

THE BIBLE WAS WRITTEN BY THE FINGER OF GOD!

The Bible is the reason I live!

Is the Bible just a collection of myths and legends, or is it the inspired Word of God? Many assume that modern scholarship has discredited the Bible, but the facts of history and the discoveries of archaeology confirm its contents to be true! The Bible recounts the past with amazing accuracy and it predicts the future like no other book! Most of the world has been misled and misinformed about the Bible. You need to understand the truth and how it can affect your life! Is the Bible really the inspired Word of God? Was it accurately preserved for thousands of years as a unique revelation from the Creator of the universe? Or is it just a collection of humanly devised myths and fables? Do we even have the right books in the Bible, or are important sources missing that would change our view of God, Jesus Christ and Christianity? Can we trust Scripture? Is the Bible vital and relevant today? Discovering the truth about the Bible could prove to be one of the most important and exciting adventures you have ever embarked upon. Although critics attack the Bible, and preachers ignore or gloss over many of its teachings, the Bible contains a dimension of knowledge that is almost totally missing from our modern world. The Bible reveals the true purpose of life. Bible prophecies not only foretold the rise and fall of ancient nations; they also explain the real significance of world events making headlines today and where those events are heading. In spite of what millions have been led to believe, the Bible is much more than a pious devotional book or an incense-shrouded source of comfort for the troubled and bereaved!

Today, many educated people assume that science and modern scholarship have thoroughly discredited the Bible. This assumption thrives because so many know so little about the Bible. Many people today are simply unaware of discoveries that continue to confirm the historical accuracy of Scripture. Instead, people are encouraged to believe that all religions are equally credible or equally fanciful without ever comparing the sourcebooks of those religions. As a result, millions are unaware of how the Bible is unique, and what amazing features distinguish it from all other religious books.

Before you accept the idea that the Bible is "just like any other book," you need to examine the evidence for yourself. That evidence is eye-opening and extremely informative, and it could change your life! You need to understand why so many today doubt the Bible's credibility, and what the truth about the Bible can mean to your future.

For thousands of years, Jews and Christians believed, and died for believing, that the Bible was the inspired Word of an Almighty God. Down through the ages, antagonists and skeptics have challenged, attacked and ridiculed the Bible. Popes and pagan Roman emperors attempted to destroy Scripture, and even altered its words. Yet, during these same turbulent centuries, the Bible was carefully preserved and its message spread in remarkable ways!

The Bible is surely the most influential book ever written. It has been translated into more languages than any other piece of literature. More than two billion people alive today embrace, at least nominally, its teachings. Even so, many do not realize how profoundly the Bible has influenced the course of all Western civilization. Millions do not understand that biblical laws and teachings provided the basis for social values and legal systems throughout the Western world for centuries. Sir Isaac Newton, one of the most brilliant minds of his century, remarked, "There are more sure marks of authenticity in the Bible than in any profane history." Britain's Queen Victoria said of the Bible, "That book accounts for the supremacy of England." U.S. President Andrew Jackson stated, "That book, sir, is the rock on which our republic stands." U.S. President George Washington commented, "It is impossible to govern the world without God and the Bible." France's Napoleon observed, "The Bible is no mere book, but a Living Creature, with a power that conquers all who oppose it" Halley's Bible Handbook, pp. 18–19.

Yet much has changed since these statements were made. Today, Bibles can be found in far-flung corners of the globe. But in Western nations founded on biblical principles, there has been a steep decline in respect for the Bible. There is a pervading notion that the Bible is just another book, and that its teachings are archaic, outdated and irrelevant to our modern lives. Many seriously doubt that God inspired Scripture. Millions, who live in nations that once learned to read from the Bible, and sent Bible-toting missionaries around the world, cannot even name books in the Bible or explain basic biblical doctrines. Surveys have been done in recent decades show that even many professing Christians have little real knowledge about the Bible. Coinage in the U.S. proclaims, "In God We Trust." Yet recent legislation and judicial decisions have made it illegal in the U.S. to display the Ten Commandments in public buildings, or for students to pray in school!

What has produced such a profound shift in attitudes toward the Bible in the very nations that once professed strong belief in Scripture? Why do millions now doubt that God inspired the Bible? Why are billions searching everywhere else for answers found clearly in the Bible? Why do people fail to recognize that the Bible contains prophecies clearly revealing the course of world history, and even the

future of specific nations? Why have modern generations chosen to ignore a book that reveals essential details about the future and explains the way to peace and the ultimate purpose for human existence? Why has such vital information remained hidden from so many today?

The answers to these important questions read like a novel laced with danger, intrigue and adventure. You will be surprised by information about the Bible that is readily available, yet has largely gone unappreciated or been ignored. You will be shocked to learn how power-seeking religious leaders have twisted Scripture to support misguided and anti-biblical doctrines.

The more you learn about Scripture, the more you will realize that you can believe the Bible, because it has been inspired and preserved by a real God who is alive today! The Bible is firmly based on the facts of history, not on myth and fiction. The evidence presented here will make this clear.

Many today assume that to believe the Bible, you must ignore the facts of science and history and just proceed on "blind faith." Some believers relish the old saying, "God said it. I believe it. That settles it" but this does not fit well with the skepticism that dominates our age. Others want to ignore what Scripture plainly states, and invent ways to "harmonize" the Bible with modern preferences. Many theologians teach that the Bible is only authoritative when it speaks of broad spiritual principles, and suggest that details of science or history in Scripture are merely the untrustworthy additions of human writers.

This desire to accommodate the Bible to the modern world is reflected in an October 2005 document issued by Roman Catholic bishops from England, Scotland and Wales. In "The Gift of Scripture," the bishops warned that while they consider the Bible true in passages regarding salvation, "we should not expect total accuracy from the Bible in other matters... We should not expect to find in Scripture full scientific accuracy or complete historical accuracy." Even so, the bishops profess respect for Scripture, telling their flock: "We have rediscovered the Bible as a precious treasure, both ancient and ever new." These double-minded statements reflect the mindset of many theologians today, who say they respect the Bible but deny its authority. When religious leaders urge people to believe in a book that cannot be trusted on many topics, it is not surprising that church attendance in many countries has fallen off dramatically in recent decades. The plain teachings of the Bible, however, stand in striking contrast to what many religious leaders preach today. The Apostle Paul did not encourage first century Christians to "just believe" in Jesus and merely accept the teachings of the Bible

and Christianity "on faith." Instead, he told his audiences, "Test all things; hold fast what is good" 1 Thessalonians 5:21. Paul urged people to check into the facts and believe what they could prove to be true! His admonition reflects Old Testament passages where God challenged the ancient Israelites to "prove Me now... if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it" Malachi 3:8–10, KJV. God urged Israel to put His promises to the test, and promised that He would bless them, to prove that He was real and that His promises were true! Paul knew that true religious belief involves evidence, assurance and certainty, not "blind faith." He wrote that "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" Hebrews 11:1. According to the Bible, faith should rest on solid evidence, not just warm, fuzzy, emotional feelings in your heart. You should never believe something in spite of the facts, and that includes believing in the authenticity and authority of the Bible! The Apostle Peter emphasized the credibility of Scripture and of the Christian message when he wrote: "For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty" 2 Peter 1:16. Peter also warned his readers to "be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets" because "scoffers will come in the last days" questioning and ridiculing Scripture, "saying, 'where is the promise of His coming?'" 2 Peter 3:1–9. Peter challenged prevailing misconceptions about Scripture; he did not try to water down fundamental scriptural teaching.

The Bible clearly reveals that the apostolic writers were advocates of Scripture, and of the teachings of the Christian faith! They knew that they were preaching the truth! Their approach followed the example of their teacher, Jesus Christ. The New Testament shows that Christ's manner of preaching surprised His audiences. "And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" Matthew 7:28–29.

The contents of Scripture can be verified by the facts of history and the discoveries of modern science and archaeology. What is more, the Bible provides answers to life's big questions. Not only do the hundreds of detailed Bible prophecies accurately reveal the future course of world events; they set the Bible apart from all other religious books! The Bible provides a dimension of knowledge that is simply not available from any other source.

With so much evidence available, the real question that we face today is simply whether or not we can believe the Bible. As you read here, you will see that the answer is, "Yes, we can!"

Many assume that all religions are equally credible, that religious people all worship the same God and that the holy books of various religions are of equal value. Yet nothing could be further from the truth! Scholars confidently claim that no one can predict the future with assurance and that only fools try! However, these assertions overlook or ignore the incredible phenomenon of Bible prophecy, which distinguishes the Bible from any other book that has ever been written. The God of the Bible claims that He can predict the future and bring it to pass! The Bible contains hundreds of prophecies that have come true, and are confirmed by history. The Bible also contains dozens of prophecies that are coming alive today! Bible prophecies explain the real significance of global events making headlines today. Bible prophecies also reveal what is ahead for major nations of our modern world and for the human race! No other book, religious or secular, does this with such accuracy and detail! Prophecy is clearly the Bible's most striking feature! Notice this amazing statement by Dr. Gleason Archer, a renowned Old Testament scholar: "The Holy Bible is like no other book in the entire world. It is the only book which represents itself as the written revelation of the one true God, intended for the salvation of man, and demonstrating its divine authority by many infallible proofs. Other religious documents, such as the Muhammadan Koran, may claim to be the very word of God, but they contain no such self-authenticating proofs as does the Bible, for example, the phenomena of fulfilled prophecy" (A Survey of Old Testament Introduction, Archer, p. 9).

Another authoritative source notes: "One of the strongest evidences that the Bible is inspired by God is its predictive prophecy. Unlike any other book, the Bible offers a multitude of specific predictions, some hundreds of years in advance that have been literally fulfilled or else point to a definite future time when they will come true" (Geisler, p. 609). Old Testament professor Milton C. Fisher recognizes a "sharp distinction between prophetic in Israel and the outwardly similar phenomenon in surrounding cultures... both the type of message and the writings of Israel's prophets is without parallel" (The Origin of the Bible, Bruce, pp. 105–106). Another scholar has noted that "the Bible... is the most remarkable volume that has ever been produced in some five thousand years... it is the only volume that has ever been produced by men, 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. The ancient world had many different devices for determining the future, known as

divination, but not in the entire gamut of Greek and Latin literature... can we find any real specific prophecy of a great historic event to come in the distant future, nor any prophecy of a Saviour to arise in the human race" (Evidence That Demands a Verdict, McDowell, p. 22). These are absolutely remarkable statements that clearly recognize the unique nature of Bible prophecy!

Being able to predict the future accurately and consistently is simply not a human trait. Even the best strategic planners acknowledge that detailed prediction of future events, especially geopolitical events is difficult in the short term, and practically impossible in the long term, at least at any level of detail. Yet the Bible repeatedly predicts the rise and fall of prominent individuals, nations and empires with amazing accuracy and in remarkable detail! Bible scholars have determined that more than one quarter of the Bible about 27 percent is devoted to prophecy, and that the Bible contains more than 1,800 predictions, many of which are very specific. Hundreds of specific prophecies, given centuries before their exact fulfillment, are undeniable evidence that an all-powerful God is alive and in control of future events!

Scripture makes this plain when the God of the Bible challenges skeptics to predict the future and bring it to pass! Through the pen of the prophet Isaiah, God thunders: "Show the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that you are gods... indeed you are nothing, and your work is nothing; he who chooses you is an abomination" Isaiah 41:23–24. And again: "Remember the former things of old, 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, and I will do my pleasure'" Isaiah 46:9–10. These verses boldly state that no human being can predict the future and bring it to pass on the scale that the God of the Bible claims He can and has, and will!

This unique capacity to predict the future accurately sets the Bible apart from any other piece of literature. Bible scholars recognize: "Other books claim divine inspiration, such as the Koran, the Book of Mormon, and parts of the Hindu Veda. But none of these books contains predictive prophecy. As a result, fulfilled prophecy is a strong indication of the unique, divine authority of the Bible," (The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict, McDowell, p. 13). Bible prophecy stands in marked contrast to human attempts to predict the future. A study of 25 top-rated psychics discovered that 92 percent of their predictions were totally wrong, and that chance or general knowledge of circumstances could explain the remaining 8 percent that were accurate (Geisler, p. 615). Anyone familiar with the so-called prophecies of Nostradamus (Michael de Nostredame), the 16th century French

psychic who dabbled in astrology, alchemy and other occult practices, is aware that his vague and nebulous verses simply do not compare to biblical prophecies. Specific prophecies, given centuries before they were accurately and consistently fulfilled, are some of the most stunning proofs that the Bible is the inspired Word of God!

Some of the Bible's most striking examples of fulfilled prophecies are those that accurately foretold specific details about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, centuries before He was born! More than 200 prophecies, written centuries before His birth, foretold specific events in His life that were fulfilled to the letter. He would be born of a virgin and named Immanuel Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23, in Bethlehem Micah 5:2; Matthew 2:3–8. He would be a descendant of David Matthew 1:1; 22:42–45. He would sojourn in Egypt Hosea 11:1; Matthew 2:13–15. His birth would prompt a massacre of children Jeremiah 31:15; Matthew 2:16–18. He would live in Galilee Isaiah 9:1–2; Matthew 2:19–23. He would enter Jerusalem on a donkey Zechariah 9:9; Matthew 21:1–5. He would die with transgressors and be buried in the tomb of a rich man Isaiah 53:9, 12. He would be resurrected after three days Matthew 12:40; Jonah 1:17.

The remarkable fulfillment of hundreds of specific predictions, recorded centuries earlier in the Hebrew Scriptures, demonstrates beyond any reasonable doubt that Jesus was the prophesied Messiah of the Bible and the Son of God. It should be noted that "Mohammedanism cannot point to any prophecies of the coming of Mohammed uttered hundreds of years before his birth. Neither can the founders of any cult... rightly identify any ancient text specifically foretelling their appearance" (McDowell, p. 22). Some Muslim scholars cite Old Testament verses that they say prophesied Muhammad Deuteronomy 18:15–18, but it was Jesus Christ who actually fulfilled those prophecies Matthew 21:11; Luke 1:76; 24:19; Acts 3:18–22 more than 600 years before Muhammad was born! The Bible's prophecies about Jesus Christ are unique among religious writings. The Bible contains more than 1,500 prophecies that foretell in remarkable detail the future of prominent cities, kings and kingdoms.

The Prophecy of Tyre's Downfall:

Fulfilled prophecies about the ancient Phoenician city of Tyre stand as a sobering testimony to the power and accuracy of Bible prophecy. When Ezekiel recorded his prophecies around 585BC, Tyre was one of the great cities of the ancient world. It was situated on an island at the center of a maritime trading network that controlled Mediterranean commerce. Tyre was a wealthy emporium of goods,

surrounded by 150-foot-high walls that were considered impregnable. The Bible reports that Tyre's citizens rejoiced when Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian army conquered Jerusalem; they anticipated gaining access to valuable inland trade routes passing through Jerusalem. In response, God delivered a series of specific prophecies of Tyre's future devastation. Ezekiel wrote that, "because Tyre has said against Jerusalem, 'Aha! She is broken who was the gateway of the peoples'... Therefore thus says the Lord God: 'Behold, I am against you, O Tyre, and will cause many nations to come up against you, as the sea causes its waves to come up. And they shall destroy the walls of Tyre and break down her towers; I will also scrape her dust from her, and make her like the top of a rock. It shall be a place for spreading nets in the midst of the sea... they will lay your stones, your timber, and your soil in the midst of the water... you shall never be rebuilt, for I the Lord have spoken, says the Lord God'" Ezekiel 26:2–14.

To appreciate the power and scope of Ezekiel's prophecies, picture someone trying to predict what will happen to New York or London over the next 2,500 years! Yet history records how Ezekiel's predictions have come to pass. In 585BC, Nebuchadnezzar began a 13-year siege against Tyre. His was the first of many nations that would come like waves against Tyre. Around 530BC, the Persians gained control of Tyre. In 332BC, Alexander destroyed the mainland portion of Tyre and threw the debris into the sea to build a causeway for assaulting the island city. When Alexander conquered the island fortress of Tyre, he battered down the walls and reduced the city to ruins. As Phoenician specialist Glenn Markoe wrote, "The conquest of Alexander... marked the beginning of the end for Tyre and Phoenicia... Tyre would soon recover commercially... yet it would never fully reclaim the pride of place it had enjoyed" (Phoenicians, Markoe, p. 61). Greeks and Romans later dominated what remained of the city. In 638AD, Muslim armies captured Tyre. Crusaders recaptured the city in 1124, and used it as a staging area for military operations. In 1291, the Muslims retook Tyre and laid it in ruins, "after which she never again regained any importance" (Geisler, p. 870). Today, there is a small fishing village near the ruins of the once proud city of Tyre, but the city's ancient power and splendor, and its extensive trade network, are gone. The site of one of the wealthiest cities in the ancient world has become "a place for spreading nets," just as the Bible predicted.

The Bible contains prophecies about other cities near Tyre that would have a bloody history but a different future. Sidon, an idol-worshipping Phoenician city about 20 miles north of Tyre, was noted for artistic metalwork and fine cloth. Bible prophecies reveal that Sidon would have a bloody history and suffer from pestilence, but would come to "know that I am the Lord" Ezekiel 28:21–23.

Nowhere did God prophesy total destruction or oblivion for Sidon. History records that the Assyrians destroyed Sidon in 678BC, but the city was rebuilt and it submitted to Nebuchadnezzar after suffering from a devastating pestilence. Persians burned the city in about 351BC. Syria and Egypt fought over Sidon, and it became a free city under Roman rule. The Bible indicates that Jesus may have visited Sidon Matthew 15:21 and that Sidonians heard Jesus preach the gospel Mark 3:7–8. The Apostle Paul also visited Sidon Acts 27:3. Today, modern Sidon is known for its gardens and orange groves. Bible prophecy outlined a very different future for Tyre's sister city Sidon and it came to pass, just as Scripture predicted!

Around 700BC, the prophet Isaiah recorded several specific prophecies about the downfall of the Babylonian Empire and the destruction of the city of Babylon Isaiah 13; 14. At the time of Isaiah's prophecy, Babylon was subject to the Assyrians and would not become a major power for another hundred years. Yet Isaiah foresaw the future glory that Babylon would achieve under Nebuchadnezzar with its Hanging Gardens, magnificent palaces, luxurious living, massive walls and military conquests. Isaiah also foresaw the Medes' destruction of Babylon, and the city's ultimate desolation, several hundred years in advance! Isaiah's prophecies foretold: "The burden against Babylon... I will stir up the Medes against them... And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldeans' pride, will be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It will never be inhabited, nor will it be settled from generation to generation; or will the Arabian pitch tents there... but wild beasts of the desert will lie there... her days will not be prolonged" Isaiah 13:1–22. History records that these prophecies were fulfilled: "In 539BC Babylon fell to the Medes and Persians... Xerxes destroyed the city in 478, and it was finally abandoned in the 4th century BC" (Erdman's Handbook of the Bible, p. 382).

The Chosen People:

Some of the Bible's most amazing and surprising prophecies deal with the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the twelve tribes of Israel, whom God chose to use for a special purpose Exodus 19:1–6. God promised Abram, Abraham that in return for obedience his descendants would become great and be a blessing to the world Genesis 12:1–3. Later prophecies stated that Jacob's descendants through Manasseh and Ephraim would ultimately become a "great" nation, and a great "multitude, company, commonwealth of nations," who along with the other descendants of Jacob, would in Bible prophecy be called Israelites Genesis 48:14–22. In the Bible, the terms Israel and Israelite generally apply to the descendants of all twelve of Jacob's sons. The Jews are the descendants of Judah, who was just

one of Jacob's sons. In a more specific sense, Israel applies to the descendants of the ten tribes that made up the nation of Israel, with its capital in Samaria, which broke away from the nation of Judah, with its capital in Jerusalem when the kingdom of Solomon was divided 1 Kings 12. This biblical distinction between the Jews and the other Israelite nations is an important key to understanding Bible prophecy.

Genesis 49 contains a remarkable series of prophecies foretelling how the Israelites, descendants of Jacob's twelve sons will be recognized "in the last days." Reuben will become powerful and have notions of grandeur, but will lack national stability; consider how this description could describe France. Judah the Jews will provide the Messiah and retain knowledge of the Law of God. Zebulun will dwell by the sea and become a mercantile people; a description evocative of modern Holland. Dan will leave its mark, having traveled from its base in the Middle East; a description evocative of Denmark and Ireland. Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh will become a colonizing people dwelling in the choice places of the earth and dwelling "separate from his brothers" a description perfectly apt to describe the former British Commonwealth nations and the U.S. Genesis 49:22–26. These remarkable prophecies were not to be fulfilled only by the Jews, to whom the world gives the name "Israel" but also by eleven other nations that are part of the "whole house" of Israel. These prophecies reveal keys to the identity and location of the modern descendants of Jacob's twelve sons, the children of Israel.

Understanding the true identity of the Israelite nations is not only a key for understanding Bible prophecy; this knowledge is also essential for God's Church, which must fulfill the commission that Jesus gave. Jesus commissioned His disciples to "go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel," to preach about the coming kingdom of God, and warn the Israelites about terrible trials they would face in the last days because of their disobedience to God's laws Jeremiah 30:7–24. Jesus' disciples took this commission seriously. In their day, the tribes of Israel were not "lost." The Apostle James addressed his epistle "to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad" James 1:1. Josephus revealed that in the days of the apostles, "ten tribes are beyond the Euphrates... and are an immense multitude." (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book XI, 5, 2). This explains why several of the apostles, including Peter and Andrew, traveled in that direction.

Historical sources also indicate that Peter, Paul and others traveled to Western Europe and Britain preaching the gospel. The clear implication of these leading apostles' journeys to the West is that Israelite peoples were there! Examine the history of ancient Ireland, and notice which Israelite tribal name appears in the

records. When you study the Genesis 49 prophecies about the characteristics and future history of Jacob's descendants, you will notice the connection with peoples that currently reside in, or emigrated from, northwest Europe! When you understand the identities of modern Israelite nations, you can begin to understand from Bible prophecy what lies ahead for these nations and for other nations mentioned in Bible prophecy!

Bible prophecies are not just about ancient history. The book of Daniel contains detailed yet sweeping prophecies that provide an outline of history from the time of Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon through the return of Jesus Christ at the end of the age. Modern critics, seeking to discredit the prophetic and supernatural elements in the book of Daniel, have revived ideas put forward by Porphyrius, a third-century pagan philosopher from Tyre. Porphyrius also called Porphyry claimed that the book of Daniel was a fraudulent work produced in the second century BC, after the events it recounts had already taken place! However, this theory does not square with the facts. The book of Daniel gives precise dates, locations and names that can be verified. The prophet Ezekiel was a contemporary of Daniel, and mentioned him very respectfully Ezekiel 14:20. The book of Daniel was widely accepted as inspired, and was included in the Hebrew Bible in the second century BC. Jesus acknowledged Daniel as the author of the book Matthew 24:15. One respected source notes: "In NT prophecy Daniel is referred to more than any other book in the OT. Moreover, it contains more fulfilled prophecies than any other book in the Bible" The Expositor's Bible Commentary, vol. 7, p. 3.

Daniel recorded a dream about a huge image Daniel 2. The four parts of the image, head, chest, belly and thighs, legs and feet, pictured four empires that would arise in the future to dominate the Mediterranean world. Bible scholars now recognize these empires as the Babylonian Empire, the Medo-Persian Empire, the Greco-Macedonian Empire under Alexander the Great and the Roman Empire. Daniel also revealed that Jesus Christ will strike the last remnant of the Roman Empire on its feet and toes, made of iron and clay when He returns to set up His kingdom on this earth at the end of this age Daniel 2:41–45. Daniel described the same four empires as four beasts, and gave additional details about each. The third empire (Greco-Macedonian under Alexander) was pictured with four heads Daniel 7:6. History records that after Alexander's death, his empire split into four parts, about 300 years after Daniel recorded the prophecy. Daniel described the fourth beast, the Roman Empire as having ten horns representing "ten kings who shall arise from this kingdom" Daniel 7:7, 24. History records the many attempts to continue or revive the Roman Empire down through the centuries. They have all occurred in Europe, including revivals under Charlemagne, Charles V of the Hapsburgs,

Napoleon and Mussolini. According to Bible prophecy, the final revival will be lead by a person labeled "the beast," backed by a religious leader called the "false prophet" Revelation 13 and 17.

Daniel also mentions a "little horn" that will disown the first three attempts to continue the Roman Empire, but will be intimately involved with subsequent revivals of the Roman Empire in its various forms. This figure is prophesied as speaking "pompous words against the Most High... persecute the saints... and change times and law" Daniel 7:8, 20, 24–25. This "little horn" foreshadows those religious leaders who have claimed to be the "vicar of Christ" meaning "in place of Christ", who murdered Bible-believing Christians through an Inquisition and who replaced commanded biblical Holy Days with pagan holidays. Other prophecies identify this "little horn" as a prominent religious figure whose latter-day counterpart will play a key role in events leading to Jesus Christ's return 2 Thessalonians 2; Revelation 13; 17.

The ten toes of Daniel's image Daniel 2:40–43 correspond to ten kings who will give their power and authority to "the beast," a powerful and deceptive political leader who will emerge on the scene in Europe just before Jesus Christ returns at the end of the age Revelation 17:1–13. This political leader will receive support from, and be influenced by, a powerful religious leader, the final manifestation of the "little horn." Like his predecessors, this "little horn" will play a key role in world politics Revelation 13; 17. History records that Roman Catholic popes have crowned the emperors of the Holy Roman Empire, and that popes and bishops have long influenced European politics. The iron and clay of the ten toes of Daniel's image foretells the attempts by squabbling European nations to form a union by surrendering their sovereignty to a central government akin to what the E.U. has done in Brussels. Current attempts to create a united Europe modeled on the old Roman Empire have been backed by several popes and the Roman Church. Daniel and other books of the Bible indicate that the final fulfillment of these remarkable prophecies will occur in the years just ahead!

It is ironic that while these ancient and detailed prophecies are coming alive today, leaders of the Roman Church insist that the symbolic language used in Daniel and Revelation "is not to be interpreted literally. We should not expect to discover in this book, Revelation, details about the end of the world" yet that is exactly what these prophetic books claim to reveal! Today, for people who really want to understand where world events are leading, the challenge is: Whom do you believe theologians or the Bible? This is why it is important to determine whether or not the Bible is truly the Word of God, whether it is fact or fiction!

Sadly, modern skeptics and even many who claim to believe in Jesus Christ dismiss ideas about the end of the age as pure fantasy and wild-eyed doomsday talk. Yet the Bible takes a linear view of history, and pictures all events moving toward a climax. The prophecies in Daniel take this view, with the climax being Jesus Christ's return to establish the kingdom of God on this earth. Jesus spoke freely and in detail about specific events that would signal the end of the age. When Jesus' disciples asked Him, "what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age" He did not beat around the bush or try to avoid answering the question, as many theologians do today Matthew 24:3. He told His disciples to watch for a time when they would see widespread religious confusion and deception, and increasingly frequent reports of violence, wars, ethnic strife, famines, disease epidemics and natural disasters on a global scale Matthew 24:4–7.

These are the very headlines dominating our news today! Yet Jesus said that this would be just the "beginning of sorrows" Matthew 24:8. Christ went on to reveal that there will be a global persecution of Christians, but that the true gospel of the coming kingdom of God will nevertheless "be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come" Matthew 24:14. Jesus said that all these events leading up to the climax of this age will occur at a time in history when the very existence of life on this planet will be threatened. Notice Jesus' description that "unless those days were shortened by Jesus' return, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened" Matthew 24:22. Jesus admonished His disciples to watch, to remain alert, so that they will recognize when the civilizations of this world are entering their final hour Matthew 24:36–44; 25:1–13; Mark 13:32–37; Luke 21:34–38.

In the 1950s, world leaders first realized that, with the development of nuclear weapons, mankind has created the capacity to destroy all life from the face of the earth. This was never possible until the last half of the 20th century! Is it just a coincidence that between 1950 and today we have seen the global spread of HIV-AIDS, the return of drug-resistant tuberculosis and the threat of international pandemics of bird flu and other infectious diseases? Is it just a coincidence that today we are concerned with the emerging threat of global warming and the sobering consequences of global climate change? Is it just a coincidence that all this is happening amid rising fears about international terrorism and escalating conflict in the Middle East, all of which Scripture predicted long ago? Is this all coincidence, or are we seeing the approaching fulfillment of ancient Bible prophecies that describe in detail the end of the age? These astoundingly accurate

prophecies distinguish the Bible from any other book on this planet, and they offer proof that the Bible was written by "the finger of God."

One of the Bible's most striking features is that it plainly claims to be the inspired Word of an Almighty God. We see this in the words of the Apostle Paul, a highly educated Hebrew who wrote, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God" 2 Timothy 3:16. The Apostle Peter wrote that the content of Scripture "never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" 2 Peter 1:21. To early Church leaders, "inspiration was not an ecstatic overpowering of the writer's consciousness, but rather a high degree of illumination and calm awareness of God's revelation... extending to every word of Scripture" (The Origin of the Bible, Bruce, et al., p. 38). Scripture indicates, and the early Church recognized, that God inspired the biblical writers to use their own minds and their own styles to write what God wanted them to write.

The Bible describes the process of divine inspiration in the way God worked with Moses, "And God spoke all these words... And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord... when Moses had completed writing the words of this law in a book... Moses commanded the Levites... Take this Book of the Law, and put it beside the Ark of the Covenant" Exodus 20:1; 24:4; Deuteronomy 31:24–26. Centuries later, Ezra and Nehemiah read to the people of Israel from the "Book of the Law of Moses," which was also called "the Book of the Law of God" Nehemiah 8:1, 18. Jesus acknowledged its divine inspiration when He said, "have you not read in the book of Moses... how God spoke to him" Mark 12:26. The prophet Jeremiah recorded a similar experience: "The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, 'Thus speaks the Lord God of Israel, saying: Write in a book for yourself all the words that I have spoken to you'" Jeremiah 30:1–2. The phrase, "Thus says the Lord" is used more than 350 times in the Old Testament, clearly implying that the words of Scripture came from God.

As we will see, other religious books may claim divine inspiration like the Bible, yet they lack the specific characteristics that confirm the Bible's authenticity. Not only does the Bible claim to be divinely inspired, it claims to be the ultimate source of truth, revealed by the one true God. The Apostle John wrote, "Thy word is truth" John 17:17, KJV. David wrote, "Your law is truth... all your commandments are truth... The entirety of Your Word is truth" Psalm 119:142, 151, 160. The prophet Isaiah asserted, "To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" Isaiah 8:20. Isaiah meant that if statements and ideas do not agree with Scripture, we can

recognize them as false. The Apostle Paul also calls Scripture "the word of truth" 2 Timothy 2:15.

These statements stand in marked contrast to the uncertain words spoken by Pontius Pilate, "What is truth?" John 18:38. Today, many skeptics and cynics share Pilate's question. Yet the Bible's bold claims show that its writers clearly believed that the words they recorded were absolutely true and inspired by a wise and all-powerful God Genesis 17:1; Psalm 86:10; Jude 1:25. What is truth? You need to prove that for yourself!

The Bible repeatedly emphasizes, "The Lord is the true God" Jeremiah 10:10; see also John 17:3; 1 Thessalonians 1:9; 1 John 5:20. Scripture records that when the ancient Egyptian priests saw the miracles announced by Moses, and saw their own gods powerless, they concluded: "This is the finger of God" Exodus 8:16–19. Daniel records that Nebuchadnezzar, pagan king of Babylon, came to the same conclusion after encountering the God of the Bible: "Truly, your God is the God of gods, the Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets" Daniel 2:47. The Bible records that the Apostle Paul, distressed at seeing Athens "given over to idols," taught superstitious Greek philosophers about the true God Acts 17:16–34.

The Bible's clear and unambiguous message is that Scripture is the inspired word of a real God, and is the ultimate source of truth! This is difficult for many today to believe, because we live in a skeptical age where even so-called biblical scholars doubt that the Bible really is God's Word. However, the Bible's bold claim that it is the inspired word of an all-powerful God, and is true in its entirety, can be verified in the records of history and the discoveries of archaeology. The evidence is there for anyone willing to look!

Scripture boldly asserts that "the word of our God stands forever" and "the word of the Lord endures forever" Isaiah 40:8; 1 Peter 1:25. King David wrote, "His truth endures to all generations" Psalm 100:5. Yet, down through the centuries, antagonists and critics have tried to undermine, disparage, defy and destroy Scripture, and even mock the God of the Bible. The Bible warns, "Do not be deceived; God is not mocked" Galatians 6:7. The Old Testament records that during the Assyrian invasion of Judah 700BC, Sennacherib, a pagan Assyrian king, mocked the God of Israel before king Hezekiah and the people of Jerusalem 2 Chronicles 32:9–19. Shortly thereafter, "the Lord sent an angel who cut down every mighty man of valor... in the camp of the king of Assyria. So he, Sennacherib returned shamefaced to his own land. And when he had gone into the

temple of his god, some of his own offspring struck him down with the sword there" 2 Chronicles 32:21–22.

Historical records confirm that Sennacherib did not conquer Jerusalem, and that his own sons killed him. Secular history does not explain why this occurred. However, the Bible reveals that dire consequences can arise when doubters and critics mock the real God! Next to the exodus from Egypt, this is one of God's most dramatic interventions in Israel's history, and the facts of secular history support the biblical record. Incidentally, the Greek historian Herodotus relates that Sennacherib also suffered an embarrassing setback, with supernatural overtones, when his army invaded Egypt and a swarm of field mice chewed up their weapons, causing him to flee from the field near Pelusium with heavy losses. This truth of Scripture, that God will not be mocked, stands confirmed.

In the century after the apostles, historical sources confirm that Celsus, an articulate pagan philosopher, created a major stir when he wrote a blistering attack against the Bible and Christianity. Celsus wrote that biblical teachings were "absurd," that the gospel accounts were "a deception" and that anyone who believed in one God was "deluded". The Bible survived, and Christianity spread around the world, but few people today have even heard of Celsus! Modern biblical critics who have resurrected Celsus' ideas should remember that his attack on Scripture was answered by an early religious scholar named Origen, whose eight-volume *Against Celsus* gave a point-by-point rebuttal in defense of the Bible.

At the beginning of the 4th century, the Roman emperor Diocletian sought to wipe out the Christian religion. He unleashed a terrible persecution of Christians, and commanded that all Bibles be burned. However, within a few short years a new emperor, Constantine actually ordered the production of 50 Bibles! During the Middle Ages 500–1500AD, scholars influenced by pagan philosophy taught that scriptural accounts were merely allegories and should not be taken literally. Their allegorical approach assumed that Bible passages hid a deeper meaning, making the literal meaning unimportant. The Bible survived, but this way of thinking also survives today in many theological schools. The allegorical approach is a very subtle way of undermining the Bible's clear message, because it ignores what the Bible actually says.

Secular scholars in the 18th century became enthralled by the apparent power of human reason and the new discoveries of science. Regarding human reason as the ultimate authority, and armed with a bias against the supernatural, these critics began to offer speculative theories about the Bible's supposed origins, apparent

contradictions and assumed errors. However, the assumptions and speculations of these critics have not stood the test of time. In fact, some of their bold pronouncements now appear extremely presumptuous and naïve. Toward the end of the 18th century, the French philosopher Voltaire predicted that Christianity would be swept from existence within a century. Yet, 50 years after he died, the Geneva Bible Society produced stacks of Bibles in Voltaire's house on his own press (*The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, McDowell, p. 10). The facts of history and the discoveries of archaeology make it plain: secular critics' ill-founded pronouncements and theories are intellectual castles built on hot air.

Over the last 200 years, the rise of biblical criticism spawned many confident assertions by scholars who doubted the inspiration of Scripture. Skeptics at first claimed that since there was no evidence outside the Bible of various people and places mentioned in the Bible, the writers of Scripture must have invented them. This approach found fertile ground in "progressive" schools of theology, and in secular academic circles. The press and media fed these ideas to society, furthering doubts about the Bible's credibility. This doubt and skepticism persists today, even though ongoing archaeological discoveries continue to validate the Bible's historical accuracy, and discredit the skeptics' assumptions!

As recently as 1992, some scholars were confidently asserting, "There are no literary criteria for believing David to be more historical than Joshua, Joshua more historical than Abraham, and Abraham more historical than Adam" Yet, just one year later, archaeologists digging in upper Galilee discovered a 9th century BC inscription about the "house of David." Jeffrey Sheler, an award-winning journalist and a religion writer for U.S. News & World Report, wrote: "The fragmentary reference to David was a historical bombshell. Never before had the familiar name of Judah's ancient warrior king... been found in the records of antiquity outside the pages of the Bible".

For decades, critics viewed the biblical story of David and Goliath as a fanciful tale of religious fiction. Yet, recently, "archaeologists digging at the purported biblical home of Goliath 1 Samuel 17:4 have unearthed a shard of pottery bearing an inscription of the Philistine's name, a find they claimed lends historical credence to the Bible's tale of David's battle with the giant". This is the oldest Philistine inscription ever discovered, dated to 950BC within 70 years of the biblical narrative.

Doubting scholars for years assumed that "there were no Hittites at the time of Abraham, as there were no records of their existence apart from the Old Testament.

They must be a myth." (McDowell, p. 11) However, later "archaeological research... uncovered more than 1,200 years of Hittite civilization" In similar fashion, critics assumed that the biblical patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, were fictional figures from Hebrew folklore. Yet cuneiform tablets discovered in the royal archives of the palace of Mari in northern Syria, dating from the start of the second millennium BC, the approximate time of the patriarchs, mention "such names as Abam-ram, Abraham, Jacob-el and Benjamites". All these discoveries support the biblical record and refute the charges of critics.

Scholars skeptical of the Bible have noted the similarity between the Genesis creation account and Babylonian clay tablets describing the creation of the world. These scholars have glossed over major differences in the accounts, and suggested that biblical writers simply borrowed their material from other sources. However, the discovery of more 17,000 clay tablets at Ebla, in modern Syria, dating from 2500BC, has overturned the critics' theories. The Ebla tablets, which predate the Babylonian creation epic by some 600 years, contain "the oldest known creation accounts outside the Bible... The creation tablet is strikingly close to that of Genesis, speaking of one being who created the heavens, moon, stars and earth. Parallels show that the Bible contains the older, less embellished version... They, the Ebla tablets destroy the critical belief in the evolution of monotheism from supposed earlier polytheism," (Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics, Geisler, p. 208).

There have been dozens of other remarkable discoveries. The Merneptah Stela describes an Egyptian pharaoh conquering Israel 1200BC. The Black Obelisk from Nimrud pictures Israelite king Jehu bowing before Assyrian king Shalmaneser III. An inscription near Jerusalem refers to "Joseph, son of Caiaphas" Caiaphas was the high priest in Jerusalem at the time of Christ's crucifixion; Matthew 26:57. An inscribed stone from first century Caesarea reads, "Pontius Pilate, the Prefect of Judea" Pilate was the Roman governor at the time of Jesus' crucifixion; Matthew 27:2. Such evidence, carved in stone, supports the conclusion that the Bible writers were recording facts and not fiction

The manner in which archaeology has verified the historical accuracy of the Bible has been nothing short of remarkable! As noted archaeologist Nelson Glueck has written, "It may be clearly stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a single biblical reference. Scores of archaeological findings have been made which confirm in clear outline or exact detail historical statements in the Bible". Glueck's comments echo the words of another prominent archaeologist, William F. Albright, who stated, "There can be no doubt that

archaeology has confirmed the substantial historicity of Old Testament tradition... The excessive skepticism shown toward the Bible by important historical schools of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries... has been progressively discredited" (Evidence That Demands a Verdict, McDowell, vol. 1, p. 65). The evidence of history and archaeology defies the critics, and supports Scripture!

How can we know whether the text of the Bible has been preserved accurately down through the centuries? Is it logical to believe that a book written by more than 40 authors in different locations over 1,500 years can be trustworthy? Can we prove that the text we have today is reliable?

If the Bible is the inspired word of an Almighty God who encourages people to "check the facts," we should expect to find convincing evidence that Scripture has been preserved carefully and accurately over time. Such evidence is available, in Scripture itself! Evidence can also be found in Jewish historical literature, in the writings of early Church scholars and in a multitude of modern sources. The evidence for the accurate transmission of the Bible is remarkable, overwhelming and, indeed, irrefutable!

The Apostle Paul revealed where to find evidence of Scripture's preservation when he wrote, "What advantage then has the Jew...? To them were committed the oracles of God" Romans 3:1–2. Biblical scholar Bernard Ramm comments, "The Jews preserved it, the Old Testament as no other manuscript has ever been preserved" (McDowell, p. 9). When God revealed His laws to their ancestors, they were given a mandate: "You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it... be careful to observe them, the statutes of God... teach them to your children and your grandchildren" Deuteronomy 4:1–10. History clearly shows how this has occurred.

The Bible records that God gave His laws directly to Moses 1400BC, and that "when Moses had completed writing the words of this law in a book... Moses commanded the Levites... Take this Book of the Law, and put it beside the Ark of the Covenant" Deuteronomy 31:24–26. This ark was a box containing stone tablets of the law carved by God and the writings of Moses Deuteronomy 10:5. It was kept in the Tabernacle, and later in the Temple at Jerusalem. The Bible shows Ezra the priest reading and explaining the "Book of the Law of Moses" to Jews who had returned to Jerusalem from Babylon in the fifth century BC Nehemiah 8:1–12. By 150BC, there is even evidence from extra-biblical sources that the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament was attributed to Moses. In the first century AD, Jesus and the apostles also quoted from and referred to the books of Moses as

inspired Scripture Mark 12:19–27; John 1:17; Romans 10:5. Thus, the Bible provides its own account of how Scripture was preserved and used over generations.

Evidence also exists from the Bible, as well as from historical sources, that the Old Testament consisted of specific books that were widely recognized as divinely inspired. The list of books recognized as inspired became the canon of the Old Testament, the Hebrew Bible. In the first century AD, both Jesus Luke 24:44 and the Jewish teacher Philo referred to three major divisions of the Old Testament canon: the Law, the Prophets and the Writings. Josephus, a first-century Jewish historian, acknowledged that the Hebrew Bible consisted of 22 books, essentially the same text which divided differently, forms the 39 books of our modern Old Testament and that these books "have all been accepted as canonical from time immemorial". The fact that 22 books of the Old Testament and 27 books of the New Testament comprise the 49 books of the complete Bible, 49 is considered a number of completion, indicates that a divine mind was guiding this process. The Bible is not just a haphazard collection of books!

Modern scholars generally agree that the Hebrew Scriptures were recognized as inspired from an early date. According to one source: "The evidence supports the theory that the Hebrew canon was established well before the late first century AD, more than likely as early as the fourth century BC and certainly no later than 150BC" (McDowell, p. 26). Another source states: "No one doubts that the Pentateuch was both complete and canonical by the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, in the fifth century BC... such evidence implies that by the beginning of the Christian era the identity of all the Old Testament canonical books was well known and generally accepted" (The Origin of the Bible, Bruce, et al., p. 56). It is worth noting that none of the biblical writers or early Church scholars accepted as inspired the apocryphal books written in the inter-testament period.

But how reliable are the Old Testament books that we have today? Has the text of the Old Testament been transmitted to us accurately? Consider the evidence. "In Judaism, a succession of scholars was charged with standardizing and preserving the biblical text" during a period extending from about 500BC to about 1000AD (McDowell, pp. 73–77). The earliest scribes, the Sopherim (400BC to 200AD), worked with Ezra and "were regarded as the Bible custodians until the time of Christ". They were followed by the Talmudists (100AD to 500AD) and finally by the Masoretic (500AD to 1000AD). Numerous accounts confirm that these scribes copied the biblical texts with extreme care, counting the number of words in a

book, counting the number of times a letter appeared in a book, and even pointing out the middle letter in the Pentateuch and the middle letter in the Bible!

Because of such careful attention to detail in the preparation and transmission of Old Testament manuscripts, modern scholars acknowledge that "the Hebrew Bible has been transmitted with the minutest accuracy... it may safely be said that no other work of antiquity has been so accurately transmitted... it is little short of miraculous" (Evidence That Demands a Verdict, McDowell, pp. 55–56). The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947 proved just how accurately the Jews have preserved and transmitted the Old Testament text. Before the discovery of the scrolls in a cave near the Dead Sea, the oldest copy of the Hebrew text dated from around 1000AD. The newly discovered scrolls dated to the first century BC about 1,000 years earlier! The scrolls contained two nearly complete copies of the book of Isaiah, which proved "to be word for word identical with our standard Hebrew Bible in more than 95 percent of the text. The 5 percent of the variations consisted of obvious slips of the pen and variations in spelling" (When Skeptics Ask, Geisler & Brooks, pp. 158–159). The Dead Sea Scrolls provide solid evidence that the text of the Old Testament has not changed in more than 2,000 years!

The reliability of the New Testament rests on a wealth of material that is available. Scholars readily acknowledge, "There are earlier and more manuscripts of the New Testament than of any other book in the ancient world". These manuscripts clearly reveal that the New Testament "has been transmitted to us with no, or next to no, variation" (Evidence That Demands a Verdict, McDowell, p. 44).

More than 24,000 manuscript copies of the New Testament in Greek, Latin and other languages provide evidence about the text. The earliest New Testament manuscripts date within a few decades or a few centuries of the apostolic writers. By comparison, there are only 643 manuscripts of Homer's Iliad written in the 8th century BC, and the earliest copy in existence today dates from about 400BC some 500 years after it was composed. Only 10–20 copies of writings of Julius Caesar, the Roman historian Tacitus, and the Greek historian Herodotus exist today, with the oldest manuscripts copied 1,000 years after the originals were composed (McDowell, pp. 39–43). Compared against the New Testament, no other document from the ancient world has left such a wealth of material documenting the reliable transmission of its text. In addition to the many available manuscripts, early Christian writers quoted the New Testament so extensively that almost the entire New Testament could be reconstructed from other sources.

Critics have theorized that unknown authors composed the gospels centuries after the apostles. Yet the earliest fragment of John's gospel is dated 130AD, about 30 years after the apostle's death. This supports the traditional view that John wrote his gospel towards the end of the first century. Also, "there is no evidence from the first two Christian centuries that the gospels ever circulated without the names of the authors attached" (Sheler, p. 33). One scholar has observed: "If we compare the present state of the New Testament text with that of any other ancient writing, we must... declare it marvelously correct" (McDowell, p. 45). Another prominent scholar stated: "It cannot be too strongly asserted that in substance the text of the Bible is certain: Especially is this the case with the New Testament... This can be said of no other ancient book in the world".

For decades, critics have charged that the books of the New Testament were not written until a century or more after Jesus and the apostles lived, and were probably pieced together by anonymous authors. Such a late composition would allow time for myths and legends to creep into the text. Some progressive theologians and modern authors, as in *The DaVinci Code*, also assert that the books of the New Testament were selected by politically motivated committees, and that valuable books were deliberately omitted, thereby compromising the Bible's accuracy and value. However, the internal evidence of the New Testament books, the facts of history and the weight of modern scholarship all refute these ideas!

Today, most credible scholars concur that "the New Testament canon with the Gospels and most of Paul's Epistles was formed by the end of the first century... The attested date for the canonical Gospels is no later than 60–100" AD (Geisler, p. 520). Neither Luke's gospel nor the book of Acts, also written by Luke mention the 70AD destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, which was for Jews the most significant event of the century. Indeed, no New Testament author mentions the destruction of the Temple, which strongly suggests early authorship of the New Testament canon.

The New Testament books themselves reveal that the authors recognized which writings God had inspired, and belonged in the canon. The Apostle Paul wrote that "the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord" 1 Corinthians 14:37. Paul wrote that the teachings of the apostles were divinely inspired and were to be read in the churches, "because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God" 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 5:27. Peter warned that those who were twisting Paul's writings were twisting "the Scriptures" 2 Peter 3:15–16.

Scholars in the early centuries of the Church accepted the apostles' writings as Scripture, but they "all draw a clear distinction between their own, writings and the inspired, authoritative apostolic writings" (Bruce, p. 71). This argues strongly that the New Testament canon was recognized very early in Church history.

Tertullian, a religious historian who wrote in the early 200s, appears to be the first writer to call Christian Scripture the "New Testament." This is significant, because it "placed the New Testament Scripture on a level of inspiration and authority with the Old Testament" (Bruce, p. 66). From the 300s we have records showing that the New Testament canon consisted of 27 books, the same books we have today. A letter written in 367AD by Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, provides the earliest documentation of the exact 27 books of the New Testament canon. His letter, which was "designed to eliminate once and for all the use of certain apocryphal books," warns: "Let no one add to these; let nothing be taken away" (Bruce, p. 74). Later, in 397AD, a church council in Carthage decreed that "aside from the canonical Scriptures, which the council listed as 27 books nothing is to be read in church under the Name of Divine Scriptures" (Bruce, p. 74). The clear purpose was to identify which books were parts of the inspired New Testament canon, and to eliminate the use of apocryphal literature.

Just what are the apocryphal books? Why were they an issue of controversy in the early Church? Are they relevant today? The "Apocrypha", which means hidden or concealed refers to books that neither the Jews nor the early Church ever accepted as inspired or as part of the canon (see Bruce, pp. 79–94; Geisler, pp. 28–34). Most apocryphal books date to the inter-testament period, and were written by anonymous authors or under the name of a person or a place named in Scripture. These books do not claim to be inspired. They contain no predictive prophecies, but instead contain historical and geographical errors and promote fanciful ideas and false doctrines that contradict canonical Scripture. Jesus and the New Testament writers never acknowledged the Apocrypha as Scripture. "No canonic list or church council accepted the Apocrypha for nearly the first four centuries" (Geisler, p. 33).

Although some apocryphal books were published along with canonical books in the Septuagint (a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures produced by 70 scholars in Alexandria 250BC), this translation was not supervised by scribes of the Judaic tradition, who had their centers in Tiberias and Babylon.

Josephus, writing in the first century AD, specifically excluded apocryphal books from the Hebrew canon when he wrote, "we have... but only twenty-two books,

which are justly believed to be divine". Philo, a first century Jewish teacher in Alexandria, "quoted the Old Testament prolifically from virtually every canonical book. However, he never once quoted from the Apocrypha as inspired" (Geisler, p. 32). Prominent early writers such as Origen, Cyril of Jerusalem, Athanasius of Alexandria and Jerome all rejected the apocryphal books as inauthentic. In fact, it was Jerome, who prepared the Latin Vulgate Bible 400AD who first used the term Apocrypha when referring to books that were not considered part of the inspired biblical canon and should not be used to establish doctrine. Jerome disputed with the theologian Augustine, who felt that the apocryphal books were inspired and should be included in the canon, apparently because they had been included in the Septuagint.

The Apocryphal books became a major issue during the Reformation, when Protestants, following Jerome's thinking, rejected the Apocrypha as uninspired. However, at the Council of Trent in 1546, Roman Catholic leaders, following Augustine's ideas, declared those books part of the New Testament canon. This was an attempt by the Roman church to counter the influence of Martin Luther and other reformers who were teaching against celibacy, prayers for the dead, and purgatory, ideas that do not come from canonical Scripture but are found in some apocryphal books. Yet this was not the end of the controversy over apocryphal writings.

In 1945, a group of books commonly called "Gnostic gospels" were found near Nag Hammadi, an Egyptian town north of Luxor, on the Nile. Gnosticism encompassed a collection of heretical ideas that early Church leaders attributed to Simon the Sorcerer Acts 8:9–25; Gnostic writings contain purported "secret sayings" of Christ that differ dramatically from His New Testament teachings. In the Gospel of Thomas, Jesus flies into a fit of rage and causes a child who has offended Him to wither 3:1–3. In another work, Jesus makes clay birds on the Sabbath; when His parents correct Him, He claps His hands and the birds fly away. The Gospel of Philip suggests that Christ had a romantic relationship with Mary Magdalene. The Gospel of Mary asserts that Mary was the real leader of Christ's disciples.

Early Church leaders denounced the Gnostic writings as spurious and heretical. Yet modern biblical critics, along with revisionist theologians, creative writers and mystical New Agers, have resurrected these "alternative" gospels and present them as equally credible as canonical Scripture. Dan Brown, author of the widely read fictional novel *The DaVinci Code*, draws heavily on the heretical ideas of Gnostic writings, as well as on occult, pagan goddess worship and mysticism. In his novel,

he "makes the case that Mary Magdalene was... a strong independent figure, patron of Jesus, cofounder of his movement, his only believer in his greatest hour of need, author of her own Gospel, his romantic partner, and the mother of his child. To the millions of women who feel slighted, discriminated against, or unwelcome in churches of all faiths today, the novel is a chance to see early religious history in an entirely different light... The DaVinci Code opens everyone's eyes to a startlingly different view of the powerful role of women in the birth of Christianity. These themes have become mainstream at Harvard's divinity school and other intellectual centers" (Secrets of the Code, Bernstein, p. xxvii). When Dan Brown makes his leading characters say, "almost everything our fathers taught us about Christ is false" and, "The Bible is a product of man, my dear, not God," he is promoting an agenda and world view that seeks to undermine and discredit the Bible, and the Jesus Christ of the Bible. Though the plot of The DaVinci Code appears to "advocate a courageous search for truth at any price, its real goal is to undermine one of the fundamental characteristics of the Christian faith, the belief that the original message of the Gospel, enshrined in the Bible, is the unique, inspired word of God" (Cracking the Code, Garlow & Jones, p. 72). The real danger of books like The DaVinci Code comes from doubts planted in the minds of people who lack historical and biblical knowledge. For such people, the fiction of apocryphal writings can appear to be fact, which leads to deception about the true nature of inspired Scripture. One of the primary reasons for public declarations about what books comprised the canons of the Old and New Testaments was to clearly distinguish between inspired books and the false and misleading writings of the Gnostics.

Today, many people live in a materialistic world of affluence and abundance. More people enjoy a higher standard of living today than at any other time in human history. Yet with more money in our pockets and more time on our hands, millions of people still find life empty and meaningless. More and more people today are finding that money material things and searching for the ultimate experience simply do not provide lasting happiness, remove the emptiness or provide meaningful answers to the big questions of life: Why was I born? Why am I here? Why do I exist? What is the real purpose of life? What happens when I die? Those who take time to look beyond themselves soon notice the tremendous inequities in our modern world, and wonder: Why do millions of human beings suffer from a lack of food, lack of fresh water, lack of sanitation and inadequate shelter? Why are so many people exploited and abused by corrupt leaders in failing countries? Why are wars and deliberate acts of horrific violence and terrorism proliferating around the world? Why is there no peace? Millions want a better

world, but know they cannot make it happen. Why, then, does God fail to intervene, if indeed there is a God?

Few people find satisfaction in the vague answers they hear from most religious leaders and secular philosophers. To hear that human beings are merely "trousered apes", nothing more than bags of DNA struggling to survive in a purposeless universe, awaiting eternal nothingness at death does not provide an inspiring reason to live. On the other hand, it seems like purposeless fantasy to believe that the goal of life is to spend eternity sitting on a cloud, playing a harp. To hear that "God is love" and then to witness all the evil and inequality in the world simply does not add up. Tragically, many today have been led to believe that these answers are "as good as it gets."

But this is nonsense! Most people who assume that these are the best answers to life's big questions have never heard the real answers that God recorded in the Bible! Many theologians either do not know or do not believe what the Bible actually says about life's big questions. Because of our society's prejudice against the supernatural, fostered by biblical scholars who do not believe in the personal and all-powerful God of the Bible, millions have been conditioned to be skeptical of whatever Scripture might reveal about these subjects. However, the Bible provides real answers to life's big questions!

The Purpose of Life:

Contrary to popular modern notions that life emerged from hot slimy pools of pre-biotic soup akin to an idea espoused by pagan Greek philosophers and that human beings evolved from an ape-like ancestor, as postulated by the disciples of Charles Darwin, the Bible reveals that God created human beings in His own image Genesis 1:26–28. Whether or not you can believe this statement will depend on whether you can accept the plentiful evidence that the Bible is truly the Word of God. According to Scripture, human beings were not created to amuse the gods, as some ancient philosophers assumed. The Bible reveals that God created humans so that they could learn to manage the earth Genesis 1:26–28; 2:15, and build character by learning to discern right from wrong Genesis 2:16–17. According to Scripture, God established the institutions of marriage and family Genesis 2:18–24. He also established roles in marriage and revealed important guidelines so that these divinely ordained institutions would function smoothly and successfully Matthew 19:3–9; Ephesians 5:22–33; 6:1–4; 1 Timothy 2:8–15; 1 Peter 3:1–7.

The reason for the biblical emphasis on learning to manage our own lives, and on functioning smoothly in marriage and family, is that we have been created to become members of God's spiritual family Romans 8:15–17; Hebrews 2:5–11; 1 John 3:1–3. If we qualify to become members of that spiritual family, we will reign with Jesus Christ when He returns to establish the kingdom of God on earth Revelation 1:4–6; 5:10. The Bible, when properly understood, clearly reveals that we do not fly off to heaven when we die John 3:13; Acts 2:29, 34; 13:36. When you understand what Scripture actually reveals about the purpose of life, you can begin to understand why the teachings of today's "mainstream" Christianity are not very satisfying or convincing. But what is the cause of the human suffering that has occurred down through time? Why is there so much evil in the world? Why does God allow it? If there is a God, why does He fail to act? People ask these questions because they do not understand that God is working out a plan and a purpose on this earth. Scripture reveals His plan, and it is pictured in the Holy Days that He commanded His people to observe Leviticus 23. God's plan reveals not only the cause of, but also the solution to, the problems we see in our world. Many today do not believe in God's existence, but even fewer believe that Satan is real. However, Scripture reveals quite a bit about this spirit being. The Bible reveals that Satan was originally an "anointed cherub" covering the throne of God, who sinned, "became filled with violence" and led a rebellion against God involving one-third of the angels Ezekiel 28:1–19; Isaiah 14:12–17; Jude 6; Revelation 12:4. We see so much evil in the world today because Satan is the "god of this age... who deceives the whole world" by influencing people to reject the instructions and way of life that God has revealed in the Bible 2 Corinthians 4:3–4; Ephesians 2:1–2. You need to read these Scriptures for yourself to verify what the Bible actually says about this individual who has deceived the whole world Revelation 12:9.

The biblical Holy Days picture the major steps in God's plan of salvation. Those steps reveal that Jesus Christ came to die for the sins of mankind, to replace Satan as the god of this world. Jesus then raised up His Church Acts 2 called the "Church of God" 1 Corinthians 1:2; 10:32; 15:9; 2 Corinthians 1:1 to preach the gospel of God's kingdom to the world Mark 16:15 and to prepare a group of believers to become the "firstfruits" James 1:18; Romans 8:23; Revelation 14:1–5 who will reign with Him in the coming kingdom of God for a thousand years, a period called the Millennium Revelation 20:4–6.

The Bible also reveals that when Christ returns, Satan will be bound and put out of commission Revelation 20:1–2. This is how God will eliminate evil, and will use the individuals whom He has prepared to solve the world's problems. This will all happen according to God's plan, which is revealed in Scripture.

But what is the real hope for the future? Why should we struggle against the trials and temptations of this world? What is the value of learning to live by God's laws and the Bible's instructions? The answers emerge when we understand what the Bible reveals about the kingdom of God, and why it is called the "gospel." The word "gospel" means "good news" and the biblical message about the kingdom of God is good news, it is exciting news! The gospel of the kingdom of God, as described in the Bible, is not about some warm fuzzy feeling in your heart. It is about a coming world government that Jesus Christ will establish on this earth. The Bible clearly reveals that Jesus will return to Jerusalem Zechariah 14:4. He will take charge of the kingdoms of this world Revelation 11:15–18 and set up a world government that will bring true justice and lasting peace to this planet. Jesus will be aided by the saints, individuals who understand the laws of God and have learned to function within the family of God, who will serve as civil and religious leaders, "kings and priests" Revelation 5:10. God's government will bring peace and justice to the earth Isaiah 9:6–7. The saints will also function as teachers Isaiah 30:20–21 who will explain the laws of God Isaiah 2:2–4, show people the way to peace Psalm 119:165 and help them understand the real causes of strife and war James 4:1–4. Christians are urged to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord" 2 Peter 3:18 so that they will be prepared to rule with Christ in this coming kingdom.

The Bible reveals that in the coming kingdom of God, rebuilt cities will promote a sense of community and will be in harmony with the environment Isaiah 61:4; 11:6–9; Amos 9:14–15. Our polluted planet will be restored and made productive Isaiah 35:1–7; Amos 9:13. The global curse of disease will be eliminated as people learn to live by the Bible's personal and public health laws Leviticus 3:17; 7:23–27; 11:1–47. The peoples of the world will learn to speak one language Zephaniah 3:9, and "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" Isaiah 11:9. The Bible speaks of the coming kingdom of God as the "times of refreshing" in which there will be a "restoration of all things" Acts 3:19–20. The Apostle Paul called this "the world to come" or "the age to come" Hebrews 2:5. The Bible holds out these Scriptural teachings as our real hope for the future!

Modern critics scoff at taking Scripture literally, at face value. Many preachers do not even mention the exciting biblical information we have covered. Instead, most willingly overlook or even ignore what history reveals about the teachings and beliefs of the early Church. Historian Edward Gibbon wrote: "The ancient and popular doctrine of the Millennium was intimately connected with the second coming of Christ... a joyful Sabbath of a thousand years; and that Christ, with the triumphant band of the saints and the elect... would reign upon earth... The

assurance of such a Millennium was carefully inculcated by a succession of fathers from Justin Martyr and Irenaeus who conversed with the immediate disciples... Though it might not be universally received, it appears to have been the reigning sentiment of the orthodox believers; and it seems so well adapted to the desires and apprehensions of mankind, that it must have contributed in a very considerable degree to the progress of the Christian faith" (The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, Gibbon, vol. 1, pp. 187–188).

Gibbon wrote plainly that early Christians believed and taught about the Millennium, the coming kingdom of God. The Bible's exciting and inspiring gospel of God's kingdom motivated believers and spurred the growth of the early Church. However, Gibbon also recorded how early theologians, influenced by pagan philosophy believing they knew better than God's inspired word gradually watered down this important teaching of Scripture and then explained it away, first calling it allegory, then calling it heresy. Millions have lost sight of or have never heard the real biblical answers to life's big questions, because most scholars and religious leaders have rejected or never heard those answers! This is one reason why so many today find life empty and meaningless.

In our modern age, many seriously doubt or openly disbelieve that an all-powerful supernatural God inspired Scripture. Many assume that the Bible is no different than any other humanly authored book. Many also assume that modern scholarship has completely discredited the Bible, and that no evidence exists that proves otherwise. Yet, as we have seen, the truth is just the opposite! These widely held beliefs and assumptions are, in reality, fictions that are totally contrary to the facts! The big question that you face, and the challenge that confronts many others today, is: What exactly will you believe about the Bible? Will you believe the facts or will you accept skeptics' speculations that undermine and discredit the Bible, largely by ignoring the facts?

The God of the Bible can challenge us to "examine all things" and "prove" whether He exists, and whether He inspired the Bible, because there is so much remarkable and irrefutable evidence available! True biblical scholars know that the Bible is unlike any other religious book in the world, and that the most distinctive feature of the Bible is prophecy. Students of prophecy know that the Bible contains hundreds of specific prophecies that have been consistently and accurately fulfilled. No other book on the face of the earth contains such remarkable prophetic material, and human efforts to predict the future simply do not compare to the scope and accuracy of Bible prophecy. All this provides powerful evidence pointing to the Bible's divine origin.

The facts of history demonstrate that the Bible has been preserved and accurately transmitted for thousands of years, in spite of concerted efforts to outlaw, suppress, corrupt, burn and destroy it. The continued existence of the Bible under such adverse and hostile conditions offers strong support that an all-powerful God inspired such biblical statements as "the word of the Lord endures forever" and "My counsel shall stand." The remarkable way that archaeological discoveries continue to confirm Scripture's historical accuracy, and undermine critics' speculative theories, clearly affirms that the Bible is the inspired Word of God! The Bible provides real answers to life's big questions, unlike academics, philosophers and theologians who offer mere platitudes. This strongly indicates that the Bible's answers were revealed from a supernatural source.

But why do critics and skeptics who are often highly educated ignore the facts and continue to claim that the Bible is only a collection of myths and legends, and is untrustworthy as a source of historical, theological or scientific information? Is it significant that secular-minded scholars have planted doubts about the Bible in the minds of millions of people today? What are the consequences of ignoring evidence that the Bible is the inspired Word of God? Scripture provides informative answers and offers sobering warnings.

The Bible reveals the cause of this widespread deception: Satan "deceives the whole world" Revelation 12:9. We can certainly see this when we consider the incredible misconceptions that so many have acquired about the Bible. Jesus prophesied that one sign of the "end of the age" would be the increasing number of false teachers who "will deceive many" by spreading false teachings Matthew 24:3–5, 11. The Apostle Peter warned that false teachers would subtly bring in "destructive heresies" that would discredit the truth of God and deceive many people 2 Peter 2:1–3. He also warned that "scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts" casting doubts on Scripture and ignoring the facts of history 2 Peter 3:3–9. This deception will be widespread at the end of the age.

However, the Apostle Paul reveals that scoffers and false teachers will reap serious consequences from the God they are mocking and defying. He wrote: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all... who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them... so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God... but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools" Romans 1:18–22. Paul's condemnation of the misguided pagan intellectuals of his day also applies to the

misguided scholars and critics of today who ignore the powerful evidence that points to God as the author and finisher or sustainer of the Bible. We need to remember that there is a judgment coming!

The stinging reproofs that the prophet Jeremiah leveled at his contemporaries also apply in our present day. Jeremiah warned that "the prophets become wind, for the word of God is not in them... The prophets prophesy falsely... and My people love to have it so... the false pen of the scribe certainly works falsehood... the prophets prophesy lies in My name. I have not sent them... they are prophets of the deceit of their own heart, who try to make My people forget My name by their dreams... and cause My people to err by their lies and by their recklessness... they shall not profit this people at all" Jeremiah 5:13, 31; 8:8; 14:14; 23:26, 30–32. God said through Jeremiah that because His people "have forsaken My law... and have not obeyed My voice... but they have walked according to the dictates of their own hearts... I will scatter them also among the Gentiles... I will send a sword after them until I have consumed them" Jeremiah 9:13–16. The Bible clearly reveals that serious consequences will befall those who forsake the laws of God and promote their own theories, or follow those who do.

However, wonderful benefits come to those who prove and believe that the Bible is God's inspired Word, and who follow God's biblical instructions. King David wrote: "Blessed are they... Who walk in the law of the Lord... Your commandments make me wiser than my enemies... Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path... Great peace have they who love My law, and nothing shall offend them... All Your commandments are truth... The entirety of Your Word is truth" Psalm 119:98, 105, 151, 160, 165. The Bible reveals that God will look favorably on those who develop a deep respect for His Word, and are willing to follow its instructions. The prophet Isaiah wrote,

"But on this one will I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at my word" Isaiah 66:2.

The Bible reveals that God has not left human beings to flounder without absolute guidelines, or without important answers to life's big questions. God has inspired and preserved the Bible in a way that no other book has ever been preserved. He has filled Scripture with hundreds of prophecies that accurately predict the future, setting the Bible apart from all other religious books on earth. The discoveries of archaeology and the facts of history continue to confirm the validity of Scripture, even though it was written thousands of years ago. These facts are simply astounding and cannot reasonably be denied!

When you weigh critics' claims about the Bible against the tremendous evidence of the Bible's divine inspiration, you are left with a clear choice. You can choose to believe that critics' theories might have some foundation in fact, while waiting for the next theory to change and assumptions to be revised. Or you can trust the evidence from archaeology, history and fulfilled prophecy, which clearly reveals that the Bible is the inspired Word of God.

It is pure and simple, I as a preacher, having been born of parents who themselves were born from a blood line that dates back to our original ancestral parents lives by the Word of God. The Bible is my very life and the blood that drips from my very veins is the Bible Itself.