

# Why Should I Trust The Bible?

## FEARED AND REVERED

In 1978, British interviewer, David Frost, invited Charles Colson to a debate with the famous atheist, Madelyn Murray O'Hair. As Colson recounts the episode in his book, *Loving God*, he tells of how O'Hair mocked the Bible, misquoted a number of passages and generally twisted the Scriptures to her own advantage. At one point she shouted, "The Bible teaches you to kill!" That was the opening for which her opponent had been waiting. Colson, who had secretly brought his Bible with him, picked it up and, reaching across Mr. Frost, tried to hand it to Mrs. O'Hair. He said, "You know this book, Mrs. O'Hair. Find where it says that. Read it to me." Writing five years after the event, Colson said he was struck by her complete refusal to take the book. It was as if she were afraid even to touch it!

The Bible has often inspired such fear. In the fourth century, the Roman Emperor Diocletian issued an edict ordering that all Christian Scriptures be burned. To this day, there are countries where the Bible is considered contraband and a threat to the government. There have been national borders where travelers were confronted with signs that said, "No Guns! No Bibles!"

Yet, in spite of persistent opposition brought on by fear of this book, the Bible continues to be the single most popular, most translated, most read and most loved book in the world. A perennial best seller, the entire Bible has now been translated into 392 languages, while the New Testament has been translated into 1,012. Presently, at least some portion of the Bible has been translated into 2,287 languages (United Bible Society, 2002).

The status of the Bible at the beginning of the 21st century reminds us of something written more than 2,700 years ago:

All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the Lord blows on them. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever" (Isaiah 40:6-8).

So, what are we to do with this remarkable book? Is it, indeed, the word of God? Does it deserve our respect and attention? I believe so,

and the focus of this study will be the question, "Why should I trust the Bible?"

### **THE BIBLE'S OWN CLAIMS**

Obviously, a book is not true simply because that book makes the claim to be true. However, the Bible's own claims about itself need to be heard as we begin this examination. Just a few of the important passages on the nature of the Bible are listed here:

Hear the word of the Lord (Amos 7:16).

We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words (1 Corinthians 2:12-13).

The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart (Hebrews 4:12).

...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 (1 Peter 1:20-21).

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16).

In short, Scripture does not view itself as the creation of human beings. It claims much more than simply being the writings of great poets, historians and philosophers; it claims to be "God-breathed." While many critics may view it as humanity's word about God, the Bible clearly views itself as God's word to the human race.

While such claims do not, in themselves, prove that the Bible is what it says it is or that it can be trusted, these statements provide us with a starting point. Next, we have to ask if the evidence supports such big and bold claims. These are the matters to which we now turn our attention.

### **THE UNITY OF THE BIBLE**

If you open a Bible to its table of contents, you will find that there are 66 "books" that make up this one book. They were written by about 40 people over a period of nearly 1,500 years. Yet, remarkably, they form one book and tell one story.

"The greatest story ever told," as the Bible has been called, begins with the creation of the universe and the start of the human race. It describes the way marriage, work and sin entered the world and the plan God set in motion to restore mankind's relationship with Him. In the unfolding of salvation's saga, God promised Abraham to make His descendants a chosen race, used Isaac and Jacob to build such a people and sent Moses to Egypt to deliver these people, now known as Israelites, from slavery.

In time, Saul, David and Solomon served the nation of Israel as kings. After Solomon's death, Israel divided, and both kingdoms steadily drifted deeper and deeper into rebellion against God. Prophets were sent to call the people back to obedience and to warn of coming punishment. These same prophets also foretold a coming day when God would send a Messiah to deliver His people from their sins.

At the close of the Old Testament, there was a 400-year period of silence. However, when the New Testament opens, it seems to pick up the story in mid-sentence. The birth, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus are described by four different writers. These Gospels are followed by an account of what became of the followers of Jesus after his ascension to heaven. Then there are letters that were sent to first century churches to help them with the challenges they faced. At the end of the Bible is the Book of Revelation, which assures persecuted Christians that God is still in control and that heaven awaits those who remain faithful.

When viewed all at one time, the 66 books of the Bible exhibit a remarkable unity. Kings and farmers, poets and law-givers, doctors and fishermen, people living centuries apart all contributed their little stories to the one big story of the Bible. How is such unity explained? Did it just happen, or is the Bible in fact exactly what it claims to be: the word of God? The amazing unity of the Bible points to a single author, and that author is God. Using three languages, 40 writers and 1,500 years, He composed "the greatest story ever told."

### **THE RELIABILITY OF THE BIBLE**

No book has ever spent more time under the microscope of criticism than has the Bible. Its history, biography, geography and theology have all been accused of contradictions and inaccuracies. Many critics continue to hold that if the Bible says anything that is not confirmed by another source outside of the Bible, then the Bible must be wrong. Such an approach has led to a number of embarrassments for the critics of the Bible who proudly asserted that the Bible was unreliable. The following are two of the most famous cases of this:

- The Writings of Moses – Years ago, a number of scholars doubted that Moses could have written the Books of the Law because there was no known written language dating back to the time of Moses. They contended that this proved the Bible was a human fabrication of a later era. However, in more recent times, archeologists have discovered samples of writing that predate Moses by more than 500 years! This alone doesn't prove that the Bible is the word of God, but it does destroy an argument once confidently made by the Bible's critics.
- The Existence of the Hittites – Until the beginning of the 20th century, there was no known reference to the Hittites outside of the Bible. This ancient nation is claimed by Scripture to have been displaced by the Israelites when Joshua led them into the promised land (Joshua 1:4; 24:11). For years, skeptics pointed to the Hittites as an example of a groundless myth created by the writers of the Bible. However, in 1906, archeologists uncovered the capital city of an ancient Hittite empire and discovered an impressive library detailing Hittite history and culture. Again, such a discovery does not prove that the Bible is the word of God, but it does (or should!) warn anyone that assuming the Bible is false until proven otherwise is a very foolish thing to do.

The Bible has also been called untrustworthy because of its mention of King Sargon of Assyria, the great wealth of Solomon, and the existence of King Belshazzar of Babylon. Yet, in each case, recent archeological findings have proven the Bible to be true and the critics to have been wrong. Though subjected to fierce, hostile and relentless criticism for almost 2,000 years, the Bible has repeatedly been proven amazingly reliable.

### **THE RELEVANCE OF THE BIBLE**

What could possibly explain the persistent popularity of the Bible? Why would millions of people be so devoted to such an ancient book at the beginning of the 21st century? One sure reason is that the Bible continues to prove itself relevant to our greatest needs and deepest

questions. It explains our sin and guilt, our hopes and fears, our joys and sorrows. It gives dependable counsel on how to live life well and how to truly love other people. It is honest in its description of our struggles, our weakness and our failures.

Almost 3,000 years ago, King David marveled at the relevance of the word of God:

The ordinances of the Lord are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward (Psalm 19:11).

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path (Psalm 119:105).

### **A FINAL CHALLENGE**

If you still do not believe that the Bible is the word of God or that it is worthy of your trust, I have a challenge for you – read it! Don't disregard the Bible until you have read it. The Bible welcomes your examination and your scrutiny of it. I close with this challenge because I believe that many skeptics have read the Bible, looking for evidence of its failings, only to become convinced of its reliability in the process. Go ahead, give it a chance! You will be so glad that you did!

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