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Last week – How is the Bible organized and why did they include these books? This week: How do we know the Bible is God’s Word?

Joshua 1:7-8 Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. <sup>8</sup> Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. ?

Jim Blazek had a great illustration at Men of God this week. The Bible is a lot like this level. Most of you understand that this level has some tubes with air bubbles and it can tell you, using gravity, whether something is straight or level. In a world of competing agendas and messages, the Bible is what you can measure everything else by. This is why God told Joshua to say it, meditate on it day and night. It is one thing that points you to truth. Following the Bible aligns you with God’s plan for the universe and sets you up for a God-pleasing, prosperous and successful life. It is truly good.

But lets get really practical and ask the question Joshua did not. WHY should I believe that this book is actually from God? (Joshua saw the 10 plagues, red sea part, manna from heaven... so he had some advantages...) But if you are a skeptic today or are asking questions about the faith, we start without miracles, we could be accused of Circular argumentation – Problem!

**Circular Diagram:** Jesus says the Bible is God’s word -> The Bible says Jesus is the Son of God ->

So for those who are pragmatic thinkers in the room, Lets go linear and in stages.

**Is the New Testament Historically Reliable? → Information about Jesus → Is the Bible Divine?**

We begin with the questions – not whether the Bible is divine, but whether it is Historically reliable! That way, you can use standard historical standards to judge without taking the great leap of faith. Then, if these are just honest people who are writing down what they saw and heard, you can evaluate Jesus. And if Jesus is actually divine, you can determine if the Bible is divine based on Jesus ideas. Make sense?

**First, Is the New Testament Historically Reliable?**

If you are going to determine if ANY book is historically reliable, then you have three test you would apply to it. This puts the New Testament on similar grounds to other documents. And how might it compare? Here are the three tests: **Internal Evidence, External Evidence, Manuscript Evidence.**

First, the internal Evidence test.

- **Internal Evidence Highlighted** – Four key questions. First, Is there internal consistency in the New Testament documents?
  - **Are the writers close in time and space to the events?**

- Lets look at the gospels – Matthew was a follower of Jesus. So was John. Mark was an eyewitness, but young for a disciple. He was a disciple of Peter and wrote on his behalf. Luke was an outsider who heard rumors. He was a historian and a physician who went to investigate himself. Here is what he says about his task:
  - Luke 1:1-3 Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled<sup>[a]</sup> among us, <sup>2</sup> just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. <sup>3</sup> With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus,
  - This guy is a careful investigator. A gentile sent by Theophilus to get the facts straight from the eyewitnesses. And that is what you get. In the case of the gospels and Acts and the whole NT, every event is written by an eyewitness or a reporter of eyewitnesses. This is the best you can get. In fact, most of what we have in ancient history is NOT written by eyewitnesses. It is mostly written by second hand historians or people decades or centuries later. And sometimes far away.
- Do they claim to be history or fantasy?
- Luke 2:1-2 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. <sup>2</sup> (This was the first census that took place while<sup>[a]</sup> Quirinius was governor of Syria.)
  - You can see here that Luke is claiming to be history. At this time, in this place, with these people watching, this event happened. Fiction or allegory begins “a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away... or Once upon a time.” But the gospels are all firmly placed in a real historical context.
- Are there one or many?
- In this case, there are four. Some would count Paul in this, but his being an eyewitness is an eyewitness of a vision of Jesus, not the historical person of Jesus... so that one is debatable. But four for sure! I don’t know of any other historical event during Jesus time that had four eyewitnesses attesting to it. Let me say that again. I don’t know of any ancient event that has four eyewitnesses to it. This is unprecedented in the history of that day. And highly credible.
- Do they agree or disagree?
- Lets acknowledge that there are differences in the gospels. A lot of them. The sermon on the mount is totally skipped in John and Mark. Jesus calming the storm is only in some gospels. Sometimes a miraculous catch of fish is at the beginning of Jesus ministry and sometimes at the end. How do you account for this?
  - Detail inclusion is the number one way. In any eyewitness account, some eyewitnesses will include some details and others will include others. The fact that they don’t all have all the details actually ADDS to the authenticity of the accounts. You would expect that of eyewitnesses. When our kids were grade school age, we went to Disney World as a “home school field trip.” We justified this by having each kid

write a paper about the trip. We read all four and they were totally different. They highlighted different rides, different jokes, different events. One kid even did not include that grandma and grandpa were on the trip! And they paid for it! They were all writing what is true but had varying details. Same with the gospels.

- The other difference can be accounted for easily. On the miraculous catch of fish for example, Mark has it at the beginning of the ministry and John at the end. Mark has Jesus in the boat and Peter falling to his knees. John has Jesus on the shore and Peter jumping in. What is the story? Easy. Jesus did the same miracle twice. Once to call peter... and later on after peter's betrayal to restore him. These are not contradictions, they are easily understood in context. I want to commend to you some very cool resources if you like to tackle Bible difficulties – **the Hard Sayings of the Bible. Hard sayings of Jesus, Paul, Old Testament, New Testament, or the whopper that contains all five.** I read this stuff recreationally... and if you are broken like me and you love Bible difficulties, there are smart scholars who have thought through all of them!
  - The truth is that there is no problem with the agreement of the gospels. They are amazing in their agreement. Stunning, in fact. Some sections agree so much that many scholars think that Matthew and Luke used Mark as a source document to get parts of their gospels. If this interests you, google the key word "Synoptic Problem" and you'll see the problem with the gospels is not that they disagree, but that they agree on SO much.
- Next Test: **External Evidence**
  - The external evidence test asks how the evidence of the Bible lines up with the evidence of other documents and archaeology of its day.
  - Now, before we jump into this test, lets talk about the limits of it. External evidence can only test things like whether a city existed, whether a king reigned, whether a site is where it is said to be.
  - Throughout the Bible there are hundreds of stories in dozens of locations. Did you know that location after location is affirmed by archaeology. There is a real Jerusalem, a real Babylon, a real Jericho, a real Galilee, a real Rome. Now this may not seem like a big deal, but if you read the book of Mormon, you find a bunch of cities that never did exist. So while archaeology does not prove the Bible is God's word, it can disprove that something is historically reliable. But, as expected, hundreds of archaeological sites confirm that the writers of the Bible were just writing down history in time and space the way they saw it.
  - In fact, I keep two finds in my office. An oil pot from 1000 BC and an oil lamp from the time of Jesus. Now, these don't prove the Bible is true, but they do prove that people around Bethlehem used oil pots and lamps just like the Bible says, when the Bible says. If you want to handle something after the service that is 2000 or 3000 years old... literally... come on up and my friends will help you with it.

- But this is not what you REALLY want to know. You want to know if outside sources can verify anything about Jesus. I cannot verify certain stories or people – unless they were extremely famous.
- Remember, Jesus was just an obscure rabbi in a po-dunk town in a remote corner of the Roman empire. Nobody ever wrote about people like him – unless they followed him. So you would expect to find zero information about Jesus from the first century after his death. To make it worse, Jesus was only active for three years and most documents that were written in the day did not survive. You would expect to find nothing.
- Even with that, there were historians who noticed him. Five within the first century who were NOT in Jesus' circles:
  - Josephus, Jewish Historian writing for Roman government
  - Cornelius Tacitus – Roman Historian
  - Pliny the Younger, Roman Historian
  - Suetonius, Roman historian
  - Rabbi Eliezer, Jewish Historian
- And here are the facts that we can confirm about Jesus and the church from these historians
  - Jesus was a historical person whos public career occurred in the time of Emperore Tiberius
  - Jesus was called the Christ
  - James was Jesus' brother
  - Jesus claimed to be God
  - Jesus was reported to have done miracles
  - Jesus claimed he would 'depart and come again'
  - Pontius Pilate was the governor when Jesus died
  - Christ was executed by crucifixion during Passover
- Facts about the early Christians
  - Assembled together on a certain day of the week
  - Read the writings of the apostles
  - Practiced high ethical standards
  - Believed Jesus was God
  - Claimed Jesus rose from the dead
  - Were helping Christianity to become a worldwide movement by spreading it to Bythnia, Rome, and beyond
- Wow. You would expect nothing to be written about Jesus, yet all of these facts can be confirmed outside of the Biblical sources! Again, I am unaware of any other religious teacher that has FOUR eyewitness sources and FIVE external sources that confirm what happened in his life. The New Testament is unparalleled in this manner!
- I remember one person in a seeker group I was in saying "you know, that is an impressive list, but one thing missing is the biggest deal. There are no sources from non-believing historians that say that they saw Jesus rise from the dead. Why can't we confirm the resurrection from external, non-believer sources?" So I asked him... if you were there and saw someone risen from the dead, how long would you be a non-believer? Yeah, that's why all resurrection witnesses are believers!

OK that gets us through the first two tests, now let's look at the **manuscript evidence.** (Highlight Manuscript Test) It asks **"Is the text of the Bible today, the same as what the eyewitnesses originally wrote?"**

**Copies of Copies** Just to be sure we understand this concept, we need to point this out. Let's assume THIS is the original document – say the book of Romans, written by Paul. We don't have that copy anymore, it has withered and faded and crumbled long ago. But that document was copied... and copies of that were made and copies of copies of copies etc. And you can imagine that if we don't have the original documents... the copies of copies of copies may be subject to some evil monk that changed stuff around, right? So do we have something that looks a lot like the original?

- **There are two components to this question – How close in **time Graph from p. 17 – total time elapsed** are the copies we have to the originals?**
- You can see from this graph that the normal amount of time for documents from the same time like Thucydides, or Homer's Iliad or Caesar's History of the Gallic Wars is 600-800 years gap. That is 800 years from the time of the writing to the earliest manuscript or partial manuscript.
- But the New Testament gap is 35 years from the writing of John, to the John Rylands manuscript – a partial manuscript of the book of John held currently at Oxford University.

The second question is: how many **copies Graph from p. 18** do we have? The more copies, the more reliability. Makes sense, right?

- The competitors have as few as 7 and as many as 643. Homer's Iliad has 643 manuscripts. And as they agree with each other, this leads to a very high certainty that the copy in our hand is the same as the original. But the New Testament has over 5,600 manuscripts or pieces of manuscript from antiquity. Meaning if some cranky monk made a change in 382 AD it would be obvious because his manuscripts don't look like the rest. The New Testament manuscripts are overwhelming, even embarrassing. This does not even count translations of the NT... if we did foreign versions, it would tip the scales at over 26,000 manuscripts. Bottom line: the Greek manuscripts we have today are clearly like the originals.

So, to summarize. Internal – four eyewitnesses writing it in their lifetime. External – tons of affirmation from archaeology and from science and from history that the Bible is true and reliable. Manuscript – demonstrates that the books originally written are the same as the ones we translate from today.

**Jesus** (highlight was Jesus the Son of God?) Now, the rest of this argument flows downhill. Once you have good information about Jesus, you can evaluate his

- **Character, Teachings, Claims, Miracles, Death and Resurrection**

And I have taught many times here how Jesus is unparalleled among any religious leaders. Or anybody. These things put him in a category by himself – the unique son of God – which allows us to ask – what did Jesus say about the Bible?

### **Divine Authorship**

- **Matthew 4:4 –** Man does not live by bread alone, but by EVERY WORD. Every word that comes from the mouth of God. He considered this to be truth and life and power!

- **Matthew 26:56** – Prophecies coming true! Again, divine origin and pointing to him. We could do a long study on this – feel free on your own. But Jesus Quoted from the Old Testament, he considered it a powerful spiritual weapon, he submitted to the Law, he said that it would last even after heaven and earth pass away. Then he commissioned the disciples to spread the news and gave them the Holy Spirit to remember all he said. He commissioned the New Testament. In both ways, Jesus taught the Bible is TRUE! And if Jesus trusted it, that is my best card.

Some may say, but what about translations? I mean, isn't it true that the Bible was translated from Hebrew, to Greek, to Latin, to King James English to modern English? With all of those translations, it is bound to be a mess. So we decided to illustrate this mess with a Middle School Moment -

Just to show how silly this can get, we asked our Middle School Staff to take a simple recipe and translate it from English to Sudanese to Arabic to Bengali to Bulgarian to Chinese to Danish and back to English and see how it would work

### **Middle School Moment**

Fortunately, the Bible is translated by first class scholars directly from the original languages into English. Now, any time you translate any document from one language to another, you lose some meaning. Next week I'll tell you how to study this responsibly, but this week, we just admit that there is some loss any time you make a translation.

But here is the bottom Line: You can trust the Bible. When it comes to internal evidence, external evidence, manuscript evidence and translations, it just smokes the competition. There just isn't a more reliable book in ancient literature. **Visual: The Bible: Authoritative, Reliable, Inspired/Expired, Divine**

But what adds to the case is that thousands of people have found the truths contained within to be profound, lifechanging, universal, and adding to life's prosperity. And in a world of competing false messages, we NEED a source of truth.

- Your feelings may tell you that you will never be enough, but the BIBLE says you were so valuable that God sent his son to claim you with his life
- The devil will tell you that you are hopeless, but THE BIBLE says that you have God's Spirit and you are never without hope
- The Media will tell you "new information" that left is right and up is down and right is wrong, but the BIBLE gives you values proven by the people of God for 3000 years running
- Shame will tell you that you are trapped in past behaviors, but the BIBLE says that it is for FREEDOM that Christ has set you free!
- Institutions of power will tell you that all sexual instincts and behaviors are normal and good... but the BIBLE teaches God's best for the use of our sexuality
- Pain will tell you that you must not be loved, but the BIBLE tells you that God's love is undying and faithful in the midst of pain

Friends, we need a level in our life! And the Bible is the authoritative, reliable, inspired, Divine truth that you can count on.

Cutting room floor

**But it does raise an interesting question... is the Bible Inerrant? I mean, is this New International Version of the English Bible that I hold in my hands perfect in every way – without error? And some of you will cringe when I say ‘no...’**

Let me talk a little about this...

**Inerrant in original writing** (with scroll pic and ‘we don’t have these’)

The Christian and Missionary Alliance statement on the Bible says “**The Old and New Testaments**, inerrant as originally given...” And I am in full agreement that the text in its original language and its original form was inerrant. But here is the problem. We don’t have that! There is not a copy of the original Bible in a museum in the Vatican... remember all we have is copies of copies.

**Copies of Copies**

And if you study manuscripts, you find that there are ‘variants’. That means that one manuscript says one thing and another says another. Now, if you have 5,500 that say the same thing and 100 that say another, it is easy to resolve. But sometimes you have some where the later manuscripts (and a lot of them) have some extra scripture in them. Like Mark 16 adds 8 verses onto the end. Or John 8, the story of the woman caught in adultery is in MOST manuscripts and nearly all the later manuscripts, but the earliest and most reliable manuscripts DON’T have this. Fortunately, responsible translations have a little marker inside the text that says “the earliest and most reliable manuscripts don’t have Mark 16:9-16” – so an average reader like me can know.

Beyond this, there are a ton... and I mean a boatload... of minor inconsequential variants. Like a spelling change or a missing dot over an I (that is an English equivalent, but tells you how big a deal it was.) because of the volume of manuscripts, we have high confidence... but is it possible that some spelling errors, commas, or minor variants made it into the current translations? Yes, I think so. And that is one reason why our doctrinal statement does not call THIS book inerrant, but the originals.

And this is where the Dead Sea Scrolls come in. The dead sea scrolls were found in an area of Israel called: Qumran and **MAP!** The community here were like a cross between the Amish and the monks. They copied important scripture and put it in caves around 100 BC to 68 AD. And when their community was destroyed, these documents were left for 2000 years until found in 1943. But here is what they did for us. They narrowed the gap from when Old Testament writers, say, Isaiah wrote in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC and the manuscripts we had of Isaiah which were from the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD. A 1300 year gap! But the dead sea scrolls told us this is what it looks like from the year, say, 0. And you could ask... how much of Isaiah has changed in copying over 700 years? And the answer was – we found variants, but they were relatively few and of no consequence in their content. In other words, the copyists were amazing!

But one more thing needs to be pointed out. You also lose something in translation....**English Translation**

Some people think that the Bible was translated from Hebrew to Greek to Latin to King James to modern English. That is just not the case, but if it was, you could imagine how much meaning you might lose.

And these two reasons – copyist errors and translation challenges – are the two reasons that I am not too hot on saying my current NIV is inerrant. However, this does not mean that you need to doubt the veracity of the Bible. I feel very comfortable using these words about my current Bible.

The Bible is INSPIRED by God – which is not totally accurate either. I prefer to say it is expired by God. Even Paul says “All Scripture is God-breathed” It is breathed out by God, not just the liver shivers of the writer. It is breathed by God into human authors and by his power and with his protection they wrote.

God did not dictate the text to them word for word, but he used their language, their intelligence, their style, their education level to communicate his truth in their context. This is one reason why each book has the personality of that person...

We trust that the copyists did an excellent job and that they copyist problems are just the equivalent of a letter or an apostrophe... or if they are significant – like Mark 16 and John 8 – they just point it out in the text itself. We trust that the scholars who translated did a darn good job. And at least in English, we have many options of translations to compare. And because of this, I can be fully comfortable saying that this book is Authoritative, Reliable, Inspired/Expired, Divine.

So, can I just say it again. Read your Bible Every day. In it is life and prosperity and success and direction and joy and meaning.