

Getting To Know The Book of Books

by Daniel W. Bailey

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Getting To Know The Book of Books

– *Who Gave Us The Bible?* –

I. The Old Testament Canon

Many people believe that the Roman Catholic Church is responsible for compiling and approving of the Bible in the form that it exists today. In fact, the Catholic Encyclopedia states:

“From [the Church] alone we know what books belong to the Bible. At the Council of Trent she enumerated the books which must be considered "as sacred and canonical". They are the seventy-two books found in Catholic editions, forty-five in the Old Testament and twenty-seven in the New. Protestant copies usually lack the seven books (viz: Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Sirach, Baruch, and First and Second Maccabees) and parts of books (viz: Esther 10:4-16:24, and Daniel 3:24-90; 13:1-14:42) which are not found in the Jewish editions of the Old Testament.” (Catholic Encyclopedia, *Bible*)

However, when you sit down and actually read the Book that the Catholic Church claims to have compiled and authorized, it tells a much different story about itself. Notice the following facts recorded in Scripture:

- 1. Moses is the first person mentioned in the Bible as writing any of God’s revelations (c. 1500 BC).**
 - Ex 17:14, 24:4, 34:27f; Num 33:2; Deut 31:9,24, 31:22 with 32:1-4 – In each of these passages, some work of writing is attributed to Moses, including the book containing the Law of God which was kept in the ark of the covenant.
 - Josh 8;31; Judg 3:4; Mal 4:4; Luke 24:44 and John 7:19 – Other writers of the Bible also acknowledge Moses as the author of the “book of the law of Moses.”
- 2. From Moses’ time forward, many other revelations of God began to be recorded by His people:**
 - Josh 24:26 – Joshua, the successor of Moses in leading the people of Israel, added to the book of the law of Moses.
 - I Sam 10:25; Jer 36:2 – Other men of God recorded both history and prophecy, as commanded by God.
 - Neh 8:1; Dan 9:2 – The people of Israel knew well the writings which were truly inspired by God, and they referenced these works to learn God’s will and consulted them to recognize the fulfillment of God’s prophecies (cf. I Pet 1:10-11).
 - In this way, book by book, the canon referred to as the Old Testament came into being: recorded by God’s prophets and recognized by His people as authentic and inspired.
- 3. Jesus endorsed the books of the Hebrew Bible in their extant form in His day:**

The Hebrew Bible was fully compiled about the time of Ezra (c. 400 BC), and history attests that no book was added to the Hebrew Bible after the time of Malachi:

“From the death of Moses until Artaxerxes...the prophets who followed after Moses recorded their deeds in thirteen books. The remaining four comprise hymns to God and rules of ethical conduct for men...the Holy Spirit departed after the death of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. Thus Judaism defined the

limits of the canon that was and still is accepted within the Jewish community.” (Josephus, *Contra Apion*, c. 95 AD)

- The time of Artaxerxes marks the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Zechariah and Malachi, thus all literature written after Malachi (approximately 400 AD) never appeared as part of the Jewish Scripture.
- Note that Josephus refers to 22 books because the Hebrew Bible is in a different order (Law, Prophets, and Writings, cf. Luke 24:44) than the English Bibles of today, and some books were combined, namely Judges-Ruth, Samuel, Kings, Jeremiah-Lamentations, the Book of the Twelve (i.e. the Minor Prophets), Ezra-Nehemiah, and Chronicles.
- Jesus endorsed and approved of the Hebrew Scriptures *in their extant form in His day*, even alluding to those books included, “*from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah*” (Luke 11:51) – these martyrs of the Old Testament stretch from the book of Genesis to the book of Chronicles (II Chron 24:20-21), the last book of the Hebrew Bible (cf. Luke 16:29,31, 24:27,44).

Note: In modern Catholic Bibles, several books known as the Apocrypha are interspersed throughout the Old Testament. More time will be devoted to these and other so-called “Lost Books,” however it is important to here point out that these Old Testament apocryphal books, written after the time of Malachi, were never considered part of the Hebrew Bible by the Jewish community, and consequently not endorsed by Christ in the passages mentioned above!

There is another important fact revealed in all the above passages and reiterated in the quote from Josephus, and this may be the **key fact for this lesson**: the Old Testament books were included in the canon of Scripture by the Jewish community, not because they had the authority to sort through and include or discard religious books, but because these books were written by inspired men who spoke from God. The Jews knew well the definition of a prophet (cf. Ex 4:10-17 with 7:1), and furthermore they knew the test of a true prophet along with the consequences of following a false one (cf. Deut 18:18-22). The people of God never enjoyed a position of authority equivalent to the Scriptures to ratify whichever writings they approved or disapproved of: they simply gathered together the writings of the prophets of God.

What Part Did God Play In All Of This?

First and foremost, every one of the Old Testament books was written by God. “*All Scripture is God-breathed...*” (II Tim 4:14-17) – when Paul spoke of the Scriptures which young Timothy had known since childhood, he spoke of the Old Testament! (Of course, the inspired books of the New Testament are Scripture, too, as we will see in a later study.) God told the prophets what to write, and when to write it (cf. Ex 17:14; etc.) as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (II Pet 1:20-21). Beyond the actual inspiration of these books, it is impossible to exactly define God’s providential role in the transmission and preservation of the Scriptures. However, we can say without a doubt that God has paramount interest in the preservation of His word. Note how many times the gospels refer to the Scriptures as inevitably being fulfilled, and then the books of Acts and the New Testament epistles refer to the fulfillment of the Scriptures as evidence of the truth of the Gospel: God must be interested in the preservation of these inspired books that prove the deity of Christ! Furthermore, note passages like Matt 24:35 and I Pet 1:24-25 – God has the power to ensure that His word never passes away, but is always available for the obtainment and consideration of mankind!

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II. The New Testament Canon

In the last study, we observed that the Old Testament canon was in its completed form long before Jesus came to the earth (probably since about the time of Ezra, c. 400 BC), and that Jesus Himself approved of the Old Testament in its extant form during His earthly ministry. These writings were reverently gathered together by the people of God of old, not because they had the authority to grant any book the status of Scripture, but because these writings were the inspired word of God and thus Scripture since their very inception. Now we turn our attention to the 27 books of the New Testament.

A. The Influence Of The Apostles

The piecing together of the New Testament canon was evidently a somewhat more complicated process than the gathering of the Old Testament writings. Jesus Christ is the most stunningly influential character of all human history, thus it is only natural that even from the very beginning there was an enormous amount of literature written about Him or referring to Him. Of all the books and letters which speak of the gospel of Christ, the task that early Christians faced was to gather together only those writings that were in fact inspired and authoritative to all Christians, separating the chaff from the wheat. It is not surprising then that this process took many years to be finalized, especially since in the early years of the church a written record of all things pertaining to the gospel was not crucially needed: the inspired apostles of Jesus Christ still walked the earth, traveling extensively from church to church, and sending out their immediate followers to speak exactly their words (e.g. Phil 2:19-23; Tit 3:12-13; etc.). And rightly so, for this is exactly the work the Lord Himself had given these men to do (cf. John 16:12ff; Matt 28:18-20; etc.). However, as the apostles died (or more accurately, as they were killed off by the Roman government), a collection of their writings became more and more important (cf. II Pet 1:13-15). And so the New Testament canon began to be assembled, piece by piece.

B. The Four-fold Gospel

By the time that Paul wrote I Timothy, shortly after his first Roman imprisonment (c. 63 AD), at least the gospel of Luke was available to the church and recognized as Scripture. *‘For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,” and, “The laborer is worthy of his wages”* (I Tim 5:18). The second quotation in this passage concerning the financial support of the eldership is from Jesus Himself, recorded only in Luke 10:7, and plainly referenced by Paul as Scripture. Other passages also imply that the Christians of the 1st Century had the gospels available to study and read (e.g. I Cor 11:23-25 w. Luke 22:19-20; I Cor 15:3-4; Jam 1:25; I John 1:1-4; etc.). In fact, history records that all four gospels were the first New Testament books to be preserved and distributed, accepted as a whole and not one by one. The gospels were a standard of truth, along with the epistles of Paul (discussed next), by which were judged all other books claiming canonical worthiness. F.F. Bruce speaks of the writings of the second century Christian, Irenaeus, and states “it is evident that by AD 180 the idea of the fourfold Gospel had become so axiomatic throughout Christendom that it could be referred to as an established fact as obvious and inevitable and natural as the four cardinal points of the compass (as we call them) or the four winds” (Bruce, *The Books And The Parchments: How We Got Our English Bible*). (The famous “Four Winds” passage by Irenaeus comes from *Adversus Haereses*, c. 180 AD). See also the *Diatessaron* by Tatian which harmonized all four gospels (c. 160 AD).

C. The Epistles Of Paul

After the establishment of the four gospels, it is apparent from II Peter that by the time of its composition Paul's letters were collectively regarded as Scripture, as well. *"...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"* (II Pet 3:15-16). There is no small amount of contention concerning the authorship and date of this letter, scholars offering dates from 60-130 AD. Even granting the latest date for the composition of II Peter, it is evident that by the early 2nd century Paul's writings were both readily available to Christians throughout the world and regarded by the early church as Scripture. In fact, Paul gave explicit commands to the churches who received his letters to share them with other churches, such that his words might become known everywhere and in every church (cf. Col 4:16; I Cor 4:17). This is not surprising because Paul and all the other apostles were inspired by God, eyewitnesses of Christ, and able to perform miracles proving the authority and truth of their message (cf. Acts 5:12, 14:3, 19:11; II Cor 2:12; etc.). There was no other choice for faithful Christians but to accept their writings as Scripture because they were spoken from God Himself through His chosen prophets. *"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, which also effectively works in you who believe"* (I Thess 2:13). It is natural then that the writings of the other apostles would also be gathered into the canon, and eventually this indeed came to completion, but only after the death of John who lived until nearly 100 AD. Peter obviously intended his writings to be permanently available to the church following his martyrdom, for he writes in II Peter, *"Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by reminding you, knowing that shortly I must put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me. Moreover I will be careful to ensure that you always have a reminder of these things after my decease"* (II Pet 1:14-16).

References to certain books as Scripture, such as I Tim 5:18 to the gospel of Luke and II Pet 3:16 to the epistles of Paul, give an important insight into how exactly the early church gathered the canon of the New Testament. These texts were referred to as Scripture, not because some group of people or churches approved of them above all other works of religious literature, but because these writings were inspired by God (II Tim 3:16). *"...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 Peter 1:20-21). At least by 65 AD, the New Testament Scriptures were being gathered together to form the New Testament canon. These selections were made because of the authorship of these books and their content, not because of whatever the church of any particular day liked or disliked. The books of the New Testament were collected and preserved because they were inspired truth; they were Scripture from the moment of their composition.

God has never given any man the authority to accept or reject His word, as if the inspiration of Scripture depends on the acceptance of mankind. Some religious groups proclaim boldly that the New Testament books are Scripture because they were accepted by the church, but in truth they were accepted by early Christians because they were inspired Scripture! Much later in time, certain councils and synods gathered together to ratify the 27 books of the New Testament – but these people did not sort through manuscripts and accept only the books that they judged the most palatable and agreeable: they simply approved of the canon which had already been long established by Christians the world over.

More details on the canonical and non-canonical works of the 1st and 2nd centuries will be discussed in the next lesson.

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III. The Old Testament Apocrypha

In the first lesson of this series, we observed both from the Scriptures and from historical accounts that the books of the Old Testament were gathered together and preserved because they were inspired by God and therefore authoritative for His covenant people of old, the Israelites. Even though the overwhelming evidence from history indicates that this Old Testament canon was closed and complete by about 400 AD, in the course of time other books written much later came to be included in some versions of the Old Testament canon. These extra books of doubtful origin and authenticity, and of inferior quality compared to the canonical Old and New Testament books, came to be known as the *Old Testament Apocrypha*. In this lesson, we will investigate the history of these books and the differences between them and the 39 books of the Old Testament.

A. The Cessation of Prophecy and the Close of the Old Testament Canon

When speaking of the Old Testament writings, the New Testament speaks of a defined body of literature (i.e. the Scriptures) which contains three categories of works, “*the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms*” (Luke 24:44). Jesus Christ Himself gives an indication of the limits of this canon in Matt 23:34-35 (cf. Luke 11:49-51), when He speaks of the martyrs from Abel to Zechariah, spanning the books of Genesis to Chronicles, the first and last books of the Hebrew Bible that had been compiled for centuries before His coming to earth. Historical accounts from Philo of Alexandria (c. 20-50 AD), the apocryphal 2 Esdras (i.e. 2 Ezra, c. 1st Century AD), Josephus (c. 37-100 AD), Melito of Sardis (c. 170 AD), Origen (c. 185-253 AD), etc. corroborate that the Hebrew Bible in existence at the time of Christ was comprised of 22 books which correspond exactly to the 39 books of today’s Old Testament (with minor disagreement between some writers concerning Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon and Esther). These books conclude at the time of Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi for good reason: Jewish history records that prophecy from God ceased around 400 BC. “Since the death of the last prophets, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi, the Holy Spirit [of prophetic inspiration] departed from Israel” (the Talmudic *Tosfeta Sota* 13:2, Wegner 106). A similar statement is made by Josephus, the Jewish historian, in his *Contra Apion*. Without inspiration, no writing could be considered Scripture, and thus all works penned after the time of Malachi are by definition not worthy of the canon.

B. Tests of Old Testament Canonicity

Paul Wegner (author of *The Journey From Text To Translation*) records a statement of Josephus found in his *Contra Apion* which provides much insight into the standards used by the Jewish community in judging whether or not a book deserved preservation in their Bible: “It therefore naturally, or rather necessarily follows (seeing that with us it is not open to everybody to write the records, and that there is no discrepancy in what is written; seeing that, on the contrary, the prophets alone had this privilege, obtaining their knowledge of the most remote and ancient history through the inspiration which they owed to God, and committing to writing clear account of the events of their own time just as they occurred) – it follows, I say, that we do not possess myriads of inconsistent books, conflicting with each other. Our books, those which are justly accredited, are but two and twenty, and contain the record of all time.” Clearly, for a book to be considered worthy of the authoritative canon of Scripture (a concept thoroughly rooted in the Scriptures themselves, cf. Ex 24:7; Deut 4:2; ; Josh 8:35; II Kings 23:3 w. II Chron 34:32; Neh 8:9; Jer 26:2; etc.):

1. *The book must have been inspired by God* – “Inspired” meaning given word-for-word by God, i.e. “God-breathed” (II Tim 3:16). The Jewish community had no authority over whether or not a book was Scripture: the Scriptures were inspired and thus authoritative as soon as they were recorded (see the references above, as well as references in the prophets, such as Is 1:24; Jer 1:2; Ezek 1:3, 6:1, 7:1; Hos 1:1; etc.).
2. *The book must have been written by a prophet* – By inspiration alone did a book carry any authority (Deut 18:18-22; cf. I Cor 14:36), and thus only the writings of the prophets, (lit. the “mouth-pieces”) of God could be considered Scripture. The Jewish Talmud refers to the writings of wise though uninspired men as *bath kol* (lit. “daughter of a voice”), meaning something not as reliable as the words of the prophets themselves.
3. *The book does not contain contradictions* – Inconsistencies either internally or which contradict the established Scriptures (e.g. the Law of Moses) automatically disqualify a book from the canon of God’s word, for God is the God of truth (e.g. Deut 32:4).
4. *The book was accepted by the Jews as inspired and authoritative* – It is difficult to fully describe the reverence with which the Jews held and protected their Scriptures. The history of their nation, the very covenant that defined their identity, was built upon the word. Of all people of all time, the Jews were the best qualified to know whether or not a book was truly inspired and authoritative. The Jews record that prophecy ceased after Malachi, and thus all works written later could not be considered authoritative.

C. The Old Testament Apocrypha

There are several books (the exact number differing upon organization) that are combined to form the Old Testament Apocryphal Books: Tobit (or Tobias), Judith, Wisdom (of Solomon), Ecclesiasticus (Sirach), 1 and 2 Maccabees (or Machabees), Baruch (chapter 6 in the Catholic Bible being the Letter of Jeremiah), Additions to Esther (Catholic Bible, Esther 10:4-16:24), Additions to Daniel (Catholic Bible: 3:24-90, Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men; 13, Susanna; 14, Bel and the Dragon), 1 and 2 Esdras (or 3 and 4 if Ezra and Nehemiah are counted as 1 and 2 Esdras), and the Prayer of Manasseh. Though some of these books were mentioned at the Councils of Hippo (393 AD) and Carthage (397 AD), these books were not officially canonized by the Catholic Church until the 16th Century Council of Trent (1546 AD). At this time, the Roman Catholic Church accepted the Apocrypha as authoritative Scripture, even though religious leaders in its own history spoke out against these books as uninspired and not possessing the intrinsic qualities of Scripture. Summaries of these books can easily be found online or in Bible reference books/encyclopedias.

1. Arguments For Canonization of the Apocrypha

- *The Council of Trent proclaimed the Apocrypha canonical* – A group of professed Christians hundreds of years removed from the writing of these books could not possibly judge their inspiration and authority better than the Jewish communities of 400 BC – 200 AD. The Catholic Council of Trent accepted the Apocrypha mainly due to the influence of Augustine (c. 354-430, who accepted these books as canonical) and for theological reasons (e.g. 2 Maccabees 12:44-46 provides a basis for prayers/indulgences for the dead and the doctrine of purgatory, both concepts completely foreign to the Scriptures).
- *Some of the New Testament books are assumed to allude to the Apocrypha* – (cf. Heb 11:35 with 2 Maccabees 7,12; Jude 9 and II Tim 3:8 with the Testament of Moses; and Jude 14,15 with I Enoch 1:9 – These allusions are merely possible, not definitive. But even if they are quoted or alluded to, none of these apocryphal documents are referred to by the New Testament authors as authoritative Scripture, but only cited as illustrations of Scriptural truths (cf. Acts 17:28; Tit 1:12).

- *New Testament authors often quote from the Septuagint which includes the Apocrypha* – Three copies of the Septuagint dating back to the 4th and 5th Centuries AD (i.e. Codex Sinaiticus, Codex Alexandrinus, Codex Vaticanus) include portions of the Apocrypha. However, without earlier extant copies, there is no way to discern which books were included in the original LXX (c. 250-100 BC). The overwhelming historical evidence from the first three centuries AD indicates that the Jews considered only the existing 39 Old Testament books to be inspired and authoritative. Thus, these late copies of the LXX, probably influenced by Augustine and others who accepted the Apocryphal Books, cannot be more accurate than the testimony of religious historians from centuries before.
- *Miscellaneous* – e.g. Some apocryphal books were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. Some art from the first centuries AD reflects knowledge of the Apocrypha. Some early Christians accepted parts of the Apocrypha as authoritative (e.g. Clement of Alexandria, Origen and Irenaeus). To all of these arguments it must be noted that knowledge of, use of, and/or confusion about the Apocrypha does not prove their authority nor necessitates their canonicity.

2. Arguments Against Canonization of the Apocrypha

- Jesus approved of the Hebrew Bible (Luke 24:44, Matt 5:18), which did not include the Apocrypha. He indicated which books this canon included (Matt 23:34-35), and quoted from 24 of the 39 Old Testament books but none of the Apocrypha.
- The New Testament never alludes to or quotes from any apocryphal book as inspired Scripture. In all their preaching, the apostles are never recorded as ever referring to characters or events from the Apocrypha. The New Testament writers quote extensively from nearly every book of the Old Testament but never quote from the Apocrypha as Scripture.
- None of the apocryphal books claim to be the word of God, vastly differing from the prophetic books of the Old Testament which claim to be the very word of God (as discussed above).
- A large body of evidence from historical writings of the first centuries AD indicates that the Old Testament canon consisted of the same 39 books (though organized in various ways) as today, and none of the Apocrypha, long before Christ was born.
- At least 10 of the 15 Apocrypha contain historical/geographical inaccuracies, internal contradictions, and/or contradictions of Scripture (see Wegner 125). For example:
 - Tobit 1:1-4, Tobit is said to have lived through both the division of Israel and Judah (c. 930 AD) and the Assyrian captivity (c. 722 BC).
 - Judith 1:6, the Hydaspes river of India is erroneously referred to as a river of Mesopotamia.
 - Judith 2:1, Nebuchadnezzar is referred to as the king of Assyria rather than Babylon.
 - 2 Esdras 6:55 states that the world was created specifically for Israel.
 - Sirach 3:3,14-15,30 state that kindness to parents and almsgiving atone for sins.
- Many of the early Christians spoke against the Apocrypha while none of the so-called church fathers accepted all of them until Augustine, c. 400 AD). Jerome, the great Hebrew scholar who produced the Latin Vulgate, argued against the canonicity of the Apocrypha.
- The Apocrypha all date to the 1st and 2nd Centuries BC during the 400 years of silence between the Testaments in which there were no prophets (cf. the Talmud, Josephus, etc.).

The Apocrypha are of some value in learning about Jewish history and culture during the time between the Testaments. However, the abundance of evidence points to the fact that these books were never part of the Hebrew Scriptures, they were not approved as Scripture by Christ or any of the inspired writers of the New Testament, and were not listed as canonical by the vast majority of writers from the 1st and 2nd Centuries. The Apocrypha are not rejected because any group of people had or has the authority to grant or revoke their status as Scripture: they are rejected because they are not and never were inspired truth.

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– *Who Gave Us The Bible?* –

IV. What About The New Testament Apocrypha?

It seems that every few years, pop culture takes a renewed interest in the apocryphal literature surrounding the Bible, and especially certain books written from the 2nd and 3rd centuries not included in the New Testament canon. The word *apocryphal* is from a Greek word meaning hidden, unknown or spurious, and when used to refer to religious literature outside the Old and New Testament canons, this adjective means “*of doubtful authorship or authenticity*” (Random House Dictionary). Since the New Testament was composed within literate cultures (e.g. Hebrew, Greek and Roman), it should not come as a surprise that a great number of literary works were written alongside the books of the New Testament. The Scriptures themselves attest to this fact in passages like Luke 1:1 (cf. John 21:24-25), and even illuminate that the apostles wrote letters which no longer survive (e.g. I Cor 5:9; Col 4:16). These books and letters were not hidden or suppressed: they were read, circulated, considered, and even accepted by some people as worthy of canonicity, but in the course of time did not gain universal acceptance as authoritative. In this lesson, we will explore the main differences between the New Testament canon and the apocryphal literature of the following generations.

A. New Testament Compilation: A Lengthy Process

In the previous lesson, we established that the building of the New Testament canon was not a responsibility left in the hands of any person or group of persons in the 4th Century or beyond, but rather began very early, first with the gathering of the four gospels, then with the compiling of Paul’s letters, and so on. The 27 books of the New Testament eventually gained universal acceptance because they were inspired by God, not because some select group of persons placed their stamp of approval upon them. Still, the compilation of the New Testament took many years, probably beginning around 50 AD and finally coming to completeness in the mid-300s AD. Now, that statement should bear significance to the alert reader: none of the books of the New Testament were *composed* anywhere near 300 AD, in fact the oldest letters (those of John) were penned just at the close of the 1st Century. After all, when the apostles and prophets of the New Testament died, no one was left to write inspired literature or record eyewitness accounts of Christ and the apostles! However, from 100 AD even until nearly 400 AD, there exist lists of accepted New Testament literature composed by early Christians (and by early heretics, valuable for comparison), and these lists illuminate that all of the “Christian” literature of this time basically falls into three categories:

- *The Core Canon*: those books and letters universally accepted as inspired and authoritative, forming the core of the New Testament canon.
- *The Fringe Canon*: those books and letters that were widely accepted in the church, but held in skepticism by at least a few, causing delayed acceptance into the canon.
- *The Apocryphal Literature*: those books and letters which may have enjoyed moments of isolated popularity, but that never gained widespread acceptance as inspired or worthy of the canon.

As seen in the last lesson, the four gospels and the Pauline epistles fall into the first category: these books were accepted virtually immediately as inspired and definitive, forming a mini-canon by the late 1st Century. History attests that Acts (sometimes called *The Acts of All The Apostles*) and Revelation (sometimes called *The Apocalypse of John*) followed closely thereafter. However, the other letters (namely, Hebrews, I and II Peter, I, II and III John, James, and Jude) faced more controversy and challenges before eventually being accepted

everywhere as canonical, and so these general epistles formed a fringe of inspired literature. Meanwhile, other works, such as the *Shepherd of Hermas*, *The Apocalypse of Peter*, I and II Clement, etc., were accepted by some individuals and groups as authentic and inspired, but were never accepted universally. Furthermore, other works, mostly composed long after the deaths of the apostles and eyewitnesses of Christ (such as the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Truth, etc.) are mentioned by a rare few as canonical, but condemned by as many as heretical, and never enjoyed even popular acceptance on the same order as the *Shepherd of Hermas*, etc.

For example:

- Clement of Rome (c. 60-100 AD), Ignatius of Antioch (c. 60-117 AD), and Polycarp of Smyrna (c. 60-155 AD) allude to Matthew, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, I and II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, II Thessalonians, I and II Timothy, Titus, Hebrews and I Peter. *No non-canonical books are quoted during this time period!*
- Justin Martyr (c. 100-165 AD) mentions 13 of the New Testament books, and no non-canonical books. All of the above early Christians may have been aware of other canonical books that they simply did not specifically quote from or allude to in their writings.
Note: It is important to distinguish between the writings of these early Christians and the New Testament apocrypha: these writers recognized the superior authority of the apostolic writings, and their letters and treatises were never meant to be considered as canonical.
- Irenaeus of Lyon, Gaul (c. 130-202 AD) quotes from all the New Testament books except Philemon, Jude and III John (notably short letters with specific content), while also approving of the Shepherd of Hermas and I Clement as authoritative, and specifically condemning the Gospel of Truth as heretical.
- The Muratorian Canon (c. 190 AD) lists all of the New Testament books except Matthew and Mark (which must have been discussed in the missing beginning portion of the fragment) and the letters of Hebrews, James, I and II Peter and 3 John (which might have been discussed at the end of the fragment which is probably missing as well). This canon also lists the Wisdom of Solomon and the Apocalypse of Peter as canonical, while mentioning that the latter was controversial. Furthermore, the canon cites the Shepherd of Hermas as useful but strictly non-canonical *because it was not written by a prophet or apostle*: “therefore it ought indeed to be read, but it cannot be read publicly, in the Church or to the other people either, among the prophets, whose number is settled, or among the apostles to the end of time” (Muratorian Canon, vs. 77-80).
- This process can be continued on through Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Origen, Eusebius, and others, until finally Athanasius of Alexandria (c. 296-373) expounds on the 27 books of the New Testament just as they exist today in a sermon preached in 367 AD:
“Since, however, we have spoken of the heretics as dead but of ourselves as possessors of the divine writings unto salvation, and since I am afraid that - as Paul has written to the Corinthians [2 Cor. 11:3] - some guileless persons may be led astray from their purity and holiness by the craftiness of certain men and begin thereafter to pay attention to other books, the so-called apocryphal writings, being deceived by their possession of the same names as the genuine books, I therefore exhort you to patience when, out of regard to the Church's need and benefit, I mention in my letter matters with which you are acquainted. It being my intention to mention these matters, I shall, for the commendation of my venture, follow the example of the evangelist Luke and say [cf. Luke 1:1-4]: Since some have taken in hand to set in order for themselves the so-called apocrypha and to mingle them with the God-inspired scripture, concerning which we have attained to a sure persuasion, according to what the original eye-witness and

ministers of the word have delivered unto our fathers, I also, having been urged by true brethren and having investigated the matter from the beginning, have decided to set forth in order the writings that have been put in the canon, that have been handed down and confirmed as divine, in order that everyone who has been led astray may condemn his seducers, and that everyone who has remained stainless may rejoice, being again reminded of that.

*** (*Athanasius now enumerates the 22 Old Testament Books, see Lesson 1*)

Continuing, I must without hesitation mention the scriptures of the New Testament; they are the following: the four Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, after them the Acts of the Apostles and the seven so-called catholic epistles of the apostles -- namely, one of James, two of Peter, then three of John and after these one of Jude. In addition there are fourteen epistles of the apostle Paul written in the following order: the first to the Romans, then two to the Corinthians and then after these the one to the Galatians, following it the one to the Ephesians, thereafter the one to the Philippians and the one to the Colossians and two to the Thessalonians and the epistle to the Hebrews and then immediately two to Timothy, one to Titus and lastly the one to Philemon. Yet further the Revelation of John

These are the springs of salvation, in order that he who is thirsty may fully refresh himself with the words contained in them. In them alone is the doctrine of piety proclaimed. Let no one add anything to them or take anything away from them...

But for the sake of greater accuracy I add, being constrained to write, that there are also other books besides these, which have not indeed been put in the canon, but have been appointed by the Fathers as reading-matter for those who have just come forward and which to be instructed in the doctrine of piety: the Wisdom of Solomon, the Wisdom of Sirach, Esther, Judith, Tobias, the so-called Teaching [Didache] of the Apostles, and the Shepherd. And although, beloved, the former are in the canon and the latter serve as reading matter, yet mention is nowhere made of the apocrypha; rather they are a fabrication of the heretics, who write them down when it pleases them and generously assign to them an early date of composition in order that they may be able to draw upon them as supposedly ancient writings and have in them occasion to deceive the guileless."

– 39th Festal Letter, Athanasius of Alexandria, 367 AD

Translation from <http://www.ntcanon.org/Athanasius.shtml>, May 16, 2009.

Notice several aspects of this letter:

- *“matters with which you are acquainted”* – By this time, controversy over the fringe books had been settled and the New Testament canon had evidently been long established such that Athanasius could expound upon the canon as axiomatic (this homily is not, after all, a defense).
- *“according to what the original eye-witness and ministers of the word have delivered unto our fathers”* – The construction of this canon relied heavily upon the word of the early Christians who were eye-witnesses to the apostles and/or their immediate followers, i.e. those who best knew the authorship and confirmed authority of these books.
- *“have been handed down and confirmed as divine”* – These books were selected above all others not because some person or persons gave them authority but because they are the confirmed word of God (cf. Mark 16:20; Acts 14:3).

- “*there are also other books besides these*” – There were other books which the churches viewed as “reading-matter” but that clearly did not meet the test of being confirmed, God-inspired Scripture. Far from indicating some widespread conspiracy to destroy the apocrypha, Athanasius talks about them plainly: they were available, they were read and considered by Christians, and they did not meet the standard of inspired Scripture.

Thus, by sometime in the early or middle 4th century, unwarranted hype over the obviously non-canonical books had been thwarted, and the churches in every place had universally accepted the current books of the New Testament for preservation and transmission. It is important to point out that the apocryphal books and letters written concerning Jesus and the apostles during the 2nd and 3rd centuries were not hidden or suppressed in any great conspiracy to keep them from public consideration. These works were read, considered, and rejected from the canon because they did not meet the requirements of authorship, authenticity and authority shared by the books that form the New Testament canon. Origen (185-250 AD) notes in his *Homily on Luke* that, “The church receives only four gospels; heretics have many, such as the gospel of the Egyptians, the gospel of Thomas, etc. These we read, that we may not seem to be ignorant to those who think they know something extraordinary, if they are acquainted with those things which are recorded in these books.” Note that even while condemning certain books as heretical, Origen expresses great tolerance for false gospels, the presence of which was clearly an established fact. This is a far cry from what some claim to be a great conspiracy to cover up and suppress “secret gospels”!

B. Tests Of Authority Used In Compiling The New Testament Canon

So far, we have seen that the 27 books of the New Testament, though all written within the last 60 years of the 1st Century, were compiled into a complete anthology over time: first the gospels, then Paul’s letters, and the rest followed. Some books were received at first with hesitation, for example *Hebrews* whose author is unknown – these books are the exception, not the rule. However, note that these exceptions should inspire great confidence in the existing body of New Testament Scripture: the early Christians were unwilling to exalt any work of literature to the level of universally accepted Scripture if even a shadow of a doubt existed as to its authorship and inspiration! What were the tests used by the early Christians (as evidenced in their writings) in judging whether or not a book was truly part of God’s canon of the New Testament?

1. **Did an apostle or the immediate follower of an apostle pen the book?** This is the first criteria for authoritative authorship about any person or event: was the writer there, or the immediate follower of someone who was there. In the case of the New Testament, the gospel of Jesus Christ, the authors were Christ’s followers (i.e. the apostles), the immediate followers of the apostles (e.g. Mark and Luke), and Christ’s own family (i.e. James and Jude). The church was built upon the foundation of the gospel, laid down by the apostles and prophets of Christ as they were guided by the Holy Spirit (cf. Eph 2:20, John 16:13) – the first Christians continued in their teaching and naturally accepted their writings as Scripture (see Lesson 2). The immediate followers of the apostles are commanded by the apostles to be our example/pattern (cf. Phil 3:17), so clearly their works of literature are weighty as well. But here is the point: if the author of a book was unknown or questionable, that literary work had a very difficult time finding acceptance in the early church:
 - *Hebrews* was held in question by the church in Rome because they were not certain Paul wrote it, since Tertullian ascribed it to Barnabas (cf. Eusebius of Caesarea, 260-340 AD, *Historia Ecclesiastica*).
 - The Eastern churches largely accepted *Hebrews*, but questioned the Revelation of John.

- Eventually, through the correspondence of these churches concerning the authorship and authority of these books, both were accepted – but the question of authorship was so vitally important!
2. **Was the author inspired?** No one could judge the answer to this question better than those who knew the author! “For whatever subsequent debate there may have been about a book’s place in the canon, the people in the best position to know its prophetic credentials were those who knew the prophet who wrote it. Hence, despite all later debate about the canonicity of some books, the definitive evidence is that which attests to its original acceptance by the contemporary believers” (Geisler, *A General Introduction To The Bible*, 229). The early Christians knew very well the definition of Scripture (cf. II Tim 3:16, etc.), the first disciples having been Jews with their own writings from God (i.e. the Old Testament). Whether or not a book was inspired depended upon whether or not the author was indeed a prophet of God, and not simply giving his/her own philosophy and interpretations (cf. II Pet 1:20-21). If a book was written by an author whose word was not confirmed among the first Christians, it could not and did not find a place among the inspired writings of the New Testament, even if the book had some merit or good qualities (e.g. see the reference to the Shepherd of Hermas in the Muratorian Canon, cf. I John 4:1-3).
 3. **Does the book contradict established Scripture?** This argument at first seems circular – *a book is not Scripture if it contradicts Scripture?* – but with some rational thought you will see that it is not. Remember that the first Christians and their immediate followers (i.e. those responsible for beginning the assembly of the New Testament canon, and whose writings were so vitally crucial throughout the completion of its construction) did not rely on the written word alone for their doctrine and faith. The gospel was spoken in its completeness by the apostles and prophets of the New Testament, and these inspired traditions were established everywhere and in every church – the “pillar and ground of the truth” (I Tim 3:15; cf. Acts 2:42, 20:27; I Cor 4:17, 11:2, 16; II Thes 2:14-15, 3:6; II Pet 1:2-3). Thus, if a book or letter came along that contradicted these long-established and miraculously-confirmed truths, that composition would absolutely be rejected (cf. Gal 1:6-9, etc.). Furthermore, even after the apostles died and the written canon became more and more important, there was a core of writings (namely the gospels and the letters of Paul) that was never seriously disputed except by people whose intentions and motivations were clearly corrupt (e.g. Marcion, c. 140 AD). Thus, even in the 2nd and 3rd centuries, the early Christians could judge a writing by both the traditions handed down by the churches since the apostles and the core of the canon that was already established everywhere. Any book inspired by God would surely agree in every aspect with the prophecies and theology of the Old Testament, as well as the teachings of the core canon, universally accepted as inspired New Testament Scripture. After all, the authorship of some New Testament books was disputed even in the 1st Century (e.g. Hebrews), and thus these books were accepted not just by reputation but because their teaching agreed in every way with the apostles’ doctrine that was well-established among the churches. Thus, the gospels and Paul’s letters, universally accepted as Scripture, were used to aid in evaluating other books. It is by this standard (among others) that the Gnostic gospel of Thomas and the Docetic gospel of Peter, both of which contradict the known inspired gospels, were rejected by all but a few individuals as heretical.
 4. **Was the book universally used by the early church for reading and doctrine?** When we consider this question, we must remember not to put the chicken before the egg: the use of a book by the church did not make it Scripture; the church used a book for doctrine because it was recognized as Scripture.

For example, the reading of Paul's letters was evidentially universal in the church because he was known by the entire church to be inspired by God (cf. II Pet 3:15-16). However, if a book or a letter comes into consideration for the canon which was never mentioned or quoted by any of the earliest Christians, this could be an indication that the book was not inspired and never considered to be canonical. Furthermore, if the early Christians spoke against such a book, that is a tremendous indication that the book was a falsehood from the beginning. This standard obviously cannot and does not rank as high as the first three tests: many canonical books, such as Philemon and III John, are hardly quoted (if at all) by early Christians in at least their extant writings. Also, just because a book was quoted by a Christian or even read in the congregations of early churches does not automatically demand inclusion of that book in the New Testament canon: non-canonical books were and are often quoted simply as illustrations of Scriptural truths (cf. Muratorian fragment concerning the *Shepherd of Hermas*, as well as Paul's use of secular writings, Acts 17:28; Tit 1:12; etc.).

Conclusions: In summary, we have seen that the books of the New Testament were compiled over time and gained universal distinction from the non-canonical books because they were inspired and confirmed by God. There was no great conspiracy during the compilation of the New Testament to suppress or destroy the non-canonical books: they simply could not measure up to the standard of Scripture and so faded into the past. The synods and councils that convened later in history and listed the books of the canon did not originate new information and impose their canons on the churches of the world: they simply codified those books that were already well-established in every faithful church as inspired and authoritative. These books were Scripture from the very moment they were written. The Christians of the first centuries did not give the Scriptures authority and infallibility, but these people of God simply recognized, revered and preserved the inspired word of God. If a person wants to contend that another book should be added, the burden of proof falls on him: why should that book be considered? Was it written by an apostle or prophet or eye-witness of Christ? Was it regarded as inspired and authoritative by the early Christians? Did the early Christians quote from it positively or speak against it as heretical in any of their extant writings? Does it in any way contradict established Scripture?

For the Christian: Read the non-canonical books and letters of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd centuries. Even to the untrained critic, these books are very different from those found in the pages of the New Testament. What is it that sets these books apart (besides obvious contradictions of Scripture, etc.)? What is it that gives the New Testament books such uniformity, such undisputed agreement? Is it not the fact that the books accepted and preserved by the early church were all composed by the Holy Spirit (cf. II Pet 1:20-21)? Test them and see, not as a proof to skeptics, but to strengthen your own faith! A note was made at the end of the first lesson on God's providence in bringing together the canon of Scripture. Can we possibly believe that God revealed His word through the apostles and prophets of the New Testament, but then allowed uninspired works of men to intermix with His truth? The compilation and preservation of the Scriptures, even against the worst of odds and at the mercy of the most heinous of enemies, is a true miracle that should build our faith!

References and Works For Further Study:

Fruce, F.F. *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*

Lightfoot, Neil R. *How We Got The Bible.*

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Comfort, Philip W. *Essential Guide To Bible Versions.*

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Getting To Know The Book of Books

– How Did We Get Our English Bibles? –

V. The Historical Reliability Of Today's Old Testament Text

The first Old Testament books were composed by Moses around 1500 BC or even earlier – that's at least 3500 years of textual transmission! This fact automatically leads the thinking mind to ask questions like: Who copied these texts for all those years? How can we be sure that the Old Testament copies today are even remotely accurate as compared to the original books? In this lesson, we will seek to answer questions like these. Without any controversy or question, there is no text of all classical literature for which there is more manuscript evidence attesting its accuracy than for the Bible (e.g. see Archer, *Survey of the Old Testament*, 23-25). There exist today over 10,000 ancient manuscripts dating from the third century BC to the tenth century AD for the Old Testament alone. This number is especially staggering when compared to the numbers of extant copies of other works of literature of the ancient world (to be discussed in a later lesson). Obviously, this is too much evidence to cover in one short lesson. Furthermore, beyond the actual manuscript evidence verifying the reliability of the Old Testament, there are whole books written on the testimony of extrabiblical literature, and historical, geographical and archaeological evidence! The diligent student would be advised to examine some of the excellent references works mentioned throughout this lesson.

A. The Transmission Of The Old Testament Text

The English translations of today are based mainly on the school of textual critics and copyists known as the Masoretes (c. 500-1000 AD, name from a Hebrew verb meaning "tradition" or "to hand down"). In fact, their diligent and scrupulous efforts are so important to the Hebrew Bible of today that it is often referred to simply as the *Masoretic Text*. Without the advantage of a printing press, the Old Testament books were painstakingly copied by hand by a succession of textual scholars who protected and preserved the text from every possible source of error:

- *Sopherim* (lit. scribes), c. 400 BC - 200 AD – History states that Ezra worked with these scribes, and their tradition continued until after the time of Christ (see Geisler and Nix, *General Introduction to the Bible*, 306). These scholars included subgroups like the *Zugoth* (lit. "pairs"), c. 200 BC – 0 AD, and the *Tannaim* (lit. "to hand down"), c. 0-200 AD. According to the tradition of these scribes, meticulous rules were followed to preserve all Scriptural texts, traditions which were accepted and expanded by successive schools of scribes. These rules included (from Davidson's *Hebrew Text Of The Old Testament*, 89):
 - "An authentic copy must be the exemplar, from which the transcriber ought not in the least to deviate."
 - "No word or letter, not even a yod, must be written from memory, the scribe not having looked at the codex before him."
 - "The rolls in which these regulations are not observed are condemned to be buried in the ground or burned; or they are banished to the schools, to be used as reading books."
 - The first point indicates that these scribes were careful textual critics: no manuscript was chosen for preservation if its quality and authenticity was in any way questionable.
 - In Jesus' day, these scribes were viewed as experts and interpreters of the law, but not as having authority equal to the law (cf. Matt 7:29, 13:52, 17:10, 23:2-3; etc.).
- *Talmudists* (including the *Amoraim*, lit. expositors, c. 220-500 AD), c. 100-500 AD – During the later years of the Sopherim era, the recorded traditions of Jewish teachers began to be collected in the form of the Mishnah and the Gemara (commentary on the Mishnah). The *Talmudists* were largely

responsible for completing and copying these works in the form of the *Talmud*, which includes “the opinions and decisions of Jewish teachers from about 300 BC to 500 AD” (Geisler 306). It is quite natural that the work of these scribes included carefully copying the Hebrew Bible since the Talmud was simply a compilation of rabbinical teachings based on the Scriptures. These scribes observed and even intensified the same extreme care in copying manuscripts as the schools of scribes before them (see Kenyon, *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts*, 43).

- *Masoretes*, c. 500-1000 AD – The Masoretes adopted a more stringent method of exact copying than all the scribes before them, and played an instrumental role in both finalizing the form of the Hebrew Bible and adding vowels to the original consonantal Hebrew manuscripts, thus preserving vocalization and pronunciation in a culture that was increasingly losing its knowledge of their original language. It is difficult to concisely put into words the complicated system of checks and safeguards that these scholars employed in their reverent preservation of the Scriptures. They counted the numbers of each word and letter and calculated the middle word and letter of each book (see Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments*, 117); they added vowels in the margins and between lines but refused to actually alter the original texts handed down to them by the Sopherim (Archer 63); they formed extensive rules about types of skins and ink that could be used, the allowable size and number of columns, and performed ritual cleansing of their bodies before ever writing the name of God; and “if a manuscript was found to contain even one mistake it was discarded and destroyed” (McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands A Verdict*, 76). These scribes could tell if a single consonant was omitted from a book simply by the number of columns, rows and spaces in a manuscript. Their calculations and counting methods were so meticulous that they could identify if a single consonant was missing from the entire Hebrew Bible!

Note: The above discussion of the meticulous transmission of the Old Testament Scriptures by the successive schools of scribes lends some answers to the issue of why there are not more Old Testament manuscripts. Before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1948 (discussed below), the earliest manuscripts of the Old Testament dated to the ninth century AD. Even today, the manuscript evidence of the Old Testament, though absolutely convincing concerning the reliability and accuracy of those texts, is not as abundant as the evidence for the New Testament texts. At this point we can consider several answers to this dilemma:

1. *Decay with age:* a great proportion of the Old Testament manuscripts would date to before the time of Christ, and writings made on papyrus and leather parchments deteriorate and tear with use and time.
2. *Calamities:* the Scriptures themselves are a testament to the wars and struggles that fill the history of the land of Palestine, not the least of which were the destructions of Israel by Assyria (722 BC), Judah by Babylon (586 BC), and Jerusalem by Rome (70 AD) – all of which must have had a tremendous impact on the survival of Old Testament texts.
3. *Scribal tradition:* as early as the Sopherim, the Hebrew scribes took such meticulous care to preserve and copy the Scriptures that the age of a manuscript gave it no advantage in judging its accuracy. When a manuscript was copied with the absolute and verified precision demanded by their own traditions, the new copy was considered to have equal authority and value as any other copy. In fact, given the tendency for older manuscripts to become defaced and damaged over time, the newer copies were regarded as more reliable than the original! Furthermore, all defective, damaged and/or imperfect manuscripts were condemned to destruction, thus drastically reducing the number of extant copies over the course of time. (See Kenyon 43.)

B. The Dead Sea Scrolls: Accurate Transmission Confirmed

There is no doubt whatsoever that the Jews of the 1st Century AD had absolute confidence in the accuracy and authenticity of their Hebrew bible. Flavius Josephus, the renowned Jewish historian of that time, states in his

work *Contra Apion*: “We have given practical proof of our reverence for our own Scriptures. For, although such long ages have now passed, no one has ventured either to add, or to remove, or to alter a syllable...” Jesus and the apostles also endorsed the Hebrew Bible as it stood in their day with absolute confidence and authority in passages like Luke 24:27,44; John 5:39, 7:38, 10:35; Acts 1:16, 17:11; II Tim 3:15-16 – for these passages would be meaningless if many versions of the Scriptures were held to be authoritative, or if the texts themselves had been perverted and adulterated so that truth had been lost. However, the earliest Masoretic manuscripts date to around 1000 BC and even later. How can we be sure that throughout those thousand years of textual transmission the Hebrew Bible remained the same as the Hebrew Bible of the 1st Century? The most important documents found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, discovered in Qumran in 1948, answer this question: these Old Testament manuscripts (about 10,000 fragments in all) date back to more than a century before Christ. The scrolls contained fragments of every Old Testament book except Esther, and included complete manuscripts of Isaiah and several of the Minor Prophets which date back to 150 BC – 70 AD, over one thousand years older than the previously available manuscripts. The overwhelming evidence provided by these scrolls leads to the inescapable conclusion that the Masoretic text, even after a millennium of textual transmission, is virtually identical to the manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible used during the time of Christ!

Example: The Transmission of Isaiah

Arguably the most important manuscripts found among the Dead Sea Scrolls are two manuscripts of Isaiah, one complete and one nearly complete. Skeptics had argued against the accuracy of Isaiah, stating that Christians had warped prophetic passages like Isaiah 53 to resemble events in the life of Christ. However, the Isaiah scrolls, which date back to at least 125 AD, “proved to be word for word identical with our standard Hebrew Bible in more than 95 percent of the text. The 5 percent of variation consisted chiefly of obvious slips of the pen and variations in spelling” (Archer 19).

- Isaiah 53 contains 166 Hebrew words. Of those words, only 17 *letters* are questionable between the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Masoretic Text of over 1,000 years later.
 - Ten of these 17 controversial letters are simple matters of spelling which do not affect the meaning in any way
 - Four of these letters in question are minor changes in writing style, such as conjunctions
 - The remaining three letters form the word “light” in Isaiah 53:11 (see footnotes in NKJV and NASU) and, again, do not significantly change the meaning of that verse.
 - Therefore, in 1,000 years of hand-copied textual transmission, there is only one word in a chapter of 166 words that is even questionable, and this word does not change the meaning of its verse! (See McDowell 78-79.)
- Isaiah 6 contains 37 variant readings between scroll A (complete) and scroll B (fragment), however 34 of these variations are mere differences in spelling and insignificant in altering the meaning of their respective verses. The three remaining variations are:
 - “they were calling” instead of “one called to another” (vs. 3)
 - “holy, holy” instead of “holy, holy, holy” (vs. 3)
 - “sins” instead of “sin” (vs. 7)
 - After 1,000 years of textual transmission, only three variations are counted for an entire chapter, and not one of them is even worthy of a footnote in a modern English translation! (See Lightfoot 50.)

In conclusion, we turn to the words of Gleason Archer (Survey of the Old Testament, 65) after discussing the Dead Sea Scrolls as compared to the Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible: “Because of [the faithfulness of the Masoretes], we have today a form of the Hebrew text which in all essentials duplicates the recension which was considered authoritative in the days of Christ and the apostles, if not a century earlier...As W. F. Albright has said, ‘We may rest assured that the consonantal text of the Hebrew Bible, though not infallible, has been preserved with an accuracy perhaps unparalleled in any other Near Eastern literature.’”

Getting To Know The Book of Books

– How Did We Get Our English Bibles? –

VI. The Historical Reliability Of Today's New Testament Text: Oral Transmission

When we turn to the New Testament text and consider its reliability, one of our first realizations must be that Jesus preached to the world from about 27-30 AD and yet the earliest gospel was recorded roughly 50-60 AD. This means that for at least twenty years, the gospel of Christ was propagated by oral tradition, so how could the gospels be reliable at all? For the Christian who is confident in the Scriptures, this question poses little difficulty because the writers themselves were inspired by God who is both omniscient and timeless. However, are there other reasons, based in sound textual criticism, that verify the preservation of the New Testament's accuracy through the period of oral transmission?

A. Oral Tradition Typically Retains Fixed Form

- What if someone told you that Cinderella's shoe was made of wood? Or that Dorothy had a Tibetan Mastiff named Porkchop and walked down a road made of silver bricks?
 - The major details of these stories have taken on a fixed form in the minds of a huge number of people: any retelling would have to be true to that form or be lost in history.
- More currently: What if you told people that George W. Bush was twice elected on huge margins of victory in the popular vote? Or that Hurricane Katrina struck Florida the hardest? Why wouldn't those accounts survive long?
 - Eye witnesses are still around to verify the truth!
- Not only that: What if someone in the 1st Century tried to convince some of the first churches of Christ that Jesus and the apostles in fact drank milk and not the fruit of the vine at the Last Supper? Would that be an easy fact to change in the midst of so many churches worldwide practicing the same thing?
 - A *system of religion* was built upon the life of Christ: the early Christians would have made every effort to verify the accuracy of their facts and practices, especially since many of them suffered intense persecution because of their practices and doctrine!
 - Remember the discussion of "tradition" from last week (cf. I Cor 4:17, 11:16)!

B. Eyewitnesses Still Alive During This Period Of Time

- See Matt 4:25, 14:21; I Cor 15:3-8, Acts 2:22,32, 3:13-15, 10:39 – How easy would it have been to falsify an account of Christ's life?
- Luke 1:1-4 – These accounts were circulated and examined...
- There was simply not enough time between Christ's death and the writing of the gospels for His story to become mythical and full of legend! The events were still too current; the eyewitnesses were still alive in the thousands.
- "The time elapsing between the evangelic events and the writing of most of the New Testament books was, from the standpoint of historical research, satisfactorily short. For in assessing the trustworthiness of ancient historical writings, one of the most important questions is: How soon after the events took place were they recorded?" (Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*, pg. 14).

C. The Martyrdom Of The Apostles

- Beginning with Stephen (Acts 7) and James (Acts 12), the early Christians and apostles began to be killed for their faith.

- With James dead and himself imprisoned in threat of death, Peter continued to preach the gospel after his miraculous escape (read Acts 12).
- History attests that nearly all the writers of the New Testament were tortured and killed for what they believed and preached, refusing to deny the gospel – how reasonable is it to argue that they were all just fabricators of a great conspiracy and lying the whole time?

D. The Negative Accounts Of The Apostles

- Stories that live on in oral tradition tend to lose the negative details and retain the heroic, decent, good details, etc. about their protagonists.
- Think about the “heroes” of the New Testament: the disciples of Christ, Paul and the first century churches – the New Testament records their faults as well as their victories, whereas fictions would probably not have included the unfavorable details.
- Cf. Mat 26:47-56, 69-75; Mark 16:8 with Luke 24:11-12, 25-27; John 20:24-29; Acts 7:58, 8:1; Gal 2:11-21; etc.

E. Extrabiblical Accounts Of Jesus’ Life Support Scripture

- There are many extra-Biblical, historical accounts that verify much of the gospel details about Jesus:
- See Wegner 132-133
- Strobel, *The Case For The Real Jesus*.
- Perhaps a longer study on this later...

F. Why Did It Take So Long To Pen The Gospels?

- Apostles and eyewitness still alive for consultation (see quote in Wegner 134)
- Early church had the same Bible that Christ and the apostles had – the Hebrew Bible
- Many illiterate people: oral tradition and memorization was common, even the accepted way of learning. (Consider the Talmud: all of its enormous volumes lived on in oral tradition before they were recorded.)
 - Compare Matt 5:27 with Mark 2:25
- The hope of Christ’s imminent return, Rev 22:20

Conclusion:

The first gospel recorded with pen and ink was probably the gospel of Mark, c. 65 AD. So the evidence suggests that the gospel of Christ lived on in the teaching and preaching of the 1st Century Christians for roughly 30 years. Now, the Bible teaches that the apostles and many with whom they came into contact were inspired by the Holy Spirit, and not relying on memory alone (cf. John 14:26, etc.), but were guided into what to speak and write by God (cf. II Tim 3:16; II Pet 1:20-21; etc.). But even if we ignore the inspiration of these preachers and teachers, the evidence is simply too strong for the rational thinker to believe that the gospel was twisted, warped and turned into a legend during its meager 30 years of oral tradition. The eyewitnesses were too many, the churches practicing the gospel and propagating its doctrine and remembering Christ were too multitudinous and too wide spread for the gospel to be perverted and its Main Character mythologized – these things “*were not done in a corner*” (Acts 26:26).

Perhaps any one of the reasons listed above would not alone prove the case of the reliability of the oral tradition of the New Testament, but honestly and openly consider them all together – what is your judgment?

Getting To Know The Book of Books

– How Did We Get Our English Bibles? –

VII. The Historical Reliability Of Today's New Testament Text: Textual Transmission

Scholars place the writing of the New Testament books very roughly as follows: Matthew, 70-90 AD; Mark, 50-65 AD; Luke, early 60-85 AD; John, 80-100 AD; Paul's letters, 50-66 AD; and the rest of the New Testament epistles, all before 100 AD. The original manuscripts (i.e. "autographs"), none of which exist today, were either written by the authors themselves or dictated for another person to transcribe (i.e. an *amanuensis*, e.g. Rom 16:22; II Thes 3:17). In the case of the New Testament epistles, the original letters were delivered by various means, often by a faithful teacher and preacher who could ably share other news and teaching (e.g. Eph 6:21-22; II Cor 7:5-16; Col 4:7-8; etc.), and then shared with other churches (e.g. Col 4:16; II Pet 3:15-16; etc.). And so, from the time they were written on sheets or scrolls of papyrus (II John 12) or parchment (II Tim 4:13), these books were shared amongst churches and copied and copied again. Furthermore, because of the evangelistic nature of the gospel message (cf. Matt 28:18-20; etc.), the New Testament Greek documents were quickly translated into other languages, beginning at least by 150 AD with Syriac, Latin and Coptic. From the very beginning of the New Testament canon, these precious documents were copied, distributed, quoted extensively in other writings, and translated. The question we turn to in this study is simply this: even after centuries of copying and translation, is there evidence that the New Testament text of today is an accurate replication of the original autographs?

A. The Staggering Abundance Of New Testament Manuscripts

It is very doubtful that the early Christians employed professional scribes to copy the original manuscripts of the New Testament. To the contrary, individuals in the churches probably copied the letters for preservation and distribution. Wagner writes, "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" (*Journey from Text to Translation*, 207). Furthermore, history attests that the majority of translations of the New Testament literature from the original Greek were not translated by professionals, either. Even though translation from one unrelated language to another is a tremendously daunting tasking, Augustine noted in the 4th Century that "in the early days of the faith every man who happened to get his hands upon a Greek manuscript, and who thought he had any knowledge, were it ever so little, of the two languages, ventured upon the work of translation" (*On Christian Doctrine*, 2:11:16).

These facts lead to a simple and unsurprising result: the extant manuscripts of the New Testament contain many variant readings, variant translations, and copyist errors. This might pose a problem in accurately determining the original reading except for one fact: **New Testament manuscripts, dating back as far as the mid-2nd century AD, are so staggeringly abundant as compared to any other work of ancient literature that it is not difficult to determine the original wording.** Bruce notes this very fact in his work, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable*: "Fortunately, if the great number of MSS increases the number of scribal errors, it increases proportionally the means of correcting such errors, so that the margin of doubt left in the process of recovering the exact original wording is not so large as might be feared; it is in truth remarkably small. The variant readings about which any doubt remains among textual critics of the New Testament affect no material question of historic fact or Christian faith and practice" (19-20).

For example, if two people today were to sit down and copy by hand the gospel John in the English language, there is a good likelihood that they will both make an unintentional mistake here or there: maybe they'll leave

out words, or transpose letters, even skip entire lines or verses. However, the probability that both of these copyists will make exactly the same mistakes is very small, so by comparing each copy we would easily be able to determine the original reading. Now imagine that there were 5,000 people copying the gospel of John by hand. Again, there are going to be substantial variations in this pool of 5,000 copies – however, by comparing all of these abundant witnesses together, it will be essentially impossible to **NOT** find the original wording of every single verse! This is exactly the case in determining the original wording of the New Testament! **To the honest critic, there is virtually no way to complain that the New Testament text has been perverted since the books were written in the 1st Century: there are simply too many manuscripts attesting to the accurate preservation of these timeless words.**

B. Types Of New Testament Manuscript Evidence

What kind of manuscript evidence exists supporting the New Testament text, and how many such manuscripts exist? The following breakdown is compiled from a number of sources, and includes extant manuscripts from the mid-100s AD to the 1400s AD:

1. *Greek manuscripts* – Direct copies of the New Testament books, including papyri (approx. 100 MSS), uncials (approx. 300 MSS), and minuscules (approx. 2850 MSS). Uncial manuscripts were composed of all capital letters in continuous script (i.e. *scripta continua*, no breaks, no punctuation marks, etc.). In this type of writing, some ambiguities occur because breaks between words are sometimes difficult to determine. However, because almost all Greek words end with a vowel (i.e. *diphthong*) or one of three consonants (i.e. ν , ρ or ζ), such ambiguities are quite infrequent. In time, minuscule script (a type of cursive book-hand) superseded uncial script such that most New Testament manuscripts from the ninth to the fifteenth centuries are composed with these letters.
2. *Lectionaries* – The second largest group of New Testament Greek manuscripts, numbering at least 2,300 catalogued, though the majority has not been critically analyzed (Metzger, *The Text Of The New Testament*, 30). These are collections of New Testament writings intended to be publically read during worship assemblies, following in the tradition of the Jewish synagogues. The earliest lectionaries date to the 500s AD, and yet they conservatively employed older texts as exemplars and contain the New Testament books many times over, and so they are very valuable in textual criticism of the New Testament (MacDowell 42).
3. *Translations* – Though “ancient literature was rarely translated into another language” (Greenlee, *Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism*, 45), from nearly the beginning of the gospel age, New Testament books have been translated into many languages, beginning with Syriac, Latin and Coptic and dating back to at least 150 AD. Syriac is the name given to the Aramaic language used widely at the time of Christ, while Coptic is a form of ancient Egyptian. The number of extant New Testament translations from the second to fifteenth centuries is astounding, numbering at least 19,000 (at least 10,000 of which are in the Latin language).

Note: While many of these manuscripts date several centuries after the New Testament books were actually written, it must be remembered that even these later copies must have been based on much older manuscripts, such that they are closer to the original autographs than one might first think. In fact, if the early church preserved the original autographs with even moderate care, it would not be surprising if these manuscripts lasted for one hundred years or more (after all, the oldest extant manuscript of the New Testament is a papyrus containing John 18:31-33,37-38 which traces back to 130 AD Egypt – that’s nearly 1900 years of preservation for a manuscript made out of leaves instead of leather or more durable parchment!). If

this is the case, copies made in the late second century or even early third century might have been made, not from an older copy, but even from the original autograph itself. Therefore, even the manuscripts which date from 200-400 AD are probably based on manuscripts very close to the original autographs – perhaps even first or second generation copies. There are just such early manuscripts, dating from 210-350 AD, which together include the *entirety* New Testament (e.g. the Codex Vaticanus, the Codex Sinaiticus, and the Codex Alexandrinus, etc.).

In total, the extant manuscripts of the New Testament number at least 5,550 in Greek and 19,000 in other languages, totaling at least 24,550 documents! No other work of literature of the ancient world can even remotely compare to this staggering number. In fact, the runner up to the New Testament in terms of manuscript evidence is Homer’s epic *The Iliad*, which boasts only 643 manuscripts dating from at least 400 years after it was written. (See other examples in the following chart.) Contrastingly, many of the most important New Testament manuscripts date from only 100-300 years after the original autographs! And so, bibliographically speaking, to reject the reliability of the New Testament text is to reject the reliability of all ancient literature. In the words of Bruce, “There is no body of ancient literature in the world which enjoys such a wealth of good textual attestation as the New Testament” (*Books and Parchments*, 178).

Textual Reliability Standards Applied to Classical Literature					
Author	Book	Date Written	Earliest Copies	Time Gap	No. of Copies
Homer	<i>Iliad</i>	800 B.C.	C. 400 B.C.	C. 400 YRS.	643
Herodotus	<i>History</i>	480-425 B.C.	C. A.D. 900	C. 1,350 YRS.	8
Thucydides	<i>History</i>	460-400 B.C.	C. A.D. 900	C. 1,300 YRS.	8
Plato		400 B.C.	C. A.D. 900	C. 1,300 YRS.	7
Demosthenes		300 B.C.	C. A.D. 1100	C. 1,400 YRS.	200
Cesar	<i>Gallic Wars</i>	100-44 B.C.	C. A.D. 900	C. 1,000 YRS.	10
Livy	<i>History of Rome</i>	59 B.C. - A.D. 17	4th Cen. (Partial)	C. 400 YRS.	1 Partial
			10th Cen. (Mostly)	C. 1,000 YRS.	19 Copies
Tacitus	<i>Annals</i>	A.D. 100	C. A.D. 1100	C. 1,000 YRS.	20
Pliny Secundus	<i>Natural History</i>	A.D. 61-113	C. A.D. 850	C. 750 YRS.	7

Source: McDowell, Josh. The New Evidence That Demands A Verdict. Nelson: Nashville, 1999, 38.

C. Quotations From The New Testament By Early Christians

Through the centuries, the writings of the Bible have moved an innumerable multitude of people to write about their religious beliefs in the form of letters, treatises, sermons, articles, books, commentaries, etc. It is not surprising at all to find that the early Christians who lived in the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Centuries wrote volumes of literature about religion in which they quoted freely from the New Testament. Many of these writings are still in existence today, and they provide valuable information in restoring the New Testament text:

- *Books in the Canon:* These quotations help us to determine which books and letters were considered by early Christians to be inspired and worthy of the New Testament canon – some of these Christians who writings exist even today sat at the very feet of the apostles!

- *Original wording of the New Testament:* The early Christians quoted extensively from the New Testament, providing exact quotes or paraphrases of virtually every verse of every New Testament book. These quotations are in combination with the extensive list of New Testament manuscripts discussed above to help in determining the exact wording of the original New Testament autographs.
- *Meaning of New Testament language:* The writings of early Christians (in addition their contemporary secular writings) also help scholars of the ancient languages to determine the meaning of words and phrases as they were used in the 1st Century. This important lexicographic knowledge of 1st Century Greek grammar, idioms, and word usage helps translators of the New Testament to accurately relay the original meaning of the Greek text.

Below is a list of just a handful of the early Christians who wrote extensively about the New Testament. Many of their writings are available today through libraries or internet sources:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| - Clement of Rome, c. 60-100 AD | - Clement of Alexandria, c. 155-200 AD |
| - Ignatius, c. 60-117 | - Tertullian, c. 160-220 AD |
| - Polycarp, c. 69-155 | - Hippolytus, c. 170-235 AD |
| - Justin Martyr, c. 100-165 AD | - Origen, c. 185-253 AD |
| - Tatian, c. 110-172 AD | - Eusebius, c. 265-339 AD |
| - Irenaeus, c. 130-202 AD | - Jerome, c. 345-420 |

So, just how many New Testament quotations do we gain from the writings of these early Christians? In his classic work, *The New Evidence That Demands A Verdict*, Josh McDowell provides a count of New Testament quotations from just 7 of the early Christians listed above, dating from approximately 100 AD to 339 AD. In total, these writings quote from the New Testament a staggering number of 36,289 times. **The textual evidence supplied by these quotations is so abundant that if all other textual evidence attesting to the New Testament was completely lost or destroyed, the entirety of New Testament could accurately be reproduced from the writings of these early Christians alone!** (See McDowell 43.)

Conclusion:

The mantra is so often repeated, hardly anyone stops to investigate whether or not the claim is really true: *“The New Testament has been copied so many times, there is just no way that anyone can know what the original documents really said...”* The fact of the matter is, after all of the evidence is weighed and tested, **there is no other work of ancient literature for which we can be so assured of its textual accuracy than the New Testament!** Assuredly, among the thousands upon thousands of extant New Testament manuscripts and quotations, there are many variations in wording, spelling, etc. And yet, when the evidence is examined as a whole, the actual amount of variation between these documents is actually quite small, only approximately 10 percent of the roughly 138,000 words in the Greek New Testament (Wegner 215). Meanwhile, simple errors in spelling and word order account for the vast majority of these variations, such that the actual amount of New Testament text in which there is substantial variation between ancient manuscripts is only about 1/1000 of the whole (or 0.1 %, Lightfoot 44, see also Lesson 8 in this series: *Introduction To New Testament Textual Criticism*). To test these variants, modern translations (for example, the New King James Version) readily list variant readings in the footnotes such that the honest Bible student can weigh the evidence for himself or herself. And still, not a single fundamental teaching of the gospel rests upon any of the disputed readings! **The skeptic mantra simply is not true, academically or otherwise: we can absolutely rest assured that the New Testament text we read today, and indeed the text of the whole Bible, is virtually identical to the words of the original autographs recorded by those who claimed to be inspired by God.**

Getting To Know The Book of Books

– How Did We Get Our English Bibles? –

VIII. Introduction To New Testament Textual Criticism

In the previous lesson, we observed the absolutely outstanding textual evidence that enables scholars to reproduce the original New Testament text, even though none of the autographs today survive. In this regard, the New Testament is truly unique among all the other literary works of antiquity, so much so that Bruce Metzger declares, “In contrast with [other ancient literary works], the textual critic is embarrassed by the wealth of his material” (*The Text Of The New Testament*, 34). However, the fact that there are so very many ancient manuscripts, lectionaries, translations, and quotations of the New Testament by early Christians poses some definite difficulties: how does a person begin to sort through all this wealth of information, with its variant readings, translations, and fragmented manuscripts, etc., to arrive as close as possible to the original autographs? This branch of literary study in which scholars identify and remove textual inaccuracies is referred to as *Textual Criticism* (sometimes called “Lower Criticism”), where “criticism” denotes an act of discernment and judgment. Nearly every good book that gives an introduction to the Biblical text and the origin of translations will include some discussion of textual criticism. Meanwhile, several excellent texts provide a detailed and authoritative overview of the subject: e.g. *A Student’s Guide To Textual Criticism Of The Bible* by Paul D. Wegner, and *Introduction To New Testament Textual Criticism* by J. Harold Greenlee, just to name two. In this lesson, we take a cursory glance at this fascinating subject to better understand and appreciate the scholarly accuracy with which today’s New Testament text is reconstructed.

A. History Of New Testament Textual Criticism

Textual criticism of the New Testament enjoys a rich history – a history that is discussed in great detail in some of the references already mentioned, as well as in *The Journey From Texts To Translations* by Paul D. Wegner, pages 215ff (an invaluable work that has already been referenced several times throughout this series of studies).

- Jerome produced the Latin Vulgate in 382-390 AD which employed Old Latin manuscripts compared with some old Greek manuscripts, changing the Old Latin readings only when necessary to restore meaning. This monumental work reigned for over a thousand years as the authoritative New Testament text.
- From 1546 to around 1730, several scholars (including Stephanus, Beza, and the Elzevir Brothers) systematically collected variant readings among the Greek manuscripts available in their day, also collating evidence from early translations and quotations from early Christians, to arrive at what came to be known as the *Textus Receptus*, based upon the ground-breaking work of Erasmus in 1516.
- Johann Bengel, a German scholar, published a work in 1734 that challenged the *Textus Receptus* in that he divided the extant Greek manuscripts into groups and weighed them rather than assuming they were all of equal validity and value. He concluded that there were in fact “far fewer variant readings than originally thought, and no variant affected any article of evangelical doctrine” (Wegner 217).
- In 1881, the renowned New Testament textual scholars B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort, both of Cambridge University, published *The New Testament In the Original Greek*. Their classifications of manuscripts, textual families, early versions and quotations from early Christians are still largely used today, though in somewhat modified form. This version along with several other Greek translations from this same time period, especially Eberhard Nestle’s *Novum Testamentum Graece*, entirely displaced the *Textus Receptus* from its position of highest authority.

- In 1955, the American Bible Society assembled an international committee of textual scholars to produce a Greek New Testament which incorporated all the extant manuscript evidence and could be universally used by Bible translators to revise existing translations and build new translations. The latest edition of this monumental work gives “graded evaluations for each textual note so that the reader can determine how certain a variant reading is...” (Wegner 222).

B. Principles Of New Testament Textual Criticism

As we have already seen in these studies, the reality of copyist errors, both unintentional and intentional, is an unavoidable consequence of having such a wealth of copies and translations of the New Testament documents. Out of the 25,000+ manuscripts and versions available, and the 35,000+ quotations of the New Testament found in the letters, sermons, commentaries, etc. of early Christians, how do scholars begin to determine the most plausible reading? Several principles guide the textual critic in determining the reading that most accurately reflects the original autograph, just a sampling of which are discussed below:

- **Manuscripts must be weighed, not counted** – Earlier manuscripts are closest in time to the originals, allowing less opportunity for corruption; manuscripts found in the same geographical location are probably copied from the same text and so should be considered one witness (or one family of witnesses); etc. For example, the two manuscripts considered by far the most accurate and comprehensive are the *Codex Vaticanus* (c. 325 AD) and the *Codex Sinaiticus* (c. 350 AD), which are the oldest, best-preserved, and highest quality Greek manuscripts in existence, and contain the entire New Testament. Given their early date, these excellent manuscripts may have even been copied from the original autographs. When they agree word-for-word, and especially when their reading is verified by other manuscripts and quotations, there is little room for doubt that they contain the correct reading, no matter how many later manuscripts might contain variation.
- **Determine the reading that would most likely give rise to the others** – In most cases, the shortest, most distinct (or difficult) reading is usually the most preferable. Over time, verses might be elaborated, and difficult concepts or wordings may be smoothed out by copyists, so it is very important to determine which reading most probably came first: the readings which smooth out difficulties are less accurate, while the reading that most ably explains the existence of all variant readings is probably the original. A notable exception is I John 2:23, in which some manuscripts leave out the longer reading, “the one who confesses the Son has the Father also.” However, examination of the Greek text reveals that two lines end in the same words (“τον πατερα εχει”), and thus it would be very easy for the scribe to accidentally skip from the first line to the second. In this case, even though many manuscripts (even a majority) omit the final clause, the longer reading is almost certainly the most accurate, as reflected in the major English translations.
- **Examine parallel passages and determine why differences may appear** – When copyists duplicate parallel passages – for example, parallels between the gospels, similar epistles, or Old Testament quotations in the New – often an attempt is made to make the wording of the parallel passages more uniform. And so, in this case, variation between parallel readings is usually more accurate than those manuscripts with uniform wording between parallel passages. For example, Matt 19:20 (paralleled in Mark 10:20 and Luke 18:21) almost certainly does not contain the words “in my youth,” but these words were added over time to match the other accounts. Matt 11:19 compared to Luke 7:35 shows another good example of this principle, where “works” is almost certainly the most accurate reading of Matt 11:19 even though many later manuscripts substitute “children” instead, evidently to match the

reading in Luke. Similarly, Matt 13:9 probably does not include “to hear” as in the NKJV (cf. NIV and NASU), but was assimilated to sound like Mark 4:9, 23, 7:16, etc.

Clearly, determining the most plausible reading requires two types of evidence: internal and external. **Internal evidence** is supplied by the context of the passage itself: what type of language does the author frequently use? Are there frequent grammatical and spelling errors in a manuscript which call its validity into question? Meanwhile, **external evidence** is supplied by other manuscripts and quotations of manuscripts, ranked in order of importance and accuracy, which help to shed light on the reasons for and origins of variant readings.

Just this small glimpse into the principles guiding New Testament textual criticism helps us to better appreciate the tremendous importance of such work, and the staggering efforts of scholars who have gone on before us. In terms of reconstructing the New Testament text, we stand on the shoulders of giants, and reap the benefits of diligence of countless honest and reverent scholars who have done all this work in earlier days and times. However, let us remember that though this field of study is broad and of great importance, New Testament textual criticism does not really seek to establish the most accurate reading of the entire New Testament, but only the small portion of text that is in any way disputed. Recall from the last lesson that the vast majority of the New Testament text is authentic and completely accurate, beyond any question or refute. Westcott and Hort determined that no more than 1/8 of the New Testament text available in their day (c. 1881) contained notable variation between manuscripts, while no more than 1/1000 of the text contained significant variations: “The proportion of words virtually accepted on all hands as raised above doubt is very great, not less, on a rough computation, than seven-eighths of the whole. The remaining eighth therefore, formed in great part by changes of order and other comparative trivialities, constitutes the whole area of criticism. . . .the amount of what can in any sense be called substantial variation is but a small fraction of the residuary variation, and can hardly form more than a thousandth part of the entire text” (*The New Testament in the Original Greek*, 2-3). Later, Geisler and Nix calculated that no more than 400 words of the New Testament text are in any doubt (*General Introduction To The Bible*, 367, pub. 1968), such that today’s Greek New Testament is approximately 99.7% accurate (a percentage that is even closer to perfection if one excludes the 300 words which compose the questionable concluding verses of Mark 16).

Getting To Know The Book of Books

– *How Did We Get Our English Bibles?* –

IX. The Building Of The English Bible: From Wycliffe to the 1611 King James Version

The story of the English bible is full of heroism, tragedy, scholarship and religious division. In this lesson, we attempt to grasp a summary of the rich history leading up to the King James Version of 1611.

A. Christianity In the Britains

- Significant evidence that churches were established in England by at least the 4th Century (Wegner 274).
- Early Bibles in England were written in Latin, that being the dominant language in the West.
- English-speaking people did not have a Bible in their native language for nearly 900 years:
 - Until approximately 1600 AD, the Latin Vulgate was considered the authoritative translation.
 - Even the most trained religious “clergy” did not have the training to translate the Bible into English.
 - Translating the Bible into another language was dangerous because Catholic authorities feared the common people having an understanding of Scripture. Many early translators were tortured and killed for their efforts!
- From approximately 650-1300, some portions of the Bible were translated into English to form stories and songs. Some clergymen, poorly trained in Latin, penned English notes between Latin words and lines, forming primitive interlinear translations: these were the beginnings of translation of the Bible into English (cf. Wegner 277).

B. Wycliffe Bible, 1380-1382

- 14th Century discontent over corruption in the Catholic Church and the papacy.
- John Wycliffe, Oxford scholar and debater, was especially concerned with the Church’s wealth, political sway, and corrupt doctrines (e.g. priests mediating between God and man, cf. I Tim 2:6; Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation; etc.)
- However, Wycliffe was acutely aware that for reform to take place, the common people had to have the Bible in their native language.
- 1380, New Testament; 1382, Old Testament, both in Middle English; based on the Latin Vulgate.
- 1388, John Purvey revised the Wycliffe Bible, and this version remained strong until the 16th Century.
- The Catholic Church condemned the Wycliffe Bible as heresy, throwing its promoters into prison, and burning some at the stake with translated bibles tied around their necks (Wegner 283).
- People who were caught reading this bible were threatened with loss of property and/or life, which only worked to stir curiosity in this forbidden translation among the common people.

C. Tyndale Bible, 1526-1534

- William Tyndale, Cambridge scholar and one of the few people in his day qualified and able to translate Greek into English, realized the importance of a New Testament translated from the original Greek.
- Tyndale staunchly opposed the Catholic Church and the pope, saying, “I defy the Pope and all his laws,” and that if God gave him long enough life, he would allow a plowman to know more Scripture than the Pope (Wegner 286).
- It was Tyndale’s ambition to translate the Bible into the English language from the original Hebrew and Greek, not from Latin translations, and to make it readily available to the common people.
- Tyndale utilized the 1516 Greek New Testament of Erasmus, the Greek scholar of Cambridge.

Note: Erasmus' Greek New Testament was rivaled by the Complutensian Polygot, an undoubtedly more accurate work, but the later was not published until 1522 because of delays from church authorities. Erasmus doubted older manuscripts, and so used them the least, unfortunately ignoring the oldest and best manuscripts at his disposal. For some passages, Erasmus had no Greek text at all (e.g. the last six verses of Revelation), and so simply translated the Latin Vulgate back into Greek. This Greek New Testament went through four revisions, becoming more accurate each time, and Tyndale would have had access to at least the first two or three revisions.

- Tyndale finished the New Testament in 1526, and was able to smuggle some copies into England. However, he never finished the Old Testament because he was kidnapped and imprisoned in 1535, and burned at the stake in 1536. Tyndale's famous last words were, "Lord, open the King of England's eyes."

Peculiarities of the Tyndale Bible:

- Replaced many uniquely Catholic words with more accurate readings: e.g. "congregation" for "church," "elder" for "priest," and "repentance" for "penance."
- Old Testament translations (which Tyndale strived to complete in prison) contain many:
 - *Boldly anti-Papal statements* – e.g. "The Pope's bull slayeth more than Aaron's calf" (note, Ex 32:35); and "When will the Pope say 'Hoo!' and forbid an offering for the building of St. Peter's church?...Never until they have it all" (note, Ex 36:5-7).
 - *Peculiar idioms* – e.g. "Tush, ye shall not die" (Gen 3:4) and Pharaoh's "jolly captains" (Ex 15:4).
- Translated from the original Greek and Hebrew, rather than the Latin Vulgate.
- First English Bible to be printed, rather than hand-written.
- Translated into Modern English, rather than Middle English like the Wycliffe Bible.
- Contained copious marginal notes, many of which were antagonistic toward the Catholic Church and critical of Catholic doctrines.
- While the English bible would subsequently go through many revisions, many authors note that the 1611 King James Version adheres to the Tyndale Bible in fully 90% of the text.

D. Other 16th Century Translations

- *Coverdale Bible* – 1535, Miles Coverdale. First English Bible to circulate without hindrance of government or church officials (accepted by King Henry VIII). Revision of Tyndale Bible with some reliance on German versions, e.g. Luther's German translation of Erasmus' Greek New Testament. Separated Apocrypha from the Old Testament, noting that they were neither a part of the Hebrew Bible nor on the same level of authority as Scripture.
- *Matthew Bible* – 1537, John Rogers (aka. Thomas Matthew), a student of Tyndale. Completed Tyndale's work of translating the Old Testament from Hebrew, relying somewhat on the Coverdale Bible. Full of notes emphasizing Matthew's own doctrinal ideologies, many of which influenced his translation. After England reverted to Catholicism under the reign of "Bloody Mary" Tudor, Rogers was burned at the stake in 1555.
- *The Great Bible* – 1539, edited again by Coverdale, commissioned by King Henry VIII. First English Bible authorized to be read in the Churches of England.
- *Geneva Bible* – 1560, various scholars. Parliament outlawed the Tyndale and Coverdale Bibles in 1543, however the Great Bible (based on these two translations) was still authorized in the churches. Realizing this inconsistency, various political and religious leaders ordered a full revision of the Great Bible to conform to the Latin Vulgate. This bible became the preferred bible of the people, just as the

Great Bible had been the bible for the clergy (Lightfoot 67). This would have been the bible of Shakespeare, the pilgrims, etc.

- *The Bishops' Bible* – 1568, Matthew Parker and various bishops. The official English bible of the Church of England. Revision of the Geneva Bible, omitting all sectarian footnotes. Never as popular as the Geneva Bible amongst the common people.
- *Douay-Rheims Bible* – 1582, New Testament; 1610, Old Testament, translated by William Allen and Gregory Martin in two cities of France, Douay and Rheims. The official English Bible of the Roman Catholic Church, acknowledged in preface to refute the Protestant “false translations.” Translation of the Latin Vulgate, not the Greek. Old Testament includes the Apocrypha. Marginal notes full of Catholic doctrine. Contains many Catholic doctrinal peculiarities:
 - Matt 6:11 – “Give us this day our *superstantial* bread,” reflecting the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation .
 - Luke 10:35 – “Whatever thou shalt supererogate, I, at my return will repay thee,” reflecting the Catholic doctrine of supererogation.
 - “Repent” became “do penance.”
 - Acts 14:3 – “elders” became “priests.”

Thus, by the end of the 16th Century, the English translations of the bible were in a sad state of affairs: the common people had their bible, the Churches of England had a translation of their own, and the Catholic Church had commissioned a translation that reversed all progress practically back to the Wycliffe translation of the Latin Vulgate! An accurate English translation was desperately needed that could be of both private and public use, and that eradicated the marginal notes and biased translations that promoted one religious sect over others. In 1611, these needs were met by the King James Version.

Getting To Know The Book of Books

– How Did We Get Our English Bibles? –

X. The History, Successes and Shortcomings Of The King James Version

In 1604, King James I called together the Hampton Court Conference, a meeting of a diverse group of religious representatives and scholars, in an attempt to lessen the tension between the religious sects of England. In this meeting, Dr. John Reynolds of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, proposed a new and more accurate translation that would help to bridge these religious divides. This suggestion was met with favor, and soon King James himself initiated the process of building the new translation, even taking an active role in the planning and oversight. For example, several authors note that King James required (or at the very least, authorized) that:

- University professors, even some qualified laymen, be part of the translation committee to ensure the most current, unbiased scholarship.
- Translators were to refrain from marginal notes (unless necessary to shed light on the meaning of the original Hebrew and Greek manuscripts).
- Translation was to revise the 1602 Bishops' Bible, with an examination of the original Greek and Hebrew texts.
- Chapter and verse divisions, first found in the Geneva Bible and then later in the Bishops' Bible, were to be retained.
- To keep the language from sounding too stiff and formal, "a variety of words were to be used for the same Greek and Hebrew words. (In the later revisions of 1881 and 1885, this principle was reversed because it was thought that it interfered with an accurate reflection of the text.)" (Wegner 310).

In 1607, around 50 scholars, experts in Hebrew and Greek, began the new translation in committees that translated a group of books and then submitted their work to select scholars from the other committees for approval. The translators followed the Bishops' Bible (itself a revision of the Geneva Bible, which traces its roots back to the Greek text of Erasmus, later called the *Textus Receptus*), but consulted other English translations, too. In 1611, the first copies of the King James Version (KJV) were distributed in England, with many revisions to follow, including the 1613 edition which includes over 400 corrections from the original printing (Lightfoot 69). The preface of the original KJV states that the translators sought only to "make a good [translation] better, or out of many good ones one principal good one."

Also known as the Authorized Version (since its construction was authorized by the king of England), the KJV has withstood the test of time: no book has ever sold as many copies; no book has ever been read by as many English-speaking people (Comfort 160). Even today, though overshadowed by more modern translations of the English language, the KJV is still one of the most popular and enduring translations of the bible. However, no translation is perfect: a translator can only hope to "work in the light of the knowledge of his day, with the materials available to him, and put his translation in words spoken by his generation" (Lightfoot 72). Not surprisingly, the KJV has a number of advantages as well as a number of shortcomings, paving the way for later and more accurate translations of the bible into the English language.

A. Advantages Of The King James Version

- *Product of No Individual* – One of the most important aspects of the KJV as compared to all other previous versions was that it was the work of no one person or religious group, but was translated by a

diverse group of scholars from many different religious backgrounds. The English-speaking people had been torn apart by religious division, and the KJV stands as a monument to religious impartiality during a time of the most intense religious partisanship and hatred.

- *Improved Greek and Hebrew Scholarship* – For its day, the KJV was a very accurate translation, vastly surpassing even the work of Tyndale since scholarship in the ancient languages, especially Greek, had progressed in leaps and bounds with the Renaissance. Whereas Tyndale was virtually the only scholar of his day qualified to translate the Bible from its original languages, King James would have had no trouble at all finding scores of qualified scholars to take on this monumental work.
- *Beautiful Language* – The KJV is the paramount example of the beauty and vigour of Elizabethan English, written when literary scholarship in England was at its peak. It has been termed the “noblest monument to English prose” (Preface, NRSV), and its poetry, style, and language have influenced English literature more than any other literary work.
- *Built Upon Scholarship of Exceptional Accuracy and Reverence* – From Wycliffe to Tyndale to Coverdale all the way to the Geneva Bible, exceptional scholars with exceptional reverence for God and His word paved the way for the making of the KJV. In 1611, a translation was needed that would not represent any one religious sect while capitalizing on the tremendous efforts of the English translators who went on before. The fact that the KJV differs from the Tyndale Bible in only 1/10 of its translation is a testament to the brilliance of the translators who lived (and in many cases died) to provide the English-speaking peoples with a bible in their native tongue.

At the same time, it cannot be denied by any intellectually honest person that the King James Version, especially in its earliest revisions, has many inaccuracies and shortcomings.

B. Shortcomings Of The King James Version

- *Inadequate Knowledge of the Hebrew Language* – The Hebrew text (i.e. the Masoretic text) available to the KJV translators was sufficient (though important manuscript discoveries had not yet been made, for example the Dead Sea Scrolls, c. 1950). However “*it would take many more years of linguistic studies to enrich and sharpen understanding of the Hebrew vocabulary*” (Comfort 147).
- *Inadequate Textual Base of the Greek New Testament* – With few exceptions, the KJV translators used the *Textus Receptus* (TR), which was based on the ground-breaking work of Erasmus, printed in 1516. However, recall from Lesson 8 that the TR (especially before 1611) was based on a handful very late Greek manuscripts, and sometimes even translated from the Latin Vulgate back to Greek. After the KJV translation, multitudes of earlier Greek MSS were discovered, including the three best, most complete and most ancient codices, the Codex Alexandrinus (disc. c. 1630), the Codex Sinaiticus (disc. c. 1830), and the Codex Vaticanus (disc. c. 1481, made available to scholars by the Vatican only in the 1800s). Work done from the mid-1600s to the late 1800s would vastly improve the accuracy of the Greek New Testament, as discussed in earlier lessons. This scholarship was not available to the translators of the KJV. For an outstanding examination of the textual basis of the King James Version, see “*Shall We Return To The Text of the King James Version*” by Phil Roberts in *A Tribute To Melvin D. Curry, Jr.*, Florida College Bookstore, 1997.
- *KJV Contains Approximately 50 Spurious Verses* – Because of its reliance on late manuscripts which had been somewhat contaminated by copyist errors and additions, the KJV contains about 1,000 words that modern textual criticism has proven spurious. Modern translations that follow the *Majority Text* (M), which is basically the same as the TR, include these verses as well, e.g. the New King James Version. Furthermore, modern translations which rightly omitted these verses (e.g. the Revised Standard Version, first printing) faced tremendous resistance from the public accustomed to the KJV,

and so many modern translations have added these verses back in while noting in the margins that they are of doubtful origin. (These verses are discussed in *Appendix A* of this lesson series.)

- *Errors In Translation* – The KJV contains many translation errors, though some of these have been corrected in more recent revisions. For example:
 - Acts 12:3 translates *pascha* as “Easter” though it is accurately translated Passover in every other occurrence. Indeed, the lack of consistency in the KJV translation is one of its major problems.
 - Matt 24:36, the KJV omits “nor the Son” so as not to indicate that Jesus did not know the timing of the discussed events.
 - Luke 9:35 should read, “This is My Son, My Chosen One” rather than “This is my beloved Son.”
 - John 1:18 is more accurately, “the only begotten God” rather than “the only begotten Son,” still indicating that Jesus Christ was the only man that was God in the flesh (cf. vs. 14).
 - I Thes 5:22 should read, “Abstain from every form of evil” rather than “Abstain from every appearance of evil” (though it is possible that this admonition is a general warning about perception and influence, as found in other verses).

This is just a brief list, but even from this handful we see that the errors in translation of the KJV (whether due to inadequate text, inadequate knowledge, or theological bias) significantly impact the meaning of some verses. The translation was outstanding for its time, but improved manuscript evidence and scholarship have proven it out of date.

- *Archaic Language* – This is perhaps the biggest problem with the KJV. Remember that English translations were originally created to put the bible in the language of the common people: “Therefore blessed be those, and most honored be their name, who break the ice, and begin that which helps to the saving of souls. Now what can be more useful to this end, than to deliver God’s book to God’s people in a language which they understand?” (Preface, KJV). Here is the problem: **the Elizabethan English of the KJV is no longer the common language of English-speaking people.** Archaic words like “peradventure,” “licentiousness,” “because that,” are puzzling and near-indecipherable in some instances. Archaic spellings like “shew” for show, “divers” for diverse, and many others are constant stumbling blocks to understanding, especially to younger readers. Furthermore, the meanings of many words have evolved since the 17th Century such that a word in the KJV might mean something completely different in the language of today (e.g. “allege” meant prove, “allow” meant approve, “suffer” meant allow, “communicate” meant share, “conversation” meant conduct, “study” meant be diligent, etc.).

C. Understand Thou What Thou Readest?

Read the following verses in a modern translation, like the NASU, NKJV or NIV:

- I Cor 11:26 – “For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.”
- Ps 5:6 – “Thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing: the Lord will abhor the bloody and deceitful man.”
- Luke 17:9 – “Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not.”
- II Cor 6:11-13 – O ye Corinthians, our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged. Ye are not straitened in us, but ye are straitened in your own bowels. Now for a recompence in the same, (I speak as unto my children,) be ye also enlarged.
- Acts 21:15 – “And after those days we took up our carriages, and went up to Jerusalem.”

- Acts 28:13 – “And from thence we fetched a compass, and came to Rhegium...” (Note: Could Paul and Luke even find a compass in the 1st Century?)
- 3 John 5-7 – “Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers; which have borne witness of thy charity before the church: whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well: because that for his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles.”

To stubbornly cling to the King James Version, when its manuscript evidence is outdated and its language is archaic and indecipherable at best, misleading at worst, is to dishonor the very goal that the KJV translators strived to achieve: to ensure that English-speaking people had the most accurate translation possible in language that they could plainly understand. This time-honored translation was the absolute best available *in its day*, but manuscript discoveries, improved Greek and Hebrew scholarship, and the evolution of the English language demand that modern English-speaking people have a modern translation. The revisions of the KJV and other modern translations will be discussed in the next lesson.

Getting To Know The Book of Books

– *How Did We Get Our English Bibles?* –

XI. The Revisions Of The King James Version

Soon after the completion of the King James Version, scholars realized that this monumental work was in need of correction and revision. Between 1629 and the late 1800s, several attempts were made to correct the errors of the KJV and incorporate newly discovered manuscript evidence into the translation. Early revisions include the 1762 Cambridge Bible of the Authorized Version, edited by Dr. Thomas Paris, which included many corrections, modernizations, and marginal notes, and the 1769 Oxford standard edition, edited by Dr. Benjamin Blaney, which is estimated to differ in about 75,000 places from the 1611 KJV. As a consequence of revisions like these, the KJV of today differs dramatically from the original. However, this version of the English Bible did not just need revisions: the English language was also dramatically evolving to the point that a modern revision was needed for people to be able to read and readily understand. Archaic words whose meanings had either been lost or changed; developments in Biblical archaeology, linguistics and textual criticism; and an abundance of new manuscript evidence (most notably, the Codex Vaticanus, Codex Sinaiticus, and Codex Alexandrius) led to the recognition that a new revision was needed.

A. English Revised Version (ERV, 1881)

- 16 scholars supervised a group of 54 translators from diverse religious backgrounds
- Two committees, one for the New Testament and one for the Old, set up in the USA
- Policies of the translators:
 - Render KJV closer to the original language while nominally modernizing the English
 - Translations performed strictly as a group, with a 2/3 majority necessary to make changes after the second revision
 - Word-for-word translation, where each original word has a corresponding English word
 - Masoretic Text used for Old Testament; Textus Receptus with improvements by Westcott and Hort for the New Testament.
- Changes to the KJV:
 - About 6,000 changes in the New Testament, following better Greek manuscripts, based mainly upon the work of Westcott and Hort (about 25% of these changes altered the meaning of the text, Wegner 317)
 - Eliminations of ambiguities in the KJV, and correction of translation errors
 - Eliminated inconsistencies of KJV, where the same Greek or Hebrew word is translated with multiple English words – this makes some passages unnatural and difficult to understand
 - Many disputed passages were excluded (e.g. Acts 8:37, I John 5:7, etc.)
 - Many archaic words and phrases were eliminated
 - The Apocrypha was included
- Problematic issues:
 - The American translators were often not in agreement with the guidelines and decisions of the British translators and supervisors (considering the obvious differences between American and British English)
 - Renowned for its lack of readability and linguistic beauty, including still too much archaic language
 - Manuscript evidence still inferior to later revisions
- Sample text – Matt 5:33-37

ERV

“Again, ye have heard that it was said to them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: but I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by the heaven, for it is the throne of God; nor by the earth, for it is the footstool of his feet; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, for thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your speech be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: and whatsoever is more than these is of the evil one.”

KJV

“Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.”

B. American Standard Version (ASV, 1901)

- Revision of the KJV by the American scholars who participated in the translation of the ERV, contractually prohibited from publishing their own revision until 14 years after its completion
- Very similar to the ERV except for Americanized changes in wording and spelling, new paragraph distinctions and titles, less marginal notes and the Apocrypha is omitted
- Noteable changes in wording (see Wegner 319)
 - Holy *Spirit* instead of Ghost
 - LORD or GOD is always rendered Jehovah (more accurately transliterated “Yahweh”)
 - Grave, pit or hell in the ERV becomes Sheol in the ASV
 - Hell in the ERV becomes Hades in the ASV
 - The ambiguous “which” in the ERV is translated “who” or “that” when referring to people in the ASV (e.g. “Our Father who art in heaven...”).
 - Attempt to indicate the importance Greek tenses of the original verbs
- Problematic issues:
 - Also renowned for its lack of readability, linguistic style and beauty – principle of consistent translation makes some passages hard to understand, just as in the ERV
 - Soon discovered archaeological and manuscript evidence “made the translation obsolete almost immediately” (Wegner 320)
 - Still too much archaic language – both the ERV and ASV translators were instructed to make as few changes as possible to the KJV
- Sample text – Matt 5:38-42

ASV

“Ye have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: but I say unto you, resist not him that is evil: but whosoever smiteth thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man would go to law with thee, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.”

KJV

“Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.”

C. Revised Standard Version (RSV, 1946)

- Copyright to the ASV transferred from Nelson to the International Council of Religious Education in 1928
- After much discussion, the ICRE decided that a new revision was needed “which embodied the best results of modern scholarship and yet preserved the literary qualities of the King James translation” (Lightfoot 75)
- Translated by a group of 32 scholars, headed by Luther Weigle of Yale Divinity School
- Incorporated newly discovered manuscript evidence, as well as discoveries of secular materials (e.g. personal letters, formal letters, bills of sale, etc.) that lend new information on the meanings of Greek words and phrases as used in New Testament times
- Masoretic Text used for Old Testament; an eclectic Greek used for the New Testament, comparing and weighing all variants.
- New Testament published in 1946, Old Testament in 1952, and a version including the Apocrypha (to appeal to Roman Catholic readers) in 1957
- In 1971, a second edition was published which reincorporated many disputed texts in order to help with the translation’s popularity, e.g. Mark 16:9-20 and John 7:53-8:11.
- Notable changes:
 - Most marked changes are the modernization of words and spellings making this translation highly readable compared to the preceding revisions
 - Relaxed the requirement of having one word for each word in the original text to improve readability and beauty while preserving a literal translation
- Problematic issues:
 - Some changes highly criticized (though they are *not inaccurate* renderings of the original language), notably Isaiah 7:14 (“young maiden”) and John 3:16 (“only Son”)
 - Lightfoot notes several passages in which better translations would be desirable, for example (Lightfoot 77):
 - Matt 12:40 – “whale” should read “sea monster” or “great fish”
 - I Tim 3:2, Tit 1:6 – “married only once” should accurately read “husband of one wife” or “man of one woman”
 - Heb 6:6 – “if they then commit apostasy” should read “if they fall away”
- Sample text – Matt 5:43-48

RSV

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you salute only your brethren, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

KJV

“Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”

No translation is perfect: each translation bears some distinct advantage or disadvantage when compared to others. However, the revisions of the KJV are a pattern of forward progress: the ERV and ASV are indisputably better translations than the KJV, while the RSV is in many ways a preferable translation compared to the ERV and ASV. In time, further discoveries of ancient manuscripts (e.g. the Dead Sea Scrolls) would demand still more diligent progress in striving to produce a translation that is both readable and inclusive of the most modern scholarship and discoveries. Other translations would soon follow, both revisions of the KJV (e.g. the New American Standard Bible and the New King James) as well as wholly new translations (e.g. the New International Version and English Standard Version). In the next lesson, we will exam some of the more modern translations of the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

Getting To Know The Book of Books

– *How Did We Get Our English Bibles?* –

XII. Modern Bible Translations and Paraphrases

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Getting To Know The Book of Books

– *How Did We Get Our English Bibles?* –

XIII. How Do I Choose A Bible To Read And Study?

- A little over one hundred years ago, there was essentially only one English translation of the Bible to use: today there are literally hundreds of translations and paraphrases available to English speaking peoples! **Out of all of these translations and paraphrases, how do we choose the one(s) to use?**
- It is never wise to use only one Bible translation: each translation has its own advantages and disadvantages (see the three preceding lessons)
- It may be advantageous to have one translation as your main study Bible (while cross-referencing others as needed) and another as your main reading Bible, providing a fresh perspective
 - For example, we have seen that some translations stand out as superior for better understanding of the original languages underlying the English translation (i.e. NKJV for valuable information on variant manuscript readings; NASB/U for examination of the important verb tenses in the NT, e.g. compare NASU and KJV in passages like Acts 2:43, 9:22, 12:22; Col 3:1; I Pet 4:13).
 - As for daily Bible reading (cf. Deut 6:6-8, 17:18-19, 32:46-47a; Acts 17:11; etc.), even paraphrases can be useful, if they are held in check for accuracy by more trustworthy translations.
- Good translations of the Bible seek to accomplish three main objectives:
 1. Produce a readable translation that incorporates the current changes in language
 2. Take into account any new discoveries in ancient manuscripts that might hold variant readings
 3. Take into account the most current scholarship concerning how the ancient Hebrew language and first-century Greek language were used

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Getting To Know The Book of Books

– How Did We Get Our English Bibles? –

Appendix A: The Extra Verses Of The King James Version

As discussed in Lesson 9, the translators of the King James Version followed the Greek New Testament known as the *Textus Receptus* (TR), which is based on the Greek text of Erasmus, first printed in 1516. The TR (especially before 1611) was based on a small number of very late Greek manuscripts: Erasmus considered the later manuscripts to be more trustworthy, and even occasionally translated from Jerome's Latin Vulgate back into Greek. After the KJV translation was made, a large number of earlier and more pure Greek MSS were discovered, including the three best, most complete and most ancient codices, the Codex Alexandrinus (disc. c. 1630), the Codex Sinaiticus (disc. c. 1830), and the Codex Vaticanus (disc. c. 1481, made available to scholars only in the 1800s). Textual criticism performed during the mid-1600s to the late 1800s would vastly improve the accuracy of the Greek New Testament, as discussed in earlier lessons. This scholarship was not available to the translators of the KJV.

Because of its reliance on late manuscripts which had been contaminated by copyist errors and additions, the KJV contains about 1,000 words (out of approximately 138,000 words in the Greek New Testament, thus comprising about 0.75% of the text) that textual criticism has shown to be spurious. Modern translations that follow the *Majority Text* (M), which is basically the same as the TR, include these verses as well (e.g. the New King James Version). Modern translations (e.g. the Revised Standard Version, first printing) which rightly omitted these verses faced tremendous resistance from people accustomed to the KJV, and so many of the modern translations have incorporated these verses back into the text, usually noting in the margins that they are of doubtful origin.

A list and description of these verses follows, broadly grouped into three categories. Compare these verses in the KJV or NKJV to a modern translation such as the NASU or NIV, carefully examining the marginal notes. For a thorough discussion of these verses, including a complete listing of which ancient manuscripts include or exclude these verses, see:

– Comfort, Philip. *Essential Guide To Bible Versions*.

Wegner, Paul. *A Student's Guide to Textual Criticism of the Bible: Its History, Methods and Results*.

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Getting To Know The Book of Books

– *How Did We Get Our English Bibles?* –

Appendix B: An Objective Examination of the New International Version

As discussed in Lesson 12, the complete New International Version of the Bible was first published in 1978. Over a hundred scholars participated in its creation and revision, representing many English-speaking countries throughout the world and over 30 different denominations. Because of its combination of accuracy and readability, the NIV is wildly popular, and the best-selling Bible version since 1987 (Comfort 190).

As a consequence, Paul Wegner points out that “theological and denominational biases in this translation are minimal” (379).

- Thought-for-thought translation in contemporary language, translated by over one hundred international scholars
- Half-way between a literal translation and a paraphrase because “thought patterns and syntax differ from language to language” and thus “faithful communication of the meaning of the writers of the New Testament demanded frequent modifications in sentence structure and constant regard for the contextual meanings of words” (Preface, NIV).
- Further, the translators showed concern for style, mood, and clarity: “Concern for clarity of style – that it should be idiomatic without being idiosyncratic, contemporary without being dated – also motivated the translators and their consultants. They have consistently aimed at simplicity of expression, with sensitive attention to the connotation and sound of the chosen word. At the same time, they endeavored to avoid a sameness of style in order to reflect the varied styles and moods of the New Testament writers.”
- Old Testament mainly follows the Masoretic Text with some variation from other manuscript evidence; the New Testament mainly follows the United Bible Society’s Greek text, also with variation from other manuscript evidence – thus, both Testaments follow an eclectic text
- This translation presents an outstanding combination of accuracy and readability, make the NIV the best-selling Bible translation, even above the KJV, since 1987
- Problematic issues: many authors have published criticisms of the NIV, some more educated and honest than others. For the purposes of this study, suffice it to say that the translators of the NIV have published several explanatory documents (available at www.biblica.com/niv/) in which they openly discuss all major variations between the NIV and more traditional renderings.

Since the very beginning of its distribution, the NIV has faced aggressive opposition by some writers and preachers within the churches of Christ:

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Getting To Know The Book of Books

– *Is The Bible Inspired By God?* –

XIV. What Is Inspiration and Why Is It Important?

A. The Bible Claims To Be Inspired By God

The Bible is one of the greatest works of literature, but it cannot simply be considered a great book and nothing more. The Bible *claims* to be the only book of its kinds: the complete revelation of the Creator to mankind.

- II Tim 3:16-17 – All Scripture is inspired by God, *lit.* “God-breathed,” i.e. the very words of God
- II Cor 2:7-13 – The apostles of Jesus Christ claimed that the words they spoke were revealed directly from God (cf. Acts 3:17-26; I Cor 7:10, 14:37; I Thes 2:13; I Pet 1:22-25; etc.)
- Literally thousands of passages in the Old Testament attribute the words of these 39 books to God Himself (e.g. Is 1:2; Jer 1:4,9; etc.)
- The New Testament writers also continually attribute the writings of the Old Testament to God Himself or equally to human authors as inspired by God (e.g. Matt 1:22; Acts 1:16, 2:30, 28:25; Heb 1:1; etc.)
- Jesus also quoted and referenced the Old Testament Scriptures as absolute, inspired truth (e.g. Matt 5:17f; Matt 19:4ff, 21:42-46, 22:29-33, 41-46; John 10:34-38; etc.) – including many of the passages often considered mythical or otherwise fictitious (e.g. Matt 12:39f, 19ff; Luke 4:27; John 3:14f).
Consequently, it is impossible to believe in Jesus and follow Him without believing in the inspiration of the Scriptures!

The Bible does not claim to be a collection of fables, traditions, or philosophies of mere men (actually, quite to the contrary, see II Pet 1:16; Matt 15:6-9; Col 2:8). Consequently, the reader must approach the Bible like no other work of literature: we expect evidence – proof – that the Bible is in fact what it claims to be. If we find the evidence lacking, or even disproving that the Bible is inspired, then it is doubtful that this could be considered even a “good” book. If, however, proof is found for the divine knowledge of the Biblical authors, we cannot afford to cast off the Bible as just a common work of classical literature!

B. What Is Inspiration?

There are many misconceptions about the inspiration of the Bible. What does the Bible claim about its own inspiration?

- **Inspired means “God-breathed”** (II Tim 3:16) – Not inspired in the sense that an artist might be inspired to paint or compose by a beautiful figure or landscape, or an author might be inspired to write by a traumatic or emotional experience. The Bible claims that it is inspired in the sense that it came directly from God – when we read the words of the Bible, we read the words of the divine Creator.
- **Every word is inspired** (II Tim 3:16) – Notice from this verse that the Bible claims it is **entirely** an inspired work: not a single word is the product of man’s mind alone. I Corinthians 2:10-13 provides a detailed explanation of revelation, stating that the Holy Spirit searches the mind of God and reveals His spiritual thoughts to man in the form of spiritual words (see NIV and NASU translation of this passage). In fact, many times in Scripture, the argument of the author or speaker falls upon a single word – or even one letter – written elsewhere in the Bible. For example, see Matt 22:29-33 and Gal 3:16. Thus, the prophets claimed that they spoke the very words of God, not their own words (cf. II Sam 23:2; Ezek 1:3). Meanwhile, the apostles claimed that the commandments they preached were the commandments of God, not their own (I Cor 7:10, 14:37).

- **Inspiration is not interpreted revelation** – Some people think the Bible is the interpretive teachings of men who claimed to be inspired. In other words, God revealed a message to someone, then that person interpreted the message and wrote it down. However, this is not what the Bible claims at all. In addition to the verses cited in the previous point, consider II Pet 1:20-21 – “...no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation...” (NIV). The Bible claims that when a prophet of God spoke, he or she did not give their own private interpretation, but simply spoke the words given by God through the Holy Spirit.
- **God's inspiration can preserve the personality of the author** – Man is not the source or the authority behind Scripture, yet God used people as the medium by which He revealed His truth. In doing so, the Bible reveals that God preserved the individuality, personality, consciousness and emotion of His human authors. Many of the Biblical authors exhibit unique literary characteristics and mannerisms (e.g. see how Peter speaks of the unique characteristics of Paul's letters in II Pet 3:15-16). At the same time, many of the Biblical authors reveal their own emotions and personal concerns in their writings, especially seen in the greetings and salutations of the New Testament epistles, but in other passages, too. In fact, this fact provides somewhat of a distinction between inspiration and revelation: sometimes God *inspired* a Biblical author to write something that was not necessarily *revealed* to him, but rather intimately known by him already. For example, Paul did not need God to reveal to him his own sorrows over the unbelieving Jews (Rom 10:1), his affection for his fellow laborers (e.g. Phil 2:19-22; Col 4:14), or facts about the physical situations he faced (e.g. II Cor 12:7-10; II Tim 4:13,21). However, according to the Bible's claims of inspiration, God absolutely inspired Paul to record these facts and feelings!

C. Why Is Inspiration Important?

A detailed examination of the inspiration of the Bible is perhaps the most important study that we will ever undertake. We cannot possibly overemphasize the importance of this issue!

If the Bible IS NOT inspired:

- It is not a “good” book, but a book full of lies and deceit. The person who claims to admire the Bible and its teaching while not believing in its full inspiration must consider this fact!
- The book would be suspect of bearing all the faults and shortcomings of its mortal authors, such that its truth could not be considered infallible.
- Its authority would mean nothing: all commands would be only the suggestions of human authors.
- Its promises and assurances would mean nothing: only the hopes and dreams of uninspired people.

If the Bible IS the inspired word of God:

- The Creator of the universe and all life is seeking to communicate with mankind, specifically through His Son, Jesus Christ (Heb 1:1-4).
- Our Creator reveals knowledge about Himself and our own immortal nature that we could not possibly learn through natural or physical means (I Cor 2:6-16) .
- The salvation of our immortal souls depends upon our obedience to His commands (II Thes 1:8; Heb 5:9), because all people of all time will one day be judged by Him in righteousness (John 5:28f; II Cor 5:10).

You see, if the Bible is God's word, then it is a veritable road map and instruction manual for the human soul! Only a great fool would turn away from this book without at least one thorough examination to test its inspiration. If it is not inspired by God, it is just another book, some parts history, some parts religious philosophy, but all the mere words of fallible, mortal men – and all our faith and hope means nothing.

Searching and weighing the solid evidence for the inspiration of the Bible is the most important journey that a person can ever take!

D. What Should We Expect From A Book Inspired By God?

Not only does the Bible claim to be inspired by God and provide a specific definition for its inspiration, this book also reveals much about the nature and characteristics of the spiritual being known as God. These characteristics of God help us to formulate expectations for the “fingerprints” of inspiration that we should find in the Bible.

- **The Omniscient and Omnipresent God** – He knows everything about the past, the present and the future. He is living and always present, in every place, in every time, observing absolutely everything that goes on in the entire universe and beyond.
 - See Job 28:24; Heb 4:13; Prov 15:3; Jer 23:23-24; etc.
 - A book inspired by this God would be expected to contain much information that man could not possibly know on his own. Explanations of the past and present, detailed prophecy concerning the future, truths about human nature, emotion, experience, etc. that have no other explanation but divine inspiration.
- **The Omnipotent God** – He has the power to do anything and everything that He desires
 - Jer 10:12; Matt 19:26; Gen 18:14; etc.
 - We would expect awesome works from this God, far beyond the capabilities of mankind to perform. We also expect credible evidence supporting the truth of the accounts from witnesses of His power and miracles.
- **The God of truth and justice** – A God whose every word is truth: it is impossible for Him to lie (for this would cause Him to cease from being God).
 - Deut 32:4; Titus 1:2; etc.
 - We expect that the revealed word of this God would be free from errors, without contradictions or mistakes, for they are against His very nature. Thus, inerrancy is expected in every aspect of the Bible.
- **The God who sustains and preserves His word**
 - Psalm 100:5 (“endured,” cf. Ps 117:2); I Pet 1:24-25; Matt 5:18; etc.
 - Through passing ages, societies, advances, disasters, and the aggressive assaults of its enemies, we expect the Bible to stand, accurately preserved. God wants His word to be available to those who want to hear Him!

Truly, a book inspired by such a God would have to be unique – one of a kind, something that no mortal man or group of mortal men could ever compose on their own. Is this what we find when we stop to examine the Bible? **You see, no one should be expected to blindly accept that the Scriptures are inspired: God does not expect such “blind faith” either!** “‘Come, let us reason together,’ says the Lord” (Isa 1:18) – in these lessons, let’s sit down and reason with God and come to a conclusion that makes rational sense! Let’s examine and weigh the evidence that the Bible is indeed inspired by the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth.

Getting To Know The Book of Books

– *Is The Bible Inspired By God?* –

XV. The Amazing Uniqueness Of The Bible

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Getting To Know The Book of Books

– *Is The Bible Inspired By God?* –

XVI. The Bible and Prophecy

Because the Bible claims that its Author is the Creator of the Universe and the one God who knows, sees and comprehensively understands all things of all time (cf. Ps 139; Heb 4:13; Job 28:24), we would reasonably expect that a revelation inspired by Him would contain a significant amount of prophecy concerning things to come. Remember that prophecy by definition *does not* necessarily have to deal with the future: by the Biblical definition, a prophet of God is simply a “mouthpiece” (literal translation, cf. Ex 4:10-16 with Ex 7:1) who passes on the exact message that he or she receives from God, whether that message is about the past (cf. Matt 26:68), the present (cf. Matt 26:14-25,48-56), or the future (cf. Matt 26:1-2,31-35). However, throughout the Bible, prophecy concerning the future is continually presented as evidence of God’s power, knowledge and faithfulness.

- Isa 42:9, 43:9-13, 48:3-8; John 13:19, 14:29, 16:4 – Only someone with immortal knowledge can truly foretell the future, not in ambiguous generalities but specific details.
- Deut 18:20-21 – A person who wrongly predicts the future cannot possibly be inspired by God.

Looking closely at Deuteronomy 18, the Bible holds itself to a very high standard: if a professed prophet gives even one prophecy that fails within the frame of time that it was supposed to be fulfilled, that prophet cannot possibly be inspired by God. Thus, since the Bible claims divine authorship (II Tim 3:16-17, etc.) it also claims absolute fulfillment of all of its prophecies. Truly, the Bible is totally set apart from every other work of ancient literature in that: 1) it contains such an enormous body of specific prophecies (see the previous lesson, section: “*Unique In Its Prophecies*”), and 2) not a single prophecy in Scripture has ever failed to be fulfilled in its proper time frame:

“No unconditional prophecy of the Bible about events to the present day has gone unfulfilled. Hundreds of predictions, some of them given hundreds of years in advance, have been literally fulfilled. The time (Dan. 9), city (Mic. 5:2), and nature (Isa. 7:14) of Christ’s birth were foretold in the Old Testament, as were dozens of other things about His life, death, and resurrection (see Isa. 53). Numerous other prophecies have been fulfilled, including the destruction of Edom (Obad. 1), the curse of Babylon (Isa. 13), the destruction of Tyre (Ezek. 26) and Nineveh (Nah. 1-3), and the return of Israel to the Land (Isa. 11:11). Other books claim divine inspiration, such as the Koran, the Book of Mormon, and parts of the Veda. But none of those books contains predictive prophecy. As a result, fulfilled prophecy is a strong indication of the unique, divine authority of the Bible.”

- Geisler and Nix, *General Introduction to the Bible*, 196

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Getting To Know The Book of Books

– *Is The Bible Inspired By God?* –

XVII. Scientific Foreknowledge In The Bible

“Scientific foreknowledge” refers to the body of information in the Bible that contains scientific facts that could not possibly have been known to the writers/characters of the Bible in the time they wrote/lived. If we can find a number of facts in the Bible that could only have been known through scientific and exploration techniques not developed for centuries, even millennia, then this gives great credence to the idea that the Biblical writers possessed supernatural knowledge.

“Many scientific facts, which prove the infallibility of Scripture, are tucked away in its pages. These proofs are given in nonscientific language; nevertheless, they substantiate the claims of the authenticity of the Holy Scriptures.... In some cases, scientific concepts have been known through the ages, but these concepts are mentioned in a unique manner in Scripture. In other cases, scientific topics have been mentioned hundreds or even thousands of years before man discovered them.”

– Jean Morton, *Science In The Bible*, 1978, p. 10.

A. Word Of Caution

There are two possible extremes in this study:

- 1) To stretch the meanings of verses to find scientific foreknowledge that was never in the intended meaning...
 - Figurative language should be understood as figurative language...
 - Is 40:22; Job 26:7 just like Ps 104:5; Job 26:11
 - Empirical knowledge must not be mistaken for scientific foreknowledge
 - Life is in the blood, Lev 17:11,14; the Sun’s “orbit,” Ps 19:4-6
 - We never have the authority to stretch the meaning of God’s word to fit our arguments
 - “One writer suggested that the Bible anticipated: automobiles (Joel 2:3-4); airplanes (Isaiah 31:56); submarines (Revelation 9:1-11); radio (Ecclesiastes 10:20); and television (Revelation 11:3-12) [Beirnes, 1951, pp. 31-32].”
 - Bert Thompson, *Scientific Foreknowledge and the Bible*, apologeticspress.org
- 2) To make a blanket statement that there is no evidence for scientific foreknowledge in the Bible whatsoever since it is not intended to be a scientific document.

The truth evidently lies somewhere in between these two approaches.

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Getting To Know The Book of Books

– *Is The Bible Inspired By God?* –

XVIII. The Missing Human Element In Its Authorship

In the first lessons of this series, we saw that the Bible contains the characteristics we would expect of a revelation of an omnipotent and omniscient God. Now we turn to the fact that **the Bible is missing all the elements we would expect of a revelation written purely by men.**

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Getting To Know The Book of Books

– *Is The Bible Inspired By God?* –

IXX. The Evidence For Christ's Resurrection

The resurrection of Christ is the most pivotal event in all of human history. Romans 1:4 states that Jesus Christ was “declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.” Romans 6:4 states that when an unbeliever is baptized into Christ Jesus, he is “buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so [he] also should walk in newness of life.” Thus, baptism is meaningless without the resurrection from the dead. Paul goes on to state, in I Corinthians 15:12-19, that's impossible to believe the gospel but disbelieve the resurrection – without Christ's resurrection, there is no hope, no remission of sins, no purpose to our sacrifices and sufferings, and no eternal home in heaven after this life is over!

Some contend that the resurrection of Christ is just a myth or a legend that grew over time. Others claim it's a great conspiracy, that the body of Christ was tossed in a shallow criminal's grave and devoured by beasts, or that the apostles stole the body. Whatever the objection, you see from the Scriptures above that it's quite important for Christians that the resurrection of Jesus Christ be true: not a myth or a metaphorical tale, but a reasonable historical account proving that Jesus was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, never to die again. Consider in this lesson some of the evidence supplied in Scripture (and a little from history) that persuades me to believe that the New Testament accounts of Christ's resurrection are indeed fact and not fiction.

A. The Historical Gospels

Before one throws away the evidence for Christ's resurrection that is found in the four gospels, it must be considered that they stand as some of the very best attested and preserved historical accounts of all antiquity.

- Lessons 6 and 7 establish the accuracy of preservation of these books that far surpasses any other work of ancient literature
- These books were written too soon after Christ's death to take on legendary or mythical characteristics – well within the 1st Century, and probably within 30 years of Christ's crucifixion (in the case of the gospel of Mark)
- Meanwhile, I Cor 15:1-7 dates at least back to 55 AD, while the sermons preserved by Luke (e.g. Peter in Acts 2, Stephen in Acts 7, and Paul in Acts 13) date back substantially earlier, even to just a few days after Christ's crucifixion and transmitted through oral tradition
- The gospels are presented as and bear the qualities of historical accounts, not fables or legends. The information provided concerning Christ's life and death is:
 - Provided in multiple, independent accounts written and verified by eyewitness.
 - Corroborated by early Greek and Jewish writers and historians (e.g. Clement of Rome in 1 Clement, Polycarp in his letter to the Philippians, Josephus, Tacitus, Mara Bar-Serapion, etc.).
 - Even attested by one of the greatest enemies of the early church, Saul of Tarsus.

Note that, for the purposes of this study, the gospels *do not* have to be given preferential treatment based on their assumed inspiration: if an honest, objective investigator simply treats them as any other work of ancient history, they still stand as excellent historical accounts of the end of Christ's life on earth. (See Lee Strobel, *“The Case for the Real Jesus,”* 109,113,116.)

B. Christ's Burial

The Lord was crucified between two criminals, though He Himself was in no way a criminal in any sense of the definition. However, just as foretold hundreds of years earlier in the book of Isaiah, Christ was buried in a rich man's tomb – “*And they made His grave with the wicked – but with the rich at His death*” (Isa 53:9). The gospel accounts record that the rich man who owned this unoccupied tomb was Joseph of Arimathea, whom Matthew refers to as a disciple of Christ (Matt 27:57), a prominent member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Council (Mark 15:43).

1. *The Unlikely Sanhedrin Member – Luke 23:50-54*

Joseph of Arimathea is an extremely unlikely figure to find in a myth or lie created by Christ's disciples – all of the disciples of Christ desert him, but a member of the villainous Jewish Sanhedrin (granted, who had not consented to the vote to kill Christ, Luke 23:51) procures Christ's body and places it in a royal tomb? A specifically named person from a specific group about whom people could verify the details? Not likely at all for a legend or a lie, and certainly an historic figure.

2. *Multiple Mythical Burial Accounts?*

Furthermore, if the burial story of Christ were a myth that developed over generations, one would expect there to be multiple and differing burial stories, but this is not true at all. *All four gospel accounts* mention the burial of Christ in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea.

C. The Empty Tomb – Luke 23:55-4:12

1. *The First Witnesses – Women?*

Consider the first visitors to the empty tomb, the first people to discover that Jesus had risen from the dead. If this story arose after decades of exaggeration and mythical contamination, who would we expect to be the first to uncover the resurrection of Christ? Peter, John, the other apostles? Certainly not women – these were neglected and scorned in Jewish society. (See John 4:27 where the apostles accusingly question Christ for even speaking to a woman.) However, in all four gospel accounts, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and other women are the first to discover Christ's empty tomb. Notice that in I Cor 15:1-8 these women are not even mentioned: Paul is here presenting *credible* evidence of the resurrection of Christ, and as medieval as this might sound to us, the testimony of a group of women was *not* considered credible evidence at that time! (*Note*: Paul does not say that Peter saw the resurrected Christ *first!*)

2. *Even The Jews Knew The Tomb Was Empty – Matt 28:11-15*

Notice that even among those Jews who wanted so badly to disprove the resurrection story, their argument was never that the tomb was empty, but rather that the disciples stole away the body. Even their concocted, deceitful story begins with the assumption that the tomb was empty! Thus, through these historical accounts, their attempts to cover up the resurrection stand as tremendous testimony to the truthfulness of Christ's empty tomb: the corroborating testimony of an enemy is very weighty in establishing the most probably historical account.

3. *Lie About An Empty Tomb In Your Own City?*

The gospel began to be preached in Jerusalem, the very city where Jesus was murdered and buried (cf. Acts 2:22-24): could such a revolution occur in a city where Christian and Jew alike could go to see a tomb that wasn't really empty or talk to people who could factually contradict the accounts of Christ's resurrection? When did the rulers of the Jews or any other enemy of the cross ever stand up to the apostles and say that the tomb was not empty, that Christ's body did not rise?

D. Witnesses Of The Resurrected Christ – Acts 2:22-24,32; 13:29-31; 23:6-9; 26:6-8, 24-28; I Cor 9:1, 15:1-8

1. *The Early Writings Of Paul and Luke*

Romans and I/II Corinthians were composed on Paul's 3rd missionary journey. Acts was probably written during the two years of Paul's first Roman imprisonment. Thus, these books were probably written and circulated before any of the gospel accounts. Furthermore, Paul says that he received (and began preaching) the very account recorded in I Corinthians 15 from the beginning of his ministry – i.e. from about 32 A.D., just two years after Christ died! Therefore, accounts of the resurrection were not adapted into mythology over generations of time: these accounts were written and preached from the time of a few days to a few years after the resurrection of Christ – the witnesses themselves were still around to either verify or debunk the apostles' teachings! People who heard the gospel preached could go to the witnesses and verify the accounts for themselves! I Cor 15:6 practically beckons people to check the facts for themselves!

2. *The Apostles Suffered And Died For A Lie? – Acts 5:26-32, 40-42*

All accounts of a resurrection conspiracy – e.g. the disciples stole the body, etc. – fail to account for a tremendously powerful truth. After Christ's death, the picture of His disciples is quite pitiful: scattered, lost, their confidence shattered, back at their old jobs again after three years of devotion to Jesus. And yet, just a few days later, we find them rallied together, boldly preaching the gospel of Christ in the very city where Jesus was murdered! What in the world could make them unite again, preach the word with such boldness and courage, and die for their gospel?

Answer – I John 1:1-4

The apostles obviously believed that their story was true, that Christ had risen from the dead – they suffered and died to maintain that Jesus was the resurrected Christ! We see eleven men with no apparent ulterior motives, with nothing in this world to gain but every comfort and security to lose, all testifying the same thing despite incredible danger *because they all observed the resurrected Christ with their own eyes and touched Him with their own hands.*

3. *The Testimony Of Christ's Most Vehement Enemy*

Think about Paul, a sworn enemy of the cross who believed it was God's will to kill Christians (Acts 26:9) – and then all of a sudden he's preaching Christ in Damascus and in Jerusalem and in all the world, suffering greatly for the gospel (read **II Cor 11:22-28**, also attested by Clement of Rome, Polycarp, Tertullian, Dionysius of Corinth, and Origen [Strobel 120]). What could cause such a change in Paul's mind and behavior, especially when he had absolutely nothing to gain from his conversion, but rather absolutely everything to lose (Phil 3:4b-11)?

4. *The Conversion Of James, the Half-Brother Of Jesus*

How easy would it be to convince you that your brother is the Son of God?

See Mark 3:21,31, 6:3-4; John 7:3-5 with John 19:25-27

Now read Acts 15:12-21 with Galatians 1:9 → what happened? See I Cor 15:7!

You're forced to one of three conclusions: a) the apostles were stark raving mad – and their stories are perfectly unified despite their insanity and hallucinations; b) the apostles were the greatest conspirators and deceivers the world has ever known; or c) they were telling the truth. Read the *Acts Of The Apostles* and observe the goodness, peace, gentleness, self-control that the apostles preached: are these the actions and teachings of conspirators and deceivers? Read the gospels and the epistles: are these the words of mad men?

E. Circumstantial Evidence – Matt 16:16-18

If you were an unbiased observer looking at the world around 30 A.D., which institution would you expect to be around in another 2,000 years: a small, diverse, largely impoverished and oppressed group of people calling themselves Christians who believed that a carpenter from an obscure Jewish village had been cruelly executed but raised from the dead by the power of God, or the Roman Empire?

- Rome is gone – yet the church remains?
- Thousands of Jews who had been practicing animal sacrifice and the Mosaic Law all their lives, whose entire social structure was built on the Old Testament, turned from those ways to become Christians and leave the Old Law behind.
- Skeptics like the brothers of Jesus and even the murderous Saul of Tarsus were convinced enough to turn their entire lives around and eventually die for Christ as their Savior.
- The enemies of the cross who have tried in every century to utterly stamp out the church have vanished into the darkness of the past while Christianity marches on and permeates all the earth.

Conclusions: If the resurrection of Jesus Christ is not factually, historically, literally true, what explanation can possibly account for all of this first-hand and circumstantial evidence? Whatever theory you come up with has to account for all of this evidence, not just bits and pieces. My conclusion is the same of Paul, who actually saw the resurrected Christ with his own eyes – the resurrection of Christ is true: it's the only answer that's truly reasonable in an ocean of poorly formulated and incomplete skeptic explanations. Read **I Cor 15:20-28**.

Getting To Know The Book of Books

– Dealing With Bible Difficulties –

XX. Introduction to Biblical Inerrancy

“*Inerrancy*” means free from error, contradictions, and untruths. Traditionally, “*Biblical inerrancy*” refers to the ideology that the Scriptures are infallible and free from contradiction on whatever subject they happen to discuss. More recently, it has become popular to loosen the definition of inerrancy to only refer to the Bible’s teachings on spiritual subjects such as the nature of God, the soul, and salvation. In this lesson, we will attempt to answer some of the important questions about this important subject:

- Is it truly important to our faith in the word of God that the Bible contain no contradictions and errors?
- If so, to what extent is the Bible infallible, only on spiritual subjects or on all subjects it considers and examines?
- How did Jesus and the inspired writers of the Bible view the Scriptures, as the work of fallible men or as the flawless and dependable words of God?

A. The Biblical Argument for Inerrancy

It is important that this lesson follow an examination of the evidence for the inspiration of the Bible. On one hand, a detailed study of Biblical inerrancy may provide further proof that the Scriptures are inspired. However, whether or not we have concluded that the Bible is inspired by God will absolutely impact how we approach Bible difficulties. For example, two people consider the same Bible difficulty, say the contradiction alleged by some to exist between Matt 5:9 and Matt 10:34.

- The person who has examined the evidence for the inspiration of the Bible and come to the conclusion that it is the word of a divine Creator has motivation to patiently search for the resolution to this difficulty. He humbly believes that the contradiction is only apparent and due to a lack of understanding of the entirety of the subject (Ps 119:160).
- Contrastingly, the person who refuses to believe that the Bible is inspired by God has no firm reason to search for a resolution, but rather is much more likely to accept the shallow and easy interpretation that the two passages simply contradict.

So, the question of inspiration becomes the motivation for the examination of inerrancy. A person who accepts the inspiration of the Bible is motivated to dig for answers, while the person who assumes the Bible is the fallible work of mere men will be more likely to see contradictions in every difficult passage and apparent discrepancy.

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Getting To Know The Book of Books

– Dealing With Bible Difficulties –

XXI. Dealing With Bible Difficulties

“So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. **His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.**”

Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.”

– II Peter 3:14-18 (NIV)

The subject of Bible difficulties has many faces and is somewhat subjective. A passage which one person finds difficult may not be as difficult for another Bible student, and for various reasons:

- *A lack of wisdom and knowledge* clouds the understanding, see Prov 10:14, 12:1; Matt 22:29; Acts 18:26; Rom 10:1-3 with Prov 19:2 (NIV)
- *Deception due to false teaching* places many obstacles in correct understanding, see Luke 11:52; I Tim 4:1-5; Tit 1:10-16
- *Preconceived ideas, prejudices and pride* are stumbling blocks to understanding, see Prov 12:15, 14:12; Matt 15:1-20; John 8:31-47; II Pet 2:12

All of these reasons, and many others like them, may cause two people to approach the same passage in very different ways. However, the Scriptures give us much guidance to approach Bible study in such a way that we are less apt to arrive at false conclusions:

- Study with humility, see Jam 1:21; Prov 15:33
- Thoughtfully inquire into the entirety of the Scriptures, see Acts 17:11; Ps 119:160
- Examine more than one translation with textual footnotes (for example, compare even the above passage from II Peter in the NKJV and NIV)

In the case of almost all difficult passages, these guidelines will help us to sort out the confusion and adopt a clear and Scriptural interpretation of the passage. However, in this study we want to examine not just generally difficult passages (as Peter talked about in II Pet 3:14-18), but specifically those passages which the critics of Biblical inspiration and inerrancy point out as sure indications that there is no divine hand or power behind the Bible.

The renowned author and Biblical scholar, Dr. Gleason Archer, studied the subject of Biblical difficulties comprehensively. Here is his conclusion, as stated in one of his most well-known works, *The Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (12):

“As I have dealt with one apparent discrepancy after another and have studied the alleged contradictions between the biblical record and the evidence of linguistics, archaeology, or science, my confidence in the trustworthiness of Scripture has been repeatedly verified and strengthened by the discovery that almost every problem in Scripture that has ever been discovered by man, from ancient times until now, has been dealt with in a completely satisfactory manner by the biblical text itself – or else by objective archaeological information. The deductions that may be validly drawn from ancient Egyptian, Sumerian, or Akkadian documents all harmonize with the biblical record; and no properly trained evangelical scholar has anything to fear from the hostile arguments and challenges of humanistic rationalists or detractors of any and every persuasion. There is a good and sufficient answer in Scripture itself to refute every charge that has ever been leveled against it. But this is only to be expected from the kind of book the Bible asserts itself to be, the inscripturation of the infallible, inerrant Word of the living God.”

Good References:

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- Kaiser, Walter C., et al. *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (1996). This book includes five volumes in one: hard sayings of the Old Testament (2 volumes), the New Testament, Paul, and Jesus.
- A host of useful websites, including:
 - <http://www.apologeticspress.org/allegeddiscrepancies/>
 - <http://www.carm.org/bible-difficulties/genesis-deuteronomy>
 - <http://www.lookinguntojesus.net/answering.htm>

Some Guidelines To Dealing With Bible Difficulties:

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