

Why Trust The Bible - Apologetics Talk

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[0 : 00] Excellent, Paul. Thank you, and thank you again for the opportunity to be here. Thank you for the opportunity to be here and to talk with you about this really important! question, why trust the Bible? It's actually two questions. The first question is why trust! and the second question is why trust the Bible? And to add that, why can we trust the Bible? And why should we trust the Bible? And we're going to spend most of the evening talking about why can we trust the Bible? But we would not leave the night complete by also answering the question very briefly at the end, why should we trust the Bible? So that's kind of the agenda tonight. And it's an important question because if people want to kind of chip away at the Christian faith and criticise it, usually what they'll do is attack the Bible. I don't know if you've ever looked at Christian stuff online, but you'll find a lot of Christian sites both for and against Christianity will focus in on questions concerning the Bible, its reliability, and a whole bunch of things. Because the enemies of Christianity, the evil one himself, know that if he can cause people to doubt the word of God, then the Christian faith will, it won't fail because the Lord is behind you of course, but that is one of the major things. And if we think about the devil's temptation in the garden, his temptation was directly at the word of God. The first question that Satan asked the woman was, did God say, did God say, getting him to doubt God's word? Now obviously that wasn't the Bible at that point. It was the word of God to Adam and Eve. But the evil one's attack has always been on the interpretation of scripture, the reliability of scripture, whether it's worth doing that. And we see that coming on and on in our own time. The short answer to our question is, why trust the Bible? To both questions is because the Bible is the word of God. That's the answer that Christians have always given. We trust the scriptures because we believe that they are the God-free word of God, God's communication to us, exposing to us and communicating to us his character, his plan, and particularly his plan of salvation wrapped up in the Lord Jesus Christ. And we can stop the talk there, except that what people will generally say then is, is this not a circular argument? And a circular argument is an argument that assumes its answer in the way that it sets itself up. So why do we know the Bible is the word of God? Well, because the Bible tells us it's the word of God. And so we create a circle. Now, usually when people talk about circular arguments, they mean that that's a bad argument. But some arguments are inevitably circular because they're making a claim to absolute authority. And if you try and justify that to an outside authority, you're saying there's a higher authority. So a circular argument is not bad if it's a good circle. But nonetheless, it's usually seen as a criticism. And I want to therefore think a little bit more carefully about this question. How can we talk about the Bible as the word of God? How can we talk about trusting the Bible as the word of God? And let me not avoid the charge of a circular argument, but just certainly make make it aware that we're aware that there is a circularity to the argument that there are ways of thinking about that as we go. And so what I want to do is work two ways. I want to work from the inside out.

So we're going to look at some passages inside the Bible and then work to the conclusion that the Bible is the word of God. And then I want to work from the outside in. And so to think about the reasons outside the scriptures, which help us to understand why the Bible is the word of God. And so what we're doing there with our circular argument is at one level, filling it out, but then we're going to take a tangent from things like history and archaeology and other things, which take us into the circle, but not from the scriptures itself.

[4 : 52] So I'm talking about going from the inside out and then the outside in. And if that didn't quite make sense, I hope it does once we start explaining it. Okay. So looking from the inside out, first of all, really the key to why we should trust the Bible as the word of God really comes down to the person of Jesus himself.

And so Jesus, like, it's like the old Sunday school thing. The answer to every question is God, Jesus, or the Bible. And usually Jesus, that's the best way to go. Kids learn that pretty quick. But it's true. Jesus is the key to our understanding of the nature of scripture and his reliability. Why is that? Well, Jesus trusted the Old Testament.

And so from the record of Jesus that we have in the New Testament, we see how he viewed the Old Testament. When we're talking about the Bible, we're talking about the Old and New Testament tonight.

And so we see that Jesus referred to and held in his mind and arguments with his opponents. The very strong view that the Old Testament is reliable, that it can be trusted as the word of God.

[6 : 13] So just one example, Matthew chapter 22. There are many, many examples we could, but there's just a...

And we're reading that Jesus is having an argument with a group called the Sadducees. And they pose a question to him about what happens in the afterlife if a man dies and he's been married seven times.

Who will he be married to? The Sadducees are mocking the idea of the resurrection because they don't believe in the resurrection. So they set up this little puzzle that Jesus stole. Jesus replied, verse 29, you are in error because you do not know the scriptures or the power of God.

Now, in the context, of course, Jesus is referring to what we would understand to be the Old Testament at this point. The Torah of all the prophets and the writings. At the resurrection, Jesus says, people will neither marry nor be given in marriage.

They will be like the angels in heaven. But about the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what God said to you? I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.

[7 : 27] And that is a quote from the Old Testament, from Exodus chapter 32, verse 6. That Jesus attributes that word to God himself.

So he doesn't say as Moses said in Exodus. He doesn't say as Exodus says. He says as God said. And this is not uncommon for Jesus to do this. That he is referring to the Old Testament text as the word of God.

Jesus understood his whole mission in terms of the scriptures. So again, just a quick look at a very short passage in Luke chapter 24, verses 44 to 47.

Jesus is post the resurrection here. And he's talking to his disciples in his resurrected state. He eats a piece of fish in his presence to prove.

It shows that he's not a ghost. Ghosts can't eat. It's a bodily resurrection. And then Jesus says to them in verse 44. This is what I told you while I was still with you. Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets and the Psalms.

[8 : 39] Then he opened their minds so they could understand the scriptures. He told them this is what is written. The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day. And repentance for sins will be preached in his name to all nations beginning in Jerusalem.

And on he goes. Jesus understood his whole mission in terms of the scriptures. And declared that the scriptures were fulfilled because they expressed the plan of God. So I suspect that this is not something that we really need to spend a lot of time on.

But just to say that we understand that the scriptures are the Old Testament. Because this is the way that Jesus referred to them. Now there's a problem here of course. Someone might say, well hang on, you're referring to the words of Jesus in the Bible to prove the Bible.

Help me back in that circular reason. And the short answer to that is yes. You see that's a circle. But we're at the moment we're working from the inside out. So we're still within the circle there.

And we'll talk a little bit more about this. Jesus trusted the Old Testament. So did Paul. He describes all scripture in a letter he wrote to Timothy.

[9 : 48] 2 Timothy 3.16. As God breathed and useful for correction. Sorry, teaching, correction, proof and training in righteousness. And we've got the God in one. So that the person of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

And so Paul again is referring to the Old Testament scriptures at that point. And he refers to them as God breathed the word of God.

Peter also understood the scriptures to be the word of God. 1 Peter. Sorry, 2 Peter chapter 1. 2 Peter chapter 1. For prophecy, there is using prophecy in talking about...

Sorry, verse 20. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy or scripture came about by the prophets' 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.

[10:52] So, again, whether we... Yeah, so our three key figures, Jesus, Peter and Paul, all according to the historical record understood the Old Testament scriptures to be the word of God.

And so that's just a piece of historical data, at least, that works for us to think about. But there's a big but there.

At this point, we're similarly talking about the Old Testament. What about the other third of the world, the New Testament? We may very well think that Jesus, Peter and Paul thought the Old Testament was the word of God.

But what did they think of the New Testament? What did Jesus say about that? And Christians have always understood that Jesus affirmed the Old Testament as the word of God.

And authorizes or inspires the New Testament as a record, an accurate record of him. And it falls under the word of God as well. And we particularly see this in John chapter 14 and 16, where Jesus promises his disciples the help of the Holy Spirit to remember all that he has taught and to lead them into that truth.

[12:14] And that, I would argue, is an apologetic for the reliability of the apostolic witness, particularly the Gospel of John, in where those passages have occurred.

And John himself seems to understand that his writings are scripture. He refers to, right at the very end of the Gospel, he says that Jesus did many other signs that these things are written, using a phrase that he usually uses to refer to scripture, it is written.

He refers to his own book as it is written. And so I think he is also meaning us to understand that he understands that he is writing scripture there as well.

And so Jesus stands behind the New Testament writings, the writings particularly of the apostles, as scripture. And he says, we've got a very interesting passage in 2 Peter, chapter 3, verses 15 and 16, where Peter is talking about the coming of the day of the Lord.

and apparently some people are saying the day of the Lord is ever going to come because we've been waiting and it hasn't come and Peter talks a little bit about this, how it is going to come and then in verse 15 he says this, bear in mind that our Lord's patience, in other words he's holding off the day of the Lord means salvation just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him so he's referring to some teaching from Paul, probably from 1 and 2

Thessalonians, the letter that Paul wrote to the Thessalonian Christians where he talks about the second coming of Jesus Paul Peter goes on he writes the same way in all his letters speaking in them of these matters his letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort as they do the other scriptures to their own destruction and so here we have Peter referring to Paul's letters as scriptures and that comes with the full freight of the understanding of the word of God and so it seems to me there was a very quick and early consciousness on early believers parts that there were writings which were authoritative and scripture the word of God and so this is another part of our outside just by the way it's very interesting that Peter has trouble understanding Paul as well so this is probably an ongoing story where we all struggle sometimes to understand there it comes so that's that's very brief

[15:05] I've gone through that fairly quickly because we're still within the circle but just to say that the historical account and if it's only a historical account of Jesus and the apostles is that they had an understanding of the Old Testament scriptures and there was also awareness that there was a New Testament scriptures as well now that may not have been the New Testament exactly as we have it Peter is talking very specifically about Paul's writings but the concept that there were scriptures being written in the New Testament comes now as we said that's the inside out and you still we still may say well hang on you're still using the Bible at this point to kind of show that the Bible is the Word of God so now let's think about working from the outside in how do we know the question where it comes is how do we know that the New Testament is a reliable account because if the New Testament is a reliable account then we can trust what we've just heard on the inside so now we're trying to come from the outside to the point that we've just made that makes sense so we've seen what the New Testament is saying is that is that a reliable account is that something that we can trust and we can believe there are many different aspects to this question the first one is a question of manuscripts do we have a reliable account of what Jesus said are the New Testament documents the ones that were written in the first century were the Old Testament

documents written are they accurate are they as they were originally written as well how can we think about this as a as a question let's think about the Old Testament first the and here what we're doing we need to understand how did the Bible come to us so it wasn't always published with a nice kind of fake leather background in a single book as you know the Bible is a collection of 66 documents and they are written over a period of 1600 years by about 40 different quarters and they've been collected into a collection and they've been copied they've been copied by hand from copy to copy to copy and they come to us in the form that they are now are they accurate copies of what was originally written that's the kind of question that people ask in terms of the Old

Testament up until about halfway through last century the earliest manuscripts that we had for the Old Testament were dated to about 900 to 1000 AD which is old but it's not really old then in 1947 there was a discovery around the Dead Sea of a group of documents called the Dead Sea Scrolls and in those scrolls were hand written and hand copies of whole texts there's a thing called the Isaiah Scroll which is a whole text of Isaiah and partial fragments because they kind of faded away of every Old Testament book that we know in the Old Testament except the book of Esau and those fragments dated back to the first century took the whole dating back to a thousand years and there were also multiple copies of some documents so that we could compare how carefully they had been copied and the upshot of all of this is that the books that we know in the Old Testament were validated as being 2,000 years old now and collections were held by a group of Jewish believers but they also showed a remarkable accuracy in the way that they were copied when you compare documents and also comparing them with the documents from a thousand years later the accuracy rate has been estimated at around about 95% and variations of that 5% very very small that were there in fact what we do know is that when the Jewish scribes were copying scrolls if they realised they made a mistake they would destroy the scroll and start again because they felt that they were dealing with the word of God and so they did this very very carefully but the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls gives us confidence in what's called the Masoretic text of the Old Testament the Hebrew text of the Old

Testament it stretches back to a thousand years and as far as we can see it's been copied accurately to an extraordinary degree now what about the New Testament well the New Testament is relatively young compared to the Old Testament dates from the first century or inside the first century and again it's the same process we have the copying of manuscripts over and over again to take us eventually to the Bible that we have it's estimated that there are over 5,000 Greek manuscripts!

representing all or part of the New Testament and then there are many more copies beyond that sometimes a figure of 25,000 or so is quoted but it's not quite as impressive as it sounds because they're all copies but the original kind of manuscripts those on the virus and letter all that kind of stuff it's a remarkable amount of documentary evidence to be behind the text of the New Testament as we have it.

[21 : 11] Now there's a scholar in pursuit called Textual Criticism don't ask your children to go into this thing it's mind knowingly painstaking the old I'm going to say boring but the guys would do it love it and what they do is they compare manuscripts and they can try to work back it's not a biblical kind of discipline it's a historical discipline used by biblical scholars to get back to the original text and there's certain rules we can talk about that later if you like but again the estimation is that around about 99% of the original text can be reconstructed beyond reasonable doubt and we're always going to say beyond reasonable doubt because rather than absolute certainty because it's historical discipline that's just the language of that caution but as I say over 99% of the original text can be reconstructed and there are books that are listing the variations in the manuscripts so you can see that as well nothing is hidden in this whole process there there are what we call textual variants and I'll talk a little bit about those in a moment where we're not sure whether a text is using one word or another sometimes it's spelling mistakes and things like that but nothing significant which affects any major doctrine is in these textual variants we do not have as far as we know the original documents it would be great to have Paul's document where he's written with his own hand but we have copies and we have copies of copies and a high degree of certainty about the reconstruction of the text that's there so how early are these texts well the earliest fragment we have but it's only a little tiny bit of John's gospel dates from about 125

BC AD it dates from about 125 AD now the estimates when John was written vary between somewhere around maybe something before 70 AD through to about 90 AD so this is a copy made

within 30 to 80 years of the actual document being written that may sound like a long time but when we compare it to the documentary evidence or other historical figures such as Julius Caesar and others it's extraordinary so I think the earliest topic we have where Caesar is about 900 AD sort of 900 thousand years after Julius Caesar lived and so there is a lot of documentary evidence to show that what we've got is the accurate writings of the first century writers now that doesn't mean they're true but it does mean they're accurate truth is a different question we don't have to believe these documents in other words and people will still doubt but in terms of the reliability of the text we have we have a reliable copy and account of what the earliest writers wrote and therefore what they believed and what they understood so one writer says if someone wants to question the integrity of the Greek

New Testament based upon the manuscript evidence that person ought to be ready to throw out everything they think they know about ancient history since we have so many more and better quality manuscripts than any other document from ancient history historians of other ancient documents find themselves wishing they had so many manuscripts to work with so we really do have an embarrassment of riches in those documents that are there now another thing which I appreciate and this doesn't often come up in talks like this is when I'm reading my English Bible it often has little footnotes which refer me to the fact that this text is uncertain we're not sure what this word means in other words there's no hiding of any of the issues that perhaps still remain so let me give you an example and maybe in your English Bible I'm not sure Luke chapter 8 verse 26 this is one that I've just opened by opening the

Bible at random just saw this sorry not Luke chapter 8 verse 43 sorry 26 and 43 so if you got a this is the NIV so it's got a little V beside verse 26 and it says some manuscripts Gadarenes other manuscripts Gergesenes also in verse 37 so there's no hiding the fact that we're not completely sure whether it's Gadarenes or Gergesenes you can ask yourself the question does that make much of a difference no no and then in verse 43 you'll see that there's a footnote again you've got it many manuscripts add in these words years and she spent all she had on doctors and so this is talking about the woman who's bleeding who comes up to Jesus she's been bleeding for 12 years but the main text says she was bleeding for 12 years but no one could heal her many manuscripts say 12 years and she spent all she had on doctors and now that appears in some manuscripts it doesn't appear in others and then there's a process you've got to decide whether it's original or not the fact that it's footnoted suggests that people can't quite decide whether it's original or not some people suggest that

Luke being a doctor would not have put this in because it's his own profession and so Mark has this in there so we don't hide from the problems and I'm using that with a very small p because they are minor but there is no hiding the fact that there is a textual tradition behind the Bible and we're not fighting the issues that are there there's also no harmonising of awkward passages between texts one of the issues that people bring up are the so-called internal contradictions so when Jesus was when he healed the blind man Bartimaeus was he going in or out of Jericho it's a really minor detail but I think it's Matthew has him going in and Mark coming out or vice versa was he going in or was he going out now it would have been very easy publishing the

[28 : 17] Bible to simply harmonise that out or in a documentary kind of copy to harmonise that out but that is left there as a little puzzle for us to think about and so people put their attention to try to work out whether Jesus was going in or out or there was a way that he was doing faith and there are various historical reconstructions that come in order to explain things like that and so what was the same is that there are questions that we have but Christians are fully aware of them and we don't hide from them and they're hiding on the record for us to be and perhaps they're just there for future research sometimes we just think well we can't explain that but we're happy to wait for more information to come and we can resolve that particular difficulty that's there and the difficulties are usually what we would say minor and they also depend how difficult they are depends on your view of scripture of stupid how error free or by the law to be is there and we can talk about that as we go so the manuscript evidence for the accuracy is really important but still people say well hang on maybe it's all made up did Jesus actually really exist and so maybe that's a question that comes to people's minds and this is the ultimate outside in question is the only evidence we've got for Jesus existence coming from the inside out or is there evidence from the outside in in other words are there any references or mentions to Jesus outside the

Bible or are we totally reliant on the Bible for understanding the existence of Jesus now the this is sometimes posed in terms of the many authors got together and created Jesus out of various myths at the time the dying and rising God and Jesus and then there's a question historically speaking if you look at the evidence that we've got would you say Jesus didn't exist at all the consensus as I understand it and this is said often by a number of people is that no credible historian actually denies the existence of Jesus the evidence of the in fact there's an Australian scholar who's said if you can provide credible evidence that Jesus didn't exist he'll eat a page of his Bible which interesting kind of challenge but he hasn't eaten a page of his Bible yet so it's there but the evidence in the

New Testament letters of Paul he obviously refers to Jesus so that's inside evidence but there is also references outside the Bible upwards of around 18 references in different documents from non-Christian sources referring to the person of Jesus and this evidence is enough to convince even people who are sceptical about the claims of Christianity and the truth of Christianity to not deny that Jesus existed but to say Jesus must have existed so there's a well-known New Testament scholar guy called Bart Nerman who's very sceptical about much of the teaching of the New Testament but he's written a couple of books defending the existence of Jesus as a historical figure because he just sees the evidence as unassailable he's not a friendly witness he's a hostile witness but he is still able to make the point that

Jesus existed I want to show you just a quick sample of three of these probably the most famous is this passage from a Jewish historian called Josephus writing in the first century and so he writes this about this time there lived Jesus a wise man if indeed one ought to call him a man for he was one who put before such surprising deeds and was a teacher of such people as accepted truth gladly he won over many Jews and many of the Greeks he was the Christ and when upon accusation of the principal men of men had condemned him to a cross those who had first come to love him did not cease he appeared to them spending a third day restored to life for the prophets of God who had told these things and a thousand other martyrs about him the tribe of the Christian so-called after him has still to this day not disappeared now this is a controversial passage and you can see why because of all the information that it's got and one of the theories about this passage is that

Christians have got hold of Josephus and they've copied the context around it and they've added some stuff particularly the statement which says he was the price that seems an unusual thing for the Jewish historian Josephus to write so I'm not pretending that this is an uncontroversial passage now a recent book has come out which makes a pretty powerful case for the genuineness of this as Josephus and I'm just going to say that out there and you can follow that up if you'd like to but even if people take out some of the stuff in the middle is very positive there's still a reference to Jesus as a wise man a reference to Pilate the condemnation on the cross the bare bones of the Jesus story are there even if you want to take out the apparently Christian embellishments he was the Christ the restoration to life and so on but there's evidence that what the evidence in this book is that what [34 : 19] Josephus is doing is not reporting these things as facts so much but the way that he writes it in the original language is the kind of this is the so called story and so he's tidying up the claims that are made about Christ but this is a Jewish historian no friend of Christians and certainly a clear reference to Jesus and the events that are around what about Roman historians this is the Roman historian Tacitus and he's talking about the emperor Nero who blamed Christians around the mid-60s for the burning of Rome and so Tacitus says this consequently to get rid of the report the report being that Nero himself had set fire to Rome you know the famous phrase Nero killed while Rome burned I think it's all Nero Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures by a class hated for their abominations called Christians by the populace

Christus from whom the name had its origin suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our populace conscious pilot and the most mischievous superstition thus checked for the moment and again broke out not only in Judea the first source of the evil but even in Rome there are all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular and then Nero goes on to talk about what he did to the Christians covering them in tar and setting them on fire and animal skins and so on but again Tacitus is a Roman historian and seems to be just referring as matter of factly to the origins of what he calls superstition he's by no means positive without the fact in taking greats and puts it all into these hideous and shameful other religions of other parts of the empire but we've got again the reference

to Christ the extreme penalty reference to the cross under conscious pilot those basic facts like we've also seen from Josephus this is a passage from some Jewish writings and this is many years post the New Testament but some of the traditions go back quite early but it gives a little bit of a view of Jewish rabbis and their reflection and they say it is taught on the eve of Passover they hung Yeshua and the crier went forth for 40 days beforehand declaring that Yeshua was going to be stoned for practicing witchcraft for enticing and leading

Israel to explain anyone knows something but clearly you should come forth and exonerate him now we don't know what this is all about but here we get a reference to Jesus being hung probably a reference on a tree to show that he's under the curse of God and the accusation that he's practicing witchcraft one of the early accusations is that Jesus was a sorcerer or a magician and so this looks like a reference again to Jesus in a Jewish text now there are other ones and naturally all of these are disputed and I don't want to shy away from that because people don't want to see this kind of evidence but as I say there is this and there are another 15 or so references in various texts quite early referring to Jesus or the Christian faith or even events around it so there's kind of this is we're talking about the outside in as well as the inside out it wasn't really made up though maybe just everybody got together and the four gospels got together and read the story about Jesus searched through the Old Testament to find 300 or so prophecies that they could read into the story to show that

Jesus fulfilled them and then Paul somehow took that story and decided to write letters and create a religion out of it and then they were also committed to this that they all decided that they were happy to be martyred by the end of the first century wasn't it all made up how would we think about this let's think about archaeology and history because this would be another outside in the Bible is continually referring to historical events do they fit with what we know of the historical record now I don't want to over claim here and the argument is roughly that about 5% of sites mentioned in the Bible have been dug up that there are some pretty spectacular confirmations in the archaeological record of some of the events in the Bible so there was a stone thing called a stele found in northern Israel that mentions the house of

David for example and for a long time people felt that maybe the whole story of King David had been made up suddenly there was some documentary evidence in terms of archaeology to do that there was a limestone block found in Israel confirming that Pontius Pilate was the Roman prefect of Judea as recorded in the Gospels there's a thing called the Cyrus Cylinder which corroborates the Persian king's policies regarding the return of captive's people which supports the account of Ezra and so there are some quite significant historical discoveries not everything in the Bible is confirmed by the historical record but then that's the problem with archaeology right you're kind of digging somewhere in the sands and the stones of ancient things and you're really at the mercy of whatever kind of pops up in the New Testament in the pool of

[40 : 37] Siloam has been excavated John 9 for a long time the story in John 5 where Jesus heals the man at a pool with five porticos that was felt to be made up because no one knew where they existed and a monastery was excavated right at the end of the 20th century in about the late 1800s and sure enough they found a pool that had five porticos and suddenly that story starts to look very black there and there are numerous other discoveries there the bible story continually intersects with history sometimes in quite detailed ways so one fellow has done a study of the names of the Roman governors through Acts and Luke uses a number of different words for the various rulers of the various regions and they all tag into what we know from other evidence of the names of those rulers so there's a governor or a prefect or an arch governor or something like that different names for different readers and they all kind of make sense there also it's in the details that what we see here is what

I would call cultural detail that comes particularly from eyewitnesses and who are embedded in the place so in the New Testament people keep constantly talking about going up to Jerusalem it sounds like a fairly innocuous phrase but they're going up to Jerusalem often from Galilee Galilee is in the north of Israel and they're heading south so I would normally think of saying going down to Jerusalem but you go up to Jerusalem because you're going up to the mountain of the temple on the mountain and this phrase is used regularly there little things like in the feeding of the 5000 in John chapter 6 there's just a little detail that says there was lots of green grass in that place that doesn't add anything to the stories but no theological significance it sounds like there was lots of green grass in the place and that made an impression at the time in

Mark's account he talks about how they sat down in groups of 50 and 100 and there are little details that are different between the accounts they all meld together but you get different eyewitness perspectives on the accounts that are there because it's the sense that we understand that there was eyewitness detail in John 21 one of the most famous numbers in the New Testament 153 that's the number of fish that were called that now a lot of work is trying to be done in the symbolic nature of that fish but I'm thinking it's just a bunch of fishermen that couldn't believe their luck and of course Jesus might help them but 153 fish just a detail that comes into play there are lots of names of people mentioned so in Mark chapter 15 he mentions Simon son of Cyrene as the father of Alexander and Rufus as if the audience will probably know who Alexander and Rufus are just little ties into history all of these little incidents on the way through in Acts chapter 12 Peter escapes prison and knocks on the door a servant girl goes up and her name is Rhoda and she answers the door and she's so overjoyed she shuts the door again goes back inside and leaves the outside again it doesn't add anything to the story but it just has that eyewitness sense now the ultimate skeptic says well all these details are just made up to give a sense of reality to the story but maybe some people can't be satisfied it's it's always a question it's in the details and the details point to and this is an inside question that what we're dealing with is eyewitness accounts particularly when we're talking with the gospels not claiming that for the whole Bible but certainly with the gospels we seem to be dealing with eyewitness accounts and there's also eyewitness claims in John's gospel he talks about the gospel written by the beloved disciple who saw these things and his testimony is true he's asking to believe on account of his eyewitness weep on the other hand says that he didn't see these things but he consulted eyewitnesses which again I think is interesting he's not claiming to be an eyewitness but he's claiming to carefully investigate to have done the work of a first century historian in order to bring this account two other final thoughts and these are kind of inside and maybe outside people were often impressed by the coherence of the Bible narrative so we're talking about 66 books written by over 40 different authors in three different languages over the course of about 1500 years and when people read this as a whole there is a coherence a picture of a story that revolves around God creating men and women the story of sin God making a way for the restoration of all things through the death and resurrection of his son they paint a consistent and clear picture of God's plan through history they even begin and end kind of in the same place they begin in creation and they end in a new creation and so there's an overarching kind of unity that people are often impressed with impressed with the [46 : 45] Bible also contains many what we would call predictive prophecies that are picked up and referred to in the New Testament as being fulfilled in Jesus now the skeptical explanation for this is something like what I said people trolled through the Old Testament tried to find prophecies relating to the Messiah and then they overlaid them onto the story of Jesus and kind of back work with them but when we look at those some of them particularly are so obscure it almost beggars belief that this would be the choice that's being done but the New Testament writers are seeing that what happened hundreds of years after this text were written is fulfilled in the life death and resurrection of Jesus that we're dealing with something which is an extraordinary piece of coherent literature over so much diversity over so much time the last couple of points the other thing people mention is that and I've alluded to this before one of the historical questions we'd ask about

Christianity is how did Christianity grow how does something like this begin and like all historians look back the New Testament answer is the resurrection of Jesus Christ the New Testament answer is the resurrection of Jesus this is where Paul says it happened and if it didn't happen Christianity is futile and so the resurrection becomes the explanation for the existence and for the growth of Christianity one year before Jesus left there was no Christianity one year after there is and then 300 years it had expanded to become a major religion within the Roman Empire in fact under Constantine it becomes the official religion of the Empire this was not this is something that needs to be explained something happened and something happened for the original disciples of Jesus they are portrayed as frightened ignorant slow all this kind of stuff and yet post the resurrection they are preaching faithfully and fearlessly and that leads to their fatality all of them except as we understand according to church tradition except the apostle John died violent deaths at the hands of all the hands John himself died as we understand it of all the age towards the end something happened and how to account for that that's another soft piece of evidence that people bring into play the other thing I should have mentioned earlier when it comes to not hiding things is one of the other things that people know about the Bible which maybe helps us to see it's authentic

is it doesn't sugarcoat its heroes in other words people like Abraham David and Peter are given a waltz and all presentation so Abraham is mentioned as the forefather of our faith twice he tries to give his wife as a sex slave possibly to a foreign king

David of course organizes or orchestrates the death of a man so that he can marry his wife these things are an embarrassment if we're talking about the heroes of faith the disciples are continually portrayed as a bunch of knuckleheads that aren't really understanding what Jesus is wrong about and Peter himself of course denies Jesus three times these things aren't hidden they are extraordinary things in religious documents they're enough to make you think those are the guys who are willing to part of it and that's part of the kind of the heroes there but that's a whole summary of many of the usual arguments there's a couple of other thoughts along the way you may have other questions as well and we can discuss those let me just briefly go to that second question why trust the Bible we're trying to talk about why can we trust the Bible why should we trust the Bible and two very quick points both the New

Testament and the Old Testament affirm that the word of God means life Psalm 119 goes through the Hebrew alphabet I've been twice extolling how great God's word is in order to bring life Jesus at one point has a conversation with Peter when many of Jesus disciples leave him now there's an embarrassing thing isn't it how successful is Jesus ministry when people leave him in droves he turns to Peter and says you want to go as well what's Peter's reply you alone have the words of eternal life and those words are recorded for some scriptures there is life in the words of Jesus and the final kind of point and that's simply encapsulated in take and read is Christians have often felt that the Bible itself is self testing that the fact that the scriptures are the word of God will be clear to the person who reads it in good faith seeking to understand it and so the advice is often if you doubt that the

[52 : 29] Bible is the word of God or you want to think about why should I trust the Bible the best thing you can do is actually just to simply start reading it and see what you think and go through and many people often when they're discussions they'll say I don't like the Bible and say which part of the Bible you like and it's a bit like Donald Trump remember they held the Bible outside the I think it was upside down anyway wasn't it they said you know can you name a verse in the Bible and I love the Bible but you couldn't name a verse in it and often people are like that not all some have read the Bible and still are sceptical and so on and that's perfectly fine but the challenge first of all challenge and the invitation but it's an invitation and a challenge is to certainly take that read to see how this word plays out how it speaks to us and how perhaps it's so unique and transformative as the living and active word of our lives so with that I'll pause

I'll grab a drink and then what are you doing Jeremy are you going to catch questions for us if people would like to ask questions and do further to the thanks thank you again to Bill for that so now we're going to move into our Q&A; so we'll just give you guys maybe about 2-3 minutes to think about any questions you might have while we get the slide of set up so okay so we'll do that one by one so the first question is there a difference between infamical and inherent two common words to describe the Bible sure okay so we're moving into the kind of thinking about the Bible now instead of its reliability in terms of those terms inherent means it is without error in things like history in the things that the things that the Bible affirms infallible is a lesser version of inerrancy saying the Bible is infallible but totally reliable in the positive things that it is teaching and so the issue is usually around about the level of historical detail and so when I mentioned before that idea of Jesus going in or out of Jericho and inerrancy would say that somehow

Jesus went in and out and there's a historical explanation for that the infallible would say that that may well be a discrepancy which we can't reconcile and it might be a different account and therefore an error but the Bible is still infallible in what it's teaching about God and how to have a relationship with those who agree the inerrancy is carefully defined but people often say oh does that mean that inerrantists believe that the Bible that the world was created in six days we committed to that and some scientific views that come out of the Bible but inerrantists will talk about the importance of understanding the claims of the Bible within a cultural context and things like that and the use of phenomenological language so the Bible at one point says the sun rises people say ah the Bible is wrong because we know the sun doesn't rise we know the earth is revolving around the sun but that's clearly when I talk about the sun rising and you do too probably and so that's phenomenological language within a culture and so inerrantist doesn't mean that the Bible also says

God is a rock now if God's not a rock is it therefore inerrant no because that's metaphorical language so but the issue inerrancy particularly is historical detail and veracity to the truth that's there okay now secondly is it the original documents or the translations we have to say of course that some translations are in error okay there was a very famous Bible called the sinner's Bible that left them not out of all the commandments okay and so clearly you're not going to be relying upon that as your Bible right otherwise if you shall do a whole bunch of stuff which is not any intention so it is talking about yes the original intentions of the author the so called I forget the term the first manuscripts there now that's kind of more the issue there is more apparent than real because of the reliability of the translations we've got and so then the question then comes is how reliable are the translations to our

Greek text and we've got many translations and they are all different translation philosophies but none of this means you can be confident that you're reading the scriptures in front of you in a way that comes across one of the beautiful things about the Bible of course is that it is translatable it was translated from the get-go because it's a missionary religion and so God is able to work through that in a way that the Koran for example as I understand it is not to be translated it's meant to stay in its kind of pristine language Arab so now third question was how did the church fathers decide between the the church fathers had two criteria they decide the apostle is one criteria and the gospel is the other and so they were looking for first of all they received the Old

[58 : 39] Testament there was a question about apocryphal books and I'll come to those in a second but the New Testament was chosen on the basis of a connection to an apostle and coherence with its teaching with the gospel so Mark is not an apostle but the understanding was that that was the memoirs of Peter Matthew was an apostle John was an apostle Luke is connected with Paul obviously the writings of the letters of Paul come into play John and Peter June is the Lord's brother one of the two books that had the most trouble and discussion about them were Hebrews because it's anonymous and the book of Revelation because people didn't like its theology of the second coming even though it was written by John so that brings us to the second question once the book is in the canon it becomes a norm by which you can judge the theology of the other books and it's really on those theological grounds and also the fact that there's discussions amongst the early Jews about those apocryphal books particularly in the

Old Testament that's why they aren't accepted in Protestant Bibles so in the Roman Catholic Bible I think you'll find the apocryphal books as part of it the apocryphal books are usually recognised as being useful for interest historical background but not to draw a doctrine from so that's a big quoted version of those things I'm sure more could be said that that's an other problem to get you going thank you now this is the slide that is up so if you have any questions you want to ask more anonymously you can scan and ask away here speaking of there is one here you kind of touched on it a bit but is there anything you might want to add which is how do I know that 66 books in the Bible we have is the correct one yeah so this is a question of canon and again we need to understand that we that Jesus was born with the Old Testament in his cradle if you like so really the question of canon usually revolves around the New

Testament books and the way that this is there are two ways that this is conceived one that there was a dark plot in the back room of Athanasius and then out popped this list of the books which agreed with his theology the other one is that the canonical books of the New Testament were by and large almost instantly recognised by the Christian church and that decision was ratified over a period of 300 years when they had to do that because of increasing theological disputes we needed a canon or a rule was needed by which to work out doctrine and so on and as I said there was a bit of discussion about some of the books what we can also see is the early church writers there are people writing in the early there are early church writers writing to Christian congregations in the early second century and they're quoting bits and pieces of scripture and we can recreate what they felt was the authority of books by those quotes and so the scholars that do these things work out that almost all the books of the New

Testament are quoted by those writers and there are other books which are in a little bit of a grey area they took a little bit of time for people to work out but we basically end up with the canon that we've got that was recognised by the churches the books of the Indian use not chosen at that point now I've constricted a long let's see there we go so that's summarised a fairly lengthy debate into a very quick sound like but the traditional view the Protestant conservative view is that the books more or less chose themselves and we can see that by their use by the early church fathers and

again there's no hiding in this there were disputes over a book like Hebrews because of authorship eventually they decided it was written by

Paul though the early church historian origin said the only one who knows who wrote Hebrews is God in the end because of the discussion that was there but the theology of Hebrews was so considered so valuable that it was included as well so they're comparing authorship and theology and usage and we end up with the books that are there as I say there's a couple of books on the fringe one particularly called the didiki which stands for the teaching but it's not apostolic it's anonymous we don't know where it was going so that was probably why that ultimately wasn't included but yep so do you have any thoughts on the book on Enoch not really that's long and it's a book it's one of the books we call the pseudepigrapha and what that means is it was written using the name of

[64 : 18] Enoch Enoch of course was a person from the Old Testament he's the guy who walked with God then was not okay translated into heaven or something the book of Enoch is a useful book for New Testament background so particularly the book of Jude and 1 Peter seems to be drawing on some of the teaching and imagery from Enoch in their background a lot of it has been made of a group called The Watchers if you're a fan of the cartoon of Watchmen I think that's they get that from Enoch so that won't be different to see it's got nothing to do with the Bible but yeah it's one of those books which we can read to find out more about possible Christianish beliefs or Jewish beliefs as background to the New Testament but it's not you know I've read it once and it's a long book it's 66 chapters they often

I'm not sure if this is Enoch I might be thinking of another thing called the Psalms of Solomon but they often give you information about the expectations concerning the Messiah as well which is good background for the New Testament but not scriptural at that point third question there is is the Catholic Bible untrustworthy well yes that is no because the Catholic Bible is by and the the 66 canonical books are as trustworthy whether they're in a book marked by the Pope or by the you whatever it is as I say we would not we just need to heed the warning about the apocryphal books that they can be read with interest but not for the prophet if you like they can be read with interest but not for doctrine but you know the genesis to revelation remains the word of God whether it's in a book marked for

Catholics Protestants camels children youth you know there are all sorts of Bibles that are around it's the it's the canonical books which are trustworthy no matter what their cloak if you like anyone else has any questions oh great so some may say that trusting the Bible alone is enough creeds and confessions are useless what do you think I think trust well begs the question enough for what but yeah of course trusting the Bible is enough for a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ made possible through his attaining death and the scriptures trust really enough for all that you need to live the Christian life that's exactly what Paul sums up for then they are at least of historical influence if not of importance for the

Christian I often am very grateful that in the Anglican church we say the apostles creed quite regularly because I think when I'm on trial for my faith and they say what do you believe it's going to come to me I believe in God the Father created heaven and so on and I see creeds so I can really walk to death in the confessions possibly slightly one step beyond the creeds because they are denominationally based and often a little bit more contentious between denominations that are going on so one man's creed might be another man's

I'm not that fussed about it just because of the denominational differences but again they are an attempt to capture the teaching of scripture and they are as good as their fidelity to the source material could you tell us about the Ethiopia Bible yeah I can tell you what I found out last night on Google when someone mentioned that the Ethiopia Bible might be mentioned apparently as we looked it up it's a version of scriptures that has 88 books I don't know anything about the history of the Ethiopia Bible all I know is that it contains the canonical books plus a whole series of the apocryphal books plus some others which look like they are peculiar to the Ethiopian church so my comments about the Ethiopian Bible without having read it would be equivalent to my comments about the

[70 : 04] Roman Catholic Bible and the Apocrypha that contain within it the canonical trustworthy books that will take us through the others are no doubt of interest to the Ethiopian church either historically or otherwise but I would caution them against using those books for relying upon for a relationship with God and for doctrine and they need to be compared to the core of the 66

campaign to do that but that's my little bit of homework going on from this particular trick is to just do a little bit more investigation into the Ethiopian Bible that's got to be intriguing so that's as far as I can go so would the human authors of the Bible know that they were actually writing one big story that's a really interesting question certainly when it comes to parts of the scriptures they know that they are writing the story of God so the very fact that the

Hebrew Jewish believers talk about I don't know if you know this but the canonical order of the books in the Hebrew Bible is different from the English Bible so when Jesus refers to the scriptures in the New Testament he talks about the law the prophets and the writings so there's a threefold division which reflects the Torah the first five books of the Old Testament Genesis through to Deuteronomy then the next books which we refer to as history books in our Bibles which is Joshua Judges Kings and then we pop Chronicles on to the end Chronicles is excluded that's in the part of the Bible called the Vikings but those history books they call the former prophets in other words they call them it's a prophetic understanding of God's history and that to me suggests that they're collated with an understanding that they hang together as God's word and they're also connected by the fact that they're dealing with the history of the nation of Israel so they're clearly telling the story of the history of Israel at least from

Genesis to the end of two kings well I'd say sorry to the end of Ezra and Nehemiah they're telling the story of God and his dealing with his people Israel from creation so the question really is did the New Testament writers have a sense that they were completing the Old Testament and seeing that as one story and I think the answer to that is yes they did because they're continually referring back to prophecies that are being fulfilled they're growing those connections they're continually alluding to Old Testament figures and all sorts of things they are seeing a definite link now whether it's to see one big story that's a kind of a 20th century discussion but I think what they are definitely seeing is Jesus being the fulfilment of the hopes of Israel that certainly ties the end of the story and the fact that that gospel needs to be quite plain they're certainly seeing a continuity right the way through whether they will talk about it in terms of salvation history and

God's story and so on different kind of question but I think the consciousness of the New Testament writers is that when they see Jesus and they understand what he's doing he is very much rooted into the story of the Old Testament which is rooted in the story of God's creation and is looking forward to a new creation that's the elements of that particular story yeah so this next one is how can we apply infallibility and inerrancy properly between the original Bible manuscripts and our translations I think we made questions getting and how do they carry over when you translate into translation yeah I'm not sure I understand that question I think it's how should people like I mean that you haven't seen it like now we have touched it and not that sure I think my answer would be the same as I had before that we have reliable manuscript tradition enormous amount of work goes into translation work and so we can trust the Bible in front of us to be teaching us truthfully about God we can trust the Bible in front of us to be teaching us truthfully about how to live a Christian life that kind of thing comes into play and if we're worried about the minor details then I think the best thing you can do is read three Bibles at once and compare translations!

[75 : 22] original languages in which case I invite you to go to a theological college and learn Greek and Hebrew and do that then you can deal more directly with the original text that is there but we are all I was going to say the mercy of translations but that's not true we are all the benefit of translations and the work that goes into that and as I said our translations don't hide the difficulties there's plenty of footnotes and comments pointing out areas where they're gray and if you really think that Gatterids or Gergesenes affects eternal life then good luck that you can have that opinion but the discrepancies and the issues as I say you need to take my word for it here but you can investigate this minor so minor that they don't affect doctrine particularly that's there now that may affect your view of infallibility or inerrancy what I just said you might say to yourself well I think I'm going to be an infallibilist but not an inerrantist that's fine all I'm saying is please don't preach to my church and say it's clearly a mistake in the

Bible at this point I never hear an infallible say that from the book it's clearly a mistake here so I think most people who hold a very wide view of the infallible are in fact practical inerrant they're just trying to pitch their this but that's my opinion and it may be controversial but yeah I don't I don't think I can say much more than that but yeah it's 930 so maybe we'll take this as the last question so how can we trust the miracles and supernatural occurrences in the Bible how can we trust them well in the light of everything we've said if we've got a reliable account then these things happen why

wouldn't we trust these things well because we come to it with a preconceived idea that such things cannot occur and that accounts for the skepticism in scholarly and other language of course if miracles and supernatural occurrences can't be trusted then I'd advise you to go and become a Mormon or a Muslim or whatever you like because the resurrection is the supernatural and miraculous occurrence on which you stake your eternal life now if the resurrection did happen then there is nothing in principle to say that the other miracles could happen with an extraordinary person like Jesus we can't prove a miracle all we can do is look at the accounts and the context that they're in and say on balance did these things occur and a surprising number of people are prepared to conceive that Jesus was an extraordinary person who probably did extraordinary things they usually fought at the resurrection but there are other accounts of miracle workers around you already heard an explanation from the Jewish writers that he's a magician so clearly I would say there's evidence that he was doing something in order to draw that particular accusation that would be a little bit of historical data to say something must have happened for him to be seen as a magician that he's doing that and so again how can you trust this probably answered a couple of ways can we accept that these things happen well that's kind of a question of what preconceptions you're bringing to the scriptures and understanding that if these things are categorically ruled out of action then you'll go for naturalistic explanations and you've got a problem when it comes to the resurrection particularly or you can look at the accounts look at them as historical records with all the caution that you would normally do and say well on balance they seem to be pointing to the fact that these extraordinary things did happen and what are the implications and then you move into a different form of trust because you're trusting that Jesus has been adjusted by these things as the Messiah and the Divine things are important so great thank you very much now if you wanted to ask a question but you didn't get the chance I believe that Dr Bill will be here for a little bit more and you can come and approach him directly and chat with him he's very very nice and with that I will end here for me for tonight and I'll just say a quick prayer and we can all go Heavenly Father, we thank you for sending Christ, your Son, who came in the flesh and whom we encounter in your Word. Thank you for these scriptures that have been reserved for us through the ages that we can reliably trust in them and help us to trust in them as well. I always do pray in Jesus' most precious name.