

# ⇒ MY ⇒ PROBLEM *with God*

## Message 2 | Can I really trust the bible?

### Intro

KNIGHT THEATER

Today we are in part 2 of our series called “my problem with God.” The goal is to listen to common doubts and objections people have with God and then we as a church are going to try and give reasonable, hopeful responses to some of the more common ones. And, listen there is a spot on the website where you can post “your problem” anonymously and we’ll try to provide responses over time on our blog.

Today we are diving into what I think is maybe the most widely held objection to Christianity. The topic is the bible. The Holy Book of Christianity. It is far and away the highest selling book of all time. Currently, 50 copies of the bible are sold every MINUTE. It has shaped history, art, government, education, and culture for two millennia. And today this book stands as probably the most polarizing piece of writing ever. Some call it the “word of God” and devote their lives to following it & many others appreciate it’s place in history but completely reject its claim as having divine authority for our lives. That’s the chasm we are walking into today. And we’ll spend most

of our time of course addressing the objection to the bible being what it claims to be.

It goes like this: **How can you honestly believe that the bible, as we have it today, is the infallible word of God?** And the reason this is a really important question is because everything we Christians believe about God, sin, Jesus, salvation, heaven...we find our reasons for it where? IN THE BIBLE! So if the bible isn’t God’s words, then Christians can’t claim they have absolute truth. You see how pivotal this is?

This is why opponents of Christianity go after the bible. Because they know if you can prove it to be unreliable... then they can dismiss every other thing Christians believe. If we lose the bible, we lose Jesus! And there are many objections people throw at the bible that we are going to get into today:

- The Copies of Copies Problem
- Internal Contradictions Problem
- Fact vs Fiction problem
- Culturally Outdated & Offensive Problem –slaves

Do you see why, in the eyes of the modern person, believing the bible is God’s word is an uphill climb? And it doesn’t help them that when they try and talk to Christians about it they often hit a wall of circular logic that leaves the conversation at an impasse. It goes something like this

- Christian: I believe the bible is the word of God
- Non-Christian: How can you know it is the word of God?
- Christian: Because God said so

- Non-Christian: Where did he say that?
- Christian: In the Bible
- Non-Christian: 🙄

I KNOW! I get it. And I fear that as a result some of you have viewed the bible as small and irrelevant. An ancient book. And some of you Christians have been Christians for years but this book has no real impact on your daily life. You may believe it is God's word but an honest audit of your past 2 months says it isn't necessary for your life. For all of us, I want pray Paul's prayer in Ephesians that you might have the eyes of your heart enlightened that you may know the hope to which he has called you. That you begin to see or at least be open to the glorious nature of the bible.

I'm going to spend time getting a little technical in a few spots in an attempt to defend the reliability of the bible BUT I don't want that to overshadow the big picture. My job isn't just to convince you the bible is reliable. It's to invite you into IT. To challenge you to explore them and see for yourself what you make of it. My main point today, the big idea, is

The Bible reveals Jesus Christ to be the true savior of the whole world

That's what I want you to walk away with today ok. Let's be clear that this is the Bible's agenda. To introduce you to Jesus so that you might find true life in him. And that's where we are headed. But I feel it will help to show you the bible's credibility first to help us all go there in the end.

First, I'm going to show you what the bible says about itself by looking at a short passage from 2 Peter. I'm going to show you that it is indeed a historically reliable account & not a legend. Then we'll deal with 3 or 4 objections I mentioned above. Then we'll finish with a challenge to you.

What the Bible says about itself<sup>1</sup>:

[16] For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

[17] For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," [18] we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.

2 Peter 1:16-18

The apostle Peter, in this letter to the early churches, is seeking to expose some false teachers who were spreading lies about Jesus and the gospel message. Peter, the universally accepted author of this letter, is saying "We didn't follow some myth, some fairy tale that enforces a nice principle to live by, No we ourselves...with our own eyeballs...we were eyewitnesses to everything we are saying." The idea that the account of the death and resurrection of Jesus is a legend, or an oral tradition handed down, instead of an

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<sup>1</sup> I thought this was a helpful sermon structure by J.D. Greear in his sermon "You can't really trust the bible" preached in the "Why I'm not a Christian series" at the Summit Church in 2008.

eyewitness account...that is still very popular today like it was in Peter's day.

Critics will say "well history is written by those on the winning side. So what happened is after Jesus died his followers got together and the ones who held to the view that he was "divine" they are the ones who won out so they put the texts they wanted to in the bible. And over time the bible was changed by emperors and kings and so what we really have is not the historical Jesus. We have a legend.

"Nobody knows who the four evangelists were, but they almost certainly never met Jesus personally. Much of what they wrote was in no sense an honest attempt at history. . . . The gospels are ancient fiction." – Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*

Let me zero in on the 4 gospels and offer 4 reasons this cannot be true<sup>2</sup>:

**1. The Timing is too early for the gospel to be legend**

The 4 canonical gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, & John) were written at the very most 40 to 60 years after Jesus' death. Paul's letters were written just 15 to 25 years after his death and hold within them outlines of the events in Jesus' life that are recorded in the gospels. And those dates are almost universally agreed upon. Which means the biblical accounts of Jesus' life were circulating within the lifetime of the many hundreds of people who'd been

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<sup>2</sup> The structure of the "3 reasons" and much of the content comes from Tim Keller's *The Reason for God* chapter 7 "You Can't Take the Bible Literally." Pp 100 – 108.

around to see them first hand. Luke specifically says "I got this stuff from eye witnesses." This is just too soon after Jesus' life for a legend to be made up. Because too many people would say "Nah, it didn't happen that way."

For example: Mark says that the man who helped carry Jesus to the cross was the father of Alexander and Rufus (Mark 15.21). Why say that? In case you want to know if it really happened, go ask those guys.

Paul says there were 500 eye witnesses in 1 Cor 15 and you should check with them to verify that Jesus really did rise from the dead. You can't say that when writing during the lifetime of those eyewitnesses unless you are confident they will support your claim!

Some people say no one claimed Jesus was divine until Emperor Constantine showed up around 350 A.D. and decided Christianity would be the religion of the empire. Listen, the idea that calling Jesus divine was a political maneuver or a power play is absurd. Phillipians (written 27 years after Jesus died) records a hymn sung by the church about the divine nature of Jesus.

**2. The Content is too counterproductive to be legend**

Many people believe the gospels were written as a power play by the authors to assert their leadership, their view of the world, and to really push forward a certain kind of movement. But look at what they record in these gospels. There are some very embarrassing events and comments if you are trying to put forward a great leader & his knights of the round table.

Jesus in the Garden – he asks if he can get out of his mission. Why put that in there if it didn't happen? That makes him seem weak. Women were the first to discover Jesus at the tomb. Why make women the heroes, the first to believe in the resurrection...in a society where the status of women was so low their testimony wasn't admitted in court?

Why depict the apostles, the future leaders of the movement...as petty and jealous, and in the end as cowards who either actively or passively fail their master? Peter himself denies Jesus 3 Times in a very crucial moment. Why put that in? that's what reporters do. Report what happened.

### **3. The literary form of the gospels are too detailed to be legend**

"Historical fiction" like we have it today, didn't even exist as a genre back then. C.S. Lewis was a world class literary critic and he said " I have been reading poems, romances, vision literature, legends, and myths all my life. I know what they are like. I know none of them are like this. Of this (gospel) text there are only two possible views. Either this is reportage...or else, some unknown (ancient) writer...without known predecessors or successors, suddenly anticipated the whole technique of modern novelistic, realistic narrative..."

In other words...this was NOT remotely close to any type of fiction before, during, or after its time. IT WAS NOT RECEIVED AS HISTORICAL FICTION. THAT WOULD HAVE CHANGED THE COURSE OF LITERATURE.

NEVER BEFORE...POCKET OF TIME...1700 Years after it.

One evidence of that this isn't historical fiction is the inclusion of random unnecessary details. In that day, fiction genre like romances and epics just didn't include it like they do today. So the inclusion of random unnecessary details are evidence that this is a reportage not a legend. For example:

John 21 tells us Peter was 100 yards into the water when he saw Jesus. They later caught 153 fish together. Why tell us 153?

Or how about this one: Mark 14.52. My favorite example of this. Mark tells us Jesus is betrayed. And finishes the scene in verse 50 with he was taken away to fulfill what the scriptures said. And verse 53 begins the account of Jesus' interrogation before the high priests. But verses 51-52...right in the middle...say this:

[51] And a young man followed him, with nothing but a linen cloth about his body. And they seized him, [52] but he left the linen cloth and ran away naked.

That's it! That's all we hear about this guy! That he went streaking off into the woods. WHY INCLUDE THIS!?! Because it happened!!! Our office is right beside a retail strip and so I'll sometimes walk to the store and back. If I'm telling at the dinner table telling about my walk to Rite Aid tomorrow, and on that walk a guy went streaking through the parking lot...I'm pretty sure that's going to make it into the story. Because streakers are never central to the plot but always make it into the story!

### **4. The gospel was too costly to be a legend**

I owe this one to my old pastor J.D. Greear. I find this one to be really convincing. Why would the apostles make up the idea that Jesus died and then rose again...then die for it? Think about it. Preaching this got them all killed! Peter himself was crucified upside down the day after his wife was crucified. Do you really think they made this all up after he died and then they went to their deaths for it? And if you respond: "People sacrifice their lives all the time for their religion. Terrorists drive trucks into crowds & planes into buildings knowing it will cost them their lives." TRUE. But they don't die for something they know is a lie.

\*\*Christianity is diff than all other religions because its based on an event not on a teaching. These guys went to their death because they believed an event happened and they believed the implications of that event were that salvation from sin was offered to the whole world. It makes no sense that they would die for something they knew was a lie.

That'd be like deciding to start the Scott Urbanek RELIGION. The SCOTTIANS. We decide he's the messiah. He dies, we make a pact that "hey guys, let's all start calling him God and then we'll say he resurrected."

Then, some mob comes and lines us all up. You are 1<sup>st</sup> in line and I'm 2<sup>nd</sup>. and says to you: do you think Scott Urbanek is the resurrected messiah? If so we are going to kill you. In your head you say...well we did all agree on this so.. YES! And boom they kill you right there. When they come to me you know what I'm saying...OOOOO

HEY HUGE MISUNDERSTANDING. NOPE HE JUST HAD A GREAT SHOE GAME. MY BAD. RELIGION OVER! BYE!

I'm not going to my death for something I KNOW IS A LIE! The Gospel news is too costly for early Christians to believe in if it didn't really happen.

There is ample evidence to suggest the gospels are not legends but instead the eye witness accounts of the people who were right there on the scene. **The gospels are not legends. they are eye witness accounts of events that actually happened.**

One more really important thing Peter says in this passage:

[19] And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, [20] knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. [21] For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. 2 Peter 1:19-21

Peter is saying we can trust the bible because it's ultimate author is God, not men. To which you naturally say "waaaaiit a second. Men wrote the bible. That's abundantly clear. You were just talking about the authors. Yes and No. See where Peter says in verse 21

[21] For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God **as they were carried along** by the Holy Spirit

See that phrase carried along? The root there is the greek word “phero” which gives the idea that one thing is moving forward because another thing is moving it. I’m trying to teach my kids how to ride a bike. When going up hill I have my hand on their seat and on the handle bars. I’m pushing & steadying. Are they riding the bike? Yes and no. they are on it. But the only reason they get where they are headed is because I take them there. When you ask “how could fallible men write an infallible bible?” Peter is saying it’s the same thing. God “phero’d” them along.

So yes it is written by men which is why it has the personality, perspective, and clearly distinct writing styles of different authors. But, and this is big: it’s not the men who were infallible, but the words themselves given to them from God. That’s the claim. I know you may not agree with it. But can I pause here and challenge you a little? Read it for yourself. See if you do not find what it says to be true. See I think one of the best defenses of the claim the bible is God’s word is the beauty & glory of the bible. I’m going to come back to that at the end so let’s keep going.

Ok here are a couple more objections people give:

### **Doesn’t the Bible contradict itself?**

This objection focuses on the varying tellings of the same event and picks up on what seem like contradictory eye

witness accounts. This is the one my college professor I mentioned last week loved to hit us with. Something like this:

When you look at the resurrection, there are different accounts as to the number of angels at the tomb. Matthew’s account says there was ONE angel. He rolled the stone away, sat on it, and told Mary & Mary not to be afraid because Jesus rose. But then in Mark’s account the stone was already rolled away and it was Mary, Mary, & a woman named Salome who all went into the tomb and the angel was in there, not sitting on the stone. Luke’s account says it was “the women” doesn’t specify who. And says there were TWO angels in the tomb.. So...WHAT GIVES!?! How many angels? Norm Geisler in his book *When Skeptics Ask* puts the response really succinctly...Matthews gospel doesn’t say *only* one angel, nor does Mark. Luke’s gospel does say two. And where there is two, there is always one. One rolled it away, then went inside. This is not a real problem, just a weak attempt to play “gotcha” with the bible. And I believe with each of them there are thoughtful answers if we take the time to look and consider.

### **What about all of the contradictions between varying manuscripts?**

So one big problems doubters of the bible have is that we don’t have the original manuscripts of the bible. We don’t even have copies. We have copies of copies of copies. And, skeptics will point out...some of these copies have variations from one to the next. We don’t have God’s word, we have man’s word and its full of copying mistakes so we can’t trust it...right?

I feel in a moment like this like we are going into the “fact check” corner after a political debate. Here’s the deal. We have about 5,800 ancient copies of the original Greek New Testament. In fact you can view them online at the center for the study of new testament manuscripts. Ok, in those 5,800 manuscripts some scholars will say there are thousands and thousands of errors. Let me tell you what we have:

- Among those 5,800 texts there exists about 10,000 variants
- Out of those 10,000 all but 400 are spelling variants<sup>3</sup> (Like Courtney with a K instead of the correct way “C.”) Or typos & obvious mistakes like one manuscript that reads “thou shalt commit adultery”
- Of those 400 all but 40 are just sentence word order that doesn’t really matter:
  - We are saved by Jesus Christ our Lord vs. We are saved by our Lord Jesus Christ. Which one is it? Amen
- The total number of places where we there are variations between manuscripts that actually change the sense of the passage: 30.

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<sup>3</sup> While these stats come from Norm Geisler’s *When Skeptics Ask*, & the argument is best put forward in chapter 7 of Piper’s *Peculiar Glory*, I owe the organization of them to a seminar by Biblical Scholar Ed Gravely “Is the bible reliable” from December 2004. & the following “yard” illustration of them to J.D. Greear’s “You can’t take the bible literally” sermon. Ironically *this* Nic cage example is original with me (those who know greear know why I say ironically).

- OF THOSE 30, the number of places where something theological is at stake: 0.

And less you think I’m just giving you one side’s biased opinion, Bart Erhman, the new testament critic I mentioned last week gives significant ground on this: “[T]he essential Christian beliefs are not affected by textual variants in the manuscript tradition of the New Testament.”<sup>4</sup>

And if you say...why not just give us one copy that is perfect? Because that would not be anywhere near as reliable! If you had one copy locked up in the Vatican somewhere...I’d be convinced Nicolas Cage had broken in and national treasured it somehow. The fact that there are so many copies helps ensure that Nic Cage nor anyone else hasn’t messed with it because no one person could change all those copies! The vast multiplicity of copies is even more reliable than having only the original.

- Illustration: The Yard. The original “yard” stick is kept in Great Britain. If it vanished would we all say “OH NO! WE CANT KNOW WHAT A YARD IS!” Of course not, because we have all the copies.

### **The bible is culturally outdated and offensive**

I mentioned this one early on today and I know for many this is a huge objection. I want to bring up two things:

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<sup>4</sup> Bart Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), 252.

**1. Slow Down & Study It** - Sometimes people will say Ephesians 6.5 says slaves obey your masters. So therefore the bible approves of slavery. And that's as far as they go. Assumption made. In a soundbite culture can I suggest slowing down & really studying the things in the bible that concern you. Because you may find the bible doesn't say what you think it does. Here's the thing: ephesians 6.5 & Colossians 3.22 can be translated bondservants also BECAUSE the idea of slavery in that day was NOTHING like the African slave trade our minds go to where they kidnapped people and brought them on a boat and sold them. In that day bondservant was a job with that you often went voluntarily into so you could get out of debt and you worked your way out within your lifetime. Kidnapping is condemned in the OT & NT and modern day slavery as we know it and think about it is clearly condemned by scripture. So don't read a modern day definition into a 1<sup>st</sup> century world.

**2. Deal with the main things first** – Maybe you do study what the bible says about something and you just don't like it. Think about a hot topic right now like sexual orientation. Let's say you come to a conclusion about what the bible says about that and you disagree with it. Ok. Well, punt that for a while because that's not really the bible's main message. "Well," you reply "But I can't accept the Bible is what it says about sexual orientation is outmoded." Ok let me ask you this – are you saying that because you don't like what the bible says about sexual orientation that JESUS couldn't have been raised from the dead? Of course not. That's a non sequitur. See here's the thing: The bible isn't about sexual

orientation It's about Jesus. So if Jesus is who he says he is, well then its time to seriously consider *his* confidence in the authority of the bible. But if he's not who he says he is...then why would we care about anything else the bible says?

Let your first dive be into the deep end of the bible pool. Where there is consensus among Christians about the deity of Christ and his death and resurrection. And let the other things follow. That leads me to my final point

The Bible reveals Jesus Christ to be the true savior of the whole world

Sally Lloyd Jones is the author of a children's bible called the Jesus Storybook Bible. The tagline for the book is "every story whispers his name." And when you get into it you'll find this to be true. The bible is an announcement about the Lord Jesus Christ and what he has done for you. That you are deeply deeply loved by the one you are created to find love in. St. Augustine said our hearts are restless until we find rest in thee. In the pages of scripture you will find God. And he will be more glorious than you ever thought.

And this is where my challenge to you comes in. Read the bible for yourself. Do you doubt it? Read it. It's beauty, its power, all reveal to you the God who is real and who offers you true life. My biggest fear today is that I haven't let the bible speak enough for itself. Because if you just read it, I believe you will be overcome by it. Listen to Psalm 19

**Psalm 19:7-11**



[7] The law of the LORD is perfect,  
reviving the soul;  
the testimony of the LORD is sure,  
making wise the simple;  
[8] the precepts of the LORD are right,  
rejoicing the heart;  
the commandment of the LORD is pure,  
enlightening the eyes;  
[9] the fear of the LORD is clean,  
enduring forever;  
the rules of the LORD are true,  
and righteous altogether.  
[10] More to be desired are they than gold,  
even much fine gold;  
sweeter also than honey  
and drippings of the honeycomb.  
[11] Moreover, by them is your servant warned;  
in keeping them there is great reward.

Is this not what your soul desires? A soul revival!  
Wisdom! Something so TRUE that your heart rejoices. It  
sings YES I've found truth finally! Enlightenment that you  
can know beyond certainty why you were put here on  
earth. Righteousness. That you can stop trying to cover  
up your sin and live in righteousness & truth! Pleasure!  
Not religious moralism but words so enjoyable you'd take  
them over the best pleasure earth has to offer. And  
reward...something that tangibly changes our lives here  
and now and forever.

I believe some of you are close to becoming followers of  
Christ. And this book has been a hangup for you. Today I

want to say to you it is the exact opposite. It is beautiful  
and glorious and if you will read it you will find the God  
you've been looking for and he will change you. We have  
7 days until knight theater. Will you take the Gospel  
Challenge? Read the gospel of Mark by next Sunday.  
And if you will, you come down front with me there at  
Knight theater and tell me about the Jesus you encounter  
in those pages.