

Hopefully, reading the Bible will generate plenty of questions! I (Steve) will do my best to give 1 paragraph ideas and musings to the questions raised – but these will not be the ‘only’ answer in many cases (I am not omniscient, nor even anywhere near as knowledgeable as many others I know). I will also know some things better than others – for example, I am better acquainted with Marks gospel than the others and John’s writings more than Paul’s. Ask me about Jeremiah and Job and I’m virtually clueless, I’ll have to seek others thoughts! Some may disagree with my thoughts given as answers – that is absolutely fine, disagreeing respectfully is important (demonstrating this at college, one fellow tutor and I let students observe us debating the various ‘John’ writings in scripture – gospel, 3 letters and Revelation, the extent to which they may be the same or different authors – we disagree, but are not arrogant enough to proclaim that one of us is definitely right to the exclusion of the other). There are some things which it is definitely important to be sure and ‘right’ about – such as who Jesus is, and others where it is not really important (such as which John wrote Revelation). There are some things which it is important to be certain about. There are some other things where we do not have certainty.

So, following are my imperfect, human musings to the questions Bible School students have raised. If others have better, wiser, or even just alternative thoughts (but biblically based and thought through) - let me know, we may incorporate them.

I’ll get as far as I can with the questions in the time I have available – so do bear with me if one or two remain unanswered for a while.

Acts 8.

An angel spoke to Philip. Can we expect angels to speak to us?

We do see a reasonable number of people who claim to have seen or spoken with Angels (including at least 2 at RVC). So, whilst it would appear to be a rarity, it would appear to happen.

I (Steve) am aware of one person who seems to have this on a regular basis.

The book ‘*Angels: God’s secret agents*’ by Billy Graham contains some thoughts, teaching and several examples – well worth a read.

Video 1:1

‘Creation is not static’
In what ways / areas is God creating ?

Creation is dynamic – at the cosmic level, new stars are being created constantly. At the molecular level new cells are being created in plants and animals. At a personal level, our very existence is evidence of ongoing creation – the improbable miracle of reproduction.

Every time you heal a cut (cells), every time a baby is born, every time an acorn starts its journey into being an oak ... We see the dynamic of creation.

Acts 8

How did Phillip teleport?

Am I a really bad Christian if I can't teleport?

Phillip was suddenly taken away and found himself at Azotus (approx. 30 miles from Gaza). In short, we don't know how. We still, today, have very occasional stories of Christians being taken from/to somewhere.

Am I a bad Christian if I can't teleport definitely ... It would save lots of space in the church car park on Sundays if you and others could arrive by teleportation.

More seriously – there is a hint of the eschatological future here – our new bodies will have similarities to and differences from our current earthly bodies (similarities – note how in Revelation, John recognised people for who they are; and differences - read the last section of 1 Corinthians ch15). Jesus' resurrected body appeared in a room which had been locked (John 20). So, maybe we won't need South Western Trains (and their delays) in heaven.

What does 'apocalyptic' mean in its Biblical use/context?

Apocalypse / apocalyptic is regarding matters of the destruction of the world.

In Revelation ch21 we are told that there will be a new heaven and new earth – this one is temporary and will be destroyed. So, the apocalypse (or destruction) is one part of the eschatological (end times) happenings – others include the return of Jesus, the judgement of people and the establishment of the heavenly uninterrupted reign of God together with his people – the 'great multitude dressed in white' (Revelation chapter 7).

Apocalyptic writings are those which talk about these times – especially the books of Revelation and Daniel, but also some parts of Isaiah, Haggai and Zechariah.

1. What order should I read the books of the Bible in?

2. Where should I start reading the Bible?

There is no set order – all of the books have value and God can speak to you through every one.

Most people would suggest starting with a gospel. That can be:

Mark – the shortest (16 chapters), can be read in 2 hours, very action oriented and fast paced – telling the stories of what Jesus did.

Luke – longer and also has a follow up by the same author – the book of Acts. If you read Luke (24 chapters) then Acts (28 chapters) you hear the stories of Jesus and the early stories of his followers/church.

John – a different approach – he sets out to show theologically, logically and with reference to the old testament that Jesus was the messiah and was God himself walking on this planet. Some huge bombshells dropped throughout the 21 chapters.

However Anywhere is good. When my (Steve) father became a Christian as an adult (and military) he really dived into Daniel and Revelation with its cosmic warfare overtones – it met his needs (65 years on, they are still his favourite books).

1. How can we be sure that all the correct books are included in the canon?

Are we missing some?

2. Why 66 books? Why not 65/67? Who decided?

The 'canon' is the list/collection of books which we see as authoritative, or scripture – ie the Bible. The question is about why certain books are in the Bible and maybe there could be some others – why were some chosen and some not?

Today Protestants include 66 books of the Old and New Testament in the canon. Roman Catholics and some Eastern Orthodox churches accept additional writings known as the Apocrypha, a set of books not considered authoritative or divinely inspired in Judaism and Protestant Christianity. The word canon has a Semitic origin which means "reed," but has come to mean, "measuring rod." Various individuals and councils sought to apply a number of 'measuring rods' to discern which are authoritative as the word of God. It's not often that you'd find me recommending Wikipedia ... But the section on 'biblical canon' gives a history and shows the differences between the canons of Western, Eastern, Assyrian and Oriental churches. Andy recommends Wayne Grudem's 'Systematic Theology' which has a good chapter on the canon.

How do we discern whether a Bible book (or a word in the Bible) is prophecy or poetry?

The two are not mutually exclusive. Prophecy is about God speaking to people, usually future related. Easton's Bible dictionary defines biblical prophecy as "miracle of knowledge, a declaration or description or representation of something future, beyond the power of human sagacity to foresee, discern, or conjecture."

Sometimes we see this in prose format, sometimes in poetic format.

How can we point an enquirer in the right direction about Bible reading, when they don't have an understanding of the overarching story?

This will be dealt with in video clip 6.1 and even more in 6.7 towards the end of this term.

Did Jesus sin when he cursed the fig tree?

Short answer 'No'.

Longer answer, this is a fascinating passage in Matthew and Mark, the 2 versions being slightly different. I (Steve) am more familiar with Mark as I have studied it academically whereas I have not specifically studied Matthew's gospel ... So, in Mark ... Chapter 11. v12-14 Jesus sees the fig tree, it has no fruit, so he curses it. V15-19 Jesus clears the temple. V20-21, they disciples see the fig tree withered. This is a classic literary technique used especially by Mark and John where there are 2 bookends and a book, or a sandwich with 2 pieces of bread and the BLT in the middle. The bookends/bread are the same and point to, or relate to the book/BLT. Here the fig tree is the bookend/bread, pointing to Jesus actions in clearing the temple of those trading. No space here for detail ... But the fig tree is all about the Jews and them representing and presenting God to the nations (fig tree = Israel, an OT theme) – but they haven't done it – all leaves and no fruit. So, Jesus will change things. The temple was the physical the centre of Jewish faith and Jesus is replacing the temple with himself. The BLT in this story, v15-19 shows him starting to do that.

Based on the New testament, what time are we living on?

There is a theological concept referred to as Inaugurated eschatology this basically says that the kingdom of God, as prophesied in (e.g.) Isaiah 35, began at the first coming of Jesus and is now here, although it will not be fully consummated until His second coming. Inaugurated eschatology is also sometimes referred to as a “partially realised eschatology” and is associated with the “now and not yet” concept.

Inaugurated eschatology is the belief that we are now living in the end times (or latter days), which were inaugurated at the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. With the kingdom of God having been inaugurated by Jesus, the church has access to the kingdom promises right now. In contrast to this view is dispensational eschatology, which sees the kingdom of God as a separate, future era in which the promises made to Israel will be literally fulfilled on earth.

How do we teach children to read this? How much do they need to know (context)? Can they read it simply?

This will be dealt with in video clip 6.1 and even more in 6.6 towards the end of this term.

Will reading the Bible give you answers to your problems?

It depends. Ultimately, the Bible points to God and God is the ultimate bearer of our problems. Whether the Bible gives answers will depend on what the problem is. Exploring this in the context of a RVC homegroup/smallgroup would probably be the best option.

How can some people read the Bible and NOT encounter God?

In the same way that Herod, Pilate and many of the Jewish religious authorities encountered Jesus and did not embrace it as an encounter with God.

Other times people see just a small part of the scriptures and the Holy Spirit enlivens it to bring them into an encounter with God.

So, the best answer is probably 'we don't know' – sometimes the Holy Spirit drives a piece of the Bible in such a way that people are pointed through it to God; sometimes, even the same piece of scripture may have no effect on someone. As we don't know which will happen, our best answer is always to pray for the former!

Am I reading the Bible correctly?

Probably the best place to explore this question would be within a RVC homegroup / small group where we seek to explore the Bible together.

Why are Jewish people more blessed?

This will be dealt with in video clip 4.2 on the Bible School session on Monday 29th October and also (partially) in the readings we have over the half term break. It would be an advantage to do some of the priority 2 readings as well as the core (priority 1) readings during the half term break to explore this question.

How do we distinguish between the words inspired by the Holy Spirit and that of Paul ?

I wouldn't.

2 Peter 3.15-16 shows that Peter (and therefore almost certainly the early church) placed Paul's writings on the same level as the rest of the bible calling them 'scripture'.

If some of Paul's more 'interesting' comments in 1 Corinthians are the source of this question, I would completely recommend '*Women and Worship at Corinth: Paul's Rhetorical Arguments in 1 Corinthians*' by Lucy Peppiatt. £7.49 Kindle version on Amazon, 2nd hand books can be as low as £10.

As we need to get the metastory, we need to read the whole Bible, not just bits of it. How can we help each other with this more?

This Bible School aims to do exactly that.

Later (November) we look at how we can bring this to others.

If the Bible is not neutral ...
What does this mean for the
homosexual debate? What is
the answer?

If it was easy, the church would have a definitive and universally agreed answer by now; whereas the church has had its knickers in a twist for decades about the issue. This is true of the Vineyard movement as well as so many other church groups – Lonnie Frisbee was an instrumental part of the start of Vineyard alongside John Wimber, yet now seldom mentioned. He died of AIDS related complications in 1993.

The answers here are aiming to be one paragraph long ... So rather than being simplistic, maybe best refer to some recommended reading such as: *Straight & Narrow?: Compassion & Clarity in the Homosexuality Debate* by Schmidt; *The Only Way is Ethics. Part 1: Sex and Marriage* by Sean Docherty; *Same Sex Relationships* John Stott (only £4 from The Good Book Company). Also, almost anything by Nadia Bolz-Weber would be well worth reading – she pastors the ‘House for all saints and all sinners’, Denver – the only church I am aware of where City Bankers and Drag Queens minister and worship together! I would always advocate leaning towards compassion. For me, compassion triumphs over ‘being right’; and divisiveness, arrogance and judgementalism are almost always inadvisable.

Within minutes of writing the above answer; on BBC.co.uk was this article:

Didsbury church's radical change after gay girl's suicide

Four years ago, 14-year-old Lizzie Lowe took her own life because she did not believe she would be accepted as a Christian who was also gay.

Since then her church, St James in Didsbury, Manchester, and its sister church Emmanuel, has formally become an inclusive church - embracing everyone, regardless of gender, race, disability or sexuality.

Lizzie's parents believe embracing inclusion could help save the lives of other teenagers.

You can see this story in full on BBC Inside Out North West at 19:30 BST on BBC One on Monday 24 September

Eph 1:5
Were we pre-ordained to be
Christians?

People often set up a false juxtaposition of ‘freewill v predestination’. Churches and theologians have argued vociferously on the issue and in many cases fallen out of fellowship with each other as a result. The biblical answer is ‘both’.

Did the God who transcends time know, before the creation of the world that you would be one of his followers? – if he did not, he is not all knowing! Did he pre-ordain that you were to be adopted into his family? – that’s what Ephesians 1.5 unequivocally says.

However, if that was the whole answer, there would be no need to evangelism, no Alpha courses – pre-determined people would automatically find Christ.

For your own life – is following Christ a choice you did make and constantly make every day?

We have both ‘predestination’ and ‘freewill’ in the scriptures – the error is to set them as mutually exclusive alternatives.

Eph 1:9 “The mystery”
What is “the mystery” Is it the
revelation of God’s plan
through Jesus? There must be
even more to this awesome
word?

Yet to answer

Psalm 106.
Moses & Phinehas intervened
and the Lord didn’t destroy the
people – did they change God’s
mind?

Yet to answer

If Christ came to fulfil the law;
should we therefore live by the
law or fulfil it too?

Yet to answer