

Questions – Role Play

Episode 4: Bible Myth ?

Leaders Introduction

In Episodes 1 & 2 we laid the foundations of understanding the importance of trust and the inevitability of people having an ultimate authority, be it reason, experience or revelation. We saw that reason and experience are important in the Christian faith, but not ultimate; they are used in thinking about faith but are not the content of faith. We began to look at why revelation from God in his word the Bible, as an ultimate authority is reasonable when you think about it and experience it.

Episodes 3 to 6 look in more detail at the reasonableness of the Bible as a foundation for knowledge by considering the Bible's historical reliability. The episodes break it down as follows:

Episode 3 – Looks at the idea of apparent contradictions in the bible

Episode 4 – Considers the question of whether the Bible was simply made up

Episode 5 – Examines how the Bible was put together (the canon of scripture)

Episode 6 – Looks at transmission and translation, how the Bible was passed down to us today.

Each of these issues is a part of the picture of the reliability of the Bible. In normal conversations they won't come up as nice neat separate subjects, but we have created an episode for each one to help focus on the specific aspects of each question in turn.

In considering the question of historical reliability we might be tempted to move over to a wholly evidentialist approach to apologetics (see the introductory video for what that means). But whilst the focus does indeed shift towards that, there is still half an eye on the key ideas unpacked in Episodes 1 & 2, namely that no one is neutral everyone has a faith position. So in considering evidence there is a reason why some people consider it convincing and others don't; none of us are objective.

Leader's Questions

1. When Sylvia first begins to challenge Holly about the Bible being myth, how does Holly respond?

She continues to do what she has always done which is ask questions (e.g. when Sylvia says the Bible is just like the Wizard of Oz, Holly asks her if that is how the Bible sounds when she reads it. This approach has the benefit of opening up the conversation around whether someone has read the Bible for themselves or not).

Questions – Role Play

Leader's Questions

2. **Sylvia says that the stories of Jesus are probably exaggerated claims arising from one small, maybe true, story and compares this to myths such as Horus, Osiris, Mithras. Holly hasn't heard about all of these but how does she respond?**

She doesn't panic; she asks Sylvia another question: where she got her information from. It's always best to say when we don't know and then to ask how the other person thinks they know, this can either show that they are just repeating what someone else has said or reveal their source which can later be investigated.

3. **When Sylvia explains where she got her information from Holly asks her: 'Why are you quicker to believe this book over the Bible?' Why is this a good question?**

It's a helpful question because it asks Sylvia to think about her foundations and biases. It (hopefully) will show her or at least open up the conversation around the myth of neutrality. It's also helpful because it reveals something very important about Sylvia; she has had certain experiences or church that have influenced her views (Sylvia brings up the issue of 'miracles' here but Holly ignores it for now – miracles will come up again in the second series).

4. **Why do you think Sylvia and Holly have different views on the Bible?**

There are different (complementary) answers to this, but as was set out in episodes 1 & 2 it is important to remember that no one is neutral, everyone has a 'faith' position; whilst Holly will want to engage rationally with Sylvia she will need to remember that Sylvia is not neutral, her presuppositions impact the conclusions she draws from the data in front of her (this is why these conversations are always as much spiritual encounters as rational ones). If you want to go deeper you could consider Romans 1:18-20 with your group. This passage indicates that at some level people know the truth, even if they deny it to themselves, and so they are suppressing the truth; there is something ethical about this: people don't want to believe in God. So with this passage in mind Holly should not be surprised at Sylvia's response.

5. **As the second set gets underway, even though Sylvia's 'faith' position means she will interpret evidence for Jesus' life in a certain way, does that stop Holly from showing her the evidence?**

No – Holly still gives reasons to Sylvia why she thinks the Bible is not myth (e.g. the accurate historical details of the gospels, the honesty of the New Testament writers in discussing their weaknesses, the suffering that the early witnesses endured. Consider the power of each one of these in turn).

6. **What do you think about the way in which Sylvia very quickly 'bats away' Holly's point about the evidence as in question 5?**

It might seem as if she is easily 'disproving' what Holly is saying, but in actual fact it really shows that she is rejecting it all fairly out of hand which reinforces the point about a lack of neutrality.

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7. **Read I Corinthians 15:1-6 – What do these verses say about how important historical evidence and accuracy mattered to Paul?**

It shows it mattered a lot! Paul wanted people to see that many were witnesses to Jesus' resurrection and that people could go and talk to them if they liked.

8. **Holy only mention archaeology briefly. How might archaeology help when considering the question of the reliability of the Bible?**

Often people forget that one of the foundational maxims of archaeology is: 'The absence of evidence is not evidence of absence of evidence.' Meaning that just because there is no archaeological evidence found to back up a detail in a historical document it doesn't mean the historical document is wrong. Archaeological evidence has been found to back up a significant amount of the New Testament detail and where no archaeological evidence for certain details, it means only that we haven't (yet?) found evidence for them.

9. **Before they see the flying pig what is helpful about how Holly finishes the conversation?**

She briefly revisits the question of miracles and asks Sylvia if it's not logical that amazing (unbelievable?) things would happen if God acted in human history? But then also (and naturally) extends an invitation to read the Bible with Sylvia so that she can see for herself.

Role Plays

In pairs, in turn, have a conversation starting with one of the following:

- Lots of great literature isn't literally true, so why can't you accept the Bible as important without insisting that it's literally true? A sea parting so people can walk through, a dead man rising from the dead? I mean come on!
- You don't believe the Bible is true do you?
- I love the Bible it's full of such lovely mythical stories, it seems to me like some of the best fiction there is!

Remind them that they are focussing on responding with a question back to the other person.

If these conversations don't go well, don't worry and tell the people in your group not to worry, it is likely that it's the first time most of them have tried any of this and like anything else it takes time to get used to. You could finish your time together by thinking through one of the role plays as a group, pooling ideas of questions that could be asked.

Questions – Role Play

Group Member Questions

1. When Sylvia first begins to challenge Holly about the Bible being myth, how does Holly respond?
2. Sylvia says that the stories of Jesus are probably exaggerated claims arising from one small, maybe true, story and compares this to myths such as Horus, Osiris, Mithras. Holly hasn't heard about all of these but how does she respond?
3. When Sylvia explains where she got her information from Holly asks her: 'Why are you quicker to believe this book over the Bible?' Why is this a good question?
4. Why do you think Sylvia and Holly have different views on the Bible?
5. As the second set gets underway, even though Sylvia's 'faith' position means she will interpret evidence for Jesus' life in a certain way, does that stop Holly from showing her the evidence?
6. What do you think about the way in which Sylvia very quickly 'bats away' Holly's point about the evidence as in question 5?
7. Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-6 – What do these verses say about how important historical evidence and accuracy mattered to Paul?
8. Holly only mention archaeology briefly. How might archaeology help when considering the question of the reliability of the Bible?
9. Before they see the flying pig what is helpful about how Holly finishes the conversation?

Role Plays

In turns have a conversation, with one person playing the role of a Christian and the other a non-Christian. Start with one of the following:

- Lots of great literature isn't literally true, so why can't you accept the Bible as important without insisting that it's literally true? A sea parting so people can walk through, a dead man rising from the dead? I mean come on!
- You don't believe the Bible is true do you?
- I love the Bible it's full of such lovely mythical stories, it seems to me like some of the best fiction there is!