

IS THE BIBLE A RELIABLE WITNESS?

Introduction – The Koran claims to be a word-for-word dictation by Allah to Mohammad. The Bible is a compilation of a variety of authors over time and claims to be inspired by God. The Bible is one of a number of ancient writings considered important enough to be passed on by scribes prior to the printing press.

2 Timothy 3:16

The last 200 years we have begun to excavate numerous ancient sites where writing on clay tablets and stone are preserved. We have also recovered a variety of cultural artifacts at biblical related sites. Using these external sources only, the story of the Bible can be confirmed as reliable.

A. Noah's Flood – Genesis 6-9

1. The Sumerian Kings List – oldest copy dates to 2000 B.C. It contains a series of eight kings in five cities who were ordained by Heaven. Then there was a catastrophic flood that destroyed their world, followed by the establishment of a new kingly dynasty. The length of the lives of the kings before the flood was very long compared to afterward, just like the Genesis account.
2. The Astra-Hasis Epic, whose earliest copies are from the 17th century B.C., contain a creation story followed by a flood account as a judgment from Heaven.

B. The Tower of Babel – Genesis 11

1. In Mesopotamia, towers of mud bricks are common and were called *ziggurats*.
2. In the Sumerian story of Enmerkar, King of Uruk, it is said to go back to a golden age in the past when “the whole universe, to people in unison to the god Enlil in one tongue did speak. Then the god Enki...changed the speech in their mouths and set up contention in it.” This was composed about 2200 B.C.

C. The Patriarchal Period – Genesis 12-50

1. This nomadic period (2200-1800 B.C.) is characterized by urban cities being abandoned and mass population migrating long distances for their survival.
2. Ur of the Chaldeans was a well-known ancient city from before 2500 B.C. This is the urban environment which Abraham and his family left.
3. The last patriarch is Joseph who became second to Pharaoh in Egypt. This could have only occurred in the period when another Semitic people, the Hyksos, ruled over Egypt (1850-1500 B.C.).

D. The Exodus, Sinai Covenant, and the Conquest of Canaan Period – Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, and Judges

1. The first nine of the ten plagues brought on Egypt follow a pattern of the occasional 500-year flood scenario.
2. There was a distinct form of covenant used in the 14th and 15th centuries B.C. It was a Hittite Suzerainty Treaty. The format begins with an introduction of the *suzerain* and his past history with his vassals. The stipulations for the vassal are

outlined followed by a section of curses and blessings. Witnesses to the covenant are mentioned along with a mandate that it be written down and read repeatedly.

3. The stone carving of Pharaoh Merneptah tells of his many military exploits including a campaign in Canaan where he mentioned the Israelites specifically. This stela dates to about 1210 B.C.
4. The Amarna letters tell of the *habiru* causing conflict as invaders to the existing city states of Canaan. These Canaanite kings ask for Egyptian military assistance (1360-1330 B.C.).
5. Only three cities in Canaan were specifically designated as burned during the conquest of Canaan. Jericho came to an abrupt end after being consistently occupied over 8,000 years. Hazor was destroyed by fire followed by an Israelite occupation.
6. There is a distinct cultural transition from Canaanite to Israelite in Palestine. You can see it in the change to a simple style of pottery, distinct design of Israelite houses, and the absence of pig bones.

E. The Period of the Kings of Israel – 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings, 1-2 Chronicles

1. A stone carving was found in excavating the city of Dan dating to the reign of Jeroboam (841 B.C.) which refers to “the house of David.”
2. Shishak I, Pharaoh of Egypt, engraved at the Temple at Karnak along with a stela left at the city of Megiddo that he conquered the King of Israel (925 B.C.; 1 Kings 14:25-26).
3. Mesha, King of Moab created a stela at Dihon where it is written “Omri King of Israel and his son (Ahab) oppressed Moab many years” (2 Kings 3:4-27).
4. The events recorded in the books of 1-2 Kings about the nation Aram and their kings are alluded to by the King of Aram in a stela erected in the city of Dan.
5. The Babylonian Chronicles¹ record the Assyrian conquest of Northern Israel and their deportation in 720 B.C.
6. The siege and capture of the Israelite city of Lachish and other southern cities by Assyria is recorded in the Babylonian Chronicles. The King of Judah is said to be trapped “like a bird in a cage” in Jerusalem, but no mention is made of its capture (King Hezekiah – 2 Kings 18-19).
7. Of all the foreign rulers referred to in Kings and Chronicles, all but two turn up in external sources.
8. From 853 B.C. onward, nine of 14 Israelite kings are named in external sources.
9. The capture and exile of Judah between 605 and 586 B.C. are recorded in the Babylonian Chronicles.
10. The book of Daniel predicts there will be three more empires after the Babylonian Empire before the kingdom of God is established in the third empire. The Persian, Greek, and Roman Empires came; as predicted, Jesus came to establish the kingdom during the Roman Empire.

F. Jesus and the New Testament Church

1. Around 55 A.D., a Roman historian, Thallus, wrote that the darkness that covered the earth at Jesus’ crucifixion was a solar eclipse.

2. Sometime around 73 A.D. Mara bar Serapion, a Jew, gave three examples of exceptionally wise men being killed by the mob. He alluded to Socrates, Pythagoras, and Jesus.
3. Pliny the Younger wrote about 100 A.D. to the Emperor about a society of Christians in his territory who worshipped Christ as a god.
4. Tacitus, Roman historian, wrote about 115 A.D. about the fire that destroyed much of the city of Rome in 64 A.D. under Emperor Nero: "Therefore, to put down the rumor, Nero substituted as culprits and punished in the most unusual ways those whom the crowd called Christians. The founder of the name Christ had been executed in the reign of Tiberius by the procurator Pontius Pilate."
5. Josephus, a Jewish aristocrat and military commander of Galilee during the Jewish revolt against Rome from 66-70 A.D., wrote about the death and character of John the Baptist and James, the brother of Jesus. Josephus wrote the following in his book, The Antiquities of the Jews, Book 18, chapter 3, part 3: "Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it is lawful to call him a man; for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was Christ. And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive the third day; as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And the tribe of Christians, so named for him, are not extinct to this day" (95 A.D.).

Conclusion – The fundamental story of the Bible from the beginning of the Old Testament through the New Testament is confirmed by many independent sources. Therefore, we can reasonably conclude that the Bible is a reliable witness to the events it records.

Reference: Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament, IVP Press; Bible Background Commentary: New Testament, IVP Press

¹Babylonian Chronicles – compiled on clay tablets between 550 and 400 B.C. from earlier sources in many cases in the city of Babylon.