

Can We Take the Bible Seriously? Dr. Nijay Gupta

Key Text: John 6:60-68: “You have the words of eternal life”
Theme: Bible is God’s Transforming Message for Our Daily Lives
Series Tie-in: There are good reasons to trust the Bible as “true”

I. Introduction with John 6:60-68:

On hearing it, many of his disciples said, “This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?”

Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, “Does this offend you? Then what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe.”

For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him.

He went on to say, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them.”

From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

“You do not want to leave too, do you?” Jesus asked the Twelve.

Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.

My undergrad major was public relations. When I read the Gospels, sometimes I think about what it would have been like to have been Jesus’ PR agent. A good PR agent helps you avoid public scandals and concerns. And Jesus—He was a popular guy, but He sometimes seemed to *INVITE* controversy. That’s putting it mildly. I’m not going to make comparisons to Elon Musk, or Charlie Sheen (remember that guy?), but have you thought about some of the seemingly unusual choices that Jesus made, where people stopped following him? Or in today’s language: HIS RATINGS DROPPED.

Let me set up John 6.

John 5: Jesus heals on the Sabbath

PR: *Good job, Jesus. People are impressed, but Ix-nay, on the Ork-way, on the Abbath-Say, if you know what I mean...After all, some people are trying to kill you. Just sayin.*

John 6:1 Feeding the 5k

5 loaves, 2 fish: and there were leftovers.

PR: *This is good. Keep it up. We're getting a lot of positive engagement—people like free food.*

John 6:16: Jesus walks on water

PR: *That's pretty cool; let's get a crowd for it next time, can we? Or at least a GoPro*

John 6:35: Bread of Life teaching: "I am the bread of life"

PR: *Okay, they liked the bread, keep 'em coming for more.*

[some are upset by Jesus] Jesus: Stop complaining, if you eat of me, you will live forever

PR: *HUH? Can you clarify?*

John 6:52: to clarify, Jesus says: "eat my flesh and drink my blood"

PR: *Ummmm? ??*

John 6:66: "Many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him"

PR: *That's it, I'm out...*

II. The Problem: The Bible can be confusing and offensive

The Bible is a bestseller: but it is also controversial.

(1) Mark Twain: *A Classic is a book everyone owns and no one reads* (War and Peace)

WHY?

(1) Antiquated, racist, sexist, oppressive, violent

(2) Like Jesus' bread speech, the Bible overall can be **confusing** and **offensive**—sometimes both and the same time! **MANY**: hundreds?

BUT: Words of Life: *to some*

John 6:67 "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve.

John 6:68 Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God."

III. My story

Genesis

John: fully accepted by God, victory over sin in the gospel of Jesus Christ

College: Raise questions about the Bible

Can We Take the Bible Seriously? Is it true?

IV. Can we Take the Bible Seriously? (Gospels)

A. Gospels as **Ancient Biographies**: *Bios*

1. Plutarch (49-118CE): *Parallel Lives*, 48 figures: Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar
2. BIOS: Rules and boundaries (GENRE)
 - a) Stories, not factbooks (artistic license)
 - b) Focus on Role Model: Noble deeds and sayings
 - c) Draw from the real life of the figure—how? (no newspapers, Youtube): Eyewitness Testimony

B. Gospels and Eyewitness Testimony

1. **Luke 1:1** Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.
2. **LIVING MEMORY**

C. **The Other Gospels?** Gospel of Thomas, Gospel of Judas, Gospel of Peter?

1. 40-50 gospels before 4th century
2. **Peter Williams, *Can We Trust the Gospels***
 - a) Other Gospels: sparse on verifiable details of geography, names, and places (you could make up stories that cannot be checked)
 - b) NT Gospels: lots of names: Fit the time period, fit geographic references
 - c) **Names:** hard to remember, yet GOSPELS don't shy away

D. **Why 4 Gospels?** Richard Burridge, *Four Gospels, One Jesus*

E. Chartwell country house, Kent; owned by Churchill

"Here is a picture of the statesman in conference with his allies, including President Roosevelt. His face is grim and determined, for the fate of the world rests upon those shoulders..."

"Around the corner, another picture: a painting, done by Churchill himself...the room was then host to a happy family gathering...Church is casually dressed, smiling at friends and family around the table..."

AGAIN: "a photograph of Churchill at rest. He sits in a basket chair in the gardens of the Villa Choisi on the shores of Lac Léman in Switzerland."

Different portraits, one and the same person. In these simple portraits—Just as with the Gospels—we have diversity and continuity, inspiration and selectivity, artistic license within limits.

The KEY FOR US: Do we trust the painters? In our case the Evangelists, the Gospel writers?

Here's the reality: CAN WE TAKE THE BIBLE SERIOUSLY?

V. *"I can't prove to you that the Bible is the Word of God, you have to experience it for yourself"* [Missionary work in Macedonia]

Transition: How can *CHRISTIANS* take the Bible seriously?

VI. How *Not* to use the Bible

- A. **Fortune Cookie Bible** (verse of the day): It is meant to be studied (**Shema**)
- B. **The Afterlife Bible** (how to get to heaven): Sermon on the Mount: worry about today
- C. **The "My Values" Bible**

VII. How to take the Bible seriously

- A. **Study Scripture** (e.g., memorizing sports details): seek out answers to your questions, readers have pondered the mysteries of the Bible for centuries.
- B. **Read the Parts You Never Read**
- C. **Meditate on Scripture** (Peterson analogy): Psalm 19

PSALM 19:7-10: TRANSLATIONS

The law of the LORD is perfect,
refreshing the soul.
The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy,
making wise the simple.
The precepts of the LORD are right,
giving joy to the heart.
The commands of the LORD are radiant,
giving light to the eyes.
The fear of the LORD is pure,
enduring forever.
The decrees of the LORD are firm,
and all of them are righteous.
They are more precious than gold,
than much pure gold;
they are sweeter than honey,
than honey from the honeycomb.

Psalm 19: Nijay's Version

The Word of the Lord is everything you need,

It's life-giving: like bringing a dead person completely back to life.

What the Lord says, you can trust fully.

No matter what you started with, it can fill you up completely.

Its guidance is perfect—satisfaction guaranteed!

Its advice is practical, you'll know how to live life well.

There is nothing better than focusing your life on the Lord, you won't have any regrets.

What the Lord calls you to do is good and right, for your good and for all.

Why are we so obsessed with chasing after money, when we have this priceless book in our hands right now?

Why do we scroll through Netflix and Prime looking for something interesting, or decide between donuts or ice cream looking for something sweet—when the gift of God's Word satisfies so much better?

VIII. Wrapping Up

Does that hit home for you?

Maybe you've never really spent time with the Bible. This might be the nudge you need to dive in.

Maybe you were in certain routines and rhythms, and got out of them because of the pandemic or for other reasons. You stepped away. Maybe now is the right time to establish new habits.

PEOPLE ASK: *Where do I start?* You could start in Genesis, like I did. (Don't start in Leviticus—trust me on that.)

BUT: You can't go wrong with Jesus. Start reading through the Gospels, one chapter a day. Study. Meditate. Journal. Ask questions. Talk to God. Listen to God. The beauty of the Christian faith is that there are no secrets, no paying for upgrades. No special wisdom for the elite. Each of us has equal and free access to the Father, Son, and Spirit.

Here are the words of life, for you and for all. Trust happens through experience. I welcome you to experience God's Word for yourself.

Resources

Peter Williams, *Can We Trust the Gospels?*

Richard Burridge, *Four Gospels, One Jesus*

Michael F. Bird, *Seven Things I Wish Christians Knew About the Bible*

Dennis Edwards, *What is the Bible and How Do We Understand It?*

Paula Gooder, *The Bible: A Beginner's Guide*

VIDEO: Can We Trust What the Bible Tells Us about Jesus?

<https://www.publicchristianity.org/youth-resource/can-trust-bible-tells-us-jesus/>