

The BIG QUESTIONS about Christianity
Authorship, Dates, and Translation
10-24-10
Scripture Reading - 2 Peter 1:16-21

For the last three weeks we've been building a case for the Bible being God's Word

12 reasons to believe

- 1) Experience it for yourself
 - a. Larry Filmore's testimony
 - b. John 10:27-28 (ESV)
²⁷My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.
- 2) Bestselling most read book of all time by FAR
- 3) Most influential book of all time by FAR
- 4) Claims to be God's Word throughout
- 5) Never been proven historically or archeologically false
- 6) Hundreds of specific fulfilled prophecies
- 7) Internally Consistent (unity of the Bible)
- 8) Explains Reality
- 9) Answers Big Questions
- 10) Timely (pertinent)
- 11) Has yet to steer me wrong
- 12) Life Changing

For the next three weeks we're going to be answering some important questions that could potentially undermine the case for the Bible being God's Word.

Note: Most of the people asking these questions: are seeking to undermine the Bible's authority, already have their mind made up about what it is, have spent very little or no time looking for answers, and have not read the Bible for themselves.

- This was the case for me

Here are the common questions that I hear people asking...

- Can we trust that the 66 books of the Bible were written when and by whom they seem to be written?

- Can we trust that the 66 books of the Bible are the right ones and that the books we read today are the same as they were when they were originally written 2,000 to 3,500 years ago?
- Does the fact that people interpret the Bible in lots of different ways undermine its credibility?
- What about the fact that it contains numerous seemingly impossible and miraculous stories as well as some very strange and difficult teachings?
- Finally, does modern science undermine the Bible's credibility?

These are all good questions, and for each of these questions there is a good answer. However, it is important to remember that without God's help, they're not going to be able to *hear* those answers.

- 1 Corinthians 2:14 (ESV)
¹⁴The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.
- Ex. L.C. Case for Christ and Bible / hypocrisy in early church

That's why it is SO important that we remain both prayerful and patient with our loved ones who don't yet believe.

- 2 Timothy 2:24-26 (ESV)
²⁴And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, ²⁵correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, ²⁶and they may escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

So with that in mind let's tackle the first question...

Can we trust that the 66 books of the Bible were written when and by whom they seem to be written?

First why is this question important?

- Based on internal evidence, the Bible claims to be a collection of 66 books, written by more than 30 authors, over the course of more than 1500 years.

- o If this were not true, then its authority would be undermined.
- Seems like the only way you could explain things like...
 - o Hundreds of specific fulfilled prophecies
 - o Internally Consistency/Unity*apart from God .*

So, *can* we trust that the 66 books of the Bible were written when and by whom they seem to be written?

The answer is YES! Though in recent times, some modern scholars have questioned the long held orthodox/traditional view of the church on the authorship and dates of various books of the Bible, *there is no good reason to reject ANY of the those views.* Therefore, we can be confident that the 66 books of the Bible are indeed written by more than 30 authors over the course of more than 1500 years, just as it claims.

Where do the traditional views of authorship and date come from?

Primarily from the Bible itself

- Some books directly identify directly their own author
 - o Galatians 1:1-3 (ESV)

1 Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead— 2 and all the brothers who are with me, To the churches of Galatia: 3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,
 - o Isaiah 1:1 (ESV)

¹The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.
- Others do not, but authorship can be confidently determined from the Biblical evidence.
 - o Ex. Luke and Acts
 - o Whoever wrote Luke also wrote Acts
 - **Luke 1:1-4 (ESV)**

¹Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, ²just as those who from

the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, ³ *it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus,* ⁴ that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.

- **Acts 1:1-3 (ESV)**
¹ *In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach,* ² until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. ³ To them he presented himself alive after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.
- o “We sections” Acts assume the author is a companion of Paul
- o Thus Paul probably listed the author name in another letter but not in we sections of Acts
 - Colossians 4:14 (ESV)
¹⁴ Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas.
 - Acts 20:3-6 (ESV)
³ There he spent three months, and when a plot was made against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia. ⁴ Sopater of Berea, the son of Pyrrhus from Berea, accompanied him; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and the Asians, Tychicus and Trophimus. ⁵ These went on ahead and were waiting for us at Troas, ⁶ *but we sailed away* from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days we came to them at Troas, where we stayed for seven days.
- o Second generation of early church, not an eye witness, and a Gentile

- Sometimes extra-biblical evidence can also be helpful when determining authorship
 - Church tradition supporting Luke as the author is both *early* (mid-2nd century AD) and *unanimous* (never doubted until 19th century)

- Sometimes authorship cannot be finally determined
 - Hebrews – Many thought Paul at first but now unsure (very different writing style)
 - 1 and 2 Samuel – Author unknown but Samuel may have written portions
 - In cases like these, canonicity is determined in ways other than the credibility/authority of the author.

- Like authorship, when dates are not directly stated (which they rarely are) can still be confidently determined based on Biblical evidence.
 - Ex. Galatians
 - No reference to Jerusalem council in Acts 15
 - Since the council took place in AD 48/49 and Paul evangelized South Galatia in AD 47/48 sometime around AD 48 is plausible date

No reason to reject traditional/orthodox views of authorship and dates determined from internal Biblical evidence and often corroborated by historical and archeological evidence as well

Resource: ESV Study Bible (other study Bibles) and good commentaries (ask me if interested)

Can we trust that the 66 books of the Bible are the right ones and that the books we read today are the same as they were when they were originally written 2,000 to 3,500 years ago?

Why is this important?

- 1) Skeptics assume the canon (correct collection of inspired books) was thrown together by men with an agenda
 - Implied in Dan Brown's The Davinci Code
- 2) With all the different modern translations out there today, the early dates of the original writings (2,000-3,500 years ago),

the inherent challenges of translating one language to another, and the imperfect and sinful nature of those doing the translating, people question whether the Bible that is read in their church today is the same as the one that was read in the first church 2,000 years ago.

3) 2 Timothy 3:15-17 (ESV)

¹⁵and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

OT Canon

Process of recording and preserving God's revelation of Himself to His people was begun by God Himself at Mount Sinai 3,500 years ago...

- Began with 10 Commandments (basis of God's original covenant with His people)
 - Exodus 32:16 (ESV)
¹⁶The tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets.
- God commanded that the 10 Commandments be kept
 - Deuteronomy 10:5 (ESV)
⁵Then I turned and came down from the mountain and put the tablets in the ark that I had made. And there they are, as the Lord commanded me."
- God added to the 10 Commandments what is referred to as the "Book of the Law" or "Book of the Covenant"
 - Exodus 24:3-4 (ESV)
³Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the rules. And all the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words that the Lord has spoken we will do." ⁴*And Moses wrote down all the words of the Lord.*
 - Joshua 24:25-26 (ESV)
²⁵So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and put in place statutes and rules for them at

Shechem. ²⁶ *And Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God.*

- God commanded that the Book of the Law be kept and read as well
 - Deuteronomy 31:24-26 (ESV)
²⁴ When Moses had finished writing the words of this law in a book to the very end, ²⁵ Moses commanded the Levites who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord, ²⁶ *"Take this Book of the Law and put it by the side of the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there for a witness against you.*
 - 2 Kings 22:8 (ESV) - Josiah late 600's BC
⁸ And Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the secretary, *"I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the Lord."* And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it.
 - Exodus 24:7 (ESV)
⁷ *Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient."*
 - Nehemiah 9:3 (ESV) - Late 400's BC
³ And they stood up in their place and *read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for a quarter of the day; for another quarter of it they made confession and worshiped the LORD their God.*
- Book of the Law was read on the Sabbath and was later supplemented by readings from the Prophets (Luke 4:16-20)
- Evidence of OT cannons development seen throughout the 400 year period between the OT and NT.
 - Final touches made in 165 BC when Judas Maccabeus listed the 24 books of the current Hebrew Scripture
 - Our 39 book OT only in a different order with some books combined
 - Kings, Chronicles, Ruth prefixed to Psalms, Ezra/Nehemiah, and The Book of 12 (Hosea - Malachi)
- Quoted approximately 300 times in NT, often as having divine authority: "it is written", "Scripture says", "God says"

- o Luke 24:44 (ESV)
 - ⁴⁴Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that *everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms* must be fulfilled."
- o Occasionally other authors are quoted, but NEVER with divine authority
- No disputes between Jesus or his disciples and the Jewish religious leaders over which OT books were canonical
- Josephus (born AD 37/38) as well as additional Jewish tradition after the time of the NT express conviction that no more prophetic writings were given after the time of the last OT prophets Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

Thus in the eyes of both the Jews and the earliest Christians, the OT Canon was set *very early*, before Jesus was even born.

NT Cannon

The Canon reopened when Jesus, the much anticipated, last, and greatest prophet came on the scene.

27 books of NT Canon *recognized* based on three things...

- 1) Written by an apostle or a close associate of an apostle
 - a. John 14:26 (ESV)
 - ²⁶But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.
 - b. John 16:12-14 (ESV)
 - ¹²"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. ¹³When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. ¹⁴He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.
 - c. Ephesians 2:19-20 (ESV)
 - ¹⁹So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰*built on the foundation of the*

apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,

- d. Matthew, John, Paul all apostles
- e. Mark (Peter), Luke (Paul), James and Jude (Jesus), Hebrews (originally thought to be Paul – see next two sections)

2) Consistency of doctrine

- a. Ex. Hebrews
- b. Ex. Gospel of Thomas and some Apocryphal (though they fail the other tests too)

3) Blessing to and recognition by church

- a. Though the NT Canon was not entirely and officially agreed upon by the church until the mid to late 4th century, it was largely undisputed well before then.
- b. Early Church Father's like Clement, Ignatius, Polycarp, and Justin Martyr saw many of the NT books as authoritative throughout the second century and were quoting, writing, teaching and preaching from them.
- c. By the end of the 2nd century a "core" collection of NT (21 of 27) was generally recognized and by the 240's AD Origin recognized all 27.

Is the Canon closed?

I think so.

- Revelation suggests it
- In light of 2 Timothy 3:16-17 it's hard to believe that God would leave His church without a key text for 2,000 years
- Book of Mormon

Can we trust modern translations?

Yes we can. Despite no remaining original manuscripts we can be sure that *more than 99%* of the words we find in our modern Hebrew OT's and our modern Greek NT's are *exactly the same as the originals*.

Lots of copies, especially of NT (more than 20,000!!!)

Meticulous copying techniques

Mostly insignificant copying errors (textual variants)

No variants that affect any major doctrine
All significant variants noted in modern Bibles

Many good English translations

- Read them side by side and you'll see (good practice anyway)
- Realize that some are more word for word and some are thought for thought
- I would recommend NIV or ESV which is between KJV/NASB and Message/New Living

Resources: ESV Study Bible, [The Case for Christ](#) by Lee Strobel, Wayne Grudem's [Systematic Theology](#)

Conclusion we can trust that when we read our modern, English translations of the Bible we are reading *the Word of God*.

2 Peter 1:16-21 (ESV)

¹⁶For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. ¹⁷For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," ¹⁸we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. ¹⁹*And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts,* ²⁰knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. ²¹For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.