



## Fall 2013 Sermon Series: Bible on Trial

### The Charge:

- A. The Bible is merely a human book, not the message from any God.
- B. The Bible is not true, it contains errors, it is not historically reliable and it is not accurate.
- C. The Bible's teachings are often unscientific, unethical, socially regressive and immoral.

### The Plea: Not Guilty

### Introduction

We at FTC claim that the Bible is the written word of God. We claim that it is true, without error and that it is authoritative. Everything we teach here has as the Bible as its basis and authority. We claim that it is not merely a truth but that its message is **exclusively the** truth. We claim that the Bible (all 66 books) is not merely a word from God, but that it is **the** word from God. All our theological beliefs are founded on the Bible. Since the Bible is God's word, it is a worthy foundation for our beliefs and practices. If the Bible were not the word of God, it would be instructive, containing much history and wisdom, but it would not be authoritative. If the Bible were not the word of God, it would be like all other books, merely the word of men.

The purpose of this series, Bible on Trial, is to learn why we believe that the Bible is the word of God. Our study will cover eight crucial topics:

**Revelation** addresses the issue of *what God revealed*.

**Inspiration** addresses the issue of *how what God revealed (the Bible) was written and by whom*.

**Canonicity** addresses the issue of *which books are in the Bible*.

**Inerrancy** addresses the issue of the original inspired books *being without error*.

**Reliability** addresses the issue of *how accurate* our modern day Bibles are *to the original books*.

**Translation** addresses the issue of what it says *in another language*. "What does it say?"

**Interpretation** addresses the issue of meaning, and answers the question, "What does it mean?" "How should we interpret the Bible?" Literal, metaphorical, allegorical, etc? This topic is called **hermeneutics**.

**Application** addresses the issue of life response. "What am I going to do about it?"

*"How can we know that the Bibles we have today accurately reflect originals written 2000 years ago for the New Testament and up to 3400 years ago for the Old Testament? Communication is never perfect; people make mistakes. Copying errors are compounded with each successive generation, just like the message in the telephone game. Over 2000 years have passed; so it's anyone's guess what the original said. Plus, there are so many different translations and interpretations. Who knows what the Bible originally said!?"*

**The Bible makes claims about itself. The Bible requests to take the witness stand. It speaks and wants to be heard, questioned, cross-examined. So let's put the Bible on the trial.**

### Procedure for This Study

We will appeal to the Bible in our defense of its authority. This may appear to be circular reasoning, but think of this study as a trial. In a trial the accused is permitted to speak in his own defense. The defendant is permitted to testify in his own defense. While the defendant's testimony does not settle the matter, it is admissible as evidence and useful for evaluating the defendant's credibility. It is also fair game for the prosecution to call the defendant back to the stand for cross-examination. In our case, the defendant will not plead the 5<sup>th</sup>.

First, we need to clearly understand the claims. Then we need to weigh the evidence and come to some conclusions. In a court of law, you don't have to prove your point *beyond all shadow of doubt*. You do have to prove your point, or make your case, *beyond reasonable doubt*.

## Interpretation & Application – “What does it mean and what am I going to do about it?”

**Interpretation** addresses the issue of meaning, and answers the question, “What does it mean?”

“How should we interpret the Bible?” Literal, metaphorical, allegorical, etc? This topic is called **hermeneutics**.

**Application** addresses the issue of life response. “What am I going to do about it?”

### Literal Interpretation:

1. Following the ordinary and apparent sense of the words and the grammar, the passage means what it says in the basic, customary, socially designated meaning of the words.

Example: You describe your weekend to a friend.

Example: Words have meanings common to your cultural context.

2. The Bible should be interpreted the same way any written communication would be interpreted.
3. When you write something down or say something, you do not intend multiple meanings to be applied to what you have written or spoken. You intend that your words be understood in the plain sense in which you wrote or spoke them.

*The Bible is called revelation because it contains what God has reveled or made known to us. He communicated with us so that we would know certain things. He made it understandable to us for us. So when the plain sense makes common sense, seek no other sense.*

### Figures of Speech

1. The literal interpretation of Scripture does not overlook the fact that figures of speech are often used, as are symbols, types, and metaphors. As with all written texts, we interpret the Bible literally unless something in the text indicates that we should not.
2. When interpreting the Bible, we take into account the following:

#### Literary genre:

- Historical narrative
- Poetry
- Wisdom Literature
- Didactic material (teaching)
- Songs/Hymns (thanksgiving, praise, lament, imprecation, etc.)
- Prophecy
- Apocalyptic literature (describes the end times future in terms of the writer’s present or past)

Some say that the Bible contains mythological literature. Those who make the claim assign very specific verses and stories to this category because they have already decided that miracles are not possible. Having read mythological literature, I am certain that this genre of literature is not present in the Bible. The context of the supposed “mythological” parts reads like straight historical narrative, not at all like mythology.

**Words:** etymologically (origin), comparatively, culturally, cognate languages (similar languages)

**Grammar:** Figures of speech, metaphor, simile, hyperbole, personification, metonymy, irony, etc

**Context:** whole Bible, Old Testament or New, particular book, immediate context (before and after) author’s other writings in the Bible,

**Cultural and historical context** of the particular book, including geography. This is very important!

**Parallel passages** or cross references that contain similar words, phrases, or ideas.

### How to do theology:

1. When addressing an issue or topic, we take into account the entire testimony or witness of Scripture on that issue, as well as all of the above-mentioned factors.

2. Consider all the verses that speak to the issue then take a theological stand on that issue that allows all the verses to be true, while contradicting or ignoring none.
3. There is one correct interpretation (meaning) of a verse or passage, but there may be many appropriate applications.

A recent string of popular-level books written by the New Atheists have leveled the accusation that the God of the Old Testament is nothing but a bully, a murderer, and a cosmic child abuser.

“The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.”

— Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*

Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens (together called "the Four Horsemen of New Atheism")

*The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* by Sam Harris

*Letter to a Christian Nation*, which is a severe criticism of Christianity by Sam Harris

*The Root of All Evil?* television documentary by Richard Dawkins

*The God Delusion*, by Richard Dawkins (*New York Times* bestseller list for 51 weeks)

*Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* by Daniel C. Dennett

*God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* by Christopher Hitchens

4. How should we Christians respond to such accusations? And how are we to respond to alleged Old Testament atrocities, and how do we to reconcile the seemingly different natures of God portrayed in the two testaments?
  - ✓ Your God is arrogant and jealous and therefore not worthy of worship even if he did exist.
  - ✓ Your God is intolerant of other religions and beliefs...
  - ✓ Your God says it is a sin to eat shrimp or to wear clothing made of mixed materials...
  - ✓ Your God punishes people too harshly ...
  - ✓ Your God's treatment of Isaac (telling Abraham to kill and sacrifice him), is child abuse...
  - ✓ Your God is guilty of genocide and ethnic cleansing... (Deut. 20:16-18)
  - ✓ Your God is homophobic, even to point of requiring that all homosexuals be killed...(Lev. 18;22 and 20:13)
  - ✓ Your God endorses slavery...
  - ✓ Christianity causes violence....
  - ✓ Your God oppresses women with His laws and requirements....
    - Numbers 5 (What is with the witchcraft-like means to determine if a wife had committed adultery (the Law of Jealousy) in Numbers 5:11-31? How did that work, and was that fair?);
    - Lev. 12:1-8 (uncleanness after childbirth);
    - Deut. 25:5-10 (Levirate marriage If a woman's husband dies without having had a son, she must marry his brother and have intercourse with him until they have a son.)
    - God blessed men who had multiple wives, and concubines; and bride-price (paying the girl's father for her hand in marriage);
    - women as the spoils of war (Deut. 20:13-14; 21:10-14);
    - rape laws (Exodus 22:16-17, Deut. 22:23-29)

“Many people believe that the Bible is culturally regressive, outdated, and opposed to basic human rights. In their view, the Bible is no more than a fictional account, made up by a powerful religious elite, for the sake of controlling the population.”

## Message

Representing God accurately requires interpreting and applying His Word accurately.

### **Action Points:**

- If you'd like to talk about this topic, I would love to discuss it with you.  
jtalone@fardaletrinitychurch.org or 201-825-1823
- Sunday School is a great idea for everyone!
- Folds are a great way to get to know the Bible too!
- Read a book of the Bible this week. Pick a book, any book!