

ReGroups 6/4/23

Making of the Bible: A Completed Book

In our previous three studies on the making of the Bible we've learned:

- The **Bible** is the **foundation** of our faith, but the **cornerstone** is **Jesus Christ**. A cornerstone is the point of reference that gives shape and ensures the stability of the foundation and the structure that builds upon it. All 66 books **point to Jesus** and affirm that He is the full revelation of God and the one and only Savior.
- The Old Testament came together **over a 1000 year period**, starting with **Moses** and concluding with **Ezra**. Written into the narrative about ancient Israel is the story of God's Word being shepherded by prophets and scribes. Moses first received revelation on Mt. Sinai as Israel began its journey to the Promised Land, passing the torch to Joshua, Samuel, Nathan, and others. Years later, the nation would be conquered and exiled by Babylon but would return to the land under and began seeking God anew. A priest and scribe named Ezra compiled and editorialized all the books, producing what was accepted as God's completed Word. Jesus himself confirmed this collection of book as God's Word, up until that point. To this day, this set of books is what we find in our Old Testament.
- The New Testament is the result of **eyewitness reports** of people who were among the **closest followers and associates of Jesus**. Written by eight individuals, including Jesus' most trusted disciples and even His own brothers, there's no question that the Gospel accounts and letters to churches are God's inspired Word to us.

Spend a few minutes recapping what we've learned about the Bible so far. Have you gained clarity about the Bible? Do you have confidence that you could defend the Bible's authenticity and trustworthiness as God's Word to an inquiring mind? What questions might you still have about the Bible?

For the remainder of this lesson, we will address some of the common questions and concerns that many still have about the Bible. From discussing the so-called "lost books" of the Bible to verses/chapters that seem to be contested across various translations, we will hopefully cover many of your most pressing questions. We'll also bring a definitive word about whether we can trust the Bible is the completed, uncontested Word of God.

The Apocrypha

Maybe you've heard that there were books written between the Old and New Testaments, that were removed from the Bible or that some Bibles contain. These books are referred to as "***The Apocrypha***", which literally means "**inauthentic**".

It is true that some Catholic Bibles contain these books, and you can certainly find a copy of the Bible with these intertestament writings - they were even translated alongside the first English translation (*The King James Version*). However, all throughout church history there has been a consistent understanding that these books are *not* to be upheld alongside either the Old or New Testaments.

We've obviously seen how Jesus affirmed that our Old Testament and the Jewish Bible are one and the same, and we know that the New Testament begins with the story of Jesus. So what do we do with these books? Should we read them as we read Scripture? The answer to that is an emphatic *no*. Many of the Apocryphal books are dramatic retellings of events that took place during the exile and more-or-less journal entries of many who were in Babylon and the regathered Israel. They *don't contribute* to the overall Redemption Story and never claim to channel what "*thus says the Lord*" like the other Old Testament books do.

There are four books called "**The Maccabees**" that are included in this grouping that actually do a great job at bridging the gap between the Testaments. The Maccabees were a family of Jews that helped Israel break free from Greek rule, and establish brief independence until Rome would eventually take over.

In fact, these books deal with a prophecy given in **Daniel 8:8-14**. The prince spoke of in this passage is a tyrant named *Antioches Ephianes*. When Alexander the Great died, his kingdom was split in four parts, hence the "four winds" reference in Daniel 8:8. Antioches took over the portion of the Greek Empire within the Middle East, and sought to merge all world religions into one. He went around explaining to the different tribes and nations that the Greek gods were basically the same as their gods, just with different names. Most cultures accepted this, *but not the Jews*. Verses 11-13 speaks of the Temple being desecrated and a great desolation taking place, which happened when Antioches went into the Jewish Temple and sacrificed a pig on the alter to the Greek god, Zeus. This crushed the spirit of the Jews and caused many to lose heart completely, as pagan idols were placed all over Jerusalem. *However*, the Maccabean family rose up and vowed to drive out Antioches' forces.

Judas the Maccabean, often called ***The Hammer***, led the revolt and helped to restore the Temple as Daniel predicted in verse 14. At this point, the nation was very impoverished and lacked many common goods. In their efforts to begin sacrificing to God again they went to light the candlestick in the Holy Place, but only had enough oil to last a day and it would take a week to import some into town. The story goes that a miracle took place and that small portion of oil lasted *all week long*, which led into a season of revived hope and faith.

This all took place in December of 168 BC, and every year going forward a **Festival of Lights and Dedication** was celebrated to remember God's faithfulness and the Maccabean courage. This festival was called **Hanukkah** in Hebrew, and is still celebrated to this day. In fact, less than 200 years later, Jesus was at the Temple during this very festival in **John 10:22-23**.

Other than this story, there really isn't anything else very consequential to come from the Apocryphal time. And while the story is inspiring, the text that originally told this story **wasn't ever written to be considered as Scripture, but as mere history**.

Lost Books of the New Testament

As far as other potential "*missing*" books, these mostly come from the New Testament period. You've probably heard of things like the Gospel of Thomas or Judas, as well as letters written by lesser known disciples or early church leaders. As far as the different gospels go, most of them were written much later than the New Testament era from 30-90 AD. Were there other stories and accounts written about Jesus during this time that didn't make it in the Bible? *Probably so* - however, **Luke 1:1-4** should tell us that those not included in the Bible just **weren't considered to be infallible and inspired** like the four we have most definitely are. Luke tells us that "many" set out to tell the story of Jesus, but **God only commissioned and sanctioned the four we have**.

Textual Variants

Perhaps you've had a copy of the Bible that has a footnote about some verses being excluded from most manuscripts of the original Hebrew or Greek translations. The King James Version doesn't happen to have any of these asterisks or notes, which causes many to suggest it to be superior translation. Along with being the oldest complete English translation, it's easy to see why its favored above the rest.

However, you've probably wondered why the KJV contains verses that other translations resort to the margins or include words that may vary. The truth isn't some conspiracy among the team behind the New King James, ESV or other, word-for-word translations. It's actually pretty simple to explain...

The KJV was **translated** primarily **from the Latin Bible** which was produced by the Catholic Church. The Latin Bible (The Vulgate) was translated from Hebrew and Greek over 1000 years before 1611. As time went on, other manuscripts were found that proved older and more reliable than the source material for the Vulgate. These **Hebrew/Greek manuscripts** would go on to be used in translating modern English Bibles such as the New King James, NIV, ESV, and others.

The difference in these manuscripts were incidental and were **99.99% the same** as the KJV source. However, much attention is given to the .01% differences, like Mark having multiple endings or verses being omitted here and there. This shouldn't shake our confidence in the authenticity or accuracy of the Bible, but simply prove that the Bible was copied many times after its initial, original inscription. Some things may have been added in the margins or footnotes of these copies or struck through, and that's why there has been the smallest bit of confusion over a few passages and verses.

Inerrancy of Scripture

2 Peter 1:21 tells us that when God inspired the Word, **from person to pen to paper** everything was seamless and trustworthy. The original copies of God's Word were **without error**, and we can safely trust that the Holy Spirit has preserved the Word over time. The Bible was originally given in the **common tongue** of the world that was, from Hebrew to Greek. Translations have always been important and will always be in order to get the Bible to every generation. While some are more literal and beneficial than others (Like the King James, New King James, or ESV), even more paraphrased versions (Like the NIV) are still God's Holy Word carrying His Gospel truth.

Rest assured, the Bible is a witness to itself regarding its reliability - from prophecies spoken and fulfilled to the cohesiveness of teaching from one book to another. The Bible can handle any measure of investigation into its own integrity. It repeatedly speaks of its own inspiration and authority. Jesus said in **Matthew 5:17-18**, "**Not a letter or a part of a letter will pass away until all of it is fulfilled.**" He said in **John 10:35**, "**The Scriptures cannot be broken**", and then in **John 17:17** in His high-priestly prayer, He said "**Your Word is truth.**"

The apostle Paul gave us the classic verse on the Bible's witness to itself when he says in **2 Timothy 3:16**, "**All Scripture is inspired. All Scripture is God-breathed.**" And so the Bible is the Word of God. Yes, written in the words of men, but its ultimate author and source is God Himself, Who is a God of truth.

A Finished Product?

With all that being said, it should go without saying that the Bible is the completed Word of God. Revelation 22 is not just the ending of John's prophecy, but serves as **the final, inspired words from God. Revelation 22:17-21** invite us to hear God's full and complete Word, but also warns against any suggestion that the Bible needs to be revised or added to.

Across the last few hundred years, there have been many who claim to have a new or fresh word from God, which is contrary or additive to what the Bible already teaches. From Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon to the Jehovah's Witnesses complete rewording of significant passages in the Bible, there are many cases where Revelation's warning was ignored.

Over the last few decades as the Charismatic/Word of Faith movements have grown, many have claimed to be "new" apostles and prophets, with a brand *new* revelation from God. Groups like the New Apostolic Reformation promote this sort of teaching, and many pentecostal and charismatic churches have unfortunately given into this deception.

This is no doubt **a sign of the times**, and shows how discontent people have gotten from the truth. It only takes a few deceptive leaders to sway entire generations away from God's Word, but ultimately if Churches stand on God's Word and teach it, people will not go hungry and will be led by the Holy Spirit.

Read **2 Timothy 4:1-5** and discuss how Paul's charge to Timothy speaks of our day wherein people have turned from God's Word to additional, uninspired teachings. We can be sure that what we are hearing in churches lines up with God's heart if we do like the people did in **Acts 17:10-12**. Preachers aren't to add their own "revelation" to what God has already said, they simply are called to **expound** on it and **explain** it clearly.

Do you have a good understanding of God's Word so that you can withstand false teaching? We all must heed Paul's words in **Ephesians 6:10-18** and be students of God's Completed and Inspired Word.