“Why Should We Trust the Bible?”

Dear Mr. Zukeran,

I recently caught your article on “The Authority of the Bible” and I was wondering if you could answer a few questions for a long time follower of Christ who is now having trouble with the Bible. I’m not having trouble with the Bible as a whole, but what I’m having a problem with is the claim that it is inerrant. With your impressive list of merits, degrees, etc, I was wondering if you could tell me what you think about this. The name of God has been used to influence people to do some pretty awful things. How do we know that the Bible was immune from political influence during its translation?

Is there a line that you drew in the sand and just said, “Even though I don’t understand it, I will claim this as truth”? In all your experience and learning, what is the one thing you hold to when everything else seems to falter?

I did not grow up in a Christian home and throughout high school I attended a private Episcopal School. The priests were atheists or very liberal. Therefore, I grew up not believing in the Bible. Eventually I embraced Atheism. After hearing the gospel message at a small Baptist church, I began to investigate the claims of Christ. From the evidence of creation, I could not deny the evidence for God’s existence.

Then I studied the historical accuracy of the gospels and found them to be very accurate historical works written by first century eyewitnesses. (For more see the article “Historical Reliability of the Gospels.”) In the gospels, Jesus claimed to be the divine Son of God and confirmed his claims through his miraculous, sinless life, death, and resurrection. We have good historical evidence that Christ did

live a miraculous life not only in the gospels, but in several works of non-Christian literature as well. (For more information read the article "The Uniqueness of Christ" and "The Resurrection: Fact or Fiction?")

Since Christ confirmed his claims to be the divine Son of God, what He taught was true. He taught the Bible was the inerrant word of God. [Note: theologian Dr. Wayne Grudem defines inerrancy as the belief that all the words in Scripture are completely true and without error. "The inerrancy of Scripture means that Scripture in the original manuscripts does not affirm anything which is contrary to fact." *Bible Doctrine*, Zondervan 1999, p. 40, 42.] Inerrancy applies to the original documents, not the copies. However, we have thousands of ancient manuscripts to confirm that our Bible today is very accurate to the original texts.

Finally, I agree, there have been atrocities committed in history in the name of Christ. However, we should not discount the Bible because of the misinterpretation and misapplication of men in history. To those who have misapplied the text, we can point to the Bible and show where they have deviated from the biblical teaching and the example of Christ. The reason we know they were in error is that we can point out the error in the biblical text. The truth of the Bible should not be judged on the misapplication of certain people or organizations. We do not discount the value of the medical practice because we have had bad doctors who have used their practice for evil ends. The example we should look at is Christ, the founder of our faith.

Thanks for your question; it's great to interact with someone who is really thinking through the issues.

Patrick Zukeran

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“The Bible is Full of Errors, So Why Do You Trust It?”

As a Christian fundamentalist group you believe the Bible is the Inerrant word of God and this highly prized book of canonized scripture is your infallible authority and source of truth. (Please correct me if I’m wrong.) Now, with that thought in mind, read what Christian scholars are publicly saying about the sacred canon of biblical scripture, and not just a few. [Link to document called “The Apparent Inerrant Word Of God” included in letter] (Understand, as a Christian Latter-day Saint, I strongly value the Bible too.) Here, you have some serious credibility issues to overcome in making the Bible everything you want and clam it to be. Christian scholars are now reaching the same conclusion about the Bible that faithful Latter-day Saints have known all along and they are finally speaking out. The truth is, the Holy Bible has errors – lots of them! Obviously, God did not intervene and “supernaturally” protect the sacred canon of biblical scripture, as some people erroneously believed.

Our primary focus for understanding these errors in the biblical record is the result of discovering ancient manuscripts, like the Dead Sea Scrolls, that have recently been found in our time. These ancient biblical and historical texts, lost in antiquity, have recently come forth from out of the dust and date back in time to around the Common Era, (CE). All of these early documents predate any of the canonical writings of the New Testament by hundreds of years. There are NO original autographs existing from the New Testament record. All that remains today are generational copies of earlier manuscripts that were handed down throughout the centuries.

So, as I understand the common biblical record, the early Christian Saints should never have been separated or divided from their original apostolic teachings. Nevertheless, through the centuries of time and by a multitude of religious concepts that crept into the early church, this apparent division among the early Christian believers actually happened and today's Christian religious world is deeply divided.

But, whenever the Bible is being presented as authoritative, infallible, or Inerrant, I scratch my head and think to myself – Hold On – Now wait just a minute! From everything that we know and with the myriads of scientific and archeological evidence, your particular views on biblical authority, inerrancy, and infallibility don't exactly add up with all the facts. Infallible or Inerrant? Well, that's hardly the case, because errors exist in the copied manuscript records! And, as for biblical authority? Just look around the Christian community and you will see a staunch Bible expert standing on nearly every street corner. Only, which one is right?

The common thread running through the biblical Christian community is the canonized Holy Bible and that's where the problem is. So, if the Bible is guilty of doing all that, I would strongly suggest that the highly prized biblical canon is anything but authoritative.

Christian scholars have sufficiently demonstrated that you have reached the wrong conclusion for your erroneous "supernatural" biblical beliefs and who among you can dispute the facts? Anyone attempting to believe such nonsense is going to eventually look like an idiot and that's not good for the image! But, the choice is freely yours to believe whatever you want; although, truth will be truth and error will be error, regardless of the disguise or package it comes in.

Thanks for your letter. Although your comments about the Bible are definitely weighted toward the moderate to liberal perspective of biblical scholarship, I would generally agree

with much of what you wrote. Indeed, while I would disagree with some of the specifics in your letter, the general ideas expressed therein are well known to all of us here at Probe.

When conservative Christian theologians speak of "inerrancy," they are speaking with reference ONLY to the original writings—not the copies. Of course there are many variants in the copies we possess, but this can give a misleading picture of biblical reliability. Part of the reason there are so many variants is simply because we have so many copies. And this wealth of manuscript evidence allows us, through the science of textual criticism, to accurately reconstruct the original documents with a high degree of accuracy. New Testament textual critics maintain that we can reconstruct the original documents to about 95-99% accuracy. The Old Testament is slightly less than this, but it can still be reconstructed with a high degree of accuracy.

It's important to realize how variants are counted. If a particular "error" occurs in 3,000 manuscripts (e.g. a definite article written twice rather than once), this counts as 3,000 errors. Most of these variants are quite insignificant (e.g. spelling differences, a word left out, an extra word inserted, etc.) and can be easily corrected on the basis of many other manuscripts which have the correct reading. None of these variants affects a significant doctrine of Scripture. Discoveries like the Dead Sea Scrolls actually reinforce the notion that the Masoretic scribes were very faithful copyists. The manuscript evidence for the NT is far, far superior to any other book from the ancient world (e.g. Tacitus, Livy, Pliny, Herodotus, etc.).

Archaeological evidence has repeatedly verified the reliability of the biblical accounts. And no responsible scholar would say otherwise. Although there may still be questions about some issues, archaeology has overwhelmingly served to confirm the Bible, not disconfirm it.

Thus, while I generally agree with what you've written, I certainly don't think your letter gives the whole picture concerning biblical reliability. An excellent, comprehensive resource on this issue (from a conservative Christian standpoint) is *A General Introduction to the Bible: Revised and Expanded Edition* by Norman Geisler and William Nix (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986). This text has numerous chapters and delves into great detail on such issues as the inspiration of the Bible, canonization, transmission of the text, and translation. Conservative scholars have repeatedly responded to the charges of those who would like to discredit the general reliability of the Bible. I hope you'll give such scholars a chance to offer you another perspective on this crucial issue.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn