

You Can't Take the Bible Literally

Chapter 7

Reason for God

Tim Keller

Literally True or Reliable

- Some parts of the Bible, such as the gospels and the epistles, can be taken to be more literally true than other books in the Bible that are very historically and culturally distanced.
- Keller doesn't think anybody is really a biblical literalist.

We Can't Trust the Bible Historically

- According to the “Jesus Seminar” no more than 20% of Jesus’s account can be verified.
- At the time of the Gospels writing there were still many witnesses alive.
- Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are recognized as the most historically reliable books.
- The Gnostic Gospels, such as Thomas, not so very reliable.

Consolidating Power

- Keller asserts that the gospels were written by early church leaders to consolidate power.
- If true, we would have seen Jesus taking sides on issues in the gospels.
- For instance, Jesus says nothing about circumcision.
- The Apostle Paul deals with that issue later.

Arguments Against Consolidating Paper

- Women were the first witnesses to the resurrection.
- The apostles were depicted as petty and argumentative.
- Jesus signifies his fear that God has abandoned him.
- If the Gospels had been written to undergird a ruling elite, these facts would have not been included.
- That they were suggests the historicity of the account.

Gnostic Gospels

- The Gnostic Gospels, like The Acts of Thomas and the Acts of John, were never adopted into the New Testament in great part over controversies regarding their authorship and the reliability of their content – heavily steeped in the Greco-Roman philosophy of Gnosticism.
- Gnostic doctrine taught that the world was created and ruled by a lesser divinity, the demiurge, and that Christ was an emissary of the remote supreme divine being, esoteric knowledge (gnosis) of whom enabled the redemption of the human spirit.

The Literary Form of the Gospels is Too Detailed to be Legend

- The Gospels are not fiction, either in ancient form (absent a sense of realism) or in terms of modern fiction which is steeped in realism.
- The detail in the Gospels corresponds with what we can verify about history and culture of the time.

We Can Trust the Bible “Culturally”

- There are distinct and significant cultural and historical differences between the period in which books of the Bible were written and when they were studied in modern times.
- There is an immense “cultural distance” between modern readers and the authors of the Gospels.