

## SESSION 1 NOTES

### Isn't the Bible a Myth? Hasn't Science Disproved Christianity?

#### Opening Thought

In 1993, archaeologists dug up the first outside-of-the-Bible reference to King David. Up until then, only the Bible talked about King David—there were no inscriptions, no archaeological digs, no other documents, nothing, that ever mentioned David. Does that mean that Christians could not believe there was a David before 1993? It does not work that way. Christians believe there was a King David because the Bible is the Word of God.

#### The Objection

People say that there are many good things in the Bible, but you should not take it literally; you must not insist that it is entirely trustworthy and completely authoritative because some parts of the Bible are wrong, historically unreliable, and culturally regressive.

Video Notes — <http://youtu.be/OI5kx2IKQ0c>

#### Questions for Discussion

1. *Are people you know more troubled by the ethical aspects of the Bible or the historical? Why?*
  - **People we know are troubled by both the ethical and the historical aspects of the Bible.** It seems likely that religious people are more concerned with the ethical aspects, while irreligious people are more bothered by the historical aspects. In our group discussion, a possible link between the two aspects presented itself, and the Bible interestingly suggests that link, as well.
  - Romans 1:19-21a; 2:1-3, 14-15 — We have a testimony to God's moral code ("the law") in our heart (i.e., our conscience) that authenticates the teaching of Scripture. **If we can undermine the historical veracity of God's Word, then we don't have to concern ourselves with its ethical code.**
  - The host of the video discussion reminded us that studying the truth/untruth of the Bible impacts us—that is, if it is true, then it has claims upon what we believe and how we live. So, it's hard to be objective when we study the Bible. Like a judge who would recuse herself because of personal bias, we have to recuse ourselves when considering the veracity of God's Word. We have to "be sceptical of our scepticism."

2. *One of the participants on the video said, "The Bible is a wonderful text, it's complex, a lot of things going on; some people believe it to be the truth; I myself do not." Another said, "Jesus sacrificed himself—I'm not sure if there is evidence for that." Many people say the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life—His claims to be divine, the miracles He performed, His death on a cross, His rising from the dead—were written much later by church leaders who were trying to consolidate their power and build their movements, so they suppressed the evidence that the real Jesus was just a human teacher. How would you respond?*
  - **The New Testament accounts of Jesus were written too early to be legends.** → The gospel writers constantly allude to eyewitnesses with whom the readers could verify their accounts. And they frequently "footnote" their writings in order to reference their sources.
    - Luke 1:1-4 — Luke worked to painstakingly preserve historical facts. He claims to have "carefully investigated," even consulting eyewitnesses, and he differentiates between an "orderly account" and spinning a tale.
    - John 19:35 and 1 John 1:1-4 — The author, John, claims to have been an eyewitness of the events of Jesus' life.
    - 1 Corinthians 15:6 — Paul states that Jesus appeared to "more than five hundred of the brothers...most of whom are still living." He is, in essence, inviting his reader to seek out those eyewitnesses and confirm their harmonious testimonies. And, if Paul was just strategically beefing up his authority by deceptively referring to so many eyewitnesses, that would have been easily discovered.
    - Acts 26:26 — Paul tells King Agrippa that the events of Jesus' life "were not done in a corner." In other words, the entire city of Jerusalem (perhaps 1 million people during the Passover weekend of Jesus' crucifixion) had heard and watched Jesus. His opponents need only hit the streets of Jerusalem and interview the average person, and they would discover testimony in agreement with Paul's.
    - Mark 15:21 (cf. Romans 16:13) — Like a modern-day "footnote," Mark refers to the man who carried Jesus' cross as "Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus." Apparently these men were well-known to his readers and could easily be interviewed to check Mark's writing.

- **The documents are too detailed to be legends.** → The gospels contain many details that are irrelevant to the narrative and insignificant to the interpretation. They are best explained by understanding that these personalized details would have been retained in the eyewitnesses memory.
  - Mark 4 — Jesus was asleep on a cushion in the stern of the boat.
  - John 21 — Peter was a hundred yards out in the water, and he caught 153 fish.
  - John 8 — Jesus doodled with His finger in the dust, twice.
- **The documents are too counterproductive to be legends.** → Some claim that the Bible does not give an account of what actually happened, but only includes what the church leaders wanted people to believe in order to consolidate their power and build their movement. However,
  - Why include the following “low lights” about Christian leaders? (Jesus, Matthew 26:39; Peter’s denial; the regular foolishness and cowardice of the disciples)
  - Why would they attest that the first resurrection witnesses were women at a time when a woman’s testimony was not admissible evidence in court?

### 3. Respond to the following objections, “The Gospels are full of contradictions.”

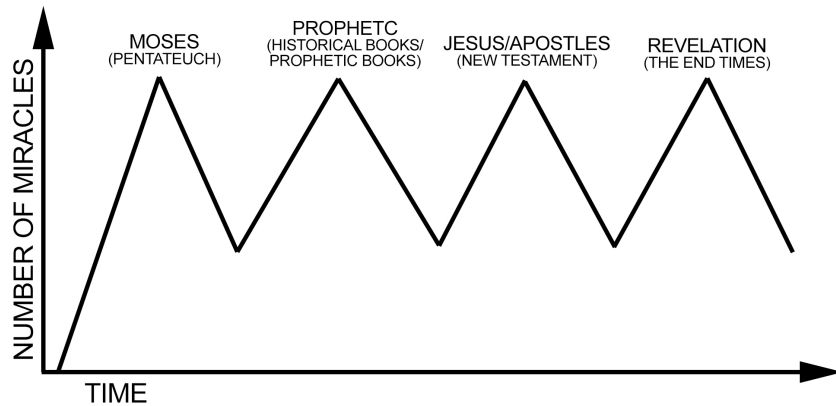
- **Start by asking, “What are some of those contradiction?”** Many people do not know and are only parroting what they have heard.
- **Each gospel writer selected in accordance with his didactic goals, since they were not mere reporters, but also teachers** (cf. John 20:31). Jesus did and said much more than would be possible to record (cf. John 20:30; 21:25), so the gospel-writers had to be selective. One example: while the other gospel writers reveal that a group of women first discovered the empty tomb, John depicts Mary coming alone. However, in John 20:2 he has her saying “we,” indicating that he knew she wasn’t actually alone. He simply focuses on her exclusively because he wanted her dialogue with Jesus to be highlighted.
- **Each witness would only have seen part of the events.** Matthew and John were themselves eyewitnesses; Luke interviewed several eyewitnesses; and Mark relied on Peter’s testimony.

- **Each witness could have described a fact in different ways without any contradiction.** For example: when Mary arrived at the tomb it was “still dark” (John 20:1), “at dawn” (Matthew 28:1), and “just after sunrise” (Mark 16:2). At that time of day, the degree of darkness or light is a matter of opinion and there is no contradiction between those different ways of looking at it.

### 4. One of the participants said, “There are a lot of miracles that happen in the Bible, but...I’ve never seen a miracle along [the lines of] what happens in the New Testament.” Others claim, “The Gospels can’t be reliable accounts because they describe miracles.” How do people you know react to the idea of the miraculous? What does this passage teach about miracles?

- Matthew Arnold, a 19<sup>th</sup>-century thinker, said, “Miracles cannot happen. Therefore miracles have not happened.” This, however, is an intellectually inconsistency and is arguing in a circle. To say “miracles cannot happen” is a philosophical assumption, not an epiracle conclusion.
- **If there is a God—a thesis that can neither be proven nor disproved empirically—then, miracles would have to be possible.** You cannot deny the possibility of miracles, unless you disprove the existence of God. Furthermore, since science assumes and purposes to provide the natural explanation, it will by definition reject the supernatural. So, science cannot help verify or refute the occurrence of miracles.
- **Miracles have always been hard to believe in (Matthew 28:16-17).** Even when they were more regularly occurring, people found them incredulous. Don’t think that only modern, scientific people struggle with the idea of the miraculous, while ancient, more primitive people did not.
- **The purpose of Jesus’ miracles was to provide a wonderful foretaste of what He is going to do with His power—not suspend the natural order, but restore it.** His miracles weren’t mere tricks that wowed and astonished, nor were they mere proofs that He had power, but they were illustrations of what He intends to do with that power.

- Throughout the Bible, the primary purpose of miracles seems to have been to authenticate divine revelation (cf. Hebrews 2:2-4). That is why we don't see miracles occurring with the same intensity or frequency throughout the entire Bible. Instead, they are relegated to four primary eras, and each era corresponds to when God was giving mankind divine revelation.



#### 5. "Why should a person believe the Old Testament is true?"

- There is a great deal of archaeological and historical support that validates much of the Old Testament, but that alone could not establish the divine inspiration of the Bible.
- Jesus taught and believed in its entire inspiration and trustworthiness—that it is true and will come true (John 5:37-39, 46-47; 10:34-35; Matthew 5:17-19; Mark 12:24; Luke 24:44; Matthew 23:35).
- In John 7:17, Jesus lays down this challenge to people who doubted His words, "Anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether My teaching comes from God or whether I speak on My own." **Jesus is saying that if you want to know in your own experience whether or not the Bible really is true** (what the host referred to has his "existential" reason for believing Christianity), **then put its teaching into practice.**
- Cf. <http://bit.ly/1rSfGTE>

#### 6. One of the participants said, "Evolution is very crucial for me—it being able to mesh into the Bible properly. Because I definitely believe in evolution. So, if the Bible says evolution does not exist, then I feel it loses credibility." How would you respond to someone who felt that evolution makes biblical faith unacceptable?

- The most important point is that "God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1; John 1:1; Colossians 1:16-17).
- Faith in a literal seven-day creation is *not* necessary for saving faith in the gospel (Romans 10:9; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4).
- There are good reasons for holding to a literal seven-day creation:
  - *Literary*: (1) the Hebrew word "day" (*yom*) with number (i.e., "the first day") and "evening/morning" always refers to a literal 24-hour day (<http://bit.ly/1wAOVHm>); (2) God's command of a six-day work week with the Sabbath rest on the seventh day was based on the seven days of creation (cf. Exodus 20:8-11); (3) Jesus and Paul believed in literal interpretation of Genesis 1-2 (cf. Matthew 19:4-6; 1 Timothy 2:12-14)
  - *Theological*: (1) alternative creation views put death before sin (Romans 5:12); (2) the first/last Adam contrast is based on a literal interpretation (Romans 5:12-21; 1 Corinthians 15:22, 45-47; <http://bit.ly/1wAP1Pj>)
  - *Scientific*: Both non-literalists (i.e., evolutionists) and literalists (i.e., creationists) have the same facts (i.e., fossils, rocks, geological formations, etc.), but they have different starting points. Both must admit that that starting point is a faith-issue, and that affects how they interpret the data. Again, science will always deny the supernatural, because its defined purpose is to provide an observable, natural explanation. Also, it is good to note that creationists don't deny micro-evolution, but we do deny macro-evolution, especially its implications as held by its worldview proponents.

#### 7. If you had to summarize the Bible from Genesis to Revelation in three minutes, what would you say?

- Cf. *The Story* — <http://viewthestory.com/4997>

**8. Was there anything in the way the video discussion was conducted in terms of tone, atmosphere, attitude, mannerisms, expressions, and so on, that you might find helpful to adopt, or not, when you run your own discussion about this objection?**

- The discussion host listened graciously and attentively for a long time before offering his arguments and responses.
- While we often think that all brilliant minds and scholarly researchers reject the Bible, many have affirmed their trust in it (cf. Lee Strobel's *The Case for Christ: A Journalist's Personal Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus*—<http://amzn.to/YHBLd9>). Furthermore, these intellectually astute people are themselves sometimes very wrong/incorrect in what they assert.
- One of the participants expressed concern over the preservation of the wording of the Bible. She contended that it has been translated several times over and that it was cobbled together. In contrast, while it is true that the original manuscripts are no longer extant, over 5,000 ancient fragments (both short and lengthy) exist which had not been translated multiple times over. Our English versions have been translated directly from Hebrews and Greek texts that have been carefully investigated so as to reflect the originals. Furthermore, far from being “cobbled together,” the Bible demonstrates almost an impossible harmony within itself. Written over a span of ~2000 years by ~40 authors, its unifying metanarrative is incredible. The postmodern thinker views the Bible as a sort of multi-voiced tapestry, in which the diversity of the voices leads to a myriad of different interpretations. In contrast, consider the testimony of Kimberly Shumate in an article entitled “I Was a Witch” (2002 September/October issue of *Christianity Today*), in which she testifies to the power that understanding the Bible’s metanarrative had on her own life:

*“As Lisa drove me home, my mind ached as I replayed Scott’s words. All the Old Testament and New Testament verses had one oddly familiar voice – one tone, one heart. I wondered, How could a book written by so many different people over the course of hundreds of years fit together perfectly as if one amazing storyteller has written the whole thing? The Holy Spirit began melting my vanity and arrogance with a power stronger than any hex, incantation, or spell I’d ever used. Suddenly, the blindfold I’d worn for almost 30 years was striped away, and instantly I knew that I’d been searching for: Jesus!”*

### **Final Thought**

Notice how 30 to 50 percent of each gospel is given to the last week of Jesus’ life. If you were telling the story of someone’s life, why would you do that? The Gospel writers believed it was not the example and teaching of Jesus, but His saving work in history, His death and resurrection, that was the important and significant part. One of the participants said on the DVD, “Did Jesus come, die on a cross, or did He not? For me that is very important, that is the most important, because it holds all these ramifications with it. If He did do that, then that changes everything, as opposed to, if He did do that.”