

It's not just the Bible that is treated this way. Homer's *Illiad* includes both mundane historical information and accounts of divine intervention. Historians require more proof of divine intervention in Homer than they require of details of battle. Similarly, there are historical documents that trace the Emperor of Japan's ancestry back to Amaterasu the sun goddess, leading historians to treat the list as partially reliable and partially unreliable.

So when the Bible comes under extra scrutiny for making extraordinary claims, this is not a sign of religious bias but rather of standard historical scholarship.

To make matters worse, parts of the Bible — the Gospels in particular — seem to have a strong agenda of proving that many Old Testament texts are actually prophecies of Jesus' life. This agenda may have lead to some elements of Jesus' life being misreported so that they more clearly matched prophecy, so historians need to be particularly careful.

To download additional tracts or purchase a copy of Ask Yourself to Be Moral, please visit [blog.iamanatheist.com](http://blog.iamanatheist.com)



## IS THE BIBLE RELIABLE?

A Question of Moral Atheism

from [blog.iamanatheist.com](http://blog.iamanatheist.com)



©2009 D. Cancilla. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License

reasonable to expect other historians of the day to make note of them. They should probably be treated with some skepticism. Biblical history that is contradicted by non-Biblical evidence would include things like the list of patriarchs, which would lead us to believe that humanity has existed for only a few thousand years. In this case, the Bible should be treated as unreliable (and, in fact, most Christians and Jews either treat these portions of the Bible as poetic or non-literal or reinterpret them so that they are in concert with other evidence). The most unreliable parts of the Biblical history are those that are both uncorroborated and extraordinary. This includes accounts of miracles, extraordinary human fears, and prophecy. Some religious people complain that atheists do not treat the miracles in the Bible as history even though they are as well documented as other ancient occurrences. The problem is that, as extraordinary events, miracles need more than standard evidence to back them up.

THE BIBLE IS both a work of history and of religious philosophy. There are more manuscripts of the Bible than there are of most ancient texts. So, even if we don't agree with the Bible's religious message, can we rely on it as a historical document? The Bible includes five kinds of historical information, and they need to be handled differently. Biblical historical information which is corroborated by acceptable non-Biblical evidence should be treated as reliable. Uncorroborated but mundane information in the Bible — lists of rulers, descriptions of traditions, names of cities — should be treated just as it would if it came from any other historical document. Things start to get sticky when we get to Biblical information that is particularly notable but not corroborated by non-Biblical evidence. This would include incidents like King Herod's massacre of the innocents or the flight of hundreds of thousands of Jewish slaves from Egypt. Such events are only mentioned in the Bible, even though it would be

**T**HE BIBLE IS both a work of history and of religious philosophy. There are more manuscripts of the Bible than there are of most ancient texts. So, even if we don't agree with the Bible's religious message, can we rely on it as a historical document?

The Bible includes five kinds of historical information, and they need to be handled differently.

Biblical historical information which is corroborated by acceptable non-Biblical evidence should be treated as reliable.

Uncorroborated but mundane information in the Bible — lists of rulers, descriptions of traditions, names of cities — should be treated just as it would if it came from any other historical document.

Things start to get sticky when we get to Biblical information that is particularly notable but not corroborated by non-Biblical evidence. This would include incidents like King Herod's massacre of the innocents or the flight of hundreds of thousands of Jewish slaves from Egypt. Such events are only mentioned in the Bible, even though it would be

reasonable to expect other historians of the day to make note of them. They should probably be treated with some skepticism.

Biblical history that is contradicted by non-Biblical evidence would include things like the list of patriarchs, which would lead us to believe that humanity has existed for only a few thousand years. In this case, the Bible should be treated as unreliable (and, in fact, most Christians and Jews either treat these portions of the Bible as poetic or non-literal or reinterpret them so that they are in concert with other evidence).

The most unreliable parts of the Biblical history are those that are both uncorroborated and extraordinary. This includes accounts of miracles, extraordinary human feats, and prophecy.

Some religious people complain that atheists do not treat the miracles in the Bible as history even though they are as well documented as other ancient occurrences. The problem is that, as extraordinary events, miracles need more than standard evidence to back them up.

©2009 D. Cancellia. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License

Moral, please visit [blog.iamatheist.com](http://blog.iamatheist.com)

To download additional tracts or purchase a copy of Ask Yourself to Be

to be particularly careful. they more clearly matched prophecy, so historians need some elements of Jesus' life being misreported so that prophecies of Jesus' life. This agenda may have lead to of proving that many Old Testament texts are actually Gospels in particular — seem to have a strong agenda To make matters worse, parts of the Bible — the scholarship. of religious bias but rather of standard historical making extraordinary claims, this is not a sign So when the Bible comes under extra scrutiny for unreliable.

to treat the list as partially reliable and partially back to Amaterasu the sun goddess, leading historians documents that trace the Emperor of Japan's ancestry require of details of battle. Similarly, there are historical more proof of divine intervention in Homer than they and accounts of divine intervention. Historians require *Iliad* includes both mundane historical information It's not just the Bible that is treated this way. Homer's



from [blog.iamatheist.com](http://blog.iamatheist.com)

A Question of Moral Atheism

## IS THE BIBLE RELIABLE?



# QUESTIONS OF MORAL ATHEISM: INSTRUCTIONS

---

We appreciate your interest in helping us spread information about moral atheism! To make copies of this pamphlet for your own use or to share with friends, follow these simple steps:

1. Print pages one and two of this document, one on each side of the same piece of paper (if you don't have access to a duplex printer, print page one, put the page back in the paper tray upside down, and print page two — depending on the type of printer, you may have to experiment a bit).
2. Cut the printout in two, using the thin rules across the middle of the page as a guide.
3. Fold the two pieces of paper in half, making a pair of small pamphlets.
4. Keep one of the pamphlets to read, and give the other away to an interested friend or stranger.

That's it! If you have any questions, suggestions, or comments, we invite you to share them by leaving a comment on [blog.iamanatheist.org](http://blog.iamanatheist.org). Thanks!

---