

CHAPTER 14

BELIEVING THE BIBLE – PART 1

*what about sickness and death?
...and how about healing and life!*

Before reading this chapter, how would you answer the question:
Should we believe all the Bible is true?

How much of the Bible is true?

It is one thing to understand the Bible, but it is quite another thing to believe it.

How much of the Bible should we believe? All of it? Or should we pick out only those parts we think are true?

2Timothy 3:16–17 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. (NKJV)

Anyone who reads the Bible is bound to say it contains good things, maybe even things inspired of God. For example the Bible says for us to love our neighbour (Matthew 22:39). Who can argue with this?

But do we believe God inspired all the Bible? When Jesus says obey My commandments, is He referring to all the Bible, or do we need to hold back and judge each passage as we read it?

In this chapter, we will examine the reliability of the Bible and what happens when we do not take all of it as truth. We will also look at some objections people raise.

Believing all the Bible is true

No one understands the Bible fully. Therefore, believing all the Bible to be true requires faith.

There are good reasons why we can believe all the Bible, primarily because of its claims that God wrote it. Many times the Bible uses phrases such as ‘God said’ (Genesis 1:3), or ‘the Lord said’ (Exodus 3:7), or ‘Thus says the Lord’ (Jeremiah 2:5). Matthew, Mark, Luke and John contain many words spoken by Jesus, the Son of God (Matthew 16:15–17).

2Peter 1:20–21 Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the

human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (NIV)

There is also a solemn warning in the Bible for men not to add or take away any words from the Bible (Revelation 22:18–19).

Not accepting all of the Bible is true

Some people assert the scriptures are always right when talking about God, faith and salvation, but otherwise can be in error.

We should think very carefully indeed before accepting the Bible can be wrong as taking this step can adversely affect our relationship with God.

Firstly, we may feel we cannot always take Him at face value. God could very easily tell the truth in the Bible so why mislead us with something which is wrong?

Secondly, we make ourselves judge over what God says and we end up deciding what is true and what is false.

Thirdly, we will hold back from submitting ourselves fully to God's ways. If we doubt the integrity of the Bible in some way, in critical times we could default to judging what is right in our own eyes rather than God's. Everyone has their own opinion on what is right and wrong (Judges 21:25) so we could end up ultimately pursuing our own ways.

Literal or metaphorical?

A related question, concerning how much we believe the Bible, is how much of it should be taken as literally true and how much is metaphorical. If we take a metaphorical interpretation, then we are saying the Bible is not meant to be understood the way it is presented, but rather we should look for a deeper spiritual interpretation.

God has written the Bible so that the ordinary person can understand it and apply it to their lives.

Proverbs 3:1–2 My son, do not forget my law, But let your heart keep my commands; For length of days and long life And peace they will add to you.

Indeed He wants us to be able to teach it to our children (Deuteronomy 6:6–7), so much of it will be clear and easy to understand. We can therefore take it literally.

However, there are some passages where the plain literal meaning does not make any sense and we are forced into looking for a metaphorical (or spiritual) meaning.

Jesus deliberately spoke in parables when people started resisting Him so they would not understand (Matthew 13:10ff). When He gave the interpretation to His disciples, we can see the true meaning of the parables was something deeper. One time He said to His followers that they needed to eat His flesh and drink His blood (John 6:51ff). Many of His disciples stopped following Him when they heard this because they took Him literally and did not understand what He really meant (John 6:66).

If we are not disciplined in the way we read the Bible, we could end up spiritualising anything we disagree with. A good rule of thumb is to take the plain meaning of the passage unless there is an obvious reason not to.

We should also note that there may be a plain and a spiritual meaning to a passage (see for example Galatians 4:21–31).

Why doubt the Bible?

In all likelihood, we will need some convincing before we can accept all the Bible is true. Why is this?

Any objections are likely to fall into these categories:

1. We do not think the Bible is always correct about the world we live in
2. We do not think the Bible is always correct about God and the Spiritual dimension

3. We do not think the Bible is always good in its moral teachings
4. We doubt the Bible's accuracy or supernatural authority

These objections almost certainly come from something else we have already been taught. Rather than dismiss the Bible out of hand, it is prudent to reconsider the reasons for our existing beliefs.

Objection 1: the Bible is not always correct about the world we live in

It is easy to accept the Big Bang Theory and the Theory of Evolution as true, because we hear about them unchallenged all the time. Our faith in this worldview may build up over time without our ever realising it.

However, questions about life and the origin of mankind are hugely important so it is perfectly acceptable to challenge these theories. You might find it helpful to think deeply about the following questions:

- (i) Is it credible that everything in the universe suddenly exploded into being, whereas previously nothing existed?
- (ii) Is it likely that all life evolved spontaneously out of a piece of rock? Or is it more likely that a piece of rock will remain a piece of rock no matter how long you leave it?
- (iii) Is it right to assume that things behave many millions of years ago exactly the same way they do today?
- (iv) Is it valid to rule out the spiritual nature of man because we cannot prove it physically?
- (v) Is it safe to dismiss miracles simply because they do not fit our own limited worldview?

In general, a child will accept miracles happen more readily than an adult, and a humble uneducated person will believe before an accomplished academic. Education must therefore adversely affect our ability to believe in supernatural things.

Proving miracles actually happen to an educated sceptic is a difficult thing to do as the level of proof required can be very high indeed. People who strongly disbelieve in miracles can actually hinder them from happening in the first place (Mark 6:5–6), so it is quite likely God hides proof from them (Matthew 11:25; Mark 8:11–12).

There is anecdotal evidence for miracles occurring in the churches today. According to recent surveys, there are two million evangelical Christians in the UK,¹ and 83% of these believe in the miraculous gifts of the spirit.² Something must have convinced them.

In the next chapter, we will look more at the Creation – Evolution debate.

Objection 2: the Bible is not always correct about God and the spiritual dimension

Any knowledge about God and the spiritual dimension has to come by revelation rather than scientific observation. If we disagree with Jesus being the Son of God (Matthew 16:13–17; 17:5) and Jesus being the only way we can come to the Father (John 14:6), then it is because we have accepted an alternative revelation which says something else.

Why are there conflicting revelations about God? We can see this by the number of different religions with their associated holy writings. Why not just have one religion with everyone in agreement?

The confusion over God (which also exists within Christendom) is a reflection of the situation in Heaven. God has given His Word to man, but Satan in seeking to promote his own kingdom hinders the truth (1 Thessalonians 2:18). He is a liar and the father of liars (John 8:44) and uses deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons (1 Timothy 4:1) to confuse. As a result, there are many deceivers in the world (2 John 7), people who consistently oppose the truth (Acts 13:8–10), who preach things they do not understand (1 Timothy 1:7) and who substitute man's teachings in place of God's (Matthew 15:8–9). Jesus warned his disciples to beware of the religious leaders'

teachings (Matthew 16:11). The Bible says those who do not have the right teaching about Jesus Christ do not have God (2John 9).

How will we know what is the right path to take? Jesus said this to those who believed Him...

John 8:31–32...If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free (NKJV)

Objection 3: the Bible is not always good in what it teaches

The Bible's standard of righteousness is the same as God's, which is perfection. When we struggle with its moral teachings, it is because we have been brought up in a sinful world which has different views of right and wrong.

The struggles people have with the Bible will vary across cultures and over time, but in today's western countries the following teachings are probably most of concern:

- (i) Everyone has sinned before God and are deserving of hell (Romans 3:23; Luke 12:4–5)
- (ii) The way God treated nations in the Old Testament (Joshua 8:1ff)

In the Old Testament, God lived among the Israelites and so their enemies became His enemies. When a nation came and fought against Israel, they unknowingly fought against God as well so He would destroy them. At that time, God based His throne in the midst of the nation of Israel so His servants fought to protect it.

Conversely, in the New Testament, when the soldiers came to arrest Jesus, He told His disciples not to fight back.

John 18:36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here." (NKJV)

By this time, God had moved His throne back into Heaven, so there was nothing on earth to fight for (see Ezekiel 9:3; 10:4; 10:18–19; 11:23). Jesus taught His disciples that they should not fight to impose God’s will on this earth, or even try to force people to do God’s will, but instead to seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33).

(iii) God’s favouritism with Israel (Deuteronomy 10:15)

(iv) The prohibition on killing (especially with regard to unborn infants) (Exodus 20:13)

(v) The strong emphasis placed on traditional marriage, including submission to male leadership (Matthew 19:3–12; Ephesians 5:22ff)

(vi) Common sexual behaviour is condemned; such as fornication (sex outside of marriage), adultery (breaking a marriage vow) and homosexuality (Galatians 5:19–21; Romans 1:26–32)

(vii) Submission to authorities rather than fighting for our rights (Romans 13:1ff)

Why do we struggle with the Bible? God sees things differently to man. In general, man only sees things as far as his death so wants everything now. In contrast, God sees this age as a temporary time of testing.

Matthew 16:26 For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? (NKJV)

Objection 4: the Bible is not always accurate

Some people find it difficult to accept the Bible is infallible because it was written thousands of years ago and has been copied and translated many times through the generations. They overlook the fact that God would take care of it.

Psalm 119:160 Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever. (KJV)

If we can accept the claim that the Bible is inspired of God, then in its original Hebrew and Greek manuscripts, it will be perfectly right. Errors in translation, while regrettable, do not undermine our confidence in the Bible. Jesus managed fine by quoting from the Septuagint (see for example Mark 7:6–7 with Isaiah 29:13), which is a Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament.

People misquoting or misunderstanding the Bible can cause others to lose confidence in the Bible. This is predicted to happen (2Peter 3:16, 2Timothy 4:3–4) and the number of denominations and sects indicates just how common this is. We need the Holy Spirit to help us use the Bible correctly otherwise we may misuse it ourselves.

Galileo, in 1615, correctly observed that the earth moved around the sun, and not, what was believed at that time, that the sun revolved around the earth. The religious authorities at that time rejected his observations. They had a narrow and bigoted view on the subject based on their understanding of the Bible. Although the earth is the most important place in the physical universe, God chose not to place it in the centre of the universe. This caught many religious people out. Their bigotry was so serious that the Pope summoned Galileo before the Inquisition for his perceived error and made him spend the rest of his life under house arrest.³

Believing the Bible is true can be a struggle

Believing in God and in the Bible can be a struggle. If we live among people who do not believe or if we have a background of unbelief then we may find ourselves battling doubts in our own minds. Believing is not just an intellectual exercise but a spiritual and emotional one as well. Seeking God and prayer are the key for finding truth.

The emphasis science places on proof has hindered people forming a relationship with God. In the United States, a 2009 report by the Pew Research Center found that members of the American Association for the Advancement of Science were much less religious than the general public.⁴

God expects us to accept what the Bible teaches by faith.

Hebrews 11:3 By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible. (NKJV)

Science requires proof before believing something is true. Philosophy requires understanding. Both these approaches fail because God requires us to believe in Him without conclusive proof (Hebrews 11:1, 6) and without full understanding (Proverbs 3:5–6).

1 Corinthians 1:21–24 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. (NKJV)

Questions to consider

1. How much should we be open to other people's views of life and how much should we be closed to their views?
2. What sort of evidence do we need to believe in God?
3. How much should we seek to understand God before we believe Him?
4. Is there anything in the Bible you believe to be wrong? If so, why?

References:

1 Tearfund, Churchgoing in the UK, 2007, page 16

2 Christian Research for the Evangelical Alliance, 21st Century Evangelicals: A snapshot of the beliefs and habits of evangelical Christians in the UK, 2011, p5

3 The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, Edited by Cross and Livingstone, Third Edition, Oxford University Press 1997, pp 650–1

4 Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Relationship_between_religion_and_science#Surveys_on_scientists_and_the_general_public