

## INFALLIBLE AND INERRANT

- A. Introduction: We are working on a series about how to read the Bible. Our goal is to help sincere people overcome the many obstacles that hinder them from reading effectively.
1. Some people struggle with reading the Bible because they don't understand what it is and why it was written. As a result, they have false expectations about what it will do for them. Others don't know how to approach the Bible and are frustrated by it or read incorrectly and misinterpret what they read.
    - a. The Bible is not a collection of individual verses meant to be read randomly. It is a collection of 66 books and letters (known as epistles) that are each meant to be read from start to finish.
    - b. Together, these books and letters tell the story of God's desire for a family and the lengths to which He has gone to obtain His family through Jesus. Through these writings God has revealed Himself and His plan to deliver all who put faith in Jesus from sin, corruption, and death. II Tim 3:14-15
  2. Last week we made the point that Bible reading is made more difficult because we aren't sure we can trust it. Many of us have a built-in distrust due to cultural influences. We've all heard statements like these: Men wrote the Bible. It's filled with myths and contractions. We don't have the right books.
    - a. It is increasingly common to hear people say that the books in the New Testament were chosen centuries after Jesus lived by church councils (Council of Nicaea, AD 325) to advance political agendas and mislead and control people.
    - b. However, when we understand who wrote both the Old and the New Testament and why, and then examine the historical evidence for how it was transmitted and preserved, it is clear that we can trust what the Bible says. We have the information that God intended us to have.
- B. Let's briefly review why and how the Bible came into being. The Bible was written over a 1500 year time period (1400 BC to 100 AD) and is at least 50% history. It is a record of how God unfolded His plan of salvation or redemption as He worked in the lives of real people who lived real lives.
1. The Bible opens with an account of the creation of the earth (which was supposed to be the family home) and of the first man and woman (who were to bring the rest of the family into existence). Gen 1-2
    - a. Adam and Eve chose independence from God through sin. As the head of the human race and earth's first steward, Adam's disobedience affected both the family and the family home. A curse of corruption and death infused the human race and the planet itself. Gen 3:17-19; Rom 5:12; etc.
      1. This development did not take Almighty God by surprise. He immediately began to unveil His plan to undo the damage. He promised the coming of a Redeemer who would one day deliver the family and the family home from sin and complete God's plan—Jesus Christ. Gen 3:15
      2. Gen 12:1-3—As part of His plan, God chose the people group through whom the Redeemer would come into this world, the descendants of a man named Abraham. Abraham's offspring grew into the Jewish people and eventually became the nation of Israel.
    - b. The Lord gave these people increasing revelation of His plan which, under His direction and inspiration, they began to write down. These writings are found in what we call the Old Testament.
      1. The Old Testament is mostly the history of Abraham's descendants and is written in Hebrew because that is the language they spoken. Acts 3:21; Luke 1:68-70; Ps 147:19-20; Rom 3:2; etc.
      2. Early in Israel's history, a class of scribes developed and was charged with preserving the God-inspired writings that were being given to Israel. The scribes developed detailed procedures, not only for preserving the writings, but for making copies of the original manuscripts.
    - c. These Hebrew writings made up the Bible that Jesus and His followers read, referred to, and quoted from. Jesus accepted their accuracy and reliability. Matt 5:17-18; John 5:39; John 5:46; etc.
  2. What we call the New Testament consists of documents written by eyewitnesses of Jesus or close associates of eyewitnesses. Following His resurrection from the dead Jesus commissioned His original

twelve apostles to go out and tell the world what they had witnessed (His resurrection). Luke 24:46-48

- a. They proclaimed their message orally at first. Written documents grew out of the fact that they couldn't be in more than one place at one time, and written accounts of what they saw greatly expanded their reach as they proclaimed the good news of Jesus Christ.
    1. Accurate transmission of what they witnessed was critical to them because of the nature of the message: Thanks to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, salvation from sin is now available to all who believe on Him. Acts 2:22-40
    2. The writers of the New Testament documents were aware that what they wrote was given and inspired by God. This increased the importance of accurate communication of the writings they were given. II Pet 3:15-16; II Pet 3:1-2; I Tim 5:18 (Luke 10:7; Matt 10:10); James 3:1
  - b. No one “picked” the books that are in the New Testament. As the writings of these apostles began to circulate, communities of believers accepted them because it was well known that they came from the original eyewitnesses of Jesus. The historical record from this period makes this clear.
    1. Early church leaders such as Ignatius and Polycarp were taught directly by the apostles and then taught others like Irenaeus. These men (and many others like them) wrote extensively about the early Christians. Their works pre-date the Council held at Nicaea in AD 325.
    2. These church fathers (as they are called) wrote about practices and beliefs among the first Christians. They also made reference to which documents (books and letters) were recognized universally from the very beginning as authoritative—or written by an original apostle.
  - c. The New Testament documents were originally written in Greek because, by the time that Jesus was born, the Jewish nation was under the control of the Roman Empire. Although Latin was the official language of the empire and the Jews in Israel spoke Aramaic, Greek was a universal language spoken throughout the empire. Here's the historical background.
    1. In 586 BC the Jewish people were temporarily removed from their land by the Babylonians and relocated to Babylon. During their seventy year exile, most of them learned to speak Aramaic (the language of their captors) and brought it back with them when they returned to Israel.
    2. Then, prior to the rise of the Roman Empire, Alexander the Great of Greece conquered much of the land that would one day belong to Rome—from northern Greece to India (323 BC). Part of Alexander's plan for his empire was to spread Greek culture throughout. For this reason he made Greek the universal language—including in Israel.
3. The fact that there are numerous translations available today troubles some sincere people. Therefore, we need to make some comments about all the different Bible translations.
    - a. The Bible (Old or New Testament) was not written in English. So, unless you are reading the Old Testament in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek, you are reading a translation.
      1. The Bible is the most translated book of all time. The Old Testament was the first book (or collection of books) to be translated. It was translated into Greek (250 BC to 150 BC).
      2. Some mistakenly think that the King James Bible is the original Bible. However, it is also a translation, commissioned by James I of England (a protestant) and completed in 1611 AD.
    - b. Translations are necessary because the vast majority of people on earth speak neither Hebrew nor Greek. If there were no translations most of us would not be able to read the Bible at all.
      1. Translating is a complicated task because no two languages are the same. For example, Greek has four different words for love. English has one. Different languages also arrange various parts of speech differently, and every language has its own idioms and figures of speech.
      2. There are two main approaches used by scholars who translate—word for word and thought for thought. Both have value. In each case, translators must stay true to original word meanings and thoughts without sacrificing readability. Reading passages from several translations can often give you greater insight into the meaning.

3. Which translation should you use? The one with wording you can understand. There are many good translations, such as *The New Living Translation* and the *English Standard Version*.
- C. Here's another question that comes up. Even if we have the right books, how can we be certain that the books have the right words? Aren't there all kinds of mistakes and contradictions in the Bible?
1. There are no original copies of the books of the Bible (or any other book from antiquity). The originals (called autographs) disintegrated centuries ago because they were written on highly perishable materials—papyrus (early form of paper), leather (animal skins), parchment (made from stretching animal skins).
    - a. In the case of the Old Testament, when a scroll (book) wore out because of use, they disposed of it and replaced it with a fresh copy. Israel stored their Scripture scrolls in the Jerusalem Temple and the synagogues around the country. Over the centuries foreign enemies burned many of those sites.
    - b. The New Testament books also eventually deteriorated and disintegrated. There are hints in the church fathers that original manuscripts may have survived until the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century.
  2. Every Bible manuscript we have today (both Old and New Testament) is a copy. Until the printing press was invented all books had to be copied by hand. (Johan Gutenberg printed a Bible in 1456.)
    - a. The issue is: How reliable are the copies? How many are there and how close to the originals (the autographs) were the copies made? The more copies you have and the closer to the time the originals were written, the more you can compare to see if there are errors or changes.
    - b. We have over 24,000 copies (partial and complete manuscripts) of the New Testament. The New Testament was written between AD 40 and AD 100, and the earliest known copies date from AD 125. The New Testament far surpasses any document from antiquity in terms of the number of manuscript copies and nearness to the writing of the originals.
  3. II Tim 3:16—The Bible declares itself to be given by inspiration of God. The Greek word that is translated inspired literally means God-breathed. God imparted something of Himself to the Scriptures.
    - a. The writers of the Bible didn't go into a trance and write. But they were aware that the words they were writing were inspired by God Himself. I Pet 1:10-11
      1. II Pet 1:21—They were moved, “borne along or impelled by the Holy Spirit's power, not acting according to their own wills, or simply expressing their own thoughts, but expressing the mind of God in words provided and ministered by Him” *Vine's Dictionary of New Testament Words*.
      2. They were not robots. Their individual personalities, linguistic styles, and life experiences are present in the writings. God superintended the writings. In His sovereignty He oversaw and guided them as they chose their words.
    - b. If the Bible truly is inspired by Almighty God, then it must, by definition, be error free because God cannot lie or make a mistake. The Bible is infallible and inerrant. Infallible means incapable of being wrong and unable to deceive, and inerrant means free from error.
      1. Inerrancy and infallibility apply only the original documents (known as autographs) because copyists did make mistakes—some unintentional and some intentional.
      2. There are textual variants or difference in the copies—about 8% in the New Testament. And, the overwhelming majority are spelling or grammar errors and words that are reversed, left out, or copied twice—errors that are easy to recognize and do not affect the meaning of the text.
      3. Occasionally a scribe tried to harmonize two passages in different gospels that describe the same event or added a detail known to the scribe, but not reported in the original.
        - A. For example, John 7:53-8:11 is not found in manuscript copies written prior to the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Many translations include it because it is consistent with what Jesus taught and did according to earlier manuscripts (along with a note that it seems to be a later addition).
        - B. Sometimes a scribe tried to make the meaning clearer by explaining what they thought a passage meant. And they weren't always correct.

- c. These changes are insignificant. They don't alter the narrative, and they don't affect the major doctrines (teachings) of Christianity. And, we have hundreds of early manuscripts that show us what the text looked like before the additions were added.
4. What about the charge that the Bible is full of contradictions? When we carefully examine the so called contradictions we find that they don't contradict. The accounts have more or less information or different details. Different writers wrote from different perspectives for different purposes. None of the differences affect the narrative or the doctrines of Christianity.
- a. Matt 8:28-34 reports that Jesus freed two demon possessed men in the country of the Gergesenes. Mark 5:1-20 and Luke 8:26-40 mention only one demonic in the country of the Gaderenes.
    - 1. The incident occurred in the city of Gadera. Gergesa was another town in the region. The terms country of the Gergesenes and the Gadarenes were general geographic terms for the area.
    - 2. Mark and Luke (not part of the original twelve apostles) were not eyewitnesses to the event. Matthew was present at the incident (Matt 8:23). Mark and Luke's accounts are less complete but not contradictory. If you have two men, then you clearly also have one. Perhaps Mark and Luke focused on the more prominent man or the one who was the more violent of the two.
  - b. Matt 20:29-34 reports that Jesus healed two blind men. Mark 10:46-52 and Luke 18:35-43 report that one man was healed. Where there are two, there is always one. Perhaps Mark and Luke mentioned only the more prominent or better known of the two. Note, Mark gave the man's name.
    - 1. Mark and Matthew say the healing occurred as Jesus left Jericho. Luke says it happened when Jesus was near the city. How can this be reconciled? Possibly three were healed—one when Jesus entered the city and two when He left. Or one was healed when Jesus came to the city and one when He left and Matthew condensed it as if both occurred when Jesus left the city.
    - 2. The fact that an account isn't explained down to the last detail doesn't make it false. Ancient writers weren't that concerned with putting events in chronological order or quoting people word for word as long as the essence of what happened and what was said was preserved.
  - c. Matt 27:3-8 says Judas returned the thirty pieces of silver he received to betray Jesus and hanged himself. Acts 1:16-19 says he bought a field with the money then fell, burst open, and his bowels gushed out. Is this a contradiction? Closer examination shows that both statements are accurate.
    - 1. According to the Law the silver couldn't be returned to the Temple treasury because it was blood money (Deut 23:18). So the priests used it to buy a potter's field (a place to bury Jews not from Jerusalem). It was a common figure of speech to attribute an act to man which he had either done directly or indirectly. Judas' return of the money made the purchase possible.
    - 2. The field was at the east end of the Hinnom Valley (SW of Jerusalem, 100 yards outside the old city walls). It is a deep, narrow ravine with steep, almost perpendicular rocky sides (25 feet to 40 feet in height). The valley floor is also rocky. Trees still grow out of these steep slopes.
    - 3. Judas hanged himself from a tree over one of these cliffs and either before or after he died, the rope broke and he fell. If he struck a pointed rock on the way down or at the bottom, his bowels would have come out.
- D. Conclusion: We have more to say about why you can trust the Bible next week. But consider this thought. Lessons like this one are helpful. But they can't replace reading the New Testament for yourself.
- 1. John 4:5-42—When Jesus engaged in conversation with a Samaritan woman at a well, she became convinced that He was the Savior. She told the nearby townspeople who then came to hear Jesus.
  - 2. After they heard Jesus speak they told the woman: Now we believe because we have heard him ourselves, not just because of what you told us. He is indeed the savior of the world (v42, NLT).
  - 3. Hearing Jesus (the Living Word) through the written Word (the Bible) will produce a confidence in you like nothing else can. Become a regular reader of the New Testament. Lots more next week!