

WHY YOU CAN HAVE CONFIDENCE IN THE BIBLE DISCUSSION AND APPLICATION

Chapter 1: Can This Book be Trusted?

BOTTOM LINE SUMMARY: While vast numbers of people say they believe the Bible, their lives often are disconnected from the teaching and instruction of this great book. In recent days “new discoveries” –which often are actually not recent at all–drive a wedge between biblical trustworthiness and our hearts. “After all,” we are often told, “the Bible is so old and has been translated and copied so many times, how can we be sure that it is trustworthy?” So we revere the old book as something that is literary and contains interesting stories but is not to be taken very seriously. Then biblical authority is challenged by questions such as, “What about the Gospel of Judas (which is not really a Gospel in the sense that the first four books of the New Testament are) or The Gospel of Thomas, or whatever?” What distinguishes this book from other religious documents? Or is it simply one of many ancient religious writings. Harold Sala’s whole point of writing this book is to show you that the Bible is trustworthy.

REFLECTIONS / DISCUSSION STARTERS

- When famous explorer Richard Byrd got lost in a snowstorm on the Ross Ice Barrier, he used a fixed point of reference to find his way back to safety. How could the Bible serve as a reference point for your life?
- Many people say they revere the Bible and have at least one copy in their home, but seldom take the time to actually read it. If you have a Bible, how often do you read it? What are some steps you could take to make time in God’s Word a healthy habit?
- When everyone is a “law unto himself,” where does that lead in society?
- If I believe God’s plan and purpose for my life is better than I could discover on my own, what compelling influence could the Bible have on my life?
- How can you counter some of the persuasive arguments against biblical authority you read in current publications or see on programs such as The History Channel that leave grave doubts as to whether or not this book is trustworthy?

Chapter 2: The Bridge of Uniqueness

BOTTOM LINE SUMMARY: Crossing the bridge of uniqueness is the first step in acknowledging the fact that no other book in the world can boast of: an uncommon unity and coherence. Written over a period of at least 1400 years by at least 40 different individuals with differing cultures, world views, outlooks on life, and even education, the manner it was written is definitely God-breathed. Unlike the Koran which is best read in Arabic, the Bible has been translated into hundreds of languages and has been universally embraced by cultures and peoples down through the centuries. Found in 92% of American homes and the unofficial best-selling book in China (a Communist country), the Bible is unrivaled in uniqueness.

REFLECTIONS / DISCUSSION STARTERS

- How could so many different individuals from different backgrounds contribute to the Bible over hundreds of years, and yet their writings reflect essential harmony? Do you see the hand of God in this? What are the chances of it “just happening”?
- Undoubtedly God revealed much about his plan and purpose for humanity to the descendants of Adam and Eve, and these stories were passed along as oral history. Describe ways your family passes along its history from generation to generation.
- What is a covenant? Describe the difference between the Old and New Covenants.
- J.B. Phillips, a scholar of Classics at Cambridge University, once held a disparaging view of the Bible – until he actually studied it. Then he said it was “strangely alive” and “spoke to my condition in the most uncanny way.” What do you think he meant by that?

Chapter 3: The Bridge of Manuscript Evidence

BOTTOM LINE SUMMARY: The case for having confidence in the Bible rests squarely upon the foundation of manuscript evidence. At the very time that biblical credibility was being challenged by the emerging phoenix of science and technology, God saw fit to allow dusty manuscripts that had been lying hidden for centuries to come to light. Under critical and unbiased studies it became obvious that though the texts had been transmitted over the centuries, they had not become corrupted. Comparing the ancient texts as the Sinai Bible and the Isaiah manuscript, along with hundreds of Old Testament fragments from Qumran, showed that variations are minor ones of spelling and orthography – not substance or content.

REFLECTIONS / DISCUSSION STARTERS

- What do a few old manuscripts discovered in an old monastery or in the desert have to do with my life today?
- At a dinner with friends, someone mentions they just rented The Da Vinci Code movie, which leads them to believe Jesus may have really been married to Mary Magdalene. How would you respond to them?
- Professor Jose O’Callaghan, a scholar at the University of Barcelona, discovered fragments of Mark’s gospel dating from the year A.D. 50, about 75 years older than any other previously discovered manuscripts. Why is this discovery important?
- When the Sawis of Papua New Guinea heard the story of the gospels for the first time, they cheered for Judas, because their culture valued treachery above integrity. In what ways has modern culture affected the value system of you or your friends so that wrong appears to be right?

- Scoffers and skeptics claim the Bible is riddled with errors and has been changed through the centuries. How would you answer their criticism?
- The author believes that more “old manuscripts” will probably be unearthed. So will that challenge your faith in what the Bible says? Is it not logical that the enemies of the Gospel wrote diatribes against the authority of the New Testament manuscripts just as agnostics and critics rail against the Bible today?

Chapter 4: The Bridge of Archaeology

BOTTOM LINE SUMMARY: Archaeology does not “prove” the Bible; however, it consistently verifies the geographical statements of Scripture, names, places, events, and even minor cultural or climate. While archaeology is not a pure science as such, it utilizes the latest scientific techniques such as DNA analysis, x-ray and satellite technology, as well as computer technology in reconstructing the remains of long-gone civilizations. It is one more solid bridge to biblical confidence.

REFLECTIONS / DISCUSSION STARTERS

- How could archeological evidence give your added confidence that your “calling and election” are sure?
- How do the ruins of an old fortress at En Hatzeva confirm the prophecies of Isaiah and Obadiah about Edom?
- The Ebla tablets prove that a highly literate society existed in approximately 2300 B.C. Why is that significant?
- If you buried a time capsule in your back yard for some future generation to uncover, what would you include in your capsule and why?

Chapter 5: The Bridge of Fulfilled Prophecy

BOTTOM LINE SUMMARY: Biblical prophecies – unlike many contemporary prophecies and predictions of contemporary sooth-sayers – are precise in mentioning names, time periods, and circumstances. They are so specific that one must either say, “This could not have just happened; God must have revealed this to men!” or else deny that the prophet wrote about the event *before* it took place. This, of course, invokes the validity of the supernatural. Understanding that God gave precise and elaborate details of what would take place, and then seeing them fulfilled, are confidence-builders in what the Bible says.

REFLECTIONS / DISCUSSION STARTERS

- How do you explain the explicit picture of the life of Alexander the Great written in the Book of Daniel at least 200 years before his first breath of Macedonian air?
- Contrast the prophecies of Buddha, Confucius or Muhammad with the prophecies give in the Bible about Jesus.

- If you had friends playing with Ouija boards, consulting palm readers or astrologists, what would you tell them?
- What is the significance of the rebirth of the modern state of Israel? Do you also see uniqueness in the rebirth of Hebrew language, the same as that spoken by Elijah and the kings of Israel (something that has never before taken place)?
- Why is the manner and timing of Jesus' birth of any importance?

Chapter 6: The Bridge to a Truce with Science

BOTTOM LINE SUMMARY: At three critical junctures the Hebrew word *bara* which means "to create from no previously existing material" is found: the creation of matter, the creation of lower forms of life, and the creation of human life. It is not by chance that the statements the Bible makes of a scientific nature were usually in conflict with the scientific thought of the era and day when the authors wrote those statements. Some of these are the stars being without number, that the life of all flesh is in the blood, and that the world is round. There is but one God – not a God of the Bible and the God of Science. And much of the conflict over creation, humankind, and our world can be resolved by cross-checking the theories of science with the statements of Scripture and cross-checking the interpretations of Scripture with valid facts of science. The author believes that much of the conflict is between what men say the Bible says (which is often their interpretation) and what it really says, and what scientists say is "a scientific fact" when in reality it is scientific theory.

REFLECTIONS / DISCUSSION STARTERS

- How did a simple mousetrap cause microbiologist Michael Behe to rethink evolution?
- Why do you think that some secular scientists are so slow to recognize the evidence for a Creator? Do you think their stubborn intransigence is motivated by dark spiritual forces of which they may be totally unaware?
- Russian astronauts said they saw no sign of God when they went into space. American astronaut Jim Irwin, however, described the moon as a holy place where he sensed the presence of God. Why do you think he said that?
- Since an alphabet or code is not a random assemblage of symbols, how does the DNA code imply the existence of God?
- While the Bible is not a scientific book, all of its writings penned centuries ago are in harmony with what is now considered scientific. Describe one of these confirmations. Do you see this as being more than coincidental?

Chapter 7: The Living Book That Changes Lives

BOTTOM LINE SUMMARY: No other book in the entire world has affected the lives of people for the better as this book has. It confirms the New Testament statement that "the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts

and attitudes of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). Hundreds of thousands of people can say, "This book changed my life!" The only way you can discover whether or not this is true is to put the Bible to the test starting today.

REFLECTIONS / DISCUSSION STARTERS

- Why do you think some risk imprisonment or even death to take a Bible into restricted countries? What difference will it make?
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- E.V.Rieu described the Bible as "the Magna Carta of the human spirit." What do you think he meant by that phrase?
- Describe someone you know who has undergone a significant transformation in their understanding about God.
- How has Jesus changed your life?

Chapter 8: The Implications of "So What?"

BOTTOM LINE SUMMARY: While most of us have strong convictions when it comes to politics, sports, and contemporary life, what we think or believe ceases to be of major importance when we lie in the emergency ward of a hospital – the result of a heart-attack or a serious health issue! Thoughts then focus on, "If I don't pull through, what's out there? Whom will I meet when the monitor goes flat on the heart monitor?" The implications of what the Bible says and whether or not it should be taken seriously has major consequences. No other book gives answers of such great importance. And going beyond "cramming for your finals," it reveals how you can find purpose and meaning in life, comfort in times of sorrow and loss, and helps you discover what makes life worth living. The implications of biblical confidence are great – never to be taken casually.

REFLECTIONS / DISCUSSION STARTERS

- Why did so many visitors go to the Louvre Museum to see an empty space on the wall once occupied by a famous painting? What would be the implications if we had no Bibles?
- Describe any encounters with truth that have caused you to make a change in your lifestyle.
- In what ways has postmodern thinking influenced you or your friends?
- The Archbishop of Canterbury once said, "the longest journey in the life of one's belief is from the head to the heart." How has your spiritual journey moved between your head and your heart?
- Charles Farrah grappled with a crisis of faith while he worked on his Ph.D. at the University of Edinburgh. One night he asked himself, "Is there a God who is personal and caring? Is the Bible really true?" How do you answer these questions for yourself?