

Walking With God in a Pandemic

Why You Can Believe the Bible Is the Word of God

Rough Transcript

Patrick Morley

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Good morning, men. Please turn in your Bibles to Second Timothy chapter 3, verse 16. The last time we were together, we talked about faith, how to satisfy that ache for more faith and the big idea was that we can live a supernatural life by faith and the word of God is where it starts. At the very end I said, I'd like to pick up there and talk more about the word of God today. And so the title for this message today is, **Why You Can Believe the Bible is the Word of God.**

I got this idea, I was talking to a man one day and he was telling me that he was having doubts about his faith so I showed him the Man in the Mirror statement of faith. Which of course goes into things like the deity of Jesus, the Virgin birth and the Holy Spirit, the Trinity, and things like that. But the number one item on our statement of faith is about the inerrancy of the word of God, the trustworthiness of God's word. And so I asked this man if he would go through our statement of faith and just write down next to each of the 10 items, whether he believed, didn't believe or doubted each of those 10 items. And he quickly answered, he said, "Well, if I could believe the first one then I believe all of it."

And so believing the word of God really is a crucial element in the Christian life. We're going to take a look at that today and the first circle on the handout, if you want to go ahead and fill that out, is the Bible the word of God?

IS THE BIBLE THE WORD OF GOD?

We're not going to talk today about what's in the Bible so much, but more about whether you can trust what's in the Bible. And so here's the Big Idea and you may want to go ahead and write this down. **In the Bible we find a flawless record of exactly what God wanted to say, exactly the way he wanted to say it.** Let me say that again. In the Bible, we find a flawless record of exactly what God wanted to say, exactly the way he wanted to say it.

Let's take a look at some scriptures that reinforce this Big Idea, and then we'll continue to unpack that for the rest of the message. In Second Timothy chapter 3, verse 16, the one I directed you to, it begins, "All scripture is inspired by God." In Second Peter chapter 1, verse 20 and 21, Peter writes, "Above all you must understand that no prophecy of scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation 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." In First Thessalonians chapter 2, verse 13, Paul says, "You accepted it not as the word of men but as it actually is, the word of God."

These are internal claims if you will, that the Bible is making to be the word of God. Now I could tell you, I could claim to be the King of England and that doesn't make me the King of England, but it's not insignificant that these internal claims are made. And so we want to continue here just for a few minutes, just looking at what the Bible says about itself.

In Second Peter chapter 3, verses 15 and 16, I just, and this is so fascinating to me. This is Peter talking about Paul. He says, "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. 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," watch this, "the other scriptures." Peter is authenticating, Paul is writing scriptures.

Proverbs chapter 30, verses 5 and 6 says, "Every word of God is flawless." John 17, verse 17 says, "Your word is true." I love Isaiah 55:11, it's another one of my go to verses. And it just talks about the efficacy of the Bible. "My word that goes out from my mouth, it will not return empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I said it." And I did say we're not going to get into necessarily the content of what the Bible says, but it is important to talk about the overall purpose of the Bible and John chapter 20, verses 30 and 31 say that the miracles of Jesus were and I quote, "Written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." That is the big picture of what the word says about the word. Now, what I want to do is in the second circle, ask you to write a brief history of the Bible. A brief history of the Bible.

A BRIEF HISTORY ABOUT THE BIBLE

We just talked a little bit about is the Bible the word of God? The claims that it makes itself and what we're going to be looking at. A brief history of the Bible itself is the second circle.

And I just wanted to just start telling you a story. Basically, let me give you a little bit of a physical description. The Bible is about 770,000 words. That would be the equivalent of about 12 nonfiction books. If you're going to read through the Bible in one year, you would need to read about roughly seven pages every day. The Bible was written by actually 40 different human authors. There is 66 books in the Bible, 27 of which are in the New Testament, written by 40 different human authors over a time span of 1,500 years. And the total time span covered in the Bible is 4,000 years. Somebody was writing down the oral tradition that was handed down by Moses and that's how we ended up with some of the Pentateuch.

The construction of the Bible is basically there are two testaments, there's an Old Testament and a New Testament. You know this. What is Testament? Testament means covenant, it means promise. We have basically two testaments that are like two pieces of a treasure map and neither one really makes complete sense without the other. In the Old Testament, we find the Christ of prophecy. In the New Testament, we find the Christ of history. In the Old Testament, there was an anticipation and in the New Testament, we have a fulfillment that takes place.

Just picture the Bible as a movie, if you would, that lasts about two hours. The first hour and a half of the movie is about the Old Testament. 75% of the Bible is the Old Testament. 25% of the Bible is the New Testament. But watch this, 99% of the timeline of the Bible is in the Old Testament and just 1% of the timeline of the Bible is actually in the New Testament. We have 25% of the Bible being written about 1% of the timeline. And it's also interesting, just the book of Genesis alone, which is only 4% of the Bible, covers 50% of the timeline of the Bible. 50% of everything that happened over time is contained in just the book of Genesis.

Then let's talk about the formation of the canon. Irenaeus in the year 180 AD was the first person to mention the idea of having a New Testament. A New Testament. And it was important because he was a disciple of Polycarp and Polycarp was a disciple of John who was an eyewitness and he was deeply respected. And so the idea caught on that there should be a New Testament that would go together with the Old Testament. Different books were already widely in circulation. In fact, some of them were great writings like The Shepherd of Hermas, but when Christians were being arrested in Rome and they

were told to give up their Bibles, what they would do is they would give up the lesser varieties, like The Shepherd of Hermas so that they could keep the books that we now have in our Bible today.

It's said that the church did not choose the canon, the canon chose the church. And so basically these books were in wide circulation, as I said, and by 367 and the Easter letter of Athanasius, the Bishop of Alexandria in Egypt, it was the common practice for the Bishop in Alexandria to each year write an Easter letter and declare what he thought would be the canon. And so in 367, he included the 27 books that we now have in our New Testament. It was widely accepted. It was confirmed at Carthage and Hippo in two additional sentence that were attended by Agustin, who became the great writer Saint Agustin. And so from 367 on there has been no dispute whatsoever about what the canon of the New Testament is. And I might even point out that the Catholic and the Protestant New Testament are the same.

The Old Testament is a little bit different because the Old Testament, which contains the writings of Moses, or actually it contains the sayings of Moses written down by others, more likely. And the survival of that was solidified with the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek. 70 scholars were brought together and they translated the Old Testament from Hebrew to Greek. It's a document we call the Septuagint. And so from about 200 years before Christ on, that canon was set in place. And in fact, it's interesting because many places where Jesus is quoting the Old Testament, the Old Testament was the Bible of Jesus. And many times when he was quoting it, he would be quoting the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament. We know that Jesus was very comfortable using translations of the Bible.

And then the Old Testament basically is preserved in three forms, the Septuagint, which I just mentioned, then the Masoretic texts. The Masoretes were a group of self appointed scholars who existed from roughly the seventh, through the 10th century AD in Jerusalem and Tiberius and elsewhere. And they were scrupulous scholars that wanted to protect the integrity of the Old Testament. And so they were even known to take copies of the Bible that were found to have errors in them, and they would burn the entire text. They were extremely careful. In fact, all major translations of the Old Testament today are based on the Masoretic text.

And then the third source for Old Testament manuscripts today are the Dead Sea Scrolls, which were found in 1947. And so it's interesting because there had been a lot of concern up until that time that maybe some of the copy, some of the scribes who were copying the manuscripts had made errors, well they knew they had, there were some copy errors in them. But they were extremely encouraged to find that this Masoretic text around roughly 1000 AD, that when they found this, these Dead Sea Scrolls, that they were virtually exactly the same. Some had been written from 200 years before Christ so roughly a span of a 1,000 or 1,200 years, and the texts were virtually identical. That's the Old Testament.

Then and the New Testament, we have lots of manuscript evidence, something like 5,000 manuscripts. And there was a tremendous demand for manuscripts, as you can imagine, when Paul was circulating his letters. People were waiting breathlessly to get the next letter from Paul, and then they would make copies of them. And then they would begin to archive the letters of Paul along with the Old Testament and other scripture writings and the gospels when they became extremely well known as well. And they would archive these in their various churches so there was a tremendous demand for copies of the Bible.

And so this is just the view of the Bible from 30,000 feet, to give you some better sense of how it came to be. And the Big Idea here today is that; **In the Bible, we find a flawless record of exactly what God wanted to say, exactly the way he wanted to say it.** Well now for the third circle, is there any reason to doubt that the Bible is the word of God?

IS THERE ANY REASON TO DOUBT THAT THE BIBLE IS THE WORD OF GOD?

Well, there are some problems that we should talk about. The first one is that the original 66 manuscripts or autographs the autographer have long since been lost or misplaced or destroyed. And so we rely on copies. Tens of thousands of copies that had been made by these copyists in scriptoriums.

And so the way that these scriptoriums would work sometimes is that there would be a person speaking the words that were to be written down, and then there would be many scribes in the room, and they would meticulously write down each letter of the Bible. In fact, they would literally count the number of letters in the Bible when they were done to make sure that they had not made a mistake. But because humans were involved in God decided that he wanted to have humans involved. God could've produced the Bible if he wanted to. In the copy machine age, or in the age of computers where we could have had some programs written to decide all of these things, but he decided not to do it that way. He produced the Bible in a time when there was being a transition from oral tradition to a written tradition, and much of the Bible was actually given to us in an oral form, not a written form.

As it was though, made into this written form, these scribes would write it down. And as you would imagine, from time to time, they would make a mistake. For example, they might leave out a word. They might, maybe they were supposed to write Jesus Christ, but they only wrote the word Jesus and left off the word Christ. Or maybe if they were trying to raise the esteem of Mary, they would insert the word Virgin, Virgin Mary, when it wasn't really in the actual text that God had given to the author of that particular text. And then occasionally, somebody would like to enhance the theological understanding. Some scribe with an ego would put something in.

But here's the thing, every variant that has ever been made has been identified. And how are these variants identified? Well, we have, as I say, thousands and thousands of manuscripts. And so through the process of text criticism, perhaps you've heard that before. It's a way of scientifically comparing different documents to find out where the variances are and then catalog them. And so every variant. We know that we have been able to reproduce the original autographs of the Bible, because we have been able to look at these 200,000 or so variants. And so if five manuscripts or say a 1,000 manuscripts say it one way, and then one manuscript has an error in it, well then we note that.

In fact, there is a text critical Bible. I actually have a text critical Bible on my Logos Bible software. And so at the bottom below the text, it lists all of the variants, V-A-R-I-A-N-T-S, variants. That exists for that particular text. And so the upshot of it is that we do know that we've been able to reconstruct the original text with 99.9% confidence. No major theological concept is in any way impugned or under a cloud of any kind. You can have a tremendous confidence that the Bible we have is in fact, the word of God. There very little reason. There's no reason to doubt it. And very little reason to even think about doubting it.

When you think about it, the believer's point of view on this is that God could have easily given us the Bible any way he wanted to. And for whatever reason, God decided sovereignly that it was not important that the original autographs survive. God decided that the transmission of the Bible would be through copies. God decided to allow humans who make errors, to be the copyists of these manuscripts. And then God has given us this task of sorting out all of these different variances to make sure that we actually have the accurate representation of his original word through these 40 different human authors, who he has inspired.

And so really the greatest evidence and the thing that removes the doubt the most, of course, is as we talked about last week, it's being in the word yourself. Those two disciples, they said, "As we were walking along and he was explaining the scriptures to us," when they were in the scriptures, "were not our hearts burning within us?" And that's because in the Bible, we find a flawless record of exactly what God wanted to say, exactly the way he wanted to say it. I hope you found this helpful.

Let's pray. Our dearest father because of your great desire to love us and lavish your love on us, you have not only given this life, you have given us your word and you have given us your spirit to animate that word. Lord, I pray that this message would remind every man of just how much you have intervened into creation to speak to us. And for those who have had a struggle in believing the word of God, I pray that you would use this message to help them have more confidence to believe that the Bible is your word so that it can have a greater impact than what they think, say and do. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Thanks, men. And we'll see you next week.