

Why Is the Bible Important?

Rivne Lecture #2

Introduction: There is no question that the Bible has had and continues to have a profound influence on millions of people. The question is, why? What makes this ancient book so appealing and so influential? Even in our technological age, why is it that so many people still find the Bible meaningful and relevant? In this presentation I would like to offer four reasons why I believe this is so. There are many others, I am sure, that could be suggested, but these are what I regard as some of the most significant reasons why the Bible continues to be important.

1. First, the Bible offers a reasonable and comprehensive explanation of the universe in which we live.

- A. Psalms 19 says, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky proclaims His handiwork."
The psalmist assumes, of course, the truthfulness of the declaration of Genesis 1 and 2 that everything that exists has been created by God.
- B. I am well aware (as you are) that this view of the origins of the universe is now widely rejected, and that it has been replaced by materialist theories of a purely accidental beginning of all things, starting with the cosmic "Big Bang."
- C. Still, I find the biblical account to be more reasonable and compelling for the following reasons:
 - (1) Even many materialists acknowledge that the universe appears to have been designed, yet continue to deny the presence of a Designer. They will often say such things as, "Nature has designed. . . ." or, "Evolution planned. . . ." With so much evidence pointing toward design (such as the precise distance of earth from the sun so as to make life on our planet possible, which is statistically highly improbable), why is it easier to speak of the universe being the result of chance rather than the work of God?
 - (2) Materialist theories really don't explain origins at all. They only describe a process that supposedly took place *after* the beginning of the universe. A renowned physicist who visited our university a few years ago gave a very helpful and reasonable explanation of the "Big Bang." But when he addressed the question of "What was before the Big Bang?", he acknowledged that "We simply don't know," and that physics can offer no suggestion at all in answer to the question of ultimate origins. Yet everyone acknowledges that "nothing comes from nothing," so where did the molecules, gasses, and energy required for the Big Bang come from? If there was such an event as the Big Bang, it seems there must also have been a "Big Banger."
 - (3) Concerning human origins, evolutionary theories (and they *are* only theories, regardless of claims to the contrary) leave many unexplained gaps. For example, how do species manage to survive while they are evolving the adaptations necessary for their survival, a process which, by any evolutionary time-table, must take millions of years?
 - a. For example, the Emperor Penguins of Antarctica have a unique means of providing for the survival of their unborn chicks. Once the female lays the egg, she passes it from her feet to the top of the feet of the male. Male

emperor penguins have a large flap of skin and feathers which comes down to their feet, and once the egg is deposited, they quickly cover it with the insulated covering that keeps the chick alive even during the minus-fifty degree cold until time for it to hatch. If this is merely a chance evolutionary adaptation, how did the species survive until the penguins (a) evolved the necessary covering and (b) learned to deposit their eggs there in order to incubate them?

b. Another example: In the case of vertebrate animals, two specimens of each species had to have evolved in exactly the same way and arrive at sexual maturity at the same time – and one had to be a male and one a female. Then the process must be repeated for each stage of evolution from species to species. The odds against this happening are astronomical. It seems to me that it makes far more sense to believe that “God made them male and female,” as the book of Genesis claims.

(4) Given these realities, I must concur with the title of a book by Norman Geisler and Frank Turek: *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist*.

2. Second, the Bible continues to be relevant and important because it explains human existence as we all experience it.

- A. In spite of our efforts and hopes that humans will eventually evolve beyond jealousy, violence, manipulation, greed, and warfare, we don't seem to be any nearer to such perfection than we were thousands of years ago. Our technological advancements promise to make us better people, but somehow this promised improvement in humanity never materializes. Why is this?
- B. The Bible says it's because we are inherently sinful, morally flawed, in spite of our best efforts. “All have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God,” the apostle Paul declared. And our experiences prove that to be correct.
- C. Likewise, we are all subject to death. In spite of the advances in medical science, death is still the inevitable universal outcome. Why? Because our moral failures also corrupt us physically, so that without a solution to the one problem, we have no answer to the other.
- D. In addition, there are universal longings within all of us that simply will not go away, and yet are never fully satisfied.
 - (1) For example, we share universally a profound sense of a need for justice. One of the first things we learn to say as children is, “That's not fair!” All over the world there are people who long for justice but who are forced to live under oppression politically, socially, and economically. The problem is, no one has ever yet succeeded in establishing a perfectly just society. True justice is always a fleeting illusion.
 - (2) We could also add, as does British theologian N.T. Wright in his book *Simply Christian*, our hunger for relationships, our appreciation of beauty, and our never-ending quest for some form of spirituality. These are what Wright calls “echoes of a voice” that calls us to a higher form of existence, one we seem incapable of creating for ourselves. They seem to be the voice of God resident within us, a voice that cannot be completely

eradicated no matter how far from God's image we may fall. If these realities are not the voice of our Creator, how *do* we explain such universal longings and experiences?

E. Not only does the Bible reflect all of these longings, but it points to a satisfaction of them that can come only from outside ourselves, from the Creator who made us, and who knows how to draw us to Himself.

3. Third, the Bible continues to be important and influential because it teaches a positive way of life that benefits individuals as well as society as a whole.

- A. Along with materialist philosophy usually goes the rejection of all moral and ethical absolutes. That is, since there is no higher power to decree what is right or wrong, good or bad, nothing can be said to be either absolutely good or absolutely evil. Instead, morality depends on either the agreed standards of society or individual preferences. Usually it is the latter, so that the individual becomes the sole arbiter of what is right and wrong.
- B. One major problem with this approach is, it makes all moral distinctions impossible. For example, no one can say that there is any difference morally between Adolf Hitler and Mother Teresa. Neither is "evil" and neither is "good."
- C. Most of you have probably never heard of Arland D. Williams, Jr. But on January 13, 1982, Arland Williams became known as "the man in the water." He was a passenger aboard Air Florida flight 90 when it slammed into the 14th Street Bridge during a snow storm in Washington, D.C., less than a two hours' drive from where I live in Virginia. Many were killed instantly, but many found themselves struggling for life in the icy water as they waited for rescuers to arrive. As rescue lines were thrown to the survivors, Arland Williams repeatedly passed them to other people rather than hold on and be rescued himself. By the time another line was thrown, Mr. Williams had drowned. He was later hailed as a hero by those whose lives he helped save and by those who were trying to save them. But if unbelievers are right, if there is no such thing as right and wrong, then Arland Williams was not a hero, he was a fool. There is no inherent reason why his sacrifice was better than if he had shoved someone else away from the rescue line and caused them to drown, unless there are moral absolutes.
- D. In practical terms, no one actually believes there is no right or wrong or lives consistently by such a standard. Everyone draws the line between good and evil somewhere, usually when the wrong is done to *them*, if not before.
- E. In place of such hopeless skepticism, the Bible offers the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount, both of which teach moral and ethical standards that, while difficult to achieve, point us in a higher direction than mere self-determinism.
- (1) For example, the Ten Commandments forbid killing, stealing from one another, or lying about one's neighbor. If observed, such rules have to help make a stronger society.
 - (2) Likewise, the Sermon on the Mount encourages the control of anger, lust, and greed, all of which likewise will benefit any individual or society, as do Jesus' instructions to love and forgive one another, even our enemies.
- F. Question: Who would NOT want to live in a society where parents were respected, where killing and lying and stealing were forbidden, and where human relationships were characterized by love and forgiveness and purity of heart? This is the kind of society which the Scriptures seek to

create.

4. Finally, the Bible is important because it contains the answer to the universal problem of death.

- A. According to the Bible, death is not a “natural” part of human existence, but is the result of sin. If that is true, then what we need is not simply a set of moral guidelines (as important as they are), but a remedy for sin.
- B. The story told in the Bible is the story of sin’s entry into the world through human disobedience, but much more, of God bringing about the remedy for sin through the coming of Jesus Christ into the world.
- C. In His death on the cross, Christ died “for our sins,” the Bible says, which suggests that He died because of our sins and on behalf of our sins. He bore the punishment for sin in Himself, in order that we might be set free from bondage to it. “He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness,” the great apostle Peter wrote. And not only did He die for our sins, but also, as the apostle Paul says, “to deliver us from this present evil age.” There’s no doubt that the world is evil, & we need to be rescued from it so that we can enjoy what Jesus called “abundant life” – life to the fullest, life as it was meant to be.
- D. Just as the death of Christ makes possible the removal of our sins, so the resurrection of Christ makes possible the reversal of death for all humanity.
- E. So the Bible speaks of a general resurrection of all the dead, followed by a judgment based on our response to Jesus and the kind of lives we have chosen to live in light of His teachings.
- F. This great reversal of death is the result, not of our own merit or efforts, but is due to the loving and forgiving nature of God, who longs to set us free from the bondage to sin and death that we all experience.
- G. Without such a remedy for death, the most that materialists can offer is belief in annihilation, which is anything but a hopeful concept. The only answer to our desire to live is life – eternal life.

Conclusion: So the Bible offers a comprehensive understanding of the universe, of life as we know it here on earth, and even of eternity. It’s no wonder that so many millions continue to find the Bible not only relevant and meaningful, but a source of hope and inspiration in the midst of a dark and often hopeless world. I would encourage you to read it so it can become equally important for you.

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