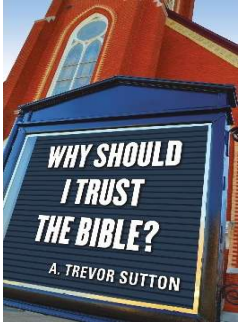


Christ the King Lutheran Church



Why Should I Trust the Bible?

A. Trevor Sutton

Session One – Claim: *The Bible is Merely a Mythological Story, Like Homer’s Odyssey*

Head Elder, Rob Balancia, presenting with Pastor Rob Morris

But first...

Introduction:

Trust is built. It rises from a foundation of truth. It grows slowly and painstakingly over years of steadfast honesty, reliability, and dependability. It holds together with the mortar of integrity. Trust is formed not all at once but over the course of many small interactions...Although trust is built slowly, it is destroyed instantly. (13)

Today – as in every previous generation – people try to break trust in the Bible by questioning everything from the physical manuscripts and text to the formation of the biblical canon and how it is interpreted. The effort to deconstruct trust in the Bible is going on right now as you read this sentence. Yet it is still standing... It is still historically accurate, textually reliable, and culturally relevant.... And it is still God’s Word for all eternity. (15)

Chapter One: *All true... helpful in this context?*

Chapter Two:

[Four different creation accounts on p.29] This is exactly the problem: conflicting accounts about the origin of the universe cannot all be trustworthy. (30)

Claim: *The Bible is Merely a Mythological Story Similar to Homer’s Odyssey*

Ignorance abounds in this claim. Any person making this argument proves only one point: he or she knows nothing about the study of mythology, the Bible, or Homer’s *Odyssey*. Rather than breaking trust in the Bible, this argument breaks trust in the one making the claim. (31)

The simple response is that the Bible is not a mythological story. It may share certain similarities to mythological texts; however, that does not mean the Bible is a mythological text. Jesus did not approach the Bible as mythology... Jesus spoke of Adam, Eve, Moses, Jonah, and David as historic people. The disciples and those in the Early Church knew that it was not mythology; nobody dies the horrific death of a martyr for a myth... (31)

A more complex response... you need to know something about the study of mythology. People often assume that a myth is nothing more than a fabricated story. They reduce all mythology down to one determining factor: is it true? If an account is true, then it is not a myth. If an account is not true, then it is a myth.

This is an antiquated and oversimplified understanding of mythology... Modern scholars of mythology are far less interested in determining the text true or false. Rather, they study how the text worked to



shape the culture...

There is no denying that the Bible has some similarities with mythical texts... History books on the British monarchy share certain similarities to Shakespeare's *King Richard III*, yet this does not mean that these history books ought to be classified as drama. Scripture can share similarities with mythological texts yet not be a myth. (31-32)

The Bible is not a mythological text. There is no justification for placing Scripture in the same category as Virgil's *Aeneid*, Homer's *Odyssey* or the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. Unlike these texts, the Bible is historically accurate, confirmed by extrabiblical accounts, and verified by archaeologists... No reputable historian would argue for the existence of Atlas just as no reputable historian would argue against the existence of Jesus of Nazareth. (32-33)

- Many myths, such as The Aeneid and the Odyssey were never believed to be factual and historical accounts

The Bible is greater than mythology. It is the Word of God. It is holy, eternal, powerful, authoritative, and life-giving...

"The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever." (Isaiah 40:8)... "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12) (33)

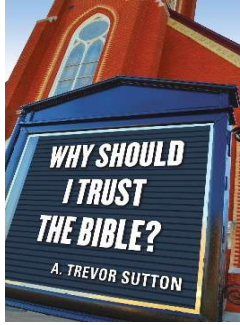
This does not mean that the Bible descended from heaven pre-bound, untouched by human hands, and ready for the church to read. Despite being the very Word of God, human authors composed it. And nobody is trying to hide that fact... (2 Thess. 3:17 and I Cor 16:19-21) (34)

Human authorship does not exclude divine authorship. God composed the books of the Bible through human authors. Moses, David, Paul, John, and all the others were used by God to compose his Holy Word. Just as it is accurate to discuss Moses' word in Deuteronomy, David's word in the Psalms, or Paul's word in Corinthians, it is also accurate to discuss God's Word in Deuteronomy, God's Word in the Psalms, and God's Word in Corinthians. Both are correct depictions of Scripture... God put words in Moses' and Aaron's mouths in order to confront Pharaoh (Exodus 4:10-17). God spoke through the human mouths of the prophets... God spoke eternal life through Peter's proclamation of the Gospel at Pentecost (Acts 2:14-41). The Holy Spirit uses human mouths to proclaim the Word of God. This is not scandalous. This is the wonderful mystery of God's work in creation. (34)

This means that the Bible is both eternal and historic. It is timeless, boundless, permanent, and transcendent. And it was written in a particular language using particular expressions, idioms, and sayings... And it was written to a specific people in a specific location. These tensions are unique to Scripture. Since the Bible is unlike any other text in human history, it is not at all surprising that it has its own unique tensions, challenges, and idiosyncrasies. (35)



Christ the King Lutheran Church



Why Should I Trust the Bible?

A. Trevor Sutton

Session Two – *Claims: There are Many Other Creation Accounts... Flood Accounts*

Elder, John Rau, presenting with Pastor Rob Morris

Claim: There are many other creation stories beyond the Biblical account in Genesis. The version in Genesis is just one of the many other fictitious stories

This claim is really troubling...until you stop to think about it. Some questions and curiosities are innately human: Who am I? Where did I come from? Where did the world come from? These are questions that all people in all places at all times have asked. They are not unique to any one time or culture... It is no surprise, then, that every culture throughout history would have an account of human origins. Asking questions of origin, known as cosmology, is a natural human impulse. (36)

These creation stories, along with thousands of others, all agree on one point: the world came from somewhere. There must be an explanation for the origin of life. It is neither surprising nor scandalous that there are multiple creation stories in existence. The trouble comes with all the radical differences between the various accounts... Is the Genesis account simply one of many thousands of ancient stories trying to explain the origin of the earth and life? (37)

When all the evidence is viewed together, it is obvious that the origin of the earth depicted in Genesis is credible.

Jesus: The importance of Jesus treating the Book of Genesis as authoritative cannot be overemphasized. He affirmed God as creator (Mark 13:19) and recognized that Adam and Eve were real people in God's creation (Mark 10:6). Jesus further upheld a six-day creation when He affirmed the Old Testament teaching that God created for six days and then rested on the Sabbath (Mark 2:23-28). Jesus did not treat Genesis as false or fictitious, poetic or passe...

Science: Yes, you read that correctly. Science provides evidence that the Genesis creation account is accurate. One of the most fundamental assumptions of science is consistency... Other creation stories – the ancient Greek account filled with quarreling gods and goddesses, the Babylonian account of competing creators, and Iroquois account of mud piled atop a floating turtle – lack the constancy required for scientific inquiry...

History: Human history confirms that Genesis is trustworthy. The Genesis account is deemed authoritative by what has occurred in subsequent generations... Over half the world's population identifies with one of the three Abrahamic religions. Absolutely no other ancient text has this sort of historical confirmation.(37-39)

- Additional lines of thought – naming conventions, place familiarity, cultural familiarity, archaeological finds
- How to respond to “competing” lines of scientific evidence?



Claim: Numerous flood stories exist from antiquity. The Biblical story of Noah and the ark is a mixture of flood stories from other cultures

The existence of other flood accounts is no surprise. In fact, the existence of other flood accounts is a relief, because it further proves that a catastrophic, history-altering flood actually happened. These other flood accounts just add more credence to the biblical flood in Genesis 6-9. There would be reason for skepticism if a geologically unprecedented flood happened and nobody else in human history ever made mention of it. (40)

Unlike a creation story, a catastrophic flood story is not necessary for a person's self-understanding. Tribes and nations do not need to have a flood story to explain their history. This further proves that the flood was a historical reality; it is illogical to think that over a hundred ancient societies concocted a flood story simply because it was entertaining. Something must have happened. (41)

These three additional flood stories [see pp.41-42] originated around the same time and place as the story of Noah in Genesis. Is it possible that one is right and the rest are wrong?

Jesus: Just as He confirmed the creation account in Genesis, Jesus also confirmed that the account of Noah is trustworthy. From His mouth came validation that the flood as depicted in Genesis is reliable (Luke 17:27)...

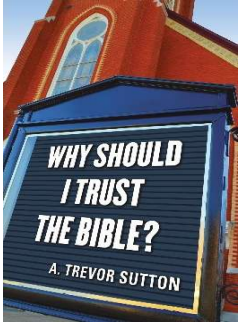
Genre: Scholars have classified all of the other Mesopotamian flood accounts as poetry... The Genesis account is not a poetic recollection of a flood; rather, it is a historical narrative depicting real events in detail...

Plausibility: Genesis offers a more plausible account than the other Mesopotamian flood stories... [construction of boat/ark, quantity of rain, time to recede, e.g.] (42-44)

Excursus: The *Epic of Gilgamesh*



Christ the King Lutheran Church



Why Should I Trust the Bible?

A. Trevor Sutton

Session Three – *Claim: The Bible Cannot Be Inerrant Because Humans Wrote It*

Elder Dave Reitz, presenting with Pastor Rob Morris

Background of Biblical Texts – how did we get them and are they reliable?

Claim: The Bible Cannot Be Inerrant Because Humans Wrote It

Some of the claims made against the Bible are downright silly. This one is not. Whether you are skeptical of Scripture or a bold Bible believer, this claim deserves thoughtful reflection. Can something produced by human hands actually be free from error? Is it possible for mortal minds to speak the Word of God? (58)

It defies reason to think that God would use broken humans to compose a text that is trustworthy, inerrant, and authoritative. It seems impossible to think that human authors could be used to write the Word of God... There are two alternatives that seem far more reasonable:

Reject Human Authorship: ...the word of God came through the human authors like water through a pipe. The Bible is inerrant because it is untainted by human hands.

Reject Divine Authorship: ...this notion claims that the Bible was composed without the influence of God. It is a completely human book depicting the religious beliefs of a group of ancient people. (58-59)

Both of these alternatives attempt to resolve the mystery of a divinely inspired book written by human hands. And both of these alternatives are wrong. The Bible is both the inerrant Word of God and the work of errant human beings. Not one or the other. Both. This is possible only by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit... Inspiration and inerrancy are inextricable. (59)

The Biblical authors repeatedly assert that the words of Scripture are the inspired Word of God

- 2 Timothy 3:16-17

- 2 Peter 1:21

- 1 Thessalonians 2:13 (60)

Affirming that Scripture is God's Word, however, does not deny the presence of human authors. The inspiration of the Holy Spirit allowed human authors to proclaim the Word of God. Unlike anything else in all creation, the Bible is composed by human hands yet entirely divine and without error or contradiction. (61)



The Holy Spirit is the divine author of the Bible. Therefore, it is essential to have a firm knowledge of this person. The Holy Spirit is not a mere attribute or power of God. He is not a strange mist, vapor, or ghostly presence of a deceased person. He is the real and unique Third Person of the Trinity. He is the person Jesus promised to send: “Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send Him to you.” (John 16:7) (62)

The Holy Spirit is active and powerful. The Spirit was present in the beginning (Genesis 1:2)... The Spirit was active in the lives of Israel’s judges and kings (Judges 6:34, 1 Samuel 16:13)... Prophets spoke on behalf of God through the Spirit (Ezekiel 2:2-3; Micah 3:8)... The Holy Spirit directs and connects people to the death and resurrection of Jesus. He allows people to say and believe, “Jesus is Lord.” (1 Corinthians 12:3) (62)

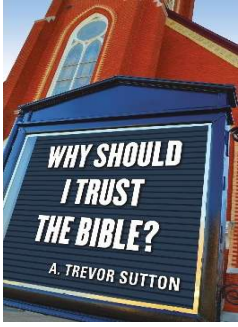
Apart from the Holy Spirit, no one can truly confess that Jesus is Lord. Human authors could not have composed the Bible without the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Why? Because the Bible is one continuous confession that Jesus is Lord. (63)

The Bible consists of sixty-six books substantiated by at least twenty-five thousand ancient manuscript witnesses. Although none of the original manuscripts exist today, the sixty-six books of the Bible have been reconstructed by these ancient manuscript witnesses. Overwhelming evidence has shown that the copies of biblical manuscripts are accurate and do not deviate. And when there is a deviation in the manuscripts, scholars can recognize it and make sure that every word of the Bible remains accurate to the original text. Therefore, we can be confident that the Bible in its present form today is the inspired Word of God. (64)

Excursus: The Gettysburg Address



Christ the King Lutheran Church



Why Should I Trust the Bible?

A. Trevor Sutton

Session Four – *Claim: The Gospels disagree*

Elder, Gary Gollenberg, presenting with Pastor Rob Morris

Previous claim: none of Biblical history can be trusted

Tests of context, content, and archaeological evidence

Claim: The Gospels disagree on even the most basic events in the life of Jesus

The blind men and the elephant – a good analogy?

Different authors wrote the Gospels in order to address different audiences. It is woefully naïve to argue that their reports are incorrect simply because they pick up on different events and teachings of the life of Jesus... These unique men had different cares and concerns. Their perspectives were not monochromatic. Their social networks were not the same; the followers of Jesus came from different communities and had ties to extremely different groups of people... To call these differences “inaccuracies” or “mistakes” is an inaccurate mistake. (80-81)

Matthew... places an emphasis on Jewish religious practices and on Jesus fulfilling numerous Old Testament prophecies... Matthew appears to have written his Gospel to the Jewish community in order to proclaim that the long-awaited Messiah had arrived in the person of Jesus.

Mark... Early Church writings connect the text to a colleague of Peter named Mark... the audience of Mark was primarily Greek-speaking and unfamiliar with Jewish practices; the text often explains Jewish customs and translates Aramaic terms.

Luke... Luke states that the genre in which he intends to write is an orderly narrative; readers are instructed to approach this text as an orderly narrative depicting the life and teachings of Jesus.

[Note: don't forget that Luke is the first Volume and Acts is Volume II. – RM]

John... The Gospel of John is not considered to be one of the Synoptic Gospels. The word *synoptic* means similar or same view. The Synoptic Gospels – Matthew, Mark, and Luke – view the life and ministry of Jesus in the same way. The Gospel of John clearly has a different aim, placing a higher emphasis on the eternal truths of Jesus rather than linear history. The audience for the Gospel of John was less concerned with knowing exactly when events happened in the life of Jesus; rather, they were far more concerned with knowing why things happened in the life of Jesus. (81-82)

Refuting the Supposed Inaccuracies

Skeptics have pored over the Gospels and attempted to find as many disagreements and discrepancies as possible. All they have really found, however, are situations in which different authors have arranged material in ways that are appropriate for their different audiences and purposes...



Temptation of Jesus: A careful reading of how Matthew (4:1-11) and Luke (4:1-13) depict the temptation of Jesus will reveal a difference in the ordering of events... this difference in the ordering of the last two temptations is often cited as proof that the Gospels do not accurately capture what happened in the life and ministry of Jesus.

There is, however, a rather obvious response to this claim that is found right in the text. Matthew connects the sequence of temptations with a conjunctive adverb (“then”), indicating an emphasis on sequence of events... Luke connects the various temptations of Jesus with a coordinating conjunction (“and”), indicating a list in no particular order... Matthew places an emphasis on the chronological ordering of the events; Luke makes no indication that the list is supposed to be understood chronologically. Furthermore, Jerusalem is a reoccurring theme in the Gospel of Luke; it is no mistake that the final temptation of Jesus takes place in the holy city of Jerusalem. (83-84)

- You also have to ask: if it's a fiction, why didn't they spot and correct this difference?

The Lord's Prayer: Matthew and Luke present slightly different versions of the Lord's Prayer as well [cf. Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4]... skeptics pounce on these differences and claim that this foundational prayer is built on shaky ground.

This false claim is undone with one simple question: do you think Jesus taught on prayer only once? No! Jesus taught extensively on the topic of prayer... It should also be noted that biblical prayers are not fixed incantations or formulaic statements. Ancient Jewish prayers... were abstracts or guides for how to pray. Jesus likely taught multiple versions of the Lord's Prayer to the disciples. Even if they were not identical, they were all guides given by Jesus for how to pray.

- Again, if it's made up, wouldn't you agree word-for-word on the prayer Jesus himself gave?

Holy Week: The final days of Jesus' life and ministry are the most highly scrutinized days of His entire life... many have concluded that the Gospels epically failed in their attempt to recount the events of Holy Week.

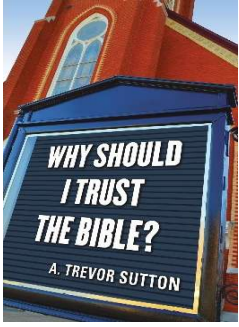
The argument is that the pieces do not fit when you try to put together the events of Holy Week as reported in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. There is agreement about what happened up until about Wednesday of Holy Week. The Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) report that the Last Supper occurred around this time, while Jesus was celebrating a Passover meal (Luke 22:7)... The Gospel of John, however, reports that the Last Supper occurred before the Feast of the Passover (John 13:1)... This makes it unclear not only on which day the Last Supper happened, but also when the subsequent trial and crucifixion of Jesus took place. Furthermore, many scholars are skeptical as to how both Jewish and Roman trials could take place between Thursday evening and Friday morning. These are commonly cited as inconsistencies and proof that the Gospels cannot be trusted.

This is quite troubling. That is to say, it is quite troubling until you know something about ancient calendars... There were no atomic clocks during the time of Jesus. Determining days and times was a local approximation rather than an exact science. Furthermore, there was not a universally accepted calendar to govern the days... It is reasonable to think that Matthew, Mark, and Luke were referencing one calendar while John was referencing an entirely different calendar... There is evidence that various Jewish groups (Samaritans, Zealots, and the Essenes) used different calendars during the first century in Jerusalem. If the Gospels are referencing different calendars to suggest when the Last Supper occurred, then there is no real disagreement.

- Also, Jewish days start at sundown, thus preparation happens Wednesday and meal Thursday.



Christ the King Lutheran Church



Why Should I Trust the Bible?

A. Trevor Sutton

Session Five – Claim: A small group secretly picked Bible texts

Elder, Dave Reitz , presenting with Pastor Rob Morris

Parlor tricks are fun as long as they stay in the parlor. However, you do not want your doctor to do sleight of hand... You do not want your banker to do sleight of hand... There are countless other places – auto repair shop, dentist, grocery store, subway – where you do not want sleight of hand to happen. Parlor tricks are fun as long as they stay in the parlor.

Claim: A small group in the early church picked the books of the bible behind closed doors.

Juicy scandals can draw a crowd... Open and honest deliberation, on the other hand, causes people to yawn... Books and documentaries, scholars and researchers have tried hard to turn the Bible into a scandalous scheme concocted by the Church. They claim that the biblical canon came together secretly and illegitimately. This story line, though erroneous and untrue, certainly draws a crowd. (92)

Read typical claim from 92-93 and discuss – have you heard this claim? Where?

Read actual events from 93 and discuss – does this seem to align with what can be verified textually and archaeologically?

These Christian texts circulated across vast geographic spaces. During the first century, the apostle Paul's letters began to circulate as a collection. During the second century, the four Gospels began to circulate as a collection. These texts then began to circulate collectively rather than individually... Although there were other texts present during this time, the Christian communities recognized them as inaccurate. The church freely and openly discussed whether these texts ought to be used in worship and catechesis. (93)

Example of this from Serapion of Antioch in 190AD with Gospel of Peter. (94)

The formation of the biblical canon was openly discussed and entirely transparent... The church utilized different categories when classifying various texts:

Homologoumena: These texts were unanimously included in the biblical canon. There were no disputes or disagreements as to whether these texts deserved to be in the Bible based on author, content, and widespread usage among congregations...

Antilegoumena: These were texts that some disagreed about in regards to their canonical status. There were some church leaders or congregations that did not consider these texts a part of the biblical canon because there were questions about author, content, or usage among congregations...

Heretical: There was unanimous agreement that these texts were not fit to be included in the biblical canon because they were incorrect, inaccurate, or part of an entirely separate religious community. (95)



Determining the biblical canon was not a closed conspiracy. Rather, it was a deliberate dialogue that took place over many generations. There are a few crucial highlights in the canonization process that are worth knowing:

Early Church Writings. The early church was geographically diverse with various communities dispersed across hundreds of miles. As a result of this dispersion, church leaders used letters and other writings to communicate across the various Christian communities. These texts provide evidence of the active and open conversations that took place regarding which books were included in the biblical canon...[Eusebius, ca. 325AD; Athanasius, 367AD; and church meetings in Hippo Regius, 393AD, and Carthage, 397AD; all confirmed 27 canonical NT texts]

The Council of Nicea... It has been alleged that this was when the Church determined which books were to be included in the Bible and which books were to be burned. In actuality, this council convened at the request of the Roman Emperor Constantine I to discuss debates about the divinity of Jesus that were introduced by a theological movement known as Arianism. This council resulted in the creation of the Nicene Creed. No record or evidence exists indicating that an extensive discussion took place on which books should be included in the Bible and which books should be excluded...

[Perhaps discuss why, with no historical evidence, this theory developed. - RM]

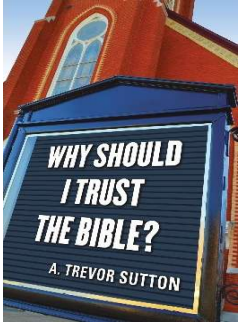
Codex Sinaiticus... Dating back to about AD 330-360. This text contains many books of the Old Testament and New Testament together. Although it is fragmented as a result of age, the text does provide firm evidence that the majority of the biblical canon was set forth by the fourth century.

Jerome's Vulgate. This is a Latin translation of the Bible composed in AD 382 at the request of Pope Damasus I... One striking feature of the Vulgate is that it labeled a group of texts "apocryphal" since they were included only in the Septuagint (a Greek translation of the Old Testament) and were excluded from the Hebrew text. By doing this, Jerome separated these texts from the rest of the biblical canon and determined them to be of secondary status. (95-97)

What is apparent from these highlights is that the formation of the biblical canon was not top-down, authoritarian, or isolated to a single moment in history. There were no backroom negotiations as to what books were in and what books were out. There is no single moment at which point the canonical books of the Bible were once and for all determined. (98)



Christ the King Lutheran Church



Why Should I Trust the Bible?

A. Trevor Sutton

Session Six

Elders Rob Balancia and Gary Gollenberg, presenting with Pastor Rob Morris

To begin, read:

- Matthew 7:15-22
- Galatians 1:8
- 1 Timothy 4:1-2
- 1 John 4:1-3
- 2 Peter 2:1-3...

False teachers were a known problem from the very beginning, not a useful invention for the consolidation of political power.

Claim: The early church secretly worked to silence certain nonbiblical texts.

Some scholars have claimed that the Church worked especially hard to censor other texts and silence certain voices. This argument suggests that the early followers of Jesus agreed on a certain story about the ministry of Jesus and refused to let anyone speak a dissenting opinion. In order to destroy these unorthodox views, the Early Church burned the texts and banned them from seeing the light of day.

There is one big, glaring problem with this argumentation: all of the texts referred to by the people making these arguments still exist today... If the Church attempted to censor these texts, then they did a really bad job of it. Had the Church truly set out to burn all the writings of dissenting voices, they must have inadvertently missed a few thousand of them. (100)

Have you heard such claims? Where?

There are many ancient nonbiblical texts in existence today that offer a depiction of Jesus. Although these writings describe the life and teachings of Jesus, they were not included in the Bible...

Apostolic Writings. There are many Early Church writings that were not included in the Bible [such as Paul's other letters to Corinth]... The Church simply did not use and circulate these other letters in the same way they used 1 and 2 Corinthians... *[Similar suggestions for Peter and John]...*

Early Church Writings. The Early Church produced many other nonbiblical texts and statements depicting the life and teachings of Jesus... All these texts – the Didache, the writings of Justin Martyr, and the Apostles' Creed – were excluded from the biblical canon. The Early Church recognized them as being helpful texts depicting the life and teachings of Jesus yet still did not include them in the New Testament.(100-102)



Gnostic Writings. Like the texts described above, many Gnostic texts were not included in the biblical canon. Yet unlike the previously mentioned texts, these texts were excluded from the Bible because they grossly distorted the life and teachings of Jesus. Gnosticism describes an ancient religion that rejected the material world as inferior and downright evil and sought the discovery of secret knowledge. The name *Gnostic* derives from the Greek word for “knowledge”; this religious sect was fixated on hidden wisdom and secret knowledge that led to salvation. The Gnostics latched onto small portions of the life and teachings of Jesus while also inserting many other teachings of their own... They conflate and confuse the true teachings of Jesus by inserting false Gnostic teachings.

Therefore, these texts were excluded from the Biblical canon with good reason: they were neither Christian nor accurate. Gnostic writings came out of an entirely different religious faction with an entirely different conception of divinity, creation, and evil. (102-103)

There is nothing scandalous about the existence of nonbiblical texts. The Early Church was not trying to hide anything: Jesus clearly did not have a secret mistress, nor did he extol secret teachings to a fortunate few. There was no conspiracy or confidential texts. (103)

Counter-evidence in Justin Martyr (100-167AD), Origen (185-253AD), Eusebius (260-310AD), and many more... (cf 104-105; additional handout if desired)

If you are looking for a scandal, then you will have to look elsewhere. The Early Church did not hide behind a curtain to create the Bible. Nobody hid any secret books up their sleeve. All the cards were set down on the table for everyone to see. (107)



Christ the King Lutheran Church
Why Should I Trust the Bible? A. Trevor Sutton



Session Seven – Claim: the Bible is so old that it could not possibly speak to contemporary culture.

Pastor Rob Morris

The more things change, the more they stay the same. According to Ecclesiastes, "What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun" (1:9). Don't believe it? Here are some instances of there being nothing new under the sun:

- Ancient Greek physicians and philosophers, such as Hippocrates and Aristotle, wrote about the struggles of acne. They proposed treatments for pimples that relied on sulfur, honey, and other peculiar remedies. This means that teenagers in Athens probably spent way too long in the bathroom examining zits, washing their faces, and lathering up with sulfur and honey. ...

- Way back in about AD 397, Augustine of Hippo wrote about making up stories to impress his friends...

There is nothing new under the sun.... Much of daily life in antiquity is conversant with daily life today. (120-121)

Although the Bible is an ancient text-with many writings extending long before the time of Aristotle, Hippocrates, and Augustine- it has extremely timely and relevant verses. There are a number of verses in Scripture that people identify as speaking loud and clear to contemporary culture today. These verses are well known by many people and highlighted as particularly relevant because their inspirational words convey timeless wisdom:

- Love (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).
- Do not be anxious (Matthew 6:34).
- "For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven" (Ecclesiastes 3:1).

As long as people have love in their hearts, fear for tomorrow, and a longing to make sense of the ever-passing present moment, then these verses of the Bible will speak to contemporary culture. These verses are standards when it comes to greeting cards, wedding readings, and social media posts. Whether people know the Bible or not, they are often familiar with these verses. (121)

Nevertheless, there are more than just a couple of verses in the Bible that still speak to contemporary culture. It is not as though a small portion of Scripture is relevant to contemporary culture while the bulk of it is outmoded, outdated, and out of style. The entire Bible-every chapter, every verse, and every word-speaks loud and clear to contemporary culture... The Bible is eternally relevant as it constantly speaks God's commandments and promises, the Law and the Gospel:

Law: The Bible contains God's clear instructions for holy living. There is no uncertainty about God's will for how you are to live your life because it is clearly articulated by God's Word. You do not need to look into your heart or up at the stars to determine what is right; you simply need to look to what God has declared to be right...The Law incessantly speaks divine truth into hearts of falsehood. has always and will always shine a spotlight on the darkness of sin. This means that the Law is eternally relevant to your life. As long you have a penchant for sin, you will need the Law of God.



Gospel: The Bible is not merely a handbook for holy living. The Bible is the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. God speaks hope into your ear and salvation into your heart. God sings new songs of joy into the dirge that is your past. Scripture declares God's unending promises to you. The Law reveals your sinfulness and makes clear your need for a Savior. The Gospel reveals that your Savior has come in Christ Jesus. (122-123)

The ancient Gospel of Jesus Christ contains present power for this very moment:

Despair. Contemporary culture struggles with profound despair. Nihilism is a philosophical ideology claiming that life is essentially without meaning, purpose, or value. This belief in a meaningless existence has resulted in a culture of despair. What is the meaning of human life if it is nothing more than a random assemblage of chemicals, confusion, and chance? What is the point of anything if the planet Earth is just a chunk of rock floating in an infinitely tiny part of the universe? ... Into this meaningless mind-set, the Gospel proclaims God's eternal purpose and plan for salvation. Life has eternal value; Scripture clearly states that God values life so highly that He is willing to do anything—anything!—even shed His own blood in order to redeem life from the clutches of death. Life has eternal purpose; the Bible clearly conveys God's plans that human creatures are to live in community and harmony with the rest of creation and with Him. The Bible is a powerful antidote to the despair of contemporary culture: "Through Him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Romans 5:2).

Sickness. Long ago, people suffered from sickness and disease. Today, people still suffer from sickness and disease. Despite all of the advances in medicine, there is still the constant threat that cancer, diabetes, miscarriages, and infertility will bring an end to life... The Bible speaks of God's power to form living creatures out of dust and bone (Genesis 2:7, 21), of Jesus' power to heal broken bodies with mud and spit (John 9:6-7), and of the Holy Spirit's power to restore life to lifeless bodies (Romans 8:9-11). The Bible proclaims the eternal health of the Divine Physician to a world full of sickness...

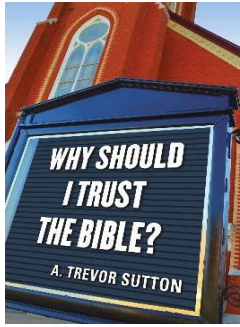
Evil. Contemporary culture denies the existence of God and the authority of Scripture. Nevertheless, people today readily agree that evil exists in the world. Terrorism, racially motivated violence, and widespread genocide provide proof of the reality of evil. It is not hard to find someone willing to admit the presence of evil. It is hard, however, to find someone with an adequate response to the problem of evil... Far better than anything else in contemporary society, Scripture offers a truly honest assessment of evil and depicts a comprehensive response. Unlike many other religious texts, the Bible actually takes evil seriously. It depicts the profound depravity of a fallen creation and tells how God will not rest until evil is adequately vanquished. God does not respond to evil with legislation, education, or medication; God responds to evil by giving His own life on the cross...

Death. As with all the previous issues, contemporary culture has no adequate response to death. Death has plagued all people, in all places, at all times... It is a perennial problem for which contemporary culture has no permanent solution. Contemporary culture simply does not know what to do with death. [examples]... Scripture has much to say to contemporary culture on the topic of death. The Bible does not deny death. Rather than pretending it is not an issue, God's Word is a head-on confrontation with death... The Bible reveals how God put death to death through the cross and the empty tomb of Jesus Christ. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus interrupts funerals by raising the dead back to new life. Through faith in Him, God promises to interrupt your death when He raises you to new life: "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:55-57). (125-128)

Excursus: Example of cautionary fairy tales



Christ the King Lutheran Church



Why Should I Trust the Bible?

A. Trevor Sutton

Session Eight – Claim: Even Christians Disagree About How to Interpret the Bible. Why Should I Trust It if You Can't Even Agree Among Yourselves?

Elder Dan Swanson, presenting with Pastor Rob Morris

If that is true, then you should probably set this book down right now. Rejecting the Bible on the basis of differing interpretations would require you to reject every book ever written. And every work of art ever produced. And every movie ever made. And every musical composition ever arranged. And just about everything else in the world.... if you do not want to reject all these things, then you should probably learn something about hermeneutics. (143)

The theory and methodology of interpretation is known as hermeneutics. The goal of hermeneutics is to answer the question "What does this mean?"... Although hermeneutics is used in many different disciplines, scholars studying the Bible were foundational in developing this academic practice. Methods for interpretation were first formulated through reading, discussing, and applying Scripture. For as long as the Bible has existed, people have been developing best practices to help interpret these sacred texts. (144)

Biblical interpretation can be divided into two different categories: historical-critical and historical-grammatical. Think of these as different operating systems for a computer. The operating system for a computer determines how a user logs on, navigates through pro-grams, and performs tasks. The overall user experience depends on the operating system. The same holds true for these two methods of biblical interpretation. (145)

Historical-Critical Method: This method of interpretation assumes that the Bible is a purely human text and the aim of interpretation should be to understand the historical factors that gave rise to the writing... The goal is to deconstruct the text and reveal what is hidden behind it (i.e., author, historical setting, and political forces). The historical-critical method relies only on tools developed by historians, anthropologists, sociologists, and literary scholars.

There are two substantial problems with this method of interpretation. First, since the historical-critical method aims to deconstruct the text and reveal the hidden factors behind the text, this method obliterates the text and leaves only shreds of Scripture for readers to interpret. [Example of Peter and his view of women - p.146]

The other problem with this approach to interpreting Scripture is denying that it is the Word of God. This method assumes that the Bible is a purely human text like the phone book or a handbook on tax code. This is problematic because the Bible asserts that it is the Word of God on numerous occasions (Deuteronomy 9:10; 2 Chronicles 34:31; Acts 18:11; 2 Timothy 3:16; 1 Thessalonians 2:13). (145-146)



Historical-Grammatical Method: This method of interpretation strives to accurately understand the author's original meaning for the text. According to this method, the goal of biblical interpretation is to draw on reputable scholarship—history, archaeology, and ancient languages—in order to determine the meaning of the text as the original author and audience would have intended. Rather than trying to deconstruct a text to determine the historical factors that gave rise to the writing, the historical-grammatical method aims to understand what the text meant in its original setting. Scholars use a number of techniques in order to determine the original meaning of the text.

Exegesis is the practice of closely studying the language, syntax, and grammar of a text. Understanding the original language is vital to accurately understanding a text's original meaning....

Genre is another important factor for biblical interpretation. A genre is a literary category or type of writing. Scripture is comprised of many different genres: narrative, poetry, prophecy, parables, apocalyptic writing, along with other subgenres. These genres are essential to understanding how to interpret the text...

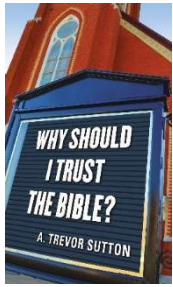
Context, like genre, is crucial in understanding the meaning of a text. Context is the text surrounding a text: the sentences, paragraphs, and chapters surrounding the text that is to be analyzed. Biblical interpretation relies on the surrounding chapters and books of the Bible in order to gain an understanding of a text...

Like the historical-critical method, the historical-grammatical method relies on reputable scholarship to inform interpretation. Nevertheless, there is one major distinction between these methods: the historical-grammatical method interprets the Bible with the recognition that it is the Word of God. It relies on human scholarship insofar as the Bible is God's Word composed through human authors within a historical context. It relies on faith given by the Holy Spirit insofar as the Bible is the eternal Word of God. (147-148)

Arguing that the Bible should not be trusted because of the multitude of different interpretations misses a serious point: the truth is worth a fight. The apostle Paul used the image of a boxer fighting in a match when he said, "Fight the good fight of the faith" (1 Timothy 6:12). Fighting for a faithful reading of Scripture, orthodox interpretations of the text, and accurate applications into daily life is worth the struggle. The disagreements about how best to interpret the Bible are not evidence that it should not be trusted; rather, they are proof that Christians take the Word of God seriously. (149)

Diverging interpretations of Scripture have always threatened the truth. And God's people have always fought the fight of rightly interpreting God's Word... Struggling to maintain an orthodox reading of the Bible does not undermine its trustworthiness. It does just the opposite. Striving to have a faithful interpretation of God's Word – even if that leads to disagreements – is essential to trusting the Bible. (150)





Christ the King Lutheran Church
Why Should I Trust the Bible?
A. Trevor Sutton

Session Nine – CLAIM:THE BIBLE IS JUST ONE OF MANY HOLY BOOKS. IT IS OUTRAGEOUS TO THINK THAT IT IS RIGHT AND ALL OTHERS ARE WRONG.

Elder, Jason Miller, presenting with Pastor Rob Morris

It certainly is outrageous to claim that the Bible is right and all other holy books are wrong. Yet it is even more outrageous to claim that every holy book ever written is right. Claiming that every holy book ever written is equally true is an outrage to logical thinking. The many different holy books read by people today – *the Book of Mormon*, the *Quran*, the *Bhagavad Gita*, *Science and Health*, the Bible, and many others — make claims that are fundamentally incompatible with one another. It requires a great deal of mental gymnastics, creative interpretation, and wishful thinking in order to synthesize these holy books. (188-189)

There is an academic discipline known as comparative religion that does just this. ... One of the most famous axioms to come out of the field of comparative religions is "All religions are essentially about being a good person." This would mean that all holy books are essentially handbooks for being good....

- Have you heard this claim, or some version of it?
- How about: "All religions are just different paths up the same mountain?"

The problem with this axiom is that it blurs, botches, and bungles the central message of Scripture. The Bible is not about simply being a good person. God's Word is not a handbook for holiness, a path to prosperity, or a guide to the good life. The Bible is about what God has done for you in human history through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. (189)



Here are some of the substantial differences that set the Bible apart from any other holy book:

Guidance: Other holy books claim to offer guidance... [examples]

The heart of Scripture is Gospel, not guidance. Pick up the Bible and you will find that it is not fixated on offering advice. Certainly the Bible offers guidance for how to live as one redeemed by God. Nevertheless, the Bible is primarily good news about what God has done for you in Christ Jesus...

Demands: Other 10 holy books are full of demands. Salvation is contingent on meeting a long list of demands. Pilgrimages, offerings, good works, and pure hearts are just the beginning of the countless demands set forth by other holy books...

The Bible is not a collection of commands, a digest of demands, or a list of outlandish obligations. The Bible proclaims that God has fulfilled the demands on your behalf in Christ Jesus. Scripture speaks comfort to people overwhelmed with far too many demands...

Holy Words: Other holy books claim to be filled with holy words...

To be absolutely certain—the Bible does claim to be holy words.

It is called the Holy Bible for a reason. The Bible is the Word of God.

Thus it is a holy book with holy words. Nevertheless, the Bible is far more than just holy words that descended from heaven. The words and events of the Bible are actual occurrences in human history. The historical life, death, and resurrection of Jesus makes the Bible unlike any other religious text...(191)

The holy words and claims of the Bible can be corroborated by actual historical evidence.

Archaeologists have unearthed proof of enslaved Hebrews in Egypt, King David's reign, and the existence of Pontius Pilate. These discoveries—and the thousands of others like them—are proof that the Bible is more than just holy words. Scripture is both God's Word and God's work in human history. The Bible is the timeless and eternal Word of God spoken into a specific time in human history. And it is the tremendously timely work of God in human history. The Bible is both God's holy words and God's holy work.

No other holy book can claim the level of historical corroboration supporting the Bible. (191-192)

