

Subject: *God's Eternal Word*

Scripture: *Isaiah 40:6-8*

Human beings are like grass and flowers, here one day and gone the next, but God's Word is permanent. It is eternal. Some things won't last forever, but the Word of God will last forever. In this series of messages we have discovered that God's Word is what He has revealed to us. It is truth that only God knows and only He could reveal. We have learned that the Bible is inspired by God ("God-breathed"). We have seen how Jesus spoke about the Scripture and how He used the written Word in His life and ministry. In this message I want us to think about God's Word being eternal. Did you know that only three things in this building are eternal? The presence of God is eternal, our souls are eternal, and God's Word is eternal. The Bible is not the book of the month or the book of the year; it is the book of the ages.

1. Statements about God's Eternal Word

I want us to think about some statements from Scripture about God's Word being eternal. We have this statement in Isaiah 40:8, "the word of our God shall stand for ever."

- *1 Peter 1:24-25*²⁴ *For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away:*²⁵ *But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.*
- *Psalms 119:89* *For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven.*
- *Psalms 119:152* *Concerning thy testimonies, I have known of old that thou hast founded them for ever.*
- *Matthew 5:18* *For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.*
- *Matthew 24:35* *Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.*

The Bible is indestructible. One person said he knew the Bible could not be destroyed because it had stood up under so much shoddy preaching.

2. Warnings in God's Eternal Word

These are warnings about adding to or taking away from God's written Word. The Bible is perfect and complete. Even though it was completed almost 2,000 years ago, there is nothing more to add to it. God gave several warnings not to tamper with it:

- *Deuteronomy 12:32* *What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it.*
- *Proverbs 30:5-6*⁵ *Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him.*⁶ *Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar.*
- *Revelation 22:18-19*¹⁸ *For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book:*¹⁹ *And if any man shall take away from the*

words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.

God takes His Word very seriously and He wants every person to take it seriously. Don't mess with His Word. God made it perfect and He made it to last forever. It is eternal.

3. Formation of God's Eternal Word

Since the Bible was written by 40 different writers over 1,500 years living in different places, how do we know that we have all the Word of God? Our word "Bible" comes from the word *Biblia*, which means "a collection of books." Actually the Bible is a collection of 66 books. How do we know these books are complete and that only these 66 books are the inspired Word of God?

- Jesus confirmed the Old Testament was complete – **Luke 24:44** *And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.* Jesus referred to the three divisions of the Old Testament: the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms represented the third and final section. Jesus obviously believed the Old Testament was inspired and complete. Jewish scholars still refer to the Scriptures as Tanakh, which stands for Torah (books of Moses), Nebiim (prophets), and Ketubim (writings).
- Peter confirmed the writings of Paul as Scripture – **2 Peter 3:16** *As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.*
- Paul referred to both the Old and New Testaments as Scripture – **1 Timothy 5:18** *For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward.* In this one verse Paul quotes from Deut. 25:4 in the Old Testament and from Luke 10:7 in the New Testament and calls them both Scripture.
- The church accepted the 66 books as Scripture – This process is called "canonization." The word "canon" means a measuring rod. Over time the church recognized which books met the standard or "measured up" to the level of inspired Scripture. We need to be careful here. The church did not make Scripture inspired; it only acknowledged that Scripture was inspired by God. It was somewhat like the process of discovering gold. If a person finds gold, he can test it to see if in fact it is real gold. The testing doesn't make it gold; it only reveals the gold for what it is. Each book was included if it had certain qualities:

Does it have the authority of God?
Is there a connection to a man of God?
Does it contain the truth of God?
Does it possess the power of God?
Is it received, used, and preserved by the people of God?

The writings of the early church leaders consistently quoted from the Word of God. Many years ago a group of Bible scholars were discussing the reliability of Scripture. The question was asked, "Suppose the New Testament had been destroyed and every

copy lost by the end of the third century; could it be reconstructed from the writings of the Church Fathers of the second and third centuries?” One person at that meeting, Sir David Dalrymple (1726-1792), accepted the challenge. For the next few months he searched through all the documents of the second and third century church leaders. He reported back to the group that he was able to reconstruct from the writings of those church leaders the entire New Testament except for eleven verses.

Over the centuries some have tried to include other books in the Bible, but upon close investigation they all prove to be unworthy and inferior in some way.

4. Preservation of God’s Word

It is a testimony of God’s goodness and power how He has preserved His Word through these many years. Many books don’t last 20 years. Most books don’t survive longer than 100 years. But the Bible has survived for centuries in spite of vicious attacks against it. How did God preserve it to this present time?

- Original writings – These are called manuscripts or autographs. They were written on different materials: parchment (animal skins); papyrus (from which is derived our English word “paper,” it was prepared from reeds that grew in marshy areas). Old Testament and New Testament books were written on scrolls. Later on, copies were sown together with pages in a book form. In his last letter Paul wrote, **2 Timothy 4:13** *The cloke that I left at Troas with Carpus, when thou comest, bring with thee, and the books, but especially the parchments.* “The books” refers to the papyrus scrolls and “the parchments” refers to the scrolls of animal skins.

They were written in different languages. The Old Testament was written mostly in Hebrew and small parts in Aramaic. The New Testament was written in Greek which was then the language of the common people.

- Accurate copies – We do not have any original manuscripts today. Many of them were made close to the time of the original writings. At first copies were made for local churches and then others for individual believers. There is much evidence that the copies were made very carefully. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947, proved the accuracy of these copies. Compared to the number of other ancient writings, the number of Bible books is amazing.

“There are 5,366 (New Testament) manuscripts to compare and draw information from, and some of these date from the second or third centuries. To put that in perspective, there are only 643 copies of Homer’s *Iliad*, and that is the most famous book of ancient Greece! To have such an abundance of copies of the New Testament from dates within 70 years after their writing is amazing.”

- Norman Geisler

- Translation into other languages – God used men who preserved His Word in the language of the common people. One of the first translations was the Septuagint, Old Testament translated from the Hebrew into the Greek. Then there was the Latin Vulgate translated by Jerome. Our English Bible has a rich history. The most famous is the King James Version or Authorized Version in 1611. Today the Bible can claim to be the world’s best-seller and the most widely distributed book ever. It has been translated into over 2,000 languages.

Through this whole process God preserved His Word in spite of human limitations and fierce opposition. One of the greatest limitations was that all Scripture was hand-written until the invention of the printing press in 1456 AD. Then there was the fierce opposition and persecution through the centuries, for example the Roman Emperor Diocletian, who in 313 AD ordered that every Bible should be destroyed. He believed if he could destroy the Bible he would destroy Christianity because he had been told “Christians are a people of the Book.” He tried, but failed.

Fourteen hundred years later, the French atheist Voltaire boasted, “One hundred years from now there will not be a Bible in the earth.” But twenty years after his death, the Geneva Bible Society bought his house and used it as headquarters for printing Bibles and sending them all over Europe. In America, atheist Thomas Paine once predicted that the Bible would soon be out of print. He boasted, “When I get through, there will not be five Bibles left in America.” He was wrong.

The French Protestants known as Huguenots pictured the Bible as an anvil surrounded by three blacksmiths. Beneath the picture they wrote these words: “The more they pound and the more they shout, the more they wear their hammers out!” Some have tried to destroy it. Some have tried to discredit it. But God will always defend it

What is the best translation of the Scriptures? The most powerful translation is the one that has been translated from the printed page into your life and mine.