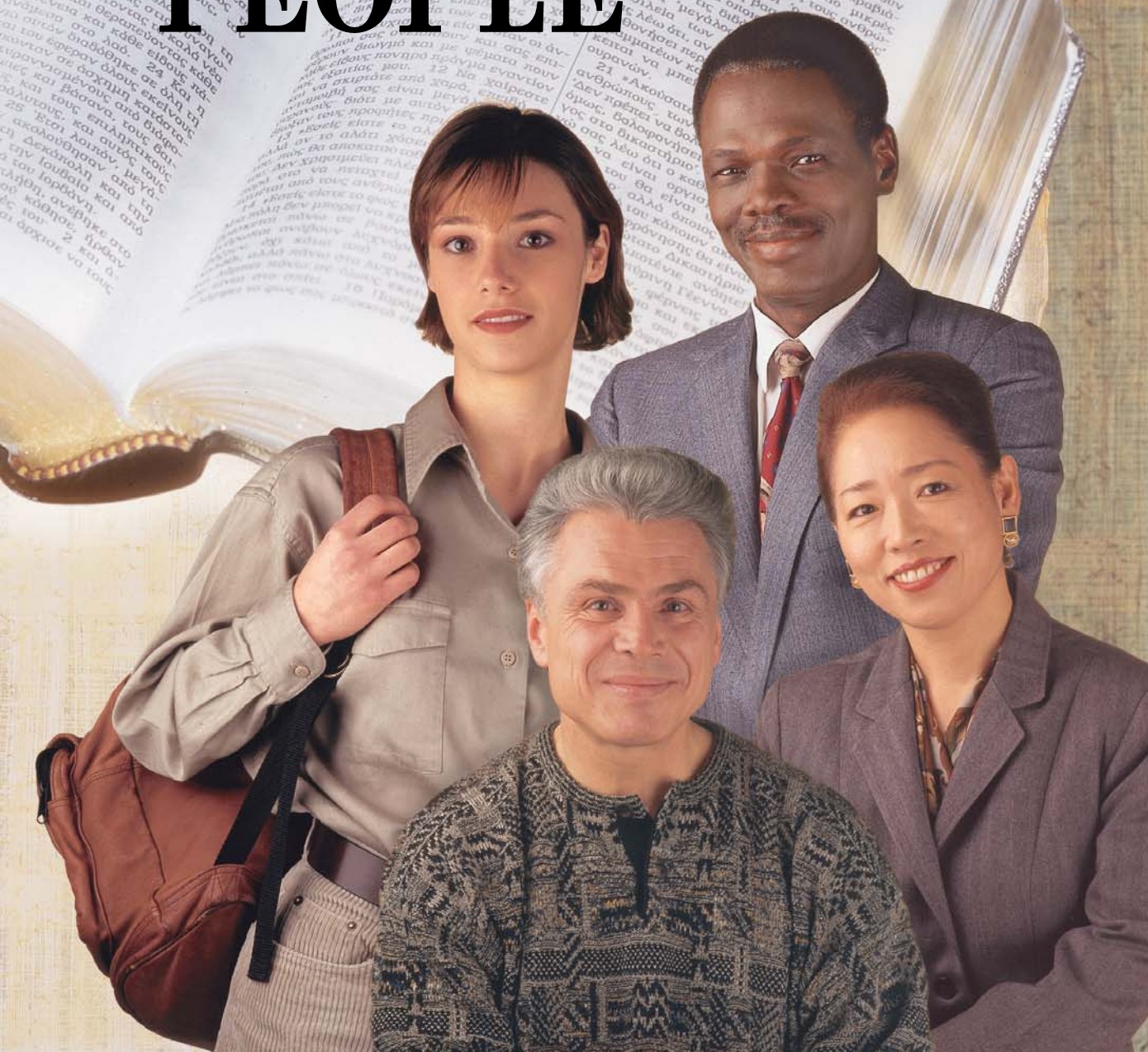


A BOOK FOR ALL PEOPLE



A BOOK FOR ALL PEOPLE

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A Book for All People
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A BOOK TO BE READ

“The Bible is not to be taken seriously.” So said a university professor to a plainspoken young woman.

♦

“Have you ever read the Bible?” she asked.

♦

Taken aback, the professor had to admit that he had not.

♦

“How can you voice a strong conviction about a book that you have never read?”

♦

She had a point. He decided to read the Bible and then form an opinion about it.

THE Bible, made up of 66 writings, has been described as being “probably the most influential collection of books in human history.”¹ Indeed, it has influenced some of the world’s greatest art, literature, and music. It has had a significant impact on law. It has been extolled for its literary style and has been held in high esteem by many well-educated individuals. Its effect on the lives of people in all strata of society has been particularly profound. It has inspired in many of its readers a remarkable degree of loyalty. Some have even risked death just to read it.

At the same time, there is skepticism about the Bible. There are people who have definite opinions about it although they have personally never read it. They may acknowledge its literary or historical value, but they wonder: How could a book written thousands of years ago possibly be relevant in this modern world? We live in the “information age.” Up-to-the-minute information on current events and technology is at our fingertips. “Expert” advice on virtually all the challenges of modern life is readily available. Can the Bible really contain information that is practical today?

This brochure endeavors to answer such questions. It is not designed to impose religious views or beliefs on you, but it is intended to show that this historically influential book, the Bible, is worthy of your consideration. A report published in 1994 noted that some educators strongly feel that the Bible is so firmly embedded in Western culture that “anyone, believer or unbeliever, who is not familiar with Biblical teachings and accounts will be culturally illiterate.”²

Perhaps, after reading what is published herein, you will agree that—whether a person is religious or not—the Bible is, at the very least, a book to be read.

“I owe my enlightenment quite simply to the reading of a book.—A book? Yes, and it is an old simple book, modest as nature itself, and as natural . . . And the name of this book is quite offhandishly the book, the Bible.”—Heinrich Heine, 19th-century German writer.³

A BOOK THAT IS MISREPRESENTED

“The doctrine of the double motion of the earth about its axis and about the sun is false, and entirely contrary to Holy Scripture.” So stated the Congregation of the Index of the Roman Catholic Church in a decree in 1616.¹ Does the Bible really disagree with scientific facts? Or has it been misrepresented?

IN THE winter of 1609/10, Galileo Galilei turned his newly developed telescope toward the heavens and discovered four moons circling the planet Jupiter. What he saw shattered the prevailing notion that all heavenly bodies must orbit the earth. Earlier, in 1543, the Polish astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus had theorized that the planets revolve around the sun. Galileo verified that this was scientific truth.

Two of Galileo's telescopes

that the earth was the center of the universe.² This view was based on a literal interpretation of scriptures that pictured the earth as being fixed “on its foundations, unshakable for ever and ever.” (Psalm 104:5, *The Jerusalem Bible*) Summoned to Rome, Galileo appeared before the Inquisition. Subjected to rigorous examination, he was forced to recant his findings, and he spent the rest of his life under house arrest.

In 1992, some 350 years after Galileo's

death, the Catholic Church finally acknowledged that he was right after all.³ But if Galileo was right, then was the Bible wrong?

Finding the True Sense of Biblical Passages

Galileo believed the Bible to be true. When his scientific discoveries contradicted the prevailing interpretation of certain Bible verses, he reasoned that theologians were missing the true sense of the passages. After all, “two truths can never contradict one another,” he wrote.⁴ He suggested that the precise terms of science do not contradict the everyday words of the Bible. But theologians would not let themselves be persuaded. They insisted that all Biblical statements about the earth are to be taken literally. As a result, not only did they reject Galileo's discoveries but they also missed the true sense of such Scriptural expressions.

Really, common sense should tell us that when the Bible refers to “the four corners of the earth,” it does not mean that the Bible writers understood the earth to be literally square. (Revelation 7:1) The Bible is written in the language of ordinary people, often using vivid figures of speech. So when it speaks of the earth as having “four corners,” a durable “foundation,” “pedestals,” and a “cornerstone,” the Bible

is not offering a scientific description of the earth; obviously it is speaking metaphorically, as we often do in daily speech.*—Isaiah 51:13; Job 38:6.

In his book *Galileo Galilei*, biographer L. Geymonat noted: “Narrow-minded theologians who wanted to limit science on the basis of biblical reasoning would do nothing but cast discredit upon the Bible itself.”⁵ That they did. Actually, it was the theologians’ interpretation of the Bible—not the Bible itself—that put unreasonable constraints on science.

Similarly, religious fundamentalists today distort the Bible when they insist that the earth was created in six 24-hour days. (Genesis 1:3-31) Such a view agrees neither with science nor with the Bible. In the Bible, as in everyday speech, the word “day” is a flexible term, expressing units of time of varying lengths. At Genesis 2:4, all six creative days are referred to as one all-embracing “day.” The Hebrew word translated “day” in the Bible can simply mean “a long time.”⁶ So, there is no Biblical reason to insist that the days of creation were 24 hours each. By teaching otherwise, fundamentalists misrepresent the Bible.—See also 2 Peter 3:8.

Throughout history, theologians have often distorted the Bible. Consider some other ways in which the religions of Christendom have misrepresented what the Bible says.

Misrepresented by Religion

The actions of those who say they follow the Bible often besmear the reputation

* For example, even the most literal-minded astronomers today will speak of the “rising” and “setting” of the sun, stars, and constellations—although, in fact, these only appear to move because of the earth’s rotation.

Galileo facing his inquisitors

of the book they claim to revere. So-called Christians have shed one another’s blood in the name of God. Yet, the Bible admonishes followers of Christ to “love one another.”—John 13:34, 35; Matthew 26:52.

Some clergymen fleece their flocks, wheedling hard-earned money from them—a far cry from the Scriptural instruction: “You received free, give free.”—Matthew 10:8; 1 Peter 5:2, 3.

Clearly, the Bible cannot be judged according to the words and actions of those who simply quote it or claim to live by it. An open-minded person may therefore want to discover for himself what the Bible is all about and why it is such a remarkable book.

THE WORLD'S MOST WIDELY DISTRIBUTED BOOK

*"The Bible is the most widely read book in history. . . . More copies have been distributed of the Bible than of any other book. The Bible has also been translated more times, and into more languages, than any other book."—"The World Book Encyclopedia."*¹

IN SOME respects, most books are like people. They appear on the scene, may grow in popularity, and—except for a handful of classics—become old and die. Libraries often serve as cemeteries for countless books that are obsolete, unread and, in effect, dead.

The Bible, however, is exceptional even among classical works. Although its written origins go back 3,500 years, it is still very much alive. It is by far the most widely circulated book on earth.* Each year, some 60 million copies of the entire Bible or portions of it are distributed. The first edition printed from movable type came off the printing press of the German inventor Johannes Gutenberg about 1455. Since then an estimated four billion Bibles (the whole or in part) have

Gutenberg Bible, in Latin, the first complete book printed from movable type

* The next most widely distributed publication is thought to be the red-covered booklet *Quotations From the Works of Mao Tse-tung*, of which an estimated 800 million copies have been sold or distributed.

been printed. No other book, religious or otherwise, even comes close.

The Bible is also the most widely translated book in history. The complete Bible or portions of it have been translated into more than 2,100 languages and dialects.* Over 90 percent of the human family have access to at least part of the Bible in their own language.² This book has thus crossed national boundaries and transcended racial and ethnic barriers.

Statistics alone may not provide a compelling reason for you to examine the Bible. Nevertheless, the circulation and translation figures are impressive, testifying to the Bible's universal appeal. Surely the best-selling and most widely translated book in all human history is worthy of your consideration.

* Statistics regarding the number of languages are based on figures published by the United Bible Societies.

HOW DID THE BOOK SURVIVE?

Ancient writings had natural enemies—fire, moisture, mold. The Bible was not immune to such hazards. The record of how it has survived the ravages of time to become the world's most accessible book is outstanding among ancient writings. That history deserves more than passing interest.

THE Bible writers did not engrave their words on stone; neither did they inscribe them on durable clay tablets. They evidently recorded their words on perishable materials—papyrus (made from the Egyptian plant of the same name) and parchment (made from the skins of animals).

What happened to the original writings? They probably disintegrated long ago, most of them in ancient Israel. Scholar Oscar Paret explains: "Both of these writing mediums [papyrus and leather] are in the same strong measure endangered by humidity, by mold, and by various maggots. We know from daily experience how easily paper, and even strong leather, deteriorates in the open air or in a damp room."¹

If the originals no longer exist, then how did the words of the Bible writers survive to our day?

Preserved by Meticulous Copyists

Soon after the originals were written, handwritten copies began to be produced. Copying the Scriptures actually became a profession in ancient Israel. (Ezra 7:6; Psalm 45:1) The copies, though, were also recorded on perishable materials. Eventually these had to be replaced by other handwritten copies. When the originals passed off the scene, these copies became the basis for future manuscripts. Copying the copies was a process that went on for many centuries. Did copyists' mistakes over the centu-

ries drastically change the text of the Bible? The evidence says no.

The professional copyists were very devoted. They had a profound reverence for the words they copied. They were also meticulous. The Hebrew word rendered "copyist" is *so-pher'*, which has reference to counting and recording. To illustrate the accuracy of the copyists, consider the Masoretes.* Regarding them, scholar Thomas Hartwell Horne explains: "They . . . reckoned which is the middle letter of the Pentateuch [the first five books of the Bible], which is the middle clause of each book, and how many times each letter of the [Hebrew] alphabet occurs in all the Hebrew Scriptures."³

Thus, skilled copyists utilized a number of cross-checking tools. To avoid omitting even a single letter from the Bible text, they went so far as to count not just the *words* copied but the *letters* as well. Consider the painstaking care this involved: They reportedly kept track of 815,140 individual letters in the Hebrew Scriptures!⁴ Such diligent effort ensured a high degree of accuracy.

Nevertheless, the copyists were not infallible. Is there any evidence that, despite centuries of recopying, the Bible text has survived in reliable form?

* Masoretes (meaning "the Masters of Tradition") were copyists of the Hebrew Scriptures who lived between the sixth and the tenth centuries C.E. The manuscript copies they produced are referred to as Masoretic texts.²

A Solid Basis for Confidence

There is good reason to believe that the Bible has been accurately transmitted down to our day. The evidence consists of existing handwritten manuscripts—an estimated 6,000 of all or portions of the Hebrew Scriptures and some 5,000 of the Christian Scriptures in Greek. Among these is a Hebrew Scripture manuscript discovered in 1947 that exemplifies just how accurate the copying of the Scriptures was. It has since been termed “the greatest manuscript discovery of modern times.”⁵

While tending his flocks early that year, a young Bedouin shepherd discovered a cave near the Dead Sea. In it he found a number of earthenware jars, most of them empty. However, in one of the jars, which was sealed tight, he found a leather scroll that was carefully wrapped in linen and contained the complete Bible book of Isaiah. This well-preserved but worn scroll showed signs of having been repaired. Little did the young shepherd realize that the ancient scroll he held in his hands would eventually be given worldwide attention.

What was so significant about this particular manuscript? In 1947 the oldest available complete Hebrew manuscripts dated from about the tenth century C.E. But this scroll was dated to the second century B.C.E.*—more than a thousand years earlier.[#] Scholars were very interested to find

* B.C.E. means “Before the Common Era.” C.E. denotes “Common Era,” often called A.D., for Anno Domini, meaning “in the year of the Lord.”

[#] *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, by Emanuel Tov, states: “With the aid of the carbon 14 test, 1QIsa^a [the Dead Sea Isaiah Scroll] is now dated between 202 and 107 BCE (paleographical date: 125-100 BCE) . . . The mentioned paleographical method, which has been improved in recent years, and which allows for absolute dating on the basis of a comparison of the shape and stance of the letters with external sources such as dated coins and inscriptions, has established itself as a relatively reliable method.”⁶

The Bible was preserved by skilled copyists

out how this scroll compared with manuscripts produced much later.

In one study, scholars compared the 53rd chapter of Isaiah in the Dead Sea Scroll with the Masoretic text produced a thousand years later. The book *A General Introduction to the Bible*, explains the results of the study: “Of the 166 words in Isaiah 53, there are only seventeen letters in question. Ten of these letters are simply a matter of spelling, which does not affect the sense. Four more letters are minor stylistic changes, such as conjunctions. The remaining three letters comprise the word ‘light,’ which is added in verse 11, and does not affect the meaning greatly. . . . Thus, in one chapter of 166 words, there is only one word (three letters) in question after a thousand years of transmission—and this word does not significantly change the meaning of the passage.”⁷

Professor Millar Burrows, who worked with the scrolls for years, analyzing their contents, came to a similar conclusion: “Many of the differences between the . . . Isaiah scroll and the Masoretic text can be explained as mistakes in copying. Apart from these, there is a remarkable agreement, on the whole, with the text found in the medieval manuscripts. Such agreement in a manuscript so much older gives reassuring testimony to the general accuracy of the traditional text.”⁸

“Reassuring testimony” can also be given about the copying of the Christian Greek Scriptures. For example, the 19th-century discovery of the Codex Sinaiticus, a vellum manuscript dated to the fourth century C.E., helped confirm the accuracy of manuscripts of the Christian Greek Scriptures produced centuries later. A papyrus fragment of the Gospel of John, discovered in the district of Faiyūm, Egypt, is dated to the first half of the second century C.E., less than 50 years after the original was written. It had been preserved for centuries in the dry sand. The text agrees with that found in much later manuscripts.⁹

The evidence thus confirms that the copyists were, in fact, very accurate. Nevertheless, they did make mistakes. No individual manuscript is flawless—the Dead Sea Scroll of Isaiah notwithstanding. Even so, scholars have been able to detect and correct such departures from the original.

Correcting Copyists’ Errors

Suppose 100 persons were asked to make a handwritten copy of a lengthy document. Undoubtedly at least some of the copyists would make mistakes. However, they would not all make the *same* mistakes. If you were to take all 100 copies and compare them very carefully, you would be able to isolate the errors and determine the exact text of the original document, even if you never saw it.

Similarly, the Bible copyists did not all make the same mistakes. With literally thousands of Bible manuscripts now available for comparative analysis, textual scholars have been able to isolate mistakes, determine the original reading, and make note of needed corrections. As a result of such careful study, textual scholars have produced master texts in the original languages. These refined editions of the Hebrew and of the Greek texts adopt the words

most generally agreed upon as being the original, often listing in footnotes variations or alternative readings that may exist in certain manuscripts. The refined editions by the textual scholars are what Bible translators use to translate the Bible into modern languages.

So when you pick up a modern translation of the Bible, there is every reason for confidence that the Hebrew and the Greek texts on which it is based represent with remarkable fidelity the words of the original Bible writers.* The record of how the Bible survived thousands of years of recopying by hand is truly extraordinary. Sir Frederic Kenyon, longtime curator of the British Museum, could therefore state: “It cannot be too strongly asserted that in substance the text of the Bible is certain . . . This can be said of no other ancient book in the world.”¹⁰

* Of course, individual translators may be stringent or loose in their adherence to the original Hebrew and Greek texts.

The Dead Sea Scroll of Isaiah (facsimile shown) is practically identical with the Masoretic text produced a thousand years later

A BOOK THAT “SPEAKS” LIVING LANGUAGES

If the language in which a book is written dies, for all practical purposes the book dies too. Few people today can read the ancient languages in which the Bible was written. Yet it is alive. It has survived because it has “learned to speak” the living languages of mankind. The translators who “taught” it to speak other languages faced seemingly insurmountable obstacles at times.

TRANSLATING the Bible—with its more than 1,100 chapters and 31,000 verses—is an imposing task. However, over the centuries, devoted translators gladly took on the challenge. Many of them were willing to suffer hardships and even to die for their work. The history of how the Bible came to be translated into the languages of mankind is a remarkable account of perseverance and ingenuity. Consider just a small part of that compelling record.

The Challenges Facing the Translators

How do you translate a book into a language that has no written script? Numerous Bible translators faced just such a challenge. For example, Ulfilas, of the fourth century C.E., set out to translate the Bible into what was then a modern but not a written language—Gothic. Ulfilas overcame the challenge by inventing the Gothic alphabet of 27 characters, which he based primarily on the Greek and the Latin alphabets. His translation of nearly the entire Bible into Gothic was completed before 381 C.E.

Tyndale translating the Bible

In the ninth century, two Greek-speaking brothers, Cyril (originally named Constantine) and Methodius, both outstanding scholars and linguists, wanted to translate the Bible for Slavic-speaking people. But Slavonic—the forerunner of today’s Slavic languages—had no written script. So the two brothers invented an alphabet in order to produce a translation of the

Bible. Thus the Bible could now “speak” to many more people, those in the Slavic world.

In the 16th century, William Tyndale set out to translate the Bible from the original languages into English, but he encountered stiff opposition from both Church and State. Tyndale, who was educated at Oxford, wanted to produce a translation that even “a boy that driveth the plough” could understand.¹ But to accomplish this, he had to flee to Germany, where his English “New Testament” was printed in 1526. When copies were smuggled into England, the authorities were so enraged that they began burning them publicly. Tyndale was later betrayed. Just before he was strangled and his

body burned, he uttered these words with a loud voice: "Lord, open the King of England's eyes!"²

Bible translation continued; the translators would not be stopped. By 1800, at least portions of the Bible had "learned to speak" 68 languages. Then, with the formation of Bible Societies—in particular the British and Foreign Bible Society, founded in 1804—the Bible quickly "learned" even more new languages. Young men by the hundreds volunteered to go to foreign lands as missionaries, many with the prime purpose of translating the Bible.

Learning the Languages of Africa

In 1800, there were only about a dozen *written* languages in Africa. Hundreds of other *spoken* languages had to wait until someone invented a writing system. Missionaries came and learned the languages, without the aid of primers or dictionaries. Then they labored to develop a written form, and after that they taught the people how to read the script. This they did so that someday people could read the Bible in their own tongue.³

One such missionary was a Scotsman named Robert Moffat. In 1821, at the age of 25, Moffat set up a mission among the Tswana-speaking people of southern Africa. To learn their unwritten language, he mixed with the people, at times journeying into the interior to live among them. "The people were kind," he later wrote, "and my blundering in the language gave rise to many bursts of laughter. Never, in one instance, would an individual correct a word or sentence, till he or she had mimicked the original so effectually, as to give great merriment to others."⁴ Moffat persevered and eventually mastered the language, developing a written form for it.

In 1829, after working among the Tswana

for eight years, Moffat finished translating the Gospel of Luke. To get it printed, he traveled about 600 miles by ox wagon to the coast and then took a ship to Cape Town. There the governor gave him permission to use a government press, but Moffat had to set the type and do the printing himself, finally publishing the Gospel in 1830. For the first time, the Tswana could read a portion of the Bible in their own language. In 1857, Moffat completed a translation of the entire Bible into Tswana.

Moffat later described the reaction of the Tswana when the Gospel of Luke was first made

Robert Moffat

available to them. He noted: "I have known individuals to come hundreds of miles to obtain copies of St. Luke. . . . I have seen them receive portions of St. Luke, and weep over them, and grasp them to their bosoms, and shed tears of thankfulness, till I have said to more than one, 'You will spoil your books with your tears.'"⁵

Devoted translators like Moffat thus gave many Africans—some of whom initially saw no need for a written language—the first opportunity to communicate in writing. The translators, though, believed that they were giving the people of Africa an even more valuable gift—the Bible in their own tongue. Today the Bible, in whole or in part, "speaks" in over 600 African languages.

Learning the Languages of Asia

While translators in Africa struggled to develop written forms for spoken languages, on the other side of the world, other translators encountered a much different obstacle—translating into languages that already had complex written scripts. Such was the

challenge facing those who translated the Bible into the languages of Asia.

At the beginning of the 19th century, William Carey and Joshua Marshman went to India and mastered many of its written languages. With the help of William Ward, a printer, they produced translations of at least portions of the Bible in nearly 40 languages.⁶ Regarding William Carey, author J. Herbert Kane explains: "He invented a beautiful, free-flowing colloquial style [of the Bengali language] that replaced the old classical form, thereby making it more intelligible and attractive to modern readers."⁷

Adoniram Judson, born and raised in the United States, traveled to Burma, and in 1817 he began to translate the Bible into Burmese. Describing the difficulty of mastering an Oriental language to the degree necessary to translate the Bible, he wrote:

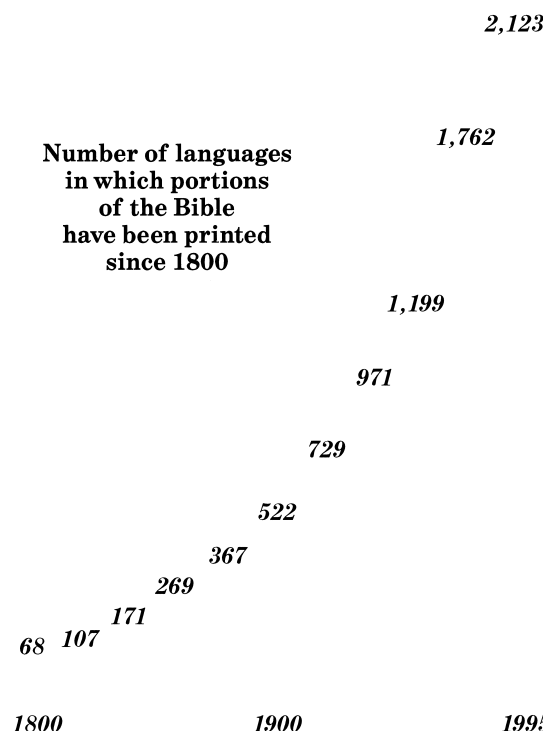
'When we take up a language spoken by a people on the other side of the earth, whose thoughts run in channels diverse from ours, and whose codes of expression are consequently all new, and the letters and words all totally destitute of the least resemblance to any language we have ever met with; when we have no dictionary or interpreter and must get something of the language before we can avail ourselves of the assistance of a native teacher—that means work!'⁸

Adoniram Judson

In Judson's case, it meant some 18 years of painstaking work. The final portion of the Burmese Bible was printed in 1835. His stay in Burma, however, cost him dearly. While he was working on the translation, he was accused of spying and hence spent nearly two years in a mosquito-infested jail. Not long after his release, his wife and young daughter died of fever.

When 25-year-old Robert Morrison arrived in China in 1807, he undertook the extremely difficult task of translating the Bible into Chinese, one of the most complex written languages. He had only a limited knowledge of Chinese, which he had started studying just two years earlier. Morrison also had to contend with Chinese law, which sought to maintain China's isolation. The Chinese people were prohibited, under penalty of death, to teach the language to foreigners. For a foreigner to translate the Bible into Chinese was a capital offense.

Undaunted but cautious, Morrison continued studying the language, learning it rapidly. Within two years he obtained a job as a translator for the East India Company. During the day, he worked for the company, but in secret and under constant threat of de-



tection, he worked on translating the Bible. In 1814, seven years after he arrived in China, he had the Christian Greek Scriptures ready for printing.⁹ Five years later, with the help of William Milne, he completed the Hebrew Scriptures.

It was an enormous achievement—the Bible could now “speak” in the language used by more people than any other in the world. Thanks to capable translators, translations into other Asian languages followed. Today, portions of the Bible are available in over 500 of the languages of Asia.

Why did men such as Tyndale, Moffat, Judson, and Morrison labor for years—some even risking their lives—to translate a book

for people they did not know and, in some cases, for people who did not have a written language? Certainly not for glory or financial gain. They believed that the Bible is God’s Word and that it should “speak” to people—all people—in *their own language*.

Whether you feel that the Bible is the Word of God or not, perhaps you would agree that the kind of self-sacrificing spirit displayed by those devoted translators is all too rare in today’s world. Is not a book that inspires such unselfishness worth investigating?

**Robert
Morrison**

WHAT THE BOOK CONTAINS

A person entering a library for the first time may find the array of books bewildering. But with a little explanation of how the books are arranged, he soon learns how to locate things. Similarly, finding your way around in the Bible is easier when you understand how its contents are arranged.

THE word “Bible” is derived from the Greek word *bi-bli’a*, which meant “papyrus rolls” or “books.”¹ The Bible is actually a collection—a library—of 66 individual books, the writing of which spanned some 1,600 years, from 1513 B.C.E. to about 98 C.E.

The first 39 books, about three quarters of the Bible’s contents, are known as the Hebrew Scriptures, since they were written mostly in that language. These books may generally be divided into three groups: (1) *Historical*, Genesis to Esther, 17 books; (2) *Poetic*, Job to The Song of Solomon, 5 books; and (3) *Prophetic*, Isaiah to Mala-

chi, 17 books. The Hebrew Scriptures cover the early history of the earth and of mankind as well as the history of the ancient nation of Israel from its inception down to the fifth century B.C.E.

The remaining 27 books are known as the Christian Greek Scriptures, for they were written in Greek, the international language of the day. They are basically arranged according to subject matter: (1) the 5 historical books—the Gospels and Acts, (2) the 21 letters, and (3) the Revelation. The Christian Greek Scriptures focus on the teachings and activities of Jesus Christ and his disciples in the first century C.E.

CAN THIS BOOK BE TRUSTED?

“I find more sure marks of authenticity in the Bible than in any profane [secular] history whatsoever.”—Sir Isaac Newton, renowned English scientist.¹

CAN this book—the Bible—be trusted? Does it refer to people who really lived, places that actually existed, and events that truly happened? If so, there should be evidence that it was written by careful, honest writers. Proof does exist. Much of it has been found buried in the earth, and even more is contained within the book itself.

Digging Up the Evidence

The discovery of ancient artifacts buried in Bible lands has supported the historical and geographic accuracy of the Bible. Consider just some of the evidence that archaeologists have dug up.

David, the courageous young shepherd who became king of Israel, is well-known to readers of the Bible. His name appears 1,138 times in the Bible, and the expression “House of David”—often referring to his dynasty—occurs 25 times. (1 Samuel 16:13; 20:16) Until recently, though, there was no clear evidence outside the Bible that David existed. Was David merely a fictitious character?

In 1993 a team of archaeologists, led by Professor Avraham Biran, made an astounding discovery, which was reported in *Israel Exploration Journal*. At the site of an ancient mound called Tel Dan, in the northern part of Israel, they uncovered a basalt stone. Carved into the stone are the words “House of David” and “King of Israel.”² The inscription, dated to the ninth century B.C.E., is said to be part of a victory monument erected by Aramaeans—enemies of Israel who lived to the east. Why is this ancient inscription so significant?

Based on a report by Professor Biran and his colleague, Professor Joseph Naveh, an article in *Biblical Archaeology Review* stated: “This is the first time that the name David has been found in any ancient inscription outside the Bible.”^{3*} Something else is noteworthy about the inscription. The expression “House of David” is written as one word. Language expert Professor Anson Rainey explains: “A word divider . . . is often omitted, especially if the combination is a well-established proper name. ‘The House of David’ was certainly such a proper political and geographic name in the mid-ninth century B.C.E.”⁵ So King David and his dynasty evidently were well-known in the ancient world.

Did Nineveh—the great city of Assyria mentioned in the Bible—really exist? As recently as the early 19th century, some Bible critics refused to believe so. But in 1849, Sir Austen Henry Layard unearthed ruins of King Sennacherib’s palace at Kuyunjik, a site that proved to be part of ancient Nineveh. The critics were thus silenced on that score. But these ruins had more to tell. On the walls of one well-preserved chamber was a display showing the capture of a well-fortified city, with captives being marched before the invading king. Above the king is this inscription: “Sennacherib, king of the world, king of Assyria, sat upon a *nîmedu*

* After that discovery, Professor André Lemaire reported that a new reconstruction of a damaged line on the Mesha stela (also called the Moabite Stone), discovered in 1868, reveals that it also contains a reference to the “House of David.”⁴

-throne and passed in review the booty (taken) from Lachish (*La-ki-su*).”⁶

This display and inscription, which can be viewed in the British Museum, agree with the Bible’s account of the capture of the Judean city of Lachish by Sennacherib, recorded at 2 Kings 18:13, 14. Commenting on the significance of the find, Layard wrote: “Who would have believed it probable or possible, before these discoveries were made, that beneath the heap of earth and rubbish which marked the site of Nineveh, there would be found the history of the wars between Hezekiah [king of Judah] and Sennacherib, written at the very time when they took place by Sennacherib himself, and confirming even in minute details the Biblical record?”⁷

Archaeologists have dug up many other artifacts—pottery, ruins of buildings, clay tablets, coins, documents, monuments, and inscriptions—that confirm the accuracy of the Bible. Excavators have uncovered the Chaldean city of Ur, the commercial and religious center where Abraham lived.⁸ (Genesis 11:27-31) The Nabonidus Chronicle, unearthed in the 19th century, describes Babylon’s fall to Cyrus the Great in 539 B.C.E., an event narrated in Daniel chapter 5.⁹ An inscription (fragments of which are preserved in the British Museum) found on an archway in ancient Thessalonica contains the names of city rulers described as “politarchs,” a word unknown in classical Greek literature but used by the Bible writer Luke.¹⁰ (Acts 17:6, footnote) Luke’s accuracy was thus vindicated in this—as it had already been in other details.—Compare Luke 1:3.

Archaeologists, however, do not always

agree with one another, let alone with the Bible. Even so, the Bible contains within itself strong evidence that it is a book that can be trusted.

Presented With Candor

Honest historians would record not just victories (like the inscription regarding Sennacherib’s capture of Lachish) but also defeats, not just successes but also failures, not just strengths but also weaknesses. Few secular histories reflect such honesty.

Regarding Assyrian historians, Daniel D. Luckenbill explains: “Often it is clear that royal vanity demanded playing fast and loose with historical accuracy.”¹¹ Il-

lustrating such “royal vanity,” the annals of Assyrian King Ashurnasirpal boast: “I am regal, I am lordly, I am exalted, I am mighty, I am honored, I am glorified, I am pre-eminent, I am powerful, I am valiant, I am lion-brave, and I am heroic!”¹² Would you accept everything you read in such annals as accurate history?

In contrast, the Bible writers displayed refreshing candor. Moses, Israel’s leader, frankly reported the shortcomings of his brother, Aaron, of his sister Miriam, of his nephews Nadab and Abihu, and of his people, as well as his own mistakes. (Exodus 14:11, 12; 32:1-6; Leviticus 10:1, 2; Numbers 12:1-3; 20:9-12; 27:12-14) The serious mistakes of King David were not covered over but were committed to writing—and *that while David was still ruling as king*. (2 Samuel, chapters 11 and 24) Matthew, writer of the book bearing his name, tells how the apostles (of which he was one) disputed over their personal importance and

how they abandoned Jesus on the night of his arrest. (Matthew 20:20-24; 26:56) The writers of the letters of the Christian Greek Scriptures freely acknowledged the problems, including sexual immorality and dissensions, in some of the early Christian congregations. And they did not mince words in addressing those problems.—1 Corinthians 1:10-13; 5:1-13.

Such frank, open reporting indicates a sincere concern for truth. Since the Bible writers were willing to report unfavorable information about their loved ones, their people, and even themselves, is there not good reason to trust their writings?

Accurate in Details

In court trials the credibility of a witness' testimony can often be determined on the basis of minor facts. Agreement on minor details may stamp the testimony as accurate and honest, whereas serious discrepancies can expose it as a fabrication. On the other hand, an overly tidy account—one in which every last detail is neatly arranged—may also betray a false testimony.

How does the “testimony” of the Bible writers measure up in this regard? The Bible penmen displayed remarkable consistency. There is close agreement about even minute details. However, the harmony is not carefully arranged, arousing suspicions of collusion. There is an obvious lack of design in the coincidences, the writers often agreeing unintentionally. Consider some examples.

The Bible writer Matthew wrote: “And Jesus, on coming into Peter's house, saw his *mother-in-law* lying down and sick with fever.” (Matthew 8:14) Matthew here provided an interesting but nonessential detail: Peter was married. This minor fact is supported by Paul, who wrote: “Have I no right to take a Christian wife about with

Assyrian wall relief depicting siege of Lachish, mentioned at 2 Kings 18:13, 14

me, like the rest of the apostles and . . . Cephas?”* (1 Corinthians 9:5, *The New English Bible*) The context indicates that Paul was defending himself against unwarranted criticism. (1 Corinthians 9:1-4) Plainly, this small fact—Peter's being married—is not introduced by Paul to support the accuracy of Matthew's account but is conveyed incidentally.

All four of the Gospel writers—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—record that on the night of Jesus' arrest, one of his disciples drew a sword and struck a slave of the high priest, taking off the man's ear. Only the Gospel of John reports a seemingly unnecessary detail: “The name of the slave was Malchus.” (John 18:10, 26) Why does John alone give the man's name? A few verses later the account provides a minor fact not stated anywhere else: John “was known to the high priest.” He was also known to the high priest's household; the servants were acquainted with him, and he with them. (John 18:15, 16) It was only natural, then, that John mention the injured man's name,

* “Cephas” is the Semitic equivalent of “Peter.”—John 1:42.

whereas the other Gospel writers, to whom the man was a stranger, do not.

At times, detailed explanations are omitted from one account but are provided elsewhere by statements made in passing. For instance, Matthew's account of the trial of Jesus before the Jewish Sanhedrin says that some people present "slapped him in the face, saying: '*Prophesy* to us, you Christ. Who is it that struck you?'" (Matthew 26: 67, 68) Why would they ask Jesus to "prophesy" who had struck him, when the striker was standing there in front of him? Matthew does not explain. But two of the other Gospel writers supply the missing detail: Jesus' persecutors *covered his face* before he was slapped. (Mark 14:65; Luke 22:64) Matthew presents his material without concern as to whether every last detail was supplied.

The Gospel of John tells of an occasion when a large crowd gathered to hear Jesus teach. According to the record, when Jesus observed the crowd, "he said to *Philip*: 'Where shall we buy loaves for these to eat?'" (John 6:5) Of all the disciples present, why did Jesus ask Philip where they could buy some bread? The writer does not say. In the parallel account, though, Luke reports that the incident took place near Bethsaida, a city on the north shores of the Sea of

Galilee, and earlier in John's Gospel it says that "Philip was from Bethsaida." (John 1: 44; Luke 9:10) So Jesus logically asked a person whose hometown was nearby. The agreement between the details is remarkable, yet clearly unwitting.

In some cases the omission of certain details only adds to the credibility of the Bible writer. For example, the writer of 1 Kings tells of a severe drought in Israel. It was so severe that the king could not find enough water and grass to keep his horses and mules alive. (1 Kings 17:7; 18:5) Yet, the same account reports that the prophet Elijah ordered enough water to be brought to him on Mount Carmel (for use in connection with a sacrifice) to fill a trench circumscribing an area of perhaps 10,000 square feet. (1 Kings 18:33-35) In the midst of the drought, where did all the water come from? The writer of 1 Kings did not trouble himself to explain. However, anyone living in Israel knew that Carmel was on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, as an incidental remark later in the narrative indicates. (1 Kings 18:43) Thus, seawater would have been readily available. If this otherwise detailed book were merely fiction masquerading as fact, why would its writer, who in that case would be a clever forger, have left such an apparent difficulty in the text?

So can the Bible be trusted? Archaeologists have dug up enough artifacts to confirm that the Bible refers to real people, real places, and real events. Even more compelling, however, is the evidence found within the Bible itself. Candid writers spared no one—not even themselves—in recording the hard facts. The internal consistency of the writings, including the coincidences without design, gives the "testimony" the clear ring of truth. With such "sure marks of authenticity," the Bible is, indeed, a book you can trust.

DOES THIS BOOK AGREE WITH SCIENCE?

Religion has not always viewed science as its friend. In previous centuries some theologians resisted scientific discoveries when they felt that these endangered their interpretation of the Bible. But is science really the Bible's enemy?

IF THE Bible writers had endorsed the most widely held scientific views of their day, the result would be a book of glaring scientific inaccuracies. Yet the writers did not promote such unscientific misconceptions. On the contrary, they penned a number of statements that not only are scientifically sound but also directly contradicted the accepted opinions of the day.

What Is the Shape of the Earth?

That question has intrigued humans for thousands of years. The general view in ancient times was that the earth was flat. The Babylonians, for example, believed that the universe was a box or a chamber with the earth as its floor. Vedic priests of India imagined that the earth was flat and that only one side of it was inhabited. A primitive tribe in Asia pictured the earth as a huge tea tray.

As early as the sixth century B.C.E., Greek philosopher Pythagoras theorized that since the moon and the sun are spherical, the earth must also be a sphere. Aristotle (fourth century B.C.E.) later agreed, explaining that the sphericity of the earth is proved by lunar eclipses. The earth's shadow on the moon is curved.

*Thousands of years before
humans saw the earth
as a globe from space,
the Bible referred to "the
circle of the earth"*

However, the notion of a flat earth (with only its upper side inhabited) did not disappear completely. Some could not accept the logical implication of a round earth—the concept of antipodes.* Lactantius, Christian apologist of the fourth century C.E., ridiculed the very idea. He reasoned: "Is there any one so senseless as to believe that there are men whose footsteps are higher than their heads? . . . that the crops and trees grow downwards? that

the rains, and snow, and hail fall upwards?"²

The concept of antipodes posed a dilemma for a few theologians. Certain theories held that if there were antipodeans, they could have no possible connection with known humans either because the sea was too wide to navigate or because an impassable torrid zone surrounded the equator. So where could any antipodeans have come from? Perplexed, some theologians preferred to believe that there could be no antipodeans, or even, as Lactantius argued,

* "Antipodes . . . are two places that are exactly opposite each other on the globe. A straight line between them would pass through the center of the earth. The word *antipodes* means *foot to foot* in Greek. Two persons standing at antipodes would be closest together at the soles of their feet."¹—*The World Book Encyclopedia*.

that the earth could not be a sphere in the first place!

Nonetheless, the concept of a spherical earth prevailed, and eventually it was widely accepted. Only with the dawn of the space age in the 20th century, however, has it been possible for humans to travel far enough into space to verify by direct observation that the earth is a globe.*

And where did the Bible stand on this issue? In the eighth century B.C.E., when the prevailing view was that the earth was flat, centuries before Greek philosophers theorized that the earth likely was spherical, and thousands of years before humans saw the earth as a globe from space, the Hebrew prophet Isaiah stated with remarkable simplicity: "There is One who is dwelling above the *circle* of the earth." (Isaiah 40: 22) The Hebrew word *chugh*, here translated "circle," may also be rendered "sphere."³ Other Bible translations read, "the globe of the earth" (*Douay Version*) and "the round earth."—*Moffatt*.[#]

The Bible writer Isaiah avoided the common myths about the earth. Instead, he penned a statement that was not threatened by the advances of scientific discovery.

What Holds Up the Earth?

In ancient times, humans were perplexed by other questions about the cosmos: What is the earth resting on? What holds up the sun, the moon, and the stars? They had no knowledge of the law of universal gravitation, formulated by Isaac Newton and published in 1687. The idea that heavenly bodies are, in effect, suspended in empty space upon nothing was unknown to them. Thus, their explanations often suggested that tan-

gible objects or substances held the earth and other heavenly bodies aloft.

For example, one ancient theory, perhaps originated by people who lived on an island, was that the earth was surrounded by water and that it *floated* in these waters. The Hindus conceived that the earth had several foundations, one on top of the other. It rested on four elephants, the elephants stood on an enormous tortoise, the tortoise stood on an immense serpent, and the coiled serpent floated on universal waters. Empedocles, a Greek philosopher of the fifth century B.C.E., believed that the earth rested upon a whirlwind and that this whirlwind was the cause of the motion of the heavenly bodies.

Among the most influential views were those of Aristotle. Although he theorized that the earth is a sphere, he denied that it could ever hang in empty space. In his treatise *On the Heavens*, when refuting the notion that the earth rests on water, he said: "It is not the nature of water, any more than of earth, to stay in mid-air: it must have something to rest upon."⁴ So, what does the earth "rest upon"? Aristotle taught that the sun, the moon, and the stars were attached to the surface of solid, transparent spheres. Sphere lay nestled within sphere, with the earth—immobile—at the center. As the spheres revolved within one another, the objects on them—the sun, the moon, and the planets—moved across the sky.

Aristotle's explanation seemed logical. If the heavenly bodies were not firmly attached to something, how else could they stay aloft? The views of the revered Aristotle were accepted as fact for some 2,000 years. According to *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, in the 16th and 17th centuries his teachings "ascended to the status of religious dogma" in the eyes of the church.⁵

* Technically speaking, the earth is an oblate spheroid; it is slightly flattened at the poles.

[#] Additionally, only a spherical object appears as a circle from every angle of view. A flat disk would more often appear as an ellipse, not a circle.

With the invention of the telescope, astronomers began to question Aristotle's theory. Still, the answer eluded them until Sir Isaac Newton explained that the planets are suspended in empty space, held in their orbits by an invisible force—gravity. It seemed incredible, and some of Newton's colleagues found it hard to believe that space could be a void, largely empty of substance.*⁶

What does the Bible have to say on this question? Nearly 3,500 years ago, the Bible stated with extraordinary clarity that the earth is hanging “upon nothing.” (Job 26:7) In the original Hebrew, the word for “nothing” (*beli-mah*) used here literally means “without anything.”⁷ The *Contemporary English Version* uses the expression, “on empty space.”

A planet hanging “on empty space” was not at all how most people in those days pictured the earth. Yet, far ahead of his time, the Bible writer recorded a statement that is scientifically sound.

The Bible and Medical Science —Do They Agree?

Modern medical science has taught us much about the spread and prevention of disease. Medical advances in the 19th century led to the introduction into medical practice of antiseptics—cleanliness to reduce infections. The result was dramatic. There was a significant reduction in infections and premature deaths.

Ancient physicians, however, did not fully understand how disease spreads, nor did they realize the importance of sanitation in preventing sickness. Little wonder that many of their medical practices would seem barbaric by modern standards.

* A leading view in Newton's day was that the universe was filled with fluid—a cosmic “soup”—and that whirlpools in the fluid made the planets revolve.

*Sir Isaac Newton explained that
the planets are held in their orbits by gravity*

One of the oldest medical texts available is the Ebers Papyrus, a compilation of Egyptian medical knowledge, dating from about 1550 B.C.E. This scroll contains some 700 remedies for various afflictions “ranging from crocodile bite to toenail pain.”⁸ States *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*: “The medical knowledge of these physicians was purely empirical, largely magical and wholly unscientific.”⁹ Most of the remedies were merely ineffective, but some of them were extremely dangerous. For the treatment of a wound, one of the prescriptions recommended applying a mixture made of human excrement combined with other substances.¹⁰

This text of Egyptian medical remedies was written at about the same time as the first books of the Bible, which included the Mosaic Law. Moses, who was born in 1593 B.C.E., grew up in Egypt. (Exodus 2:1-10) As a member of Pharaoh's household, he was “instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians.” (Acts 7:22) He was familiar with “the physicians” of Egypt. (Genesis 50:1-3) Did their ineffective or dangerous medical practices influence his writings?

No. On the contrary, the Mosaic Law included sanitary regulations that were far ahead of their time. For example, a law regarding military encampments required

burying excrement away from the camp. (Deuteronomy 23:13) This was a profoundly advanced preventive measure. It helped keep water free from contamination and provided protection from fly-borne shigellosis and other diarrheal illnesses that still claim millions of lives each year in lands where sanitary conditions are deplorable.

The Mosaic Law contained other sanitary regulations that safeguarded Israel against the spread of infectious diseases. A person who had or was suspected of having a communicable disease was quarantined. (Leviticus 13:1-5) Garments or vessels that came in contact with an animal that had died of itself (perhaps from disease) were to be either washed before reuse or destroyed. (Leviticus 11:27, 28, 32, 33) Any person who touched a corpse was considered unclean and had to undergo a cleansing procedure that included washing his garments and bathing. During the seven-day period of uncleanness, he was to avoid physical contact with others.—Numbers 19:1-13.

This sanitary code reveals wisdom not shared by the physicians of surrounding nations at the time. Thousands of years before medical science learned about the ways in which disease spreads, the Bible prescribed reasonable preventive measures as safeguards against disease. Not surprisingly, Moses could speak of Israelites in general in his day as living to 70 or 80 years of age.* —Psalm 90:10.

You may acknowledge that the foregoing Biblical statements are scientifically accurate. But there are other statements in the

* In 1900, life expectancy in many European countries and in the United States was less than 50. Since then, it has increased dramatically not only on account of medical progress in controlling disease but also because of better sanitation and living conditions.

Bible that cannot be proved scientifically. Does that necessarily put the Bible at odds with science?

Accepting the Unprovable

A statement that is unprovable is not necessarily untrue. Scientific proof is limited by man's ability to discover sufficient evidence and to interpret data correctly. But some truths are unprovable because no evidence has been preserved, the evidence is obscure or undiscovered, or scientific capabilities and expertise are insufficient to arrive at an uncontested conclusion. Might this be the case with certain Biblical statements for which independent physical evidence is lacking?

For example, the Bible's references to an invisible realm inhabited by spirit persons cannot be proved—or disproved—scientifically. The same can be said of miraculous events mentioned in the Bible. Not enough clear geologic evidence for the global Flood of Noah's day is available to satisfy some people. (Genesis, chapter 7) Must we conclude that it did not happen? Historical events can be obscured by time and change. So is it not possible that thousands of years of geologic activity has effaced much of the evidence for the Flood?

Granted, the Bible contains statements that cannot be proved or disproved by available physical evidence. But should that surprise us? The Bible is not a science textbook. It is, however, a book of truth. We have already considered strong evidence that its writers were men of integrity and honesty. And when they touch on matters related to science, their words are accurate and completely free from ancient "scientific" theories that turned out to be mere myths. Science is thus no enemy of the Bible. There is every reason to weigh what the Bible says with an open mind.

*A statement
that is
unprovable
is not
necessarily
untrue*

A PRACTICAL BOOK FOR MODERN LIVING

*Books offering advice are very popular in today's world.
But they tend to become outdated and are soon revised or replaced.
What about the Bible? It was completed nearly 2,000 years ago. Yet, its
original message has never been improved upon or updated.
Could such a book possibly contain practical guidance for our day?*

SOME say no. "Nobody would advocate the use of a 1924 edition chemistry text-[book] for use in a modern chemistry class," wrote Dr. Eli S. Chesen, explaining why he felt that the Bible is outdated.¹ Seemingly, this argument makes sense. After all, man has learned much about mental health and human behavior since the Bible was written. So how could such an ancient book possibly be relevant for modern living?

Timeless Principles

While it is true that times have changed, basic human needs have remained the same. People throughout history have had a need for love and affection. They have wanted to be happy and to lead meaningful lives. They have needed advice on how to cope with economic pressures, how to make a success of marriage, and how to instill good moral and ethical values in their children. The Bible contains advice that addresses those basic needs.—Ecclesiastes 3:12, 13; Romans 12:10; Colossians 3:18-21; 1 Timothy 6:6-10.

The Bible's counsel reflects a keen awareness of human nature. Consider some examples of its specific, timeless principles that are practical for modern living.

Practical Guidance for Marriage

The family, says the *UN Chronicle*, "is the oldest and most basic unit of human or-

ganization; the most crucial link between generations." This "crucial link," however, is coming apart at an alarming rate. "In today's world," notes the *Chronicle*, "many families face daunting challenges that threaten their ability to function and, indeed, to survive."² What advice does the Bible offer to help the family unit survive?

To begin with, the Bible has much to say about how husbands and wives should treat each other. Concerning husbands, for example, it says: "Husbands ought to be loving their wives *as their own bodies*. He who loves his wife loves himself, for no man ever hated his own flesh; but he feeds and cherishes it." (Ephesians 5:28, 29) A wife was advised to "have *deep respect* for her husband."—Ephesians 5:33.

Consider the implications of applying such Bible counsel. A husband who loves his wife 'as his own body' is not hateful or brutal toward her. He does not strike her physically, nor does he abuse her verbally or emotionally. Instead, he accords her the same esteem and consideration he shows himself. (1 Peter 3:7) His wife thus feels loved and secure in her marriage. He thereby provides his children with a good example of how women should be treated. On the other hand, a wife who has "deep respect" for her husband does not strip him of his dignity by

constantly criticizing him or belittling him. Because she respects him, he feels trusted, accepted, and appreciated.

Is such advice practical in this modern world? It is interesting that those who make a career of studying families today have come to similar conclusions. An administrator of a family counseling program noted: "The healthiest families I know are ones in which the mother and father have a strong, loving relationship between themselves. . . . This strong primary relationship seems to breed security in the children."³

Over the years, the Bible's counsel on marriage has proved far more reliable than the advice of countless well-intentioned family counselors. After all, it was not too long ago that many experts were advocating divorce as a quick and easy solution to an unpleasant marriage. Today, many of them

urge people to make their marriage last if at all possible. But this change has come only after much damage was done.

In contrast, the Bible gives reliable, balanced counsel on the subject of marriage. It acknowledges that some extreme circumstances make divorce permissible. (Matthew 19:9) At the same time, it condemns frivolous divorce. (Malachi 2:14-16) It also condemns marital infidelity. (Hebrews 13:4) Marriage, it says, involves commitment: "That is why a man will leave his father and his mother and he must *stick* to his wife and they must become one flesh."^{*}—Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5, 6.

^{*} The Hebrew word *da-vaq'*, here translated "stick," "carries the sense of clinging to someone in affection and loyalty."⁴ In Greek, the word rendered "will stick" at Matthew 19:5 is related to the word meaning "to glue," "to cement," "to join together tightly."⁵

CHARACTERISTICS OF HEALTHY FAMILIES

Several years ago an educator and family specialist conducted an extensive survey in which more than 500 professionals who work with families were asked to comment on the traits they observed in "healthy" families. Interestingly, among the most common traits listed were things long ago recommended by the Bible.

Good communication practices topped the list, including effective methods of reconciling differences. A common policy found in healthy families is that "nobody goes to bed angry at another," noted the author of the survey.⁶ Yet, over 1,900 years ago, the Bible advised: "Be wrathful, and yet do not sin; let the sun not set with you in a provoked state." (Ephesians 4:26) In Bible times the days were reckoned from sundown to sundown. So, long before mod-

ern experts studied families, the Bible wisely advised: Settle divisive matters quickly—before the day ends and another begins.

Healthy families "don't bring up potentially explosive subjects right before they go out or before bedtime," the author found. "Over and over I heard the phrase 'the right time.'"⁷ Such families unwittingly echoed the Bible proverb recorded over 2,700 years ago: "As apples of gold in silver carvings is a word spoken *at the right time for it*." (Proverbs 15:23; 25:11) This simile may allude to golden ornaments in the shape of apples placed on engraved silver trays—prized and beautiful possessions in Bible times. It conveys the beauty and value of words uttered at the appropriate time. In stressful circumstances, the right words said at the right time are priceless.—Proverbs 10:19.

The Bible's advice on marriage is as relevant today as it was when the Bible was written. When husband and wife treat each other with love and respect and view marriage as an exclusive relationship, the marriage is more likely to survive—and with it the family.

Practical Guidance for Parents

Several decades ago many parents—spurred on by “innovative ideas” on child training—thought it was “forbidden to forbid.”⁸ Setting limits for children, they feared, would cause trauma and frustration. Well-meaning counselors on child rearing were insisting that parents refrain from anything more than the mildest correction of their children. But many such experts are now reconsidering the role of discipline, and concerned parents are searching for some clarity on the subject.

All along, however, the Bible has offered clear, reasonable counsel on child rearing. Nearly 2,000 years ago, it said: “Fathers, do not be irritating your children, but go on bringing them up in the discipline and mental-regulating of Jehovah.” (Ephesians 6:4) The Greek noun translated “discipline” means “upbringing, training, instruction.”⁹ The Bible says that such discipline, or instruction, is evidence of parental love. (Proverbs 13:24) Children thrive with clear-cut moral guidelines and a developed sense of right and wrong. Discipline tells them that their parents care about them and about the kind of person they are becoming.

But parental authority—“the rod of discipline”—should *never be abusive*. * (Proverbs

* In Bible times, the word “rod” (Hebrew, *she’vet*) meant a “stick” or a “staff,” such as that used by a shepherd.¹⁰ In this context the rod of authority suggests loving guidance, not harsh brutality.—Compare Psalm 23:4.

22:15; 29:15) The Bible cautions parents: “Don’t over-correct your children, or you will take all the heart out of them.” (Colossians 3:21, *Phillips*) It also acknowledges that physical punishment is usually not the most effective teaching method. Proverbs 17:10 says: “A rebuke works deeper in one having understanding than striking a stupid one a hundred times.” Besides, the Bible recommends *preventive* discipline. At Deuteronomy 11:19 parents are urged to take advantage of casual moments to instill moral values in their children.—See also Deuteronomy 6:6, 7.

The Bible’s timeless advice to parents is clear. Children need consistent and loving discipline. Practical experience shows that such counsel really works.*

*The Bible
offers clear,
reasonable
counsel on
family life*

Overcoming the Barriers That Divide People

People today are divided by racial, national, and ethnic barriers. Such artificial walls have contributed to the slaughter of innocent humans in wars the world over. If history is any indication, the prospect of men and women of different races and nations viewing and treating one another as equals is indeed bleak. “The solution,” says an African statesman, “is in our hearts.”¹¹ But changing human hearts is not easy. Consider, though, how the Bible’s message appeals to the heart and fosters attitudes of equality.

The Bible’s teaching that God “made out of one man every nation of men” precludes any idea of racial superiority. (Acts 17:26) It shows that there is really only one race

* See the chapters “Train Your Child From Infancy,” “Help Your Teenager to Thrive,” “Is There a Rebel in the House?”, and “Protect Your Family From Destructive Influences” in the book *The Secret of Family Happiness*, published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.

—the *human race*. The Bible further encourages us to “become imitators of God,” of whom it says: “[He] is not partial, but in every nation the man that fears him and works righteousness is acceptable to him.” (Ephesians 5:1; Acts 10:34, 35) To those who take the Bible seriously and who truly seek to live by its teachings, this knowledge has a unifying effect. It works on the deepest level, in the human heart, dissolving the man-made barriers that divide people. Consider an example.

Jehovah’s Witnesses were among the first concentration camp inmates

When Hitler waged war throughout Europe, there was one group of Christians—Jehovah’s Witnesses—who steadfastly refused to join in the slaughter of innocent humans. They would “not lift up sword” against their fellowman. They took this stand because of their desire to please God. (Isaiah 2:3, 4; Micah 4:3, 5) They truly believed what the Bible teaches—that no nation or race is better than another. (Galatians 3:28) Because of their peace-loving stand, Jehovah’s Witnesses were among the first inmates in the concentration camps.—Romans 12:18.

But not all who claimed to follow the Bible took such a stand. Shortly after World War II, Martin Niemöller, a German Protestant clergyman, wrote: “Whoever wants to blame God for [wars] does not know, or does not want to know, God’s Word. . . . Christian churches have, throughout the ages, repeatedly given themselves to blessing wars, troops, and weapons and . . . prayed in a very unchristian way for the destruction of their enemies at war. All this is our fault and the fault of our fathers, but by no means is God to blame. And we Chris-

tians of today stand ashamed before a so-called sect like the Earnest Bible Students [Jehovah’s Witnesses], who by the hundreds and thousands went into concentration camps and [even] died because they declined service in war and refused to fire on humans.”¹²

To this day, Jehovah’s Witnesses are well-known for their brotherhood, which unites Arabs and Jews, Croats and Serbs, Hutu and Tutsi. However, the Witnesses readily acknowledge that such unity is possible, not because they are better than

others, but because they are motivated by the power of the Bible’s message.—1 Thessalonians 2:13.

Practical Guidance That Promotes Good Mental Health

A person’s physical health is often affected by the state of his mental and emotional health. For instance, scientific studies have established the harmful effects of anger. “Most of the available evidence suggests that hostile people are at higher risk for cardiovascular disease (as well as other illnesses) for a variety of reasons, including reduced social support, increased biologic reactivity when angered, and increased indulgence in risky health behaviors,” say Dr. Redford Williams, Director of Behavioral Research at Duke University Medical Center, and his wife, Virginia Williams, in their book *Anger Kills*.¹³

Thousands of years before such scientific studies, the Bible, in simple but clear terms, made a connection between our emotional state and our physical health: “A calm heart is the life of the fleshly

organism, but jealousy is rottenness to the bones.” (Proverbs 14:30; 17:22) Wisely, the Bible counseled: “Let anger alone and leave rage,” and “Do not hurry yourself in your spirit to become offended [or “angry,” *King James Version*].”—Psalm 37:8; Ecclesiastes 7:9.

The Bible also contains sensible advice for managing anger. For example, Proverbs 19:11 says: “The insight of a man certainly slows down his anger, and it is beauty on his part to pass over transgression.” The Hebrew word for “insight” is derived from a verb that draws attention to a “knowledge of the reason” for something.¹⁴ The wise advice is: “Think before you act.” Endeavoring to grasp the underlying reasons why others talk or act in a certain way can help a person to be more tolerant—and less prone to anger.—Proverbs 14:29.

Another piece of practical advice is found at Colossians 3:13, which says: “Continue putting up with one another and forgiving one another freely.” Minor irritations

are a part of life. The expression “continue putting up with” suggests tolerating the things we dislike in others. “Forgive” means to let go of resentment. At times it is wise to let go of bitter feelings instead of nursing them; harboring the anger will only add to our burden.—See box “Practical Guidance for Human Relationships.”

Today, there are many sources of counsel and guidance. But the Bible is truly unique. Its counsel is not mere theory, nor does its advice ever work to our harm. Instead, its wisdom has proved “very trustworthy.” (Psalm 93:5) Furthermore, the Bible’s counsel is timeless. Although it was completed nearly 2,000 years ago, its words are still applicable. And they apply with equal effect regardless of the color of our skin or the country in which we live. The Bible’s words also have power—the power to change people for the better. (Hebrews 4:12) Reading that book and applying its principles can thus enhance the quality of your life.

PRACTICAL GUIDANCE FOR HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

“Be agitated, but do not sin. Have your say in your heart, upon your bed, and keep silent.” (Psalm 4:4) In most cases involving minor offenses, it may be wise to restrain your words, thus avoiding an emotional confrontation.

“There exists the one speaking thoughtlessly as with the stabs of a sword, but the tongue of the wise ones is a healing.” (Proverbs 12:18) Think before you speak. Thoughtless words can wound others and kill friendships.

“An answer, when mild, turns away rage, but a word causing pain makes anger to come up.” (Proverbs 15:1) It takes

self-control to respond with mildness, but such a course often smooths out problems and promotes peaceful relations.

“The beginning of contention is as one letting out waters; so before the quarrel has burst forth, take your leave.” (Proverbs 17:14) It is wise to remove yourself from a volatile situation before you lose your temper.

“Do not be quick to show resentment; for resentment is nursed by fools.” (Ecclesiastes 7:9, The New English Bible) Emotions often precede actions. The person who is quick to take offense is foolish, for his course may lead to rash words or actions.

A BOOK OF PROPHECY

People are interested in the future. They search for reliable predictions concerning many subjects, from weather forecasts to economic indicators. When they act on such forecasts, however, they are often disappointed. The Bible contains many predictions, or prophecies. How accurate are such prophecies? Are they history written in advance? Or are they history masquerading as prophecy?

THE Roman statesman Cato (234-149 B.C.E.) reportedly said: "I wonder that a soothsayer doesn't laugh when he sees another soothsayer."¹ Indeed, to this day many people are skeptical of fortune-tellers, astrologers, and other soothsayers. Often their predictions are couched in vague terms and are subject to a wide variety of interpretations.

What, though, about the Bible's prophecies? Is there reason for skepticism? Or is there a basis for confidence?

Not Just Educated Guesses

Knowledgeable people may try to use observable trends to make accurate speculations regarding the future, but they are never right all the time. The book *Future Shock* notes: "Every society faces not merely a succession of *probable* futures, but an array of *possible* futures, and a conflict over *preferable* futures." It adds: "Of course, no one can 'know' the future in any absolute sense. We can only systematize and deepen our assumptions and attempt to assign probabilities to them."²

But the Bible writers did not simply "assign probabilities" to "assumptions" about the future. Nor can their predictions be dismissed as obscure statements open to a wide variety of interpretations. On the contrary, many of their prophecies were uttered with extraordinary clarity and were unusually

specific, oftentimes predicting just the opposite of what might be expected. Take as an example what the Bible said in advance about the ancient city of Babylon.

To Be 'Swept With the Broom of Annihilation'

Ancient Babylon became "the jewel of kingdoms." (Isaiah 13:19, *The New American Bible*) This sprawling city was strategically located on the trade route from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean Sea, serving as a commercial depot for both land and sea trade between the East and the West.

By the seventh century B.C.E., Babylon was the seemingly impregnable capital of the Babylonian Empire. The city straddled the Euphrates River, and the river's waters were used to form a broad, deep moat and a network of canals. In addition, the city was protected by a massive system of double walls, buttressed by numerous defense towers. Little wonder that its inhabitants felt secure.

Nevertheless, in the eighth century B.C.E., before Babylon rose to the height of its glory, the prophet Isaiah foretold that Babylon would be 'swept with the broom of annihilation.' (Isaiah 13:19; 14:22, 23) Isaiah also described the very manner in which Babylon would fall. The invaders would 'dry up' its rivers—the source of its moatlike defense—making the city

vulnerable. Isaiah even supplied the name of the conqueror—"Cyrus," a great Persian king, "before whom gates shall be opened and no doors be shut."—Isaiah 44:27–45:2, *The New English Bible*.

These were bold predictions. But did they come true? History answers.

‘Without a Battle’

Two centuries after Isaiah recorded his prophecy, on the night of October 5, 539 B.C.E., the armies of Medo-Persia under the command of Cyrus the Great were encamped near Babylon. But the Babylonians were confident. According to the Greek historian Herodotus (fifth century B.C.E.), they had enough provisions stored up to last for years.³ They also had the Euphrates River and Babylon’s mighty walls to protect them. Nonetheless, on that very night, according to the Nabonidus Chronicle, “the army of Cyrus entered Babylon without battle.”⁴ How was that possible?

Herodotus explains that inside the city, the people “were dancing and making merry at a festival.”⁵ Outside, however, Cyrus had diverted the waters of the Euphrates. As the water level sank, his army sloshed along the riverbed, with water up to their thighs. They marched past the towering walls and entered through what Herodotus called “the gates that opened on the river,” gates carelessly left open.⁶ (Compare Daniel 5:1–4; Jeremiah 50:24; 51:31, 32.) Other historians, including Xenophon (c. 431–c. 352 B.C.E.), as well as cuneiform tablets found by archaeologists, confirm the sudden fall of Babylon to Cyrus.⁷

Isaiah’s prophecy about Babylon was thus fulfilled. Or was it? Is it possible that this was not a prediction but was actually written after the fact? Really, the same could be asked about other Bible prophecies.

History Masquerading as Prophecy?

If the Bible prophets—including Isaiah—merely rewrote history to look like prophecy, then these men were nothing more than clever frauds. But what would be their motive for such trickery? True prophets readily made it known that they could not be bribed. (1 Samuel 12:3; Daniel 5:17) And we have already considered compelling evidence that the Bible writers (many of whom were prophets) were trustworthy men who were willing to reveal even their own embarrassing errors. It seems unlikely that men of this sort would be inclined to commit elaborate frauds, disguising history as prophecy.

There is something else to consider. Many Bible prophecies contained scathing denunciations of the prophets’ own people, which included the priests and rulers. Isaiah, for example, decried the deplorable moral condition of the Israelites—both leaders and people—in his day. (Isaiah 1:2–10) Other prophets forcefully exposed the sins of the priests. (Zephaniah 3:4; Malachi 2:1–9) It is difficult to conceive why they would fabricate prophecies that contained the sharpest censures imaginable against their own people and why the priests would have cooperated in such a ruse.

In addition, how could the prophets—if they were nothing more than impostors—have pulled off such forgery? Literacy was encouraged in Israel. From an early age, children were taught how to read and write. (Deuteronomy 6:6–9) Private reading of the Scriptures was urged. (Psalm 1:2) There was a *public* reading of the Scriptures in the synagogues on the weekly Sabbath. (Acts 15:21) It seems improbable that an entire literate nation, well versed in the Scriptures, could have been deceived by such a hoax.

*Were the
Bible writers
accurate
prophets or
clever
frauds?*

Besides, there is more to Isaiah's prophecy of Babylon's fall. Included in it is a detail that simply could not have been written after the fulfillment.

"She Will Never Be Inhabited"

What would become of Babylon *after* its fall? Isaiah foretold: "She will never be inhabited, nor will she reside for generation after generation. And there the Arab will not pitch his tent, and no shepherds will let their flocks lie down there." (Isaiah 13:20) It may have seemed odd, to say the least, to predict that such a favorably situated city would become permanently uninhabited. Could Isaiah's words have been written after he had observed a desolate Babylon?

Following the takeover by Cyrus, an inhabited Babylon—albeit an inferior one—continued for centuries. Recall that the Dead Sea Scrolls include a copy of the complete book of Isaiah that is dated to the second century B.C.E. About the time that that

scroll was being copied, the Parthians took control of Babylon. In the first century C.E., there was a settlement of Jews in Babylon, and the Bible writer Peter visited there. (1 Peter 5:13) By that time, the Dead Sea Scroll of Isaiah had been in existence for the better part of two centuries. So, as of the first century C.E., Babylon still was not completely desolate, yet Isaiah's book had been finished long before then.*

*There is solid evidence that the books of the Hebrew Scriptures—including Isaiah—were written long before the first century C.E. The historian Josephus (first century C.E.) indicated that the canon of the Hebrew Scriptures had been fixed long before his day.⁸ In addition, the Greek *Septuagint*, a translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek, was begun in the third century B.C.E. and was completed by the second century B.C.E.

As foretold, Babylon eventually became mere "piles of stones." (Jeremiah 51:37) According to the Hebrew scholar Jerome (fourth century C.E.), by his day Babylon was a hunting ground in which "beasts of every type" roamed.⁹ Babylon remains desolate to this day.

Isaiah never lived to see Babylon become uninhabited. But the ruins of that once powerful city, about 50 miles south of Baghdad, in modern Iraq, bear silent testimony to the fulfillment of his words: "She will never be inhabited." Any restoration of Babylon as a tourist attraction might lure visitors, but Babylon's "progeny and posterity"

are gone forever.—Isaiah 13:20; 14:22, 23.

The prophet Isaiah thus did not utter vague predictions that could be made to fit just any future happening. Neither did he rewrite history to make it appear as prophecy. Think about it: Why would an impostor risk "prophesying" something over which he would have absolutely no

control—that mighty Babylon would never again be inhabited?

This prophecy about Babylon's downfall is but one example from the Bible.* Many people see in the fulfillment of its prophecies an indication that the Bible must be from a source higher than man. Perhaps you would agree that, at the very least, this book of prophecy is worth examining. One thing is certain: There is a vast difference between the hazy or sensational predictions of modern-day soothsayers and the clear, sober, and specific prophecies of the Bible.

*For a further discussion of Bible prophecies and the historical facts documenting their fulfillment, please see the book *The Bible—God's Word or Man's?*, published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., pages 117-33.

A BOOK FOR YOU?

“To the making of many books there is no end,” stated Solomon some 3,000 years ago. (Ecclesiastes 12:12) That observation is as appropriate today as ever.

In addition to the standard classics, thousands of new books are printed every year. With so many books to choose from, why should you read the Bible?

MANY people read books either to be entertained or to be informed, or perhaps for both reasons. The same can be true of reading the Bible. It can make for uplifting, even entertaining reading. But the Bible is more than that. It is a unique source of knowledge.—Ecclesiastes 12:9, 10.

The Bible answers questions that humans have long pondered—questions about our past, our present, and our future. Many wonder: Where did we come from? What is the purpose of life? How can we find happiness in life? Will there always be life on earth? What does the future hold for us?

The collective force of all the evidence presented here establishes clearly that the Bible is accurate and authentic. We have already considered how its practical counsel can help us to live meaningful and happy lives today. Since its answers about the present are satisfying, surely its answers about the past and its prophecies about the future are deserving of careful attention.

How to Get the Most Benefit

Many people have started to read the Bible only to stop when they found parts of it difficult to understand. If that has been your experience, there are some things that may be of help.

Select a reliable translation in modern-day language, such as the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*.^{*} Some

^{*} Published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.

people start by reading the Gospel accounts of the life of Jesus, whose wise teachings, such as those found in the Sermon on the Mount, reflect a keen awareness of human nature and outline how to improve our lot in life.—See Matthew chapters 5 to 7.

In addition to reading through the Bible, a topical method of study can be quite informative. This involves analyzing what the Bible says on a particular subject. You may be surprised to learn what the Bible really says about such topics as soul, heaven, earth, life, and death, as well as God’s Kingdom—what it is and what it will accomplish.^{*} Jehovah’s Witnesses have a program for topical Bible study, which is provided free of charge. You may inquire about it by writing to the publishers, using the appropriate address listed on page 2.

After examining the evidence, many people have concluded that the Bible is from God, whom the Scriptures identify as “Jehovah.” (Psalm 83:18) You may not be convinced that the Bible is of divine origin. But why not examine it for yourself? We are confident that after a process of learning, meditating, and perhaps experiencing the practical value of its timeless wisdom for yourself, you will come to feel that the Bible is indeed a book for all people, and more—a book for you.

^{*} A book that has helped many in a topical study of the Bible is *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* published by Jehovah’s Witnesses.

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WHAT OTHER BOOK

- has influenced as much of the world's greatest art, literature, and music, while also having a profound impact on law?
- has survived thousands of years of recopying by human hand and yet has come down to us essentially as it was written?
- has inspired such unselfishness that some have been willing to suffer hardships and even risk death in order to translate it?
- has been translated into more than 2,100 languages, making it available to over 90 percent of the human family?
- mentions scientific truths not discovered until many centuries later?
- contains timeless principles that can help people of all racial, ethnic, and national backgrounds to improve their lot in life?
- contains unambiguous predictions that came true, as proved by historical facts?

Would it not be worth examining such a book?