

## Denver Baptist Church | 2021 Winter Bible Conference

Session 1 – “What is the Bible?” - Chris Griggs

Each winter we want to have a short conference to study some aspect of our faith so that we can not only know WHAT we believe, but WHY we believe. This year we want to talk about the Bible...which is a huge topic. We can't talk about everything, but we want to ask and answer three questions: (1) what is the Bible? (2) can we trust the Bible? (3) how should we read the Bible?

I want to put everything I need to say in this session under two headings. First, revelation. Second, description.

### 1. Revelation

- The Doctrine of Revelation= God reveals Himself to us so that we might know Him, experience life with Him, and then go and let others know about Him. How does he reveal Himself? Two ways:
- General Revelation= to everyone
  - Creation
    - Psalm 19:1, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims His handiwork"
    - Isaiah 6:3, "Holy, holy, holy, the who earth is full of His glory!"
    - Romans 1:20, "For His invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse."
    - Acts 14:17, "Yet He did not leave Himself without witness, for He did good by given you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness."
  - Common Grace-His kindness common to all people (not in a saving way)
    - Psalm 65:9, "You visit the earth and water it, You greatly enrich it; the river of God is full of water; you provide the grain, for so you have prepared it."
    - Psalm 104:14, "You cause the grass to grow for the livestock and plants for the man to cultivate, that he may bring forth food from the earth..."
    - Matthew 5:45, "For He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust."
  - Conscience-internal sense of right and wrong because we are all made in His image
    - Romans 2:14-15, "For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law unto themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness..."
    - Matthew 7:11, "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!"
- Special Revelation
  - While general revelation is good and true, it is not sufficient for someone to know the gospel. General revelation may bear witness that there is a Creator who exists, it does not convey a saving gospel message. It is sufficient to condemn and insufficient to save. Nature cannot unlock the door of redemption. So, God has revealed Himself in a special way. How?

- Supremely in the Living Word, Jesus.

- Hebrews 1:1-2, "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed the heir of all things, through who also He created the world."

- Notice the contrasts:

Eras: "long ago" vs "these last days"

Recipients: "to our fathers" vs "to us"

Agents: "by the prophets" vs "by His Son"

Ways: "many times and in many ways" [visions, dreams, burning bush, a donkey, writing on the wall] vs "by His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ"

- The implicit contrast is that where there were many ways formerly in which God spoke to His people, there is now only one means of revelation: through His Son. Christ is the superior and final agent of God's redemption and revelation. **Christ did not arrive with a revelation from God; He Himself is the revelation from God.**
- John 14:8-9, "Philip said to Him, 'Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.' Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know Me, Philip? Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father.'"
- Colossians 2:9, "For in Him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily..."
- In the OT you have a progressive unfolding of truth. All through the OT God is revealing His character, His heart, His will, His ways...and ultimately revealing His plan to rescue sinners.
- That revelation reaches its pinnacle in Jesus Christ, who was the fulfillment of God's rescue plan as He unfolded it in the OT with prophecies and types. In fact, all of Scripture pointed to Christ and found its fulfillment in Christ.
- Luke 24:25-27, "And He said to them, 'O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into His glory?' And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself."
- John 5:39, "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about Me..."
- Since Jesus is the final revelation of God, it is fitting that He is called "the Word."
- John 1:1, 14, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."
- So, in the person of Jesus Christ revelation has been brought to completion with a dramatic suddenness. God's Son embodies all that the Father has to say to men. Nothing needful was held back for a later time. No greater revelation can be imagined. Christ is the ultimate truth and reveals it fully. Hebrews 2:1-2 breathes unreserved finality. Christ, the Son of God, is the grand finale of revelation.

- Primarily in the Written Word, the Bible.
  - Jesus comes to accomplish salvation and forgiveness for His people, which He does through His perfect life, sacrificial death, and victorious resurrection. Then He ascends to the right hand of the Father and sends the Holy Spirit.
  - What would the Holy Spirit do when He arrived?

- John 14:26, "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all that I have said to you."

- John 16:13, "When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth..."

When the Holy Spirit of inspiration came upon them, it was to bring back their memories to what Jesus had taught beforehand and to illumine them concerning the significance of His sayings. The sun of revelation shone in Jesus Christ. The apostles' writings were not new beams of light, but reflections of the glory that shone in the Son of God.

- John 17:4, 8, "I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the word that You gave Me to do...For I have given them the words that You gave me, and they have received them and have come to know the truth that I came from You; and they have believed that You sent Me."

- John 15:15, "...all that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you."

This indicates to us that there are no more unspoken words held in reserve for another era. On the day of Pentecost, the promise of Jesus was kept-the Holy Spirit had come to teach them the things which they had learned from Christ and enable them to record that same truth in Scripture. The Lord kept His promise by giving all revelation to His apostles.

- Ephesians 2:20, "...built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Himself being the cornerstone..."

The foundation of revelation and truth is completed and contained in the Bible. We do not have to look for a new message from heaven to reveal to us what God is like, what He has done, and what He is doing. We no longer have progressive revelation, but permanent revelation contained in the Bible. The task of revelation is finished.

- So, what is the Bible?
  - God speaking His truth in human words contained in the Old and New Testaments.
  - Bible: Greek= Biblia ("book")
  - 4<sup>th</sup> Century John Chrysostom referred to OT and NT as "ta biblia" (Latin= "the books")
  - 66 books (39 OT, 27 NT)
  - 3 languages - Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic
  - 3 continents -Asia, Africa, Europe
  - 40+ authors over 1,500 years
  - "A library of books that are one book." Tells one grand story of redemption with divine unity and continuity.
- Canon - "a ruler, a measuring rod"

- Refers to the books that are regarded as having divine authority.
- By 367AD, the church had determined that these 66 books were "the rule." How?
- OT - Matthew 23:35, " ...from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah..." The Hebrew Bible started with Genesis and ended with 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles. Abel was the first one murdered, and Zechariah the last. So, Jesus is affirmed the 39 books of the OT as having divine authority.
- NT - 3 tests to determine their divine authority:
  1. Conformity- did the book conform to orthodox, Christian truth recognized as normative in the churches?
  2. Apostolicity- was the writer an apostle or have immediate contact with the apostles?
    - Matthew and John - apostles and eyewitnesses
    - Mark - connected to Peter
    - Luke/Acts - connected to Paul
    - James/Jude - connected to the apostles in Jerusalem and probably Jesus' brothers
  3. Catholicity- did the book have widespread and continual acceptance and usage by churches everywhere?
- Council of Carthage, 397AD - church leaders from all over the world came to the meeting in North Africa. They all agreed on which books belonged in the NT, which considering their diversity of cultural backgrounds, it suggests that this final decision wasn't made solely on a human level.
- The Canon is closed. No more books, writings, or Scriptures. The 66 are the only written Word of God.

## 2. Description

- How does the Bible describe itself? In other words, what is the nature of the Bible? We will look at 4 characteristics of the Bible: authority, inerrancy, clarity, and sufficiency.
- **God speaks with authority.** This truth is grounded in inspiration.
  - 2 Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work."
  - Inspiration refers to the Bible being "God-breathed." It has authority because it was breathed out of God, spoken by God. The words of Scripture are God's own words. The Bible's origin is traced back to God, not man.
  - This inspiration is verbal, meaning the very words themselves have been breathed out by God, not just the concepts and ideas. It is also plenary, meaning all-extensive. All the words of Scripture are inspired. We cannot decide for ourselves what parts of Scripture are inspired and what parts are not.
  - Inspiration refers to that act whereby the Holy Spirit came upon the authors of Scripture, causing them to write exactly what God intended, while simultaneously preserving each author's writing style and personality.
  - This means that there are divine and human aspects to Scripture. God is the divine author, and yet He didn't drop the Bible down from heaven or give it to man mechanically (dictation). There is a dual authorship to each book. The divine author is in full control, guiding, directing and providentially supervising and overseeing everything so that His exact words are communicated. This means that the Bible comes from God to man, not the other way around.
  - 2 Peter 1:21, "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."

- Acts 1:16, "Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David, concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus."
- Matthew 19:3-5, "And the Pharisees came up to Him and tested Him by asking, 'Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?' He answered, 'Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife and the two shall become one flesh?'"
- In this passage Jesus quotes from Genesis 1:27 and 2:24. Notice that He did not say, "Moses said," but rather "He...said," that is, God. Jesus is attributing this comment by the author of Genesis to God Himself.
- Romans 9:17, "For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, 'For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed in all the earth. Paul quotes Exodus 9:16 and equates the voice of God with Scripture. When the OT speaks, God speaks."
- John 12:48-50, "The one who rejects Me and does not receive My words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day. For I have not spoken on My own authority, but the Father who sent Me has Himself given Me a commandment-what to say and what to speak."
- John 3:34, "For He whom God has sent utters the words of God..."
- John 14:24, "And the word you hear is not Mine but the Father's, who sent Me."
- Jesus' words are God's words. There is no higher authority. So, when you open your Bible and read the words of Jesus, you are reading words that Jesus Himself believed were from God and were authoritative.
- Ephesians 3:2-5, "...you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit."
- Galatians 1:11-12, "I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel that was preach by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ."
- 1 Corinthians 2:7, 10, "But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory...these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit."
- 1 Thessalonians 2:13, "And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God..."
- 2 Peter 3:15-16, "...as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptu res."
- So, when the NT speaks, God speaks. The NT authors understood that God had given them a revelatory word, equal in authority with the OT. What this means practically is that when you open your Bible are read it, no matter where you read from, you are reading the only breathed out Word of God that has all authority, for God can never speak without complete authority.

- **God speaks truthfully.** This truth is ground in inerrancy. The Scripture is inerrant, meaning that in its original manuscripts it does not err in all that it asserts. The Bible is true in all that it affirms. In everything that it addresses it speaks the truth. So, whether it is doctrine, morality, history, or even life sciences, its assertions are truthful and trustworthy.
  - Scripture is trustworthy because the God behind Scripture is trustworthy. Scripture is flawless because its divine author is perfect. The holiness of Scripture is derived from the holiness of God. God and His Word are tied together...they rise and fall together. This is why the Scripture is called the Word of God.
  - The God of the Bible is a God of truth, not falsehood. The same is said of Christ, the Son of God who bears witness to the truth, speaks the truth, and is Himself the truth. The Holy Spirit is referred to as the Spirit of truth and identified as the one who is the truth.
    - Jeremiah 10:10, "But the Lord is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King."
    - Numbers 23:19, "God is not a man that He should lie..."
    - Titus 1:2, "...in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began..."
    - 2 Timothy 2:13, "...He cannot deny Himself."
    - John 1:14, 17, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth...for the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."
    - John 18:37, "...for this purpose I have come into the world-to bear witness to the truth."
    - John 14:16-17, "And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth..."
    - 1 John 5:6, "This is He who came by water and blood-Jesus Christ...and the Spirit is the One who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth."
  - The God of the Bible is not a God who lies, nor is He one who can err or deny His own holy character. He is faithful in all He says and does. His ways are holy, just and true. Unlike man, God is reliable, unchanging and dependable.
    - Proverbs 30:5, "Every word of God proves true; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him."
    - Psalm 12:6, "The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times."
    - Psalm 18:30, "This God-His way is perfect; the word of the Lord proves true..."
    - Psalm 119:160, "The sum of Your word is truth..."
  - A rejection of inerrancy turns things upside down. Man, not God, has become the judge of truth. The reader, not the author, now determines what is good and necessary for the Christian faith. Believing that God has not revealed Himself in a completely truthful manner, each individual must decide for himself what parts of God's self-communication stay and what parts are to be dispensed with. Inerrancy means that the Word of God always stands over us, and we never stand over the Word of God.
- **God speaks to be heard.** This truth is ground in clarity. The God of the Bible is an effective communicator and His words concerning how to become a Christian, live as a Christian, and grow as a Christian are not ambiguous but clear. God does not leave us to guess what He wants or thinks.
  - Perspicuity- the notion that ordinary people using ordinary means can accurately understand enough of what must be known, believed, and observed for them to be faithful Christians. His Word is clear in what it communicates because God Himself is clear. His Word does not come to us wrapped in code, nor is it coated in some type of heavenly dialect. It comes to us in plain language.

- o Three objections:
  1. The Mystical Objection. God is so transcendent that He cannot be talked about meaningfully with words. There is an attempt to rescue God from our man-made theology. The Christian faith, it is said, is utterly mysterious. You can't put God in a box. Truth cannot be captured in words and propositions. There is a spiritual element to hearing from God that goes beyond just words in a book.
  2. The Catholic Objection. The Bible, as a whole, is not completely clear in itself and needs to be explained and augmented by tradition. On our own we are apt to misunderstand and misapply the Scripture, so we need someone or something to offer an authoritative and binding interpretation. That job has been given to the Pope and the bishops of the Catholic church.
  3. The Pluralism Objection. If the Bible is so clear, then why can't Christians agree on what it means? Why are there so many denominations? Why are there so many Christian books that present different views? How clear can it be when the church used the Bible to justify slavery or the crusades? This view doubts that we have sufficient grounds to even know whether an interpretation is right or wrong.
  
- o But if Scripture is not clear in the way we need it to be clear for our salvation, then essentially God's intentions will fail. If His message in Scripture be unreadable and unintelligible, it remains ineffective. God's Word comes back void. The question is this-is He a God who can speak clearly and effectively?
  - Deuteronomy 6:6-7, "These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up." [God's Word was not restricted to the educated adult but could be understood by children.]
  - Deuteronomy 31:12, "Assemble the people, men, women, and little ones, and the sojourner within your towns, that they may hear and learn to fear the Lord your God, and be careful to do all the words of this law, and that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the Lord your God..."
  - Deuteronomy 30:11, "For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear and do it?' Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it."
  
- o Like a river, God's Word is deep enough for an elephant to swim in but shallow enough for a lamb to find its footing. God's commands were not designated for the classroom. They were to be the topic of everyday, public conversation. Rather than concealing His Word from us, God has made His will known to us, and He has done so in a way that we can understand and comprehend. Scripture is like a light that shines bright, clearly showing us the way to salvation. Without it we stumble around in darkness, straying off the path that leads to life.
  - Psalm 119:105, "Your word is a lamp unto my feet, a light on my path."
  - Proverbs 6:23, "For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light..."
  - Psalm 36:9, "For with You is a fountain of life; in your light do we see light."
  - Psalm 119:130, "The unfolding of Your words give light; it gives understanding to the simple."
  - Psalm 19:7, "The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple."

- o Clarity is confirmed when you realize who the Bible was written for:
  - Not just the educated, but for the uneducated.
  - Not just for adults, but for their children.
  - Not just to scholars, but for everyone in the church.
  - Not just for Jews, but for non-religious Gentiles as well.
  
- **God's speech is enough.** This truth is grounded in sufficiency. It is only because Scripture is authoritative, God-breathed, trustworthy, and clear that we can also say it is sufficient for the Christian life. The Bible is our only inspired, inerrant, and sufficient source of divine revelation which means that Scripture alone is our final authority, and therefore sufficient for faith and practice.
  - o Sufficiency means that all things necessary for salvation and living the Christian life in obedience to God and for His glory are given to us in the Scriptures. The Bible provides believers with all the truth they need for reconciliation with God and for following after Christ.
  
  - o Sufficiency also means that we should not be seeking out additional divine words from God. He has given us in Scripture all the divine words we need. The Bible alone teaches a complete Christian worldview that includes what we need to know about God, how to come into a relationship with Him, who Jesus is and what He did for our salvation, and what will happen at the end of history.
    - Matthew 4:4, "But he answered, 'It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" [Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:3 to show that the words of God were sufficient, even in a time of testing.]
    - Luke 16:29-30, "But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them...if they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'"
    - Romans 15:4, "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."
    - 2 Timothy 3:14-17, "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise unto salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work."
    - 2 Peter 1:3, "His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us to His own glory and excellence, by which He has granted to us His precious and very great promises..."
    - 2 Peter 1:16-19, "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...and we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention to as a lamp shining in a dark place..."
    - Revelation 22:18-19, "I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll. And if anyone takes away from this scroll of prophecy, God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City..."
  
- o Sufficiency means that God expects us to be content with what He has told us in the Bible. Unfortunately, we are always looking for something new—a new vision, a new word, a new revelation. We are living in a day where subjective emotion is more valued than the objective truth of Scripture.
  - The primary and permanent way that God now speaks to His people is through His Word.

- God still speaks to His people, but only through His Word. The days of speaking through dreams and vision and impressions is past; He now speaks through His Son, who guided the writers of the Bible to record His true Word for His people. Since the canon is closed, we are not to expect more revelation to come to us in any form. To do so is to demote the Scripture, not promote it.
- There is a difference between revelation and application. We don't receive new information from the Lord, but the Spirit who indwells us may show us how to practically apply the word in our lives.
- There is no new revelation but plenty of new application. The Spirit is guiding you here, not speaking to you. God speaks through His Word alone.

## Denver Baptist Church | Winter Bible Conference

### Session 2 "Can We Trust the Bible?" – Patrick Lowman

- When we hold the Bible in our hands, we are holding a book that has been written by some 40 different authors, written over a period of some 1,500 years and representing countries from three different continents including the Middle East, Africa, and Europe.
- So, can we really trust what is written in the pages of Scripture?
  - Maybe you grew up in a context where the reliability of the Bible was somewhat taken for granted and was never questioned. Or maybe you are somewhat new to the faith and have had questions about the trustworthiness of Scripture.
  - Maybe you have wondered if the Bible is any different than the Quran or the Book of Mormon or maybe you have heard skeptics talking about how the Bible can't be trusted.
  - Wherever you may be, I hope this little talk will help strengthen your trust in the reliability of the Bible.
  - Before we begin let me share a quick story about why I believe that this topic is so important for our day and age.

#### What Does the Bible Claim?

- The Bible says of itself that it is the inspired word of God:
  - 2 Timothy 3:16-17 "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.
  - 2 Peter 1:20-21: "Knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. 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."
- The Bible also claims to be true:
  - Psalm 19:7-9 "The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether."
  - Psalm 119:160 "The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever."
  - Proverbs 30:5 "Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him."
  - Isaiah 40:8 "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever."

In this session I want to briefly touch on four arguments that I think help us to see that the Bible can in fact be trusted as being the very Word of God. We will look at 1. Historical Evidence 2. Prophetic Evidence 3. Resurrection Evidence and 4. Manuscript Evidence. In other words, history, prophesy, the resurrection and the biblical manuscripts all point to the reliability of the biblical text.

## 1. Historical Evidence

### ➤ The Old Testament

- When it comes to historical evidence, there are so many pieces of evidence that could be given to show that the Bible is historically trustworthy.
  - The first piece of historical evidence has to do with an interesting biblical figure that is involved in an even more interesting biblical story.
  - In Numbers 22-24 we read about the story of the prophet Balaam son of Beor, his donkey, and a king named Balak who wants to have Balaam curse the Israelites.
  - This is a fascinating story but also one that skeptics would question its truthfulness.
  - Interestingly enough, in 1967 at a place called Deir 'Allah, Jordan located some 25 miles north of the Plains of Moab, which was a camp site during the Exodus there were found fragmentary inscriptions written in red and black ink.
  - They were written on what is believed to be a plaster wall of a building that was most likely destroyed from an earth quake
  - The Deir 'Allah inscription was written in Aramaic and record a frightening night vision that the prophet Balaam shared with his colleagues (Walter C. Kaiser Jr.).
  - This Balaam was not an Israelite but was used by God to bless instead of curse Israel and was also mentioned in several other places in Scripture.
- What does this archaeological evidence show us?

It helps to show that this Balaam son of Beor was not just a fictitious biblical character that was made up by the biblical authors but was a well known prophet living in the area surrounding the Jordan River.

### ➤ The Tell Dan Stele

- The Tell Dan Stele was found in 1993 and 1994 in the city of Dan. Before this was found there were no external reference to King David.
  - "For the first time we now had external confirmation for King David and his 'house' [= 'kingdom']. Prior to this time, we had not had such external witness to the reality of his existence; therefore, it was fashionable for minimalists to dismiss the Davidic narratives in the Bible as just so much priestly propaganda created by those in Babylonian exile who needed a heroic figure to provide a sense of national respectability" (Walter C. Kaiser Jr.).
  - The Dan Stele was dated to 841 BC and also referenced 8 other biblical kings' names
  - The Dan Stele makes reference to the defeat of the Israelite kings Jothan and Ahaziah found in 2 Kings 8:28-29

### ➤ The Amarna Tablets

- These tablets were found in 1887 by a Bedouin woman. This find contains 382 clay tablets with Babylonian writing on them containing diplomatic correspondence addressed to Pharaoh, giving a rare glimpse into the conditions of the mid-fourteenth century BC around the time of Israel's invasion of Canaan (Kaiser).
  - "Some 106 of these letters were from Canaanite kings begging Pharaoh to help them find relief from these invaders... The call was for Pharaoh to come to Canaan to

deliver the Canaanites from these troublesome Habiru; this is what triggers the possible reference to the Israelites who were entering Canaan at this same time" (Kaiser).

### ➤ **The New Testament**

- To begin with I think it is helpful to mention a few verses from the New Testament that show us the claims of historical reliability.
  - Luke 1:1-4; 2 Peter 1:16; 1 John 1
  - Like the Old Testament, the New Testament has many examples that we could point to in order to show that the New Testament is historically reliable.

### ➤ **Three 1<sup>st</sup> Century Historical Writers**

- Because there are so many things we could point to, let's limit our findings to three historical authors who were not Christians but whose writings help to show that what the NT claimed is historically reliable.
  - Cornelius Tacitus
    - Born circa AD 56 and held a series of Roman offices including being a senator and a consul (Peter J. Williams).
    - In his writings, Tacitus tells the story of how Nero (who most likely set Rome on fire) blamed it on the Christians which led to mass persecution.
    - Tacitus writes: "But neither human help, nor gifts from the emperor, nor all the ways of placating Heaven, could stifle scandal or dispel the belief that the fire had taken place by order [of Nero]. Therefore, to scotch the rumor, Nero substituted as culprits, and punished with the utmost refinements of cruelty, a class of men, loathed for their vices, whom the crowd called Christians. Christus, the founder of the name, had undergone the death penalty in the region of Tiberius, by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilate, and the pernicious superstition was checked for a moment, only to break out once more, not merely in Judaea, the home of the disease, but in the capital [Rome] itself, where all things horrible or shameful in the world collect and become fashionable."
    - Peter J. Williams points out how reading the writings of men such as Tacitus we learn several things:
      1. We learn that Tacitus did not like Christians. He refers to Christians as a "disease."
      2. Tacitus says that it was the crowd who gave them the name Christian and not the followers themselves: "a class of men, loathed for their vices, whom the crowd called Christians." This is affirmed in Acts 11:26 "And at Antioch the disciples were first called Christians."
      3. Tacitus writes that Christ was put to death while Tiberius was emperor: "Christus, the founder of the name, had undergone the death penalty in the region of Tiberius." This would have been between AD 14 and AD 37 (see. Lk. 3:1-2).
      4. He says that this took place while Pontius Pilate was ruling in Judaea: which would have been between AD 26-36.
      5. Tacitus tells us where Christianity started out (Judaea) and where it spread to (Rome) which agrees with the NT.
  - Pliny the Younger
    - Born in AD 61/62 and died in AD 111.
    - He held public offices and became governor of Bithynia and Pontus which was a region in northwest Turkey.
    - In a famous letter written to the Emperor Trajan, Pliny wanted counsel in how to deal with the Christians.
    - This letter has some fascinating historical details that help to shine light on what was taking place in the Roman Empire during the 1st and 2nd centuries.

- Pliny writes: "For this contagious superstition is not confined only to the cities, but has also spread through the villages and rural districts. It seems possible, however, to check and correct this. It is certain at least that the temples, which had almost become deserted, are now beginning to be visited again; and the sacred rites, after a long interlude, are again being revived. There is a general demand for sacrificial animals, for which up to now only rarely were purchasers found."
- What can we learn from this?
  1. We already learned that Tacitus wrote of the "vast number" of Christians in Rome and here Pliny the governor of Bithynia is writing the Emperor, telling him that there are so many people becoming Christians that the temples were becoming deserted and there "rarely were purchasers found" to buy sacrificial animals.
  2. This interestingly enough brings to light what is happening in Ephesus in Acts 19:21-41.
  3. Pliny also wants Trajan's thoughts on how he is handling (persecuting) the Christians.
  4. Trajan's response is that Pliny's punishment is proper and one way to know if the Christians have denounced their faith is if they give proof "by adorning our gods, he shall be pardoned on ground of repentance." In order to know that these people were not Christians, they had to worship Roman gods.
  5. This goes to show that Christians believed in the worship of one God and so much so that they were willing to die for that believe.
  6. Polycarp a disciple of John and an early Christian leader AD 65-155 when pressed by the Romans to worship Caesar and burn incense to him would not do it.
  7. Before being burned at that stake said, "Eighty and six years I have served Him, and He hath done me no wrong. How can I speak evil of my King who saved me?"
- Flavius Josephus
  - Born around AD 37 or 38 and died sometime after AD 111.
  - He was the commander of the Jewish forces in Galilee during the initial rebellion against Rome in AD 66.
  - He was captured by the Romans in AD 67 and later became a Roman citizen.
  - Josephus is well known for his historical writings such as Jewish Wars, Jewish Antiquities, Life of Josephus.
  - Jewish Antiquities writes of Jesus Christ as well as John the Baptist.
    - In Jewish Antiquities Josephus writes: "[Ananus] convened the judges of the Sanhedrin and brought before them a man named James, the brother of Jesus who was called the Christ, and certain others. He accused them of having transgressed the law and delivered them up to be stoned."
    - This affirms the biblical teaching of Matthew 13:55 and Mark 6:3 that Jesus had a brother named James.
    - Think about this too, James grew up in the same house as Jesus and something led him to believe that his Brother, Jesus actually is who He said that He is. God in the flesh who died on a Roman cross and raised from the dead.
    - He believed this to the point of death by stoning.

## 2. Prophetic Evidence

- There are many, many, fulfilled prophecies that we could point to that show that the Bible can be trusted as the Word of God.
- Micah 5:2

- Here an Old Testament prophet is writing around 700 years before the birth of Jesus making exact prophetic claims about the birth of the Messiah.
  - "But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from old, from ancient days" Micah 5:2.
  - The prophecy was given around 700 B.C.
  - Copies of manuscripts of this text easily date before the birth of Christ.
  - "Micah's prophecy of Christ's birth was so well known that when King Herod sought the location of the Savior's birth, his royal scholars referred to it without hesitation: "In Bethlehem of Judea, [who] are by no means least among the rulers of Judah, for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel" (Matt. 2:5-6) Richard D. Phillips
  - And this One who is to be born in Bethlehem, His "coming forth is from of old, from ancient days."
- Isaiah 7:14: "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."
- This prophecy is quoted in Matthew 1:22-23 as being fulfilled in the birth of Jesus: "All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 'Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel.'"
  - Zechariah around 520 BC tells us that the King is will come humble and on a donkey: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey" Zechariah 9:9.
  - This is affirmed in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John
  - The prophet Isaiah, writing 700 years before Jesus's earthly ministry, writes very clearly of the crucifixion of Jesus in Isaiah 52:13-53:12
  - Some call this passage the gospel according to Isaiah.
  - Others say that it is as if Isaiah wrote this text at the foot of the cross.
  - Isaiah says:
    - His appearance was so marred beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind.
    - He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.
    - He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.
    - He was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.
    - He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth.
    - He was like a lamb that is led to the slaughter; and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.
    - He was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people.
    - They made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.
    - He poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many and makes intercession for the transgressors.
    - Well known Christian apologist Lee Strobel tells the story about a guy who wrote down Isaiah 52:13-53:12 and had people who were unbelievers in his office read it and tell him what it was talking about.
    - Many said that this was talking about the crucifixion of Jesus. What is fascinating is that these weren't necessarily Christians, but they understood what this text from the prophet Isaiah was writing about some 700 years prior to the crucifixion.
    - Some 400 years before crucifixion was even created as a form of the death penalty, king David wrote: "Many bulls encompass me; strong bulls of Bashan surround me; they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death. For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet-- I can count all my bones-- they stare and gloat over me; they divide my garments among them, and for my

clothing they cast lots" Psalm 22:12-18.

- Like Isaiah, these words from the psalmist paint a vivid and clear picture of the crucifixion. To deny these prophetic words is to not take the evidence seriously.

### 3. Resurrection Evidence

- One of the greatest arguments Christians have for the existence of God, the truthfulness of the Christianity, the deity of Christ and the reliability of the Bible is the resurrection of Jesus.
- If this Jesus of Nazareth really was who He claimed to be, died on a Roman cross and rose from the dead on the third day. then what He claimed has to be taken seriously.
- Unfortunately, we do not have the time needed to give credible arguments for the resurrection. Even so, let me assure you there is fantastic evidence that Jesus of Nazareth:
  1. Claimed to be God incarnate
  2. Died by Roman crucifixion
  3. Was buried in a borrowed tomb
  4. Rose bodily from the dead on the third day
  5. Was seen by more than 500 after his resurrection
  6. As a result his followers lives as well as enemies such as Paul was drastically changed, so much so that they would die for their belief
- What does Jesus have to say about the Bible?
  - In John 5:39 Jesus referred to the OT as the Scriptures and claimed that they bear witness about Him.
  - Jesus affirmed the three divisions of the Hebrew Bible; the Law, Prophets, and the Psalms in Luke 24:44: "Then he said to them, 'These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.'"
  - Jesus made reference to 14 different OT books including: Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, 1 Samuel, 1 Kings, Psalms, Isaiah, Daniel, Hosea, Jonah, Zechariah, Malachi.
  - Jesus believed that OT people such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Solomon, Elijah, Elisha, Zechariah, and Jonah really existed and that the stories told of them were true such as:
    - David eating the bread of Presence (Matt. 12:3-4)
    - Manna in the wilderness (In. 6:31)
    - The story of Lot and his wife (Lk. 17:32)
    - Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Matt.10:14-15)
    - Jonah and the great fish (Matt. 12:40)

### 4. Biblical Manuscript Evidence

- Since we do not currently have any original copies (autographs) from the biblical authors, how reliable are the copies we do have?
- Let's first take a look at the Old Testament.
  - Until 1947 the earliest OT manuscripts we had were from around the late 900's AD.
  - That changed in 1947 when a shepherd boy was tending to his sheep in the area of the Dead Sea.
  - He was throwing rocks into caves and one of the rocks made a weird sound when it broke a clay jar inside one of the caves.
  - Little did he know, that cave and the surrounding caves contained what came to be known as the Dead Sea Scrolls which dated back to copies of Old Testament manuscripts 1,200 years older than anything we had before then.
  - The scrolls contained a copy almost in its entirety of the book of Isaiah dating back to

- around 200 BC.
- There were over 400 documents found with about 100 of them being biblical texts containing every book in the OT except Esther (F.F. Bruce & J.J Scott).
- This find sent shock waves throughout biblical scholarship which brought light to the reliability of the OT.
- The New Testament.
  - Currently we have around 5,800 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament.
  - The earliest Greek manuscript we currently have is the John Rylands Papyrus of the gospel of John known as P52 which is dated to around AD 125-130 plus or minus 25 years.
  - This manuscript contains parts of seven lines from John 18:31-33 on the front and parts of seven lines from verses 37-38 on the back.
  - We have around 5,800 Greek New Testament manuscripts which contain more than 2.6 million pages.
  - If we took the NT and OT manuscripts and combined them, there are more than 66,000 manuscripts and scrolls (McDowell).
  - New Testament scholar Dan Wallace explains that if we stacked the extant manuscripts of the average classical writer, they would be about 4ft tall. If we stacked the NT manuscripts, we would have a stack more than 1 mile high. A stack of OT manuscripts would be 1.5 miles high. So, a stack of manuscripts for the entire Bible would be some 2.5 miles high.
  - F. F. Bruce sums it up well when he writes, "There is no body of ancient literature in the world which enjoys such a wealth of good textual attestation as the New Testament."

## 1. Benefits of Bible Reading

- The Word is able to make you wise for salvation—do you know what you believe about Christianity? Do you ever wonder if you are a believer or if you have saving faith? If you don't know exactly what you believe, the best place to begin is by reading the Bible.
  - 2 Timothy 3:15, "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise unto salvation through faith in Jesus Christ."
- The Word is able to help you know the truth and recognize what is false. The best way to recognize false teaching is to be well-acquainted with what is true. You cannot afford to take other people's word for what is true about the Bible. We need to be more like the Bereans.
  - Acts 17:11, "Now, the Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so."
  - 1 Timothy 6:20-21, "O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called 'knowledge,' for by professing it some have swerved from the faith."
  - 2 Timothy 4:3-4, "For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths."
- The Word is able to grow your relationship with God. All relationships take time to build. Reading the Bible on a daily basis allows us the opportunity to get to know God—what He cares about, who He loves, what He desires, how He works, what He is doing, what He has promised.
- The Word is able to help you fight temptation. We all struggle with sin. The Bible is full of imperfect people—liars, adulterers, murderers, and idolaters. The Bible also illuminates our lean towards sin. Being in the word on a daily basis strengthens our minds and prepares our hearts for the battle against sin.
  - Hosea 4:6, "My people are destroyed for a lack of knowledge..."
  - Ephesians 6:17, "...take up the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God..."
  - Psalm 119:11, "I have stored up Your word in my heart, that I might not sin against You."
- The Word is able to provide revival, wisdom and joy. Are you weary? Confused? In need of some wisdom?
  - Psalm 19:7-11, "The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes...more to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward."
  - Psalm 119:28, "My soul melts away for sorrow; strengthen me according to Your word!"
  - Psalm 119:98-100, "Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies...! have more understanding than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation...! understand more than the aged, for I keep Your precepts."
  - Psalm 119:111, "Your testimonies are my heritage forever, for they are the joy of my heart."
- The Word is able to nourish your soul.

- Psalm 1:1-3, "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither."
- The Word is able to provide comfort. Everyone suffers. The best way to prepare our hearts for trials is to fill our minds with the Word of God. Knowing God's promises helps us put our hope in God and find comfort for our souls in times of hardship and distress.
  - Psalm 119:50, 52, "This is my comfort in my affliction, that your promise gives me life...when I think of Your rules from of old, I take comfort, O Lord."
- The Word is able to fill you with hope and remind us of His promises.
  - Romans 15:4, "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."

## 2. How to Read Your Bible

Some foundational issues:

- You need a good translation.

Word-for-Word:	Seeks to capture the precise wording of the original text; ESV, CBS KJV, NKJV, NASS
Thought for Thought:	Attempts to convey the full nuance of each passage by interpreting Scriptures entire meaning and not just the individual words. NIV, NLT, CEV
Paraphrased:	Puts the emphasis on readability, so it pays even less attention to specific word patterns in an attempt to capture the poetic or narrative essence of a passage. The Message, The Living Bible, The Amplified Bible

- You need a dedicated space-quiet, comfortable, well-lighted, ability to write.
- You need a plan.
- The Bible is not about you. It is not primarily prescriptive, but descriptive. So many people come to the Bible to find out what they are supposed to do...but it isn't primarily about that. It is about what God has done for you. If you don't get this, you will read the Bible wrongly.
- From Tim Keller:  
Jesus is the true and better **Adam** who passed the test in the garden and whose obedience is imputed to us. Jesus is the true and better **Abel** who, though innocently slain, has blood now that cries out, not for our condemnation, but for acquittal.

Jesus is the true and better **Abraham** who answered the call of God to leave all the comfortable and familiar and go out into the void not knowing wither he went to create a new people of God.

Jesus is the true and better **Isaac** who was not just offered up by his father on the mount but was truly sacrificed for us. And when God said to Abraham, "Now I know you love me because you did not withhold your son, your only son whom you love from me," now we can look at God taking his son up the mountain and sacrificing him and say, "Now we know that you love us because you did not withhold your son, your only son, whom you love from us."

Jesus is the true and better **Jacob** who wrestled and took the blow of justice we deserved, so we, like Jacob, only receive the wounds of grace to wake us up and discipline us.

Jesus is the true and better **Joseph** who, at the right hand of the king, forgives those who betrayed and sold him and uses his new power to save them.

Jesus is the true and better **Moses** who stands in the gap between the people and the Lord and who mediates a new covenant.

Jesus is the true and better **Rock of Moses** who, struck with the rod of God's justice, now gives us water in the desert.

Jesus is the true and better **Job**, the truly innocent sufferer, who then intercedes for and saves his stupid friends.

Jesus is the true and better **David** whose victory becomes his people's victory, though they never lifted a stone to accomplish it themselves.

Jesus is the true and better **Esther** who did not just risk leaving an earthly palace but lost the ultimate and heavenly one, who didn't just risk his life, but gave his life to save his people.

Jesus is the true and better **Jonah** who was cast out into the storm so that we could be brought in.

Jesus is the real Rock of Moses, the real Passover Lamb, innocent, perfect, helpless, slain so the angel of death will pass over us. He's the true temple, the true prophet, the true priest, the true king, the true sacrifice, the true lamb, the true light, the true bread.

The Bible's really not about you-it's about him.  
The Bible tells one story of redemption.

#### **Four Questions to ask when reading Scripture:**

- [1] What does this passage tell me about the character of God? About Jesus?
- [2] What does this passage reveal about my sinfulness and need for Christ?
  - Romans 3:10-12, "None is righteous, no not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God; all have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."

- Jeremiah 17:9, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?"
- The only hero in the Bible is Jesus. Everyone else is a sinner that needs a Savior. So, do not put yourself in the story as the hero. Allow the Scripture to expose your need for grace, forgiveness, and a Savior.

[3] How does this passage point me to the gospel-the perfect life, sacrificial death, and victorious resurrection of Jesus?

- I was challenged years ago to see the gospel in every verse and every passage. Find it in whatever passage you are reading and take note of it.

[4] How can this passage fill me with love for Christ?

- John 4:9-10, 19, "In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent His only Son into the world, so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins...we love because He first loved us.
- Bryan Chappell – "Why does sin have power in your life? What will break the power of sin in your life?"
- Peter 1:9, "For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins."