

# The Sure Foundation of the Church: A Sure Canon

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Turn with me in your Bibles to the book of Deuteronomy 18. We are continuing a topical series, normally try to preach through books of the Bible but here at Providence we've been doing a topical series for a period of time on the doctrine of the church, what the Bible says about the church and what we are in the plan and economy of God. This is our third message in the series. We began two weeks ago looking at the glorious possession of the church, that is, the truth. Then last week, we looked at the fundamental mission of the church which is to share the truth. And today we want to look at the sure foundation of the church. That's the title of the message today, "The Sure Foundation of the Church: A Certain Canon." It's an area that is not talked about a lot and it's so important and I want us to talk about it this morning, idea of canonicity. It's one of the most relevant questions that we can wrestle with, it's probably one that you may not have been thinking about lately but it's something that has been at times very much in the thought of the culture.

The question of canon is really answering the question: what books should be in the Bible? Why do we believe that the 66 books in our Bible are the true revelation of God and nothing else outside is the same as these 66 books? Because that is the Christian conviction. These 66 books, the 39 books of the Old Testament, the 27 books of the New Testament, are uniquely the infallible words of God. We make the claim that there is no other book like the Bible. In fact, there are no other books that make even the claims of the Bible; other religions don't have quite the same claims. A couple that are kind of offshoots of Christianity do claim to have infallible words from God but most religions when you look at Buddhism and Confucianism and other places like that, they don't quite have the same, even make the same claims, that they have the infallible inerrant words of God. But that is the Christian position. We believe that we have, because God has chosen to make himself known, we have in the pages of Scripture a unique book that stands above all other books. We actually possess the words of God on paper and these 66 books and no more. Though there are some who believe that there are other books that should be added, we believe and we can have great confidence that these 66 books and no more are the true word of God.

That's the issue of canonicity. The word "canon" itself, this is c-a-n-o-n, not c-a-n-n-o-n like a big cannon outside the church, that is the cannon of the church. No, this is the canon, c-a-n-o-n. It's from a Greek word. It's actually a transliteration of a Greek word

which meant "reed or a measuring stick." And so the canon is the standard, the rule, and to say a book is in the canon is to say it is a part of the rule, the standard of God, and it's that which sets all the other, everything else is judged by it. That's what we believe about the Bible. The Bible is the inerrant infallible word of God and it is the standard.

So it's so important for us to understand that we have a sure foundation, that we're not on a sea of subjectivity. In the early 2000s, it was 2003, Dan Brown wrote a book called "The Da Vinci Code." In that book, it was a novel, didn't purport to be an actual, you know, historical account. It was a novel but in the novel he makes some audacious claims but he does so with great boldness, and it's actually quite a compelling read. I read the book, I don't recommend the book, I read the book because I needed to shepherd the church and so I read the book and made myself read the book, and I found it to be an interesting read but like I said, I don't recommend that you read it because I felt like I needed to wash my brain after I was done. So be advised that way. But the book basically made, in this fictional story it's basically historical fiction. He's trying to say that there's real history undergirding this fictitious account, and the idea is, the central idea is that the Bible that we possess, particularly the New Testament, the gospels of the New Testament are not the original gospels. This is his argument, that there are other gospels that are found other places that were actually the original gospels, things like the gospel of Judas, the gospel of Thomas, the gospel of Peter; these are the real gospels and other Gnostic documents that had been found, and that essentially the church, he maintains the church at the Council of Nicea under the direction of the Roman Emperor Constantine forced Matthew, Mark, Luke and John on the church, they were later productions and these earlier gospels were then squashed.

Well, history does not bear this out. Any credible historian rejects Brown's claims because the reality is we have people in the late first century and second century quoting Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Nobody quotes the gospel of Judas or the gospel of Peter until much later because those were second and third century productions, written in the 100s and 200s AD. But it raised the question of canonicity and in a really post-modern world where actually some people say we're post-post-modern now but a lot of post-modernism still affecting us, the idea is that, you know, whatever truth is truth for you, that's great. I have truth for me. You have truth for you. Everything is relative. And so the Bible then is just relegated to just one other book among many where opinions about God are put forth but there's nothing unique about it, and we as Christians can suddenly be conditioned to think like that and what I want to suggest to you this morning is that is an entirely unchristian mindset, and it's not humility, it is pride, it's sharing in the pride of this world which would tear God's unique revelation down because when you carefully analyze the facts, Christianity makes bold claims that no other religion makes. I mean, Jesus made claims that no other religious person, a leader, ever made. He said, "I am the way, the truth and the life; no man comes to the Father but by Me." Buddha didn't say that. Confucius didn't say that. Mohammed didn't say that. Jesus says that. And the Bible makes claims about itself, that it is, as we looked at a couple of weeks ago when we looked at 2 Timothy 3, it is God-breathed, every single jot and tittle breathed out by God.

And the question is how do you know when books aren't breathed out by God and how do you know when they are? This is a question that was of such primary focus that God from the very beginning gave his people a plan to deal with that question, because one of the things that Brown comes up with and then he basically arguing that the idea is that they didn't, you know, how do you decide which books of the Bible are out there and you've got all these books and so the council meets and they determine it. Then the Catholic Church comes along and they maintain, though they disagree with Brown, they believe they have the right book, they make a statement like this, they say the Church gives you the Bible. This is the Roman Catholic position and it is in error. They say that the Church looks at the various documents and it sets its seal upon them and therefore gives them authority. The opposite is the truth. The Bible itself has intrinsic authority. It gives us the church. It births the church and the church merely recognizes the intrinsic authority already in the Bible. It's really an audacious claim to act like the Church, the pope declares, even the council declares what the word of God is. No. The council recognizes the word of God.

But in reality what we're going to see this morning is whenever there was a council where they did discuss like is this particular book in the Bible or this book in the Bible, the reality was they were dealing with heretics who were coming up and trying to masquerade, there were false prophets, but when they declared the canon, whenever they reiterated the canon they were always reiterating what the faithful had always known. There was never a sense in which they were inventing the list of books and I'm going to show you this from Deuteronomy because God in his infinite wisdom when he first began to give the Bible to us in written form, when was that? It was in the ministry of Moses. Moses was the first prophet of God that came speaking with God's voice in a significant way. I mean, he spoke through...Abraham is called a prophet etc., but Moses, the first full prophet who comes and writing down what he was to speak first. Spoke the word and then he wrote it down and he gives us the first five books of the Bible. And at the end of his life in Deuteronomy, this book Deuteronomy 18, Deuteronomy is his farewell address to the people and what we're going to see he says is, "Listen, now that I'm gone, God's going to keep speaking to you, He's going to keep sending prophets like me and you're to listen to them. And how are you going to know? There are going to be other voices that are claiming to speak for God."

It's not surprising at all. This is Satan's strategy from the beginning. I mean, think about it. In the garden of Eden there was another voice. God was speaking and Satan was speaking. Throughout history that's the reality, God speaks and Satan speaks. Satan counterfeits. And so God gives them a test in this very passage, the test of how they are to evaluate and know when God is speaking, and what I want you to understand, I want you to get this, that the people of God received this instruction when they first got the first five books of the Bible and they had a canon of five books, the law, the Torah, and then each prophet who came along after that, Joshua comes along, he speaks and then he writes and they accept his book into the canon because he met the test of canonicity. They didn't say, "Well, we just can't know if Joshua was canonical until a thousand years later until the Council of Jamnia." No, the people of God did what God said, they tested the prophets, they added the canon, and the canon grew book by book by book by book

until we had the entire Old Testament finished, in English 39 books, originally in Hebrew 29 books, the same 39 books divided up differently. For instance, the last 12 books of the Old Testament, the minor prophets are one book in the Hebrew Bible. But those same 22, 39 books in the 22 books of the Hebrew Bible were the Old Testament canon. In Jesus' day it was settled. No question. And then the Jews had learned this and as the church spread out there was always a group of Jews, we're going to see, that were helping the people evaluate. Do you remember what Ted read a minute ago? When Paul said in 2 Thessalonians 3:17, I hadn't read this in a long time, I was so glad you read it, he said, "I write this in my own hand. This signature is with all of my works." Why did he say it? Because there were false gospels out there, there were false documents out there, and he understood the people of God must know that it is truly from God, from his apostle. This issue of canonicity is something that is so very important.

Let's read these verses, Deuteronomy 18:15. Again, Moses' farewell address in the book of Deuteronomy, basically three sermons that ended up being his farewell address given in just a very short period of time as he neared death. Verse 15,

15 "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him. 16 This is according to all that you asked of the LORD your God in Horeb on the day of the assembly, saying, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, let me not see this great fire anymore, or I will die.' 17 The LORD said to me, 'They have spoken well. 18 I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. 19 It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him. 20 But the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.' [Look at this next verse.] 21 You may say in your heart, 'How will we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?'

That's the question of canonicity, how will you know what God has spoken and what he's not spoken? Verse 22,

22 When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.

Let's pray.

*Father, we ask that You might now grant that through Your word, Your precious perfect word, that You might instruct our hearts, that You might help us to see the glory of Your revelation, Your self-revelation contained in Scripture that we might have more confidence in the Bible and build our lives upon it, and that we might share it more*

*earnestly because of that confidence, more boldly, and we might see Your glory spread throughout the earth. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

I want us to look this morning at four points, four "P's" basically, that help us look at this, this question of canonicity. "The Sure Foundation of the Church: A Certain Canon." The sure foundation of the church, a certain canon, that's the title. And the first is the problem and I've introduced this already, so many voices claiming to speak for God. That's the problem, there will be more voices than just the people who are genuinely given God's word. The prophet, actually a prophet, to understand the Hebrew concept of prophet that's used here in Deuteronomy 18:15, a prophet is not someone who foretells the future, that's not the main point. They may do that but that's not the main point of what it means to be a prophet of God. What it means to be a prophet of God is that you actually are a mediator of the very words of God. God gives his very words to the prophet, the prophet gives God's very words to the people. That's what it means to be a prophet, to be a spokesman, to be a divinely called, divinely appointed, divinely used spokesman. The prophet speaks for God.

This is how God has chosen to speak to us. That's what's going on when he talks about verse 16 when you remember in Exodus when they had come out of Egypt, the Lord asked them to, the people to come near, not to come too close to the mountain but God's going to speak from heaven. He speaks from heaven, they're terrified and they say, "Please don't let this happen anymore!" Well, God had intended to give them a prophet but he let them see the terror of hearing his voice out of heaven. They needed a man to be called to speak for God and that's what God does. And Moses, of course, is that first prophet and then he promises there will be other prophets, and ultimately the final fulfillment of this is the Lord Jesus Christ who is the final prophet of God and the true prophet to which all of Scripture points.

But the problem is many voices claiming to speak for God. All world religions claim to speak for God at some level although they don't make quite the same claims that Christianity does. They do claim to be avenues to God but the Bible makes clear this is the only place that you find the revelation of the true and living God, the Bible. And within the church, the problem is also that there are those who are false teachers, false prophets, false voices in the church. In the Old Testament people of God that was true, and in the New Testament people of God that is true. There's been much confusion at many points that has been brought upon the church because of false prophets.

You see this early on even in Moses' lifetime. You have Balaam, the false prophet, in Numbers 22. Korah's rebellion in Numbers 16 which is basically challenging Moses' authority. He wants to be the one to lead, or he wants someone else to lead besides Moses. But you see it throughout the Old Testament as you go along, and I want to just kind of survey a few places.

I want you to turn, well, let me explain this. We'll turn to it a little bit later because I want to turn to it when we're going to look at some specific points. But in Jeremiah's day you see this probably one of the most clear illustrations of this. Jeremiah is called by God,

given the words of God. They're like a burning in his bones and he has to speak the word of God, and his message is essentially this, "Repent or judgment is coming." He ministers from like 610-570 BC. So he starts ministering a few years before the first Babylonian invasion. Babylon invaded Israel in three different invasions: 605 BC, then eight years later, 597 BC, and then 11 years later, 586 BC. So between these three invasions Jeremiah is prophesying and he's telling them, "Repent. Turn back to God or this is going to happen." Then once they reach a certain point he says, "There's no longer, you can no longer stave off the judgment that God is bringing but humble yourself and accept it and stop fighting against it." He's basically saying, "Stop fighting against the king of Babylon. You're just making it worse for yourselves. God has decreed that you will go into captivity for 70 years."

Now there's all these other false prophets. It was like a cohort of prophets who claimed to speak for God contemporary to Jeremiah and they are the Joel Osteen's of the day. They are, "You can have your best life now, right now. God is going to make you happy. That's what He exists to do, to make you happy and healthy. You're God's people." And they say things like, "The temple will never be destroyed." Jeremiah says, "It's going to be destroyed." They say, "It'll never be destroyed." And there's a whole bunch more of them and the question is who's the prophet of God? They're both saying, "Thus says the Lord." How do you know? Well, they tested the prophets and they found out who was right. One of them spoke and what happens in this verse said was true. Jeremiah is the one who his word was vindicated.

You see the false prophets in Nehemiah. Remember in Nehemiah 6, those of you who were attending while we were going through Ezra-Nehemiah, and in Nehemiah 6, Nehemiah in his ministry there trying to, remember he's building the wall of Jerusalem. There were a bunch of prophets that were opposing him. We see this clearly in Nehemiah 6, a guy named Shimei, a female prophetess, I forget her name, Noadiah, and then a number of other prophets who were trying to frighten Jeremiah basically and saying and telling the people, "God is telling you to stop building the wall."

You see false prophets, Jesus warns about false prophets in Matthew 7 early in his ministry. He's come now, he's the true light that has come into the world and he says in verse 15 of Matthew 7, "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves." He said, "There are going to be people who come, continue to come and claim to speak for Me but they are false." He says, "You will know them by their fruits," verse 16, "Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit." Here's another test of the prophets, you look at the fruit of their life. Is there holiness? Is there godliness?

Now you see it also in 2 Corinthians just to show you how this flows through the whole. This is just a couple of examples, we could multiply this over and over because false teaching is going on in almost every epistle they're opposing it. But 2 Corinthians 11:13-15 then there were people who claimed to be not just prophets, now since God is now in the New Testament, he's appointed 12 apostles and they're ones sent, apostle means to be

sent with authority, they're sent directly from Jesus to give his word to the church, the 12 apostles. But there are others who claim to be apostles and Paul says in 2 Corinthians 11:13, "For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds."

Again and again and again you see this. 1 John 4:1 says, "test the spirits to see whether they are from God." He's not talking about trying to talk to a spirit itself. He's saying test the spirits of the teaching. Where did the teaching come from? Does it come from the Spirit of God or does it come from the spirit of this age? And there in 1 John 4 he says, "test the spirits to see whether they are from God; every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God." Do they say the right thing about Jesus?

So that shows the problem, it's a perennial problem, and so it's not surprising that in the second and third century there were men who were deceivers just like Paul talked about, claiming to be apostles, writing under pseudonyms, Gnostic heretics who chose to say, "I'm Peter," and they wrote a document, the gospel of Peter. Peter had nothing to do with the gospel of Peter. The gospel of Peter is an entirely different character. Peter would never have, if Peter saw it he'd burn it. Isn't it interesting the gospel of Judas? That kind of shows you how wacky that whole group of Gnostics were. They tried to make Judas a hero in these gospels.

So the perennial problem, the question is how do you know which, as we saw in Deuteronomy 18, how do you know which word the Lord has not spoken? That's the problem. The second point is the prescription and back to our text, Deuteronomy 18, we have here, I'm going to suggest to you there are three main tests that they're given in Deuteronomy and there's a fourth that is occasionally also a mark. But these first three are the main essential tests and the first test is the test of authority. So there's four subpoints under the prescription but the three main subpoints and a fourth you might dotted line, there's a D that's a little different character than A, B, and C.

A is authority, that if you wonder if it's from God, well, the first thing it has to do, it has to claim to be from God. Don't wonder about something that doesn't claim to be from God. Verse 15, "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen." Verse 18, "I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him." God puts his words in the mouth of the prophet and the prophet says, "Thus says the Lord." Over 4,000 times in the Old Testament you have phrases like "Thus says the Lord. The Lord said. God said. God spoke." The Old Testament bears this mark of authority from Genesis to Malachi. They're not just pondering and meandering. They're saying, "Thus says the Lord."

So authority. The second test under the prescription. So the prescription is test the prophets with these tests. The first test is authority. The second test is accuracy. Verse 22, this is how he answers the question directly he raises in verse 21, "How will we know the

word which the LORD has not spoken?" Verse 22, its accuracy, "When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken." Truth. If he says it's going to happen and it doesn't happen, if he says something that's not consistent with truth and reality, therefore God doesn't speak that way. God is truth. Accuracy.

So if a prophet comes and he claims to speak for God but then what he says isn't true or doesn't come true, you reject that, the church immediately or the people of God, the Old Testament people of God, the faithful in the Old Testament immediately reject that. This is what they did in Jeremiah's day, they got these false prophets that they really liked their message, "We really wish what you're saying is true. We've got Jeremiah saying we're going into captivity, we've got you saying peace, peace, everything is great. We vote for you," but God votes for Jeremiah and what Jeremiah said came true, what they said did not come true. Therefore any writings they had, throw them away. Jeremiah and his prophesy you now add to the canon of Scripture. Do you see that?

So the third test. Now to see this you have to look at another part of Deuteronomy, Moses' farewell address, chapter 13. We said authority is the first test, accuracy is the second test, the third test is consistency. These are the three main tests. Consistency. It's not enough to have authority and accuracy but you have to also have consistency.

Let me show you how this works out. Deuteronomy 13:1, "If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder," even, "and the sign or the wonder comes true," he says he's going to do something and he does it, looks like he's met the test of authority and accuracy. He says, "Look, I'm speaking for God. Look, what I said came true." But there's a third test. Look what he says next, verse 2, "and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them,' you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the LORD your God is testing you to find out if you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul." The Lord may allow him to work signs or wonders through the power of darkness. God may allow that to happen and the question is if he's telling you to worship someone other than who you've already received instruction on to worship in the first five books of the Bible, remember Moses was finishing up the Torah, the law, he says if somebody comes along and they work miracles, they say something is going to happen and it does happen but they tell you to worship another god, you shall not follow them. God is not speaking through them. It must be consistent.

Those are the three main tests: authority, accuracy, consistency. Now there's a fourth test implicit in this chapter 13 and that is that sometimes it's there but it's most often not there with prophets but it occasionally is. It's the fourth test would be authenticity. I can't come up with a better term than that, authenticity. It's a sign or mark of authenticity. It's a fingerprint of God on the prophet. And what I mean is God sometimes gives the prophet who's speaking not only the ability to say and what he says and predicts comes true, but he also works signs or miracles, but that's a much rarer thing. As I pointed out a couple of weeks ago when we went through that, if you didn't hear the message a couple of weeks



ago, I encourage you to listen to that, the message on the church's glorious possession. I think that was two weeks ago. Anyway, where I talked through how the miracles come in clusters to confirm revelation. Like for instance, Jeremiah didn't work any miracles, Isaiah didn't work any miracles, most of the prophets didn't work any miracles but you receive their word because they claimed authority, they were accurate, and they were consistent. Sometimes God gives miracles to get people's attention and you see this here and remember when we looked at this also a couple of weeks ago, we looked at Exodus 4 where God tells Moses to go before any of the ministry begins, God finds him in the plains of Midian, in the wilderness of Midian, and he says, "Go to My people." He sees the burning bush and Moses at some point says, "Hey, if I go and tell them that You sent me, how are they going to believe me? What if they say they don't believe me? Why would they believe that I've heard from You?" And God gives him three signs. God says, "Throw your staff on the ground," turns it into a snake. "Pick it up." God says, "Put your hand in your coat and pull it out," it's leprous. "Put your hand back in and pull it out," it's no longer leprous. God says, "Touch the Nile River and it will turn into blood, or take water out of the Nile River and it will turn into blood." If they don't believe the first sign, they'll believe the second sign, if they don't believe the second sign, there will be the third sign. That is, "Okay, I know that I've got to give you some authenticating thing upfront," and that happens again in Elijah and also in Jesus and the apostles but it's not the regular accompanying mark of true prophets. Like I said, most of them don't work miracles. They speak for God.

Now that's the prescription, so when a prophet comes, does he claim to have authority, does what he says come true, is his revelation completely true and is it consistent? That's the prescription. So we said the problem, the prescription, third point now, the practice. The practice. You see this is actually what they do. This is what they did when Moses died and Joshua starts leading them and Joshua says, "God told me we're supposed to take that city and this is what we're supposed to do." Jericho, for instance, they were supposed to march around it once a day for seven days and on the seventh day we're to march around it and we're to shout, we're to be silent all that time, we're to shout at the given moment and the walls are going to fall down. And do you know what happened? Exactly what he said and so when Joshua wrote his book down, wrote his revelation down, what did they do? They added it to their canon and this is how it went throughout the Old Testament.

Came to Jeremiah's day, back to Jeremiah, remember I mentioned that he had all those guys against him. He's the doom and gloom guy whom God has truly sent and he's working against all the power of positive thinking guys. Name it, claim it. All of those guys are on the other side arrayed against him and he actually says, in fact, turn to Jeremiah for a moment, Jeremiah 14. Jeremiah, there's a reason he was a weeping prophet. He mainly was weeping over the destruction of Jerusalem because he had the heart of God for Jerusalem and God's heart is broken over what he has to do to his people, but he also had such a hard ministry. I mean, Jeremiah is faithful to the Lord, preaches the word and nobody responds, or just very few, not enough to even be told about.

In verse 13 of chapter 14, look what Jeremiah says to God, "But, 'Ah, Lord GOD!' I said," this is what Jeremiah says to God, "Look, the prophets are telling them," this is what the prophets are telling them, "'You will not see the sword nor will you have famine, but I will give you lasting peace in this place.'" That's what they're saying: no famine, no sword, God's going to deal with Nebuchadnezzar, no worries, everything's good. But look what God says to Jeremiah, "Then the LORD said to me, 'The prophets are prophesying falsehood in My name...they are prophesying to you a false vision, divination, futility and the deception of their own minds.'" I mean, they were very likely sincere people who were sincerely deluded by their own sinfulness, and because they don't know God they're in the dark.

Chapter 23, turn over to chapter 23, verse 16 and 17, "Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are prophesying to you. They are leading you into futility; They speak a vision of their own imagination, Not from the mouth of the LORD. They keep saying to those who despise Me, 'The LORD has said,'"' they say to them, "Thus says the Lord, You will have peace'; And as for everyone who walks in the stubbornness of his own heart, They say, 'Calamity will not come upon you.'" They are people walking in wicked, unrepentant, stubbornness against God and he says they're saying, "Don't worry about it. You're fine." And God, of course, is not saying that at all. He's going to bring judgment upon them because he's too good to leave them in their unrepentance and their hardness. He's going to bring them to a reckoning that will possibly lead them to salvation.

It's interesting, chapter 28, we don't have time to read all of this but I encourage you to read it this week, the entire chapter. One of the false prophets is a guy named Hananiah who's especially bold and he basically just takes Jeremiah on directly to his face. He's tired of hearing Jeremiah's negative naysaying kind of, you know, downer prophecy because Jeremiah has just spoken the words God gave him, and the reality is, unless God grants you grace, you will never want to hear the word of God because the word of God confronts our sin and so we naturally, we reject it. We want to hear good news but you can't receive the good news until you really face the bad news of our need for Christ, our sinfulness, our utter darkness of soul.

So Hananiah comes along and he's especially bold, though, at going at Jeremiah. He says in verse 2, this is Hananiah talking, "Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, 'I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon.'" Now remember I told you there were three different installments of these attacks of Babylon and so they're getting ready for the third one and he says, "Listen, it's over. God has destroyed. Babylon is no longer going to be an issue for us." And this Hananiah saying, "I'm telling you, the yoke is broken." Jeremiah responds and says, "I wish that were true but it's not true." And he goes on in verse 9 and he says, "The prophet who prophesies of peace, when the word of the prophet comes to pass, then that prophet will be known as one whom the LORD has truly sent." Do you see that? Do you see how they're thinking in line with the testing of the prophets? This was the thinking of the people of God all throughout history. That's why the Catholic nonsense about the Council of Hippo gave us the Bible is absolute

hogwash. God told his people how to test for canonicity all along, and you see it in an example like this.

Verse 10, so Jeremiah says, "Well, if what you're saying, if you're a prophet and what you say will truly come to pass." Hananiah is not slowed down by that, he becomes even more bold because Jeremiah is holding a yoke on his neck, God told him to wear a yoke on his neck, a wooden yoke that you yoke oxen with. Jeremiah is walking around with it, that's one of the problems that the prophets had, a lot of times the Lord calls them to be visual word pictures. This was, I mean, a wonderful calling to be a man of God but there were challenges. He had to walk around with a yoke on his neck. He's got a yoke on his neck and Hananiah takes the yoke, verse 10, from the neck of Jeremiah and breaks it. "Hananiah," verse 11, "spoke in the presence of all the people, saying, 'Thus says the LORD, "Even so will I break within two full years the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon from the neck of all the nations.'" Then the prophet Jeremiah went his way." He just walked away. "The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah after Hananiah the prophet had broken the yoke from off the neck of the prophet Jeremiah, saying, 'Go and speak to Hananiah, saying,'" this, "You go back and find Hananiah and you say this, 'Thus says the LORD, "You have broken the yokes of wood, but you have made instead of them yokes of iron." For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, 'I have put a yoke of iron on the neck of all these nations, that they may serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; and they will serve him. And I have also given him the beasts of the field.'" Look what he says next, "Then Jeremiah the prophet said to Hananiah the prophet, 'Listen now, Hananiah, the LORD has not sent you, and you have made this people trust in a lie. Therefore thus says the LORD, "Behold, I am about to remove you from the face of the earth. This year you are going to die, because you have counseled rebellion against the LORD.'" Verse 17, "So Hananiah the prophet died in the same year in the seventh month."

And we know that, like I said, they immediately took this for the word of God, actually I'm moving on to the next...yeah, okay, we're practice. Yeah, I'm sorry. I thought I was getting ahead of myself on points. We're still on point 3. Turn to Daniel 9:1, "In the first year," this is Daniel 9, it's right after Ezekiel. Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel. Oh by the way, our kids are learning all the books of the Bible on Wednesday nights. Patty and some other ladies are leading that children's class and she said in seven weeks that they all have all the New Testament books and many of them have the Old Testament books. So they're able to find through their Bibles better than a lot of us are.

Daniel 9:1, "In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of Median descent, who was made king over the kingdom of the Chaldeans in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, observed in the books the number of the years which was revealed as the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet for the completion of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years." Now what's interesting about this is Daniel says he's reading in 539 BC, the first year of Darius. Jeremiah died in 570, it's 31 years after Jeremiah's death. There's no doubt and there is no waiting on a church council, an Old Testament Jewish council. Jeremiah prophesied, what he said came true, and the people of God accepted his revelation as the very word of God. Daniel is reading his Bible when he reads this

passage. He's not reading just among all kinds of fanciful documents. He's reading what he believes to be the Bible because all of the faithful know that God has confirmed the ministry of Jeremiah.

That's exactly the way they approached the New Testament. Acts 17:11. This is the way Christians thought, I mean, because the Jewish mindset was always at the core of the Christian mindset. All the apostles are Jews. They're going out and they always go first to the synagogues, and there's always a small core of Jews there and then the Christians, the Gentiles also become Christians and become more numerous than the Jews but this idea. Acts 17:11, a very familiar verse. Luke says about the believers in Berea that they "were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so." They received Paul as an apostle. They listened to him. He claimed to have authority. What he said seemed to be true. And what are they doing here in Acts 17:11? They're testing for consistency. Is what he's saying match up with the Old Testament? And God is putting his seal on that and saying, "Listen, don't give Paul even the authority just for his office. This flies in the face of all of the Roman nonsense. Don't give Paul the authority just because of his office. You check him out and make sure what he says lines up with the rest of Scripture." That's what Acts 17:11 says. Even though Luke was an associate of Paul, had a great opinion of Paul. Paul was an apostle and he says, "You check him out, what he says."

That's the beauty of the word of God and it does stand up and this is the beauty of the 66 books we have. There is authority, accuracy, consistency. And the New Testament, they're so careful to make their argument. Everything they're saying about Jesus they're grounding in the Old Testament. Paul himself in Romans when he presents the gospel of justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, he says, "Listen," he's saying, "I'm not teaching something strange and new." And it goes back to Genesis 15:6 and he goes to Psalm 32 and he says, "Listen, these are the things that we've known all throughout the Bible. God always intended to give salvation by imputing our sin to Christ and imputing His righteousness to us through faith." This is the teaching of all of the Bible. Completely consistent.

Just look at this from Matthew 1 for a minute. Let me just show you how this is. There are approximately 300 places in the New Testament where there are direct or indirect quotations of the Old Testament. It's like 240 direct quotations where there will be a formula that says, "Just as the prophets said," and they'll quote the Old Testament. Or they'll say, "Just as the prophet said," and sometimes an indirect quotation is they'll say, "Just as the prophet said," and they'll kind of summarize in their own words but give you the true content of that revelation. That's an indirect quotation, over 300 of them. Then another 500 or so allusions to the Old Testament.

But look with me at Matthew 1:22. After he's told in a dream, Joseph is told in a dream, "Your wife is pregnant by the Holy Spirit. She's going to bear a son. You call His name Jesus." Verse 22, "Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 'Behold, the virgin shall be with child,'" there's a quotation from Isaiah 7:14.

Look at chapter 2, verse 5, this is actually on the word that the scribes and Pharisees but Matthew incorporates it in Scripture. They ask, "Where is the Messiah to be born?" Herod asks, "Where is the Messiah to be born?" They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet: 'And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the leaders of Judah; for out of you shall come forth a ruler who will be shepherd of My people Israel.'" They quote Micah.

Then verse 15 when Joseph carries the child into Egypt because of the plot of Herod to kill the babies, verse 15, "He remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 'Out of Egypt I called My Son.'" Hosea.

Then verse 17 when Herod does carry out his wicked plan. Verse 17, "Then what had been spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: 'A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children; and she refused to be comforted, because they were no more.'" There in those first two chapters four direct quotations of four different Old Testament books. In the time of the New Testament, there was no lack of clarity about what the canon was. The canon was clear and all throughout.

Now it's a little complicated if you think about it as the canon is formed in the New Testament because what's happening is letters are going out to different places. Thessalonians get a letter, two letters, we read from 2 Thessalonians earlier. The Corinthians get a couple of letters. The Ephesians. The Galatians. And there are other general epistles that go out, James and Peter, Hebrews. You have the gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. They're written by the apostles to give them to certain churches and certain churches in areas. We believe Mark wrote his as we've been hearing on Sunday mornings in our Sunday morning Bible study taught by Todd Guthrie, that Mark wrote with a Gentile focus to the Roman Christians particularly because Peter was in Rome and he was a close associate of Peter. Mark was drawing so much of his material from Peter.

So it took a while for everybody to pass along those books but think about it, they receive a letter and they take these tests, these three tests. Authority, is it from an apostle or from a close associate of an apostle? Authority. Secondly, is it accurate? Is everything it says true? And thirdly, is it consistent? And when they applied those three tests and they looked at it, "Yes, it's the word of God." And what you also see, in fact, in that authenticity you can say not just the signs and wonders that accompanied it but there is a sense in which and this is what is true always of the Scripture, there is an authenticating power in the word. The word itself, the books of the Bible that we have, it testifies to its own intrinsic truthfulness and power. There's no other book like it. It's a living book. Hebrews 4:12 says that, "The word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to dividing joint and marrow, soul and spirit and is a discerner of the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

There is an amazing unity about this book written by 40 authors, more than 40 different human authors. Just think about that. In three different languages over a period of 1,500 years. Think about that. And yet it is one book because in spite of the reality that all of those human authors were there writing various different genres of literature, writing with distinct human styles, you read John, he writes differently than the author of Hebrews does, you read Amos, he writes different than Isaiah does, but though they're different men their human character is there. It's true that whatever they wrote on paper has been superintended by the Spirit of God using the human instrument, preparing the human instrument so that what they write down is literally breathed out by God and it is a living powerful book.

I love the story of the Frenchman, Emil Cailliet, who was a naturalist and atheist in France. He served in the French military in World War I. What a terrible place to be. That was one of the most horrific experiences to be in the trenches in World War I. He writes, "During long night watches in the foxholes I had in a strange way been longing—I must say it, however queer it may sound—for a book, I longed for a book that would understand me. But I knew of no such book." So Cailliet set out to construct one himself. He was a learned man, an advanced degree, studying in the humanities, philosophy, literature, and so he began to compile the most insightful things he found in literature and philosophy and he put them into a book, this book that he sought to understand himself and life. But he said when he finally finished his book, he went out to read his book that he thought now was complete and he read it and it carried no strength of persuasion. Instead of insight he found emptiness.

Around that time, his wife happened on a Protestant church, went in for some reason and asked for a Bible. She was given one in French and she took it home, set it on the table. This atheistic naturalist picked up the book, went to his study and this is what he writes, "I literally grabbed the book and rushed to my study with it. I opened it and 'chanced' upon the Beatitudes." Matthew 5. "I read and read.... I could not find words to express my awe and wonder. And suddenly the realization dawned upon me: This was the Book that would understand me! I needed it so much, yet, unaware, I had attempted to write my own—in vain. I continued to read deeply into the night, mostly from the gospels. A decisive insight flashed through my whole being the following morning as I probed the opening chapters of the gospel according to John. The very clue of the secret of human life was disclosed right there not stated in the foreboding language of philosophy but in the common everyday language of human circumstances. An apparently common book and yet it is the very word of God." This man went on to become a noted philosopher and Christian thinker.

The book that understands you, that's what the Bible is and so, listen, we need to take this book and fill our lives with this book. We need to share this book with one another and we need to share this book with a lost world. We need to do it boldly, confidently. We don't need to say that it's just one book among many. It is the only book. There's nothing like it. And we need to make that kind of claim graciously, of course, gently, of course, but clearly and enthusiastically, confidently, because we have in this book the very words of God, the very words that give life to the dead, that if you know Jesus have given life to

you. Born again by the living and abiding word of God. Transformed by the living and abiding word of God. Sanctified by this word.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

*Our Father, how grateful we are for Your precious word, perfect clarity and purity of it. Forgive us for treating it so often as something that's not as vital, Lord, that we find ourselves distracted, we find ourselves dull as we read. O God, give us eyes to see and ears to hear more and more and more to love Your truth, to see that every time we come to truths that confront us and unsettle us, if we stay and abide there we see that it is the truth, it is life, and that in submission to Your word there is true freedom, there is the freedom of the soul and the joy of the heart. Be glorified in Your people as we become more and more people of the book and may You bring more and more lost people through the power of Your word into Your kingdom. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*