

Life Group Study Guide

Ask Anything!

Which Religion Is Right?

July 1, 2012

QUESTIONS: What is the Bible? Is the Bible true? Should you believe it? How can you trust the integrity of the Bible? Can the Bible withstand scrutiny of its apparent contradictions? **How do we know the Bible is not just mythology? If the Bible is the authoritative Word of God, what should we expect to find in it? Is the Bible a true and reliable guide to how we should live? How has the Bible fared when scientists have compared their findings with the record of Scripture?**

Q. How so you answer these questions when someone asks?

Q. Do you really completely believe everything in the Bible?

Q. What is the purpose and value of studying the Bible in your life?

Q. What happened when you heard the gospel and believed? Was there any change?

Q. How valuable is the Bible to you? How much time do you spend in the word?

There are probably a thousand different opinions on what the Bible is. Some say the Bible is just a collection of stories and fables. Some acknowledge that the Bible is good historical literature, but they don't think it applies in today's world. Others think it is OK to read as long as you don't have something else to do. Some people don't turn to the Bible until they find themselves in a severe crisis. Many a person in prison, held hostage, recovering from a drug addiction or experiencing a terrible tragedy finally turns to the Bible for encouragement and direction. But is this really a good way to treat information that can make a difference in this life as well as the one to come? And what good is this if we aren't sure that what the Bible says is true?

The main reasons given by those who don't believe the Bible – “not enough historical facts, stories seem like Fairy tails, it doesn't mean that God is anymore real than anyone else's God, the bible was written by man not God, there is nothing to prove Jesus was real was or the son of any God, it isn't true until someone proves it.”

Jesus said that Satan is the father of lies. No liar ever admits he is a liar but always accuses the other fellow of lying. He is the great deceiver. Satan is out to deceive us...to torment us...to destroy us. He wants to keep us from the truth because he knows that the truth of the Word of God - when it is applied to our lives, will set us free. But what is Satan's real strategy...how does he bring about all this turmoil? The attack starts in the mind. He loves to create doubt, denial and confusion. Many in our generation today are puzzled, bewildered and confused. Men once took their directions from the Bible. However our nation has all but abandoned this trustworthy resource. As a result, we are still reaping the bitter fruits that come from neglecting God's counsel. If people don't believe the Bible is relevant today, it isn't because we tried it and it failed, but because we have ignored it and have virtually destroyed the morality of the last generation.

Truth matters to Christians. It sets us apart. That is why we refuse to buy into the mantra that all beliefs are equal. That is why we refuse to believe that truth is relative.

These are some of the absolutes that are true and real and will never change in God's word.

The Authority of God's Word - The correct answer to what is the Bible is that - “All scripture is given by inspiration of God - (God- breathed)” (2Timothy 3:16) Every word that the human authors of the bible wrote down was given to them by God. Here is what the Apostle Peter said about the bible. “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)

Another testimony to the Bible's divine authorship is the vast number of detailed biblical prophecies that have come true exactly as foretold. We see the psalmist, for example, telling of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ nearly a thousand years before it occurred (Psalm 22), and hundreds of years before crucifixion was even invented. Simply put, it would be impossible for human beings to have seen so far into the future with such precision and accuracy hundreds of times. Indeed, it would be completely illogical to believe these proven prophecies are anything other than the work of God. Incidentally, and amazingly, probability experts tell us the mathematical odds of just forty-eight prophecies regarding one person (i.e. Christ) coming true as foretold are one-in-ten to the 157th power! There are so many prophecies concerning Christ (over 270!)

that it would take more than a few pages to list them all. Further, Jesus would have had no control over many of them such as His birthplace or time of birth. Second, the odds of one man accidentally fulfilling even 16 of these are one-in-ten to the 45th power. For comparison, there are less than 10-to-the 82nd atoms in the entire universe! And Jesus, who affirmed the Bible as the Word of God, proved His reliability and deity by His resurrection, an historical fact not easily ignored.

The Authenticity of God's Word - The Bible is without doubt the best documented book from the ancient world, with more than 24,000 whole or partial biblical manuscripts in existence. No other document of antiquity has nearly as much evidence to confirm its reliability. Over hundreds of years, thousands of copies of the individual books that make up the Bible have been discovered. Some ancient manuscripts of the Old Testament date back to before the birth of Jesus. Scholars and historians who have studied these ancient manuscripts—written by hand before the days of the printing press and photocopy machine—have continually been impressed at the careful way the text of the Bible was transmitted without change.

Was the Bible written by merely good men? No, because the Old Testament alone claims over 2,600 times to be written by God. It's inconceivable that good men would lie about the same subject 2,600 times. Was the Bible written by bad men? No, because it's inconceivable that bad men would write a book that continually lifts men and women to the highest plain of morality and purity, that demands the most exacting standards of righteousness, and pronounces doom upon all sinners.

The only logical alternative is, the Bible was written by God (2 Peter 2:20-21). And since the Bible was written by God, it is reliable and true because its author - God Himself - is reliable and true. What about the New Testament? There are over 5,500 existing ancient manuscripts of the New Testament. These ancient hand-copies have been studied and examined over and over again with "a fine tooth comb" and they verify that the books of the New Testament are authentic documents - they have not changed down through the years. Ancient New Testament manuscripts have been found in Palestine, Syria, and Egypt, and their content is virtually identical no matter where they were found.

What about the Old Testament? The Dead Sea Scrolls refer to over 800 ancient scrolls discovered in 11 different caves near the Dead Sea from 1947 to 1956. The Dead Sea Scrolls date back to at least 100 B.C. and they contain fragments from every book of the Old Testament except Esther. Scholars have examined those fragments and found them to be virtually identical with our standard Hebrew Bible. There is more evidence for the authenticity of the 66 books of the Bible than there is for *any other book from the ancient world. The Bible is without doubt the best documented book from the ancient world, with more than 24,000 whole or partial biblical manuscripts in existence. No other document of antiquity has nearly as much evidence to confirm its reliability.*

Now consider the Quran - its author, Muhammad, performed no miracles to back up his message even when he was asked to by his followers. Only in much later tradition do any alleged miracles even show up and these are all quite fanciful and have zero reliable testimony to back them up. Further, the Quran makes clear historical errors. Muslims believe the Bible is inspired but with some errors from editing. The question they cannot adequately answer is: "When was the Bible corrupted?" If they say before 600 A.D. then how can the Quran admonish believers to read it? If they claim it was after 600 A.D., we have absolutely no doubt as to the accuracy of biblical manuscripts from at least the 3rd century forward. Even if Christianity

were false, the Quran still has an insurmountable problem because it makes judgments against Christians for believing things that they do not nor have they ever believed. For example, the Quran teaches that Christians believe the Trinity is the Father, the Mother (Mary), and the Son, and the Quran also teaches that Christians believe that God had sex with Mary to have a son. If the Quran is really from God, then it should at least be able to accurately report what Christians believe.

The Sufficiency of God's Word - God speaks and accomplishes His purposes (Isaiah 55:11). God's Word is our food (Matthew 4:4). God's Word is irresistible power (Jeremiah 23:29). God has spoken the words that are written down in our Bible (2 Timothy 3:16). When it is believed and received, it creates eternal life

(John 20:31). Its truth sets apart the people of God (John 17:17). It opens the eyes of the blind (2 Corinthians 4:4-6). It gives life to the dead (Colossians 2:13). It grows the Church (Acts 12:24). It frees the captive (John 8:31-32). It gives hope to the weary (Romans 15:4). It brings joy to the heart (John 15:11). It brings glory to God (John 15:7-8). Nothing needs to be added to it and nothing needs to be taken from it (Deuteronomy 4:2). Nothing can be set alongside it (Psalm 119:89). If we will believe it and proclaim it, God will glorify himself through it.

The Relevance of God's Word - In Exodus 20 we read the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments were not given just as laws to be obeyed, but as a mirror to reveal just how futile attempts at living independently were and are. When we declare independence the result is sin; because apart from him we can only draw upon ourselves. There's much more to these commandments than meets the eye. Sadly, most people know little about the Ten Commandments. Few people can name more than three or four of them. Those who take the time to study the commandments find they're not a list of "Do nots," but are in fact God's guide to the good life—a life full of blessings. That's why the Bible calls them "the royal law" and "the law of liberty." The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5 tells us how to live a life that is dedicated to and pleasing to God, free from hypocrisy, full of love and grace, full of wisdom and discernment.

Hebrews 4:12 says, "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." While the Bible was completed approximately 1900 years ago, its accuracy and relevance for today remain unchanged. The Bible is the sole objective source of all the revelation God has given us about Himself and His plan for humanity.

Believers of the Bible as well as skeptics—have gained expertise and understanding in many disciplines. Some have conducted scientific experiments. Others have recorded what man has learned through trial and error. Through simple observation many have discovered, or recognized the existence of, the natural laws that govern the universe. Their research has helped us understand our world. The truth is that the Bible does not contradict scientific evidence, and science does not disprove the biblical record. Science cannot of itself tell us why the earth and the physical creation exist. Wrote Carl Sagan: "Why it happened is the greatest mystery we know. That it happened is reasonably clear". But the Bible tells us why!

The Superiority of God's Word - "To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8:31-32) The pleasure of life is found in worshiping and trusting in Christ above all other things: Repent of yourself (Acts 2:38); deny self (Luke 9:23); lose self (Luke 9:24); humble self (James 4:10; 1 Peter 5:6); put off your old self (Ephesians 4:22).

One would expect that a book given to man by God would have a dynamic influence on those who embraced it. Without a doubt the Bible is such a book having directly transformed the lives of multitudes of people through the ages who have received the Gospel message in truth. The Bible's dynamic ability can also be seen indirectly overflowing into the lives of those who have been the recipients of the love of God

found in the hearts of His children.

The Excellency of God's Word - *The Word of God is a treasure chest of joy and riches. We open the Word with enthusiasm and expectation and pray that the Spirit who inspired the writings would open our eyes so that we might see the wonderful things in God's law. "Then I will not be disgraced when I compare my life with your commands." (Psalm 119:16)*

There are over 270 prophecies concerning Christ. Further, Jesus would have had no control over many of them, such as His birthplace or time of birth. Second, the odds of one man accidentally fulfilling even 16 of these are 1-in-10 to the 45th power. How many is that? For comparison, there are less than 10 to the 82nd atoms in the entire universe! And Jesus, who affirmed the Bible as the Word of God, proved His reliability

and deity by His resurrection, an historical fact not easily ignored. Probability experts tell us the mathematical odds of just forty-eight prophecies regarding one person – Christ - coming true as prophesied are one-in-ten to the 157th power!

God's word is eternal - *"I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished." (Matthew 5:18) Read - Matthew 24:35, Mark 13:31, Luke 16:17, Luke 24:44, John 10:35 .*

'It is blessed to eat into the very soul of the Bible until, at last, you come to talk in Scriptural language, and your spirit is flavored with the words of the Lord, so that your blood is Bibline and the very essence of the Bible flows from you.' –Charles Spurgeon

The difference between those who are deceived and those who remain is simple. Those that "remain" are those who stand firm on the solid foundation of God's Word. Those who fall build their lives on the shifting sands of human theories (Psalm 1/Romans 12:1-2). I think Paul would warn us: "Don't chase after high sounding philosophies of unbelieving men. Don't let the lies of this world conform you to its corrupting and disappointing ways. Stand on the truth that is written down in our Bible, that Book that contains God's words.

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"We owe to Scripture the same reverence as we owe God, since it has as its only source in him and has nothing of human origin mixed with it." John Calvin