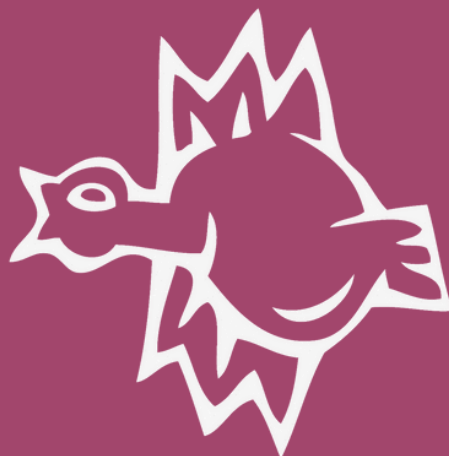




The Bible is...
the Bible isn't...



wild
goose
resource
group



The Bible is... the Bible isn't...

Dialogue by Jo Love, WGRG. Adapted from original version written 2012.

- A:** Let's sort out a few things about the Bible.
What is it, and what isn't it?
- B:** Well let's start with the big question then.
How do we know that God exists?
- A:** Well, the Bible says so!
- B:** That's just the problem.
- A:** What's the problem?
- B:** I can't find anything in the Bible that proves that God exists!
- A:** But the Bible is full of God! It's all about God... isn't it?
- B:** Yeah, but all the people in these stories assume that God exists.
They take it as a given. Nobody really tries to prove it anywhere.
- A:** So there's the first thing the Bible isn't...
The Bible is not a proof of God's existence.
- B:** It makes you wonder why all these people weren't obsessed with proving things.
I mean, look at us sometimes.
The things that people won't believe unless you can prove it.
- A:** That's a modern obsession.
The Bible is ancient.
- B:** *And the Bible was not written with us in mind.*
- A:** We forget that.
None of these storytellers sat down and considered
that a bunch of folk would be reading their stories
3000 miles away and in 3000 years' time.
- B:** Their stories... there's one in here about kings with their thumbs cut off,
another about flaming angels,
another about disabled people being attacked through a water tunnel.
- A:** And then there's the talking snake, the pillar of cloud, the slaughter of thousands with a
donkey's jawbone, the murder of a soldier by a woman with a tent peg, and
instructions on how to deal with mildew, boils and hair loss.
- B:** It must have all made sense to the people who wrote it.
- A:** *Hmm... the Bible is not straightforward...*

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- A:** In fact it's pretty complex...
I can't think how I would tell the one about the Kings with their thumbs chopped off to a group of children...
- B:** Would you even try, Jo? You know, in spite of how we think of it at times,
The Bible is not a children's book.
- A:** *It is not a DIY guide to life, either.*
I mean, if your house keeps getting mildew, the advice here is,
"The house must be torn down, and all its stones and wood and plaster carried out of the city."
- B:** Might be more effective than waiting for the Council to fix it!
But it sounds like a last resort, not a hasty remedy.
Most of what's in here was retold by word of mouth for ages before it ever got written down.
The Bible is long in the making.
- A:** And things like the mildew instructions do seem very matter of fact.
But most of these stories are not like that. They wander all over the place.
You can get eighty years summed up in a single sentence,
and then one incident is drawn out over five pages!
The Bible is not a neat, systematic collection of ideas about God and human life.
- B:** But it is an expression of the faith of ancient tribes and early church communities.
- A:** Their faith, their way of telling it.
Their choice to speak of violence and hatred as much as justice and peace.
Their choice to write four different versions of the life of Jesus.
The Bible is not a dictation from God...
- B:** ...not a manifesto for Christianity.
- A:** Yet it is a gift for the community. We've got so much to learn from our ancestors.
Why did they preserve these stories?
Why did they record their experiences in these ways?
- B:** Even their style of storytelling is nothing like ours.
They don't tell us what that man looks like, what tone of voice that woman is taking, the expression on someone's face, the emotional atmosphere in the room...
Have you noticed the absence of any detailed descriptions?
- A:** "Jesus moved cautiously, like a prowling tiger.
Peter the disciple gazed intently, his black hair falling like ravens' wings against his rough brown cloak."
You're right! The Bible never says it like that!
The Bible is not descriptive.

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- B:** How different from a modern novel. But no wonder!
The stories of the Bible were written in times and places
very unlike the cultures we live in.
- A:** And they had never heard of inclusive language or gender equality!
The Bible is not politically correct.
- B:** You can't get away from it.
The Bible is patriarchal – written by adult men,
written mostly about adult men,
and originally, written for adult men.
- A:** Do you think they thought they were the most important people on earth?
- B:** Actually, no. I think they always felt quite small in the grand scheme of things.
The whole Bible originates from a tiny population of people
in a tiny patch of the earth's land.
- A:** For such a small part of the known world,
what an incredibly vast collection of writings.
They wrote much more than is now part of the Bible as we know it.
The Bible is not one single book.
- B:** It's a whole library, spanning centuries.
You're right, the Bible is so diverse – with many authors and voices,
many perspectives, many kinds of writing.
- A:** Yep. You've got laws in here, poetry, history, prophecy...
- B:** You've got letters, philosophy, songs, legends...
- A:** Have you noticed that some stories are told more than once?
The second telling is never quite the same as the first.
The Bible is 'contradictory...'
- B:** ...but no-one in the old days had a problem with that!
Different accounts are given equal importance.
- A:** The church hasn't learned that lesson, really, has it?
We're still seeing it as a problem that we have different Bibles!
The Bible is not even one list of contents agreed by all churches...
- B:** And within it is a patchwork of pieces laid side by side – purposefully.
- A:** Yes, a patchwork, *not a biography with a beginning, middle and end.*
- B:** ...but having repetitions and retellings and recurring patterns...
if we have some curiosity, we'll notice them.
- A:** What a library, what a treasure chest...
- B:** What a gift!