

BIBLICAL INTRODUCTION

A STUDY OF HOW
WE RECEIVED OUR BIBLE



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“Biblical Introduction”

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BIBLICAL INTRODUCTION

How Did We Receive Our Bible?

INTRODUCTION - The Bible is God's voice ... it is God speaking to us. The sacred scriptures are in fact a revelation from God to man. God has given to man a special, infallible, supernatural revelation. Such a revelation is *possible, necessary, probable, credible, reasonable, and certain*.

God has spoken and the Bible is the result of it! His Spirit has spoken unto us *through men*. The Apostle Peter declares that "men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit" (cf. 2 Pet.1:21).

The Bible is a series of messages from God to man. It is a communication by God to man of those truths concerning himself and his plan of redemption for our lives. These truths could not be known through nature, intuition, or any process of reasoning, apart from divine revelation.

THE BIBLE

God's Revelation to Man

1. A Revelation is Possible. With God all things are possible (Mk.10:27, Lk.1:37). Surely an infinitely wise and powerful God can, if He will, reveal Himself, His plans, and His will to man. And certainly God is able to *preserve* such a revelation over the centuries.

2. A Revelation is Necessary. Without a revelation from God, man could know nothing of God's love, his provision for pardon, reconciliation, and all the blessings of the new life in Christ. These truths could only come through divine revelation. Man could not possibly have knowledge of the resurrection, future rewards and punishment, and eternity without a revelation from God.

Human opinions are not sufficient guides in life issues and conduct. They are too numerous, varied, and contradictory. The law of God, the only sufficient rule, can be known only through revelation.

The heathen world is hopelessly corrupt, and is powerless to make itself better. The best of heathen philosophers and moralists are corrupt and blind and teach statutes that are contrary to the law of the Creator. It is the Bible alone, as a revelation from God, that saves us from the ignorance, superstition, cruelty, and impurity of these abominations (see Psa.19:9,11, 119:105, Eph.1:13, 2:13).

3. A Revelation is Probable. If a revelation is possible and necessary, and if God loves his creatures, yearns over them, and longs to bring them into intimate fellowship with Himself, then surely a revelation is preeminently *probable*.

4. A Revelation is Credible. If a revelation is possible, necessary, and probable, it is also overwhelmingly believable that God would give one. In fact, it would be most difficult to believe that such a revelation should not be given.

5. A Revelation is Reasonable. It would seem strange indeed if the Author of our being who has enabled us to communicate with one another in so many ways, should never have communicated with us at all. Reason, so far from rejecting the idea of a revelation, rather calls for it.

6. A Revelation is Certain. The obvious conclusion is that our wonderful Bible is this revelation. The Bible claims to be a revelation from God and these claims are fully substantiated by its miracles, fulfilled prophecy, the beautiful fruits of Christianity, and the satisfaction it brings to the human heart the world over.

THE BIBLE IS ACCURATE AFTER ALL THESE CENTURIES

- Matthew 24:35 - Jesus said that heaven and earth would pass away but his words would never pass away. What God says is eternal.
- Psalm 119:89 - “Forever O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven.” What God has spoken will never be altered or lost. He is the unchanging Lord (Mal. 3:6, Jas.1:17).
- Matthew 5:17-19 Jesus backed up all the Old Testament scriptures. He said all the scriptures testified of Him (Jn. 5:39, Lk. 24:27, 44-45).
- Matthew 5:18 - Not one “jot or tittle” of the Law will fail or go unfulfilled. A jot and tittle in the Hebrew language would be equivalent to our comma and apostrophe. The Lord God is so particular about his Word that not even one letter of one word will be lost.
- Psalm 138:2 - God puts his Word above his name. The Lord magnifies his Word even above his name. Thus, we see the authority and certainty of God’s written Word.
- Revelation 19:13 The very title of the Lord Jesus Christ is THE WORD OF GOD (cf. Jn.1:1, 1:14), and he is the same, yesterday, today, and forever (Heb.13:8). God’s words will not change.

Why a Book?

The Apostle John was told in Revelation 1:11, “What thou seest write in a book.” Why did God record his Word in a book? He did so *to preserve it*. What is written down or engraved remains the same. This is the reason James calls it “the engrafted word” (Jas.1:21). Centuries do not alter what has been inscribed. Succeeding generations could never rely on memory or passed down stories or traditions. They would very quickly lose their exactness.

God Loves Books

The Lord has many books in heaven. Can you think of a few? Here are several:

- The book of life - (Rev. 20:12-15) Men will be judged by what is written in the books of heaven.
- The book of remembrance - (Mal. 3:16) God remembers and records our good deeds.
- Books that record every part of us—spirit, soul, and body. (Psa.139:13-16, Mt. 10:30).
- Books that register every tear we shed, and every heartache. (Psa. 56:8).
- Job wished his trial were recorded in a book—it was! (Job 19:23). So will our trials be recorded.

God gives a solemn warning not to add to or take away from His Word (Rev. 22:18-19). Anyone who tampers with the eternal Word of God will face serious consequences (Prov. 30:6, Deut. 4:2).

DIVINE INSPIRATION

INSPIRATION - (breathing in). According to Second Timothy 3:16, “All scripture is given by *inspiration* of God.” All scripture (every single word) is God-breathed or filled with the breath of God. Our Bible is the product of the divine breath or Spirit of God. The same breath that breathed life into the nostrils of Adam, also brought life into the men who penned the sacred scriptures.

Inspiration is the inbreathing of God into men, thus qualifying them to receive and communicate divine truth. It is the Holy Spirit speaking through men, to man. It is the work of God through the Spirit in men, enabling them to receive and give forth divine truth without error. It makes the speaker and writer infallible in the communication of this truth, whether this truth was previously known or not. It causes the message to go beyond human power and become divinely authoritative. Hence, the Bible reads like no other book. The Holy Spirit so guided and controlled the men who wrote the Old and New Testaments in the original languages that what they wrote was *exactly* what God wanted to communicate.

The scriptures are not only inspired, they are *God-inspired*. The Bible is the direct result of the all-powerful creative breath of God, the same power that created all the hosts of heaven (Psa. 33:6.) The writers of the Bible were God-inspired men (2 Pet. 1:21, 2 Sam. 23:2), in order that they might give to us a God-inspired Book (2 Tim. 3:16).

INSPIRATION for:

a. Revelation

b. Known Facts

REVELATION is the work of God by which he communicates facts and truths which were *not known before*. The first chapters of Genesis which record the creation, and the fall of Lucifer which is seen in Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 are examples of history given by revelation. These are episodes which could only be known by revelation. No one knows exactly how much of the Bible came by divine revelation. Revelation is an act of God, a disclosure of what was previously unknown (see Amos 3:7, Gen. 40:8, 41:16, Dan. 2:28, Gal.1:11, Eph. 3:3,5, I Cor. 2:10, Rev.1:1, and others.)

KNOWN FACTS may come either (1) from personal observation, or (2) from existing documents. Ezra and Nehemiah for example, used both. Ezra, who is the author of First and Second Chronicles, quotes from a number of other competent scholars whose writings had accumulated during the nation's history (cf. 1 Chron. 29:29, 2 Chron. 9:29, 12:15, 13:22, 20:34, 24:27, 26:22, 32:32, 33:19).

It did not require *revelation* for Moses to record the journey of Israel from Egypt to Sinai to the plains of Moab because he was an eyewitness of all these events. However, it did require *inspiration* to let him know just what to include and what to omit, and to secure accuracy.

Revelation discovers new truth to men (I Cor. 2:10-11); *Inspiration* guides and controls the giving out of the truth (I Cor. 2:13). Not all the Bible was *revealed* by God to the writers, nor did it need to be; but the entire Bible is *inspired* by God. The Bible *contains* revelation, but is totally inspired.

VERBAL INSPIRATION

The scriptures are not partially inspired and not occasionally inspired. Every single word is inspired or God-breathed. Second Timothy 3:16 declares, *all scripture* is inspired by God. Here is our definition of verbal inspiration:

Verbal Inspiration is the work of the Holy Spirit so directing men in their choice of the subject matter and also their *selection of each word* so that their writings contain exactly what God desired, and *all* that He desired them to contain.

God so guided in the writing of the books of the Bible, and he so overshadowed each penman, that even their *words* were precisely and sovereignly selected by the Lord. Yet, each book was composed in the style of the writers. God's Spirit articulated Himself *through* the individual personalities of each Bible writer.

Every part of the Bible is inspired, and equally inspired. *Every word* is inspired in the original languages. However, no *translation* from the original language can claim absolute and perfect inspiration.

GOD-GIVEN WORDS God did not give general thoughts to the Bible writers and then ask them to articulate these thoughts. No, even the choice of words was directed by the Holy Spirit. The writers were so controlled by the Spirit that they wrote exactly what God wanted them to write. God gave assurance to Moses saying; "I will be with thy mouth and teach thee what thou shalt say" (Ex. 4:12,15). To Jeremiah he declared; "I have put my words into thy mouth" (Jer.1:9). He did not say, "I have put my thoughts into your head." David's testimony was this; — "The Spirit of God spake by me, and his *word* was in my tongue" (2 Sam. 23. 2).

Jesus said; "I have given them the *words* which thou gavest me" (Jn. 17:8). Christ did not teach ideas, concepts, and statutes. He delivered the very words of the Heavenly Father. The Apostle Peter declares that "Men *spake* from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet.1:21 R.V). Spake what? "*Words* which the Holy Spirit teacheth" as Paul says in First Corinthians 2:13. On Mount Sinai it says, "And God spoke all these *words* . . ." (Ex. 20:1).

Every *word* was inspired. God did not give the writers general thoughts. If God simply gave men thoughts or left them to their own ideas, and permitted them, then or afterwards to write these thoughts or ideas, undirected as best they could in their own words, then there would be no guarantee that we have God's words, nor even his choice of words, but merely man's selection. Thus, we see the importance of verbal inspiration.

BUT NOT VERBAL DICTATION

However, we should not think that God *dictated* to the writers just as the business or professional man would dictate to his secretary. This would be "mechanical inspiration." We must remember that both the writer and the writings were inspired by the Holy Spirit.

VERBAL DICTATION makes the writer almost a mere machine, a passive agent, a pen and not a penman of the Holy Spirit. It does not account for the different styles and individualities of the writers, and the personal and human touches in the writings. Dictation is not inspiration. There were, however, several times in scripture when a prophet under the inspiration of the Spirit dictated a message to a scribe, and he recorded it for the prophet.

Only the Bible *in its original language*, Hebrew and Greek, is inspired. And while the Christian Church has not always had, and does not now have the *original* apostolic autographs, yet she has always had the original scriptures. By the process of textual criticism and the comparison of the many existing manuscript copies, versions, and patristic quotations, we have assurance that we have a text which is very substantially the same as the original. But putting all of this aside, we have the reassurance of the Lord Jesus Christ that not one jot or tittle of the law will pass away. Every comma and apostrophe is preserved by God Himself. Jesus told us in John 10:35 that the scripture cannot be broken, and that a prophet [and his words] could not perish out of Jerusalem (Lk.13:33). God has even elevated his Word above his name.

No claim is made for the perfect inspiration of a *translation*, yet our English translations (KJV, ASV, etc.) are quite true to the Hebrew and Greek, and it is always possible to compare our translation with the original languages.

Apparent Contradictions

For apparent contradictions or errors, there is a reasonable explanation an unprejudiced person could readily accept. I might add here, however, that God provides *excuses* and places stumbling blocks in his Word for those who do not want Him. His truth is intentionally veiled by parables, proverbs, and symbols. Only those who love the truth can understand the mysteries of scripture. Understanding is God's gift to the *righteous*. A perceiving mind is a divine blessing and granted only to those who please the Lord. Only the pure in heart are able to see (Mt. 5:8).

The Bible never seeks to *prove* it is the inspired Word of God, it simply assumes it. The expressions, "Thus saith the Lord" or "God said" or their equivalents, are found over 3800 times.

Avoid a lot of Apologetics

In this course we are not attempting to prove that the Bible is God's Word, nor are we trying to defend it. *We should never try to defend God's Word, only use it.* Jesus never defended the scriptures. He just quoted them and with great authority! The Word of God is likened to a *sword* and Christ used this sword on Satan continually, declaring; "It is written." Satan knows the Word of God is true and for this very reason he has done everything in his power to abolish it.

The Apostle James tells us that even the devils "believe and tremble" (Jas. 2:19). All the demons believe and they know their doom is coming at the appointed time (Mt. 8:28). Therefore, we should not try to defend the Word of God to the spirits who are blinding our listeners, but use it on them. To illustrate this point, an enemy might say; "I don't believe in that sword you are holding. It is dull, and it is very ineffective." You would not reply, "Oh, but it is sharp and it really works." You should not stand there and defend that Sword to your enemy, you should just use it on him.

Not Greek, but Grace

An intense study of the original Greek and Hebrew languages is *not* the answer for gaining a correct understanding of truth. Even the greatest scholars of Greek and Hebrew cannot see eye to eye on many doctrinal subjects. Do not strain over the meaning of one word. If a word or passage seems obscure, there will be other places in the scriptures that will help clarify it. The Bible is its own best interpreter. Remember, we cannot base a whole doctrine on *one* scripture or *one* word.

If you are confused or troubled over doctrine, do not go to the Greek Lexicon for help! Go to the Lord. He is the Light. Truth comes by grace, by the anointing. If God does not give us grace, if he does not show us light, we will not see no matter how much we study (Deut. 29:2-4). Thus, we should seek at all costs to please God, for he reveals his secrets to those who fear him (Psa. 25:14).

Most difficulties over doctrine are because of a “heart condition.” Something in the heart is not dedicated to God—perhaps moral impurity, or corrupt motives, etc. *Clarity* is God’s gift to the pure in heart. It has nothing to do with a high IQ. Going the intellectual route is a dead end.

Reasons Christians Have Error

1. *Lack of knowledge*—Mt. 22:29. Therefore we must study (2 Tim. 2:15).
2. *Immaturity*—We must grow from a newborn babe unto fatherhood (1 Pet. 2:1-2).
3. *People are taught wrong*—(Lev. 4:1-3, Jas. 3:1-2) The problem then is in their leader.
4. *Overconfidence*—(1 Cor. 8:2) Infallibility attitudes, or thinking we know it all (Rev. 3:17).
5. *Failure to test revelations*—(1 Thes. 5:21, 1 Jn. 4:1) We are warned not to believe every spirit.
6. *Sincerely wrong*—(Prov.14:12) Sincerity is not enough. We can be sincerely on the wrong road.
7. *Willingly ignorant*—(2 Pet. 3:5) Evading certain truths we do not like. It does not excuse us.
8. *A closed mind*—Stubbornness, tradition, mindsets. God must open our minds (Lk. 24:45).
9. *Independent*—Accountable to no one, avoiding the company and counsel of others (Prov.11:14).
10. *Sensationalism*—inordinate desire to know the future, spirit world, myths, etc. (2 Tim. 4:2-4).
11. *Unbalanced truth*—Truths overemphasized/not emphasized. It produces spiritual monstrosities.
12. *Naive (simple)*—(Prov.14:15) No convictions, easily swayed, can flow with anything.
13. *Wrong motives*—(Acts 20:30, 1 Kgs.1:5) Deception thrives in Christians with impure motives.
14. *Pride*—(Obad.1:3) The greatest reason for error, false doctrine, and false religions.
15. *Delusion from God*—God smites with blindness those who have pleasure in sin and unrighteousness (believers and unbelievers alike) (2 Thes. 2:11-12, Isa. 66:4, 2 Chron.18:18-22).

When People Are Always Off On Tangents

When Christians have unpurified motives, they swerve aside to *vain jangling* [or bickering], defending *causes* or being a crusader for one thing or another. Without notice, they will change their course from one week to the next. Digressions such as these are sure evidence that something is wrong in their hearts. They are constantly drawn to the irrelevant (i.e. you must be baptized this way, “ultimate reconciliation”, or a defense of some other erroneous belief). They are accustomed to following the wrong people, the wrong doctrine, and the wrong anointing. God will use them to cleanse your church, for they will take the undedicated ones with them when they leave the church. When this happens, you might also be surprised *who* leaves your church and goes with them.

DEFINITION FOR “BIBLE”

Bible is from the Greek word “biblia” (or books.) In around A.D. 400, Jerome and the Church fathers titled the scriptures “The Books.” By the year 1200, the Bible became known as The Book.

BIBLIA - the plural term Biblia stresses the fact that the Bible is a collection of books. That the word came to be used in the singular emphasizes the fact that behind these many books lies a wonderful unity. Though there were over 40 writers, there was only One Author, the Holy Spirit.

The New Testament refers to the Old Testament about 1,000 times, either by direct quote or reference. The Bible is its own best interpreter. Jesus clearly upholds all the 39 Old Testament books. Matthew 23:35 and Luke 24:44-45 are all-inclusive of the whole Jewish Canon (from one end of the Hebrew canon to the other — Genesis to Second Chronicles.) Second Chronicles was positioned last in the Hebrew canon. We will see the arrangement of books in the succeeding pages.

FACTS ABOUT THE BIBLE

Chapter and verse divisions

The early manuscripts of the Bible did not have chapter and verse divisions. The probable *chapter divisions* were given by Stephen Langton, Archbishop of Canterbury, who died in 1228. The modern *verse* divisions were made by Robert Stephens in 1551, in Paris.

The Geneva Bible, published in 1560 was the first English New Testament which had both chapter and verse divisions.

Some of the advantages of chapter and verse divisions:

- a. They are convenient for *reference*
- b. It is easier for *quotation* purposes.

Several disadvantages of chapter and verse divisions:

- a. They are man-made and not inspired, and may interfere with the meaning of the text.
- b. They may make the Bible fragmentary, consisting of detached statements.

It is all right to ignore the chapter and verse divisions.

Punctuation in Scripture

The early manuscripts did not have punctuation either. It came about gradually. By the seventh or eighth century the scriptures had systematic punctuation.

Words in Italics

Italicized words in the scriptures are words not in the original manuscripts. They are words which were added by the translators to give more sense to the verses. The use of italics can be tested by reading the passage through without the italics. If the idea is incomplete, they are needed.

Center references

Center references are chapter and verse references to parallel passages illustrative of similar teaching, topics, words and various explanations found in the other parts of the Bible. They are only helps, they are not part of the inspired text.

When was the Bible written?

The Bible was written over a period of 1600 years (or more). Basically from 1500 B.C. when Moses wrote Genesis, to about 96 AD when John wrote Revelation. The Book of Job was earlier than Moses, however, perhaps as far back as 2000 BC.

Who wrote the Bible?

The Bible was written by over 40 different writers, all from different walks of life. It was penned by kings, prophets, statesmen, herdsmen, fishermen, priests, a tax collector, a physician, etc. But all were inspired by the same Holy Spirit and all with tremendous unity.

In what language?

The sacred scriptures were originally written in three different languages. The Old Testament was primarily in *Hebrew* (although Daniel 2:4-7:28; Jeremiah 10:11; and Ezra 4:8-6:18, 7:12-26 were written in *Aramaic*). The New Testament was written in *Greek*.

The Three Most Disputed Accounts of the Old Testament:

1. The Creation - Matthew 19:4-5
2. Noah and the Flood - Matthew 24:37-39
3. Jonah and the Whale - Matthew 12:39-41

The Lord Jesus Christ upholds all three accounts. In fact, he upholds all 39 Old Testament books. The most powerful evidence of the authenticity of the Old Testament is the credence Christ gives to it in Luke 24:44-45. Once again we see the importance of Luke's passages of scripture.

OTHER FACTS:

There are 1,189 chapters in the Bible (929 in Old Testament; 260 in New Testament)

There are 31,102 verses, and 775,693 words.

Psalm 119 is the longest chapter. Psalm 117 is the shortest.

Esther 8:9 is the longest verse.

John 11:35 is the shortest verse.

THE HEBREW OLD TESTAMENT CANON

(The 39 books we use and accept)

Jesus Himself supported and upheld the Hebrew Canon. The Hebrew Bible is divided into three divisions as follows: (Luke 24:27, 44) The Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms (or Writings).

I. THE LAW (or Torah)

Genesis
Exodus
Leviticus
Numbers
Deuteronomy

- The 12 Minor Prophets were one unit.
- Ezra - Nehemiah were one unit.
- I - II Samuel were one scroll.
- I - II Kings were one scroll.
- I - II Chronicles were one scroll.

Note: The Hebrew Canon had 24 books, compared with our 39. This is because the Jews bunched some of their books together into groups

II. THE PROPHETS

Joshua
Judges
Samuel
Kings
Isaiah
Jeremiah
Ezekiel
The Minor Prophets

III. THE PSALMS (Known as “The Writings”)

Psalms
Proverbs
Job
Canticles Read at Passover
Ruth Read at Pentecost
Lamentations Read on the 9th of Abib (commemorating Jerusalem’s destruction)
Ecclesiastes Read at the Feast of Tabernacles
Esther Read at the Feast of Purim
Daniel
Ezra-Nehemiah
Chronicles

* In Matthew 23:35, Christ speaks of the blood of righteous Abel (recorded in Genesis), to the blood of Zacharias mentioned in Second Chronicles 24:20-22. *Genesis* was the first book in the Hebrew canon, *Chronicles* was the last book in their canon.

THE OLD TESTAMENT APOCRYPHA

The Old Testament Apocrypha refers to 14 extra books which were not considered inspired. The literal meaning of the word “Apocrypha” is (to be hidden or concealed). Originally the word referred to “the works of a secret or mysterious nature - familiar only to an “inner circle.”

The 14 books were considered spurious and forged, with unknown or fraudulent authorship. By the 4th century A.D. the word “apocrypha” referred to books that were uncanonical or unrecognized as being part of scripture. They were never accepted in the Hebrew Canon or referred to by Christ. For this reason the Protestant Church rejected them. They were, however, in the Septuagint (or Greek version of the Old Testament) which was composed in Alexandria, Egypt, in the 3rd century B.C. The Catholic canon accepts 11 of these books and includes them in the Douay Bible.

THE APOCRYPHA BOOKS

I Esdras
II Esdras
Tobit
Judith
The Rest of Esther
The Wisdom of Solomon
Ecclesiasticus
Baruch, with the Epistle of Jeremiah
The Song of the Three Holy Children
The History of Susanna
Bel and the Dragon
The Prayer of Manasses
I Maccabees
II Maccabees

Reasons for Rejecting the Apocrypha From the Canon

1. They never had a place in the Hebrew Canon. This is universally acknowledged.
2. They are never quoted in the New Testament, either by Christ or his apostles, or by any writer, much less do they ascribe to them inspiration or canonicity.
3. Josephus (37-100 A.D. Jewish historian) expressly excludes them.
4. Philo, the great Jewish philosopher of Alexandria (20 BC - 50 AD) wrote prolifically and quoted largely from the Old Testament scriptures, yet he never quoted from the Apocrypha, or even mentioned them.

**Reasons for Rejecting the Apocrypha
From the Canon
(continued)**

5. Jerome (400 A.D.) rejected the authority of the entire Apocrypha in the most emphatic manner. His positive declaration carried great weight with the churches.
6. Authorship is unknown for many of the books; divine inspiration and authority is claimed by none of the writers, and disclaimed by some.
7. The books contain many historical, geographical, and chronological errors, and distortions of Old Testament narratives, contradicting themselves, the Bible, and secular history.
8. The Apocrypha teach doctrines and uphold practices which are directly contrary to the canonical scriptures. Lying is sanctioned, suicide and assassination are justified; salvation by works and almsgiving, magical incantations, prayers of the dead for the dead, etc. are taught and approved by these books.
9. There is a weakness of style, stiffness, a lack of originality, and artificiality of expression as compared with the canonical books.
10. Much of the literature is legendary and the stories contain many absurdities.
11. The “miracles” and the descriptions of the persons and deeds of these “supernatural” beings and visitations contain much that is fictitious, grotesque, and silly.
12. The spiritual and even the moral level is, as a whole, far below that of the Old Testament. When one reads in the Old Testament and then turns to a reading in the Apocrypha, he feels that he is almost in another world.
13. The books were written *much later* than those of the Hebrew Old Testament, long after its canon was closed (400 B.C). They were authored sometime between 200 B.C. and 100 A.D, and they were written in Greek, except Ecclesiasticus.
14. They were not considered canonical and authoritative for doctrine by any prominent man, set of men, nor church council until the Roman Catholic Council of Trent (1546 A.D.), by a small majority declared them so, and put a curse on any one who might think differently.
15. There is strong presumption from the expressions of Christ and his apostles, that their use of the word “scripture” implied in their day that the Hebrew Old Testament Canon had *long* been fixed. Christ appealed to the Hebrew scriptures as to a well-defined collection of writings held in absolute reverence. Jesus limits the Jewish Old Testament to the threefold division: The Law, Prophets, and the Writings (Luke 24:44-45). Christ supported and upheld the Jewish Canon (the 39 books we use), and he gives no authority or authenticity to the Apocrypha whatsoever.

CANONIZATION

What does Canon mean?

The definition of the word *Canon* is derived from the Hebrew (*kaneh*), meaning “a measuring rod, a rule.” Used metaphorically it means - “Anything that serves to regulate or determine other things.” Hence, it is *a standard!*

The Greek word (*kanon*) occurs 5 times in the New Testament. It means “that which measures, as a rod or ruler.” In this sense it is used in Galatians 6:16 and Philippians 3:16 and is translated “rule.” It is the thought of a measuring rod, straightedge, or ruler.

Also “kanon” can mean *limit*. A canon is a definite bounds or fixed space of which one’s power and influence is confined.

The meaning of “Canon” as applied to the scriptures

The Canon is the measuring rod, the straightedge, the resting rule, or critical standard by which each book of the Bible must be tested before it may be admitted as a part of the Sacred Scriptures. Those books which came up to the standard were admitted, while those books which did not come up to the standard were rejected.

The Sacred Canon is the name given to the collection of books which came up to the standard, and which therefore has become the testing rule of faith and practice. The word “canon” was first applied to the sacred scriptures in the fourth century A.D. by the Alexandrian Church father Athanasius (296-373 A.D.)

The Sacred Canon

“The Sacred Canon” or “The Sacred Canon of Scripture” is the name given to those genuine, authentic, and inspired books which form the Holy Scriptures.

a. *A Canonical book* - is a book which comes up to the “standard.”

b. *An Uncanonical book* - is a book whose contents have not reached the standard so that it may not be admitted to the Canon.

In order that a book could be acknowledged as canonical, as worthy of a place in the Sacred Canon, certain tests were applied. These will be outlined on the next page. Also the *importance* of the Canon (or standard) will be presented.

There are at least four major reasons why the Church needed a standard to measure which books were inspired and which were spurious.

STANDARD OF CANONICITY

In order that a book may be acknowledged as canonical, as worthy of a place in the Sacred Canon, these tests are applied:

- 1. Divine Authorship.** Was it inspired (God-breathed?) Was it given by God through the Spirit through men; or did it come from man alone?
- 2. Human Authorship.** Was it written, edited, or endorsed by a prophet, or spokesman for God?
- 3. Genuineness.** Can it be traced back to the time and to the writer from whom it professes to have come? Or if the writer cannot be named positively, can it be shown to contain the same matter, in every essential point as it contained when it was written?
- 4. Authenticity.** Is it true? Is it a record of actual facts.

THE NEED FOR THE CANON OF SCRIPTURE

- 1. To insure all the books of God's revelation were included.** The Bible, the Sacred Canon of Scripture is, in a real sense, one Book. Though there were over 40 writers there was only *One* Author—the Holy Spirit. Redemption is the central theme running through the entire Book, and it is not completed until *all* the books, in their proper order, are included. It is (as a whole) a revelation from God, and every book is needed to make that revelation complete.
- 2. To collect the inspired books into one volume.** While the prophets and apostles were living and inspiration to write was in effect, it was easier for them to know which writers were or were not inspired. After these men had died and inspiration had ceased, it was necessary to collect *into one volume* and preserve the inspired writings.
- 3. To preserve the inspired writings from corruption and destruction.** This was especially necessary in the hostile days of early Christianity. In A.D. 302 the Roman emperor Diocletian ordered all the sacred books of the Christians to be burned. Hence, it was necessary for the Christians *to know just which books were sacred* in order to defend and preserve them.
- 4. To show the people which books were inspired and which ones were not.** A mass of uninspired and spurious literature was claiming the right of admission into the Canon, both of the Old and New Testament. Therefore it was necessary to know *how many* and *what* books should be considered canonical.

In 330 A.D. the first (so-called) Christian Emperor Constantine ordered 50 copies of the scriptures to be prepared for use in the churches in Constantinople. The question would then arise, “Which writings are “Scripture?” Constantine’s request to Eusebius to prepare 50 copies of scripture brought about the need to know *what constituted the Canon*. In Luke 24:44, Christ clearly confirmed the Old Testament canon—the same 39 books we use today—the Law, Prophets, and the Writings.

**THE SUBJECT OF CANONICITY
SEEKS TO ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS:**

- Why was each book of the Bible placed there?
- Why have certain other books been refused a place in the Bible?
- Why have all these books been brought together in one volume?
- Does this volume contain all the books which properly belong there?
- Has any book which should be there been omitted?
- Does our Bible contain any book which should not be there?

**THE FORMATION OF
THE OLD TESTAMENT CANON**

(see page 10)

Luke 24:44 are the three divisions of the Old Testament which are endorsed and upheld by Christ.

A. The Law of Moses —This division is mentioned as “scripture” 32 times in the New Testament.

B. The Prophets —The books of this section are called “scripture” 43 times in the New Testament.

C. The Psalms (The Writings) —The books in this section of the Old Testament are called “scripture” 37 times in the New Testament.

As we have already mentioned on page 10, the Hebrew Canon was made up of 24 books. They contained the same material as do the 39 books in our English Bible, only they were arranged differently. In the Greek Version (the Septuagint), the books of Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, and Ezra-Nehemiah were each divided into two, making eight books instead of four. The twelve minor prophets were divided into 12 books, whereas in the Hebrew Canon they were one unit. This makes 15 more books, or 39 in all, but no new matter. Only the arrangement of books was different.

The Septuagint—(The LXX or translation of the 70), was a Greek version of the Hebrew Old Testament, composed in around 280 B.C. in Alexandria, Egypt. LXX is the abbreviated name. The world had been *Hellenized* by Alexander the Great which created a need for a Greek version of the scriptures for the Jews scattered among the nations. The Apostle Paul was well acquainted with both the Greek and Hebrew versions of the Old Testament and quoted extensively from both. Most of his Old Testament quotes in his epistles to the Gentile churches are from the Greek version.

The Septuagint had the 39 books arrangement, instead of the Hebrew 24. *The Vulgate* (a Latin version of the Bible prepared by Jerome in the 4th century serving as the authorized version of the Roman Catholic Church), followed the same divisions, and this has been followed by the English and other versions. (39 books instead of 24). Jerome did not recognize the apocrypha books.

**THE 39 BOOKS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT
ARE UPHELD BY THE NEW TESTAMENT
(The Bible is its own best interpreter)**

- The New Testament refers to the Old Testament about 1,000 times, either by direct quotation or reference. In fact, *ten percent* of the New Testament is made up of Old Testament verses.
- The only scriptures Timothy had as a child were the Old Testament. Second Timothy 3:15-17 is a direct reference to the *Old Testament*. The New Testament was not fully established until 396 A.D. All the Old Testament scriptures are inspired by God (God-breathed) and are profitable for doctrine, reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.
- Jesus used the Old Testament scriptures against Satan (Matt. 4:4, 4:7, 4:10) (cf. Deut. 8:3, 6:13, 6:16). Thus, the authority of the Old Testament is demonstrated in the defeating of Satan.
- Christ's ministry was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (Lk. 4:17-21, cf Isa. 61:1-2). He is the Lamb of Isaiah 53 (cf. Acts 8:28-35).
- Jesus recognized the authority of the Old Testament (Mt. 21:42; cf. Psa.118:22-23).
- Christ was expecting and also watching the fulfillment of the Old Testament scriptures take place before his very eyes (John 13:18,17:12).
- James 5:10-11 reminds us of the patience of Job and God's graciousness to him, a lesson taught us from the Old Testament book of Job. Also we are to consider the Old Testament prophets who are examples of those who suffered affliction.
- Romans 15:4 "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written *for our learning*, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope." The Old Testament was written for each and every future generation to give us hope.
- In First Corinthians 10:1-11, The Apostle Paul uses the journey of Israel as a warning to New Testament believers. "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: *and they are written for our admonition*, upon whom the ends of the [ages] are come" (10:11). See Hebrews chapter three and four where Paul again refers to Israel's journey.

Jesus fully endorsed the Old Testament scriptures (Luke 24:27, 44-45). He declared: "the scripture cannot be broken" in John 10:35. He taught that error in the things of God arises from ignorance of the scriptures, and that those who rightly know the scriptures do not err. (Mt. 22:29-33, Mk.12:24). He recognized the entire Old Testament as scripture which testifies of and leads to Himself. (Lk. 24:27, 32, 44-46, Jn. 5:39,46). Jesus Christ Himself is the Living Word of God who came down from heaven. His title is—THE WORD OF GOD (Jn.1:1, 14, Rev.19:13). He cannot change or be altered in any way, nor can his Word be altered.

AUTHORITY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT UPHELD BY THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

In the first chapter of the sermon on the mount (Matthew chapter 5), Christ deals with the Law and the Prophets, especially the Law. He declared that the Law is eternal and unchangeable, and that he did not come to annul the Law but to interpret it and to apply its deeper spiritual implications. The man who gives due weight to it will be great in the kingdom, but he who neglects it will be least (Matt. 5:17-20). Six Old Testament passages are quoted and applied (5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43).

Twice he spoke about learning the meaning of Hosea 6:6. (Matt. 9:13, 12:7). In connection with the scriptures, he mentioned by name Moses, Isaiah, David, and Daniel.

JESUS RECOGNIZED THE HISTORICITY of numerous Old Testament persons, places, and events:

the creation (Mt.19:4-5)
the first marriage (Mt.19:5-7)
the blood of Abel (Lk.11:51)
Noah and the flood (Mt. 24:37-39)
Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Mt. 22:31,32)
Lot, his wife and the destruction of Sodom (Lk.17:28, 29, 32)
the burning bush (Lk. 20:37)
Moses (Mk. 7:10, 12:19, 26)
the manna in the wilderness (Jn. 6:31, 32, 49)
the serpent in the wilderness (Jn. 3:14)
the law for leprosy (Mt. 8:4)
David and the shewbread at Nob (Mt.12:3-4)
David as a writer (Lk. 20:41-44)
Solomon and the Queen of Sheba (Mt. 12:42)
Solomon as king (Mt. 6:29)
Elijah and the famine, the widow of Zarephath,
The cleansing of Naaman the leper, (Lk. 4:25-27)
Daniel the prophet (Mt. 24;15)
Jonah in the fish and preaching to Nineveh (Mt.12:39-41, 16:4)
the sabbath (Mk. 2:24-28)
the murder of Zacharias (Mt. 23:35)
Sodom and Gomorrah (Mt.10:15)

Jesus began his earth's ministry with "*it is written*" (Mt. 4:4, 4:7, 4:10); and ended it in the same manner (Lk. 24:46). From beginning to end he used the Old Testament most freely. He recognized the entire Old Testament as we have it, as the very words of God, perfect, and authoritative. What the scriptures say, God says, and the one who does not believe the scripture is "foolish and slow of heart" (Lk. 24:25-27).

His entire life was a fulfillment of scripture. (Mt.1:22, 23; 2:5, 6, 15, 17, 18, 23; 4:13-17; 8:17; 13:35; 21:4-; 26:31, 56; 27:9, 10, 46; Jn.19:24, 28, 35-37).

AUTHORITY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT UPHELD BY ALL THE NEW TESTAMENT WRITERS

The Gospel writers (4) — Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John not only recorded the quotations of Jesus from the Old Testament; they themselves also made similar quotations and allusions from the Old Testament. Their writings, as well as the words of Jesus, are also inspired and possess divine truthfulness and authority. The same is true of the other New Testament writers, Paul, Peter, James and Jude.

The Book of Acts — has more than 40 quotations and references, and many allusions to the Old Testament. Acts records the sermons of Peter, Stephen, and Paul and these are saturated with verses from the Old Testament.

Epistles of Paul (14) — are built largely upon the Old Testament scriptures. His great arguments and reasonings are substantiated by numerous Old Testament scriptures.

The General Epistles (7) — James mentions Rahab the harlot, the offering of Isaac by Abraham, Job, the suffering prophets, and Elijah's fervent prayers. Also he makes reference to the ten commandments, but especially the second great commandment. He enumerates the seven pillars of wisdom found in Proverbs 9:1, and uses the early and latter rain of Joel and Zachariah to illustrate the patience of the Heavenly Husbandman.

Jude is filled with Old Testament examples as well, such as Israel's failure in the wilderness, the state of the fallen angels, and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. He mentions the unrepentant attitude of Cain, the greed of Balaam, and the usurping, gainsaying spirit of Korah. He even mentions the prophetic ministry of Enoch.

The Epistles of Peter are charged with Old Testament quotes and allusions. "Because it is written, be ye holy; for I am holy." And "All flesh is as grass." "Wherefore it is contained in the scripture, Behold I lay in Sion a chief corner stone." He uses Sarah as an example of a godly woman in subjection to her husband, who ruled her spirit well.

John's epistles are always going back "to the beginning." The *beginning* is in Genesis where God wanted the first family to love one another. "For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one and slew his brother..." John also refers to the devil "sinning from the beginning" (i.e. the beginning of his career as the devil). The fall of Lucifer is recorded for us in the Old Testament books, notably Isaiah and Ezekiel.

The Book of Revelation — There are no direct quotations in the Book of Revelation, but there are nearly 400 references and allusions to thoughts, persons, and events of the Old Testament. The writer of Revelation refers to each of the three great divisions of the Hebrew Canon - (The Law of Moses, The Prophets, and The Writings). Perhaps as many as 25 books are alluded to. Revelation does not quote, but its language is full of Old Testament phraseology to an extent unparalleled in other books.

WHEN WAS THE OLD TESTAMENT CANON COMPLETED, AND BY WHOM?

Here is a place where opinions differ and historical statements are scarce. There are ancient and persistent traditions that the books were collected and the Canon completed by *Ezra* and a band of helpers known as “The Great Synagogue.” Without attempting to defend the existence of the “*Great Synagogue*” as a definite institution, the following facts stand out boldly:

1. The Babylonian Exile (606-536 B.C.) was a period of punishment for disobedience to the law of God. The era after the return from captivity was one of confusion and reconstruction. Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah, with Haggai and Zechariah were busy rebuilding the temple, city, and walls, and restoring the Mosaic laws and institutions. Great religious revival and reform followed the public reading of “the book of the Law” (Neh. 8 -10). Certainly the people would desire an authoritative collection of their sacred books to know the will of God and to guard against future trouble.

2. Ezra, the leader of the second return (458 B.C.), was not only a priest; he was also “a ready scribe in the law of Moses;” “a scribe of the law of the God of heaven.” (Ezra 7:6, 7:11, 7:12, 7:21, Neh. 8:1, 8:4, 8:9, 8:13, 12:26, 12:36). He was the beginning of a guild of scribes which extended into New Testament times. The scribes were lawyers, teachers, judges, writers, and copyists, all in one.

3. There were, near and at the close of the Old Testament times, five great inspired writers, more or less contemporaneous: *Haggai* and *Zechariah*, *Ezra*, *Nehemiah*, and *Malachi*. These, with other godly priests, could have been members of such a “synagogue.”

4. All the Old Testament books were written before 424 B.C, Nehemiah and Malachi being the last, also Ezra. It is highly possible that these men began and completed a collection and an arrangement of the O.T. Canon. *Doubtless Ezra (known as “the second Moses”) was the leader in the work.*

5. It is generally understood that Malachi (433-430 or 425 BC) was the last of the Old Testament writing prophets, and that Old Testament prophecy (scripture) ended with him.

6. There existed “books” (see Dan. 9:2), private and partial collections of books (rolls), and books “laid up in the temple” which were carefully guarded, and these were recognized as inspired and authoritative. As the line of prophets had ceased there was need of an official collection and canonization of these books. And it would seem highly probable that the canon was collected in this time.

7. Josephus, the Jewish historian (100 A.D.) clearly states that the sacred books of the Jews were written from the time of Moses (1500 B.C.) to Artaxerxes I (who reigned 465-424 BC), that nothing was added after the death of Artaxerxes (424 B.C.) because the line of prophets had ceased at that time; that since that time no one had dared to make any addition, subtraction, or alteration, and that every Jew was not only willing to abide by them as the commands of God, but he was also willing if need be, to die for them. Josephus was a learned man of priestly origin, and he had abundant facility for knowing the history of the Old Testament scriptures.

8. The Septuagint, begun in about 280 BC and completed in about 180 BC, contained the entire Old Testament. It proves all the books of the O.T. existed at that time and were considered authentic.

AUTHORITY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT UPHELD BY THE EARLY CHURCH

The same Old Testament books which had been received by the Jews and by Christ and the New Testament writers as inspired and authoritative were received by the early Church as well. However much the Early Church Fathers may have differed in other doctrines, they all (from various parts of the Empire, differing in character and training) were unanimous in this, that the entire Old Testament was inspired by God and fitted permanently for our instruction. The matter was not even discussed as some doctrines were; it was not even considered debatable.

THE FORMATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON

The New Testament Canon is the collection of 27 books which the Church receives as its New Testament scriptures. These books existed at the end of the first century. All 27 books were written within the last half of the first century, sometime between 50 and 96 A.D.

All our 27 New Testament books existed at the end of the first century A.D. over a wide territory, probably from Babylon in the east, to Rome in the west. They were received by the churches to which they were sent, and were treasured with the Old Testament and oral instruction, as containing the life and words of Jesus or the teaching of the apostles (Rom. 1:10, 11, 15:28, 1 Cor. 4:17, 11:23, 2 Thess. 2:15, Col. 2:7, Eph. 3:2-4 etc.).

The New Testament speakers and writers spoke and wrote under divine inspiration and with great authority. The New Testament scriptures are placed on the same level as the Old in every way; the same divine Author and authority are recognized, and the same inspiration holds.

According to the words of Peter (2 Pet. 3:15-16), Paul's epistles were considered "scripture" even while Paul was still alive. Paul asked that his epistles be read in the churches and interchanged among the churches (see 1 Thes. 5:27, Col. 4:16). He wrote his Galatian letter to the "churches" of Galatia (Gal. 1:1-2).

His first epistle to the Corinthians was addressed to the church at Corinth and to "all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor. 1:1-2). Second Corinthians was written to the church at Corinth, "with all the saints who are in all Achaia or Greece (2 Cor. 1:1). The Book of Revelation was to be written and sent to the seven churches of Asia. Asia was a Roman province in what would be modern day Turkey (Rev. 1:11).

In the second century (100 -199 A.D.) preliminary steps were taken in the formation of the New Testament Canon. Some of the books were not as well known as others and were slower to be universally recognized. It was a time of much sifting before it could be known positively which books were inspired and which ones were not. It was not until nearly 400 A.D. that the universal Church had the witness of the Spirit which books God had selected to be in the New Testament.

ANCIENT VERSIONS

The Second Century

During the second century, three or more translations of the Bible into other languages were made. These offer important testimony, not only to the existence of the books at this early date, but also to their recognized value as a part of the inspired Word of God, equal with the Old Testament. Two of these versions contain both Testaments, but at present, our interest is with the New Testament only.

1. THE OLD LATIN VERSION was made in about 150 A.D. for the churches of North Africa. It was used by Tertullin, Cyprian, and others. It contains 26 books, omitting 2 Peter.
2. THE SYRIAC VERSION was made probably around 150 A.D. for the churches of Syria. It contains 22 books (omitting 2 Peter, 2 & 3 John, Jude, and Revelation).
3. TATIAN'S DIATHESSARON (or "Harmony of the Gospels") contained our four gospels, no more, no less. It was made in the Syriac language, about 170 A.D.

The Diatessaron is another strong proof of the fact that at that time *the four Gospels* had been in existence long enough to be well known and fully established as inspired and authoritative.

The Third Century

The second, third, and fourth centuries might be called "The Period of Formal Recognition of the Canon." (170 - 397 A.D.) Several important early Church fathers of these centuries were:

1. *Irenaeus* The 2nd century could be called "The Age of Irenaeus."
2. *Origen* The 3rd century could be called "The Age of Origen."
3. *Eusebius* The 4th century could be called "The Age of Eusebius."

Three great names of the third century were Origen, Dionysius, and Cyprian.

Origen (185-254), native of Alexandria, Egypt, was called "the greatest scholar of his day." He was a teacher, exegete, commentator, and textual critic. He traveled extensively to acquaint himself with Biblical literature in use in different parts of the Church world. He was well qualified to speak concerning the collections of the apostolic writings. He divides these writings into three classes;

- a). *Genuine* (those which were received everywhere): The four Gospels, Acts, 13 Pauline epistles, 1 Peter, 1 John, and Revelation.
- b). *Doubtful* (those which were disputed in some of the churches): Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, and Jude. Among these he himself seems to have questioned the genuineness of only two, 2 & 3 John.
- c). *Rejected* - certain apocryphal books.

Dionysius the Great of Alexandria, Egypt (190-265), was a notable lawyer and writer. He seems to have acknowledged all the writings except Second Peter and Jude.

Cyprian (200-258), bishop of Carthage, Africa, was called “the greatest bishop of the third century,” He was a great writer and martyr. He quotes scripture extensively, but shows no signs of knowing Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2-3 John, and Jude. It is possible, however, that he had not seen these books or that he had no occasion to quote from them.

The Fourth Century

There were *collections* of apostolic writings from the middle of the second century and onward (and probably before). Means of communication were limited, and transportation was slow. The larger books, historical and doctrinal, were known first, hence, were received first. Smaller books like Jude and 2 & 3 John were not as well known. In the fourth century the collections became *One Collection*, and the word “canon” came to be used.

Eusebius (270-340) was a historian and bishop of Caesarea, and “the father of Church History.” He was a learned and faithful collector of facts, especially facts concerning the attitude of various churches regarding the apostolic writings. He sums up a comprehensive statement of these views which is similar to Origen’s list:

Acknowledged books - the four Gospels, Acts, 14 Pauline epistles, I John, I Peter.

Questionable - Eusebius also accepted Revelation, but some did not.

Disputed books - James, 2 Peter, 2 & 3 John, and Jude.

Cyril of Jerusalem (315-386). Cyril of Jerusalem accepted all 27 books, except the book of Revelation.

Anathasius (296-373) was bishop of Alexandria, Egypt. He was a theologian and writer. In his writings he declared that certain ones had drawn up for themselves apocryphal books and had mingled them with the inspired books, and of the need of “setting forth in order from the first, the books that are *canonized* and handed down and believed to be divine, so that each, if he has been deceived may detect those which have misled him.” Then he enumerates the entire 27 books of our New Testament, and calls them the “wells of salvation,” divine and canonical. “Let no man add to these; and let nothing be taken away” said Anathasius. This was written in 367 AD, and seems to be the climax.

Jerome (340-420) - Renowned Latin writer, was called the “most learned, most eloquent, and most interesting author among the Latin Fathers.” Jerome was the maker of the famous Latin Vulgate translation (started in 382-384). He recognized, as divinely inspired and canonical, the same 27 books which we have.

Augustine (354-430) was bishop of Hippo, North Africa, and a voluminous writer. With his friend Jerome, he held to the inspiration and canonicity of our 27 books.

SUMMARY

By the middle of the second century (150 onward,) 20 or more books of our Canon were generally known throughout the Church, East and West, and were received as inspired and authoritative. Lists, translations into other languages, commentaries, and expositions were made. Some of the smaller books were unknown by some of the churches or there was a question as to authorship; hence they were not received as early.

However, before the close of the fourth century the entire church was practically unanimous concerning the canonicity of our 27 N.T. books, to the exclusion of all other writings.

The books were well tested, and the Canon came gradually, through the conviction of the Church and its leaders, the bishops and their people working in harmony. It was not decreed by any church council, nor were the books selected from a mass of literature. No council was engaged in its formation.

The Council of Damascus at Rome (382) recognized the 27 books as complete; likewise did the Councils of Hippo (393) and Carthage (397 and 419) over all of which Augustine presided. For a thousand years, in all the churches, East and West, down to the Reformation and the Council of Trent, the same opinion prevailed.

THE NEED OF A NEW TESTAMENT CANON

The collection of the apostolic writings into one volume possessing the same authority as the books of the Old Testament would come in response to several needs of the times:

1. The desire of the Church for a collection of authoritative records of the work and message of their Lord and Savior, and the inspired letters and writings of His apostles.
2. The existence of heretical leaders with their false doctrines, in the second century and onwards called for a decision as to what writings were to be regarded as scripture.
3. Sectarians began to make changes in the apostolic writings to suit their fancies and numerous books were being written under the forged name of the apostles; hence, the Church felt the necessity of knowing the exact scope of apostolic teaching in order to unite more effectively in the defense of it.
4. With the spread of the gospel and the making of versions into other languages, even as early as 150 A.D, the question would naturally be, "What is scripture?" "Which books are inspired and which ones are not?"
5. A fuller settlement and definition of the creed of the Church called for a "canon."
6. In 331, Constantine requested Eusebius to have prepared for him 50 large copies of the Holy Scriptures to be used in the churches in his new capital, Constantinople. Thus the question as to the extent of the canon was raised in a very practical way.

THE STANDARD OR TEST OF NEW TESTAMENT CANONICITY

Since the question of the formation of the Canon is a matter of historical inquiry, it is necessary to find the tests employed by the Fathers and the early Church. Each book was tested before admission into the collection. These tests are gathered from the early Christian writings:

1.) Whether or not it was Apostolic. Apostolic *authorship* and the authority of the apostle's companions were considered the chief criteria of inspiration.

2.) Was it read in all the churches? It had to be accepted by the Church, accepted, read, and recognized by all the churches. This type of statement is emphasized repeatedly in the writings of the early Church fathers. It was considered a practical proof of a book's inspiration. This does not mean read in "some" churches, but in the churches as a whole. The "disputed" books were read in some churches, but they were not acknowledged until they were read in the churches *as a whole*.

3.) Recognition by the Church fathers. Endorsement by the Spirit-filled Church fathers was very important. Even in the early days this was an important test. Eusebius (270-340) speaks of accepting Peter's first epistle because "the ancient presbyters used it freely in their own writings as an undisputed work."

4.) Did the contents of a book agree with the apostolic doctrines? In those days doctrine had been received orally from the apostles and had been transmitted orally. The Church had its rule of measure (having been given them orally by the apostles), and the question concerning the authenticity of a book was: "Does it agree with the doctrine or rule of faith given us orally by the apostles?"

5.) The ability of the book to edify. This was another important test. If a book did not appear to edify at all, it would scarcely have been considered canonical. Of course, this test was not sufficient by itself (there were apocrypha books which were thought to be edifying somewhat).

6.) The witness of the Holy Spirit. It is held by the great writers, ancient and modern, and by the great Church creeds and confessions, that above and beyond the common consent of the Church, we have the perfect assurance of the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit. The same Spirit who inspired the writers in producing the New Testament, guided the Church step by step in the growth of the Canon, and bears witness with our spirits that the Canon is correct.

A God-given agreement as to the canonicity of our 27 books has been reached. The witness of the Spirit to the hearts of believers through so many centuries cannot be wrong, and no one would care to make a change in the list of canonical books.

Brief Summary

Twenty of our 27 books were accepted readily without question! The disputed books of our canon were *Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 & 3 John, Jude, and Revelation*.

Hebrews - was questioned slightly as to its doctrine, but more about its authorship.

James - was questioned slightly due to its apparent “conflict” with justification by faith.

Second Peter - Differs in structure from First Peter, in style and contents.

Jude - Mentions the non-canonical book of Enoch, and its authorship.

Revelation - Differs in style from the Gospel of John.

By the end of the fourth century A.D. the entire Church was practically unanimous as to the Canonicity of our 27 New Testament books, and it took its present form.

THE MANUSCRIPTS

A manuscript is a literary composition written by hand, as opposed to a printed copy. An *original* manuscript is the one which came from the hand of the author; an autograph.

No *original* manuscript of any book of the Bible now exists, as far as is known; they are all lost. It is not known just how they became lost, but several causes may be suggested, such as decay and other natural causes, the wear and tear of the fragile papyrus, destruction by enemies, war and persecution, and the burning or burial of worn or soiled manuscripts by friends.

Why didn't God cause the *original* manuscripts to be preserved? The answer is not positively known, but two thoughts have been suggested:

1. Their preservation was not necessary. There are many manuscript copies reaching from the early times to the present day. There are so many evidences that our Bible today contains the same matter as did the original, that the preservation of these manuscripts was quite unnecessary.

2. They might have been worshiped. Natural man is ready to worship anything which lays claim to sanctity. Hezekiah had to destroy the brazen serpent made by Moses because it was being worshiped (2 Kgs.18:4.) No tangible Bible objects have been preserved. If the handwriting of Moses, David, Paul, or any Biblical writer should now exist, it would probably be worshiped, thus detracting from the worship of the invisible God.

In Matthew 24:35 Christ said: “My words shall not pass away.” God has so carefully guarded the preservation of his Word, and the *transmission* of his Word that we can be confident that the copies of scripture we have today possess the genuineness and integrity of the original manuscripts.

PREPARATION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT MANUSCRIPTS (How they were copied)

In preparing the manuscript copies of these rolls, the utmost care and the strictest rules were observed. Some of these rules, as prescribed in the Talmud (Jewish writings) are as follows:

1. The parchment had to be made of the skin of clean animals only, prepared and fastened with clean strings, by a Jew only.
2. Each column had to have between 48 and 60 lines.
3. The ink was a specially prepared black ink recipe.
4. Each word had to be read and pronounced before being written.
5. Before the name of God (El) could be written, the pen had to be wiped, and the whole body had to be washed.
6. Strict rules were given concerning the forms of the letters, spaces between letters, words, and sections, the use of the pen, and the color of the parchment.
7. One mistake on a sheet condemned the sheet; if three mistakes were found on any page, the entire manuscript was condemned.
8. Every word and letter was counted; if a letter were omitted or an extra letter inserted, or if one letter touched another, the manuscript was condemned and destroyed.

Some of these rules may seem extreme and absurd, yet they show how sacred the Holy Word of the Old Testament was to the Jews (Romans 3:2), and they give us strong encouragement to believe that we have the real Old Testament, the same one which was originally given by inspiration of God. (These rules governed the copyist in the Talmud period—100 to 500 A.D.).

Josephus testified to the great care taken with the manuscripts. He stated that the Old Testament manuscripts were “justly believed to be divine,” and that the Jews would not tamper with them, but would die for them.

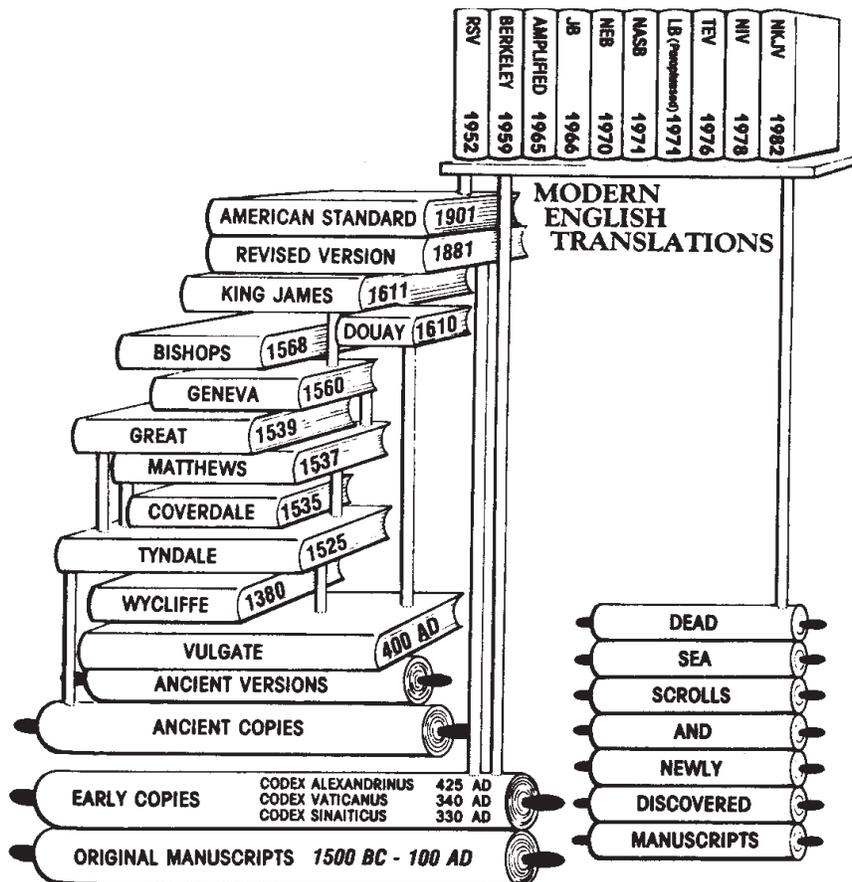
NEW TESTAMENT MANUSCRIPTS

The New Testament copyists were governed by less strict rules, yet in the absence of these it is obvious that many were careful and faithful in their work, in the fear of God. There is such an abundance of manuscript copies, version copies, and quotations from the early Church fathers (86,000) that it is not difficult to check up and detect any error in transcription.

FROM THE ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPTS TO US

- **The Original Manuscripts** (from the pen of the writers.) These no longer exist.
- **Ancient Copies and Translations** (made from 280 B.C. to 870 A.D.) are the earliest manuscripts known. Earliest *translations* of the original manuscripts include the Greek Septuagint in 280 B.C. of the entire Old Testament and Jerome's Vulgate into Latin in 384 A.D. of both Testaments.
- **Quotes of the Early Church Fathers** (96 to 600 A.D.) taken from the original manuscripts. Over 86,000 quotations by the Church fathers of the sacred scriptures are known.
- **Copies of the Original Manuscripts** (250 to 1450 A.D.)
- **Printed Copies of the Original Texts** (from 1477 A. D. to today).
- **Modern Versions** (from 1380 A.D. to today).

THE ORIGIN AND GROWTH OF THE ENGLISH BIBLE



THE OLDEST KNOWN DOCUMENTS ARE:

- 1. The Septuagint.** Called the LXX (or translation of the 70), the Septuagint was a translation from the original Hebrew Old Testament into the Greek language. It is believed that the work on this translation began in about 285 B.C. During the second century A.D. a new literal translation was made by a scholar named Aquila.
- 2. The Dead Sea Scrolls.** This is a very large collection of scrolls of all the Old Testament books except Esther, and many other documents, dating from approximately 100 B.C. to 100 A.D. They were discovered by a young Arab shepherd boy in caves at Khirbet Qumran, near the northwestern corner of the Dead Sea, in around 1947. Perhaps the most important discovery ever made in Old Testament manuscripts, they are now housed in a specially constructed shrine in Jerusalem.
- 3. The Syriac Version (or Peshitta).** This is the most ancient translation of most of the Bible. Only the Epistles of John, Peter, Jude, and Revelation were omitted. This Old Testament translation into the Aramaic (or Syriac) language was done at Edessa in Mesopotamia towards the end of the first century A.D. The New Testament translation was made between 411 and 435 A.D.
- 4. The Codex Sinaiticus (330 A.D.)** This document was found by Dr. Tischendorf at the Monastery of St. Catherine, on the slopes of Mt. Sinai between 1844 -1859. Now in the British Museum, the Codex dates from the fourth century A.D. and contains all the New Testament and 199 pages of the Old Testament.
- 5. The Old Latin.** This translation was made as early as A.D. 150 and still exists in some 20 copies.
- 6. The Latin Vulgate.** Earlier versions of the Bible had become so corrupted with errors that in A.D. 382, Pope Damasus chose Jerome to make a completely new translation. He was able to complete the work on the whole Bible in about A.D. 405. Every translation of the Bible in Western Europe was based on this translation. In 1455, it was the first book printed from moveable type.
- 7. The Coptic Versions.** Several translations were made into the Coptic dialects of Egypt around A.D. 250.
- 8. The Alexandrian Manuscript.** Now in the British Museum, made in around A.D. 425, this manuscript once contained the whole Bible plus other writings. It now lacks only small parts of Genesis, First Samuel, and some of the Psalms.
- 9. Codex Ephraemi.** This Greek translation of the whole Bible, made during the fifth century, now only contains 60 percent of the original work, but each book of the Bible (except 2 Thessalonians and 2 John) are represented.
- 10. The Masoretic Text.** This was not a translation but an attempt to preserve the pronunciation of the original Hebrew language by adding vowel points and accents. It was believed to date back to about 900 A.D.

EARLY ENGLISH VERSIONS

All of the earliest attempts at translating the Bible into English were fragmented. For example, Bishop Aldhelm of Sherbourne translated the Psalms into Old English around 709 A.D. Venerable Bede, a monk at Jarrow, translated a part of the Gospel of John. By A.D. 900 all of the Gospels and most of the Old Testament had been translated into Old English.

John Wycliffe (1380) — John Wycliffe was the first to plan a complete English translation of the Bible from the Latin. His translation was based on Jerome's Latin Vulgate (400 A.D.). He completed the New Testament prior to his death, and his friends completed the work after his death.

William Tyndale (1525-1530) — Driven from England by persecution, William Tyndale shared Wycliffe's desire to produce a Bible that the common English-speaking person could readily understand. Using the Latin Vulgate and other ancient sources, Tyndale was able to translate the New Testament and Pentateuch before he was martyred.

Miles Coverdale (1535) — A friend of Tyndale, Coverdale was able to publish a complete Bible. It is generally believed that Coverdale used Tyndale's work in producing his New Testament. This Bible was done to honor King Henry the VIII.

Matthew's Bible (1537) — Despite the name, it is widely accepted that a friend of Tyndale, John Rogus, did most of the work on this Bible. Based largely on Tyndale's previous work, it also contains evidences of Coverdale's work as well. This might be considered an updated Tyndale Bible.

The Great Bible (1539) — This Bible takes its name from its great physical size. Based on the Tyndale, Coverdale, and Matthews Bibles, it was used mainly in churches. Often chained to a reading desk in a church, people would come to listen as a minister read from the Great Bible.

The Geneva Bible (1560) — Produced in Geneva by scholars who had fled persecution in England under Queen Mary, this Bible was based not only on the Great Bible, but also on the other English translations of that day. Though very scholarly, it was a popular Bible because of its small size.

The Bishop's Bible (1568) — This was a revision of the Great Bible and Geneva Bible done under the direction of the Archbishop of Canterbury during the reign of Elizabeth.

Douay-Rheims Bible (1582-1610) — The New Testament was published in Rheims in 1582 and the Old Testament in Douay in 1609-1610. This was a revision of the Latin Vulgate and has become the generally accepted English Version for the Roman Catholic Church.

The King James Version (KJV 1611) — The most popular translation ever produced, this Bible was done during the reign and at the urging of King James I of England. Forty-seven scholars, divided into 6 groups, worked on this translation. Based largely on the Bishop's Bible, many Hebrew and Greek texts were also studied as well as all the other available English translations, to insure the best results. By choosing men of many different theological and educational backgrounds, it was hoped individual prejudices of the translators could be minimized. Printed in a handy size and in clear type, the KJV was supposed to please clergy and laity alike. The KJV became and still is the largest selling translation of the Bible.

The KJV is the most commonly used Bible in the English speaking world. Also it is known as the Authorized Version (A.V.). It is very true to the original manuscripts and does not delete any of the original words. Any words that are added by the translators are in *italics*. Possessing a beautiful Shakespearean style, it was translated in the vernacular of 1611 in England. Some of the words are outdated and obsolete today, and it is poor on prepositions.

The Revised Version (1881 - 1884) — This was a revision of the King James Version. The Revised Version had the advantage of being able to access some of the ancient manuscripts. Although this revision was sponsored by the Church of England, many American scholars were invited to participate.

Some Modern Translations of the English Bible

American Standard Version (1901 ASV) This was a revision and upgrading of the Revised Version of 1881, which was a revision of the King James Version of 1611. It is an excellent translation, very similar to the old King James Version, and true to the original texts. The ASV is an improvement on the KJV's verbs and prepositions.

The Amplified Bible (1965 AMP) Committees of Hebrew and Greek scholars tried to pay particular attention to the true translation of key words in the ancient texts. By bracketing explanatory words or phrases directly in the text, it poses a problem for simple reading, and it becomes a bit like a commentary. It is very useful however.

The Jerusalem Bible (1966 JB) This is the first complete Catholic Bible to be translated into English from the original languages. The footnotes are strongly sympathetic to Catholic doctrine, and it also contains the non-inspired Apocrypha.

New English Bible (1970 NEB) A liberal translation which leans toward *Calvinism*. Due to its free use of the English language, many verses of scripture become almost paraphrases rather than translations. Some editions contain the Apocrypha.

New American Standard Bible (1971 NASB) This Bible uses more modern English. (*i.e.* *thou, thee, thy*, are replaced by *you and your*, and so forth). Like the Amplified Bible, it is not always translated directly from the original texts. Sometimes it is over extended. Greek “tenses”, however, are translated well. It is generally one of the better versions.

New International Version (1978 NIV). This also goes beyond the original texts. Originally it left out 24 entire verses, and deleted several hundred other words from the original texts. Many words are an improvement however. It has better English, and makes a good “second” Bible.

Moffat's Translation This was a translation by James Moffat, a chain smoker who died smoking. He had a brilliant mind but probably was not regenerated. There are some groups who intercede against his translation today. A top Greek scholar once told me that he would not own this translation.

Phillips Translation (by J. B. Phillips) Known as The New Testament in Modern English, this translation was first published in 1958 and revised in 1973. J. B. Phillips was a British newspaper journalist. Phillips did not translate most of his work from the original Greek. It is popular because of its readability, and freshness of style.

Many years ago a Greek scholar, and personal friend said to me: “It is senseless to say we like a particular translation better than the other translations if we do not know what the *original* Hebrew or Greek texts say! We may like the style or its readability better, but the question is—is it truth?” We cannot determine which translation is the most accurate by how good it sounds or how easy it is to read. The real issue at stake is—does it agree with the original texts?

The Companion Bible (by Bullinger) This Bible uses the King James Version on the left column of each page, and has original Hebrew and Greek meanings in the right column. Most of Bullinger's works are very good. Some of his notes and chronology are incorrect. It is a very useful tool *if* you know the weaknesses.

The Living Bible (1974) For an accurate rendering of the sacred Word, it often falls far short. Sometimes the vernacular borders on vulgarity (cf. 1 Sam. 20:30.) Written in an appealing and readable paraphrase, it is, however, a “translation of a translation.” It is unsafe to follow without first checking it against a more faithful translation.

The New King James Bible (1982 NKJV) This is an update of the 1611 KJV Bible. 119 scholars worked on this project to make the KJV more accurate and readable and yet maintain the grace and beauty of the original version. It is highly recommended as a safe translation.

Acknowledgment of Resources

- Some of the preceding pages are quotes or partial quotes from Reverend H. S. Miller's *General Biblical Introduction, 1940*, a book now out of print.
- Many thanks to *Back to the Bible Broadcast* for the chart on page 27, and some of the information used on pages 29-31.
- Jason Fawcett, D. Th.
- Reverend Theodore D. Burch

Recommended Books for Studying the Bible

1. A Good Bible that is true to the original language is the first prerequisite. The King James Version (A.D. 1611), the New King James Bible (1982), or the American Standard Version (1901) are regarded among the most accurate translations of the original scriptures. It is also good to have a secondary Bible such as the New International Version or the Amplified Bible.

2. An Exhaustive Concordance There are many English Bible concordances, but for study purposes either Strong's Exhaustive concordance or Young's Analytical Concordance are recommended.

3. Several good Bible Dictionaries Several Bible dictionaries are important for a serious student of the Bible. Of these the Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary, The New Bible Dictionary, and the Davis Bible Dictionary are to be preferred.

4. Several Sets of Bible Commentaries Of the many commentaries available, Matthew Henry, Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, and Adam Clark are recommended, to name only a few.

5. Language Study Dictionaries Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, and The Tyndale Word Study New Testament give excellent help.

* There is an abundance of other reference books, and many of these can be valuable assets in a student's library. However, great caution should be exercised to ensure that the books we invest in are written by good Spirit-filled scholars because we will receive the spirit and mentality of the author. Discern "who" was inspiring the author. Many books are written by the mind of man, and some are written by another spirit. Add other reference books as God leads you, and make this a matter of prayer. Get books whose authors are pure in spirit.

- **Choose the Right Teachers** One of the great hallmarks of wisdom is this—wisdom enables us to know *who* to listen to and who to avoid. If we open our spirit to the wrong teachers and counselors, we will walk in the counsel of the ungodly and the fruit of our life will not be glorying to God. Let us seek God earnestly for wisdom to know which stream is pure to drink from. We must not think that we can discern who is who by our own judgment.

- **Go to the Right Schools** Also it is so important to be led by God in our choice of a Theological school. Bible schools form and mold us for all eternity. It is almost impossible to unlearn and deprogram ourselves from wrong concepts which have been instilled in our lives over a long period of time. Many Bible schools and seminaries destroy our faith. Thousands of seminary students graduate with heads that are full, but hearts that are empty and void of faith. Schools that produce godly men and women *major* on the Word of God, and they *rely* on the Holy Spirit to help them understand the Word of God. The Word of God alone has the only real answers for man's problems. Avoid training that emphasizes worldly philosophy, psychology, sociology, politics, and humanism.