

Part of the Great Isaiah Scroll from Qumran

Light
SPECIAL EDITION

opening up **THE**
BIBLE

"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path"

Psalms 119:105

Vol 27.1

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Editor: Colin Dryland

Correspondence: John Carpenter

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The Christadelphians believe the Bible (Old and New Testaments) to be the wholly inspired and infallible Word of God. Its principal theme is the salvation of mankind through the saving work of Jesus Christ and the setting up of the kingdom of God under his rulership when he returns to the earth.

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Light on a new world Vol 27.1 SPECIAL EDITION

OPENING UP THE BIBLE

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Introduction

The Bible is still the world's best seller in English, but sadly it seems to be read less and less, so ...

Find your Bible and look at it as if you had never seen it before. Somewhere on the cover you will find the title 'HOLY BIBLE'. Both words are so familiar we hardly think about their meaning. 'Bible' is related to the Greek word 'biblios'. It is found in the English word 'bibliography' which simply means a list of books – usually books related to a particular subject. 'Bible' just means 'books, collection of books or library'.

The word 'Holy' means 'consecrated, sacred; morally and spiritually perfect; belonging to, commissioned by or devoted to God' (Concise Oxford Dictionary). This is also used (because of its derivation) to mean 'special' or 'set apart for a special purpose'. The title of the book we are looking at really means that it is a special library or collection of books – commissioned by God, set apart for a particular purpose. One of the aims of this magazine is to

demonstrate why the Bible is special and what makes it special.

a library of books

Open your Bible and look at the index at the front. You will see a list of the titles of all the separate books which make up the whole library. They are divided into two groups: 39 in the first group called the Old Testament and 27 in the second group called the New Testament. The books of the Old Testament were all written before the time of Christ and the New Testament after the time of Christ in the first century AD. Practically all of the Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew whereas most of the New Testament was written in Greek. The whole of the Bible had to be translated so that we can read it in a language we understand, whether that be English, Russian, Chinese or any other language.

As you turn the pages of the Bible you will find the books are of different lengths and many of them have strange names – Genesis, Deuteronomy, Habakkuk

and Malachi for example in the Old Testament – Colossians, Thessalonians and Philemon in the New Testament.

Genesis means ‘the beginning’ and the opening words of the book are ‘*In the beginning...*’. Exodus is linked to our word ‘exit’ and means ‘the way out’. The book tells us about the way in which the Israelites were brought out of Egypt and what happened to them afterwards. Other titles of books are named after prophets, teachers, leaders or others who wrote them. Malachi and Habakkuk are the names of prophets as are Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. You can usually tell why the book is so-called by looking at its opening verses.

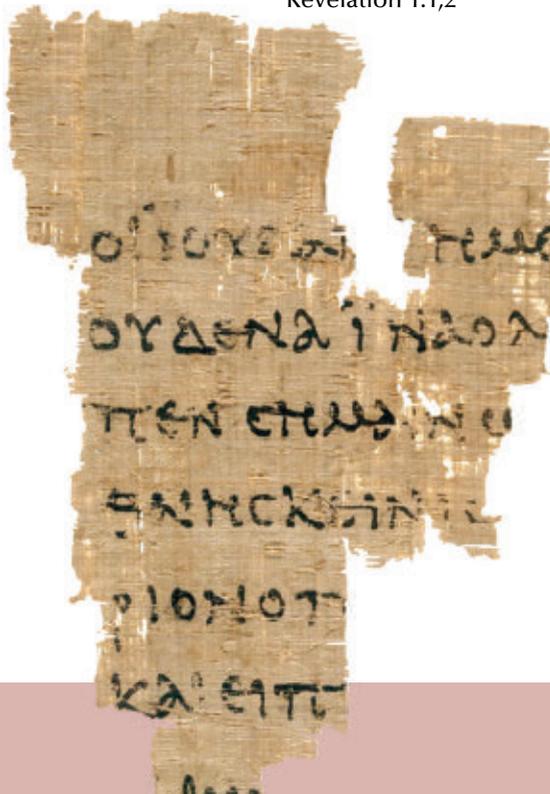
In the New Testament the titles of the first four books are the names of the writers of the accounts of the life, work and teaching of Jesus – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Some of the books are letters named after their writers e.g. Peter, James and Jude. Others are named after the groups of Christians to whom they were written. For example, Colossians is a letter written to Christians at Colosse by the Apostle Paul. Philippians is the

name of the letter by the same writer to Christians at Philippi.

The Book of Revelation is different. It is an account of the visions that were given to the Apostle John at the end of his life when he was in exile on the Island of Patmos. It begins:

‘The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants – things which must shortly take place. And he sent and signified it by his angel to his servant John, who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, and to all things that he saw’

Revelation 1.1,2



already something special

If we study the various books of the Bible carefully we find that about 40 different people were involved as writers. They wrote while living in different countries – Mesopotamia (now Iraq), Greece, Egypt, Italy and of course, Israel. The books were also written over a long period of time – about 1,500 years (see **BIBLE TIMELINE** on pages 6 and 7).

The Bible then, in a very real sense, is not just one book, but a library of books. The fact that we have all these separate writings bound together in one volume makes it different and rather special.

For ease of reference the books of the Bible can be grouped as follows:

Old Testament (OT)

The Law: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. These first five books are sometimes called ‘The Pentateuch’, which means the ‘five’ books. They are also known as ‘The Books of Moses’ and in the Jewish Scriptures they are called ‘The Torah’.

LEFT: fragment of John’s gospel written in Greek on papyrus, the oldest known New Testament manuscript (about 150 AD).

Historical Books: Joshua, Judges, Ruth, the First and Second Books of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles, together with Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther. These books describe the history of Israel from the death of Moses to the establishment of a kingdom under Saul, David and Solomon; then its division into the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. Both kingdoms were eventually conquered and the people taken into exile to Assyria and Babylon. People from the southern kingdom were allowed to return as described in the books called by the names of two of the returning exiles, Ezra and Nehemiah.

Poetic Books: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon. There are 150 Psalms which are divided into five sections or ‘mini books’.

The Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. The opening verses of these books will usually say when the prophets gave their message.

BC 2100 2000 1900 1800 1700 1600 1500 1400 1300 1200 1100 1000



MESOPOTAMIA

Abraham



LAND OF CANAAN (Palestine)

Isaac

Jacob (ISRAEL)



Joseph

EGYPT

Israelites slaves to Pharaoh

Moses

Rameses II *

Merneptah *

Sheshonk I * (Shishak)

T H E P H A R A O H S

Jeroboam *

UNITED ISRAEL

DAVID

Gideon *

Samuel *

* Deborah

Samson *

* Saul

Abraham leaves Haran
The Patriarchs

Israel in Egypt:
the birth of the nation

EXODUS
Conquest of Canaan

The Judges

The Kings

Job?

TORAH

Joshua

Psalms

The Bible



when the books were written

Genesis
Exodus
Leviticus
Numbers
Deuteronomy



Judges

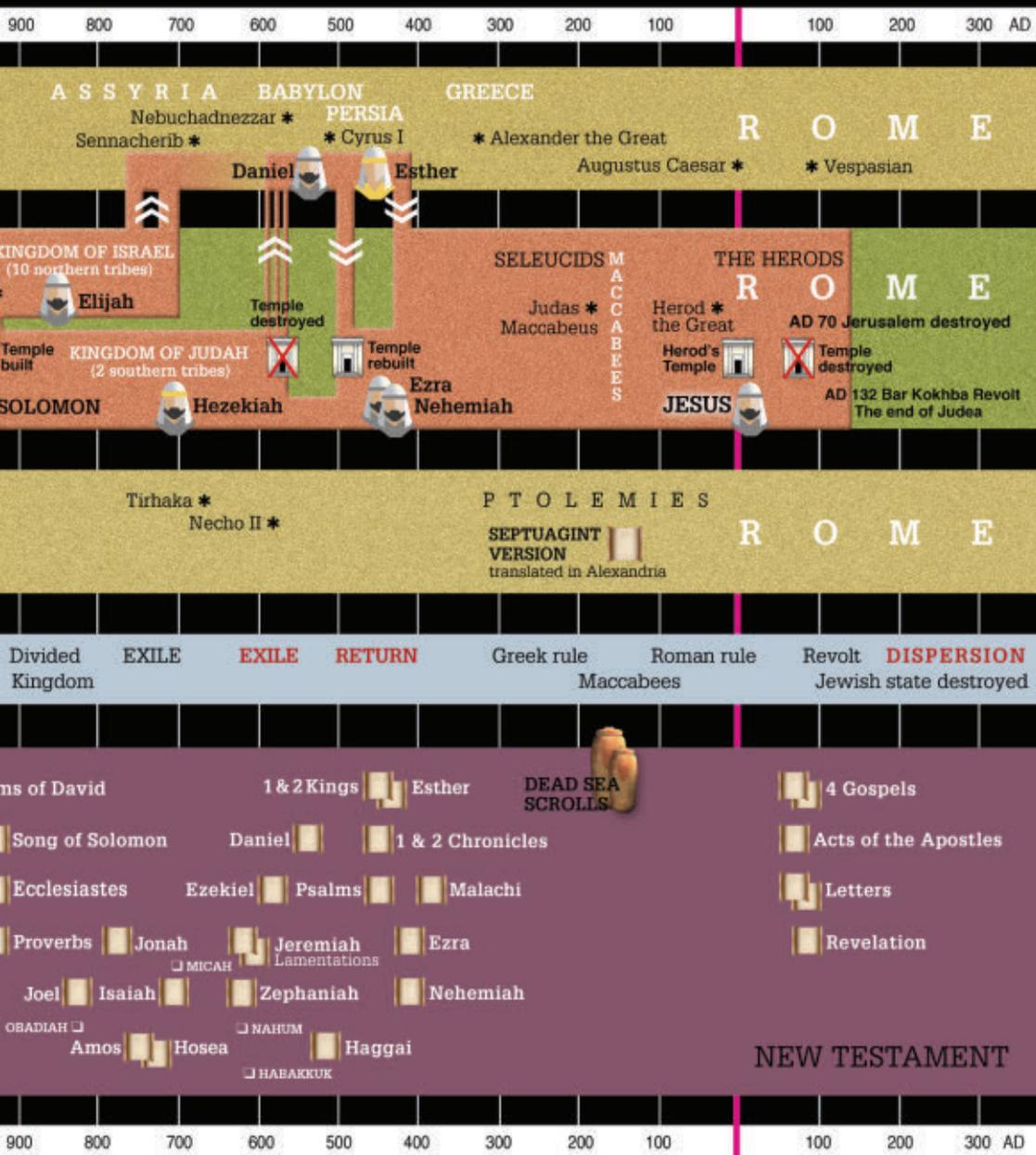
Ruth

1 & 2 Samuel

OLD TESTAMENT

BC 2100 2000 1900 1800 1700 1600 1500 1400 1300 1200 1100 1000

BIBLE TIMELINE from Abraham to Jesus



Light Bible Publications

Chronology based on the work of John C Whitcomb

New Testament (NT)

The Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The Gospel writers tell us about the birth of Jesus, his ministry and teaching, his crucifixion and resurrection.

History: The Acts of the Apostles describes the spread of Christianity in the first century AD including the journeys of the Apostle Paul.

Letters to groups of people: Romans, First and Second Letters to the Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians. These were written by Paul to the newly formed first-century churches.

Letters to individuals: To Timothy (two letters), Titus and Philemon.

Hebrews: Written to the Jewish converts to Christianity in particular.

Other letters: James, First and Second Letters of Peter, First, Second and Third Letters of John and the letter of Jude. The writers' names form the titles of these books.

Revelation: A last message from Jesus Christ to the churches in the Roman province of Asia (now part of Turkey); prophetic visions seen by the Apostle John during his exile on the Island of Patmos.

The massive power and authority of the Roman Empire forms the backdrop to the entire New Testament record. Picture: the Roman Forum



The claim of the Bible

As we look at the books of the Old and New Testaments we find many verses where the writers claim to be writing the words of God. Here are some examples from the book of Jeremiah:

‘The words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiah, of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, to whom the word of the LORD came in the days of Josiah...’

Jeremiah 1.1, 2

‘Hear the word which the LORD speaks to you, O house of Israel. Thus says the LORD: “Do not learn the way of the Gentiles ...”’

Jeremiah 10. 1, 2

The books of the prophets provide many examples of the same claim. These claims are confirmed in the New Testament.

When Jesus was preaching, he often backed up his argument by appealing to the authority of the Jewish Scriptures (the Old Testament). ‘*Have you never read...*’ he said on many occasions. And again: ‘*Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? For God commanded,*

saying, “Honour your father and your mother”’ (Matthew 15. 3, 4). Jesus is quoting here from the book of Exodus (one of the books of Moses) which, he says, is the Word of God. He quotes from the Psalms and the Prophets in the same way.

When talking to his disciples after the resurrection, Jesus explained to them that what had happened to him – his arrest, his suffering, crucifixion, death and resurrection – were all part of the Divine plan. ‘*And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself*’ (Luke 24. 27 NIV). The Old Testament books claim to be the Word of God and Jesus referred to them and quoted from them as God’s Word.

the testimony of the Apostle Paul

Paul reminded the young man Timothy that from childhood he had been brought up to know the Jewish Scriptures. They would tell him about:

❖ **Doctrine:** the word means ‘teaching’, so this meant that

the Scriptures would tell him what he should believe;

- ❖ **Reproof:** they would tell him when he was choosing the wrong path;
- ❖ **Correction:** he could learn how to put himself right again;
- ❖ **Instruction in righteousness:** the Scriptures would tell him how to live his life in a way that would please God.

Paul said to Timothy that the reason the Scriptures are able to do this is because they are inspired by God:

‘... from childhood you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work’.

2 Timothy 3.15-17

what does inspiration mean?

The word ‘inspiration’ means that God breathed His message into the writers and they wrote His words, as Peter tells us:

‘...no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit’

2 Peter 1. 20, 21 NIV

The phrase ‘*carried along*’ is very strong in the original Greek from which the New Testament is translated. The Greek means ‘*carried irresistibly along*’. The writers were literally compelled to write what they did. The prophet Jeremiah is a good example of this. Because of his unpopular message, he was arrested, put in the stocks and on one occasion imprisoned in a water cistern. As a result he made up his mind that if this was how he was going to be treated, if this was what would happen as a result of his preaching, then he would stop and not speak any more in God’s name. Instead, he wrote:

‘...if I say, “I will not mention him or speak any more in his name,” his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot’

Jeremiah 20. 9 NIV

Jeremiah was unable to stop himself speaking the divinely inspired message. That is what Peter meant when he wrote: ‘*Holy men of God spoke as they were moved*’ (NKJV), ‘*carried along*’ (NIV), ‘*impelled*’ (NEB) ‘*by the Holy Spirit*’.

The verses and the claims we have looked at apply to the Old Testament and we have concentrated on this part of the Bible because many Christians accept the New Testament as originating from God but will question the inspiration of the Old Testament. The Bible itself does not distinguish between the Old and New Testaments in this way.

Peter says that although Paul wrote many things that are hard to understand, his writings have the same authority as the Old Testament. In Peter’s second letter, he referred to Paul’s teaching about salvation and the suffering and patience of Christ. He commented

that Paul wrote with God-given wisdom:

‘He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other

Scriptures...’ 2 Peter 3.16 NIV

Peter speaks of Paul’s writing as having the same authority as ‘*the other Scriptures*’. In other words, they are also part of God’s Word. Paul himself wrote to the Christians at Thessalonica:

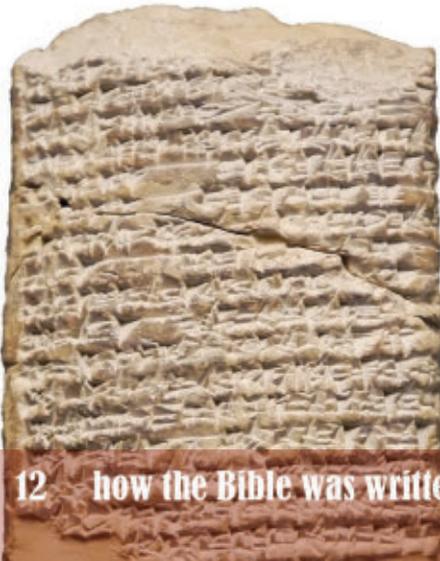
‘...we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe’. 1 Thessalonians 2. 13 NIV

‘his word is in my heart like a fire ...’

how the Bible was written

At one time critics would say that the Bible could not have been written when it claims to have been, because writing was not known so long ago. A visit to any of the major museums in the world shows that writing has been known certainly from much earlier than the time of Abraham who lived about two thousand years before Christ.

Excavations at Ur in Mesopotamia, where Abraham came from, have unearthed libraries of clay tablets as well as bank records, trading accounts and hire purchase agreements. Writing in Ur consisted of wedge-shaped characters made in clay with a shaped stick or stylus. This writing is known as cuneiform.



Records required for a limited time were dried to make the tablets hard. Permanent records were baked even harder.

At the time when Moses lived in Egypt, writing was on papyrus with pen and ink. Records have survived on sheets made from the papyrus reed which was scraped, soaked and laid criss-cross, then pressed and dried. The natural gum made a good writing surface. There are many examples of the hieroglyphic picture writing in the British Museum in London as well as of the everyday, simpler script.

Other permanent writing materials were parchment (scraped, stretched and dried skin) and vellum, a much finer material made from calfskin. Ink was made from finely ground charcoal in a thin gum or egg white.

Scrolls were made from sheets of parchment sewn together and could become very bulky; so when lengthy records had to be kept, successive scrolls were numbered. That is why in the Bible we find the First and Second Books of Kings

and the First and Second Books of Chronicles.

If a book was important – and the sacred books (scrolls) of the Jews were important – they would be copied with great care so that they could be read by more people in different places. In New Testament times, the letters to various groups of Christians were copied and passed to other groups: *‘After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea’* (Colossians 4.16 NIV).

Jeremiah, like all of the Old Testament writers, wrote mainly in Hebrew. Paul wrote in Greek, as did most of the other New Testament writers. It is a huge benefit for us to be able to read the Bible in our own language. Many people over a long period of time were involved in making this possible..

A Jewish scribe continues the tradition of copying the scroll of the Torah by hand. Writing the 600,000 characters will take him about a year

the first major translation

When Egypt was part of the Greek Empire around 250 BC, its ruler, Ptolemy Philadelphus established a library at Alexandria. His aim was to collect a copy of every important book, wherever it came from in the Empire. Josephus the Jewish historian describes the way in which the sacred books of the Jews were included in the library:

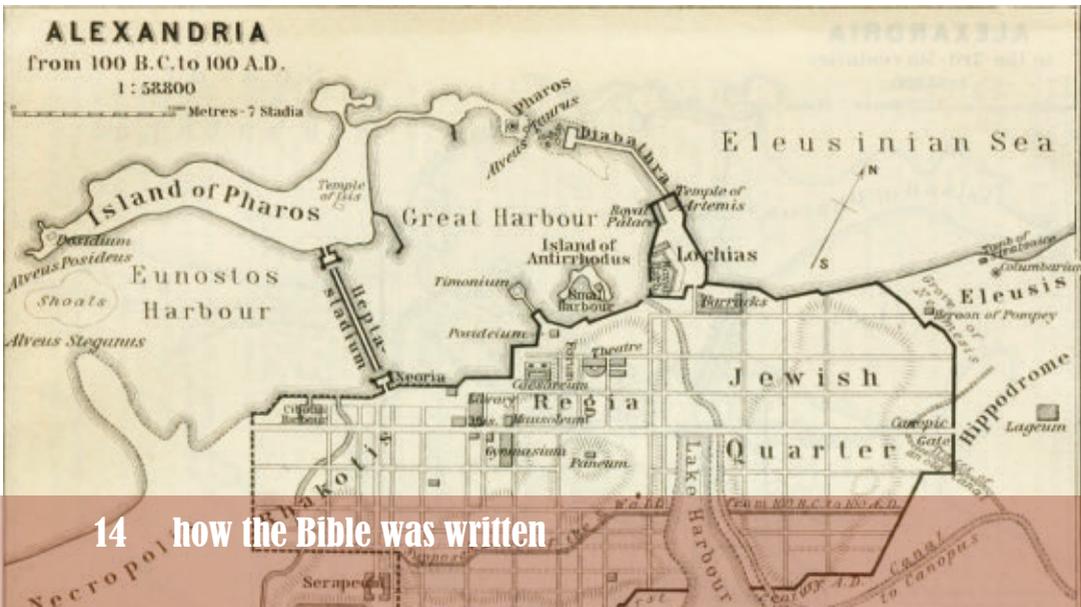
‘Demetrius Phalerius, who was library-keeper to the king, was now endeavouring, if it were possible, to gather together all the books that were in the habitable earth, and buying whatsoever was anywhere valuable, or agreeable to the king’s inclination, (who was very earnestly set upon collecting of books;) to

which inclination of his, Demetrius was zealously subservient’.

Josephus: ‘Antiquities of the Jews’; Book XII, Chapter 2, Para.1

We can understand how *‘zealously subservient’* Demetrius was. His life as well as his livelihood might depend upon how well he did. He was commanded to get in touch with the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem to arrange for a translation of the Jewish Scriptures to be made. He wrote to the High Priest who, Josephus tells us, wrote the following reply:

‘It is not fit for us, O king, to overlook things hastily, or to deceive ourselves, but to lay the truth open; for since we have determined not only to get the laws of the Jews transcribed, but interpreted also, for



thy satisfaction, by what means can we do this, while so many of the Jews are slaves in thy kingdom?’

Josephus: ‘Antiquities of the Jews’ Book XII, Chapter 2, Para. 2

In other words, the High Priest was saying that they could work with much more enthusiasm if something could be done to deal with the ongoing problem of the number of Jewish political prisoners still being held. He did not say the work could not be done; the arrangements were already being made, but such was the keenness of Ptolemy to obtain the Jewish Scriptures in Greek, tradition has it that he agreed to the release of 100,000 Jews.

Greek and Hebrew scholars were selected and it is believed that eventually 72 scholars took part in the work. This important translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek became known as the Septuagint Version (Septuagint is from the Latin ‘septuaginta’ meaning 70). (See Bible Timeline page 7).

LEFT: Alexandria in Egypt was home to the largest Jewish colony in the ancient world, a centre of learning with a famous library. Here Jewish scholars worked on the the Septuagint Version.

the Scriptures of Jesus and the apostles

In New Testament times copies of the Old Testament books were available in the synagogues in Hebrew as were copies of the Septuagint translation of the books of the Old Testament into Greek. Although the Greek Empire had now been succeeded by the Roman Empire, the language of the educated people for official purposes was still Greek and that of the Jewish synagogue was Hebrew. However, in the home and the street it was mainly Aramaic, an ancient Semitic language closely related to Hebrew.

On one occasion when the Apostle Paul had been arrested and was about to be taken into the Roman barracks by the soldiers, he said to the commander, ‘*May I say something to you?*’ The commander immediately replied, ‘*Do you speak Greek?*’ He thought that Paul was an Egyptian terrorist who had started a revolt sometime earlier. However, Paul asked permission to address the crowd and ‘*...When they were all silent, he said to them in Aramaic: “Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defence”. When they heard him*

speak to them in Aramaic, they became very quiet’ (Acts 21.37–40; 22.1,2 NIV).

The use of both Greek and Hebrew is very helpful to our understanding of the Old Testament (OT.) When quotations are made from the OT by the New Testament (NT) writers, because the NT was written in Greek, it is usually the Septuagint version that is quoted. Luke tells us that when Jesus went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, he found Isaiah chapter 61 and read:

The tradition of reading from the scroll of the Torah still continues in the synagogue.

‘The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent me to heal the broken-hearted’.

Luke 4.18

Jesus would have been given the scroll written in Hebrew but because Luke wrote in Greek, he made the quotation from the Greek Septuagint version. If we compare this with Isaiah chapter 61 in the OT, we read:

‘The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent me to heal the broken-hearted’.



You will notice that the NT reading from Luke has the word *'gospel'* where the OT rendering is *'good tidings'* (or good news). The difference is because Jesus was quoting from the OT book of Isaiah. Although we read both Testaments in English, the quotation in Luke has been translated twice – from Hebrew to Greek to English. However, this reminds us that the meaning of *'gospel'* is *'good news'* and if you look at a translation into more modern English like the New International Version (NIV), that is exactly what it says: *'The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor'* (Luke 4.18 NIV).

the value of an historical translation

The example above is a simple one that confirms the meaning of the word *'gospel'*. Sometimes the value of a translation made before the time of Jesus is much more important. Isaiah foretold that when the Saviour came, he would be born of a virgin:

'...Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call his name Immanuel.' Isaiah 7. 14

Bible critics have claimed that the word Isaiah used and which is translated *'virgin'*, really means a young woman, so the prophecy does not have the special significance that Christians claim. It is true that the word in Hebrew translated *'virgin'* can also mean a young woman, but what did Isaiah mean when he made that prophetic statement?

When Jewish scholars 250 years before the time of Christ were translating the prophecy of Isaiah into Greek (in the Septuagint Version), they used a Greek word which could only mean *'a virgin'*. Two and a half centuries before the time of Christ, the Jews themselves understood Isaiah to have prophesied that the Messiah, when he came, would be born miraculously of a virgin. The NT writer Matthew leaves us in no doubt about the accuracy of the prophecy:

'All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel – which means, "God with us"'.

Matthew 1. 22, 23 NIV

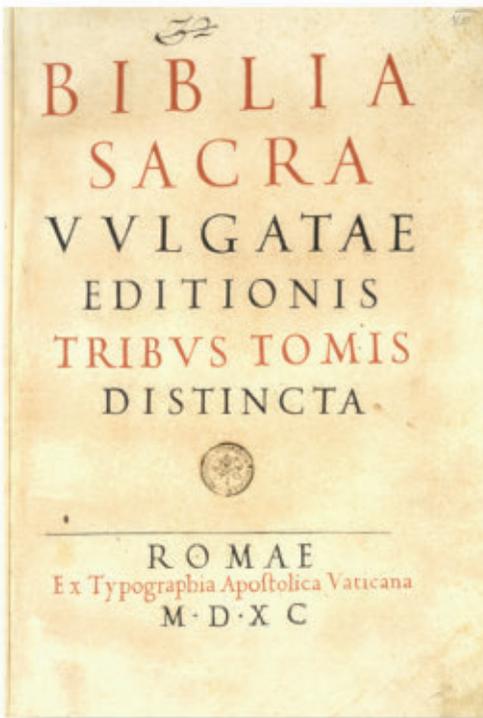
the next major step forward

Up to the early centuries after the time of Christ, the OT manuscripts in Hebrew had been copied and copied by hand for generations. The originals were no longer in existence but great care was taken in the copying and every manuscript was checked and re-checked. Because the books were sacred to the Jews, every letter of the text was counted before any

copy was regarded as authoritative. The Greek translation was also available and many copies of this had been made too.

The NT manuscripts written in Greek were also being copied. As Christianity spread, so the copies were taken all over the Roman world. However, language was also changing. Latin was now the language of the Roman Empire and fewer and fewer people could read Greek. Because of this, a monk





Title page of the Latin Vulgate edition of 1590

called Jerome made it his life's work to translate the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, into Latin. His translation was called the 'Vulgate'. The English word 'vulgar' really means common or ordinary and the Vulgate was the Bible in the common or ordinary language – the language of the people. The Vulgate was to be the Bible in use for many centuries.

When Augustine came to Britain he brought this Bible with him; it also went to Spain, North Africa and

other parts of the world. Sadly, with the breakup of the Roman Empire, fewer people could read the Bible for themselves. Latin was no longer spoken and they had to rely on priests and missionaries. Their teaching was often far removed from the original Bible message.

times change and language does too

As the years went by, the cycle of change repeated itself. When Greek was spoken, the Hebrew Old Testament could not be read by people who did not understand Hebrew. Under God's hand the Jewish Scriptures were translated into Greek (see chart opposite). In the early history of Christianity, the official language of the Roman Empire was Latin and so the work of Jerome was essential in enabling both Old and New Testaments to be read.

The Bible in Latin had come to Britain but ordinary people did not speak Latin. The work of translation had to continue, as the message of the Bible was still closed to them.

the English translations

The Anglo-Saxon spoken by the people of Britain was very different from the English spoken today, but the Bible was needed in Anglo-Saxon. By AD 709 Aldhelm, Bishop of Sherbourne, had translated many of the Psalms into West Saxon and twenty five years later the Venerable Bede translated the Gospel of John. King Alfred translated a number of the Psalms in the early part of the tenth century AD.

History was moving on and so was the language of the people. AD 1066 was the date of the Norman invasion of England and the language was now changing by being mixed with Norman French. No more Saxon translations appeared but the foundations of our modern English Bible were being laid. **John Wycliffe** was Master of Balliol College, Oxford. He resigned from this post to become priest of Lutterworth, and by the year of his death in 1384 he had completed his life's work of translating the whole Bible from Latin into English with the help of a group of faithful followers. This Bible was hand-written and it would have taken about ten months for a written

copy to be made. So although the Bible was being written in the language of the people, it was not freely available.

the Church in control

The extent to which people understood the teaching of the Bible was under the control of the priesthood who were able to quote from the Latin text and could not



be contradicted. However, important developments were now to dramatically affect the course of the Bible's history.

First, more Bible manuscripts were coming to light and scholars were able to study the Bible not only in Latin, but by looking at the original Hebrew and Greek texts. But the authority of the Church and the very small number of Bibles available still limited access by ordinary people to the Word of God.

LEFT: The opening of John's gospel in Wycliffe's version. The small format was maybe designed for travelling preachers.

BELOW: A replica of Johannes Gutenberg's first printing press.

This changed dramatically when Gutenberg invented the printing press. Printing meant that once the type had been set up, instead of taking nearly a year to copy the Bible by hand, copies could now be made available in large numbers and much more cheaply. By the end of the fifteenth century, Bibles were being produced in French, German, Italian and Spanish and in 1530 the first printed English Bible appeared.

William Tyndale

This was the work of **William Tyndale**, whose aim was to make the Bible widely available so that everyone could read it. He said that if God spared his life, before many



Se that ye gaddre not treasure vpon ye erth, where rust and mothes corrupte, and where theves breake through and steale. But gaddre ye treasure togeder in heve, where nether rust nor mothes corrupte, and where theves nether breake vp nor yet steale. For where soever youre treasure ys, there will youre hertes be also. The light of the body ys thyne eye. Wher fore yf thyne eye besynge, all thy body shalbe full of light. But and yf thyne eye be wycked then all thy body shalbe full of derckenes. Wherefore yf the light that is in the be darckenes: how greate is that darckenes.

Matthew 6.19-23 Tyndale's translation

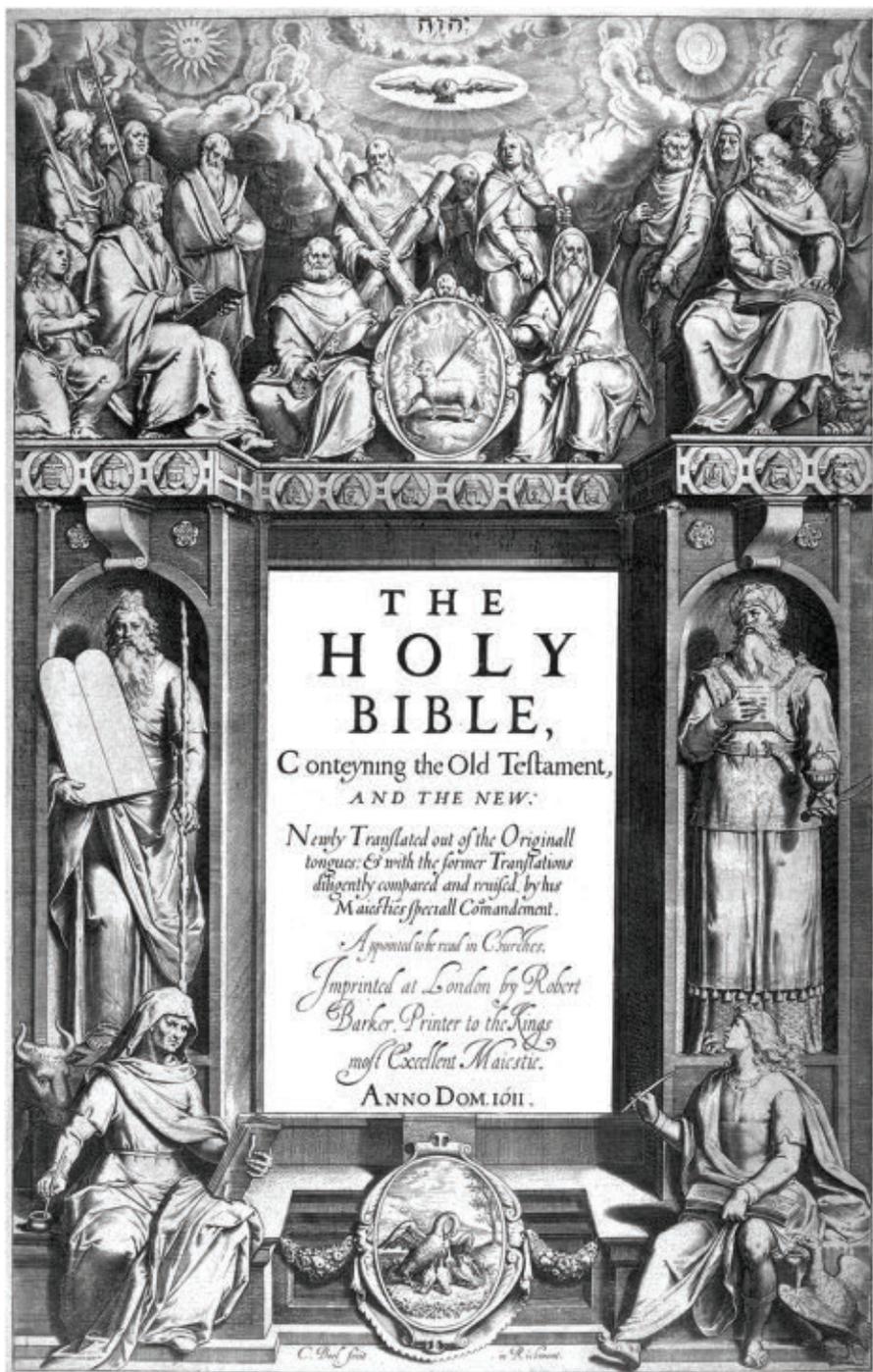
years he would cause the boy that drives the plough to know more of the Scriptures than did the Pope.

His work was not approved by the clergy who saw their authority being eroded. Tyndale's copies of the New Testament were confiscated and burnt at the instigation of the Bishop of London. However, as the copies were destroyed, so more were printed in Europe and smuggled into England. Eventually, Tyndale himself was betrayed and arrested for advocating that people could themselves learn the Gospel from the Bible and he was burnt at the stake on 6th October 1536.

Erasmus

Another important development was the result of the work of a scholar, Desiderius Erasmus who worked for many years in England as a professor at Cambridge. He published a Greek NT text and a Latin translation. This influenced Martin Luther and provided a sound basis for much of Tyndale's translation. Erasmus wrote:

'I wish the sacred Scriptures were translated into all languages of all people, that they might be read and known, not merely by the Scots and Irish, but even by the Turks and Saracens. I wish that the husbandman may sing parts of them at the plough, that the weaver may warble



the King James version

Forty seven scholars in six groups met at Oxford, Cambridge and Westminster. The title page says that it was 'Translated out of the Original Tongues (so the scholars went back to copies of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures) and with the former Translations diligently compared and revised by His Majesty's special command.' The new translation known as the King James Version (KJV), was completed in 1611.

Language was still changing, as those of our readers who studied the works of William Shakespeare at school will know very well. For example, 'to prevent' means to stop something happening. The English word comes from the Norman French 'pre' (before) and 'venir' (to come) so at the time of Shakespeare and the KJV 'to prevent' meant 'to come before'.

Paul wrote (as translated in the KJV) that when Jesus returns, those that are alive will not *'prevent'* those that are dead (1 Thessalonians 4.15). He did not mean that those who are

alive will not stop those who are dead. He meant that they will not 'come before', or have any advantage over those who are dead – because when Christ comes *'the dead in Christ shall rise first'* (verse 16). The New International Version (NIV) translates the verse:

'...we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first'

1 Thessalonians 4. 15, 16 NIV

more recent English translations

Many other words have changed their meaning and the 'old' verb endings ('cometh' instead of 'comes') and the use of 'thee' and 'thou' in the King James Version make the language of the text unfamiliar. (Note: this is not to criticise the translation, merely to recognise that the language has changed).

LEFT: The title page of the King James Bible ('Authorised Version') of 1611



However, towards the end of the nineteenth century it was felt desirable to produce the Revised Version (RV). The whole Bible was issued in 1885 although the New Testament was available earlier. There has been a continuous effort in the past century to make sure that the Bible is available in a language that is accessible to everyone. Some translations have been more successful at achieving this aim than others.

The New International Version, The New King James Version, The Good News Bible, among a number of others, have been produced by teams of scholars, checking and re-checking each other's work. In addition there have been a number of 'one man' translations. All have their supporters. All have various strengths and weaknesses being translations into the everyday language of ordinary people.

What is important as far as the Bible student is concerned is that we are able to hold in our hands a book

which brings before us the mind of God Himself. If we can read, we can be transported into events which demonstrate the unfolding of God's plan for the world. We can be brought close to divine principles that can change our lives. We can find the way to salvation and have the opportunity of learning the true Gospel message and eventually receive the gift of eternal life.

We can have all this by reading the Bible in our own language and by following its teaching. No minor blemishes of an imperfect translation will prevent this, whichever modern translation we read.

But how can we be sure of this?

Centre pull-out section

BIBLE READING PLAN BOOKMARKS

Carefully detach this double page centre section from the rest of the Magazine and trim the tables to size for use as Bible Bookmarks. You could laminate them to make them more permanent.

For an introduction to this Bible Reading Plan see page 43. You have three bookmarks, giving you three different sections of the Bible to be read each day of the year. By the end of the year you will have read the whole Bible, the Old Testament once and the New Testament twice.

Note for online readers: you are able to print from both the pdf file and also from the e-mag edition using the print button. You may wish to enlarge your prints for improved readability, and use a heavier print paper.

January			February			March		
1	Genesis	1, 2	Exodus	5, 6	Leviticus	5, 6		
2		3, 4		7, 8		7		
3		5, 6		9		8		
4		7, 8		10		9, 10		
5		9, 10		11, 12		11		
6		11, 12		13, 14		12, 13		
7		13, 14		15		14		
8		15, 16		16		15		
9		17, 18		17, 18		16		
10		19		19, 20		17, 18		
11		20, 21		21		19		
12		22, 23		22		20		
13		24		23		21		
14		25, 26		24, 25		22		
15		27		26		23		
16		28, 29		27		24		
17		30		28		25		
18		31		29		26		
19		32, 33		30		27		
20		34, 35		31, 32	Numbers	1		
21		36		33, 34		2		
22		37		35		3		
23		38		36		4		
24		39, 40		37		5		
25		41		38		6		
26		42, 43		39, 40		7		
27		44, 45	Leviticus	1, 2		8, 9		
28		46, 47		3, 4		10		
29		48 - 50		—		11		
30	Exodus	1, 2		—		12, 13		
31		3, 4		—		14		
April			May			June		
1	Numbers	15	Deuteronomy	18	Joshua	18		
2		16		19		19		
3		17, 18		20		20, 21		
4		19		21		22		
5		20, 21		22		23, 24		
6		22, 23		23	Judges	1		
7		24, 25		24		2, 3		
8		26		25		4, 5		
9		27		26		6		
10		28		27		7, 8		
11		29, 30		28		9		
12		31		29		10, 11		
13		32		30		12, 13		
14		33		31		14, 15		
15		34		32		16		
16		35		33, 34		17, 18		
17		36	Joshua	1		19		
18	Deuteronomy	1		2		20		
19		2		3, 4		21		
20		3		5, 6	Ruth	1, 2		
21		4		7		3, 4		
22		5		8	1 Samuel	1		
23		6, 7		9		2		
24		8, 9		10		3		
25		10, 11		11		4		
26		12		12		5, 6		
27		13, 14		13		7, 8		
28		15		14		9		
29		16		15		10		
30		17		16		11, 12		
31		—		17		—		

July			August		September	
1	1 Samuel	13	2 Samuel	18	2 Kings	6
2		14		19		7
3		15		20, 21		8
4		16		22		9
5		17		23		10
6		18		24		11, 12
7		19	1 Kings	1		13
8		20		2		14
9		21, 22		3		15
10		23		4, 5		16
11		24		6		17
12		25		7		18
13		26, 27		8		19
14		28		9		20
15		29, 30		10		21
16		31		11		22, 23
17	2 Samuel	1		12		24, 25
18		2		13	1 Chronicles	1
19		3		14		2
20		4, 5		15		3
21		6		16		4
22		7		17		5
23		8, 9		18		6
24		10		19		7
25		11		20		8
26		12		21		9
27		13		22		10
28		14	2 Kings	1, 2		11
29		15		3		12
30		16		4		13, 14
31		17		5		—
October			November		December	
1	1 Chronicles	15	2 Chronicles	30	Esther Job	9, 10
2		16		31		1, 2
3		17		32		3, 4
4		18, 19		33		5
5		20, 21		34		6, 7
6		22		35		8
7		23		36		9
8		24, 25	Ezra	1, 2		10
9		26		3, 4		11
10		27		5, 6		12
11		28		7		13
12		29		8		14
13	2 Chronicles	1, 2		9		15
14		3, 4		10		16, 17
15		5, 6	Nehemiah	1, 2		18, 19
16		7		3		20
17		8		4		21
18		9		5, 6		22
19		10, 11		7		23, 24
20		12, 13		8		25-27
21		14, 15		9		28
22		16, 17		10		29, 30
23		18, 19		11		31, 32
24		20		12		33
25		21, 22		13		34
26		23	Esther	1		35, 36
27		24		2		37
28		25		3, 4		38
29		26, 27		5, 6		39
30		28		7, 8		40
31		29		—		41, 42

‘Remember from what sort of people your knowledge has come, and how from early childhood your mind has been familiar with the holy scriptures, which can open the mind to the salvation which comes through believing in Christ Jesus.

All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching the faith and correcting error, for re-setting the direction of a man’s life and training him in good living. The scriptures are the comprehensive equipment of the man of God and fit him fully for all branches of his work.’

PAUL’S SECOND LETTER TO TIMOTHY 3: 14 -17 (PHILLIPS)

FIRST READING

January			February		March	
1	Psalms	1,2	Psalms 2	58, 59	Psalms 4	105
2		3-5		60, 61		106
3	Book 1	6-8		62, 63	Book 5	107
4		9,10		64, 65		108, 109
5		11-13		66, 67		110 - 112
6		14 - 16		68		113, 114
7		17		69		115, 116
8		18		70, 71		117, 118
9		19-21		72	119	v7 - 40
10		22	Book 3	73		v41 - 80
11		23-25		74		v81 - 128
12		26-28		75, 76		v129 - 176
13		29,30		77		120-124
14		31		78		125-127
15		32		79, 80		128-130
16		33		81, 82		131 -134
17		34		83, 84		135, 136
18		35		85, 86		137-139
19		36		87, 88		140-142
20		37		89		143, 144
21		38	Book 4	90, 91		145-147
22		39, 40		92, 93		148-150
23	Book 2	41-43		94, 95	Proverbs	1
24		44		96 - 99		2
25		45		100,101		3
26		46 - 48		102		4
27		49		103		5
28		50		104		6
29		51, 52		—		7
30		53-55		—		8, 9
31		56, 57		—		10

April			May		June	
1	Proverbs	11	Ecclesiastes	10	Isaiah	24
2		12		11		25
3		13		12		26, 27
4		14	Song of Solomon	1		28
5		15		2		29
6		16		3		30
7		17		4		31
8		18		5		32
9		19		6		33
10		20		7		34
11		21		8		35
12		22	Isaiah	1		36
13		23		2		37
14		24		3, 4		38
15		25		5		39
16		26		6		40
17		27		7		41
18		28		8		42
19		29		9		43
20		30		10		44
21		31		11		45
22	Ecclesiastes	1		12		46, 47
23		2		13		48
24		3		14		49
25		4		15		50
26		5		16		51
27		6		17, 18		52
28		7		19		53
29		8		20, 21		54
30		9		22		55
31		—		23		—

SECOND READING

January			February		March	
1	Matthew	1,2	Romans	10,11	1 Corinthians	14
2		3,4		12		15
3		5		13,14		16
4		6		15,16	2 Corinthians	1, 2
5		7	Mark	1		3, 4
6		8		2		5 - 7
7		9		3		8, 9
8		10		4		10,11
9		11		5		12, 13
10		12		6	Luke	1
11		13		7		2
12		14		8		3
13		15		9		4
14		16		10		5
15		17		11		6
16		18		12		7
17		19		13		8
18		20		14		9
19		21		15,16		10
20		22	1 Corinthians	1,2		11
21		23		3		12
22		24		4,5		13, 14
23		25		6		15
24		26		7		16
25		27		8,9		17
26		28		10		18
27	Romans	1,2		11		19
28		3,4		12,13		20
29		5,6		—		21
30		7,8		—		22
31		9		—		23

April			May		June	
1	Luke	24	Acts	9	Hebrews	6,7
2	Galatians	1,2		10		8,9
3		3,4		11,12		10
4		5,6		13		11
5	Ephesians	1,2		14,15		12
6		3,4		16,17		13
7		5,6		18,19	James	1
8	Philippians	1,2		20		2
9		3,4		21,22		3,4
10	John	1		23,24		5
11		2,3		25,26	1 Peter	1
12		4		27		2
13		5		28		3-5
14		6	Colossians	1	2 Peter	1,2
15		7		2		3
16		8		3,4	1 John	1,2
17		9,10	1 Thessalon.	1,2		3,4
18		11		3,4		5
19		12		5	2 & 3 John	
20		13, 14	2 Thessalon.	1, 2	Jude	
21		15, 16		3	Revelation	1,2
22		17, 18	1 Timothy	1-3		3,4
23		19		4,5		5,6
24		20, 21		6		7-9
25	Acts	1	2 Timothy	1		10, 11
26		2		2		12, 13
27		3,4		3,4		14
28		5,6	Titus	1-3		15,16
29		7	Philemon			17,18
30		8	Hebrews	1,2		19,20
31		—		3-5		—

THIRD READING

July			August		September	
1	Revelation	21,22	Romans	9	1 Corinthians	15
2	Matthew	1,2		10,11	16	
3		3,4	12	2 Corinthians	1, 2	
4		5	13,14	3,4		
5		6	15,16	5-7		
6		7	Mark	8,9		
7		8		1	10,11	
8		9	2	12,13		
9		10	3	Luke	1	
10		11	4		2	
11		12	5	3		
12		13	6	4		
13		14	7	5		
14		15	8	6		
15		16	9	7		
16		17	10	8		
17		18	11	9		
18		19	12	10		
19		20	13	11		
20		21	14	12		
21		22	15	13,14		
22		23	16	15		
23		24	17	16		
24		25	18	17		
25		26	19	18		
26		27	20	19		
27		28	21	20		
28	Romans	1,2	22	21		
29		3,4	23	22		
30		5,6	24	23		
31		7,8	25	—		

October			November		December	
1	Luke	24	Acts	10	Hebrews	6,7
2	Galatians	1,2		11,12	8,9	
3		3,4	13	10		
4		5,6	14,15	11		
5	Ephesians	1,2	16,17	12		
6		3,4	18,19	13		
7		5,6	20	James	1	
8	Philippians	1,2	21,22	2		
9		3,4	23,24	3,4		
10	John	1	25,26	5		
11		2,3	27	1 Peter	1	
12		4	28	2		
13		5	Colossians	3-5		
14		6		2	2 Peter	1,2
15		7	3,4	3		
16		8	1 Thessalon.	1 John	1,2	
17		9,10	3,4	3,4		
18		11	5	5		
19		12	2 Thessalon.	2 & 3 John		
20		13,14	3	Jude		
21		15,16	1 Timothy	Revelation	1,2	
22		17,18	4,5	3,4		
23		19	6	5,6		
24		20,21	2 Timothy	7-9		
25	Acts	1	2	10,11		
26		2	3,4	12,13		
27		3,4	Titus	14		
28		5,6	1-3	15,16		
29		7	Philemon	17,18		
30		8	Hebrews	19,20		
31		9	1,2	21,22		

THIRD READING

July			August		September	
1	Isaiah	56, 57	Jeremiah	22	Laments.	2
2		58		23	3	
3		59	24	4		
4		60	25	5		
5		61	26	Ezekiel	1	
6		62	27		2	
7		63	28	3		
8		64	29	4		
9		65	30	5		
10		66	31	6		
11	Jeremiah	1	32	7		
12		2	33	8		
13		3	34	9		
14		4	35	10		
15		5	36	11		
16		6	37	12		
17		7	38	13		
18		8	39	14		
19		9	40	15		
20		10	41	16		
21		11	42	17		
22		12	43	18		
23		13	44	19		
24		14	45, 46	20		
25		15	47	21		
26		16	48	22		
27		17	49	23		
28		18	50	24		
29		19	51	25		
30		20	52	26		
31		21	Laments.	1	—	

October			November		December	
1	Ezekiel	27	Daniel	10	Jonah	1
2		28		11	2,3	
3		29	12	4		
4		30	Hosea	1	Micah	1
5		31		2		2
6		32	3	3,4		
7		33	4	5		
8		34	5	6		
9		35	6	7		
10		36	7	Nahum	1,2	
11		37	8		3	
12		38	9	Habakkuk	1	
13		39	10	2		
14		40	11	3		
15		41	12	Zephaniah	1	
16		42	13	2		
17		43	14	3		
18		44	Joel	1	Haggai	1,2
19		45		2	Zechariah	1
20		46	3	2,3		
21		47	Amos	1	4,5	
22		48		2	6,7	
23	Daniel	1	3	8		
24		2	4	9		
25		3	5	10		
26		4	6	11		
27		5	7	12		
28		6	8	Malachi	13, 14	
29		7	9		1	
30		8	Obadiah	2		
31		9		—	3,4	

SECOND READING

an important question – an important answer

How can we be sure that we hold in our hands a book which conveys to us the mind of God?

We will look first at just one criticism of the reliability of the Bible in English. It has been said that if you look at the early history of the Bible, because the manuscripts were copied so many times, mistakes must have been made. This applies not just in the centuries immediately before the invention of printing but also in the hundreds of years that followed the writing of the original manuscripts. When printing was invented, the translations and versions were 'static' in a sense, but before that...? There are two main arguments, which refute this criticism.

the Samaritan Pentateuch

When the Assyrians invaded and destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel, the Jews were taken into captivity and replaced with people from other conquered nations. They occupied the land and prevented the southern kingdom of Judah uniting again with the remnants of Israel. This mixed group became

known as the 'Samaritans' because their capital was Samaria. At the time of Christ it was still said that the *'Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans'* (John 4. 9).

When the Samaritans first settled they felt they would only prosper if they adopted the 'local gods'. They obtained copies of the first five books of the Jewish Scriptures (the Pentateuch) and for hundreds of years, having no contact with the Jews, they copied and re-copied them and adopted many Jewish religious practices.

If the copies of the Jewish Pentateuch had gradually included mistakes, then, after a long period of time there would have been some significant differences between the Samaritan and the Jewish Pentateuch. A number of these important manuscripts have since been discovered. They can be compared, and such was the care taken by the copyists under divine providence, that the critics cannot argue that the early manuscripts are unreliable.

These ancient scrolls were discovered between 1946–56 in caves at Qumran near the Dead Sea in Israel. They include parts of most of the Old Testament books as well as some complete scrolls. The scroll of Isaiah is probably the most famous and received the greatest publicity.

The scrolls from Qumran date from around 125 BC. The scroll of Isaiah was written a thousand years earlier than the oldest Hebrew manuscript of Isaiah then available.

It suddenly became possible to compare copies of Isaiah which had been written a thousand years apart. If there were copying errors, it would

immediately become apparent. Instead, the results of the comparison showed that there were no material differences in text and more importantly, no changes over time to the message or substance of the Old Testament Scriptures.

This is why the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls was so important as well as being fascinating and faith stimulating.

THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS



Fragments of the scrolls laid out in the 'Scrolleries' at the Palestine Archaeology Museum.

RIGHT: The Isaiah Scroll found in Cave 1 in 1947 – the most complete of all the scrolls.



LEFT: Part of the great Temple Scroll (over 8 metres long) found in Cave 11.



ABOVE: Several of the 11 caves near the Dead Sea where the scrolls were discovered between 1946 – 56.

RIGHT: one of the distinctive earthenware jars in which some of the scrolls were stored

There can be no doubt that when we open our copies of the Bible and read in the English language what Isaiah had written, we are as close as we can get to the thoughts and ideas of Isaiah when he first penned them in Hebrew, words inspired by God. It was Isaiah who wrote: *'To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them'* (Isaiah 8. 20).

The prophet Isaiah vividly described the kingdom that Jesus will establish when he returns to the earth (Isaiah chapters 2, 11, 32, 65). He also foretold the first coming of Jesus as the saviour (Isaiah chapter 7.14-16 and chapter 53) which reminds us that when man was unable to save himself, God's arm brought salvation (Isaiah 59.15, 16, 20).

For more information on this subject, send for the Light special edition on the Dead Sea Scrolls (also available online).



Can we trust the Bible?

What do we really mean when we ask the question 'Can we trust the Bible'? Here are two definitions (Concise Oxford Dictionary 12th edition):

- ❖ Confidence: the belief that one can have faith or rely on someone or something.
- ❖ Trust: a firm belief in someone or something; acceptance of the truth of a statement without evidence or investigation.

When we talk about the Bible in these terms, we are asking whether we can believe firmly and strongly in the honesty and truth of what is written there, whether we can rely on what it says and be able to depend on it without further evidence. But if we do need additional evidence to support our belief, there is so much available.

what kind of evidence do we need?

Several years ago the writer witnessed a road accident which resulted in a court case. One police officer on duty that morning said that the way the witnesses had all agreed was quite remarkable. He

said that sometimes witnesses do not even agree on the colour of the vehicles involved in the accident, let alone anything else. The officer then made a statement that has stuck in my memory:

'When two or three people tell exactly the same story (and it doesn't happen often) – it must have happened that way'.

one kind of harmony

Mark's Gospel record tells us that on one occasion Jesus was followed by a great crowd when he wanted to go away quietly with his disciples. Because he felt they were like '*sheep without a shepherd*' he began teaching them and continued for some while. The miracle which followed, 'the feeding of the five thousand' is recorded in all four Gospels. It is fascinating to see some of the finer details of these accounts. Matthew says that the people were made '*to sit down on the grass*' (Matthew 14.19).

Mark's account tells us that the people sat down '*on the green grass*' (Mark 6. 39). John says '*there was much grass in the place*' (John



The cobble road outside the village of Bethsaida, in use from about 900 BC to AD 400 and recently excavated.

6.10). John also tells us that it was the time of the Passover. All these statements fit exactly together. In Israel, for much of the year the grass is sparse, dried and brown. The time of year when grass is plentiful is springtime, the time of the Passover, when in the words of the Gospel writers there would be much grass and the grass would be green.

There is another detail that links the Gospel writers' accounts. Luke says that the miracle took place near Bethsaida (Luke 9.10). John tells us that Philip was the disciple that Jesus asked about buying food

(John 6.5). These two apparently unrelated facts become significant when we learn that Philip was from Bethsaida (John 1. 43, 44). This was his home so he was the obvious one to ask about buying food there.

'When two or three people tell exactly the same story – it must have happened that way.'

Can we trust the Bible? There are numerous examples of this harmony found in the Gospels and in many other places in the Bible, even in the smallest details. The books of Kings and Chronicles contain parallel accounts of much of the history of Israel. The prophet Isaiah was contemporary with some

of those kings and these accounts agree with each other, sometimes in very small details.

another kind of harmony

This is what we have learned about the Bible so far:

- ❖ It is a library of 66 books divided into two groups
- ❖ There were 40 different writers
- ❖ The books were written over a period of some 1,500 years
- ❖ They were written in widely separated countries such as Babylon (now Iraq), Greece, Israel, Egypt, Italy, and Asia Minor (now Turkey).

The different writers, separated by time and distance, are not only in textual harmony but their teaching on fundamental issues is also in complete agreement.

As an example of harmony on fundamental issues, consider the teaching of the Bible about our mortality in contrast to what many people believe today. The book of Genesis explains that we are mortal, that is 'subject to death', and this is the result of disobedience to God. This disobedience is called 'sin' and Paul wrote in New Testament times

that '*the wages of sin is death*' (Romans 6.23). 'Death' in the Bible refers to a state of complete unconsciousness and the extinction of life. David in the Psalms, Solomon in the book of Ecclesiastes and later the writings of the prophets, all teach the same thing:

'Like sheep they are laid in the grave...'
Psalm 49. 14

'His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; in that very day his plans perish.'
Psalm 146. 4

'...there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going.'
Ecclesiastes 9.10

'...the soul who sins shall die.'
Ezekiel 18.4

The Jews spent a long period in Egypt in the earliest days of their growth as a nation (see Bible Timeline pages 6, 7). The Egyptians had a strong belief in an afterlife, as did the Assyrians, the Babylonians and later the Greeks and Romans. But the teaching of the Jewish scriptures is completely different because it is God's revelation to us, not human invention. Men and women die because of sin; the dead are completely unconscious, and it

is only the Bible hope in the future physical resurrection of the dead that allows us to look beyond an eternal grave.

The Apostle Paul underlines this great hope:

The Egyptian view of the afterlife: a papyrus (1285 BC) shows the 'weighing of the heart' ritual. The heart of a dead man is being weighed in the balance against the 'feather of truth' by the jackel-headed god ANUBIS. If he fails the test, the deceased is devoured by the waiting demon AMMIT, a hungry creature part crocodile, part lion and part hippopotamus.

'For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.'

Romans 6. 23

'...now Christ has risen from the dead, and has become the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive... Christ the first-fruits, afterwards those who are Christ's at his coming.'

I Corinthians 15. 20-23



The evidence of Archaeology

As we have seen, one of the strongest evidences for the inspiration of the Bible is the complete harmony of its records and the consistency of its teaching. There is also much external evidence to support the veracity of the Bible. We will now look at the evidence of archaeology and fulfilled prophecy.

Archaeology has confirmed many of the historical records in the Bible. The cuneiform writing on the **Taylor prism** in the British Museum gives the Assyrian account of the events described in 2 Kings 18,19, 2 Chronicles 32 and Isaiah 36,37.

The Assyrian record says:

'I besieged Hezekiah of Judah who had not submitted to my yoke and I captured forty six of his strong cities and fortresses, innumerable small cities which were round about them, with the battering rams and the assault engines and the attack of foot soldiers... himself (Hezekiah) like a caged bird I shut up within Jerusalem his royal city'.

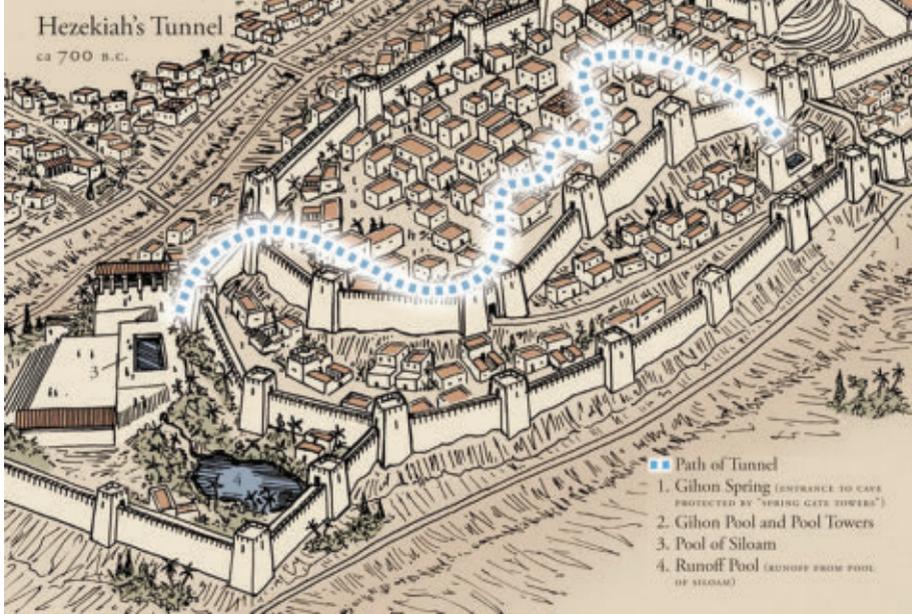
Many details in this record confirm the Bible account. However, the

Assyrian record does not say how Sennacherib the Assyrian king was defeated after Hezekiah had prayed for God's help. The Assyrian account simply says that Sennacherib returned to his own royal city of Nineveh. Isaiah had recorded, *'By the way that he came, by the same shall he return; and he shall not come into this city, says the LORD'* (Isaiah 37. 34).

The period of the Assyrian and Babylonian empires is a rich source of tablets and monuments relating to nearly all their kings who are also mentioned in the Bible. The British Museum's own publications provide a wealth of fascinating material for the Bible student.

Hezekiah's tunnel

The Bible gives an account of the way that Hezekiah (see **Timeline pages 6,7**) had a water-course constructed through the rock to bring water into Jerusalem. This was to ensure that there was a good water supply for the city when the Assyrians invaded. At the same time access to the springs outside the city was blocked up:



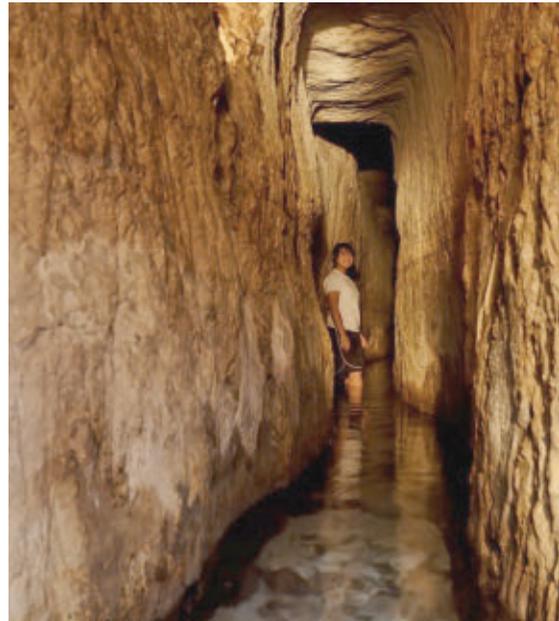
‘This same Hezekiah also stopped the water outlet of Upper Gihon, and brought the water by tunnel to the west side of the City of David’.

2 Chronicles 32.30 - also 2 Kings 20.20

Archaeological discoveries on their own do not prove that the Bible is divinely inspired, but their confirmation of so many of the Biblical records gives us confidence.

At one time critics of the Bible maintained that the science of engineering was not developed sufficiently at the time of Hezekiah to enable this water-course to be constructed. Today the tunnel has been discovered – it came from outside the old city of Jerusalem into the Pool of Siloam. Near the entrance was an inscription written in the Hebrew characters of Hezekiah’s time which records the construction of the tunnel.

Inside Hezekiah’s tunnel today.
 Discovered by Edward Robinson in 1848,
 the tunnel is 1,750ft (533 metres) long.

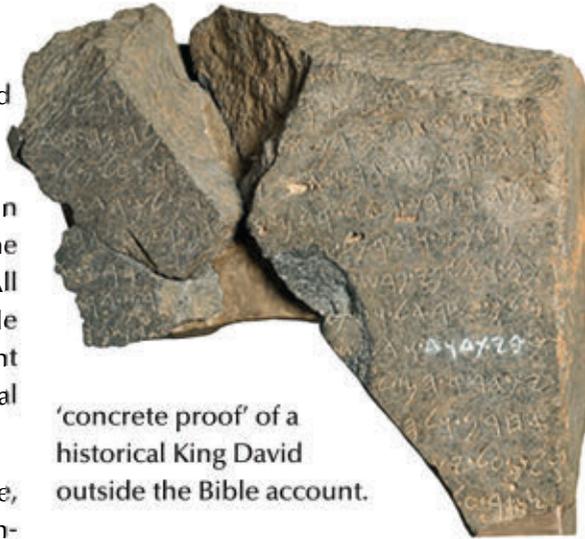


a wealth of evidence

The great Museums of the world are full of exhibits which bear directly or indirectly on the Bible account – the British Museum in London, the Louvre in Paris, the Israel Museum and many others. All support the authenticity of the Bible record. No other ancient document has such a wealth of archaeological support.

Archaeology is not an exact science, and different 'schools' of archaeologists can reach very different conclusions based on the same evidence. Earlier generations of archaeologists were happy to work with the Bible in one hand and the spade in the other, such was their respect for the Bible narrative. But in the 20th century a group of archaeologists known as 'minimalists' rejected the Bible's account – in particular they dismissed the existence of the united monarchy under Kings David and Solomon.

They were wrong. In 1993 during excavations at Tel Dan in northern Israel, an Aramaic inscription on a stone slab was found which claimed victory over 'the king of Israel' and 'the king of the house of David'. It dates from about a century after David's time, and is the first



'concrete proof' of a historical King David outside the Bible account.

The evidence keeps coming.

Recent excavations (2013) at Khirbet Qeiyafa, a site near the valley where David met Goliath, have uncovered monumental buildings dating from David's time, the 10th century BC. The archaeologists comment:

"It is clear now that David's kingdom extended beyond Jerusalem, that fortified cities existed in strategic locations and that there was an extensive civil administration capable of building cities..."

If you would like to explore this subject further, please send for the Light special edition on Archaeology; also note that every quarterly edition of Light Magazine has an article on a specific aspect of Biblical Archaeology.

The evidence of Prophecy

This is the line of evidence that God Himself has given us to strengthen our faith in His Word. The Bible not only teaches us that God knows how His purpose is to be worked out but also that He declares *'the end from the beginning'* (Isaiah 46.10). He reveals what He intends to do through His servants the prophets (Amos 3.7). We can look at the history of Israel for specific prophecies that have been fulfilled – *"You are my witnesses,"* says the LORD' (Isaiah 43.10). An example from Israel's history will illustrate the point.

The first king over the nation of Israel was Saul. He was followed by David and Solomon (**see Timeline Pages 6, 7**). After the death of Solomon the kingdom was divided into a northern kingdom of Israel (eventually destroyed by Assyria) and a southern kingdom of Judah which lasted 100 years longer than the kingdom of Israel. The prophet Jeremiah lived in the closing days of the kingdom of Judah when Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, was invading the land. He made a very specific prediction in these words:

'I will banish...sounds of joy and gladness...This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon for seventy years.'

Jeremiah 25. 10, 11 NIV

Here is a very specific time period. Not only was the land desolated by the Babylonian armies, but also thousands of captives were taken to Babylon. One of these was a young man of noble birth – Daniel. He was to become prominent in the Babylonian court and eventually was made ruler of one of the three major provinces of the empire. In spite of the honours he gained, he was a Jew and his heart was always yearning for the restoration of Jerusalem.

Babylon eventually fell to the Medes and became part of the Medo-Persian Empire. Daniel was now a very old man and there is an amazing passage in the book that bears his name:

'In the first year of Darius son of Xerxes (a Mede by descent), who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom – in the first year of his

reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the LORD given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer...'

Daniel 9. 1-3 NIV

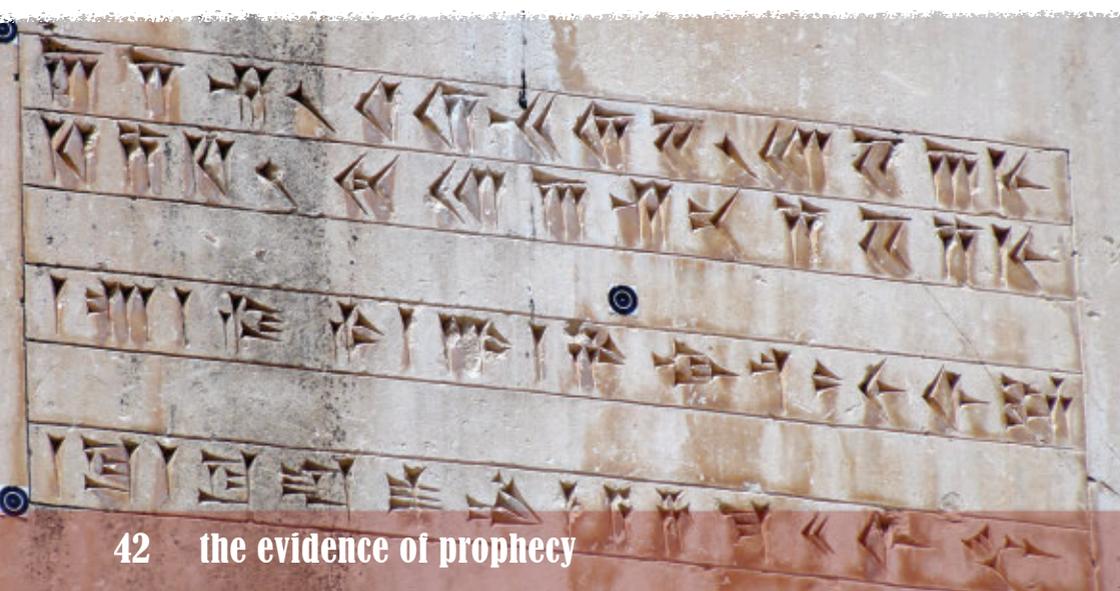
Daniel had read the book of Jeremiah and understood his prophecy of the 70 years captivity. He knew he was now living at the end of this time – so he prayed to God.

The rich archaeological evidence from this period enables the dates to be identified fairly accurately. Seventy years after the fall of Jerusalem, Cyrus the Persian, the king who followed Darius the Mede,

made a decree that the Jews should be allowed to return and rebuild their city. Other conquered nations were given similar privileges, again as Jeremiah had foretold.

In this example we have a specific time period. It was foretold beforehand and the end is also recorded. This is just one of many examples of prophecies detailed in advance. The history of Israel had many ups and downs including invasions, sieges and captivities. The last of these was followed by a long period of almost 2,000 years desolation following the Roman

'I am Cyrus the King...'- part of an inscription at Pasargadae where Cyrus had his Palace. The famous Cyrus Cylinder (British Museum) confirms his policy towards the Jewish exiles.



occupation. This long period ended with the restoration of the nation to the land of Israel in the 20th century and has been described as an ‘impossible history’. Yet almost every stage was the subject of prophecy, demonstrating the truth of the prophet Isaiah’s words:

‘...you are my witnesses, says the LORD, that I am God.’ Isaiah 43.12

For more detailed examples of fulfilled prophecy, send for the Light special edition on Bible Prophecy.

This evidence supports our trust. We can be confident. The only explanation for the wealth of fulfilled prophecy relating to nations, cities, individuals and events, is that the Bible is a revelation from God Himself. The writers were inspired. Its claim to be the Word of God is well founded.

The evidence of:

- ❖ the Bible’s textual harmony
- ❖ the unity of its message
- ❖ its miraculous preservation
- ❖ the testimony of archaeology
- ❖ the witness of fulfilled prophecy

all testify that the Bible was written because the writers were moved by

the Holy Spirit – they were inspired by God. This is the only explanation of its uniqueness.

Can we trust the Bible?

In the fullest sense of the question, the answer must be ‘Yes’. If then the Bible is the Word of God, we have a responsibility to read it, to listen to its message and to act upon it!

a vital message for us today

Wherever we are in the world and whatever language we speak, we can read the words of Moses and the laws that were given to the nation of Israel many centuries ago. We can listen to the sublime message of the Old Testament prophets as they looked forward to the coming of the saviour, Jesus.

We can understand the message of Jesus himself as he exposed the shallowness and hypocrisy of the leaders of his day and as he spoke about the purpose of his death and resurrection. He taught his hearers about the coming of the kingdom of God – and all this we have in our own language.

We can follow the exciting story of the development of Christianity in

the first century, the establishment of the first churches and we can hold in our hands, in a form that can be easily understood, the letters that were written to those early Christian communities. Their needs were so like our own. The inspired teaching in these letters is just as relevant today.

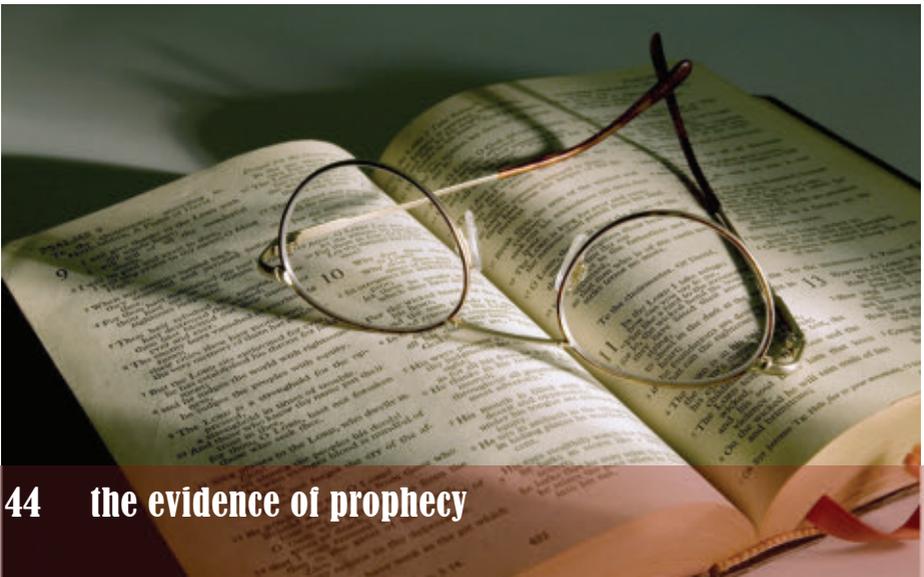
So...allow it to influence your life.

Don't just treat it as something of academic interest. Read the Bible for yourself so you can understand more of its message for today. If the Bible has come from God, if this holy book is God's Word to us then read it. Read it so that you can know what God has revealed about Himself and about His purpose. If the Bible contains prophecies about

individuals and nations, about cities and events which have all been fulfilled in the smallest details, we can be confident that other prophecies will be fulfilled. These include prophecies about future events, about God's plan for the world, about the return of Jesus and the events that will herald his 'Second Coming'. We can be certain that when the Bible foretells a time in which all of the world's problems will be solved, then that time will come.

'For he (God) has fixed a day in which he will judge the whole world with justice by means of a man he has chosen. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising that man from death!'

Acts 17. 31 GNB



Reading the Bible for yourself

There are some people who have never seen the sea.

They have never scanned that broad horizon, never smelt the tang or tasted the salt spray on their lips, never experienced the crash or roar of the great breakers, the turmoil of the surf, the gentle lapping of a tranquil sea, or the quiet stillness of a flat calm. They have missed a whole dimension of life's experience.

One writer puts it like this:

'The Bible is like a great ocean. It has a sandy beach with shallows where even children can play safely. It has deeper parts where adults can swim. But it also has vast depths that we can never get to the bottom of'.

A User's Guide to the Bible – Lion Press

Like the sea, the Bible has many moods. Sometimes it thunders, challenging our complacency and inertia and threatening judgment to come. At other times it calms and comforts, soothing shredded nerves, offering words of comfort and hope and promising re-birth.

Yet there are many people who have never opened its pages, never even dipped a toe in the water, so to speak. Like the man who has never seen the sea, their minds have never been opened to these broad horizons, these new perspectives which the Bible presents to us.

There are others who occasionally dip into its pages to read again a familiar and much-loved passage, as they might resort to an tranquilliser in time of stress. The Bible deserves better than that – God’s Word has so much to offer us if we open our minds to its message in its completeness.

Reading the Bible from cover to cover however, is a daunting prospect for most people. Whilst it is probably no longer than a typical ‘blockbuster’ novel, its qualities and the impetus to read it, are very different. A collection of 66 books of different types, some written more than three thousand years ago, springing from very different ages and cultures, it presents some formidable obstacles which can quickly put off the casual reader.

As we noted earlier, the Bible is in two parts, 39 books in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament. The books were originally written on scrolls in a continuous text divided into columns. When the King James Version was translated in AD 1611 the book was divided into chapters (with a few exceptions) and then again into verses following an earlier system used in the Geneva Bible. This is a

very useful method of finding our way and enables us to pinpoint a particular passage with relative ease. However, this system of breaks into chapter and verse is not always the best arrangement to retain the flow of the text. Do bear this in mind as you read and study the Bible, so that you have a complete understanding of the passage being read.

So how are you going to start? The following are a few suggestions to help you get started on your Bible reading in a sensible and structured way, which will eventually provide great rewards.

which Bible shall I read?

Any bookshop with a comprehensive religious section will present a bewildering array of different Bibles. The most familiar is still the King James Version, read and revered by many people for its outstanding literary qualities.

However, the Bible is far more than great literature and there are some who, coming fresh to the Bible, will find the language of King James an insurmountable barrier to understanding or applying its message today. The New King James Version



retains the basic sentence structure and rhythms of the King James Bible, whilst updating the language. Other new translations, such as the New International Version, provide an alternative.

Some translations are freer and the language is more colloquial than others. Every translation needs to be used with care and any serious Bible study will involve the use of more than one version. But for everyday reading, find one that you understand and that you enjoy

reading. As your knowledge of the Bible increases, you will become aware of the weaknesses and strengths of each version and better equipped to choose between them.

When you are choosing a Bible for yourself, think about other ways it can help you in your reading. Ideally, choose a Bible with cross references in the margin that will help you find quotations and parallel passages. A good selection of maps will be useful and some editions will have other 'helps', such as a list of references to Christ in the Old Testament, Bible weights and measures and their current equivalents, the Jewish calendar and so on. Some Bibles even have a small concordance in the back, where you can look up particular words and find out where they occur and how they are used. However you will probably find this to be an abbreviated version, and of limited value compared with a separate complete concordance.

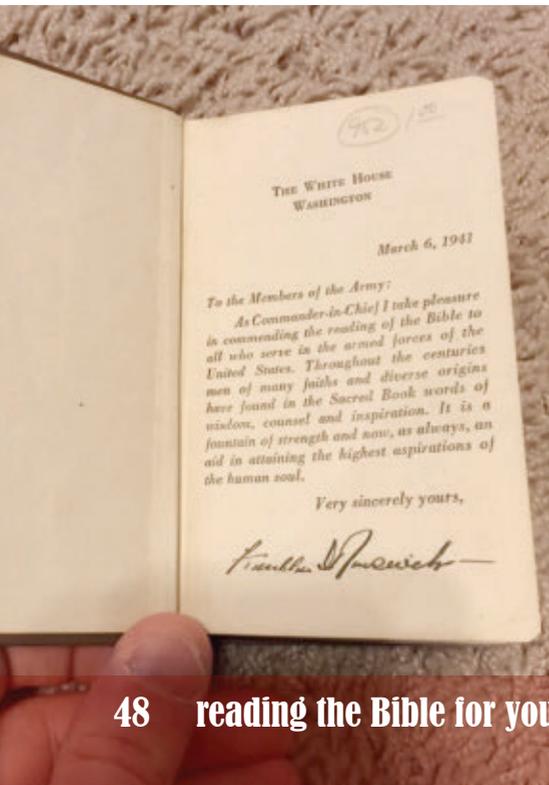
Think also about whether you need to carry a Bible with you and if so, choose a small Bible that will not be too heavy. For those used to carrying a computer with them, a range of Bible versions is available

in electronic format, together with study aids such as concordances and lexicons. Similar software is available for smaller hand-held electronic devices like mobile phones and tablet computers.

where do I start?

When they pick up a good book, many people cannot resist the temptation to look at the end, at the same time, or even before they look at the beginning. When it comes to the Bible that is not a bad

A miniature Bible printed in 1941 for American troops in World War II and signed by President Roosevelt.



idea. If, for example, you read the early chapters of Genesis and the last few chapters of Revelation, you will find the origin of sin and death (Genesis 3) and God's promise to remove both (Revelation 21.4). You will also read of a new creation to replace the first (Revelation 21.1), of the rivers watering Eden and the tree of life at the beginning, a river of life and the tree of life in the age to come (Genesis 2.10, 3.24; Revelation 22.1,2). The importance of Genesis as the foundation of God's plan for mankind could hardly be clearer.

It has to be said that the Book of Revelation is not the easiest place for the new Bible reader to begin. Reading the Old and New Testaments simultaneously is definitely a good idea – the fact that they interrelate and complement each other will soon become obvious. Some editions of the New King James Version contain a plan for reading the whole Bible in a year, reading part of the Old Testament and part of the New Testament each day, starting with Genesis chapter 1 and Matthew chapter 1 respectively. The problem here is that, due to the difference in the length of each Testament, a

very small section of the New Testament (often half a chapter or less), is accompanied by a large section of the Old Testament – often three or four chapters. Also, reading the Bible in sequence (for example the four Gospel records), is not necessarily the most interesting and productive way of reading.

a plan for daily reading

For more than 150 years the Christadelphians have used a daily reading plan which enables the reader to cover the Old Testament once and the New Testament twice in the course of a year. It does so with three different daily readings, two from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament (**see special pull-out centre section, pages 27 to 30**).

The Old Testament plan starts with Genesis and Psalms, and then simply follows the books through in sequence. The New Testament plan starts with Matthew, but after each Gospel record, diverts to some of the later books and letters before returning to the next Gospel record and so on. Such a plan ensures a varied and interesting diet each day. The Psalms, for

example, provide a perfect foil for the narrative of Genesis and the details of the Law of Moses in the subsequent books.

One of the criticisms which may be levelled at the 'Bible reading tables' is that they split up even some of the smaller books over several days, and it is sometimes difficult to achieve the overall picture of a book's message and structure. No daily reading plan will be sufficient on its own to do justice to God's Word and needs to be supplemented by additional study which focuses on particular themes or books. The 'Bible reading tables' have been tried and tested by several generations of Christadelphians, and we recommend it to you. The reading tables in the middle of this magazine can easily be removed and used as book-marks to follow the daily reading plan.

an approach to reading

Reading the Bible needs a careful, disciplined approach. It may be unfashionable but it is essential. It needs self-discipline to set aside a particular part of each day, ideally when the mind is fresh and when your reading can perhaps be

shared with a friend or members of your family. The mind needs to be re-focused otherwise it is occupied with 1001 things, some trivial, some important, but none as important as God's Word. It means a disciplined approach to the Bible itself - a constant and structured questioning of its content, designed to bring out its real message and its genuine practical relevance to your life. The following, for example, are some of the questions that you might like to keep in your mind as you read the Bible each day.

what kind of writing is this?

The Bible contains many different types of literature – history, narrative, poetry, prophecy and parables etc. If a passage appears to be straightforward historical narrative, then we need to ask why it has been preserved and what we are intended to gain from it. This is how the early disciples of Jesus used the Old Testament narrative. The Apostle Paul, looking back on some of the events which happened to Israel in the wilderness writes: *'These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us...'* (1 Corinthians 10.11 NIV). The Apostle

James tells us: *'...as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord...You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.'*

James 5.10,11 NIV

So we need to read the Bible imaginatively and actively, placing ourselves in the position of its heroes and villains, drawing practical and spiritual guidance from the record of their lives. If a passage we are reading is poetry (and one of the advantages of a modern version is that the layout of the text will clearly distinguish between poetry and prose), then we need to be aware of the poetic imagery being used. We also need to ask ourselves what emotional response it is designed to evoke from us and not to read it or interpret it in the same literal way that we would a historical section.

Many parts of the Bible contain prophecies about the future and we looked at an example earlier in this booklet (see page 41). It was in this way that God, through His prophets, distinguished their message from the many false prophets.

Some understanding of the historical background of the prophecy will probably be essential if we are to appreciate how it was fulfilled. A **Bible Dictionary**, or one of the popular **Study Bibles** will usually provide the basic information. Many Bible prophecies have more than one application and you may well find in your reading that a prophecy which may appear to

Assyrian archers attack the Jewish city of Lachish. The Jewish prophets knew the attack foreshadowed a much greater attack on Israel in 'the last days'.

have been fulfilled long ago has received an even more dramatic fulfillment in our own time. Or maybe it is telling us about something still to happen in the future – preparing us for the great climax of God's plan. So when we read passages like this, we need to ask ourselves some questions:

- ❖ What is the background to this passage?
- ❖ When was it given and why?
- ❖ Was it fulfilled at the time and if so, how?



- ❖ Does it teach me anything? Is there anything about the future here that I should be expecting and preparing for?
- ❖ What does it teach me about Jesus?

One of the most astonishing features of the Bible, as you get to know it, is that such an assortment of writers have a **single theme**, and that it is dominated throughout by a **single person**. The theme is God's plan for bringing salvation to sinful mankind. The person is the one man through whom that objective is being achieved – Jesus Christ. Jesus is alluded to there – in the earliest chapters of Genesis, the Law of Moses, the Psalms and the prophets, as well as being the subject of the Gospels and the Apostles' letters.

A key question to ask yourself as you read a particular passage of the Bible is this: 'Does it tell me anything about Jesus?' Often of course the answer will seem to be 'No' – but as you explore the Bible more and more, you will find the answer is often 'Yes'. As you learn more about Jesus, for example his feelings as depicted in the Psalms (which fill out the often sparse

account of the Gospel records), you will come closer to him and so better equipped to imitate his outstanding qualities in your life.

unanswered questions

Having set yourself a series of questions, don't worry if many of the answers escape you. It is the experience of all Bible students that as their knowledge of the Bible increases, the number of unanswered and unanswerable questions increases as well. Bible reading and study is not an intellectual diversion. The Bible was never designed simply to satisfy human curiosity. Whatever problems your reading of God's Word may pose, we believe they are nothing compared with the clarity, simplicity and certainty of God's plan which it reveals.

prepare to be laughed at

The Bible is not a fashionable book at the moment. Many people see it as a relic of ancient superstition which we have outgrown. TV and other popular media are ruled by a fashionable and aggressive atheism, and society in general rejects the moral principals and spiritual guidance of the Word of God.

But you are prepared to be different.

You are reading the Bible for yourself, and you are taking it seriously. Some of those around you may not understand that, but don't be put off! Perhaps your example will help others to re-evaluate this wonderful but much neglected book.

listening to God every day

'The very best way to study the Bible is simply to read it daily with close attention and with prayer to see the light which shines from its pages, to meditate upon it, and to continue to read it until somehow it works itself, its words, its expressions, its teaching, its habits of thought and its presentation of God and His Christ into the very warp and woof of one's being'.

Dr. Howard A Kelley

That will take a lifetime, but follow this advice and you will find out what the Psalmist meant, and you will be able to pray with him when he said:

'Your word is
a lamp to my
feet and a
light for my
path ...

Your statutes
are forever
right; give me
understanding
that I may
live.'

Psalm 119.105,144 NIV

Piecing it all together

Jewish scholar Simon Schechter in the Cambridge University Library in 1896, surrounded by some 193,000 fragments of Hebrew manuscripts. He had just discovered them in a store room in the old Jewish Synagogue in Cairo, Egypt – the most important collection of medieval Hebrew writings ever found. They include many other documents apart from the biblical books (see <http://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/collections/genizah>).

In Jewish tradition, no copy of the Torah scrolls should ever be destroyed when it is worn out, but put away in a special storeroom (the 'genizah'). After one thousand years of accumulated storage, this is the result!

Despite many attempts to destroy and discredit it, the Word of God has come down to us essentially unchanged over the passage of over three thousand years. Through the generations, God has used men and women of courage and dedication to preserve and protect his sacred message – so that we can read it and put our faith in it today.

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Light on a new world

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We will be pleased to answer your questions. Please write to the correspondence secretary at the address on the inside front cover, or e-mail us at:

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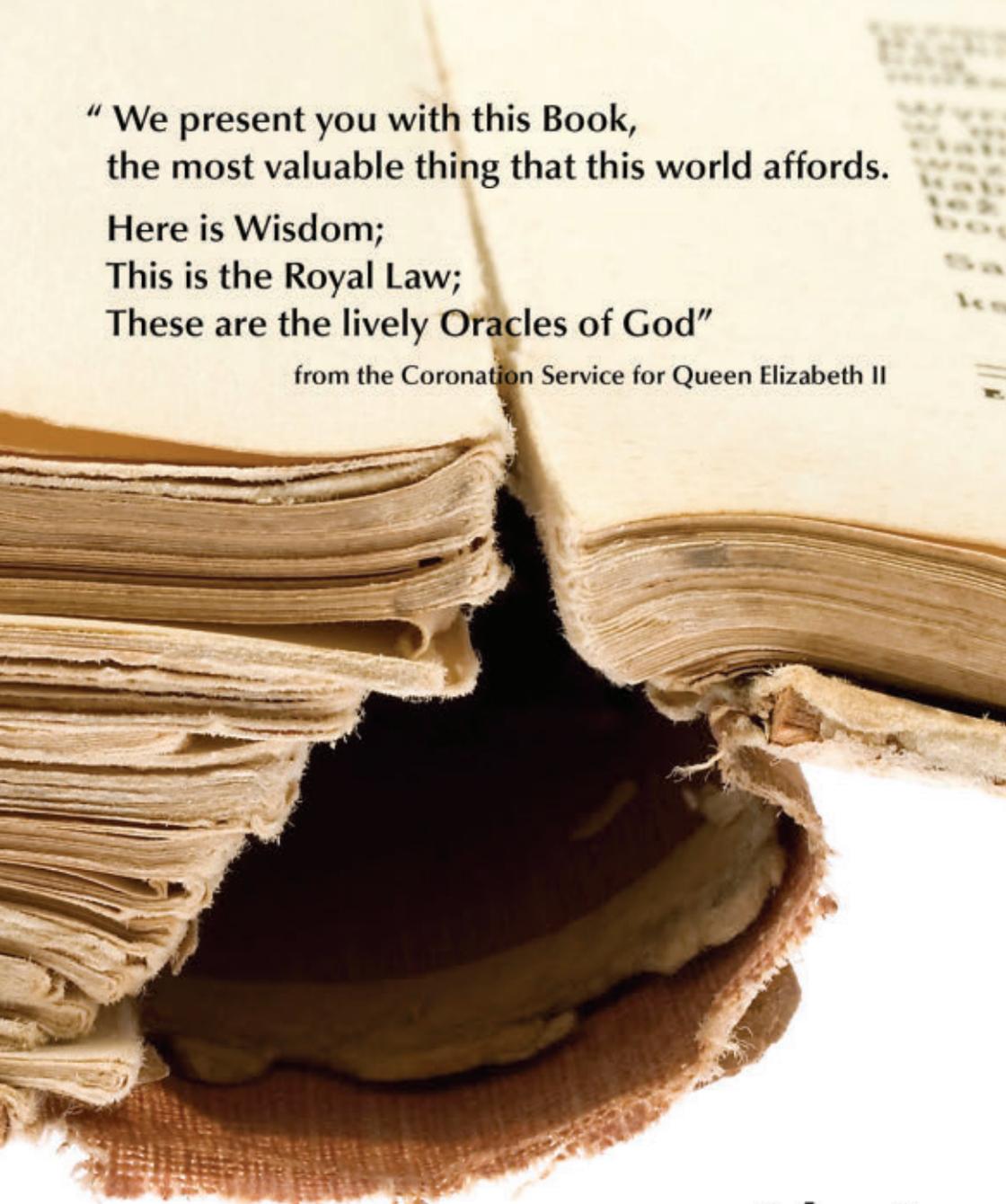
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This is the Royal Law;
These are the lively Oracles of God”**

from the Coronation Service for Queen Elizabeth II

**not just
another old book**