

Dialogue Question III: **Is the Bible reliable?**

Background

The Bible is a compilation of works by over 40 authors over a period of over 1,500 years. Perhaps no single work of art or literature has been as carefully scrutinized (by its supporters and detractors) as the Christian Bible. The claims made on behalf of the Bible range from the mundane to the staggering. Some say that the Bible is a collection of ancient writings that can hardly be trusted. Others claim that the Bible contains key moral teachings from profound authors that can help guide our lives in times of trouble and confusion. Still others assert that the Bible is the very Word of God, written by God and not by men.

If the Bible is no more than a collection of the writings of people, then the reader may embrace or dismiss it at their leisure. On the other hand, if the Bible is actually the Word of God (not simply man) then one must pay careful attention to it for the author is one who created the whole universe.....including the reader. However, it is difficult to draw an informed conclusion about Christianity without a general understanding of the Bible.

Inspiration

A central issue in understanding the nature of the Bible is “inspiration.” Inspiration asks and answers the question of who ultimately wrote the Bible. If the Bible is the Word of God, then how is it that it was written down by human authors?

Someone might reference artists who produce magnificent works of art and point to their inspiration. This type of inspiration assumes that ultimately the artist is responsible for the work. Christians have historically maintained that the inspiration of the Bible authors was ultimately outside themselves and from God Himself. One who believes in God will likely find it plausible that God could intervene in time and space and speak to people through human authors. A key verse from the Bible in understanding inspiration is

2 Tim 3:16, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.”

It should be noted that inspiration does not mean that the human authors were in some sort of trance or robotic state. They wrote what was in their minds and hearts, but what was in their minds and hearts was directed from God Himself. This is somewhat of a mystery. Christians don't deny the mysterious aspect of inspiration but accept the reality that God has chosen to reveal Himself through the writing of humans.

Internal Evaluation

To evaluate the Bible reasonably, one must ask, “What does the Bible claim about itself?” Does the Bible actually claim to be the very word of God?

One of the primary and regular ways that God has revealed Himself in history is through His word. Throughout the Bible, authors refer to the “word of the Lord.” He spoke to various characters in the times before Christ such as prophets, priests, and kings. Sometimes God would speak verbally, and His words were recorded by the hearers. These words have been recorded and passed down to us today in the form of the Bible. Furthermore, Christ is actually referred to as the “Word that became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). Jesus is the living complement to the written word.

In addition to 2 Tim 3:16 (mentioned above), one finds a clear explanation of the Bible's inspiration in 2 Peter 1:20-21: “But know

this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.” The Bible itself testifies that it is ultimately written by God.

Contradictions?

Often the objection is raised that the Bible can't really be the Word of God because of all of its contradictions. But before this objection is raised, we must understand more of the background and intent of the Bible.

One important fact is that the Bible is a collection of literature. God has spoken to us in a way with which we can identify. As a literary work, the Bible contains different genres (history, poetry, prophecy, etc.) and different literary devices. The authors of the Bible sometimes use metaphor and allegory. This is to be expected as God used human authors to give us His word. Many claims of biblical contradictions are made while ignoring the literary nature of the Bible.

External Evaluation

When studying ancient literature, a fundamental principle is to believe that the document is true unless credible reason against the claim exists. Most all ancient works of literature claim authorship, time, place, etc. The Bible does so as well. To date, no historical or archeological claim has ever been established against the Bible. Where the Bible claims there are cities, cities have been unearthed. Where the Bible claims there were battles, evidence of battles have been discovered.

Another question relates to the accuracy of the Bible we have today as compared to the words of the Bible when the original documents were written. How exact is the Bible that we have today in comparison to the original text? In answering this question it is important to understand how the accuracy of all ancient documents is evaluated. Because of the type of material that documents were produced from in the ancient world, we do not have the original copies of any ancient works of literature. We have to rely on 'manuscripts.' Manuscripts are hand-made copies.

Two key questions relate the reliability of ancient manuscripts: 1) how long is the gap from the original document to the earliest manuscripts (copies) and 2) how many manuscripts are surviving today? The greater the number of manuscripts, the more opportunity exists to compare for accuracy.

By these standards the Bible is far and away the most accurate work of ancient literature in the world. For comparison, let's consider one of the most well known works in all of ancient Greek and Latin literature, Homer's *Iliad*, to the New Testament:

<u>Work</u>	<u>Author</u>	<u>Date Written</u>	<u>Earliest Copy</u>	<u>Time Span</u>	<u>Total Manuscripts</u>
<i>Iliad</i>	Homer	900 B.C.	400 B.C.	500 years	643
New Testament	Various	40-100 A.D.	125 A.D.	25 years	over 24,000

There is little, if any, academic challenge to the reliability of the *Iliad*. There is no reason for there to be. In the same way, the Bible should be received as authentic of what was originally written. Charges that the Bible has changed substantially over time are unfounded.

Conclusion

After looking at internal and external evidences, one can conclude that the Bible is the very word of God. Even if one questions who wrote the scriptures, one can still conclude that the Bible is a reliable source to know and understand things about God. Please don't allow your questions to hinder your continued investigation of God by completely dismissing the validity of the Bible.

If you have further questions about the authenticity of the scriptures, here are some further resources to assist your investigation:

Inerrancy, Geisler

Evidence That Demands a Verdict, McDowell

Dialogue Questions

- 1) Does it make sense that one of the ways God would reveal himself is through a written word?
- 2) Why would we tend to subject the Bible to intensive questioning and scrutiny much more than other ancient documents?
- 3) What effect does the fact that the Bible was penned by over 40 different individuals covering a time period over 15 centuries have on its trustworthiness?

The Gospel of John

Chapter 7

After this, Jesus went around in Galilee, purposely staying away from Judea because the Jews there were waiting to take his life. ²But when the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles was near, ³Jesus' brothers said to him, "You ought to leave here and go to Judea, so that your disciples may see the miracles you do. ⁴No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world." ⁵For even his own brothers did not believe in him. ⁶Therefore Jesus told them, "The right time for me has not yet come; for you any time is right. ⁷The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify that what it does is evil. ⁸You go to the Feast. I am not yet going up to this Feast, because for me the right time has not yet come." ⁹Having said this, he stayed in Galilee. ¹⁰However, after his brothers had left for the Feast, he went also, not publicly, but in secret. ¹¹Now at the Feast the Jews were watching for him and asking, "Where is that man?" ¹²Among the crowds there was widespread whispering about him. Some said, "He is a good man." Others replied, "No, he deceives the people." ¹³But no one would say anything publicly about him for fear of the Jews. ¹⁴Not until halfway through the Feast did Jesus go up to the temple courts and begin to teach. ¹⁵The Jews were amazed and asked, "How did this man get such learning without having studied?" ¹⁶Jesus answered, "My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me." ¹⁷If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own. ¹⁸He who speaks on his own does so to gain honor for himself, but he who works for the honor of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him. ¹⁹Has not Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law. Why are you trying to kill me?" ²⁰"You are demon-possessed," the crowd answered. "Who is trying to kill you?" ²¹Jesus said to them, "I did one miracle, and you are all astonished. ²²Yet, because Moses gave you circumcision (though actually it did not come from Moses, but from the patriarchs), you circumcise a child on the Sabbath. ²³Now if a child can be circumcised on the Sabbath so that the law of Moses may not be broken, why are you angry with me for healing the whole man on the Sabbath? ²⁴Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment." ²⁵At that point some of the people of Jerusalem began to ask, "Isn't this the man they are trying to kill? ²⁶Here he is, speaking publicly, and they are not saying a word to him. Have the authorities really concluded that he is the Christ? ²⁷But we know where this man is from; when the Christ comes, no one will know where he is from." ²⁸Then Jesus, still teaching in the temple courts, cried out, "Yes, you know me, and you know where I am from. I am not here on my own, but he who sent me is true. You do not know him, ²⁹but I know him because I am from him and he sent me." ³⁰At this they tried to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his time had not yet come. ³¹Still, many in the crowd put their faith in him. They said, "When the Christ comes, will he do more miraculous signs than this man?" ³²The Pharisees heard the crowd whispering such things about him. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees sent temple guards to arrest him. ³³Jesus said, "I am with you for only a short time, and then I go to the one who sent me. ³⁴You will look for me, but you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come." ³⁵The Jews said to one another, "Where does this man intend to go that we cannot find him? Will he go where our people live scattered among the Greeks, and teach the Greeks? ³⁶What did he mean when he said, 'You will look for me, but you will not find me,' and 'Where I am, you cannot come'?" ³⁷On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. ³⁸Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." ³⁹By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified. ⁴⁰On hearing his words, some of the people said, "Surely this man is the Prophet." ⁴¹Others said, "He is the Christ." Still others asked, "How can the Christ come from Galilee? ⁴²Does not the Scripture say that the Christ will come from David's family and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?" ⁴³Thus the people were divided because of Jesus. ⁴⁴Some wanted to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him. ⁴⁵Finally the temple guards went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, "Why didn't you bring him in?" ⁴⁶"No one ever spoke the way this man does," the guards declared. ⁴⁷"You mean he has deceived you also?" the Pharisees retorted. ⁴⁸"Has any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed in him? ⁴⁹No! But this mob that knows nothing of the law--there is a curse on them." ⁵⁰Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus earlier and who was one of their own number, asked, ⁵¹"Does our law condemn anyone without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?" ⁵²They replied, "Are you from Galilee, too? Look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee." ⁵³Then each went to his own home.

Chapter 8

But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. ²At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. ³The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group ⁴and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. ⁵In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" ⁶They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to **write on the ground with his finger**. ⁷When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." ⁸Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. ⁹At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. ¹⁰Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" ¹¹"No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin." ¹²When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." ¹³The Pharisees challenged him, "Here you are, appearing as your own witness; your testimony is not valid." ¹⁴Jesus answered, "Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going. But you have no idea where I come from or where I am going. ¹⁵You judge by human standards; I pass judgment on no one. ¹⁶But if I do judge, my decisions are right, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me. ¹⁷In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two men is valid. ¹⁸I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me." ¹⁹Then they asked him, "Where is your father?" "You do not know me or my Father," Jesus replied. "If you knew me, you would know my Father also." ²⁰He spoke these words while teaching in the temple area near the place where the offerings were put. Yet no one seized him, because his time had not yet come. ²¹Once more Jesus said to them, "I am going away, and you will look for me, and you will die in your sin. Where I go, you cannot come." ²²This made the Jews ask, "Will he kill himself? Is that why he says, 'Where I go, you cannot come'?" ²³But he continued, "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. ²⁴I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins." ²⁵"Who are you?" they asked. "Just what I have been claiming all along," Jesus replied. ²⁶"I have much to say in judgment of you. But he who sent me is reliable, and what I have heard from him I tell the world." ²⁷They did not understand that he was telling them about his Father. ²⁸So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. ²⁹The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him." ³⁰Even as he spoke, many put their faith in him. ³¹To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. ³²Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." ³³They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?" ³⁴Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. ³⁵Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. ³⁶So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. ³⁷I know you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are ready to kill me, because you have no room for my word. ³⁸I am telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence, and you do what you have heard from your father." ³⁹"Abraham is our father," they answered. "If you were Abraham's children," said Jesus, "then you would do the things Abraham did. ⁴⁰As it is, you are determined to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. ⁴¹You are doing the things your own father does." "We are not illegitimate children," they protested. "The only Father we have is God himself." ⁴²Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me. ⁴³Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. ⁴⁴You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. ⁴⁵Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! ⁴⁶Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me? ⁴⁷He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God." ⁴⁸The Jews answered him, "Aren't we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?" ⁴⁹"I am not possessed by a demon," said Jesus, "but I honor my Father and you dishonor me. ⁵⁰I am not seeking glory for myself; but there is one who seeks it, and he is the judge. ⁵¹I tell you the truth, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death." ⁵²At this the Jews exclaimed, "Now we know that you are demon-possessed! Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you say that if anyone keeps your word, he will never taste death. ⁵³Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?" ⁵⁴Jesus replied, "If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. ⁵⁵Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and keep his word. ⁵⁶Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad." ⁵⁷"You are not yet fifty years old," the Jews said to him, "and you

1. What does Jesus mean when He keeps saying His time has not yet come?

(7:8, 30)

have seen Abraham!" ⁵⁸"I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" ⁵⁹At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.

Chapter 9

As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. ²His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" ³"Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. ⁴As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵While I am in the world, I am the light of the world." ⁶Having said this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. ⁷"Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means Sent). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing. ⁸His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, "Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?" ⁹Some claimed that he was. Others said, "No, he only looks like him." But he himself insisted, "I am the man." ¹⁰"How then were your eyes opened?" they demanded. ¹¹He replied, "The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see." ¹²"Where is this man?" they asked him. "I don't know," he said. ¹³They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. ¹⁴Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath. ¹⁵Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. "He put mud on my eyes," the man replied, "and I washed, and now I see." ¹⁶Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others asked, "How can a sinner do such miraculous signs?" So they were divided. ¹⁷Finally they turned again to the blind man, "What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened." The man replied, "He is a prophet." ¹⁸The Jews still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man's parents. ¹⁹"Is this your son?" they asked. "Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?" ²⁰"We know he is our son," the parents answered, "and we know he was born blind. ²¹But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don't know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself." ²²His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for already the Jews had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Christ would be put out of the synagogue. ²³That was why his parents said, "He is of age; ask him." ²⁴A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. "Give glory to God," they said. "We know this man is a sinner." ²⁵He replied, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!" ²⁶Then they asked him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" ²⁷He answered, "I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too?" ²⁸Then they hurled insults at him and said, "You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! ²⁹We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from." ³⁰The man answered, "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. ³¹We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his will. ³²Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. ³³If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." ³⁴To this they replied, "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!" And they threw him out. ³⁵Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" ³⁶"Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him." ³⁷Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you." ³⁸Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him. ³⁹Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind." ⁴⁰Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, "What? Are we blind too?" ⁴¹Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.

2. What did Jesus teach about the consequences of not believing that He was the Christ (The Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament who was to be the only payment for man's sins)? (8:24)

3. Jesus taught that to be His disciple meant to follow his Word. What does it mean to hold to His teaching? (8:31)

4. What does it mean to be free? (8:32-36)

5. The Jews of Jesus' day certainly had a strong belief in God. Did Jesus accept such a belief as sufficient? (8:38-47)

-- Scripture taken from the New International Version of the Holy Bible --