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## Is the Bible True?

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# Is the Bible True?

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In 1536, William Tyndale, who's been called the "Father of the English Bible," was burned at the stake for translating the Bible into English. His passion to make the Bible available to everyone cost him his life.

But why would Tyndale give his life for a mere book?

Tyndale, and other martyrs who have suffered similar fates, were motivated by the belief that the Bible isn't merely a book written by men, but rather it is God's one true message to humankind written *through* men who were specially chosen and inspired by God.

Tyndale believed that each person should be given the opportunity to read the Bible for himself, and be able to evaluate it on a personal basis.

Skeptics believe Tyndale died in vain, arguing that the Bible is a fictional book written thousands of years ago by men who copied down ancient stories, passed on from previous generations.

Leading the skeptics' charge today is atheist Richard Dawkins, who warns his daughter, Juliet,

*Belief that there is a god...belief in Heaven,...belief that Jesus never had a human father, belief that prayers are answered...not one of these beliefs is backed up by any good evidence.*

*And, next time somebody tells you that something is true, why not say to them: "What kind of evidence is there for that?"*

*Your loving Daddy<sup>1</sup>*

Dawkins argues that the Bible is scientifically and historically inaccurate. He recommends it be taught because of its cultural value, but "emphatically not as reality." He says, "It is fiction, myth, poetry, anything but reality."<sup>2</sup>

Another skeptic who doubted the inspiration of the Bible, Bertrand Russell, was once asked what kind of evidence it would take for him to believe in God. Pondering the question, Russell responded,

*Well, if I heard a voice from heaven and it predicted a series of things and they came to pass, then I guess I'd have to believe there's some kind of supernatural being.<sup>3</sup>*

For skeptics like Dawkins and Russell, the question of the Bible's validity comes down to the evidence.

Oxford scholar C. S. Lewis also considered the Bible to be untrue. But after hearing an atheist friend exclaim that the evidence for its truth was "surprisingly good," Lewis decided to evaluate it for himself.<sup>4</sup>

As an atheist, Lewis didn't want to obey the good moral laws and teaching in the Bible. On the contrary, Lewis decided he would only accept the Bible's teaching about God and Jesus Christ if it were true. He explains,

*Christianity...if false, is of no importance, and, if true, is of infinite importance. The one thing it cannot be is moderately important.<sup>5</sup>*

Lewis understood that the truth of Christianity is based on the truth of the Bible. If the Bible isn't true, then why should we believe what it says about God, about Jesus Christ, and about our purpose on Earth?

On the other hand, if the Bible is really God's word to us, then its credibility is based on him alone. Theologian J. I. Packer explains,

*We are to believe and obey [the Word of God, or Bible]...because it is a true word. Its author is "the God of truth."<sup>6</sup>*

Lewis wanted freedom to live without moral restraints, but realized that if the Bible is true, he needed to personally respond to its message. Lewis decided to let the evidence speak for itself. Once he accepted the Bible as true, Lewis admits he came "kicking and screaming" to faith in Christ.<sup>7</sup>

Although he was an atheist, Lewis set aside his personal desires in order to discover the truth. He was willing to let the evidence speak for itself. In this article we will attempt to discover if there is evidence which would convince an objective person that the Bible is true. To find out we need to examine the evidence for the Bible in three crucial areas:

1. Its scientific accuracy
2. Its historical accuracy
3. Its prophetic accuracy

## Is the Bible Scientifically Accurate?

The Bible touches on science with profound statements about our origins. It is regarding our origins that skeptics like Dawkins have criticized the Bible as being scientifically inaccurate. Let's take a look at science and the Bible to see if they agree or disagree.

### A One-Time Beginning

The opening words of the Bible are, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."<sup>8</sup> However, since Aristotle, most scientists believed that matter and energy had always existed. Many scientists accused the Bible of being out of date and unscientific.

The Bible also contradicted scientific opinion which assumed time and space had always existed, by stating that *time and space* were created along with energy and matter. It says,

*The whole scheme of time and space was created by God's command—the world which we can see has come into being through principles which are invisible.*<sup>9</sup>

Although leading scientists were convinced that everything, including time and space, had always existed, Einstein's theory of relativity, pointed to a beginning of the universe. Unwilling to accept a beginning, Einstein, who many call the greatest scientist of all time, "fudged" his own equations to make it appear the universe had always existed.

But a decade later, astronomer Edwin Hubble discovered the universe is expanding. Rewinding the tape, he realized everything began in a massive cosmic creation event. Einstein admitted his error, calling it, "the biggest blunder of my life."<sup>10</sup>

The highly regarded astronomer Fred Hoyle was also reluctant to admit the universe had a beginning. He sarcastically labeled the enormous creation event leading to our universe, "the big bang," and the name caught on. Since then, scientists have referred to creation as the big bang.



*Here is the cosmological proof of the existence of God.... The fine-tuning of the universe provides prima facie evidence of deistic design. Many scientists when they admit their views, incline toward...the design argument.<sup>16</sup>*

However, scientists who don't believe in God seek natural, rather than theological, answers for the remarkable fine-tuning of our universe.

Stephen Hawking, an atheist, admits that *"these numbers seem to have been very finely adjusted to make possible the development of life."*<sup>17</sup> Hawking, has also admitted, *"There must be religious overtones. But I think most scientists prefer to shy away from the religious side of it."*<sup>18</sup>

In his effort to explain the fine-tuning apart from a Creator, Hawking argues that if an infinite number of universes exist (multiverse), one of them would have been lucky enough to have just the right conditions for life. Hawking supposes that we are that "lucky" universe.

But since no scientific evidence exists for Hawking's multiverse hypothesis, many scientists reject it as too speculative. British astrophysicist Paul Davies, an agnostic, writes, *"Such a belief must rest on faith rather than observation."*<sup>19</sup>

Astronomer, Robert Jastrow, speaks for many scientists who regard the beginning and fine-tuning of our universe as evidence for divine creation.

*For the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountains of ignorance; he is about to conquer the highest peak; as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries.<sup>20</sup>*

## **The Time Question**

In spite of the Bible being right about a beginning to the universe, Dawkins and other skeptics still call the Bible a book of fairy tales, belittling its six-day creation account as mythical. But, to make his point, Dawkins oversimplifies the biblical view.

There are actually several different views of how to interpret the time period in Genesis. Some scholars believe the Hebrew word for "day" in Genesis (*yom*) means a 24-hour period; others, however, point out that *yom* can refer to an indefinite

period of time, such as an age or era.<sup>21</sup>

Physicist Dr. Gerald Schroeder argues that both the Bible and science are right. Schroeder believes that God perceives time differently than we do.

*By God's time frame, the sequence took six days. By our time frame, it took billions of years.<sup>22</sup>*

Schroeder points out that Einstein's theory of relativity proves there is no absolute passage of time; it varies as opposed to being fixed. This principle of "time dilation" is why Atomic clocks on Earth run slightly slower than those on GPS satellites, and why astronauts age at slightly slower rates while traveling in space.

Nearly 2,000 years before Einstein's theory the Bible indicated that God views time differently than we do when the apostle Peter wrote,

*To the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years is as one day.<sup>23</sup>*

Regardless of how long creation took, the more fundamental question is: how was the Bible able to get it right about our one-time beginning millennia before telescopes, when science didn't have a clue as to our origins?

## **Origin of Life**

The Bible speaks of life as a miraculous gift from God. But since the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century, scientists have looked for a natural, rather than a supernatural, explanation.

Charles Darwin's theory of evolution dealt with natural selection in living things, not with the origin of life itself. He imagined life began in a slimy pond somewhere when organic chemicals spontaneously came together.

However, a hundred years after Darwin, Francis Crick and James Watson discovered that life is based on an intricately complex coded molecule called DNA. Crick, an agnostic, was so overwhelmed with DNA, that he called it, "almost a miracle."<sup>24</sup>

What stunned Crick is that DNA operates like a language with its own extremely complex software code. DNA's intricate intelligence prompted Microsoft founder Bill Gates to say that the software of DNA is "far, far more complex than any software we have ever developed."<sup>25</sup>

How did such intelligent coding originate? Dr. Stephen C. Meyer observes that coded languages are *always* derived from an intelligent programmer.

*Our experience with information-intensive systems (especially codes and languages) indicates that such systems always come from an intelligent source.*<sup>26</sup>

When Antony Flew, the world's leading atheist for 50 years, realized the intelligence within DNA, he reversed his anti-God belief, shocking the world. Flew admitted,

*What I think the DNA material has done is to show that intelligence must have been involved.... It now seems to me that the finding of more than fifty years of DNA research have provided materials for a new and enormously powerful argument to design.*<sup>27</sup>

Instead of the Bible being outdated by science, scientific evidence has actually confirmed its ancient account of our origins in the following areas:

- Everything, including time and space, had a one-time beginning.
- Our universe and planet are perfectly fine-tuned for life.
- DNA's sophisticated coding requires supernatural intelligence.

Oxford professor of mathematics, Dr. John Lennox summarizes the impact of these findings.

*The more we get to know about our universe, the more the hypothesis that there is a Creator . . . gains in credibility as the best explanation of why we are here.*<sup>28</sup>

## Is the Bible Historically Reliable?

As we weigh the evidence for the Bible, our next question is that of its historical reliability. Biblical critics have attempted to prove the Bible untrue by citing, what they believe, are historical errors.

Although several supposed errors have been alleged by skeptics, two of the most common arguments against the Bible's historical reliability are:

1. The Old Testament is unreliable since two of its most important characters, Moses and David, didn't exist.
2. The New Testament is unreliable because it was written at least a century after Christ by unknown authors, and archaeologists can't verify some of its key people and places.

Skeptics believe the evidence supports their arguments. But are they right?

### Did the Old Testament Characters Moses and David Exist?

If Moses and David didn't exist, a significant portion of the Bible's history and teaching would be baseless.

Let's look first at Moses, regarded as the most important person in Jewish history.

- Moses led the Jews out of Egyptian bondage.
- Moses is called the greatest of all Hebrew prophets.
- Moses delivered the Law and Ten Commandments to Israel.
- Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible (Torah).

But did Moses really exist?

In the late 19th century, the German critic Julius Wellhausen argued that Moses couldn't have written the Torah, since the art of writing hadn't yet been developed. Wellhausen reasoned that, if Moses didn't write the Torah, he must have been mythical. This, coupled with the scarcity of archaeological evidence for Moses, led many skeptical scholars to argue he was mythical.

However, in 1974, archaeologists discovered the Ebla tablets, proving that writing existed well *before* the time of Moses.<sup>29</sup> In fact, archaeologists found numerous written documents, such as the codified Laws of Hammurabi, dated centuries prior

to Moses.<sup>30</sup> Although these discoveries don't prove Moses existed, they totally undermine Wellhausen's primary reason for calling him mythical.

Skeptics also doubt Moses' existence since neither he nor the Jewish exodus from Egypt are specifically cited in ancient Egyptian writings. Yet, there is overwhelming evidence of his existence from several other sources that can't be denied.

- Ancient Jewish rabbis and scribes never doubted Moses was real
- The ancient historian, Josephus regarded Moses and the exodus as real
- Until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, no credible historian questioned Moses' existence

It would be extremely difficult to imagine the origin of the Jewish religion with its laws and traditions apart from Moses. In his classic work, *A History of the Jews*, Paul Johnson argues that Jewish history centers on Moses being a real person.

The world historian emphatically states,

*The contention of Wellhausen and his school that Moses was a later fiction and the Mosaic code a fabrication—a view held by some historians today—is skepticism carried to the point of fanaticism, a vandalizing of the human record. Moses was beyond the power of the human mind to invent.<sup>31</sup>*

Skeptics argued that David was mythical because no evidence had ever been discovered confirming his existence.

- David was the king through whom Messiah would come.
- David was author of most of the Psalms.
- David established Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

However, in 1993 archaeologists discovered a ninth-century b.c. stone slab with the inscriptions "King of Israel" and "King of the House of David." Scholars believe this "Tel Dan inscription" provides solid evidence of David's existence.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, two archaeologists believe they have recently unearthed David's palace and storehouse, dated to his time.<sup>33</sup>

Johnson notes that the biblical skepticism of 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century German critics is continually eroding under the spade of the archaeologist.

*The process whereby the Hebrews first settled in ancient Palestine, sojourned in Egypt, and then conquered Canaan has been brought bit by bit over the past half century into the lighted circle which is now illuminated, if still only dimly, by archaeology. Some events of the books of Exodus and Joshua, once dismissed by biblical critics as entirely imaginary, have now been confirmed by the work of such scholars as G. E. Wright on ancient Schechem, Kathleen Kenyon at Jericho, J. L. Starkey at Lachish, Yigael Yadin at Hazor, James Pritchard at Gibeon, to mention only five outstanding cases.*

*...it is now possible to see much of the historical writing contained in the books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles as constituting the finest and most dependable history in all the ancient world, on a level with the best work of the Greeks, such as Thucydides.<sup>34</sup>*

These recent discoveries have built a much more compelling case for the Old Testament's historical reliability. (For more on the reliability of the Old Testament, see [here](#).)

### **Is the New Testament Reliable?**

When it comes to the New Testament, German critics argued that all New Testament books were written in the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries, much too late to have been eyewitness accounts. Their skeptical view convinced some scholars that the Gospels weren't written by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

However, ancient New Testament manuscripts discovered in the 20<sup>th</sup> century prove that its books were written *much earlier* than skeptical scholars believed. Let's look at two of these manuscript discoveries.

- A fragment of a copy of John's Gospel (labeled p52) discovered in Egypt is dated to about 25 years after John wrote the original.<sup>35</sup>
- A first century fragment of Mark's Gospel was discovered on an Egyptian mummy mask. According to New Testament scholar Craig Evans, it has been carbon-14 dated prior to a.d. 90 A.D.<sup>36</sup>

Based on these dates, it's probable that numerous copies of Mark and John were in circulation within a few decades of Jesus' death and resurrection—*while many eyewitnesses were alive*. The discovery of p52 proves that John's Gospel was written

much earlier than skeptics thought. Princeton scholar Bruce Metzger explains the significance of this partial manuscript.

*Just as Robinson Crusoe, seeing but a single footprint in the sand, concluded that another human being, with two feet, was present on the island with him, so P52 proves the existence and use of the Fourth Gospel during the first half of the second century...far removed from its traditional place of composition.<sup>37</sup>*

These two early fragments were copied from the originals Mark and John had written 20-45 years earlier. Most other ancient historical manuscripts of nonbiblical have time gaps from 400 to 1,400 years. Aristotle's *Poetics* was written about 343 B.C., yet the earliest copy is dated 1100 A.D., with only five copies in existence. That's a time gap of 1,443 years between the original and the existing copy—and yet no historian challenges Aristotle's writings.<sup>38</sup>

So how many New Testament copies are in existence today? Textual scholars have recovered nearly 24,000 in all languages, over 5,600 in the original Greek.<sup>39</sup> This greatly exceeds the number of manuscripts for all other ancient historical writings.

It's understandable why critical scholar John A. T. Robinson made the following statement about the New Testament.

*The wealth of manuscripts, and above all the narrow interval of time between the writing and the earliest extant copies, make it by far the best attested text of any ancient writing in the world.<sup>40</sup>*

Robinson concluded that all New Testament books were originally penned between 40 and 65 A.D.<sup>41</sup> Archaeologist William Albright assigned a slightly later date, "probably between about 50 A.D. and 75 A.D."<sup>42</sup>

Given these early dates, Mark and John could have vividly recalled Jesus' warmth and compassion, his miraculous healings, the dead he brought back to life, his profound words, his death on the cross, and their jubilation when he appeared to them alive three days later.

But the Gospels weren't the first written accounts of Jesus. Paul's letters, written 10-22 years after Christ, relate the traditional accounts of Jesus' life, death and resurrection passed on to him by Peter and the other apostles.

The early manuscript evidence led biblical critics to redirect their attack on the New Testament from its dating to denying the existence of key people and places, including Jesus himself.

If Jesus didn't exist, then Christianity would be founded upon a myth. However, evidence for the existence of Jesus is overwhelming—far greater than for many ancient historical figures such as Alexander the Great.<sup>43</sup> (For evidence of Jesus' existence see [here](#).)

Skeptics have also argued that Jesus' hometown of Nazareth didn't exist during his lifetime. Their point is that if Nazareth is bogus, then Jesus must also be bogus. In *The Myth of Nazareth* Rene Salm writes,

*The proof is now at hand that "Jesus of Nazareth," a long-standing icon of Western civilization, is bogus. Celebrate, freethinkers. Christianity as we know it may be finally coming to an end!*<sup>44</sup>

But in 2009 the Israel Antiquities Authority announced an archaeological find proving that Nazareth did exist in the first century. Archaeologist Stephen Pfann provided some details: "It...shows us what the walls and floors were like inside Nazareth in the first century."<sup>45</sup>

Skeptics have also cited lack of evidence for the Roman governor Pontius Pilate and the Jewish chief priest Joseph Caiaphas, key figures in the trial leading to Jesus' crucifixion. If Pilate and Caiaphas didn't exist, then the entire account of Jesus' death and resurrection would be suspect.

But, in 1961 archaeologists discovered a stone inscribed with the name of "Pontius Pilate prefect of Judea."<sup>46</sup> And in 1990 archaeologists discovered an ossuary (bone box) with the inscription of Caiaphas.<sup>47</sup>

Hundreds of other New Testament details have also been verified. Classical historian Colin Hemer, for example, "identifies 84 facts in the last 16 chapters of Acts that have been confirmed by Archaeological research."<sup>48</sup>

Archaeologist Sir William Ramsey originally thought that both Luke's Gospel and his book of Acts were forgeries written in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. After extensive research, Ramsey concluded that Luke wrote his own eyewitness accounts as well as those

related to him by the apostles. Ramsey wrote,

*Luke is a historian of the first rank.... This author should be placed along with the very greatest historians.... Luke's history is unsurpassed in respect of its trustworthiness.*<sup>49</sup>

Historian Paul Johnson summarizes the impact of these discoveries.

*What is clear beyond doubt is that whereas in the nineteenth century the tendency was to cast doubt on the veracity of Judeo-Christian records,...in the twentieth century it has moved in quite the opposite direction, and there is no sign of the process coming to an end. It is the skeptics who have reason to fear the course of discovery.*<sup>50</sup>

Further evidence for the New Testament's validity is that nearly all its words are cited in over 36,000 private letters and nonbiblical documents.<sup>51</sup>

Clark Pinnock, professor of interpretations at McMaster Divinity College, compares the reliability of the New Testament with other ancient history.

*There exists no document from the ancient world witnessed by so excellent a set of textual and historical testimonies.... Skepticism regarding the historical credentials of Christianity is based upon an irrational basis.*<sup>52</sup>

## **What about Jesus' Miracles and Resurrection?**

Some believe the historicity of the New Testament, but not its miracles. The third President of the United States, Thomas Jefferson, just couldn't bring himself to believe in anything supernatural. So he took a pair of scissors and removed every miracle from his personal New Testament.

However, if the Bible is scientifically and historically accurate, and if its predictions of future events are true, then miracles shouldn't be too difficult to believe.

Certainly, if God created and finely-tuned the universe, coded DNA, and engineered the human brain, he should be able to perform miracles. And presumably, he could do so without violating the natural laws he created.

Jesus' greatest miracle is his resurrection from the dead. His convinced followers gave their lives proclaiming it really happened. A *New York Times* article acknowledges, "*Something happened!*"

*Shortly after Jesus was executed, his followers were suddenly galvanized from a baffled and cowering group into people whose message about a living Jesus and a coming kingdom, preached at the risk of their lives, eventually changed an empire. Something happened...But exactly what?<sup>53</sup>*

English journalist Frank Morison believed Jesus' resurrection didn't happen, and began writing a book documenting the evidence against it. However, the evidence Morison discovered turned his skepticism into belief. Although his investigation is beyond the scope of this article, you can read [what Morison discovered](#).

(To read more on the reliability of the New Testament see [here](#).)

## **Is the Bible Prophetically Accurate?**

As previously noted, the atheist Bertrand Russell said the only thing that would convince him of God's existence is, "if I heard a voice from heaven and it predicted a series of things and they came to pass."

According to the Bible, God has infinite knowledge, including everything in the future. But how can he know the future when it hasn't happened yet?

Since God is outside of our time dimension, C. S. Lewis reasons he is able to see past, present and future just as an author of a book knows the ending from the beginning. "What we call 'tomorrow' is visible to Him in just the same way as what we call 'today'....He is already in tomorrow."<sup>54</sup>

Of the 26 so called holy books of various religions, the Bible is the *only* one containing predictive prophecy.<sup>55</sup> Biblical scholar Wilbur Smith compares the prophecies of the Bible with other historical books.

*The Bible is the only volume ever produced by man, or a group of men, in which is to be found a large body of prophecies relating to individual nations, to Israel, to all the peoples of the earth, to certain cities, and to the coming one who was to be the Messiah.<sup>56</sup>*

About 25% of the Bible is predictive prophecy. The Bible tells us that God gave specially chosen Hebrew prophets glimpses of future events for them to write down in the Scriptures. The test of a prophet's credentials was 100 percent accuracy. If a prophecy proved to be untrue, he was subject to the death penalty.<sup>57</sup>

The three central themes in Bible prophecy in the Old Testament are:

- Israel and its holy city, Jerusalem
- The coming of the Messiah
- The return of the Messiah as King

Now to address Russell's point, have the Bible's predictions come true?

### **Prophecies Regarding Israel and Jerusalem**

The Old Testament tells the story of God's people, Israel, his dealings with them, and his future promises to them. Although he was a Jew, the apostle Paul made it clear that everyone, regardless of their race, is equally important to God.

*After all, is God the God of the Jews only? Isn't he also the God of the Gentiles? Of course he is.<sup>58</sup>*

But, why then is the nation of Israel special to God?

Israel traces its roots back 4,000 years to a man called Abraham. God called Abraham (formerly Abram) to leave his native land of Ur and begin living a life of faith and obedience. Because of Abraham's faith, God promised him that he would become the "father of a great nation," and through his seed the entire world would *eventually* be blessed.

Abraham's descendants are what we now know as the people of Israel, the Jews. As his chosen emissary, Israel had three basic tasks:

1. To provide the birthplace of the Messiah
2. To be the depository of divine revelation (Scripture)
3. To proclaim God's message to all nations

God promised the people of Israel great blessing if they would obey his commands, yet severe consequences if they disobeyed him. Moses admonished them,

*You must completely obey the Lord your God, and you must carefully follow all his commands.... But if you do not obey the Lord your God ...the Lord will scatter you among the nations—from one end of the earth to the other.<sup>59</sup>*

God said their disobedience would result in them being destroyed and scattered among the nations. But he also spoke of their future restoration.

*I will bring my people Israel back from captivity; they will build the ruined cities again, and they will live in them.*

*They will plant vineyards and drink the wine from them; they will plant gardens and eat their fruit.<sup>60</sup>*

Predictions of the Jews being scattered, and eventually regathered to the land of Israel, were written by several different prophets who lived between 500 and 1,500 years before Christ. Yet, although most of them had no opportunity to collaborate, their theme was consistent:

1. Israel would be destroyed.<sup>61</sup>
2. Surviving Jews would be scattered to foreign nations.<sup>62</sup>
3. Yet God would one day regather his people from the nations.

Tragically, Jerusalem has been destroyed twice, besieged 23 times, attacked 52 times, and captured and recaptured 44 times.<sup>63</sup>

1. Jerusalem was destroyed in a.d. 70 and a million Jews were killed.
2. Jews who escaped the siege fled to other nations. For nearly 1,900 years Israel didn't exist, and Jerusalem was a "no-man's land."
3. Yet the Jews survived. The uniqueness of their survival is remarkable, considering the many neighboring nations that no longer exist.
4. After the Nazi Holocaust, millions of Jews emigrated to Israel. In 1948, the Jews' 2,000-year-old dream of Israel's rebirth became a reality.

No other nation in history has returned to their homeland after being separated from it for so many years. How is it that the Jews survived while most of their neighboring nations didn't? As a historian, Paul Johnson is struck by their remarkable survival.

*Where are the Canaanites? Where are the Edomites? Where are the ancient Hellenes and the Romans, the Byzantines the Franks, the Mamluks, and the Ottomans? They have vanished into time, irrevocably. But the Jews are still in Hebron.<sup>64</sup>*

How could this have happened? The desolate land has been restored; the vineyards have been planted. People are drinking the wine and eating the fruit. These 2,500- to 3,000-year-old prophecies about Israel have come true. How could anyone have predicted all these events so precisely—unless he or she had been given a glimpse of the future from God himself?

### **Prophecies Regarding the Coming of the Messiah**

Throughout the Old Testament, it becomes clear that *Someone is coming*. Bible scholar Ray Stedman says that “*Someone*” is God’s promised Messiah:

*From the very beginning of the Old Testament, there is a sense of hope and expectation, like the sound of approaching footsteps: Someone is coming!... That hope increases...as prophet after prophet declares yet another tantalizing hint: Someone is coming!<sup>65</sup>*

Hundreds of Old Testament prophecies speak of a Messiah (Christ) who would one day bring peace to Israel and the world.<sup>66</sup> About 740 years before Christ, God revealed through Isaiah that the Messiah would be born as a child. Yet in the same passage the prophet tells us that he is to be called “Mighty God.”

*To us a child is born, to us a son is given...  
And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.<sup>67</sup>*

The waiting Jews must have wondered what Isaiah meant by the words, “Mighty God.” How could a child be called God? Apparently the Messiah would be both human and divine. Several other Old Testament clues revealed other details about who the Messiah would be, and how he could be recognized. Let’s look at just a few. The Messiah would be:

- Born of a virgin<sup>68</sup>

- From the lineage of David<sup>69</sup>
- Born in Bethlehem<sup>70</sup>
- Rejected by his own people<sup>71</sup>
- Betrayed by a friend<sup>72</sup>
- Sold for 30 pieces of silver<sup>73</sup>
- Silent before his accusers<sup>74</sup>
- Pierced in his hands and feet<sup>75</sup>
- Crucified with thieves<sup>76</sup>
- Buried in a rich man's tomb<sup>77</sup>
- Raised from the dead<sup>78</sup>

When Jesus began his ministry, his miraculous deeds led many to believe that he was the Messiah. But it was his fulfillment of nearly 200 Old Testament prophecies that convinced his followers.

Although Jesus performed powerful miracles and taught us how to love one another, he said his primary mission was to save us from our sins.<sup>79</sup> His intense suffering and painful death on the cross for us was foretold in the 53rd chapter of Isaiah. Here are portions of that remarkable prophecy:

*He was hated and rejected by people....  
 But he took our suffering on him  
 and felt our pain for us.  
 We saw his suffering  
 and thought God was punishing him.  
 But he was wounded for the wrong we did;  
 he was crushed for the evil we did.  
 The punishment, which made us well, was given to him,  
 and we are healed because of his wounds.  
 We all have wandered away like sheep;  
 each of us has gone his own way.  
 But the Lord has put on him the punishment  
 for all the evil we have done.*

*He was beaten down and punished,  
but he didn't say a word.  
He was like a lamb being led to be killed.  
He was quiet, as a sheep is quiet while its wool is being cut;  
he never opened his mouth....  
He died without children to continue his family.  
He was put to death;  
he was punished for the sins of my people.  
He was buried with wicked men,  
and he died with the rich.  
He had done nothing wrong,  
and he had never lied.*

*But it was the Lord who decided  
to crush him and make him suffer...  
He willingly gave his life  
and was treated like a criminal.  
But he carried away the sins of many people  
and asked forgiveness for those who sinned.<sup>80</sup>*

When Jesus was accused during his trial, he never opened his mouth. Although Jesus lived a sinless life, he was beaten and killed like a lamb at slaughter. His body was then buried in a rich man's tomb.

### **Dead Sea Discovery**

Skeptics, troubled by Jesus' fulfillment of Isaiah 53, accused Christians of altering the text after his death. Their argument was based on the fact that the text of Isaiah we read in the Bible—from the Masoretic Aleppo Codex dated to a.d. 935—is a copy dated nine hundred years after Christ.<sup>81</sup>

However, in 1947, a copy of Isaiah was discovered near the Dead Sea, carbon dated 125 years *before the birth of Christ*. And Isaiah's words in the Dead Sea Scroll are virtually identical with the words of Isaiah from the Masoretic Codex in our Bibles.<sup>82</sup> In other words, this prophecy of the Messiah was in existence at least 150 years before Jesus suffered on the cross.

Since the Jews were looking expectantly for their Messiah, one would think they would interpret Isaiah 53 as messianic. Although most Jews rejected Jesus, many commentators believed Isaiah was writing of the Messiah.

“For example, Rabbi Jonathan ben Uzziel...who lived early in the second century C.E., begins with the simple and worthy words: ‘Behold my servant Messiah shall prosper; he shall be high, and increase, and be exceeding strong: as the house of Israel looked to him through many days....(Targum Jonathan on Isaiah 53, ad Iocum)’”<sup>83</sup>

The Babylonian Talmud, The Midrash Ruth Rabbah, and the Zohar also refer to Isaiah’s prophecy as messianic. So too did the great rabbi, Maimonides. But the influential 11<sup>th</sup> century Rabbi Rashi argued that Isaiah’s passage refers to the nation of Israel, not the Messiah. Rashi’s view is held by most Jews today.<sup>84</sup>

However, Rashi’s interpretation has serious flaws. For example, in verse 12, Isaiah says the suffering servant dies for Israel’s sins. How could Israel die for Israel? Also, the prophet Zechariah makes it clear that when the Messiah descends on Jerusalem in the last days, the Jews will recognize him by the marks he suffered on Earth.

*They will look on me whom they have pierced and mourn for him as for an only son. They will grieve bitterly for him as for a firstborn son who has died.*<sup>85</sup>

Can you imagine the scene! Jesus was pierced on the cross, and his scars will be visible to everyone. It will cause great mourning to the Jews for their former rejection of him.

So, why did most Jews reject Jesus? Actually, his Jewish followers did accept him as their Messiah. So did thousands of other Jews. However, the religious leaders rejected him, because they were expecting the Messiah to destroy the enemies of God, bring worldwide peace, and set up his kingdom in Jerusalem.

However, the main reason they condemned Jesus to death is because he made claims about himself that only God could make.<sup>86</sup>

Although Jesus fulfilled nearly 200 prophecies, others still remain to be fulfilled when he returns (see below). So, what are the odds that Jesus could have fulfilled so many prophecies? Professor of mathematics Peter Stoner illustrates the incredible odds against any one person fulfilling just eight prophecies:

- First, blanket an area the size of Texas with silver dollars two feet high.
- Second, specially mark one of those dollars and randomly bury it.
- Third, ask a blindfolded person to select that exact dollar on one try.

Stoner calculates the odds against the blindfolded person picking that one dollar to be comparable to Jesus fulfilling just eight prophecies. In mathematical terms, that would be  $10^{17}$  (one in 100 quadrillion).<sup>87</sup>

### **Prophecies Regarding the Return of the Messiah (Christ)**

Jesus said that in the last days he would return in power and judgment.<sup>88</sup> Later, when Jesus left Earth, two angels reminded his disciples of that promise.

*Men of Galilee, why are you standing here looking into the sky? Jesus, whom you saw taken up from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you saw him go.*<sup>89</sup>

Several prophecies reveal that the Messiah will one day judge God's enemies and set up his Kingdom in Jerusalem. Although Henrietta Mears died years before Jerusalem was restored to Israel's sovereignty after the six-day war, her understanding of biblical prophecy led her to write these words:

*The Jew, today scattered over the face of the world, is being gathered back to her land of promise. Jerusalem shall be the capital of a mighty kingdom. Converted Israel shall be God's witnesses.*<sup>90</sup>

Ancient prophecies about Jerusalem are being fulfilled before our very eyes. However, prior to the Messiah destroying Israel's enemies, Jerusalem will be under siege in a war of all wars. In Zechariah, we read,

*"The Lord says,*

*"I will bring all the nations together to fight Jerusalem. They will capture the city and rob the houses and attack the women."...*

*Then the Lord will go to war against those nations; he will fight as in a day of battle. On that day he will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem....*

*Then the Lord will be king over the whole world. At that time there will be only one Lord, and his name will be the only name.”<sup>91</sup>*

How could the prophet Zechariah—twenty-five hundred years ago— predict events happening today unless his words had been divinely inspired? And Zechariah is only one of the several prophets who wrote of these end-time events.

What’s more amazing is that these prophecies about Jerusalem were written at different times. Most of the writers didn’t even know one another. A little known fact is that the Bible is actually 66 different books, written by 40 different men over a 1,600 years period.

Many Bible scholars believe we are nearing that time when Jesus Christ will return to Earth in power and glory. (Read more about [Jesus’ return](#).)

On the following page is the amazing story of what happened shortly thereafter.

Two years after Tyndale’s death, his English translation of the Bible began spreading the message of Jesus Christ throughout the British Empire.

In time its message reached all the way to a remote island in the South Pacific, which harbored sailors from the HMS *Bounty*. The famous mutiny of the *Bounty* inspired five motion pictures and numerous books. But more importantly, it led to a radical change on that tiny island.

In 1789, drunken sailors and mutineers, accompanied by several Tahitian women, fled to the deserted tropical paradise of Pitcairn Island in the South Pacific. The islanders soon degenerated into sexual promiscuity, debauchery, violence, and murder. Eventually the one male survivor, John Adams (alias Alexander Smith), 11 women, and 23 children were left. Ray Stedman tells what happened then:

*As the last man living, Smith felt responsible to look after the women and fatherless children who remained. He regretted the sinfulness of his past, and knew he lacked the wisdom to care for the women and children. He needed guidance from beyond himself.*

*Looking through a sea-chest, Smith found a Bible. Over the next few weeks, he read it from cover to cover. Then he asked God to take control of his life. He also taught the women and children to read the Bible.<sup>93</sup>*

As the Bible was read, taught and applied in people's lives, it had a transforming impact on the entire island.

*In 1808, the American whaling ship Topaz stopped at Pitcairn. The Americans were the first visitors to the island since the mutiny on the Bounty, eighteen years earlier. The sailors from the Topaz were astounded to find an orderly Christian society in which there was no crime, no disease, no alcoholism, no illiteracy.<sup>94</sup>*

Tyndale's translation of the Bible also reached a drunken slave trader named John Newton. After becoming a Christian, Newton was transformed from a slave trader to a slave liberator. Thankful for God's forgiveness, he penned the song, *Amazing Grace*, and worked to free the very people he had enslaved. Newton's changed life and desire to free slaves helped William Wilberforce convince Parliament in 1833 to abolish slavery in Great Britain.

Thirty years later, following England's example, United States President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, granting freedom to all slaves. Crediting the Bible for his conviction, Lincoln stated,

*In regard to this great book, I have but to say, it is the best gift God has given to man. All the good the Saviour gave to the world was communicated through this book.<sup>95</sup>*

The Bible continues to transform the lives of those who take its words to heart. Its central theme is that God loves us so much that he gave his Son, Jesus Christ, to die for our sins, making it possible for us to have a personal relationship with him and live forever with God.<sup>96</sup>

If the Bible is true as Jesus and the apostles claimed, then its words need to be taken seriously. The evidence for its scientific, historical and prophetic accuracy provide compelling evidence that it is indeed true.

Whether you already believe the Bible is true, or still have doubts, we encourage you to read through its pages in order to draw your own conclusion. A good place to begin is the book of John in the New Testament. If you don't already have a Bible, you can access it in this app.

As you read through the Bible, think of it as God’s living love letter to you, revealing his love and forgiveness through Jesus Christ. Most importantly, notice that Jesus desires a personal relationship with us, regardless of what we have done or thought. He said,

“I came to give life—life in all its fullness.” (John 10:10b, NCV.)

**Discover** how you can have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

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## Endnotes