

36 Do Christians believe everything in the Bible is true?

Do Christians believe everything in the Bible is true? It depends what sort of truth you're talking about. Truth that's scientifically accurate? Historically precise? Or truth to get your life right into gear!

Christians believe in Jesus more than they believe in the Bible. It's the Bible's witness to Jesus and all he offers the human race that makes the difference. Saving truth matters more than scientific or historical truth, though all truth matters in the end. We Christians believe the Bible can't be mistaken as it presents the good news of Jesus to honest seekers of the truth. Why do we so believe? Because it's what the Bible says of itself in 1 Timothy 3:15 *'the sacred writings are able to instruct (us) for salvation through Jesus Christ'*.

How come Christ's cleansing of the Temple is at the start of John's Gospel but at the end of the other three Gospels. All can't be literally true. There's a mismatching, unless Jesus cleansed the Temple twice, which seems unlikely given its obvious consequence in his rejection by his people. The *timing* of that incident is part of its significance but Christians live with the ambiguity. It doesn't make the salvation Jesus came to bring false or wrong.

There's something of a hierarchy of truth when we look carefully at how the Bible impacts the human race. There's the truth about salvation, which always comes first, and then a whole series of teachings which have been interpreted differently in different ages. Take slavery or money lending or the leadership of women. In each case you need the Bible as a whole to interpret texts that seem at first sight to put a brake on developments that have seemed good to the Christian community like freeing slaves, allowing money lending or ordaining women.

Over time some truths stated in the Bible have faded in significance and others have come alive. Think of the text in Matthew 27:25 where Saint Matthew records the Jewish crowd shouting *'His blood be on us and on our children'*. In past ages this text was made the pretext for much cruelty towards Jews in Europe. Now it's Bible passages like the letter to the Romans that guide a more constructive engagement of Christians with Jews in the wake of the holocaust.

Or take another rather neglected text whose truth has become more and more important in recent years from Acts Chapter 1 verse 8: *You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses.* People have been rediscovering the truth hidden in this Bible verse and the associated passage about Pentecost over most of the last century up to when the Holy Spirit was known in a much weaker sense as the Holy Ghost.

Christians believe the Bible is true in the sense of its being trustworthy about the things that matter *eternally* – the relationship of human beings to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

To deny everything in the Bible is true seems irreverent. Yet since it's God's word in human words it's truth comes to us in different ways - sometimes very *round about* ways!

The battles in the book of Judges seem extremely unchristian but are often interpreted in the light of Christ as inspiring Christian warfare in the Lord's army against the world, the flesh and the devil.

The first and last books of the Bible present unique challenges. A six day account of creation seems falsified by modern day knowledge until you recall God made time as well as the world. What's a day to him? We can also ask whether the truth of Genesis would be less true if it's seen as poetry rather than prose? How could the creation of the world ever be satisfactorily described in any case? No one, by definition, save God, was there!

How do we see the truth of the Book of Revelation? We're not helped by the many splinter groups of Christians who build detailed predictions and projections from this extraordinary text. They forget how Jesus himself warned against prediction of the end of the world. God's victory over an unleashing of evil in the last days is the truth affirmed in the vivid imagery of the last book of the Bible, a real tonic to Christian hope.

Do Christians believe everything in the Bible is true? A more important question is 'Can you trust the Bible?' The answer is 'Yes, you can'. Its truth is in fact its trustworthiness proved in the lives of millions through the ages.