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Lesson plan

Biblical authority and interpretation

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The big picture	In modern times, many philosophical and ethical issues that have great significance to religious believers have come under fierce scrutiny from the challenges posed by new developments in philosophy and science.
Learning objectives	What? Challenges to biblical authority from biblical criticism, philosophy and science. Why? To assess the validity and possible consequences of these challenges. How? After studying this topic, students should be able to evaluate and analyse these challenges.
Starter activity	Discuss whether every word of the Bible should be taken literally. If so, what are the implications and interpretations for Christianity, the Christian Church and society in the twenty-first century.
Lesson activities	(1) Create a revision poster on modern criticisms of biblical authority and interpretation. (2) Discuss, either in groups or in pairs: 'Should the Bible be used a source of authority for making moral decisions?' (3) Write a personal response to the following quote: 'What is right is not so because God commands it; he commands it because it is right, and it is right because it is good for man. This may be true even of what we may call strictly religious rather than moral requirements such as the observance of the Sabbath.' (Burrows 1946)
Plenary	Read other students' responses to the quote and suggest additions.
Homework task	Carry out additional research into biblical criticism of both the Old and New Testaments in the twenty-first century. Then students should create their own essay title on the topic and write the essay.
Assessment opportunities	Using the mark scheme, students should self-assess their work with feedback from the teacher.
Differentiation	Teachers may wish to make key points on a worksheet for Dyslexic or EAL students.

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