

How Can I Believe the Bible?

Series: How Can I Believe?

Brad Bailey – April 22 2018

What is the Bible?

What do we mean by “believing in the Bible?”

2 Timothy 3:15-17 (HCSB)

From childhood you have known the sacred Scriptures, which are able to give you wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

¹⁶All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

How can I believe in the Bible?

1. The Bible has historical integrity; clearly with an understanding and basis for conveying what is real, not myth.

- *Their timing is far too early for them to be legends.*
- *Their content is far too counter-productive to be legends.*
- *It bears accuracy in its transmission of texts over time*
- *It bears accuracy in archeological findings*

2. The Bible is prophetically proven in speaking of what will come.

Luke 24:44 (GW)

3. The Bible, though captured in “ancient” times, conveys the divine story of who we are, that transcends time.

4. The Bible has provided the foundations from which the most valued aspects of modern culture have come.

The Bible brought forth the aspects of modern western culture we generally value most...

- Optimism (Potential) – God’s purpose for all overcame the fatalism rooted in being powerless to the whims of the capricious gods...or destined to second class by divine order.
- Arts (Affirmation of creativity and beauty) - To be creative...to capture beauty... was more fully lifted into it’s potential light as a gift... not a waste...but a way to honor God.
- Human Dignity (of ALL individuals) – The assumption that the value of human life could be determined by rulers of the empire was overcome by the new understanding of Christ following lives offering to care for the unwanted babies... and the sick and disabled.
- Human Rights & Justice...for ALL – The understanding of “God-given” rights now stands outside the rights of those who hold power...either by virtue of their royal line...their military might...their wealth...or their privileged education.
- Political Freedom (democracy, accountability & limited power) – all life is under God and no life can be trusted to act like God
- Rationality – because the world is not “mindless”... and Science – because the world is formed with intended order.
- Economic Progress – establishing a life of mutual service ...and trust... and collaboration...in which all could gain.
- Family – Marriage was not just a convenience but a covenant... a reflection of God’s covenant.
- Education (Knowledge as positive and for all) - The Reformation in Europe played a role in breaking the power of controlling knowledge and education declaring state and church leaders no longer the ultimate source of authority... ...and all must learn to read and reason.

5. The Bible continues to speak with transforming power.

John 8:31-32

“If you continue in my Word, then you are my disciples indeed; And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free!”

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Main point: To help understand how we can trust the Bible in the face of the common cultural criticisms that are made about it bearing myth and moral reprehensible elements.

We are continuing our series entitled: How Can I Believe?.

Each week we are engaging a different question and focus.

How Can I Believe?

- *How Can I Believe in God?*
- *How Can I Believe in the Bible?*
- *How Can I Believe in Jesus?*
- *How Can I Believe in One Ultimate Truth?*
- *How Can I Believe in a Good God in a Suffering World?*
- *How Can I Believe in God and Science?*
- *How Can I Believe What is Often Associated with Hate and Hypocrisy?*

The premise which I have noted... is that when we engage the large questions of life...they are always about trusting what we don't understand by what we do understand...that is...there is always that which we do not understand... that is beyond our finite nature ...and on such matters...we ultimately must decide what makes the most sense from reason...but also from intuition... and imagination and every facet of our being.

Our goal is to understand that faith has it's questions...and it's reasons.

So today, the question is: **How Can I Believe the Bible?**

In just the past few years... it has become fashionable to challenge the authority of the Bible. And this is particularly true in western culture...where the Scriptures have been the foundation of the culture...because to challenge them offers a way to declare how smart one ...how one is declaring freedom from ignorance... and is free from any false constraints placed on them.

It's said to be **cruel and oppressive** and those who uphold the historic view of its truthfulness are seen in the same light.

And as fewer lives have either read the Bible...or how to understand what it really teaches... it is easy for many to just hear these critiques and agree. And so it becomes vital to engage the challenging issues that are raised.

This is why as many of **you may recall that at the start of last year...** we did an **entire series** on the Bible itself... entitled **“Getting to Know the Book that Knows Me.”**

So today... more a summary...and encourage you to take a little more time if these questions are significant to you.

What is the Bible?

- **The Bible is a library of books. Sixty-six**, to be exact, written by over **forty authors** covering a period of **around 1500 years**.

Most of the books bear the **name of its author** and are pretty straightforward. Sometimes the books carry the **name of the main event** that the book talks about. For example, the book of Genesis is about the genesis – the creation, the beginning – of the world. The book of **Exodus deals mostly with the great exodus**, or departure, of the Jewish people from slavery under the leadership of Moses.

A lot of the books were actually **letters**, and carry the **name of the people they were sent to**. So Philippians is the name of the book, or letter, sent to the people who lived in the city of Philippi.

So the Bible is a library of books, reflecting different times in history, different authors, different settings, and different emphases.

- **The Bible is divided into two Testaments...** reflecting two primary terms by which God was relating to humankind. The word “testament” simply means an “agreement” or “covenant” that one makes with another. So the Old Testament refers to the old covenant that was made as God originally began to call out a people to be in covenant with Him... through whom he would bless the whole world. As they failed to be able to be faithful to that covenant...God spoke of sending a Messiah to save the whole world and create a new covenant. That new covenant or New Testament unfolds with the coming of Christ...the Messiah...who would fulfill such faithfulness and through whom human life could be right...a new basis for covenant.

What do we mean by “believing in the Bible?”

What we generally mean is something to the effect of...

Can I trust that it communicates something from God?

Is there divine revelation which can be foundational to what I build my life upon?

What's important to stop and realize is that we are **not asking**.

We are not asking if we believe that this is a **magical book** like in some story about wizards and some **ancient secret book with spells and spiritual powers**.

We are not presuming that we believe that God sat down and dictated these writings. God is infinite and Spirit.

The fundamental nature of what it means to "believe" or trust in the Bible, is to believe and trust in God's ability to accommodate human understanding.

I believe that God, as the infinite creator of all, is able to engage and ultimately enter human history... and communicate to finite and flawed human life... bound within the limits of human culture, understanding, language, and historical transmission... that which he deems essential for the redemption and restoration of all things.

Illustration: If you were to tell a child it's time to get up because the sun came up...are you telling the truth? Technically no. The sun did not come up... the earth rotated in such a way that the sun came into view. But from the limited perspective we have... it is fitting and makes no difference to the point being made. One should get up.

You could not have conveyed the entire cosmological process...but that was not the point.

Similarly, when we speak of believing the Bible we are asking if we believe that the infinite can convey the larger truth that the finite need to know.

So what I am believing is that God is able to enter human history... speak through flawed half understanding lives through human forms of language to human understanding.

> That is what it really means to believe in the Bible. [1]

I believe this is what the testimony within the Bible understood about itself. Consider the words the Apostle Paul wrote to the younger Timothy whom he had mentored:

2 Timothy 3:15-17 (HCSB)

From childhood you have known the sacred Scriptures, which are able to give you wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.¹⁶ All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness,¹⁷ so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

The Scriptures are "inspired"... that means that ultimately what they are bring forth emanates from God...they bring forth that which is from God.

And they are able to fulfill a purpose.

The Word of God has the purpose and power to know the One who saves ... who can lead us towards becoming “complete” (who we were meant to be)...and able to begin living accordingly. [1b]

...But what helps us to trust that process?

How Can I believe in the Bible?

1. The Bible has historical integrity; clearly with an understanding and basis for conveying what is real, not myth.

It's become common to hear people say that...

- The Bible is a collection of legends
- The New Testament gospels were written so many years after the events that the writers' accounts of Jesus' life can't be trusted
- The writings are highly embellished if not wholly imagined
- The canonical gospels were only four out of scores of other texts

While there are plenty who may enjoy making huge statements like these, many honest scholars believe that the Gospels give us a good account of the life of Jesus. [2]

Why?

- *Their timing is far too early for them to be legends.*

The canonical gospels were written **at the very most forty to sixty years** after Jesus' death

Paul's letters were written **just fifteen to twenty-five years** after the death of Jesus

Biblical accounts of Jesus' life were circulating within the lifetimes of hundreds who had been present at the events of Jesus' ministry

Luke's gospel claims he got his account of Jesus' life **from eyewitnesses** who were still alive (Luke 1:1-4)

The gospel writers **named their eyewitness sources within the text** to assure readers of their accounts' authenticity.

Mark says that the **man who helped Jesus carry his cross** to Calvary “was the father of Alexander and Rufus” (Mark 15:21) There is no reason for the author to include such names unless the readers know or could have access to them. Mark is saying, “Alexander and Rufus vouch for the truth of what I am telling you, if you want to ask them.”

Paul also appeals to readers to check with living eyewitnesses if they want to establish the truth of what he is saying about the events of Jesus' life (1 Cor 15:1-6)

500 eyewitnesses who saw the risen Christ at once and could confirm what the Paul said as truth.

> **These records were not anonymous, collective, evolving oral traditions.**

These records were oral histories taken down from the mouths of the living eyewitnesses who preserved the words and deeds of Jesus in great detail. Bystanders, officials and opponents who had actually heard Jesus teach, seen his actions, and watched him die were also still alive

- *Their content is far too counter-productive to be legends.*

The theory many want to sell is that the gospels were made up by the leaders of the early church to promote their policies, consolidate their power, and build their movement.

This is far from what is found in the gospels at all

- Why would the leaders of the early Christian movement have made up the story of the **crucifixion** if it didn't happen? To be crucified was not something to boast about. Any listener of the gospel in either Greek or Jewish culture would have automatically suspected that anyone who had been crucified was a criminal
- Why would any Christian make up the account of Jesus asking God in the garden of Gethsemane if he could **get out of his mission**?
- Why would someone make up the part on the cross when Jesus cries out that **God had abandoned him**? People would have concluded that Jesus was weak and failing his God
- Why **invent women as the first witnesses** of the resurrection? In that society, women were assigned such low status that their testimony was not admissible evidence in court.
- **Why depict the apostles**—the eventual leaders of the early Church—**as petty and jealous, almost impossibly slow-witted**, and in the end as **cowards** who either actively or passively failed their master?

> **The only plausible reason that all of these incidents would be included in these accounts is that they actually happened.**

And it was that authenticity by which they were validated. Despite some saying that these accounts were chosen arbitrarily or manipulatively... that is pure conspiracy. They were never chosen like an NFL draft... they were confirmed by what all agreed were authentic testimony.

- ***It bears accuracy in its transmission of texts over time***

You may have heard people say, “I’m sure it was right when it was first written. But it’s been passed down generation after generation. All these changes have come in...” Ever heard that? If you’ve heard that you know somebody just hasn’t taken the time to study it, to look into it. When you look into it you find out the extreme care with which the Bible was copied.

We not only have manuscripts that have revealed remarkable accuracy going far back to the early years... we just keep finding more.

The accuracy of the Old Testament records became even clearer by such findings as the famous Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947. ...providing **manuscripts 1,000 years older than any previously known** Hebrew manuscripts of the Bible and representing almost every Old Testament book except Esther was found in these caves.

- ***It bears accuracy in archeological findings***

Another line of evidence for historical accuracy is archeology. You look at archeology and it **proves again and again** that the Scriptures are truly historical....You can go find these places. We’ve dug up these places.

Sir William Ramsay of Oxford University is regarded as one of the greatest archaeologists ever to have lived. And he took up a thorough examination of the biblical record.

He set out to put the writer of Acts on trial. He devoted his life to unearthing the ancient cities and documents of Asia Minor. After a lifetime of study, however, he concluded:

Sir William Ramsay of Oxford University

'Further study ... showed that the book could bear the most minute scrutiny as an authority for the facts of the Aegean world, and that it was written with such judgment, skill, art and perception of truth as to be a model of historical statement'

In fact, what he found in the archaeological evidence alone was so overwhelming that Ramsay himself **eventually became a Christian.** [3]

2. The Bible is prophetically proven in speaking of what will come.

What does that mean? The Bible includes well over a thousand prophecies where God says, “This is going to happen ...” and it would come upon Israel as God has warned...and the foretelling of a Messiah... savior...was fulfilled in countless ways in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Luke 24:44 (GW)

Then he said to them, “These are the words I spoke to you while I was still with you. I told you that everything written about me in Moses' Teachings, the Prophets, and the Psalms had to come true.”

3. The Bible, though captured in “ancient” times, conveys the divine story of who we are, that transcends time.

The point here is to recognize that truth is not simply bound by time.

The big questions of life are not bound within the capacity of human understanding.

If we presume that we are the hope of the world... then we may naturally embrace a paradigm that presumes everything before today is **ignorant** and everything modern is more **insightful**.

But if we are finite...then the infinite is a more timeless source of truth than mere time. [4]

I believe we have lost perspective on the difference between what is true and what is new.

Never have we become so focused on equating relevancy with what is new.

If the creator of the universe entered our midst....and they had an iPhone 3G... I think we would question their relevance.

I love every aspect of the technology that just keeps growing... but not one feature of my iPhone has told me who I am and what is true and right. (And sorry ...but I don't think the Android phones have as well.)

God reveals the big story...

- Creation – who we really are
- The Fall – what has gone wrong
- Redemption – the power of God to restore us
- What is to come

On these matters... I believe that the Biblical account of life speaks more clearly to what I see and experience than the past or present mind of man. I can't understand. It means that I do not hear anything new as simply more insightful.

4. The Bible has provided the foundations from which the most valued aspects of modern culture have come.

Despite our current cultural desire to want to embrace all ideas as equally true, the truth is that not all ideas are the same... they each lead to different consequences.

Most historians would agree that the Bible has had the **greatest impact on human civilization**. It has shaped the qualities of modern culture.

One is wise to realize that so much of what is valued most about western civilization.... emerged from the what the Bible revealed.

This is not to dismiss the many qualities that each culture bears. The whole world is influenced by what we might call “natural revelation.” (Romans 1:18-20) That is ... there are aspects of God revealed in creation itself...of glory and goodness... **so we should expect every human culture to realize and reflect some of the good intentions of God**...some basic reason about what is true and right. But God sees how darkened and dim we have become and He reveals Himself directly to Abraham and then to all of Israel...which is called “special revelation.” This is captured in the Scriptures...the Bible. And it is the Scriptures which provide the potential to have a shared perspective out of which to live not only as individuals...but as human community and culture.

As God begins to engage a people within creation...and that is captured and conveyed in this Book...it **brings forth radically different understanding of the world....and who we are and how we should relate.**

Jesus comes as the Living Word...to embody the very will and ways of God...and those whom he first gathered and imparted this to...were scattered...they went out... all the way to the **capital of Rome** itself...as well as **to Greece**. So **this revelation was now engaging the great powers of thought.**

BUT...the Bible itself was not able to be engaged by the public. The **Church would not allow** any public copies ...nor translations...and there was **no means to copy but by hand.**

That would not change **for 1,000 years.**

And then.... In **1454** –**came** the first major book printed using mass-produced movable metal type in Europe. It was the **Gutenberg Bible**. The Bible was soon made available to the public. Soon after came the Reformation in which Martin Luther and others declared that the Bible...not the Pope or State... held the authority to guide lives.

It was at this point that the Biblical story which shaped the people of Israel and those first called by Jesus... was now more free to transform the ideas of the wider culture. This worldview first effected Europe...and of course becomes foundational to the New World of America. And of course this would effect the worldviews of Australia, Canada, S America...and later leave seeds in India... Africa....and some lives everywhere.

What the Bible **shapes most directly**, is the foundations of **Western modern civilization**.

Most of the world the ancient world was shaped by the **myths of either capricious gods** who **played unpredictably with human life**....for which one felt powerless or tried to appease.

So the **revelation of one true living God who rooted the world in order ... bore a radical change to every aspect of human life**. [5]

It was quite a change for the people with whom God first began to speak to...it was a process of change in ethical and relational life.... But it also held the power to change the wider cultures where it became increasing understood and embraced.

In essence, the Bible reveals a way of knowing what the world is and who we are...which changes how people begin to live. People could begin to think:

“If this is what our world is truly ordered by...and this is who we are ... then this is how we should live.”

As such,

I just want to consider a few very quickly. [6]

The Bible brought forth the aspects of modern western culture we generally value most...

- **Optimism (Potential)** – God’s purpose for all overcame the fatalism rooted in being powerless to the whims of the capricious gods...or destined to be second class by divine order.
- **Arts (Affirmation of creativity and beauty)** - To be creative...to capture beauty... was more fully lifted into it’s potential light as a gift... not a waste...but a way to honor God.
- **Human Dignity (of ALL individuals)** – The assumption that the value of human life could be determined by rulers of the empire was overcome by the new understanding of Christ following lives offering to care for the unwanted babies... and the sick and disabled.

- **Human Rights & Justice...for ALL** – The understanding of “God-given” rights now stands outside the rights of those who hold power...either by virtue of their royal line...their military might...their wealth...or their privileged education.
- **Political Freedom** (democracy, accountability & limited power) – all life is under God and no life can be trusted to act like God
- **Rationality** – because the world is not “mindless”... and **Science** – because the world is formed with intended order.
- **Economic Progress** – establishing a life of mutual serviceand trust... and collaboration...in which all could gain.
- **Family** – Marriage was not just a convenience but a covenant... a reflection of God’s covenant.
- **Education (Knowledge as positive and for all)** - The Reformation in Europe played a role in breaking the power of controlling knowledge and education.... as it declared that the state and the church leaders should not be having authority...the Bible does...and all must learn to read and reason. This would be foundational in the founding of America.

If we are honest...I believe many of these qualities are those which we value... and likely take for granted...because we don’t realize that they have NOT been a part of all human culture. They found their foundations in a Biblical view of life...which shaped the soul of western modern world.

As we consider how the Bible changed the world...we **can appreciate why those who lived in the height of that transformations**, declared how essential it was.

This is why the 18th century philosopher Immanuel Kant wrote [7],

“The existence of the Bible, as a book for the people, is the greatest benefit which the human race has ever experienced. Every attempt to belittle it is a crime against humanity.” -

Immanuel Kant

“All the miseries and evils which men suffer from vice, crime, ambition, injustice, oppression, slavery and war, proceed from their despising or neglecting the precepts contained in the Bible. “- Noah Webster

The point is that history declares the nature of ideas and what they lead to.
As you consider the role of the Bible... belief in the Bible... let history speak.

And don't miss the most sobering truth...that **the very book that changed the world...** is also deemed the **most threatening** Book to those who want to control the world.

- Genesis 3:1 – There in the very opening core story of life... we are told that there was one who has sought to rule human life...and that source of evil referred to as the serpent or **Satan has one central goal...**to get humanity to doubt what God had spoken.
- **And just when that Word was going to break out into the Gentile world... it was the powers that be... the rulers of the CHURCH bound with the state which banned the Bible from being available to the common life...**because the Bible is dangerous to those who want to have power over people
- Today.....The Bible is **one of the most banned books in the world.** It is banned in **6 countries...**and **restricted** in as many as **40 countries.**

Notably... those countries which rule with tyranny are those which are most threatened by the Bible...and restrict ad ban lives from knowing it.

Today if you take a Bible into North Korea you can get arrested and thrown in jail and you can be killed for it. And it's not because Kim Jung-Un doesn't understand it's power...it's because in some respects he does.

5. The Bible continues to speak with transforming power.

Jesus said it like this in....

John 8:31-32

"If you continue in my Word, then you are my disciples indeed; And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free!"

It has transforming power. [8]

We are wise to recognize that it **gets channeled through** a lot of **religious** and **relational dynamics...**so many people who have related to the Bible may carry dysfunctional beliefs and confusion...**but the Bible itself...** the more clearly it is understood... has transformed lives unlike any other force.

It speaks to the human heart. You can make all the laws in the world, it isn't going to change the heart. You can make a law that outlaws racism and bigotry, but no law is going to

change our hearts.

Jesus said it brings FREEDOM.

So today...I want to challenge each of us to consider...what are we building our lives on?

Jesus says something quite profound...

Jesus said this in...

Mathew 24:35 *“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.”*

What comes from eternity ...is eternal.

And...

1 Peter 1:24-25 *“The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of God stands forever.”*

The temporary stuff doesn't last but the truth which God has spoken will last.

So what are you building our lives on?

Resources:

Why trust the Bible? - Andy Bannister - - <https://www.zachariastrust.org/why-trust-the-bible>
(Originally published on the RZIM Canada website: www.stayinthecoversation.or

[Tim Keller's Response to "You Can't Take the Bible Literally"](http://www.chriscastaldo.com/2012/07/13/tim-kellers-response-to-you-cant-take-the-bible-literally/) by CHRIS CASTALDO

<http://www.chriscastaldo.com/2012/07/13/tim-kellers-response-to-you-cant-take-the-bible-literally/>

Notes:

1. What about the parts of the Bible that present what appears to be difficult in terms of being factually correct or morally right?

I believe there are parts of the Bible which ARE hard to reconcile in terms of either factual accuracy or moral sense. I also don't presume that these are always simple to understand or reconcile. As I have noted about all beliefs regarding the larger questions of life, it always involves some element of trusting what we do not understand by what we do understand. However, I would suggest that we can be well served by considering some perspective on what we are considering.

I find that there are three ways in which people react to these difficult elements in the Bible. Some tend to dismiss them as not significant because their belief in God overrides their concern. (Skeptics will consider this to be a fear of facing the facts... a reflection of the fact that belief simply cannot be upheld by the facts.). Some will tend to see that the human element reflects that the Bible is nothing more than human. In seeing similarities to ancient myths and stories too myth-like to be historical... or details that contradict between two accounts... they see what they believe strips the Bible of any potential to reflect divine truth. However, there lies what I find myself a part of, those who see that the whole nature of the Bible is that of God accommodating human history, culture, understanding and even factual limitations – though of a secondary nature... to convey the larger truth that is not contingent on these aspects.

As one who reflects that third perspective, I believe that the nature of what it really means to “believe the Bible” is more about what I believe about God. I believe that God, as the infinite creator of all, is able to engage and ultimately enter human history... and communicate to finite and flawed human life... bound within the limits of human culture, understanding, language, and historical transmission... that which he deems essential for the redemption and restoration of all things.

Some will insist that if God is presumed to be all powerful, he would be able to overcome such limitations. I can appreciate that assumption. However, I think we should consider why that assumption may be misguided. First, the very nature being revealed about God is that he is working WITH humanity, flaws and all, rather than working to SUPERSEDE or overcome humanity. Secondly, there would be no logical way for the infinite to communicate to the finite without the limitations of the finite nature of human life. For instance, while some may have difficulty with the “simplistic” account of creation in Genesis... the very idea that an infinite God would, or even could, explain the nature of creation to finite beings may itself reflect a rather presumptuous view of our own understanding. One might have to wonder how that which is beyond time and space could convey such matters. If a more complete explanation were to be reduced to the modern mind... one may have to wonder, should such an explanation have adopted the terms of 1000 BC understanding...or the latest human created terms of “modern” physics...or that fitting future theories that have not even been developed yet? Such reflection may help us to understand that the poetic narrative of the Genesis account... along with other narrative forms in Scripture... may be fitting of how the infinite would unfold truth within the finite world of human understanding and history. Thirdly, we may do well to consider if God should be as interested in the type of truth that the modern focuses upon. We may like to focus on secondary facts that we understand... while not seeing that it is the larger truth which God is communicating. The larger truths are deeper, and not contingent upon time and place. We as finite creatures may like the nature of “truth” reflected in the instruction manual to the latest technology we own. But that truth tells us nothing about the larger questions of life... such as the origins of existence and who we are and what the nature of our spiritual condition.

This is where the analogy of a parent speaking to a child may be helpful... even if imperfect. If a parent tells a child that “it’s time to get up because the sun came up” ...are they telling the truth? Technically no. The sun did not come up... the earth rotated in such a way that the sun came into view. But from the limited perspective we have... it is fitting and makes no difference to the point being made. One should get up. The ability to convey the entire cosmological process is neither always possible, nor needed, to convey the real point.

Similarly, there are some aspects of what the Bible involves that can be challenging to our moral senses. I would surmise these elements, primarily in the Old Testament, to include:

- Commands and Punishments, particularly the penalty of death for various violations. (We can’t imagine facing death for spiritual and moral rebellion.)
- Lack of moral confrontation and clarity regarding Israel’s ancient cultural patterns including polygamy and slaves. (God seems to guide them towards better practices regarding marriage and slavery and justice...but why didn’t he just confront and clarify the ideal from the start? It can be used to suggest that the Bible accepts such behavior.)
- Sacrifices – particularly the call to Abraham to sacrifice his son.
- Destruction of enemies – particularly the conquest of Canaan. (Is what is described simply the genocidal destruction of innocent lives?)

These raise significant questions in our relationship to the Bible...and ultimately God.

I would note that it has become very common for examples to be stated in simplistic sarcastic ways... which show no real desire to actually engage what is actually at hand in the context of these situations. That itself can be very revealing of whether one simply wants to look smart or know the truth. In our culture that likes to think in quick quips that can be tweeted or fit on a bumper sticker, I would challenge us to be careful of the brevity of big accusations...which use emotionally loaded words to falsely summarize the facts. The key to understanding is always context...seeing the whole story. We can never understand anything clearly when we are told of an action without the context of the larger story. We need more of the story...not less.... to really understand the truth.

If the same atheist is confronted with the profound atrocities of that have flowed from the few rulers rooted in atheism ... particularly Stalin and Marx... who executed as many as 100 million human lives... their likely response will begin by saying that such a correlation is too simplistic... and that they need to unpack the whole story. And they are right to do so. But the point is that simplistic accusations often feel more powerful than they ultimately are. So beware of the way in which one line quips may seem potent.... not because they clarify truth...but because they remove truth.

For example, when God calls Abraham to sacrifice Isaac... to those who have never read the whole story...it can sound like a clear picture of God being brutal and heartless...of a blood-thirsty craving for child sacrifice. But if one really reads the story... it becomes clear that God never truly intended Abraham to kill his son – and that Abraham recognized this fact from the beginning. And the larger context helps us understand what Isaac represented and the stage of faith that this was calling for.

So the most helpful way to understand the Biblical Story...this revelation of God that can lead us to salvation and wisdom, pull back to see the whole story.

For more about considering the moral difficulties we face in the Bible, I spent more time in a message entitled Engaging The Severe Judgments In The Bible (February 12, 2017) which can be found [here](#) on the Westside Vineyard website. A far more satisfying depth of engagement is Paul Copan "*Is God a Moral Monster? Making Sense of the Old Testament God.*" ... and some portion online "Is the Old Testament God Evil?" article (at http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/201203/201203_034_Good_God.cfm)

1b. What is deemed the Bible... is actually rooted in the Jesus. defined by Jesus. It is what Jesus declared to be from God.

What set apart these writings from others? It is Jesus that defines what is deemed sacred and set apart. They are the one's which Jesus set apart as pointing towards him...or were recognized as direct testimony about him.

And the Bible we have is the one He set apart.

First, we accept the Old Testament as Scripture because Jesus did.

When Jesus made reference to the Scriptures, which he accepted as Scripture, he was referring to the Old Testament we have today.

When the New Testament records Jesus saying He believed in the Scriptures, that meant the Old Testament because the New Testament had not been written yet.

And here was His unqualified endorsement:

"I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law [of Moses] until everything is accomplished." - Matthew 5:18

And in what may be one of the most intriguing statements He made in relation to the Old Testament, Jesus introduced a quote from the Old Testament by saying:

“David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared...” - Mark 12:36

...and then went on to quote what David said in the Old Testament book of Psalms.

Clearly, to Jesus, the Old Testament was no ordinary collection of writings. He referred to the writers of the Old Testament as being inspired by the Holy Spirit, the very Word of God.

Now when we come to the New Testament, again, we look to Jesus for its establishment.

First, because a lot of it records just what He said, what He taught. And if He was God in human form and said something, I would call that Scripture! I think it soundly falls under that category.

But he also laid the foundation for the writings of the rest of the New Testament to be accepted as Scripture through the apostles.

These were the men who were to speak in Jesus’ name and carry His word to others. They carried the authority of Jesus Himself as they taught.

Jesus even said these words to them, as recorded in the New Testament book of Matthew: “He who receives you, receives me.” - Matthew 10:40

Which is why the teachings of the apostles were considered Scripture, and the mark of what would be included in the New Testament was simple:

...was it written by, or based on, the teaching of Jesus or one of His apostles.

So, when it comes to the Bible, it wasn’t something a bunch of church leaders sat down one day and randomly picked.

Jesus had already embraced and affirmed the Old Testament as the Word of God;

The first four books of the New Testament capture His own life and teaching as God Himself in human form come to planet earth;

And the rest of the New Testament was personally commissioned by Jesus, written by His handpicked apostles, through a special working of the Holy Spirit as they wrote.

So when the ancient church made it official through the council of Jamnia in A.D. 90 for the Old Testament, and in 397 for the New Testament through the Council of Carthage.

It wasn't a selection process. It wasn't like the NFL draft. It was a confirmation process.

It was about which books Jesus set apart! That's our Bible.

Jesus made a statement to some of the religious leaders that should challenge us all.

John 5:39 (ESV)

“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me...”

They sought the book but missed the author. They had their own ideas and couldn't understand the author's real intent.

2. A good source to explore includes: Tim Keller's chapter “You Can't Take the Bible Literally” in *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism*

3. The following is described of Ramsay in the Wikipedia article, which would be deemed not to be religious in bias:

Sir William Mitchell Ramsay (15 March 1851 – 20 April 1939) was a Scottish archaeologist and New Testament scholar. By his death in 1939 he had become the foremost authority of his day on the history of Asia Minor and a leading scholar in the study of the New Testament. Although Ramsay was educated in the Tübingen school of thought (founded by F. C. Baur) which doubted the reliability of the New Testament, his extensive archaeological and historical studies convinced him of the historical accuracy of the New Testament.

William Ramsay was known for his careful attention to New Testament events, particularly the Book of Acts and Pauline Epistles. When he first went to Asia Minor, many of the cities mentioned in Acts had no known location and almost nothing was known of their detailed history or politics. The Acts of the Apostles was the only record and Ramsay, skeptical, fully expected his own research to prove the author of Acts hopelessly inaccurate since no man could possibly know the details of Asia Minor more than a hundred years after the event—this is, when Acts was then supposed to have been written. He therefore set out to put the writer of Acts on trial. He devoted his life to unearthing the ancient cities and documents of Asia Minor. After a lifetime of study, however, he concluded: 'Further study ... showed that the book could bear the most minute scrutiny as an authority for the facts of the Aegean world, and that it was written with such judgment, skill, art and perception of truth as to be a model of historical statement' (*The Bearing of Recent Discovery*, p. 85). On page 89 of the same book, Ramsay accounted, 'I set out to look for truth on the borderland where Greece and Asia meet, and found it there [in

Acts]. You may press the words of Luke in a degree beyond any other historian's and they stand the keenest scrutiny and the hardest treatment...'

When Ramsay turned his attention to Paul's letters, most of which the critics dismissed as forgeries, he concluded that all thirteen New Testament letters that claimed to have been written by Paul were authentic. (Article - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Mitchell_Ramsay)

Ramsay wasn't alone among archeologists who have concluded that the Bible is solidly historical. Dr. William F. Albright, late professor emeritus of John Hopkins University, declared that there can be no doubt that archaeology has confirmed the historicity of the Bible.

Historian and archaeologist Joseph P. Free notes that to this day, even the most recent of discoveries continue to produce "material that confirm[s] the Scriptures at point after point."

4. This morning as I write this, (April 21, 2018), Kanye West posted a message saying that he found the idea of "God fearing" ... to be a "dated mentality." And then said, "We are in the future." He was actually trying to overcome a false fear of God... in light of noting that the Bible tells us that "God is love." And he may be right about people using the "god fearing" idea to control people. The premise that deserves to be questioned however, is his quickness to judge the past as ignorant. That itself may be ignorant. -

<https://twitter.com/kanyewest/status/987699874362675201>

5. The idea that there is only one God "may well have been the single most important innovation in history." For our purposes monotheism's importance lies primarily in the fact that it is the only viable source of absolute truth. Only a single creator God can establish such truths. Monotheism also allowed for the formation of the rule of law, whereby God stands over and above His creation, and establishes immutable laws that are equally applicable to all people without exception.⁴ With no such conception of God and His law, individual people or cultures occupy God's throne, dispensing justice as they see fit. Man-made laws are as changeable as the human mind and may not be applicable to the ruling power.

For example, God commanded people to not murder one another. This command may seem "self-evident" to most yet in many non-Western cultures female infanticide has long been a common and accepted practice. Only absolute truths based on an objective foundation (a single creator God) can help us determine if it is right or wrong to kill female infants.

From How Christianity Shaped Western Civilization, April 27th, 2015 Today's guest article was written by Dr. Andrew Stebbins.<http://www.reasons.org/blogs/reflections/how-christianity-shaped-western-civilization>

6. To those who would like to further explore the how the Bible shaped culture I gave more complete focus to this in a message entitled How The Bible Changes The World (February 19, 2017) for which the audio and notes can be found on the Westside Vineyard website [here](#).

However to really explore more richly I would highly recommend the great work of Vishal Mangalwadi entitled "[The Book that Made Your World: How the Bible Created the Soul of Western Civilization](#)," as well as Rodney Stark's "How the West Won: The Neglected Story of the Triumph of Modernity."

7. From - <http://www.whatchristianswanttoknow.com/how-does-the-bible-influence-society/#ixzz4YRiInYcW>

Another notable quote: "Hold fast to the Bible. To the influence of this Book we are indebted for all the progress made in true civilization and to this we must look as our guide in the future." - Ulysses S. Grant

8. It's been noted that in many of the highest academic institutions, the second half of these words of Jesus are printed in stone on buildings: "The truth will make you free." Then they ignore God and ignore the Bible. They forget the first part: "If you continue in my Word, you will know the truth and the truth will make you free."