

Are You There God?

Questions Vid

Welcome to MC3 today, we are so glad that you are here. We are starting a brand new sermon series today, where many of you have had a hand at helping to write this sermon series. Over the course of the next few weeks, we are going to try to answer some of the theological questions that you have submitted over this past month. And let me just say that you are a deep thinking group. There were a lot of really, really good questions.

And so we broke up the questions that were similar, and drop them in the same sermon, so that hopefully we could do a better job of addressing the questions. And so, as we jump into this series, we have a couple of goals: **1. We want to lead you to the Truth.** We hope that we can adequately answer these all-important questions. But, here's the reality, some of the answers might lead to more questions, which we will be happy to sit down with you later and try to help you discover some of the answers. At the end of the day, truth is found in Jesus, because He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. And the search for answers is a life-long journey. It's why we joke that we will ask God when we get to heaven.

2. We want to lead you to seek God. We hope that this sermon series will drive you to dive into scripture and seek these answers from God, Himself . . . Rather than from man. Many of the answers to these questions and more, are not a result of human knowledge, but Godly knowledge and wisdom. Isaiah 55:6-9 says, **"Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near. 7 Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will freely pardon. 8 "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. 9 "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."** So our hope is that this will cause you to dive deeper in His Word.

3. We want you to be satisfied with Jesus. Some of these answers may not be what we want to hear, we may not agree with the answer, or even agree with God. But we want you to remember the only question we really need to have nailed down in this life, is the question of what to do with Jesus. So our hope is that at the end of the day, you will be satisfied with Jesus. And so with that, we will jump right into 3 questions today that deal with the Bible.

How did the Bible come into existence? I understand about the first five books, but who chose all the other books and when did the Bible as we know it become a book? How do we trust the authenticity of it?

We wanted to tackle the questions of the Bible first, because it's through the lens of God's Word that we will attempt to answer all the other questions. Well, the Bible is absolutely unique. And even though it's bound as one book, it's actually 66 books. Probably one of the most remarkable qualities of the Bible is that it is **66 Books**, written by over **40 authors**, in **3 different languages** over a period of roughly **2,000 years** with **1 Unifying Message**. And that message was summed up by Jesus, in one verse, John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." And this cannot happen without Divine intervention. "Natural explanations fail to account for the supernatural character and origin of Scripture."--Tim Chaffey, Apologist

But how did the Bible come to be? The answer is by the process of Canonization. The early church used the Canon, which is a Greek word that means "Standard or measure." And so the early church used a Canon process to see if certain books or manuscripts met the "Standard" or "Measure" of being scripture.

Now I'm going to skim the Old Testament Canon, because it's extremely involved, but we know God gave Moses the Pentatuch (first 5 books) or the Law as it is called, and over the course of years other books were written, which were the Prophets and the Psalms. By the time Jesus was born, the OT canon had been decided. In fact, Jesus confirms the OT books you have in your Bible right now in Luke 24:44, "He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." One source summed up the authenticity of the OT by saying, "The accuracy of today's Old Testament was confirmed in 1947 when archaeologists found "The Dead Sea Scrolls" along today's West Bank in Israel. "The Dead Sea Scrolls" contained Old Testament scripture dating 1,000 years older than any manuscripts we had. When comparing the manuscripts at hand with these, from 1,000 years earlier, we find agreement 99.5% of the time. And the .5% differences are minor spelling variances and sentence structure that doesn't change the meaning of the sentence." (<https://www.everystudent.com/features/bible.html>)

So the Jewish elders were the ones that canonized the OT, and the early church accepted them as scripture. But the early church leaders did all the heavy lifting for the NT. In 363 AD, the early church leaders got together at the Council of Laodicea to discuss, canonizing the scriptures to counteract heresy (bad teaching) and to determine the true Word of God. Another meeting like this took place in 393 AD in the Council of Hippo, and once more in 397

AD at the Council of Carthage. They adopted the OT and 27 books for the NT, and there were 5 Criteria for a book or letter to be accepted as scripture:

1. **Was the Author an Apostle or closely connected to one?** We know that Matthew, John, and Peter were Apostles, but Mark and Luke were not, but they were closely connected to the Apostle Paul and Peter. And according to Acts 1 the Criteria for being an Apostle is: **1. The candidate was required to be someone who followed Jesus during his entire earthly ministry, beginning from Jesus' baptism by John to Jesus' ascension into heaven (1:21–22a).** **2. The candidate was required to have seen Jesus after His resurrection (1:22b).** **3. The candidate needed to have been appointed by the Lord Jesus himself (1:24–25).**
2. **Did the Church at large accept the book as inspired?** The Book of Luke was referred to as scripture in 1 Timothy 5:18. Paul's letters were referred to as "scripture" in 2 Peter 3:16. Polycarp (early church leader) in 125 AD quotes Ephesians twice and refers to them as the "sacred scripture." In 150 AD Justin refers to the Gospels as the "memoirs of the Apostles." Irenaeus in 180 AD calls them the "four-fold form" of Gospel.
3. **Is the book consistent with accepted Christian Doctrine** (or sometimes called orthodoxy)? So if a letter or book said that one had to be circumcised to be a believer, then we know from the Churches decision in Acts 15, that this teaching was NOT Christian doctrine.
4. **Does the book reflect the high moral standard of the work of the Holy Spirit?** Some of the false teachings circulating through the churches were tolerant of Pagan practices. And so only the books that shared the character of Christ and His Apostles were accepted. And so some of the books that missed the cut were the Gospel of Thomas, Gospel of Mary, Gospel of Judas, and the Apocalypse of Peter (which the church doubted its authorship). (*How Did We Get the Bible?*, Tracy Macon Sumner)

So the early church put all of the letters and books through this filter and landed on 27 NT books. The books that were most looked at were James, Jude, 1 & 2 Peter, 2 & 3 John. And if you or someone you know doubts the accuracy of the NT, I want to end this question with this, quote: **"Regarding the New Testament, it is humanity's most reliable ancient document. All ancient manuscripts were written on papyrus, which didn't have much of a shelf life. So people hand copied originals, to maintain the message and circulate it to others. Few people doubt Plato's writing of "The Republic." It's a classic, written by Plato around 380 B.C. The earliest copies we have of it are dated 900 A.D., which is a 1,300 year time lag from when he wrote it. There are only seven copies in existence.**

Caesar's "Gallic Wars" were written around 100-44 B.C. The copies we have today are dated 1,000 years after he wrote it. We have ten copies. When it comes to the New Testament, written between 50-100 A.D, **there are more than 5,000 copies.** All are within 50-225 years of their original writing. Further, when it came to Scripture, scribes (monks) were meticulous in their copying of original manuscripts. They checked and rechecked their work, to make sure it perfectly matched. What the New Testament writers originally wrote is preserved better than any other ancient manuscript. We can be more certain of what we read about Jesus' life and words, than we are certain of the writings of Caesar, Plato, Aristotle and Homer. And in all of this, God was working, yes it was a work of believers, but more accurately it was a work of God IN believers. John 1:1 clearly tells us, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." This is why Hebrews tells us the Word is "alive and active."

Does the Bible really define what marriage is supposed to be? In a legal sense? Can you consider yourself married by God, even if you haven't entered into a legal contract of marriage?

Now I hope I answer every aspect of this question. First, the answer is "Yes." The Bible defines what marriage is supposed to be. But we have to understand that in the OT and even the NT there were different marriage customs that we don't adhere to today. They were the marriage customs of the day.

For instance: In the normal marriage practice a man's wife was chosen from within the ranks of his own people, the parents generally making the choice? (Maybe we should go back to that :). An example of this is Abraham's choice for his son Isaac. If Rebekah is an example of the norm, the bride-to-be was asked for her consent.

Then there was a Betrothal Period or Engagement as we call it. And there was an Exchange of gifts took place. The bridegroom or his family gave a compensation gift to the family of the bride. This appeared to be more than a material compensation and might be considered as a kind of mental balancing of the relations. The bride's father gave a gift (dowry) either to his daughter or to her future husband. The bridegroom also gave a gift to his bride. On occasion the woman was covered by the skirt of the man's cloak as a sign of his care and protection over her. In the interval between betrothal and marriage the bride was busy preparing herself for the great day, and the groom was busy preparing a place for them to live. (This is why Jesus says in John 14:2-3, "My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? **3** And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am." The Betrothal was a signed and witnessed legal contract and was as important as the marriage ceremony

itself. Unfaithfulness during this period was described as adultery and punishable by death. This is where the the story of Mary and Joseph comes into play.

Then there was the marriage. The public acknowledgement of the marital relationship was an important feature of the ceremonies which surrounded the occasion of marriage. The wearing of distinctive clothes and being accompanied by one or more companions and friends added dignity to the occasion. The bridegroom and his friends went in procession to the bride's house and escorted her back to his own or his parent's home. (Jesus uses this as an analogy for one of His parables in Matthew 25) The procession was usually accompanied by music, singing and dancing. At the marriage feast which followed, relatives and friends attended wearing festive clothes. It was an insult to refuse an invitation (Also in one of Jesus's parables in Matthew 22). A friend of the bridegroom supervised the feast which could continue for several days (Jesus at the Wedding in Cana in John 2).

A covenant of faithfulness bound the pair as they prepared to consummate their marriage in a specially prepared bridechamber. The verb "to know" is used to describe this most intimate of relationships suggesting that sexual intercourse was viewed as primarily personal rather than purely sensual. What we see in Genesis 2 is a marriage ceremony where God in effect gives Eve away as her Father to Adam, and Adam recites his vows in Genesis 2:23-24, **"This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." 24 That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh."**

So we know that scripture highlights the legal marriage customs of the day, Jesus affirmed the legal customs of marriage through His presence at the wedding in Cana and in His parables. But, can we just live together and consider ourselves married without a ceremony, without a marriage license, and without witnesses? I don't see that supported in scripture. What we see from the very beginning of time is a visible expression of love, devotion, and promises made in marriage, with witnesses present.

I like how one writer put it, **"Marriage is more than human romance, wonderful as that is. It is more than close friendship, wonderful as that is. Marriage is the display of Christ and his Bride in love together. A beautiful, tender, thriving marriage makes the gospel visible on earth, bringing hope to people who have given up believing there could be any love anywhere for them."**

[\(https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/ray-ortlund/what-is-marriage-according-to-the-bible/\)](https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/ray-ortlund/what-is-marriage-according-to-the-bible/)

As far as, do we need the state to make marriage legal? We do see Jesus affirming our following of the law in Matthew 22:21 where Jesus says, **"So give back to Caesar what is**

Caesar's, and to God what is God's." But the other piece I would address with someone who would ask me this question, is "What is the real reason for asking the question?" Because if they are trying to placate their conscience and do an end-around God, then the answer would be NO. And if they were honestly wanting a truthful answer, then that's where discipleship and teaching would need to be applied.

If the old testament requires the Israelites to perform animal sacrifices and burnt offerings in the temple courts, how is this practice executed today while they await the Messiah?

And the short answer is, it's NOT. They have to have the temple and all of its furnishings to begin to have animal sacrifices once again. **On December 10 of last year, there were some Temple Mount Activists that wanted to do a complete sacrificial celebration of a lamb on a permanent altar on the Temple Mount, but their request was rejected by the authorities.** This group is working toward having all the necessary pieces for the temple. And we know from Revelation 11, that the temple will be rebuilt one day.

For us as followers of Jesus, animal sacrifice means nothing. In fact it would be wrong for us to offer a lamb or a bull or any animal on an altar. Because we understand that Christ fulfilled the Ceremonial Law and paid for our sins by His blood; He was our sacrifice. Hebrews 10:11-14 tells us, **"Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. 12 But when this priest [Jesus] had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, 13 and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool. 14 For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy."** And so for us to go back to that would actually be an abomination for us, because it means that we would have rejected Christ's sacrifice for us.

Which leads us to our communion today. It is a reminder of His complete sacrifice for us. It's a reminder that our sins are removed, not just covered over. So as we partake today, let us do so in confidence that we are made righteous before God, because of His work on the Cross and at the Tomb.

Prayer

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