

Skeptical: How Can we Trust the Bible? 4/28/19

We are beginning an 8-week series called Skeptical, tackling the biggest questions about God, Faith and Christianity. Maybe you came today because your curiosity was piqued when you heard we were going to address these questions because these are the questions that have nagged at you, or caused you to question your faith, or maybe these are the questions that keep you away from places like this, we are so glad you are here and I would love to follow up over a cup of coffee, take me up on that. Here's the sad truth for many people who grew up in religious households or going to church. Most were afraid to ask their biggest questions. According to Barna Research, 50% of churched millennials said they feel that church isn't safe for their biggest questions about life. The perception is, if you have doubts, if you aren't certain- it must mean you don't have enough faith. Or maybe you asked someone a hard question and you felt like they didn't treat your question seriously or they gave you a nickel answer to a million dollar question.

May that not be said of Brandywine. We want to invite you to ask your biggest questions, wrestle with your doubts, receive reasonable, well-researched responses and resources for further study. This comes from the character of God. Acts 17:26-28

"²⁶ From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands.

²⁷ God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. ²⁸ 'For in him we live and move and have our being.'"

We believe God invites believers, seekers and skeptics to "come and see." He invites them into a relationship of discovery through reason, evidence, beauty, conscience, spiritual experience, relationship with Christians, and encountering his word.

2 Caveats:

- 1) We will not be able to answer every question exhaustively or with absolute certainty. We hope this opens the dialogue and discovery. We will recommend books throughout.
- 2) You will not agree with everything we say. We are going to be too conservative for some of you, or too liberal for others. But we believe in a generous orthodoxy. There is room for disagreement and contrary opinions here.

Week 1: Why Should I Trust the Bible?

Last April I addressed this topic in a series HABITS- Bible Study. 4 Reasons to Trust the Bible: Historical Reliability, Early Writing, the abundance and accuracy of Ancient manuscripts, fulfilled prophesy. We will cover some old ground in more detail and some new ground today.

I want to address 4 questions of Skeptics:

#1 "Isn't the Bible just a bunch of made up stories and rules that got cobbled together?"

The Bible is a collection of 66 books over 1500 years written by various authors. But it tells one story about real people, real places in real times in history- that stand the archaeological test of

time with incredible accuracy. my sermon last year. But the Bible is not cobbled together. If you take the time to read it, one of the things that will stand out to you- **PICTURE: One cohesive story of God creation, man's fall and rebellion, God's plan of redemption and final restoration.** Specifically, it tells the story of God's promise to one-man, Abraham, that through Abraham's seed, the world would be blessed and ultimately redeemed. The Bible traces the history of the children of Abraham- the Jewish people, God keeping his promises to them even when they rebelled against Him. And the Bible throughout the Old Testament continues to point to and prophesy about this coming redeemer and savior, ultimately culminating in the promised seed, the Messiah, Jesus Christ. The Bible is not a book about rules for man to get to God, but the story of everything God did to get to us. So instead of looking at it like a cobbled together book written by tons of different authors- when I read the Bible I am amazed at the providence of God to bring one cohesive story from several different cultures, times, people groups and authors. The Bible is utterly unique in this.

"Ok, but I've heard that the stories of the **Bible relied heavily on oral transmission, stories passed down before they were ever written down, how can we trust that it is accurate?**

Firstly, much of the Bible does not rely on oral transmission by rather eye-witness account. A good example of this is the Book of Luke which explicitly states its origins in chapter 1. Luke is putting the results of his investigation into writing, using the experiences of actual eyewitnesses. But some portions of the Old Testament and some stories in the New Testament did rely on oral transmission.

The picture that gets painted by critics of the Bible is that of an ancient **PICTURE game of telephone.** One person tells the next and the next...and by the end of the line it is totally changed. This is really one giant attempt to judge another completely different culture with our own western, cultural views and standards. Let me share with you why comparing this to the game of telephone and questioning Oral Transmission's historical reliability is a completely inaccurate view. **Telephone game- purpose is to skew the message for a good laugh. Transmitted secretly from one individual ear to the next. There is no chance to hear the message repeatedly before it is passed on.**

Jewish and Greek Oral Transmission

Master Memorizers

We tend to think that we are smarter than ancient people. We may have more information but that does not necessarily equate to intelligence. We find it incredibly difficult to memorize with accuracy large portions of information because we have google...three words of a Bible verse and it pops up.

William Lane Craig- "In an oral culture like that of first-century Palestine the ability to memorize and retain large tracts of oral tradition was a highly prized and highly developed skill. From the earliest age children in the home, elementary school, and the synagogue were taught to memorize faithfully sacred tradition. The disciples would have exercised similar care with the teachings of Jesus."

Talmud described a good Jewish student who memorized the entire Torah- "A well-plastered cistern, which would not let even a single drop escape." Ancient Greek storytellers were able to memorize and retell the entire Iliad or Odyssey. It was common for people to be like Pastor Bo Matthews- legend says could quote entire sections of Chronicles of Narnia and entire books of the Bible.

-Oral transmission was a community project. Open for the whole community to hear and Repeated many, many times for all present people to memorize. And whole community would have been present to correct errors.

#3 "I've heard that the copies of the New Testament that we have are too late to be considered trustworthy and that there are tons of errors in the copies. How can we say it is trustworthy?"

Bart Ehrman- The leading critic of the Bible who is quoted more than any other. "Not only do we not have the originals, we don't have the first copies of the original. We don't even have copies of the copies of the original, or copies of the copies of the copies of originals. What we have are copies made later- much later...and these copies all differ from one another, in many thousands of places."

Wow, sounds convincing and condemning. But is that true? Let's break that down.

"All the NT copies today are too late."

Firstly, it is important to note that Ehrman is right, we do not have the originals. Because Papyrus is what ancient books were written on, it is extremely difficult to preserve, especially since they were used so often. However, Ehrman paints a misleading portrait. Earliest manuscript, Gospel of John, 30 years or less of the original, many larger fragments are within 150 years of original. These are very likely to be 1st or 2nd generation copies of the original. Papyrus manuscripts last on average over 100 years.

Tertullian, 2nd century church father, spiritual great grandson of the Apostle Paul. "Come now, you who would indulge in a better curiosity, if you would apply it to the business of your salvation, run over to the apostolic churches, in which the very thrones of the apostles are still pre-eminent in their places, in which their own authentic writings are read." Latin word authentic- refers to original documents.

NT- 24,000 ancient Copies, 5800 Greek copies of 27 books.

Next closest- Homer- 643 manuscripts- 500 year time gap. Demosthenes, 200 manuscripts, 1400 year gap, Herodotus, 8 manuscripts, 1400 year time tap, Plato, 7 mans, 1200 year gap. If one denies the reliability of the NT based upon the number of manuscripts and the interval of time between its original composition and nearest copy, then they would have to thereby discredit the reliability of every work from ancient history!

“Our copies differ in many places and are full of errors so how can we possibly know what the originals said?”

Now I must say, it is unhelpful when I hear Christians assert, often unknowingly, that the Bible in your hand has no errors and is precisely and exactly the same as the originals. Not true and don't say that. First of all, unless you read Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic, these are translations. Secondly, there are textual variants and copyist errors in the Bible. Scribes would take a letter and copy it, while this copy process was painstakingly detailed and done with great precision, among the 24,000 New Testament ancient copies ranging in locations, dating, etc. there are differences, what are called textual variants. Here's what you need to know about these variants.

400,000 variants across NT manuscripts, Why? Because we have so many manuscripts. We have about 6000 Greek Manuscripts- 2.6 Million total pages- One variant per 6.5pages.

Ehrman stress on the multiplicity of manuscript variants is seriously misleading. For if one word is misspelled in 3,000 manuscripts, this is counted as 3,000 errors. One person discovered 16 errors in Ehrman's book *Misquoting Jesus*. Since this first edition is reported to have sold 100,000 copies in the first 3 months, this would mean that there are 1.6mill errors in Ehrman's books (using Ehrman's own standards)! Yet no reasonable person would argue that because of this we cannot trust the copies to convey Ehrman's original thought on the matter.

99% of them fall into these categories:

- 1) Spelling errors- Johannes, 1n or 2ns
- 2) Word order changes- Jesus Christ, Christ Jesus.
- 3) "The" article, which is used far more in greek than English.

What about the 1%?

Change the meaning of a text

1 Thess. 2:7

*But we were **gentle** among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children.*

*But we were **infants** among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children.* Reason- Greek one letter difference- Napeoi, Apeoi...

This is the substance of the NT errors... Where are the big ones? Jesus death on cross, vs. a camel accident. They don't exist and None of the differences affect one belief of Christians. Most accurate and reliable ancient document- by far. None come close.

The real purpose of the NT was to preserve the faith handed down from the apostles, not to create an inerrant relic. It is the gospel that saves, not perfect copying.

#4 "Hasn't the Bible been corrupted? Haven't people in power taken the Bible and rewritten it in order to say what they wanted it to say?" This was popularized by the fiction movie- The DaVinci Code. Jesus was married had children, etc. Although this has been debunked and no respectable scholar would hold to this, I still hear this idea propagated on the internet.

Respected Scholar and Biblical Historian, Dr. James White “There has never been a time when a man or a group of men had control over the text of the New Testament. All assertions like adding doctrine, changing theology, removing teachings, etc. are without merit. The Christian church was a persecuted minority without power, to enforce a uniform textual transmission.” And because we have copies throughout different parts of the world over a short period of time that agree with one another, it is clear that this corruption could not have taken place.

Outside of Scripture- Tacitus, Suetonius, Thallus, Jewish Talmuds, Josephus- 20-150 years after Jesus confirmed universal understandings about the life and teaching of Jesus and his followers:

- 1) Jesus was from Nazareth
- 2) He lived a virtuous life
- 3) He Performed unusual feats
- 4) He introduced new teaching contrary to Judaism
- 5) He was crucified under Pontius Pilate.
- 6) His disciples believed he rose from the dead.

- 7) His disciples denied polytheism
- 8) His disciples worshiped him as God
- 9) His teachings and disciples spread rapidly.
- 10) His followers believed they were immortal.
- 11) His followers had contempt for death.
- 12) His followers renounced materials goods.

Based on all of this. What is our conclusion? At minimum, even for a critic- it would have to be admitted that the Bible is far and away the most trustworthy ancient document in existence.

Therefore, to completely throw it out like the radical skeptics do is anti-intellectual, completely bias and even narrow-minded. But what about all the miracles? Are we supposed to believe that Jesus really walked on water? And how can we really know that those disciples were telling the truth about Jesus? Well friend, I can't convince you using a test-tube that miracles are real or that the disciples really did witness the resurrection of Jesus. That will take faith. And at the end of the day, all of the great decisions of life are a faith proposition. But I invite you to come and see. What is your next step to discovering the Bible? Read it for yourself. Come to Christianity 101