

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### How do we know that the Bible is Historical?

It is doubtful whether anyone would argue that the Bible is a unique book, indeed it is the best selling book of all time. But the fact that so many copies of the Bible are sold is not really evidence that it is historical, it is simply evidence that it is popular. So what is the evidence that the Bible is Historical? There are several reasons for this.

#### Because of the Jews

We have to take into consideration that the Bible contains a great deal about the history of the Israelites. Indeed, the Jewish peoples existence today is in itself evidence that the Bible is a historical document. Without it we would have no reasonable explanation as to why the Jewish people with their customs, laws and beliefs ever came about in the first place or still survive to this day.

Thousands of years ago there were many nations who did battle with the Israelites, such as the Moabites, the Ammonites and the Philistines. But have you ever heard of an American Philistine or a German Moabite or a Polish Ammonite? No, and the reason is that all of these people groups that once existed have lost their identity and individuality as a people group a long time ago. Yet you have heard of American Jews, German Jews and a Polish Jews. They are still a uniquely definable and identifiable people group to this very day.

The history of the Israelites did not occur in isolation to other cultures or nations that existed alongside them just as Britain's history is not in isolation to the countries that surround us. Therefore, if the Bible claims to be a historical document then one would expect there to be archaeological evidence from these other nations as well as from Israel itself to support its claims.

#### Is there any evidence outside of the Bible that verify its claims?

In the past one hundred years in particular archaeology and historical documents from other cultures outside of the Bible have time and again vindicated the accuracy of the Bible. Here are only a few of the many examples of this:

For many years the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were regarded by many as being mythological.

However, recent excavations in Tell Mardikh, now known to be the site of Ebla, uncovered about 15,000 tablets. Some of these have been translated and mention the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. So they really did exist.

Until recently, scholars found no other ancient writings, outside of the Bible, which referred to the Hittites as being a real civilisation. In fact it appeared that the Bible was contradicting secular history which seemed to indicate that the existence of the Hittites was 'extremely doubtful' to say the least. It wasn't until recent excavations uncovered clay tablets from Assyria and Egypt, which spoke of the Hittites and recorded 'a fierce battle between Rameses II and the Hittites at Kadesh on the Orontes River in 1287 BC' that the secular historians conceded that the Bible was correct. Further discoveries have shown that the Hittites were a substantial power at one time. (Josh McDowell, *Evidence that demands a verdict* (Vol 2, Alpha 1994) p. 339).

The Biblical records testified to the Israelites being exiled in Babylon. Yet for years scholars disputed this as a fact. But recent archaeological evidence has confirmed that the Jews were indeed exiled to Babylon in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century BC just as the Bible says.

One final example from the New Testament this time. In his eyewitness gospel account of Jesus life, the apostle John makes note that at the pool of Bethesda where Jesus healed the lame man, there were five covered colonnades (see John 5:1-15). This observation was disputed by sceptics as being inaccurate because archaeology had only uncovered two. However, if you were to visit the pool of Bethesda today you will find that further excavations of the whole site has revealed five covered colonnades that were present during the first century AD at the time of Jesus, just as John recorded in his gospel.

The above-mentioned examples have been chosen because scholars implied that the Bible writers had either made these stories up, or simply been unreliable eyewitnesses. But the archaeological evidence has time and again verified the Biblical accounts as being accurate.

Donald Wiseman, Professor Emeritus of Assyriology at London University wrote the following regarding the accuracy of the Bible records: "No fact of archaeology so far discovered contradicts the Biblical records" (D Wiseman, *Digging for Truth*, Viewpoint no:31; ISCF). Indeed if anything, archaeology has confirmed the

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Biblical records to be accurate.

Dr Jo Kinnaman once said; "Of the hundreds and thousands of artifacts found by the archaeologists, not one has ever been discovered that contradicts or denies one word, phrase, clause or sentence of the Bible."

There are many more Biblical people, places and events that are not disputed by any serious scholar and you might be interested in considering some of the artifacts that substantiate the Biblical accounts by reading the following books:

- Josh McDowell, *Evidence that demand a verdict*, (Alpha publications 1994).
- Alan Millard, *Treasures from Bible Times* (Lion).
- T. C. Mitchell, *The Bible in the British Museum* (British Museum Press).

The British Museum website also has a few items of interest. You might like to visit their site and see the following: The siege and capture of the city of Lachish in 701 BC by the Assyrian King Sennacherib, as recorded in the Bible. You can read the account for yourself by turning to 2Kings 18:13 and 2 Chronicles 32:9 in the Old Testament. Sennacharibs victory over Lachish was turned into a relief to adorn his palace. This actual relief can be seen in the British Museum (found in room 36) or by visiting the British museum internet site on [www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/compass/](http://www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/compass/) and then using the search facility and type in Lachish one can view the relief on line.

You can also view online Jehu king of Israel (841-814BC) paying tribute to Shalmaneser III as depicted in the famous Black Obelisk. Shalmaneser III, was king of Assyria from 858-824 BC. The obelisk depicts the military achievements of the king, among which he is seen receiving tribute from Jehu the King of Israel who bows down at the Assyrian kings feet. The story of king Jehu can be found in the Bible at 2Kings 19ff.

So from an archaeological point of view the Bible is dealing with real human history, not fantasy.

### What about the miraculous events in the Bible?

I appreciate that there may be some people reading this who would accept that people, places and battles in the Bible existed and happened, but they struggle

with the miraculous events that the Bible equally holds as being real events.

Unfortunately most people dismiss the Bible on the grounds that it does indeed contain miraculous events such as the feeding of the five thousand, rising people from the dead, Moses and the Israelites crossing of the red sea etc. Perhaps if these miracles were removed from the Bible (as some have tried to do) then the Bible would be held up as an accurate historical and reliable document. Why? Because you would be left with a straight-forward history book on the Israelite people.

Yet every attempt to remove or explain away the miraculous events found in the Bible makes it incomplete and incoherent. The miraculous is so woven into the fabric of every event in Israel's history that it simply does not make sense without these events being included.

One will never be able to accept the Bible unless one accepts that there really is a God who is not limited to human limitations (for that would be a God created in the image of man).

If the Israelites accurately recorded their history, then on what grounds do we think that they invented the miraculous events that God worked within that history? What right do we in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century have to say that what they claimed to have seen and heard as eyewitnesses to these events did not really happen? After all people back then knew that feeding five thousand people with only a few fish and bread and raising people from the dead was just as impossible to believe in *then* as it would be for us *today*. These are not natural events; they are supernatural - beyond what is normally possible. But just because we cannot come out with a neat natural explanation for everything this should not make us dismiss the clear evidence set before us in the Bible.

Do we you have any real reason to believe that what these people wrote was not true? The Israelites have faithfully recorded their history correctly and God cannot be removed from it, indeed he is the vital part of their story ( and one day your story too!).

The Apostle Peter as recorded in the New Testament said:

*" We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eye-witnesses of his majesty. For he received honour and glory from God*

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the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain. And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. :Above all, you must understand that 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 1:16-21 (NIV)

### Further Reading and Research

- Alan Millard, *Treasures from Bible Times* (Lion).
- T. C. Mitchell, *The Bible in the British Museum* (British Museum Press).
- Josh McDowell, *Evidence that demand a verdict*, (Alpha publications 1994).
- David Wilkinson *God the big bang and Stephen Hawking* Monarch Publications 1997
- Ernest Lucas *Can we believe Genesis today?* IVP 2001-04-20

*The response to this question is based on work done wholly or in part by Colin Webster.*

<http://www.cornerstone-evangelical.org.uk>  
[colinwebster1@ntlworld.com](mailto:colinwebster1@ntlworld.com)

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