

Week Three: Can We Really Trust the Bible?

Summary Document

Here are the questions submitted that were considered in the message:

How do we know we have not misinterpreted parts of the Bible and are now spreading the wrong message e.g. Jesus being God or just any small section?

How can we consider the Bible infallible despite its contradiction, inaccuracies and the fact that what we have is essentially an interpretation of a translation?

How do we know to take everything from the Bible as God's word and what He intended when it might in fact just be what the author believed or thought God told him e.g. a lot of Paul's instructions on how to live a Christian life?

While Christianity seems to diminish and erode its originally bold claims, and we start to shrink down the into a smaller faith, a smaller Christianity and a smaller core set of believes/truths we can hold onto or even believe - at what point should/do we say, it is not true, or, it is less likely to be true than false? (Also, what do you believe will be the next part of Christianity we will no longer hold to as true like we did say 5-10 years ago?)

How can we believe the time periods of how long e.g. Noah lived as being actual? Possibly these numbers were exaggerated over time. Thus it is not possible to take all the events of the bible as being actual – the Great Flood, story of Joshua, parting of the waters for escape from Egyptians etc.

1. What is the Bible

The Bible is more like a library than a single book. It has 66 books, written by 40 authors, over 1600 years. Some Bible books describe the Bible as the “word of God” (Hebrews 4:12, 1 Thessalonians 2:13, Isaiah 59:21), words taught by the Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:13, 2 Peter 1:20-21), and “God-breathed” (2 Timothy 3:16). The Bible is thus *inspired* by God, but written by human hands.

The Old Testament is included in the Bible because Jesus valued and affirmed the place of the Old Testament books. Jesus quoted from 22 of the 39 Old Testament books, and declared that the Old Testament should not be removed or altered (Matthew 5:17-18).

The New Testament books have historically faced scrutiny regarding their inclusion in the Bible, and conspiracy theories abound concerning the selection and inclusion of certain books. Anybody who has read “The Da Vinci Code” will be aware of these theories. However, we can have great confidence about the selection of New Testament books, for a number of reasons.

First, the New Testament books were already being used in an authoritative way in the early church communities, and the process of inclusion was much more organic than political. There was no debate or vote at the infamous council of Nicea (325 AD), but the books used by the early church were simply formalised. Second, all the New Testament books were written by the first generation of disciples of Jesus. The role of the first witnesses in recording the events of Jesus life is affirmed by Jesus (John 15:26-27, see also Acts 1:21-22). It also makes sense that our primary accounts should be by first-hand witnesses. Third, all the New Testament books were written in the first century (up to 100AD). The non-included “gnostic” gospels were written much later, and had not been referred to by the early church leaders, and so their non-inclusion makes sense. Fourth, the contents of the Bible doesn't contain the raw material to control and oppress people. The New Testament speaks of a God humbling himself for humanity, and Jesus was a man who fought for the oppressed and lifted up the lowly. The New Testament teaching makes poor fodder for leaders seeking to control and hold onto power. While the Bible has been

used to oppress others over the years, it's usually when access to its words (esp. in the common languages of the day) has been restricted and suppressed! Fifth, all the authors of the New Testament suffered and died for their faith. They gained neither fame nor fortune in their lifetime for the books they wrote. It seems unlikely that they would all suffer and die for an elaborate conspiracy through which they gained nothing. More likely is that they had real experiences and recorded what actually happened.

2. How should we read the Bible?

One helpful way to describe the Bible is *infallible*, which means that the Bible will not fail us. Peter similarly describes the Bible as **completely reliable** (2 Peter 1:19). As God's inspired word, the Bible is true, but true in the setting it has been written.

First, the sections of the Bible need to be read according to their Genre. Historical narrative, including biography (e.g. Old Testament history, the gospels, Acts) should be read as actual events that took place. Parables should be read as parables (word pictures that tell us true things about God). Prophecy should be read as prophecy, Psalms as Psalms, letters as letters. While it can sometimes be hard to pin down the exact genre of certain passages (e.g. Genesis 1), this is an important step in reading the Bible helpfully.

Second, the Bible should be read with an eye to where in salvation history the passage is placed. So while Old Testament law is certainly God's word, and was genuinely the law code for God's people at the time it was written, because we live after Jesus' death and resurrection, it is no longer law we have to follow.

3. What should we do with the Bible?

Firstly, we should use the Bible because the Bible is *useful* (2 Timothy 3:14-17). Second, we should pay close attention to the Bible and heed its warnings (2 Peter 1:19-21, 1 Corinthians 10:6-12). Third, we should test other things (including the messages of pastors!) against the Bible (1 Thessalonians 5:20-21). The Berean Jews that Paul encountered on his journey demonstrate a great attitude towards reading and using the Bible (Acts 17:10-12).

Further reading

Justin Holcomb: Why you can trust your Bible

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/why-you-can-trust-your-bible/>

Tim Keller: What I've learned about the Bible

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-bible-is-alive-and-active/>

Andy Bannister: Why trust the Bible?

<https://www.zachariatrust.org/why-trust-the-bible>

Matthew Bryan: Books removed from the New Testament?

<https://conciliarpost.com/theology-spirituality/scripture/books-removed-new-testament/>

John Dickson: 10 Reasons you can trust the Bible

<https://www.eternitynews.com.au/good-news/10-reasons-you-can-trust-the-bible/>

Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart: How to read the Bible for all it's worth

Charles R. Swindoll: Insight's Bible Handbook