



EXCERPT



## **Light of the Word**

*How Knowing the History of the Bible Illuminates Our Faith*

December 5, 2023 | \$18, 240 pages, paperback | 978-1-5140-0694-8

The more we understand how Scripture came to be, the more we discover its power and truth. Unpacking how the history of the Bible bolsters our faith, historian Susan Lim explains how Christians came to accept certain documents as inspired and how the books we now call the Bible came to be assembled and canonized as authoritative.

## **My First Confession**

I made my first confession during the spring of my senior year in high school. I was desperate for love and desperate for peace, and a friend had told me that there is a God, whose name is Jesus, who could provide both. It sounded too good to be true, and I wondered if this was a cult or some moneymaking scam. But my friend seemed genuine, so I followed her to church on a Friday night to attend a youth rally. The songs, the raising of hands, and the emotions all intrigued and, to some extent, worried me. Were these people delusional or making it up? Regardless, I stayed, observing the preacher, who spoke with passion about Jesus, who can heal broken hearts and make all things new. My heart was shattered at age seventeen, feeling irreparably broken and discarded. So I listened closely, hanging on to every word about this Jesus, who through his death and resurrection, offers new life in exchange for marred ones. These were the very words I needed to hear, but how could these promises be true?

After the sermon, small groups met to discuss the content and raise questions. I sat silently for most of the small-group session, but toward the end, the leader asked, "Who would like to invite Jesus into their hearts?" At that moment, God whispered into my heart, "That was me. And my name is Jesus." I knew implicitly that Jesus was referring to that encounter with light and love when I was twelve years old, and I believed everything that was shared about Christ that night.

I cried rivers of tears that night, as if the years of abuse and sadness would be washed away in that torrent. And Jesus has indeed given me a new and resurrected life.

That night, however, no one told me that Jesus, who was now my Lord and Savior, was the fulfillment of prophecy or that there are four Gospel accounts to convey his truths. I was also unaware that there are sixty-six books in the entire Bible, thirty-nine in the Old Testament and twenty-seven in the New Testament. No one told me about the Council of Nicaea in AD 325, the Arian controversy, or the role of the church fathers regarding the compilation of the Bible. Did I need to know these facts to make the first confession? Absolutely not. My salvation was sealed that evening when I accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior.

Perhaps your experience of salvation was similar. The experience and power of the Holy Spirit were more real than anything tangible. Like me, you might have made the first confession without a solid understanding of the Scriptures. You're not alone. That was my story and the story of countless others. A nuanced knowledge of the Scriptures is not a prerequisite for salvation.

The first and second confessions, however, are inextricably linked because Jesus, who is Lord and Savior, is also the Word of God. The God of our salvation is the God of the Scriptures. Jesus built his ministry on the Scriptures, and we believe in his death and resurrection as told in the Scriptures. God, in his divine wisdom and kind grace, has made himself accessible to humankind by donning human flesh and by revealing himself through words penned by humans.

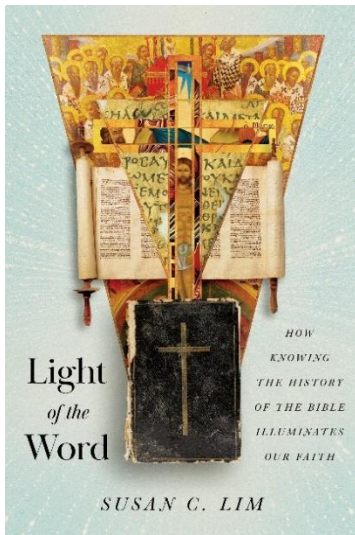


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**Susan C. Lim** (PhD, UCLA) is a historian and writer. She has been a professor of history at Biola University in La Mirada, California, and is a speaker at conferences, churches, and retreats. She loves to share God's Word and serve at her home church, Mariners Church in Irvine, California.

Yet those who believe in the incarnation and resurrection of Christ might not know that the sixty-six books of the Bible are the true Word of God. In pews across the world, many genuine followers of Jesus do not believe that the entire Bible is the Word of God. The catch, however, is that many are unaware of this unbelief.

#### MY SECOND CONFESSION

Our first confession is typically accompanied by baptism and celebration. But our second confession largely goes unexamined. For me, the first and second confessions were not automatically linked. More importantly, I was unaware of their disconnect.

I spent over fifteen years as a Christian quoting, memorizing, studying, and teaching Scripture. At one point, I even wrote out the entire Bible by hand. But deep in my heart was an unbelief that festered without my knowing, and my unbeknownst secret came to light one random morning in 2007.

I was reading the Bible when the Holy Spirit stirred my soul and made me pause from the familiar verses. The Spirit convicted me of my unbelief in such a gentle but firm manner by whispering into my spirit: "You don't believe what you're reading."

I remember saying out loud in response, "You're right . . . these words sound nice, but I don't believe that they're from you. And some of the stories in here . . . I just can't."

These words, this confession, tumbled out, and I hadn't even realized that they had taken residence in my soul. Had it not been the conviction of the Spirit, I would have vehemently denied my heresy! But here I was, telling God that the Bible was a sham.

The journey from that fateful morning in 2007 to now is a road map of sorts for this book. Your journey might look different, but I hope the lessons I've learned can clarify mysteries that shroud our understanding of God's Word. I'm a skeptic—that's just how I'm wired, and maybe that's how you tick. If that's the case, this book is for you. Christians are asked to base their entire lives on the Bible, but so few of us know how it was formed or what it declares.

Before someone buys a house or enters employment, the contract should be reviewed thoroughly. Christians are asked to trust in the Scriptures, yet many haven't read God's covenant in full before professing faith. While a comprehensive understanding of the Scriptures is not a prerequisite for salvation, it is nonnegotiable for sanctification.

Spiritual confusion and the high rate of deconversion, among other issues in the church, can be traced back to a lack of love and reverence for the Scriptures. Prior to my second confession, I failed to love or truly believe in the entire Bible. There were certain parts—such as the Gospels and the Psalms—that seemed more believable. But there were many (many) parts I did not believe or understand. I felt spiritually anemic, hoping that the next day would be better if I tried harder. I felt like I was groping in the darkness and lost in my faith. But learning about the history was like light dawning after a long and confusing season. So I share this light with all those who need encouragement in their faith journey.

-Adapted from the introduction, "Loving God's Word"



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*"Being in a Bible study with Susan and her family for the last five years, I have witnessed firsthand Susan's passion for the Scriptures and the powerful and gracious work God has done in her life through the Scriptures. My confidence in Scripture has been strengthened and my heart has been refreshed by reading Light of the Word, and I believe this book will serve you well, no matter where you are in your faith journey. It is a book I will come back to again as a trusted resource."*

-Eric Geiger, senior pastor of Mariners Church

## **A Guide for "The Second Confession"**

### **What realization led you to write *Light of the Word*?**

**Susan Lim:** From my own decades-long journey as a Christian, I realized that salvation does not always automatically translate into accepting the Bible as God's Word. Christians might consume bits and pieces of Scripture, quote passages here and there, study books in isolation, but never accept the entirety of the sixty-six books in sum as divine revelation. This disconnect, however, is not always obvious or readily discerned, even by believers themselves. My hope is that this book will point out this divide, and then persuade readers to definitively know that the Bible is God's Word. As the saying goes, knowledge is power; and my prayer is that knowledge about the canonicity of Scripture will lead to a greater love, acceptance, and practice of the Scriptures.

### **What is the unique and central theme of this book?**

**Susan:** I came up with the term "The Second Confession" to symbolize the moment when a believer, who has made the first and most vital confession that Jesus is Lord and Savior, comes to believe that the sixty-six books of the Bible are indeed the Word of God. I believe that there is a large disconnect between the first and second confessions, and this book aims to bridge this divide. Giving language to this moment or process of accepting Scripture as God's very Word is helpful for Christians to better live out biblical truths.

### **What is your hope for readers of *Light of the Word*?**

**Susan:** If Christians read *Light of the Word*, they will be able to:

- Assess their own level of belief or unbelief of the Scriptures as God's Word. This can be a scary venture for Christians, but they will be invited to take an honest and bold look at their faith and its biblical foundation.
- Understand canonicity without having to attend seminary or stumble through a dense textbook.
- Gain a solid understanding of why the Bible contains the sixty-six books in the Old and New Testaments, while excluding the Apocrypha and other writings.
- Be better prepared to evangelize or share with nonbelieving friends how canonicity provides historical and archeological evidence for the Bible.
- More fully accept the veracity of the Scriptures and live out biblical truth.



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