

Why Bother with the Bible?

How do I know for sure that the Bible is special? There are many excellent religious writings - why is the Bible so great? I don't understand a lot of it - and I don't see why reading about wars and things teaches me about God in my life today.

What the Bible is:

A library of 66 books, written by many authors over a period of several thousand years.

Yet - it also reads like one book with a well planned theme - as if one Author wrote it all. For instance: the story opens in Paradise. There is a close, open relationship between God and people. People spoil it, lose the relationship and get booted out of paradise (Genesis 1-3).

The story then follows a select group as they learn to live in relationship with God and as He provides them with a covenant (contract) to look after them.

Time and again they break the contract, yet God goes on loving and caring (and disciplining!). All this is in preparation for a new Contract, which is established by Jesus:

Having been despised and rejected by people, God comes as a person to make possible a living relationship with Himself.

Yet again He is despised & rejected and now killed. Yet this is the Master Plan! For He conquers death, having paid the penalty for sin.

The story then shows the victory. Christ's Victory brings in the lives of ordinary men and women, and finishes with the restoration of people to Paradise (Revelation 21, 22). The Tree of Life which had been forbidden in Genesis is given in Revelation. And they all lived happily ever after....

How could the individual authors know that a book they were writing was a piece in a jigsaw that

would not be complete for centuries? Each piece tells a story - but only the completed picture makes it possible to fully understand the individual piece.

... The Word of God

The title 'Word of God' is given twice; once to the Scriptures (the Bible) and once to Jesus Christ. The Bible is not Jesus but it is His story. It is a record of what God would say to us His people.

Jesus is the Word God spoke to us - the way He has communicated; the Bible is a written record of that Word.

It was written down to make God's Word known for all time, but it was written at a specific time to a specific people. It is important to remember that, for instance, Paul's instructions about 'women learning in silence' is not a put down on women but a liberation for them; women were not educated and not considered capable of understanding, so they were sat at the back of the synagogue to chat whilst the men listened to the speaker. Now Paul says - No! The women can listen and learn too, just like the men. Knowing the context changes our view of the passage, so it is important to do so!

There are tough bits in the Bible; but if it is God's Word then it is true or God is a liar. And it is a book to be obeyed if it is from God.

Why wouldn't God the Creator and Preserver collect His thoughts in written form for us? It makes sense that He should! We would surely be more surprised if there wasn't such a book. Even Chairman Mao wrote one for his 'loving' followers.

Inspiration

We can look at the Bible in several ways which can basically be fitted into two broad viewpoints:

- ① The Bible is a collection of religious writings which are the product of human thought. Its 'inspiration' (spiritual value) comes from the Holy Spirit prompting us as we read it. He can do this equally with any book.
- ② The Bible is a collection of writings which were inspired when written; that is, the Holy Spirit guided the authors. It is a unique book.

Your reliance on the Bible will depend on which of these most closely matches your own perspective. The Bible itself says:

ALL SCRIPTURE IS INSPIRED BY GOD AND IS USEFUL FOR TEACHING THE TRUTH, REBUKING ERROR, CORRECTING FAULTS AND GIVING INSTRUCTION FOR RIGHT LIVING, SO THAT THE PERSON WHO SERVES GOD MAY BE FULLY EQUIPPED AND QUALIFIED TO DO EVERY KIND OF GOOD DEED [2 Tim 3:16,17]

It is clear from even a casual reading of the New Testament that the Scriptures (Old Testament) were highly valued by Jesus and the Apostles.

When tempted by Satan Jesus used the Word of God to defeat him. Paul described scripture as the 'sword of the Spirit' and described this as 'sharper than any two-edged sword'.

If it has this power we neglect it at our peril!

Throughout history great lives have been built on the teachings of this Book. People have been to great lengths to get a copy; and risked death to hide and keep it. Which other book have people been punished for having and risked death to keep?

They have risked this because they see God's Word as
'a LAMP TO GUIDE ME AND A LIGHT FOR MY PATH'
(Psalm 119:105)

It is a mirror to reflect our own inner selves, and to present Jesus as a pattern to follow.

Reading the Bible tunes us in to hear God. Without Scripture you cannot know what God is saying. With it you can begin to hear His voice. Scripture 'edifies' you and cleans you, by tuning you into whatever is pure, whatever is true, noble, right, lovely and honourable [Philippians 4:8]

Our best wisdom does not begin to compare - many societies have laws and morality based on the Bible. The British Constitution, enshrined in the Coronation service, teaches us the Bible (which is presented to the Monarch) is the 'most valuable thing this world affords. Here [in the Bible] is Wisdom. This [the Bible] is Royal Law. These are the living oracles of God'. Perhaps our society has slipped from a belief of those words at the moment, but have you?

Contradictions and Criticisms

The 20th Century has seen the rise of those who would pooch-pooch the Bible. A popular myth is that it is full of contradictions + inaccuracies. There are none, providing you remember:

- each book was written for a purpose. The message consistent within the Bible about women is that they are human beings equal in God's eyes with men. Yet it also records accurately their treatment in societies. That is not a contradiction! The Bible teaches celibacy, yet tells frank stories about people who were not celibate. The Bible is not shy about sin; but a story about sin is not an approval. Often it also shows the consequence of sin.
- archaeology is constantly discovering more and more of the Bible to be true. Even most of Genesis (s now considered to be historically reliable (chs 12 onwards).

- science today does not agree with science 100, 50 even 30 years ago. Nor can science ever prove how the world began or the Theory of Evolution. Science can only 'prove' what it can repeat in a laboratory. The Bible is concerned with the fact that God made the world. It does not tell us how, because it is too amazing for us to know probably!

The God who appears to the desert wanderer Moses, the learned Pharisee Paul, the Shepherd David, the King Solomon, the Fisherman Peter, the Apostle Exile John is clearly the same God. The Bible is consistent. Made up stories would invent different characteristics for their gods. Instead, we see a real Person consistently the same in centuries of writings.

The founding elders of the Church of England prepared 39 articles of faith and belief which they thought spelt out the Christian doctrine as received from God, through scriptures and the Holy Spirit. Article 6 is of the 'sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures for salvation' and states:

HOLY SCRIPTURE CONTAINETH ALL THINGS NECESSARY FOR SALVATION: SO THAT WHATSOEVER IS NOT READ THEREIN, NOR MAY BE PROVED THEREBY, IS NOT TO BE REQUIRED OF ANY MAN, THAT IT SHOULD BE BELIEVED AS AN ARTICLE OF THE FAITH, OR BE THOUGHT TO BE REQUISITE OR NECESSARY TO SALVATION.

Of the Old Testament, article 7 says:

THE OLD TESTAMENT IS NOT CONTRARY TO THE NEW FOR BOTH IN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS EVERLASTING LIFE IS OFFERED TO MANKIND BY CHRIST, WHO IS THE ONLY MEDIATOR BETWEEN GOD AND MAN BEING BOTH GOD AND MAN. NO CHRISTIAN MAN WHATSOEVER IS FREE FROM THE OBEEDIENCE OF THE COMMANDMENTS WHICH ARE CAUSO MORAL.

Clearly a high value was placed on the Bible by these men.

Perhaps, however, a more up to date character ought to have the last WORD:



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