

## **The Trustworthy Word**

### **Weeks 1 - 56 Review**

#### **Introduction**

Week 1 (8/9/2015): Where do we look for evidence of a trustworthy Bible? God has always worked in human history through (sinful) people such as Abraham, David, Cyrus, Mary, Pilate, and Peter. God's purposes have been accomplished through them and in spite of them. The same is true for the Bible: God has used (sinful) authors, manuscript copyists, and translators, yet His purposes have been accomplished through them. The Bible is remarkable in the same way that all human history is remarkable: we marvel to see how God demonstrates His greatness by keeping His promises and accomplishing His purposes despite and through sinful people. So the trustworthiness of the Bible is not established by proving a lineage of perfectly trustworthy people who have handed the Bible down to us. Rather, the Bible is trustworthy because God purposed and promised to work through sinners to reveal Himself in His trustworthy Word.

Because the general plan for this study was to begin in the present with our modern English Bibles and work backwards in time, we began by studying translations:

#### **Understanding Translations**

Week 2: How can we trust the Word of God if we have more than one translation in our language? Some have argued that there can only be one inspired translation in each language. But this confuses inspiration (which applies to the original manuscripts) with preservation (which applies to the copies and translations made from the original manuscripts). Having more than one careful translation in a language is actually a rich benefit that helps us understand the original text better.

And so at that point we began a 6-week study of the translation of Psalm 23 to illustrate this:

Weeks 3-8 (Aug/Sept '15): Comparing 4 different translations of Psalm 23 to learn more about how translations work and to illustrate how multiple translations actually deepen our understanding of God's inspired Word. (We also took a brief diversion to talk about the importance of faithful seminaries, Bible scholars, and biblical scholarship, which is a labor of love that blesses each of us in our local churches.) We learned about some of the challenges that translators face, and how translators tend to lean toward emphasizing either form or meaning in their translation (both of which have benefits for the reader). We observed how comparing translations actually made it much easier for us to understand Psalm 23 thoroughly, rather than confusing us and making it difficult to understand.

Weeks 9-12 (Oct/Nov '15): Compared translations of another passage (Matthew 18:21-35) to continue learning more about how our modern English translations work and how we benefit from having multiple excellent translations.

### **The History of English Translations**

Then we began our study of the history of English translations. Weeks 13-14 told the story of the KJV, and then we started back in early English history (back to the 300s!) to learn the story of the translation of the Bible into English. Weeks 15-18 (Dec '15) told the story up to William Tyndale (including Wycliffe), and then weeks 19-28 (Jan/Feb '16) told the story of Tyndale, whose translation work continues to dramatically impact English Bibles today.

### **Other Ancient Translations**

Week 29 overviewed some of the other ancient translations of the Bible, including the early Greek translations of the Old Testament. We briefly noted some of the encouraging stories of how the New Testament was translated as the gospel spread through the early church.

Then we began our study of canonicity, or the question of which books should be included in the Bible:

### **Introducing Canonicity: Which Books Should Be Included in the Bible?**

In Week 30 (4/17/16) we talked about the word “canonicity,” which suggests a ruler that measures something (does this book “measure up”?) or a line that creates a boundary (of all the books that could possibly be included in the Bible, how do we draw a line around the ones that should be?). We also considered quotes from some of the books not included in our Bible, like *Judith*, the *Gospel of Thomas*, and the *Shepherd of Hermas*. This continued into Week 31, when we talked about several different categories of extra-biblical books. We learned that nothing in these books is secret (as authors like Dan Brown imply), nor do they teach some other early Christianity that was lost and has been recently rediscovered. All of these books are publicly available, well-known, and have been extensively studied.

In Weeks 32-33 (5/8/16, 5/15/16) we began to talk about “models of canonicity,” which, as we learned, is unrelated to models of cannons or Canons. We learned that some of these can be rejected completely, such as the idea that the biblical books were selected to serve personal agendas, that the Roman Catholic pope and bishops (the “magisterium”) possess the God-given authority to define the canon, or that any book is Scripture if it gives you a spiritual experience.

A much better model suggests that the biblical books were accepted by the early Christians because they met certain criteria. For example:

- The books best represented the true Christian faith and gospel. This is a genuine factor, because the apostles did teach the early church to identify and reject heresy.

- They were consistent with the rest of Scripture, especially by demonstrating the fulfillment of all of the Old Covenant Scriptures.
- They were supported by historical evidence of their genuineness.
- They were closely connected to the apostles or their disciples.

While these things are true – and we have been studying some of them – they aren’t the ultimate “model,” because ultimately we must believe that the canon exists because God inspired it. The Scriptures exist because of God’s revelation, not man’s canonization. As Fisher writes, “The method of determination is not one of selection from a number of possible candidates (there *are no* other candidates, actually) but one of reception of authentic material.” (*The Origin of the Bible*, p.75) Some (especially Roman Catholics) will argue that this leaves us with no way (no external verification) to know what Scripture is. But Jesus promised that “My sheep hear My voice” (John 10:27). The true canon (the true revelation of God) will make an authoritative impact on the true church, because Jesus’ sheep hear His voice. As James White writes, “The true foundation for confidence in the canon of Scripture is found in God’s sovereign power to fulfill His own purposes (Psalm 135:6), and it is His purpose for Scripture to function in the church as a means of instruction, admonishment, and encouragement.” (*Scripture Alone*, p.109)

### **The Divine Qualities of the Canon**

Then we began studying the Divine Qualities of the canon since the books that are from God will demonstrate divine qualities above every purely human book. In Week 34 (5/29/16) I shared my own testimony of 10 reasons why I am convinced that the Bible cannot be merely a human book, but must be what it claims to be: a revelation from God. In Weeks 35-42 (Jun-Aug ’16) we talked about the divine quality of “unity.” If the sixty-six biblical books are from God they will demonstrate a unified and consistent message despite being authored across two millennia. We focused specially on the theme of covenants, which ties the Bible together in a stunning way and creates a message that unfolds with remarkable continuity. The sixty-six parts of the Bible are undoubtedly one book in a way that only God could have arranged.

### **The Apostolic Origins of the Canon**

Then we began studying the Apostolic Origins of the canon since the books that are truly from God would have come from the apostolic foundation laid by Jesus. In Week 43 we talked about how the Old Testament set this pattern: redemption, followed by explanation of that redemption through God-appointed messengers. In other words, the Old Testament is not a random assortment of books, but an explanation of God’s redemption that came through God’s chosen messengers. It was no surprise, then, when Jesus came with the climactic redemption and appointed messengers (the apostles) to explain it. The New Covenant followed the Old Covenant pattern.

Beyond this, the Old Covenant admitted that it was incomplete, promising that the climactic redemption was coming and that a climactic messenger would explain it. This means that when Jesus brought the once-for-all redemption and the once-for-all message about it, He not only followed the Old Covenant pattern but also fulfilled the Old Covenant itself.

But how would that once-for-all message of redemption spread to the world after Jesus returned to heaven? Just as the Old Covenant redemption was explained through the *written* revelation of authors chosen by God, we expect the same thing for the New Covenant redemption through Jesus. This is exactly what Jesus established through the apostles as He promised in John 13-17. He chose men who would be the messengers of redemption, and everything that happened in the writing of the New Testament fulfilled the promises of Jesus to those men.

In Weeks 44-52 we examined the remarkable internal evidence for the fulfillment of those promises. We demonstrated that the New Testament books came from the apostles and their associates; that they were well aware of their qualifications and role; that they were faithful to carry out their role; and that the result was not only countless disciples of Jesus, but also the deposit of authoritative truth. This “faith once for all delivered to the saints” was written down and preserved so that the revelation of Jesus Christ could go around the world, across languages, across millennia, until He comes again. It was delivered one time for all people in all times. This is precisely what the Old Covenant led us to expect, what Jesus promised, and what the apostles explained.

Having already considered much of the internal evidence about the authorship of the New Testament, in Weeks 54-56 we added external evidence such as the traditions of the early church. We learned that while we don’t know for certain the authorship of some books, such as Hebrews, there is very little historical evidence that could be used to argue for any other authors besides those claimed in the books themselves and traditionally accepted.

## **The Corporate Reception of the Canon**