

BASICS • Part 2 – The Bible

I. INTRODUCTION - PSALM 138

A. *The Jesus Seminar*

1. They sit around a table and read a small portion of one of the Gospels
2. In front of them are 4 cups filled with different colored beads; black, gray, pink, and red
3. They listen while someone reads a verse quoting Jesus; then each of them reaches into one of the cups and lifts out a bead
 - a. red if he or she thinks Jesus *definitely* said that
 - b. pink if it's the kind of thing Jesus *might* say
 - c. gray if Jesus probably *didn't* say it
 - d. black if Jesus *definitely* didn't say anything like that
4. A basket goes round and collects the votes; a count is made, and a determination is reached on whether or not Jesus really said what the New Testament writers said He said.
5. So, who is this group of experts? They're known as the Jesus Seminar, and they meet regularly to decide such weighty matters as what Jesus really said and did, what Paul really wrote, and whether or not we ought to believe in the reliability of our modern Bibles
6. Now, we would expect that a group which takes on such a daunting task would be comprised of today's best scholars who are well versed in the original languages of the New Testament.
 - a. we would expect that this panel is filled with historians; people with extensive background and learning in the literature and customs of the 1st Century
 - b. but that isn't the case; oh, there are several experts in the field of biblical studies
 - c. but *over half* the participants are obscure unknowns who find their expertise somewhere [\[1\]](#)
7. And when a verse is read, and they're called upon to pass judgment on whether or not Jesus really said it or not, they make their decision based not on conclusive research but on what to them *feels* right.
8. When their session is done, they print up their conclusions, publish a new book which claims Jesus said virtually none of what the Gospels claim He said, they hold a big press party, and the media eats it up.
9. *Time* and *Newsweek* do cover stories and Peter Jennings invites the leaders of the Jesus Seminar to speak as THE experts on New Testament studies to a national audience as he does a prime time special on Jesus.
10. And as millions of people watch, their confidence in the reliability of the Bible is shattered because 75 nameless, faceless, ill-informed and poorly conceived people, 2000 years removed from the event, think they are *better* equipped to report on what Jesus said and did than the eye-witnesses who were there to hear and see it

B. *The Bible Is Reliable*

1. It's my aim today to *shatter* the illusion of the Jesus Seminar
2. When you leave here today, you will have great confidence in the *reliability* of your Bible, and you will understand why we look to it as our *sole authority* regarding the content of our Faith

3. The foundational verse for our study today is Psalm 138:2 - **TOGETHER**

I will worship toward Your holy temple, And praise Your name For Your lovingkindness and Your truth; For You have magnified Your word above all Your name.

- a. this last phrase is amazing!
- b. God's name is exalted and honored endlessly in Scripture
- c. but here David recognizes that God Himself magnifies His Word *above* His name.

- d. one of the ways God reveals the exaltation of His Word is seen in how He ensures it's *preservation* throughout history
- e. let's consider that this morning as we look first at the Reliability of our modern Bible

II. THE RELIABILITY OF OUR MODERN BIBLES

A. *The Problem With Copies*

1. Last week we talked about the inspiration and inerrancy of the Scriptures
2. We realized that the originals, or what is known as the *autographs* were inspired, not the copies that were made of them.
3. Since we don't possess the autograph of a single book of the Bible, the question is – "How accurate and reliable is our modern Bible?"
4. Remember that the Old and New Testament books of the Bible were written hundreds of years before the invention of the printing press.
5. That means the only way to duplicate them for a thousand and more years was by hand-copying them.
6. If you've ever had to hand-copy a long portion of text, you know it's inevitable for errors to creep in to the copying process.
7. Then the errors multiply as copies are made of the copies.
8. So we're faced with a valid question – Just how reliable is our modern Bible?
9. We have to answer that by considering the Old Testament and New Testament books separately because widely different rules were followed for copying them

B. *The Reliability of the Old Testament*

1. Until the middle of this last century, the oldest manuscripts of the OT we possessed dated to the 900's AD!
2. This is nearly 1500 years after the last of them were penned.
3. For years the critics and skeptics said that with at least 1500 years of copying between the originals and the oldest existing copies, the text was so badly corrupted and changed what we have today is no where near the original.
4. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in the 40's and 50's changed all that.
5. Now we possess manuscripts of the OT dating back to 300 BC.
6. What was amazing to the scholars who studied the scrolls was the *similarity* between these Dead Sea Scrolls and the manuscripts from the 900's.
7. They are so close as to be virtually identical.
8. And this helps explain why, in fact, there are so few existing copies of ancient OT books.
9. The reason for the scarcity is because of the *strict rules* used by the Jewish scribes when they made copies.
 - a. they were so exact in their method of copying, there was little chance of making a mistake
 - b. they would only copy a scroll when the original was old and needed to be replaced.
 - c. the way they copied was letter by letter
 - d. then they would cross check and count up the words and letters on each line and make sure no error had been made.
 - 1) they would *total the letters* in a scroll and make sure both the original and the copy had the same amount
 - 2) they would total *each individual letter*, so all the a's would be checked, then the b's, and so on
 - 3) the *words* were counted
 - 4) then the *middle letter* of each scroll was found by counting and verified
 - e. and you know what would happen to a scroll that didn't check-out? It was destroyed!
 - f. but if the copy checked-out; then it was considered by the scribes to be an exact replica and so as good as the original.

- g. since they feared the parchment or papyrus of the older scroll might be misused for some *profane* purpose if just left to sit around, they burned or buried the older scroll.
 - h. and this accounts for why so few copies of ancient OT books are to be found; they were purposely destroyed.
 - i. there's some evidence this is where the Dead Sea Scrolls came from; the caves they were found in may very well have been the burial chambers of old scrolls, but the extremely dry climate of the area ensured their preservation for the last 2000 years.
10. Another reason for the scarcity of ancient OT manuscripts is because of *persecution*.
 - a. throughout history the Jews have faced violent waves of anti-Semitism
 - b. and one of the prime targets in this persecution has been the Jewish scriptures
 - c. thousands upon thousands of OT scrolls have been burned throughout Europe, Asia, and Northern Africa
 11. Yet though it all, the high regard of the Jews for their scriptures ensured their scribes duplicated the texts exactly as they were from of old.
 12. Since the Dead Sea Scrolls, numerous other finds of ancient OT manuscripts have been found which only adds to the weight and credibility of our modern translations
 13. Only a handful of far-left critics today doubt the textual reliability of the OT.

C. The Reliability of the New Testament

1. As we turn to the NT, we find a bit different story.
2. This is due to the way in which people copied the NT books
 - a. for the most part, these copyists weren't trained scribes
 - b. they were ordinary people like you and me who simply wanted a copy of one of the NT gospels or letters
 - c. in fact, so hungry were believers for the books of the New Testament that they copied them by the thousands!
3. What this means is that there are *so many* NT manuscripts, determining the accuracy of our modern translations is an easy chore
4. There are over 24,000 manuscripts of the NT
 - a. these range in composition from small portions of just a few lines to entire bibles
 - b. and the time span between the autographs and the earliest copies we possess is so small as to be unimportant.
 - c. the famous archaeologist Kathleen Kenyon made this remark

The interval between the date of the original composition and the earliest extant evidence becomes so small as to be negligible, and the last foundation for nay doubt that the Scriptures have come to us substantially as they were written had now been removed. Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established. [2]

5. So, we have some 24,000 ancient NT manuscripts – how does that stack up to other ancient literary works?
6. Look at the chart in your study sheet . . .

Author/Writing	##No. of Copies	Date Written	Earliest Copy	Time Span
Testament	24,000+	AD 40-80	AD 115	35 –75 years
er • The Iliad • (This is the second most abundant source ext to the NT)	643	750 BC	250 BC	500 years
ar's • Gallic Wars	10	100-44 BC	AD 900	950 years
's • Tetralogies	7	427-347 BC	AD 900	1,250 years
us • Histories	20	AD 100	AD 1100	1,000 years

Herodotus • Historical Works	8	460-400 BC	AD 900	1,400 years
Herodotus	100	496-406 BC	AD 1000	1,400 years
Herodotus • Historical Works	8	400-450 BC	AD 900	1,300 years

7. This bonanza of NT manuscripts presents something of a challenge for this reason . . .
 - a. because the people who made these copies didn't follow the strict rules of duplication the Jewish scribes did, they were less exact in the copying process
 - b. and the result was the introduction of copying errors
 - c. now, if we only had a dozen or so manuscripts, it would be inordinately difficult to figure out where the errors were
 - d. but the more manuscripts you have, the greater the ability to cross-check each other
 - e. since different people make different mistakes, as we compare *all* of the copies to one another, the errors become obvious because they aren't repeated in the other manuscripts
8. Let me use an example that will easily illustrate this . . .
 - a. let's say 5 of us go into the Fellowship hall and take a Bible with us
 - b. these 5 people turn to the Gospel of John and then begin to hand copy it onto sheets of notebook paper.
 - c. will each of them make some errors in that copying process? More than likely
 - d. will they all make the same errors? Not likely
 - 1) there may be some common mistakes
 - 2) but it is highly unlikely all or even the majority will make the same mistake
 - e. okay, now let's send each of those 5 with their 1st generation copies to separate rooms in the building here
 - f. in each room are 50 people waiting with paper and pens
 - 1) 3 people in each room sit down and make their own copy of 1st generation copy that is brought to them
 - 2) when they're done, 3 more people make copies of each of these copies
 - 3) if we keep this up, then we will see 5 generations of copies in each room from that original done in the Fellowship Hall
 - g. but now think about it – in every room, with each new copy, the earlier errors will be copied as well, with new errors added
 - h. if we only look at *each* room as an isolated case, we will see certain common features for all of those copies
 - i. but as we begin to compare the 4 other rooms and their copies in comparison to *each room*, it's easy to see where the errors are in any one room's texts because we *don't* find them in the other rooms
9. This is precisely what we have with the abundance of NT manuscripts
 - a. there are so many of them, and they tend to be grouped according to geographical area
 - b. as we compare these groups of texts, it's easy to see where corruptions to the text began, and what the correct reading ought to be
 - c. the result is that Bible scholars have calculated that of the NT text, 99.5% of it is certain beyond any kind of doubt
 - d. and of that ½ of a percent that is in question, none of it deals with Christian doctrine.
10. Now, here's where all of this comes together –
 - a. there's no debate raging in the halls of higher learning about the accuracy or reliability of our text of the *Iliad*
 - b. no one is protesting the study of Caesar's *Gallic Wars* because the textual evidence is in doubt
 - c. no one is spinning new theories about how to interpret Herodotus's view of the ancient world because there are only 8 existing manuscripts and the oldest dates to 1,300 years after he penned the original

- d. but when it comes to the NT, there's this loud hew and cry by the skeptics and critics and liberal theologians that the text of the NT is faulty
 - e. there's the protest by the ill-informed that the Bible is full of errors and contradictions and has been hopelessly corrupted through the years
 - f. the answer to these objections is simple: If you are going to accept Homer's Iliad and Caesar's *Wars*, then you *have* to accept the accuracy and reliability of the NT.
11. Why *do* those who reject the bible apply a *different* standard to it than they do to everything else?
 12. The answer to that is simple – they don't have a problem with anything Caesar or Homer wrote
 - a. Homer doesn't tell them they're accountable to God
 - b. and Caesar doesn't tell them how to live
 13. If the Bible is inspired, and our modern translations are reliable as all the evidence overwhelmingly reveals, then it is something we ought to give heed and attention to
 14. If I don't want to, then I'll simply deny it's inspired and reliable.

C. Our Modern Bibles Are Virtually Inspired

1. Let's distill this down now to something we can use
2. Last week we established the inspiration of the Scriptures
3. And we were careful to identify that when we are talking about inspiration, we mean the autographs, the originals
4. Since we don't possess the autographs, just copies of copies, how does the issue of inspiration affect us?
5. Today we've established that because of the careful and strict rules of scribal transmission, the OT documents are incredibly faithful to the originals.
6. We've also seen that the abundance of ancient NT manuscripts, coupled with their early dates, brings a ultra-high degree of certainty to the accuracy of our NT's.
7. Therefore, we can say that while the autographs were inspired, our modern bibles, both Old and New Testaments are *virtually* inspired.

III. THE BIBLE AS OUR SOLE AUTHORITY

A. Defining Authority

1. Finally, as we wrap up our study this morning, we want to briefly take a look at how the Bible is our authority
2. By the authority of the Bible, we mean that the Bible, as the inspired expression of God's will to us, possesses the *supreme right* to define what we believe and how we are to conduct ourselves.^[3]
3. The key passage for this is the main verses we looked at last week – 2 Timothy 3:16-17

¹⁶All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,

¹⁷that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

- a. when it comes to the basic needs of spiritual growth and life;
 - 1) for defining doctrine – what we believe
 - 2) for reproof, for showing us where we've erred
 - 3) for correction, for showing us how to get back on track
 - 4) and for instruction; for showing us how to go on in the right path
 - b. and note what Paul says in v. 17 – the scripture is able to make us *complete*
4. Psalm 119:105 says,

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

5. In Ephesians 2 the Apostle Paul writes this . . .

19 **You are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,**

20 **having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone,**

21 **in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord,**

22 **in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.**

- a. the spiritual building he's speaking of is the Church
 - b. notice what he says – it is built on a foundation comprised of the Apostles and Prophets, with Jesus Christ Himself being the base from which it all springs
 - c. now – where do we find the ministry of the Apostles and Prophets?
 - d. the Bible!
 - 1) the Prophets refers to the books of the OT
 - 2) and the Apostles refers to the NT
 - e. the Word of God as most perfectly revealed in the Person of Jesus Christ, and then after that in the teaching of the Apostles and Prophets, provides the base and authority for the Church
6. Now - Speaking to you all about the authority of the Bible may seem like a moot point
- a. probably everyone here already accepts this as a given
 - b. the reason I want to deal with it as we wrap things up thing morning is because as you share your faith with others you will meet people, specifically, you will meet Roman Catholics who will argue this point with you
 - c. usually, it happens like this . . .
 - 1) as you're trying to share with a Catholic, you bring up what the Bible says
 - 2) they reply by saying, "But the Church says . . ."
 - d. you see, while we recognize the Bible as our sole authority, or as Martin Luther put it in his great Reformation theme "sola scriptura – only scripture" – the Roman Catholic holds the Church, and specifically, the *Pope* as his or her final authority.
 - e. we start with the Bible, they start with Rome; and because we have such diverse starting points, we often end up at very different ends
 - f. when we point out practices in the Roman church that are *incompatible* with the Bible, they reply by saying that the Church says it's okay, and at that point the conversation breaks down
7. We contend that the Bible, as the sole authority of faith and practice gives rise to and defines the Church
8. The Catholic position is that the Church gave rise to the Bible and so has the sole right to *interpret* it
- a. individual believers cannot study the bible on their own and come to a sure knowledge of what it means
 - b. they have to depend on the teaching authority of Rome to understand God's will
9. Now, this clearly flies in the face of the entire tone of the Bible which teaches the Spirit of God is all a person needs to understand even the deep things of God
10. In 1 Cor. 2:10 Paul writes . . .

God has revealed *them* to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.

11. Then in v. 15 he says . . .

The one who is spiritual judges all things

12. But it couldn't get any clearer than 1 John 2:27

The anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him.

13. If individual Christians had to depend on an official priesthood to understand the Scriptures,

- Paul and John never could have written these words.
14. They would have directed their readers to go to their priests and pastors and do whatever they say because to them and them alone has been entrusted the hidden things.

IV. CONCLUSION

A. Our Foundation

1. So, we've laid the first brick in our foundation as we take a look at the Basics of the Christian Faith
2. That first brick is the Bible
 - a. it is inspired and inerrant in the autographs
 - b. it's reliable in its modern translations
 - c. and it serves as the sole authority of faith and practice

B. Next

1. Next week we will take a look at the Attributes of God
2. The week after that, we're going to consider an issue which is a real hot potato today
3. We're going to take a look at the whole Creation versus Evolution debate as we consider God as Creator

[1] Wilkins, Michael J. & Moreland, J.P. *Jesus Under Fire*, pg. 19-20

[2] Water, Mark *Hard Questions About The Bible Made Easy* pg. 39

[3] Erikson, Millard, *Christian Theology* pg. 241