

Real or Fake?

Sometimes it can be difficult to spot what is real from what is fake. It isn't hard to tell a stone statue from a real person or animal, but daily life can be more complex.

A frequent topic recently has been 'fake news'. This means stories or reports carried by the press or other media, which are just not true. Their intent would be to change people's views or even to change the course of events. Election results are thought to have been influenced by fake news, and world leaders have blamed it for many stories not to their liking.

A major development in technology and entertainment is 'virtual reality'. By putting on a headset, we can seem to swim with dolphins, fly with an eagle or even go into space. Even children play games on their mobile phones, which mix maps, their cameras and animated characters – this is known as 'augmented reality' – mixing reality with make-believe.

When Pontius Pilate asked, "*What is truth?*" (*John 18:38*), that corrupt, vain man was actually asking an important question – and one we still have to deal with today.

Is the Bible Real?

The same question has often been asked of the Bible. It claims to be the word of God, written down by men inspired by His power:

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).

It also claims to be the guide for people who want to please God:

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 (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

Many critics have claimed that it is just a set of human writings which cannot be trusted. However, they ignore the important evidence that the Bible is a reliable record of what was written down under God's guidance.

A Reliable Record

The Bible we can read today, in our own language, is a translation of the original text and the message it contains is completely unchanged. We can find support for this view for both Old and New Testaments.

Although the Old Testament was written between 1500 and 400 BC, recent discoveries show that it has been very carefully copied over the intervening centuries. So critics are wrong to suggest that the original message has changed: it has not.

In 1946 the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in caves near the Dead Sea. They contain many documents, including much of the text of the Old Testament. They have been dated as having been written between 300 BC and 100 AD. This means that they are about 1000 years older than the oldest known texts before they were discovered. Comparisons have shown

that there are no significant differences between these ancient writings and the Bibles now in general use. This means that the Old Testament we have today is an accurate copy of what was originally written down.

The New Testament was completed in the First Century, and many very old manuscripts exist. These help us to see that, again, our Bible is an accurate copy of the original. The 'Rylands Library Papyrus P52' is a fragment from the Gospel of John. Scholars have debated its age using a variety of methods, but the range is from 90 to 175 AD. This means that it was copied within a few decades of the apostle John having penned its words. Again, the Bible is shown to be a reliable record. We can trust what we read.

The Word of God

The Bible gives a simple test which we can apply, to decide if a message comes from God, or not.

When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken (Deuteronomy 18:22).

If a prophecy doesn't come true, it is fake. This test still works, as of course humans cannot foretell the future.

The Bible contains a lot of prophecy. For example, Daniel prophesied about the empires of his day (Babylon and Medo-Persia), those to follow (Greece and Rome) and the time (up to our own day) when there would be no single world power. His prophecies came true – read Daniel 2 for a good example.

Several of the prophets accurately foretold the exile of the Jews and their return under King Cyrus:



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“For behold, the days are coming,” says the LORD, “that I will bring back from captivity My people Israel and Judah,” says the LORD. “And I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it” (Jeremiah 30:3).

How to Respond?

There is much more evidence that the Bible is the Word of God and we detail that from time to time in *Glad Tidings*. How should we respond? Our earlier reference helps:

Whoever will not hear My words... I will require it of him (Deuteronomy 18:19).

Let's heed the warning and take time to read the real word of God.

Editor

editor@gladtidingsmagazine.org

