

(10 Minutes) Introduction: Good morning, Church.

Good morning, Church!

This morning, I want us to look at this (hold up bible). Is the bible credible? Is the bible reliable, and is the bible relevant, these are questions that have been asked throughout history but are being asked by more people today especially by millennials, Gen Z, and Gen alpha.

We as Christ followers should be able to answer this question because, even though there is evidence that there is a God all around us, the claim of Christ as messiah comes directly from the recorded scriptures of the bible.

1. **So how do** we know that the bible is credible, reliable and relevant?

First, we test the historical documents of scripture using the same tests used for any historical document, these three test are (internal, external, and the bibliography test). In other sermons, Pastor Iosmar, has highlighted these concepts but in different ways, so let's look at them specifically. I am expressing information collected by men and women far more intelligent than I, and I also do not have the time to present all the evidence. So, I encourage you as a Christ follower to dig deeper for yourself so you can answer these questions confidently. First we look at the internal test:

The internal test examines each text to see if they are internally credible, answering the question 'Can we trust what the authors wrote?' We do this first with each text individually and then collectively with the whole bible. A few examples of internal test evidence are:

1. The Significance of the events in the lives of the disciples (easy to remember).
2. The External and Internal eyewitnesses (would have loved to discredit).
3. The authors died for their faith. (wouldn't die for a lie).

4. Jesus says, the Holy Spirit will recall to remembrance what happened. (Christian confidence).

Based on these and more evidence, historians hold that scripture is internally credible. Now let's look at the external test:

The external Test looks for contemporary historical sources to corroborate or support the statements of another document. In this case we ask, "What evidence exists outside the bible to support the trustworthy nature of the New Testament?" A few of the external test evidence are:

1. There is supporting evidence from other contemporary Christian writers. (Papias, Irenaeus)
2. There is supporting evidence from non-Christian contemporary writers. (A letter from Pliny the Younger, writings of Josephus, Tacitus, Lucian, and the Talmud) to name a few.
3. There is supporting evidence from archeology (Sir William Ramsey uses Luke to find historical sites, John 19 'the stone pavement', John 5 'pool of Bethesda') to name a few.

Based on these and more evidence, historians hold that scripture is externally reliable. Finally, let's look at the Bibliography test evidence:

The Bibliography test examines the credibility of textual transmission of historical documents. (meaning) In our case we examine the textual transmission and accuracy of the New Testament manuscripts.

1. The NT manuscripts outnumber all other historical documents at 5,600 Greek and up to 24,000 in all languages. (Fragments, Partials, and full).
2. The NT manuscripts also have earlier fragments and full documents than any other historical texts.
3. The NT manuscripts have far more citations in than any other historical documents.
4. The NT manuscripts were widely spread geographically.

5. The NT manuscripts are well preserved. (less than 1% of text disputed, mostly spelling, and no major theological doctrines).

Based on this evidence, historians hold that the transmission of the NT manuscripts is credible and reliable.

So based on the scientific testing method for historical documents, the bible is a credible and reliable historical document. So, when we are presented with the credibility and reliability of the NT and OT scriptures, we must ask ourselves if we believe them to be true. If you are still wondering or questioning if the bible is true, I would encourage you to see myself and/or Pastor Iosmar out and we would love to explore those questions more with you.

For this sermon though, I am going to move forward with the understanding that the bible is credible, reliable, and true as the word of God. As a result of the bible being credible, reliable, and true then it is relevant to all of us because it testifies to important truth about who the God of the universe is, who He cares about, and what He desires. It identifies and answers what humanities design is, purpose is, challenges are, need for redemption, and answers the age-old philosophical question, "What is the meaning of life?". If that is not relevant, I don't know what it.

You may be asking, why did we need to start there? The answer is because more often in Christian circles it has become acceptable to minimize scripture that we find difficult to hear or understand, elevate NT scripture over OT scripture, and look at scripture in pieces rather than a whole. We as Christians especially in America have the blessing to have access to all scriptures, and it is highly irresponsible to focus on some not all of scripture.

So, let's answer the question: How do I read scripture with a holistic approach? But before we do that let's pray.

Let's Pray:

(13 Minutes) Main Lesson:

1) **How do I read scripture** with a holistic approach?

Holistic is characterized by the belief that the parts of something are interconnected and can be explained only by reference to the whole. So, when we read the bible, we approach reading it in the same sense. Each of the 66 individual books, with all their chapters and verses, are interconnected. This means verses are interconnected to chapters, chapters to chapters, chapters to books, and books to books. That is why it is imperative for each believer to read the bible in its entirety, to know what God says collectively.

Jesus affirms this concept in **Matthew 5:17 – 20** when he says: (2 Slides)

“¹⁷ “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹ Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰ For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

The gospel is powerful, and the words of Jesus lift us up, but we must also be intellectually honest, here Jesus says, the OT, the law and prophets are not abolished, they are not done away with, rather they are fulfilled in Christ, The moral law in his perfect life, the ceremonial law in his priesthood, and the judicial law in his death. As we all know full well, this doesn't not mean we do not sin, need to repent, and receive God's forgiveness and redemption through the fulfillment of Christ.

When Jesus was in the wilderness being tempted by the devil, Jesus' response was to quote OT scripture saying, “It is Written, man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Duet 8:3), “It is written, he will command his angels concerning you” (Psalm 91:11-12), “It is written, you shall

worship the lord your God and him only shall you serve.” (duet 6:13 – 14). Jesus was constantly referring back to the OT.

Which means all scripture is interconnected, as we can see **from this image**. Let's take a moment look at this image. There is a line on the bottom of the page, this line has a dot for each chapter of the bible. The column descending from the dots shows how many verses are in that chapter, and the rainbow color half circles show all the cross-references found in scripture, totaling over 64,000.

As Jordan Peterson (a Christian theologian) says, the bible is the very first hyperlink document. From beginning to end, from creation to new creation, scripture is constantly cross referencing itself, across thousands of years of history, across language barriers, culture differences, and different writers, all to create a God-breathed message for humanity. Steven, that's all fine and good, but...

2) **Why should we** read the whole bible?

Reading the whole bible allows us to see the big picture of what God has done, what God is doing, and what God will do. Reading the whole bible also allows us to see the small details of how God is working throughout history including (your and my life). We read the whole bible because the whole bible is the word of God as seen in these scriptures: **2 timothy 3:16-17:**

¹⁶ All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God^[a] may be complete, equipped for every good work.

But also in the OT:

Psalm 119:105 - Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

Isaiah 55:11 - so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

Proverbs 30:5 – Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.

Some challenge that Paul's letters aren't scripture or don't have as much authority because he didn't walk with Jesus but:

1. Paul experiences Jesus Christ in a miraculous encounter on the road to Damascus.
2. Peter directly states that Paul's letters are scripture in 2 Peter 3:15 – 16.

¹⁵ And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, ¹⁶ as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.

Again, we see this claim in 1 Thessalonians 2:13,

¹³ And we also thank God constantly^[a] for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men^[b] but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.

We see from the testimony of Jesus and his disciples, that both the OT and the NT books are scripture, God-breathed, word of God. To reduce our understanding of the bible to only the NT, the direct words of Jesus, or easily understood scriptures is to reduce and minimize the words of God.

- 3) I like Jesus but not the Old Testament Response.

I have heard this so many times, in so many ways (I like Jesus, but not the OT God. I only read Jesus's words, Jesus didn't say that, The OT is irrelevant) The problem with that is:

1. We worship one God (The OT and NT same God)

God the Father, God the Holy Spirit, and God the Son were all in the beginning. To say I like Jesus, but I don't like the OT God, the OT scriptures, or refusing to read every verse, chapter, and book is being intellectually dishonest. Why? Because Jesus claims that the Father and He are One, and we believe in Jesus. Jesus being fully God is the power of the Cross, the hope of the OT scriptures fulfilled in the Cross and resurrection. God claims He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. So, this isn't an either-or option, it is a both-and. Remember Jesus didn't come to abolish or change what God had done in the OT, rather He came to completely fulfill what God had done in the OT.

I heard this illustration that is so powerful. It comes from a mathematician named **Peter Stoners and a book he wrote called science speaks**. Peter was an expert on probabilities, but He was also a Christian. So, Peter took the time to study the probability of the OT prophecies of a messiah coming true, and this is the result:

Peter stoner estimated that the probability of one man fulfilling just eight of the 360 prophecies of the messiah was 10^{17} .

Let us try to visualize this chance. If you mark one of ten tickets, and place all the tickets in a hat, and thoroughly stir them, and then ask a blindfolded man to draw one, his chance of getting the right ticket is one in ten. Suppose that we take 10^{17} silver dollars and lay them on the face of Texas. They will cover all the state two feet deep. Now mark one of these silver dollars and stir the whole mass thoroughly, all over the state. Blindfold a man and tell him that he can travel as far he wishes, but he must pick up one silver dollar and say that this is the right one. What chance would he have of getting the right one? Just the same chance that the prophets would have had of writing these eight prophecies and having them all come true in any one man, from their day to the present time, providing they wrote using their own wisdom.

Peter Stoner goes on to show the probabilities for fulfilling even more prophecies.

So, what does this highlight? It highlights that God was speaking and moving in the Old Testament. It highlights that The Old Testament is relevant for our lives. It highlights that the OT scriptures are as much the word of God as The New Testament, and that Jesus fulfills, quotes, and affirms the Old Testament scriptures in their entirety. That the hope of the NT is found in the truthfulness of the OT.

2. So, when we read 2 Timothy 3:16 – 17 like we did earlier:

We see that all scripture is accomplishing 4 things in the lives of each believer. So, when we limit our reading of scripture, we limit these intended outcomes in our lives:

1. Teaching: Divine Instruction.
2. Reproof: rebuke wrong behavior and correction.
3. restoration to proper condition.
4. and training in righteousness: positive training for holiness.

This is true for every scripture you have access to. If you live in a place that has limited access to scripture, you immerse yourself in what you have access to, thankfully and graciously we here in America have access to all scripture. When we read with a minimalistic view of the scripture, we impose our lives on scripture instead of imposing scripture on our lives and changing accordingly.

(2 Minutes) Call to Action:

So let me Challenge you to read all scripture. The part you like and the parts you don't, challenge yourself to see scripture through the Lense of a holistic viewpoint. Including all that God has to say through the OT and NT.

1. **Start by praying and** asking God to reveal to you his Word in its entirety, and ask for wisdom when reading, and for understanding.

2. Ask yourself: What are the most challenging, confusing, or disagreeable portion of scripture for you? Start there.
3. **Talk with fellow believers**: Bring your questions, wrestle with the text, and listen.
4. Finally allow God's word to instruct you, rebuke wrong behavior in your life and correct you, restore your relationship with God, and to train you in righteousness.

There was a pastor I watch, who had a sermon called Give me steak based on this scripture from **Hebrews 5:11-14** (2 slides) And I'll close with this:

¹¹ About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. ¹² For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, ¹³ for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

Saint John, my prayer for us is that we as a church may become a church who eats steak. A church who understands the basic principles so that we can pursue maturity in faith, practice our discernment, and distinguish good from evil.

Let's pray.