

CAN WE TRUST OUR PLAY BOOK?

The game is close and time is running out. The coach calls his point guard to the bench to tell her what plays he wants to run. The plays she signals to her teammates can make the difference between winning or losing the game. Just as calling the right plays helps teams win games, calling the right plays in life helps us win at whatever we do. Life is full of choices and the choices we make will have everything to do with the quality of life we will have.

What do you use to help you make your choices? God wants us to have a relationship with Him so we trust Him to help us make our choices. Having a relationship with anyone requires communication and the quality of that relationship depends on the quality of that communication. A spiritual relationship with God is no exception. Prayer is how we communicate with God and the bible is how He communicates with us. The bible is the play book for our lives.

Just as a coach gives an athlete a play book to map out a plan to win games, God gives us the bible so we can make the right choices to help us win in life and to overcome the eternal consequences of death. A very important question we need to answer is – can we trust God’s play book? Our answer will have so much to do with how we live our lives and how much we will get out of our spiritual relationship.

If you were to ask many of your college professors, high school teachers, or coworkers what they thought of the bible what do you think their answer would be? Would any of these people accuse you of being ignorant or narrow-minded if you relied on the truths taught in the bible? I once heard a political radio commentator mock one of his callers to his show for referring to “God’s creation”. The radio commentator stated “how can you believe that myth?”. Unfortunately, in our post-Christian society this is a prevalent view held by many of our educators and this view has filtered through to those being educated.

I want you to ask yourself the following question. If the bible stories are myths and no reasonably intelligent person should view the bible as no more than a good book of literature, then why do you find people in all walks of life that try to live by the words and instructions of the bible? Why do many world leaders, corporate executives, musicians and entertainers, and professional athletes trust the bible? Why do you find so many college professors at Christian colleges and even many at secular colleges that believe the bible? Why do you still find many scientist, philosophers, authors, and other well educated individuals trying to live by and defend the truths of the bible? Are these ignorant or weak people? Why are you even reading this? Could it be that deep down inside you really don’t believe we are just accidents? Could it be you feel there may be a purpose to your life and you want to know what that purpose is? Is it possible the following scripture explains why we don’t rule out the existence of God?

Romans 1:20 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

If there is any truth to our purpose being to have a relationship with God, then it would make sense God would create us with a “hunger and thirst” to know Him. Along these lines it would be logical that God would provide a way for us to know Him and if He could create the universe then He probably could handle creating a book like the bible. It would also make sense if there were any truth to a spiritual force opposed to God, this force would attempt to keep mankind from knowing God. To discover the truth then, may require us to use our God given intellect and this is important to understand.

Another important point we need to comprehend is we must really want to know what truths there may be. If we buy into any form of today's post-modern philosophy that truth can't be known or truth is only in the eyes of the beholder, we are already defeated in our search for spiritual truth. We need to be honest with ourselves as well as understand there are many who are not intellectually honest because they are more interested in justifying their lifestyle instead of knowing any truths, especially moral truth, that may exist. Our hearts have to be right to understand and know God's truths. If our hearts are right, if we are sincere in our quest for spiritual truth, we will have the help of the Holy Spirit (see Chapter 11, "The Game Plan" to learn more about the Holy Spirit), and without the Spirit we will struggle when trying to understand the Bible.

1 Corinthians 2:13,14 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. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.

In other words, if someone has little interest in understanding the true spiritual aspect of life, the bible will not make much sense to that person. If you are serious about your spiritual life, and you want to have an intellectual understanding of Christianity and the bible which Christianity is based on as well as a "heart" understanding there are many excellent books that present very compelling evidence for the existence of God and the reliability of the bible. As you will soon see as you read on, the problem is not finding support for the reliability of the bible, it is the willingness or lack of to accept that support.

These books that "defend" the existence of the God of the bible as well as the bible itself are classified under the category of "apologetics". I have used some of these books as references to this chapter and I have done more than just footnote these books. I have given you a little background about the books and especially the authors because the credibility of the authors is crucial in order to accept what they write about. I also want to encourage you to read their books in order to gain a better understanding of the material covered in this chapter.

There is one apologetic book, "The Case for Faith" by Lee Strobel, I did not reference (I had already referenced similar material from other books) but I would like to include as a recommended book because it is a very easy and interesting read due to the issues addressed.

Lee Strobel, the author of "The Case for Faith", was an award winning legal editor for the Chicago Tribune. He received his Master of Studies in Law from the Yale Law School. Strobel is among the ranks of many other "apologetic" authors who were at one time atheists and a sincere search for truth provided them with enough evidence to become very adamant defenders of the faith. Being skilled in the techniques of an investigative reporter as well as having legal training that relies on evidence, he uses his skills to addresses 10 major issues that were obstacles to becoming a believer, including the issues of why there is suffering, the apparent conflict between science and the bible, problems with church history, problems with some old testament events, and other biblical events and issues that are stumbling blocks to many and excuses for others to reject the bible.

Another reason I am mentioning his book, aside from the reason that Strobel's book discusses obstacles to faith that I have not addressed in this book, is there are two paragraphs in the introduction to "The Case For Faith" that do a great job of explaining why I feel this is a very important chapter in this book. The first paragraph is an observation of responses to an "alter call" (a call to commit ones life to Christ) during a Billy Graham crusade.

“What is faith? There would have been no need to define it for these people on that sultry June night. Faith was almost palpable to them. They reached out to find God almost as if they were expecting to physically embrace him. Faith drained them of all the guilt that had oppressed them. Faith replaced despondency with hope. Faith infused them with new direction and purpose. Faith unlocked heaven. Faith was like cool water soaking their parched soul.

But faith isn't always that easy, even for people who desperately want it. Some people hunger for spiritual certainty, yet something hinders them from experiencing it. They wish they could taste that kind of freedom, but obstacles block their paths. Objections pester them. Doubts mock them. Their hearts want to soar to God; their intellects keep them securely tied down.”

To drive home the point of why having a firm basis for believing what we believe can be so vital to our faith, and essential for sharing our faith, I will quote another paragraph from a book I recommend and that I have referenced often in this book - “How Now Shall We Live” by Charles Colson and Nancy Pearcey.

“Today we must break down this false dichotomy between the spiritual and intellectual and recover the calling to save minds – especially in our highly educated society. Unlike a generation ago, churches today are filled with college graduates; in fact polls say that evangelicals are better educated than the general populace, a striking change from 40 years ago. Pastors must begin to redefine their task to include intellectual evangelism, for if they do not preach to issues of the mind, they will find themselves increasingly alienated from their own flock.”

Although it is faith that is essential for our spiritual relationship, an intellectual understanding makes our faith stronger and more effective. Highly educated individuals would be less likely to embrace the truths of the bible unless there is at least some evidence to support their beliefs. There is far more than “some” evidence, in fact, there is so much evidence it is impossible for this chapter to do justice to this topic so I will just try to touch on some of this evidence.

The argument that's used most often to try to label Christians as ignorant is the supposed conflict between science and the bible's account of our origins. The problem is what is passed on as science in our schools and universities are actually theories and there is a major difference between the two. Webster's definition of science is - 1. to know, orig., the state of fact of knowing; knowledge 2. Systematic knowledge derived from observation, study, and experimentation carried on in order to determine the nature or principles of what is being studied. The conclusions based on science are derived from experiments that rely on physical truths. A definition of theory is – a speculative idea or plan as to know how something might be done. Theories are based on what theorists think to be true and assumptions are used to back these theories. Most scientific theories used in public schools and universities are based on the assumption there is no God, which leads to the assumption there has to be some natural explanation for how we came into being. What is often ignored, are very credible scientific theories that actually give evidence to the creation account of the bible.

Although there are many very good books that address these theories I have primarily referenced the book “How Now Shall We Live” because it goes beyond citing support for “intelligent design”, it also addresses why there appears to be a conflict between faith and science (note – the authors have published a shorter book titled Science and Evolution that is more specific to the material covered in this chapter).

One of the authors, Charles Colson, is a widely known author, public speaker, and radio commentator. In 1993 he was awarded the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion, a very

prestigious honor given for strong leadership and originality in advancing humanity's understanding of God. Nancy Pearcey, the book's coauthor is a fellow at the Discovery Institute's Center for the Renewal for Science and Culture, and the managing editor of the journal "Origins and Designs". Her articles have appeared in various journals and magazines and she has coauthored several books that deal with issues concerning science and faith.

Their book supports the premise that there is not a conflict between science and the creation account of the bible, but there is a conflict between world-views. This book explains that it is mankind's refusal to acknowledge God's moral laws that is behind many views and philosophies being taught in our schools that are contrary to what is taught in the bible. Again, this is another important topic that I cannot adequately cover in this chapter so I urge you to read this very illuminating book to really understand what is behind the many theories and philosophies that try to discredit the truths taught in the bible. In this chapter I am going to use some of the evidence this book uses to refute the world-view that science proves there is no God. You will discover there are well known scientific theories that actually give evidence to a creator.

For example, until the 20th century it was "known science" (actually accepted theory) the universe always existed – in other words it had no beginning. That was until the Big Bang Theory became widely accepted. Prior to the Big Bang Theory there was evidence the universe had a beginning. The finding that stars had a "red shift" implies the stars are moving outward, which indicates there had to be an event to start this outward movement. The Second Law of Thermodynamics (the law of decay) implies the universe is in a process of gradual disintegration. In other words the universe is running down so there must have been a point when it was wound up. The first law of thermodynamics implies matter cannot just create itself or come into existence. This means there must have been something external to the universe to cause it to come into existence.

Additional evidence we were created instead of being an accident is supported by the anthropic principle, which states the physical structure of the earth is exactly what it must be to support life. It may be possible to find a condition needed to support life on another planet but life needs many conditions to sustain itself. Colson and Pearcey's book discuss the extremely precise conditions needed to keep life going. One of the many examples illustrating the anthropic principle is the distance of earth from the sun. Just a little closer and all earth's water boils away and just a little farther and all water freezes. The following quote from their book sums up what this all means.

"The list of coincidences goes on and on. It turns out the slightest tinkering with the values of fundamental forces of physics – gravity, electromagnetism, the strong and the weak nuclear forces – would have resulted in a universe where life was utterly impossible. The anthropic principle states that in our own universe, all these seemingly arbitrary and unrelated values in physics have one strange thing in common: They are precisely the values needed to get a universe capable of supporting life. "

Life has never been created in the laboratory in spite of our technological advances, and many scientists have tried. In 1953 Stanley Miller of the University of Chicago made the newspaper headlines by making the claim he accomplished the first steps toward creating life. He synthesized amino acids, the building blocks of protein, that are similar to those found in living cells. But these amino acids lacked characteristics found in living organisms. In other words – close but no cigar. There have been other experiments that have made news by claiming to duplicate conditions needed to create life. Yet, these highly controlled experiments always lacked

something needed to actually sustain life. These experiments used controlled environments that probably never occur in reality. The conditions were rigged to try to support the claim naturalistic forces were responsible for creating life, which would imply no need for a Creator.

The belief of many scientists is that if given enough time the conditions required to create life would eventually happen. But the number crunching powers of computers cast shadows on these beliefs. The results of programs that modeled the processes and conditions needed to create life showed no matter how long the time scale, millions or billions of years, the probabilities of just the right conditions occurring to create life were effectively zero! Again I will quote a couple of paragraphs from Colson and Pearcey's book to make an important point.

“So what do these experiments really prove? That life can be created only by an intelligent agent directing, controlling, and manipulating the process. The latest scientific findings do not discredit biblical faith; rather, they provide positive evidence that the origin of life requires an intelligent agent, a creator.”

“The advance of science is not casting up new challenges to Christian faith, as we are so often told. Instead, it is uncovering ever more powerful evidence that what Christians believe is true on all levels, including the natural world. And that is becoming even clearer today as scientist learn more about what is inside the cell – and especially the structure of DNA.”

DNA is what defines us and a single cell of the human body contains as much and sometimes several times more information than a 30 volume encyclopedia. What is amazing about DNA is not the ordinary chemicals it is made of but its pattern. DNA molecules (nucleotides) must be in a very exact order to define us as we are defined. Colson and Pearcey's book, as well as other skeptics of evolution, pose the question – Does the chemical sequence of DNA come from random natural causes or is there a Creator behind its design? An example is given in the book of finding a watch on the beach. The analogy is that no one would assume the watch was formed by natural cause because of its complexity compared to everything around it. DNA is like that watch and the obvious conclusion is there is an intelligent Creator behind its design.

Charles Darwin and his theory of evolution has been embraced by educators to the point when many accept his theories as absolute truths. Anyone who disagrees with Darwin's theories are often portrayed like the characters in the movie about him (Inherit the Wind) – as ignorant religious extremists. Yet his theories run into many problems. No one has ever witnessed the evolutionary process of one species developing into another – we have seen and developed only changes within a species. One of the problems Darwin's theory of natural selection has not addressed is the concept of irreducible complexity. This term means organisms are composed of integrated systems and these systems are interdependent on each other. Our biological systems rely on each other to work properly. So if one part of our system were to evolve independently, this would cause serious problems for the rest of the system. The following paragraphs from Colson and Pearcey's book discuss this problem -

Interestingly, Darwin himself grasped the problem and even admitted that it could falsify his theory. “If it could be demonstrated that any complex organ existed which could not possibly be formed by numerous, successive, slight modifications,” he wrote, “my theory would absolutely break down.” Today we confidently say that his theory has broken down, for we now know that nature is full of complex organs that could not possibly have been formed by numerous, slight modifications – that is, organs are irreducibly complex.

Take the example of the bat. Evolutionists propose that the bat evolved from a small, mouse like creature whose forelimbs (the “front toes”) developed into wings by gradual steps. But picture the steps: As the “front toes” grow longer and the skin begins to grow between them, the animal can no longer run without stumbling over them; and yet the forelimbs are not long enough to function as wings. And so, during most of its hypothetical transitional stages, the poor creature would have limbs too long for running and too short for flying. It would flop along helplessly and soon become extinct.

There is no conceivable pathway for batwings to be formed in gradual stages. And this conclusion is confirmed by the fossil record, where we find no transitional fossils leading up to bats. The first time bats appear in the fossil record they are already fully formed and virtually identical to modern bats.

According to Darwin changes in species occur when genes mutate. On the surface this sounds like a plausible explanation but again there are serious problems with mutations. What is a mutation? It is an error in DNA coding and the key word is error. When we typically see biological mutations in an animal, for example, we find that animal is at more risk for survival. This is because mutations are errors and the result is a weaker, not stronger animal. In fact mutations in humans and animals can often be fatal. Mutations are better suited for explaining devolution than evolution.

I can go on and on citing interesting arguments and scientific evidence from Colson and Pearcey’s book as well as many other books and papers from well respected scientists that support the existence of a Creator. Of course there will always be scientists that come up with new theories to explain away the problems of old theories. There is no doubt God will not be in the picture as a plausible solution to flawed theories even though it would take more faith to believe these new theories than to believe an intelligent Creator is behind it all. Once again I will refer to Colson and Pearcey’s book to explain why evidence of a Creator is too often ignored.

Since the scientific evidence is so persuasive, why does the scientific establishment cling so tenaciously to Darwinian evolution? Why is Darwinism the official creed in our public schools? Because the real issue is not what we see between the microscope or telescope; it’s what we adhere to in our hearts and minds. Darwinism functions as the cornerstone propping up a naturalistic world view, and therefore the scientist is committed to naturalism before he or she even walks in the laboratory is primed to accept even the flimsiest evidence supporting the theory. The most trivial changes in living things is accepted as confirmation of the most far-flung claims of evolution, so that minor variations in finch beaks or insecticide resistance is touted as evidence that finches and flies both evolved ultimately from the slime by blind, unguided natural forces.

The problem is not between science and faith but lies in our hearts. What do we really want to believe? Do we want to believe in a loving God and for our own benefit we should submit our lives to Him or believe we make life whatever we want it to be because there is no absolute standard to live by? Using science as a reason to reject God is only an excuse because as you should now see believing in God will not put us at odds with science. Sure, there are interesting challenges to what the bible teaches – such as what constitutes a day in the first chapter of Genesis? But these are just puzzles to solve rather than inconsistencies between the bible and science. In other words the problem is in our inability to know the answers to some of the mysteries of the bible, not the bible itself.

I believe these mysteries are all part of God's plan to keep us interested in searching the bible for His truths. I remember being taught in an art appreciation class that shapes such as circles and rectangles are considered perfect art forms but these forms do not hold our interest? Why? It is because our intellect needs to be challenged in order for something to hold our interest. If the bible were some simple book that never challenged us mentally, no matter how beneficial the message, we would lose interest in it. But the bible challenges us; it is a book that can keep our interest for the rest of our lives and we will never be bored searching for and learning about God's truths.

Another topic used to downplay the authority of the bible is the methodology used to determine what should be included in the bible. For this subject the book I referenced is Josh McDowell's "New Evidence That Demands a Verdict". This book may be one of the most widely referenced and perhaps one of the most thorough compilations that provide evidence for relying on the bible. It is well researched as his research team consisted of 25 students from 23 universities, including such well-known secular institutions as Ohio State, the University of Virginia, Louisiana State, Arizona State, and the University of Arizona, to name a few. The book is in outline form so it is not an easy read, but it appeals to the serious searcher of truth because of its depth and scope.

McDowell is like so many others who become great defenders of the bible – his original mission was to disprove the bible! In fact at one time he told a fellow student "I am sick and tired of religion and religious people, I don't want anything to do with it". His goal at that point in his life was to write a book that would make an intellectual joke of Christianity.

McDowell went through a life changing transformation as he did his research causing him to leave the University of Michigan to complete his degree at Wheaton College. He then went on to graduate from Talbot Theological Seminary. He has written over 45 books and is a world re-known lecturer on apologetics. McDowell's book addresses the very important issue of how the bible was put together and what was behind determining what should be included in the bible. Anybody who is serious about considering relying on the bible should want to know what was the standard used and who decided what that standard should be.

The early church did not create the standard to be used – because the standard always existed from the first book recorded. The standard was that any writings to be included in the bible had to be the inspired Word of God before it would be considered scripture. The job of the early church was to determine what writings met that standard. There were tests that the manuscripts had to pass before any of these writings were determined to be scripture such as –

1. Was the book written by a prophet of God? A prophet was someone who spoke for God.
2. Was the writer confirmed by acts of God? In other words was the author able to perform miracles demonstrating God's power and authority.
3. Did the message tell the truth about God? If writings contradicted the truths of the other books or made false claims these writings were not included in the bible.
4. Did it come from the power of God? The writings had to edify or have the power to change and influence a life. There had to be a purpose consistent with God's will to transform lives.
5. Were the writings accepted by known people of God? For example, Jesus accepted the books included in the Old Testament. In fact Jesus so relied on the total accuracy of Old Testament scripture as the word of God that in a confrontation with the Sadducees (Jewish leaders who did not believe in any type of resurrection) over resurrection he based his entire argument on the resurrection on the tense of a simple verb "to be" in Matthew 22:32. The apostles who were

taught by Jesus accepted the writings of Paul as having the authority of God. Kings of Israel accepted the authority of books written by the Old Testament prophets.

The early church fathers took great care to protect the integrity of scripture. Throughout the history of the early church those charged with protecting the ancient writings faced persecution and death. If they were going to risk their lives they were going to be certain what they were protecting was truly sacred. Heresy and false teachings were a constant threat so great care was taken so there would be no doubt as to the authority of scripture.

There are many very compelling reasons that make it evident the bible is a special book. I will list 10 reasons from Willmington's Guide to the Bible by Dr. H.L. Willmington. I want to include it as a reference because it was one of the first sources I used for this chapter and I believe this book may have been the framework for many other apologetic works. This huge 1,000 page reference tool is an excellent companion to the bible for the serious bible student. Not only does this book address evidence for the reliability of the bible, it also goes into detail to help the reader understand the major theological concepts of Christianity as well as providing additional commentary and historical background to the bible.

Before I start discussing the reasons listed in Willmington's book I want to give some background information on one more apologetic reference book - "A Skeptic's Search For God" by Ralph Muncaster. I could have easily used just this one book for this chapter because it is an easy read that covers the majority of material already discussed in this chapter. I wanted to include the other reference books so readers can be aware of the wealth of credible support for the authority of scripture. I used material from this book to expand primarily the section about prophecies.

Once again we have an author who's original mission was to prove the bible is myth. Ralph Muncaster was raised in the church and was a regular attendee of Sunday school as a child. As his public school education filled him with information that contradicted what was taught in the bible, especially information concerning our origins, he began to doubt the existence of God and the divine authorship of the bible. He said when presented with the reasoning he was expected to believe the bible only on "faith" and when presented with seemingly huge amounts of contradictory evidence that was supposedly based on science, science would win out every time for the battle of his mind.

The only thing that kept any resemblance of faith alive in him as a teen was a fear of going to hell just in case there was one. The more influenced he became by his public education, eventually earning a degree in Engineering from the University of Colorado, the more the apparent contradictions between the bible and science caused him to lose that fear, and he eventually became a full-fledged atheist.

His journey back to faith started with a chance meeting with a stranger at an airport. This stranger challenged Muncaster to take an active approach, a challenge I will throw out at any skeptics reading this book, in finding out if there is truly a God and if so who is this God. Muncaster took up this challenge and decided to use objective research and mathematical probabilities to prove or disprove God and the bible. He discovered much of the same scientific evidence discussed in this chapter and this evidence caused him to conclude, using mathematical probability formulas, that there is an intelligent creator.

The next challenge was to prove who this God is, since the world has many different concepts of God. What he discovered is what I want to use to lead up to the first of Willmington's ten reasons that makes it clear why the bible can be depended upon to know who God really is.

Its Prophetical Accuracy

Muncaster pointed out a major difference between the great Eastern Religions and Judaism and Christianity is the Eastern religions are based on un-provable philosophies while Judaism and Christianity are grounded in historical revelations and events. In the bible God often used prophecies to reveal his involvement in the lives of his people so God gave us a basis to test his divine revelations and this is exactly what Ralph Muncaster decided to do.

There are an amazing number of prophecies made in earlier books of the Bible concerning Jewish history and the life of Jesus. Willmington and Muncaster in their books list the numerous prophecies recorded in earlier books of the bible that have been fulfilled and recorded in subsequent books. These prophecies are very specific and describe events that leave little room for liberal interpretations. Specific dates, specific events, specific nations, and even specific names are given concerning the history of Israel.

The recreation of Israel alone is an example of a remarkable event predicted centuries earlier in the bible. The exile of its people and destruction of Israel was predicted by several prophets of God (Amos in chapters 3 and 5-9, Isaiah 7:18-25; 9:8-10:4, Jeremiah 5:1-19; 6:1-30; 7:30-34, and Ezekiel 6:1-14; 7:1-27; 8:17-18). All these prophecies are supported by history. In addition it was prophesied In Isaiah 11:11-12 and Ezekiel 37:21-22 that the exiles would return to their own land. This was fulfilled in 1948 when Israel became a nation again after 2,000 years of its people being disbursed from their homeland.

To be scattered all over the world for centuries, to maintain their ethnic identity, to be reunited in their original homeland, and to survive in an area where the neighboring countries are committed to the small country of Israel's destruction defies all odds! Muncaster concluded that mathematically it was virtually impossible to have so many provable prophecies (and none proven to be false prophecies) fulfilled by pure chance, that if there is a God, then this God has to be the God spoken of in the bible.

The final challenge for this author was to determine if the Jesus worshiped by Christians was truly someone sent by God, someone who was what he claimed – the son of God, someone far more significant than a prophet, the Savior for mankind. Once again it was fulfilled prophecies than convinced Muncaster that Christianity was unlike any other religion, that it was unique because of these prophecies.

For example, to name just a few of many, hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus it was predicted he would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), Israel would reject him (Isaiah 8:14), his hands and feet would be pierced (Psalm 22:16), he would speak in parables (Psalm 78:2), and he would be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver (Zechariah 9:9). If this were not enough Isaiah chapter 53 lists points that describe who Jesus is and how he will be treated. The life and death of Jesus described in the much later manuscripts that make up the New Testament fits the prophecies of Isaiah so remarkably well – 25 different characteristics of Jesus are clearly predicted in this chapter. It fact so many prophecies were fulfilled by events one could not control it would take more faith to believe Jesus staged his life than to believe he was really the Messiah.

Its Care and Copy

Muncaster, understanding the mind of a skeptic, had to address the issue of how the bible was recorded because the skeptic would argue the bible was recorded and manipulated to fit historical events. He discovered there was good reason to trust prophecy because of the amazing

emphasis on accuracy in recording the Torah and Tanakh, which contained the same books used in the Old Testament we use today.

The Israelites were governed by God (a theocracy), so the accurate recording of scripture was of utmost importance. Scribes, those who copied scriptures, were highly trained and esteemed and there were numerous rules to protect the accuracy of copying scripture. For example, each word and even each letter of the copy was counted in order to compare to the master copy. In addition each middle letter in the copied scroll was compared to the master scroll to make certain nothing was added or admitted to the copy.

Muncaster surmised that the Israelites would have no reason to deceive themselves concerning their own history. This is why the credibility of the prophetic books were so important, false prophecies would disqualify the author as a prophet of God, therefore disqualifying their writings as scripture. Plus, if someone wanted to change scripture to fit events that did not match up with prophecy, the task would be virtually impossible because of so many existing manuscripts not to mention the problem of dealing with the memories of the many scribes who recorded those scriptures. One book could be manipulated. To change the many existing copies just could not be done without creating a scandal of unheard of ramifications. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls verified the integrity of Old Testament scripture and prophecies because they proved there was no corruption of scripture over the past 2,000 years.

This emphasis on integrity carried over to New Testament scripture as well, as there are over 5,000 ancient Greek Manuscripts in existence today that testify to the life of Jesus. In fact no other book in history has been copied as many times with as much care as these manuscripts while there are very few manuscripts of such writers as Sophocles, Euripedes, Virgil, and Cicero. The original authors were not far removed from the events written about and they relied on eyewitnesses to back their claims. Other ancient writings have provided cross-references to many of the events recorded in the New Testament.

Amazing Unity

Willmington's Guide to the Bible points out the incredible unity that was achieved in spite of the fact fifteen centuries passed between the writing of Genesis and Revelation. The authors of the various books came from very diverse backgrounds – an Egyptian prince, a king, a queen, a housewife, a rich farmer, a poor farmer, a prime minister, a cup bearer, a tax collector, a physician, fisherman, and a tentmaker, and the authors came from different geographical areas. Yet these books of the bible tie together themes that would be a challenge for even the greatest of writers today.

Willmington poses the thought - Imagine someone trying to put together a religious novel with chapters authored by many individuals with very different backgrounds, speaking different languages, and coming from different times and countries, and have that novel make any sense! The amazing unity of the bible could not be achieved by man alone, given the circumstances described, it could only be done if there are absolute truths revealed by supernatural means to the various authors.

In my view this point alone tells me there is something very special and unique about the bible. So many authors from such diverse backgrounds with such a unifying message. I believe God chose this way of revealing His word to protect the integrity of scripture. You will read in Chapter 13, Be Prepared for War, that our struggle is against spiritual forces trying to separate us from our relationship with God. A logical tactic to achieve this would be to keep us from knowing

who God really is. The best way to do that would be to corrupt God's revelations and throughout history many have tried to do just that.

Ask yourself this question – what would be easier to do, corrupt the message of one individual who claims to speak for God or a very diverse group of individuals who could never be accused of being in collusion with each other? This would have been the case with the Old Testament prophets who sometimes lived centuries apart from each other. The New Testament authors knew Jesus and were witnesses to His teachings. I think it is significant that basically the same account written about the life of Jesus was written by four separate authors – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Indestructibility

Even though the bible gives us truths that lead to a more fulfilled life, there have always been an abundance of those that view the bible as a threat. History records many attempts from those in power to destroy the Bible, from Roman emperors to religious leaders.

For example, in A.D. 303 Diocletian, a Roman Emperor, tried to destroy all bibles, and persecuted those that read them. On a column he had erected to mark his perceived success, he had the inscription "Extinct is the Name of Christian". Even the Roman Catholic Church tried to limit the bible to only a select few as Pope Innocent III in 1199 ordered the burning of all bibles. John Wycliffe was considered a heretic for his efforts to translate the bible into English so scripture could get into the hands of the common man in the 14th century England and William Tyndale, who was considered one of the greatest bible translators who ever lived, was executed in 1536 for printing and distributing copies of New Testament scripture.

The bible has always suffered philosophical persecution as any secular college student can attest to today. Voltaire predicted in another century there would be no bibles left on earth. Thomas Paine in his effort to destroy the credibility of God's Word said he would go through the bible like a man felling trees, never to grow again. Joseph Stalin led a campaign to purge all bibles from Russia. One does not have to look far to observe how often the entertainment media mocks those who put their trust in Holy Scripture.

Yet this indestructible book is the most widely read, most widely published book today. Copies are found in countless homes all over the world. Dr. Willmington in his Guide Book to the Bible compares the Word of God to an anvil that wears out hammers as he states "... The hammers of persecution, ridicule, higher criticism, liberalism, and atheism have for centuries pounded out their vicious blows upon the divine anvil, but to no avail. There they lie, in rusting piles, while the mighty anvil of scriptures stands unbroken, unshaken, and un-chipped".

Historical accuracy

Archaeology does not prove the divine inspiration of the bible as much as it supports the historical accuracy, therefore providing evidence of the integrity of the bible. There will always be, and always have been, critics of the bible and these critics time and again attack the historical accuracy of the bible. There was a time when most historians doubted the biblical description of the extensive reign of King Solomon, the existence of cities described such as Sodom and Gomorrah and cultures such as the Hittites, as well as many other historical events and people described in the bible. McDowell's book, *New Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, points out that like science, archeology was embraced by critics of the bible as a means to discredit the bible.

Instead, discovery after discovery has corroborated the events described in scriptures. Both Willmington's and McDowell's books list many archeological discoveries that support the validity of Old and New Testament events. For example, excavations of Jericho found evidence that the city was under siege, the siege was short, the attack occurred just after harvest time, the city was not plundered, and the city was burned. In addition it was found the walls had fallen outward. A city under attack would have its walls collapse inward from battering rams. In other words, archaeology has supported the biblical story of the fall of Jericho as described in the book of Joshua.

Sir William Ramsey during his time was known as one of the world's most respected experts on the history and geography of Asia Minor, which is known as Turkey today. He was one of those skeptics, a bible critic who set out through his field research to back up his view that the Book of Acts was an "imaginative and colored account of primitive Christianity". Instead, after his intensive research, he became a staunch defender of the trustworthiness of New Testament writings.

Scientific accuracy

There are many examples of statements made in the Bible supporting specific scientific truths that no known scholar of science could have known or probably would not have known at that time, yet these insights have been backed by scientific discoveries sometimes centuries later. There are scriptures saying the earth is spherical (Isaiah 40:22), has mountains and canyons in the sea (2 Samuel 22:16, Jonah 2:6), and has water currents (Psalms 8:8).

Dr. Willmington cites an interesting story concerning Psalms 8:8 and the impact this scripture has had on oceanography. Matthew Fountaine Maury is known as the father of oceanography and is considered responsible for the establishment of Annapolis Academy. There is a statue at the Academy of Maury with a bible in one hand and charts of the sea in the other. This came about because after hearing Psalms 8:8 proclaim there are watery paths in the sea, Maury, a firm believer of Scripture, accepted this as truth and set out to find them. His book "Physical Geography of the Sea" was the first textbook of modern oceanography and contained charted sea lanes from his discoveries.

There are many scriptures dealing with solutions to health and sanitation problems that were implemented centuries later in other cultures. In Willmington's Guide to the Bible there are excerpts from a book by Dr. S. McMillen entitled "None of These Diseases" that describe rules for isolation and quarantine laid out by Moses in the book of Leviticus for certain infectious diseases that were totally contrary to what the healers of their time used. Dr. McMillen also noted the filthy sanitation habits that were prevalent up to the end of the eighteenth century. Disease was rampant and killed millions in Europe. He observed if society had adopted the sanitation rules God laid out in Duet. 23:12,13 (the handling of human excrement) countless lives would have been saved.

In addition the bible describes detailed hand washing methods such as using repeated washings in running water with time intervals for drying along with exposure to the sun (heat to kill bacteria), and instructions to change clothes after the handling of infectious diseases, methods that if adopted by hospitals during the beginning of the twentieth century would have greatly reduced the very high mortality rate from infections during that period.

Science has been used liberally to discredit the bible over the last several centuries, yet science is now making it evident how the bible is just ahead of its time.

Universal influence upon civilization

Does one have to look far to see the effect the Bible has had on civilization? Our calendar is dated from the death of Christ and Christmas is a holiday celebrated throughout the world. Many of the world's greatest artists, such as Leonardo da Vinci, Rembrandt, and Michelangelo, painted scenes describing bible characters or events. World famous composers Mendelssohn, Brahms, Beethoven, Handel, and Hayden wrote music for the church. Sebastian Bach devoted much of his life to church centered works. Much of the world's greatest literature contains references to God's Word. The law of the Western world has been influenced by Scripture more than any other factor.

Its amazing circulation

In spite of the persecution the bible has faced throughout history the Bible's circulation dwarfs all other books, including other holy ancient writings. There are no other religious books that can be compared to the Bible. You cannot find a copy of Zen Vedas, or the Egyptian Book of the Dead, and other writings of once thriving religions yet Bibles are found everywhere. Although written centuries earlier and from different cultures, the bible still holds our interest today because the truths written about centuries ago are as relevant for our times and for all cultures as they were when they were first recorded. If truth is truth, then it will not change with time, it will always be relevant to our lives.

Its absolute honesty

Dr. Willmington makes this insightful statement in his Guide to the Bible – “The Bible is not a book that man could write if he would, or would write if he could”. The first part of this statement, the bible is not a book man could write if he would, is supported by scientific and prophetic statements in the Bible that man could not have known about when scripture was written. There must have been a supernatural revelation involved.

If man could have written the bible on his own it doubtful he would have written it as it is. If the bible were written by one person it would be possible that one person would be dedicated to giving an honest account. If you chose a committee that could not be accountable to each other, like the Old Testament authors, with the purpose of writing a historical book, chances are someone would have tried to twist the facts to manipulate the message.

Yet the books of the bible give an honest account of the failures of mankind, including Moses, David, Peter, and many other heroes of the bible. Man does not like to expose his weaknesses, yet the bible holds nothing back when describing the failings of its central characters. The Bible even describes good things about the enemies of God – a rarity in any kind of ancient literature. In other words the Bible tells it like it is.

Its life-transforming power

The bible changes lives! Even the toughest skeptic would have to admit this fact. I am not talking about temporary changes you see in individuals but life-long changes that truly transform individuals. I have experienced this, known others to have experienced this, and you more than likely have witnessed this.

In fact, I believe most Christians do not need to examine all the evidence presented in this chapter to know there is something special about God's Holy Word. All they had to do was observe how living by the bible, how trusting God's promises and instructions, has given those who truly follow God a peace that goes beyond understanding. All they have to do is observe how those who put God first in their lives have such a positive impact on this world because others become more important than themselves. All they have to do is know a Christian that truly has the love God wants us to have, even for those who are "enemies" for whatever reason, to see that there is power in scripture.

Ralph Muncaster, Josh McDowell, Lee Stroebel, and many, many others started a quest to discredit the bible, and now they not only are staunch defenders of Scripture, they are devoting their entire lives to helping others understand who God really is. What happened to them? It was the power of the bible that took hold of them during their search for truth. They actually had to read the scriptures in order to discredit them, and the Word of God along with the Holy Spirit did the rest.

The Bible is truth and because it is the truth it will change your life if you seek (key word – a bible gathering dust does little good) and live out these truths. The Bible impacts my life and I am in good company. Read what the following well known individuals have said about the Bible

George Washington – *It is impossible to govern the world without the Bible.*

Abraham Lincoln – *But for this book we could not know right from wrong. The Bible is the best gift God has given to man.*

Theodore Roosevelt – *No educated man can afford to be ignorant of the Bible.*

Woodrow Wilson – *The Bible is the one supreme source of revelation of the meaning of life.*

William Gladstone – *I have know ninety-five great men of the world..., and of these eighty seven followed the Bible.*

Winston Churchill – *We rest with the assurance upon the impregnable rock of Holy Scripture.*

Chiang Kai-Shek – *The Bible is the voice of the Holy Spirit*

Douglas MacArthur – *Believe me sir, never a night goes by, be I ever so tired, I read the Word of God before I go to bed.*

Sir Isaac Newton – *I find more sure marks of authenticity in the Bible than any profane history whatsoever.*

Daniel Webster – *I believe the scripture of the Old and New Testament to be the will and Word of God.*

Benjamin Franklin – *My advice to you is that you cultivate an acquaintance and firm belief in the Holy Scriptures.*

Patrick Henry – *This is a book worth more than all the others ever printed.*

Immanuel Kant – *The existence of the Bible as a book for the people is the greatest benefit the human race experienced.*

John Locke – *It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter, sincere, nothing too much, nothing wanting.*

These are intelligent people who have achieved great things in their lives. They are not weak people who need a crutch by any stretch of the imagination. They recognize the power of the Bible and so should you.

This chapter and all the reference books I have mentioned will not prove anything, just as skeptics will never prove there is no God. But you should see there is ample evidence for relying on the truths of the bible. You should clearly see why so many intelligent, well-respected individuals trust the words of the bible. Although it will be ultimately be faith that causes you to follow God, it will be a faith based on reason.

After reading this book you should also see why so many refuse to accept the bible as truth. Just as there is more than ample evidence that drugs, heavy drinking, pornography, promiscuity, smoking, and overeating are harmful, many refuse to acknowledge this evidence because they don't want to give up what they are doing. So it should be no surprise that many reject the bible because they do not want to give up their self-serving lifestyle. I admit there are interesting issues concerning interpreting the meaning of some passages and one can easily try to second guess why God chose to do what he chose to do. God can even seem harsh or cruel if we read certain passages without understanding or knowing the context of how those passages were written. But we are not equal to God and we cannot understand like He can.

If you read the bible with a truly open mind, if you pray for God's help in understanding what you are reading, and if you make an honest effort to really know who God is and what His will is your life will be changed. If you have objections there are plenty of books and resources that will address these objections because chances are, you are not the only person to have these objections, whatever they may be. And the key to discovering God's truths will be having a sincere desire to know the truth. You have to examine your heart and determine if you want to just justify your disbelief or if you really want to know what truths there may be. If you want to know the truth Jesus promises you will find it. You will find it through prayer and your bible – our play-book for a winning life in every way.