

STUDY ON THE BIBLE

Session 1

Tonight we begin a new study and it will be about the Bible itself. We'll seek to answer the following questions:

- How did the books of the Bible come to be recognized as holy scripture?
- Who decided what the shape or arrangement of the canon should be?
- What were the criteria that influences these decisions?

Before we get to the place where we can begin to answer these questions, we need to lay a foundation of exactly what the Bible is and what it's purpose is. Why is it important that we understand the Bible and why is this book so hotly debated? Buckle your seat belts for a wild ride through history and God's redemptive plan.

[Read Matthew 4:4]

Bread is symbolic of the natural or material world. In this verse, Jesus (who is quoting Deuteronomy 8:3) is letting us know that while mankind needs food, air, shelter and other such physical things to survive in the material world; man also has another dimension to him - a spiritual dimension. He will live by every word that comes from the mouth of God. Our lives are in some way dependent upon the words which God has spoken to mankind. Thus, since our lives depend upon the Word of God, it is critical to understand the Word of God - what it says and how God intends it to be used for our lives.

The question then is, if the Word of God is critical for our lives both physical and spiritual, then what is the Word of God? Do we have what God intends for us to have or is this just some made up work of fiction by an ancient author?

To answer these questions, we need to examine a very fundamental issue about the Bible. What does God's Word claim to be? What does it claim or say about itself? Does it ever truly claim to be the Word of God or is that just something certain men attributed to it? If it is truly the words of the Creator, Lord of All, and the only eternal and supreme being, then it should have some marks that distinguish it in some way or it should reflect God, it's author, in some manners to reveal who He is, as well.

First, if the Bible is God's Word, it will be true as opposed to false. God claims to know everything and be outside of time, so whatever He has to say will in time prove itself to be true instead of a work of fiction.

Second, we need to know if the Bible is timeless. God is timeless in nature and has been around for all time past and will exist in all present and future eternity. So His Word should also be timeless in nature, speaking accurately to mankind in at any point along human history. It must transcend time and culture to pass this test.

Third, we need to know if the Bible is transforming or not. Whenever God encounters a person, that life is transformed by His presence. In the same way, if a person were to encounter God's Word, it should have the exact same power and influence upon that person as meeting God Himself when it comes to transforming a person's heart or mind.

I. What does the Bible say about itself? This is called internal evidence. The single most important claim that the Bible makes about itself is that it is the Word of God. There can be no

claim or suggestion or thought higher than that proposition.

[Read II Peter 1:16-21]

Q: What did Peter say he and the other disciples DID NOT do when making known the power and coming of the Lord Jesus Christ? *(v.16 - they did not follow cleverly devised tales)*

Q: How did Peter and the other disciples get their knowledge of Jesus Christ? *(v.16 - they were eyewitnesses)*

Q: What was the role of human will in the process of Scripture? *(v.21- no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will. Human will is not part of the process of obtaining divine oracles.)*

Q: How was Scripture transmitted to mankind according to this passage? *(v.21 - the Holy Spirit moved men to speak the words of God)*

Notice in v.20 that no Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation. The word "interpretation" is only used in the New Testament in this verse. It means "disclosure" and in this sense then means that no one ever self-disclosed Scripture. It was not something that people developed on their own but rather was disclosed to them by God through the Holy Spirit.

[Read II Timothy 3:16-17]

Q: What is the first thing this passage teaches us about Scripture? *(v.16 - that it is inspired by God)*

The word "inspired" means God-breathed. In other words, God exhaled or spoke into the mind of a person and that person copied down God's words.

Q: What is Scripture profitable for? *(v.16-17 - teaching, reproof, correction, training in righteousness; so that the man of God can be adequate and equipped for every good work. God spoke it with a purpose in mind.)*

[Read Revelation 22:18-19]

Mankind is not permitted to add or subtract from the Word of God. He alone is the author of Scripture and the penalties are substantial for changing the Word for whatever reason. It is a unique book and authoritative (that which is above all other books).

[Read James 1:19-25]

Q: What is the Word able to do according to this passage, if implanted in one's heart? *(v. 21 - save one's soul)*

Q: If you hear the Word but do not carry out its intent, what does this passage say that you are?

(v.22 - deluded or deceived)

Q: What happens to the man who looks intently at the perfect law of liberty and is an effectual doer of it? *(v. 25 - that man is blessed in what he does)*

This short passage gives a few big keys to what the Bible says about itself. It is able to save a person's soul. In other words, the Bible claims to have the power to change a person's eternal destiny. For the person who lives out the Word of God, He will be blessed as God because he will be displaying God's character and actions rather than his own.

These are weighty claims. If they are true then the Bible becomes the only book in this world that is authoritative and possesses the power to change lives as it is the only book God has authored. If these claims are true, then the Bible is the only way to know anything about God. It is God's only record of His revelation of Himself. All other ideas about religion and Scriptures and sacred texts become meaningless, if the Bible's claims are true. They are seen only as products of human imagination or demonic interference in human history. However, if the Bible's claims aren't true - then it too should be judged as a mere work of fiction. Keep in mind, these are just a sampling of the things the Bible says about itself.

So are these claims inflated or human inventions? What does the Bible have to say about God. Assuming the Bible is the Word of God, then as mentioned before, we need to see if this book displays some of the characteristics of God Himself.

[Read Hebrews 6:18]

Q: What is God incapable of doing? *(lying. God always tells the truth - so His Word must be true as well)*

[Read Isaiah 43:10-13]

Q: What does God say about Himself in this passage? *(He is the only God, He is eternal, He is omnipotent. He is the only One like Himself -there are no other beings like Him. He has acted on behalf of His own people and they know Him due to His miracles on their behalf. So God's Word needs to be eternal or timeless as He is)*

[Read Ephesians 3:20-21]

Q: What is God capable of according to this verse? *(v.20 - He can do exceedingly abundantly above all we can even think or imagine - He is unlimited in His ability to act according to His nature.)*

Q: Who is the church mentioned in v.21? *(Paul was speaking to the Ephesian church but the church is all those who have been saved. This power of God is not used to maintain the status quo (that takes no power at all) but rather it is used to transform people and their circumstances. Thus the Bible, if it is God's Word, needs to be a powerful agent in the transformation of*

people's lives.)

To answer these questions, we need to go look in the Bible to see what it says but also then look outside the Bible to verify whether or not the Bible is actually telling us the truth. Since God cannot lie, it is imperative that all of the Bible is true, timeless and transforming.

II. Is the Bible true?

A. If the Bible is true, there should be physical evidence outside the Bible that proves the many stories found within its pages. Archeology should be able to help confirm that what the Bible says is accurate, thus true - at least when it comes to those things archeology can confirm.

For years (nearly a century) archeologists dismissed the Bible as false because they couldn't find many of the major cities in the Bible - especially Jericho. Jericho was important in that it was the first city the Israelites defeated upon entering the promised land and it was the largest city in the region. If you cannot find the big one then there's little hope of finding the little ones. In 1907 Carl Watzinger discovered the remains of Jericho at an area called Tel es-Sultan. His team found a very large double outer wall to the city (exactly as described in the book of Joshua - whereby both several teams of chariots could ride atop the wall abreast and people could live between the two outer walls). Since that time many others have unearthed not only Jericho but also the cities of Ai and Hazor. By knowing the location of Jericho, they were able to use the Bible to find the others.

In fact, the Bible is so accurate archeologically that many of the cities and places of the Old Testament and New Testament have been discovered by using just the Bible. Ancient cities such as Antioch, Ashdod, Beersheba, Bethel, Gaza, Jezreel, Shechem, Nineveh, and countless other places that once were in doubt have been discovered and proven the Bible accurate. There has never been an archeological discovery that has contradicted the Bible. They have either not been part of the Biblical record or have further proved that the Bible is indeed accurate.

[II Chronicles 36:22-23]

Like most Biblical records, there is a great deal of controversy in that the secular world loves to attack the Biblical record on historical matters. The problem is that the Bible always ends up winning proving itself true.

In 1879 the Cyrus Cylinder was unearthed in Babylon. Cyrus the Great destroyed Babylon and he signed the document that allowed the Jews to return to their homeland and end their captivity in Babylon as we just read in II Chronicles. The Cyrus Cylinder was the secular, governmental record kept by the Persians detailing King Cyrus' release of the Jews and thus ending the exile, God's judgement upon the Jews.

On the other hand, when the Mormons went searching for the golden tablets Joseph Smith claimed to possess or for any records of the ancient civilizations mentioned in the book of Mormon, there isn't one shred of archeological evidence to support their claims in the 200 years of intense searching. In all their searching through North America, there is no a single item or piece of evidence that could substantiate the claims of the Indian civilization contrived by Joseph

Smith. Yet there is no archeology that disproves the Bible.

B. In addition to archeology, history itself should back up the Biblical record if it is true. These events chronicled in the Bible did not take place in a vacuum but rather on the world stage and many were discussed by secular historians from other nations.

1. A historian named Flavius Josephus who lived from 37 A.D. to 101 A.D. mentioned several prominent Bible figures in his writings. Among them Josephus mentioned John the Baptist, James the brother of Jesus and Jesus Himself. Listen to the words Josephus wrote concerning Jesus, *“Now there was a man about this time, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man; for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher or such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles...”*

2. Tacitus, the Roman historian mentions Christ who is Jesus but he did so in an unfavorable light. *“Christus, from whom the name had its origin suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judea the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their center and become popular.”*

3. Thallus, another historian, wrote in 52 A.D of a total eclipse of the sun that had happened some years prior, which he recorded because it happened without any reason. However, unknown to Thallus, he cited it as occurring at a time concurring with Jesus’s crucifixion. This account is further recorded and noted by Julius Africanus in 221 A.D. According to Luke 23:44-5, when Jesus was crucified, there was a total eclipse of the sun.

4. Pleny the younger, the Roman governor of Bithynia in Asia minor wrote of Jesus in his tenth book.

5. The list goes on and on. Non-Christian, non-inspired historians and government officials wrote enough about Christ and Christianity from their first hand accounts to corroborate much of what we read in the Bible.

C. Though not a science text-book, has proven itself accurate on many scientific fronts long before they could be proven by modern science.

a. **Isaiah 40:22** - The shape of the earth is a circle - not flat.

b. **Job 26:7** - The earth is suspended in nothing (space).

c. **II Sam. 22:16** - There are valleys in the seas

d. **Psalms 102: 22-26** - The concept of the law of entropy - the idea that things move from a more ordered existence to a less ordered existence naturally.

e. The book of Leviticus gives many thoughts on modern hygiene and health that are accepted as valid today.

4. Lastly, as if more evidence was needed on this front, the prophecies concerning Jesus and their fulfillment show us that the Bible is indeed true. The following illustration comes from Josh McDowell, a man who was bent on disproving Christianity, but in the end saw the truth and was born again.

a. In the Old Testament there are somewhere around 375 prophecies concerning the Messiah. If God really wrote the Bible then all of them would have to come to pass or the Bible is false.

b. Here are just a few prophecies concerning Jesus that He fulfilled. He was born of the

seed of a woman, He was born of a virgin, He was decreed to be the Son of God, He was of the seed of Abraham and Isaac, He was of the house of David, Born in Bethlehem, He would be a prophet, He will be a priest, He would be a judge, He would be proceeded by a messenger, He would be rejected by His own people, He would enter Jerusalem on a donkey, He would be betrayed by one of His own for 30 pieces of silver, His side would be pierced, and He would be crucified. All of these were made no earlier than 450 years before Jesus lived and some were thousands of years old.

c. Peter Stoner of *Science Speaks* says that coincidence is completely ruled out in this case.

1) Choose any eight prophecies of the 375 that the Old Testament made of Jesus. The chance of any one man fulfilling any eight is 1 in 10^{17} (one hundred quadrillion). To help comprehend how staggering this is, take one hundred quadrillion quarters and they would cover the entire state of Texas to a depth of 2 feet. Paint one quarter red. (Keep in mind, I used to drive 14 hours to college one way and I never left the state and I didn't go from end to end.) Bury the state in 2 feet of quarters, then blindfold a man and have him travel as far as he wishes and at some point pick up one quarter and it be the red one. That would be the chances of one man fulfilling any eight prophecies.

2) Stoner then considered the chances of a single man fulfilling 48 of the prophecies concerning the Messiah. The chance of that happening would be approximately 1 in 10^{157} . The estimated number of electrons in the entire universe is only 10^{79} . Now ponder that Jesus Christ fulfilled 375 prophecies and some wonder if He is the Messiah. Only an Almighty God could accomplish this. Then go to the Old Testament and remember that there were prophecies concerning all sorts of things and that all of them have come to pass exactly as predicted. Math, science, history, and archeology all come together to prove to the mind that is looking for proof that the Bible is true.

D. There has been no other book in history subjected to the scrutiny of the Bible and it has stood up. No other book or philosophy or religion can even come close to making these kinds of claims with this kind of evidence behind it.

III. Is the Bible timeless?

A. Since God is eternal, His Word should be eternal. It should transcend time and speak to all people in all cultures in all generations. Also, to be timeless, it must pass the test of reliability that all ancient texts must pass to be credible.

1. The Bible transcends time because it speaks of timeless issues. At its core is an eternal, all-powerful, loving God who desires fellowship with His creation, man.

a. The Bible is the only source for accurate revelation about this God. All other religions show man reaching and working to get to God but the Bible portrays a God reaching out to rescue man from himself.

b. Mankind is the other main character in the Bible. The human condition is expressed in the highest and lowest of terms. Everyone can relate to some character in the Bible as it encompasses sin and salvation.

c. In addition to this, the Bible was written by about 40 men over a 1500 year period of time and doesn't contradict itself. This is only a feat that God could have accomplished because He alone is timeless. He knew the future completely and could inspire men to write what would happen because He already knew what was to be.

2. The Bible is great literature but can it pass the test of reliability. Is what we have the “real” Bible or is what we have merely a watered-down mixture of God’s Word and man’s invention? To answer this, we have to examine the Bible as we would any other ancient text. This is called the reliability test.

a. Before explaining this, I need to introduce a term called “autograph”. An autograph when used in the context of discussing ancient literature and writings means the “original” copy or the first copy of a writing. From there, depending upon the significance of the writing, it’d be copied, often many times, by many different people over many years or even centuries. It is important to note that there are no known copies of autographs of any of the Biblical writings and there are no known autographs of any ancient literature apart from those carved in stone.

b. Many scholars use the writings of Plato as the standard. Plato wrote his works about 400 B.C. However, we don’t have any of the originals. The earliest (oldest) copy of his work that has survived is from 900 A.D. There is a 1300 year gap between the original and the copies we have. We have seven copies of his work dating to about 900 A.D. With this kind of evidence, scholars agree that what we have a Plato’s writings are indeed the words he wrote. Seven copies 1300 years from the original is very good for an ancient work.

c. Take the works of Julius Caesar. He wrote around 50 B.C., the earliest copies of his work that survived date to 900 A.D. - so there is almost a 1000 year gap and we have 10 copies of his work. Thus, we say that we have reliable copies of Caesar’s words.

d. Now take the New Testament. It was written from 50 A.D. to about 95 A.D and we have a copy of the book of John that dates to 125 A.D. (about a 30 year gap). We have 5600 complete copies of the New Testament that are less than 200 years later than the original. They agree with each other 99.5% of the time and the 0.5% of the time they don’t it is a word that has been omitted as a scribal error but not one of these omissions makes any difference to the meaning of the passage. The Old Testament stacks up very similarly. If you don’t doubt that we have Plato’s writings of the writings of Caesar, then there is absolutely no room to doubt the Bible. What we have is what was inspired by God. It is very reliable. Thus it is timeless in its message and in its form.

IV. Is the Bible transforming?

A. God is in the life-transforming business. His desire is for all people to come to realize that they are sinners separated from Him. Yet rather than devise their own strategy for seeking salvation from sin or giving up, He also desires everyone to know just how great His love is for them by offering His own Son, Jesus Christ, on the cross as payment for their sins. By receiving Jesus Christ and being willing to turn from one’s sins, one can be saved - allowing God to be Lord over one’s life. This is called being born-again and it is a complete transformation of a human life from the heart. God’s Word should be the vehicle that makes this transformation possible as that’s His main desire for mankind. Martin Luther was a Catholic monk who felt bad about his sins. He tried everything to cleanse his conscience that his faith dictated but nothing worked. In the end he read the Bible (as a monk he could do so) and read that we are justified by faith not by works. He was saved and in so began a powerful religious revolution throughout Europe known as the reformation.

B. There was once a man who asked a Gideon for a Bible. This man said that the paper was perfect for rolling his cigarettes. The Gideon gave him the Bible on the condition that he read the pages front and back before using them for his cigarettes. The man agreed and over the

course of the next few weeks, proceeded to smoke his way through Matthew, Mark, and Luke. When he got to John 3:16 he stopped and gave his heart to the Lord. The Bible had transformed his life - one page at a time.

C. One of my other all-time favorite accounts of the transformational power of the Bible is the man who went to Mardi Gras in New Orleans alone. His life was terrible and he felt that the festive party atmosphere would lift his spirits. It didn't. In fact all it did was make him contemplate how terrible and lonely his life was and how he'd be better off dead. To go out in style, he went and got completely drunk one night while there. The next morning, half surprised to find himself still alive, he was sprawled out along a street outside the bar where he'd been. He pulled himself together and walked back to his hotel. As he pulled his shoes off to lie down, he found a piece of paper stuck to his shoe. It was one page of a gospel tract with several Bible verses on it talking about God's love. He reached into the night stand drawer and pulled out the Bible there and started reading. In the end he gave his life to Christ and felt so strongly about how powerfully his life had been changed, he dedicated his life to distributing Bibles for free to anyone who'd take them.

1. Other books have changed the way people think but no other book has transformed lives in the form of hope, courage, and joy like the Bible.

2. [Hebrews 4:12]

E. The Bible is God's Word and as such it is from God and by nature it counter-cultural. By this I mean that it goes against the philosophies, rules and axioms that undergird the way this world works. This is why the Bible is so revolutionary and life-changing.

1. Take Jesus' sermon on the Mount for example (Matthew 5-7). While many try to twist the words of Jesus to say, "*Here is your duty as a Christian, now do it!*" If you read it for what it says, the truth is the message of Jesus is, "*Do what is not your duty.*" It isn't our duty to go the second mile or turn the other cheek but if we are genuine disciples of Jesus, this is what we do by our new nature given to us by the Holy Spirit.

2. Take just one of the more controversial points of the Sermon on the Mount [Matthew 5:39] - "*I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.*" In the natural realm, if a person does not hit back (either physically or verbally) it is because that person is a coward. But in the spiritual realm, it is the very evidence of the Son of God within him if he does not hit back. When you are insulted, you must not only NOT resent it but take it as the opportunity to exhibit the Son of God in your life. You cannot imitate the nature of Jesus - either you have it or you don't. A personal insult or character attack becomes a huge opportunity for a believer to reveal the incredible sweetness of the Lord Jesus. See, the calling on our lives is to lay down our rights to ourselves and do what is not our duty - to avenge ourselves - to get even - to defend our honor and character. These are but two examples of thousands in the Bible pointing to the other-worldly origin of the Bible.

a. The first key to living under the Bible fully is to be saved. Only those who are born again possess the Holy Spirit Who interprets the Word and brings it to life for us daily.

[I Corinthians 2:14-6]

Q: To the natural man (the lost) what are the things of God? (v.14 - foolishness)

Q: Why are the things of God foolishness to this natural man? (*v.14 - because they only make sense when the Holy Spirit causes them to make sense and the lost man doesn't have the Spirit operating within his life.*)

b. The second key to living under it fully is to allow it to be your judge rather than you be the judge over it. This is living by faith in God.

1) If we then take the Bible to be the Word of God, which it purports to be and the evidence certainly backs it (in that it is true, timeless and transforming) then it becomes our judge and we live under it. How can any judgement we make compare to the judgement of the Supreme Being of the Universe - the Creator and All-Powerful Living God? Instead, we allow His words to transform us by living under it's direction rather than trying to twist it or ignore the parts we don't like. Instead, Christians are to not debate or argue the teaching but adjust to it through the power of the Holy Spirit within us.

2) There was once an older man in our church who has since gone to be with the Lord, but he hadn't spoken to his cousin in over 30 years over a bad business deal earlier in life. This man ran into a Bible passage about forgiving others and living at peace with others. He called his cousin and offered to lay the offense aside. In the end both were transformed as the relationship was restored in joy. That's what faith is. We may not fully understand why God leads us in a certain way, but we follow Him receive His blessing.

c. If it is truly God's Word, then it becomes His love letter to mankind. It becomes His statement of who He is and how He works in the world. Our job is to read it often and study it with others so that we come to understand it as fully as we can in this life. One of past presidents of my seminary had a quote that kept him focused. *"To know God's will is the greatest knowledge a man may ever know. To do God's will is the greatest accomplishment a man may ever achieve."*

Q: Do you have any questions, comments, rebukes or rebuttals?