

Why You Can Believe the Bible



The Christadelphians



Why You Can Believe The Bible

The Bible is no ordinary book.

- ✓ **It claims to have been inspired by God and to contain His message to mankind.**
- ✓ **It explains why things have happened and what needs to be done to remedy the situation.**
- ✓ **It contains some unpleasant truths about human nature and spells out what will happen if no action is taken.**

So it should come as no surprise that some people ignore what the Bible has to say and others work hard to try to discredit it. They want to demonstrate its inaccuracies but the Bible has proved remarkably resilient and there are good reasons why you can believe that the Bible is what it claims to be – a message from God to you!

Accurate or Not?

There was a major assault made on the Bible during the 19th century when critics of the Bible tried to show that the collection of 66 books we know as “The Bible” was flawed and fallible. They claimed that much of what was written was myth and legend and that it had no historical credibility, because some of it was just made up.

It was said that in ancient times people couldn't write so they could only pass on information by word of mouth. If so, you might expect things to get distorted in the telling.

Even when they could write, the sceptics argued, because there were no printing presses in existence the original message would soon have got corrupted. They said that inaccuracies would have crept in as handwritten copy after copy was made.

Ridiculous!

These statements look ridiculous now, to people who are aware of what has been discovered since, including many ancient libraries from different civilisations. But at the time the words of these learned scholars carried a lot of weight and ordinary people were impressed by them. It became fashionable to pick and choose what was likely to be historical and what was not. As a result the authority of the Bible was considerably damaged.

A critical system was devised which split up the Biblical account into the work of supposed different authors.

The assumption was that an editor, somewhere and at some unknown time, had brought various accounts together and had merged and modified them.

He was called a “redactor”; the system was known as “form criticism”, and the bottom line was that this collection of writings could be regarded rather differently. Instead of a communication from the

Creator of the Universe, it was considered to be an attempt by men to describe their search after God and their experiences in the process.



Reappraisal

At the time when this critical view was becoming popular, archaeology was in its infancy. Scientific work in general was being done by wealthy amateurs – people with time on their hands who had an interest in the natural sciences. But when discoveries like the site of ancient Nineveh were made, and when sculptures and artefacts began to fill museums, money was found and the business of exploration really got underway.

Ancient history was thus revealed and the facts became known. Writing was indeed an ancient skill. The empires, cities and people featured in the Bible accounts were real enough. Fact by fact the accuracy of the Bible was established and it was not only shown to be historically accurate. It was also seen to contain very detailed data about historical events and cultural practices which matched the discoveries being made – and which are still being made – in nearby countries.

Dead Sea Scrolls

Then, in 1947, some discoveries near the Dead Sea in Israel caused further great excitement. Scrolls dating back before the time of Jesus were discovered, manuscripts much older than those that had been previously known. Suddenly it was possible to check whether the alleged errors made by copyists were there or not. The scrolls provided a chance to see the Old Testament books in the form that



Jesus would have seen them. It was years before the texts became available, as scholars pieced the fragments together, restored, debated and eventually published them. Now you can buy your own “*Dead Sea Scrolls Bible*” which states that it is based on a text which is “*Over 1000 years older than any previously discovered biblical manuscripts*”.

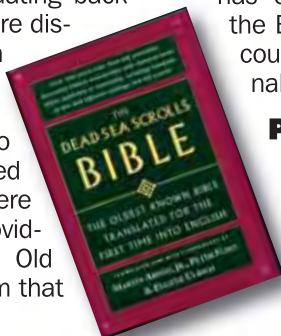
Yet there are no significant differences between the Bible as it has come down to us and the manuscripts found in the caves near the Dead Sea. One scholar summarised the situation like this:

“The new evidence confirms what we had already good reason to believe – that the Jewish scribes of the early Christian centuries copied and recopied the text of the Hebrew Bible with the utmost fidelity” (F. F. Bruce: Second Thoughts on the Dead Sea Scrolls).

There are some minor differences, but none of them in any way affect the main message of the Bible or challenge the evident outcome – that God has overseen the transmission of the Bible text so that His message could reach us in almost its original form.

Public Confidence

When mud is thrown it tends to stick, so many people have been left with the wrong impression that the Bible has been discredited



by scholars and it has nothing important to say to them in the 21st century. Or maybe they think that the only ones who take the Bible seriously are people who take a blind leap of faith. You know the argument – ‘They know it to be wrong, but they believe it anyway!’ Both those assumptions are entirely wrong.

É As the archaeologist discovers and the historian analyses, there are increasing reasons for accepting that the Bible is a remarkable collection of wonderfully preserved books which trace the purpose of God through the centuries.

É And if you take the trouble to read the Bible you will discover that it still has something very relevant to say to us.

There may be a reason why the public memory has stored away the attempts to rubbish the Bible, but has conveniently failed to take account of the things that authenticate it. Long ago the apostle Peter told his First Century readers that a time would come when people would disregard God’s message and go about their business regardless. They would live the way they wanted to, without interference from anyone. What he said is typical of the hard-hitting and no-nonsense style of the Bible:

For this they wilfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men (2 Peter 3:5–7).

He was writing about the flood that

happened in Noah’s day, a long time ago; something that a lot of people now discount. But notice his careful analysis. He says that people forget about these things wilfully – because they want to! For consider the alternative. If this remarkable collection of books, written by many people over a long period of time is indeed an inspired and authoritative message from the Creator, we have got to do something about it, or else! If God has something important to say, we had better listen. And if He is offering a solution to the problems that have troubled mankind throughout the ages, we would ignore that at our peril, and much to our disadvantage.

Reasons to Believe

We believe that the Bible offers something really valuable for every thinking man and woman and that there are good reasons why we should believe it. It’s not a matter of a leap of faith but a question of studying the evidence and then making an informed decision.

É Consider what the Bible claims to be, and you will see that it’s a question of accepting it as such or dismissing it altogether. There is no middle ground.

É Think about the fact that those who wrote the Bible could foretell the future in a quite remarkable and sometimes very detailed way.

í Then consider what the Lord Jesus thought about the 39 Old Testament books which were his lifelong study. If he believed them, why don’t you?

í You will discover that it has a wonderful message from the Creator and an offer you really don’t want to miss.

The Bible's Amazing Claims

If you were reading the Bible for the first time you might be struck by its opening words which take the reader back to the time when God created the world:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters (Genesis 1:1-2).

And if you read right through the 66 books to the very last one, the Revelation of Jesus Christ, you could be equally impressed with the claim it makes that all human affairs are subject to God's control. The Bible says that He intends to change the course of history and take control of the earth, to convert it into a place fit for His people:

I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.' Then He who sat on the throne said, 'Behold, I make all things new. And he said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful" (Revelation 21:3-5).



'True and faithful'

Whilst describing the most remarkable things that are due to happen, or when explaining why awful things have taken place, the Bible always makes it clear that its message has come from God.

It consistently claims to be a Divine message. We are now living in a society which doesn't bother much about instruction booklets or detailed explanations about how to use a new appliance. We expect it to be self-explanatory and complain if the design is not 'intuitive'. But the world in which we are living is hugely complex and it is a real bonus that a guidebook to life has been preserved for us, which carries the stamp of Divine authorship.

When Moses went up Mount Sinai and returned with two tablets of stone inscribed with the Ten Commandments he never once suggested that these were his laws. How could he? Nobody would have accepted his ideas as a rule for life. They were presented to Israel as God's law:

And God spoke all these words, saying: 'I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me...' (Exodus 20:1-3).

Eye Witnesses

That claim was accepted because of what accompanied it. The infant nation

had been freed from slavery in Egypt by powerful demonstrations of God's power. They had been saved when Pharaoh and his army tried to recapture them. They had seen Mount Sinai ablaze and had witnessed the earthquake and the cloud that coincided with Moses' ascent. And they had heard a voice speaking that had filled them with fear and trembling.

We weren't there of course to witness those things ourselves but that it happened like that is verified by the continual observance of these laws by the Jewish people from that day to this. Those Ten Commandments have been the backbone of their moral law from then until now, and they would never have begun to act like this – and thus to restrict their freedom of action – unless the events of Exodus chapter 20 had convinced those who were there with Moses.

It is just the same with other great happenings. When Jesus rose from the dead there were plenty of people in Jerusalem who would have wanted to prove that he was still dead. But they could not, try as they might.

And when the apostle Peter stood up in Jerusalem, only a few hundred yards from where the death and burial of Jesus had taken place, he could say with absolute confidence:

Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves also know – him, being delivered by the determined purpose and

foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that he should be held by it (Acts 2:22–24).

This was an astonishing claim: that a man who had been publicly executed, who they had seen being crucified, had risen from the dead and was now alive and well in heaven (Acts 2:33). Notice that he appeals to their knowledge of these things – “as you yourselves also know” (v 22) – and that he was speaking to people who could have gone and checked out the facts for themselves. That contemporary acceptance is the reason why the New Testament account could be published, be accepted, and then be preserved by people who still believe its remarkable claims.

Inspiration

There were some things the apostles saw and experienced themselves of course, so they could write an eye-witness account. The apostle John had stood by the cross when Jesus was dying and had been there to witness a soldier thrusting a spear into Jesus to make sure he was dead. Listen to this categorical statement:

One of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe (John 19:34–35).

John had no reason to record an untruth and



every reason to tell us what really happened, for he wrote his gospel account to explain to his readers that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (John 20:31). But was his memory always accurate, or did he forget things like the rest of us, or exaggerate a little?

This is something else that sets the Bible apart from all other literature. For Jesus told his disciples that when they passed on the events they had experienced they would be given supernatural help to make sure their recollection was correct:

The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you (John 14:26).

That is how all Scripture was transmitted by God to make sure that it accurately conveys His message. Whilst it is coloured by the experiences and backgrounds of the people who conveyed it, the message itself is God's. In the Bible God is communicating directly to us. When we read it we are reading His Word.

Carried Along

We cannot understand exactly how this process worked – why should we expect to, for this is God's method of communication? But you see the process at work in writer after writer. The apostle Peter had been one of three of Jesus' disciples who had been present when Jesus was transfigured before their eyes. His appearance and clothing shone with a luminous brightness. Writing about the event



much later, Peter says that it was a depiction of the majesty of Jesus (as if his inner moral purity was being displayed outwardly). Then he adds:

... knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20–21).

He shared the experience with his readers but he was conscious that he was a driven man – that something impelled him to write as he did and say what he did. Evidently he wanted to share those thoughts, for he was writing at the time to Jewish believers for whom he was responsible. But sometimes the writers did not want to communicate; either because they didn't like the message they were given, or because it was painful and made them deeply unpopular. Jonah tried to run away, but he was tracked down by God and made to convey a message to Nineveh that he would rather not have given. Jeremiah's life was on the line because of his downbeat utterances. So he tried to stifle the prophetic impulse, without success:

Then I said, 'I will not make mention of Him, nor speak anymore in His name.' But His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, and I could not. For I heard many mocking: 'Fear on every side!' (Jeremiah 20:9–10).

So when the Bible makes these amazing claims to be the Word of the living God, there are good reasons why we should believe it and take notice.

Its Remarkable Prophecies

When the apostle Peter boldly asserted that Jesus had risen from the dead he was confident about this for two reasons:

- ✓ **The facts supported him, and**
- ✓ **The resurrection and ascension of Jesus had been foretold long before, so what happened was a fulfilment of Bible prophecy.**

Listen to what he said about Jesus:

Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that he should be held by it. For David says concerning him: 'I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken. Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad; moreover my flesh also will rest in hope. For you will not leave my soul in Hades, nor will you allow your Holy One to see corruption (Acts 2:23–27).

Peter was quoting from Psalm 16, written by the psalmist King David about a thousand years before. Peter went on to explain that David had not spoken about himself – for he both died and was buried – but about his great successor to the throne, none other than the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Future Foretold

It may come as a surprise that the future can be foretold with such precision, but that is a characteristic

feature of the Bible and something that extends right down to our own times. Consider the way that the life-history of Jesus was predicted in Scriptures that preceded his birth by many hundreds of years. Here are a few examples, and some passages that you can check for yourself.

- 4 He was to be born of a virgin: *Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:18,24-25; Luke 1:26-35.*
- 4 He would be the Son of God: *Psalms 2:7; Matthew 3:17; 16:16; Mark 9:7.*
- 4 He would be Abraham's descendant (or seed): *Genesis 22:18; Matthew 1:1; Galatians 3:16.*
- 4 He would be from the tribe of Judah: *Genesis 49:10; Luke 3:23,33; Matthew 1:2; Hebrews 7:14.*
- 4 He would be from the House of David: *Jeremiah 23:5; Luke 3:23,31; Matthew 1:1; 9:27; 15:22.*
- 4 He would be born in Bethlehem (the city of David): *Micah 5:2; Matthew 2:1.*
- 4 His birth would be accompanied by the slaughter of infants: *Jeremiah 31:15; Matt. 2:16.*
- 4 He would be a prophet: *Deuteronomy 18:18; Matthew 21:11.*
- 4 He would be empowered by God's Holy Spirit: *Isaiah 11:2; 61:1-2; Matthew 3:16-17.*
- 4 He would perform many miracles *Isaiah 35:5-6; Matthew 9:35.*

You might be thinking that it would have been possible to self-fulfil some of these Old Testament predictions about the coming Messiah. Jewish couples were always hopeful that their son would be the one who had been so long awaited. Might there have been a conspiracy? Could they perhaps have contrived to make these prophecies come true? Was Jesus in on the act?

Surprising Future

Far from that happening, as things worked out everyone was taken by surprise. The Jewish desire for a Messiah was for a fighting man who would rouse and empower the nation so they could overthrow their Roman masters and declare self-rule. When news got around that here was someone with extraordinary powers – someone who could feed a multitude with just a few loaves and fishes, for example – they knew at once what they wanted him to do, and their plans were different from his:

When Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he departed again to the mountain by himself alone (John 6:15).

They wanted a king and took every opportunity to urge Jesus to assume that role, for they thought it was what the Old Testament promised. They were right about that but their understanding was limited. The prophets predict the coming of a conquering king who will subdue all his enemies and establish world dominion, bringing all mankind to recognise God's supremacy. King David was inspired to make this prediction, speaking on God's behalf like this:

'Yet I have set my King on my holy hill of Zion'. I will declare the decree: The

Lord has said to me, 'You are my Son, today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will give you the nations for your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron; you shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel' (Psalm 2:6–9).

Suffering Servant

But there was another set of predictions which the Messiah had to fulfil first, and nobody had seen this coming. The prophets had also spoken about someone who would be God's perfect Servant, someone who would be absolutely obedient and who would voluntarily give his life to save people from their sins. The prophet Isaiah said this of that coming one:

He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; he was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment, and who will declare his generation? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of my people he was stricken (Isaiah 53:7–8).

Nobody had worked out that this was also Messiah's role. Not even the closest followers of Jesus had anticipated this development. But he knew; and when he began to tell them that this was the first work that Messiah had to fulfil they tried to dissuade him and to point him in another direction. Peter once said:

"Far be it from you, Lord; this shall not happen to you!" (Matthew 16:22).

He was soundly rebuked by Jesus, for the Lord knew what none of his contemporaries had understood.

Sacrificial Death

How did Jesus know? Jesus knew because his destiny was foretold in the Old Testament Scriptures and he read these avidly. They spelled out in detail the various things that were due to happen and because God can foretell the future, even when it involves the voluntary actions of others, this was exactly what happened.

- 4 Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey: *Zechariah 9:9; Luke 19:35-37.*
- 4 He was rejected by his nation: *Psalms 118:22; John 1:11; 1 Peter 2:7.*
- 4 He was betrayed by a follower: *Psalms 41:9; Matthew 10:4.*
- 4 Sold for thirty pieces of silver: *Zechariah 11:12; Matt 26:15.*
- 4 Forsaken by his disciples: *Zechariah 13:7; Mark 14:50.*
- 4 He was beaten: *Isaiah 50:6; Matthew 26:67.*
- 4 He was mocked: *Psalms 22:7-8; Matthew 27:29.*
- 4 He was nailed to the cross: *Psalms 22:16; Luke 23:33*
- 4 There he interceded for his persecutors: *Isaiah 53:12; Luke 23:34.*
- 4 His friends and relatives stood far off: *Psalms 38:11; Luke 23:49.*
- 4 His clothes were divided between the soldiers: *Psalms 22:18; John 19:23-24.*
- 4 After his death not one of his bones was broken: *Psalms 34:20; John 19:33.*
- 4 His side was pierced by a spear: *Zechariah 12:10; John 19:34.*
- 4 He was buried in a rich man's grave: *Isaiah 53:9; Matthew 27:57-60.*

Notice that most of these things were outside Jesus' control for they were actions undertaken by his enemies or his executioners. Yet this prophetic scenario is part of a complex set of interlocking prophecies given by several prophets over a period of up to one thousand years before Jesus was born.

This is why Bible prophecy is considered to be such a powerful testimony to the truth of the Bible. It exists as a testimony to God's foreknowledge and His absolute control over world events and people. Our world might go careering downhill, apparently out of control, but the Bible makes it clear that there is a mastermind in charge and that God has a gracious purpose which will work out for the benefit of certain individuals and for all nations, in due course.

Israel's History

The history of the nation God chose as His witness to all nations confirms that in a very graphic way. For some 1400 years before Jesus was born Moses had offered them a choice between obedience to God's law – which would bring great blessing – and disobedience, which would bring catastrophic consequences. You can read the choices for yourself in Deuteronomy chapter 28.

Throughout their national history there were reminders given by the prophets that they had that choice, but little notice was taken. Instead of trusting God and being obedient, too often they carved out their own destiny, often with the help of surrounding nations who offered to help them against common enemies. Now their rejection of Jesus led to a dramatic fulfilment of other Bible prophecies.

Jewish history has become a remarkable testimony to the truth and authority of the Bible.

National Catastrophe

On his way into Jerusalem, with the crowds proclaiming that he was their coming king – the one long ago promised by King David – Jesus made this far-reaching prediction: saying,

“If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation” (Luke 19:42–44).

The people did not know that Jesus was their long-promised Messiah and the result of his execution was catastrophic for them. Whilst his sacrificial death made salvation possible, the consequence of their rejection was that the Jewish nation ceased to exist.

It was their nationalistic zeal and patriotism that brought matters to a head. Desperate to become an independent nation again, and frustrated by actions of Rome, a freedom-fighting faction known as the Zealots decided to take on the might of the Roman Empire and at first – in 66 AD – they had remarkable success.

But when the Romans marshalled their forces and attacked Judea and Jerusalem the writing was on the wall and the result was the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, the massacre of hundreds of thousands of captives and the deportation of any survivors. The

outcome was what had been long ago foretold by the prophets: because of their rejection of Jesus as Messiah they lost everything.

National Recovery

For nearly two thousand years the Jewish people were spread and scattered throughout the world and there seemed no hope that they would ever return. Other people had taken over their ancient homeland and made it their own. Yet despite their dispersion and regardless of persecution that followed them, they remained a distinctly separate people. They always hoped and prayed that they would return. Their cry was always “Next Year in Jerusalem”. For those who believed in God’s Word had the promise of the prophets to look forward to. They would have understood that as their scattering had been foretold, so had their regathering, at some unspecified future time:

The Lord your God will bring you back from captivity, and have compassion on you, and gather you again from all the nations where the Lord your God has scattered you. If any of you are driven out to the farthest parts under heaven, from there the Lord your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you (Deuteronomy 30:3–4).

Could you have a more remarkable prophecy that extends over three thousand years, and more? For those words of Moses were spoken on the plains of Moab before the infant nation had even taken possession of the Promised Land. And now the Jewish people are back in that land, thanks to a vote in the United Nations (in 1947) and the hand of God at work in the 20th century. That’s how remarkable Bible prophecy really is.

What Jesus Said

There has never been anyone like Jesus and there never will be. He is unique because he is *“the only begotten Son of God”* (John 3:18). Because there was no other way, and no other person to save us from our sins, God caused His Son to be born to the virgin, Mary. He was thus *“born of a woman”* and *“born of God”* – a unique combination.

There was never anyone who understood the Scriptures better than Jesus. He had no formal teaching and never attended Rabbinical School, but he read the Hebrew Scriptures and came to understand them far better than his contemporaries. On the occasions when they tried to catch him out, or to trick him with clever questions, his understanding was far superior. Once he said as much when he answered a trick question with the words: *“You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God”* (Matthew 22:29), and they had no answer.

Authenticated

People who believe in the person and work of Jesus will obviously want to know what he thought about the credibility and authority of the Bible, for his opinion will really matter to them. But people who are undecided about who Jesus really is may not know whether his opinion counts for anything. Even the Bible’s statement that he is the only begotten Son of God



may appear to be an unfounded claim. So how do we know that Jesus was who he claimed to be? This question opens up another aspect of the Bible’s remarkable character.

Read the four gospel accounts about the death of Jesus and you will be in no doubt that Jesus was crucified by experienced Roman executioners and was taken down from the cross dead. Crucifixion was meant to be a public spectacle, so that others would take note and obey Roman law, or else... But then read on.

Two of Jesus’ followers laid him to rest in a nearby rock-cut tomb and left the body encased in spices (to ward off rapid corruption) until it could be properly laid out, for there was a Jewish feast day starting within a few hours. The accompanying women took careful note of all this and as soon as Jewish law allowed they went early that morning to do the necessary.

To their amazement the stone had been rolled away, the guard had gone and the body was nowhere to be found. Instead angels appeared to them to say that Jesus had risen from the dead and they rushed off to tell the disciples, who just thought they were seeing things. Nobody expected what had happened and for quite a while nobody believed that it had happened. That’s how true to life and how honest the gospel accounts are, for it had never happened before that a man who had been publicly executed had come back to life again.

Think it Through!

Since then sceptics have tried to advance a different argument. It has been suggested that Jesus wasn't really dead, but that he just swooned and then staggered back to life again. Others thought that the disciples might have stolen the body away and then pretended that Jesus was alive, whilst in fact they had quietly buried his body elsewhere. But none of these theories does justice to the facts, which you can read for yourself.

The bodily resurrection of Jesus is the only satisfactory answer to the question: "What was it that transformed the followers of Jesus from a group of dispirited and defeated people into a community with absolute faith, who were ready to die for what they believed to be true?" Once you have reached that conclusion you will know that it REALLY matters what Jesus thought about the Old Testament Scriptures. Wouldn't you want to know the opinion of someone who has triumphed over death?

Historical?

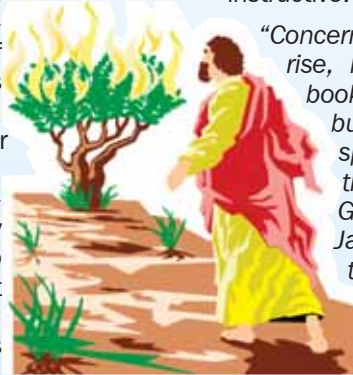
Be in no doubt. Jesus believed the Scriptures to be the Word of God. He believed that it recorded historical happenings –

- ✓ that Adam and Eve were God's special creation (Matthew 19:4);
- ✓ that there was a flood in Noah's day (Matthew 24:37-38);
- ✓ about Abraham and his family (Luke 13:28), and about

Abraham's understanding concerning Jesus (John 8:56);

- ✓ the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Luke 17:29); and
- ✓ Moses' encounter at the burning bush (Mark 12:26),

What Jesus said about Moses meeting with the angel of the LORD is instructive.



"Concerning the dead, that they rise, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the burning bush passage, how God spoke to him, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob' ? He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living. You are therefore greatly mistaken" (Mark 12:26-27).

He was speaking to people who did not believe in resurrection, but Jesus declared his belief by referring to the account in Exodus (Jesus called it "the book of Moses"). For when the angel, the spokesman of Almighty God, spoke about people long since dead, instead of saying "I was the God of Abraham..." the angel used the present tense. This, said Jesus, demonstrated that Abraham and others will be raised from the dead. In other words even the tense used in the Hebrew Scriptures was significant. That's how Jesus viewed the Scriptures, and he held that view consistently.

Jesus and the Scriptures

Here are some more examples:

Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I

say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:17–19).

For God commanded, saying, ‘Honour your father and your mother’; and, ‘He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death’ (Matthew 15:4).

For David himself said by the Holy Spirit: ‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool”’ (Mark 12:36).

Jesus answered them, “Is it not written in your law, ‘I said, “You are gods”?’ If He called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken)...” (John 10:34–35).

But he answered and said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God”’ (Matthew 4:4).

Unbreakable!

If you let these words of Jesus speak for themselves you will see that he considered the Scriptures to be wholly inspired by God. What had been written was, said Jesus, the result of God’s power – His Holy Spirit – working through them. When Moses gave the Ten Commandments to Israel, they were God’s commands, not those of Moses. And when Jesus said that “*the Scripture cannot be broken*” he was saying that he held it in the highest

possible esteem. That’s a remarkable testimony from an altogether remarkable man.

Not surprisingly, the followers of Jesus accepted their Lord’s view of the Scriptures. The apostle Paul once said to his young friend Timothy:

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, (2 Timothy 3:15–16).

When he said that all Scripture was inspired, he used a word which literally means ‘God-breathed’. It was, Paul believed, a message that had come as if from the mouth of God.

New Testament Too

It was not only the Old Testament writings that were considered to be inspired. How could God have communicated with Israel for many hundreds of years but have left the message about His Son to the chance recollection of his contemporaries. He most certainly did not! For the New Testament has equal authority, by whichever inspired writer the message was transmitted.

Writing that some people were misunderstanding what the apostle Paul had written, Peter said this:

*As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also **the rest of the Scriptures.** (2 Peter 3:16).*

So what Jesus believed his apostles also believed and taught.

The Bible Message

The lady on this month's front cover is working in one of the potato fields of Nepal in an area known as Bhujel. If she had time to look around her, a magnificent panorama unfolds sweeping down to the Himalayan Mountains. Layer after layer of mountains, each with their unseen valley, unfold as the scenery moves majestically upwards, towards the snow-covered peaks.



Layer after Layer

The Bible is very like that landscape. It starts off with one person – Adam – who had been created to work the land that God had made, and just a few chapters later a wide sweep of world events resulted in a civilisation that was quite alien to what God wanted from mankind. So He intervened and started the whole process again, beginning with just 8 people – Noah and his family. But again things worked out perversely and human society was founded on wrong ideas and human invention.

This time God chose one man with whom He began His purpose all over again – Abraham – and through him a different sort of society emerged – the nation of Israel. It was to have been a God-centred society that would serve as an example for all other nations who, by following their godly example, would come to know God and to accept what He had to offer. Sometimes it did just that but more often the people failed and became imita-

tors of other nations and eventually their slaves.

God started again with one man – Jesus. Because there was no other way, He sent His Son who was born of the virgin Mary and who was asked to do what Adam had failed to achieve: to be wholly obedient. He was and he never once failed to fulfil his Father's will. Father and Son worked in perfect unison. He

was asked to serve God absolutely and it was his delight to do just that:

He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted him and given him the name which is above every name ... (Philippians 2:8–9).

New Beginning

Jesus died to undo all the damage that had previously been done to and by humanity, which is why the New Testament describes him as the Last Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45). He gave his life as a sacrifice for sin, which is what God asked him to do, and because of his life of perfect obedience his Father “highly exalted him”. Jesus was raised from the dead and after he had spent some time with his disciples, both to persuade them of his glorious resurrection and to commission them to preach the gospel, he ascended to heaven. Jesus is the only person who has ever ascended to heaven (John

3:13), for everyone else who has died remains dead for the present, waiting for that time when they too will be raised from the sleep of death:

Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits 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. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at his coming (1 Corinthians 15:20–23).

This inspired statement by the apostle Paul shows what the Lord Jesus achieved in balancing out Adam's disobedience with his perfect obedience "to the point of death". Adam brought death into the world but Jesus brought the hope of everlasting life.

God's Great Plan

It is nearly 2000 years since Jesus rose from the dead and ascended to heaven where he now sits in glory at his Father's right hand. Those have been years of opportunity for people like us to get our lives right with God, and Father and Son have not been idle during that time. There is a grand plan working out which is proceeding to its final phase. Time has passed, as if we were travelling from one mountain range to another. Sometimes it has seemed as if the end of the process was in sight, but as one peak of expectation was reached there was another, a higher one, to be climbed.

Ě The apostles were empowered to preach the gospel, for Jesus gave them the ability to speak in tongues – in languages other than their native tongue – and to perform miracles.

Ě That same power enabled the Holy Scriptures to be completed and when all the Word of God was communicated the special powers that had been conferred were withdrawn (1 Corinthians 13:8-10). As the apostles died out, so did the power to perform miracles, and suchlike.

ĭ God's purpose with the nation of Israel saw a different development for, about 30 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus, Jerusalem was conquered and Jewish national existence came to an end. The people who survived the Roman conquest were exiled and over the years the entire nation was dispersed all over the world. That is why there are Jews everywhere, even today. But God had not given up on His people (Romans 11:1-2). The apostle Paul asks and then answers this question:

Have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles. Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness! (Romans 11:11–12).

A King is Coming

When Jesus lived in Israel his contemporaries wanted a king to rouse the nation and overthrow the hated Romans who ruled over them, but that was not the role that Jesus had then come to fulfil. He had to initiate a way of salvation by his obedience and had to give his life as a sacrifice for sin. So his work was misunderstood and whilst there were many who accepted him as their Saviour, the nation as a whole rejected him.

They had been hoping for a Saviour but, at the time, they didn't understand their real enemy. They thought that it was the Romans who separated them from a better life, but it was sin that separated them from God. They wanted freedom from Roman rule, but they needed freedom from sin and its inevitable end – death. As Paul once explained: “death reigned” (Romans 5:14).



There is only one man who has shown that he is fit to rule the world and he has demonstrated that by ruling perfectly over himself. Nobody else has been able to master human desires and passions: he “*was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin*” (Hebrews 4:15). This was a wonderful achievement and yet greater wonders will be seen when Jesus

returns to rule and to change the world back to the state that God desires. Jesus will rule over a new society on earth – over the Kingdom of God on earth. It will be a time when the Lord's Prayer is at last answered and the will of God will be done on earth as it is done in heaven.

Life-Bringer

Jesus came to bring life – to set them free from sin – and that opportunity still exists for us. But Jesus is coming as a king, to rule on earth over God's kingdom which is to be re-established and will be centred in Jerusalem. He is the long-promised ruler: the subject of many of the great prophecies and promises of the Scriptures, like this one:

There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots. The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. His delight is in the fear of the Lord, and he shall not judge by the sight of his eyes, nor decide by the hearing of his ears; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked (Isaiah 11:1-4).

Why Wait?

If God wanted this change to be effected, why not send Jesus straight back from heaven and set up the kingdom there and then? That was the very question the disciples were asking Jesus about on their last journey with him, across the Mount of Olives (Acts 1:6). His answer was that the Kingdom would only come in God's good time, and that they had work to do in the interim. He had previously warned them of difficult times to come for the world as human government continued, with all its imperfections. He gave a detailed prediction known as 'The Olivet Prophecy' which you can read in Luke chapter 21 and elsewhere. It includes a forecast about the fall of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jewish nation which, said Jesus, would continue “*until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled*” (Luke 21:24).

- ❖ One factor that required time was God's ongoing purpose with His people, descended from Abraham.
- ❖ The other key reason for the delay is that God has been giving every one of us time to discover and respond to His gracious offer of salvation.

What's on Offer?

In a careful analysis of the human condition, the apostle Paul shows that we all have a problem in that we are naturally inclined to please ourselves, rather than to obey the commandments of God. In fact, he says, many people block God out of their thinking entirely, regardless of the evidence all around us. He shows that the Bible analyses our condition and labels us "sinners" and warns that if we do nothing about it we will end up dead forever. But notice how he sums up the comparison between our natural condition and what God is offering:

The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23).

God offers us life forever in a perfect world, and more besides. He offers us forgiveness of sins and the ability to sort our minds out, despite all the horrible things that are happening around us. For we can have fellowship with God and with fellow-believers as we patiently await the Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and the kingdom that he will establish when he returns, in power and great glory.

What's the Catch?

There is no catch. God doesn't work like that or think like that. He is abundant in goodness and truth and God is both loving and merciful. He doesn't

want anybody to miss out on the offer of salvation, but He does expect us to respond to His offer in a particular way. Throughout history God has offered men and women a way back into fellowship with Him, whatever they might have said or done, but it was always His way that had to be followed, and there is only ever one way. That is why Jesus once described himself as *"the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"* (John 14:6).

But how can we come to God through Jesus? Scripture explains to us how straightforward it is:

- Ē We need to read the Bible and understand its message, so we know what God is doing in the world and what He plans to do.
- Ë We have to believe what God is offering, for we need a saving faith. None of us is good enough to merit salvation: only Jesus is good enough and we need his help.
 - ì Once we understand these things we have to be baptized, by immersion in water, so we can identify with Jesus – buried in water, just as Jesus was buried; rising from water in the way that he arose from the dead (read Romans chapter 6). It's an act of identification with what Jesus has done for us.
 - í Then we begin life anew, this time living according to the commandments and direction of Jesus, which is why the Bible serves as a guidebook both for the life that now is and for the life that is to come.
 - î Because there are many other people who are following this way all over the world, we will want to join with them in a fellowship of believers, so we can be working together to prepare for the Second Coming of Jesus and the Kingdom that is coming when he returns.

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