

LEADER'S STUDY GUIDE

WHO CAN YOU TRUST?

PRIMARY SCRIPTURE

“...knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” —2 Peter 1:20–21

ADDITIONAL PASSAGES

Luke 1:1–4; John 19:35; 1 Corinthians 15:3–8; 2 Timothy 3:14–17; Hebrews 1:1–2; 2 Peter 1:16–21

PURPOSE OF THE GATHERING

This study is designed to help participants consider whether the Bible can be trusted as an authentic, accurately transmitted, and authoritative revelation from God.

The goal is not merely to win an argument about the Bible. It is to help people understand that if Scripture is truly God's Word, then God is speaking through it—and we should listen to him with humility, faith, and obedience.

MAIN IDEA

The Bible's historical reliability, manuscript evidence, fulfilled prophecy, eyewitness testimony, and unified message corroborate its trustworthiness. Ultimately, however, Scripture carries God's authority because it is God's Word, given through human authors who were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

OPENING THE CONVERSATION

Consider beginning with the story from the devotional: A golfer returns from a round and announces that someone in the group made a hole-in-one. A skeptical friend immediately responds, “I would call you a liar. Did anyone see it?”

Ask: Why would someone hesitate to believe the hole-in-one? What kind of evidence would make the claim credible? Why do golfers sign one another's scorecards? Can a signed scorecard prove beyond all possible doubt that the event happened? What would make you trust the witnesses?

Leader's Note: Golf provides a helpful picture of **corroborating evidence**. A signed scorecard, eyewitnesses, the ball in the cup, and the testimony of playing partners do not create the hole-in-one. They confirm that the event happened.

In a similar way, historical evidence, archaeology, manuscripts, fulfilled prophecy, and eyewitness accounts do not make the Bible God's Word. They corroborate the Bible's own claim that God has spoken through it.

Transition by saying: "Extraordinary claims deserve careful examination. Christianity does not require us to stop thinking or ignore the evidence. It invites us to examine the witnesses and consider what God says about his Word."

READ THE PRIMARY PASSAGE

Read 2 Peter 1:16–21 aloud.

Then ask: According to verse 16, what did Peter say the apostles had not followed? What did Peter mean when he said, "We were eyewitnesses of his majesty"? According to verses 20–21, where did biblical prophecy originate? What does the phrase "carried along by the Holy Spirit" communicate?

Leader's Explanation: Peter distinguishes the apostles' testimony from "cleverly devised myths." Their proclamation about Jesus was based on what they had seen and heard.

Peter then explains that the prophetic message did not originate in human imagination or personal initiative. God used real human authors with individual personalities, vocabularies, backgrounds, and writing styles. Yet the Holy Spirit sovereignly guided them so that what they wrote was truly God's Word.

The authors were not passive machines taking dictation. They wrote consciously and willingly. At the same time, God superintended their writing so that his intended message was communicated.

This is why Christians speak of Scripture as both fully human and divinely inspired.

FIRST WITNESS: PROPHETIC CORROBORATION

The Bible repeatedly announces events before they occur and later interprets their fulfillment as evidence that God is directing history.

Examples include God's promises concerning Abraham and his descendants; the rise and fall of nations; the promised exile and restoration of Israel; the coming of the Messiah; and Christ's suffering, death, resurrection, and worldwide kingdom.

Ask: Why would fulfilled prophecy support the Bible's claim to divine authorship? What is the difference between a vague prediction and a specific biblical promise? Why would it matter that prophecies were recorded before their fulfillment? How does fulfilled prophecy point to God's sovereignty over history? Supernatural Guidance?

Leader's Note: Biblical prophecy is not merely an effort to satisfy human curiosity about the future. It reveals that God rules history and faithfully accomplishes his covenant purposes.

The central focus of biblical prophecy is Jesus Christ. The Old Testament promises find their fulfillment in his person and work. Jesus is not an unexpected addition to the biblical story. He is the one toward whom the story has been moving.

SECOND WITNESS: HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL CORROBORATION

The Bible describes real rulers, cities, nations, battles, customs, and geographical locations. Archaeological discoveries have repeatedly confirmed details connected with the biblical world.

Archaeology does not prove every theological claim in Scripture. A discovery cannot dig up the Trinity, forgiveness, or eternal life. Nevertheless, archaeological and historical evidence can help establish that the biblical writers were describing real people, places, cultures, and events.

Ask: Why does it matter that the Bible is rooted in actual history? How is Christianity different from a religious philosophy that is disconnected from historical events? What would it mean for Christianity if Adam or Jesus had not actually lived, died, and risen? What are the limitations of archaeological evidence?

Leader's Explanation: Christianity stands or falls on events that happened in history. The gospel is not merely a collection of inspiring ideas. Jesus lived, died under the authority of Pontius Pilate, was buried, and rose from the dead.

Paul makes the historical nature of Christianity unmistakable in 1 Corinthians 15. If Christ has not been raised, Christian faith is futile. Christianity is therefore open to historical investigation because its central claims concern events that occurred in the real world.

THIRD WITNESS: MANUSCRIPT EVIDENCE

We do not possess the original handwritten copies of the biblical books. However, we have thousands of ancient manuscript copies, portions, and quotations that allow scholars to compare the available evidence carefully.

Approximately 5,800 to 5,900 Greek New Testament manuscripts exist, along with thousands of manuscripts in other ancient languages. Some manuscript fragments date to the second century.

This abundance does not prove that the Bible is divinely inspired. It does, however, provide substantial evidence that the text has been carefully preserved and reliably transmitted.

Ask: What is the difference between inspiration and transmission? Why is having many manuscripts helpful? What might you say to someone who claims that the Bible was repeatedly rewritten until its original message was lost? Why is it important to distinguish between textual variations and changes to the Bible's essential message?

Leader's Explanation: Inspiration concerns the origin of Scripture: God spoke through the human authors. Transmission concerns how that written text was copied and passed from one generation to another.

The large number of manuscripts gives scholars many witnesses to compare. Copying variations exist, but the abundance of evidence makes it possible to identify and evaluate them. **No central Christian doctrine depends upon a disputed textual reading.**

We should avoid overstating the evidence. Manuscript evidence does not, by itself, demonstrate that God inspired the Bible. It shows that we have reliable access to what the biblical authors wrote.

FOURTH WITNESS: EYEWITNESS TESTIMONY

The New Testament writers did not present the gospel as a private spiritual experience or a story that happened in an imaginary world. They appealed to eyewitnesses and publicly known events.

Consider: Luke investigated the testimony handed down by eyewitnesses. John identified himself as a witness to events surrounding the crucifixion. Peter said that the apostles were eyewitnesses of Christ's majesty. Paul referred to witnesses of the risen Christ, including more than five hundred people at one time.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:3–8.

Ask: Which facts does Paul identify as being "of first importance"? Why does Paul name specific witnesses? Why would mentioning living witnesses strengthen his argument? What risks did the apostles face by publicly proclaiming Christ's resurrection? What is the difference between sincere belief and reliable eyewitness testimony?

Leader's Note: People can sincerely believe something that is not true, so sincerity alone is not enough. The apostles claimed to have encountered the risen Jesus in history. They proclaimed this message publicly in places where their claims could be investigated and challenged.

Their willingness to suffer does not automatically prove that everything they said was true. People have died for false beliefs. However, the apostles were in a position to know whether their central claim—that they had seen the risen Christ—was true or something they had invented.

Their suffering demonstrates that they were not proclaiming the resurrection for comfort, wealth, popularity, or political power.

FIFTH WITNESS: THE UNITY OF SCRIPTURE

The Bible contains sixty-six books written by numerous authors over many centuries. Its writers came from different social positions, lived in different historical periods, and used different literary forms.

Yet these books together tell one unfolding story: God created the world and humanity for his glory. Humanity rebelled against God and came under sin and judgment. God promised redemption through the offspring of the woman. God established his covenant promises. God formed Israel and worked through the history of his people. The prophets pointed forward to a coming King, Servant, and Redeemer. Jesus Christ fulfilled God's promises through his life, death, and resurrection. Christ is gathering a people from every nation. Christ will return to judge evil, renew creation, and dwell with his people forever.

Ask: Why is the Bible's unity remarkable? What themes hold the biblical story together? In what ways does the Old Testament prepare us for Jesus? What happens when individual Bible verses are separated from the Bible's larger storyline? How does Jesus help us understand the whole Bible?

Leader's Explanation: The unity of Scripture does not mean that every biblical book sounds the same. The Bible contains history, poetry, prophecy, wisdom, letters, and apocalyptic writing. Its human authors have distinct voices.

Nevertheless, one sovereign God stands behind the whole. Scripture unfolds one plan of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration centered on Jesus Christ.

DOES EVIDENCE GIVE THE BIBLE ITS AUTHORITY?

Read 2 Timothy 3:14–17.

Ask: What does Paul mean when he says that Scripture is “breathed out by God”? According to this passage, what does Scripture accomplish? Does Scripture become God's Word only after we accept it? What is the difference between recognizing authority and creating authority?

Leader's Explanation: Evidence is important, but human beings do not sit as the final court deciding whether God's Word deserves to have authority. Scripture is authoritative because it comes from God; its “self-attesting.”

A jury's verdict does not make an innocent person innocent. The verdict recognizes a reality that is already true. In the same way, our belief does not make Scripture God's Word. By God's grace, we come to recognize and submit to what Scripture already is.

Because of sin, our problem is not merely a shortage of evidence. We are not spiritually neutral observers. We naturally resist God's authority and suppress the truth about him. We therefore need the Holy Spirit to overcome our blindness and enable us to recognize God's voice in Scripture.

This does not make evidence unnecessary. It means that evidence alone cannot transform a resistant heart. The same Spirit who inspired Scripture works through Scripture to bring people to faith in Christ.

QUESTIONS AND COMMON OBJECTIONS

“Wasn’t the Bible written by human beings?”

Yes. Christianity does not deny human authorship. God spoke through real people with their own personalities, experiences, and writing styles. The Holy Spirit sovereignly carried them along so that their words communicated what God intended.

“Hasn’t the Bible been changed many times?”

The Bible has been copied and translated many times, but translating a text is not the same as changing its message. The abundance of ancient manuscripts allows scholars to compare copies and identify variations. The evidence supports the reliable preservation of the biblical text.

“Doesn’t everyone interpret the Bible differently?”

People do disagree about some passages, but disagreement does not mean a text has no intended meaning. Golfers may disagree about how a rule applies, but that does not mean the rulebook has no meaning.

Responsible interpretation considers grammar, context, literary genre, historical setting, and the Bible’s overall message. Clearer passages also help us interpret more difficult ones.

“Isn’t trusting the Bible circular reasoning?”

Every claim to ultimate authority eventually appeals to something regarded as final. Human reason cannot place itself above God without becoming its own highest authority.

Christians do not believe the Bible without evidence. Historical, manuscript, prophetic, and eyewitness evidence all corroborate its claims. Ultimately, however, Scripture is recognized as God’s Word through the Spirit speaking in and through it.

“What about difficult passages in the Bible?”

A difficult passage is not necessarily an inaccurate passage. Some difficulties arise because we are separated from the biblical world by language, culture, geography, and thousands of years.

Christians should not be afraid of hard questions. We should examine them honestly, humbly, and patiently, recognizing that our limited understanding is not the measure of God’s truthfulness.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

Bring the conversation from evidence to personal response.

Ask: Have you approached the Bible as God’s Word or merely as an interesting religious book? What has most influenced your view of Scripture? Are your questions primarily intellectual, personal, moral, or spiritual? Is there anything in Scripture that you resist because you do not

want it to have authority over you? What would change if you became convinced that God was speaking to you through Scripture? How can Christians listen more carefully to God's Word rather than merely using it to support opinions they already hold?

Leader's Note: Avoid pressuring participants to pretend they have no doubts. Welcome honest questions, especially from seekers and nonbelievers.

At the same time, gently redirect the conversation from "Can the Bible survive my judgment?" to "What if God is addressing me through his Word?"

The goal is not merely to convince people that the Bible is an impressive document. The goal is to encourage them to hear the God who reveals himself in Scripture and ultimately in Jesus Christ.

THE GOSPEL CONNECTION

The supreme message of Scripture is not "Try harder to become a better person." Its central message is what the holy and gracious God has done to rescue sinners through Jesus Christ.

The Bible explains who God is; why the world is broken; why we are alienated from God; why we cannot save ourselves; why Jesus came; what Christ accomplished through his death; why the resurrection matters; how sinners are reconciled to God; and where history is heading.

Jesus said that the Scriptures bear witness about him. The reliability of Scripture matters because it is through Scripture that we learn the gospel: Christ died for our sins, was buried, rose again, and offers forgiveness and eternal life to everyone who trusts in him.

The Bible does more than provide information about God. Through his Word and by his Spirit, God confronts us, exposes our sin, reveals Christ, and calls us to repentance and faith.

CLOSING SUMMARY

You might close the discussion by saying:

"A hole-in-one does not become real because witnesses sign the scorecard. Their testimony confirms an event that has already happened. In a far greater way, manuscripts, archaeology, fulfilled prophecy, eyewitness testimony, and Scripture's unified message do not make the Bible God's Word. They corroborate its claims.

"The Bible has authority because its ultimate author is God. Human authors spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the most important question is not simply, 'Can I understand everything in the Bible?' The most important question is, 'Am I willing to listen when God speaks?'

"God has not remained silent. He has revealed himself through his Word, and the message of that Word centers on his Son, Jesus Christ."

