

The Book of Life

We know from scripture and are comforted by the promise that we will all be changed in a “twinkling of an eye”. This will be an instantaneous change, but as we wait for this change we realize that generally this change or transformation, (looking more like Jesus) is a lifelong process. As we grasp this realization we can be certain, people who truly change are people who are in the word.

The letter to the Hebrews was sent to a group of people who had become discouraged because of persecution. They had started so strong but now were being tempted to return to empty lifeless rituals. The writer was emphasizing that Jesus was greater than anything they could turn to, any religious system, idol, idea, etc. In chapter 5, he is telling them by this time in their walk they should be teachers, but they were still spiritual babies not growing and being changed by his word. In a sense he is telling them that they are stuck, you’ve stopped growing.

“For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”¹³ Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.” (Hebrews 4:12-13)

So in our study today we will divert from hearing and learning *from* the bible and learn *about* the bible.

We believe that the bible is a unique book, there has never been another book like it. Five billion copies of the scriptures have been printed throughout human history, the next closest book that has been massed produced is 800 million.

Throughout the centuries it has been translated into 2600 languages, cherished, smuggled, hidden in their hearts, but it has also been banned,

burned and outlawed. So why have so many people given their lives to translate or distribute this book while others spend most of their lives mocking and attempting to discredit it?

Why from the very beginning in Genesis 3, did Satan attack God's Words?

Because the bible is a unique book, because it is the only book that *claims* it is a *living book*...its alive and it contains the very breath of God. God and his Word are one, when he speaks life happens.

An example of the opposition would be **François-Marie Arouet** (November 21 1694 –May 30 1778), known as "**Voltaire**". He was a French Enlightenment writer, historian, and philosopher who was famous for his wit and his attacks on the established church and the bible.

He believed because of all of the scientific findings of that time along with the enlightenment that would surely come, he predicted that within 100 years' no one would be reading the bible. Of course we know from history this would not even be close (4.5 billion printed since his prediction) to an accurate prediction.

God's life is imparted in this book, an impartation of life, God's life.

How does the word work in us:

- **When you're feeling dead, find life in the Word (living)**

It is proper to pray for seeds (his word) of life to those dead or dying areas of our lives. Because his word "active" we get our word "energy", It not only brings life to me but actively works in me.

- **When you feel weak, find strength in the Word (active)**

We see this in the life of Jesus, when he was agonizing in the garden or being crucified, he went to the word of God.

"If I'm not in the Word, I can magnify other's weaknesses and minimize my own"

- **When you need to change, find truth in the Word (discerning)**

Basically people don't change unless something active and alive changes them.

Hebrews told us that his word "divides" deeply. One reason we don't change is because we don't open to and allow God to make judgements in us. We are very good at self-deception, lying to ourselves and justify our behaviors. His word divides our thoughts, attitudes and intents, and desires and discerns the difference between these and God's thoughts and intentions.

"You are reading the bible but is the bible reading you?"

Like David in Psalm 51 who had sinned and is now being confronted by God's word through the prophet, will begin to allow his word to cut away things in his life. David would cry out this, "search me, try me oh Lord if there be any wicked way in me". "Create in me in clean heart" whatever was deep inside me that caused this, cut it away. God's Word is so discerning between flesh and spirit, the attitudes and intents of our heart, it's so reveling so discerning.

When we're in the word we look at things, people and circumstances differently. If we are honest, we can tell when we haven't been in the word.

The second half of our study will be spent pointing out things about the bible we read.

The Bible was written:

- over a 1500-year span (from 1400 B.C to A.D. 100)
- over 40 generations
- over 40 authors from many walks of life (i.e. - kings, peasants, philosophers, fishermen, poets, statesmen, scholars)
- in different places (i.e. - wilderness, dungeon, palaces)
- at different times (i.e. - war, peace)
- in different moods (i.e. - heights of joy, depths of despair)

- on three continents (Asia, Africa, and Europe)
- in three languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek)

The Word (bible) began when Moses came down the mountain with the tablets, Moses then began to write the Law. As other people were carried along by the Holy Spirit, other books of the bible including the Psalms, Proverbs, the Prophets and the letters of the New Testament were added.

The Old Testament was immediately recognized by the early church fathers because Jesus affirmed it, every; “jot and tittle and every aspect of it”.

Next they had to decide what would be the core of what would be called the New Testament. We will not go into great depth concerning how the early church fathers assembled the Canon of Scripture that we read today, but these were some of the questions they wrestled with:

1. So how did the bible come into existence?

- **Authorship (Did this person know Jesus?)** Not second hand or third hand accounts but direct eyewitness accounts.
- **Inspiration (Does this bear witness to the truth?)** Does this bear witness in our spirits, does it have God’s voice and authority?
- **Content (Does this line up with the truth we’ve known as the consistent truth handed down from the Apostles?)**

The bible was meant to be read by all the people. Just prior to the “Dark Ages” the Pope in Rome decided that it was dangerous for people to have the scriptures. So there was a decree and the bible was outlawed to be available to people. Additionally, it could only be written in Latin, so all the bibles were rounded up and the church services were conducted only in Latin. The challenge was that only the trained elite clergy and a few others understood Latin.

So access to the scriptures were withheld from the people, until brave bible translators like Wycliffe and Huss came on the scene around 1384. John Huss would be burnt at the stake for his belief in the availability of the scriptures in the people’s language. Ironically the fire was built from the bibles John Wycliffe had published.

In 1522 a man named Martin Luther translated the bible into German. Luther a former Priest would read the N.T. and find, find a revelation of Jesus and the truths of the scriptures like salvation by faith, the royal priesthood of all believers and much more.

In 1526 William Tyndale would publish the first English bible from a printing press. Although slow and cumbersome this would be the beginning of a mass distribution. In 1536, Tyndale was arrested, imprisoned and ultimately strangled and burned at the stake.

Thankfully in 1539, King Henry the 8th, declared that the scriptures were to be available in English and authorized the printing of the English bible. From this point on in many places in the world would have access to the printed scriptures.

Sometimes we don't appreciate what some people have sacrificed so we could have the written word of God. Throughout history it has been loved and contended for, but it has also been contested and opposed...but in a different way both of these still happen today.

2. Is the Bible authentic and can I trust it?

- **The Internal Test** – *what does the bible say about itself?*

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. ² The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. ³ We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.” (1 John 1:1-3)

This is clearly seen as Luke begins his account in chapter:

*“Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, ² just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were **eyewitnesses** and servants of the word. ³ With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most*

excellent Theophilus, ⁴ so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught”.

- **The External Test** – *what does the outside evidence say about the bible?*

One external test is in the area of archaeology; we hear from one of the foremost experts in this area (not a Christian):

“It may be stated categorically, that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference.” Nelson Gluecke

- **The Bibliographic Test** – *How well were the original documents translated and handed down?*

In 1946 a Bedouin shepherd named Muhammed edh-Dhib was looking for two lost goats and is throwing rocks near the Qumran Caves. When he heard what sounded like a clanking sound, he went into the caves and found ancient scrolls. For those of us who love the scriptures this would be a significant, important discovery.

Dead Sea Scrolls – pre-dated our oldest documents by 1,000 years. 13 small changes (punctuation), 99.9% the same.

Fulfilled Prophecies

For only 8 of the prophecies of Jesus to be fulfilled, would be the equivalent of 1 in 100,000,000,000,000,000 (10 to the 17th power).

Preserved Documents (Credibility)

The way to appreciate what we are seeing here is to compare the preserved documents of scripture to other ancient writings and literature

Herodotus (Greek Historian)– 8
Plato – 7

The Iliad (Homer) – 643

The N.T.? 5,700 Greek manuscripts and 21,000 partial manuscripts.

AUTHOR	BOOK	DATE WRITTEN	EARLIEST COPIES	TIME GAP	NO. OF COPIES
Homer	<i>Iliad</i>	800 B.C.	c. 400 B.C.	c. 400 yrs	643
Herodotus	<i>History</i>	480-425 B.C.	c. A.D. 900	c. 1350 yrs.	8
Thucydides	<i>History</i>	460-400 B.C.	c. A.D. 900	c. 1300 yrs.	8
Plato		400 B.C.	c. A.D. 900	c. 1300 yrs.	7
Caesar	<i>Gallic Wars</i>	100-44 B.C.	c. A.D. 900	c. 1000 yrs.	10
Livy	<i>History of Rome</i>	59 B.C.- A.D. 17	4th Cent. (partial mostly 10th Cent.)	c. 400 yrs. c. 1000 yrs.	1 partial +19 copies
Tacitus	<i>Annals</i>	A.D. 100	c.A.D. 1100	c. 1000 yrs.	20
Pliny the Younger	<i>Natural History</i>	A.D. 61-113	c.A.D. 850	c. 750 yrs.	7
New Testament		A.D. 50-100	c. 125 (fragment) c. 200 (books) c. 250 (most of NT) c. 325 (complete NT)	+50 yrs 100 yrs. 150 yrs. 225 yrs.	~5700 +21,000 fragments

3. How Should I read the Bible?

- You never have to read the bible alone – The Holy Spirit is your teacher.

*“I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. ¹³ But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, **he will guide you into all the 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 glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. ¹⁵ All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you.” (John 16:12-15)*

- Find people to help you (discipleship)

“He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.” (Acts 18:26)

- **Look for the author**

When we read, we never divorce it from the one who wrote it. All scripture is not only inspired by the Holy Spirit but it points to Jesus. It isn't about learning abstract things, facts, gaining knowledge, etc., it about knowing Jesus...when we read the scriptures we meet Jesus:

*“You have your heads in your Bibles constantly because you think you’ll find eternal life there. But you miss the forest for the trees. These Scriptures are **all about me!** And here I am, standing right before you, and you aren’t willing to receive from me the life you say you want.” (John 5:39-40 The Message Transliteration)*

Discussion Questions

- 1) As we continue our look into transformation in our lives what were some of your original thoughts as we were challenged with this statement: “people who truly change are people who are in the word”?
- 2) Take another look at your notes at the bottom of page 1 and the top of page 2 and we “divert from learning *from* the bible and learn *about* the bible, what did you notice? Also, what does it mean to you that, “*the only book that claims it is a living book*” and that “*God’s life is imparted in this book*”?
- 3) At the bottom of page 2 and top of page 3, we learn how his Word works in us. Specifically discuss this when are feeling “dead” (living), “weak” (Active) and “need change” (Discerning).

- 4) At the bottom of page 4, we begin to look at the more technical part of how the scriptures came to be as they are today. What did you learn and what are some further thoughts?
- 5) On page 4, we began to consider how the bible came into existence. Of all the information that is listed which was the most meaningful?
- 6) Looking at the bottom of page 5, we begin to examine if the scripture is authentic and if we can trust it. There are several categories listed through page 7, which of these listed meant the most to you in relation to God's Word?
- 7) Finally on pages 7 and 8 when we think about how we should read the bible, what were you able to take away from that section that will help you with your time in the Word?