

Getting the Big Picture: Session 1

# How did we get the Bible?

# Revelation

- The only way we can know God is if He chooses to reveal Himself.
- The Bible speaks of two classes of God's revelation:
  - General revelation
    - Creation
    - Conscience
  - Special/direct revelation

# Special revelation

- Dreams & visions
- Angels
- Prophets
- Jesus Himself
- The Bible
  - *Actually the Bible serves as the most inclusive of all avenues of special revelation, for it encompasses the record of many aspects of the other avenues...*
    - Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, pg. 73

# Inspiration

- Two key passages
  - 2 Timothy 3:16-17
  - *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

# Inspiration

- Two key passages
  - 2 Peter 1:20-21
  - *...knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.*

# Inspiration

- Definition

- *God superintended the human authors of the Bible so that they composed and recorded without error His message to mankind in the words of their original writings.*

- Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology*

- *Inspiration was not God magically transcending human minds and faculties; it was God expressing his will through the dedication of human minds and faculties. It does not supersede the sacred writer's own personality and make him God's machine; it reinforces his personality and makes him God's living witness.*

- James Stewart, *The Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ*, pg. 9

# The Canon of Scripture

- The word canon term means “rule” or “measuring rod” and refers to the list of books that are recognised as Scripture.
- The idea is that these books were judged to be authoritative and are, therefore, included in the canon of Scripture.
- No church or council made a biblical book authoritative; they simply recognised what was already true.

# The Canon of Scripture

- *"The canon is a list of authoritative books more than it is an authoritative list of books. These documents didn't derive their authority from being selected; each one was authoritative before anyone gathered them together."*
  - Bruce Metzger, Princeton University



# The Canon of Scripture

- One author has illustrated this principle by noting that tests don't make students intelligent; they simply measure their knowledge or ability.
- In the same way, the authority, accuracy, and transforming power of the books that compose the Bible were recognised and acknowledged, so these books were compiled.

# Canon of the New Testament

- The Lord Jesus promised His chosen apostles that after His death the Holy Spirit would help them write the New Testament.
  - John 14:25-26 *"These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and **bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.**"*

# Canon of the New Testament

- John 16:12-14 *"I still have many things to say to you, **but you cannot bear them now.** However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and **He will tell you things to come.** He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you."*

# Canon of the New Testament

- Paul said that the church was "*built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets*" (Ephesians 2:20).
- He also said that the message he preached he received by direct revelation.
  - Galatians 1:11-12 "*But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but **it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.***"

# Canon of the New Testament

- The apostles were given the ability to perform miracles to confirm the message which they preached.
  - Hebrews 2:3-4; 2 Corinthians 12:12
- So the early Christians accepted the writings of the apostles as Scripture because of the miracles they performed.
- They also began making copies and sharing them amongst the various churches.

# Canon of the New Testament

- Norman Geisler points out that there was “an unbroken chain of testimony from the apostles to the early church fathers regarding the authorship and authenticity of the New Testament books.”

# Canon of the New Testament

- “John, who obviously knew all of the apostles, had a disciple named Polycarp (A.D. 69–155), and Polycarp had a disciple named Irenaeus (130–202). Polycarp and Irenaeus collectively quote 23 of the 27 New Testament books as if they are authentic—and in some cases they specifically say they are authentic. Irenaeus explicitly affirms the authorship of all four Gospels.”

# Canon of the New Testament

- He continues:
- “While the major works of the New Testament were immediately seen as authentic by these early church fathers, most of the New Testament was accepted before A.D. 200, and all of it was officially and finally recognized as authentic by the Council of Hippo in 393.”



# How well was it preserved?

- The manuscript evidence for the NT documents is unparalleled.
  - There are over 5700 handwritten Greek manuscripts of the NT, despite the edict by Emperor Diocletian (c. A.D. 303) to destroy churches, manuscripts, and Christians.
  - Some of these manuscripts are from less than 30 years after they were originally written.
    - By comparison, other ancient Greek manuscripts (like Homer's Iliad) are from at least 500 years after he wrote.

# How well was it preserved?

- “How old are the oldest surviving manuscripts of complete New Testament books? Manuscripts that are complete New Testament books survive from about A.D. 200. How about the oldest manuscripts of the entire New Testament? Most of the New Testament, including all of the Gospels, survives from 250, and a manuscript of the entire New Testament (including a Greek Old Testament) called Codex Vaticanus survives from about 325.”
  - Norman Geisler, “I Don’t Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist”

# Independent confirmation?

- Geisler writes:
- “Just how many non-Christian sources are there that mention Jesus? Including Josephus, there are ten known non-Christian writers who mention Jesus within 150 years of his life.”
- “Piecing together all ten non-Christian references, we see that:”

# Ancient non-Christian testimony

1. Jesus lived during time of Tiberius Caesar.
2. He lived a virtuous life.
3. He was a wonder-worker.
4. He had a brother named James.
5. He was acclaimed to be the Messiah.
6. He was crucified under Pontius Pilate.
7. He was crucified on the eve of the Jewish Passover.

# Ancient non-Christian testimony

8. Darkness and an earthquake occurred when he died.
9. His disciples believed he rose from the dead.
10. His disciples were willing to die for their belief.
11. Christianity spread rapidly as far as Rome.
12. His disciples denied the Roman gods and worshiped Jesus as God.
  - Norman Geisler, "I Don't Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist"

# Canon of the Old Testament

- The Hebrew Scriptures, our Old Testament, were compiled over a period of many years by prophets and priests. These men were recognised as men of God, and their writings gained an authoritative standing in their communities and were passed on from generation to generation.

# Canon of the Old Testament

- Evidence of a progressive collection of prophetic books
  - Mosaic writings preserved, Deut. 31:24-26
  - Joshua's writings added, Josh. 24:26
  - Samuel's writings added, 1 Sam. 10:25
  - Prophetic writings added, Ezek. 13:9
  - Note that later writers were aware of and quoted from earlier writers, e.g. Dan. 9:2, 6, 11; cp. Jer. 25:11

# Canon of the Old Testament

- But perhaps the most important endorsement of the Hebrew Scriptures was that of Jesus Christ, who studied them, taught from them, and quoted them.
- Jesus claimed to be the Son of God and the truth of this was demonstrated by His resurrection from the dead.
- And if Jesus recognised the authority and reliability of the OT, we should, too.



# Why so many versions?

- OT was written in Hebrew and Aramaic.
  - Aramaic was the common language of the Middle East from about 7<sup>th</sup> century BC to the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD.
- As Greek became the dominant language of the ancient world, the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek.
  - This translation is known as the Septuagint (LXX)
- NT was written in Koine (common) Greek.

# Why so many versions?

- In time, Latin became the dominant language of the western world and the entire Bible was translated into Latin.
- Jerome was commissioned in 382 to produce a standard Latin version that is now known as the Vulgate. This work was completed in 405.
- This became the standard Bible of the church for the next 1,000 years.

# Why so many versions?

- In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, John Wycliffe completed an English translation of the Bible from Latin.
- In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, William Tyndale began work on an unofficial English translation from the original languages.
- In 1611, King James of England authorised an English translation that is still used today (though undergoing many revisions).

# Why so many versions?

- Since that time, the English language has continued to change and additional ancient manuscripts have been discovered, so scholars have continued to work on providing us with a Bible that is faithful to the original languages and yet readable for modern readers.
- It can be helpful to compare Bible translations to get a clearer understanding.