

Thursday Nights Going Deeper: “Finding Life in the Scriptures”

Week 3 – How to Overcome doubts About the Bible



Opening discussion: Each week we will break into different small groups to engage in relational, easy-going conversation to discover how each of us process the topics at hand, consider what challenges we may be experiencing with this topic, and “crowd-source” solutions and ideas to take our engagement with God’s Word to the next level.

As we begin today, move rather quickly...spend just a minute or two with each person in your small group and discuss: *What do your non-Christian friends think or say about the Bible? What are the most common arguments they make against the Bible being a trustworthy source of spiritual guidance? Where do you struggle with the Bible’s authority, relevance, or trustworthiness? Or where did you struggle in the past with this?*

The Key to Trusting the Scriptures:

- 1) We must work through the question of trust: Is this real and not a **fable**?
- 2) We need to engage **apologetics** on scriptural trustworthiness.
- 3) We need to understand the doctrine of **inerrancy** vs. **inspiration**.
- 4) We need to understand how the **Canon** came to be

We must _____ the Word: we must believe in the _____, _____,
and _____ of the Word of God.

“All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

2 Timothy 3:16-17

“Jesus answered, ‘It is written: “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”’

Matthew 4:4

“Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

2 Peter 1:20-21

“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.”

James 1:22-25

- **The Word is both the revealed mind (the will) of God, and the incarnation of God.**

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning....The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”*

John 1:1-2, 14

*** In the Greek language, the “Word” is “logos”, which simply means: “intelligence; to speak a word as the expression of that intelligence.”**

(Zodhiates, Spiros, Th.D. [The Complete Word Study New Testament](#). AMG Publishers, Chattanooga, 1991; pages 305, 932.)

More specifically, the “logos” is the full mind, full will, full wisdom and thoughts of God. It is the complete essence of what is important to God, what God thinks and feels, what He values, etc. The logos is expressed to us in the revealed will of God through the inspiration of written scripture, and through the incarnation of God in the person of Jesus Christ.

“In the past, God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.”

Hebrews 1:1-3

“For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”

Hebrews 4:12

- As the **revealed** will of God, it is essential that we understand the Bible to be **inerrant**.
 - It is not without human fingerprints, of course
 - God chose humans through whom to reveal himself – *2 Peter 1:20-21*
 - There are many examples of errors in grammar, timing, and small circumstantial details that show the human weakness in biblical authors
 - Contrary to what many modern critics suggest, however, there are no unresolvable contradictions in the meaning of scripture
 - What is inerrant is the meaning, the doctrine, the revelation of God to us
 - Much more on this will be discussed in Week 6 of this course

- We must settle the issue for ourselves of whether we personally **trust** the Bible to be the **inerrant authority** over our lives.
 - Is the Word of God more **accurate** and more **authoritative** than my own opinions?
 - Is the Word of God **superior** to my political ideologies?
 - Is the Word of God **wiser** than my feelings?
 - Is the Word of God **unconditionally authoritative** over my moral behaviors?
 - Is the Word of God more **accurate** than my perceptions?

- We must **recognize** and trust what the Word does **for** us:
 - The Word reveals **God’s will** – *2 Timothy 3:16-17*
 - The Word accomplishes **God’s agenda** in the spiritual realm – *Isaiah 55:8-11*
 - The Word establishes and builds **faith** – *Romans 10:17*
 - The Word discerns the **thoughts** and **attitudes** of our heart – *Hebrews 4:12*
 - The Word is the **authority** over ideologies – *2 Corinthians 10:3-5*
 - The Word **defends** us and **combats** against the enemy – *Ephesians 6:17*

Exploring Apologetics on Scripture’s Trustworthiness:

- The most important rule of criticism is intellectual **consistency**.
 - Are we using the same rules on the New Testament that we would on any other source of history?

How We Know: Historical Accuracy of the Biblical Text

There is not a single reference in either the Old or New Testaments to non-primary details that is historically inaccurate (*i.e. references to political leaders, political situations, geography, power structures, dates, etc.*). In fact, the Bible serves as one of the primary sources for confirming historical data contained in other, non-biblical sources. If we were to look exclusively at the New Testament by example—and the four gospels especially—we find enormous reference to the surrounding historical detail of its time.

- By example, there are **84** examples in the New Testament book of Acts that reflect historically accurate and archeologically confirmed non-primary details. Written by Luke, it affirms that authors' primary source presence to the events, and his commanding accuracy in historical detail.
(Colin J. Hemler, [The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History](#). Winona Lake, Eisenbrauns, 1990)
- In similar fashion, there are **59** “details...confirmed to be historical by archeology and/or non-Christian writings” within the Gospel of John. These include some details that are “historically probable because they would be unlikely inventions of a Christian writer.”
(Norm Geisler and Frank Turek, [I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist](#). CrossWay Books, 2004)
- Geisler and Turek also note over **32** historical figures mentioned and noted in the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and Acts) that are also noted and confirmed in secular, non-Christian historical writings of the same time period.
(Norm Geisler and Frank Turek, [I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist](#). CrossWay Books, 2004)

How We Know: Confirmation of Accuracy from Outside the Text

The Old Testament texts amazingly affirmed by the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1948. This was perhaps the most profound archeological discovery in ancient Middle Eastern studies, as hundreds of ancient scrolls from the 200s B.C. were discovered, and they affirmed the accuracy of the Old Testament texts we were using at the time—the oldest of which, prior to 1948, were texts from the 400s A.D. In regard to the New Testament, the internal content of the Gospels and other New Testament books is affirmed, quoted, and reinforced through numerous writings in the first 300 years following Jesus, written during the period *before* political power was gained by the church.

- Writers such as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Tertullian, and others quoted the New Testament **32,289** times—enough so that the *entire* New Testament could be reconstructed solely from these writings, excluding 11 verses.
(Norman Geisler and William Nix, [General Introduction to the Bible](#). Moody Press, Chicago; 1986)
- This is critical because while we sort through the nuances and minor differences contained in the **5,700** handwritten Greek New Testament manuscripts surviving from ancient times, we are able to **cross-check** these differences to “extra-biblical” quotations, allowing us to confirm the original content.

- Beyond the Bible itself, a **plethora** of early church writings exist, including apocalypses, “apologies” (Greek for “defense”), martyrologies, tractates, and commentaries.

(NOTE: It is interesting to observe the critics of orthodox Christianity and how they cite the challenges to discerning New Testament authenticity. In defense of their claims that the New Testament is flawed and not trustworthy because of textual problems, they are forced use many other works of the same time period—which by nature would have the same challenges to discerning their authenticity—to make their arguments and defenses. By way of example, Bart Ehrman uses the works of Origen, an early church father (circa late 200s A.D.) as he tries to debunk the accuracy of surviving copies of the New Testament. Ehrman says, “Origen’s book Against Celsus survives” and “allows us to reconstruct with fair accuracy Celsus’ claims” (Misquoting Jesus, page 40; emphasis added), which in this context is an example challenging New Testament accuracy. What Ehrman fails to note is that Origen’s works are no better preserved or copied than the New Testament!)

How We Know: Historical vs. Mythical Style of the Biblical Text

A common question raised in textual criticism has to do with the intent of the writing. Were the author(s) intending to write literal history and practical theology, or were they intending to write more impressionistic, artistic fables that would inspire us, much like fairy tales inspire us with anecdotal truth? Unique to most other religious scripture, both the New and Old Testaments contains day-to-day details that other “scriptures” do not.

- In more modern times—certainly from the days of Shakespeare and forward—fiction writers add in lots of day-to-day details to make the fiction come alive. But **in more ancient times**, if we compare works that are clearly fiction—like Homer’s *Iliad*—we would find the **fiction did not contain details of realism**, but rather the writing style was more mythical, fantastical, and impressionistic. By comparing this to scripture, we get a quick sense that the work of scripture is not intended as fiction, but rather as fact.
- For example, the **Gospel of John contains scores of day-to-day details**—what Jesus ate or drank, places they walked, distance between places, surrounding circumstances that are not necessary to the content—that give the writings a flavor of authenticity. **By contrast, the Gospel of Judas, a Gnostic Gospel** composed in 180 A.D., contains virtually no day-to-day details, but has a more fantastical feel to it—more like a myth or fairy tale.
- **If a writer were intentionally crafting a fictional story with religious intention**, they would tend towards the mythical and fantastic, finding detail a less essential matter. By contrast, the confirmable detail and “normal-ness” of the gospel writers tends to add authenticity to the storyline.
- All writers write with bias. But **authenticity is often gauged by a willingness to express reality**, even if it may be harmful to the understood bias and agenda of the author. It is clear the writers of the four gospels intended to write religious documents that would convince people to become followers of Jesus. But did they do so with open candor and honesty, or veiled deceptiveness? Attempts to make their “heroes” in the story look better than reality is a sign of inauthenticity. In the four gospels, the **New Testament authors present embarrassing details about themselves**. In other words, they make bad “mythical heroes.”

How We Know: Claims of the Most Widely Trusted Early Church Leaders

Many of the early church leaders (often called the “Church Fathers”) would have **personally known** the 12 apostles or their **immediate disciples**.

If the most widely trusted leaders taught a comprehensive understanding of Jesus’ life and teachings, then we have another piece of evidence that shows *concretely* that the **early church believed, taught, and understood Jesus’ claims to divinity**, for these leaders—if not teaching *widely held* understandings—would have been popularly refuted.

“There is one physician, fleshly and spiritual, begotten and unbegotten, God in man, true life in death, both of Mary and of God, first passible then impassible, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, circa 112 A.D. The Incarnation

(Documents of the Christian Church. Oxford University Press, London, 1967.)

“By his own blood then the Lord redeemed us, and gave his life for our life, his flesh for our flesh; and he poured out the Spirit of the Father to bring about the union and communion of God and man, bringing down God to men through the Spirit while raising man to God through his incarnation....”

Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyon, circa 180 A.D. The Recapitulation in Christ

(Documents of the Christian Church. Oxford University Press, London, 1967.)

“This Word [Greek: logos], we have learnt, was produced from God...and therefore is called the Son of God.... This ray of God...glided down into a virgin, in her womb was fashioned as flesh, is born as man mixed with God. The flesh was built up by the spirit, was nourished, grew up, spoke, taught, worked, and was Christ.”

Tertullian, circa 197-212 A.D. The Incarnation of the Logos

(Documents of the Christian Church. Oxford University Press, London, 1967.)

How We Know: The Canon: A “Locked and Loaded” Scriptural Base

For some, the obviously human way the Canon emerged in the late 300s A.D. is a stumbling block to faith. For others, it is another critical piece of evidence that time proved right the “orthodox” understanding of Christ. It is critical to note that **no canonical text ever started as canonical** in its acceptance (true of both Old & New Testaments). They all **grew to be known** as revelation, which is part of the mystery of inspiration.

How the Canon Came to Be

- Christianity **began** with a canon. (Circa 30 A.D.)

“In some sense, Christians started with a canon in that the founder of their religion was himself a Jewish teacher who accepted the Torah as authoritative scripture from God, and who taught his followers his interpretation of it. The earliest Christians were followers of Jesus who accepted the books of the Jewish Bible...as their own scripture.”

(Bart D. Ehrman, [Misquoting Jesus](#). Harper San Francisco, San Francisco, 2005.)

- Even Jesus himself made early **claims** to authoritatively **add** to the scripture, at least in understanding and meaning. (Circa 30 A.D.)

*“You have heard that it was said....**But I tell you...**”*

Matthew 5:21-48 *(emphasis added)*

- New Testament writers began to exchange defining **each other's** work as **scripture**. (circa 40-60 A.D.) Note here the Apostle Paul referencing both Deuteronomy 25:4 and Luke 10:7 as scripture, giving credence to the Gospel of Luke as “scripture”:

*“For the **scripture** says, ‘Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain,’ and ‘The worker deserves his wages.’”*

1 Timothy 5:18, *(emphasis added)*

- Peter references Paul’s writings as “scripture”:

*“...our dear brother Paul wrote you with the wisdom God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the **other Scriptures**, to their own destruction.”*

2 Peter 3:15-16 *(emphasis added)*

- The early church devoted themselves to reading **scripture** on Sundays, which very early testimony shows included the New Testament **epistles**. (Circa 40-60 A.D.)

“Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of scripture, to preaching and to teaching.”

1 Timothy 4:13

“On the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together in one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things.”

Justin Martyr, 1 Apology, 67 (Circa 155-157 A.D.)

- Early writings show **acceptance** of key New Testament writings as **scripture**. (Circa 70-400 A.D.)
(See especially: Norm Geisler and Frank Turek, [I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist](#), Crossway Books, Wheaton, 2004. Page 369)

“Mark became the interpreter of Peter and he wrote down accurately, but not in order, as much as he remembered [Greek here could also mean “as much as Peter related”] of the sayings and doings of Christ....And so Mark made no mistake when he thus wrote down some things as he remembered them; for he made it his especial care to omit nothing of what he heard, and to make no false statement therein.”

Papias, Bishop of Hierapolis (Circa 130 A.D.)

([Documents of the Christian Church](#), Oxford University Press, London, 1967.)

- The first “recorded” **canon** emerges under Marcion. (Circa 140 A.D.)
 - Included **10 letters of Paul** (*all those in the New Testament except 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*), and the **Gospel of Luke**.
- The “**Muratorian Canon**” names **all but four** New Testament books as authoritative. (circa 170 A.D.)
 - Included all but **Hebrews, James, 1 & 2 Peter**. The author of this list is unknown.
- Irenaeus names almost **all** of the New Testament as **authoritative**, including a clear **defense** of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. (Circa 180 A.D.)

“It is not possible that the Gospels can be either more or fewer in number than they are....it is fitting that we should have four pillars.”

Irenaeus, Against Heresies (Circa 180 A.D.)

- The final culmination of church leaders’ **affirmation** of the canon came through Athanasius, the Bishop of Alexandria in 367 A.D.

*“In the year 367 C.E. [A.D.], Athanasius wrote his annual pastoral letter to the Egyptian churches under his jurisdiction, and in it he included advice concerning which books should be read **as scripture** in the churches. He lists our twenty-seven books, excluding all others. This is the first surviving instance of anyone affirming our set of books **as the New Testament**.”*

(Bart D. Ehrman, [Misquoting Jesus](#), Harper San Francisco, San Francisco, 2005.)

How We Know: The Test of Popular Acceptance Over Time

Time is a great refiner of many things. Over the course of the first 300 years of Christendom, scores of groups and teachers made various claims about the life and teachings of Jesus and what they meant. Many fell by the wayside, being dismissed readily by vast majorities of the early followers of Jesus.

Much like any **fantastical idea** that is presented in popular culture (*i.e. the Holocaust never occurred, man never walked on the moon, airliners are routinely spreading government chemicals in the atmosphere, etc.*), the immediate **rejection by the vast majority of the culture** provides later historians certain evidence that such claims are false. While many people make claims and many people adhere to these claims for long periods (*i.e. Neo-Nazis have been claiming the Holocaust didn't occur for nearly 50 years, with thousands of followers to their beliefs*), still, when a **mass populace widely rejects** and dismisses these ideas as blatantly false we can wisely question the historical accuracy of a claim.

Over those 300 foundational years of Christianity—all of which were prior to the achieving of political acceptance of Christianity in Rome (Circa 325 A.D.)—time and time again, the **mass populace of Christian followers came back to the teachings and meanings of the life of Jesus** presented in the New Testament writings we have today as authoritative, authentic, and orthodox.

How We Know: Content and Consistency of the Results

The New Testament has been tried and tested in every country of the world, through 2,000 years of human existence, in nearly every language on the globe. It has become the world's largest religion, gaining more adherents than any other faith system. **It has proven to work** in the lives of millions and millions of people **who devoutly follow** its teachings, many of **whom have died as martyrs** in defense of its power and meaning to them.

Group Exercise / Lab Experience:

Our Group Exercise for tonight will look a little different: We will use an open Q&A discussion as large group this night; let's wrestle with the "nuts and bolts" a bit in togetherness!