

How did we get the Bible?

God's Word to man

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How did we get the Bible?

The English word “Bible” comes from the Greek word “*Βιβλία*” which means “books” (The Latin word “*Biblia*” also means books). The word “Bible” doesn’t mean the “book” is from God any book is a “bible” in the general sense. That is why you find most “Bibles” will say “Holy Bible”. Think also about our word “*Bibliography*”.

a. Introduction to the Holy Bible (The following taken from “The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict”)

- i. The Holy Bible is unique
 1. Written over a period of 1500 (- 2000) years
 2. Written by more than forty authors
 - a. People from every walk of life from kings, to shepherds, to musicians, to philosophers and prophets
 3. Written in different places
 - a. In the wilderness
 - b. In dungeons
 - c. While traveling
 4. Written at different times
 - a. Times of war
 - b. Times of peace
 - c. Times of prosperity
 5. Written during different moods
 - a. Heights of joy
 - b. Depths of sorrow
 - c. Confusion and doubt
 6. Written on three continents
 - a. Asia
 - b. Africa
 - c. Europe
 7. Written in three languages (More on this later)
 8. Written in a wide variety of literary styles (More on this later)
 - a. Poetry and song
 - b. Historical narrative
 - c. Personal correspondence
 - d. Law
 - e. Parable
 9. In spite of its diversity, the Bible presents a single unfolding story: God’s redemption of human beings. There is more we could say about its circulation and translation but for now that is enough.

- b. God spoke to men in various ways** (Numbers 12:6-8, Hebrews 1:1-2)
 - i. Direct discourse
 - 1. God speaks with Moses in a unique way (Numbers 12:6-8)
 - ii. Dreams
 - 1. Joseph was given dreams by God and also the ability to interpret dreams (Genesis 37-41)
 - 2. Jacob was given a dream of a ladder with angels ascending and descending (Genesis 28:11-12)
 - iii. Angels
 - 1. Mary is visited by an angel who tells her she will conceive and give birth to the holy one (Luke 1:26-38)
 - 2. The angel of the Lord speaks to Hagar (Genesis 21:17)
 - iv. Visions
 - 1. God spoke to Abraham through a vision (Genesis 15:1)
 - 2. Samuel is given a vision (1 Samuel 3)
 - 3. Isaiah was given visions (Isaiah 1:1)
 - 4. Paul is given a vision of a man of Macedonia (Acts 16:9)
 - v. God the Son
 - 1. God revealed himself in Jesus of Nazareth (John 6:46, 10:30, 14:9)
 - a. He is the final and complete revelation of God to man.
- c. God the Spirit moved men to speak and write** (2 Peter 1:20-21)
 - i. Prophets spoke the words of God to God's people and to the world (Jonah, Moses, Isaiah, ect)
 - ii. Some prophets wrote down what was given to them by God (Amos 1:1, Hosea 1:1, Jeremiah 1:1, New Testament Letters, Revelation 1:11)
 - iii. God used some to record the history of his people and historical events (1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, The Gospels, Acts)
- d. The importance of the bible** (The Scriptures)
 - i. They are the words of God to men (2 Peter 1:20-21, Hebrews 1:1-2, Mark 13:31, John 3:34, John 8:47, 1 Thessalonians 2:13)
 - ii. They are the words of eternal life (John 6:68)
 - iii. They are all sufficient (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

- e. All scripture is given by God and is inspired (2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Peter 3:2)**
- i. The Old Testament (Genesis – Malachi) Jesus and the Apostles and New Testament prophets quote the Old Testament as inspired of God
 1. Jesus: Matthew 19:4, 5; **22:31, 32**, 43; **Mark 12:26**; Luke 20:37
 - ii. New Testament (Matthew – Revelation) Paul’s words are God’s words (1 Thessalonians 2:13) Peter saw Paul’s words as scripture (**2 Peter 3:15-16**)
- f. Writing utensils**
- i. Stone, chisel and hammers (**Exodus 34:27-29**, Deuteronomy 27:2-3, Joshua 8:30-32)
 - ii. Clay tablets (Ezekiel 4:1)
 1. Clay was sometimes used in ancient times. They would use soft clay to write on and then bake it to harden it
 - iii. Vellum, Parchment (animal skins) ink and writing tools (Brushes and pens)
 1. The Jerusalem Talmud requires that the scriptures (Old Testament) be copied on animal skins (How we got the Bible by Neil R. Lightfoot Pg 14)
 2. “Originally... vellum (related to English word *veal*) denoted the skins of calves and antelopes, while parchment referred to material obtained from sheep and goats.” (*In modern times vellum and parchment are used synonymously*) “The difficult process begins when the animal skins are stretched and dried. The hair is removed from one side and the flesh from the other; both sides are then rubbed smooth with stone. Sheets of vellum are cut and folded in the middle to form quires, a process which results in hair-side facing hair-side and flesh-side facing flesh-side. Lines are ruled on the sheets by means of a pointed instrument, which cuts a groove on one side and leaves a ridge on the other. Writing on the vellum codex was done in columns, at first three or four columns to a page and later two to a page.” (How we got the Bible by Neil R. Lightfoot Pg 16)

- iv. Papyrus (paper, reeds pressed and dried to make paper) ink and writing tools (Brushes and pens)
 - 1. "Papyrus by nature is fragile and subject to decay. For this reason, and because of an eventual shortage of papyrus, it was inevitable that vellum would replace papyrus, and so from the fourth century through the Middle Ages the Principal receptacle for the written Word of God was vellum." (How we got the Bible by Neil R. Lightfoot Pg 16)
- v. Ink
 - 1. The ink was usually a combination of charcoal, gum, and water (The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict by Josh McDowell Pg. 18)

g. Scroll and Codex

- i. Scrolls were used originally and were made of papyrus as well as animal skins
- ii. Codex came into use in the first or second century AD. The Codex is equivalent to our modern book. These were made of papyrus and animal skins as well.
 - 1. A scroll was typically written on only one side while a codex had writing on both sides of each sheet.

h. Languages used by God to record his words

- i. Hebrew (Most of the Old Testament)
 - 1. Hebrew was the language of the Jews throughout much of the Old Testament period
- ii. Aramaic (Small sections of the Old Testament) Genesis 31:47 quotes an Aramaic word and Daniel chapter 2:4 - chapter 7 were written in Aramaic
 - 1. Aramaic became the dominant language of the Jews replacing Hebrew in the first century
- iii. Hebrew and Aramaic are related languages
 - 1. See chart

iv. Greek (All of the New Testament)

1. Greek was the universal language of commerce in the first century so Greek was spoken by most people
2. Latin was the official language of the Roman empire and officials spoke and wrote in Latin but even they spoke in Greek
3. There are areas in the New testament where we find transliterated words from Aramaic to Greek (**John 5:2, 19:17, Mark 5:41, Matthew 27:46**)
 - a. Transliteration: is the practice of converting a text from one writing system into another in a systematic way.
 - i. Example of Greek to English transliteration: (Greek) *Ευαγγέλιο* - (English) Euangelio
 - ii. Example: Greek to English transliteration: (Greek) *Βαπτίζω* (English) Baptidzo – Baptize

i. **These writings were copied**

i. Jewish copyists

1. In the Jewish history of copying there were professional scribes and copyists
2. This was a closed system for the most part. Only the professional copyists were to copy the Old Testament
3. There were very strict rules for copying the text
 - a. They could only use clean animal skins, both to write on, and even to bind manuscripts.
 - b. Each column of writing could have no less than forty-eight, and no more than sixty lines.
 - c. The ink must be black, and of a special recipe.
 - d. They must verbalize each word aloud while they were writing.
 - e. They must wipe the pen and wash their entire bodies before writing the word "Jehovah" (YHWH), every time they wrote it.
 - f. There must be a review within thirty days, and if as many as three pages required corrections, the entire manuscript had to be redone.
 - g. The letters, words, and paragraphs had to be counted, and the document became invalid if two letters touched each other. The middle paragraph, word and letter must correspond to those of the original document.
 - h. The documents could be stored only in sacred places (synagogues, etc).
 - i. No document containing God's Word could be destroyed; they were to be stored, or buried.

- ii. In some cases when the originals were worn out they would be recopied
- iii. Some writings were copied and sent to others who copied and sent them on
- iv. Hebrew was written without any vowels only consonants
- v. Christian copyists
 - 1. The New Testament was an open system and was not as strict in its copying
 - a. A Christian travels to Rome from Jerusalem and finds that they have a letter from Paul and asks if he can make a copy and bring it to Jerusalem. The same thing happens in Ephesus and Corinth and we have multiple copies being copied and distributed.
 - b. These were not professionals so their copies were not as precise as the Old Testament copies.
 - c. Later in history scriptoriums came into existence. Here people were trained to be copyists
 - i. Often one person would read the text while a few scribes copied the text being read
- vi. Originally Greek was written in all capitals with no spaces or punctuation
- vii. Latter in history Greek was written in lower case letters and had spaces and punctuation

j. These writings were translated into other languages and recopied

- i. Throughout history the writings that were made by apostles and prophets were translated and passed on and recopied and passed on
- ii. The Old Testament was translated into Greek from Hebrew
 - 1. Translated in stages between the 3rd and 1st centuries BC in Alexandria
 - 2. Many Jews were unable to read or speak Hebrew in the first century AD. Aramaic had become the common language for the Jews as well as Greek. Greek was also the common language of the known world (Roman Empire) including Judea
 - a. In Acts 21:40-22:2 they were astonished that Paul spoke Hebrew. This may show that Paul spoke Hebrew which was very rare or it may just mean he spoke to them in Aramaic (*See the NIV for the translation "Aramaic" and see The Acts of the Apostles: A Study*

Guide by M.S. Mills – Mills thinks Paul spoke Hebrew and not Aramaic here)

- b. Though Jews had once spoken Hebrew as their primary language, this changed when Israel was overthrown, first by the Assyrians in the eighth-century B.C. and then by the Babylonians in the sixth-century B.C. By the time of Jesus Aramaic was so common among Jews that the reading of the Hebrew Scripture in the synagogue was accompanied by translation into Aramaic.
- iii. The New Testament was translated into Coptic, Aramaic, Latin and other languages very early on
- iv. The Bible as a whole (Old and New Testament) was translated into other languages in church history as well.

k. The Canon of Scripture

- i. The word Canon means “law, rule, or code of law”. When referring to the scriptures “Canon” refers to those books that are accepted as inspired by God.
 - 1. Josephus, writing in the first century A.D., in “Against Apion 1:18, says that the canon (the Old Testament) was marked off from Moses to the Persian king Artaxerxes which is the time of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Malachi (How we got the Bible by Neil R. Lightfoot Pg. 20)
- ii. Old Testament
 - 1. The Old Testament began to be written down with the first five books. The books of Moses. Then came the prophets and the writings. The Old Testament came into existence over a long period of time. These books were recognized and accepted by the people of God.
 - 2. Jesus and the Apostles recognized the canon of the Old Testament and quoted from much of the scriptures.
- iii. Following the Roman destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 A.D., the rabbinical school of the Pharisees in Jamnia became a center of religious thought. There was a Jewish council that affirmed the books traditional to Judaism.
 - 1. This council did not give us the Old Testament canon this council merely confirms what we already know from Jesus and the apostles and the faithful people of God prior to A.D. 90.

- iv. The council of Jamnia 90 A.D. used 4 criteria to determine which books should be retained for the canon of Hebrew Scripture:
 1. The book had to conform to the Pentateuch
 2. The book could not have been written after the time of Ezra (circa 400 BC)
 3. The book had to be written in Hebrew
 4. The book had to be written in Palestine
- v. It should be noted that they didn't have any more or any less books in the Old Testament than we do in the church.
 1. The books they confirmed were the very ones Jesus the apostles and the church used.
- vi. New Testament
 1. The people of God recognized and accepted the New Testament writings as inspired as they were being written (2 Peter 3:2)
 - a. Peter recognized Paul's writings as scripture (2 Peter 3:15-16)
 - b. Paul saw his writings as God's words (1 Thessalonians 2:13)
 2. Later in Church history councils gathered and following a set of rules tested and marked out what the New Testament canon was. They did not give us the scriptures only collected the already recognized writings and made sure non-inspired writings were not seen as inspired.
 3. The criteria the church used for recognizing and collecting the Word of God are as follows:
 - a. Was the book written by a prophet or apostle of God?
 - b. Was the writer authenticated by miracles to confirm his message?
 - c. Does the book tell the truth about God, with no falsehood or contradiction?
 - d. Does the book evince a divine capacity to transform lives?
 - e. Was the book accepted as God's Word by the people to whom it was first delivered?
 - f. Did the book have apostolic backing?

l. Printing press allowed exact copies to be made

- i. Once the printing press was invented there was an easier way to copy written works and they would all be exact copies
 1. The printing press was invented in 1440-1455 by Johannes Gutenberg
- ii. That is not to say there would be no errors. They might contain errors but every copy would be identical and contain the same errors

m. Textual Criticism

- i. We have more manuscripts for the New Testament than any other writing from antiquity
 1. Approximately 5,700 Greek manuscripts
 - a. Some are fragments and some are complete books, letters, or whole New Testaments
 2. Approximately 10,000 Latin manuscripts
 3. Approximately 9000 Ethiopian, Slavic, and Armenian manuscripts.
 4. In sum, the number of extant partial or complete manuscripts at our disposal total approximately 24,000
 5. No other ancient writing comes close to that of the New Testament in terms of its manuscript copies
- ii. Textual Criticism is the science of collecting and evaluating the different manuscripts and the technique of determining the original words
- iii. When anything is hand copied it will contain errors
 1. Some errors are spelling and some are a change in word order others remove words or insert words
 2. Some errors were unintentional and some were intentional
 - a. Unintentional:
 - i. Eye skips a line or a word
 - ii. Writing in the margin a note that a latter scribe thinks is part of the text and they copy it into their copy.
 - b. Intentional:
 - i. Harmonizing similar passages
 1. A scribe knows Matthews gospel very well and they are copying Luke's and they come to a part that is slightly different in Luke's they might try to harmonize it with what they know from Matthew's

- iv. Most errors are unimportant
 1. Most variants make no difference in the meaning of the text. Some are differences of spelling (John or Johnn)
 2. Some are word order. Greek word order is not as important as English. You could in many places write the same sentence in Greek in three different ways and it means the same thing. The meaning isn't changed due to word order but this would be a variant.
 3. Very few variants are meaningful and need to be studied in depth
 - a. The last 12 verses of Mark 16:9-20 are not original but were added by later scribes wanting to "finish the story". Mark's gospel ends abruptly and some scribes added bits of Matthew and Luke and Acts to the end to make it complete. Mark ended the way he did for a reason.
 - b. In John 7:53-8:11 we have the story of the woman caught in adultery. This story is one of the most well known stories but this story is not original to the text of John or the New Testament. This story was added by later scribes possibly intentionally or unintentionally.
 - i. This portion is not found in the oldest and best manuscripts and it is even found in different places in different books in different manuscripts.
 - c. Other than these two passages that are 12 verses each no other variant is more than a few words.
 - d. Example: 1 Timothy 3:16
 - i. There is a variant; does the text say "God" or "Who"?
 - ii. *Nomina Sacra* = Short hand for divine names and titles
 - iii. The difference is between 2 lines
 - iv. See Handout
- v. No variant affects any Christian doctrine
 1. If you pick up any Greek manuscript and read it you are going to have the same Christian beliefs and doctrines in every one. There are not different doctrines or different beliefs in the different manuscripts.

- vi. We have not lost any portion of God's word. The originals are still with us in the manuscript tradition
 - 1. We could illustrate this by making the analogy of a 1000 piece puzzle. We have not lost any pieces we have more. Instead of 1000 pieces we have 1010 pieces. The job the textual critic has is to determine which pieces were original.

n. Modern translations

- i. Modern translations are made from the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts or the modern printed critical texts (UBS4, NA27)
- ii. Modern translations also consult early copies of the LXX (Greek translation of the Old Testament Hebrew), Coptic, and Latin translations as well as Lectionaries and early Christian writings that quote the bible.
- iii. Modern Translations are accurate and reliable even though they use different words for the most part they will be saying the same thing
 - 1. There are cases when one translation will follow a different variant
 - a. μονογενής θεός (God) (Joh 1:18 BGT) ESV, NASB, NIV
 - b. μονογενής υιός (Son) (Joh 1:18 BYZ) KJV, HCSB
 - 2. There are also a few places in the bible that are hard to understand and different translations will have to use their judgment and interpret the text the best they can and so you will find some differences between translations
- iv. Translations are grouped along a sliding scale from "free" or "paraphrase" to "literal" or "word for word".
 - 1. There are basically three general groupings along the sliding scale.
 - a. Paraphrase (Free)
 - i. These are not recommended for study. They are more like a commentary than a bible translation
 - ii. They are useful as reading bibles or along with a more literal translation
 - iii. **Warning:** never base your understanding of a text or a doctrine off of a paraphrase
 - b. Dynamic equivalent
 - i. This is a kind of middle of the road translation type
 - ii. This is very useful as both a reading translation and a study translation

- c. Functional equivalent (Literal)
 - i. This translation type is often very wooden and hard to understand at points
 - ii. This translation type is very good for study but not as good for general reading due to the woodenness

Recommended books

- Elements of Biblical Exegesis** (A Basic Guide for Students and Ministers) by Michael J. Gorman
- History of the Bible in English** by F.F. Bruce
- How to Effectively Study the Bible** by J.J. Turner
- How to read the Bible for all its worth** by Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart
- How to Understand the Bible** by W. Robert Palmer
- How we got the Bible** by Neil R. Lightfoot
- New Testament Exegesis** (A Handbook for Students and Pastors) by Gordon D. Fee
- The Bible in Translation** by Bruce M. Metzger
- The Case for Historic Christianity** by Edward C. Wharton
- The New Testament Documents** (Are they Reliable?) By F.F. Bruce