



JOSH MOODY

HOW THE
BIBLE
CAN CHANGE YOUR LIFE

ANSWERS TO 10 MOST COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT THE BIBLE

Introduction

Christians are Bible people. We believe that God speaks to us through the Bible, and that God has inspired—that is, breathed out—the words of the Bible. We believe that the Bible points us to Jesus Christ, and that 'faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ' (Rom. 10:17). We believe that 'All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness' (2 Tim. 3:16), and that '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' (Heb. 4:12). We believe that 'the words of the Lord are pure words, like silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times' (Ps. 12:6).

We believe all this, but there is a gap between our

profession and our practice. Some Christians rarely read the Bible on their own at all, and those who do have 'devotions' or 'quiet times' will give more attention to the inspiring commentary on the Bible rather than to the inspired word of the Bible. Some churches, I am very much afraid, give little attention to the Bible as well, and so it is not surprising that Christians follow the practice of their leaders as they shape their worship services without time for the teaching of the Bible. These days you can go to church services and find the Bible remains studiously unopened altogether, let alone see any finer points of the right way to do exposition.

The reason for this gap between our profession and our practice is twofold.

On the one hand, we live with the fruit of what is now centuries of academic disillusionment with the historical reliability and the authority of the Bible. This doubt of, if not attack on, the Bible, has over time inevitably filtered down first to the mainline or liberal churches, and then gradually even to those that are evangelical. When you can find innumerable, learned-sounding critiques exposing the so-called faults of the Bible on YouTube or various blogs, it begins to cut well-meaning Christian confidence at the knees.

The other reason for this gap, though, is a little more recent. The argument is being made, and increasingly heeded, that to use the Bible in church—and thereafter in Christian witness and perhaps in Christian devotion—is not only unnecessary but unhelpful. Because, it is said,

we live in a post-literate age, we must all adjust, and talk about what God says in the Bible, but not actually explain the Bible itself. The trouble with this argument is, of course, that while we may or may not live in a post-literate age, we are certainly not the first age that was non-literate. The Bible was itself written at a time when most people actually could not read or write at all—rather than simply did not choose to do so. You could argue, in fact, that more is being read today than ever before; it is just that it is being read in electronic in addition to print form.

At any rate, for the sake of this book, I am going to take it for granted that both tendencies are unwelcome to my readers. The more pressing issue then is what to do about them? In at least a rather small way I hope the answer is: read and disseminate this book. My goal in writing it is to follow on from the previous book in this series (*How Church Can Change Your Life*) by tackling the next great challenge for contemporary Christians: faith in and practice of the Bible itself. I have taken the same approach to the structure of the book.

Relying on thousands of conversations with many people over the years, I have constructed what I take to be the 'ten most common questions' that people tend to ask about Scripture. The goal is to bridge that gap between our profession and our practice with regard to the Bible. And to show, therefore, that the Bible can and does change our lives.

My ultimate goal, as always, is for the glory of God. *Soli Deo Gloria.*



Is the Bible True?

If you're a Christian, then you know that you are meant to assume that the Bible is true, but you may secretly wonder whether it is actually all that it is cracked up to be. If you're not a Christian, or not sure whether you are, then you probably think that the claim that the Bible is true, in any literal or factual sense, is borderline laughable –even if you're too polite to come right out and say as much to your Christian friends.

The reality is that since the Enlightenment, the fulcrum of modern science and rationalism in the eighteenth century, there have been many scholarly criticisms of the Bible.

But what is new in the last, say, twenty years or so, is that these well-worn (to academics) criticisms of the Bible have been gradually making their way more and more into the popular realm. Part of this is that, because of the Internet, information is far more widely available than ever before.

Part of it is because a group sometimes dubbed 'neo-atheists' have decided that the best way to prevent religious extremism from taking hold is to attack the certainties that Christians have traditionally had about the Bible (though you wonder sometimes why they don't expend as much energy utilizing the orientalist's historical criticisms of the Koran). But whatever the reason, more people than ever today are aware that there is—and has been for a long time—a group of sophisticated academics who lampoon the idea that the Bible is in any sense 'true.'

This apparently puts Christians on the back foot, having to defend the Bible and answer the questions being asked of it. We will answer some of those questions, though inevitably in a somewhat brief and non-technical way, in this book and in particular in this chapter. But it is important, first of all, to get back on the front foot and take the initiative against the historical criticisms of the Bible at their source, the very fount of such criticisms.

At root, these criticisms are making a number of untested and unwarranted assumptions. Above all, they are assuming that the miraculous does not happen. Now, we who are Christians need to be careful not to give the impression that we think that miracles happen all the time. On the contrary, by definition, miracles are rare events; otherwise, they would be called 'normal life,' not miracles.

But, by the same token, there is an untested assumption at the back of much criticism of the Bible which is that prophecies—turning water into wine, and the like—cannot happen, therefore did not happen, and so there must be a different explanation to the miracles as recorded.

I recall one school teacher of mine when I was young explaining away the fall of the walls of Jericho along these lines.

According to him—because it was simply impossible to believe that God made the walls fall down—what really happened was as follows. The people inside the walls became more and more terrified watching the Israelites march around. And then when, on the last day, the Israelites shouted and blew their trumpets, fear overwhelmed the city and they all threw open the doors to the city. The description of the 'walls falling down' was an ancient way of saying that they 'opened the gates.' I remember, even then, thinking, well, if you can believe that, you can believe anything! So... someone is terrified by a surrounding army—and their response is to open all the doors to let the army in? Yeah, right. That would be like someone being terrified of flying and so opening the plane door midflight and jumping out. Right. That makes sense.

If you assume that the miraculous cannot happen, you are forced to find alternative explanations. Isaiah could not have made predictions about the emperor Cyrus,

so—there must have been three Isaiahs. On and on it goes: but the root assumption needs to be brought out into the light and examined on its own merits. You are saying that miracles do not happen. Which means you are really saying that whatever God there may be is not the kind of God who can do miracles. Which means that you are already assuming that the kind of God that the Bible describes does not in any real sense exist. Which means that you are dismissing the Bible's claims to truth based upon a set of presuppositions which may or may not be accurate. Which means that by using those presuppositions you are shielding yourself from the very evidence (the Bible) that might help you question whether your assumptions are indeed correct.

The easiest way to see the astonishing bias that these historical criticisms of the Bible have is in the way that they treat other ancient historical documents quite differently.

It is a fact of surpassing strangeness that at the very same time that the Biblical Studies Departments at elite universities were becoming more cynical about the texts they were studying, right across the street, in the Classics Departments, they were growing more confident about the veracity of the texts that they were studying. And both were employing rational, scientific, modern tools! But, in the one case, there were no miraculous or demanding moral claims being made on their lives. In the other, it challenged the philosophical assumptions

and committed lifestyles of the people looking at the texts. Interestingly enough, in some universities, because of these dynamics, more senior professors who take a more conservative approach to the Bible are being appointed to Biblical Studies Departments.

The popular Internet is yet to catch up with this trend; wait ten years and it will be more evident!

Leaving biases and prejudices about the miraculous to the side, then: is the Bible true? For it to be true, the Bible must be historically accurate, scientifically commensurate, and ethically acceptable.



Is The Bible Historically Accurate?

The Bible is a historical book. That does not mean that it only talks about past events: the Bible has predictions about the future—'a new heaven and a new earth' (Isa. 65:17; Rev. 21:1)—and it is readily applicable to everyday events today. Christians believe that it is 'living and active' (Heb. 4:12), and that when they read the Bible, it speaks to them right now. Nonetheless, however, the Bible was written in the past; its claims to be true are made within the truth-claims of historicity.

There are other kinds of truth claims beside those of historical truth.

Empirical science, what used to be called 'natural philosophy,' makes its claim to truth based upon a mix of Karl Popper's famous 'potentially falsifiable' standard

for scientific truth claims, and the empirical method of observation, hypothesis, testing, and then establishing a theory which makes best sense of available data.

If you approach the Bible's truth claims assuming it is testable in an empirical, scientific sense, you will rapidly become deeply frustrated. You cannot test the Bible in that sense; you cannot put the truth claims of the Bible in a laboratory and perform natural scientific tests to verify its truth claims. That does not mean that its truth is not even, as Karl Popper would say, 'potentially falsifiable;' that it does not even rise to the level of being a real truth claim at all. For there are other kinds of truth claims beside the scientific, empirical method that Popper was describing. Some of these truth claims are mainly subjective, or a matter of personal opinion –as in the 'truth' that a certain piece of art is better than another piece of art; 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder.'

There are methods, in fact, at arriving at objective truth in addition to, and supplemental to, empirical testing. For instance:

The truth claims of philosophy. Some of that may seem like going round and round in circles to you, but the principles and reasoning are well established within the history of philosophy.

The truth claims of a court of law. Legal truth may not reach the level of ultimate truth. But the law, when due process is followed, is recognized the world over as

eventually being able to arrive at the closest thing we can discover in this world to the truth about an event or a dispute.

The truth claims of economics. For sure, economics (sometimes rather unfairly called 'the dismal science') struggles to make certain predictions. But there are basic economic rules and principles which, irrespective of which competing school of economics you belong to, are recognized as being true.

The truth claims of history. If we could find nothing to be true from history, we would have little certain truth. All our knowledge, information, and truth-gathering in society relies upon our ability to learn and record the recognizable truth of history, from recent years to the distant past.

That all other truth claims are somehow less objective than those of natural science is simply not the case. The reality is that truth claims of natural science change over the years; what was received wisdom yesterday may be outmoded trash tomorrow. There are 'paradigm shifts' (in Thomas Kuhn's phrase) that take place within the scientific guild as much as anywhere else.

It is important to emphasize that the Bible was written in the past, and that therefore its truth claims are historical claims, so that we can then make sure we assess those truth claims by the right methods.

Historical facts are established by a simple methodology.

First of all, there must be some record. That record could be oral history (the passing of the truth from mouth to ear, recorded in human memory, and then retold again), but obviously oral history has a tendency to become distorted over time because of the vagaries of human memory. More commonly, historians base their assessment of facts on some sort of written or physical record. In recent history that could be a video (for instance, of the Vietnam War); in very ancient times it could be an archaeological remains of some clay pot or a 'bullae' (seal). Most commonly, it is a written record.

Second, that written record is then assessed for its veracity and reliability. It is assessed based upon the reliability of the author of that record. If the author is known to be a liar from other evidence, that obviously influences the extent to which you take what they say seriously. If they have a well-known bias to advocate for some event or other, that also influences your assessment of the data. If the author himself saw the event, then that becomes stronger evidence. If instead they rely on other eyewitnesses, but if the author actually interviewed those witnesses, that is different than if their evidence has become distant from the original event by some long gap.

Then, third, having assessed the reliability of the author, the reliability of the record itself must be assessed. Is this the original? Is this a copy of a copy of a copy? Is the copy originating within the lifetime of those who could

deny or confirm the truth of what is being said? Are there other corroborating records that document compatible evidence that mutually confirm the truth claim?

If there is a reliable record, if it is written by an author who is known to be reliable, if the copy of the record is written close to the event, and the copy is known to be accurate because of the expertise of the scribes, then for all intents and purposes, what we are dealing with is a truth claim that is true—in the same way that empirical science establishes a theory that is the best working paradigm for the available data.

There is another level of 'interpretation' to mention, which is where most of the work of professional historians goes; here motives, rationales, and causes are debated and discussed. These are by nature more subjective.

For instance, no one doubts that King Henry VIII had six wives. This is a historical fact. But exactly why he had six wives, what motivated him to divorce one and behead another, what sort of person Henry was to treat his wives this way, how much he was motivated by politics or religion—all this is endlessly debated. But no one doubts the fact that he had six wives! It is important to make this distinction because a lot of professional theologians utilize the evidence and work of professional historians without understanding the difference between these two kinds of history; you cannot rely absolutely as a truth

claim upon one particular view about why Henry did something—or why Paul did something—but you can rely upon the fact that Henry existed and that Paul existed.

So, then, based upon this methodology of historical truth claims—leaving as unvoiced for the moment the power of God to witness to His own Word through what theologians call 'illumination' and the work of the Spirit—are the claims of the Bible true?

Obviously, this is a huge subject, not just because of all the books and conversation about it over the years, but also because the Bible itself was written over a very long period of time by different human authors. It is quite impossible to exhaustively answer that question in this chapter of this book—or any one human book or conversation, for that matter.

But what we can say is the following.



Don't Prejudge the Bible

If you found a legal document that described magical fairies in the courtroom, you would doubt the validity of that legal record as a whole.

But the presence of miracles recorded in the Bible cannot by itself be used to dismiss the rest of the Bible, any more than if a time traveler came to our present time and saw mobile phones in use, they would be right to dismiss the mobile Internet as impossible before they considered the evidence.

You should not prejudge by intellectual bias before assessing the evidence.

As Sherlock Holmes said: When all the other options have been ruled out, what is left, however strange, must be the truth. Do not assume that Jesus' resurrection from the dead could not have happened. If all other ways of

explaining the beginning of the church are ruled out logically—as I think they are—then you are faced with a truth claim about the resurrection of Jesus physically from the dead which is true. Astonishingly, beautifully, true.



Start with Jesus

We know as a historical fact that Jesus existed. This is certain not just because of His huge influence on history subsequently, not only and most importantly because of the record of the New Testament, but also because of the records of non-Christian authors about Jesus (for instance Josephus, Tacitus, and Suetonius).

Now let us consider what the New Testament, and in particular Luke's gospel, says about Jesus. Luke's gospel is a verifiably reliable, historical document. It was written by a person close to the events. It was written based upon eyewitness accounts. Its data is corroborated by what else we know.



Is The Bible Scientifically Commensurate?

By scientifically commensurate I mean not that what the Bible says is compatible with what we currently think is true based on the latest scientific theory. That could suggest that the authority of the Bible is checked by novel human opinions. I mean that it is 'commensurate:' the approach that the Bible takes fits with or matches an approach that is supportive of scientific investigation.

That begs a question: is what we currently think to be true based on the discoveries of modern science really in fact true? We know that science changes its mind from time to time. To take the most celebrated example (and often used to attack the Bible): do we live in a heliocentric or geocentric galaxy? In other words, does the sun go around the Earth or does the Earth go around the sun? The Copernican view, adopted by Galileo, repressed by the Roman Catholic church, was believed by some to

be antithetical to various texts in the Bible that talk of the sun rising and setting. But that description of the sun rising and setting was never intended to be what we would call a 'scientific' description. It is a simple description of how things appear to be to a person walking about this planet that we call Earth. If I asked you, 'When is sunset?' you would not thereby assume that I am making a claim that the sun goes around the Earth (rather than the other way around).

The reason why the Roman Catholic church resisted Galileo's more scientifically accurate model of the galaxy was because his viewpoint was gathering traction among the Protestant Reformers at the time. Galileo was viewed as potentially heretical because there were those, from the Reformers' camp, who were leaning towards the Copernican view of the universe. As Galileo himself remarked, 'All the most distinguished heretics [that is the Reformation leaders] accepted Copernican doctrines! There is evidence that it was in particular the Jesuits, who were formed with the mission to counter and defeat the Reformation, that drove Galileo's heresy trial. Father Grienberger, later leader of the Jesuit College, said, "If Galileo had not incurred the displeasure of the Company [that is, the Jesuits], he could have gone on writing freely about the motion of the Earth to the end of his days." The 'Galileo-thing' was more about a debate between Roman Catholics and Protestants than between the Bible and science.

Now we live in an Einstein universe, where his theories

of special and general relativity are accepted, and the whole idea of a 'center' to the universe is suspect. It all depends from what part of the universe you are taking your perspective. While it is still more accurate to talk about the Earth going around the sun (than the other way around), the whole debate appears somewhat archaic because it was given heat by a different model of the universe than the one we at the moment hold to be accurate.

But what about the origins debate? Surely, people would say, science has established evolution as the only workable scientific model. Therefore, is it not the case that the description in the Bible of Genesis chapters 1 and 2 is entirely 'non-commensurate' with what we know to be true?

The trouble with answering this aspect of the question is that the right response is hotly debated among Christians. There are some Christians who feel very strongly that evolution, of whatever kind, is antagonistic to the Christian gospel. There are other Christians who are quite happy to at least potentially agree to a science of evolution –though they would still¹ strongly resist the naturalist philosophy and reductionistic assumptions of atheistic evolution. The important point to grasp is that the Bible itself does not teach that if you accept the science of evolution you cannot believe the Bible.

Augustine, writing a long time before Darwin, viewed Genesis chapter 1 in a non-literal way because the text itself indicated as much. If there is light before the sun is created, Augustine thought, then the message of Genesis chapter 1 cannot be taken as a literal text book. It has a bigger and more important meaning than the engineering of creation – it is about the creation of creation. Not to mention, in addition, that thinking of anything in the Bible as literally scientific is a kind of anachronism. Science, as we know it, did not even begin until about 500 years ago, a long, long time after Genesis chapter 1 was written.

The Bible is not against reason, science and learning. Far from it: there is an assumption throughout the Bible that God's Word gives light to our path. Jesus is the Logos or Word. Jesus is the light. Christianity is a religion of light (not darkness), of reason and logic (not irrationality), and it has been at the forefront of the birth of science, the universities, the hospitals, modern democracy, and many of the foundational elements of civilized societies.

1 Denis Alexander, *Rebuilding the Matrix: Science and Faith in the 21st Century* (Lion, 2001), p. 120.



Is The Bible Ethically Acceptable?

Not too long ago it would have seemed absurd to doubt the ethically acceptable nature of the Bible. We took it for granted that the Bible occupied the high moral ground. Those who follow it were those who were at least trying to be moral, sometimes even coming across as claiming to be more moral than the rest of us ('holy Joes,' Christians have in the past been called disparagingly).

Nowadays, however, people look at the bloodshed in the Bible, particularly in the Old Testament, and wonder whether it is really a moral book after all. Some even look at the cross, with its death and gore, and wonder whether having a symbol at the heart of a person's faith that is so violent could legitimate bloodshed, even be reflected in the violence of the history of Christendom.

Part of the answer to this moral aspect of the question 'Is the Bible true?' will come subsequently (see chapter 9). For now, though, let us turn this charge against the Bible on its head.

Has there ever been a higher statement of moral standards than Jesus' Sermon on the Mount? Who else ever commanded us to 'love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you' (Matt. 5:44)? What is more, do we really want to live in a universe where there is never any final justice? Plainly, evil does occur in this world. Are we saying that we want to live in a universe where that evil never receives its appropriate justice? Do we want the Hitlers of this world never to receive their comeuppance? If we want there to be justice, in what sense can we honestly claim to not also be those who are worthy of being on the wrong end of judgment (certainly when we judge our lives by that Sermon on the Mount, adulterers and murderers at heart as we all are)?

And what greater love is there than this, that someone lays down His life for His friends (John 15:13); that Christ gave His life for us that we might go free? What greater holiness or morality could there be than that God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8, NIV)?

In short, those who charge that the Bible is unethical have not come to grips with the inner structure and texture of the story of the Bible, understanding how the goodness of God, His holiness, and His love, even

towards rebels like us, is met in the sacrificial death of the Son of God.

In all, the best answer to the question about the truth of the Bible is *tolle lege* –as the little child's game said to the great Augustine. 'Take and read' the Bible. Discover its truth for yourself. It is sweeter than honey.



A Story

Frank had only heard about the Bible—and what he had heard was not encouraging. Apparently, it was just old mythical stories about people invading other people's countries and ethnically cleansing whole nations. He was rather surprised, then, when he actually read the Bible for himself and started with the Sermon on the Mount. Who is this that tells us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us? It made him rethink the whole thing.

Gradually, bit by bit, as he read more and talked about it with friends, he began to find that the Bible was sweeter than honey. It was a strange thing: he had never been much of a reader. But reading the Bible was more like an experience, an encounter, listening to a voice. Somehow it had hands and feet and ran after him; it had a voice that spoke to him. He was hooked, but in a good way. He

had found the words of eternal life, and he did not ever want to leave them again.



Discussion Questions

- Do you think it is possible to be a scientist and also believe in the Bible?
- Do you think you can have a high view of reason and still also believe in the Bible?
- How would you answer the question, 'Why do you believe the Bible is true?'
- What could you do today to start finding out about the truthfulness of the Bible for yourself?
- What new areas of your life could you submit to the truth claims of the Bible?

(This editor's note is the same one from the attached PDF entitled, "Does The Bible Promote Intolerance?")



Editors' note:

This guide is an adapted excerpt from Josh Moody's book, [How the Bible Can Change Your Life: Answers to the Ten Most Common Questions](#) (Christian Focus, 2018).

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