

Why Do **!** Believe?

1 Peter 3:15

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WARNING

**PROCEED
WITH
CAUTION!**

*Have you ever asked yourself the question, "Does God really exist?" Have you ever wondered why your parents, family members, or peers are able to believe in someone or something, whom you have never seen, with so much confidence? Have you ever thought to yourself, "Where does the Bible come from?" or "How do I know slave masters didn't create the Bible to support enslaving my ancestors?" Whether you've thought about these questions in the past or are wrestling with them today, this guide will serve as a navigation tool to address some of your toughest claims and reservations regarding your faith. The purpose of this guide is **NOT** to make you believe in the existence of God; The purpose is to equip you with historical and biblical resources so you can make an informed decision on your own. I challenge you to dig deep, think critically about your faith, and do not be afraid to ask the tough questions.*

**** At the end of each section, there are a set of reflection questions that will challenge you to dig deeper. Feel free to use the space provided to write down your answers or reflect as you progress throughout the packet ****



What is the Bible?

- The Bible is a compilation of books written by real people during real periods of time that tell the unified story of the ultimate hope, salvation, and life we have through Jesus Christ.
- The human goal of the Bible is to invite readers into the life of God and experience what He has to offer.
- The oldest writings of the prophets (the *Tanak*, which was the original Jewish Bible and consists of our Old Testament) and writings of the Apostles (which make up our New Testament), ultimately form the Bible as we know it today.
- The books of the Old Testament fall into 4 groups: Law (5 books), History (12 books), Poetry (5 books), and Prophecy (17 books).
- The books of the New Testament also contain 4 groups: Gospels (4 books), History (1 book) Letters (21 books) and Prophecy (1 book).
- Before printing existed, handwritten manuscripts were the only method of transcription of the Bible. The Old Testament books were written between 1400 BC and 400 BC and were collected and preserved by the Jewish priesthood. While we do not have the manuscripts written by the original authors, in 1947, Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered that were written around 100 BC and contain the oldest known record of the Hebrew Bible.
- New Testament manuscripts were written on papyrus and fragments of the earliest manuscripts were discovered in 1920 and still exist today.

Canonization

Old Testament

- The Old Testament is comprised of **39 Books** which were originally written in Hebrew.
- The original Jewish Bible was referred to by the acronym, *TaNak*. *Ta* = *Torah* which contained the books of "Law" that we know as *Genesis*, *Exodus*, *Leviticus*, *Numbers*, and *Deuteronomy*. *Na* = *Nevi'm* (prophets) which are writings from the known prophets and include *Isaiah*, *Jeremiah*, *Ezekiel*, *Hosea*, *Joel*, *Amos*, *Obadiah*, *Jonah*, *Micah*, *Nahum*, *Habakuk*, *Zephaniah*, *Haggai*, *Zachariah*, and *Malachi*. The *K* = *Ketu-vim* (writings) are comprised of the poetic and wisdom writings and include the remaining books that create the Old Testament. Together, these texts tell a story of how God was working to bring order and beauty out of the chaos of the world through our prophesied savior, Jesus.

New Testament

- The New Testament is comprised of **27 books** which were originally written in Greek.
- These books were written by Jesus' apostles and they contain the *Gospels* (*Matthew*, *Mark*, *Luke*, and *John*), a formed account of the spread of the Gospel outside of Israel that we know as the book of *Acts*, as well as a myriad of letters (*Romans* to *Jude*) written to different communities of believers who resided all around the world. The last book of this collection is the book of *Revelation*, and it is the only New Testament prophetic book.
- Their writings came together to be God-breathed and God-inspired because the people believed that God was speaking to His people through those texts alongside the scriptures of Israel.

The Bible is THE Ultimate Authority

- According to 2 Timothy 3:16-17, the Word of God, in its entirety, is God-breathed, God-inspired, and contains everything we need to be servants in God's kingdom. But what does that really mean?
- The more you read the Bible and gain a deeper understanding of the stories and things that happened to the people back then, the more you are able to put and see yourself in the text. You will grow to find that government, culture, traditions, and the times have changed, but the principles discussed by the Biblical authors still apply to what is going on in our world today.
- To better understand this, it's important to mention how the *Tanakh* was meditative literature. This means that Jewish people would read, meditate on, and apply its words to their everyday lives. As a result of this, they recognized that the inspiring nature of the Word of God is its ability to teach and instruct while simultaneously pruning and perfecting you as well.
- Out of all religious scripture, when one really takes the time to read, study, and meditate on the Word of God, it has the ability to change you from the inside out and change the world around you.

Fun Facts

- ⇒ 66 Books
- ⇒ 40+ Authors
- ⇒ Written over a 1,000 year time span
- ⇒ The Bible is the BEST selling book of all time!
- ⇒ Real. Relevant. Truth.

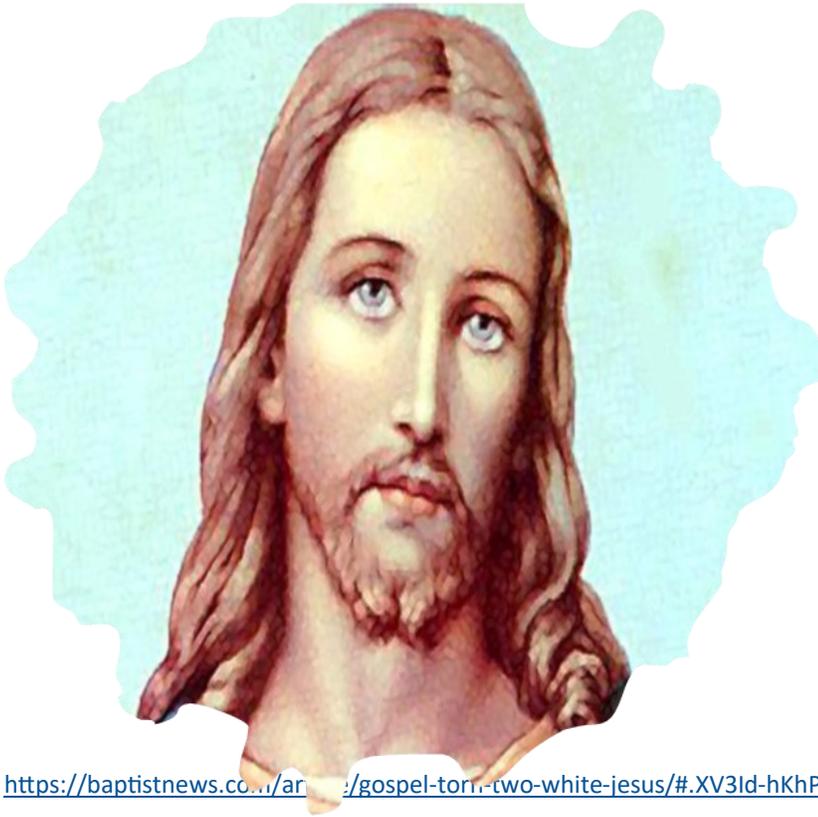
2 Timothy 3:16-17

**ALL SCRIPTURE IS GOD-BREATHED
AND IS USEFUL FOR TEACHING, REBUKING,
CORRECTING AND TRAINING IN RIGHTEOUSNESS,
SO THAT THE SERVANT OF GOD
MAY BE THOROUGHLY EQUIPPED
FOR EVERY GOOD WORK.**



Questions/Reflections

- What questions or reservations have you had when it comes to where the Bible comes from, what it is, and what its purpose serves?
- As it pertains to your faith, how important is it to know what the Bible is and where it comes from?
- Which group of writings (law, prophecy, history, poetry, letters) are you most familiar with?
- Which group of writings (law, prophecy, history, poetry, letters) are you least familiar with?
- When reading the Word of God, do you consider the culture, customs, and the appearance of the people in the text?

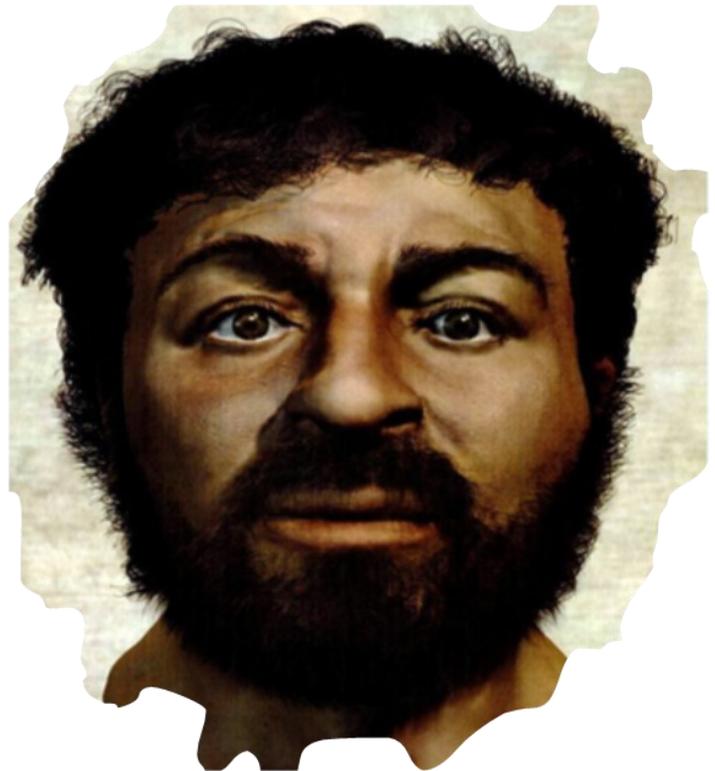


Is
Christianity
the White
Man's
Religion?

<https://baptistnews.com/articles/gospel-torn-two-white-jesus/#.XV3ld-hKhPY>

or

Debunking
Myths
&
Mis-
conceptions



Myths

- * The Bible is pro-slavery
- * Jesus was a white man with blue eyes and blonde hair
- * The Council of Nicaea established and created the divinity of Jesus
- * Christianity was introduced to Africans through the transatlantic slave trade

Truths

- * The Biblical passages that address slavery are referring to believers in a particular situation and time period. The Bible does not, nor has it ever, supported slavery as we know it today. Reference scriptures: Ephesians 6:5, Colossians 3:22, and 1 Peter 2:18
- * Jesus was a Jewish man born in Bethlehem and he had hair like wool, bronze skin, and fiery eyes. Given his place of birth and his biblical description, it is highly unlikely that Jesus looked as he has often been portrayed throughout history. Reference scripture: Revelation 1:14-15
- * The Council of Nicaea was convened in 325 AD to resolve the controversy of Arianism
- * Evidence dates the earliest presence of Christianity in Africa to the 2nd century

- Contrary to popular belief, Christianity was not manufactured and distributed by European men. Archeological evidence of a Christian burial ground in Tunisia proves that Christianity was present in North Africa in the second century, nearly 13 centuries before the transatlantic slave trade.
- Christianity was introduced to Africa by way of the apostle Mark who started the first theological school in Alexandria.



Acts 2:7-12 New International Version (NIV)

7 Utterly amazed, they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? 9 Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,^[a] 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome 11 (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" 12 Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?"



- Africans were present on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:7-10. This means that Africans were charter members of the inception of the church.
- People such as Tertullian, King Ezana of Axum, and several others were influential in the presence and continued growth of Christianity throughout Africa.



Questions/Reflections

- Have you ever heard someone say that Christianity is the white man's religion? If so, what evidence was presented to back this claim?
- What issues or concerns do you see coming from the inaccurate portrayal of Jesus throughout history?
- What value is there in knowing or understanding the cultural identity (e.g. race, skin color, culture, customs, etc.) of the people in the Bible?
- How can understanding the presence of Christianity in Africa support the cross-cultural nature of the Gospel?
- In one to three sentences, how would you describe who Jesus is and what He did for you and this world?

"Allow Me to Reintroduce Myself, My name is Jehovah!"



Jay-Z, aka "Hova," claimed his nickname back in 1993 when he was in the infancy stages of his career. People marveled at his lyrical genius and his ability to freely spit his rhymes off the top of his head without using a pen or paper. His peers dubbed him "Hova" because, in their opinion, they had never seen someone work so miraculously in the studio before. But what if I told you there was someone bigger and greater? Someone who isn't just the greatest of *his* time but the greatest of ALL time. Wouldn't you want to hear more about this person?

Well, I'd like to reintroduce to some and present to others a man who needs NO introduction. He came down from royalty to die for our sins. He brought forth a NEW way of life that has saved the lives of millions. His daddy is the best selling author of all time. His mother serves as a role model to women around the world. You've heard Him referenced as the King of all Kings, the Prince of Peace, and the bright and morning star. He's our lily in the valley. He's our light in this cold, dark world. He's our daily dose of SONshine and He's the reason why we still have breath in our bodies. Give it up for my Lord and your Savior, Jesus Christ!

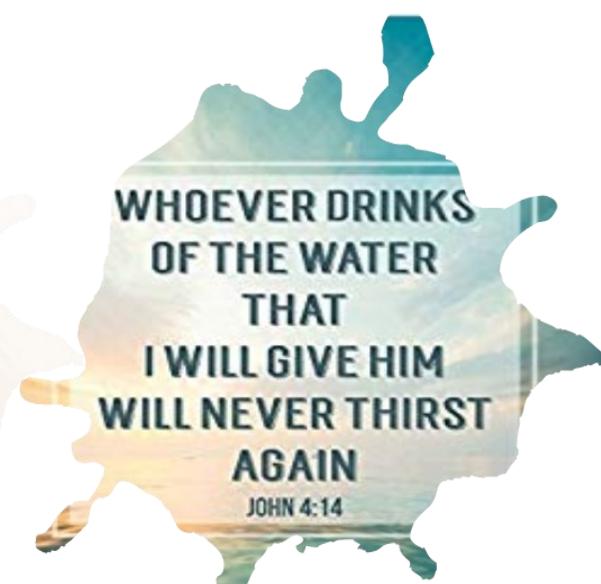
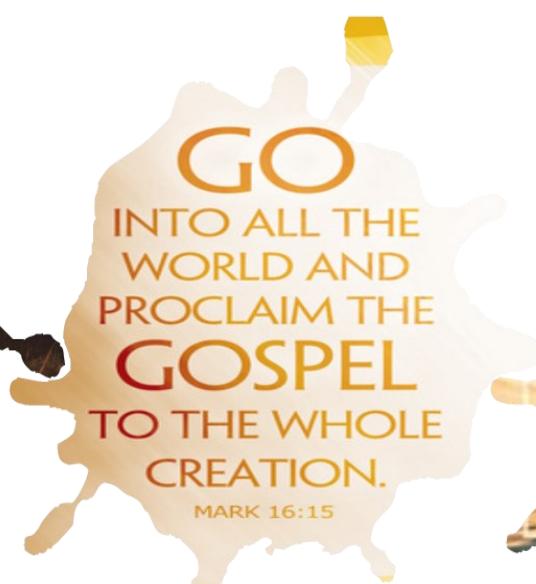
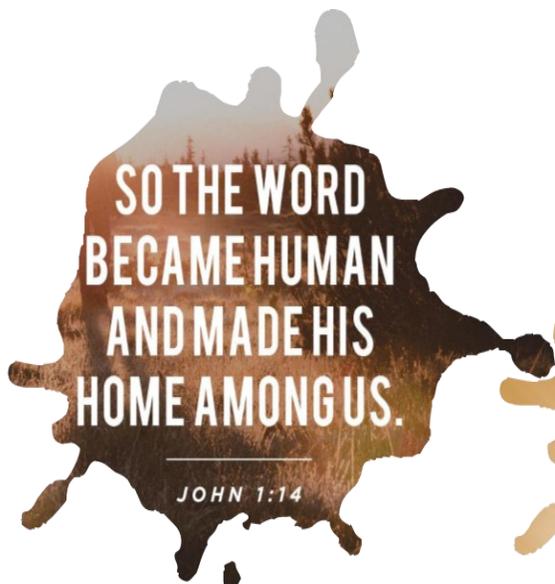
I AM
THE
BREAD
OF
life
JOHN 6:35

"I AM"

John 8:24

ALPHA
I AM THE ALPHA AND THE OMEGA
OMEGA
REVELATION 22:13

I AM THE
Light
OF THE WORLD.
JOHN 8:12



The Man

John 1:14

Jesus is both fully God (God, the Son) and fully human. The Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) tell us how Jesus, while He was walking on this Earth, was born to a virgin mother, Mary, and Joseph of Nazareth. Jesus lived 33 years and He experienced pain, hardships, and temptations the same way that we do today. Jesus has a human body (Luke 24:39), a human mind (Luke 2:52), and a human soul (Matthew 26:38). He possesses full humanity which allows Him to sympathize with our human struggles, hardships, limitations and our weaknesses.

The Mission

Mark 16:15

Luke 3:23 tells us how Jesus was around 30 years old when he began his ministry. In 3 short years, He radically redefined the purpose of life. Jesus mingled with the ostracized people in His society (Mark 2:15), He stood up for those who could not defend their selves (John 8:7), He showed love to His enemies (John 13:10-12), He forgave those who persecuted Him, (Luke 23:34) and He died for our sins (1 Peter 3:18). His life serves as the ultimate example of the life and mission we are to embody. And in Mark 16:15, Jesus commissions us to go out into the world and tell everyone about this good news that He has to offer.

The Promise

John 4:14

John 4:14 tells us, that when we make the decision to follow Christ, we are essentially choosing to drink from an everlasting well. A well that will never run dry and will produce a spring within us whose overflow will impact everyone around us. The promise that we have in making the decision to be a disciple of Christ is that we too will rise again. We will transcend from one life to the next where we will have a body that will never perish, we will never experience hurt or pain again, and we will live in glory with our Heavenly Father forever.

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Questions/Reflections

- Considering how we are called to be in relationship with Jesus Christ, how important is it to know who He is?
- What attributes of Jesus have been most relevant in your life and why?
- What are some practical ways that you can see *the mission* being played out in your life?
- Do you trust the promises of Christ? Do you believe that God will follow through on the promises He has made to us in the Bible?
- When you decide to truly follow Christ, what are some things that that decision will require of you? (e.g. What might you have to give up or take on?)

THE CHOICE IS YOURS

One of the beautiful things about life is that God has gifted us with free will. This means that we have the power to choose between good or evil, right or wrong, and self or others. God invites each of us to learn about Him, study His word, and experience His pure, unrelenting love. He does not coerce us to choose Him; Instead, He allows us the time, space, and opportunity to make an informed decision on whether or not we will choose to follow Him and His Word, or something else entirely. The Choice is Yours!

Resources

The Bible Project:

<https://www.youtube.com/thebibleproject>

Youversion Bible App

<https://www.youversion.com/the-bible-app/>

Blue Letter Bible:

<https://www.blueletterbible.org/>

The Urban Perspective:

<https://www.youtube.com/theurbanperspective>

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