

## **Why I'm a Christian**

### **Week 3: The Bible**

For the last couple thousands of years this has been baseline for followers of Jesus - to trust and submit to the Bible - because we believe that what we have in front of us are the very words of God. Even in the Old Testament, long before that, God's people trusted that they had direct revelation from God.

Which is a big claim to make. And if you grew up in the South or grew up in the church, there are things about the Bible you take for granted. And then when you actually read the Bible it can seem difficult or outlandish to comprehend at times. So why do Christians, including myself trust and submit to the Bible?

#### **So that's what we're getting into this morning.**

Now before we get to why we trust the Bible, let's make sure we have clarity on what the Bible is:

#### **Define the Bible**

The Bible is a library of 66 different books, spanning from roughly 1,400 BC to 100 AD. Within these 66 books there are dozens of authors, writing in different languages - such as Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic - in different geographic locations - such as Egypt, Israel, and Rome - in different literary genres - such as narratives, poetry, wisdom, epistles, history, and apocalyptic literature. And all of these writings with all of their different stories point to one unified metastory of God rescuing His people through the person of Jesus.

#### **2 Timothy 3:14-17**

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Now to be clear, this is what the Bible *claims* about itself. And if you're a naturally skeptic person like me, that doesn't necessarily mean it is true.

So then why do Christians trust and submit to the Bible? Three reasons why I trust and submit to the the Bible and you should too:

#### **1 - Jesus**

As we said last week, Christianity is the only religion grounded in one major historical event - that if it did happen, then it makes Christianity the bedrock of Reality, but if it didn't happen then we need to find a better hobby because we're wasting our time. And that historical event is the resurrection of Jesus. So let's start there.

And when you look Jesus' words, you see over and over again that He trusted the Bible and saw it as authoritative.

#### **a. Taught from the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament) and defended it**

Jesus quotes directly from the Old Testament about 78 times in the Gospels. Just to give you a few examples:

Jesus says in Mark 12:

##### **Mark 12:36**

David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared:

“The Lord said to my Lord:

“Sit at my right hand  
until I put your enemies  
under your feet.”

Not only does he quote Psalm 110, he also says that the biblical authors were moved by the Holy Spirit, showing that the Bible has both human and divine authorship.

- He doesn't see it as **invention**. He doesn't say, “David speaking from his own experience.” Or “David airing out his own opinion” or “Or David imagining this with his narrow view of God and his built in prejudice”...
- But also doesn't see it as **dictation** either. Like David fell asleep with a pen in his hand and woke up with magical words written on a leaf of papyrus... or that the Spirit sat David down like a boss to a receptionist and told him to take down a memo.

Or I'll give you another one. In Matthew 4, Jesus is being tempted by the devil. And each point in the temptation Jesus responds by quoting the Old Testament. It is written. It is written. It is written. Revealing that Jesus was committed to the Bible, trusted the Bible, and submitted to the Bible.

Now that's just some quick snippets but you get the idea. The fact is Jesus is constantly teaching and quoting from the Hebrew Bible shows that, like other rabbis in his time, He had large chunks if not the entire Hebrew Bible committed to memory.

Not only does he quote or refer to the Hebrew Bible, we also see him in the New Testament defending it.

You see many times in the Gospels, you have different Jewish circles confronting Jesus and trying to trap him in a theological debate. You have the Pharisees who were the religious conservatives of the day thinking he was too far on the left, hanging out with drunkards and tax collectors and trying to trap him in theological debates thinking he didn't take the Bible seriously enough. You have the Sadducees were the religious progressives of the day thinking he was too far right, because he upheld the authority of the Bible a little too much.

And on it goes. You see these different groups try to trap Jesus over a confusing passage in the Bible, or set up weird scenarios to mock his beliefs, and Jesus never shies away from or apologizes for the Bible, rather he always defends and teaches it correctly with truth and grace.

Which sidenote, you may be comforted to know, people have been trying to mock and make fun of the Bible since the time of Jesus. Welcome to the club.

### **b. Taught the Old Testament as being about Him**

Jesus in his life and ministry also says that the Hebrew Bible all points to Him and that He's come to fulfill everything the Bible talks about:

#### **Luke 24:27**

And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

#### **Matthew 5:17**

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.

That word fulfill means "to bring to completion what it's talking about." Jesus is saying He is the key to unlocking the meaning behind everything in the Old Testament. Jesus calls Himself:

- A greater Abraham - the patriarch of the Jewish faith (John 8:48-59)
- A Greater David - the archetype of the kings (Matt 22:41-46)
- A greater Solomon - the archetype of wisdom (Matt 12:42)
- A greater temple (Matt 12:6)

### **c. The Old Testament as predicting Him**

On top of that, where it gets really fun is when you begin to look at the Old Testament **Messianic prophecies** in the Bible. These were future predictions about the Messiah, some of those including that he would be

- born in Bethlehem according to Micah 5:2
- Born of a virgin according to Isaiah 7:14
- That he would be betrayed according to Psalm 41:9
- That he would die by crucifixion according to Isaiah 53:12

One scholar noted when you look in the Old Testament there are at least 300 direct prophecies concerning the Messiah - dating as far back as 15th century BC and ending around 450 BC. Jesus in the New Testament fulfills all of them. And just think about the odds for a moment. Mathematician Peter Stoner in his book *Science Speaks* says the odds of Jesus fulfilling 8 of the 300 is 1 out of 100 quadrillion. The odds of fulfilling 48 of them is 1 in 10 to the 157 power. The odds of all 300, he couldn't figure out, I think his calculator exploded.

#### **d. Commissioned the writing of the New Testament**

Where Jesus teaches, defends, and fulfills the Old Testament, he also commissions the writing of the New Testament, specifically to his disciples - the people who literally saw him and were eyewitnesses to his life and ministry.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus says:

##### **John 14:25-26**

These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

Many biblical scholars point to this referring to the eventual writing and teaching within the New Testament. And that's exactly what the disciples did. All of the books of the New Testament were written by either a disciple of Jesus or a close companion of one of Jesus' disciples, including Paul who Jesus directly commissions in Acts 9. (Which another sidenote, that means if you have a problem with Paul - you have a problem with Jesus.)

Now add this all together, it's pretty clear that Jesus viewed the Bible - both the Old and the New - as the Word of God, pointing forward to and pointing back to Himself.

Jesus, who historically entered into human history, who historically died on a Cross and rose from the dead, put his trust in the Bible. He saw it as authoritative. He listened to the Bible and he followed what it said, and Jesus says we should too.

Author Andrew Wilson in his book *Unbreakable* - which is a resource available on our website - put it like this:

##### **Andrew Wilson, *Unbreakable***

I don't trust in Jesus because I trust the Bible. I trust the Bible because I trust in Jesus. I love him, and I've decided to follow him, so if he talks and acts as if the Bible is trustworthy, authoritative, good, helpful and powerful, I will too....Even if some of my questions remain unanswered, or my answers remain unpopular.

So that's one reason why Christians trust the Bible. Jesus did. And for the record, it's the most important to me as well.

#### **2 - The quantity, quality, and accuracy of the historical documents**

Some of what you might hear from our larger culture, from maybe friends or family members that don't believe in Jesus, whoever - some of the leading pushback for why we shouldn't trust the Bible is that we don't have the original manuscripts.

When I was a kid we played a game in school. I'm sure you did too. One person would whisper a phrase to a friend. Then that friend would whisper that same phrase to the next person. And by the end the phrase was totally different because what people thought they heard wasn't what the person thought they were saying.

Well some critics claim that's what has happened with our bible. And so people argue that because it's been so long since the original manuscripts were written, **that we can't trust what we hold in our hands today.** It was a translation of a translation of a copy of a copy of a copy or a copy of some folklore that someone told one time.

How do we know that's not what happened with the Bible? Glad you asked.

While it's true that we do not have the original manuscripts, if you look at the evidence we *do* have - all of the copies of all of the Old Testament and New Testament - you see that unlike any other piece of literary work in the history what we have is unbelievably reliable - more than any other community, the Jewish and Christian community went to great stakes to preserve the original writings.

Side note: if you want to dive in more, there's a great lecture called The Making of the Bible on our website you can check out. It's an almost two hours chock full of delightful Bible nerdiness. I love it.

But to give you an overview: Let's start with the New Testament because it's the easiest.

When you look at the New Testament we have over 5,000 Greek manuscripts, about 8,000 Latin manuscripts, and another 1,000 manuscripts in other languages (Syriac, Coptic, and the like.) Among all those manuscripts there's about 99.5% congruence among all of them. 99.5% AMONG ALL OF THEM.

You find no other work of literature or history preserved in the same way the Bible has been preserved. So just **compare this to other historical documents and books circulating in and around that time period:**

<u>AUTHOR</u>	<u>DATE WRITTEN</u>	<u>EARLIEST COPY</u>	<u>TIME SPAN</u>	<u>NUMBER OF COPIES</u>	<u>ACCURACY<sup>1</sup></u>
Euripedes	Ca. 440 BC	ca. AD 1100	About 1,500 years	9	
Plato	Ca. 380 BC	ca. AD 900	About 1,300 years	7	
Aristotle	Ca. 350 BC	ca. AD 1100	About 1,400 years	5	Not enough copies to

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<sup>1</sup> *I'm Glad You Asked*, Ken Boa, p.78

					reconstruct the original.
New Test.	Ca. AD 60	ca. AD 130	Less than 100 years	About 14,000	99.5%

Other works of literature circulating in and around that time pale in comparison to the quantity, quality and accuracy of the New Testament.

Now like me, you may recognize those names and say, “Hey wait a minute, Plato didn’t write history though that comparison isn’t 1-to-1.” And if you’re the one other nerd in the room who knows that here’s a list of other historical works at that time for you to compare.

<u>AUTHOR</u>	<u>DATE WRITTEN</u>	<u>EARLIEST COPY</u>	<u>TIME SPAN</u>	<u>NUMBER OF COPIES</u>	<u>ACCURACY<sup>2</sup></u>
Herodotus	Ca. 450 BC	ca. AD 900	About 1,350 years	8	
Thucydides	Ca. 420 BC	ca. AD 900	About 1,300 years	8	
Tacitus	Ca. AD 100	ca. AD 1100	About 1,000 years	20	Not enough copies to reconstruct the original.
New Test.	Ca. AD 60	ca. AD 130	Less than 100 years	About 14,000	99.5%

Boom. Roasted. Simply put, if someone seeks to eliminate the trustworthiness of the New Testament then to be consistent they would also have to dismiss almost the entire canon of western literature and ancient histories and pull everything from the book shelves and out of classroom discussions.

Real quick, this was mentioned last week. But if you look at the writings of the early church fathers, and attempt to reconstruct the New Testament without looking at any manuscripts, just the verses they cite - you can reconstruct about 95% of the entire New Testament.

And if you notice in the chart, the earliest manuscripts we have of the New Testament were written within 100 years of the events of the New Testament, to where there was a unanimous consensus that we have in our New Testament is exactly what the disciples of Jesus had in mind.

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<sup>2</sup> *I'm Glad You Asked*, Ken Boa, p.78

So much to the disappointment of DaVinci Code fans and bad History channel “experts” and I use that term loosely... there was no secret conspiracy that the early church tried to pull a power play to get the books they wanted in the Bible. Rather when the Council of Nicea came together in 325AD, they simply affirmed what they already knew to be true primarily due to fake Gospel accounts being circulated waaaaay after the life of the first century eyewitnesses.<sup>3</sup>

**Henry Gamble, “The New Testament Canon in Recent Research” *The Canon Debate***

The New Testament was not self-consciously created by the church, either as a response to external pressures or as a means to some end, but arose naturally and spontaneously from the inner life of early Christianity, above all in contexts of worship and instruction.

Henry Gamble, important to note, not a Christian and recognizes that the New Testament writings are reliable.

Now admittedly, the Old Testament is a bit tougher because it is considerably older. And for a long time we had a couple of major pieces of evidence that helped us with the Old Testament - but for the longest time we didn't have manuscript evidence predating the time of Jesus.

We had the Masoretic text - as early as 600AD

The Septuagint - as early as 250BC but it was in Greek

And for the longest time Bible-skeptics used the telephone analogy to dismiss the Old Testament, because we didn't have the Old Testament in Hebrew before the time of Jesus

Until...

the Dead Sea Scrolls.

And their story is a wild one. Real life National Treasure, Goonies stuff. They were discovered back in 1946-1947, but a shepherd boy who just randomly out in the desert throwing rocks into a cave - as one would assume a shepherd boy would do - and, no lie, he hears something smash and is like, “uh oh. What was that? And he discovers an almost endless cave system filled with these old pots that contained tons of ancient scrolls including parts of every single Old Testament book except one dating as far back as 400 BC. And in all of these pots are ancient scrolls including parts of every Old Testament book except for

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<sup>3</sup> **J.I. Packer, *God Has Spoken: Revelation and the Bible***

The Church no more gave us the New Testament canon than Sir Isaac Newton gave us the force of gravity. He did not create gravity but recognized it.

**Michael Kruger, *Canon Revisited***

The canon was never authorized or mandated by any general council of the ancient church, but rather rested upon the early and largely informal consensus of the church. In short, the church did not ‘close the canon because it never started it to begin with. It was inherited from the apostles.

one, dating as far back as 400 BC. It was considered by many to be the greatest discovery of the 20th century.

So you have 250 years before the birth of Jesus, clear manuscript evidence that the Hebrew Bible was formed and figured out. <sup>4</sup>

And what's incredible is if you overlay all of these different documents together - the Masoretic text, the Septuagint, and the Dead Sea Scrolls - you find they are all saying the same thing. There's no major theological discrepancies or contradictions one from the other. Any discrepancies you find in these three documents are for the most part either a misspelling, or a misplaced word, or one will use a pronoun instead of a proper noun. Almost all of which you can find in the footnotes of your Bible.

### **In Sum**

You have Jesus and the historical documents to back up the trustworthiness and reliability of the Bible.

### **Pushback**

“Ok well, the Bible is full of contradictions though.” In fact, one person constructed that there are about 475 supposed contradictions. However, just because two passages appear to be contradictory doesn't mean they actually are. Many of these can be quickly resolved through understanding the context of the passage, the purpose of the passage, the genre of the passage, or the author's intention. If you want some good resources on how to answer these I'd recommend the *Apologetics Study Bible* or the *Big Book of Bible Difficulties*, both of which are on our website.

So, why all the controversy over the Bible?

It's because 99% of the time the real issue people have with the Bible is not a textual issue or one seeming contradiction that they can't resolve, it's because if the Bible really is true then that means we need to follow it. And that gets us really uncomfortable really quickly.

Which leads to the third reason why I find the Bible trustworthy is it's spiritual power. So let me end with this. Give me 5 minutes to preach and then we'll be done:

### **3 - Spiritual Power**

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<sup>4</sup> R.T. Beckwith, “The Formation of the Hebrew Bible”

It is very striking that, over a period ranging from the second century BCE to the first century CE, so many writers of so many divergent groups (Palestinian, Hellenistic, Pharisaic, Essene, Christian) show such agreement about the canon of the Hebrew Bible...None of these witnesses are concerned with asserting the authority of the books they mention, rather they all assume the Scripture's authority, and go on to debate about their interpretation.

It is clear that these groups do not speak simply for themselves but represent Judaism as a whole...Any inference that the canon was decided by councils must be abandoned. The role of later councils was not to decide the canon, but to confirm decisions about the canon already reached in other ways.



Andrew Wilson again:

**Andrew Wilson, *Unbreakable***

Let's be honest: the Scriptures can be difficult. Sometimes...the difficulties come from within the texts themselves. Accounts vary, theology develops, tensions exist and authors bring different perspectives on things (not to mention the fact that all the texts were written in languages and cultures which are completely different from ours). In my experience, though, most of these difficulties are fairly easy to resolve, with a mixture of study, imagination and honesty. They can make people puzzled, but they rarely make people angry. The things that really get people riled up, at least in our day, are areas where Scripture challenges our deeply held beliefs (or where Scripture is challenged by them, depending on which way you look at it). When you get into conversations about the Bible, you find that the biggest challenges for most people are not over issues where the Bible is unclear, but over issues where the Bible is very clear, and people don't like it. Judgment. Miracles. Sex. Things like that.

I just gave you so much manuscript evidence for why we can trust the authority of the Bible. The evidence based on the teachings of Jesus. That He taught the Scriptures and affirmed the Scriptures.

But it's my experience, in my own life and in being in ministry and interacting with others - that most of our problem with the authority of Scripture has nothing to do with manuscripts or translation issues or discrepancies or whatever - **So much of our distrust of the Bible is because we don't like what it says.**

Tim Keller, a pastor in NYC who we've cited a lot in this series, said that whenever someone from his church who's been faithfully following Jesus in his church, wants to meet up with him and say, "Pastor, I'm walking away from the faith, there's just so many theological problems I have with the Bible," his immediate response has become, "So... who ya sleeping with?" (By the way, I wish I could do that. He's almost 70, so lookout for me in 40 years...)

And look this is the funny, maybe a little bit mean way of saying this reality - that when our view of the world, or our sinful desires, or our wants or needs or preferences butts up against what Scripture says is right and true and good and what God commands through His Word over our lives - sometimes it's much easier on our conscience to say - "Well I just don't know that I trust the Bible, manuscripts you know, ancient languages, etc." rather than just being honest and saying - "You know if this is true then that means I'm a sinner and I want things the Bible doesn't say I should want so...see ya later Bible."

But if you've rejected Jesus because something he says bothers you or you disagree with him about some issue, I would say that you've gotten it backwards. If he actually is god and rose from the dead to prove it, you should start there. And if he's god, then you should assume he's gonna see some things differently than you do.

And if we're being honest, there's probably stuff all of us wish wasn't in there:

If you lean **politically left**, you might love the stuff the Bible says about welcoming in the refugee, of loving your neighbor regardless of their religious background, of creation stewardship, of creating welfare systems to help the needy, of racial reconciliation - you love that stuff. But we might rather do without the stuff the Bible says about gender, or heterosexual marriage, or the exclusivity of Jesus.

If you lean **politically right**, you might love the stuff the Bible says about having a hard work ethic, and obeying authority. But when it comes to the stuff about generosity and hospitality and confessing sin, ah that's a little bit trickier.

**But here's the reality: You don't want other people to have the same "pick-and-choose" mentality or leeway towards the Bible that you want for yourself.**

**Examples:**

- So the guy who is physically or emotionally abusing his wife...you don't want him to dismiss Colossians 3 or Ephesians 5 which tells him to love and not be harsh with his wife.
- The business owner who is taking advantage of his employees for his own personal greed and gain...you don't want him to reject Proverbs 11 or Ephesians 6 which tells him that false bookkeeping is an abomination to the Lord.
- That woman who keeps gossiping and spreading lies about you...you don't want her to reject Ephesians 4:29 which tells her to build up and not tear down with her words.
- The racist down the street...you don't want them rejecting Galatians 3:28 which says that all are one in Christ Jesus or Genesis 1 - all are made in the image of God
- The country on the other side of the world that treats people as lesser than because they're in a different social class you want them to obey Leviticus 19:18 that says you should love your neighbor as yourself.

You don't want other people to reject the Bible. You want them to be convicted. To be brought under its authority. To submit their lives to it and obey it so they don't destroy themselves and others.

And yet when you want to reject the parts of the Bible you don't like **what you're saying is you want to be the exception.** To get to stand out from underneath it. To get to pick and choose what you obey, what you follow, what you are shaped by, and explain away the stuff you don't like.

And listen, I want you to hear me on this - If you only accept and trust and follow the parts of the Bible that line up with what you already think, that fit your worldview, that fit your chosen lifestyle, that are easy...if you never let the Bible disagree with you and then submit to it...you rob yourself of so much power in your Christian life.

And if you do that, and you just pick and choose what you like and don't like, then why should anyone follow it all? You've got to play fair. If you get to dismiss it then why shouldn't everyone else?

If you don't allow the Bible to confront you the same way you want it to confront others, you will simply be a captive to your culture. Doing and thinking whatever the loudest voice tells you to do and you will be susceptible to your cultural blindspots.

**You will never grow as a Christian if you only follow the parts of the Bible that agree with you. Guaranteed.**

And that's where the Bible leads us - submission to a higher authority that brings with real spiritual power. An authority and a power that can tell us we're wrong and show us a better way. An authority and a power that can contradict us. And when we submit to God and His Word, to follow Jesus, that's exactly what we're doing. We're saying, "You're the authority. You call the shots. So rather than me trying to challenge the Bible, I want to let the Bible challenge me. To tell me I'm wrong. Because if I don't I will never grow, I will always be selfish and stagnant, letting my inner desires and letting my culture and my comfort tell me what to think and what to do. I will never be a person of love that Jesus can use if I insist on my own authority.