



Is the Bible a trustworthy document? Are the Scriptures true as written? Or are they full of myths that may have symbolic value but little if any basis in fact? People have been questioning the biblical record almost from its beginnings. Peter, for instance, encountered skepticism as he presented the gospel in the first century. His claims about Jesus were nothing but cleverly devised fables, some said—a charge he vehemently denied (**2 Peter 1:16**). Today the Bible's credibility and authority are still attacked. Yet how many of its critics have carefully studied its teaching? How many have even looked at the story of how it came to be written? Is the Bible reliable?

A careful reader will recognize that the Bible is not so much a single book as a library of 66 books. It contains a variety of literary genres: history, poetry narrative, exposition, parable, and "apocalyptic" (see **Revelation 10:1-10**). Its approximately 40 writers wrote during a period of some two thousand years using three languages—Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic. Probably all were Jews (**Romans 3:1**).

Remarkably, the writers tell one unified story:

- They offer the same understanding of God throughout. He is one God, Creator, Savior, and Judge. He is all-powerful, all-knowing, and eternal. His character is holy, good, loving, and just.
- They offer the same understanding of human nature. People are made in God's image and are capable of great good. Yet they are also sinful and capable of great wickedness.

The great need of humanity is to be reconciled to God and to each other.

- They offer a common understanding of Jesus Christ. He is the Son of God. He became a real human being in order to show the world the God it could not otherwise perceive. Something deeply significant happened as a result of His death on the Cross, making it possible for God and humanity to be reconciled.
- They offer the same hope. God will accomplish His purposes for His creation.

Aside from the internal evidence that Scripture is what it claims to be—the very words of God—is a growing body of external evidence that supports its reliability as a document. For example, scholars have found many contemporary sources that parallel the Scriptural record. For instance, Jesus is mentioned by two Roman writers of the first century, Tacitus (*Annals* 15.44) and Pliny the Younger (*Letters* 19.96), as well as by some Jewish writings of that period, including Josephus (*Antiquities* 18.3.3) and the Mishnah, a collection of traditions under compilation in Jesus' day

Another body of research that proves invaluable for biblical studies is archaeology. Countless discoveries have helped to verify the text of Scripture, most notably the Dead Sea Scrolls. Likewise, digs throughout the Mediterranean have supported biblical references to various places and people and the events of which they were a part thousands of years ago.

The more one examines the evidence, the more one becomes convinced that the Bible is more than as cleverly devised tale. It has the ring of authenticity. But in that case, readers ought to pay attention to its message. That is the ultimate issue. As Mark Twain aptly put it, it is not the things in the Bible that people can't understand that prove troublesome, but the things they can understand. Even if people are convinced that the Bible is true from cover to cover, will they heed its message?

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