

## Can I trust the Bible?

### Leader's version

Barry Cooper's book, *Can I really trust the Bible?* (2014, The Good Book Company) is really worth a read before you lead this study!

There is quite a lot of information that will help to answer the question, 'Can I really trust the Bible?' that can't be directly drawn from a Biblical quote, so the leaders' answers are fuller than usual. Please don't be put off! These notes are there to help you to answer any other questions that may arise.

**Check in** – with the group sitting in a semi-circle go round and ask everyone, including leaders, how they are and how they're feeling about studying the Bible today.

### What does the passage say and mean?

#### 60 minutes

1. **STICKERS** Can you trust the Bible? Why?

*Just read out the answers – don't try to come to a conclusion.*

#### Read Psalm 119:9-16 to the group

2. Does the guy who wrote that psalm (= song / prayer) seem to trust the Bible? How can you tell?

*Ask the group to read out the things in this passage that show us that the author seems to trust the Bible. He lives according to God's word v9, he doesn't want to stray from God's commands v10 etc.*

3. Read 2 Timothy 3:16. What does the Bible tell us about who wrote it?

*The Bible claims that all Scripture is God-breathed – God is the author.*

*God inspired people to write things down that would one day become a book, which is actually 66 books bound together. About 40 people were involved from many different backgrounds – kings, princes, shepherds, fishermen, prophets and we know some of these had committed murder or adultery... These*

*people physically put pen to paper (/ ink to papyrus!) but it was God who inspired their words.*

*People may respond to this verse by saying that this is a circular argument, or an argument that relies on itself. However, consider this. It is reason / common sense that tells us that this is a circular argument. But reason / common sense define what reason / common sense dictate, and so this is itself a circular argument, which relies on itself. Therefore arguing that the Bible being self-authenticating is a circular argument is no argument at all!*

#### **4. Read Luke 1:3-4. How much care did Luke take as he wrote his history of Jesus' life?**

*Luke had 'carefully investigated everything'. He didn't sit down one day and start scribbling his memoirs, he spent time getting the facts straight first. He wrote in order to help someone called Theophilus to 'know the certainty', i.e. be sure, of the things that he had already been taught – Luke had checked it all out and wanted Theophilus to be reassured that, after all this investigation, the claims about Jesus held up.*

#### **5. Read 2 Peter 1:16. Why is it important for us to know that that the New Testament was written by eye-witnesses to the events it describes?**

*Let the group discuss this first, then explain:*

*It means that we're not getting second hand information, it's straight from the people who were there.*

*The books of the New Testament were all written in the period AD 50-100. Jesus died around AD30. When the gospels started to be written (the first, the gospel according to Mark, was written in the early 50's, a record of the testimony of one of the disciples, Peter, an eye-witness to Jesus' ministry and resurrection, the last, the gospel according to John was written in the 90's) the eye-witnesses were still around and would have made a pretty loud noise if people were misrepresenting the facts. Nobody complained. The eye-witnesses (there were thousands of them!) were happy with the accounts of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. It's worth noting that the earliest biography of Alexander the Great was not written until 400 years after his death (Morrow 2014, p46).*

*In the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, a group of church leaders got together and prayerfully defined what was NT Scripture and what was not. (The OT was already defined before Jesus came). Their 3 tests were 1. The teaching in the document must be already in common use by the church (i.e. acceptable to the church) 2. It must be written by an Apostle (someone who had seen the risen Jesus) and 3. It must not contradict any recognised Apostolic book or teaching. Thus anything written after 100AD is not included, so the 'alternative gospels' (which were written from 200-400AD and therefore not Apostolic) are not recognised as Biblical (from Cooper 2014, p52).*

#### **6. How many copies of New Testament manuscripts do you think we have?**

*We don't have any first copies, but there are 5,800 manuscript copies or fragments of manuscript copies catalogued. However there are tens of 1000's of still uncatalogued manuscript copies. This is more than we have for the average Greco-Roman scholar (whose writings we do not tend to question).*

*The Bible documents were hand written. The printing press wasn't invented until the 1400's so every copy of the manuscripts until then was done by hand. Although there are minor copying errors in some of these*

*copies, when you compare the multiple copies, you can find the errors and see what the original would have said. The multiple copies therefore help us to spot errors and deal with them. In fact, "For over 99% of the words of the Bible, we know what the original manuscript said." The remaining less than 1% make no difference to any biblical doctrine or teaching.'* (Cooper 2014, p59).

*The Bible was written in Hebrew, Greek and some Aramaic (probably Jesus' first language). It has been translated into many languages across the world, and Bible translation still goes on today. As you translate from one language to another, there are some words that have similar meanings and can be equally good translations – for example, 'pren' in Welsh could be translated 'wood', 'tree' or 'timber' in English, all are correct. So we have different translations of the Bible in English – some are more accurate to the original language than others, some are easier to read than others. The important thing is that they are true to the original text. Some trustworthy ones that I would recommend are the NIV and the ESV. The AV was the first English translation and the language in it is not very easy to understand today. Some 'versions of the Bible' are written with a specific agenda and are not true to the original text, so the teaching about God in them becomes unreliable and wrong.*

## 7. How would it help if we had evidence from outside the Bible that backed up the claims in the Bible?

*Let the group discuss, and then read the following quote.*

*'Without a single Bible verse, we know from history that:*

*There was a Jewish man who lived early in the 1<sup>st</sup> century by the name of Jesus who was born out of wedlock, whose life intersected with that of John the Baptist, who as an adult became a very popular teacher in Israel who worked wondrous feats – apparently miraculous signs of different kinds, who gathered a closer group of followers together that he called disciples – 5 of them are named – who consistently challenged conventional Jewish teaching on key topics of the Law and because of that was eventually arrested, was crucified (a Roman form of execution) as ordered by the Roman governor Pontius Pilate (which narrows the time period down to his reign in Judea between AD 26-36) and that despite this horrible and shameful death his followers believed he was the Jewish Messiah, or Christ, and they claimed to have seen him resurrected from the dead and within a couple of generations (at the latest) were singing hymns to him; worshipping him as if he were a god.'*

*(in Morrow 2014, p40-41)*

Ask the group what is their reaction to this quote?

## 8. Read 2 Peter 3:15-16. Peter and Paul were leaders of the early church. What does Peter tell us about Paul's writings?

*Paul wrote with the wisdom that God gave him, (v16). Peter classes Paul's writings as Scripture (end of v16). Before Paul died, other leading Christians recognised God's authority in his words.*

9. Let's think a little about the Old Testament now. Read John 5:39. What did Jesus say about the Scriptures (i.e. our Old Testament)?

*He says that the Scriptures testify about him and he is the one that fulfills all the OT prophecies! (also Luke 24:27).*

*By Jesus' time, the Old Testament books were recognised as Scripture, the Jews had no doubt that they were God's word. Jesus often quotes the OT and none of the religious experts contradict him (although they disagreed with him about a lot of other things, it wasn't the Scriptures!) (Cooper 2014, p50). Jesus talks about Adam (Mark 10:6-9), Abraham (John 8:58), Moses (John 5:46-47), David (Matthew 22:41-46), Jonah (Luke 11:32), etc. - he doesn't doubt that they were real people and real events.*

10. Read John 20:31. What reason does John give for writing his gospel and what do you think about investigating the claims of Jesus further?

**Check out** – with the group sitting in a semi-circle go round and ask everyone, including leaders, how they found the study and if they are safe to go back to the cell.

NB the following argument seems to be doing the rounds at the moment, so I've included an answer from Cooper 2014, p64:

'What would you say if I told you that the Egyptian god Horus was conceived by a virgin called "Meri"; that his birth was announced by angels and heralded by a star; had twelve disciples; raised people from the dead and walked on water; was crucified and resurrected? What if I suggested that the biblical portrait of "Jesus" is just a fictional mash-up of earlier gods?

Recently, this idea has become popular in some quarters. The only fly in the ointment, as scholars of ancient Egyptian mythology will explain, is that none of the above claims are true. Horus was conceived by a non-virgin called Isis, not "Meri"; his birth wasn't announced by an angel or heralded by a star; he had four disciples, not twelve; there's no reference to Horus raising the dead or walking on water; and there's no mention of him being crucified or resurrected.'



## Can I trust the Bible?

### What does the passage say and mean?

1. **STICKERS** Can you trust the Bible? Why?

### Read Psalm 119:9-16 to the group

2. Does the guy who wrote that psalm (= song / prayer) seem to trust the Bible? How can you tell?

3. Read 2 Timothy 3:16. What does the Bible tell us about who wrote it?

4. Read Luke 1:3-4. How much care did Luke take as he wrote his history of Jesus' life?

5. Read 2 Peter 1:16. Why is it important for us to know that that the New Testament was written by eye-witnesses to the events it describes?

6. How many copies of New Testament manuscripts do you think we have?

7. How would it help if we had evidence from outside the Bible that backed up the claims in the Bible?

8. Read 2 Peter 3:15-16. Peter and Paul were leaders of the early church. What does Peter tell us about Paul's writings?

9. Let's think a little about the Old Testament now. Read John 5:39. What did Jesus say about the Scriptures (i.e. our Old Testament)?

10. Read John 30-31. What reason does John give for writing his gospel and what do you think about investigating the claims of Jesus further?