

Seven steps to understanding your Bible Part 1

Here on the last Wednesday Night we are going to journey through the Bible book by book and chapter by chapter. Before we get start going through the Bible I want to begin with two introductory studies that will help us understand how we got our Bible and how to study the Bible.

I want to address these two topics in seven truths which I am calling the seven steps to understanding your Bible. Here they are:

1. Revelation
2. Inspiration
3. Canonization
4. Transmission
5. Translation
6. Illumination
7. Interpretation.

Tonight I want to begin by looking at the first five steps. These first five steps deals with how we got our Bible. As we look at these steps you will see that the Bible you have in your hand is the authoritative inspired and inerrant word of God.

Let's look at our first step which is revelation.

Revelation is how God revealed Himself to mankind. God's Revelation of Himself was essential for man to know because God is infinite and incomprehensible (Rom.11:33).

There are two ways that God has revealed Himself to mankind. First there is general or natural revelation. This form of revelation is called general because all mankind can know it and natural because it is revealed in and through God's creation.

God's general revelation is seen in the universe (Ps.19, Rom.1), the design of mankind (Gen.1:26-27), Human conscience (Rom.2:15) and God's providence

over Israel and human history (Dan. 2:21). Regarding general revelation it is important to note that general revelation is sufficient to condemn mankind (Rom.1:20), but insufficient to save mankind because it does not reveal the gospel.

Because God had to specifically speak to mankind and reveal Himself and the way of salvation this form of revelation is known as special revelation. There were ten ways that God has spoken to man throughout history. They are: the lot (Prov.16:33), the Urim and Thummim (Exod.28:30), dreams (Joel 2:28), visions (Isa.1:1), Theophanies (Gen.16:7-14), angels (Dan.9:20-21), events (Ezek. 25:7), prophets in the Old Testament (Zech.1:1) prophets and Apostles in New Testament (Eph.3:5), Jesus Christ (Joh.1:18) and scripture (2 Tim.3:15-17).”

Now that the Apostles and prophets of the first century have died and the Bible has been completed the way that God reveals His will and ways to mankind is through the complete written word of God.

The second step is inspiration.

The inspiration of the Bible deals with how God used Human authors to write His revelation. Concerning the importance of inspiration and its relationship to God’s revelation Paul P. Enns says, ¹“Inspiration is necessary to preserve the revelation of God. If God has revealed Himself but the record of that revelation is not accurately recorded, then the revelation of God is subject to question. Hence, inspiration guarantees the accuracy of the revelation.”

Inspiration deals with the process of how the human authors wrote God’s revelation on paper. When talking about inspiration there are two important scriptures.

First there is 2 Peter 1:20-21

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

¹ Enns, Paul P., “The Moody Handbook of Theology.” Chicago, Illinois. Moody Press. 1989. Page 159.\

Peter in these verses says that the source of the words and writings of the Old Testament prophets did not originate with them rather they were moved by the Holy Spirit. This is what God told Moses in Deuteronomy 18:18 concerning the ministry of a prophet He said, I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him.

The ministry of a prophet was to speak and write the authoritative words of God. Many of the authors of the Old Testament held the office of a prophet they were Samuel (1 Sam.15:1-2), Isaiah (Isa.1:1), Jeremiah (Jer.1:9), Ezekiel (Eze.1:3), Daniel (Matt.24:15), Hosea (Hos.1:2), Joel (Joe.1:1), Amos (Amo.1:3), Obadiah (Oba.1:1), Jonah (Jon.3:1-4), Micah (Mic.2:3), Nahum (Nah.1:12), Habakkuk (Hab.2:2), Zephaniah (Zep.2:2), Haggai (Hag. 1:1-2), Zechariah (Zech.1:3), Malachi (Mal.1:1-2).

Also those who did not hold the office of a prophet in the Old Testament spoke by the gift of prophecy and have evidence that their books were inspired. For example David is said to speak by the Holy Spirit (2 Sam. 23:2), Solomon is said to have the wisdom of the Lord (1 King. 3:9-10), also he spoke authoritatively in proverbs and Ecclesiastes (Ecc.12:13) and Job spoke prophetically about the Messiah Jesus Christ.

In the New Testament the office of prophet and gift of prophecy continued. For example the church was laid by the Apostles and prophets who spoke with divine authority (1 Cor.14:37, 1 Thess. 2:13, Acts 15). Also concerning those who did not hold the office of Apostle or Prophet in the New Testament Jesus said that He would lead the writers of scriptures into all truth.

So the source of the words and writings of the writers of the Old and New Testament came from God.

The second scripture for inspiration is 2 Timothy 3:16 which says, All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.....

This verse refers to the source, process and nature of the Old Testament writings. First concerning the source the scriptures are given by God, the process was that God superintended over the human authors so that what they wrote was exactly what God wanted written and the finally the product

was the authoritative word of God. Notice the extent of the inspiration of the Bible Paul said all scripture. This refers specifically to the Old Testament but it can also refer to the New Testament as well.

For example in 1 Timothy 5:18 Paul quotes Luke 10:7 with Deuteronomy 25:4 showing they were of equal authority.

Also in 2 Peter 3:15-16 the Apostle Peter referred to Paul's writings as scripture (2 Tim. 3:16) and therefore as having the same authority as the Old Testament.

Since the Bible is God's inspired word of God there are two logical results.

First the Bible is inerrant: 1. God cannot err (Psalm 119:160). 2. The Bible is the word of God (2 Timothy 3:16). 3. Therefore, the Bible cannot err because God cannot err.

Second since the Bible is the word of God it is authoritative in all it says. Paul in Timothy 3:16-17 says,

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

The third step is Canonization.

The word canon comes from the Greek word Kanon which means rule or measuring stick. The word Kanon began being applied to the excepted books of the Bible in the fourth century.

The excepted books of the Bible were those books that meet the following criteria. It is important to note that these guidelines and the Holy Spirit helped the church to recognize the books which were the authoritative word of God; their decision did not make them the authoritative word of God.

1. Was it written by a prophet, Apostle or an associate of an Apostle? In other words does the book itself claim to be the word of God? Does it contain phrases such as the word of the Lord came to me? Does it contain authoritative commands such as seen in the epistles?

2. Did the early church accept the book as the word of God? There are over 36,000 quotes of scripture from the early church fathers; we can reconstruct the entire New Testament minus eleven verses. We also know that the New Testament was accepted early because they have found scriptures written on the ossuary boxes.

3. Does the book have the power of God? (2 Tim.3:15, Acts 9). Are there acts of God such as miracles seen in the book? Does the book change lives?

4. Does the book tell the truth? In other words does the truth in the book line up with the truth that was previously given by God? God will not contradict Himself (1 Tim. 6:20, Heb. 6:18, Tit.1:2).

5. Did other authors or Apostles make reference to the book in their writings (2 Pet.3:16, 1 Tim. 5:18, Luke 10:7 or Matt.10:10)?

Here's a brief history of how the books of the Old and New Testament were collected.

- Old Testament

The Old Testament was written over a period of over a thousand years. We know from passages like Deuteronomy 31 and 2 Kings 22:8 that the Old Testament scriptures were accepted and gathered right away. We also know that by the time of Jesus the 24 books and the threefold division of the Tanak were already accepted and set (Luke 24:44).

In 90AD, there was a council of liberal Rabbis which meet in Jamnia. These Rabbis sought to question the books of the Bible which had already been accepted for many years by the Jews. They questioned a couple books but the end result was they reaffirmed that the 24 books of the Jewish Bible was the inspired word of God.

- New Testament

The New Testament was written over a period of 50 years (50-100AD). Just like the Old Testament the books of the New Testament were accepted and gathered very quickly. For example:

1. The people recognized that the Apostles were writing the authoritative word of God.

- Colossians 4:16 Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.
- 1 Thessalonians 5:27 I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read to all the holy brethren.
- Paul said in 1 Timothy 6:1-5 that if someone rejected his writings then they were to withdraw from them.

2. Paul quoted Luke 10:7 in 1 Timothy 5:18.

3. Peter refers to Paul's writings in 2 Peter 3:16.

The process of the church recognizing an official canon of scripture came in response to the writings of the Gnostic Heretic Marcion. Marcion believed that the whole Old Testament was not inspired, he also believed in a god of the Old Testament and New Testament. In the middle of the second century Marcion made a canonical list which left out many books and included his gospel.

There is evidence of the churches desire to establish an official canon in the second century from a document that was discovered by L.A. Muratori in a Library Milan Italy.

This document was a Latin manuscript which dated to the eighth century AD. The manuscript recorded some of the New Testament books which were looked at as canonical by believers by 200AD.

Other canonical lists that have been discovered were lists by the church fathers Origin, Eusebius and Athanasius which date to the third century.

Athanasius the Bishop of Alexandria in 367 listed all 27 books of our New Testament.

In 382 the church had a synod in Rome and they agreed with Athanasius' list. The 27 books of our New Testament became the recognized canon for the western church. Because there were no phones or email, the Eastern Church and all believers would recognize these 27 books 397 at the Synod of Carthage.

Now we come to our fourth step which is transmission.

As seen in step three the church in the first century began collecting the inspired writings of the New Testament and circulating them. Another thing that believers began doing is copying the inspired manuscripts.

Transmission deals with copying a manuscript on to another manuscript in the same language.

The Bible over time was written on different materials and in different Greek script. The Bible was copied on Papyrus which comes from a reed in Egypt, Vellum which were animal skins and often these materials were bound in a book and referred to as a codex.

The types of writing that scribes used in copying manuscripts were first uncial which were capital letters without spaces. This was a common way to copy in the 4th-9th century as demonstrated by the Codex Vaticanus, Sinaiticus and Codex Alexandrinus (4th to 9th century). Second there was minuscule's which was lower case cursive. This was the common way to copy from the 10th century to the 15th century. Majority of our manuscripts are this kind of writing. Finally the world changed when Gutenberg brought out the printing press in the 1500's.

- Periods of Transmission.

1. (100-300 AD) not many manuscripts were copied during these times. Many lectionaries which were the writings of early church fathers have been found on papyri, walls and ossuaries.

2. (300-500AD) there was an explosion during this time because Constantine legalized Christianity. Most of these manuscripts were written on Vellum and parchment.

3. (500-1000) this period is characterized by monks who copied scriptures. The quality of manuscripts decreased at this time because the monks wanted to copy them faster. The Quality refers minor things like grammar and punctuation.

4. (1000-1400) in this period the minuscule's replaced the uncials which helped them produce copies faster. After 1500 everything changed with the printing press.

In talking about transmission the question is often asked, are the manuscripts that we have accurate and reliable? This is an important question because we don't have the original manuscripts for the Bible.

The answer to that question is, yes our manuscripts are accurate and reliable.

First concerning the Old Testament manuscripts the two oldest manuscripts that we have are the *Aleppo Codex* (900AD.) and the *Codex Leningradensis* (1008AD.)

The evidence that we have that these manuscripts were copied correctly comes from the Dead Sea scrolls.

In March of 1947 a number of caves were found in Quram near the Dead the sea. In these caves all the books of the Old Testament were discovered with the exception of Esther. These manuscripts are important because they date from the 2nd century B.C to the 1st century AD. One specific scroll that was discovered was the Isaiah scroll which dated to 100BC. This scroll of Isaiah was compared to the latest Hebrew manuscripts and was almost identical.

Concerning the Isaiah scroll Dr. Gleason Archer said,

²“The two copies of Isaiah discovered in Quram cave 1, proved to be word for word identical with our standard Hebrew Bible in more than 95 percent of the text. The 5 percent of variation consisted chiefly of obvious slips of the pen and variations.”

This shows us the reverence that the Jews had for their scriptures and the accuracy with which they copied.

Now let's talk about the New Testament.

Just as the Old Testament we do not have any of the original Greek manuscripts. Though this is so, scholars have an abundance of resources with which they could reconstruct the New Testament.

² Norman Geisler quotes Gleason Archer, Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics. P. 187.

- Church Father's quotes: Scholars say that there are 36,000 quotes from the pre-Nicene (325AD) church fathers. If you put all their scripture references together you can reconstruct the entire New Testament minus eleven verses.
- Also there are 5,600 Greek manuscripts which date close to the original manuscripts.
- John Ryland fragment (125AD), John 18:31-33 & 37-38.
- Chester Beatty Papyri (200-300AD) Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, the Pauline epistles and Revelation.
- Bodmer Papyri (175-250) Portions of the John, 1 & 2 Peter, Jude.
- Codex Vaticanus (325AD) contains some of the Greek Old Testament and majority of the New Testament.
- Codex Sinaiticus (350AD) contains half the Greek Old Testament and the entire New Testament minus John 7-8, Mark 16.
- Codex Alexandrinus (5th century) contains the entire Old Testament and most of the New Testament.
- Not only are their Greek manuscripts, but because of the day of Pentecost the gospel and the New Testament was translated into different languages and taken to the ends of the earth.

The total number of ancient manuscripts that we have of the New Testament is 24,970 and a number of these manuscripts such as the Codex Sinaiticus, Alexandrinus and Vaticanus has the entire New Testament and a gap of 225 years of the original manuscripts.

In comparison to the number of other ancient manuscripts and the gap between the copies and their originals Dr. Norman Geisler says, "There are 643 copies of Homers Iliad, and that is the most famous book of ancient Greece! No one doubts the text of Julius Caesar's Gallic Wars, but we only have ten copies and the earliest of those was made 1,000 years after it was written. To have such an abundance of copies for the New Testament from dates within 70 years of their writings is amazing!"

Now we come to our fifth and final step this evening which is translation.

First let's talk about the translations of the Old Testament. The Old Testament was mainly written in Hebrew, by the third century AD most of the world spoke and read Greek, because of this the Old Testament from about 150-250BC was translated into Greek by 72 Jewish scholars in Alexandria Egypt.

Because there were seventy two translators this translation was called the Septuagint which is Latin for seventy. The Septuagint later came to be the Bible of the early church.

Now concerning the New Testament it was written in Greek from 50-100AD. Because the gospel had spread throughout the world very early the New Testament was translated into Syraic, Coptic and Old Latin.

In 382 Bishop Damasus of Rome commissioned his sanctuary a man named Jerome to gather together all the Old Latin translations and produce a revised version. Jerome completed the gospels in 384, but did not complete the entire Bible until years later.

Jerome's Bible officially did not replace the Old Latin version in the Catholic Church until 600AD. Jerome's Bible became the standard Bible for the Catholic Church for one thousand years. In 1546 at the council of Trent the Catholic Church named this Bible the Latin Vulgate, Vulgate is Latin for common. From the thousand years that the vulgate was in circulation we have over 10,000 Latin manuscripts.

Now let's talk about how we got our English Bible. By the 700's the gospel went west and as a result there was a need for a translation from Latin into Old English. A number of missionaries from 700-1300 made many partial translations into Old English.

An entire translation into English did not happen until the 1300's; at this time John Wycliffe translated the Latin Bible into English. In 1380 the New Testament was complete; Wycliffe after this would pass away and Nicolas Hereford in 1382 would complete the Old Testament and In 1388 John Purvey produced a revision of Wycliffe's translation which later replaced it.

In the 1500's William Tyndale from Germany translated the entire New Testament into English .In 1525 Tyndale smuggled 15,000 translations of the English New Testament into England. Later while translating the Old Testament Tyndale was caught by the Catholic Church condemned strangled then burned at the stake.

In 1537 Miles Coverdale finished Tyndale's translation of the Old Testament.

In the late 1500's Thomas Matthew produced the Matthew Bible which was later called the Great Bible. In the late 1500's and early 1600's two translations came out that would affect the world forever.

In the late 1500's in Geneva William Whittinham made a translation of the New Testament based on Theodor Beze Latin text and the current Greek Text. Upon completion they called this translation the Geneva Bible. The Geneva also had John Calvin's commentary and notes, this became the English translation of the Reformers.

The next translation came in the early 1600's and it was known as the King James Version. Around the year 1604 James IV of Scotland who was also James the first of England assembled Anglican and Puritan scholars at the Hampton court conference so they could solve the religious differences. The attempt failed. One individual named John Reynolds the leader of the puritans had an idea, he suggested that they make a translation with no notes that all could read.

The King agreed and called 50 scholars from many different Universities to translate the Bible. The 50 scholars were divided up into 6 groups, two at Oxford, two at Cambridge and two at Westminster. The work began in 1607 and completed it in 1611.

The texts that were used to translate the King James Version was the Coverdale, Great Bible and the Geneva Bible when they appeared closer to the Greek Text. Also they used Erasmus's 4th and 5th edition Greek text and Robert Stephanus text which was also based on Erasmus's and Theodor Beza's Greek text.

The King James Version after this went under many revisions; a recent revision took place in 1967. The King James Version was the most widely read Bible in the 17th and 18th century.

In the early 1980's a New Version of the King James came out. This version updated the English and went relied on the same Greek manuscripts as the King James Version. That's the basic history concerning the New King James Bible.

If the New King James and King James are good translations why are there so many different translations? Let me give to reasons

1. Some translations are easier to read because rather than translate the text word for word like the they paraphrase or give a dynamic equivalent such as the NLT and NIV.
2. Many who want to study the scriptures want a good word for word translation of the Greek Text
3. Some scholars favor specific Greek Manuscripts out of the over five thousand. Let me quickly explain:

Beginning in the late 1800's many manuscript and archeological discoveries were made. Of importance is the discovery of the Codex Alexandrinus, Sinaiticus and Vaticanus. These texts differ from the majority in minor areas such as omissions.

Scholars such as John Mill (1700's), Albert Bengel (1730's), Karl Lachman (1831), Samuel Tregelles and Constantine Von Tischendorf sought to form an accurate Greek text based on the discovery of these earlier Greek manuscripts.

This is where the often heard names of Brook Westcott and Fenton Hort come in. These two men took the Greek text produced by these scholars and worked for 28 years and produced a one volume Greek text called the New Testament in the original Greek. The result of this Greek text was scholars favored the Westcott and Hort Alexandrian text over the Textus Receptus because it is based on older manuscripts. The logic is if it is older than it is better.

Based on this text both the English and American revised versions were produced in the early 1900's.

A little later Eberhard Nestle took the known Greek texts such as those by Tischendorf, Westcott, Hort and Weymouth and made a standard Greek text. Eberhard's son Erwin years later along with Kurt Aland produced the latest and now standard Greek Text which is known as the Nestle- Aland Greek Text.

This Greek text is the standard for all new translations such as the New English Bible, The Living Bible, and the New International Version, New American Standard, English Standard Version.

It is important to note that the differences in modern translations is next to nothing, in comparing the good English translations there is no change that effects any essential doctrine or meaning of the text.

I want to close with answer one last question, are our copies and translations inspired? Only the original manuscripts are inspired, but because our copies of the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts and translations of those manuscripts communicate the meaning of those original meaning of those text we can be assured that the books we have in our hands is the inspired, inerrant authoritative word of God.