

XLI. Timeless Truth for Timely Topics in Biblical Perspective

What Does the Bible Say?

“Why and How Did We Get a Bible with These 66 Books?”

Selected Texts

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We will be looking at a number of texts in this study to answer the question ‘why and how did the church of Jesus Christ get a Bible and why and how did this Bible have these 66 books within it?’ Let’s start this study with a prayer.

Prayer:

Father, I’m grateful to You that we can go to Your Word and that You might speak to us from Your Word and that You might even use the foolishness of preaching so that Your people might hear the Word of Christ and that they might believe and grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ. Father, I thank You that Your Word is glorious. Help us to understand from this study how we got it, why it’s these 66 books and how we might be persuaded by Your Spirit and the Word itself that this is the Word of God for I pray this in Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Let’s start by looking at Psalm 19. So why is it that we hold to these 66 books and on what basis is this Canon? Canon means the measuring rod. What is the measuring rod we use to answer this question? Psalm 19:1–11 says [1] *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.* [2] *Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.* [3] *There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard.* [4] *Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them he has set a tent for the sun,* [5] *which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy.* [6] *Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them, and there is nothing hidden from its heat.*

[7] *The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; [8] the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; [9] the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether. [10] More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. [11] Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.*

I get this question from a lot of people about these 66 books. Who said that this is the Bible? How did we get it? Why do we say it’s these 66 books? Before I go any further I want to read to you the opening paragraphs of the Westminster Confession of Faith. If you would have walked into one of our 18th century churches in early colonial America likely you would have seen three frames hanging up in the church. There would have been three items on them. One would have been the Ten Commandments. One would have been the Lord’s Prayer and thirdly would have been the Apostle’s Creed. Why did they do that? First of all printed material was hard to come by. Not everyone had a Bible. You may have multiple ones at home. Secondly, printed material for discipleship was hard to come by but they knew if they could get these three foundational items in people’s lives they could disciple them.

Why do I tell you this? I tell you this because I don’t think we can surpass the discipleship material that is a part of our heritage – the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechism. The Larger and Shorter Catechism are the instruments to teach

you doctrines that are found in the Westminster Confession of Faith. These are not inspired in the Biblical sense of inerrancy but I do believe they are inspired in a secondary sense because of how they have been put together and their value.

The Shorter Catechism is the exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith and therefore there are three elements to the Shorter Catechism and the Larger Catechism. It expounds basic Biblical doctrine – Apostle’s Creed. It expounds the Law of God. It expounds the Lord’s Prayer. All three of those things are the exposition of the Shorter Catechism. Once you walk your way through it you now have an instrument to understand the doctrines in the Westminster Confession of Faith. The Westminster Confession of Faith starts off with the doctrine of Scripture. I had always wondered why it didn’t start with the doctrine of God. It does move to the doctrine of God and then the decrees of the doctrine of God but why does it start with the doctrine of Scripture?

Here is the reason. It is because you cannot know God intimately, accurately and savingly without the Scriptures. You can know God in His transcendence and you can know God to be accountable to worship God as to how He reveals Himself in creation but you can’t know Him savingly, intimately and accurately unless you know the Word of God to know the God of the Word. I just read it in Psalm 19 that creation shouts the glory of God but Romans tells us while that is sufficient to hold us accountable and that no man is innocent before God, He has born witness of Himself in what we call general revelation accessible to everyone, His creation. You see the Creator. You would never know that Creator dwells as Father, Son and Holy Spirit without the Bible. You would never know that He loves sinners without the Bible. You would never know how to be saved without the Bible. The Word of God is essential and that’s what Psalm 19 is talking about.

The first section of Psalm 19 says that God has revealed Himself in general revelation but what is it that revives the soul. It is the Law of the Lord, His authoritative teaching, the Scripture. What is it that refreshes, gives the wisdom of God, gives the fear of God, cleanses the soul and fills the heart? It is the Word of God in the hands of the Spirit of God. That is right where the Westminster Confession of Faith starts off in its first chapter. The very first paragraph of the Westminster Confession of Faith declares this glorious truth.

1. Although the light of nature and the works of creation and providence manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, to such an extent that men are without excuse, yet they are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God and of his will which is necessary for salvation. Therefore it pleased the Lord, at various times and in diverse ways, to reveal himself and to declare his will to his church; and afterward—for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the church against the corruption of the flesh and the malice of Satan and of the world—to commit this revelation wholly to writing. Therefore the Holy Scripture is most necessary, God's former ways of revealing his will to his people having ceased.

What was His former ways prior to Moses? They were dreams, visions and all of those ways. Then He uses those to give His Scripture but once His Scripture is complete He ceases revealing that way and now you know Him through His Word. There are no shortcuts. It is the Word of the Lord that revives and cleanses your soul. It is the Word of the Lord that feeds your soul with the majesty and glory of God in His graciousness. General revelation is God revealing Himself in creation. Special revelation is God revealing Himself in His Word. Is the revealed Word of God that is special revelation inerrant and infallible? Yes. Is general revelation inerrant and infallible? Yes. The problem is with the interpreters of both. The first place of right

interpretation is right assessment of the Word. How do you see the Word and how did God get to you this Word?

Now I want to go to paragraph two in the Westminster Confession of Faith. *2. Under the name of Holy Scripture, or the written Word of God, are all the books of the Old and New Testaments, namely:* then the Confession lists all the 66 books of the Bible. Some would say some books were missing and what might those be? In the 16th century it had a whole section that is what we call now the Apocrypha. So paragraph three from the Confession deals with this. It says *3. The books commonly called the Apocrypha, because they are not divinely inspired, are not part of the canon of Scripture, and therefore are of no authority in the church of God and are not to be approved, or made use of, in any manner different from other human writings.*

In other words they have value because of history, insights and ethical things just like a lot of other books have value but they do not belong in The Book, the Word of God. Why would they say that? Who has the audacity to say that and why would they say that? That is absolutely crucial. Then we had it handed down to us and that was a monumental moment. By the way, how did they get in there?

Out there today is a movie called the DaVinci Code that basically says the whole Bible didn't get to you for there is a gospel of Thomas, the book of Clement and all these things we ought to have including the Apocrypha and even what is called the pseudepigrapha – the false writings that claim to be New Testament writings in the Bible. There was this big conspiracy in the days of Constantine which is the guy that controlled this or just a group of power hungry people controlled this in order to manipulate people. Some would say that the church has to tell us what is in the Bible.

We stand in the tradition of the Reformation. That is what has governed the preaching of this church for about 60 years now. In that tradition of the Reformation we hold to saying we didn't get our Bible from the church. In fact it was when the church said it gave you the Bible that it included the books that shouldn't have been in the Bible like the Apocrypha. So then how did we get the Bible?

This is what it says in paragraph 4 of the Westminster Confession of Faith. *4. The authority of the Holy Scripture, because of which it ought to be believed and obeyed, does not depend upon the testimony of any man or church, but entirely upon God, its author (who is truth itself); therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.* It is not because the church says it but because God says that this is His Word.

Chapter five of the Westminster Confession of Faith says; *5. We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the church to a high and reverent esteem for the Holy Scripture. The heavenly character of its content, the efficacy of its doctrine, the majesty of its style, the agreement of all its parts, the scope of the whole (which is to give all glory to God), the full disclosure it makes of the only way of man's salvation, its many other incomparable excellencies, and its entire perfection, are arguments by which it gives abundant evidence that it is the Word of God. Nevertheless, our full persuasion and assurance of its infallible truth and divine authority is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.*

I want to explain those paragraphs with five simple propositions as to how and why we get the Word of God. In doing this we will be looking at a couple of passages. The Word of God or the Books of the Bible are to be received as the Word of God because, number one, they come from God. They don't come from the church. It is not that they come from a man or men but it's because they come from God. II Timothy 3:16–17 says [16] *All Scripture (every single one*

of) is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, [17] that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. In other words, you have your Bible from your Triune God. God the Father has revealed Himself. God is Truth therefore when God reveals Himself it is the Truth. God has revealed Himself by the Father's appointment of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit. He has revealed Himself through the Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of Truth. The Spirit of Truth that has revealed the truth points to the preeminence of Christ as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer.

God has revealed Himself with the offices of the Trinity. The Father authors it. The Holy Spirit brings it and Christ is the preeminent subject of it. He is revealed as the Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. He is the Creator of all humanity. He is the Redeemer of the elect and He is the Sustainer of the creation. He is providential Sustainer of His people causing all things to work together. This Word of God from God, the Triune God, is to the glory of God. All Scripture is breathed out by God. So we have this glorious truth that God has revealed Himself. I've looked at the Trinity and all of the glory of the Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – who have given us the Word of God. It is the Word of God because God has revealed it as His Word. God has revealed Himself and has assured us in the Word that it is the Word. Then God brings His Son in the flesh which is the Incarnate Christ.

The second principle is the Incarnate Christ as Prophet has affirmed the Old Testament as the Word of God. Jesus comes as the Messiah – Prophet, Priest and King. As Priest He comes to bring the atoning sacrifice and He is the Sacrifice. As King He rules and reigns over all creation. He is the sovereign King over all creation and not one Adam is out from under His authoritative, sovereign decrees. He is also the Prophet and as the Prophet, He has brought us the Word of God. So what did the Reformers do in writing this confession? They went back to the Old Testament affirmed by Christ. The technical term is the Masoretic text but you can forget that and just go to Luke 24. What did Christ affirm as the Word of God? In this text Jesus is talking to two disciples who are downhearted on the Road to Emmaus.

Luke 24:27 says [27] *And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.* That is Moses and the Prophets. He is affirming their Old Testament. Their Old Testament had three parts but many times it was considered two parts. When referring to Moses that represents the first five books of the Bible – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Then there were the Prophets. The Prophets of that day for the Israelites would have been the former Prophets and the latter Prophets. That is the Prophets who spoke for God, His Word, prior to the Babylonian Captivity were the former Prophets. The latter Prophets were those who spoke for God by God after the Babylonian Captivity. Most of the time the Bible is seen another way so when they record this event they talk about how their hearts burned within them. Jesus comes not to two disciples but to all disciples which we see later in Luke 24.

Luke 24:44 says [44] *Then 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."* Here we have the first five books represented through the Law of Moses, the Prophets and then the wisdom literature preeminently the collection of the Psalms. The Psalms are not in chapters, meaning to say 'turn to Psalm chapter 1' is not correct. It is just Psalm 1, Psalm 2, etc. They are just Psalms. This is the glorious hymn book of the church that reveals the people of God in praise and prayer.

So what does Jesus affirm as the Word of God in Luke 24? He affirms the 39 books of the Old Testament. They were not arranged the way they are today but it is the essential 39

books of the Old Testament. He did not affirm the Apocrypha because the Apocrypha was not the Bible in the days of Jesus. The Bible in the days of Jesus was Moses, the former and latter Prophets and the Psalms. These are the 39 books, and therefore when the Reformers realized we needed the foundation of what the Bible is, then the answer is this; if the Bible is the Word of God then what does God say is His Word? Jesus is God Incarnate so Jesus now defines the Old Testament as the 39 books thus they jettisoned those things that the church had said belonged in the Bible over the centuries called the Apocrypha but the church does not make the Bible. The church receives the Bible. God makes the Bible and the Incarnate Christ as Prophet affirms what the Bible is. So that takes care of the Old Testament.

So what about the New Testament? Number three is the Incarnate Christ not only affirms the Old Testament Canon but He authorizes the writing of the New Testament Canon. For this we will look at a couple of passages of Scriptures. First let's look at John 14 which takes place in the Upper Room Discourse. John 14:25–26 says *[25] These things I have spoken to you (speaking to the Disciples) while I am still with you. [26] But 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.* I think this has an overflow promise to us. As you know your Bible the Holy Spirit will keep bringing it to you but what He is telling these who will write the New Testament, the New Covenant of the Bible, is that they are being authorized by Christ and resourced by Christ through the Holy Spirit so that they will bring to us all that He has said for us. Now let's look at John 16.

John 16:12–15 says *[12] I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. [13] When 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. [14] He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. [15] All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.* We see the Trinity at work here again.

Christ is now authorizing the Disciples to record everything that the Father has given to Him that He is giving to them and He will give them the Holy Spirit not only to remember what He said but what they yet need to know from the risen Christ who will keep informing His Disciples as they write the Scriptures. So the Incarnate Christ is the One who gives us the Word of God. Now let's look at Hebrews 1.

Hebrews 1:1–2 says *[1] Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, [2] but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.* God has affirmed the Old Testament by Christ and now through Christ He has spoken finally to us the New Testament. Now let's look at Hebrews 2.

Hebrews 2:1–4 says *[1] Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. [2] For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, [3] how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, [4] while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.*

Now we know whoever was writing Hebrews was and Apostle or under Apostolic authority according to Hebrews 2:3. In this text He is saying that God has already spoken in the Old Testament. It is not only reliable but it is foundational but now He has finally spoken in His Son and His Son has spoken to us through His Disciples, those who heard from Him. The writer

of Hebrews is probably not an Apostle but under the authority of an Apostle because he says ‘us’ which is those who heard it from them. Who the writer of Hebrews was is another whole subject but I think there are three possibilities but he is declaring himself under the authority of the Apostles. The Apostles have not only been taught of the Lord and authorized to teach but then Jesus gave them the special ability to do signs, wonders and miracles as credentials of their Apostolic ministry.

This is why I still believe God does miracles but I just don’t believe there are miracle workers. I believe the ability to do miracles by the spoken word and the laying on of hands was given by Christ to the Apostles. That is why Paul will later say ‘I am the Apostle untimely born but I did the signs, wonders and miracles of the Apostles.’ So they had credential gifts. It’s like if someone came up to your door and wanted to see all your financial records from the IRS and the next thing you will ask that person is ‘show me some credentials.’ When the Apostles said ‘we speak for the Lord’ then God’s people were to say ‘prophets and apostles were to be able to show the credentials’ and the credentials of speaking for the Lord was the ability to do signs, wonders and miracles. So Jesus has authorized the New Testament to be given through those who heard and that is the Apostles. He also gave them apostolic signs, wonders and miracles as His credential because anyone could and did go around saying they were an apostle but if they had truly been with Him they would be able to do these signs, wonders and miracles. He authorizes, equips them and gives them the credentials to give us the New Testament.

What is it that these will say to us? Let’s look at I John 1. John authors five of the books in the Bible – John, I John, II John, III John, and Revelation. I John 1:1–4 says *[1] That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—[2] the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—[3] that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. [4] And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.*

John is saying that we the Apostles are writing these things that He gave us therefore I could start with Matthew and go through the 27 books of the New Testament and show the evidence that they are written by Christ through those taught of Christ as each one either comes through an Apostle or one who is directly recording under an Apostle. For instance, John Mark is not an Apostle but he is recording the Gospel that Peter is giving him to write out in the Bible. It is Peter’s Gospel with John Mark as the secretary. He also helps him write out I and II Peter and he is even referenced there. So we could see this if we went through each book in the New Testament. The only questionable one that wasn’t there from His baptism to His resurrection was Paul. You not only have the affirmation of Paul doing signs, wonders and miracles but you have the affirmation of the other Apostles. Let’s look at II Peter 3.

What about the Pauline Epistles? Does he count as an Apostle? He says he does. He did signs, wonders and miracles. He said I’m glad you have received this as the Word of God and not the word of men which it really is. Notice it is not only Paul that says it for there are other witnesses that say it. II Peter 3:14–16 says *[14] Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. [15] And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, [16] as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant*

and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. In other words, Paul's writings by Peter are called Scripture and people misuse the other Scriptures even as they have misused Paul's but the point here is that Paul's writings are Scripture as well.

The Bible is the Word of God because it comes from the Triune God. The Father has authored it. It is delivered by the Holy Spirit and the glory of God is seen in the preeminence of His Son as our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. Secondly, the Incarnate Christ as Prophet affirmed the Old Testament and therefore we received the Old Testament affirmed by Christ. We don't make it we receive what He has affirmed. Thirdly, He has authorized the New Testament as the Word of God through the Apostles and those who wrote under their direction and has even given them credentialed gifts of extraordinary miracle working power to attest to their position as agents of revelation. Therefore we receive what Christ has authorized in the New Testament.

Fourthly, now secondarily are the internal proofs of all of this. There are ten that are confirmed in the Westminster Confession. The first thing is the testimony of the church. Now the church does not make the Bible but the church bears testimony to the Bible except for those centuries of corruption when they added to the Scripture. This was when the church decided to make the canon and tell people what the Word of God was, instead of receiving the Word of God. In those years they added to the Word of God with both oral tradition and Apocrypha and the psuedopigrypha.

Secondly, another internal proof is the testimony of the Bible. Notice the testimony of the Bible in all of its glory and majesty. People think 'how can you read the account of creation in Genesis and believe it?' but go read the Gilgamesh epic. That is nonsense and there is nothing transcendent about it at all. Then go read the book of Genesis and see majesty, transcendence, glory and clarity of the God of glory.

Thirdly, internal proof is the content of the Bible that bears witness. Three thousand plus times it says 'thus says the Lord' and this affirms itself as not man's word about God but God's Word through man to man. Fourthly is the majesty of the Bible. See the majestic themes that are in the Bible. Fifthly, is the agreement of the Bible. There are forty plus human authors and 1600 years that bring the Bible together and nothing is contradictory. Now some things have to be worked through but nothing is contradictory. The Bible interprets itself ultimately because it is not contradictory.

Sixthly, is the unity of the Bible. It all points to the glory of God revealed in Christ, our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. Every book and every page keeps pointing to the unity of the Bible. Seventhly, is the revelation of the Bible. Look at what it reveals. There are things that you would never know if God hadn't revealed them to you. The eighth internal proof is the incomparable nature of God's Word. It just thrills your soul to read it and all of its great themes. It is incomparable in its message of creation, salvation, its promises of providence, its anticipation of the consummation and it is glorious in its content. Nothing compares to it. O God who has known Your mind? Who has thought Your thoughts before You? Who has become Your counselor? There is no one like You. These things have been revealed to us in their incomparable glory in the preeminence of Christ.

The ninth proof are the perfections of the Bible. You have a complete Word of God to you. It is not exhaustive of all of God's truth but all that we need is in it. [16] *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, [17] that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.* (II Timothy 3:16-17). Look at its spiritual underpinnings and its glorious message. Look at how it

reveals things to you in its perfections. Not only does it give you things that you would never know but things that are illogical are supralogical – one God in Three Persons.

Every theme in the Bible that talks about God and His works, is hard to get your mind wrapped around it. God is sovereign and I'm responsible. God is sovereign in all things yet man is a free moral agent. God is glorious, majestic and transcendent yet He is imminent and present within us. God is Holy unique, wholly other and while I can never know Him exhaustively, I can know Him accurately, personally and intimately. Do you see these internal proofs that this is the Word of God? It's not why we say it is the Word of God it just consistently affirms why we have received the Word of God from God.

The last one is that you'll never believe any of the others until the Persuader moves into your heart – the Holy Spirit. You'll find every reason to walk away from the Word of God. You will find every reason to deny the Word of God. You will find every reason to walk away from the truth of God's Word unless the Holy Spirit persuades you.

My grandfather was actually on the original Billy Graham team from 1948 to 1952 part time and his full time job was being a scout for the Washington Senators baseball team but it gave him free time to be a part of the Billy Graham team. I would sit and ask him questions about this after I was converted. I didn't want to hear anything about it before I was converted. Through him I got the chance to meet the Grahams, T.W. Wilson, Grady Wilson and Cliff Barrows. All of these people were just amazing people. I'll never forget what my grandfather and his two brothers told me one time. They said the key to Billy Graham was 'the Bible says' for that is what he always said when he delivered his sermons especially his older ones.

You might be thinking that when you go tell someone what the Bible says that they won't believe it until the Holy Spirit moves upon them. My dear friend you cannot send the Holy Spirit. I wish you could. You can pray for Him to come and He loves to move in concert with the prayers of His people. You cannot open anyone's eyes or heart or mind but you can open your Bible. The same Holy Spirit that persuades people to believe the Bible uses the Bible to persuade them. So you pray for the Spirit to move. You open your Bible and the Holy Spirit with the open Bible moves men and women to believe the Word of Christ and whoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. That is how you got your Bible.

The church didn't give you the Bible and any church that said it did then get out of that church. We don't make the Bible. We don't make the Word of God, we receive it and the Holy Spirit bears witness in our hearts to it as God's Word. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the privilege to be in Your Word examining this most crucial issue of how we got these 66 books. The answer is simple. Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Thank You for giving us this Your Word. Thank You for giving us the Holy Spirit and as that Word came to us He opened our heart to believe the Word of God about the God revealed in His Word. I thank You Father that You reveal Yourself in all of creation but I thank You that You have revealed Yourself in Your Word and by Your Spirit who gave that Word we receive that Word and it gives us the love of the Lord, the glory of the Lord, the grace of our God, and the fear of God. It restores our soul and we praise You evermore for I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.