

Can We Trust the Bible?

Part 3: History: Some Inconvenient Facts
(preached 4/30/23)

Please turn to *Psalms 12:6-7*.

Sermon #1: The Bible was Good Enough for Jesus (and the Apostles).

- Jesus used the Bible to, specifically the prophecies of the OT, to: 1) confirm that He was the Messiah, 2) confirm that He was God in the flesh, 3) Confirm that He'd brought God's Kingdom, 4) confirm all His works and 5) to win debates with both the Devil and wicked men who opposed Him.
- His words and actions directly fulfilled the 1st coming prophetic verses including dying on the Cross and rising from the dead.
- The Apostles used the Bible to share the Gospel, testify about Jesus, teach, rebuke, correct, and to instruct in righteousness.
- **CONCLUSION: *if the Bible was good enough for Jesus, it's good enough for me!***
- If the Apostles relied upon it, especially after Jesus had ascended to Heaven, ***then I know I can rely upon it as the Word of God!***

Sermon #2: Is the Bible Just Another Book?

- Jesus was and is the living and active Word of God, created all things in the beginning, and is God.
- He is above the angels, demons, and humanity. All worship Him.
- He is the One Who inspired the Apostles and Prophets to write the Bible.
- Spiritual beings have appeared to people for millennia, starting religions and helping said men write religious books.
- So what makes the Christian faith and Bible stand out from the others?
- Our faith and Bible were inspired by Christ. Other religions and religious texts were inspired by lower spirit beings.
- The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth, Whom Jesus gave to all Who know His as Savior.
- His job is to testify of Christ and to remind us what Jesus said and did.
- The canon of Scripture is true because it was the Spirit of Truth Who was given to the 40 authors to record God's word.
- The Holy Spirit wasn't given to the people of other religions, but rather a different/lower spirit.

LONG SERMON

TODAY **we come to “the rapids” in the river!** We'll face some “inconvenient facts” about the history of the Bible, BUT we'll also see how God's divine hand intervened to

thwart attempts by the devil to corrupt His written word. God has and still is preserving His word so that we can trust what we're reading. What's more is that He's written and preserved His word in YOU. I could not cover everything I wanted to in this sermon, so it must be split into 2. Please make sure you listen to next week's sermon as well!

LABELS & DETAILS WILL HELP. While there will be a lot of labels and details in today's sermon I promise: they will reveal how our Bible came about and help us understand what we're reading better.

[Psa 12:6-7 ESV] 6 The words of the LORD are pure words, like silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times. 7 You, O LORD, will keep them; you will guard us from this generation forever.

BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY. Our journey begins at the Babylonian Captivity which began in 586 BC—the Temple and City of Jerusalem were destroyed, the Temple treasures looted, and many Jews taken as slaves to Babylon which is modern day Iraq. God told Jeremiah it would last 70 years and it did, ending with the invasion of the Persian empire.

Cyrus was the King of Persia and, one night, the Lord spoke to him telling him to free the Jewish people and help fund the rebuilding of the Temple and City of Jerusalem. Cyrus wisely submitted and even returned the Temple treasures. The Temple project was started by Joshua (the High Priest) and Zerubbabel (a royal) and finished by a Scribe named Ezra.

SCRIBES. The job of Scribes is to preserve, protect, and copy the Bible above all. A Scribe's mentality is that "God is in the details" and they are scholars of the highest order, placing emphasis on the preservation of the Bible word for word.

THE VORLAGE. Extra-Biblical history states that God appeared to Ezra in a dream and commissioned him to copy the Bible which was thought lost/destroyed during the Babylonian invasion. When Ezra returned to Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit led him to discover the scrolls of the Tanakh—the Jewish Bible (what we call the OT)—which were frail, but had escaped completely destruction—and copied it. This copy of the Bible is called THE VORLAGE, was written in Hebrew, and stored in the new Temple Ezra had just built.

ORIGINAL? There's debate about the Vorlage, some believing it consisted of all ORIGINAL manuscripts and others claiming it to be a mix of originals and 1st and 2nd generations mss. What's meant by 1st and 2nd generation is this: a 1st gen copy was scribed from the original. A 2nd gen copy was scribed from a 1st gen copy. Either way, most the Jews considered the Vorlage to be accurate in conveying God's word.

ALEXANDER. In 332 BC, Alexander the Great invaded the Middle East and made changes that affect us to this day. When he conquered Jerusalem he went into the Jewish Temple and was greeted WARMLY by the High Priest and the Priesthood. To Alex's great surprise, the HP

opened His Bible and showed him the verses in Daniel stating that the King of Greece would defeat the King of Persia...so they were expecting him!

SPARED TEMPLE. The only thing bigger than Alex's empire was his ego and he was quite flattered that the Jewish God wrote of his victory hundreds of years before. Therefore instead of destroying the Temple and looting it like Babylon had done, he allowed everything to remain including the Priesthood and the practice of the Jewish religion in every area of his empire.

MIDDLE EAST WENT GREEK. Alex wanted to make the whole world into Greece and he nearly succeeded. The Middle East went Greek in its culture, education, language (reading and writing), architecture, government, and infrastructure.

LEAVE RELIGION ALONE. The only thing he left alone in the countries he conquered was religion because he discovered what many other conquerors do: you can change the laws, introduce taxes, install your own politicians, etc. and the people won't like it...but most of them comply. Go after their religion, however, and the level of rebelliousness shoots up.

At this point, the Hebrew language began to die and within a short time, only the Priests and Scribes could read and speak it.

The vast majority of Jews spoke, read, and wrote Greek and Aramaic only. This happens more quickly than you might think. My mom was born and raised in Vietnam which is her native language. English is actually her THIRD language, because she also was raised with French. She came here in the 1960's and by the 1980's she lost most of her Vietnamese and French. When she worked at the Arnot Mall, she would go to the Vietnamese nail salons and couldn't understand them when they spoke to her in Vietnamese. In other words, she lost her native language in less than a generation.

TRANSLATE THE BIBLE. After Alex died, his general Ptolemy I inherited Egypt and reigned in Alexandria as King with his son Ptolemy II. Sonny boy came to his dad and said "Dad, most the Jews can't understand their own Bible. Are you willing to fund a project of translating it into Greek?" Dad agreed and, after all, Alexandria was the hub of learning, scholarship, and education having the famous Library of Alexandria. It's also said that a 1st generation copy of the Vorlage was at the Library. Ptolemy I hired 70 Jewish Scribes who were fluent in both Hebrew and Greek and tasked them with translating the Bible into Greek.

FIRST 5 BOOKS. History states that, in order to test both their scholarship and divine inspiration, Ptolemy placed them in their OWN rooms and told them to transcribe just the first 5 books of the Bible which the Jews call the Torah, and Greeks call the Pentateuch, and in English translates to "The Law."

SIDE NOTE: when reading through the NT Scriptures, we see Jesus and the Apostles dividing the Bible into 3 sections: 1) The Law, 2) The Prophets, and 3) The Writings (Psalms, Proverbs, etc.). They tended to regard them in that order of emphasis as well, the Law being above all.

THE SAME! When the 70 Scribes were done their manuscripts were compared with each other and a miraculous thing happened: *they were exactly the same!* Even unbelieving Ptolemy was impressed, and told them to go ahead and finish scribing the rest. This took place around 282 BC and **THIS COPY OF THE BIBLE IS KNOWN TO THIS DAY AS THE SEPTUAGINT**, which means 70. Many copies of the Septuagint were made and this became the Bible of the Greek speaking Jews, which were in the vast majority.

The Septuagint was the Bible that Jesus and the Apostles read.

VERY FEW SPOKE HEBREW. By the time Jesus walked the earth, VERY FEW of the common people spoke or read Hebrew and that included His 12 disciples. Only the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Scribes spoke, read, or wrote Hebrew. (Jesus also understood Hebrew.) No one called Jesus “Yeshua” despite the movies. Believe it or not, they called Him Christos Jesus, albeit not with my 21st century American accent. The NT scriptures were all written in Greek. *The only Apostle who understood Hebrew was Paul*, and we’ll get back to that NEXT WEEK.

GREECE CREATED DIVISION. The advent of Greek culture created great divisions within the Jewish community. By the time Jesus came, the Jews had broken into several “denominations”:

- The Hellenists
- The Essenes
- The Sadducees
- The Pharisees
- The Zealots

THE HELLENISTS were Jews who embraced Greek culture and were less religious—they could have been called “progressive” in their thinking and lifestyles. They abandoned Torah beliefs & lifestyle and freely indulged in the worldly “freedom” that Hellenism allowed them to.

THE ESSENES rejected Hellenism, were very conservative and lived strict lives, and separated themselves from society to live out the Torah in the Qumran region. They had a “leave us alone and we’ll leave you alone” attitude and resemble the modern day Amish.

THE SADDUCEES were the “official” priests, descended from Aaron (Moses’ brother) and were in charge of the Temple worship, rituals, and sacrifices. The High Priest and the Sanhedrin were comprised of them. They were few in number, were very wealthy from Temple tithes, and

took a “cut” from the moneychangers and animal sellers who sold in the Temple. They often made backroom deals with the politicians and military leaders of whichever empire ruled over them. They had a very “elitist” attitude and had very little to do with the common people. Caiaphas was the High Priest (in the days of Christ) and was a Sadducee. They saw their calling as preserving the way of Torah by remaining “true” to their Temple duties.

MEGA CHURCH PASTORS. They could be compared to modern day rich pastors and ministers, with big churches and ministries, who hobnob with politicians and celebrities.

THE PHARISEES were a grassroots sect who rejected Hellenism and were the most popular and greatest in number. They were like “circuit preachers” connecting directly with the people in public and at home. They enticed followers by claiming that, at Mt. Sinai, God gave laws BEYOND what Moses wrote down in the first 5 books! According to them, these laws were secret and meant to be passed on to a select ultra-spiritual few through word of mouth only. They called this “The Oral Law” and these commandments were intended to “protect” the written law which they felt was being threatened by Hellenism.

SCHOOLS. They set up schools where they disciplined people in the Oral Law, teaching them as though they came from God Himself. They supported themselves by collecting tithes from those who came to them for guidance and teaching. Two well known Pharisees were Nicodemus and Saul of Tarsus, before he became Paul.

THE ZEALOTS were Jews who rejected Hellenism...violently. They believed in a military solution to both those who occupied Judea and to bring about God’s Kingdom. They longed for the coming of Messiah whom they pictured as a great general who would lead an uprising against Rome and then conquer the known world. When they weren’t waging all out war, they would carry out acts of terrorism like assassinations and raids on the Romans.

Simon the Zealot was one of Jesus’ 12 disciples and would have shouted “amen!” when Jesus said things like “the Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.” While the Zealots hated Rome, they truly despised any fellow Jews whom they considered traitors and would have dealt with them just as harshly.

THE ESSENES. While the Essenes aren’t mentioned in the Gospels, they would play an important role in the preservation of the Bible. We’ll get back to them NEXT WEEK.

All these groups had plenty of reason to hate Jesus, just as the Lord said.

THE HELLENISTS hated Him because it would mean taking up their own Crosses, repenting of their worldly ways, and following Christ to Calvary Hill. They liked the Greek lifestyle which allowed them to indulge their flesh, desires, and feelings. They didn’t want to give up these things to be Saved. Think of people like the rich young ruler who refused Christ. Sayings

that would have rubbed them the wrong way would be something like: “What does it profit a man to gain the whole world but lose his soul?”

The SADDUCEES hated Jesus because the Lord made them obsolete...completely.

- Jesus said that HE was the real ***Temple of God*** and that He would make everyone who believed in Him Temples of God, making the actual Temple useless.
- Jesus was the ***Lamb of God*** Who would be sacrificed and bleed for sins and His sacrifice would be a “forever” one...which meant that the ones the Sadducees did and made money from were no longer necessary.
- Jesus ***forgave sins***, which was the Sadducees’ job as priests.
- Jesus was ***friendly to the people*** vs. the standoffish attitude of the Sadducees...so people were going to Him for forgiveness instead of them.
- The Sadducees had the corner on GOD, claiming He existed in the HOH in their Temple.
- Jesus said ***He was God and therefore wasn’t in the Temple***, meaning the Sads could no longer hold this over everyone’s head!
- **The Sadducees had a good thing going and Jesus threatened all of it.**

THE PHARISEES hated Jesus for different reasons, mainly because He condemned the Oral Law and told them they were going to Hell—twice—for preaching the Oral Law as the commandments of God. They were losing followers left and right to Christ, Who simplified God’s Law, preached Grace, forgave people, and said His burdens were light. The Pharisees controlled people and got their money by holding both the written and oral Law above their heads like an executioners ax. They profited both socially and financially by scaring people into following their Oral Law.

LEFT PHARISEES. Jesus caused people by the thousands to leave the teachings of the Pharisees, and not only listen to Jesus but tithe to Him instead! They weren’t about to have that.

THE ZEALOTS hated Jesus because they wanted a David, but what they got was a Joseph.

- I can only imagine that, at the Sermon on the Mount, when Jesus preached “love thy enemy” they had a cow!
- They wanted Christ to ride into Jerusalem on a white horse carrying a sword, not lowly and on a donkey.
- They wanted Jesus to lead them in battle against Rome, but Jesus chose to fight the Devil in the spirit instead.
- They wanted God’s Kingdom to spread through conquest, not through the preaching of the Gospel.
- His death on the Cross was the last straw, and they rejected Him as the Messiah.

COMMON PEOPLE. All of the common people who weren't necessarily a card-carrying member of one of these groups sympathized with one or more of them. Now you understand why, when asked to choose between Jesus as Bar Abbas, they chose Bar Abbas. Now you get why they shouted "crucify Him!" when Pilate asked what should be done with Him.

TEMPLE DESTROYED. Now we move forward to 70 AD when the 1st Roman-Jewish war finally came to an end. When the Romans destroyed the Temple and looted all the treasures within, Judaism changed forever...*a change that affected our Bibles and the Jewish faith to this day.*

CENTERED AROUND TEMPLE. Judaism as God commanded it was **centered around the Temple and Priesthood: the sacrifices, the rituals, everything**. With the Temple destroyed the Sadducees were gone. The High Priest, gone. The Sanhedrin, gone. Individual sacrifice for sin: gone. Nationwide sacrifice for sin: gone. Imagine if both the Vatican and Vatican city were completely razed to the ground...it would throw the Catholic Church into a major crises.

The *Zealots and Essenes were weakened* as many of them died in the war. There were only two Jewish sects left in mainstream society were the Pharisees...**and the Christians.**

NOT ANOTHER RELIGION. The Christians were NOT considered an entirely different religion back then, but another "denomination" of Judaism...and they were flourishing! The Apostles had been converting people by the thousands for 4 decades at that point, planting churches all over the place! Signs, wonders, and miracles abounded and people were flocking to this new Messianic cult! It's message of grace and forgiveness, resurrection from the dead, and the return of Christ in power and glory was drawing both Jew and Gentile alike! This was unprecedented!

And to the Pharisees, unacceptable. They saw themselves fighting a war on 2 fronts: 1) against the Romans who threatened them physically and 2) against the Christians who threatened them spiritually. With the destruction of the Temple and the rampant evangelism of the Apostles, they saw the Jewish faith on the cusp of death and that they alone could save it. But how?

JOHN THE PHARISEE. It started with a Pharisee named John, who secretly met with the Roman general Titus (responsible for conquering Jerusalem & burning the Temple) and asked permission to open up a religious school. Titus agreed and John created this school in Jamnia. *He had an ambitious young disciple named Akiba ben Yosef who would change everything...right up to this day.*

AKIBA MAKES A PLAN. A few decades later, at the start of the second century, Akiba was in charge of the Pharisee school and *concocted a plan to fight against the Christian incursion*. Akiba was very familiar with the weapon the Christians were using to evangelize: the Bible.

They were quoting prophetic Scriptures to prove the Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah AND to include Gentiles to be in covenant with God!

THEY PREACHED THAT PEOPLE NO LONGER NEEDED TO KEEP THE LAW BUT THAT CHRIST HAD DONE IT FOR THEM.

They shared that people were Saved by God's Grace and would receive God the Holy Spirit inside them.

This heresies needed to be stopped at all costs! Earlier I spent some time telling you why the various Jewish sects hated Jesus, and I did so because said hatred motivated what Akiba did next. Akiba had a major case of JDS, didn't want to share Salvation with Gentiles, and certainly wanted Jews keeping the Law vs. this "grace" stuff...but how to combat this? He and his disciples then took the following actions...*we have now entered the white water rapids of the sermon. The inconvenient fact part.*

Akiba stopped calling his sect "Pharisees" and rebranded them "Rabbis/Sages." While they didn't invent the term Rabbi, they added unprecedented authority to it. Remember: they were the only "priestly" religious sect that was left. With the Temple gone, much of the written Torah could no longer be followed which was perfect for Akiba—because *he and his disciples were now the SOLE keepers of the Jewish Faith...and the Scriptures.*

Although the Pharisees had always taught the Oral Law as equal to God's actual commandments, Akiba and his men were now **the supreme authorities of the Jewish faith**. Any Jews who hadn't converted to Christ looked to them for leadership.

While Akiba enjoyed this authority and power, he still had the problem of **Christian evangelists using the Bible to prove out Jesus and invite Gentiles to Salvation**. His solution to this problem was significant.

Akiba, who did read and write Hebrew, had a 2nd or 3rd gen copy of the Hebrew Vorlage...and he decided to change it.

He made mostly subtle (and some overt) edits to the Bible to

- Direct people away from Jesus as the Messiah
- Make Him a man and not God in the flesh.
- Keep Salvation for the Jews only.
- Make sure Jews keep the Law—especially the Oral—instead of receiving Grace.

I will prove it to you in a few moments. Akiba went through the Scriptures and revised certain verses, then presented Jewish society with the “official and authorized” Jewish Bible.

He renounced the Septuagint as “the Christian Bible.”

TRANSLATED INTO GREEK. Akiba’s Bible was written in Hebrew and most of the common people only read Greek. Thus one of Akiba’s disciples named Aquila took up the task of translating Akiba’s Hebrew Bible into Greek which was completed around 120 A.D. so that the Greek speaking Jews could read the Bible.

Akiba’s Hebrew Bible and Aquila’s Greek Bible replaced the Septuagint to the point where the vast majority of modern day Protestant and Catholic Bibles are translated from it, including the KJV.

Akiba’s Hebrew Bible is now known as the **MASORETIC TEXT**, because it was eventually given to a group of Scribes called the Masoretes who preserved and copied it faithfully (the Masoretes were good people). The only modern day denomination who still uses the Septuagint is the Greek Orthodox Church.

Remember that both the Septuagint and the MT are OT only.

Now to prove that Akiba made changes. In the Gospels and epistles, you notice that the Apostles quote from the OT. If you have the KJV (and most Protestant Bibles), you may have noticed an anomaly...please listen closely. The NT authors quote from a different Bible version than the OT version the same Protestant Bible uses.

ESV NT of Romans 15:12 of Paul quoting Isaiah 11:10: ‘And again Isaiah says, "The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope."

LXX (the Septuagint): Isaiah 11:10 “The root of Jesse and he that shall rise to rule over the Gentiles; in Him shall the Gentiles trust.”

KJV OT (using MT) of Isaiah 11:10 “The root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek; and his rest shall be glorious.”

Who is the “Him” Isaiah is referring to who is 1) the root of Jesse and 2) in whom Gentiles can hope and trust? Christ. When preaching to the Romans, Paul is pointing to Jesus as their hope, the Messiah, and their Savior. He’s telling them that Christ included them, Gentiles, in covenant for Salvation and that King Jesus would rule over them too...meaning they are also sons and daughters of God! **Paul is quoting from the Septuagint.**

Now look at the MT that Akiba changed. He’s 1) he says “it” and “which” to redirect people away from the PERSON of Jesus and 2) says the Gentiles will seek this “it” but leaves “it” ambiguous and 3) deleted the word “rule” which clearly denotes a person. Akiba’s goal was to was direct people away from Jesus and to leave the Gentiles out of covenant.

ESV NT of Hebrews 10:5, where author quotes from Psalms 40:6: ‘Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, **but a body have you prepared for me;**” ‘

LXX of Psalms 40:6: “Sacrifices and offerings thou wouldest not, **but a body thou hast prepared for me.**”

KJV OT (using MT): “Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; **mine ears hast thou opened:** burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required.”

JESUS COME IN FLESH. One thing unbelieving Jews rejected was that Jesus was God made flesh in the Person of Jesus. The Apostle John said that whoever denies that Jesus came in the flesh was of the spirit of antichrist. Now look what Akiba did: he changed this verse to obscure the truth that Jesus was God in the flesh.

ESV NT of Luke 4:18, quoting Isaiah 61:1: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and **recovering of sight to the blind.**”

LXX of Isaiah 61:1: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me; he has sent me to preach the glad tidings to the poor, to heal the broken in heart, to proclaim liberty to the captives, **and recovery of sight to the blind.**”

KJV OT (from MT) of Isaiah 61:1: “The Spirit of the Lord GOD [is] upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives,” [MISSING]

DELETED HEALING BLINDNESS. Here Akiba deleted “recovering sight to the blind” because, of all the miracles listed here, Jesus was most well known for this to confirm that He was Messiah.

I've restrained myself from quoting more so this sermon wouldn't go on for hours, and I'll share a few more next week.

This is NOT an attack on the KJV. My personal Bible is the KJV and is still the one I read. Millions have been Saved and discipled through the KJV and will continue to be. And remember: the vast majority of Protestant Bibles are translated from the MT—the Hebrew Bible that Akiba changed. So what applies to KJ applies to all.

Remember what I said at the beginning: **I could not fit everything into today's message and it's vital you come back next week to listen to part 2.**

Until then remember what I also told you: despite Akiba's efforts, **the Lord has still preserved His word in both the pages of your Bible and in you!**

Not only was the Septuagint preserved—I have a copy and its free on the internet!—but some modern translations such as the ESV make careful footnotes that cite the differences between the Septuagint and MT.

They “fill in the blanks” and correct the edits Akiba made.

Until next week when I can explain more, read this:

[Rom 2:15 ESV] 15 They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them

[Rom 10:8 ESV] 8 But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim);

WORD IN YOUR HEART. Upon our Salvation, the Holy Spirit of Truth entered into you and wrote Himself on our hearts so that when we read the Bible, our spirit bears additional witness to the truth! More on that next week!

My point is, despite Akiba's edits THE CHURCH KNOWS THE TRUTH.

- We know Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God.
- Despite Akiba trying to exclude Gentiles from Salvation we still heard the Gospel and got Saved.
- We know Jesus healed blindness despite Akiba cutting that part out.
- We know that we're Saved by Grace and not by following the Law.

Through a combination of the Holy Spirit and good Spirit-led scholarship, Akiba's efforts have not only been countered but the Truth of Jesus has appeared to all!

The Gospel continues to draw people to Christ on the Cross for the forgiveness of sin! We continue to be disciplined through the Scriptures!