

Lesson 7 - Literalism: Isn't the Bible Historically Unreliable and Regressive?

Introduction

- Addressing skeptics' concerns about the Bible.
- Common objection: "The Bible contains good things, but insisting it's all true is foolish."
- Key Text: Luke 1:1-4; Luke 24:13-32
- Objective: Respond by asserting the Bible is trustworthy—historically, culturally, and personally.

I. Can We Trust the Bible Historically?

Skeptical Claim

- Bible narratives are political inventions, not historical accounts.

Response: Three Reasons for Trusting the Bible Historically

1. **The Bible Was Written Too Early to Be Legend**

- Luke's Gospel based on eyewitnesses (Luke 1:1–4).
- Luke's Gospel written 30–40 years after Jesus' death.
- Paul's letters written even earlier (15–20 years after).
- 1 Corinthians 15:3–6 — Over 500 eyewitnesses, many still alive.

2. **The Bible's Accounts Are Too Counter-Productive to Be Fabricated**

- Jesus' struggles in Gethsemane and the Cross — not idealized hero portrayals.
- Resurrection first witnessed by women (low societal status).
- Apostles portrayed as cowardly and foolish.
- Legends typically do not depict leaders negatively.

3. **The Bible's Details Are Too Specific to Be Legends**

- Ancient myths lacked realistic, historical details.
- C.S. Lewis: Gospels are "reportage," not legend or myth.
- Comparison to fictional embellishments like the cherry tree myth about George Washington.

II. Can We Trust the Bible Culturally?

Cultural Offense Against the Bible

- Bible seems regressive to modern sensibilities.

Three Ways to Handle Offending Texts

1. **Consider You Might Misunderstand the Bible's Teaching**

- Example: Genesis narratives seemingly promoting polygamy.

- Robert Alter: Genesis subtly critiques ancient practices like polygamy and primogeniture.

2. Recognize Cultural Blinders

- Example: Misunderstanding Biblical slavery.
- Ancient slavery (indentured servitude) vs. New World (race-based) slavery.
- Murray Harris' research on Greco-Roman slavery.

3. Question the Superiority of Our Own Culture

- Different cultures find different parts of the Bible offensive.
- Western offense at Bible's sexual ethics vs. Middle Eastern offense at commands for forgiveness.
- A divine revelation should challenge all cultures at various points.

III. Can We Trust the Bible Personally?

The Bible and a Personal Relationship with God

- Luke 24:32 — "Did not our hearts burn within us...?"
- True encounter with Jesus happens through properly understood Scripture.

Key Insights

- Bible points to Jesus, not to self-righteous rule-following.
- Misunderstanding Scripture often stems from self-centered reading.
- True relationship with God requires submission to a fully authoritative Bible.
- If Scripture never challenges us, we've created a "Stepford God" — not the real God.

Illustrations

- The Emmaus disciples misinterpreting Scripture.
- Examples from Moses, the Passover lamb, the Tabernacle—all pointing to Jesus.

Conclusion

- Trusting the Bible historically, culturally, and personally leads to deeper faith.
- A fully authoritative Bible is not a barrier to a personal relationship with God—it's the foundation for it.
- True spiritual warmth ("burning hearts") comes from a Christ-centered, Scripture-saturated life.