

2 Peter 1:16-21

The Origins of the Bible

Introduction: If this is your first time here at Refuge - Welcome. We've taken this whole month of January to talk about the Bible as part of our kick off of the Year of Biblical Literacy.

We talked about the Problem of the Bible

We talked about the reason for the Bible - What is the Bible for? Last week we talked about the authority of the Bible.

The Bible is God's authoritative word and instruction given to God's people that we might live out the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven - that God's ways, his character, his truth, his justice, righteousness and shalom would be put on display...

The authority of scripture really has to do then with living under God's kingdom reign and rule. Therefore, as God's people, Scripture, where God instructs us in his way of life, must become the number one source of information and truth for our lives. It must become the greatest influence. in our lives as followers of Jesus.

But this begs the question - How are we sure that what we have in our hands is the actual word of God?

Hasn't the message been changed over time, or been corrupted? - Islam, JW, Mormons, the christian cults..

Hasn't the Bible gotten lost in translation?

So we've been talking about the Bible for the last few weeks, and maybe we should have started with this topic of origin, but so it is. (Everyone do yourself a favor and go watch Tim Mackie's lecture on Canonization on the YOBL site. It's under the lecture series)

1. The Origins of the Bible - Where did the Bible come from, or who wrote the Bible?

1. I'm going to read you something I found online and I would say that this is what most bible colleges teach and what most conservative christians believe -
 1. "Who wrote the Bible" is a question that can be definitively answered by examining the biblical texts in light of the external

evidences that supports its claims. 2 Timothy 3:16 states that “All scripture is inspired by God....” In 2 Peter 1:20-21, Peter reminds the reader to “know this first of all, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, ...but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.” The Bible itself tells us that it is God who is the author of His book.

2. God does not leave us with just claims of His divine handiwork in the Bible, but also supports it with compelling evidence. The design of the Bible itself is a miracle. Written over more than 1,500 years by vastly different writers, yet every book in the Bible is consistent in its message. These 66 books talk about history, prophecy, poetry, and theology. Despite their complexity, differences in writing styles and vast time periods, the books of the Bible agree miraculously well in theme, facts and cross-referencing. No human beings could have planned such an intricate combination of books over a 1,500-year time span.”
2. Where much of what is said here is true, I think this is grossly misleading. The way the question is answered doesn’t actually look at the textual evidence of authorship, but more so compiles factual data of scripture consistency, congruency, etc - It leaves one with the impression of a “Golden Tablet” type of inspiration of scripture - It’s almost like saying The Bible was written by God, yes, through people - because he needed someone's hands... look at all the consistency, theology and poetry, look how it tells a consistent and coherent story - no humans could do that, and if they did they would have messed it up and we can’t trust it - This view leaves us with this trance idea of inspiration - God wrote the Bible through Zombies, bypassing their brains and personalities, and their context. BUT - is this what we find in the Bible??
3. There are two things wrong with a “Golden Tablet” view of biblical inspiration and the first one is that it is flat out wrong.
4. The second is that this is what we call a power play - The Bible is written by God - is your book written by God? I didn’t think so. How dare you question God and his book - you must submit, obey, no questions asked.... and this is the way this view of inspiration has worked for many years... The Problem with this is all it takes is a somewhat careful reader of the Bible to see that this isn’t true. Many people who grew up in the church, being taught this view, or thinking this way, go off to college take a class on classic literature, or poetry or textual criticism and began looking at

the actual facts about how the Bible was put together and all of a sudden their whole faith comes crumbling to the ground.... which is sad on so many levels.. Church this is why the year of Biblical literacy or just reading your Bible, consistently, all the way through is so important.. to know what the Bible teaches and says about itself, for yourself.

2. The True Origins of the Bible

1. Now I fully believe the Bible is a divine book. And I want to say as well that I fully believe the bible is a human book. - Where do I get that from? The Bible.
2. When Peter says, “Above all, you do well if you recognize this: No prophecy of scripture ever comes about by the prophet’s own imagination, for no prophecy was ever borne of human impulse; rather, men carried along by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.” - 2 Peter 1:20-21
 1. What Peter is saying here is not that people were in a trance (he doesn’t tell us exactly what this looked like.. His point is that no one sat down one day and decided - ‘I’m gonna write the Bible... I’m gonna write my thoughts about God’ - This isn’t just something made up out of thin air, some persons imagination or agenda
3. If you look at the book of Hebrews, the author will refer to Psalm 95, for example, and apply two authors to the psalm. We first read “the Holy Spirit said,” and then later “David said.” Both are true. Hebrews accents the dual authorship, or concurrent authorship, of Scripture.
4. The Bible is both divine and human in it’s origin. Rather than being a contradiction this is what we see in Jesus of Nazareth - who is fully divine and fully human -It’s not one or the other and any time we pit these against each other we’re just plain wrong and get into all sorts of theological problems...
5. “While the books of the Bible were written under inspiration of the holy Spirit, and so, have God as their author, their human writers still made use of their own powers and abilities, acting as true authors, consigned to writing everything and only those things which he wanted.” - Roman Catholic Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation
 1. Textual Criticism - though many see it as an attack on the scriptures has really helped the church get away from dogma and back to orthodoxy- back to what the Bible actually says - we believe that the Bible is authoritative, but now we have to go

back and see how.. we believe the Bible is inspired by God, but now we have to go back to scripture to look at the Bible for itself and see how it is inspired by God...

3. How was the Bible put together?

1. In a very human way - I mentioned this the other week - what is the first mention of writing the Bible in the Bible?
 1. The first time God tells someone to write the Bible - Is Exodus 17 (also recorded in Deuteronomy 25), The children of Israel are in the wilderness making their way to Mount Sinai, and all of a sudden A tribe called the Amalekites, came from behind Israel's caravan and started slaughtering, the elderly, and the weak. Moses sends Joshua and a make shift army out to fight with the Amalekites, and there's this weird thing about Moses lifting up his staff and when he does they prevail but when his arms go down they begin to lose.. Finally with some assistance Moses keeps his hands up and Israel prevails. "Then the Lord said to Moses, "Write this as a memorial in a book and recite it in the ears of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven."" - Exodus 17:14
 2. The first story that God has people write down (As far as we know) is a story that records God's deliverance from those who would destroy his people and his purposes for them. It's a true story that is recorded by humans under the direction of YHWH. **And that's what we find again and again in the Biblical record** - recorded stories, by humans under the direction of God, about God and his continual acts of salvation, and his covenant relationship with human beings and how humans are to live in relationship to this God...
 3. Second mention? (We read it on Thursday) Exodus 24:4 - Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD - the words of the covenant. Then he read from the book of the covenant in hearing of the people..." Moses records the words of God, under the direction of God, for the teaching and instructing of God's people in his ways and his truth...
2. As we read through the Bible we can see: much of the material found in biblical books circulated in oral form, and along with, their written form.
 1. Example, Genesis keeps referring to a catalogue of generations..of the heavens and the earth... of adam.... of Noah..Abraham..etc... these seem to be either written or oral

accounts passed down and collected and put together by the author..

3. Not all the material, therefore, was put into writing immediately, or nearly so, with the events described
4. The Biblical books that became part of the scriptural canon themselves may have been the end product of successive traditions to shorter texts. That means - many biblical books had multiple authors over a relatively long period of time..
 1. **Example:** Moses might have gathered together most of the information and story of the Pentateuch but he can't be the final author.. "Meekest man who ever lived".... it records Moses death and events afterwards.. there was an editor.. or probably editors. But claiming that Moses did not write the Pentateuch (as we know it today) does not negate a claim to divine inspiration- it simply asks us to reconsider how that inspiration occurred within the dynamics of a human community
5. Just because the Bible, and here I'm referring specifically to the OT, has human authors/editors who came along and added to the story (Genesis 38?), made comments, insights, introductions (Psalm 1) doesn't take away from it's divine inspiration. Just because whoever wrote Samuel (hint, it wasn't Samuel posthumously) wrote the events in such a way as to compare and contrast Saul and David, in the context of sin and repentance, and to place this as cautionary tale o the nation of Israel in captivity - doesn't take away from it's divine inspiration - if anything it adds to the depth and beauty and power of the work
6. The human fingerprints on the O.T. should not be a stumbling block to Christians, the Bible doesn't hide it's origins or authorship.
 1. Think about the Gospel of John - John is very upfront about why he is writing. These aren't just facts about Jesus. This isn't a complete biography of the life of Jesus. He says, "**Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name...**" and again in 21:25 "**Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.**"

7. John wrote these specific things with a purpose - he left out a lot of info and stories, but he told these specific true stories in such a way that those who heard it and read it might believe in Jesus (the gospels are not objective biography, the writers had an agenda) - John wants you to experience the fulness of life through the life death and resurrection of Jesus Christ
8. We simply don't have a golden tablet Bible... We have something much more powerful, the true story of God interacting at various times and in various ways with human beings.
 1. "The scriptures are the revelation of a personal, relational, incarnational God to actual communities of men and women with names in history. The witnesses to the revelation are real writers who do their writing and witnessing in the full light of day and with the confirmation of their worshipping communities.
Everything is out in the open... - Eugene Peterson, Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading

4. Errors in Scripture - Because the Bible is a human and divine book, and has very human origins - then the Bible is full of errors.

1. To many, the origin of the Bible can be summed-up as follows: "A translation of a translation of an interpretation of an oral tradition" - and therefore, a book with no credibility or connection to the original texts. (people often use the example of the game of telephone to make this point)
 1. This statement is a common misunderstanding of both Christians and non-christians alike. Translations such as the King James Version are derived from existing copies of ancient manuscripts such as the Hebrew Masoretic Text (Old Testament) and the Greek Textus Receptus (New Testament), and are not translations of texts translated from other interpretations.
 2. Rather, the primary differences between today's Bible translations are merely related to how translators interpret a word or sentence from the original language of the text source (Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek).

2. O.T. Reliability

1. Another challenge against the origin of the Bible is the reliability of the manuscripts from which today's Bibles are translated. There is actually widespread evidence for absolute reliability. There are more than 14,000 existing Old Testament manuscripts and fragments copied throughout the Middle East, Mediterranean and European regions that agree dramatically with

each other. In addition, these texts agree with the Septuagint version of the Old Testament, which was translated from Hebrew to Greek some time during the 3rd century BC. (300 years before Jesus)

2. The Dead Sea Scrolls, discovered in Israel in the 1940's and 50's, also provide phenomenal evidence for the reliability of the ancient transmission of the Jewish Scriptures (Old Testament) before the arrival of Jesus Christ. The Hebrew scribes who copied the Jewish Scriptures dedicated their lives to preserving the accuracy of the holy books. These scribes went to phenomenal lengths to insure manuscript reliability. They were highly trained and meticulously observed, counting every letter, word and paragraph against master scrolls. A single error required the immediate destruction of the entire text.

3. N.T. Reliability

1. The manuscript evidence for the New Testament is also dramatic, with over 5,300 known copies and fragments in the original Greek, nearly 800 of which were copied before 1000 AD. Some manuscript texts date to the early second and third centuries, with the time between the original autographs and our earliest existing copies being a remarkably short 60 years.
2. That might sound like a long time to you, but this manuscript evidence far surpasses the manuscript reliability of other ancient writings that we trust as authentic every day.

3. Comparisons:

1. Julius Caesar's "The Gallic Wars" (10 manuscripts remain, with the earliest one dating to 1,000 years after the original autograph)
2. Pliny the Younger's "History" (7 manuscripts; 750 years elapsed)
3. Thucydides' "History" (8 manuscripts; 1,300 years elapsed)
4. Herodotus' "History" (8 manuscripts; 1,300 years elapsed)
5. Sophocles (193 manuscripts; 1,400 years)
6. Euripides (9 manuscripts; 1,500 years)
7. Aristotle (49 manuscripts; 1,400 years).

4. Are there errors in the Bible? Yes.

1. Greek expert Ezra Abbott, Professor of NT Textual Criticism at Harvard University, said about 19/20 (95 percent) of the "errors" are "various" rather than "rival" readings, and about 19/20 (95 percent) of the rest make no appreciable difference

in the sense of the passage. Thus the text is 99.75 % accurate.

2. Greek scholar A. T. Robertson said the real concern is with about a “thousandth part of the entire text.” So, the reconstructed text of the New Testament is 99.9% free from real concern.
3. Philip Schaff (Theologian/historian) estimated that of the thousands of variations in all the manuscripts known in his day, only 50 were of real significance and of these not one affected “an article of faith.”
4. Even agnostic NT critic Bart Ehrman admits that *“In fact, most of the changes found in early Christian manuscripts have nothing to do with theology or ideology.* Far and away the most changes are the result of mistakes pure and simple-slips of the pen, accidental omissions, inadvertent additions, misspelled words, blunders of one sort of another” - Bart Ehrman, Misquoting Jesus, (pg.55).
5. **Last thing** - just for fun - What belongs in the NT and who decided? Constantine decided as a power play? Not even close. The books that belong to what we call the NT were in circulation in the early church. The church, along with the apostles considered these authoritative - the books that didn't catch were because they were either not associated with the Apostles or leaders of the early church or because they were heretical.
6. What about Dan Brown - The DaVinci Code - the lost or Gnostic gospels (date 4th century AD a generous 2nd Century) and the Gospel of Thomas - You tell me? - from the last bit in the Gospel of Thomas - “Simon Peter said to them, “Make Mary (Magdalene) leave us, for females don't deserve life.” Jesus said, “Look, I will guide her to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every female who makes herself male will enter the kingdom of Heaven.”

Conclusion: It is good and necessary to talk about these things - especially in our day and age - to be sure of the reliability of the scripture. There will be many temptations in your life to challenge scripture, to reject scripture to ask yourself is this really from God or is this from humans - I hope you come back to this truth - All Scripture is given by inspiration of God - therefore our journey is to wrestle with God of the scriptures - in order to be shaped and formed by them.

You can trust the scriptures - they are authentic - the same Scriptures Jesus had, the stories, letters concerning Jesus that were used by the Early church.

And I'll be perfectly honest - the scriptures have an agenda - God wants to bring you out of spiritual darkness, relational confusion, addiction and slavery - out of isolation and into true community - he wants to fill you with his life and make you a whole human being who will reflect his Goodness, righteousness, justice and peace out into the world around you. He wants to prepare you now to rule and reign with him in a new heaven and a new earth...forever and ever.