

Isn't The Bible Just A Fairy Story ?

Questions People Ask About The Christian Faith

From as far back as I can remember, I heard stories from the bible. I learned the stories about Jesus right from the time I was a little guy. There were times in my High School years when other people raised doubts about whether the Bible was really true, but at that stage in my life, I was content to accept that it was true because my parents believed it, and if it was good enough for them, it was good enough for me.

In my early 20's I began to examine what I believed in much more depth. I wanted to know whether this faith I had in Jesus rested on solid evidence, or whether it was just putting my faith in faith. At the heart of this examination was the Bible. By then I realised that if the Bible was just a collection of myths and fairy stories, then my faith in Jesus wasn't resting on anything solid. So I began to look at questions like these:

- ***Is what is written in the gospels an accurate eyewitness account, or was this stuff about Jesus twisted by the gospel writers to produce faith?***

After all, the writers of the gospels wanted people to believe that Jesus was God in the flesh. Perhaps they embellished the stories to make Jesus look better than he really was? Perhaps they put words in his mouth that he didn't actually say? I wanted to know if what we have written in the New Testament is an accurate account of what actually happened.

- ***What about the fact that the gospels were written so far after the actual events?***

Most scholars agree that it was perhaps 60 years after the events happened before the gospel accounts were written down. I struggle to remember details of things that happened in my life thirty years ago. How can what was written 60 years after the event be an accurate record?

- ***The Bible translations we have now are based on copies of copies of copies of the original manuscripts.***

There are no original manuscripts existing anymore, so how can we know if the Bible we read today bears any resemblance to what was originally written?

I had heaps of questions like that, and for me, the answers were important. For if the Bible wasn't true, than I wasn't interested in following a Jesus who was just a myth. So I became a student of the Bible. For four years I studied the Bible every day, all day, looking for answers to my questions. I want to share with you a few of the things I discovered;

1. I discovered it was OK to ask the questions.

I did wonder if it was OK to examine the validity of the Bible, or whether I should just believe it all because my parents believed it, and my Pastor believed it, and my Bible Class teachers believed it. But when I got to studying theology at University level, I found the teachers and lecturers loved it when we asked questions. They pushed us to examine what we believed and why we believed it. Sometimes they would take the viewpoint of a sceptic, and debate stuff with us, just to make us think through an issue. They didn't just ask "What do you believe?" but "Why do you believe it?" And if you came up with an answer like "I believe it because that's what my parents believe, or my Pastor believes", you were in trouble. They trained us to examine the evidence, and only when we had examined the evidence, were we allowed to state a conclusion. I remember the College Principal saying to us as students "I don't mind if you leave here believing the same thing as when you came in. But I will have failed if you don't know why you believe it".

2. I discovered I wasn't the first to ask the questions.

When I was studying theology the library at that institution had 13,000 books in it. All of those books were written by people who were much brighter than me, who were incredibly highly qualified experts in linguistics, archaeology, ancient Greek languages, Hebrew language, Roman history, textual and form criticism and a whole lot of subjects I had never even heard of. Not all of them were Christians, but they all wanted answers to the same questions I was asking. Almost every question I had about the Bible, somebody before me had written a big fat book on it. People more sceptical than me had become

convinced through their study that not only is the bible an absolutely reliable document, but it is in fact the word of God.

I don't have time today to answer every question in detail. You would need to examine the evidence for yourself. But here are some of the things I discovered.

1. I discovered that the writers of the gospels were absolutely convinced that Jesus was God.

Their conviction about who Jesus was, was so great that they suffered torture, abuse, and ultimately paid for that belief by being killed. That set me thinking. People don't usually die for a belief that isn't true. Those gospel writers had lived with Jesus for three years. They saw what he did. If the stories about Jesus were fairy stories, why did these followers of his die for that belief? Who would die for a lie?

2. I discovered that there was plenty of eyewitness evidence that what the Bible said was true.

Eyewitness evidence is important. It's very difficult to write a distorted account of history when there are people still living who saw the events happen. When the gospel accounts were written, there were still plenty of people around who were eyewitnesses to the events that are described in the gospels.

We have a parallel in our own day. Between 1940 and 1945, the Nazi's massacred millions of Jews. That was about 70 years ago. In those 70 years, the historians have been meticulous in documenting all that happened during that period. They have eyewitness accounts, books, letters written during the period, names, addresses, times and places. It's all been accurately recorded. Now, 70 years after the event, we have people claiming that it never happened. Do you know why there is such an outcry when those claims are made? Because there are still people alive today who are firsthand eyewitnesses to those events. That's how it was with the gospels when they were written. By the time the record of the life of Jesus written by Mathew, Mark, Luke and John were being read by the early church, there were still heaps of people who were alive who remembered the events. The gospels would never have survived if they were not true. As well as that, there are plenty of historians of the time who were not Christians who wrote about what Jesus did. Their records line up with the New Testament record.

3. I discovered that that there is incredibly strong evidence for the authenticity of the New Testament.

When we say that writing 30 - 40 years after the events seems like a long time, we need to compare the New Testament with other ancient writings that are accepted as authentic. Alexander The Great died in 323BC. The two biographies of his life, written by Arrian and Plutarch, are both universally accepted as authentic. Yet they were written over 400 years after he died. Take a look at this chart, comparing the New Testament with other ancient writings which are all accepted as authentic.

Author	Date Written	Earliest Copy	Time Span	Number Of Copies
Plato	427-347 B.C.	900 A.D.	1200 years	7
Caesar	100- 44 B.C.	900 A.D.	1000 years	10
Aristotle	384-322 B.C.	1100 A.D.	1400 years	5
Tacitus	100 A.D.	1100 A.D.	1000 years	20
Herodotus	480-425 B.C.	900 A.D.	1300 years	8
Sophocles	496-406 B.C.	1000 A.D.	1400 years	100
Homer	800 B.C.	100 A.D.	900 years	650
New Testament	60 -100 A.D.	100-150 A.D. (Fragment of John's Gospel)	< 50 years	5664 Greek 8-10,000 Latin 8,000 other Total = 21,500 Copies

The former Director of the British Museum, Sir Fredrick Kenyon, is convinced that the New Testament record as we have it in our Bibles is an accurate record of what was written nearly 2000 years ago. There is no other piece of ancient literature that comes anywhere near the New Testament for accuracy.

But What About "The Da Vinci Code?"

Every now and then, something new comes along which supposedly casts doubt on the New Testament. The most recent has been Dan Brown's 2003 novel, "The Da Vinci Code", which was later made into a movie. In the front of his novel, Dan Brown lists things which he says are "facts" which gives the impression that even though it's a novel, it's based on fact. Dan Brown would have you believe that the real story about Jesus isn't in the New Testament you and I read. The real story about Jesus is in a book called the Gospel of Thomas, which the church has tried to cover up for centuries. The real story according to Dan Brown is that Jesus was actually married to Mary Magdalene, and that they had a child. The deeper you go into Dan Brown's novel, the more conspiracy theories you find. It's a gripping page turner that has made him millions of dollars. And so many people think it's fact.

Telling Fact From Fiction.

We live in an age when people can't tell fact from fiction. When actors portray a nasty character in a soap opera, they get abused by people on the street. People watch reality TV and they actually think it's all true. This inability to distinguish fact from fiction pervades the church too. In the last fifteen years there are millions of Christians around the world who think they have finally sorted out their theology of the second coming of Jesus. But they didn't get it through studying the Bible. They got it from reading Tim La Haye's "Left Behind" series of novels. And I don't want to disappoint you folks, but Tim La Haye's theology on the second coming is very shaky stuff.

It's time we got back to reading the Bible and believing it. For the Bible claims to be the inspired Word of God. In the second letter that Paul wrote to Timothy we read: ***"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."*** (2 Tim 3:16 & 17)

That's a pretty staggering claim that the Bible makes for itself. No other book in the world claims to be a supernatural book that is God's direct revelation to mankind. When we say the Bible is an inspired book, Christians don't just mean that it is inspiring, although much of it is. What we mean is that God was the overseer of the writers so that what he wanted recorded was written down. It is his word to us, to be interpreted in the light of its historical and cultural context. Because I believe the Bible is God's word to me, I have to line my life up with its teachings, rather than try and line its teachings up with my life.

A Pastor friend of mine was visiting a woman in his church. He wanted to read some scripture to her, and didn't have a bible with him, so asked if he could borrow hers. When she handed it to him, she looked rather embarrassed. He opened it and discovered she had taken a pair of scissors to it. She had cut out passages of scripture that she didn't agree with! We may be a bit amazed by that story, but I want to ask you - how often have you done that with God's word to you? How often have you recognised that what you have read in the scriptures is the truth, but it's just a bit hard for you to swallow, so you have mentally taken a pair of scissors, and cut out applying that scripture to your life?

God has given us this amazing book. It's the anvil that has worn out the many hammers of its critics. One fierce critic of Christianity and of the Bible was the French philosopher Voltaire, who lived in Ferney, just out of Geneva. The town is now named after him - Ferney-Voltaire. Voltaire claimed that the Gospels were fabricated and that Jesus didn't exist. He said that the gospels were produced by those who wanted to create God in their own image and were full of discrepancies. He once said "In 100 years this book will be forgotten and eliminated..." -Voltaire died in 1778. Twenty years after his death the Geneva Bible Society bought his former home and used it for printing Bibles. It later became the headquarters for the British and Foreign Bible Society. For several years they distributed hundreds of thousands of bibles world-wide. Voltaire's home became a major distribution hub for the very scriptures he condemned to extinction.

The Bible is God's word to us, not given to increase our knowledge, but to change our lives. This is no fairy story. It's God's word to you and me. It's God's truth in a world of deceptive lies. It's our one anchor point in a world that is changing so fast we hardly know which way is up. This world doesn't need more fairy stories. We have more fiction than we know what to do with. What we desperately

need is Gods unchanging truth. We have it right here in his word to us. Read it. Ask him to speak to you through it. Let him use that truth to change your life forever.

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