

# The Bible: Where Did It Come From?

*2Timothy 3:16*

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

I remember being in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade and running out to our spot on the playground where we could play tackle football without being seen by the teachers. When I arrived instead of the teams being determined, the group was all huddled up around one of the children. They were in the middle of a conversation of which all I heard was “No one knows where the Bible came from, *they* just found it.” Never questioning his statement, or who *they* were I would spend the next 7 years of my life believing that the Bible just appeared one day from heaven.

Nothing could be further from the truth. The Bible, while supernatural in origin, has what we might call a natural delivery. In other words it came to man through men.

- The Bible was NOT dropped from heaven like manna
- The Bible was NOT delivered by an angel on horseback
- The Bible was NOT found glowing in the dark in a farmer’s field

It is important to have some knowledge of how the Bible was received for at least 2 reasons.

1. For our sake

Since the Bible is the basis for our understanding of God, the rule of life and the source of the great and precious promises that we hold to in times of difficulty it is important that we be able to trust it

2. For the sake of others

*1Peter 3:15*

*But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and be ready always to give an answer to every man who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.*

People have many hang ups that keep them from Christ, one is that the Bible is unreliable, is full of contradiction, has been changed

through the centuries or was crafted by the church in order to suppress men

Having a good understanding of where the Bible came from will help us answer the critic, the confused and the seeker.

The better job we do removing the things someone hides behind the more likely it will be for them to take time to consider the claims of Christ

## Terms to remember

As we get started we will be using some terms that are perhaps unique to Bibliology and are worth introducing at the start.

- *Autographs*: The original texts were written either by the author's own hand or by a scribe under their personal supervision.

There are no known autographs of any books of the Bible

- *Manuscripts*: Until Gutenberg first printed the Latin Bible in 1456, all Bibles were hand copied onto papyrus, parchment, and paper.

There are tens of thousands of manuscripts to compare

- *Translations*: Since the message of the Gospel is for all people, the Bible was translated into the language of the people from the early centuries

## How did we get the Bible?

The bible was not originally written in English, the first English Bible was not translated until the 14<sup>th</sup> century

## The Old Testament

The Old Testament was written primarily in Hebrew, with a small portion written in Aramaic and was completed more than 400 years before Christ

The process of writing the OT took close to 1100 years.

It began about 1500BC with Moses writing the Pentateuch and was completed prior to 400BC

The first actually recorded instance of the Word of God being written down was when the Lord wrote the Ten Mount Sinai.

Biblical scholars believe this occurred around 1,500 BC, almost 3,500 years ago.

God commanded Moses to place a copy of his writings in the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies (Deuteronomy 10:2).

After his death, God instructed Joshua to meditate on and obey teachings of Moses. God not only promised him good success but also indicated that He would guide His people by this book.

As the history of Israel unfolded, additional books were added to the books of Moses.

These Scriptures were divided into 3 parts: Law, Prophets, and Writings.

The order of the books in the Hebrew Scriptures is different from the English Bible but the content is exactly the same.

The first known translation of the OT scriptures took place about 250 B.C.

The king of Egypt desired a copy of every known literary work for inclusion in the Library of Alexandria. To secure a copy of the Hebrew Scriptures, he invited 72 scribes from Israel to undertake the work of translation. Tradition states that each of the scribes was housed in a separate house to complete the task. Tradition also states each scribe completed his work in seventy days, and all the copies were exactly the same!

This translation is known as the Septuagint from a Latin word meaning 70, because of the 70 to 72 translators who worked on the project.

New Testament writers often used the Septuagint when they quoted from the Old Testament and this was the translation used by the early Church.

## The New Testament

The stories surrounding the life of Christ were first passed from person to person through what is known as oral tradition. As time went on and unsubstantiated stories began to develop it became necessary to write down authorized versions of the life and ministry of Christ.

The first of these was perhaps Mark, followed closely by Matthew. Luke wrote later compiling his account from eyewitness testimony.

The NT was originally written in Greek between 45-95 AD on Papyrus, a thin paper-like material made from flattened stalks of a plant.

The New Testament books were written and circulated as single units and later were collected into groups such as the epistles of Paul, the Gospels. Finally, they were bound together as a single volume.

They were originally written in a scroll format, but as they were transcribed and bound together, they would be placed into book format or CODEX as early as 100AD

The oldest copies of the New Testament known to exist today are: The Codex Alexandrius, Codex Sinaiticus and the Codex Vaticanus. These date back to approximately the 300 AD. In 315 AD

Since the Gospel message was intended for a worldwide audience, the NT was translated into 100's of languages in the first centuries of the church. This allowed people to read the Scriptures in their mother tongue. Historically Christianity has flourished where the Bible is simply placed in the hands of the people.

In 382 AD Jerome translated the New Testament from Greek into Latin. This translation became known as the "Latin Vulgate", ("Vulgate" meaning "vulgar" or "common").

He put a note next to the Apocrypha Books, stating that he did not know whether or not they were inspired scripture, or just Jewish historical writings

However, by 600AD Latin became the only authorized version of Scripture for the church in Rome and they refused to allow the scripture to be available in any language.

Since Latin became a dead language, it was written but not spoken, this kept the Word of God from the general public for 900 years.

The Bible was first translated into English in 1380 by John Wycliffe a theologian and proponent of reform in the Catholic Church.

Because he lived nearly a century before the 1455 invention of the printing press, his New Testaments and Bibles were of course, hand-written manuscripts.

After Wycliffe's death the English clergy declared English translations to be illegal at the Convocation of Oxford in AD 1408.

No one was permitted to translate the Bible into English apart from the permission of a bishop. Thus the English Bible would be officially illegal for nearly one hundred and thirty years.

After the death of Wycliffe things began to change rapidly in the West.

In the 1450's Gutenberg invented the movable-type printing press, forever changing how people would communicate. No longer was it necessary for books to be individually copied by hand; hundreds...even thousands of copies of a single book could be made on a printing press within a few months.

The first book ever printed was a Latin Bible.

In 1453 Constantinople, the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire fell to the Ottomans. Many Christians fled to the west to avoid persecution. With them they brought Greek manuscripts of the NT.

1514 A.D. Erasmus printed the Greek New Testament for the first time. He based his Greek New Testament from only five Greek manuscripts, the oldest of which dated only as far back as the twelfth century. With minor revisions, Erasmus' Greek New Testament came to be known as the Textus Receptus or the "received texts."

1611 A.D. The King James Version was translated into English using the Textus Receptus

In 1536 William Tyndale produced the very first English language New Testament to ever come off a printing press. He was burned at the stake for the "crime" of printing the English New Testaments.

In 1535, Tyndale was arrested and jailed in the castle of Vilvoorde outside Brussels for over a year. In 1536 he was convicted of heresy and executed by strangulation, after which his body was burnt at the stake. His dying request that the King of England's eyes would be opened seemed to find its fulfillment just two years later with Henry's authorization of The Great Bible for the Church of England

## BLOODY MARY

It was around this same time that HENRY THE 8 broke off from the Roman church in order to annul his marriage to his first wife and marry Ann Boleyn. This made his daughter Mary an illegitimate child and not an heir to the throne.

In 1536, Henry had Anne Boleyn beheaded and married his third wife, Jane Seymour, who insisted that the king make amends with his daughters.

When Henry died, His son Edward VI, began to reign, he was only 15 but due to poor health died shortly after and Mary became Queen of England and attempted to return England back to the Roman church.

Her efforts were carried out by killing hundreds of Protestant leaders, the first was John Rogers, the printer of the "Matthews-Tyndale Bible". His execution was followed by the execution of former Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, who was primarily responsible for the printing of the "Great Bible". Hundreds more would follow in Mary's reign.

In all about 275 people died it was because of these burnings that the Queen gained the epitaph "Bloody Mary".

In the 1550's, many of fled to Geneva, Switzerland, as a safe haven. It was there that work began on a Bible for the English-speaking world. This Bible became known as the Geneva Bible.

The Geneva Bible was the first Bible to add numbered verses to the chapters. Extensive marginal notes and references also accompanied every chapter so that it is considered the first English "Study Bible".

With the end of Queen Mary's bloody reign, the reformers could safely return to England.

The Anglican Church (which was formed when Henry VIII broke away from the Roman church) reluctantly tolerated the printing and distribution of Geneva version Bibles in England. The marginal notes, which were vehemently against the institutional Church of the day made another version desired

This ultimately led to the production of the King James Version of 1611

## Who determined what books would be in the Bible?

This is covered in what we call the study of the canon of Scripture

Canonization relates to the question of which books God inspired

Inspiration indicates how the Bible received its authority, whereas canonization tells how the Bible received its acceptance.

The original meaning of the term canon was a rod, ruler, staff, or measuring rod.

The word is used in the NT

*Galatians 6:16*  
*And as many as walk according to this RULE, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.*

From the literal "ruler," the word was extended to mean a rule or standard for anything.

The Bible is the standard by which we determine who God is and how to live

## But how do we determine what actually is the Bible?

The difficulty is that we do not have a list within the Bible itself as to what books should be part of the Bible. That being said, we do have guidelines that help determine what books actually belong

- 2Peter 1:21 – written by men of God
- Gal 1:8 – cannot contradict
- Heb 4:12 – does it have transforming power
- Was it accepted as Scripture from the time in which it was written
  - 1Tim 5:18
  - 2Pet 3:15-16
  - 1Thes 5:27

Another way of looking at this is that a book belonged to Scripture the moment God inspired it, although it may have taken some time for the church to agree upon it

## OLD TESTAMENT

Compared to the New Testament there is considerably less controversy regarding the canon of the Old Testament.

Since it was originally written, there has always been a canon of some sort

- An canonical writing was kept by the Ark of the Covenant (Deut. 31:24–26)
- After the Temple was built, the sacred writings were kept in the Temple (2 Kings 22:8).
- Josh. 1:8 records - This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night”
- Kings were required to write their own copy of the Law and read it daily
- The psalmist declares how he meditated daily upon it
- At the Time of Jesus we know it was customary to read from the OT scrolls

By 400BC the entire OT was completed and considered to be the Scriptures.

- Some suggest that Ezra played an important role in the establishing of the OT canon sometime around 450BC
- Josephus wrote:  
"From Artaxerxes until our time everything has been recorded, but



has not been deemed worthy of like credit with what preceded, because the exact succession of the prophets ceased."

According to Josephus and other ancient writers if a book were written after the prophetic period, it was not considered canonical. If it were written within the prophetic period, in the succession of Hebrew prophets, it was canonical.

- About 250BC the Septuagint was copied which contains the same 39 books found in our OT
- The New Testament recognizes the canon of the Old Testament as divine in origin and authority.

The New Testament quotations from the Old Testament serve as proofs that by the time of Christ the OT was complete and considered to be the inspired word of God

- John 5:39
- Luke 24:44
- Hebrews 10:7

## NEW TESTAMENT

The process behind the development of the New Testament Canon takes a little more attention

- The stories of Jesus were first transferred orally.
- 10-15 years after the resurrection these stories began to be written down by the apostles.
  - Mark was perhaps the first to write and he recorded the events as Peter shared them
  - Matthew wrote shortly there after
  - Luke's account was about 15 years later, he wrote after interviewing eyewitnesses
    - These were considered to be Scripture from the time they were written and later were coupled together and referred to as "The Gospel"
    - *1Timothy 5:18*

*For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,"<sup>(a)</sup> and, "The laborer is worthy of his wages*

- Paul's writings were also considered to be Scripture from the time they were written

We saw that Paul demanded that they be spread from church to church and that the Apostle Peter referred to Paul's writing as "Scripture" a term regulated only for the inspired word of God

- By the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century the gospels, acts, Paul's writing and the general epistles were coupled together and considered Scripture.
  - Only a few books remained in question and only by some church leaders
- There seems to be three basic questions that were asked of books that were considered to be part of Scripture
  - Was it written by an apostle or an associate
  - Was it accepted as Scripture from the start
  - Is it consistent with Biblical doctrine
- By 170 a canon with most of the 27 NT books was compiled
- Later, during the 4<sup>th</sup> century, after the legalization of Christianity the church met to determine views of orthodoxy. It was at this time that the NT canon was finalized

## Summary of Canonization

One thing must be emphatically stated. The New Testament books did not become authoritative for the Church because they were formally included in a canonical list; on the contrary, the Church included them in her canon because she already regarded them as divinely inspired, recognizing their innate worth and general apostolic authority, direct or indirect. The first ecclesiastical councils to classify the canonical books were both held in North Africa — at Hippo Regius in 393 and at Carthage in 397 — but what these councils did was not to impose something new upon the Christian communities but to codify what was already the general practice of those communities.

How do we know if it was translated correctly?

None of the original autographs of the Bible books remain today. In other words there are no copies of the Bible in Paul, David or Moses' handwriting.

The question then is if the copies are reliable or if they have been changed through the years.

You may have played the telephone game in psychology class where information radically changes as it is passed from person to person.

How do we know this did not happen with the Bible?

How do we know that the church leaders did not change the Bible to teach their own doctrines?

To answer these questions we have to look at the Old and New Testaments separately

## Old Testament

2 things to consider

- First the Jewish method of copying

Since documents were copied onto animal skins, they would wear out over time. When a copy showed signs of wear it was replaced and the older copy destroyed. They considered the newer copy to be of equal value with the Old

As a result the Oldest Hebrew copy of the OT was dated about 1000AD

That is 1500 years after the OT was completed

- The second thing to consider is what is known as the Dead Sea Scrolls

The story

The significance:

A copy of the OT more than 1000 years older than the oldest copy ever seen with relatively no changes

95% accuracy

5% variance mostly in spelling

# New Testament

There is overwhelming evidence to support the reliability of the NT

- Over 5,000 ancient manuscripts to compare with one another
- Some as old as 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> century
- Less than 40 places where the original is in question
- Never effects any major doctrinal position
- With the writing of the church fathers from the first 2-3 centuries the entire NT could be reconstructed with the exception of a few verses from 2-3John
  - When someone quoted John 3:16 in 100 AD they quoted the same verse you read