

Can We Trust The Bible?

Objection

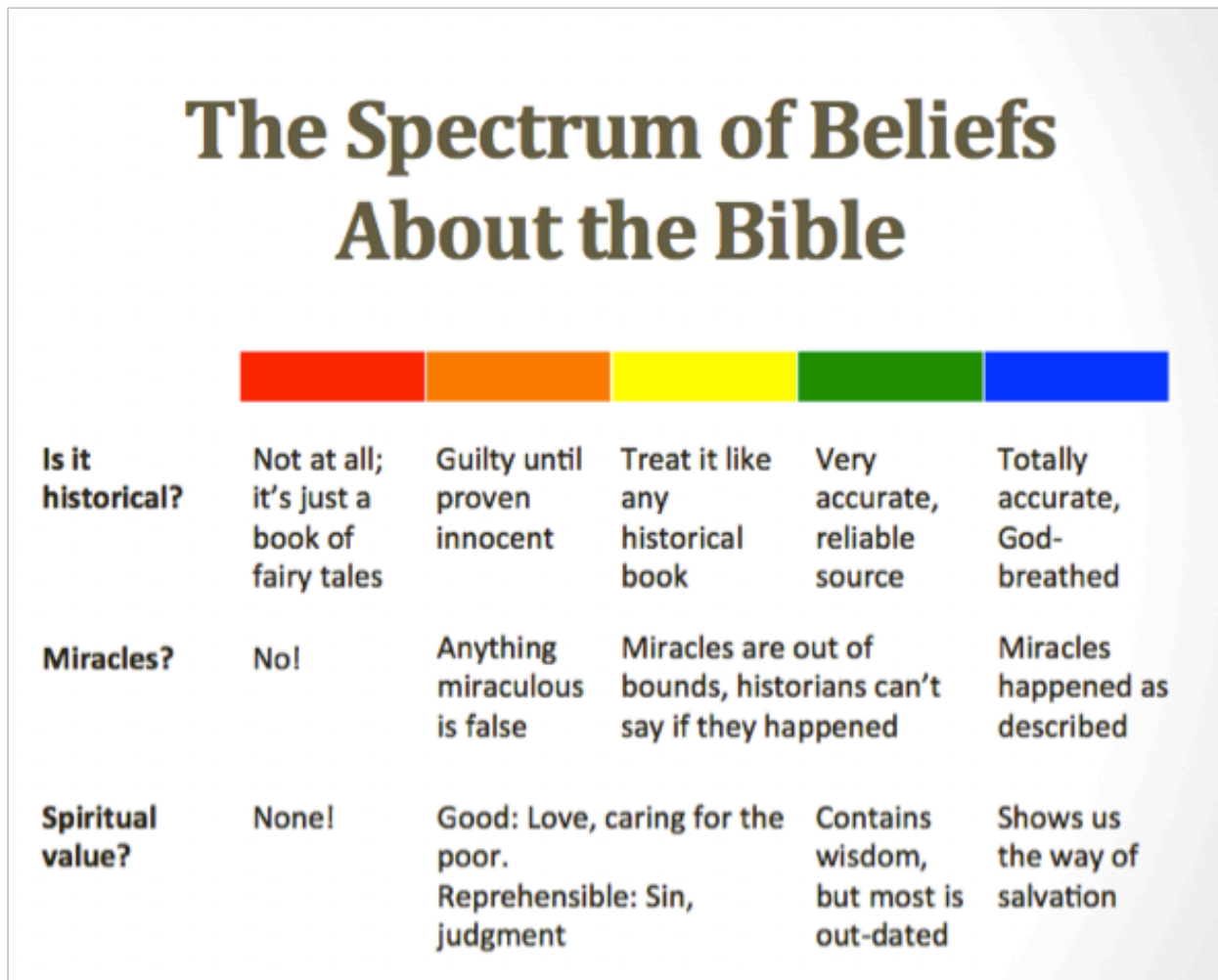
We cannot trust the Bible because it is unreliable and full of fairytales.

Strategy for dealing with challenges to the Bible

1. *Pick your battles.*

We don't need to defend everything we believe about the Bible all at once.

2. *There is a range of beliefs about the Bible*



Key points:

- There are moderate views on the Bible that may allow people to be open to hearing the gospel.
- Most scholars (including non-Christian scholars) have a higher view of the Bible than the non-Christians who have objections to the Bible.

3. *We should focus on removing barriers to belief in Jesus*
 - We want our conversations to lead people closer to Jesus, and not to go down rabbit trails.
 - Many people who are already Christians struggle with things in the Bible. It wouldn't make sense to expect people to accept everything in the Bible before they become Christians.
 - Help people to move away from the left side of the spectrum, so that they will be open-minded about encountering Jesus through reading the Bible.

Challenges to the Bible that probably aren't barriers to belief in Jesus

1. Trivial "contradictions" in the Bible
 - We don't need to defend a doctrine that the Bible is without error when we're talking to non-Christians.
 - These supposed contradictions don't affect the main things in the Bible at all.
2. Matters that Christians disagree on
 - If Christians disagree on it, then it's not central to the gospel, and it's not a prerequisite for becoming a Christian.
3. Miracles are hard to believe in
 - If it's normal for new Christians to have difficulties believing some things in the Bible, then that is obviously going to be even more true of non-Christians.
 - As long as the non-Christian keeps an open mind and doesn't completely rule out the possibility of miracles, I think we can live with that.

Challenges to the Bible that might be barriers to belief in Jesus

1. We can't trust the Bible.

Since most of the important information about Jesus is given in the four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, maybe we should focus on giving people good reasons to think that these books might be trustworthy historical documents.

Two good reasons for trusting the gospels:

- A. The gospels are primary source historical documents - They record eyewitness testimony of what Jesus said and did.
 - B. The gospels were written early, and are a reliable witness to what the author's actually believed.
- Most scholars believe that we can get accurate historical information from the Bible, and that in fact, the New Testament is the best and most reliable source of information about Jesus.

2. The Bible has been copied and recopied so many times that we can't know what the original authors wrote.

Reasons why we can trust that the Bible we have today is an accurate representation of the original text:

Old Testament:

- The Dead Sea Scrolls show that there were no significant changes in the text of the Old Testament for a thousand years. This is evidence of the extreme care and accuracy with which Hebrew scribes copied the Old Testament.

New Testament:

- The New Testament is arguably the most reliable ancient document in existence because of the number of manuscripts originating close in time to the original events.
 - Over 5,800 catalogued Greek manuscripts of the NT
 - Average classical author: 20 copies

We can trust that the Bible we have today accurately represents the original writings. Anyone who wants to disagree is going against the evidence.

Recommended resource:

The Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts in iTunes U.

3. We can't trust the New Testament because it was written by Christians

All historical writings have bias. If you're going to abandon the New Testament because it's biased, then you will have to abandon all of history if you're going to be consistent. Historians make a living out of studying historical documents written with a bias and a particular point of view and using these documents to determine what really happened in the past.

4. Any account that contains miracles and supernatural events can't be trusted

This claim needs to be supported with evidence. "Why do you think that's true?" Scholars who reject miracles still find many things in the Bible that they think are true.

5. The God of the Old Testament is morally reprehensible

A few guidelines to understanding the Old Testament passages that cause people difficulties:

- Not everything recorded in the Bible is endorsed.
- The Old Testament laws were for a specific people in a specific time, and not ideals for all time. God was meeting people halfway (e.g. Jesus's comments on

divorce in Matt. 19:8), and patiently leading them closer to the ideal, one step at a time.

- It's not fair or realistic to compare the Old Testament law to modern day legal standards. Compared to the laws of other civilizations of the Ancient Near East, the Law of Moses was very progressive: more limitations on punishments, more humanized attitude to servants, more protection for the poor and oppressed, higher regard for women, better treatment of foreigners.
- The nation of Israel has a central place in God's plan of salvation. Some of God's actions in the Old Testament seem harsh to us, but His priority was to keep the nation pure and uncontaminated by the evil practices of the surrounding nations so that one day Israel would bring salvation to the whole world through the Messiah.

Recommended resource: Is God a Moral Monster? by Paul Copan

Putting Things Together

For me (Keith) I would try and lead people through something like the following:

1. Acknowledge that the Bible is full of things that are difficult to understand. Even Christians struggle at times to understand.
2. Though difficult to grasp, the Bible is reliable. Scholars from all kinds of belief systems trust the Gospels as credible ancient eye witness accounts of what the early believers saw and thought about Jesus.
3. If the Bible is reliable, then we are faced with the question of is what we read about in it true? Did these events really happen? And do these events have the significance the authors suggest they do? To get to the bottom of these questions we can't simply dismiss what we don't know as fairy tales. We need to research deeper.⁴