

# WHY THE BIBLE?

BIBLES

A 4-WEEK STUDY

# Why the Bible?: Four Small Group Studies

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# Contents

<b>Contents</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Lesson 1: The Book of Books</b>	<b>3</b>
Is the Bible important?	3
What the Bible says about itself	4
The Bible is inspired	4
<b>Lesson 2: The Bible is Trustworthy</b>	<b>6</b>
Literary Trustworthiness	6
Further Reading	11
<b>Lesson 3: The Bible Changes Lives</b>	<b>13</b>
The word of salvation	13
A manual for discipleship	14
<b>Lesson 4: The Bible Changes Nations</b>	<b>16</b>
Further Reading	19

# Why the Bible? Small Group Studies

## Lesson 1: The Book of Books

### *Is the Bible important?*

1. When you hear the word “Bible,” what thoughts come to your mind?
2. How important do you think the Bible is for society in general?
3. How important is the Bible in your personal life?

What would your life be like if there were no Bible?

### ***Just for Your Information***

*The most common designation for the book we are discussing is “Bible,” a word that comes from the Greek biblia and simply means “books.” Thus, the Bible is a collection of smaller books—in fact, 66 of them. The Bible is also often called “scripture” or the “scriptures,” a word meaning the “writings.” These 66 books are the sacred writings of the Judeo-Christian heritage. The Bible is also referred to as “the word of God,” because it is the revelation of God to us in written form.*

4. What would you say are the “big” questions in life? For example, what is the meaning or purpose of life? What are some others?

What big questions do you wonder about?

5. Do you think the Bible has answers to these big questions?  
Why did you answer as you did?

Can you think of verses where the Bible addresses life’s big questions?

### ***What the Bible says about itself***

6. Read John 17:17 and Psalm 18:30.

According to these verses, what can we say about the Bible?

Why is believing that the Bible is true important for us?

7. Consider these verses: John 3:33, John 8:26, Titus 1:2.

What do we learn about God from these verses?

How do you think this characteristic of how God affects our understanding of the Bible?

8. What did Jesus teach us in John 10:35? What do you think this means?

### ***The Bible is inspired***

9. Take a moment to consider 2 Timothy 3:16.

How does Paul describe the scriptures?

What do you think “inspired” means?

Read this verse in different translations. How is it rendered in various translations?

10. The word “inspired” in 2 Timothy 3:16 literally means “God-breathed” in the original Greek. How does that help us understand the nature of the Bible?

Consider the following: *Paul emphatically asserts that all of the writings of God’s book were breathed out by God himself. In other words, reading the Bible is like hearing God speak to you directly, breathing out his message in words you can understand.*

How do you react to this idea? How does it affect your view of the Bible?

11. Let's consider the process of inspiration. Many people think that inspiration means that God dictated the scriptures word by word. But the scriptures themselves describe a process that involves both God and humans working together to produce God's word.

This is a mysterious process that involved the Holy Spirit moving in the hearts and minds of the biblical writers so that while they were writing their own words in their own way, at the same time what they were writing were the actual words of God. The biblical writers wrote in their own writing styles, with their own personalities, yet they were directed by the Spirit in such a way that their writings were the actual God-breathed words of the Lord. Thus, the Bible is both a divine and a human book.

Think about this description of inspiration, and discuss it with your group.

12. The method of inspiration is briefly described in 2 Peter 1:21. Here the apostle says that the Bible was written by holy men of God as they were "carried along by the Holy Spirit." The verb "carried along" used here is actually a nautical term. It refers to how the wind fills the sails of a ship and moves it along. This gives us a picture of the Spirit of God moving on the minds and hearts of individuals, causing them to write the true words of God. Yet once again we notice that it is men who are writing the words, even as they are moved by the Spirit. The writing of the scriptures was a collaborative work, inspired by God and written by men. An amazing accomplishment.

In what way does this verse in 2 Peter affect your view of the scriptures?

Why do you think this idea of inspiration is important?

13. What difference does it make to you personally that the Bible is inspired?

## Lesson 2: The Bible Is Trustworthy

1. What is your personal belief about the Bible as a trustworthy and reliable document?
2. What makes you believe the Bible is reliable?

Or, what makes you doubt that the Bible is trustworthy?

3. Think about the above questions. Why are they so important for us to consider?

### *Literary trustworthiness*

In examining any document of ancient literature, there are certain standards and methods that are used to determine the authenticity and reliability of the writing. These include such things as the number and age of manuscripts available and the variations in the various manuscripts. As we shall see, when it comes to the standard literary tests used for any piece of ancient writing, the Bible measures up extremely well. Let's examine some of the evidence for the New Testament to illustrate what we are talking about.

4. The number of manuscripts

In ancient times there were no printing presses. All writing was done by hand. And all copies of any original document were made by hand. These handwritten writings are called manuscripts. We do not have the original documents, penned by the actual authors, for any ancient writings, the Bible included. However, the more manuscript copies we have of any piece of writing, the more confidence we can have in the accuracy and authenticity of the text. You see, when any book was copied and re-copied, then small variations could result. For example, in misspelled words. However, the more copies (manuscripts) you have, the more likely you can ascertain the original wording.

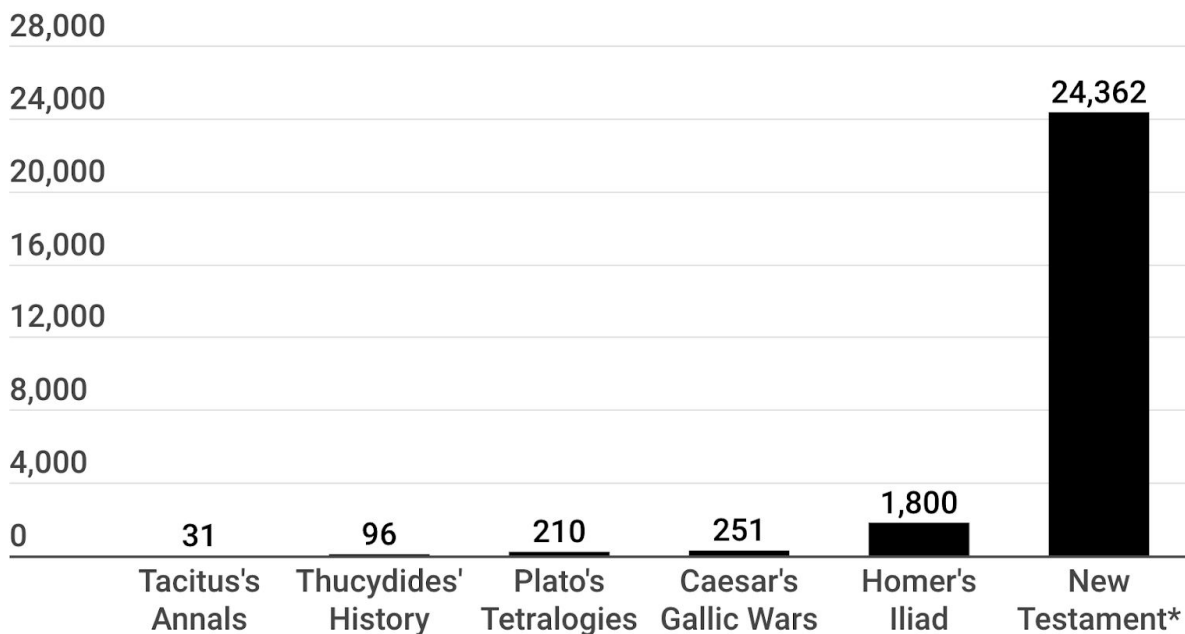
For example, suppose you had 100 manuscripts of a book. Now imagine that 92 copies said, "John was in a jazz band." The other 8 copies said, "John was in a jazz land." Which version of this sentence do you think was most likely the original text? It is reasonable to say that the

original text was the first version, and the second variation was due to a spelling error. It is in this way that we consider ancient books with multiple manuscripts, such as the Bible. The more manuscripts we have, the greater confidence in determining the original text.

With this in mind, consider the manuscript data for several ancient writings:

- Tacitus's *Annals* = 31 copies
- Thucydides' *History* = 96 copies
- Plato's *Tetralogies* = 210 copies
- Caesar's *Gallic Wars* = 251 copies
- Homer's *Iliad* = 1800 copies
- **New Testament = 5838 Greek copies + 18,524 early translations = 24,362 copies**

## Number of Manuscripts



\*5,838 Greek copies + 18,524 early translations

Now consider this: based on the manuscript evidence of these ancient works, historians believe that we have reasonably accurate texts of the writings of Plato, Caesar, Homer, and the others. Since this is true of these other ancient books, what do you think this says about the New Testament?



How does the manuscript evidence for the New Testament affect your view of the authenticity and reliability of the Bible?

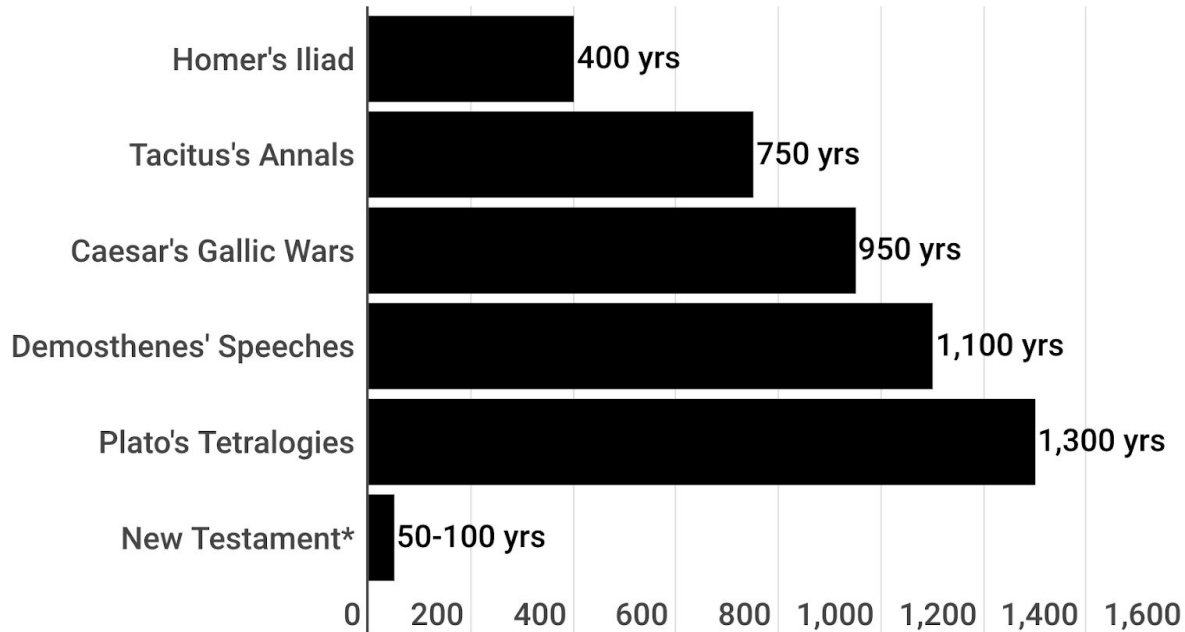
5. The age of the manuscripts

We have looked at the number of manuscripts (copies) of the New Testament. It's similar with the age of the manuscripts. Since we do not have original documents written by the authors themselves, the older the copies we have, the more confidence we can have in determining the original text. Here is how it works:

Suppose a book was written in the year A.D. 1000. Now imagine that there are 20 copies of this book. Three of these copies are from the year 1100. Five are from the year 1200. Twelve of the copies are from the year 1500 or later. Now if we want to use these copies to discover an accurate rendering of the text, as close to the original as possible, more weight is given to the copies from the year 1100. They are closer in time to the original, so there is less chance of errors or variations because these often result from manuscripts being copied and re-copied. Thus, the time span between the original date of composition and the earliest copies is very important—the smaller the timespan, the greater the accuracy in determining the wording of the original text. With this in mind, consider several ancient writings and the time span between their original composition and the earliest copies.

- Homer's *Iliad* = 400 years
- Tacitus's *Annals* = 750 years
- Caesar's *Gallic Wars* = 950 years
- Demosthenes' Speeches = 1100 years
- Plato's *Tetralogies* = 1300 years
- **New Testament** = **50–100 years**

## Years Between Original Writing and Earliest Surviving Manuscripts



\*range due to manuscripts of individual books in the NT

We see there is a great difference in the gap of time between other ancient books as compared with the New Testament. The New Testament manuscripts are much closer to the original time of writing. Again, this assures us of the reliability of the actual text of the scriptures.

Based on these (and other) standards for literary trustworthiness, we can say with assurance that the Bible's accuracy is truly of the highest order. This is why Kenneth Boa says, "The New Testament can be regarded as 99.5 percent pure, and the correct readings for the remaining 0.5 percent can often be ascertained with a fair degree of probability by the practice of textual criticism."<sup>1</sup> And what we can say of the New Testament is also true of the Old Testament. Meeting such high literary standards assures us that this book is to be trusted. So when it comes to its value for instruction in truth, or as a guide for moral and ethical living, it can be fully depended upon.

How do you react to this information?

How does this affect your confidence that the Bible is accurate, authentic, and reliable?

<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Boa. "How Accurate Is the Bible?" Found online at <https://kenboa.org/apologetics/how-accurate-is-the-bible/>

What difference does this information make in your personal walk with the Lord?

## 6. Historical accuracy

The Bible deals with many historical matters: people, places, and events. Although its historical accuracy is sometimes called into question, the fact is that the Bible has consistently and repeatedly proven its reliability regarding historical data. Archaeologists have discovered many places and sites recorded in the Bible—from Nineveh and Nazareth to Jericho and Sodom. Ancient artifacts have verified the existence of many individuals mentioned in the scriptures—from Ahab and Hezekiah to Jesus and Pilate. Events presented in the sacred text—whether battles, royal decrees, treaties, or natural disasters—have been verified numerous times. It has been said that archaeology and historical research do not prove the Bible is true, or that it is the written word of God. However, we should expect God’s word to be historically trustworthy. And this is, indeed, the case. Once again, the reliability of the Bible as history gives us confidence in reading it, and applying its teachings to our lives.

When you think about the Bible, do you think of it as an accurate historical document? Why or why not?

How would you respond to someone who says that the Bible is full of historical errors?

We can study the people and events of the scriptures, and learn valuable life lessons from them (see 1 Corinthians 10:6–11).

What are some biblical characters or events that you find helpful as examples of good or wrong behavior?

Can you think of specific times when a biblical story has been of benefit to you?

## 7. The right books

A popular question is whether the 66 books in the Bible are the right ones? Or were some left out? The issue here concerns what is called the canon of scripture. The word “canon” refers to a standard measure of acceptance—a yardstick, you might say. In other words, what books measure up to the standard of “true scripture,” the inspired word of God?

The process of identifying or recognizing what books should be included in the scriptures is known as canonization—which books measured up. The church recognized that these particular books had the stamp of divine authority on it. In establishing the canon of the New Testament, there were basically three criteria considered: First, was it a genuine work by an apostle or a close associate of an apostle? Second, was the book’s doctrine consistent with the teaching that had been handed down from Jesus himself and the apostles of the church? Third, was it generally acknowledged by the church universally as being the word of God. In applying these three yardsticks, there was an overarching consideration—did this book evidence divine authorship? In other words, God really determined the canon, which books are scripture, and we only acknowledge what God has already done.

By understanding the legitimacy of the biblical canon, we acknowledge that the Bible is truly the word of God. And when it comes to understanding correct teachings, or learning moral principles for how to live, we can have confidence that the Bible is trustworthy and reliable.

Why does it matter that we know that we have the right books in the Bible?

In your own words, describe the canonization process. Take time to discuss this with the group, and make sure everyone understands this concept.

How does this topic help you to have greater confidence in the Bible? How does this discussion make a difference in your personal life?

If you would like to study in more detail the accuracy and reliability of the Bible, we suggest the following resources:

- F. F. Bruce. *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* Eerdmans.

- Josh McDowell. *God Breathed: The Undeniable and Powerful Reliability of the Bible*. Barbour Publishing.
- Craig Blomberg. *Can We Still Believe the Bible?* Brazos Press.

## Lesson 3: The Bible Changes Lives

### *The word of salvation*

The great message of the Bible is that God loves us and has provided salvation for us through the gift of his Son, resulting in redemption from our sin and its consequences. This is the essence of the gospel. And this is why providing Bibles for people is so important, for it is one of God's primary instruments for bringing salvation to people.

1. Read 1 Peter 1:23.

According to this verse, what does God use to bring about the new birth experience?

What do we learn about the importance of the Bible from this?

2. Consider Romans 1:16.

In your own words, explain what we mean by "the gospel."

What do we learn about the gospel from this verse?

3. We know we are saved by faith (see Ephesians 2:8–9). According to Romans 10:17, where does faith come from?

If we want people to have faith in Christ, what do we need to do to help this happen?

4. Why do you think the Bible was written? List as many reasons as you can think of.

Read John 20:31. According to this verse, why did John write his gospel?

5. Do you know people who were saved because of the Bible? Or have you heard stories about such people? Please share some accounts of the Bible bringing people to Christ.

### *A manual for discipleship*

You could appropriately call the Bible a “manual for discipleship.” It is the scriptures that teach us how to effectively live for Christ, and to undertake his work in this world. For this reason, providing Bibles for Christ’s followers around the world is critical. Without the word, it will be difficult for them to mature spiritually. Let’s explore what how the Bible affects the life of a disciple.

6. Read each of the following verses. According to these scriptures, why is the Bible important in the life of a believer?

- Luke 4:4
  
- John 6:63
  
- 1 Peter 2:2
  
- Psalm 119:105
  
- Romans 15:4
  
- 2 Timothy 3:15–16
  
- Luke 11:28

7. The Bible is important for all disciples (followers) of Jesus. What do disciples learn to do based on these verses?

- 2 Timothy 2:15
- John 8:31
- James 1:22

8. One of the most valuable benefits that the Bible provides for us is spiritual cleansing and sanctification.

What is your understanding of what “sanctification” means?

How is sanctification accomplished in the life of a Christian?

Based on the following scriptures, what place does the Bible play in our sanctification?

- Psalm 119:9
- Psalm 119:11
- John 17:17
- John 15:3
- Psalm 1:1–2



## Lesson 4: The Bible Changes Nations

We have seen how the word of God is a powerful agent in changing the lives of individuals. But what we see throughout history is that as individual people are changed, then people groups are changed. Indeed, nations and kingdoms have been transformed by the gospel message. Let's explore this topic.

1. Read Matthew 24:14. (Note: the word "nations" refers to people groups, not countries.)

What promise does Jesus make in this verse?

What does this verse teach us about the importance of the gospel?

If we are serious about wanting Jesus to return, what should we be doing?

Based on this verse, why do you think the Bible is important?

2. Consider Romans 16:25–26.

What is the relationship between the gospel and the scriptures?

How would you apply this verse to your personal walk with Christ?

3. In Galatians 3:8 Paul refers to what happened to Abraham.

What promise did God give to Abraham?

How is this promise going to be fulfilled?

Where does the Bible fit in God's promise to Abraham?

4. The New Testament presents examples of the good news being proclaimed to various nations (people groups). Consider each of the following verses. What people group is being impacted by the scriptures?

- Acts 8:35
- Acts 10:1, 34–43
- Acts 17:1–4
- Acts 18:24–28
- 1 Corinthians 15:1–4

5. The result of the proclamation of the gospel and the teaching of biblical truth was a spiritual population explosion. Biblical preaching and teaching changed the Roman Empire, and then all of Western civilization. In the centuries that have followed, entire peoples and cultures have been transformed by the influence of the Bible.

Can you think of ways in which countries, kingdoms, nations, or cultures have been affected by the Bible?

6. Here are some ways the Bible has influenced societies and cultures. Read this list, and then answer the questions that follow.

- The Christian emphasis on compassion and loving others has resulted in the establishment of thousands of hospitals, charity organizations, relief agencies, homeless shelters, and humanitarian efforts.
- The biblical concept of humanity being created in God's image means that all persons have value. From this developed the concept of human rights, resulting in the widespread abolition of slavery, a rise in the status of women, recognition of the value of children, the honoring of marriage and family, and a commitment to the dignity of all humanity.

- Seeing the importance of reading the Bible itself, and valuing godly study, has caused the church to establish schools, reading programs, colleges, universities, and Bible schools around the world.
- Recognizing two biblical concepts—our God-given natural rights and the inherent sinfulness of mankind—has served as foundational underpinnings to democratic and republican systems of government.
- Biblical moral and legal codes, especially the Ten Commandments, are fundamental to modern systems of jurisprudence.
- Both science and the arts have benefited greatly from women and men operating with a biblical worldview.

How does reading this summary of the Bible's influence make you feel?

Review the list again. Can you think of specific examples for each point?

What does this teach us about the importance of the Bible being available to everyone?

What action steps can we take to ensure that the Bible continues to make a positive impact around the world?

7. Read Isaiah 55:11.

In your own words, what is this verse saying to us?

How do you respond to God's promise in this verse?

Discuss Matthew 24:14 in the light of Isaiah 55:11.

8. Consider this quote from John Piper:

“The cause of world missions is absolutely assured of success. It cannot fail. Is it not reasonable, then, that we pray *with great faith*, that we invest *with great confidence*, and that we go *with a sense of sure triumph*?”<sup>2</sup>

What can you do individually to be a part of what God is doing through world missions?

What can we do as a group (whether a small group, class, or church) to see that the promise of Matthew 24:14 is fulfilled?

*Summary:* As we have seen, the Bible contains the good news. It is the message of the Savior. Based on Matthew 24:14 we can expect that the gospel will go into all the world and be effective in changing nations. There is a pattern to this: as individuals are transformed by the gospel, then families and communities follow. The end result is entire cultures and societies experiencing transformation. However, it is up to us to do our part. We must go. We must send. We must invest. And we must ensure that God’s word is readily available to facilitate the fulfillment of Christ’s promise. Then the victory comes!

If you would like to study in more detail how the world has been and continues to be transformed by the scriptures, we suggest the following resources:

- Loren Cunningham. *The Book that Transforms Nations*. YWAM Publishing.
- D. James Kennedy and Jerry Newcombe. *What if the Bible had Never Been Written?* Nelson Books.
- Vishal Mangalwadi. *The Book That Made Your World: How the Bible Created the Soul of Western Civilization*. Thomas Nelson.

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<sup>2</sup> John Piper. “Jesus Will Finish the Mission.” Bible Gateway devotional. March 17, 2019. [www.biblegateway.com/devotional/john-piper/devotionals](http://www.biblegateway.com/devotional/john-piper/devotionals)