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INSTRUCTOR BIOGRAPHY

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Introduction

The Bible: Is there any book in the history of mankind that has endured more evaluation, more criticism or more rejection? Our world today is a skeptical one. People find it difficult to believe in things. The Bible is no exception. Recent studies have indicated that fewer people believe in the Bible. As a matter of fact, most admit they have never even read it. Even fewer understand the origins of the Bible. In addition, various national publications continue to discuss the Bible, frequently revealing questions people have about the Bible and doubts about its trustworthiness. For example, one particular article entitled “Who Wrote the Bible” made the following statement:

It is the foundation of the Christian faith. On its words rest the very existence of the church and the hope of salvation for believers through the ages. Many consider it the only dependable and abiding revelation of God to humanity. Yet the New Testament, in many ways, is a mysterious and enigmatic collection of writings – one that has enthralled and perplexed scholars and theologians for nearly 2,000 years.

It is often called “The New Testament of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” But Jesus didn’t write a word of it. And while some of the writings bear the names of those who walked with Him on the dusty roads of Judea, centuries of scholarship have turned up little convincing evidence that His 12 closest disciples did much writing either.

Who, then, wrote the 27 books that make up the traditional New Testament canon? Could these books have been written by contemporaries of Jesus? Are they close to their original form? Or were they revised by early church leaders to reflect changing views of who Jesus was, to address the problems of a growing church or even to advance political agendas?¹

As we can see, articles like this raise many questions and create many doubts in the minds of the readers. Is the Bible trustworthy? It is important that we have good information before we can make a valid decision regarding the Bible.

So, how did the Bible come down to us? This is an important question, and the answer is even more important. The journey of the Bible begins with the mind of God Himself. God then placed His word into the mind of His prophets. Those prophets wrote down the things God revealed to them. Then, through the centuries, men copied and recopied what those original prophets had written. Eventually, as the world population grew, the Bible needed to be translated into the languages of the many cultures that exist today. As you can see, the Bible has gone through an incredible journey.

In this series we are going to look more deeply into that journey. To adequately discuss how we got the Bible, we must discuss four important subjects. Those four

¹ “Who Wrote the Bible?” *U.S. News and World Report* (Dec. 10, 1990), 61.

subjects will be discussed individually in this series. First, there must be a discussion on the Inspiration of the Bible. Inspiration is a concept that is frequently misunderstood and misapplied. What does it mean, then, to say that the Bible is inspired? That is the question we will address in part one. Second, to discuss how we got the Bible we need to consider what is known as “The Canon of Scripture.” The Bible has a total of 66 books. There are 39 books in the Old Testament, and 27 books in the New Testament. How did those books become a part of the Bible? Who decided that they should be in the Bible and when did they decide this? As you can see, those are important questions. These will be considered in part two. Then in part three we will discuss the Transmission of the Bible Text. Did you know that we do not have any original writings of the Bible? That is, what men like Moses, David, Matthew and Paul wrote, is no longer in existence. Instead, we have copies of those original writings. How can we know that those writings were accurately preserved through centuries of copying and recopying? That is the question we will consider in part three. Then in part four we will discuss The English Bible. The Bible was originally written in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. Therefore, someone had to know those languages well enough to translate them into English. Can we trust that they did a good job of translating? What about the numerous English translations? Are they all about the same? Does it matter which translation I use? Those questions will be considered in part four.

Inspiration

Let us begin our journey by considering part one: Biblical Claims for Inspiration. Any discussion regarding the Bible would need to begin with a discussion of inspiration. We are not going to focus on evidences for inspiration (historical, archaeological, scientific, medical, etc.) but on what the Bible claims for itself.

The Origin of the Bible begins by discussing what God did in revealing Himself and His will to mankind. This process involved two actions of God: Revelation and Inspiration. Revelation is as it sounds. It is where God revealed to man things they would not otherwise know or understand. There is no way man could have figured these things out on their own. God needed to reveal Himself, His character and His will. Man would never know these great truths without God’s revelation.

Peter says in 2 Peter 1:19-21:

And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke *as they were* moved by the Holy Spirit.²

² The New King James Version (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), 2 Pe 1:19–21.

Notice how Peter says that the prophets did not make up these things in their own minds. They were not their “private interpretations.” He also says that these prophecies did not come “by the will of man.” God chose them to be His spokesmen. It was not that they chose this for themselves. Instead, what they spoke is that which was given them from God through the Holy Spirit.

In the Old Testament book of Ezekiel, the prophet is shown an amazing vision of God. There Ezekiel sees God sitting on His throne surrounded by four living creatures. He sees wheels and fire and hears amazing sounds. This is an example of a revelation. The vision teaches us about the nature of God and His many divine attributes. It demonstrates that God is omnipotent (all-powerful), omniscient (all-knowing) and omnipresent (everywhere). There is no way that man could have created such a God in His own mind and imagination.

Inspiration is how God’s revelations are communicated. This principle is seen in 2 Timothy 3:16. God exerted a supernatural influence over the writer so that the written product was exactly as God intended. This is a remarkable claim, and one who studies the Bible needs to recognize this claim.

2 Timothy 3:16-17, "All (*πασα* - *pasa*) Scripture (*γραφή* - *graphē*) is given by inspiration (*θεόπνευστος* - *theopneustos*) of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."

The Greek word *graphē* which is translated as "Scripture" is a word that we get a number of English words from, such as graphics, graphic design, stenographer, etc. It means “that which is written down,” and is a specialized term referring to holy writing. Each book in the Bible is among the Scriptures because it is known to be the word of God.

The Greek word *theopneustos* is the word for “inspiration.” It is a compound word that literally means “God breathed.” Think about the import of this word. It is impossible for us to speak words without breath. We draw the air into our lungs, and then our muscles force that air out through our mouths. That is how we make words. Therefore, this verse is claiming that the Scriptures are God breathed. Not only that, but it is claiming that the very words come from God Himself.

Now let’s put the whole verse together. The word “Scripture” means that which is written down. The word “inspired” means that the Scriptures came directly from God Himself. Here then is an amazing claim. This verse is saying that what we have in our Bibles is the very word of God; that is, even the words themselves are the very words chosen by God. This teaches us that every word is important, because those are God’s words.

Another important verse is Hebrews 1:1-2. There it says:

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by *His Son*,³

This verse provides a lot of important information, but the most important is that “God...spoke.” This is a remarkable claim. God has not been silent. Instead, He has communicated with man. The verse says He has done this through the prophets at various times though out the Old Testament history. He also communicated through various ways. Sometimes God would use a booming voice like at Mount Sinai, or He might speak to Moses through a burning bush. When considering the claim that “God spoke,” we need to consider the biblical claims to be the word of God.

The Old Testament Canon

The logical place to begin is the Old Testament. The Old Testament is logically divided into three sections: The Law, the Prophets and the Writings. You can see from this diagram the various books and into which category they belonged.

Old Testament Canon



This division is supported by various verses, such as Luke 24:44-45: “Then He said to

³ *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), Heb 1:1-2.

them, “These *are* the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and *the* Prophets and *the* Psalms concerning Me. And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.”⁴

As we go through these various sections, we can see clearly how they support the claim to be the word of God. When we look at the very first book, and the very first chapter, we have the phrase “and God said...” ten times.⁵ In Genesis 2:16 it says “and the Lord God commanded the man...” When Adam sinned God spoke to him (Genesis 3:10ff). God spoke the curses against the serpent, the woman, and the man (Genesis 3:14-19). In Genesis 6 we are even told the thoughts of God. We can read what God said to men like Noah, Abraham and Jacob. In Exodus we can read that God spoke to Moses from the burning bush. He addressed the Israelites from Mount Sinai. In the book of Leviticus, you have the phrase “I am the Lord” 45 times.⁶ The book of numbers begins with the phrase “Now the Lord spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai...” The book of Deuteronomy has statements that are made by “The Lord your God” 279 times!⁷ At least 74 times there is a reference to the teachings being from the Lord. It is impossible to read the book of Deuteronomy without knowing that it claims to be recording the words of God.

The Law

Scripture records the essential revelations of God at Mt. Sinai, when the Lord revealed His Law and offered His covenant to Israel. Even the ten commandments are preceded by the words, “And God spoke all these words, saying, I am the Lord your God who brought you up out of the land of Egypt...,” (Exodus 20:1). Exodus records how Moses wrote God’s words down in a scroll and read it aloud to the people (Exodus 24:3-7). The Pentateuch recounts God’s continued revelations to Moses until He had finished writing all of it down in the holy book of the Law (Exodus 33:11; Deuteronomy 31:24-26).

The Prophets

As we move to the second major section of the Old Testament, we again have overwhelming claims that these writings are from God. In the prophetic books you will have phrases like “thus saith the Lord” that are found an astounding 2,500 times. This doesn’t include passages like Jeremiah 1:2 – “The word of the Lord came in the days of

⁴ *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), Lk 24:44–45.

⁵ Gen. 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 28, 29.

⁶ The New American Standard has the phrase 49 times, as does the NIV and the ESV.

⁷ The RSV has the phrase 281 times, as does the ESV.

Josiah,” and 1:4 – “Now the word of the Lord came to me saying...” Joel 1:1 – “The word of the Lord which came to Joel...” Also, this doesn’t include the heavenly visions that a number of prophets received, like Isaiah, Zechariah and Ezekiel. Here is an important point. You do not have to believe these literally thousands of claims that the Bible is from God. You have the right to reject that claim. But, you do not have the right to deny that the Bible is making this claim! It is clearly, and repeatedly, claiming to be the Word of God.

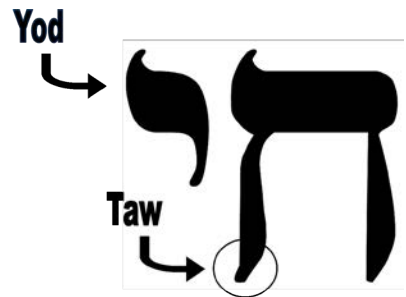
There are also other passages that may use different phrases, but all of them clearly indicate that God was speaking to these prophets. Men like David, Isaiah and Jeremiah all received revelations from God. Men like Moses, Joshua, Samuel, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel and Ezekiel were universally recognized as prophets, seers, visionaries and divinely chosen men of God (1 Samuel 3:20; 9:9 etc.).

Indeed, God’s revelations came “at various times and in various ways” to the prophets (Hebrews 1:1). God spoke from a burning bush (Exodus 3:1), a mountain top (Exodus 24:1-7) or by the handwriting on a wall (Daniel 5). He spoke through dreams and visions (Isaiah 6:1; Daniel 7-12; Ezekiel 1, etc.).

The Writings

Scripture claims that even the poetic portions of the Bible were given to prophets by divine revelation. David the Psalmist said, “The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me and his word was upon my tongue, (2 Samuel 23:1-2). Referring to the second Psalm, the apostles said, “who by the Holy Spirit, *through* the mouth of our father David Your servant, said...,”⁸ (Acts 4:25). Solomon received special, divine wisdom from God and was thus able to write most of the wisdom found in books like Proverbs and Ecclesiastes (1 Kings 3:9-15,28; 4:29-34). Asaph, who wrote 12 Psalms, is called a “prophet” by Jesus in Matthew 13:35.

Jesus said: “For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished” (Matthew 5:18 NASB). The smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet is the letter *Yod*. It is about the size of a comma. The smallest “stroke” of a letter is like the little extension found on the Hebrew letter *Taw*. Consider the magnitude of this verse. It takes pen strokes to make letters, letters to make words, words to make sentences, sentences to make paragraphs, and



⁸ *New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update* (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995), Ac 4:25. The NKJV does not have the phrase “who by the Holy Spirit.” It is found in the ESV, NIV and the best Greek manuscripts.

paragraphs to make books. This verse cannot be understood any other way than to indicate that every word in the Bible is inspired of God. God's word cannot pass away until it accomplishes all that it predicted. If we view the Hebrew Scriptures as anything less than the very words of God, then we view them differently than did Jesus and the apostles. Jesus accepted as fact the account in the garden, Noah's flood, the tower of Babel, Jonah and the great fish, etc.

If you believe in God, then it is natural to believe that God has spoken, but how? Is it possible that the Bible is how He has spoken? The Hebrew writer also says that God has spoken to us by His son. When we speak of the inspiration of the New Testament, we must begin with Jesus. John the Baptist said of Jesus, "He whom God sent speaks the words of God" (John 3:34). Jesus claimed to be speaking the words of God (John 6:63; 12:49). He told the Jews "my teaching is not mine, but His who sent me" (John 7:16). Yet it is true that Jesus did not write a single word in all of the New Testament. So, what is the link between God, Jesus and our New Testaments? The key is found in the teaching about the inspiration of the Apostles:

Jesus had personally taught the Apostles. Yet there was still much they needed to know, learn and remember. Therefore, Jesus promised to send to them the Holy Spirit, who would "guide them into all the truth." He had said earlier of the Holy Spirit: "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 things that I said to you" (John 14:26).

They received the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost as we read in Acts 2. From the Day of Pentecost on, people recognized that Christ was now speaking through the Apostles. Jesus prayed for these apostles and "for all those who will believe on me *through their word*" (John 17:20). It is through the Spirit-inspired word of the apostles that all of mankind is able to believe on Jesus and obey Him!

Recognizing that the apostles were inspired prophets of God because of the events at Pentecost and because of the miracles they performed, the ancient church "continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching," (Acts 2:42). Paul claimed to speak "God's wisdom" (1 Corinthians 2:6). He said His teaching included "things which no eye has ever seen, no ear has ever heard, and which never entered the heart of man," (1 Corinthians 2:9). Paul claimed to speak the things revealed by the Spirit "not in words taught by human wisdom but taught by the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 2:13).

He said of his preaching, "I neither received it from man nor was I taught it, but it came to me by revelation from Jesus Christ" (Galatians 1:12). Paul claimed that God made the mystery of Christ known to him by direct revelation, that he then wrote it down, and that when we read it we can understand it just like he did (Ephesians 3:3-5). He told the church at Thessalonica: "For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God" (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

Notice this statement carefully. Even though it was Paul and other men who preached to them, the church there was able to see that it was not “the word of men.” Then what was it? They could see clearly that it was “in truth, the word of God.” This is why Paul could say to the church at Corinth, “the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 14:37).

Yet a lot of people are aware that not all of the New Testament books were written by Apostles. Mark wasn't. Luke and Acts weren't. Neither were James and Jude. So how do these books claim to be inspired by God? In 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 Paul lists 9 spiritual gifts, than included powers such as wisdom, knowledge, healings, working of miracles and prophecy. The gift of prophecy enabled one to receive and communicate revelations from God. But how did one become a prophet?

All nine spiritual gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12 were bestowed through the laying on of the Apostle's hands. This is made clear in Acts 8 where Simon the sorcerer tried to purchase the ability to pass on the miraculous manifestations of the Spirit. This is seen even, more clearly in 2 Timothy 1:6 where Paul notes that the spiritual gift in Timothy was “in you through the laying on of my hands.” Therefore, no one but an apostle could impart the spiritual gift of prophecy.

So what the Bible reveals is this: God spoke to mankind by His Son Jesus. Jesus handpicked twelve apostles, and sent to them the Holy Spirit who guided them into all the truth. Those apostles laid hands on men and the Holy Spirit made them prophets. Therefore, the entire New Testament is written by either an apostle or a prophet! Notice what Paul says in Ephesians 3:3-5:

...how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets....

If you look back one chapter, notice what else Paul says about this:

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit (Ephesians 2:19-22).

We can see from these verses, as well at other passages like 1 Peter 2:5 and 1 Timothy 3:15, that those apostles, whom Jesus sent, taught that the church was vitally important. As a matter of fact, the church is so important it is the church that is able to offer acceptable worship to God (1 Peter 2:5). As a result, all men should be a part of the church built by Jesus (Matthew 16:13-18), and established on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2!

Conclusion:

Since the Bible is verbally inspired; that is, that every word is that which is from God, we should then have an appropriate response to the Bible. First, we must study it carefully. Since God has preserved His word for us, it is our obligation to do more than give it a casual glance from time to time. We should spend quality time studying the Bible. Second, we must allow it to guide our thinking and beliefs. It is clear that men throughout history have developed their own doctrines. Yet those doctrines cannot save! We see Paul talking about this very thing in Romans 10:1-4. Third, we must obey its teachings in our daily actions. It is not sufficient to study the Bible and to know what it says. We must obey it! God's word provides instructions on how we should worship, how we should be in the workplace, what kind of husbands, fathers, wives and mothers we should be. We are blessed to have received God's word!

It is clear that even though the Bible clearly claims to be from God, men have nevertheless challenged its credibility. In our next part we will address one of the major challenges to biblical credibility: the canon of Scripture. You will not want to miss this valuable study!

Canonicity

As Paul began his letter to the Romans, he describes the journey the gospel of God has taken. It originated in the mind of God, which He communicated to His prophets. Those prophets recorded God's word "in the holy Scriptures" (Romans 1:1). Those prophets were inspired of God to assure the accuracy of their writings. Thus, the discussion of How We Got the Bible naturally begins with a discussion of inspiration. Once the doctrine of inspiration is established, it leads us to a discussion on how God's inspired messages made it to written form, and then how those written documents came to be recognized by the people of God.

This is certainly a crucial step in understanding biblical origins. It addresses some of the vital questions, such as which books belong in the Bible and why other books are omitted. In addition, who made these important decisions? Can they be trusted? Also, can people today can be confident that their Bibles possess the correct (inspired) books?

The Meaning of "Canon"

The word "canon" is transliterated from the Greek word κανών (*canon*). The word has this basic definition: "a means to determine the quality of something; rule, standard" (BDAG 507). This is the way the word was used by Paul in Galatians 6:16. While the word was used in various senses, it settled on the basic idea of a standard; a standard needed for a book to become a part of the canon of Scripture.

It is clear that there were numerous written documents during the times of the Bible (c. 1400 B.C. to 100 A.D.). Among those documents were writings of a religious nature. Some of these writings even portray themselves as being written by inspired men. Yet those writings were not accepted as part of the *canon*, that is, they did not measure up to this divine standard. But why? What was it that made those during the biblical centuries reject these writings while accepting others?

The Importance of Considering Canonicity

In my library I have a book entitled *The Lost Books of the Bible*. The claim is that these books would have been included into the biblical canon had they not been somehow lost, misplaced or openly rejected. It says: "The publication of this book will do good because it takes away the veil of secrecy that has hidden for many years the act of the church in accepting certain Scriptures and rejecting others" (16).

In addition to works like this, we are inundated with other writings. These writings, like *The Secret Teachings of Jesus*; *The Gnostic Gospels*, *The Gospel of Judas* and *The Gospel of Phillip* (upon which the novel *The Da Vinci Code* was based) are

promoted as works that should stand alongside the other 66 Bible books.

As a matter of fact, some claim that there are as many as 80 gospels written. While this number is terribly inflated, there do seem to be around 35 gospels written in the early centuries of the church. How, then, did we end up with only four gospel accounts? Questions like these are at the heart of the discussion regarding biblical canonicity. Biblical critics claim that there were always politics behind the formation of the canon. Old Testament writings were accepted or rejected based upon powerful men either supporting them or rejecting them. New Testament writings were accepted for political reasons as well.

Let us return to a portion of a popular journal article entitled “Who Wrote the Bible” that we referenced in the session on Inspiration.

Who, then, wrote the 27 books that make up the traditional New Testament canon? Could these books have been written by contemporaries of Jesus? Are they close to their original form? Or were they revised by early church leaders to reflect changing view of who Jesus was, to address the problems of a growing church or even to advance political agendas? (U.S. News 61).

Even syndicated columnists in our daily newspapers have weighed in on this discussion:

The Bible itself was not compiled as one book until the late fourth century. Its creation was spurred by the Roman Emperor Constantine, who converted the Roman empire from paganism to Christianity. Gospels by other disciples that were circulating at the time were eliminated from the formal version of the Bible because they contradicted what had become by then official church doctrine.

Again, most modern-day Christians assume the Bible is something that appeared magically in its present form right after Jesus Christ died. Not so (Erbe).

Criticisms like these are customary in today’s universities and seminaries. It is being taught that books became a part of the canon over long periods of time, and were eventually confirmed through the votes of various councils. Two North African councils are often noted: The Council of Hippo (393 A.D.) and the Council of Carthage (397 A.D.). If these councils did not vote a book in, it was rejected. Sadly, these attacks on canonicity are no longer promoted as theory, but fact. All of these attacks undermine the credibility of the Bible and lead people to abandon the study of, and the belief in, the Bible. In a recent study, a disturbing downward trend has occurred when it comes to American’s view of the Bible. The Bible’s reliability is being increasingly questioned, as it is no longer being viewed as a trustworthy source by a majority of Americans. Recent studies asked people their opinion on the following statement: “The Bible is totally accurate in all of the principles it teaches.” Not too long ago 50% of Americans agreed with that statement. Today, less than 33% agree with it. Even worse, the percentage of Americans who “strongly disagree” with the statement has doubled.

It is now our responsibility to look objectively at the evidence on how Bible books became Bible books. We will proceed by looking at the Old Testament canon, followed by a look at the New Testament canon. The study will conclude with some important observations.

Old Testament Canon: Biblical Evidence

A look at the Old Testament texts gives us a clear view of how the various books were accepted. Let us consider several significant passages:

Exodus 24:4-7. It is significant that we focus on statements made in verses 4 and 7: “And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD....Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, ‘All that the LORD has said we will do, and be obedient.’”

When we look at this text, several important observations can be made: *First*, Moses was a writer. Some biblical scholars had claimed that writing did not exist until centuries after the time of Moses. To this charge R.K. Harrison noted:

Contrary to the contentions of Wellhausen, who maintained, against archaeological evidence already available in his day, that writing did not appear among the Hebrews until the early monarchy, they had the means of producing written records at their disposal from very early times (Harrison 260).

God had earlier commanded Moses to write (Exodus 17:14-16), and Moses faithfully fulfilled this charge. *Second*, Moses wrote “all the words of the LORD.” It is significant that there is no claim that Moses recorded his own thoughts and words. His writings were not his own; they were the words of God. *Third*, Moses claims to have written “all” the words of the Lord. He was not at liberty to edit, add or omit what he had received. To do so would have damaged the credibility and authority of the writing. *Fourth*, what Moses wrote was referred to as “the Book of the Covenant.” This designation is significant, since it reflects the contract between God and His people (cf. 2 Kings 23:2). *Fifth*, when Moses read what he had written, what was the people’s response? They said “all that the LORD has said we will do, and be obedient.” The people did not view this writing as coming from Moses, but from the Lord. Equally, they recognized the authority of it, swearing to be obedient to it.

Deuteronomy 31:24-26. Notice carefully this text: “So it was, when Moses had completed writing the words of this law in a book, when they were finished, that Moses commanded the Levites, who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD, saying: ‘Take this Book of the Law, and put it beside the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may be there as a witness against you....’”

Notice: *First*, it again affirms that Moses was a writer. *Second*, it indicates that Moses did a lot of writing. Scripture affirms that the books of Genesis through

Deuteronomy were all authored by Moses. This is a significant amount of writing. *Third*, it affirms that Moses “finished” his writing project. The five books of the Pentateuch were completed. *Fourth*, what Moses wrote was considered “law,” again pointing to divine authority. In Exodus 24 the word used was “covenant.” Here it is “law.” Those two words go together. *Fifth*, Moses’ Book of the Law was to be placed “beside the ark of the covenant of the Lord.” As all students of the Old Testament know, the most holy place was the tabernacle (which later became the temple). This facility was divided into two parts, the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. In the Most Holy Place was located the most holy object: the ark of the covenant. On the ark was the mercy seat where the Lord would meet with Israel (Exodus 25:17-22). *Sixth*, if the people viewed the writings of Moses as that of a man, they would have categorically rejected the request to put them in this holy location.

Let’s pause for a minute to contemplate the significance of these passages. At this point in the biblical record, we have five books that are now a part of the canon of Scripture. Remember, the word “canon” means that which is authorized and authoritative. These five books were accepted, but there was not a single vote taken. They were automatically collected and viewed as from God. A logical question at this point would be “why would the people so willingly accept the writings of Moses as the word of the Lord?” It was because the people saw God work through Moses. They saw how he yielded power in the 10 plagues. They saw the Red Sea parted at his command. They witnessed event after event that confirmed Moses as God’s representative. It was natural and logical for the people to accept his writings. Approximately 700 years later, during the reign of King Josiah, the writings of Moses were found in the temple (2 Kings 22:8-13).

What about the second section of the Old Testament: the Prophetic books. When were they accepted into the Biblical canon? The answer is, they were accepted immediately, because they were recognized by the people of God as genuine prophets. This would include men like Joshua, Samuel, Isaiah and Jeremiah.

Let’s consider the evidence for these books. We already looked at Exodus 24:4-7 and Deuteronomy 31:24-26. Now let’s consider some verses that help us understand how the prophetic books became a part of the biblical canon.

Joshua 24:26. This passage could be easily overlooked, but it is significant when discussing canonicity. It reads: “Then Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God. And he took a large stone, and set it up there under the oak that was by the sanctuary of the LORD.”

Note: *First*, Joshua was a writer. *Second*, what he wrote was added to “the Book of the Law of God.” This certainly points back to the writings of Moses noted in Deuteronomy 31:24-26. In other words, Joshua added his book to the previously accepted books of Moses. Again, we emphasize the significance of this. At this point we

have six books in the biblical canon. Yet, there still has not been a single council or a single vote. Why would the people of God allow the writings of Joshua to be added to those of Moses? Because they saw God work through Joshua in numerous events from the crossing of the Jordan to the defeat of the city of Jericho.

1 Samuel 10:25. Again, this verse could be easily overlooked. It reads: “Then Samuel explained to the people the behavior of royalty, and wrote it in a book and laid it up before the LORD.”

Note: *First*, Samuel is credited with being one who wrote. *Second*, what Samuel wrote was of some length. It is here called a “book” (*sêpher*), a word that suggests a writing of some length; a document (BDB 706). *Third*, he took his writings and “laid it up before the LORD.” This phrase, “before the LORD” is frequently in reference to the temple, and sometimes the ark of the covenant in the Most Holy Place (Exodus 28:30; 29:11; Deuteronomy 16:11-16; 18:7; 31:11). Why would the people allow Samuel to do this? The answer is the same as previously. They have seen the great power of God operate through Samuel. Our Old Testament canon continues to grow. We now have the writings of Samuel added to those of Moses and Joshua. Paul Wegner confirms the point we have made previously:

The books that were later placed into the Old Testament canon were of a self-authenticating nature and did not derive their authority from a person or an ecclesiastical decree. This point is crucial: the books did not receive their authority because they were placed into the canon; rather, they were recognized by the nation of Israel as having divine authority and were therefore included in the canon (Wegner 101).

Daniel 9:2. This amazing verse says: “in the first year of his reign I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years specified by the word of the LORD through Jeremiah the prophet that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem.”

Note: *First*, Jeremiah is credited with his words being recorded in writing. *Second*, Jeremiah’s writings were added to the “books.” This plural reference points to the fact that the book of Jeremiah “was a part of a larger collection of books that he (Daniel – dp) considered authoritative” (Wegner 105). R. K. Harrison adds: “If the reference in Daniel 9:2 to the books is to a collection of prophetic writings, as seems most probable, it would imply that these works were regarded as having divine authority and were thus akin to the Pentateuchal compositions” (266). *Third*, Jeremiah was considered to be a “prophet,” which explains why his writing would be accepted. *Fourth*, the writings of Jeremiah were considered to be “the word of the LORD.” This is clearly a reference to his writing as being viewed as inspired of God. *Fifth*, this passage confirms the immediacy these books were accepted. Jeremiah is a prophet contemporary with Daniel. Yet, Jeremiah’s writings were immediately accepted as being inspired. This defeats the argument that canonical writings went through a long evolutionary process

that culminated with councils and votes.

Isaiah 30:8. The Old Testament prophet was commanded by God: “Now go, write it before them on a tablet, and note it on a scroll that it may be for time to come, Forever and ever.”

This verse can be added to many that confirm that the prophets wrote the words of the Lord (1 Chronicles 29:29; 2 Chronicles 9:29; 12:15; 13:22; 20:34; 21:12; Jeremiah 25:13; 29:1; 30:2; 36:1-32; 51:60-64; Ezekiel 43:11; Daniel 7:1; Habakkuk 2:2). Passages like these confirm that God had His prophets record in writing their inspired messages.

What about the last group of books, known as the “Writings”? The same principle of canonicity is found with these books. The Psalms were accepted because they were written by recognized prophets like Moses and David. Asaph wrote 12 Psalms, and Jesus calls him a prophet in Matthew 13:35. The writings of Solomon were accepted because of the divine wisdom that was given him.

Lamentations was accepted because it was written by the prophet Jeremiah. Daniel was recognized as a prophet in the time the Israelites were in Babylonian captivity (Ezekiel 14:14, 20). Chronicles were written by seers and prophets according to 1 Chronicles 29:29. While we may not know who specifically wrote each Old Testament book, we know that this principle of canonicity was in place. Whoever wrote those books, they were recognized prophets of God, and therefore their writings were accepted by the people of God.

As we conclude this section, it is vital that we note that the Old Testament books were accepted by the people of God as they were written by recognized prophets of God. There is zero evidence of any vote, council or discussion regarding these writings. They were immediately accepted (as confirmed by the Daniel 9:2 quote of his contemporary, Jeremiah).

Old Testament Canon: Extra-biblical Evidence

While some suggest that the Old Testament canon was established by the Council of Jamnia (c. 90 AD), there is formidable evidence against this theory. Consider these evidences:

First, numerous Jewish writings indicate that the last genuine prophets were Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. Wegner has quoted and documented several of these quotes, and then observes: “These passages indicate that according to Jewish tradition the voice of God had ceased following the time of Malachi (about 400 B.C.), and thus new books were no longer being added to the sacred Scriptures” (106).

Second, the intertestamental writings such as the apocryphal book of 1 Maccabees,

indicates that there were no longer genuine prophets (4:46; 9:27; 14:41). The Pseudepigraphal book of 2 Baruch claims that the prophets have fallen asleep (85:3). Also, the prologue to the book of Ecclesiasticus (not to be confused with Ecclesiastes) refers to “the law, the prophets, and the others that followed them” (which later came to be known as “the writings.”) This three-fold division of the Old Testament includes only the present 39 books.

Third, Josephus provides numerous quotes indicating that the Old Testament was closed by his day (middle of the first century). He says:

From Artaxerxes to our own time, the complete history has been written, but has not been deemed worthy of equal credit with the earlier records because of the failure of the exact succession of the prophets (*Against Apion* 1:8 [41]).

He says “For although such long ages have now passed, no one has ventured either to add, or to remove, or to alter a syllable.” In the same passage he proceeds to list exactly those books that were accepted as inspired, and names them. He refers to the 22 books, but that includes the merging of Kings, Chronicles, the 12 Minor Prophets, etc. Thus, the Hebrew Bible has 22 books, but they are the exact same books that correspond to our 39 Old Testament books. Origen, one of the best-known writers of the early church era (c. 185-253) equally confirms that the Old Testament canon contained only 22 books (*Ecclesiastical History* 6.25.1-2).

Numerous other evidences could be offered, all of which confirm that our present collection of 39 Old Testament books were the complete canon, and that this collection was recognized by at least the 2nd Century B.C. (Wegner 103). Some scholars, like R.K. Harrison argue for an even earlier date:

In all its essentials the canon was most probably complete by about 300 B.C., and while discussion concerning certain component parts was continued well into the Christian era, the substance of the canon as it existed a century and a half after the time of Ezra and Nehemiah remained unaffected by these controversies (287).

Old Testament Canon: New Testament Evidence

In Luke 11:50-51, Jesus makes the following statement:

...that the blood of all the prophets which was shed from the foundation of the world may be required of this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah who perished between the altar and the temple. Yes, I say to you, it shall be required of this generation.”

This remarkable verse provides a beginning point (Abel – from the book of Genesis) to an ending point (Zechariah – from the last book of the Hebrew Bible, Chronicles). By wording it this way, it shows that the Bible Jesus used included only the recognized 22 books (our 39) of the Hebrew Bible.

What about the Deuterocanonical Books?

Those who are of the Catholic faith, or those who own Catholic Bibles, will note that the Old Testament contains 11 additional books. Most know these additional books as the Apocrypha (although that term is rejected by the Catholic church).

One will note that there are 14 books listed in the Apocrypha, but the Catholic church only accepts 11. This point is significant. It is claimed that the Bible Jesus used (the Septuagint) contained the Apocryphal books. If this is true (which it is not as will be shown shortly), then on what authority can Catholicism reject three of the books?

These books were important books to the Jews in the intertestamental period. They contained valuable religious and historical material (Owen 23). Yet these books, although accepted as canonical by some, were rejected. Here were the primary reasons they were rejected:

1. No New Testament Quotations from It
2. No Proof that the Greek Old Testament (LXX) Contained It
3. No Church Council Favored Them in the First Four Centuries
4. Many Individuals Vehemently Opposed Them (i.e. Athanasius, Cyril of Jerusalem, Origen, Jerome)
5. The Catholic Council of Trent (1546 AD) Was the First Official Proclamation on the Apocrypha
6. Most Were Written in the Intertestamental Period (when prophecy was believed to have ceased)
7. It Does Not Pass the Tests of Canonicity

We have only looked at a small portion of the evidence that we have the right 39 books in our Old Testaments. We could have also considered the evidence found in Sirach, the Qumran Library Commentaries, the Jewish Mishnah, the Council of Jamnia, the original Septuagint, as well as writers such as Cyril of Jerusalem and Jerome.

As we conclude this discussion of the Old Testament canon, it is clear that considerable evidence exists to accept only the present 39 books found in most modern Bibles. Equally, it has been demonstrated how these 39 books came to be a part of the canon at all: they were inspired by God, written by recognized prophets of God, and then collected by the people of God.

In brief, what were later called canonical writings were by the Jews considered to be those sacred and authoritative writings of the Hebrew prophets from Moses to Malachi. So sacred were these holy writings that they were preserved by the Ark of the Covenant in the Temple. To touch these holy writings was to defile one's hands; to break them was to defile one's life. The Hebrew canon, then, was that collection of writings which, because they possessed divine inspiration and authority, were the norm or rule for the believer's faith and conduct (Geisler and Nix 206-7).

The New Testament Canon

As one might expect, there are equally numerous arguments against the acceptance of the **27 books of the New Testament**. In the previously cited article from the U.S. News and World Report comes the following:

Yet today, there are few Biblical scholars – from liberal skeptics to conservative evangelicals – who believe that Matthew, Mark, Luke and John actually wrote the Gospels. Nowhere do the writers of the texts identify themselves by name or claim unambiguously to have known or traveled with Jesus. The majority of modern scholarly opinion holds that all four books were compiled from a variety of oral and written sources collected over a period of decades following Jesus' crucifixion, as the prologue to Luke suggests.

Once written, many experts believe the Gospels were redacted, or edited, repeatedly as they were copied and circulated among church elders during the later first and early second centuries. At best, some scholars, the Gospels are correctly linked with the names of those early Christian teachers who originated the oral traditions. At worst, the names of Christ's disciples were attached much later to texts that were favored by leaders of the early church in order to give those texts more authority than the many competing Christian documents. 'The bottom line,' says Jerome Neyrey of the Weston School of Theology in Cambridge, Mass, "is we really don't know for sure who wrote the Gospels" (63).

This quote correctly reflects the opinion of many theologians today. It is easy to see, if one accepts this as accurate, why so many would reject the Bible. Yet there are answers to these viewpoints; answers that rarely get the opportunity to be heard in today's skeptical environment. Part of the problem is a failure to appreciate how books came to be accepted in the first place. As with the Old Testament, biblical history paints a clear picture as to how the people of God accepted as canonical.

Apostolic Authority for the New Testament

Whereas the Old Testament canon was written over a span of approximately 1,000 years (c. 1400 to 400 B.C.), the 27 books of the New Testament were all written within a period of around 50 years (c. 50 A.D. to 100 A.D.). The discussion of the New Testament canon logically begins with Jesus. As Jesus began His earthly ministry, He hand-picked a select group of men to follow Him. These men were given the Holy Spirit by Jesus, as He has promised (John 14:26; 15:26-27; 16:13; Acts 1:4-8; 2:1-4, 33). The Holy Spirit was going to give them a miraculous ability to remember and record what Jesus said and did. In addition, these men possessed other miraculous abilities that established their credibility (cf. Hebrews 2:1-4; John 20:30-31). This explains why the early church accepted as inspired the writings of these men, known as apostles (Acts 2:42; 2 Peter 3:2; Jude 17). This is also why the apostle Paul would make a statement

like this in 1 Corinthians 14:37: “If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord.” Notice the claim: that what he *writes* are the commandments of the Lord.

God’s people in the Old Testament accepted the writings of men they knew to be prophets. These men had proven themselves, and demonstrated that they were spokesmen for the Lord. The same principle now extends to the New Testament. Canonicity was based upon apostolic authority (Matthew 16:19; 18:18; John 14:26; 16:13; Acts 2:42; 2 Thessalonians 2:15; Colossians 4:16; 2 Peter 3:2, 15-16; 1 John 4:6).

Prophetic Authority for the New Testament

Apostolic authority explains how several of the New Testament books were accepted by the people of God and became a part of the New Testament canon. Yet as most Bible students know, there are also books included, such as Luke-Acts, James and Jude which were not written by apostles. How did those books come to be accepted? As discussed in the chapter on Inspiration, there were a group of men who were known as prophets. Some of these prophets, like Luke, James and Jude were inspired to write books.

Consider the ramifications of a statement made by the apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 5:18. In this verse Paul clearly quotes from Luke 10:7. Consider the illustration below:

Paul Quoted Luke’s Gospel As Scripture

“For the Scripture says...”

Αξιός ο εργατής του μισθου αυτου
(Greek 1 Timothy 5:18)

αξιός **γαρ** ο εργατής του μισθου αυτου
(Greek Luke 10:7)

Compare the Two.

The only difference is that Paul did not include the introductory word “for” (gar).

What is the significance of this? *First* of all, Paul identifies this quote as “Scripture.” As noted in the chapter on Inspiration, this is a specific word that is only applied to Holy Writ (cf. 2 Timothy 3:16). In other words, Paul is clearly quoting Luke, and calling his writing “Scripture” (that is, inspired of God. *Secondly*, we note that Luke was not an apostle. How then can his writing be classified as Scripture, and accepted as canonical? The answer: he is a prophet. *Third*, 1 Timothy is generally believed to have been written around 63 A.D., and Luke written around 58 A.D. Some might argue that the span should be more, some less. Yet the fact remains that there is not much time between the two writings. This shows that the canon of the New Testament did not go through a long evolutionary process, with councils that discussed and voted on these books.

The Authors of the New Testament Canon

Based upon the two previous points, the 27 books of the New Testament were written by only two groups: apostles and prophets. This is confirmed by Ephesians 2:20: “...having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone....” It is also confirmed a few verses later when the apostle Paul says: “...how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets...” (Ephesians 3:3-5). The early Christians knew the men who were apostles, and they knew who were prophets. These men were proven, and their inspiration of God apparent. As a result, they had no problem accepting their writings. Thus, as they authored their various books, the early church accepted them, collected them, and considered them to be a part of the canon of Scripture. This also explains how the book of Hebrews became a part of the New Testament canon. While we may not know who authored this great book, the early Christians did. They knew him to be either an apostle or prophet, and accepted his book accordingly.

First, we revisit 1 Timothy 5:18. As illustrated above, Paul quotes Luke and considers his writing to be “Scripture.” The significance of this point cannot be overstated.

Second, Peter writes: “...and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures” (2 Peter 3:15-16). Note: *First*, these verses affirm that Paul wrote. *Second*, these verses note that Paul authored “epistles.” The New Testament claims that 13 books were written by the apostle Paul.

Third, these verses identify Paul’s writings as “Scripture.” As noted earlier, this word

is specifically applied to writings inspired of God (2 Tim. 3:16). *Fourth*, these verses point out that there are “the rest of the Scriptures.” Thus, by this time (c. 68 A.D.) the writings of Paul, Luke and other books were accepted as Scripture. If they were viewed as Scripture, they were a part of the canon. Again, it needs to be noted: no votes, no councils.

The Collection and Recognition of the New Testament Canon: New Testament Evidence

Before we consider this point, it needs to be stated that the Catholic Church claims credit for the present canon of Scripture. They claim to have weeded out certain books and authorized others, thus giving us our present 27 New Testament books. Yet Wegner correctly states:

It is important to remember that the Christian church did not canonize any book. Canonization was determined by God. But the early church needed to know how to recognize canonicity (147).

One biblical verse gives us a glimpse into how the New Testament canon came into existence: Colossians 4:16. There Paul states: “Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.” Two important observations are to be made here: *First*, it is clear that the various letters, while written to a specific group, church or individual, were intended to be passed around. Logically, each group would make a copy, and pass that copy down to the next church. The next church would do the same. This explains why there appeared collections of the NT books throughout the ancient world, from Egypt to Rome. *Second*, Paul’s words need to be carefully considered. Some have thought he claimed there to be a letter written to the Laodiceans. No such letter exists, therefore there is at least one lost book. However, this is not what Paul says. He says that a letter is coming *from* Laodicea. Most likely it is another of the existing epistles of Paul. The book of Ephesians is a logical guess as to the epistle he has in mind.

No other verse is as helpful as Colossians 4:16. However, the section in 2 Peter 3:15-16 provides a clue to the collection of the New Testament canon, since the recipients of this epistle were aware of a plurality of Paul’s epistles as well as other inspired writings.

The Collection and Recognition of the New Testament Canon: Extra-biblical Evidence

This particular section could encompass an entire chapter (or two!). There are numerous clues to the recognition of the New Testament Canon. In a Gnostic text entitled *The Gospel of Truth* there is significant evidence that most, if not all of the New Testament was recognized early in the 2nd Century. Regarding this text, Everett Harrison says:

This recently discovered work with observable Gnostic tendencies is probably attributable to Valentinus around A.D. 140. It has an important contribution to make to the study of the New Testament canon, since its use of the canonical writings is so comprehensive as to warrant the conclusion that in Rome at this period a New Testament was in existence that corresponded very closely with what we have today. Furthermore, what is utilized, whether from the Gospels, the Acts, the letters of Paul, Hebrews, or the Revelation, is regarded as authoritative (101-2).

In their monumental work, Geisler and Nix put together a chart that details the amount of material that was known to early church writers (Geisler, Norman L, and William E. Nix. *A General Introduction to the Bible*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1968, page 294). [For a recreation of this chart please see the appendix – “The New Testament Canon During the First Four Centuries.”]

When we survey the magnitude of this chart, we can see numerous early writers that made reference to New Testament books. In addition, many of these recognized them as inspired. Clement of Rome (c. 60-100) was aware of at least six books. Ignatius (c. 60-117) was aware of 10 books. Polycarp (c. 69-155) makes reference to at least sixteen books. Justin Martyr (c. 100-165) knows of at least thirteen books. Marcion (c. 80-160) references eleven books. Irenaeus (c. 130-202) quotes from twenty-four or twenty-five books. The Muratorian Canon (c. 190) references at least 20 books. Clement of Alexandria (c. 155-220), Origen (c. 185-253) and Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 265-339) reference twenty-two books. Athanasius (c. 296-373) knows of all twenty-seven books (Wegner 141).

Disputed Books

Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 330 A.D.) noted that there were some “disputed” books of the New Testament. These books were James, Jude, 2 Peter and 2 John and 3 John. Many today have incorrectly assumed that this confirms that the Catholic Church, in various councils, were able to rescue these books and put them into the Christian canon. Such is an unfortunate misunderstanding. There is a big difference between *discussing* canon and *determining* canon. It is true that these councils *discussed* canon, and noted in their discussions that certain books were being challenged. But note: *they did not change anything*. The canon of Scripture, all 27 books, had been established and accepted for hundreds of years before these councils convened.

These councils did not determine the canonicity of the New Testament books but rather helped to confirm which books were accepted more widely throughout the early church (Wegner 145).

Conclusion

Basically, the development and history of the canon is found in three basic steps.

First, the writing was inspired of God. Second, the writing was recognized by the men of God. That is, they recognized that it was written by a genuine prophet of God. Third, it was collected and preserved by the people of God.

Despite attempts to discredit the canon of Scripture, the evidence is overwhelming that we have in our Bibles the right books: 39 Old Testament books and 27 New Testament books. No credible evidence has been produced that should make us think that we're missing some books, or that we have included some books that should have been omitted. Despite attacks and criticisms, the sixty-six books of the Bible have withstood the tests of time. We should then study the Bible with all the confidence that we have the books God has given us. These books tell us what we need to know, do and practice. These books will serve as the basis when we are judged on Judgment Day. As a result, wisdom is demonstrated when we study these books and we practice what they teach us. By so doing, we have full confidence that we will please God and be rewarded with the gift of eternal life.

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Transmission of the Bible Text

In the previous sections on “How We Got the Bible,” we established important foundations to this study on the Transmission of the Bible Text. In the first chapter on Biblical Inspiration, the concept of inspiration was discussed. How did God relay His message to mankind? The Bible records that He chose to communicate directly to select men. These men were known as prophets in the Old Testament, and apostles and prophets in the New Testament. These men were commanded to record God’s message in writing. These writings were viewed not as the words of men, but as the very words of God (cf. Exodus 24:4-7; Hebrews 1:1-2; 2 Timothy 3:16-17). These writings were done over a span of approximately 1,500 years. How then, did we end up with the present collection of 39 Old Testament books and 27 New Testament books? In the second section on Canonicity, we discussed how Bible books became Bible books. Unlike what so many are saying, they became a part of the canon because they were inspired of God. They were not chosen by human councils or votes. The people of God collected them because they knew the authors were inspired. As a result, we have every confidence that we have exactly the books God wanted us to have. There are no lost books, no missing books or unfairly eliminated books.

What Bible Critics Claim

We have, however, another issue. None of those original 66 books exist today. What we have are copies of those originals. This fact has opened up the floodgates of criticism. Consider two quotes from an article “Who Wrote the Bible?” found in the *U.S. News and World Report*:

Once written, many experts believe, the Gospels were redacted, or edited, repeatedly as they were copied and circulated among church elders during the late first and early second centuries....

Some scholars say so many revisions occurred in the 100 years following Jesus’ death that no one can be absolutely sure of the accuracy or authenticity of the Gospels, especially the words of the authors attributed to Jesus himself. “In the 40 years of oral transmission, the sayings of Jesus often were paraphrased,” asserts Lane McGaughy, professor of religion at Willamette University in Salem, Oreg. (63, 64).

Bible critics are quick to point out that those original texts have been “hopelessly corrupted” (a favorite and often used term) through centuries of copying and recopying. We are reminded that they did not have computers or copy machines. Those who did the copying were often amateurs, and frequently sloppy and careless. Have you ever played the game “gossip”? This is where you have a line of people, and into the ear of the first person is whispered a message. That person then relays what he/she heard into the ear of the next person. That person passes it on, until the message is finally

given to the last person. When that person then announces the message to the group, it is hilarious how the original message has been “butchered.” Many times it is radically different than the original. So, say Bible critics, is what happened to the biblical texts. With each copy was introduced another error, another addition, another omission. And, as each new copy was made, new mistakes were introduced. As a result, we are now left with these “hopelessly corrupted” 66 books.

These are not charges that can be, or should be, quickly dismissed. The core truth is that we do not have the originals. Equally, it is true that we have disparity in the copies that we do possess. That being the case, how can anyone say with a high degree of certainty that what we now possess is the same as the original? It is vital that we consider objectively the evidences that are before us.

The Languages of the Bible

In this chapter we are considering the transmission, or the copying of the various canonical books. This being the case, logic demands that we start with the languages that the original books were first written. The biblical record confirms that the original texts were recorded in just three languages: Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. The vast majority of the Old Testament was written in Hebrew. Certain sections, like those found in Ezra and Daniel, were written in Aramaic. The New Testament was composed entirely in Greek.

God has chosen these three languages to communicate His will, even though there were numerous other options available. That fact alone provides an extra level of interest in these biblical languages. As a result, when manuscripts (this word comes from a Latin word meaning “that which is written by hand”) are found in these languages, a heightened interest arises. The first manuscripts to be written would have been by Moses around 1400 B.C. The writing materials used would have been papyrus or leather (although exceptions are found with some writings engraved on metal or chiseled into stone – Exodus 31:18; 34:28; Joshua 8:32).

While papyrus and leather are amazingly durable, they are not materials that will last forever. Therefore, through time and use, the original manuscripts would have become unusable. They needed to be replaced, and this was done through the copying work of Jewish scribes, who held these texts in the highest regard. Why? Because they believed them to be inspired writings, and they bore the holy name of God Himself.

When manuscripts began to show signs of wear, the Jewish scribes reverently disposed of them because they bore the sacred name of God. Disposing of the manuscripts avoided defilement by pagans. Since scribes were meticulous in copying biblical manuscripts, there was little reason to keep old manuscripts (Wegner 165).

It is important to note that if God wanted the originals preserved, He certainly could have done that. Yet, for reasons that are unknown to us, He desired that we learn His

will through manuscripts that are copies of the originals.

To summarize this section, God desired to communicate His will through writing, and desired to use Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek as the languages to carry His important messages.

The written word, with all of its limitations, was by far the most adequate means of conveying the truth of God because it could be more precisely presented, more easily preserved from corruption, and more effectively propagated. Therefore, when God—who spoke to the prophets by visions, dreams or angels—desired to speak through the prophets to succeeding generations, He chose to have them write their revelation. In the providence of God the Hebrew and Greek languages were prepared to express most appropriately the kind of revelation God desired for their particular days. Hebrew is a language well fitted to depict God’s deeds in the biography of the Old Testament, and Greek is particularly suited to the expression and propagation of the doctrines of the New Testament (Geisler and Nix 330).

The Text of the Old Testament: Masoretic Text

The history of the Hebrew Old Testament is a fascinating study. As noted earlier, Hebrew writing began long before the time of Moses. However, it was Moses whom God selected to be the first one to record His message to mankind. Moses did an extensive amount of writing, and then took steps to have his writings preserved by placing them in the Most Holy Place (Deuteronomy 31:24-26). Seven hundred years later, those writings were found in the temple by King Josiah (2 Kings 22:8-13). Whether these were the original writings of Moses or copies we do not know. However, the point is that those writings were preserved and available hundreds of years later. The process of preserving those writings is not revealed, although we assume it was through the work of scribes. The Bible records that Ezra was himself a scribe (Ezra 7:12). The Jews protected their Hebrew manuscripts in spite of various wars and captivities. Eventually those Hebrew texts were translated into Greek by the seventy scholars who produced the Septuagint (c. 250 B.C.). The production of the Septuagint shows that the Jews had collected all of the 39 inspired writings of the Old Testament prophets. What happened to the manuscripts used by the Septuagint translators is unknown, but serves to further illustrate how the Jews preserved these Old Testament books. “By the time of the Maccabean revolt (168 B.C.), the Syrians had destroyed most of the existing manuscripts of the Old Testament” (Geisler and Nix 354). Because of this, in the centuries to follow, the Jews developed strict rules for copying their few Old Testament manuscripts. “Sometime during the Talmudic period (100 B.C. to A.D. 400),...meticulous rules were developed to preserve the Old Testament text in synagogue scrolls” (Wegner 171). The destruction of Jerusalem (A.D. 70) radically changed what Jewish scribes were able to do. Without the centralized location of the Jerusalem temple, the work of scribes was less organized, and therefore needed the structure noted above. Eventually

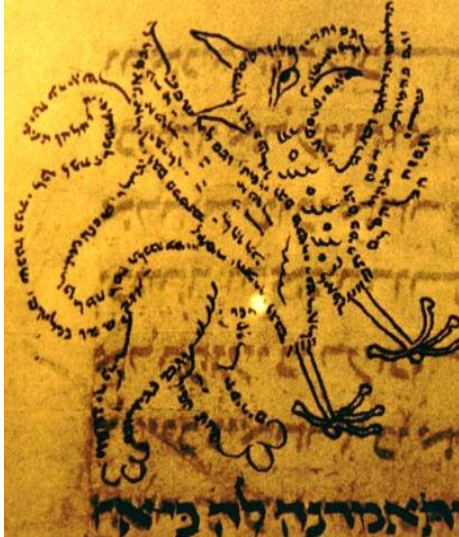
a group of scribes, known as the *Amoraim*, worked to preserve the Hebrew texts. These scribes were basically located in two areas: Babylon and Palestine. They produced the two Talmuds that we know today (Babylonian and Palestinian).

Perhaps the most famous group of scribes are the Masoretes. They operated from 500-1,000 A.D. This group of scribes is responsible for the Hebrew text of the Old Testament that we have today (known as the Masoretic Text). Much is known about the work of these scribes. They had a reverence for the Old Testament that impacted everything they did, from their personal habits to their methods of copying Scripture. The level of caution in which they copied is legendary.

They produced what is known as the *Masorah*, which was a catalogue of statistics on every Old Testament book. "Everything countable seems to be counted" (Robinson 29). That is, the *Masorah* would have noted the total number of words, the number of occurrences of particular words as well as names and places. It would even note what was the exact middle verse of a book. This catalogue of statistics would then be used by another group of scribes known as the *Sopherim*. These scribes would take the completed manuscript and then begin counting (which is the meaning of "*Sopherim*"). If the manuscript did not match the catalogue of statistics, it was discarded. There was no way these scribes were going to allow a manuscript to be circulated if it contained even a single error. "This being true, we have good reason to believe that the Masoretic Text represents the original text of the Old Testament with a high degree of accuracy" (Owen 42).



Here we have an example of a Masoretic scroll. This one is from the book of Jonah. The body of Jonah and the fish are actually statistics from the book of Jonah. They will describe how many times various words occur, like the name of the Lord or Jonah. It will record how many words there are total, and what is the exact middle word.



This strange looking bird is made up of the statistics from the book of Ruth. As with the previous example, it records the number of words, the exact middle word and just about every other conceivable statistic that could be found regarding the text of Ruth!

The following list illustrates some of the best known Masoretic manuscripts. The last one listed is the “Cairo Geniza Fragments.” This amazing discovery illustrates what happened to aging or flawed manuscripts. These manuscripts were placed in a storage room called a *genizah* (a word which means “hidden”). They were kept there until a ritual burial ceremony could be performed (Wegner 165). In December of 1896 a scholar by the name of Solomon Schechter went to the Ben-Ezra Synagogue in Cairo, Egypt. He was allowed to visit this storage room and found what is believed to be around 200,000 manuscripts, mostly dating from 1000 to 1400 A.D., although some are considered to be centuries older (Wegner 191). It is estimated that at least 10,000 of these manuscripts are biblical (Geisler and Nix 356), although some claim the number is as many as 24,000 biblical fragments (Levy 50-2).

- British Museum Oriental – Pentateuch dating from A.D. 850
- Codex Cairensis – former and latter prophets, dating from A.D. 916
- Leningrad MS B – a copy of the entire Old Testament, dating from A.D. 1010
- Aleppo Codex – partial copy of Old Testament dated A.D. 930
- Reuchlin Codex – copy of the Prophets, dated A.D. 1105
- Cairo Geniza Fragments – 24,000 fragments of Hebrew Bible discovered in 1890

These manuscripts have been an important witness to the text of the Old Testament, and served as the basis of our Hebrew Old Testaments. However, a casual look at this list reveals a major problem. All of these are relatively late, dating from c. 800 to 1100 A.D. That means that these manuscripts are removed from the actual writing of these Old Testament books by hundreds of years. Yet, despite the date of these manuscripts, we had every reason to believe that accurately reflected the

originals (autographs). Sadly, this did not satisfy biblical critics. They continued to maintain that these manuscripts reflect centuries of copying and recopying, and as a result are “hopelessly corrupted.” Fortunately, there was a game-changing discovery.

The Text of the Old Testament: The Dead Sea Scrolls

In 1947 an Arab shepherd boy thought one of his goats had wandered into a cave in the Judean desert west of the Dead Sea. He threw a rock into one of the caves to scare out his goat. Instead he heard the crash of breaking pottery. Upon investigation he found that his rock had shattered a large vessel that contained manuscripts. The Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered. William F. Albright described this as “the greatest manuscript discovery of modern times” (Trever 55).

In 11 caves were discovered 900 manuscripts, including 230 that were biblical manuscripts. Every Old Testament book was found except Esther. Many of these books had multiple copies. The magnitude of this discovery was not lost on biblical scholars. The date of these scrolls was unquestionably from 250 B.C. to A.D. 68 (when the community was destroyed). Perhaps the most significant discovery was the famous Isaiah scroll. Here we had, beautifully preserved in one scroll, all 66 chapters of this Old Testament book. Scholars, using reliable dating methods determined that this scroll dated around 250-150 B.C.

As this scroll was carefully unrolled, opportunity was presented for scholars to compare this Hebrew text with the previously oldest Hebrew text (which was about 1,000 years after the Isaiah scroll). Biblical critics were quick to point out that now, finally, they will have the proof that the Bible text was hopelessly corrupted over centuries of copying and recopying.

The Isaiah scroll was compared with our standard Hebrew text, word for word. The result? Scholar Gleason Archer observed that “the two copies of Isaiah discovered in Qumran Cave I proved to be word for word identical with our standard Hebrew Bible in more than 95% of the text. The 5% of variation consisted chiefly of obvious slips of the pen and variations in spelling” (19). The significance of this find cannot be overstated. Rather than prove the critics right, the Isaiah Scroll proved them to be woefully wrong. Despite centuries of copying and recopying, the biblical text remained virtually unchanged. The other Old Testament manuscripts went through the same process of word-for-word comparisons. Here is a list of what was found in just one of the caves, Cave #4:

- 11 mss. Genesis
- 11 mss. Exodus
- 4 mss. Leviticus
- 2 mss. Numbers
- 18 mss. Deuteronomy
- 2 mss. Joshua
- 2 mss. Judges
- 2 mss. Ruth
- 3 mss. Samuel
- 1 ms. Kings
- 1 ms. Chronicles
- 1 ms. Ezra

- 3 mss. Job
- 17 mss. Psalms
- 2 mss. Proverbs
- 2 mss. Ecclesiastes
- 3 mss. Song of Songs
- 15 mss. Isaiah
- 3 mss. Jeremiah
- 1 ms. Lamentations
- 3 mss. Ezekiel
- 5 mss. Daniel
- 7 mss. Minor Prophets

It was an amazing and astonishing discovery, finding so many biblical manuscripts. As with the Isaiah Scroll, each one of these manuscripts was compared, word by word, to our oldest corresponding book (most of which were 1,000 years later, dating around 800 A.D.). As with the Isaiah scroll, no significant differences were found. How could this be? This fact led Bible students to return to the question of who copied the Bible throughout the centuries. They were people who loved the Bible. They were people who believed the Bible was the inspired word of God. With such convictions, why would they not exercise the utmost care when copying?

The Dead Sea Scrolls provided texts of the Old Testament approximately one thousand years earlier, and their impact was explosive on the field of textual criticism. Careful study of these manuscripts has helped to confirm that the Hebrew text we possess is very accurate; differences are minimal between a good number of the Dead Sea Scroll manuscripts and manuscripts from about A.D. 800 to 1000 (Wegner 187).

The Text of the Old Testament: Additional Witnesses

Certainly the Dead Sea Scrolls have provided more than enough confirmation that the Old Testament texts were not corrupted over time. Yet there are many more witnesses, far more than we have time to discuss in this study. However, there are a few worthy of note. First, we will consider additional Hebrew discoveries. The *Nash Papyrus* is a copy of the 10 Commandments that are dated during the Maccabean period (169-37 B.C.). The *Murabba'at Manuscripts* include fragments of Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Isaiah as well as complete texts of the Psalms and the Minor Prophets. These texts are virtually identical with the Masoretic Text and date about the same time as the Dead Sea Scrolls (Wegner 189-90). The *Masada Manuscripts* must date before Romans overtook the fortification in April of 73 A.D. There were a total of fourteen scrolls, including Genesis, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Psalms and Ezekiel.

Second, there are non-Hebrew witnesses. *The Septuagint* is a translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek. The word *Septuagint* comes from the Latin word meaning "seventy," which is also why this translation is referred to as the LXX. Supposedly this number reflects the total of Jewish scholars who worked on the translation. This translation is dated as early as 250 B.C., because it was supposedly commissioned by King Ptolemy Philadelphus of Egypt who reigned from 285-246 B.C. This Greek translation was what was used by both Jesus and the Apostles. The

Aramaic Targums point back to the time when the Jews returned to Israel after Babylonian exile. While in captivity, they learned Aramaic. As a result, when they wanted to study the Old Testament books, they needed writings that would explain the meaning of the Hebrew. These writings, that explained the Hebrew, were known as *Targums*. The Targums included translations of the Hebrew books, along with interpretations (Wegner 202). Jerome's *Latin Vulgate* was completed around 404 A.D. It was also a translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. The *Syriac* translation dates in the second or third century A.D. and also provides valuable information on the Hebrew text of the Old Testament from which it was translated.

This casual survey of Old Testament manuscript evidence yields the conviction that our Bible is well substantiated. The Hebrew text was obviously transmitted quite carefully by the Masoretic scribes and their predecessors. The combined testimony of the ancient versions gives further credence to this fact. Christians, therefore, have every reason to trust the accuracy of the Old Testament text (Owen 46).

The Text of the New Testament

As with the Old Testament, there are no originals (autographs) of any New Testament book. Also, during the centuries there were advances in paper and ink. Nevertheless, the New Testament confirms that these letters were frequently written on papyrus (2 John 12). As a result of time and usage, those originals would have eventually worn out and needed to be replaced. There are, however, some important differences to those Old Testament books. First, the New Testament books were written within a relatively short time span (c. 50-100 A.D.). Second, the explosion of Christianity required numerous copies of the 27 canonical books. Paul Wegner, in his *The Journey from Texts to Translations*, says that there are now over 5,400 known fragments or manuscripts (235). Geisler and Bocchino, *Unshakable Foundations*, says that there are 5,686 Greek MSS now catalogued (p. 256).

The early Christian literature is almost silent about the original manuscripts, a silence that implies that enough faithful copies were in existence that the loss of an original posed no concern. It is doubtful that the early church set apart a specific group of professional scribes for this particular purpose; scribes were more likely hired, or individuals in the church copied the letters. This would explain why there are so many copies of the New Testament books and why there are more mistakes in the New Testament books than there are in the copies of the Old Testament (Wegner 207).

In this long list of New Testament manuscripts is the famous John Rylands fragment (known as P66). The significance of this small fragment is explained by Geisler and Nix:

This papyrus fragment (2 1/2 by 3 1/2 inches) from a codex is the earliest known copy of any portion of the New Testament. It dates from the first half of the second century, probably A.D. 117–138. Adolf Deissmann argues that it may be even earlier. The papyrus piece, written on both sides, contains portions of five verses from the gospel of

John (18:31–33, 37–38). Although this is a short fragment, it has proved to be the closest and most valuable link in the chain of transmission. Because of its early date and its location (Egypt) some distance from the traditional place of composition (Asia Minor), this portion of the gospel of John tends to confirm the traditional date of the composition of the gospel before the end of the first century. The fragment belongs to the John Rylands Library at Manchester, England (388-9).

It is estimated that out of the 5,600+ manuscripts of the New Testament, 100 are papyrus manuscripts. These are obviously the most important witnesses to the New Testament. Yet there are many more. Second in importance would be known as uncial manuscripts. Uncial manuscripts are found both on papyrus or parchment. This refers to a type of writing where all capital letters are used. There are about 274 such parchment uncial manuscripts (Metzger 42-57). Parchment (or vellum) was where animal skins were used. In 2 Timothy 4:13 Paul requests that Timothy bring the “parchments” (literally *membrana*). It is possible that some of the New Testament books were written on these animal skins. Some of the most famous manuscripts are in this category.

Codex Vaticanus dates in the fourth century, and originally contained all of the books of the Bible. Today certain portions are missing (Wegner 195).

The Codex Sinaiticus is a parchment uncial codex (written on both sides) that dates in the fourth century. Parts of the Old Testament are missing, but all of the New Testament is included. “This fourth-century Greek manuscript is generally considered to be the most important witness to the text because of its antiquity, accuracy, and lack of omissions” (Geisler and Nix 392).

The third most famous manuscript is the Codex Alexandrinus. This also a vellum codex that dates to the middle of the fifth century. It includes all of the Old Testament books and most of the New Testament.

The remaining witnesses are minuscule manuscripts (written in a kind of a long-hand form) and lectionaries (portions of Scripture that were used for readings in worship assemblies). Minuscule manuscripts date from the ninth to the fifteenth centuries.

These four witnesses provide valuable evidence for the text of the New Testament. No other ancient document has this overwhelming amount of manuscript evidences. Yet there are still more witnesses to the text of the New Testament.

First, there are the quotations from the early Christian writers (known as the church fathers). “The Fathers lived during the early centuries of the church, and their witness to the original text assists in locating the precise area, date, and type of text used throughout the early church. This evidence assists the textual critic in ascertaining the authentic text of the originals” (Geisler and Nix 419). It is said that the fathers quoted so frequently that the entire New Testament could be reproduced with the exception of only eleven verses (Leach 35-6).

Second, there are the various translations. As Christianity spread, it was natural that the Greek New Testament manuscripts would be translated into other languages. We have today ancient translations in Latin, Armenian, Syriac, Coptic, Gothic and Ethiopic. By way of example, we have around 8,000 manuscripts of the Latin Vulgate alone (Metzger, *Text*, 67-86).

Textual Variants of the New Testament

All of these witnesses have provided genuine scientific authentication of the text of the New Testament. Yet that does not mean there are not still some problems. While comparing the various witnesses, Bible students will discover what are known as “textual variants.”

A textual variant is, simply defined, where the manuscript evidence has not clearly pointed to one particular reading. Some of the more famous examples are the long ending of Mark 16, the account of the adulterous woman in John 8, and the trinitarian statement in 1 John 5:8. These textual variants are unsettling to some, and are used to challenge the credibility of the Bible by others. As we go through our New Testaments, we may see that our margins provide a note that says there is an alternate reading. Sometimes it appears that there are thousands of such notes (textual variants). Such is not the case. As a matter of fact, only $1/10^{th}$ of one percent of New Testament verses have a variant! Such a small percentage of variants for a collection this large is amazing (with 27 New Testament books, containing 260 chapters, 7,959 verses, 181,253 words and 838,380 letters). Only .1% of this number of words is questioned? “That would make the reconstructed text of the New Testament 99.9 percent free from real concern for the textual critic” (Geisler and Nix 474).

There is no legitimate reason to have concern over the text of the New Testament. The sheer number of manuscript witnesses, along with a strikingly low number of variants could provide much confidence. Besides, even that .1% of variants involve passages that do not involve major teachings or doctrines. There is *no* doctrine that is dependent upon a verse that has a textual variant. Philip Schaff construed that of the 150,000 variations known in his day, only 400 affected the sense; and of those only 50 were of real significance; and of this total not one affected “an article of faith or a precept of duty which is not abundantly sustained by other and undoubted passages, or by the whole tenor of Scripture teaching” (Schaff 177; cf. Metzger, *Text*, 112).

The foregoing discussion cannot be fully appreciated unless it is contrasted with the textual integrity of other books from the ancient world. The first comparison to consider is that of the number or quantity of manuscripts. The Greek manuscripts of the New Testament alone total more than three thousand, and there are more than two thousand lectionaries and more than ten thousand copies of Jerome’s Latin Vulgate, in addition to all of the various versions; whereas some of the greatest writings of antiquity have survived in only a handful of manuscripts (Geisler and Nix 473).

Comparative Manuscript Evidence

Author or Work	Date of Original	Manuscripts Available	Earliest Mss Available
•Thucydides	460-400 B.C.	8	900 A.D.
•Herodotus	400 B.C.	Scarce	950 A.D.
•Julius Caesar <i>History of the Gaelic Wars</i>	58-50 B.C.	5	1100 A.D.
•Aristotle	343 B.C.	5	1100 A.D.
•New Testament	50-95 A.D.	20,000+	100 A.D.

By looking at the preceding chart (basic information comes from Geisler and Nix 407), we are able to compare several famous ancient works with that of the New Testament. As the chart illustrates, there are woefully few manuscripts available for the works of Thucydides, Herodotus and others. Yet, amazing, scholarship does *not* call into question the veracity and reliability of those few manuscripts. How about the New Testament? Scholars line up to challenge the accuracy and reliability, calling the text of the New Testament hopelessly corrupted through centuries of copying and recopying. While not added to the list above, consider what Geisler and Nix had to say about the *Iliad* in comparison with the New Testament:

The Iliad is particularly appropriate because it has the most in common with the New Testament. Next to the New Testament, there are more extant copies of the Iliad (643) than any other book. Both the Iliad and the Bible were considered “sacred,” and both underwent textual changes and criticism of their Greek manuscripts. The New Testament has about 20,000 lines; the Iliad about 5,600. Only 40 lines (or about 400 words) of the New Testament are in doubt, whereas 764 lines of the Iliad are questioned. Thus, the 5 percent textual corruption of the Iliad compares with one-half of 1 percent (or less) of similar emendations in the New Testament (475).

Conclusion

It is without question that the Bible is the most attacked book in all of human history. Jesus told us that one of Satan’s primary goals is to steal the seed of the word of God out of men’s hearts. Why would he want to do this? Jesus says “lest they should believe and be saved” (Luke 8:12). James confirms that it is the “implanted word” that will save men’s souls (Jas. 1:21). Attacking the credibility of the Bible, by casting doubt on the dependability and reliability of its manuscripts is a brilliant move by Satan. However,

through the science of “textual criticism,” confidence in the Hebrew and Greek texts of the Bible is unassailable. The Bible boasts the greatest number of manuscripts of any book of antiquity. The number of textual variants is miniscule and insignificant, because they do not impact a single doctrine of Christianity.

Textual critics have made studied judgments on many of these significant variants, so that for all practical purposes the modern critical editions of the Hebrew and Greek texts of the Bible represent, with their footnotes, exactly what the autographs contained line for line, word for word, and even letter for letter. Their objective has been to find God’s Word as it was written in the autographs. This ideal is a worthy goal, for it assumes that the Word of God as originally written is a perfect treasure of God’s revelation to men (Geisler and Nix 489).

The process of textual criticism continues with each new manuscript discovery. Even in the last 30 years, an additional 300+ manuscripts of the New Testament have been discovered. Each one of these new discoveries are added to the previous evidences, and strengthen the confidence in the New Testament text. It is even conceivable that, before long, scholars will say with confidence that our modern Greek texts are 100% the same as the originals.

Those who continue to maintain that the Bible text is unreliable because of its transmission are simply not considering the mountains of evidence. It has been scientifically proven and should be beyond dispute. What more of God can we ask? He has certainly preserved His word (1 Peter 1:25). Now it is up to us to accept the Bible for what it truly is: the inspired word of God (2 Timothy 3:16).

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Translation

The attacks on the Bible have been numerous and consistent through the centuries. We consistently see articles like this one, entitled “is the Bible Fact or Fiction?” The article suggests there is more “fiction” than “fact” in the Bible. This is yet again a somewhat subtle way of destroying the credibility of the Bible. Inside the article you have the statement “Fact vs. Faith.” It reads “If Moses was a man or a myth, proof will have to come from digs like this...” Do we now need archaeology to prove the accuracy of the Bible? If archaeology does not support the Bible, does that mean the Bible is no longer believable?

Another example is this U.S. News and World Report article entitled: “Who was Jesus? A NEW look at his words and deeds.” The article inside discusses how modern scholarship has rejected the old way of taking the Bible at face value. These scholars argue that Jesus did very few of the acts reported in the Bible, He did none of the miracles recorded in the Bible, and what He is reported to have said and taught? No – he really never said most of it. Maybe, they suggest, He didn’t say any of what He is recorded as saying! Instead, the Bible is the product of creative men who have invented the character and through time have developed and expanded His words and deeds.

If we were sitting in a doctor’s office reading this article, what might we conclude? We certainly are not going to walk away having greater confidence in Bible. Instead, articles like these encourage people to never again even pick up a Bible.

Yet we have carefully gone through several important questions regarding the Bible. We have discussed what the Bible claims for itself. We noted that Bible, literally thousands of times, claims to be the Word of God. It is not just another book. We also looked at the charge that we do not have the right books; what is known as the Canon of Scripture. Again, there is remarkable evidence to prove that we have exactly the right books. There are no books that should have been included in the Bible, nor are there books that were included that should have been omitted. We also dealt with another popular charge against the Bible. It is said that the text of the Bible has been hopelessly corrupted through centuries of copying and recopying. Again, however, we provided undeniable evidence that the Bible was, in fact, accurately copied through the centuries.

This leaves us with one more important aspect to how we got the Bible: translation. We noted that the Bible was originally written in three languages: Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. How many of us are proficient in any of these languages? There are few today who are. Therefore, we are dependent upon their doing a good, reliable job of translating the original texts into English. We must remember that having the Bible translated into many different languages was God’s plan all along. The Great Commission given by Jesus in Matthew 28:18-20 demands that the Gospel be taken to the whole world. In order to do this it is going to have to be translated. On the Day of

Pentecost in Acts 2, the day the church began, the gospel message was translated into the dialects of the people in attendance. Therefore, we should acknowledge that God wanted His original word to be translated into every language of mankind, including English.

The Origins of the English Bible

Today we have literally dozens of English translations. How did we get to this point? The journey of the Bible from the original languages to modern day English is a fascinating and sometimes controversial story. It is, however, an interesting and important story.



This is what is known as an “Ivory Diptych.” It has figures carved on sides of an altar of an ancient Roman church. When the Roman Empire fell in 476 A.D., learning was incredibly low. People were scattered, no central government, wars were everywhere, and people did not go to school. The church was virtually the only organization that educated people – usually for the purpose of having a select few read their manuscripts. The only way people knew anything about the Bible was what they were told and taught, and this teaching was done

mostly in pictures. As we look at this Ivory Diptych, we can just imagine how the people would gather around it as one of the churchmen would explain the Bible story depicted. In this example, we have the following miracles of Jesus depicted:

FEEDING OF 5,000	RAISING OF LAZARUS
HEALING OF BLIND MAN	WATER TO WINE
HEALING OF PARALYTIC	CENTURIAN’S SERVANT

The officials of the church, during the first several centuries after the time of Christ, spoke and read Greek. Eventually Latin became the language spoken by most in all of Europe.



Here is a “Medieval Picture Bible.” It was like a comic book, depicting some Bible scenes with Latin captions (which most could not read – it had to be explained to them). There are many misconceptions that arose from works like this picture Bible. Notice:

- a) The people are dressed like Roman monks of the 3rd century A.D.
- b) They have the hairstyles of Romans
- c) The Furniture is not typical of Jewish household
- d) There were also doctrinal misconceptions: 2nd circle on right shows an infant being baptized. This practice did not begin until the 3rd or 4th century.

The story of the English Bible includes several famous men. First, is a British monk by the name of **Bede**. He translated parts of the New Testament, which sadly as not survived. He died in 735 A.D. He did, however, produce a work entitled “A History of the English Church and People” in which he describes the efforts of the church to communicate the Bible to people in English. He tells of a man named **Caedmon** – English monk from the monastery at Whitby in York. Caedmon put Bible stories into Old English verse. Here is an example of Caedmon’s work:

Ne beoth ge thy forhtran, thea the Faraon brohte

Be not frightened thereat, though Pharaoh has brought

Sweordwigendra, eorla unrim!

Swordwielders, vast troops!

Him eallum wile

Mihtig drihten thurh mine hand

To daege thissum daedlean gyfan

To them all will the mighty Lord through my hand this very day recompense give.

It was through poems like this that people learned the Bible stories. But some observations need to be made. First, this is not a translation of the Bible, but a Bible event being put into a poetic story: there the story of God's deliverance of the Israelites from the Egyptians. Second, this is English! However, even this old English would have to be translated for us today. **Aldhelm** the Bishop of Sherborne in Dorset, translated Psalms into English shortly after A.D. 700. After that there were more serious attempts to provide English to the people. This was typically done in an Interlinear style, where a Latin manuscript would have English written between the lines.



Here is an example of one of the Lindisfarne Gospels a Latin Manuscript (c. 698 A.D.) Front piece for Gospel of Mark. Inside we can see how each verse was translated into English:

While great progress is being made in translating the Bible into English, there was still much that needed to be done. Around 1,000 the first independent English translation was completed. It is known as the Wessex Gospels. Consider the first couple of lines. It reads: "*Sothlice ut eode se sawere his saed to sawenne. And tha tha he seow, sumu hie feollon with weg, and fuglas comon and aeton tha.*" Again, that is English! While we might recognize some of the words, it is still a far cry from modern English.

The Norman Conquest of 1066 brought great changes to English culture. Norman French mixed with spoken English so that before long, the English of the Wessex Gospels was unintelligible to the masses of English people.

John Wyclif (1329-1384) – came to teach at the University of Oxford in England. He was a Catholic Priest, and the most learned man of his day. He had trouble with his own people and the Catholic church because his personal study had convinced him that all people ought to read the Bible for themselves and that they had that right. He also believed that people could not read the Bible unless it was in their own tongue. So he set about to translate, with his secretary (John Purvey), the Bible into English.

Here is a portion of Wyclif's translation. "These thingis Jesus spak; and whanne he hadde cast up hise eyen into hevene, he seide: 'Fadir, the our cometh; clarifie thi sone, that thi sone clarifie thee.'" Notice how different this is from the way we speak today. However, we're getting closer!

100 years after Wyclif, the Synod of Oxford, in 1408, made it illegal in the country of England to either read or translate the Bible into English without the expressed written permission from the Diocese and the Bishop – and they were not about to give that permission. Wyclif dies in 1384, before they could kill him. Many of his students, however, went out to preach the Bible, making it available to the common people. Many of them were killed in the years immediately following Wyclif's death. As a result of this great persecution, little work was done on translating the Bible. Later in the 15th century, an amazing invention was made, an invention that would change the educational foundations of the world, and impact the future of Bible translations.

In 1450, the printing press was introduced into the world by Johannes Gutenberg. Before this all copies were hand written, but now it could be massed produced. Even this was very cumbersome and time consuming.

This press had to be lifted up and every letter type set – just for 1 page! Then they could put a piece of paper in there and make 1 copy, and place another piece of paper in – and so on. A very tedious process, but you could still produce more copies quicker and more accurately (as long as the original typeset was correct). The first book to be printed was the Latin translation of the Bible in 1456.

I have in my library a page produced by the Guttenberg press. Notice how this press was able to produce beautiful pages of the Bible text!



The Greek Bible was printed in 1514 along with the Complutensian Polyglot. (Polyglot means “multi-lingual”).



It was the best study tool of its day. It provided the Hebrew text, the LXX (Septuagint) with the Latin Interlinear. It included the Latin Vulgate, Hebrew and Chaldaic Roots, and Latin and Chaldaic Translations. It was an amazing study tool. There were originally 600 of these produced, but only two are known to exist today.

Erasmus, a scholar of Rotterdam began to think about publishing the Greek text in printed form so all could study the original text of the New Testament for themselves. He only had at his disposal a few manuscripts from the 12th and 13th centuries. Based on those, he produced a printed Greek Testament. The Elsevier brothers of Leiden, printed this Greek New Testament of Erasmus and, in their preface, used the phrase

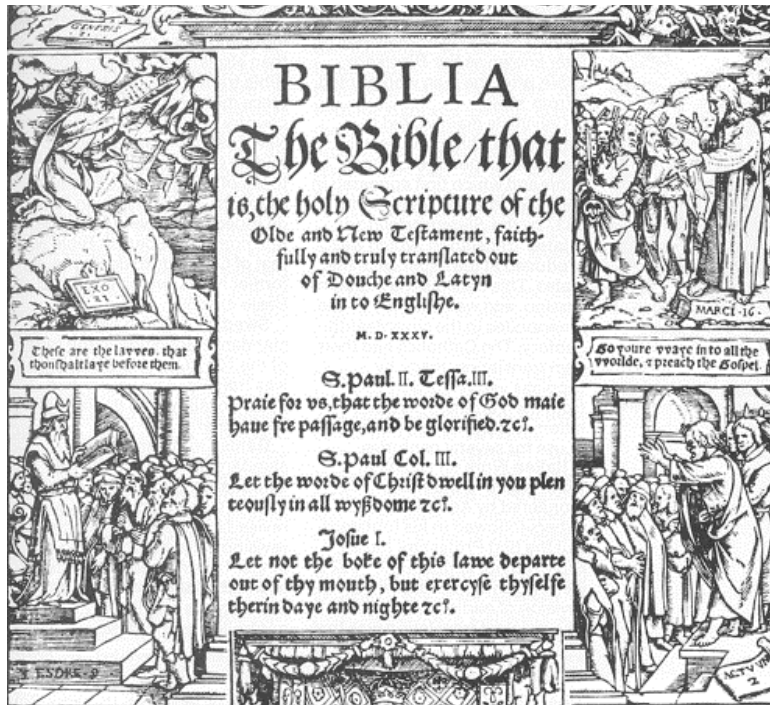
“Textus Receptus,” because this was the “text received by all.” So this was the printed Greek Testament that was in use during the 14th-16th centuries. It is the Greek text that is the basis for the King James Version.

In Germany, Martin Luther and others were beginning to see that the Catholic church practiced many things that contradicted Biblical teaching. Through Luther’s work and others, preaching in the churches became radically different. Now, instead of having mass in Latin (which the people did not know or understand), now it was in the language of the common people.

William Tyndale 1494-1536. Early in the 1500’s, William Tyndale began to have an interest in translating the Bible. He was living during the time of Martin Luther and the Great Reformation of Catholicism that was taking place all over Europe. He said that people deserved to have the Bible in their own tongue. One time he was in a heated discussion with a high official of the Catholic church. Tyndale was expressing his views that the people needed to have the laws of God – direct from the Bible – and in their own language. The Catholic official responded that it was more important that the people have the Pope’s laws than God’s laws. To this Tyndale said: “I defy the Pope and all his laws. If God spare my life, very many years I will cause a boy that drives the plough to know more of the Scripture than you do.”

Eventually Catholic and secular authorities kidnapped him, hanged him and burned his body at the stake in 1536. His last words were: “O Lord, open thou the King of England’s eyes!” He wanted people to realize that it was not a crime to read the Bible.

About 90% of the KJV is Tyndale’s translation. The KJV translators just carried (copied) it over. This Bible was probably the work of Miles Coverdale (who was not a Greek or Hebrew scholar).



The front-piece is very revealing. It shows how people felt about the Bible, and demonstrated how the word was to be given to the people:

TOP LEFT – Moses is receiving the 10 commandments, and the words say “these are the Laws that thou shall lay before them.”

TOP RIGHT – Jesus and the Apostles with the words “go ye everywhere and preach the Gospel.

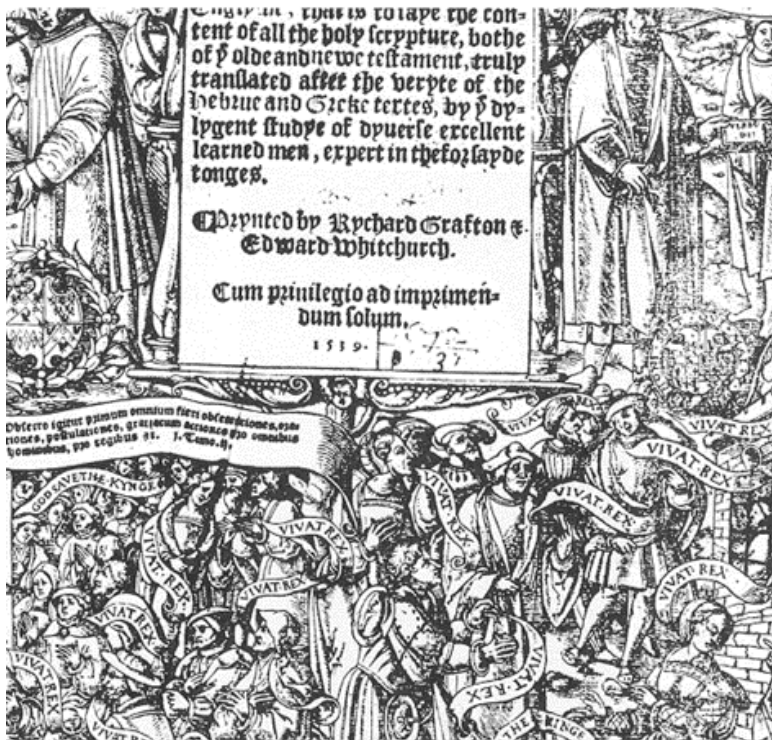
BOTTOM LEFT – Ezra with the book of the law, reading and explaining it to the people (Nehemiah 8).

BOTTOM RIGHT – Peter and the Apostles on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) – they were speaking the Gospel in the language of the people.

The main idea was that the Bible belongs to the people – in their own language.



The Great Bible. The Coverdale Bible, which was mainly the work of Tyndale, was not well accepted, but the Great Bible was – so called because it was so big. Notice Henry the 8th pictured on the front-piece of the Bible.



At the bottom the people are saying “long live the king.” This Bible dates around 1539, 3 years after Tyndale was killed (although much of this was Tyndale’s work). This

Bible was successful only because it was authorized by the king and pushed through politically.

The Geneva Bible came out in 1536. It was the first Bible to use verse numbers. It also included extensive marginal notes. Stephen Langton, a professor at the University of Paris divided the Bible into the modern chapter divisions (c. 1227 A.D.).

The Council of Trent (1546) was a Catholic conference designed to meet the ever-growing dissatisfaction with the Catholic church. There was serious political and religious upheaval at the time. The Roman Church legislated that all men should accept the Apocrypha as part of the Holy Scriptures or be anathema from God. Interestingly, they only accepted 11 of the 14 apocryphal writings. The people, however, who knew Hebrew and Greek, knew that these books did not belong with the Bible because all the best MSS had excluded them. The Catholics eventually decided they needed to produce their own Bible that included the Apocrypha, so in 1610 they came out with the Reims-Douay version of the Bible. This version was used, in part, to counter the negative comments against Catholicism found in the Protestant Bibles.

When Queen Mary was on the throne, she was pro-Catholic. Therefore, she restricted the reading of the Bible. When Queen Elizabeth was on the throne, she was pro-Protestantism and put Bibles back in the churches. This allowed people to come to the churches and read the Bible for themselves.

It had to be chained to the pulpits to protect it. History records that long lines would form outside the church buildings with people waiting hours for their turn to read the Bible for themselves. They were given just a few minutes time to do this – around 15 minutes. How many today would stand in line for 2, 3 or 4 hours just to read the Bible for 15 minutes? How many today would give their lives so that others could have the right to read the Bible in their own language, or even better, to own their own Bible? Think of how precious the word was to them. We should learn from this!

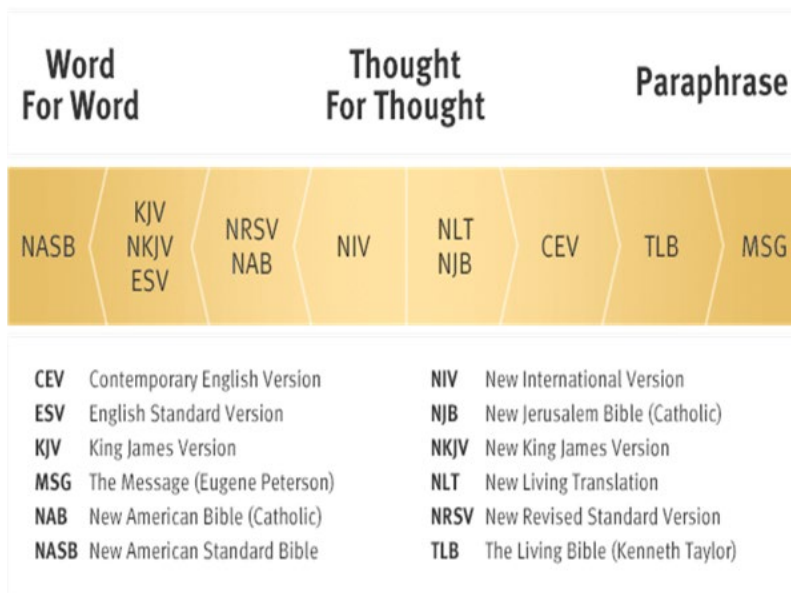
In the early 1600's there were several Bibles that had been made: the Geneva Bible, the Bishop's Bible, Coverdale's, Tyndale, Wyclif, Protestant Bible, Reims-Douay Bible – all of them with different footnotes. So, in 1604, King James VI of Scotland, decided there needed to be a uniform and accept translation of the Bible that all England could use. Unlike previously printed Bibles, it would be free of marginal notes. This enabled the Bible to be more readily accepted by both Protestants and Catholics. Their original goal was to produce a Bible for the Anglican churches. As we know, however, the King James Version ended up having a much wider scope of influence.

From 1604 to 1611 some 47 scholars labored under the royal commission to translate the Bible into the common tongue of the English people. This begins the era into modern translations.

Discussing the various translations is a difficult endeavor today. This is frequently

because many do not fully grasp the complexities of producing a good and accurate translation. In addition, there are many who have voiced very strong opinions, opinions that are not always based upon the facts and opinions that then influence the thinking of others. A translator has the task of taking what was written in the original Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek and then accurately reflecting what those verses are saying to the modern English reader. In addition, we are talking about languages from different times and different cultures. There will be different idioms, figures of speech, different ways of saying things, different word order as well as dozens of other issues that confront the translator. While some have sung the praises of a “literal translation,” it is not possible to have a true word-for-word translation. It would not make sense and it would be difficult to read and understand. Still, the best translations are those who have tried to stay more literal, and have the overall goal of representing the words the inspired writers used. Some translations have discarded any attempt to actually translate the words. Instead, they have merely determined what the general idea is, and then express that idea in their own words. Such is the translating philosophy of all paraphrases, like the Living Bible Paraphrase and the Message, as well as some “thought for thought” versions like the New International Version. Such versions should not be the main study Bible of people today. At best they should be used for comparative purposes.

Classification of Translations



Translation: King James Version:

- Revised Bishop’s Bible and Geneva Bible
- 47 experts involved
- Based on the Textus Receptus (1500)
- 90% same as William Tyndale’s translation

- e) It was written in the common language of the people of England in the 17th century
- f) In 1611 people probably were aware of about 25 manuscripts of the Greek New Testament. None of these manuscripts dated earlier than the Middle Ages.
- g) By 1881 people would have known over 1,500; Today the number of manuscripts and fragments is 5,373
- h) These manuscripts date back to the 4th century, and the fragments go back to the 2nd century.
- i) So the KJV did not have the benefit of our best/oldest manuscripts. Remember, however, that we demonstrated that there were not radical changes in the copies of the Bible. So, even though the KJV had only a few late MSS, these were still good, reliable manuscripts!

Strengths

- a. It contains old English which many people find more enjoyable and easier to memorize.
- b. It is still a reliable and dependable translation
- c. It remains one of the most popular translations

Weaknesses

- a) There are an estimated 800 words (many of which occur multiple times) in the KJV which have changed their meaning
- b) It is based upon the Old Greek Text, therefore it does not utilize the benefit of the best and oldest Greek manuscript discoveries. As a result, the King James will have some passages that do not have strong attestation.
- c) It has some incorrect translations:
 - (1) Hell for Hades
 - (2) Bishop for overseer
 - (3) Has denominational holiday "Easter" (Acts 12:4).

The 47 men who created the King James Version produced a document that was called "The Translators to the Reader." Notice some important comments they made:

"It is necessary to have translations in readiness. Translation it is that openeth the window to let in the light...indeed without translation into the vulgar tongue, the unlearned are but like children at Jacob's well (which was deep) *without a bucket or something to draw with.*"

"Now what can be more available thereto, than to deliver God's book unto God's people in a tongue which they understand?"

“No cause, therefore, why the word translated should be denied to be the word, or forbidden to be current, notwithstanding that some imperfections and blemishes may be noted in the setting forth of it.”

“We never thought...that we should need to make of a bad one a good one, but to make a good one better.”

“Therefore, as St. Augustine saith, that variety of Translations is profitable for the finding out of the sense of the Scriptures; so diversity of signification and sense in the margin, where the text is not so clear, must needs do good, yea is necessary.”

“We have not tied ourselves to an uniformity of phrasing or to an identity of words, as some...wish that we had done...for there be some words that be not of the same sense everywhere.”

There have been numerous translations that were once popular, but today have few readers. As a result, we will not say much about them. Included in this list is the American Standard Version, which was produced in 1901; the Revised Standard Version of 1946. These are good translations. Like all translations they have some problems, but truth can be learned in them.

New American Standard Bible (1963/70)

- Very conservative
- 58 scholars
- Took advantage of recent discoveries
- Premillennial preferences
- Good overall translation - but some inconsistencies

- (1) Put poetic material in poetic form
- (2) Printed verses as separate units
- (3) Overall good translation; especially the 1995 “update” edition.
- (4) Some problems in translation:
 - (a) Does not consistently translate the same Greek/Hebrew words
 - (b) Matthew 5:17 contradicts Ephesians 2:15
 - (c) Isaiah 2:2; Galatians 6:16; Mark 13:30

New International Version (1978)

- More than 110 scholars
- Attempt to provide ease in reading and comprehension
- Solid textual base

- Generally conservative (although some questionable translations - e.g. Romans 8 “evil or sinful nature”)
- Is a paraphrase in many places

- (1) Currently the best-selling translation
- (2) Translators admitted they were seeking “more than a word for word translation.” Thus many passages are more like a paraphrase than a translation.
- (3) Some church of Christ scholars were a part of the translation
- (4) Some problems in translation:
 - (a) 1 Peter 3:21 - salvation before baptism?
 - (b) 1 Corinthians 13:10 - ‘until perfection comes’

Dynamic Equivalent type of translating is now widely criticized. Ted Kyle says that Dynamic Equivalent:

“Has resulted in the impoverishment of God’s Word”

“The ‘deep things of God’ have been turned into shallow ponds”

Leland Ryken notes that Dynamic Equivalent translators “have themselves become the counterparts to medieval Roman Catholic priests. The reader is just as surely removed from the words of the text as the medieval Christian was” (p. 78). He maintains that “the whole premise...is faulty.”

New King James Version (1978)

- a) Corrected most words that had changed meaning from the KJV
- b) Kept the same textual basis as KJV
- c) Overall good translation; consistently translates Greek/Hebrew words
- d) Some problems in translation:
 - i) Kept some outdated words (i.e. ‘perdition’ - 2 Peter 3:7)
 - ii) repeated questionable passages (cf. Acts 8:37; 1 John 5:7-8)

English Standard Version (2001)

- (1) Mainly a reproduction of the RSV (about 5-10% is unique). Went back to using “virgin” in Isaiah 7:14; antiquated terms like “thee/thou” were removed.
- (2) Attempted to be “essentially literal”
- (3) Overall it is a good translation
- (4) Some problems in translation:
 - (a) Malachi 2:16 not “God hates divorce”
 - (b) Matthew 16:18 says “gates of *hell*”

(c) 1 Peter 3:8 awkward

We will always have a need for updated translations. And it will always push our comfort level when the wording is changed from that which we are familiar with. However, as language changes, so also will there be a need for new translations. Yet, herein lies the danger. We must make sure that new translations are done by true Greek/Hebrew scholars, and that the translating committees have several “checks and balances” to assure accuracy in translation.

Suggestions

- 1) Use only major translations - not those done by only one man.
- 2) Use all the translations you can put your hands on. Don't rely on just one.
- 3) Remember that all major translations have some problems, but truth can be learned.

Why? I frequently get asked questions such as:

- 1) Why did God do it this way?
- 2) Why didn't God preserve the originals?
- 3) Why do we not have more ancient manuscripts?
- 4) Why do we not have 100% accuracy?
- 5) Why are there still some textual problems?

Even if we had the originals or more ancient manuscripts, men would still find ways to criticize the Bible. Satan is not going to rest in his insidious attacks on the Word of God. The problems we have in discussing biblical origins are small. God has given us sufficient evidence. He wants us to accept His word on faith.

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

- 1) The Bible's claim to be from God is justifiable.
- 2) The 66 books of the Bible are those which were inspired of God and collected by the people of God.
- 3) The Bible was accurately copied through the centuries.
- 4) Our major English translations are dependable and reliable (remember Jesus used a translation too - the Septuagint).
- 5) There is no legitimate reason not to believe in the Bible, study the Bible and obey the Bible.

Many great passages need to be considered as we conclude this very important study. Jesus said in **John 17:17**, “Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth.”

1 Peter 1:22-23 says: "...you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls...for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God."

Revelation 20:12 says: "...and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books..."

