

THE WRITTEN WORD OF GOD

- A. Introduction: This is the third lesson in our new series about the importance of becoming a regular Bible reader, especially the New Testament. My goal is to challenge you to become a regular Bible reader.
1. Sincere Christians mistakenly believe that they read the Bible because they read verses and selected passages. However, the Bible is not a collection of verses and selected passages—it is a collection of 66 books and letters. The name Bible comes from a Latin word that means books.
 - a. Together, these writings tell the story of God’s desire for a family and the salvation (or deliverance from sin) that comes through Jesus Christ. Every book and letters advances the story.
 1. The Bible is divided into the Old and the New Testament. The Old Testament is made up of writings written and preserved over a long period of time (1400 BC to 400 BC) by the Jews (or Israelites), the people through whom Jesus came into this world, written. The New Testament writings were written by some of Jesus’ first followers after Jesus was born (AD 46 to AD 95).
 2. The names Old and New Testament were given to each section in the 3rd century to distinguish between the Jewish writings (written in Hebrew) and the Christian writings (written in Greek).
 - b. The Bible is progressive revelation. God has gradually revealed Himself and His plan of salvation through the books of the Bible. The New Testament records the completion of what the Old anticipated and predicted—the coming of Jesus to pay for sin and redeem God’s family. Because the New Testament records the fulfillment of the plan, we begin our reading with it.
 1. Set aside fifteen to twenty minutes a day to read. Start with the first book, the Gospel of Matthew and read as far as you can in your allotted time. Don’t skip around. Don’t stop to look up words in a dictionary or consult a commentary. Just read.
 - A. Don’t worry about what you don’t understand. Understanding comes with familiarity and familiarity comes with regular, repeated reading. Leave a marker where you end and pick up there the next day. Once you’ve read through the New Testament read it over and over.
 - B. This doesn’t mean that you can’t ever skip around, stop to look up word definitions, consult a commentary, or read the study notes at the bottom of the page. Just do that at another time besides your regular reading time.
 2. Save the Old Testament (except for Psalms and Proverbs) until you are competent in the New Testament. The Old is easier to understand when it is read in the greater light of the New.
 2. We made the point that in the context of the perilous times that will precede the second coming of Jesus, Paul told Timothy (his son in the faith) to continue in the Scriptures. II Tim 3:13-16
 - a. The word Scripture comes from a Greek word that means to write. Scripture is a document or writing that is from or inspired by God. Note that Paul says all Scripture is inspired by God. The Greek word translated inspired literally means God-breathed.
 1. The Bible is a supernatural book because the inspiration for its writings came from a realm beyond this physical world. Through His Word, God, by His Spirit works in and changes those who hear, read, and believe it. I Thess 2:13; Matt 4:4; I Pet 2:2; etc.
 2. We said last week that Paul reminded Timothy that he could trust the Scriptures because they were given to him by people he can trust. II Tim 3:14-15; II Tim 2:2
 - b. In this lesson we’re going to continue to talk about why we can trust the Bible to be what it claims to be (the Word of God) and to do what it claims to do (reveal God and His plan to us as it works in us).
- B. Even though we don’t start our regular reading with the Old Testament for the reasons stated above, it will strengthen your confidence in the New Testament when you understand the respect that the first Christians and the men who wrote the New Testament had for the written Word of God in their day (the Old Testament).
1. Jesus’ first followers were Jewish. Receiving writings from God was not a new idea to the Jewish

nation. They knew that God Himself instituted the practice of recording His Words and they knew that they had “been entrusted with the very words of God” (Rom 3:2, NIV). He has revealed his words to Jacob, his principles and laws to Israel. He has not done so with any other nation (Ps 147:19-20, NLT).

- a. After God delivered Israel from Egyptian slavery He appeared to them on Mount Sinai in the form of fire. Smoke ascended from the mountain and the earth quaked. All Israel saw it and all heard the voice of God when He spoke. This was a significant event in their national history. Ex 19
 1. Almighty God called Moses up to the mountain top where he was given commands and instructions from the Lord. God Himself was the first to write His Law (or Word) with His Ten Commandments etched on stone tablets. Ex 24:12; Ex 31:18; Ex 32:15-16; Deut 4:13
 2. Altogether Moses spent forty days on the mountain receiving, not only the stone tablets, but other commands and instructions (Ex 24:18). At some point Moses recorded the information that God gave him. The first five books of the Old Testament were written by Moses.
 3. Throughout Moses’ detailed record of God’s commands, it is repeatedly stated that he wrote the words that the Lord gave him. Ex 24:4; Ex 24:12; Ex 34:27; Deut 31:9
- b. In the centuries that followed Moses, other prophets, priests, and kings of Israel continued to record (or write) revelations from God as the Holy Spirit inspired them. II Pet 1:21
 1. They understood that God intended His Word to be written. Early in Israel’s history, a class of scribes (or copiers) developed. They were tasked with preserving the God-inspired writings being given to Israel. The scribes developed detailed procedures, not only for preserving, but for making copies of the original manuscripts—down to counting the letters in each line.
 2. By the time Jesus came into this world, the Jewish people had a long tradition of respect for the written Scriptures, along with the need for accurate transmission and careful preservation.
2. What we know as the Old Testament was the Bible that Jesus quoted and taught from during his earth ministry. The books were grouped differently than today, but contained the same information we have.
 - a. The Old Testament Scriptures were grouped into the Law or the Law of Moses (Genesis-Deuteronomy), the prophets, and the writings (also called Psalms).
 1. The prophets included Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and the Book of the Twelve (Hosea-Malachi). The writings included Ruth, Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Lamentations, Daniel, Esther, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Chronicles.
 2. The Old Testament was sometimes called the Law and the Prophets and sometimes just the Law. The Law was sometimes called simply Moses. When you see those terms in the New Testament—all of them refer to what we call the Old Testament.
 - b. Jesus recognized that the Old Testament writings were from God and were accurately transmitted.
 1. Jesus referred to specific people and events as actually existing and occurring—Adam and Eve (Matt 19:4); Cain and Abel (Matt 23:35); flood of Noah (Luke 17:27); burning bush of Moses (Luke 20:37); Elijah as a miracle worker (Luke 4:27); Jonah and the whale (Matt 12:40); Daniel’s prophecies concerning Antichrist (Matt 24:15).
 2. Jesus called it God’s Word: I did not come to abolish the Law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to fulfill them. I assure you, until heaven and earth disappear, even the smallest detail of God’s law will remain until its purpose is achieved (Matt 5:17-18, NLT).
 3. Jesus stated that the Scriptures testify of Him, and in that context stated that Moses wrote about Him (John 5:39; John 5:46). The Living Word, Jesus was and is revealed in the written Word.
 - A. The Jewish people were familiar with the concept of God revealing Himself through His Word. Note this comment about Samuel, one of Israel’s prophets and one of the human authors of Scripture: And the Lord appeared again at Shiloh, for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the Lord. (I Sam 3:21—ESV).
 - B. After His resurrection Jesus went through the Old Testament, pointing out passages that

referred to Him and explaining how that through His death and resurrection He fulfilled what was promised about Him. Luke 24:25-27; Luke 24:44-45

3. In the Book of Genesis, Moses wrote about the sin of the first man and woman and its effects on them and the world (Gen 3). In that context Moses, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, reported God's first promise of redemption (salvation)—God's plan to send the Seed (Jesus) of the woman (Mary) to undo the damage done by sin (Gen 3:15).
 - a. Many more promises were given concerning this Redeemer in the pages of the Old Testament. When Jesus came into this world, first century Jews were looking for and anticipating His coming.
 - b. John 1:45—Early on, Jesus' first followers (His original apostles) became convinced that Jesus was the promised Redeemer and left all to follow Him. His coming was a fulfillment of what was promised and pictured in the Old Testament.
 1. For the next three and a half years these original followers walked and talked with Jesus and lived in close contact with Him—eyewitnesses of His ministry and His miracles. Ultimately, they saw Him die and then come back to life again.
 2. Following His resurrection Jesus charged them to go and tell the world what they saw. After Jesus returned to Heaven these men went out and proclaimed the resurrection of the Lord. Luke 24:46-49; Acts 1:8; Acts 2:32; Acts 3:15; Acts 4:33; Acts 5:30-32; Acts 10:39-41
 - c. The resurrection is the singular fact of the Christian faith. We can trust the Bible because of the resurrection. Jesus authenticated the Scriptures by rising from the dead. Consider these thoughts.
 1. Christianity stands apart from every other faith system because it is based on a historical reality—the resurrection of Jesus. We said last week that when Jesus' resurrection is examined with the same criteria used to assess other events from the past, we find that there is enough evidence to substantiate it and to turn avowed skeptics and deniers into believers.
 2. Jesus predicted that He would rise from the dead before He was crucified. The resurrection authenticates what He said about Himself—that He was and is the Lord from Heaven, the Son of God. Matt 16:21; Matt 20:17-19; John 9:35-37; John 10:36; etc.
 3. If we can trust Jesus' words on His astounding prediction of resurrection, we can trust the rest of His words, including everything in the Scriptures (Old and New Testaments).
- C. The men who wrote the New Testament documents were all eyewitnesses of the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ—Matthew, Peter, John (part of Jesus' original twelve apostles), Mark (a close associate of Peter), Paul (Jesus appeared to Him two years after the resurrection), Luke (a close associate of Paul), James and Jude (Jesus' half-brothers who became believers following the resurrection).
1. All but Luke were Jews which meant that they were raised with the understanding of what the Scriptures are and with a tremendous respect and reverence for the written Word of God.
 - a. These men did not set out to write a religious book. They set out to proclaim what they witnessed—Jesus alive. Their message was: Jesus has conquered death. And, because of His death and resurrection, salvation from sin is now available to those who believe.
 - b. At that time, Israel was under the control of the Roman Empire. More than half of people in the empire couldn't read or write. So these eyewitnesses spread their message orally at first.
 - c. Jesus' first followers lived in an oral culture that emphasized memorization. With no printing presses or recording devices, transmission of information was done primarily by word of mouth.
 1. Certain literary devices were included in oral stories to make them easier to remember. Rabbis (the religious teachers in Israel) were famous for memorizing the entire Old Testament.
 2. It was highly likely that Jesus' disciples committed much of what He said to memory. They believed that He was the Messiah. Over three years, they heard what He said more than once, and they had the Holy Spirit to help them remember what Jesus said and did. John 14:26

2. The first written documents that became part of the New Testament were epistles (or letters). They were written to people converted to Jesus through the eyewitness testimony of the first apostles.
 - a. James wrote to Jewish Christians living outside of Israel (AD 46-49). Paul wrote to churches he established in the Roman province of Galatia (AD 48-49). And he wrote to believers (Jews and non-Jews) in the Greek city of Thessalonica where he also established a church (AD 50-52).
 - b. These epistles were written to by real people to other real people to address issues regarding their new faith in Christ (what to believe and how to live)—not to make a Sunday School book for them.
 - c. The gospels (Mark, Matthew, Luke) were written 20-30 years after Jesus returned to Heaven. The apostles spread news of the resurrection orally, but written words greatly expanded their reach.
 1. The Peter the apostle could only be in one place at a time. But when Mark wrote his gospel that was based on Peter’s eyewitness testimony (AD 55-64) copies could be sent everywhere.
 2. Additionally, as eyewitnesses began to die off, their eyewitness accounts were preserved in written form. John, the last apostle, lived the longest and wrote his gospel AD 80-90.
 - A. By AD 100 all the apostles had died. At that time there were about 25,000 proclaimed followers of Jesus. But over the next 200 years it expanded to as many as 20,000,000.
 - B. Justin Martyr (a church leader in the second century, died in AD 165) wrote that when Christians met on Sunday “the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read as long as time permits”—they wanted to know what the eyewitnesses saw and heard.
 3. We can trust what the writers of the New Testament documents wrote. They were eyewitnesses who knew that they had a vital message from God and accurate communication and transmission was critical.
 - a. They were aware that the words they wrote were inspired by God Himself (I Cor 2:13; Gal 1:11-12; etc.). And they recognized that they were writing Scripture.
 1. Paul called Luke and Matthew’s work Scripture, equating them with the Book of Deuteronomy (in the Law of Moses). I Tim 5:18; Deut 25:4; Matt 10:10; Luke 10:7
 2. Peter called Paul’s words Scripture and put the writings of the apostles on the same level as the writings of the Old Testament prophets—which they believed were inspired by the Spirit of God. II Pet 3:15-16; II Pet 3:2; II Pet 1:20-21; I Pet 1:10-11
 - b. The writers of the New Testament all knew each other at some level, initially lived in the same region, and communication in the Roman Empire was good. There were multitudes of other people in Israel who saw and heard Jesus and knew the major events of His life, death, and resurrection.
 1. If any of the apostles added false or inaccurate information to their documents someone—either another apostle or non-apostle witnesses—would have recognized it.
 2. The apostles themselves addressed it when errors crept in. In fact, the epistles deal with false teachings that popped up very early. Gal 1:8-9; II Cor 11:3-4; II Thess 2:2; 3:17; III John 9-12
- D. Conclusion: We struggle with reading the Bible because we don’t have the confidence that it’s a worthwhile use of our time. We have a built-in distrust due to cultural influences and statements such as these: Men wrote the Bible. It’s filled with contractions. We don’t have the right books.
1. We’ll address these issues in more detail next week, but hopefully you’re beginning to see how that understanding the background of those who wrote the Scriptures, along with why they wrote, makes the above statements about the unreliability of the Bible seem ridiculous.
 2. These books were written and preserved by people who witnessed some extraordinary things. Israel witnessed Almighty God descend on a mountain that still exists today in Arabia and the apostles and many others saw Jesus alive after He died.
 3. Accurate transmission of the information they saw and heard was critical to them. We can trust the written Word of God. Lots more next week!