

# How Do We Know That The Bible Is The Literal Truth?

*By Steve Gurko*

## I. Internal Proofs.

A. The Bible's authors intend to be taken literally. They use plain language and say they want us to believe them. Indeed, they say that believing them is the key to eternal life with God. Example: concerning the miracles of Jesus, the apostle John writes: "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name" (John 20:30-31). Example: concerning salvation, the apostle Paul writes: "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (Romans 10:9).

B. The Bible's authors back up their intention with the extraordinary power of their writing. The Bible is a masterpiece of literature, poetry, philosophy, psychology, religion, law, ethics, history, geography, and many another subject. The authors write with remarkable clarity, consistency, wisdom and effectiveness on every subject they address. Thus they establish their credibility: writers of their superb quality are worthy to be believed.

C. The natural and the supernatural are inseparably linked in the Bible. The writers describe ordinary and miraculous events in a single, integrated chronology, using the same matter-of-fact, objective style to describe events of both kinds. The miraculous events can't be segregated and disregarded without destroying the meaning. Example: the creation of Adam and Eve, followed by their expulsion from Eden due to their original sin, are the foundation of the Bible's teaching of mankind's total depravity and resulting need for the Savior, Jesus Christ. Thus the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis 1-3 can't be diluted or expunged without emasculating the whole Bible. Example: the descendents of Adam and Eve are described very exactly, generation after generation, with times of birth and death, until known historical figures such as the kings of Israel are reached. Nothing in the text suggests that the earlier figures are merely allegorical while only the later ones, verified by secular research, are real people.

D. The Bible's books link together with a unity, coherence and consistency which can only be from God. The themes begin in Genesis, then develop and expand in a gradual, orderly way, as though the Bible were written by one person. On the human level, though, its 66 books were written by some 40 different authors over some 1,500 years, under widely varying circumstances. Intricate scholarly cross-referencing systems reveal the finest details of common threads of meaning throughout the 66 books. Efforts to find internal inconsistencies have been repeatedly rebutted; the Bible has never been discredited.

E. The Bible speaks with amazing freshness to people today in their personal circumstances. The Bible is by far the most widely translated book, and also the greatest best-seller, in the history of the world. Though written thousands of years ago under completely different cultural conditions than those of today, the Bible applies today with wisdom-giving, life-changing power to individuals in all countries as they cope with the practical aspects of their relationships with God, other people, and themselves. The Bible's

transforming impact in individual lives is unique, and can only be from God.

## II. External Proofs.

### A. Fulfillments of Prophecy.

1. First coming of Christ. More than 300 specific Old Testament prophecies, all written hundreds of years before Christ's first coming, are naturally and harmoniously fulfilled in the circumstances of his birth, life, death and resurrection as recorded in the New Testament. Most of these fulfillments couldn't have been "faked" by Jesus, or claimed falsely by the writers of the New Testament. Examples: Psalm 22 and Zechariah 12:10 picture Christ's death by crucifixion, although this method of execution wasn't introduced by the Romans until long after these scriptures were written; Daniel 9:24-27 foretell that the time of Christ's death will be 483 years after the decree of the king of Persia for Jerusalem to be rebuilt (the 483 years end in about 31 A.D., which is widely accepted as the time of the crucifixion); Deuteronomy 32:21, II Samuel 22:44, Psalm 102:18 and Isaiah 52:13-15 and 53:1-3 predict the formation of Christ's church from the gentile nations after his own people, the Jews, reject him (an extraordinary paradox, hardly discoverable in advance by human reasoning); and Isaiah 53 (the whole chapter) sets forth many details and the main significance of Christ's death on the cross.

2. History of Israel. Major long-range prophecies concerning Israel run through the Old Testament, as follows: due to disobedience to the law of Moses, the Jews will be exiled from the promised land and scattered in small groups among the nations; while in exile, the Jews will be persecuted, massacred and made few in number; they'll be assimilated into the host societies when not threatened physically; they'll nonetheless survive as a distinct people with a national consciousness and a desire to return to the promised land; and they will return there and form themselves there as a nation once again, toward the end of history, as a prelude to the end-times events. Leviticus 26:33-39, 26:44-45, Deuteronomy 28:63-67, Psalm 137:5, Jeremiah 30:1-3, Ezekiel 36:16-24, the books of Esther and Daniel, and many other passages. The things described in these prophecies do not correspond to the history of any nation but Israel, yet all these things have happened to Israel since Biblical times, exactly as predicted.

3. History of the Church. The main prophecies are that the church (meaning all who believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior) will last throughout history despite all national, cultural, linguistic and other changes occurring in the world (Matthew 16:18); the church will be present in all parts of the world (Matthew 28:19-20, Mark 16:15, Acts 1:8, Revelation 5:9-10); but will always be only a minority of the human race (Matthew 7:13-14, 20:16, John 1:10-11, I John 3:1); and will be repeatedly persecuted (Romans 8:36, II Timothy 3:12). These prophecies have been fulfilled very completely.

4. History of peoples surrounding Israel. The Old Testament makes numerous predictions concerning the fate of nations, tribes and cities in the ancient world to which Israel belonged. These predictions have been fulfilled with uncanny precision, to the full extent provided for in God's timetable. Examples: the great city of Babylon will be inhabited by wild beasts instead of by people, and will become heaps of rubble (Isaiah 13:19-22, Jeremiah 50:24-26, 51:37) - both these things have been observed at the site of Babylon in modern

Iraq; Egypt will decline from international preeminence to a very lowly condition, but will still exist as a nation (Ezekiel 29:14-15) - this is exactly what has happened to Egypt; Thebes (Egypt's ancient capital, called No in the Bible) will be devastated, depopulated, and broken into fragments (Ezekiel 30:14-16) - the city's post-Old Testament history corresponds exactly to these three predictions, and today the city's ruins are parceled out among nine hamlets; Ashkelon (a Philistine city just north of the Gaza strip in modern Israel) will be depopulated except for shepherds and flocks, until Jews returning from exile dwell there (Zephaniah 2:4-7) - this is the city's post-Biblical history - the city is now inhabited by the Israelis, who rebuilt it.

5. Present world conditions. Numerous passages in the Bible (especially in Ezekiel, Daniel and the later epistles) predict that as the present age draws to a close, the situation will be as follows: an ingathered remnant of Israel will have formed a state in the promised land and will desire to rebuild the temple and resume there the religious ceremonies of the Mosaic law, but will be unable to do so because of substantial pressure from hostile forces; the nations of the world will be largely opposed to Israel, and a powerful northern country will be capable of forming a military coalition to invade Israel; knowledge and travel will be greatly on the rise; the gospel of Jesus Christ will be widely preached but rejected; and a vast religious apostasy will turn millions of people away from the truth about Christ. "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." (II Timothy 4:3-4.) The contours of the political, military and religious situation in the world today correspond remarkably to these predictions.

6. Future events. The Biblical chronology is a continuum which embraces times before the chronology was written, times between then and the present (1998) and times after the present. The flow of events described in the Bible is continuing on into the future just as it has continued up to now. Since this is so, and since all the prophecies which were supposed to be fulfilled up to now have in fact been fulfilled, there is every reason to conclude that the prophecies which are supposed to be fulfilled in the future will in fact be fulfilled. Since prophecies A, B, C, D, E, F and G have all been fulfilled like clockwork, prophecies H, I and J must be coming right up for fulfillment. The things prophesied for the future, which are certain to occur, include the lifting up of the church to heaven, the seven-year tribulation period when the antichrist reigns, the second coming of Christ, the battle of Armageddon, the 1,000-year reign of Christ and his saints, the great white throne judgment, and the eternal state.

B. Eye-witness accounts of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The resurrection is central to the whole Bible and to Christianity. The New Testament apostles not only recorded in writing their observation of the resurrected Christ, but also went through the world preaching about his resurrection and were willing to accept martyrdom rather than stop preaching. Leading American and British jurists have examined the conduct of the apostles, plus related evidence, and have concluded that the resurrection is proven beyond any doubt. Example: Simon Greenleaf, Royall Professor of Law at Harvard University, a preeminent figure in Harvard's rise to national prominence in the 19th century, wrote An Examination of the Testimony of the Four Evangelists by the Rules of Evidence Administered in the Courts of Justice. In this book, he declared it impossible that the apostles "could have persisted in affirming the truths they had narrated, had not Jesus actually risen from the dead, and had they not known this fact as certainly as they knew any other fact" (p. 29). Example: Lord

Darling, Chief Justice of England, concluded that "there exists such overwhelming evidence, positive and negative, factual and circumstantial, that no intelligent jury in the world could fail to bring in a verdict that the resurrection story is true" (from Man Alive, by Michael Green, p. 54). Efforts to discredit the testimonies of the apostles have all been in vain. Example: "The apostles were suffering from an hallucination" - but no two people have the same hallucination, and the apostles were quite uniform in their spoken and written testimonies even when widely separated from one another for long periods while preaching throughout the Roman Empire. Example: "Jesus must have lost a lot of blood on the cross, swooned, then slept and recovered in the cool tomb, then walked around again and been seen by his followers" - but a wounded, weakened Jesus isn't at all the one whom the apostles described, nor would they have risked all to preach the resurrection everywhere if they had seen a Jesus who had merely swooned.

C. Evidences of secular disciplines. A great many of the Bible's statements about history, archaeology, philology, and the like, can be tested by ordinary secular means. All testing of these statements has verified the Bible's finely-tuned accuracy. Example: the Hittite civilization, much mentioned in the Old Testament, was frequently cited by Bible critics as proof that the Bible isn't God's word, because no evidence of such a civilization had been found - but then archaeologists uncovered Hittite ruins, centered in modern-day Turkey and extending southward, confounding the critics. Example: historical studies confirm the Bible's rendering of the names, official positions and times in office of numerous kings, governors, generals, etc., in the surrounding nations over the course of many centuries. The facts which remain outside the scope of secular confirmation – including the facts pertaining to God and His works in creation, history and the future - are recorded by the Bible in the same meticulous way as the verifiable facts. If a chronicler or journalist is repeatedly proven right in element after element of his narratives, then probability grows toward certainty that everything in his narratives is true.

D. Scientific evidence. Though not primarily a scientific treatise, the Bible is strikingly accurate in every statement it makes about science. Examples: Job describes the earth as hanging upon nothing (Job 26:7) and Isaiah describes it as round (Isaiah 40:22); these truths were outside the knowledge of scientists when these verses were written. The Bible's principal scientific statements are its accounts of the creation in Genesis 1-2 and elsewhere. These accounts are perfectly in accord with all observed data, bearing in mind that these accounts are of God's creation of the universe and life in mature form, with the appearance of age, so that a person arriving on the eighth day would find starbeams already arrived from millions of light years away, carbon already substantially decayed, complex layers in the earth, etc. The evidences of design are so overwhelming in the natural world as to make the denial of the personal Creator almost ludicrous. Examples: the harmonious order known as the uniform laws of nature; the balance of forces and elements in the earth's environment so that life and civilization are possible; the reproductive system and the development of the child in the womb; the brain; eyesight; blood-clotting. It has been reported that 40% of American scientists believe in the existence of a personal God to whom they can pray.

E. The hypothesis which works. When one seeks to explain a phenomenon, one develops and tests alternate hypotheses to explain it. The Bible is the hypothesis which works to explain the phenomena of the universe and life. The universe is a phenomenon, an effect which must have a cause. The Bible's hypothesis fits: the eternal, all-powerful Supreme Being, who is outside time, space and matter, created time, space and matter with

exquisite order, balance and detail at the beginning of time as we know it. Life is a phenomenon: the extraordinary complexity and brilliant creativity of human beings, but also their distressful circumstances of pain, suffering, illness, old age, and (above all) death, are effects which must have a cause. Again, the Bible's hypothesis fits: God created mankind in His own image, but mankind has rebelled (sinned) against Him and thus separated itself from Him and brought on the curses which follow from such separation. The Bible describes two kinds of sin: ungodliness (thinking and living outside of a personal relationship with God) and unrighteousness (thinking and living in disobedience to His specific commandments). All of us can see that we are guilty of both kinds of sin. Fortunately, the Bible also provides God's solution to our separation from Him on account of sin. The solution is His Son Jesus Christ, who went to the cross of Calvary as our substitute, to die for our sins in our place, so that by believing in his death, burial, resurrection and subsequent appearances (these facts are the Gospel, or good news, according to I Corinthians 15:1-8), we are pardoned, redeemed, saved, and destined for heaven instead of hell.

### Bibliography

The Bible, by God. This is His only written communication to us. It contains everything we need to know at present about Him, His plan of history and the future, and how we can enter into a personal relationship with Him for this life and eternity.

Messiah in Both Testaments, by Fred John Meldau. This is an exuberant, easy-to-read compilation of Old Testament messianic prophecies fulfilled in the person and life of Jesus Christ in the New Testament.

Israel: Prophecy and Fulfillment – Absolute Proof that the Bible is the Word of God (An Expanded Version of a Sunday School Presentation at the Rocky Mountain Bible Church on May 8, 1988.) This 22-page essay traces Biblical prophecies concerning the Jewish people and how the prophecies have been carried out in the actual history of this people from Biblical to modern times. *(This essay may be freely downloaded with the "English Products" link on [www.bbea.org](http://www.bbea.org))*

Prophecy and Fulfillment or The Word Proved True, by Rev. William Schoeler. This highly persuasive work identifies numerous so-called minor prophecies in the Bible, concerning nations, tribes and cities not part of Israel. It then compares these prophecies with travelogues and other modern evidences concerning the current situations of those nations, tribes and cities. The correspondence in case after case is impossible to deny.

More Than A Carpenter, by Josh McDowell. This is a punchy, forceful exposition of basic historical proofs of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. More than ten million copies of this book have been sold.

Evidence That Demands a Verdict, by Josh McDowell. This two-volume treatise, far longer and heavier-going than More Than a Carpenter, contains voluminous evidence in diverse categories showing that the whole Bible is literally true. It's hard to understand how anyone can consider fairly the evidence presented in the McDowell books and not come away believing that the whole Bible is literally true.

The Scientific Case for Creation, by Dr. Walter T. Brown, Jr. (Ph.D. from Massachusetts Institute of Technology). This carefully written treatise consists in large part of quotations from leading evolutionists admitting candidly that one basic proposition after another in the theory of evolution is unsupported by observation and is contrary to logic and experience.

God and the Astronomers, by Robert Jastrow. The author, a former head of NASA and professor of physics and astronomy at Columbia University, traces the changes which have occurred over the past century in the thinking of the scientific community with respect to the origin of the universe. Though he says in his book that he's an agnostic, Professor Jastrow acknowledges that these changes are major concessions to the Biblical account of creation in the first two chapters of the book of Genesis.

### Appendix A

How to be saved from your sins, so you'll spend eternity in heaven with God rather than in hell without God. Since our salvation is BY FAITH ALONE in Christ, if you are ready to place your total TRUST in Christ, you could just pray this simple prayer (or an equivalent prayer in your own words), out loud or quietly, in full trust and sincerity:

Dear God, I know I'm a sinner, separated from you, and I know I can't get myself out of the consequences of my sin. I need a Savior, and I'm thankful to you that you've provided Him, your only Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. He died for my sins on the cross, was buried, and rose again on the third day. I trust in this good news completely. I turn over to Jesus the responsibility for my eternal destiny. Thank you, God, for saving my soul.

### Appendix B

Explanatory Note: This essay is presented by its author as a general summary of a great many credible, documented declarations of fact which have convinced him of the stated proposition: that the Bible is the literal truth. He does not claim to be an expert in each of the broad subject matters covered by the essay, but instead refers readers to the books in the bibliography and to numerous other sources of information (many of which are cited in those books.)

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