

## Our Letter from Home Why We Can Trust the Bible

War can ravage the nervous system. As many as 20% of soldiers return from active combat with posttraumatic stress disorder, or PTSD.<sup>1</sup> Flashbacks, nightmares, dissociation, anxiety, depression and other symptoms wreak havoc in their lives. Those who've seen the worst of humanity on bloody battlefields can sustain life-altering, if unseen, wounds. And researchers work hard to identify preventative factors and treatments.

As it turns out, prevention can be as simple as letters from home. A study out of the University of Denver showed that frequent communication with loved ones, particularly spouses, predicted a lower likelihood of the development of PTSD in active-combat soldiers. There was a caveat, however. Letters from unhappily-married soldiers' spouses seemed to *increase* the chances of PTSD!<sup>2</sup> We can conclude that while strident communication stresses the soul, love communicated through written words soothes and fortifies it.

The Bible is our letter from home, soothing away our loneliness and fear as we face the battles of life. In it we find messages of love from a far-away place, written by One who longs to speak to us face to face but must, for now, settle for written communication.

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” John 1:14. Notice how the grace-filled, truth-filled Jesus Who showed us the Father is identified as “the Word.” It must be that this letter from home, filled with God's words, reveals His heart.

The natural world with its pulsing beauty and power speaks of God. The experiences of life teach lessons about Him. The laws that govern the physical, social, and psychological worlds show up in our daily lives to remind us of Him, the Architect of reality. Our deepest, closest relationships show us something of Him who wants intimate bonds with us. All these “books” can teach us of God. But the clearest, most comprehensive revelation is the Bible.

Our letter from home.

But can we trust it? In order to answer this question, let us examine the Word in three parts. First, we'll look at the Bible's very bold *claims*. After that, we'll get a grasp of its unique *content*. Finally, we'll check for internal and external *consistency*. The final *conclusion* will be up to each of us.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.ptsd.va.gov/understand/common/common\\_veterans.asp](https://www.ptsd.va.gov/understand/common/common_veterans.asp)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/06/110603080109.htm>

## Claims

The Bible itself claims to be more than just a nice, devotional book. Let's look at 2 Peter 1:19-21:

And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. 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.

According to this passage, the Bible is:

- *Prophetic as opposed to private*- “Prophecy” is, in the broadest sense, any part of Scripture. Prophets communicate with a God-intended meaning. To find that meaning, we lay aside our subjective (private) biases.
- *God's idea as opposed to man's idea*- Scripture didn't come into existence by “the will of man.” It came as God's Spirit moved upon His appointed messengers.
- *Directed as opposed to dictated*- Notice how the transmission of information took place: “Holy men of God *spoke as they were moved* by the Holy Spirit.” Speaking requires thought. The Bible writers used their own mind and language skills in the expression of God's thoughts. The Bible writers were God's *penmen*, but not His *pens*.

The Bible itself claims to be divinely inspired. Which parts, then?

Let's look at 2 Timothy 3:16-17:

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Cherry picking will not do! *All* parts are inspired by God, and profitable for teaching truth and right-living. According to Paul, Timothy knew the Holy Scriptures as a well-defined body of literature, a cohesive whole that could not be fractured off into inspired and non-inspired parts.

The Bible's own claim that it is inspired, originating with God and not man, cancels out the possibility that the Bible is a nice, spiritual book and nothing more. Either it is all it claims to be, or it is one of the most insidious and crafty lies that has ever been woven.

Consider this ad dating back to the 1800s. Its claim is very radical—“Mug Wump” cures venereal disease. Someone believing that claim could die, making Mug Wump more dangerous than it would be without the claim.



Because of the Bible's shocking self-assertions we must make a serious investigation. Radical claims require radical evidence. That evidence can be found in the Bible's content.

## Content

We often throw in the phrase "trust me" when trying to convince someone: "I'll take care of you, trust me!" This is an empty command unless we have proved ourselves trustworthy. We should build trust before commanding it.

Jesus said, "Now I have told you before it comes, that when it comes to pass, you may believe," John 14:29. The lesson is clear: God establishes faith in His Word through the foretelling of the future. The fulfilling of prophecy builds our trust in God! He says, "There is none like Me; declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done," Isaiah 46:9&10. God says His prophesies are fulfilled!

The second chapter of Daniel is called "God's Primer for Prophecy" because it is one of the simplest and most widely agreed-upon prophetic passages—and it was fulfilled. Let's turn there now.

Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, had a startling dream which he promptly forgot upon waking. He called his staff of magicians and sorcerers, along with the Chaldeans—the Ph D's of Babylon—to interpret his dream. Their conversation might be paraphrased this way:

King: "I had an important dream which I can't recall. I'm really stressed out about it. I need you to tell me what it means!"

Chaldeans: "Yes, your highness. Tell us the dream then, and we'll tell you what it means."

King: “No way! If you don’t make known the dream *and* the interpretation, you’ll be tortured and killed along with your families. But if you tell me the dream and the interpretation, I’ll give you riches and lots of status.”

Chaldeans: “Please, just tell us the dream first. . . “

King: “You’re stalling! You’ve conspired together to string me along to buy yourselves a little time. Now, tell me the dream or else!”

Chaldeans: “No one on earth can do that!”

At this point, the king gives orders for the wise men to be tortured and killed (he wasn’t the nicest guy). Babylon’s wise men include a Jew named Daniel, a Hebrew who’d been captured by Nebuchadnezzar’s army at 17 years old. When he hears the news of the king’s dream and the wise men’s failure to interpret, and their fate, Daniel and his friends pray for a miracle.

As Daniel sleeps that night, he has a dream. In the dream the king sees a statue with a gold head, chest and arms of silver, belly and thighs of brass, legs of iron, and feet of part iron and part clay. A stone appears out of nowhere to strike the feet, which crushes the statue to particles, which the wind carries away. The stone becomes a giant mountain filling the earth (vs. 31-35).

Daniel came before the king to explain his dream. He said that the four parts of the statue symbolized four kingdoms. Today there is a large consensus among scholars on their identity. Here is a synopsis:

<b>Part</b>	<b>Metal</b>	<b>Kingdom</b>	<b>Era</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>
Head	Gold-Valuable but soft	Babylon	605-538 BC	Prosperous but militarily weak; Conquered by Persian King Cyrus in 539 B.C.
Chest and arms	Silver- Less valuable, but harder	Medio-Persia	538-331 BC	Less prosperous than Babylon, but militarily stronger. Conquered by Alexander the Great.
Belly and thighs	Brass- Less valuable, but harder still	Greece	331-146 BC	Alexander the Great, who was reported to have brass-colored hair, was quickly known all over the world as the greatest military general of all time.
Legs	Iron- The cheapest but hardest of the metals	Rome	146 BC- AD 476	Called “The Iron Monarchy of Rome,” for its extreme military power and brutality. Jesus was crucified under Roman rule.

The world monarchies of this prophecy come to a halt at the feet of iron and clay. There we do not see a dominant metal, but rather two substances that don't ultimately mix. If these symbols are true, there would not be another world empire after Rome.

The symbols work. No one ruler has been able to dominate the civilized world since Rome's Caesars. Through luxury, corruption and moral decay, Rome lost its stability and strength, becoming an easy prey to invading Barbarian tribes. Ultimately, Rome divided into ten kingdoms (See Daniel 7:24). These kingdoms became today's nations of Europe:

Franks	became	French
Saxons	became	English
Visigoths	became	Spanish
Burgundians	became	Swiss
Lombards	became	Italians
Suevi	became	Portuguese
Almanni	became	Germans
Vandals	became	extinct
Heruli	became	extinct
Ostrogoths	became	extinct

Many failed attempts have been made to unite Europe, including powerful kings and tyrants such as Charlemagne, Charles V, Louis XIV, Napoleon, Kaiser Wilhelm and Hitler. It is reported that when the mighty general Napoleon finally found himself exiled on the Isle of Elba, he lamented his failure to conquer the world with the words: "God is too much for me!" God was too much for all the would-be world monarchs after Rome. In Daniel 2:43 we read, "They shall not cleave to one another." So far, they haven't.

But how do we know that the book of Daniel wasn't written *after* these things occurred and then made to look as if it was written before them? This is a good question with a rather straightforward answer.

The oldest manuscripts of the Bible discovered to date are the Dead Sea Scrolls. They were discovered in 1947 when an Arab shepherd boy threw a rock at a stray goat in a cave near the Dead Sea. He heard the rock hit clay, and went to check it out. Excavations over the next ten years brought forth thousands of scrolls of all the Old Testament books except Esther dating back as far as 125 B.C. This means that the book of Daniel existed at least as early as 125 B.C., which was during the Roman Empire. From these facts we can know that the feet of iron and clay, and their symbolic prediction that there would never be another world monarchy, appeared long before the fact.

## Consistency

The Bible is consistent. We can see this consistency in four different ways: Internal, translational, cultural and experiential.

Let's take these one by one.

**Internal Consistency** indicates that the various parts of the Bible harmonize with each other. The Bible's 40 authors from three continents wrote 66 books over a 1500-year span. These writers were from diverse social and cultural backgrounds, writing on one of the most divisive subjects—religion. Yet from Moses to John the Revelator we find utter cohesiveness and continuity.

**Translational Consistency** refers to the fact that various translations, discovered from various historical periods, agree with one another. Before the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered, the oldest manuscripts dated around 900 A.D. One copy of Isaiah from the Dead Sea Scrolls, called the Great Isaiah Scroll, was compared with one of these newer copies. A thousand years had elapsed between them, yet, according to British scholar Sir Francis Kenyan, “In one chapter of 166 words there is only one word (three letters) in question. . . and this word does not significantly change the meaning of the message!”<sup>3</sup>

The same weight of evidence emerges for the New Testament, of which there are over 5000 manuscript copies. These are in about 98 percent agreement, and the only discrepancies do not affect the meaning of the text. Princeton professor Bruce Metzger estimated that the New Testament was copied with 99.5 percent accuracy, in comparison with Homer's *Iliad* at about 95 percent.<sup>4</sup>

**Cultural Consistency** is evident in the fact that the Bible is the bestselling book every year. The Internet Public Library says that the cumulative sales of the Bible, while incalculable, are probably upwards of six billion. The second bestselling book of all time is Mao Tse-tung *Little Red Book*, which couldn't help but become a best-seller because Chairman Mao made it compulsory for every Chinese adult to own a copy.<sup>5</sup> The Bible, translated into more than 2000 languages and distributed globally, holds a message that cuts through culture, class and time. It connects with people!

**Experiential Consistency** is probably the most important kind. It is the reason for the Bible's popularity. This book is not just a great work of literature, not just a historical volume, not just a source of fascinating prophecy and finely tuned theological treatises. This book changes lives.

Olympic distance runner Louis Zamperini enlisted in the US Air Force in 1941. While serving, his plane crashed into the ocean. He and one other soldier survived 47 days on a life raft which landed them on the Marshall Islands. There he suffered torture at the hands of Mutsuhiro “The Bird” Watanabe, a prison guard. After his eventual release, Zamperini had nightmares about strangling his former captors. He began drinking heavily, trying to forget his experiences as a POW.

But through the coaxing of Zamperini's wife Cynthia, he attend a Billy Graham crusade. There he gave his heart to Christ. In his subsequent career as an evangelist, he dwelt heavily on forgiveness, even visiting a Tokyo prison to tell war criminals he'd forgiven them. At 81 years old he ran a leg in the Olympic Torch relay for the Nagano, Japan Olympics a few hours' drive from the POW

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<sup>3</sup> Josh McDowell, *Evidence Demands a Verdict*, p. 58.

<sup>4</sup> Norman L. Geisler and Frank Turek, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist*, p. 229.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ipl.org/div/farq/bestsellerFARQ.html>

camp where he'd been tortured. While there, he tried to meet with Mitsuhiro Wantanabe, but the former prison guard refused to see him. Zamperini sent him a letter, saying that while he'd suffered great mistreatment from him, he forgave him.

## The Takeaway

The Word helped Louis Zamperini recover from PTSD. Maybe this is part of the reason reading the Bible has been shown to reduce symptoms of PTSD in prisoners and soldiers.<sup>6</sup> It heals wounds too deep for any human helper. It is our letter from our heavenly home where one day soon we will be safe forever from sin and suffering.

## Quiz

1. Letters from home can prevent the development of \_\_\_\_\_.
2. The Bible is \_\_\_\_\_ as opposed to private; \_\_\_\_\_ as opposed to man's idea; \_\_\_\_\_ as opposed to dictated.
3. The second chapter of Daniel is called God's \_\_\_\_\_ of prophecy.
4. The four metals on Nebuchadnezzar's statue were \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.
5. They symbolized these four nations: \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.
6. True or false: The feet of iron and clay mingled into a new metal.
7. The oldest manuscripts of the Bible discovered to date are the \_\_\_\_\_.
8. The four kinds of consistency we see in the Bible are \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2021/may/bible-reading-study-trauma-ptsd-covid19-mental-health.html>

## Answer Key

1. PTSD
2. Prophetic, God's idea, directed
3. Primer
4. Gold, silver, brass, iron
5. Babylon, Medio-Persia, Greece, Rome
6. False
7. Dead Sea Scrolls
8. Internal, translational, cultural, and experiential

