

WHAT CHRISTIANS SHOULD KNOW (#WCSK), PART III: THE BIBLE.

All scriptures will be taken from The New American Standard Bible (NASB). Further, Biblical references are examples and are in no way exhaustive. The series What Christians Should Know also is not a complete reference but is meant to provide basic beliefs, principles, and doctrines in the Christian faith. All of the lessons are best used as a general guide as you engage in your own Bible study.

“But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine” (Titus 2:1).

Introduction

Before I dive into the lesson, I’d like to take a moment to focus your attention on where we’re going. People often think the Bible is not relevant to their lives, is out of touch, or perceive it as something too big or complicated to grasp. It’s a problem of expectation because people either suppose something the Bible isn’t (for example, a roadmap to a stress-free life), or assume little to nothing about it because they fail to realize what the Bible really is.

What Christians should know is that the Bible offers a new way of looking at and understanding the world. This fresh perspective ultimately leads to life, peace, joy, and the completeness so many are searching for.

The Bible awakens a dormant imagination within all of us; this consciously and unconsciously forms our identity and, therefore, determines how we perceive and interact with the world.

Walter Brueggemann labels the Biblical example a *covenantal-historical model* of contemplating our existence and our faith in God. This model implies “an enduring commitment between God and God’s people based on mutual vows of loyalty and mutual obligation through which both parties have their life radically affected and empowered.”¹ As a result, the meaning of our lives is not rooted in ourselves so that we just get out what we put in. Rather, there is Someone greater than us all, and through grace, despite what we “having coming to us,” God trusts in and takes humanity so seriously that in spite of our depravity because of sin, we can all be saved. The Word of God reveals there is something timeless, better, and more powerful than what this world has to offer. The Bible gives everyone a genuine, fresh identity that refuses to allow us to forget who we

¹ Walter Brueggemann, *The Bible Makes Sense* (Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2003), 10.

truly are, demands obedience to expectations, and will not allow us to settle for the false identities the world would have us adopt.

The Bible is much more than a good idea or an ideology that has an alternative end. It is a concrete and unchanging fixed point of reference in an ever-changing world characterized by identity crises, displacement, and burden. From that fixed identity, we derive our life's mission and calling. The Bible locates us in fellowship with God and therefore in fellowship with other servants of God. Thus, we all belong to a community of believers and all have a responsible and caring family in one another—we are, therefore, not all alone and have definite meaning and purpose in each other *through Christ*. The Bible teaches us that we all have a unique prospect for the future where those in the front will be in the back and those on the bottom will be on top.

As Walter Brueggemann so eloquently says in *The Bible Makes Sense*, “The Bible provides us with an alternative identity, an alternative way of understanding ourselves, an alternative way of relating to the world. It offers a radical and uncompromising challenge to our ordinary ways of self-understanding. It invites us to join in and to participate in the ongoing pilgrimage of those who live in the sharing of history ... The surprises of the resurrection concern the emergence of expected new life in persons, in institutions, in social arrangements. And they come just when we think there are no more reasonable expectations.”²

The Bible teaches us that when the world says “No” God says “Yes.” The Bible teaches us that when the world says, “You’re not” God says, “I AM.” The Bible teaches us that when you thought you were destined to be enslaved to death, Christ sets you free to live.

I. What is the Bible?

The Bible is the Word of God. It is pure,³ perfect,⁴ and true;⁵ it is the perfect guide for our lives,⁶ nourishes us,⁷ and is the lamp that guides us in the darkness.⁸

This Word is a person, Jesus (John 1). The Word is God's speech, for example, when God decrees, “Let there be light” (Gen 1:3).

The Word is a personal address to a group of people or to an individual, as seen when God comes down and speaks to Israel gathered at Mount Sinai in Exodus 20. Another

² Ibid, 20-21.

³ Psalm 119:140

⁴ Psalm 19:7

⁵ Psalm 119:160

⁶ Proverbs 6:23

⁷ Jeremiah 15:16

⁸ Psalm 119:150

example is seen when God speaks from heaven at the baptism of Jesus and says, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased” (Matthew 3:17).

The Word is speech through a human vehicle. Deuteronomy 18:18 says, “I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and *I will put My words in his mouth*, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.”

The Word is in written form to preserve it accurately: anyone can refer back to it and inspect it, study it, recite it, use it, and apply it. The written word also makes the Bible accessible to anyone who wishes to read it. In Exodus 31:18, God wrote the Ten Commandments on stone tablets Himself before giving the tablets to Moses: “When He had finished speaking with him upon Mount Sinai, He gave Moses the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, *written by the finger of God*.” In other instances, people inscribed what God told them. Moses wrote down additional laws God gave him.⁹ Other examples of people writing down and inscribing what God had told them include Joshua,¹⁰ Isaiah,¹¹ and Jeremiah.¹² The Holy Spirit brought remembrance of Christ’s words to the disciples so they could faithfully remember and record what Jesus told them.¹³ In his letter to the church at Corinth, the apostle Paul wrote, “the things which I write to you are the Lord’s commandment” (I Corinthians 14:37).

The word Bible derives from the Greek work *biblia*, or book. Essentially, God wrote it by revealing it to human authors (about 40) who faithfully recorded what the Holy Spirit inspired them to write. The words are God’s but the vehicle used to transcribe those words is a select group of humans. This process of divine revelation for Biblical transcription is called *verbal plenary inspiration*.¹⁴ (Note that this term, like “Trinity” is a human construction intended to describe a Biblical phenomenon. The word does *not* appear in the Bible). II Peter 1:20-21 says, “But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.” In addition, because God is truth,¹⁵ He inspired the authors to write what is wholly true.¹⁶

The Bible is more than a mere book because the Holy Scriptures pre-existed their physical and tangible forms. In essence, the Word of God is an eternal and timeless phenomenon without equal in the realm of human existence. At the start of John’s gospel, the text reads, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through

⁹ Deuteronomy 31:9-13, 24-26

¹⁰ Joshua 24:26

¹¹ Isaiah 30:8

¹² Jeremiah 30:2, 36:2-4

¹³ John 14:26

¹⁴ II Timothy 3:16-17, Exodus 20:1-17, I Kings 12:22-24, I Chronicles 17:3-4, Jeremiah 35:13, Ezekiel 2:4-7, Zechariah 7:9-10, II Corinthians 5:20, II Peter 1:20-21

¹⁵ Psalm 116:160, John 17:17, Ephesians 1:13-14, Titus 1:2, James 1:18, Hebrews 6:18

¹⁶ I Corinthians 2:12-13, II Timothy 3:16-17, I Peter 1:10-12

Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.” Further on, in 1:14, it reads, “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.” “The Word became flesh” refers to Christ. Therefore, in the same way God is timeless and eternal, so is His Word; and if His Word transcends our existence, we ought to pay full attention and listen to what God wants us to hear.

Hebrews 4:12 speaks of the Word as “living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit.” Certainly, when God repeats or reiterates a message, we have to pay special attention.

The Bible has 66 books (39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament). The Old Testament (OT) takes us from creation to a time before the coming of Christ, and the New Testament (NT) begins with the birth (0 AD), life, death, and resurrection of Christ. In fact, the first four chapters of the NT are four different perspectives of Jesus, including details about the things He did and the things He said. The NT continues by giving Christians and Christian churches instructions on how to think, live, and act appropriately.

The OT makes up the overwhelming majority (more than 75 percent) of the entire Bible. In fact, the OT has 929 chapters and 23,214 verses. The NT has 260 chapters and 7,959 verses. Keep in mind that the chapters and verses in the Bible are human constructs added in the second millennium simply for organizational purposes. The original writings of the OT were written on papyrus, an old form of paper that often consisted of long scrolls. The original writings of the NT were written on parchment, or specially prepared animal skins. The OT spans a history of thousands of years and the NT spans a history of less than 100 years. The OT is written in Hebrew (some small parts are written in Aramaic) and the NT is written in Greek.

One way to think about the OT is that it describes how God initiated and developed a relationship with humanity. It began with individuals, and then grew into a much larger family and later an entire nation of people. The OT describes a God who establishes a series of covenants with a people who, despite all His warnings, fail to follow directions, which results in adverse consequences. Hence, because the people failed to follow commands and were incapable of obedience, a ‘new way’ had to exist. That ‘new way’ is described in the NT, with Jesus.

The Old Testament is revealed in the New Testament, and the NT is concealed in the Old. To understand truly the NT, one must first read the OT, as the NT is essentially a fulfillment of what was said before.

What Christians should know is that the Bible, above everything else, serves as a *theological statement* with a primary aim of revealing exactly Who God is, what He has done, and how we, as God’s servants, are to engage in a relationship with Him.

Thus, while the Bible (or the Scriptures) does proceed through historical events with different people and places, its goal is always to give us *theological* meaning through the context of human history. If you need an exact play-by-play of how the universe went from this to that, you would *not* find it in the Bible, *nor does it claim to provide that information*. If you need to know how the power of Christ’s atoning sacrifice frees you from the grip of sin, you’re in the right place. The Bible contains authoritative truth, but non-contradictory truth can be found elsewhere.

Two Latin slogans summarize this idea. *Sola Scriptura* (“by Scripture alone”) means the Scriptures alone are the highest form of authority. The phrase *prima Scriptura* means there are sources secondary to the Scriptures that allow us to know and understand God better, or guides we can follow, but these guides ultimately are judged and tested by the Scriptures. An example of such guides would be revelation through creation¹⁷ or our consciences.¹⁸ Therefore, the Bible is *the ultimate* source of truth by which all other sources are judged, *but not the only* source of truth. This is why I don’t open a Bible if I need to figure out what antibiotic to use to treat a complicated skin infection.

For this reason, when we judge the Bible, we first have to ask ourselves what the book claims to present. Hence, the Bible seemingly lacking a piece of data does not tarnish its reputation. If I need help with my taxes, I don’t open a book on home improvement, nor does this query negate the authority of the latter. If you consult the Bible with a tax question, you won’t find a direct answer, but it will say that God gives humanity intellect and wisdom,¹⁹ and those attributes, being from God and therefore good, can be used to seek and discover other forms of truth.

II. How can I trust the Bible?

The fundamental scripture verse that validates the authority of the Bible comes from II Timothy 3:16-17: “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” In the book of John, Jesus said, “Scripture cannot be broken.”²⁰

All the OT prophets recorded what God directly told them, either by themselves²¹ or through a scribe.²² The frequent and repetitive use of the phrase “Thus says THE LORD”²³ is an example of such revelation. As mentioned previously, the apostle Peter said that in regards to all the OT, “No prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation,

¹⁷ Psalm 19:1

¹⁸ Isaiah 30:19-22, Hebrews 9:14

¹⁹ Daniel 1:17

²⁰ John 10:35

²¹ Joshua 24:26, Isaiah 30:8, Ezekiel 43:11, Daniel 7:1-2

²² Exodus 17:14, 34:28

²³ Jeremiah 22:1

for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”²⁴

The Bible, or the Word of God, is tested and tried,²⁵ and something that is timeless,²⁶ meaning it is as applicable then as it is now and as it will be in future. The Word can be trusted because it is more than a book; it’s a viable, living organism whose trustworthiness is evidenced by the fact that it changes the person who reads it.²⁷ Because the Bible is complete and everlasting, it specifically says that Jesus is the final word of God revealed to humanity,²⁸ no other books are to be written after the Bible’s final book, Revelation,²⁹ and we will all experience Scriptural silence until the second coming of Christ.³⁰ Finally, nothing is to be added to the Bible.³¹

In practical terms, this means the Bible is complete, and anyone proclaiming to have something new to add to the Scriptures after the Scriptures were finished is a heretic who contradicts the Bible itself. If ‘god’ allegedly revealed himself to someone and directed them toward new ‘scripture,’ or if a divine messenger revealed new scripture for recital, then both instances are blatant fabrications contradictory to the Word of God.

Here is a very valid question: if human beings “wrote” the Bible, then why should I believe it’s the inspired Word of God and not some fabricated human concoction?

There are four ways to answer this question.

(1) The first is to believe the repeated declarations of the Scriptures themselves to be the infallible Word of God, as already mentioned. The *authority* of Scripture pertains to the fact that all of the words in the Bible are God’s words, so to obey those words means you obey God; to disobey those words means you disobey God. Because the Bible is *the* ultimate authority, it claims its supreme authority by its own words because no other authority can exceed it. Moreover, the Bible is *self-attesting* because if it needed to appeal to a higher authority for validation, it could not be *the* ultimate authority.

(This debunks the fallacy that Biblical authority is a circular argument: we believe the Bible *is* the Word of God *because it claims to be* the Word of God, and those words come from God Himself. Of course I believe it’s true, because it’s God Who said it! In the same way, circular arguments are used all the time in the world but are perfectly legitimate. For example, how do you know you are reading these words? Because you’re

²⁴ II Peter 1:20-21

²⁵ Psalm 18:30, Proverbs 30:5

²⁶ Isaiah 40:8

²⁷ Hebrews 4:12

²⁸ Hebrews 1:1-2

²⁹ Revelation 22:18-19

³⁰ Revelation 22:20-21

³¹ Deuteronomy 4:2, 12:32; Proverbs 30:5-6

using your eyes, of course! However, do you not use your eyes to validate what your eyes see? So how do you know it's there if only *your* eyes see it?)

Thus, when God spoke through a prophet,³² the human being was being used as a mouthpiece for THE LORD Himself. The Bible's authority is also evidenced in the fact that the Bible has the power to change people for the better, and the Holy Spirit moves people when reading its words.³³ Since God cannot lie,³⁴ all of Scripture is refined, tested, true,³⁵ and is not only truthful but truth itself.³⁶ It is impossible for God to lie.³⁷ Hence, the Bible is *inerrant*, which means it is incapable of being wrong. The denial of inerrancy stems from one of the most dangerous phenomena in our modern world—the rejection of an ultimate, absolute truth in favor of a truth judged to be real only by personal experience.

Furthermore, the Bible has *clarity*, which means that anyone who earnestly seeks to know and understand God's teachings will be able to follow the Scriptures. In fact, even children can understand the Bible,³⁸ and it imparts understanding to the simple.³⁹ Yet, this does not dismiss the fact that some passages of the book are indeed difficult to understand.⁴⁰ The reader should be aware, however, that since the Bible is the incarnate Word of God, it requires an open heart and mind to receive the gifts of the book; of course, someone with a closed heart will never be able to fully embrace the Word.⁴¹ The Bible is also *necessary* because without it, we would not know about God, Jesus, faith, salvation, grace, sin, the prophets, the covenants, the gospel, or all the other wonderful things contained within it.

This is why in Romans 10:13-17, Paul says, "For 'WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.' How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, 'HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!' However, they did not all heed the good news; for Isaiah says, 'LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT?' So faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing *by the word of Christ*" (italics mine). Thus, it is *necessary* to read the Bible to obtain knowledge of the gospel, maintain a spiritual life, and obtain knowledge of God's will to live a life that is more Christ-like. The Bible is also *sufficient* meaning in that it contains everything God wanted us to know. In other words, we don't need anything else besides the Bible to be saved, trust in

³² Num. 22:38; Deut. 18:18-20; Ezek. 13:1-16; I Kings 14:18; Zech. 7:7

³³ I Corinthians 2:13-14

³⁴ Titus 1:2

³⁵ Psalm 12:6

³⁶ John 17:17

³⁷ Hebrews 6:18

³⁸ Deuteronomy 6:6-7

³⁹ Psalm 119:130

⁴⁰ II Peter 3:15-16

⁴¹ I Corinthians 2:14, Hebrews 5:14

Him, and live a life of obedience.⁴² This doesn't mean God can't add to His words; it means *we* can't. In the time after Moses's death, for example, all Israel had was five books (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). That was sufficient for them *at that time*, and God added to it over time, stopping by the end of the first century. The sufficiency of the Bible is a very important concept for our modern time because it means that *any* problem or question we have has an answer in the Bible. The answer may not be specific to your question, but the timeless Biblical principles satisfy all queries.

(2) The second answer attempts to determine what possible malicious and unifying reason any Biblical writer would have to fabricate a story *to his own detriment*. Moses, for example, who wrote the Bible's first five books, could have stayed in Egypt and lived the high life as a member of privileged society. However, he believed in a tradition that led him out of Egypt into a less-than-privileged life, to lead hundreds of thousands of grumblers and complainers in the desert for 40 years, to die before he arrived where he wanted to go. If all the apostles of the New Testament were fabricating a grand scheme, why did they deceive and what did they gain? All the apostles lived lives of ridicule and were killed mercilessly and prematurely. Peter, for example, was crucified upside down. To top it all off, the apostles died for the truth—all they had to do was recant, but they didn't. All Jesus had to do was say, "I am *not* God" and He would have been left alone, but He never recanted.

(3) In contrast to any other religious authority, the Bible describes people from many different times and in different geographic areas making and fulfilling prophecies all pointing in the same unified direction. It would be easy, for example, for me to state that I went up a mountain, into a cave, or to a field and received 'divine revelation' when I am the only barometer for my experience. But if multiple people unconnected to one another received the same revelation that not only reinforced what others heard but also accurately predicted what would happen hundreds of years in the future and the cost of declaring that word was death, separation from society, ridicule, and anguish, you have to begin paying attention.

There is an internal consistency in that the books of the Bible refer to themselves and other books as authoritative.⁴³ Jesus repeatedly referred to the OT Scriptures as authoritative and quoted many of them;⁴⁴ and the Bible repeatedly describes the fulfillment of prophecies often made hundreds of years earlier. For example, David prophesized that Jesus would be crucified hundreds of years before crucifixion existed.⁴⁵ More than 500 years before Jesus was born, both David and Isaiah prophesized that Jesus would resurrect from the dead.⁴⁶ In addition, hundreds of years before the events came to

⁴² II Timothy 3:15-16

⁴³ Joshua 1:8, Daniel 9:2, Ezekiel 14:14, 1 Corinthians 14:37, I Thessalonians 2:13, II Peter 3:15-16, Revelation 1:3

⁴⁴ Matthew 23:25; Luke 11:51, 24:44

⁴⁵ Psalm 22:16, Luke 23:33

⁴⁶ Psalm 16:10, Isaiah 53:10-12, Acts 2:25-32.

fulfillment, Zechariah stated that Jesus would be betrayed for thirty pieces of silver,⁴⁷ Isaiah said Jesus's mother would be a virgin,⁴⁸ Micah said Jesus would be born in Bethlehem,⁴⁹ Hosea said Jesus's family would flee to Egypt,⁵⁰ and Malachi predicted that Jesus would enter the temple in Jerusalem.⁵¹

(4) The fourth approach is a historic and academic one. In short, all of the methods used to determine the historicity of any ancient text reveal that the authenticity of the Bible exceeds that of many other ancient manuscripts. Therefore, if you reject that the Bible is a legitimate historical document, you have to reject the entire canon of literature from the ancient world. For the specifics, I will direct you to a wonderful book by Kenneth Boa and Larry Moody titled *I'm Glad You Asked*.

Also, numerous non-Biblical sources locate Jesus (and especially the historical event of the resurrection) and Christians in history. Examples include the writings of Seutonius, Pliny the Younger, and the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, as well as accounts of early Christian martyrs who suffered and died at the hands of historical governments because of the reality of Christ and his resurrection. Several examples can be found in part one of *Readings in World Christian History: Volume I* and include, for example, The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicity, The Martyrs of Lyons, and Ignatius's *Letters to the Magnesians*.

Will science ever disprove the Bible? In short, no because God is omniscient and knows all facts then, now, and in the eternal future.

Trusting the Bible means trusting it in a physical, literal, and spiritual sense. This is why Jesus asked Nicodemus in John 3:12, "If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?" One cannot separate the facts of the Bible from its theology, morals, and teachings. For example, Adam cannot be 'just a myth' because then the doctrine of the inheritance of sin and the downfall of all of humankind is wrong.⁵² If Jesus wasn't born of a virgin, then his birth would be no different from that of the rest of humanity; he would be predestined to sin and, therefore, unable to atone for humankind through His death. Christ literally hung on a cross, and his blood literally was shed, and His body literally died and rose again three days later. Without the shedding of blood, there could not be any remission of sin.⁵³

⁴⁷ Zechariah 11:12-13, Matthew 26:14-15

⁴⁸ Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:18-23

⁴⁹ Micah 5:2, Luke 2:1-7

⁵⁰ Hosea 11:1, Matthew 2:13-15

⁵¹ Malachi 3:1, Luke 2:25-27

⁵² Romans 5:12

⁵³ Hebrews 9:22

III. How did the Bible assume its current form?

Wayne Grudem says it best: “[T]he ultimate criterion of canonicity is divine authorship, not human or ecclesiastical approval.”⁵⁴

The Biblical canon is the list of all the books that belong in the Bible. The process by which books were chosen is called *canonization*. *Canon* means ‘measuring rod.’

The OT was written roughly between 1200 BC and the first few hundred years before the birth of Christ, predominantly in Hebrew (some parts were in Aramaic).⁵⁵ Although *written* in this time, the composition of the OT spanned thousands of years, and a tremendous oral tradition existed in ancient Jewish society prior to the written texts taking form. In fact, the Bible as we know it today began when God gave His first written laws—the Ten Commandments—as stone tablets directly to Moses to give to the people of Israel (Exodus 31:18). These tablets were regarded as special and authoritative, placed in a very special container (the Ark of the Covenant),⁵⁶ and without question were esteemed as the direct work and writing of God.⁵⁷ From there, Moses wrote the Bible’s first five books,⁵⁸ and later other individuals, such as Joshua, Samuel, David, Solomon, and Isaiah, wrote the other books over time. The OT is the Bible Jesus used because the NT did not exist yet.

The OT books were not chosen randomly but fulfill specific criteria: (1) A prophet of THE LORD wrote them.⁵⁹ (2) What those prophets said was consistent with what other prophets said.⁶⁰ (3) An act of God confirmed the authority of the prophet.⁶¹ (4) What the prophets said carried the authority to influence lives.⁶² (5) The community accepted the prophetic utterings as true.⁶³

After about 435 BC, there were no further additions to the OT canon. However, within the Apocrypha are books composed after 435 BC. The Jewish community never accepted these books as scripture, and they are not included in the Hebrew Bible (our OT with some organizational differences). They contain some speculation about the end of days, historical accounts, short stories, and advice on how to live life day-to-day. Once Jesus arrived on the scene and raised up disciples, He and the other authors of the New

⁵⁴ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 68.

⁵⁵ Norman K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Brief Socio-Literary Introduction* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009) 57.

⁵⁶ Deuteronomy 10:5

⁵⁷ Exodus 32:16

⁵⁸ Exodus 17:14, 24:4, 34:27; Numbers 33:2; Deuteronomy 31:22

⁵⁹ Deuteronomy 18:18-22

⁶⁰ Deuteronomy 13:1-5

⁶¹ Hebrews 2:3-4

⁶² Hebrews 4:12

⁶³ Daniel 9:2

Testament cited the authoritative OT Scriptures more than 295 times,⁶⁴ *excluding* the Apocrypha and thus formalizing the exclusive validity of the OT. The Roman Catholic Church *does* include the Apocrypha in its Biblical canon even though the Apocrypha does not claim authority as the rest of the Scriptures do and despite that they proclaim as truth claims that are *inconsistent* with the rest of the Bible.

Historically speaking, Israel did not begin as a people that based its culture or religion on books until the end of the Biblical period. In addition, because Israel was a small yet distinct socio-historical entity, the writers of the Bible's books never had any awareness they were writing an authoritative 'Bible' that would lay the groundwork for a religion. Instead, the OT writers were particularly concerned with communal need and Israelite crises.⁶⁵ Therefore, there really has never been any significant debate about what belonged in the Hebrew Bible, or the OT.

The NT is a different story. After Christ resurrected and ascended, Christianity was becoming a 'big deal' in ancient Roman society—after all, this guy called Jesus rose from the dead after being crucified by the powerful Romans and told everyone they could live with Him in heaven. Many apostles were eyewitnesses to Christ and His life, but the potential for fraud, abuse, and self-gain in writing an NT 'book' became apparent. Hence, the canon of the NT was chosen based on several criteria: (1) The authors of books based their writings on eyewitness testimony of the events in Christ's life.⁶⁶ (2) Christ's followers accepted them as legitimate, and they revealed how the power of God can change people's lives for the better.⁶⁷ (3) What they said agreed with the rest of the Scriptures.⁶⁸

There are exceptions to these rules. Luke, for example, wrote his two books (Luke and Acts) after receiving information from Paul,⁶⁹ and after both collecting information from a multitude of eyewitnesses and "having investigated everything carefully."⁷⁰ Luke also accompanied Paul on several of his missionary journeys, as evidenced by several "we" passages in the book of Acts.⁷¹ Mark also wrote an NT book, and he received his information from Peter, who was an eyewitness.⁷² Jude was not a direct eyewitness, but was closely associated with James, the brother of Jesus.

⁶⁴ Roger Nicole, "New Testament Use of the Old Testament," in *Revelation and the Bible*, ed. Carl F. H. Henry (London: Tyndale Press, 1959), 137-41.

⁶⁵ Norman K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Brief Socio-Literary Introduction* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009) 57.

⁶⁶ John 19:35, II Peter 1:16

⁶⁷ Colossians 4:16, I Timothy 5:18, I Peter 3:16

⁶⁸ II Corinthians 11:1-6, Galatians 1:8

⁶⁹ II Timothy 4:11

⁷⁰ Luke 1:1-4

⁷¹ 16:10-17, 20:5-15, 21:1-18, 27:1-28

⁷² I Peter 5:13

The Pseudepigrapha contains books written after Christ's death by authors who either wrote 'gospels' that were false or who pretended to be eyewitnesses when they weren't.

Readers should note that there are references in the Bible to other sources of information, such as the reference to the Book of Jashar in Numbers 21:14. This simply means other written works offer some helpful pieces of information, but they are not part of the Biblical canon. Similarly, I may refer you to a nutrition book to acquire information on sodium intake, but that resource is not the standard of ultimate truth.

If you're wondering after all of that *how* we can trust that we've gotten it right and have reached a consensus on the right book, ultimately faith must rely on God Whom has brought all things together for good to bring His true word to light. God, being a God of love, intends the best for His people, and His words are our life. This is why Deuteronomy 32:47 says, "For it is not an idle word for you; indeed it is your life. And by this word you will prolong your days in the land ..." The Holy Spirit also convinces us in that the present Biblical canon finds validation in historical considerations and through the unified power the Word has on us when we read the Bible.

IV. Isn't the Bible self-contradictory?

The great theologian Augustine once said, "If we are perplexed by any apparent contradiction in Scripture, it is not allowable to say, The author of this book is mistaken; but either the manuscript is faulty, or the translation wrong, or you have not understood."⁷³

This is a very important question. The short answer is 'no' because, as mentioned before, God is truthful, He is unable to lie, and He never contradicts Himself since all of His words are refined and tested.⁷⁴ God never says anything hastily without thought nor is He divergent from His reliable character.⁷⁵ In addition, because God is omniscient, His thoughts are much higher than ours are,⁷⁶ and there are many secret things that God knows that we do not.⁷⁷ The apostle Peter tells us that some parts of the Bible are indeed "hard to understand."⁷⁸ Finally, the truth is often difficult to digest, and we either reject that truth outright as non-truth⁷⁹ or recognize the truth as such but suppress it.⁸⁰ Our human perception is limited further by our inability to see the infinite, which Paul

⁷³ Augustine, "Reply to Faustus the Manichaeon" in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Anti-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956).

⁷⁴ II Samuel 7:28, Hebrews 6:18

⁷⁵ Psalm 12:6, Proverbs 30:5-6

⁷⁶ Isaiah 55:9

⁷⁷ Deuteronomy 29:29

⁷⁸ II Peter 3:15-16

⁷⁹ Romans 1:18-19

⁸⁰ Romans 1:18-19

describes as looking into a dim mirror.⁸¹ The Bible is a book written on many different levels, and one often finds that the deeper you go, ideas and concepts that originally were in opposition become revealed for what they truly are, eliminating the apparent contradiction. I don't want to casually breeze over this question, so I will expand much more on this in the next section.

Many people assume the Bible is farfetched from the start until something proves it right. The general problem with this approach is that it makes life unlivable. In a Biblical sense, many shun what is superficially implausible, say, "That can't happen," and use that as 'proof' that the Bible is false. The problem with this approach is that all other fields reject it. When I see a patient who has a problem but I can't figure out what the diagnosis is, that doesn't mean the person's faking it (most of the time) or that his problem doesn't exist. It simply means I haven't asked enough of the right questions or dug deep enough to find an answer. If scientists gave up every time they encountered something they didn't 'get,' we would all be stuck in the Stone Age. A Bible student, then, follows the same blueprint as an astute scientist—that the unknown is not a contradiction or utterly unexplainable but a worthwhile endeavor that rewards those who faithfully seek, study, learn, analyze, and research.

V. How do I interpret the Bible?

A seminary professor of mine said that hermeneutics (Biblical interpretation) is about life, and your life invariably affects the way you interpret the Bible. No matter who you are your life experiences consciously and subconsciously affect what a verse means to you. Second, there is a distinct difference between *exegesis* and *eisegesis*. The former involves extracting meaning *from* the text; the latter involves putting your own meaning *into* the text. Whenever interpreting the Bible, always exegete and never, ever eisegete—otherwise, *you* are telling God what *you* think of *His* words. There is always a human temptation to reject what we read because we don't like what God has to say, which equates to a suppression of the truth.⁸² The true meaning of the Bible never changes, but our perception of that meaning does.

The way to approach Biblical interpretation is to realize that it is the inspired Word of God and thus needs to be read literally, but in this literal interpretation, there can be *figurative*, *descriptive*, and *prescriptive* passages. The whole must always interpret the part, so one verse or a part of one verse should never be interpreted out of the context in which it was said. As the saying goes, "A text out of context is pretext." In other words, when reading anything, always ask yourself what was said before it, what was said after it, and what is the meaning of the text *in the context of the entire Bible*.

Context determines meaning.

⁸¹ I Corinthians 13:9

⁸² Romans 1:18

For example, in Matthew 18:9 Christ says, “If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it from you. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than to have two eyes and be cast into the fiery hell.” Reading this passage literally yields some frightening conclusions, but in the context of Matthew 18, we see that Jesus is talking about several obstacles one ought to remove in walking a path of obedience. Hence, this is a figurative expression among other figurative expressions. Moreover, we can confirm this is figurative because Levitical law prohibits self-mutilation,⁸³ and Christ said Himself in Matthew 5:17 that He did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it.

I’ve always liked how Mark Driscoll explains principles versus methods. He says, “Be careful not to confuse principles and methods. The principles of Scripture are timeless whereas the methods for obeying them are timely. The Bible allows both a closed hand of timeless truth and an open hand of timely methods. However, great error ensues when the two are confused. For example, Colossians 2:16 commands God’s people to ‘[sing] psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.’ This is the timeless Biblical principle. To be obedient we must then develop cultural methods by deciding when the church gathers, who leads the singing, what songs are chosen, how many times each song is sung, what instruments (if any) are used, etc.”⁸⁴

Latter revelations also supplant prior revelations. This view of progressive revelation applies because God did not reveal everything He had to say at once, and people’s conditions change over time. For example, the Book of Leviticus is filled with prescriptions on what people should do if they sin, and this typically involves a form of animal sacrifice. However, Christ died and paid the ultimate atoning price for all sin for everyone,⁸⁵ so these animal sacrifices are no longer needed. Hence, Christ’s atonement supersedes the prior revelation.

It is also imperative to understand that although the Bible is the Word of God, He worked through human authors to produce the text, and as a result, each author produced unique flavors of the Bible. This includes authors quoting other humans (for example, poets⁸⁶), and using sad and mournful language (Lamentations). In many books, the author’s personality seeps through. Luke, for example, who wrote the third gospel and Acts, was a physician, so he uses very technical Greek and is detail oriented. As a healer, he also writes from the perspective of curing those with (spiritual) ailments. The book of Isaiah is prophetic but is also very poetic.

It is everyone’s responsibility to be disciplined,⁸⁷ to read and study the Word,⁸⁸ allow the Word *to guide him or her*,⁸⁹ memorize the Word,⁹⁰ obey the Word,⁹¹ and seek, teach, and share the Word with others.⁹²

⁸³ Leviticus 19:28

⁸⁴ Mark Driscoll, *On the New Testament* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 42.

⁸⁵ Hebrews 10:11-14

⁸⁶ Acts 17:28

⁸⁷ I Timothy 4:7

⁸⁸ Luke 2:46-52

VI. What's with so many Bible versions?

The best way to read either testament is in the original language, meaning Hebrew for the OT and Greek for the NT. However, this goal may be undesirable for many Bible students, so there are many English versions for you to choose from to assist you.

Literal translations seek to be as faithful to the original language as possible and translate word-for-word without any deviation. In seeking technical accuracy, some poetic or linguistic nuances are lost. These versions include the King James Version (KJV) and the New King James Version (NKJV), the New American Standard Bible (NASB), and the English Standard Version (ESV).

Functional equivalence translations take a broader approach, attempt to convey the main idea of a passage, and are not as particular about single words. Here, words may be added or deleted to express an idea or theme the original language conveys. The most popular version of this type is the New International Version (NIV) and the New Living Translation (NLT).

The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) tries to be as literal as possible but also may be free some of the time to make an idea as accurate in English as it was in the original language. The NRSV also incorporates language that is more gender-neutral and uses peripheral information to expand on how it translates the text.

Paraphrased versions emphasize the broad theme of a narrative; as a result, specific words become less important in pursuit of the poetic essence of a passage. Examples include The Living Bible (TLB) and The Message (TM).

A concordance is a book that allows you to look up an English word and find the appropriate Greek or Hebrew word and its definition. A concordance is an invaluable tool for any student of the Bible because it allows you to obtain the true meaning of the text. A concordance won't teach you these languages, but knowing what particular words mean will help you to dig deeper into the text. The gold standard in concordances is *Strong's Concordance*, but it can become cumbersome flicking back and forth through hundreds of pages to find a word. Electronic versions of Strong's make life much easier. The Olive Tree Bible App, for example, offers an ESV with a Strong's add-on for purchase that allows you to click on any word in the ESV to see a pop-up of the associated Hebrew/Greek words with definitions and descriptions. (That's what I use).

⁸⁹ Psalm 119:105.

⁹⁰ Proverbs 22:17-19

⁹¹ Hebrews 4:15

⁹² Luke 19:10, John 4.

VII. An Overview of the Books of the Bible

Old Testament

The OT starts with the words “In the beginning” and ends with the prophet Malachi about 400 years before the birth of Jesus. The OT details the start, development, and continuance of a relationship between God and His people. It moves through history, people, places, and events, but its main concern is how all these things relate to the divine purposes of God.

The main character of the OT is God, and all of the OT points toward Christ. For example, Moses was a mediator who liberated Israel from bondage, as Christ is the mediator between humanity and the Father. Jesus liberated us from sin and death. Isaac carried his own wood in preparation to be sacrificed by his father Abraham as Christ carried His own wooden cross and laid down his life for all of us. The blood of an innocent Passover lamb in Egypt spared the lives of Israel from God’s judgment just as Christ’s sinless and atoning blood produced the perfect sacrifice to save us all from condemnation. Jonah spent three days ‘down below’ in the belly of a great fish to eventually ‘come up’ and save the city of Nineveh. Jesus rose from the dead three days later to save the whole world.

The *Pentateuch* (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) is the Bible’s first five books and is also known as the Torah in Judaism. Pentateuch means “five-volume book” or “one book in five parts.” Moses wrote the Pentateuch.⁹³

Genesis is the Bible’s first book and, thus, the book of beginnings. It explains how our world and universe began, and how humans, sin, and the plan for redemption began. Genesis details many relationships, such as those between God and the world, God and humankind, and humans and one another. Genesis introduces us to the ‘founding fathers’ of Christianity and highlights God developing a relationship with *individuals and families*, starting with Abraham and ending with Joseph. Here is where you’ll also find the accounts of Adam, Eve, the Garden of Eden, Noah, and the flood. This book sets the tone for the rest of the Bible.

Exodus marks the beginning of a relationship between God and a *nation* (Israel) as its people are liberated from oppression in Egypt through a mediator (Moses). This book lays a theological foundation as God reveals His name (Yahweh), His law, and how He is to be worshipped. The tabernacle, or the mobile sanctuary Israel used in the wilderness, is the single subject to which the Bible devotes the most time. Here, God reveals Who exactly He is so His people can engage in a covenant with Him.

The key theme of **Leviticus** is holiness. By now God has established a covenant with His people, and He gives them rules and guidelines on how to be holy by distinguishing

⁹³ Deuteronomy 31:24-26

themselves from the world. Laws on communal operation, sacrifices, and the priesthood are given. (In fact, there are more than 600 laws in the Pentateuch).

In **Numbers**, Israel moves from Mount Sinai to the border of the Promised Land, but because of murmuring, the Israelites are punished for their sin and forced to wander in the wilderness for 40 years. Disobedience prevented inheritance, but God remained faithful to the covenant He had with His people in spite of their sin.

In **Deuteronomy**, Israel is outside of the Promised Land and Moses passes away before entering. He transfers leadership to Joshua. Here, the law is repeated to the people to garner total commitment to and dependence on God to receive a blessing. At the end of his life, Moses uses this book to teach people how to live properly.

History Books (Joshua through Esther)

Joshua leads the people of Israel into the Promised Land through military conquest. The people cross over the Jordan River and the walls of Jericho fall by God's power.

In **Judges**, Israel is in the Promised Land but there is no central leadership. Generally, the people are apostate and do whatever they see fit. Yet in a time of crisis, God raises up judges who push back foreign oppressors and restore peace to the people.

Ruth, the main character of the eighth book, is a Moabite woman and the great-grandmother of King David. Ruth is selflessly devoted to Naomi, another widow. In a reflection of God's unceasing love, Boaz marries Ruth, and their offspring fall in the line that bears Jesus.

In **I and II Samuel**, we see the rise of kingship in Israel, starting with a man-chosen king who fails (Saul) followed by a God-chosen king who succeeds in some areas. David establishes a theocracy and rules from Jerusalem. In his rise from being an unknown to a national hero, David defeats Goliath.

I and II Kings: After King David dies, his son Solomon rises to power and becomes wealthy and wise beyond comparison. Solomon, however, falls into sin, and after he dies, the united Israel is divided into a northern kingdom (Israel) and a southern kingdom (Judah). The prophets Elijah and Elisha are introduced, and the book ends when the Babylonians lay siege to Jerusalem and the temple. The Israelites are exiled.

I and II Chronicles are an account of recorded history (especially of kings) to show Israel how badly they behaved, to show them God's covenants still exist, and to encourage obedience.

In **Ezra**, the exiles return home and begin to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem.

In **Nehemiah**, the exiles reconstruct Jerusalem's walls.

Esther, the main character in this book, acts as a mediator between the Persian king and the Jewish people to spare their lives and preserve the ancestors that would ultimately produce Jesus.

Wisdom and Poetry (Job to Song of Solomon)

Job tackles the issue of theodicy and exemplifies the great faith of the main character.

Psalms is the Bible's longest book and has over 100 hymns, laments, and songs of praise, remembrance, and thanksgiving.

Proverbs gives practical advice on how to live everyday life and live it wisely.

Ecclesiastes addresses the meaning of life and explains how to enjoy life. The true meaning of joy and work are also discussed.

Song of Solomon contains poetic love songs written by a man to his bride. This is the Bible's raciest book by far.

The Prophets (Isaiah to Malachi)

The NT quotes **Isaiah** about 400 times. Generally, Isaiah examines the dreadful effects of sin and disobedience, and then discusses the ultimate redemption of servants of God. Isaiah repeatedly looks ahead toward Christ.

Jeremiah is the 'weeping prophet.' He recurrently speaks about the punishing effects of sin, prophesizes against other nations, and details a new covenant with God's people in light of their failure to keep the law.

Lamentations is a melancholy book that examines sin and grieves about its destructive power.

Ezekiel is a prophet who spoke to the people from Babylon while in exile. He identifies sin as the cause of Babylonian captivity. He anticipates the return of the people to Judah and their restoration.

Daniel, who also prophesizes in Babylon, is a dreamer who is thrown into the lion's den and survives the fiery furnace with his friends. He sees visions that allude to Christ in the future.

Hosea marries a prostitute, typifying God's faithfulness to His people who continually violate the covenant they have made with Him.

Joel looks forward to a day when history ends and the penalty for sin is paid. He also speaks of a plague of locusts that afflicts the people because of sin.

Amos attempts to call the people to repentance when their faith and obedience waver during a time of economic prosperity.

Obadiah condemns Edom for waging war against the people of God.

Jonah is called to preach to the evil city of Nineveh. The prophet tries to flee from God but becomes shipwrecked before being swallowed by a great fish and spending three days in its belly. Subsequently, the Ninevites see the error of their ways and are saved.

Micah speaks out against the people in a time of great inequality, when the ‘haves’ make their fortunes at the expense of the ‘have-nots.’

Nahum proclaims judgment against Nineveh for harming God’s people.

Habakkuk has faith but the people don’t, and he speaks to God looking for clarity throughout this book.

Zephaniah confirms that the ultimate penalty for sin is death, yet God remains faithful to the promise to redeem those who believe in Him.

In **Haggai**, orders to rebuild the temple are given in preparation for Jesus’s arrival.

Zechariah looks forward to Christ, attempts to call the apostate to repentance, and has visions meant to encourage the rebuilding of the temple.

Malachi is the last book of the OT and states that John the Baptist will come to pave the way for Christ.

New Testament

The NT is about everything that happened just before Christ was born, the life of Jesus, the experiences of his disciples, and the events in the early Church. The main theme of the NT is the gospel or the good news that Christ has arrived and opened the door for everyone who believes in Him to be saved and have eternal life. Again, the main character of the NT is God.

The Synoptic (or “seeing together”) Gospels are four accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus. Each gospel is characterized by the unique vantage point of the observer.

Matthew was a disciple, Jew, and tax collector. He writes to convince fellow Jews that Jesus is the Messiah. Hence, Matthew frequently relies on OT quotations.

Mark was not a disciple but a companion to the disciple Peter. His gospel is the shortest and speaks primarily to a Roman audience. He focuses on Jesus’s actions and miracles.

Luke, a gentile, was not a disciple and heavily researched his book from eyewitness accounts. He was a doctor and, therefore, was very precise and detail oriented. He wrote to a gentile audience.

John was a disciple and a Jew. His gospel addresses the Greek-speaking world and goes into great detail about the person of Jesus. While the other three gospels are roughly similar, John stands apart as unique and personal.

Luke also wrote **Acts**. This book details the happenings of the early church, the spread of the gospel after Christ's ascension, Pentecost, and the conversion of Paul. Here, the Holy Spirit does many wonderful and marvelous things in the lives of believers.

The **Epistles** (or letters) were written to an individual or a church in a particular city. Each epistle was written with a purpose, and that purpose included to instruct others, correct incorrect doctrine, warn someone, or as a means of praise. Paul wrote most of the NT letters.

Romans is an extremely intellectual and theological letter written to those in Rome. Its aim is to explain the basic gospel and salvation, righteousness, and justification by faith. Essentially, Paul wrote to a church that hadn't received the gospel to describe what exactly the gospel is.

I and II Corinthians are two letters to the church in Corinth that was behaving badly and engaging in immoral behavior. Paul explains what appropriate Christian conduct should be, clarifies any confusion they had about their immoral behavior, and describes what proper interpersonal relationships should look like in the church.

Galatians can be summarized as *by faith alone through grace alone*. Here Paul corrects the fallacy that what we do actually saves us. Galatians says we are justified only by faith in Jesus, through the power of grace. The fruits of the Spirit are detailed here.

Ephesians is not a response to anything, but attempts to give readers a better understanding of the timeless purposes of God. With this understanding and the high standard God has for the church, Paul describes how to fulfill that calling and be the best servant of Christ you can be.

Philippians was written to the church in Philippi to thank it for the monetary gift it sent to Paul. He encourages the church members to stand tall in times of crisis, promotes unity, and warns against those in their midst who wish to spread false doctrine.

Colossians refutes the heresies in the church at Colossae. Many secular ideologies mingled with Christianity, and Paul draws the line between what's true doctrine and what is false doctrine.

I and II Thessalonians was written to the young church in Thessalonica. Paul encourages new converts, inspires those facing persecution, and gives advice on how to

live day-to-day. He corrects the false perception that Christ would be coming very, very soon.

I and II Timothy form the first part of the 'Pastoral Epistles.' Paul writes to Timothy who has been left to deal with the confusion that ensues after a church is established and needs some direction and guidance to steer the organization toward health. Church leadership is discussed.

Titus is a letter written by Paul to the man of the same name. He gives Titus guidance on opposition, warns against heresies, and details general instructions on proper conduct.

In **Philemon**, Paul writes a letter to this person on behalf of Onesimus. He encourages both men to demonstrate Christ-centered love for one another and conduct themselves in a manner befitting of Christians.

Hebrews demonstrates how Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of the OT in every single way.

I, II and III John answers the question "How do I know I'm a Christian?" by explaining the life-altering changes being a Christian brings. These three books also debunk heresies.

I and II Peter serve as letters of encouragement and sources of strength for Christians enduring persecution for their faith.

The message of **James** is simple: faith produces works. In other words, when you call yourself a Christian, you will behave in a way that mirrors your new identity.

Jude is a warning against immoral people, false doctrines, and the power of such dangers to taint the pure doctrine.

Revelation is the Bible's final book, written by the apostle John to encourage believers and warn them to stay away from false or perverse forms of worship. Here at the end of the Bible is the goal of worship, just as the end of our Christian walk ends in the ceaseless, ordered, bountiful worship of God.

Questions? Email us at dlefchurch@gmail.com. Be sure to put WCSK in the subject line. We hope to hear from you!

God Bless and join us soon for Part IV: Creation ...

Dr. C. H. E. Sadaphal

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