

HOW DID WE GET THE BIBLE AND IS IT RELIABLE?

I. How was the Bible written and preserved?

A. Biblical texts were written with a stylus and some form of ink.

B. Writing Materials

1. 1500-400 BC

a. Stone tablets

b. Clay tablets

c. Leathered animal skins

2. Copies were made on papyrus.

3. 45-100 AD – Papyrus made from plant fibers written in scroll form.

4. Codices used through 100 AD were bound sheets, sewn together, and sometimes covered.

5. Copies written on vellum (calf or antelope skins) were the highest quality. Parchment (sheep or goat skins) were also used. (325-350 AD)

6. Bibles were painstakingly copied by hand on vellum until the advent of Guttenberg's movable type printing press in 1455.

II. A rough timeline for the writing and copying of the Bible.

A. In approximately 2000 BC, events began to be recorded and preserved primarily through oral tradition. Some writing was done as the centuries progressed, and the early Scriptures were written in Hebrew and later Aramaic. Written copies of Scriptures were very rare and very precious. Typically priests, scribes and kings had the only copies of Scripture.

B. Around 450 BC, Ezra, the priest and scribe, collected and arranged some books of the Old Testament according to Jewish tradition.

- C. The Septuagint (LXX) was a Greek translation of the Old Testament. It was translated in Alexandria, Egypt around 250-100 BC. Seventy to seventy-two Jewish scholars did the translating according to Jewish tradition. At this time. The books of the Bible were arranged by subject: history, poetry, and prophecy. The Apocrypha (hidden) is seven books not considered to be Scripture but of importance were included. In 90 AD, the Apocrypha was removed from the Jewish Bible. The historians Josephus and Philo supported the exclusion of the Apocrypha from the Bible in the first century.
- D. The New Testament was written between (approximately) 45 and 100 AD. The first book written in the New Testament was Mark and the last was Revelation. The early church recognized the Hebrew Bible that was accepted by the Jewish religion as their Scriptures, and they later added the books of the New Testament to their Bible. The writings of the early church fathers, Origen and Eusebius, mentioned 21 or 22 of the books of the New Testament as being authoritative and Scripture. They concluded that these documents were to be read in the churches.
- E. In 313 AD, Emperor Constantine declared Christianity to be the official religion of the Roman Empire. By then, the books of the New Testament had been translated from Greek into Latin, Koptic, and Syriac. In 400 AD, the standard twenty-seven books of the New Testament were accepted as authoritative and Scripture in both the Eastern and Western Empires according to Athanasius, Jerome, and Augustine. The twenty-seven books of the New Testament were formally canonized by the senate of Carthage in 397 AD.
- F. In 435 AD, Jerome completed his Latin translation of the New Testament called Vulgate Bible. This translation remained the standard Bible of the Church for centuries.
- G. The Masoretes were Jewish scribes who developed and practiced a very meticulous and precise method for copying biblical texts. They followed this system from approximately 500 to 900 AD. Their work is considered highly accurate, and their texts were used for many of the translations of the Bible until the 20th century. They counted every word of each copy of the Bible they made. If the tally was not correct, the copy was destroyed.

III. The History of the English Bible

- A. Christianity's presence is well documented throughout the Roman occupation (of the British Isles) prior to the year 300 AD.

- B. Augustine of Canterbury, after driving out the pagans of England, began to evangelize the Britons in 596 AD.
- C. Caedmon, an illiterate monk, began retelling portions of Scripture in oral form in Anglo Saxon through poetry and music in 709 AD.
- D. Aldhelm of Sherborne translated the Psalms into Anglo Saxon in 709 AD.
- E. Bede, the great English scholar and monk, translated many biblical texts into Anglo Saxon including the gospel of John by 735 AD.
- F. After the conquest of England by the Normans in 1066, French became the official language of Britain. No English translation of Scripture was worked on until the 1300's.
- G. In 1382 AD, the first English Bible was translated from Latin by John Wycliffe, an Oxford scholar and priest. Wycliffe's desire was for the people to have a translation of the Scriptures in their own language. His followers were derisively called the Lollards or mumblers, and forty years after his death, his translation was burned, declared heresy, and he was declared a heretic. His bones were exhumed and burned.
- H. In 1408 AD, it was declared illegal to translate or read the Bible in common English without permission from a bishop.
- I. The Gutenberg printing press with moveable metal type began to be used in 1455 in Germany. This made the copying of texts much faster and easier and increased copying accuracy.
- J. Erasmus, a priest and Greek scholar, published a new edition of the Greek New Testament which was much more accurate than the Latin translation of the New Testament. His work is the basis of the *textus receptus* or received text and was used by Martin Luther, William Tyndale, and the King James translators in their various translations. Martin Luther translated the New Testament into German in 1522. Tyndale translated the New Testament into English in 1525 but could not get permission to publish it. In 1535, Tyndale published parts of the Old Testament translated from Hebrew. In 1536, Tyndale was strangled and burned at the stake as a heretic. He is considered to be "The Father of the English Bible" because his translation is part of the basis of the King James version, and the style and vocabulary known as Biblical English comes from him.
- K. The first complete English translation was printed in 1535. It was Coverdale Bible. The Matthews Bible was printed in 1537, and it was the first English translation of the Bible published with the Crown's permission. It relied heavily

upon Tyndale's version. The Great Bible was printed and placed in every church in England. It was chained to prevent its theft.

- L. Queen Mary, also known as "Bloody Mary" was loyal to the Roman Catholic Church, and she vigorously persecuted the Protestants of England. Under her reign, hundreds of Protestant believers were burned at the stake. Many other fled to continental Europe. Exiles from England who settled in Geneva, Switzerland completely revised *The Great Bible* and translated the Old Testament from Hebrew. This is the famous *Geneva Bible*. This bible was the study bible of scholars like John Calvin, John Knox, Theodore Beza, and others whose notes were added as footnotes or marginal notes. This is the bible quoted by William Shakespeare and carried by the Pilgrims to America in 1620. It was also the first English bible to omit the Apocrypha. Under Queen Elizabeth, several Church of England bishops developed a bible to counter the influence and popularity of the *Geneva Bible*. It was published in 1568 and was called *The Bishop's Bible*.
- M. King James I commissioned a team of 54 scholars to undertake the task of developing a new translation of Scripture into English. This work took 6 years to complete. During those 6 years, six teams of scholars used *The Bishop's Bible*, the *Geneva Bible*, *Tyndale's Bible*, and available Greek and Hebrew manuscripts to do their translation. It was finished in 1611, and while it is often called "the Authorized Version," it never received royal approval in its finished state. The modern King James Version has been revised 26 times to update its language and vocabulary. It has been the most popular English bible for 300 years. In the last twenty years, it has slipped to second place in popularity among English translations.
- N. Since the 1800's many ancient biblical texts have been discovered which are older than those used by the older English translations. As a result, in 1885, *The Revised Version* was completed with the goal of using the best Hebrew and Greek texts available. In 1947, the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered by a Bedouin shepherd and these copies of the Old Testament are the oldest texts of Scripture extant (in existence). They are dated between 100 BC and 100 AD. These scrolls have given overwhelming support for the accuracy of the Masoretic copies used in earlier translations having only minor variations largely of spelling. Other copies of texts continue to be found through modern archaeological research, and strides have been made in linguistics as well.

IV. Translation Philosophies

- A. Formal Equivalence – This approach tries to translate the Bible from the best Hebrew and Greek manuscripts by staying as close as possible to the ancient texts' original wording. This philosophy may make the reading of these English

versions a little more difficult, but it is the best way to preserve the word-for-word integrity of the text.

- B. Functional Equivalence – This approach tries to translate the Bible from the best Hebrew and Greek manuscripts, but the underlying goal is readability in English. Word order, sentence structure, technical/theological words are not strictly followed from the ancient texts to English. These translations are much easier to read for modern English speaking people. It does potentially jeopardize the integrity of the text.
- C. Dynamic Equivalence – This approach tries to translate the Bible from the best Hebrew and Greek manuscripts, and it tries to balance literal translation with readability in English. It is an attempt to blend the former philosophies without compromising the text. The potential to jeopardize the text exists.
- D. When selecting a translation of the Bible for personal study or reading, the best course of action is to choose a translation which follows the most literal approach to interpretation. Among those, no major doctrinal or textual differences which touch vital doctrine exists. If every word in the Bible is the very Word of God, literal translation is the best way to preserve the authoritative nature of Scripture. The goal of literal translation is to translate, not interpret the biblical text.

V. English Translations

Literal Translations	Functional Translations	Dynamic Translations
New American Standard English Standard Version	New International Version Today's NIV	Holman Christian Standard Revised Standard Version
King James Version	New Living Translation	
New King James Version	Contemporary English Version	
New Revised Standard	Good News Bible	

*While nothing is inherently wrong with paraphrasing a biblical text, a paraphrase by definition is not focused on preserving the words of a text. Paraphrases are inadequate for serious biblical study, and great care must be taken in selecting one to read. Some paraphrases of the Bible are: *The New Testament in Modern English*, *The Living Bible*, *The Message*, and *The Street Bible*.

VI. Historical Attestation for the Bible

- A. The New Testament was written between 60 and 100 AD.
- B. More than 5,700 portions of the New Testament have survived

- C. Complete manuscripts of the New Testament from the third and fourth centuries have survived
- D. Hundreds of fragments and manuscripts from the second, third, and fourth centuries have survived

VII. Contrast with the works of Plato

- A. Written around 400 BC
- B. Only seven copies have survived
- C. Earliest surviving copies date between 800 and 900 AD (1200 years after the original)

VIII. Confessional Statements on the Bible

The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God's revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error for its matter. Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. It reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain until the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried. All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation.

(The Baptist Faith and Message, 2000)

The Scriptures of the Old and New Testament were given by inspiration of God, and are the only sufficient, certain, and authoritative rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience.

(The Abstract of Principles, Article I)

IX. Conclusions

- A. The 66 books of the Old and New Testaments are the Christian scriptures.
- B. The Bible was written by men who were supernaturally inspired by the Holy Spirit.
- C. God has inspired and preserved His Word throughout history until this time.
- D. The Bible is inerrant and infallible in all that it teaches.
- E. The Bible is authoritative in the life of the Church and is sufficient for that life.
- F. The purpose of the Scriptures is manifesting the glory of God in the salvation of sinners through Jesus Christ.

- G. The Bible is the standard by which Jesus will judge the living and the dead.
- H. The Bible, as God's Word, is eternal and everlasting.
- I. The Bible is clear in what it teaches but not equally clear in what it teaches.
- J. The proper manner of biblical interpretation is the Grammatical-Historical method.
 - 1. Analysis of vocabulary
 - 2. Analysis of grammar
 - 3. Cultural/Historical considerations
 - 4. Practical Applicability

Exodus 24:4; Deuteronomy 4:1, 2 and 17:19; Joshua 8:34; Psalm 19:7-10, 119:11,89, 105, 140; Isaiah 40:8; Jeremiah 15:16 and 36:1-32; Matthew 5:17, 18; Luke 21:33 and 24:44-46; Romans 15:4 and 16:25, 26; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; Hebrews 1:1, 2 and 4:14; 1 Peter 1:25