

ReGroups 4/23/23

Making of the Bible: Firm Foundation

The B-I-B-L-E...

Most of us have always known the Bible to be “God’s Word”. We’ve never known a world where the Bible wasn’t there to confirm or explain everything we’ve been taught about Jesus, the Church, and Christianity in general.

However, there may be some in our midst that don’t have this relationship with the Bible. Many in our churches don’t have a history with the Bible like we do. Many of them have questions, perhaps because they came to faith later in life and it wasn’t as easy to process the Bible’s trustworthiness.

The truth is that even many Christians who have believed for much of their life have many questions about the Bible, but haven’t been assisted in seeking out answers. Maybe you’ve even felt it *wrong* to ask those questions.

The purpose and goal of this study is to help all of us have a better understanding of the Bible. While there’s nothing wrong with just accepting it as God’s Word straight from Heaven, being able to answer questions and respond to criticism from outside will only *help* to strengthen our witness and validate our convictions.

Is the Bible the one and only foundation of our faith? Was there a time where Christianity existed without the Bible? How did we get the Bible? We’ll seek to answer all of these questions and more in this study. Along the way, we’ll develop a greater understanding for all the books that make up the Bible, and even discuss books that *didn’t* make it in.

Before we dive in deeper, take some time to discuss your relationship with the Bible:

How was the Bible introduced to you?

Have you ever had any questions or confusion about it?

Are there any answers you’d like to have about the Bible, for personal reasons or to assist you in reaching others?

Cornerstone vs Foundation

The background of the Bible is actually an incredible story that's definitely worth hearing and repeating. Many Christians are taught early on with regard to the Bible: "*God said it, I believe it, and that settles it*". This phrase and others like it are mostly created to combat any skepticism about the Bible. However, learning the history behind the Bible *actually* underscores and highlights the divine inspiration and supernatural witness contained within it.

One reason why many feel so inclined to protect or defend the Bible blindly and not engage with or entertain any questions is because we consider the Bible to "*The Foundation of Our Faith*." If the foundation is found to have cracks in it or prove to be unreliable, *then our entire faith might capsize*. In effort to protect people from being swept up in controversy or doubt, we often encourage people to just believe *no matter what*. While this sounds spiritual, there actually is a better way...

Read **Ephesians 2:19-22** and hear a great description of the Christian faith as detailed by the Apostle Paul. In this passage, Christianity is compared to a house that's being built. **Can you identify who/what are related to a specific process or element of a house?**

- The Church is said to be **the dwelling place for God** - a true, yet Spiritual version of the Temple of old.
- Christians are called residents or members of the family that gathers in this house. The Church is not just God's House, but it's **God's Household**, as in God's family (Emphasis on the people, not just the structure).
- The **Foundation** of the Church is said to be Apostles and Prophets, as in those who were anointed by God to bring His Word to their contemporary worlds.
- The **Cornerstone** of the Church is Jesus Christ. A Cornerstone is the first stone laid on any given structure, so as to give shape and direction for everything else. The Cornerstone is what ensures the foundation to be secure and square.

So, Jesus Christ is the Cornerstone of our faith. He is the first block that is laid that makes everything else make sense. Jesus is what validates and confirms all the other witnesses about God. **1 Peter 2:4-6** describes Christianity as being *anchored in Christ*, first and foremost.

More Than A Story

The reason this distinction is necessary is because Jesus is not just a character we read about in the Bible. Jesus is the *real*, Incarnate Son of God who *lived, died, and rose again*. The Bible attests to this, but this event is not just a story, *but a part of history*. Therefore, the cornerstone of our faith isn't a book, *it is Jesus and the work He did* Easter weekend 33 AD.

Is this historical event connected to the Scriptures? By all means, *but it stands on its own nail-scarred feet*. An early witness to Jesus and His Death and Resurrection being the Cornerstone of our faith is found in **1 Corinthians 15:3-11**. This passage reflects what validated the Christian movement and confirmed it as God's work to so many - *Something happened* and the world was being changed one person at a time.

This by no means undermines the Bible as God's Word, but speaks to how it ultimately all points to and explains *who Jesus is and what He did*. The Bible contains the books that it does and was compiled the way it was primarily because it was fanning the flame of Jesus' death and resurrection.

This is why Paul refers to the "*Apostles and Prophets*" as the foundation of our faith, because their witness echoes the work of Jesus. This refers to the entirety of the Bible, which preserves the words spoken by the Prophets of the Old Covenant and the Apostles of the New Covenant.

Peter describes the witness of the Apostles and Prophets, testifying that His written word (and all the others') was a direct result of a unique encounter with God and special revelation from God. Read **2 Peter 1:16-21** to hear how he explains this process. The Bible contains what the inspired Prophets and Apostles saw or heard from God, as it pertains to the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Knowing that this is how the Bible came to be also helps us in how are to read and interpret the Bible. If it was all inspired to point to Jesus, then it should all be *read, filtered, and understood* through the story and message of Jesus. Remember how Jesus himself framed the Jewish Scriptures in **Luke 24:27, 44**? Philip takes the same approach in **Acts 8:35**.

Is this how you read the Bible? How should this model impact/change the way you interpret Scripture?

Which Came First?

The reason this distinction is so necessary is because Christianity began (in its final and full form) on Easter Sunday 33 AD. This was over 300 years *before* there was book in circulation called, “*The Bible.*” While there were Jewish Scriptures believed to point to Jesus and fragments of documents and letters written about Jesus, there was no leather-bound, completed book that began with Genesis and ended with Revelation.

A few historical milestones to note:

- The first compilation of this kind was put together around 350 AD by a community gathered near Mt. Sinai.
- An early church leader called Athanasius wrote an Easter letter to all the churches in the Mediterranean region in 367 AD, and in this letter he listed the 66 books that we have in our Bibles as being the full and final words from God.
- The first reference to this collection of books as “The Bible” and affirmation of this book as God’s completed Word was made by St. John Chrysostom in 388 AD.

All of the books that make up the Bible were in circulation in some shape or form before these dates, but it took the first 300-350 years of the Church for an arrival and agreement at the Biblical Canon (*Selected Texts*) to be established and authorized.

Obviously God was sovereignly guiding this process and it was through much prayer and reliance on the Holy Spirit that it all came together. Hopefully by looking behind the curtains and learning how the Bible came to be, we can gain a greater appreciation for the Book that we’ve always had and never had to wonder if it was God’s Word or not.

Seen and Heard

Knowing this (and we’ve only scratched the surface of the story) allows our faith to be anchored in the *person* of Jesus and the *power* of His Resurrection Spirit. God is not just a character in a book, but He is real and He has impacted our real world in a sizable, lasting way. The Bible is our number one resource, attesting to what has happened in history and punctuating how Jesus is every bit the Savior the Church has heralded Him to be nearly 2000 years.

In closing, let us consider how the Apostles began their ministry in the early days of the Church. Notice how their message is rooted in what had *just happened* before their eyes, and how they leverage the Jewish Scriptures to underline and emphasize what they had *seen and heard*: Read **Acts 2:22-36, 4:5-12, 20**. **What stands out about their witness? How do they utilize and explain the Scriptures? How should we, in light of their practice?**

Next time we will go into more detail about why the particular books were chosen to be in the Bible, and why some were rejected. We'll also discuss how the Old Testament and New Testament were divided and how the Jewish Scriptures were adopted to become *Christian* Scriptures.

Before you leave, discuss any questions you may have and reflect on the lesson together.