

Why We Believe The Bible

Introduction

We have had a very positive response to the ministry of Tim & Faith Brennan who were with us a couple of weeks ago. As a result of that we are going to begin a series of sermons that will give an overall explanation of the Bible and the message it communicates. This series will be different from the times in the past when I have given overviews of every book in the Bible in a couple of ways. First, it will be on Sunday mornings instead of either Sunday evening or a weekday evening when only a few attend. It is important that everyone understands the flow of Scripture and not just those who can and will come to additional opportunities for instruction. Second, I will not be covering every book sequentially, but rather I will be presenting a chronological and thematic overview of the message God has revealed to us in the pages of the Scriptures. Our goal will be to understand the broad Biblical themes that explain to us what God has done and why He has done it which then in turn results in us responding to Him properly.

There are several names we use for the written revelation from the God who has created us. The three most common are the *Bible*, the *Scriptures* and the *Word of God*. The term Bible simply means book. The term Scripture means writings, and the phrase “Word of God” refers to a revelation from God. Each of these is also often given the adjective “holy” to distinguish this book, these writing, this revelation from all others. God has given us this revelation so that we know Him, what He has done and how He wants us to live.

Concerning the Bible the Statement of Faith in the Grace Bible Church Constitution states, “*We believe the Holy Scriptures, consisting of the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, to be the verbally and plenary inspired Word of God, His only special revelation to man, the final authority for faith and life, inerrant in the original writings, infallible and God-breathed.*” By *Verbal* and *Plenary* we mean that God so superintended the human authors that using their own individual personalities they composed and recorded without error God’s revelation to man in both the words and the whole message of the original autographs. In other words, we believe that though the personalities of the human writers are present in the Scriptures the particular words used and the whole message presented are exactly what God intended.

This was at one time a common belief across America, but it is no longer. While most Americans still have a high respect for the Scriptures, a large portion hold to ideas other than it is in fact direct revelation from God to man. Because of the increasing attacks on the Bible and widespread belief that it contains error it is important that we begin our series with a sermon on why we believe the Bible is true. Our starting place to explain that is to explain a little bit about epistemology or how we can determine truth. What is the source of our knowledge of reality? This will only be an overview for a comprehensive approach could easily take many, many weeks. I have listed resources for further study in the Sermon notes.

Source of Knowledge

Philosophers describe several competing ideas on how a person can know what is true. Among them are conscience, various forms of empiricism, various forms of rationalism, revelation from a divine being of some sort, and combinations of these. Let me comment briefly about these and our source of knowledge.

Many people live by the adage expressed by Jimminy Cricket to “always let conscience be your guide.” Such people view their own thoughts and feelings as the final judge of reality. This is becoming an increasingly common philosophy in a post-modern world. While the conscience is beneficial that advice has never been good advice. Why? The conscience, like everything else about man, was corrupted in the fall. It is also limited by what knowledge is available to it, and it can be trained to either good or evil. (Hebrews 10:22; Romans 2:15; 1 Timothy 4:2; Hebrews 9:14).

Other people take an empirical approach by defining reality by what they can perceive from their senses. This is a foundation for all forms of materialism including scientism and hedonism. In scientism anything

that cannot be known through the physical senses is disregarded. This is fairly common among atheistic naturalists because they believe that everything has some natural explanation and so they reject anything supernatural. The hedonist makes their decisions in life are based on the pleasure it will bring to their physical senses. The major problem with empiricism is that all our physical senses - touch, taste, smell, hearing and sight - can be deceived. We all know that from personal experience. That is why empirical claims are verified by more than one test and the more varied the tests the better.

Rationalism has generally been the realm of philosophers who believe they can come to a knowledge of reality by logic and thinking. The weakness of this view is threefold. First, just like with the conscience, man's ability to reason has also been affected by the fall into sin. Ephesians 4:17,18 describe the unregenerate as walking *in the futility of their mind, 18 being darkened in their understanding,* while Colosians 1:21 describes them as being *"hostile in mind,"* and 1 Timothy 6:5 speaks of them being *"men of depraved mind."* As much as man wants to boast about his ability to reason, he is actually very limited. Even the Christian who is in a better position because he is given the *"mind of Christ"* in order to understand spiritual things (1 Corinthians 2:16) is still limited because that transformation takes place as their minds are being renewed (Romans 12:2) and that does not take place instantly.

Second, logic is limited by the information available to it. What may seem like a proper conclusion about reality may in fact be the opposite of what is true when all the facts are known. An error in premise will result in an error in conclusion. Third, knowledge about supernatural things is often beyond our systems of logic and even what we can actually conceive. While we can give names to infinite concepts can anyone actually understand the reality of such things as eternal existence, omniscience and omnipresence? Then there is trying to understand the exact nature and relationship of the triune God.

There are various forms of rationalism for it is often mixed with other ideas about reality resulting in many hybrids. In fact, most approaches to knowledge of reality are mixtures of various ideas. In fact, a multivaried approach is the only way we can come to an understanding of those things that can be known to the extent of our limited abilities.

The last approach I want to mention this morning is revelation from a supernatural source. All theistic religions have some claim in this area. The question then is what evidence is there for the claim to be true. Obviously, a claim attributed to a supernatural source cannot be verified if the claim only affects something in a spiritual or supernatural realm. It is impossible for me to verify the claim of a religion about the nature of heaven since I cannot go there to check it out. Truth claims from the supernatural are verified only where they effect something in the natural realm. Those claims can then be examined and conclusions made about the one making the claims. A claim that proves to be false also proves that the one making it is also false.

For the rest of this morning I want to briefly look at the various things that verify the reliability and veracity of the Bible. Let us start with what Scripture claims about itself.

The Word of God

2 Timothy 3:16 describes the fullness & fact of inspiration. *"All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness."*

2 Peter 1:21 describes the men and the method of inspiration. *"For no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God."*

In Exodus 17:14 and Jeremiah 30:2 we find that they were commanded to record the very words of the Lord.

In 1 Peter 1:10-11 and 1 Thess. 2:13 we find that Peter and Paul both understood themselves to be speaking and writing God's word.

Biblical writers, especially in the New Testament, so often quote from other writers as Scripture that it would be tedious to begin to list them, but a few examples: Matthew 1:22,23 quotes from Isaiah the prophet; Acts 4:24-25 quotes David as speaking by the Holy Spirit in Psalm 2 and Hebrews 3:7 quotes Psalm 95 as being from the Holy Spirit.

In 2 Peter 3:15-16 the apostle specifically states that Paul's writings are part of the Scriptures.

We also find that the Bible itself claims to be perfect (Psalm 19:7), right (Psalm 19: 8), pure (Psalm 19:8), unchangeable (Psalm 119:89), eternal (Matthew 24:35) and true (John 17:17; Psalm 19:9).

Those are all very strong claims. What evidence is there that they are true?

The Physical World

Our starting place is the physical world for Creation itself reveals quite a bit about our God and the truthfulness of the Bible. For example Psalm 19:1 tells us that *"the heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hand."* We can examine the heavens and learn something about God. Romans 1:19,20 tell us that God has made Himself evident to all men *"for since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse."*

The various religions make different claims regarding the nature of creation that demonstrate quickly that they are not sources of truth. For example, Hinduism explains earthquakes by saying that the world rests on the backs of four elephants which in turn are standing on a giant turtle. Earthquakes occur when the elephants move. Since man has been able to circle the globe in every direction as well as view the earth from space we can say with absolute confidence that the earth does not sit on the backs of four elephants. The claim is false and so is the source of the claim.

What are some of the things declared in Scripture demonstrated to be true in our physical world?

*The Earth is Round - Isaiah 40:22; Proverbs 8:27

*The number of stars cannot be counted - Jer.33:22; Hebrews 11:12

*Law of Conservation of matter and energy in - 2 Peter 3:7; Genesis 2:1,2; Exodus 20:11; Hebrews 4:3; 1:3

*Hydrologic Cycle - Ecclesiastes 1:7; Job 36:27,28

*Law of increasing entropy - Psalm 102: 25-27; Isaiah 51:6; Genesis 3:17; Romans 8:21,22

*Atmospheric circulation - Eccl. 1:6,7; Job 28:25; 37:9

*Life is in the blood - Leviticus 17:11

*Gravitational field - Job 26:7

*Springs in the oceans - Job 38:16; Gen 7:11; 8:2; Prov. 8:28

*Stars emit sound - Job 38:7; Psalm 19:1-3

*Animals reproduce after their own kind - Genesis 1:21; 6:19

*Earth and moon formed separately - Genesis 1:1, 14-19

What is described in the Bible matches the physical realities of the earth including many things which were not known and even denied by scientists until modern times. That is not true of other religious writings. In two weeks we will get into the Creation account of Genesis 1 and I will show why it is true and Evolution is a fairy tale and not science.

Historical Accuracy

The Bible has been attacked many times over the centuries by those claiming that it is wrong in its recounting of historical events, yet further study always shows that the Bible is accurate and the scholars were the ones who got it wrong. For example, in the early 1900's scholars said the Bible was wrong because it often mentions in both Genesis and Exodus the Hittites, a culture they knew nothing about. Then the ruins of the Hittite capital were found about 90 miles east of Ankara, Turkey.

Liberal scholars scoffed at Luke and the historical accuracy of Acts because they thought he was wrong about the names of certain places and titles of particular officials. They said he used the wrong word for the assembly in the theater at Ephesus and exaggerated the number of people there. Then that theater was excavated and found to hold the number of people Luke said it did and an inscription there used the same

word Luke did for assemblies that took place there. They said that Luke used the wrong word for the city officials at Philippi, but Luke was proven correct by later archaeological findings.

There is a general truth that any culture will describe its own history in the best light possible. Victories are magnified and defeats are minimized. Its good qualities will be broadcast while its bad qualities will be hidden. That is especially true in ancient literature in which kings were all powerful. We gain a greater degree of confidence in the Bible from the fact that it does not do that. Victories and defeats are both presented forthrightly. The defeat at Ai is presented alongside the victory at Jericho. The greatness of King David is presented but so are his failures and great sins. The next time you are reading something in which the writer claims the Bible is not true about an historical event give some careful consideration to which source is most likely to be true. The writer who has his own agenda, was not present and is of limited knowledge? The references made in sources from the pagan cultures which had to please their king? Or the account of the Biblical writer who was present and had to please his God who demanded truth from His people.

Consider as well that Archaeology has proven to be a great friend of the Bible because it continues to prove it to be historically accurate with unquestionable archaeological findings. At the same time, though there are many that make claims based on their own speculation, there is nothing legitimately unquestionable in archaeology that proves the Bible to be untrue about anything.

The Biblical Writers

Another reason to believe the Bible to be reliable are the Biblical writers themselves. These were men of high integrity proven by their positions as religious leaders of their time. Men such as Moses, Samuel, Ezra, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the other prophets, and in the New Testament all the books were written by either an Apostle or someone writing under the authority of an Apostle.

They often wrote about things to which they were either eyewitnesses such as Matthew, John & Peter who accompanied the Lord for three years, or they had access to the eye witnesses of the events that occurred such as Mark and Luke. Much of the writing of the prophets was material they received directly from the Lord and so the phrase, "thus says the Lord" is found 492 times in the Old Testament. Paul and John also received much of what they wrote directly from the Lord (See 2 Corinthians 12:1ff; Galatians 1:11-17; Revelation 1:1ff).

They were not autocratic nor did they demand unquestioned obedience to themselves. They humbly saw themselves as simply servants of God and welcomed others to check out what they said with the writings of previous prophets. Acts 17:11 commends the Bereans for doing that. In addition we find that they wanted their writings widely circulated. Paul mentions that specifically in Colossians 4:16 and 1 Thessalonians 5:27. If they were uncertain about the truth of what they had written they would not have wanted a wide circulation until after any eyewitnesses were dead. Matthew, Mark and Luke all wrote and distributed their gospel accounts when eyewitnesses were still around that could have disputed any inaccuracy in what they wrote.

Prophecy

Prophecy, in the sense of predicting events that will occur in the future through direct communication from God, is another major reason to believe the Bible is a reliable source of truth. The Bible itself cites prophecy as a means of determining the veracity of a prophet. In Deuteronomy 18 Moses directly addressed this issue saying, *"And you may say in your heart, 'How shall we know the word which the Lord has not spoken?' 22 'When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.'"*

The way to test for whether someone is actually getting revelation from God or not is to test for 100% accuracy. This is still an important test for many religions, cults and aberrant Christians make claims of

foretelling the future, but they all fail this test and so prove themselves to be false prophets. It is important to point out as well that the Biblical prophets foretold things in minute detail and not just generalities as is common in false religions and cults. Let's face it, if the prophecy is general enough then there is a good chance of it coming true. To say that it will rain here in the month of May is not much of a prediction, but to say it will rain a certain amount on a certain day at a certain time in a certain place and not in another is quite a prediction.

The Bible is filled with many, many prophecies that have been fulfilled. Some were short term in that what was predicted happened within a relatively short time. For example, In Exodus Moses gave precise predictions concerning several of the plagues God brought upon Egypt as to not only what they would be but when they would either start and stop (Frogs - 8:10-13; Insects - 8:23-24, 29-31; Livestock - 9:5-6; Hail - 9:18; Locusts - 10:4; Death of first born - 11:4). Other prophecies were for things that would happen many years in the future and would not be fulfilled until long after the prophet is dead. Let me briefly list out some of these for you since they are even more demonstrative that it must be God at work and therefore more difficult to ignore.

In Genesis 15:13 God told Abram, *"Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. 14 "But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve; and afterward they will come out with many possessions."* This was fulfilled in the story of Exodus more than 500 years later.

In 1 Kings 12 Jeroboam, first King of Israel after it divided from Judah, built an altar in Bethel contrary to God's commands not to do such a thing. In 1 Kings 13 a man of God came and *"cried against the altar by the word of the Lord, and said, "O altar, altar, thus says the Lord, 'Behold, a son shall be born to the house of David, Josiah by name; and on you he shall sacrifice the priests of the high places who burn incense on you, and human bones shall be burned on you.'"* That was fulfilled some 300 years later in 2 Kings 23 when King Josiah of Judah did exactly what had been prophesied.

In Deuteronomy 28 God warned the nation of Israel about what would happen if they did not follow the Lord. That warning included being carried away in captivity (vs. 36). In 1 Kings 14 God warned Israel through the prophet Ahijah that this was about to happen because they worshiped false gods and for the sins of Jeroboam. The prophet Amos said the same thing (7:11). That was fulfilled in 2 Kings 17 when Assyria conquered Israel and carried them away.

A similar warning was given to Judah by the prophet Isaiah (Isa. 39:7) and later by the prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 25:11f) that Judah would be carried away in captivity to Babylon. That was fulfilled in 2 Kings 24 & 25. Jeremiah also foretold that after 70 years Babylon would be destroyed. That was fulfilled when the Medes captured and destroyed it as recorded in Daniel 5. Jeremiah also prophesied that after that the Jews would be brought back to Jerusalem (Jer. 29:10). Isaiah had already said many decades earlier that this would be due to a king named Cyrus (Isa. 44:28). 2 Chronicles 36:22,23 and Ezra 1:1,2 records that King Cyrus of Persia did exactly that in 538 B.C.

Ezekiel 26:1-21 records a prophesy against the City of Tyre with very specific details that are fulfilled over the next 1700 years. It was prophesied that many nations would come against it. Nebuchadnezzar was the first in 585-573 B.C. He conquered it as predicted in 26:8. Alexander the Great was next. In 333 B.C. he threw the debris of the mainland city into the sea in order to build a causeway to the part of the city that was located on an island ½ mile offshore and thus fulfilled the prophecy in 26:4, 12 & 14. Antigonos conquered it in 314 B.C. The remains of the city were cleaned off like a bare rock thus fulfilling the prophecy of 26:4. The city was conquered by the Muslims, then by the Crusaders and then in 1291 it was once again captured by the Muslims, but this time it was not rebuilt. It became a place for spreading fishing nets as predicted in 26:5. To this day, though it would still be a good site for a city, all that is there is a small fishing village which fulfills the prophecies of both 25:5, 14 & 21 for it is no longer a site of commerce and trade.

The book of Daniel gives many prophecies including the rise and fall of the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Grecian, and Roman empires. Daniel 11 gives an extremely detailed prophecy concerning the wars between the Selucid and Ptolemaic kingdoms in the second and third centuries B.C. All of this happened in a hundred of years before any of it happened.

There are many, many, many more prophecies in the Bible including all of those concerning the coming of Messiah, His ministry and His return. Prophecies are a great witness to not only God's intervention into the lives of men, but also of the truthfulness of the Scriptures.

Evidence concerning the Bible:

The final reason to believe the Bible is its own internal character and its preservation. Both demonstrate God's hand upon it as would be expected of a deity who had revealed Himself to man.

The Bible is often attacked as just the work of men, but as Lewis Sperry Chafer wrote concerning its character, *"It is not a book as man would write if he could, or could write if he would."*

Consider the following: Its contents are unsurpassed in subjects treated, unsurpassed in quality and variety of literature with it, and unsurpassed in its realistic treatment of man's condition. It was written by about 40 authors over a period of 1500 years (Moses, 1400 B.C. - John, 90 A.D.) and yet is unified in purpose and theme and in factual harmony. It shows itself to be the product of one author and many penmen.

The Bible is the most read of all books despite prohibitions against it. It has been translated into more languages than anything else. It is the most influential book of all time despite the denials of its authority.

The Bible answers all the major philosophical questions:

Is there a God? Genesis 1:1; Hebrews 1:1

Where did man come from? Genesis 2:7

What is man's nature? Genesis 1:26,27

What is man's purpose? John 10:10; Romans 8:29; 11:26; Ephesians 2:10

Is man immortal? John 14:14,15; John 11:25,26; Matthew 25

What is truth? John 14:6; John 17:17

Why does evil exist? Isaiah 14; Ezekiel 28; Revelation 20:10

What determines history? Daniel 4:17

What is right conduct? Matthew 22:37-39

What is beautiful and valuable? Psalm 27:4; Phil 4:8

What is man's future? Revelation

The Bible is also the best preserved of all works transmitted from antiquity despite the attempts to destroy it or pervert it. There are over 5,000 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament alone with some fragments dating back to the first century and quite a few into the second, third or fourth centuries. There are an additional 20,000 or so early manuscripts from translations into 14 other languages. The reason this is important is that the more manuscripts and the closer you are to the actual date it was written the higher degree of confidence there can be that the text has been transmitted correctly.

Contrast this with other ancient works. There is only one copy of Tacitus' minor works, 2 copies of Pliny the Younger and single or double digit numbers for most others except for Sophocles for which there is 193 and Homer's *Iliad* for which there are 643 manuscripts. The closest time span of any of these copies to the original is about 500 years for the *Iliad*. Most of the rest are near a thousand or more.

When it comes to the Old Testament, the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947 proved what was already known about Jewish scribes. They were meticulous in copying the text. Those scrolls are from 1,000 - 1,200 years older than the previously known oldest Masoretic manuscripts and the comparison showed that 95% of the text was identical and the 5 % variation consisted chiefly of obvious slips of the pen and variations in spelling (F.F. Bruce). If you add in the many other translations such as the Greek Septuagint we can have even more confidence that we can determine the original text.

While there are difference in the various manuscripts, none of those variations affect any major doctrine, and careful comparison yields an overwhelming confidence that we can accurately determine what God originally revealed to the prophets and apostles.

Conclusion

While finite man cannot comprehend an infinite God, the Bible gives man a vast and adequate revelation which contains all that God wants man to know presently (Deut. 29:29; 1 Cor 13:12; 2 Tim 3:15-17; 2 Peter 1:3; Rev. 10:4). I have complete confidence that this book, the Bible is what God has revealed to us and it is true for God is not a man that He should lie nor the son of man that He should change His mind (Numbers 23:19). Jesus said it best, “Thy word is truth”(John 17:17) and that it would not pass away (Matt. 5:18). We have God’s word, so we have the truth. That is why I believe the Bible.

Sermon Notes- 4/29/2007 AM
Why We Believe The Bible

Introduction

Source of Knowledge

Conscience

Empiricism (The Senses)

Rationalism

A Supernatural Source

The Word of God

2 Timothy 3:16

2 Peter 1:21

In Exodus 17:14 and Jeremiah 30:2.

In 1 Peter 1:10-11 and 1 Thess. 2:13

In 2 Peter 3:15-16

Psalm 19:7-9; Matthew 24:35; John 17:17

The Physical World

Psalm 19:2 ; Romans 1:19,20

*The Earth is Round - Isaiah 40:22; Proverbs 8:27

*The number of stars cannot be counted - Jeremiah 33:22; Hebrews 11:12

*Law of Conservation of matter and energy in - 2 Peter 3:7; Genesis 2:1,2; Exodus 20:11; Hebrews 4:3; 1:3

*Hydrologic Cycle - Ecclesiastes 1:7; Job 36:27,28

*Law of increasing entropy - Psalm 102: 25-27; Isaiah 51:6; Genesis 3:17; Romans 8:21,22

*Atmospheric circulation - Eccl. 1:6,7; Job 28:25; 37:9

*Life is in the blood - Leviticus 17:11

*Gravitational field - Job 26:7

*Springs in the oceans - Job 38:16; Gen 7:11; 8:2; Prov. 8:28

*Stars emit sound - Job 38:7; Psalm 19:1-3

*Animals reproduce after their own kind - Genesis 1:21; 6:19

*Earth and moon formed separately - Genesis 1:1, 14-19

Historical Accuracy

The Biblical Writers

Prophecy

Deuteronomy 18:21-22

Genesis 15:13 *cf.* Exodus
1 Kings 12 & 13 *cf.* 2 Kings 13
Deut. 28; 1 Kin. 14; Amos *cf.* 2 Kin. 17
Isa. 39:7; Jer. 25:11f *cf.* 2 Kings 24 & 25
Jer. 25:11f *cf.* Daniel 5
Isa. 44:28; Jer. 29:10 *cf.* 2 Chron. 36; Ezra 1
Ezekiel 26:1-21

Daniel

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Is man immortal? John 14:14,15; John 11:25,26

What is truth? John 14:6; John 17:17

Why does evil exist? Isaiah 14; Ezekiel 28; Revelation 20:10

What determines history? Daniel 4:17

What is right conduct? Matthew 22:37-39

What is beautiful and valuable? Psalm 27:4; Phil 4:8

What is man's future? Revelation

Conclusion

KIDS CORNER

Parents, you are responsible to apply God's Word to your children's lives. Here is some help. **Young Children** - draw a picture about something you hear during the sermon. Explain your picture(s) to your parents at lunch. **Older Children** - Do one or more of the following: 1) How many times the Bible is mentioned? 2) Talk with your parents about the reasons you can believe the Bible.

THINK ABOUT IT!

Questions to consider in discussing the sermon with others. What is your source of knowledge for determining reality? How do you deal with others that use a different source of knowledge? What are some of the claims the Bible makes about itself? How does the physical world prove the claims of the Bible? Does history verify or refute the Bible? Explain. Describe the character of the Biblical writers. How do we know they were accurate in what they wrote? Why is prophecy important to our ability to believe the Bible? What are some of the fulfilled prophecies that most impress you? What does the internal evidence / character of the Bible say about its veracity? How does the preservation of the Bible support its truthfulness? Compare its preservation with that of other ancient manuscripts. What do you believe about the Bible?

SUGGESTED REFERENCE WORKS:

Evidence that Demands a Verdict, Volumes 1 & 2 by Josh MacDowell

Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible by John W Haley;

Both/And: A Balanced Apologetic by Ronald B Mayers

The Justification of Knowledge by Robert L. Reymond

He is There and He is Not Silent by Francis A. Schaeffer

Know Why You Believe by Paul E. Little

Many Infallible Proofs by Henry Morris

Nothing by Truth by Brian Edwards

Sola Scriptura by John MacArthur

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