

Know Why you Believe Part 2: Authority of Scripture - Bible Study outline

Welcome and introductions.

Choose one of the following questions:

What was one thing you learned from this week's sermon that you hadn't known before?

What do you think was the most important thing you heard in the sermon?

If you could ask Pastor Nathan to preach more on one of the topics, which one would it be?

Wrestling with the Word

Martin Luther called the Scriptures 'The Swaddling Clothes of Christ:'

For these are the Scriptures which make fools of all the wise and understanding, and are open only to the small and simple, as Christ says in Matthew 11[:25]. Therefore dismiss your own opinions and feelings, and think of the Scriptures as the loftiest and noblest of holy things, as the richest of mines which can never be sufficiently explored, in order that you may find that divine wisdom which God here lays before you in such simple guise as to quench all pride. Here you will find the swaddling cloths and the manger in which Christ lies, and to which the angel points the shepherds [Luke 2:12]. Simple and lowly are these swaddling cloths, but dear is the treasure, Christ, who lies in them. ^[1]

Read the following passages out loud. For each passage, discuss briefly in your group:

What do the following passages from Scripture say about God's Word – what it's for, what it's not for, how it is to be used, what is the human author's intention, what is God's intention?

John 20:30-31 ...

2 Timothy 3:14-17 ...

Luke 1:1-4 ...

Hebrews 4:12-13...

Psalms 86:11...

Wrestling with the World

Have you ever heard the charge that the New Testament documents were written so long after the events, and that the copies we have are hopelessly inaccurate compared to the originals, so that we can't be sure that they are reliable? Discuss this charge in the light of the following (partial) table and quotes.

There are presently 5,686 Greek manuscripts in existence today for the New Testament.¹ If we were to compare the number of New Testament manuscripts to other ancient writings, we find that the New Testament manuscripts far outweigh the others in quantity.²

Author	Date Written	Earliest Copy	Approximate Time Span between original & copy	Number of Copies	Accuracy of Copies
Caesar	100-44 B.C.	900 A.D.	1000	10	----
Livy	59 BC-AD 17	----	???	20	----
Tacitus	circa 100 A.D.	1100 A.D.	1000 yrs	20	----
Aristotle	384-322 B.C.	1100 A.D.	1400	49	----
Sophocles	496-406 B.C.	1000 A.D.	1400 yrs	193	----
Homer (Iliad)	900 B.C.	400 B.C.	500 yrs	643	95%
New Testament	1st Cent. A.D. (50-100 A.D.)	2nd Cent. A.D. (c. 130 A.D. f.)	less than 100 years	5600	99.5%

The internal consistency of the New Testament documents is about 99.5% textually pure. That is an amazing accuracy. In addition there are over 19,000 in copies in the Syriac, Latin, Coptic, and Aramaic languages. The total supporting New Testament manuscript base is over 24,000.

Famous British manuscript expert Sir Frederick Kenyon summed up the matter well when he declared that: "The interval between the dates of original composition and the earliest extant evidence becomes so small as to be in fact negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down substantially as they were written has now been removed. *Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established*" (Kenyon, *The Bible and Archaeology*, 288).

What do you find most surprising/interesting/challenging about the reliability of the Biblical documents?

Consider some (just select a couple!) of the following prophecies and their fulfilment by Jesus. Which ones do you think most powerfully point to Jesus as the Messiah?

The Messiah must...	Prophecy	Fulfillment by Jesus
Be born in Bethlehem	Micah 5:2	Matthew 2:1 ; Luke 2:4-7
Be hated without cause	Isaiah 49:7 ; Psalms 69:4	John 15:24-25
Be undesired and rejected by His own people	Isaiah 53:2 , 63:3 ; Psalms 69:8	Mark 6:3 ; Luke 9:58 ; John 1:11 ,
Be plotted against by Jews and Gentiles together	Psalms 2:1-2	Acts 4:27
Be betrayed by a friend	Psalms 41:9 , 55:12-24	Matthew 26:21-25 , 47-50 ; John 13:18-21 ; Acts 1:16-18
Be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver	Zechariah 11:12	Matthew 26:16
Have his price given for a potter's field	Zechariah 11:13	Matthew 27:7
Be forsaken by His disciples	Zechariah 13:7	Matthew 26:31 , 56
Be beaten	Isaiah 50:6	Matthew 26:67 , 27:26 , 30
Be thirsty during His execution	Psalms 22:15	John 19:28
Be given vinegar to quench that thirst	Psalms 69:21	Matthew 27:34
Be considered a transgressor	Isaiah 53:12	Matthew 27:38
Be buried with the rich when dead	Isaiah 53:9	Matthew 27:57-60

What evidences of the *reliability* of the Bible do you find most persuasive? The manuscript evidence, the historical and archeological confirmation, the confirmation by prophecy, or something else?

Thinking it over

It's not always easy to read the Bible, and this is not just because we are slack, lazy, or uncommitted. What difficulties do you find popping up in your life in terms of reading the Bible? Where do they come from? How do you deal with them?

Read the following principles for interpreting Scripture.

- Remember the centre and focus of the Bible is Christ! What points us to Christ?
- Interpret difficult passages in the light of clear ones
- Don't base an important teaching on an obscure passage
- Remember that the Bible uses different literary devices and genres – understand the genre (remember the cookbook/mapbook example!)
- Remember that the Bible is a human book with human characteristics (fully human, yet without error) – the authors were not simply secretaries for the Holy Spirit

In what ways have you seen the Bible misused by others? By yourself?

[Have you ever been stumped by an apparent discrepancy or contradiction in Scripture? What was it? Could you write it down as succinctly as possible and then research it?]

Share a story about a time when you experienced the truth that the Bible is 'living and active' – the Word of God, breathing life into you, strengthening your faith, or bringing you to repentance, etc.

In what ways do you give the Bible an authoritative place in your life? Would you like to do that more? How would that happen?

Spend some time in prayer for each other. Ask God for a hunger for his word.

^[1]Luther, M. (1999, c1960). *Vol. 35: Luther's works, vol. 35 : Word and Sacrament I* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works (35:236). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.