

WHY THE BIBLE?

BIBLES

E-BOOK

Why the Bible?

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A publication from [Advancing Native Missions](#)

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Why the Bible?

It is well-known that churches and ministries around the world focus on the Bible. The scriptures, in whole or in part, have been translated into thousands of different languages. Entire organizations are devoted to printing and distributing the Bible. Christian workers carry Bibles into closed countries, often at great peril. In some places it's considered a criminal offense to possess a copy of the scriptures. Yet believers are willing to risk their freedom, even their lives, for the written word of God. And one of the most consistent (and persistent) requests heard from indigenous missionaries is a plea for Bibles. All of this begs the question: Why? Why is the Bible so important? Why is getting the scriptures into the hands of our fellow Christians so vital? Indeed, why is it so necessary that it is worth any amount of money, time, effort, or sacrifice?

There are many good answers to these questions. However, we will only offer three here for your consideration. First, the Bible is a reliable and trustworthy work, and thus can be depended upon in its teachings and moral precepts. Next, the Bible has a proven track record of producing positive change in the lives of individuals. Finally, the Bible not only changes individuals, but it also effectively transforms whole nations and cultures.

The Bible is Trustworthy

First, a word about terms. The most common designation for the book we are discussing is “Bible,” a word that comes from the Greek *biblia* and simply means “books.” Thus, the Bible is a collection of smaller books—in fact, 66 of them. The Bible is also often called “scripture” or the “scriptures,” a word meaning the “writings.” These 66 books are the sacred writings of the Judeo-Christian heritage. The Bible is also referred to as “the word of God,” because it is the revelation of God to us in written form.

There are certain fundamental intellectual, emotional, and spiritual questions all humans ask. We want to know what the purpose or meaning of our existence is. Where did we come from? Where are we going? Why are we here? What are we to do while we are here? And how are we to live our lives—to be good people, with fulfilled lives? Christians assert that the answers to these questions are found in the scriptures themselves. God, our Creator, gave us this book to be a manual and guide for living life on this earth. The Bible addresses the issues of the meaning and purpose of our existence. In order for this assertion to be valid, we must be confident in the authenticity and integrity of the scriptures. Can the Bible be trusted? As we shall see, the scriptures can indeed be trusted and relied on.

The Bible asserts its own trustworthiness

The Bible itself declares that it is the source of truth. Jesus spoke to the Father and said, “Your word is truth” (John 17:17). The Psalmist states, “The word of the Lord proves true” (Psalm 18:30). Indeed, the assertion that God’s word is true is found in a number of passages—e.g., Proverbs 33:4, Psalm 119:160, Proverbs 30:5, and Romans 3:4. The Bible also affirms that “the scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35). The reason the Bible is the basis for truth is that it is

genuinely the word of God. And since God is true (see John 3:33, John 8:26, Titus 1:2, Numbers 23:19, Romans 3:4), then his word is also true.

Yet some may ask the question—is the Bible actually the word of God? Yes, indeed. The Bible itself affirms that it is inspired by God. This is stated in 2 Timothy 3:16, where Paul declares that “all scripture is inspired.” The Greek word translated “inspired” is very interesting. It literally means “God-breathed.” Paul emphatically asserts that all of the writings of the Bible were breathed out by God himself. In other words, reading the Bible is like hearing God speak to you directly, breathing out his message in words you can understand.

The process of inspiration is briefly described in 2 Peter 1:21. Here the apostle says that Bible was written by holy men of God as they were “carried along by the Holy Spirit.” The verb here is actually a nautical term. It refers to how the wind fills the sails of a ship and moves it along. This gives us a picture of the Spirit of God moving on the minds and hearts of individuals, causing them to write the true words of God. Yet notice that it is men who are writing the words, even as they are moved by the Spirit. The writing of the scriptures was a collaborative work, inspired by God and written by men. These men wrote in their own words, with their own writing styles and personalities, yet directed by the Spirit in such a way that what they wrote were the actual God-breathed words of the Lord. An amazing accomplishment.

This is not only amazing, but it is also important for our discussion. If we understand that all the scriptures are “God-breathed” and thus convey to us the true words of God, then we can readily see why the Bible should be considered completely trustworthy, authoritative, and helpful.

Literary trustworthiness

As a literary document, the Bible may be favorably compared with any other piece of ancient writing—and it measures up extremely well. Using the same standards applied to any example of literature, the Bible excels in its reliability. For example, the number of manuscripts of the Bible (that is, handwritten copies of the scriptures) is far in excess of any other ancient writing. And in general, the more manuscripts we have, the more confidence we can have in the accuracy of the text itself.

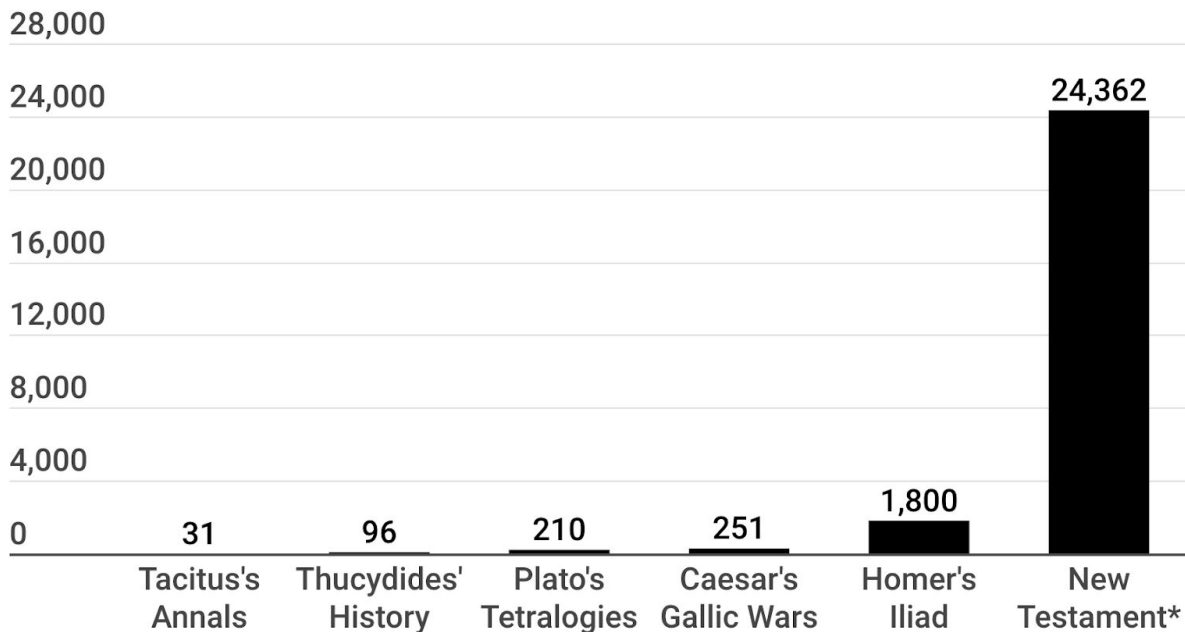
For example, suppose you had 100 manuscripts of a book. Now imagine that 92 copies said, “John was in a jazz band.” The other 8 copies said, “John was in a jazz land.” Which version of this sentence do you think was most likely the original text? It is reasonable to say that the original text was the first version, and the second variation was due to a spelling error. It is in this way that we consider ancient books with multiple manuscripts, such as the Bible. The more manuscripts we have, the greater confidence in determining the original text.

Consider the manuscript data for several ancient writings:

- Tacitus’s *Annals* = 31 copies
- Thucydides’ *History* = 96 copies
- Plato’s *Tetralogies* = 210 copies

- Caesar's *Gallic Wars* = 251 copies
- Homer's *Iliad* = 1800 copies
- **New Testament = 5838 Greek copies + 18,524 early translations = 24,362 copies**

Number of Manuscripts



*5,838 Greek copies + 18,524 early translations

Based on the manuscript evidence of these ancient works, historians believe that we have reasonably accurate texts of the writings of Plato, Caesar, Homer, and the others. Since this is true of these other ancient books, it is reasonable to deduce that the New Testament is both accurate and trustworthy.

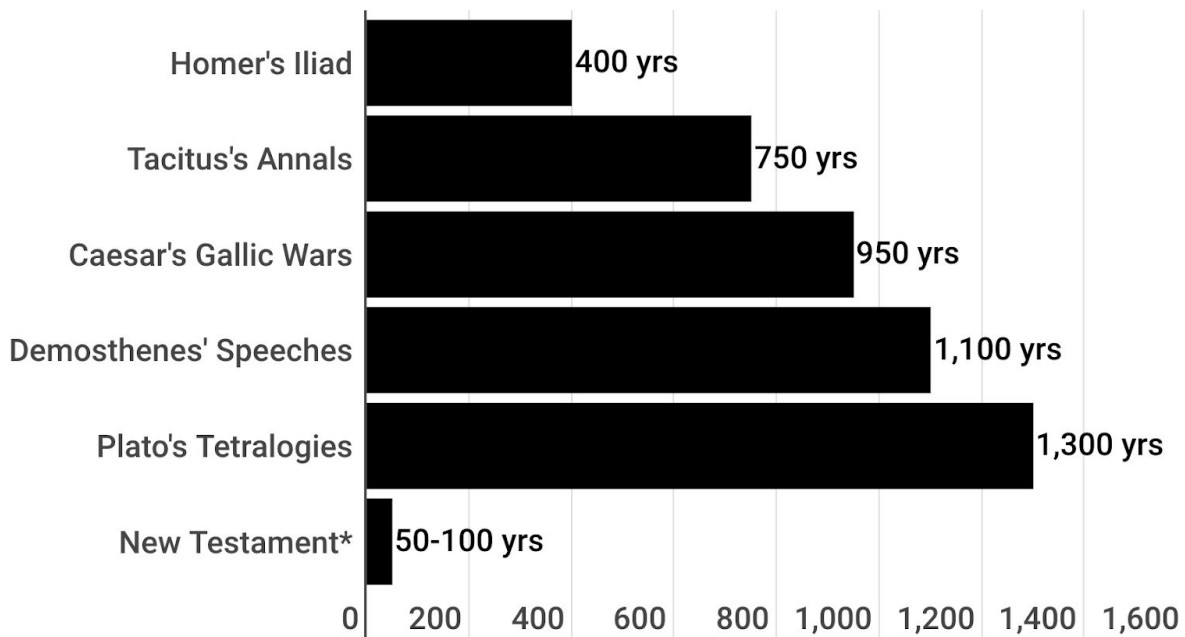
Along with this, the time span between the original composition and the existing manuscripts is much less than it is for other ancient books. Here is how that works:

Suppose a book was written in the year A.D. 1000. Now imagine that there are 20 copies of this book. Three of these copies are from the year 1100. Five are from the year 1200. Twelve of the copies are from the year 1500 or later. Now if we want to use these copies to discover an accurate rendering of the text, as close to the original as possible, more weight is given to the copies from the year 1100. They are closer in time to the original, so there is less chance of errors or variations because these often result from manuscripts being copied and re-copied. Thus, the time span between the original date of composition and the earliest copies is very

important—the smaller the timespan, the greater the accuracy in determining the wording of the original text. With this in mind, consider several ancient writings and the time span between their original composition and the earliest copies.

- Homer’s *Iliad* = 400 years
- Tacitus’s *Annals* = 750 years
- Caesar’s *Gallic Wars* = 950 years
- Demosthenes’ Speeches = 1100 years
- Plato’s *Tetralogies* = 1300 years
- **New Testament** = **50–100 years**

Years Between Original Writing and Earliest Surviving Manuscripts



*range due to manuscripts of individual books in the NT

We see there is a great difference in the gap of time between other ancient books as compared with the New Testament. The New Testament manuscripts are much closer to the original time of writing. Again, this assures us of the reliability of the actual text of the scriptures.

Furthermore, the quality of the text itself is of the highest order. We can assert that we have the correct words in the manuscripts. For example, as regards just the New Testament, Kenneth Boa says, “The New Testament can be regarded as 99.5 percent pure, and the correct readings for the remaining 0.5 percent can often be ascertained with a fair degree of probability by the practice of

textual criticism.”¹ Meeting such high literary standards assures us that this book is to be trusted. So when it comes to its value for instruction in truth, or as a guide for moral and ethical living, it can be fully depended upon.

Historical accuracy

The Bible deals with many historical matters—people, places, and events. Although its historical accuracy is sometimes called into question, the fact is that the Bible has consistently and repeatedly proven its reliability regarding historical data. Archaeologists have discovered many places and sites recorded in the Bible—from Nineveh and Nazareth to Jericho and Sodom. Ancient artifacts have verified the existence of many individuals mentioned in the scriptures—from Ahab and Hezekiah to Jesus and Pilate. Events presented in the sacred text—whether battles, royal decrees, treaties, or natural disasters—have been verified numerous times. It has been said that archaeology and historical research do not prove the Bible is true, or that it is the written word of God. However, we should expect God’s word to be historically trustworthy. And this is, indeed, the case. Once again, the reliability of the Bible as history gives us confidence in reading it and applying its teachings to our lives. We can study the people and events of the scriptures and learn valuable life lessons from them (see 1 Corinthians 10:6-11). In doing so, we know these historical examples are real people and actual events, not fairy tales or myths.

You may want to consider these passages that teach us the value of using biblical examples: Philippians 2:5, Philippians 3:17, Hebrews 6:12, 2 Peter 2:4–10, 1 John 3:11–12, Hebrews 4:11, James 2:24–26, James 5:10–11, 2 Corinthians 9:1–3, and, of course, Hebrews 11.

The right books

In recent years one of the most common questions raised about the scriptures is whether we have the right books in the Bible. It has become popular to claim that certain books were purposefully left out. Is there evidence for this? Or can we trust that the 66 books in the Bible are the right ones—none should be removed, and none should be added?

The issue here concerns what is called the canon of scripture. The word “canon” refers to a standard measure of acceptance, a yardstick, you might say. It is true that in ancient Judaism and Christianity there were many books that claimed to be inspired. These books were purportedly written by Hebrew prophets or Christian apostles. These books have names such as the Life of Adam and Eve, the Book of Enoch, the Gospel of Thomas, and even the Gospel of Judas. There were dozens of books like these. The question is, should they have been included in the Bible?

The process of what books should be included in the scriptures is known as canonization—that is to say, which books measured up to the standard of true scripture, the inspired word of God? Many people, especially critics of the Bible, think that certain religious leaders handpicked for inclusion the books they liked, or that agreed with their opinions, or supported their ideas.

¹ Kenneth Boa. “How Accurate Is the Bible?” Found online at <https://kenboa.org/apologetics/how-accurate-is-the-bible/>

Actually the canonization process was much different from this. It was really not a matter of selecting certain books for inclusion in the scriptures. Instead, it was a matter of recognition—the church recognizing that this particular book had the stamp of divine authority on it.

In establishing the canon of the New Testament, there were basically three criteria considered: First, was it a genuine work by an apostle or a close associate of an apostle? Second, was the book's doctrine consistent with the teaching that had been handed down from Jesus himself and the apostles of the church? Third, was it generally acknowledged by the church universally as being the word of God. In applying these three yardsticks, there was an overarching consideration—did this book evidence divine authorship? Was there a spirit of revelation contained in this book? Did its words speak spiritual life to the soul? In reality, what the church did was view the canon as established by God. He inspired and decided which books truly would be his written word. The church only acknowledged what God had already decreed.

This matter may seem only academic to some. However, it has great practical and spiritual value. By understanding the legitimacy of the biblical canon, we acknowledge that the Bible we read is truly the word of God. The Bibles we translate, publish, and distribute are truly scriptures, writings inspired by the Holy Spirit, and given to all of us for our eternal spiritual benefit. Furthermore, the Bible authoritatively answers the big life questions we mentioned above—the questions we ask about the meaning and purpose of life. And when it comes to understanding correct teachings or learning moral principles for how to live, we can have confidence that the Bible is trustworthy and reliable.

If you would like to study in more detail the accuracy and reliability of the Bible, we suggest the following resources:

- F. F. Bruce. *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* Eerdmans.
- Josh McDowell. *God Breathed: The Undeniable and Powerful Reliability of the Bible.* Barbour Publishing.
- Craig Blomberg. *Can We Still Believe the Bible?* Brazos Press.

The Bible Changes Lives

The word of salvation

The great message of the Bible is that God loves us and has provided salvation for us through the gift of his Son, resulting in redemption from our sin and its consequences. This is the essence of the gospel. This is the message that changes lives. And this is why providing Bibles for people is so important. For the Bible is one of God's primary instruments of bringing salvation to people.

In 1 Peter 1:23 we read, "You have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God." It is the true message of the gospel that brings salvation to lost humanity (Romans 1:16). And the scriptures present the gospel in written form

so that everyone may read, hear, and understand the good news. The Bible tells us how to be saved.

One of the basic truths of the gospel message is that we are saved by faith (Ephesians 2:8–9, Romans 3:28, Philippians 3:9). Now where does faith come from? According to the Bible, faith comes from hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17; also see John 5:24). Hearing the word often comes through the oral preaching of the gospel, certainly, but it is also found in the scriptures. For example, notice in Romans 10:8–17 how often the proclamation of the gospel is tied to the scriptures themselves. Peter says that the “word of the Lord” is the “good news that has been preached to you” (1 Peter 1:25). Paul writes that the gospel was prophesied about in the scriptures (Roman 1:2). In fact, the Bible was written so that we could understand and receive the gospel, and then have faith in Christ (cf. John 20:31 and Acts 10:43).

At ANM we are privileged to hear many stories of how God uses the scriptures to bring people to salvation. One of our staff members became a believer in this way. He was taking a course in Western literature in a state university. This was in a country with a history of oppression and persecution against the church. His professor told him that to understand Western culture he needed to read the Bible. He was able to find a copy in the school library and began to read it. His exposure to the scriptures resulted in his coming to saving faith in Christ. This is only one example of many thousands that could be recounted. There are untold numbers of individuals who began reading the Bible for various reasons. Some were challenged to do so. Some were inexplicably compelled. Some were just curious. Whatever the motivation, their Bible reading ended in accepting Christ as Savior.

A manual for discipleship

Leading someone to Jesus is just the beginning of the Bible’s work. Indeed, the reading, study, and application of the word of God is a fundamental discipline in the life of a believer. You could appropriately call the Bible a “manual for discipleship.” It is the scriptures that teach us how to effectively live for Christ, and to undertake his work in this world. For this reason, providing Bibles for Christ’s followers around the world is critical. Without the word, it will be difficult for them to mature spiritually. Let’s explore what how the Bible affects the life of a disciple.

First of all, the word of the Lord nurtures the inner man. We are taught that we do not live only on physical food, but by the word of God, our spiritual food (Luke 4:4, John 6:63). Peter says that it is the word that causes us to grow (1 Peter 2:2). It is a mark of a mature disciple to know how to correctly handle the word of God (2 Timothy 2:15). And to abide in the word is a distinguishing characteristic of a true disciple of Christ (John 8:31).

The scriptures effectively instruct us how to live the Christian life. The word is a guide for us (Psalm 119:105). It instructs us and gives us hope (Romans 15:4). Paul declares that the inspired word of God is given to us to train and instruct us in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:15–16). To hear the word and keep it brings blessings to our lives (Luke 11:28). It for these reasons, and many

others, that we should learn to obey the scriptures, to be a “doer of the word,” and not just a hearer (James 1:22).

One of the most valuable benefits that the Bible provides for us is spiritual cleansing and sanctification. The Psalmist declared that the word is able to keep us from sin (Psalm 119:9, 11). Jesus speaks of the power of the word of God to sanctify his followers (John 17:17, 15:3). Since Paul emphasizes that it is God’s will that we be sanctified (1 Thessalonians 4:3), then it is incumbent upon us to study, memorize, and apply the scriptures on a regular basis. Indeed, a significant characteristic of a righteous person is meditating continually on the word (Psalm 1:2, Joshua 1:8).

The call of the church is to reach the nations with the gospel message (Matthew 28:19–20, Mark 16:15–16). As we have seen, there is an unbreakable link between the word that is vocally proclaimed and the written word. Both are instruments God uses to save souls and to disciple believers. For this reason, to ensure that Bibles are translated, printed, and distributed is of paramount importance for the work of the church.

The Bible Changes Nations

God the Father gave a promise to his own Son, the Messiah: “Ask of me, and I will give the nations to you as an inheritance” (Psalm 2:8). As children of God, and joint-heirs with Christ (Romans 8:14–17) we are privileged to share in this promise. We can ask God for the nations. With this in mind we should also consider the prophetic promise of the Lord Jesus: “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world, as a witness to all nations, and then the end shall come” (Matthew 24:14). The nations referred to in this verse are not the countries of the world, but rather the ethnic or people groups of the earth. Jesus gave his word that all the peoples of the earth will hear the good news, and then the end will come.

In fact, through God’s revelation the nations now have access to the gospel. Paul says that the “gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ” is now “by the prophetic scriptures made known to all nations” (Romans 16:25–26). This is a fulfillment of the biblical promise given to Abraham that through him all nations would be blessed (see Galatians 3:8).

In the New Testament we see the early followers of Jesus proclaiming the good news to a variety of nations (people groups). The scriptures are consistently part of this proclamation. Notice that Philip preaches to the Ethiopian eunuch by beginning with the scripture passage he had been reading (Acts 8:35). Peter proclaims the gospel to the household of Cornelius, an Italian centurion, by referring to the biblical prophetic witness to the Messiah (Acts 10:43). The Gentiles in Antioch are instructed in the word of God by Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:35). In Thessalonica Paul “reasoned from the scripture” in telling both Jews and Greeks about the Lord (Acts 17:1–4). Apollos is noted for his proficient use of the Hebrew scriptures to convince the Jews of Ephesus that Jesus was the Messiah (Acts 18:24–28). For the Gentiles of Corinth Paul summarizes the essence of the gospel, indicating that it was scripturally based (1 Corinthians 15:1–4). Everywhere the disciples go they minister with the holy scriptures.

The result of the early church's proclamation of the gospel and the teaching of biblical truth was a spiritual population explosion. By the early 4th century the church had grown to the point that it had become a major agent of change in the Roman Empire. In the end, biblical preaching and teaching changed the empire, and then all of Western civilization. In the following centuries, peoples and cultures were powerfully affected by the influence of the Bible and biblical truth. Here are a few examples:

- The Christian emphasis on compassion and loving others has resulted in the establishment of thousands of hospitals, charity organizations, relief agencies, homeless shelters, and humanitarian efforts.
- The biblical concept of humanity being created in God's image means that all persons have value. From this developed the concept of human rights, resulting in the widespread abolition of slavery, a rise in the status of women, recognition of the value of children, the honoring of marriage and family, and a commitment to the dignity of all humanity.
- Seeing the importance of reading the Bible itself, and valuing godly study, has caused the church to establish schools, reading programs, colleges, universities, and Bible schools around the world.
- Recognizing two biblical concepts—our God-given natural rights and the inherent sinfulness of mankind—has served as foundational underpinnings to democratic and republican systems of government.
- Biblical moral and legal codes, especially the Ten Commandments, are fundamental to modern systems of jurisprudence.
- Both science and the arts have benefited greatly from women and men operating with a biblical worldview.

This is only a brief and summary list. The Bible has positively influence entire nations, countries, peoples, and civilizations. The imperative to take the biblical message of the Savior (Matthew 24:14) is thus of critical importance. We must ensure that the word of the Lord is available to all people everywhere. The prophetic promise of Matthew 24:14 is going to be accomplished. We have the word of the Savior himself: "This gospel *will* be preached...." God's word will accomplish the purpose he sends it to accomplish (Isaiah 55:11). However, we must recognize that we are the means, the agency, God uses to fulfill his word. As John Piper writes, "The cause of world missions is absolutely assured of success. It cannot fail. Is it not reasonable, then, that we pray *with great faith*, that we invest *with great confidence*, and that we go *with a sense of sure triumph*?"²

As we have seen, the Bible contains the good news. It is the message of the Savior. Based on Matthew 24:14 we can expect that the gospel will go into all the world and be effective in changing nations. There is a pattern to this. As individuals are transformed by the gospel, then families and communities follow. The end result is entire cultures and societies experiencing transformation. However, it is up to us to do our part. We must go. We must send. We must invest. And we must ensure that God's word is readily available to facilitate the fulfillment of Christ's promise. Then the victory comes!

² John Piper. "Jesus Will Finish the Mission." Bible Gateway devotional. March 17, 2019. www.biblegateway.com/devotional/john-piper/devotionals

If you would like to study in more detail how the world has been and continues to be transformed by the scriptures, we suggest the following resources:

- Loren Cunningham. *The Book that Transforms Nations*. YWAM Publishing.
- D. James Kennedy and Jerry Newcombe. *What if the Bible had Never Been Written?* Nelson Books.
- Vishal Mangalwadi. *The Book That Made Your World: How the Bible Created the Soul of Western Civilization*. Thomas Nelson.