

Baptism on Green June 11

Cuba – 90K and counting!

Intro:

Two Graphs – The Bible is totally accurate in all of the principles it teaches – National Christians 43%, Omaha Christians 27% (Second Click)

The Bible is the inspired word of God and contains truth about the world – National Christians 53%, Omaha Christians 41%

Our goal: increase our confidence in this book we always read from and study.

If you grew up in Sunday School, you learned great songs with great theology. The BIBLE, yes that's the book for me – I read and pray and then obey... the BIBLE. OR, Yes, Jesus loves me yes Jesus loves me, yes Jesus loves me... the Bible tells me so.

But at some point, you start asking the "Why" questions and the "How" questions. For me, it was 5th grade. Others it is high school or in their 20s. Now, they use a fancy phrase "deconstructing my faith", but back in the day, we were just questioning or doubting. And that is a very healthy process if you are looking for real answers.

Others of you may be here and you had no church background. But the Christians around you are quoting the Bible about morals or God or history and your first question is "Why should I take the Bible seriously? Is it any better or different than quoting Mark Twain, or Confucius or the Baghavad Gita?"

SO, here at CCC we are taking a break from teaching FROM the Bible to teaching ABOUT the Bible. How was it put together? How is it organized? Why is it so darn hard to understand? Who wrote it? Is it really inerrant? And in five weeks, Alex and Josh and I will unpack these questions and more.

This is the most difficult, complicated, crazy book you will ever read.

So, first question, 10 reasons the Bible is hard to understand?

This book is the most difficult book most of us will ever read in our lifetime. If you have a hard time understanding the Bible, you are in good company! That is because it is difficult to comprehend! Here are some of the reasons.

- 1) The Bible is not written in Chronological order. You can't start at the beginning and read through like a story. In fact, Genesis and Revelation kind of fake you out, because they are the first and the last books about the beginning and the end, but in the middle it gets all jumbled up.
- 2) It was written by over 30 authors. They came from all walks of life from fishermen, to kings, from simple to highly educated.

- 3) It was written in **3 languages**. Mostly Hebrew in the Old Testament and Greek in the New Testament. But a big chunk of Daniel and smatterings of the gospel are in Aramaic.
- 4) It was written **2000-3400 years ago**. There is a huge gap in culture and context that we need to learn in order to find meaning.
- 5) It was written from **all over the world!** Check out this **MAP!** Three continents, 13 locations, and one we don't even know. Look at this... 8 books in Rome, 2 from Nicopolis, three in Corinth, Revelation was written on the Island of Patmos, Ephesus has five books, Antioch has one. Two were written while the Israelites were in exile in Babylon – Ezekiel and Daniel – and one while in Persia Esther. Then of course, 29 in Israel, one in Edom... five while travelling through the wilderness... the first five. And part of that – the ten commandments was written with the finger of God on tablets in Sinai, modern day Egypt. Finally, there is Job which was written in Uz, but nobody knows where UZ... Was...
- 6) **It messes with you.** You are not supposed to read it and come away the same. Your thinking should be challenged. You read the Bible and it reads you... It is meant to mess with you and cause you to think and act differently.
- 7) It has many **layers of meaning**. This is a book that gets richer with time, richer with life experience, and the more you know it, the more you see the connections. But your first time through, you only see the first layers.
- 8) It has **many types of literature** – including history, poetry, census, gospel, prophetic, wisdom and more. Each type of literature has different rules for how to interpret it. Add to that the particular context of literature or history... and it is very challenging.
- 9) There are **boring parts**. Seriously, pages of census data, counting horses or gold plates, explicit instructions for the tabernacle, prophecies that relate to old foreign countries you have never heard of and names you cannot pronounce like Mephibosheth, Jeconiah, or the longest name in the Bible Mahershalalhashbaz. (and I have no idea if I said that right!)
- 10) **It is LONG!** – The Bible has, get this – 66 books, 1189 chapters, 31,103 verses and 807,361 words!

OK, so that tells you why this is the hardest book you will ever study. But it is also the best book you will ever study. Nothing that is GOOD is ever EASY. Have you ever noticed that? Have you ever heard an Olympic gymnast say “yeah, the gold is nice and it was pretty easy to get.” Have you ever heard anybody in a long term marriage say “it was a piece of cake.” Have you ever heard anybody build a cool organization or get a PHD and say “really, no problem.”? Nothing of high value comes easy. But here are some reasons that Studying the Bible is the best educational investment you can make.

But before we get there, we are going to test your Biblical literacy – With a **Middle School Moment!**

Sword Drill! – **Books of the Bible chart** and **lower thirds of verse references: John 1:1, Leviticus 27:30, Proverbs 30:5, Romans 10:9, Nahum 1:7.**

10 reasons the Bible is extraordinary!

- 1) It is **organized by genre**. First, you need to know the Bible comes in **2 parts**. The OLD Testament happened before Jesus. The NEW Testament is about Jesus and the early church. And within

each of these two parts, they are organized by Genre. You need to know that the organizers put careful thought into how the literature is put together. Let me show you **on this slide**:

- a. Torah – books of Moses – the basis of the whole OT – origins in Genesis, redemption and community creation in Exodus, Laws for living in Leviticus, training in numbers, and a review of it all in Deuteronomy.
 - b. Then you have history books from Joshua to Esther. These are largely chronological, although not perfectly. Read them to get through the history of Israel.
 - c. Wisdom literature – Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes. Super practical, suffering, worship literature and just wisdom for life
 - d. Then you have three MAJOR prophets – major because they are long books, not because they are more important.
 - e. Finally, you have MINOR prophets who were all found on a single scroll. 12 altogether. Now, the wisdom literature and the prophets are all sprinkled in among the history books... but also stand on their own.
 - f. In the NEW TESTAMENT, you have four gospels – select biographies of Jesus’ life.
 - g. Acts is a history of the early church and it’s spread to the gentiles.
 - h. Then you have epistles, In a Sunday School class, a teacher once asked “What is an epistle?” And the eight-year-old said “An epistle is a female apostle!” Actually, it is just a fancy way to say a letter to a person or group. In fact, you can find that the epistles are organized by author. Paul’s letters are first and go longest to shortest – usually to groups first, then individuals. Hebrews we don’t know the author. The rest are just the name of who wrote it.
 - i. Finally, you have revelation – apocalyptic literature – in other words, stuff God revealed to John about spiritual reality and the future.
 - j. Once you understand HOW it is organized, it is easier to find your way around it. If you are new to the Bible, you may wonder where to start. Here are my top six books for beginners: **Mark, John, Acts, Genesis, Exodus, Ephesians**
- 2) It is **mostly not boring**. There is huge excitement – I mean game of thrones level intrigue, backstabbing, wars, prostitution, family drama, miracles, massive turnarounds, redemption, philosophy, joys and pains and keys to life. This book is so cool!
 - 3) **Many types of literature** – This is also an advantage- worship poetry for life’s ups and downs, stories of a beauty queen rescuing a nation, sayings for how to do relationships and predictions about the future that came true with amazing potency. It is not like JUST reading a history book or a comic book or a Shakespeare play. You have huge diversity to match life.
 - 4) It has **layers that get better** with time. Over the years, I have read the Bible cover to cover a dozen times plus a bunch of deeper study in between. I need to say that every time I read it, I see new and bigger and deeper connections. The layers get better all the time the more I study. I am very convinced that I can read till I am 100 and it will be richer every time!
 - 5) It represents huge **cultural diversity** – languages, continents, types of people. I am constantly learning about people that are not like me and this makes me richer.
 - 6) It **connects you to God** of the Universe – The overarching story is all about how God connects us to himself. Much of it is God’s interaction with individuals and the nation of Israel and her neighbors. It is a compendium of God’s character and a manual for God’s might. If you want to know God, your surest source of information about him is the Bible.

- 7) **It empowers you** to become an amazing human being, full of God's truth, his spirit and his power. This book gives you a roadmap for life, wisdom for relationships, principles for business, values for your family, comfort in the midst of sorrow, purpose in a land that is adrift. It will help you become all you can be.
- 8) **It messes with you.** It gives you a lens through which you can understand reality, make decisions and align your belief with truth. It messes with you, and you rearrange your life around it. In fact, if you read a book that has no impact on you, why read it? The Bible immerses you into truth and enables you to live in harmony with God and the Universe rather than disharmony.
- 9) **It is ONE story** that points you to Jesus. When you read the Old Testament, you catch winds of waiting for a rescue. A messiah, a Christ, who will come and make things right. There are poems that speak of him, pictures that are a shadow of what he fulfills, and promises of what God will do through him. **(illustration?)**. All of these point forward to Jesus. Then, there are the gospels that are about God in human form walking the planet. And the rest of the New Testament are the implications of God coming to earth.
- 10) **It engages you in Gods plan** – We walk around this world with a sense that 'this is not the way it was meant to be.' And if we just look at people and empires and wars and pain. If we look at our own situation of Birth, School, Work, Death, we can be led to despair, no matter how much money or fame or kids we have. – try the book of Ecclesiastes if this resonates with you. But the Bible unfolds this plan. It is a plan where beauty replaces ugly, where abundance replaces scarcity, where light crashes into darkness, and love overcomes a multitude of sin. It beckons you "COME, give yourself to stuff that matters. Stuff that will last forever. Stuff that transforms a broken world into a thing of beauty. It empowers you by God's spirit to align with God's plan. And it is our guidebook on how to make it happen.

Ok, so this leads us to our second question of the day. "Why these books?" It is both amazing and challenging, but how did we get the books that we trust as 'the Bible' today?

I want to give you the high-level bottom line first and then get into the mechanics. **Why do we trust the Bible of today?**

1) Old Testament – Because Jesus believed it.

18 For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. 19 Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 5:18-19

2) New Testament – Because Jesus commissioned it and gave his Spirit

Now I know that some people at this moment are going "Wait a minute" – we believe in Jesus because the Bible said to and we believe in the Bible cuz Jesus said to... that sounds and awful lot like circular reasoning to me!" And if this is your thought, come back next week and we will turn the circular

reasoning into linear reasoning and build a case from history and archaeology and philosophy about trusting the Bible.

But this week, we will focus on how the books we have got selected.

Let me do the easy one first: The New Testament. Remember, the New Testament looks back on Jesus' life. And after someone rises from the dead and starts a huge movement, somebody is going to write about it. WE are fortunate to have three eyewitnesses – Matthew, Mark, and John – and one guy who interviewed eyewitnesses – Luke. They give us a comprehensive, firsthand look at the most important life of all time. Now, these books, plus the letters were considered 'good' by the original New Testament community. **How do we know a New Testament book is trustworthy?**

- **They circulated them** – they passed them on to the next guy, copied them and distributed them. They were widely known because the people who were there on the scene said “yup, this is how it went down.”
- **They quoted them** – in the first centuries after Jesus, there were thousands of letters written between the church fathers where they quoted from these books.
- **They were written with 'apostolic authority'**. In other words, they were written by an apostle, or by a scribe on behalf of an apostle. Mark wrote for Peter, Luke wrote for Paul, and some of the letters have unnamed scribes who wrote Paul or Peter's words.

Other contemporary books were written – but they were either not by the eyewitnesses, or the NT church never believed them... because they were not credible. So, these 27 books get circulated, affirmed.

- 40-90 – New Testament is written
- 2nd century- 4th century – Monasteries and churches carefully copy the books of the NT
- 2nd century-4th century – Gnostic Gospels are written
- 140 – Marcion is a heretic who began to dispute some of the 27 books
- 303 – Eusebeus categorizes NT book in his “Church History” With Accepted, Disputed but common, Spurious and Rejected
- 382- Pope St. Damasus 1 calls the synod at Rome that decrees the 27 NT books as Canon

So, why were gospels with cool names like **Thomas, Phillip, Barnabas** rejected? Add these dates under each – **160 AD (Gnostic), 230 AD (Gnostic), 1500 AD** Well, they were written over 100 years after the fact by non-eyewitnesses and were not believed by the early church. Pretty simple.

Now, every once in a while, you will hear a stirring from the Newsweek or Time Magazine genres. They will say “a lost gospel is found.” Or “why did the early church hid this gospel?!” Now you know, these are nothing burgers – publicity stunts to sell magazines or clickbait. Eyewitness books are in, 3rd century forgeries are out.

How about the Old Testament? How did it come to be? This one, admittedly is fuzzier. Why? Mostly because it was over 2,500 years ago and nobody documented the process – OR, the documentation was lost in the sands of time. Here are a few things that make sense that they would have been mindful of:

- the reputation of each book's human author
- doctrines and statements within a given manuscript that conflict with the clear teachings of established biblical writings
- historical inaccuracies and/or spurious prophetic utterances that would cast a shadow of doubt on a manuscript
- a book's widespread acceptance or rejection by respected scholars

In ancient oral and written traditions, it was common that anything less than critical would not be copied. Copying was so expensive and time consuming that it was a natural weed-out process. Only the most important items were kept.

The Old Testament was commonly held for 400 years by the people in Israel and Jesus himself quoted from it, submitted to it and affirmed it. Basically, the argument goes, if it is good enough for Jesus it is good enough for me.

But what about the Apocrypha? If you have ever held a Catholic or orthodox Bible you might notice a little something extra in the middle. Seven books called the "Apocrypha", meaning "Hidden writings". These books were written between 400BC and 0. In that time we call 'silent'. Now, these books hold value, they teach us quite a bit, but are they scripture?

39 Books – Hebrew Bible known and read by all Jewish people and agreed by scholars, including the bible Jesus used. Then, around 200 BC, they translated the 39 books into Greek and called it the "Septuagint" but they also translated **7 other books** and packaged them together. Now, the Jewish people did not change their thinking, but many greeks and Romans got a new idea about what is the Bible? Now, these books floated around and they were even used and quoted by church Fathers – **until 1546, in the council of Trent**, the Catholic church decreed that yes, the Apocrypha IS the Bible.

So, if people ask "Why don't you consider the Apocrypha part of the Old Testament?" The simple reason is "Because Jesus didn't". The snarky answer is "Well, why do you think it has to be added after 2000 years of not being in there?"

Alright, so we have hit a ton of facts this morning and answered, "How is the Bible organized?", "How did they decide which books to include?", and "What about the other books? Why were they left out?"

After all is said and done, this is the hardest and best piece of literature you will ever digest. The more you read it, the more you realize that God was behind it. That he orchestrated authors and history to tell us his story and reveal his plan. This book is not just an 'instruction manual for life' or a 'love letter from God.' It is a historical, messianic, salvation revealing, multi-genre reflection of the character nature and plan of God. It is a compendium of stories that points to Jesus in a unified manner through the diversity of all kinds of culture. It is just amazing. And it is worth reading, meditating on, analyzing, and studying every day of your life. Unlike any other book, this one is worth it.

**"For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways,"
declares the Lord.**

⁹ "As the heavens are higher than the earth,

so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

¹⁰As the rain and the snow

come down from heaven,

and do not return to it

without watering the earth

and making it bud and flourish,

so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,

¹¹so is my word that goes out from my mouth:

It will not return to me empty,

but will accomplish what I desire

and achieve the purpose for which I sent it Isaiah 55:8–11

Where were the books of the Bible written?



Europe

Rome — 8 books

Nicopolis — 2 books

Corinth — 3 books

Patmos — Revelation

Asia

Ephesus — 5 books

Antioch — Galatians

Babylon — Ezekiel, Daniel

Persia — Esther

Israel — 29 books

Edom — 1

Misc

Egypt — Part of Exodus

Wilderness — 5 books

Uz — 1