

Introduction to Series

How did our Bible come to be? Who wrote the Bible? Why are there so many English translations? Can I trust them? The next three weeks, I will attempt to answer some of these questions. I will be preaching a series of sermons called Standing on the Word that will focus on God's Word and its effect on our lives. These questions are vastly important because God's Word is the foundation for our life and our church. Without it we are lost.

Week 1: How the Bible came to be

Week 2: What makes a Bible translation

Week 3: How God's Word changes our lives

The first two weeks of this series I will be covering a good amount of material, with the goal of teaching you about the Bible and translations. However, I hope that besides increasing your understanding, these messages will do two things: 1. Increase your confidence in God's Word, 2. Help you interact with unbelievers about God's Word.

Theme verse: II Timothy 3:16-17: *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

1. Divisions of the Bible

We have our Bible here, 66 books written over the span of 1500 years by many human authors, but yet it bears the indelible stamp of divine authorship and authority. How did all this happen? I would like to give you an overview of that today. The overview will cover the divisions of the Bible, the formation of the OT and NT, and the divine nature of God's Word.

Before we talk about how the OT and NT were formed, I thought it would be important to find out what's in the Bible and how it's divided up. This is especially important for the OT. The Bible is divided up into OT, written before the time of Christ, and the NT, written in the first century after Jesus was born. The OT was written in Hebrew (with a little Aramaic, a sister language to Hebrew) and the NT was written in Koine Greek (common Greek, not classical Greek). The Hebrew Bible, our OT (what Jews use today and used in Jesus' day), is divided up differently than our English Bible. Our English OT gets its order from the Septuagint, which is a Greek translation of the OT done in the centuries leading up to Christ's birth. It's not like our order is in some way inferior, but knowing this will help us understand better how the OT came to be. The English order has more to do with the flow of history and the books' themes, while the Hebrew order has more to do with how the books were written and usage of the books (this is a general statement!).

The Hebrew Bible has three divisions, the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. The Twelve refers to the minor prophets as we call them. They put them together in a scroll, lest they lose a whole book by dropping one page. We're going to use these divisions to help us understand how the OT was developed.

2. Development of the OT

The first five books of the OT are called the Law or Torah (the Hebrew word for law) or the Pentateuch (referring to the five books). These books were written mainly by Moses, the prophet who led Israel out of Egypt (Deut 31:24-26). Sometimes in the NT, the law is referred to by just the term "Moses" (Luke 16:29). Moses most likely lived in the 15th century BC.

You may be wondering why Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings are included in prophets. They were most likely written by prophets.

I Chron 29:29-30: As for the events of King David's reign, from beginning to end, they are written in the records of Samuel the seer, the records of Nathan the prophet and the records of Gad the seer, 30 together with the details of his reign and power, and the circumstances that surrounded him and Israel and the kingdoms of all the other lands.

From verses like this, many scholars conclude that Israel's prophets were responsible for writing and preserving much of the OT. Some of the prophets we know by name like Isaiah, some of them remain nameless, like the author(s) of Judges and Samuel. Some of the wisdom books (Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Songs) were written by kings and their sages (wise men). Not all the books of the OT were written at one time. Books like Psalms and Proverbs were written by multiple authors, then compiled later.

The OT reached its current form during the 400 silent years, as they are often called. The last book to be written was probably Malachi in the 400's BC. While the Law was already in existence, the next two sections were not yet compiled. The prophets section was then compiled, since many of these books had been around for hundreds of years. The writings section was compiled last, including some older books, but also more recent ones, like Psalms and Chronicles. By 130 BC, the Jews had a three-part Bible: the Law, the Prophets, and the rest of the Books (from the Greek translation of Ecclesiasticus).

So this Hebrew Bible was in place when Jesus was born. He refers to the three parts in Luke 24:44: *He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."* Psalms most likely refers to the Writings section, whose most prominent book was Psalms. Jesus as well as the authors of the NT quote the OT as Scripture many times.

3. Development of the NT

The words of Jesus are important in establishing the authority of the NT. Jesus speaks these words to his disciples in John 16:13-14: *13 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. 14 He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you.*

Just as prophets were used by God to write much of the OT, so these disciples who were the apostles of the church (along with Paul), were used by God to write much of the NT. The authors of the NT that were not apostles were closely associated with them (Mark, Luke, Acts, Hebrews, and Jude). The first book to be written was probably Galatians around AD 50 and the last book

was Revelation, written in the last decade of the first century. Jesus and his church had accepted the OT as Scripture, and soon the early church began accepting the books of the NT as Scripture. We can see examples of this from two key passages.

II Peter 3:15-16: *Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. 16 He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.*

II Timothy 5:17-18: *The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. 18 For the Scripture says, "Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain," [Deut 25:4] and "The worker deserves his wages." [Luke 10:7]*

4. Recognition and Apocrypha

While there are writings from the early church (the first four centuries) speaking of the list of the books in the NT, the first complete list we have is from AD 367 (39th Paschal Letter of Athanasius). The church Council of Carthage in AD 397 also verified the same books we have in our NT today. The reason for the hundreds of years was for the some of the lesser-known books to be circulated and recognized as Scripture.

I have here a copy of the NRSV Bible with the Apocrypha. It has 14 extra books between the OT and the NT. The Apocrypha refers to the extra books that the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches add to their Bibles. The term deuterocanonical is also used to refer to these books. In most editions of Apocrypha there are fourteen extra books or additions to books (of the OT). These books were written in Greek or Hebrew after the OT was completed (the 400 silent years) and never accepted by the Jews. The books were sometimes added to the Septuagint used by the Greek-speaking church. The earliest Christian evidence is against these books as being Scripture (Melito, bishop of Sardis AD 170). These books were included in the Latin Vulgate (AD 404) and so preserved and used afterwards. The Roman Catholic church declared the Apocrypha to be a part of the canon at the Council of Trent in 1546.

There are other books written during the NT times that are not included in our NT, like the Gospel of Thomas and the Shepherd of Hermas. Why are not they included in the NT? Why are the books of the Apocrypha not included in our OT? (Aside: if you read these books, you will soon understand why they are not included in the our Bible.) This question is a question of what books are to be included in the canon. The canon refers to the list of books to be included as Scripture or God's Word. There are several ways you can argue for what books belong in the canon. I have used evidence from history (the list from AD 367) and evidence from the Bible itself (the apostles wrote Scripture). Evidence we have not used is what we call intrinsic evidence, or evidence from the nature of the books themselves.

The canon is self-attesting. By their very nature, the books that are truly Scripture are recognized to be as such by Christians. The church does not have the authority to declare certain books to be God's Word, but the church does recognize that certain books are God's Word. One verse the

helps us understand this is John 10:27: *My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.* Books that are Scripture have the internal quality of being God's Word, and so Christians will recognize them as such.

So do we have rock-solid scientific proof that we have the right books in the Bible? Historical evidence can be interpreted different ways; the Bible can be interpreted different ways and not believed. I can't present these facts to an atheist and make him or her believe that these 66 books are God's Word. We must believe that God has spoken to us by the Scriptures we have. Our faith is encouraged by the reliable historical facts we have, and our faith is confirmed when we hear God speak to us by His Word.

There are two passages of Scripture that show us that the canon of Scripture is closed (we shouldn't add to it).

Hebrews 1:1-2: *In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.*

Revelation 22:18-19 *I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. 19 And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.* (Revelation is at the end of the Bible.)

I have given you an overview of how the OT and NT were formed and recognized by God's people, and how we have the books we have in our Bible today. We have reliable historical evidence, a reliable historical testimony preserved in the Scriptures, and a God who speaks to us by His Word, confirm that it is true.

5. Inspiration and inerrancy

We have our Bible here, 66 books written over the span of 1500 years by many human authors, but yet it bears the indelible stamp of divine authorship and authority. Is the Bible true? Can we trust it? Is it really God's Word?

We believe as a church *that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as originally written were God breathed, both verbally and in every part. We believe God, who is Truth, communicated through Spirit-controlled men so that the Scriptures are without error and therefore authoritative in all they teach and in all matters they touch. We believe the Bible is the supreme revelation of God's will for man and constitutes the only infallible guide for faith and life.* (From NLBC's Statement of Faith)

These words are very important, and godly men have fought hard to uphold these key doctrines. I would like to comment briefly on some of these terms.

- a. Originally written: the original manuscripts or as some call them, the original autographs. These were perfect, and what we have today are reliable copies and translations (more on this next week).
- b. God-breathed: the Bible is the very word of God from him through the writers of Scripture (inspired)
- c. Verbally: the words are God's, not just the concepts
- d. Every part: every word is from God (plenary)
- e. Without error: God is truth, and there is no falsehood from him (inerrant)
- f. Authoritative: we sit under the Bible as submitting ourselves to God.

There are two key Scriptures that we use to talk about how Scripture was written.

II Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

II Peter 1:20-21 Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. 21 For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Having the right view of God's Word is very important, so next week I will review some of these concepts about God's Word. So far, we have seen how the Bible was formed and how it is God's very word. Now, that was almost 2000 years ago. How did we get from the original writings of Scripture to our Bible translations we have today? That will be the focus of next week.

I hope this sermon and next week's sermon will increase your confidence in God's Word and better prepare you to interact with people from other religions.