

Lost for Words
Week 2
The reliability of the Bible

The purpose of the course. God gathers us and then scatters us into the world. Why does he gather us? One of the purposes is to train us for life. So it's not like being a spectator at a sport's event but much more like a training session with the coach.

Recap of last week. Build up in stages. What is the gospel? The good news about the identity and mission of Jesus. About who he is and why he came. Build on this. What do we want to say about the identity of Jesus? What do we want to say about his mission? In any conversation we can expand and apply any minor point but it's important to know an outline. E.g., when talking about his identity as the promised King then we can speak about what it's like to live under his rule.

The great sharing – we share our sin and Jesus deals with it. We share his righteousness with us. Marriage.

Simpler TWTL diagram.

Practical tips when answering questions

Example question: How do you know God exists?

- *Avoid the dreaded download button*

Store away but don't download everything at once. Less is more. We should regulate the dose depending on who we are talking to and what we are talking about.

- *Answer in a way that leads to Jesus*

How do we do this? Use what he said and what he did.

Using our example question what would we say? Mark 4. **This could lead to the giving out of a Gospel.**

- *Ask questions*
 - Clarifies what and why people are asking.
 - Gets you off the back foot
 - Gives you time to think.
 - It helps you to listen.
 - People more likely to listen. It encourages a conversation rather than a monologue.
 - Keep on asking questions. Checks understanding. Shows listening.

The reliability of the Bible

In groups: Discuss how you would answer someone who said they thought the Bible couldn't be trusted.

There are different questions...

- How can I know what I'm reading is what was written?
- How can I know that what is written is what happened?
- How can I know that what is written is what I should be reading?
- What about contradictions?
- What about science and Christianity?

The ultimate reason you believe the Bible is because the Holy Spirit has confirmed it in you. He works as the Word of God is read. This is why it is so important to get people reading a Gospel.

However, in the initial conversation there are some useful things you can say.

How can we know that what was written is what happened?

There is an unthought through skepticism out there towards the bible. It is normally guilty until proved innocent rather than innocent until guilty. This is the culture we live in.

Let me provide you with a few facts. This is uploading for your benefit not necessarily what you will say to someone who asks the question.

Read Luke 1:1-4. The intention to be accurate.

They may have intended to write good history but did they succeed.

Here is a list of what we can glean from the non-Christian sources about the life of Jesus

- The name Jesus
- The place and time of his ministry. Palestine during Pontius Pilate's governorship.
- The name of his mother (Mary)
- The name of one of his brothers (James)
- His fame as a teacher
- His fame as a miracle worker
- That people thought he was the Christ
- The time and manner of his crucifixion
- The coincidence of a period of darkness at the time of his death
- The flourishing of a movement that worshipped Jesus after his death

The Qur'an doesn't check out. E.g cross.

The Bible should at least be given the benefit of the doubt.

- The honesty of the accounts
 - Mark 3:21. His family think he has lost the plot. They think he is mad.
 - Mark 8. Peter and Jesus.
- The way they agree with other sources
 - When the Gospels mention other people, places and events, do they check out to be true in cases that can be independently verified? Yes.
 - They put themselves on the line. Able to be verified or proven incorrect. People and places match up.
 - Luke begins his Gospel by placing Jesus on the stage of world history.
 - All Gospels refer to specific details about them. In John 5 we read of a pool near the sheep gate surrounded by five covered colonnades.
- The eyewitness details
 - Mark 4:38, “Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion.” Why are we told this? Someone saw it and passed it on.
 - John 21:11. The disciples caught 153. I don’t think we are to look for any deep significance. Someone counted them.
- The explanatory power of the stories
 - They provide the best explanation for the existence of the Christian movement.

Cumulative case is required. Take all these details together. **Did they have the ability to remember this information?**

Did people forget what they saw? Not long at all. Within the living memory of the generation.

Good memories. Rabbis became famous for committing the whole OT to memory.

Does anyone know what Hafiz is? It’s a term used by Muslims for someone who has memorised the Qur’an. I don’t think we have a special word for a Christian who has memorised the Bible.

The closest thing we have to memorisation in the West is the memorisation of pop songs. We all know those individuals who have memorised every lyric of countless songs and can sing them without a karaoke screen in sight. Now just imagine what could be remembered in a culture where memorisation was the norm and when the content of the information to be remembered was so important.

- Disciple means ‘learner’.
- Intentional in their memorisation.
- Major events. Unforgettable.
- Jesus’ teaching was memorable.

How was the oral tradition passed on? **Chinese Whispers** is not a proper illustration to use. Not quiet. Not whispering. Not doing everything we possibly can to make it difficult to pass on information.

How would you answer someone? Accurate when checked against other sources. The events are huge. Do you not think God would have made sure they were remembered accurately? Have a read and see what you think.

Can we be sure that what we read in this New Testament was what was originally written down?

Let's see what you think. How many of you are completely confident that what I read here was what was originally written? We can be completely confident that it wasn't. This is an English Bible and the words of the NT were written in Greek.

Should we trust that the words contained in this Greek NT are the words that were originally written? If you were to get picky you could say no because the originals were all written in capital letters and without spaces. But hopefully you are beginning to see my point. Can we trust that we today have an accurate record of what was originally written down?

If we had the originals then the question would be easily answered. **Do you know how many of the original writings of the NT have been discovered?** Absolutely none!

Can we still know what was written? Yes. We would need reliable copies of the original that have been reliably passed on through the centuries. If we had these then we could be confident that although we didn't have the originals we could still read what the originals said.

How many copies do we have? This is where I need to talk about manuscripts. **A manuscript is simply a copy made by hand.** This is the only way it could be done before the invention of the printing press.

Let me give you a few statistics for the New Testament. All in all we have about 24,000 manuscripts that have been discovered before the printing press took over. Written in different languages but if we restrict ourselves to Greek then we have over 5000 manuscripts of the NT to look at. These range from complete manuscripts to fragments. Written across the centuries and in different parts of the world.

Beware of how you use tables. Look at this one. **What does and what does it not tell you?**

Says nothing about when they were copied or where they were copied. Simply that these are from the time before the Printing Press. But it's a good table to start with. **Get it laminated and use it.**

What copies do we have of New Testament?

- The earliest are fragments of **papyrus**, a writing material made from the papyrus plant that grew in the marshes of the Nile delta in Egypt. We have 99 fragmentary pieces of papyrus that contain one or more passages or books of the NT.
 - Earliest is fragment of John. Five verses from chapter 18. Measures about two and a half by three and a half inches. Stored at John Rylands Library in Manchester.

- Chester Beatty Papyri. One contains portions of the four gospels and Acts (3rd century). The second contains large portions of eight of Paul's letters and portions of Hebrews (AD 200). The third has a sizeable section of Revelation (third century).
- Other ancient copies written on **parchment**, which was made from the skins of cattle, sheep, goats and antelope.
 - **Uncial manuscripts** – all capital letters. 306 of these, several dating back to the third century. Most important are Codex Sinaiticus, which is the only complete NT in uncial letters, and Codex Vaticanus, which is not quite complete. Both date to about AD 350.
 - **Minuscule** – more cursive, joined up writing. This emerged in about AD 800 (**notice writing style helps us date manuscripts**). 2,856 of these manuscripts.
 - **Lectionaries**, which contain NT Scripture in the sequence they are to read in the early churches. 2,403 of these have been catalogued.
- All in all 5,664 **Greek** manuscripts have been catalogued.
- Also thousands of other NT manuscripts in other languages. 10,000 Latin.
- All in all we have about 24,000.

The other thing to store away is that the NT was quoted frequently by early Christian writers so we can cross-reference their work against what we have in the NT manuscripts.

Mistakes were made. Errors were made for different reasons. However, because we have so many manuscripts and because the same mistake was not copied at the same time all over the world we can get back to the original text very accurately

This is the way God has chosen to preserve his texts. He has not made sure every copy was without error but that enough copies were made in enough locations so that when all are put together we can be sure of what was written.

One scholar, Norman Geisler, says, “The New Testament, then, has not only survived in more manuscripts than any other book from antiquity, but it has survived in a purer form than any other great book – a form that is 99.5 percent pure.”

All this is a way of saying that you can be sure that what you read today, if you read it in a reliable translation, is exactly what was written. All this means that we can have great confidence that what we read here is what was originally written down.

You may not be able to remember all this (**I don't!**) but there is a great book to give away. Make sure your church has copies of these – **The Case for Christ by Lee Strobel.**

How would you answer someone? Numbers and where they come from. Yes we can know that this is what was written. Read the book if you want more convincing but in the meantime do also read this and see what you think.