

WHAT DID JESUS BELIEVE ABOUT SCRIPTURE?

There are many perspectives on the nature of scripture and therefore we may be inclined to conclude that no single view is definitive. However, for Christians we are obliged to stand with Jesus in all matters. So what does he say about scripture?

Premise:

A very high number of Christians affirm their personal belief that Jesus Christ is God's unique Son and that he died for us. From this core clarity of belief we can already draw a number of helpful conclusions. This confidence in our reconciliation through God the Son must naturally depend on the truthful testimony of those who first told the world about him. Therefore we must have already decided that we regard the writings of the Apostles, concerning Jesus himself, to be trustworthy and a true account of God's revelation of his Son. This must also indicate that we are likely to have a 'high view' of the recording of Jesus' own words in scripture - regarding these written words as the faithful and authentic words and teachings of the Son of God. In other words; we really believe that the record in the four gospels is what Jesus said. Indeed, we have a very specific claim in

Mark, Matthew and Luke that Jesus himself regarded his own words as eternal: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away." (Mk. 13:31, Matt. 24:35, Luke 21:33). If these three gospel writers faithfully recorded this highly memorable phrase, said in the hearing of many eye witnesses, and we regard Jesus as God's Son, then we can be very confident that we do have his true words and teaching. Additionally, the common forms of Christ's teaching were given intentionally by Jesus in particular forms (memorable phrases, parables, Sermon on the Mount) designed to be memorised and passed on by disciples- which explains why we have so many of his words in the four gospels. The comparison of similar passages in different gospels show that these authors hold to the sharp and clear meaning of his teaching even when the word order is slightly different. The original disciples were so devoted to him that, like good Jewish students, they didn't lose a single drop of his core teaching. The Apostle's teaching (Acts 2:42) was no doubt a clear repetition of the words of Jesus. So with a high degree of confidence we can straightforwardly assert that we have the words of Jesus Christ.

So what did he say about scripture?

In the light of these conclusions, one initial point to make regarding the authority of scripture concerns Christ's own view of the bible. If Jesus himself expressed a view and approach to scripture, and we regard his recorded words as trustworthy, then we can take a first step towards understanding the authority of the bible. Here are eight quotes from Jesus to carefully study: it is important to let the text simply say what it says (exegesis), and not impose our own views (eisegesis).

1. When Jesus was tempted by the devil in the wilderness (Lk.4:1-13) he effectively defends himself (whilst under spiritual attack) by quoting scripture repeatedly (Deuteronomy). By doing so three times he underlines his confidence in the power of scripture. He didn't use his own recently anointed authority to rebut Satan. So Jesus clearly regarded the written words of the Hebrew bible (penned by a human) as having God's authority over powerful evil influences.

2. In John 10: 22-38, Jesus is recorded in dialogue with his critics. In verse 35 he makes an aside, “And scripture cannot be broken (or *set aside*)”. Jesus was showing that, if you use scripture correctly, your argument is true. He also demonstrates in this passage that scripture can be accurately interpreted and explained. He was clearly saying that scripture must never be ignored as it is the touchstone of truth.
3. In Matt. 22:29 Jesus was again being challenged by religious leaders (Sadducees in this instance) and he said ‘You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God.’ After this exchange it stated that no one dared ask him any more questions (v46). We can conclude that Jesus had a high view of Hebrew scripture - rightly understood- regarding it as the deciding word on all disputable matters. He called out wrong views of scripture, and corrected mistaken interpretations. For Jesus the clear understanding (*eidō* - εἶδω) of scripture was essential in resolving disputable matters.
4. In Matt. 5:19 Jesus said “Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practises and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” This was a sharp challenge to any inclination to alter, dismiss or ignore (*luō* - λύω) any single command given in the Law and the Prophets. The consequences of doing so were (according to Jesus) severe. (*Questions around what specific scriptures Jesus ‘fulfilled’ in his three year ministry and at the cross will also need to be explained to properly understand this verse.*)
5. In Mark 14:49 Jesus said, “Every day I was with you, teaching in the temple courts, and you did not arrest me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled’ (*plēroō* - πληρώ). In Matt. 26:55-56 it says “In that hour Jesus said to the crowd, ‘Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I sat in the temple courts teaching, and you did not arrest me. But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled...’ For Jesus, his life and ministry was shaped and designed to specifically fulfil the teaching and narrative of the Hebrew bible. He lived in obedience to the clear directives and *completion* of the scriptures.
6. Yet in John 5:19 it says, “Jesus gave them this answer: ‘Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.’” Jesus explicitly said that he ONLY (*tis* - τις) does what he sees his Father doing. Therefore, given the previous verses about ‘fulfilling scripture’, to Jesus, ‘doing what his Father was doing’ was the same to him as ‘fulfilling scripture’. He saw the Old Testament text as the same as his Father’s voice.
7. In Luke 24:25-27 it says, “He said to them, ‘How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?’ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.” He followed this up in v44-48, “He said to them, ‘This is what I told you while I was

still with you: everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.’ Then he opened their minds so they could understand (*suniēmi* - συνίημι) the Scriptures. He told them, ‘This is what is written: the Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. “ Jesus criticised his followers (calling them foolish and slow) for not understanding and believing the scriptures. He identified himself and his completed mission in ALL the books of the Hebrew bible. As they were so slow, Jesus graciously opened their minds to clearly understand scripture like he understood it. He fully expected his followers to have the same view of scripture as himself.

8. In John 16:12-15 Jesus said, “ ‘I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all (*pas* - πᾶς) the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you.’ J.I Packer comments on this by saying “He had promised the Twelve that the Spirit should come to teach them what in His own earthly ministry he had left unsaid, and He kept His promise; so that the apostolic teaching was in reality the complete and final version of His own.” So, if anyone regards Jesus’ words as utterly reliable, we can have great confidence that he actually fulfilled what he promised - by providing inspired Apostles and authors who wrote the text of the New Testament through the Spirit.

These above texts are extraordinarily clear in revealing Jesus Christ’s view of scripture. To him, the Hebrew bible and New Testament (written by humans) were (miraculously) the powerful, authoritative Word of God. Properly understood (and Jesus showed that they were understandable) they are the final word on disputable matters.

When Andrew Wilson debated with Steve Chalke about the nature of the Word of God, he wrote in an article, “...Many of the biblical passages that people find the most troubling, and the most likely to be ‘mistaken’, are affirmed willy-nilly by Jesus and the apostles with complete disregard for any subsequent controversies that might emerge. Creation from nothing, the origin of death among humans, the murder of Abel by Cain, a cataclysmic flood of judgement, the righteous judgement of Sodom and Gomorrah, the Mosaic origin of the Torah, manna from heaven, the reliability of Deuteronomy, the driving out of the Canaanites, Isaiah’s authorship of the servant songs, and so on – it’s almost as if Jesus and his followers went out of their way to validate all of the most awkward apologetic curveballs in the Old Testament just to make life difficult for post- Enlightenment Western interpreters. Read through the Gospels, and you won’t find even a hint that Jesus thought these events didn’t happen; quite the opposite, in fact.” (<https://www.premierchristianity.com/Past-Issues/2014/April-2014/Is-the-Bible-the-word-of-God>)

So, IF we believe that Jesus is God and died for us, and trust the accounts which say this, and consequently trust the carefully recorded teachings of Jesus (given through the apostolic writers) , then we MUST also harmonise our view with Jesus’ view of scripture, over and above all other perspectives. (Conversely, if we doubt that the bible is fully God’s

authoritative word, then sadly we cannot be truly confident in Christ's divinity or his forgiveness, or any of the core truths of Christianity.)

Q: Do you agree or disagree that Jesus had a very clear view of scripture, regarding it as the understandable Word of God? Do you agree that we need to pursue his view as the true view?

Texts listed:

"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away." (Mk. 13:31, Matt. 24:35, Luke 21:33).

Temptation Lk.4:1-13

Verse 35 (scripture cannot be broken) - John 10: 22-38

You are in error - Matt. 22:29

Least in the Kingdom of heaven - Matt. 5:19

Lives to fulfill scriptures- Mark 14:49, Matt. 26:55-56

Yet; 'Only does what the Father is doing'- John 5:19

Emmaus teaching- Luke 24:25-27 , 44-48

Future inspiration- John 16:12-15