up to this point contains strikingly accurate predictions of the whole sweep of events from the reign of Cyrus . . . to the unsuccessful effort of Antiochus Epiphanes to stamp out the Jewish faith” (*ibid.*).

### Interpreting the prophetic evidence

These scholars differ, however, on what this means. Speaking of the two viewpoints, Archer says that to conservative scholars “this pattern of prediction and fulfillment [serves as] compelling evidence of the divine inspiration and authority of the Hebrew Scriptures, since only God could possibly foreknow the future and see to it that his announced plan would be precisely fulfilled. To the rationalists, however, who begin with the premise that there is no personal God . . . , there is no possibility of a genuine fulfillment of prophecy . . . All biblical instances of fulfilled prophecy must be accounted for as pious fraud in which only after the event takes place has the fiction recording its prediction been devised . . . This is what rationalists have to say about all predictive portions anywhere in the Bible. For them there can be no such thing as divine revelation of events to come. Otherwise they must surrender their basic position and acknowledge the possibility of the supernatural, as demonstrated by detailed fulfillment of events foretold, as here in Daniel, by a prophet of God more than 360 years in advance” (*ibid.*, pp. 143-144).

Did you comprehend the full meaning of that last sentence? Those who dispute even the possibility of the existence of Bible prophecy do it because they want to deny the supernatural; they want to deny *even the existence* of a God who is able to foretell events down to their smallest details.

Some atheists admit that they reach their conclusions because they simply do not want God telling them how to live.

For instance, Aldous Huxley wrote in *Ends and Means* of his bias: “I had motives for not wanting the world to have a meaning; consequently assumed that it had none, and was able without any difficulty to find satisfying reasons for this assumption . . . The philosopher who finds no meaning in the world is not concerned exclusively with a problem in pure metaphysics; he is also concerned to prove that there is no valid reason why he personally should not do as he wants to do, or why his friends should not seize political power and govern in the way that they find most advantageous to themselves.”

He continued, “For myself . . . the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation . . . We objected to the morality because it interfered

with our sexual freedom . . .” (Chatto & Windus, London, 1938, pp. 270, 272-273).

How much more plainly can it be said? People deny the authority of the Bible because they do not want God telling them what to do. Such an approach will be to no avail when men face Jesus Christ in the judgment, because “every idle word men may speak, they will give

account of it in the day of judgment” (Matthew 12:36).

As the apostle Paul told similar men in Athens more than 1,900 years ago, God “has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained” (Acts 17:31). The time of judgment for these people is yet future, and God will be merciful as He opens their eyes.



## The Bible and *You* . . .

A poll conducted by *U.S. News & World Report* in 1994 reported that nearly six in 10 Americans believe the world will come to an end or be destroyed, and a third of those think it will happen within a few decades. That same survey also showed that 44 percent believe in a final Battle of Armageddon. A similar 1997 poll showed that 66 percent of Americans believe Jesus Christ will return (in most other countries these percentages are smaller).

If Christ were to return now, what would it mean to the average citizen of the world? If the Judge of all mankind called for an accounting (2 Corinthians 5:10), where would you stand? In all recorded history only one society has repented as a group when God warned of impending troubles. That was the ancient city of Nineveh, capital of the Assyrian empire, which repented at the warning of Jonah (Matthew 12:41).

If nations don't mend their ways, what can individuals do? In other words, what should *you* do with the information you have read in this booklet? If the Bible is indeed

### ***What should you do about the implications of the information you have read in this booklet? If the Bible is indeed the inspired instruction the Creator of the universe gives to His created beings, what should you do?***

the inspired instruction of the Creator of the universe to His created beings, what should *you* do?

The message is clear: No matter what others may do, you have the power and responsibility to take personal action and seek God. The Bible is a reliable guide to human conduct. It is God's Word to a spiritually bankrupt humanity. It is our Maker's instruction book, telling us how we should live.

The Scriptures have been available for millennia. People have heard the Word of God from its pages and from the prophets. They have heard God's exhortation to repent and obey. But, no matter who has brought the message, no matter the medium, the result has always been the same: Only a small minority have responded.

When Christ spoke the gospel powerfully to His own

people, they rejected it. He pointed out to them a shameful fact: Even though they had God's Word, they refused to believe and act on it, so God turned to others. “But I tell you truly, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a great famine throughout all the land; but to none of them was Elijah sent except to Zarephath, in the region of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian” (Luke 4:25-27).

Jesus noted a sad fact evident throughout history: Although many have had opportunity to learn of God's truth, only a relative handful have responded and allowed that understanding to change their lives (Matthew 22:14).

#### **Faith and choice**

What is different about those who respond compared with those who do not? It is usually several things. One is a conviction that the Bible is indeed the Word of God. Another is the exercise of free will. God has allowed us the right of free choice and doesn't force us to do things His way. Some people use their free will to respond positively when God calls; others reject this calling. The choice is always ours.

But there is another factor that figures heavily in how we react to the Word of God. In this booklet we have confronted the issue of whether the Bible is true and therefore a reliable guide to human behavior. We have presented some solid evidence confirming that it is. Although substantial, the evidence that the Bible is true is not enough to satisfy every agnostic and atheist. If it were, no one on earth would be an atheist or an agnostic. Every rational person would exercise his free will to at least believe, if not obey. However, the Scriptures remind us that even the demons *know* God exists, but simply *choose* to disobey Him (James 2:19).

It is God's purpose to give us a choice as to whether we will exercise a measure of faith. As American statesman and orator Daniel Webster noted, the Bible is a book of faith. If we had evidence sufficient to refute every skeptic's misgivings, we would have no need for faith. This is not the way God has chosen to work. Everyone from Adam to the present has been called upon to live by faith.

And what is faith? “Faith gives substance to our hopes and convinces us of realities we do not [yet] see” (Hebrews 11:1, REB). Concerning faith, the apostle Paul tells us that Abraham “praised God in the full assurance that God was able to do what he had promised” (Romans 4:21, Good-speed). God wants us to have this same trust in Him.

### The Bible and the present generation

While some insist on hard scientific evidence before they will believe, others fall into the other philosophical ditch. They are not interested in a God who meets them through scriptural revelation; rather, they desire a god who meets them where they are in their own personal view of the world. Some have termed this a quest for a designer god or boutique religion.

Author Wade Clark Roof notes that baby-boomers,



those born between the end of World War II and about 1964, “have grown up in a post-sixties culture that emphasizes choice, knowing and understanding one’s self, the importance of personal autonomy, and fulfilling one’s potential—all contributing to a highly subjective approach to religion” (*A Generation of Seekers*, Harper, San Francisco, 1993, p. 30). They tend to steer away from structured religion. They are less apt to belong to an organized church, and they are less likely to regard the Bible as objective truth. They are not sure where to turn for answers to religious questions.

Unsure of what truth is or whether it even exists, such people tend to look for a church that *meets their personal preference* rather than a place where objective biblical truth is to be found. It is more important for them to feel comfortable with their church or congregation than to participate in a church whose teachings and practices are firmly anchored in the Bible’s teachings. Experience in their formative and young-adult years has contributed to a feeling of alienation from societal institutions, including religious institutions.

As members of the first television generation, baby-boomers were conditioned for what Roof calls the “mentalizing” of salvation. Their parents gained most of their view of the world through reading. Boomers were largely educated through the use of images on the television screen. “In a print culture, priority was given to the objective, to the rational use of the mind, which encouraged religious discourse with logically ordered content. Doctrinal debate and theological reflection flourished under

these conditions . . . But in an image culture the *subjective* takes precedence over the *objective* . . .” (ibid., p. 135, emphasis added).

The result? Recent generations have taken a different philosophical attitude toward God, churches, religious



*The Bible is a reliable guide to human conduct, the instruction book from our Creator to man.*



experience and the Bible. Whether the Bible is true apparently isn’t that important to them.

This view is held by some professionals as well. “There is no lack of scholars—among them historians, theologians, philologists, and archaeologists—who . . . have come to the conclusion that fundamentally it is of secondary importance whether the facts reported in the Bible are correct or not” (Werner Keller, *The Bible as History*, Bantam Books, New York, 1982, p. 433).

But it does matter. Biblical archaeologist George Ernest Wright expressed the opinion that “in Biblical belief everything depends on whether the main events actually took place” (Keller, p. 434). If the main events of the Bible didn’t take place, then how can we believe anything it says?

The life stories of the Old Testament patriarchs are the foundation upon which the historical record of the Bible is based. If the God who claims to have inspired the Bible gave us a collection of myths and legends, then how could we have confidence in anything He says?

## Abraham and Alexander the Great

According to the New Testament, the patriarchs and prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures were real people. Consider Abraham as an example. He is listed in the ancestry of Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:1). In a discussion with the Pharisees, Jesus alluded to Abraham as a real historical figure (John 8:56-58). If Christ were mistaken, then He was nothing but a man and a rather uninformed one at that. In this case He could not be our Savior, and our faith would be in vain. So the accuracy of the Bible does matter!

Belief in the historicity of Abraham requires a measure of faith because no one has produced a signature in Abraham's own handwriting. Yet the evidence of his existence is there.

By comparison consider the example of a major secular figure. No one has produced a written document bearing the signature of Alexander the Great, either. Alexander's influence on his time is widely acknowledged. He "changed the entire map and culture and language of the world—even the customs and dress of its peoples" (*The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. 1, p. 77).

Yet the earliest surviving written volume about the life of Alexander was written some 400 years after his death. The earliest known biographer of Alexander was the Greek historian Arrian, born about A.D. 96. We have no contemporary of Alexander's who can attest to his deeds. Yet most do not question the words of a man who lived four centuries later and described Alexander's influence on the world.

Ancient biblical documents that were composed four centuries after his existence describe Abraham and his world. The very customs of the world of Abraham and Sarah as described in Genesis 15-16 are attested to in tablets found at Nuzi, near the city of Asshur in Assyria. The documents "pertain to matters such as inheritance and property rights, slavery, adoption, and the like" (Merrill, pp. 38-39).

Some scholars once claimed that the unusual events described in these two chapters of Genesis, such as the episode of Abraham fathering a child by his wife's hand-

maiden, Hagar, were fabricated. The same scholars had to back down when the Nuzi tablets demonstrated that such practices were commonplace in the culture of that time when a woman was infertile.

If Abraham were not a historical figure, millions of Jews and Arabs who claim to be of his lineage hold to mythical traditions and spurious accounts of millennia of history. Christ said Abraham would rise in the resurrection (Matthew 8:11). To deny the historical reality of Abraham is to deny Jesus Christ's words as well as records and traditions going back thousands of years.

In the end, the issue comes down to a matter of faith. Do we believe the Bible is truly God's Word? Do we believe God?

## God encourages faith

In spite of mountains of evidence that can be amassed in favor of the truthfulness of the Bible, having believing faith comes through developing a personal relationship with God. Doubt and disbelief are not an insurmountable hurdle. Even some people who encountered our Lord Jesus Christ in the flesh stumbled at times. "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" pleaded a man who struggled with his faith (Mark 9:24). Jesus was sympathetic and helped the troubled man and healed his son (verses 25-27).

God is understanding in His approach to struggling humanity: "For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust" (Psalm 103:14). God will help people who diligently seek Him.

One way of seeking God is through careful study of the Bible. A continuing investigation of Scripture will promote the faith you need (Romans 10:17). If you engage in an earnest study of the Bible, you will find that your faith will grow. You will be amazed at what the Scriptures proclaim. As you learn basic truths, you will want to study more and more.

You will find that the Scriptures contain the answers to the colossal problems that confront mankind. This in itself will build your faith in God. You will have confidence that He is fulfilling His plan in the world as well as in your personal life.

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