

How We Got Our Bible

There are two reasons why this topic is important to study. It fuels our worship of God and it equips us to be an effective witness. In studying how the Bible came to us, we see how God is able to use the common and familiar to glorify himself:

For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence. - 1 Corinthians 1:26-29 (KJV)

The second reason is to be able to give an answer to those who have questions about the Christian faith:

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear - 1 Peter 3:15 (KJV)

Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man. - Col 4:6 (KJV)

Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers - Titus 1:9 (KJV)

There are those who attack the origin of the Scripture as a means to discredit the message of the Scriptures, **THE GOSPEL**. Others have honest questions and would doubt going further in taking the claims of the Bible seriously if the only answer that is provided is “God just gave it to us.” While this statement is true, it can leave Christianity as a “Folk Religion” that sounds good but is not connected to reality. God gives the believer the responsibility to earnestly contend for the faith (Jude 3) and give an answer to the seeker and skeptic.

Fast Facts on the Bible

1. Written over about a fifteen-hundred-year span
2. Written by more than forty authors- Moses a political leader, David a King, Daniel a Prime Minister
3. Written on Three Continents - Asia, Africa, and Europe
4. Written in three languages – Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek
5. Written in a variety of literary styles – poetry, law, prophecy, romance, historical narrative
6. Written to reveal one unfolding story, the redemption of human beings
7. The main character is the Messiah, Jesus

Fast Facts on Bible Translation (Halley's Bible Handbook & The Bible in Translation, Metzger)

The first translation of the Old Testament was done in Greek. This Greek version is called the Septuagint (LXX) and was completed in the 3rd century B.C and was in common use in the time of Jesus. The name comes from the myth that this translation was done by 72 translators. The more realistic reason that this translation was done was to accommodate for Jews who were either weak in their Hebrew or no longer were familiar with Hebrew. One of the major benefits of this translation was that it made the truth of the scriptures accessible to a wider audience (4).

Later Translations: Old Syriac – 2 nd Century A.D., Old Latin – 2 nd Century A.D., Coptic (Language of Egypt) – 2 nd Century A.D., Peshito Syriac – 4 th Century A.D., The Vulgate – A.D. 382-404 (done by Jerome as a revision of the Old Latin), Ethiopic and Gothic – 4 th Century A.D., Armenian – 5 th Century A.D., Arabic and Slavic – 9 th Century A.D. (Halley, 1965)

English Translations:

Wycliffe's Bible – A.D. 1382 – First English Bible – suffered persecution,
Tyndale Bible – A.D. 1525 – more accurate than Wycliffe's – suffered persecution,
Geneva Bible – A.D. 1560,
King James Version – A.D. 1611 (Halley, 1965)

Questions that Skeptics have about the Bible?

How could Moses have written the Pentateuch when writing wasn't invented Yet?

This question attacks the validity of Moses's authorship of the Torah which brings into question the validity of the written accounts. In particular, the creation account of Genesis. Bringing doubts about the author opens the door to questioning the truths they express. Jesus' credibility would also be called into question since he agreed that the first five books were written by Moses (Matt 8:4, 19:8, 23:2; Luke 24:44). One way to address this question is by appealing to the Resurrection. If we already believe that Jesus' claim to Godhood is true (John 5 & 8) and that this claim was validated by a verifiable miracle, his Resurrection from the dead (Romans 1:4), this is good evidence that his claim of Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch (First five books of the Bible) is true. Neil R. Lightfoot in his book How We Got Our Bible shares the importance of recognizing that writing was around long before the time of Moses:

'...Such information as this has important implications for the origin of our Bible. For skeptical Bible critics formerly held that writing was unknown in the days of Moses and therefore that Moses could not have been the author of the first five books of the Bible. We now know that writing was practiced many centuries before Moses and that alphabetic script was in the vicinity of Sinai. Indeed at least five different systems of writing are known to have existed in the general area of Syria-Palestine when Moses lived. All this means it can no longer be assumed that it was impossible for Moses to have written the books ascribed to him'

Writing Material Ancient and Modern (5):

1. **Stone** - The earliest writings in Egypt, Babylonia, and Mesopotamia were in stone. Legal and religious laws would be put on display (Ten Commandments written in stone by God - Ex 31:18; 32:16; 34:1-4,28)
2. **Clay** - most common writing material in Mesopotamia was clay. Wedge shaped writing called cuneiform was done in wet clay then allowed to dry
3. **Wood and Wax** - Used by the Romans. They would write on whitened wood tablets or wooden tablets overlaid with wax which could be erased. It is believed that the inscription above Jesus' head during his crucifixion was a wooden tablet covered in white
4. **Metal of Gold** - Cuneiform was also done on metal. A Roman soldier who was honorably discharged would get a bronze diploma that granted them citizenship and special privileges
5. **Ostraca** - Potshards. Cheap writing material. People of Athens who wanted to banish someone would write their name on ostraca. This is where we get the word "ostracized"
6. **Papyrus** - leaf that grew along the Nile river. The Egyptians used this material since 3000 B.C. More flexible, functional, and manageable than the above materials. The New Testament documents were first written on papyrus - Greek term for papyrus was *biblos* where we get the word Bible
7. **Leather and Parchment** - Animal skins. Leather is animal skin that is de-haired, soaked in lime water and dyed with chemicals; parchment is animal skin that is de-haired, soaked in lime and stretched and left to dry
8. **Digital & Electronic** - Christians in countries where the Bible is outlawed are able to read the Bible on their smart devices

The Bible can't be true, it was written by men and men are fallible, Right?

Just because something was written by man, does not mean that what they wrote is automatically fallible. We must investigate to see if what they are saying is true. We believe that the Bible was inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Max Anders in his book, The New Christians Handbook explains, "The word 'inspired' comes from two Greek words: theo = God, pneu = to blow, to breathe, Therefore the word literally is God-breathed", meaning that the Scripture is a result of God's creative work." Charles Ryrie in the Ryrie Study Bible gives another way of defining inspiration, "Inspiration is Gods' superintending of human authors so that, using their own individual personalities, they composed and recorded without error in the words of the original autographs, His revelation to man". We also believe that portions of the Bible were written by men who were writing about their own experience and were not getting their information "second hand"

(1 John 1:1, 2 Peter 1:8, Gal 1:11-2:21)

In the box below there are some evidences for why it is reasonable to believe that the Bible is true and has a supernatural origin even though it was written by men:

Unity - It is difficult to even get five people to agree on any topic, but the message of Scripture is one entire story where men at different times in different places agree on fundamental topics - the Holiness of God, Humanity's Need of God, Humanity's Sinfulness, and the Coming Savior just to name a few.

Prophecy - Bible prophecy is one of the strongest evidences for the Bible being from God and for the Existence of God. Not only does the Scriptures tell of events hundreds of years before they happened, there are very specific prophecies concerning the Messiah that Jesus fulfilled. Two passages in Isaiah highlight what God says concerning his ability to tell of past events that we could not know about, and future events before they happen, and how this proves that he is the true God (see Isaiah 42:8-9, 46:9-10, 48:3-5)

Honesty - the Bible hides very little. It tells of humanity's sinfulness, the multiple failures of God's people as well as the failures of God's chosen men. When writing a history, we aim to highlight our group's or cultures' victories as well as the successful exploits of our heroes and downplay what would bring shame. In the Bible, we see many victories and men used by God to carry out his plan, but we also see their failures. We see Noah getting drunk after surviving the flood, we see Israel repeatedly turning from God in the book of Numbers

Translation - the Bible has been translated in more than 2200 languages and is the highest selling book of all time

How can the Bible be true if the author's make false claims about the natural world?

The Bible is not a scientific book, but it does make true scientific claims. Genesis 1:1 correctly states that the universe had a beginning as opposed to it being eternal. Genesis 1:11 makes the correct claim that fruit has the seed in itself. Isaiah 40:22 correctly points to the earth being a sphere. In Job 26:7, Job makes the correct statement that the earth is suspended on nothing. There are other scientific claims that the Bible makes that are scientifically correct: the sea has channels and paths (2 Sam. 22:16; Ps. 8:8; Prov. 8:28); the sea has boundaries (Prov.8:29); life is in the blood (Lev. 17:11); disease can be spread by physical contact (Lev 13), that the usable amount of energy is decreasing, 2nd Law of Thermodynamics (Psalm 102:25-27). While the Bible is not a science textbook, it is scientifically accurate in its claims.

How can we be sure that the Bible we have today is accurate? It's been tampered so many times since it was first written.

It would be good to ask the person to be specific. What exactly was changed and who changed it? It's one thing to claim something has been tampered with, but it's another to be able to give good reasons and evidence for the claim. The Bible is translated from copies of copies of the Old Testament and the New Testament. There is an overwhelming amount of evidence to show that the scriptures were copied accurately. Two pieces of evidence we will look at are the copying practices of the Jewish scribes, the practices of the Massorettes, and the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. We will discuss the accuracy of the New Testament in a question below.

Neil R. Lightfoot in his book How We Got the Bible describes how the Jewish scribes took beyond exceptional care to make sure that the copy of the Scriptures was accurate and used special markings and a system of counting characters to verify and maintain accuracy:

“That a few really old Hebrew manuscripts have survived does not indicate a lack of scribal activity. From earliest times the Jewish scribes devoted themselves to the accurate transmission of the Biblical text. Thus there arose schools of professional scribes (cf. 1 Chron 2:55) men who were trained in the art of writing, who were specialists in the law and who were the supreme guardians of the text. Scribal activities involved a number of people and passed from generation to generation.

Numerous examples can be cited to show the passion of scribes for minute details of the text. When for some reason the manuscript had a letter too large or too small, these letters of unusual size were carefully duplicated. If for example a scribe found an extra letter in a word he would leave the word the same but put a dot above the letter or word that he questioned. The dots show scribal

uncertainty about a word or letter, but the scribes did not alter the text because the text was regarded as unalterable.

These and similar practices reflect long-standing traditions of the scribes. It was the function of Massorah - the Hebrew term for tradition - to guard the text, and the scribes who transmitted the text, on the basis of their authoritative traditions, are generally known as Massorettes.

The Massorettes, who go back to about AD 500 succeeded the earlier scribes...The work of the Massorettes is truly significant. Their labors are spread out over a period of four or five centuries and their contributions are many. **They are perhaps best known for their system of vows with accents which they devised for the Hebrew text.** It will be remembered that all the letters in the Hebrew alphabet are consonants and that the Old Testament was first written without vowels. Although this may seem strange to us, it was sufficient during the many centuries Hebrew was a spoken language. When eventually Hebrew was no longer spoken, the danger was imminent that the proper pronunciation of the consonantal text might be lost. To meet the danger, the Massorettes, on the basis of their well-kept traditions inserted vowel points above and below the lines of the text. It must be emphasized, however, they did not bother the text itself; they only added a means by which to ensure the correct pronunciation of the text.

... They also sought ways and methods by which to eliminate scribal slips of addition or omission. This they achieved through intricate procedures of counting the number the versus, words, and letters of each book. They counted the number of times each letter was used in each book. They noted versus that contained all the letters of the alphabet or a certain number of them. They calculated the middle letter, the middle word, and the middle verse of the Pentateuch; the middle verse of Psalms, the middle verse of the entire Hebrew Bible, and so forth. In fact, they counted almost everything that could be counted. With these safeguards and others when they finished making a copy of a book you could then check the accuracy of his work before using it. This briefly illustrates why the work of the Massorettes is so important. Massorettes were textual critics of the first rank. They examined and appraised carefully all the textual materials available to them and on the basis of their abundant evidence handed down in writing the form of the text which is received at least several centuries before their time. Indeed, their labors were so productive and their contribution so large that our Hebrew text today is often referred to as the Masoretic text."

The Jewish scribes took their role seriously and went to great lengths to make sure that the copies they made were as close to the original as possible. Yet, skeptics would still make the claim that since the earliest copy of the Old Testament that was 1400 years removed from when the Old Testament was completed that there was a chance that the copies were inaccurate...until the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in 1947 in a place called Qumran located near the northern part of the Dead Sea. On these leather scrolls were fragments of Old Testament books, rules for the community that possessed the scrolls, and extra-biblical writings. It was determined that the scrolls were 1000 older than the texts we currently had available. The text of the Old Testament portions of the Dead Sea scrolls closely agreed with the Masoretic texts we currently have, which proved accurate transmission. Below is a quote from Rose Publishing Book of Maps and Charts Volume 2:

"...The Dead Sea Scrolls demonstrated how carefully the Old Testament had been copied through the centuries. Around ad 900—nearly a millennium after the time of Jesus—groups of Jewish scribes known as Masorettes began to copy the Old Testament texts according to strict guidelines. The Masorettes maintained nearly perfect accuracy in their copies. Until the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, these Masoretic texts were the oldest available manuscripts of the Old Testament. When the Dead Sea Scrolls were unearthed in the mid-twentieth century, scholars compared the text of Isaiah from the Dead Sea Scrolls with the text of Isaiah preserved by the Masorettes. What these scholars discovered was that—even though more than 1,000 years separated the Dead Sea Scrolls from the Masoretic texts—the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Masoretic texts agreed word-for-word more than 95% of the time! The remaining differences stemmed primarily from minor spelling variations. Even the scrolls that differ a bit more than the Isaiah scrolls—for example, the copies of 1 and 2 Samuel and Deuteronomy—do not differ in any way that affects any crucial Jewish or Christian belief."

The Gospels are full of contradictions; how can they be trusted?

This is another question where a good beginning response would be to ask a question. What contradictions are you referring to? Can you tell or show me where the contradictions are? While as believers we are called to be able to answer challenges to our faith, one way to answer the challenge is to challenge the questioner and hold them to the same standard to give good reasons and/or evidence for their views. Just because two passages say different things does not mean that there is a contradiction. Matthew 1 Luke 3 has different name included in Jesus' ancestry. We could say that there is a contradiction but a reasonable explanation is that Matthew records Jesus' ancestry through Joseph while Luke traces it through Mary. Matthew 27:44 states that both thieves participated in mocking Jesus while being crucified. Luke 23:40-43 says that while one thief mocked Jesus, the other begged Christ for mercy. A reasonable explanation is that both accounts are right. At one point both thieves could have been mocking Jesus but over time one of them repented and asked for mercy. In many cases further thought and investigation can clear up differences.

Can we be really sure the Gospels are accurate? They were written 300 years after he lived?

There are very good reasons to believe that New Testament Gospels are accurate and reflect the meaning of the original writers. The New Testament was written between A.D. 50 to A.D 90, and most of the New Testament was completed before A.D. 70.. Based on internal evidence, the Gospels and the Book of Acts confirm an early date for their original writing. Paul and Peter were martyred during Nero's Persecution in A.D. 64. If the Gospels and the book of Acts were written after A.D. 64 we would expect the writers to mention the death of the Peter and Paul just like the death of John the Baptist in the Gospels, James (the Apostle John's Brother) and the deacon Stephen in the book of Acts. If we accept that the death of Jesus was A.D. 30, the completion of the New Testament was about 30 years after the actual events of Christ's life which reduces the likelihood that the eyewitness accounts would be inaccurate. The fact that a good portion of the New Testament was written by either someone who personally experienced the events documented or was close to someone who personally experienced those events, is another reason to believe that the Gospels were accurate in what they wrote concerning Christ's life and their experience with Him.

When it comes to manuscript evidence for the New Testament, there are over 5000 copies of New Testament fragments that exist today which is significantly more copies than any other ancient work (In second place is the Iliad - 643 manuscripts). The earliest copy of the New Testament is only around 200 years older than the original writing which is a very short period of time compared to other ancient writings. The number of manuscripts allow for textual comparison to research differences as well as confirm accuracy. The time period between our earliest copy and the original writing reduces the likelihood of errors and mistakes. The wider the gap gets between the original work and the available copy increases the possibility of textual differences.

How do we know we have all the information on what Jesus did and said, there are other gospels that could give us more information about his life?

The topic of what books should be considered authoritative is called canonicity. Canon comes from the Greek word kanon which meant a measuring instrument. Canon then came to mean rule of action (Charles Ryrie - Basic Theology). The First Five Books of Moses were considered authoritative by other Old Testament writers (Joshua 1:7-8; 23:6; 1 Kings 2:3; 2 Kings 14:6; 21:8; 23:25; Ezra 6:18; Nehemiah 13:1; Daniel 9:11; Malachi 4:4). The Prophets declared that they were speaking the words of God and other Old Testament writers believed what they said was authoritative (Joshua 6:26=>1 Kings 16:34 - the curse on rebuilding Jericho, Joshua 24:29-33=>Judges 2:8-9 - Joshua's death, (Jeremiah 25:11-12=>Daniel 9:2 - Daniel references Jeremiah's prophecy of the 70 years of Babylonian captivity). The strongest evidence for the authority of the Old Testament is Jesus Christ. The books Jesus considered authoritative are the same books we have in our Old Testament (Luke 24:44-45 - Jesus says The Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms are all about him. This was the three-fold reference to what the Jews considered authoritative Scripture). Harold Willmington shares when the Old Testament was considered complete, "By the year 300 B.C. (at the latest) all Old Testament books had been written, collected, revered, and recognized as official, canonical books. Many believe Ezra the prophet led the recognition council.

The New testament that we have today was considered Scripture by the early church, but for it to be considered authoritative it would be subjected to strict guidelines (Taken from Ryrie-Basic Theology & Wilmington - Introduction to Theology)

1. It needed to be connected to an apostle and have apostolic authority (Peter is connected with Mark, Paul with Luke)
2. It needed to be seen as unique, different than other writings
3. The work had to be universally accepted in the church
4. Was the teaching in the book in agreement with other recognized books
5. Did the book have the ability to inspire holy living

At the Council of Carthage, the 27 books of the Bible we have today were recognized as Scripture, Harold Willmington states, "During the Third Council of Carthage, held in A.D. 397, the 27 New Testament books were declared to be canonical. However, it absolutely must be understood that the Bible is not an authorized collection of books. In other words, the 27 New Testament books were not inspired because the Carthage Council proclaimed them to be, but rather the Council proclaimed them to be such because they were already inspired" (Willmington - Intro the Theology).

How can we be sure we have the right translation of the Bible?

In selecting an appropriate translation, it's important to understand methods translators use in preparing a translation of the Bible. The below descriptions are from the Bible Translation Comparison pamphlet from Rose Publishing:

Word-for-word – A process in which the biblical and linguistic scholars attempt to translate each word based upon the word usage at the time of the writing. No translation is actually "word-for-word," but the intent is to come as close as possible (KJV, NKJV, NASB, ESV, AMP)

Thought-for-thought - A process in which scholars translate the meaning of each thought. This approach is also known as dynamic equivalence." This is how most non-biblical translations for modern books is done (NLT)

Balance - A process in which scholars attempt to mediate between a word-for-word and thought-for-thought approach (CEB, HCSB)

Paraphrase - A-re-statement of a translation in modern terms and vocabulary, often expanded (or "amplified") for clarity (The Message)

When looking for a Bible to use for personal study, it's best to have a word-for-word translation as well as look at multiple translations. The goal of this translation philosophy is to get as close to the original meaning as possible. Other translations methods are not bad, but sometimes you can have a mixture of agendas where the translators are not only looking for the right word, but also inserting their own opinions on what they believe the text 'should' say instead of 'what it says'.

How do you know your interpretation of the Bible is the right one? There are so many interpretations.

The goal of reading any text is to understand the intent of the author. While there are different interpretations possible, there is only one right interpretation. As we study and do research on certain passages, we can get a better sense of what the author is trying to say. While Christians and whole denominations differ as to what some passages mean, there is also consensus on major doctrines of the Bible: The existence of God, Man's sinfulness and need for a Savior, the Deity of Christ just to name a few. While there are some passages that may be difficult to interpret, when it comes to major doctrines of the Bible, the meaning of certain passages is quite clear.

Information for Handout gathered from the below sources:

1. Basic Theology - Charles Ryrie 2. Rose Publishing Book of Bible Charts and Maps Volume 2 3. Halley's Bible Handbook 4. The Bible in Translation - Bruce Metzger 5. How We Got the Bible - Neil T. Lightfoot 6. Answers to Tough Questions Skeptics Ask About the Christian Faith - Josh McDowell & Don Stewart 7. One-Minute Answers to Skeptics - Charlie H. Campbell 8. Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics - Norman Geisler 9. The New Christians Handbook - Max Anders