

# WHAT WE BELIEVE

## A SURVEY OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

### LESSON #4 – THE SCRIPTURES

#### **Baptist Faith and Message Article 1**

##### The Scriptures

#### **MEMORY VERSES**

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; 2 But his delight is in the law of the Lord, And in His law he meditates day and night. 3 He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper, (Ps 1, NKJV).

#### **Canon, Inscripturation, Transmission, Translation**

How did the Bible come to be? What was the process by which the Bible came to us and what about all those different translations?

First, why did some books make it into the canon of Scripture and others did not? The primary criterion for canonicity is inspiration. Was the book inspired by God? If so, then it made it into the Bible.

Contrary to many false claims, no church council made any book a part of the canon. In other words, man never determines canonicity; it is simply recognized by man as having been inspired by God. Over the centuries, God's people have recognized God's authentic voice and power in these 66 books. The church councils only recognized and approved what the Spirit had already confirmed to His people.

I. Criteria for the Canonicity of the Old Testament (canon closed ca. 425 B.C.; recognition settled ca. A.D. 70-90). The following questions were raised when God's people tested the inspiration of individual books (From Geisler

#### **CANON**

Literally meaning “standard,” “rule,” or “measuring rod,” the canon of Scripture refers to the collection of books the church has recognized as the rule or standard of faith and practice.

and Nix, A General Introduction to the Bible):

1. Is it authoritative? Does it claim to be from the Lord?
2. Is it prophetic? Was it written by a man of God?
3. Is it authentic? Is it consistent with other revelation? Does it record facts as they actually occurred?
4. Is it dynamic? Does it come with the power of God?
5. Was it received? Has this book been accepted generally by the people of God?

II. Criteria for the Canonicity of the New Testament (canon closed ca. A.D. 90; recognition settled by A.D. 367 when Athanasius listed them in an Easter letter).

1. Apostolicity: Was it written by an apostle or someone closely associated with an apostle?
2. Antiquity: Is it traced to the time of the apostles?
3. Orthodoxy: Does its teaching agree with the apostolic teaching?
4. Reception by the churches: Did the Christian churches accept it?
5. Spiritual value: Did it have the power to change lives?

III. Books Which Failed the Test of Canonicity (not inspired)

1. Rejected books mentioned in the Old Testament
  - a. Examples: Book of the Wars of the Lord (Num 21:14); The Book of Jashar (Josh 10:13; 2 Sam 1:18); The Words of Gad the Seer (1 Chr 29:29); The Prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite (2 Chr 9:29); The Visions of Iddo the Seer (2 Chr 9:29); etc.
2. The Apocrypha
  - a. "Apocrypha" means "secret writings." Some of these books are included in the Roman Catholic Bibles. They include historical, wisdom, prophetic, and religious romance literature. These do not have the same character as Scripture. They include historical errors, teaching contrary to Scripture, and lack prophetic power. They were written between 400 B.C. and A.D. 1.
3. The Pseudepigrapha
  - a. "Pseudepigrapha" means "falsely written." These were written between A.D. 1 and A.D. 100. Among these books are false writings such as the Gospel of Thomas and the Acts of Paul.

QUESTION 1: Was there a recognized canon of Scripture in the Bible itself?

ANSWER: 2 Chron 34:14-21; Neh 8:1-8; Matt 11:13; Luke 24:27, 44-45; John 1:45; Acts 8:32, 35; 13:15, 33; 28:23; Rom 3:21; 1 Tim 5:18; 2 Pet 3:16

SUMMARIZE:

EXPLANATION

The Hebrew Bible is called "Tanak" abbreviation for Torah, Neviim, and Ketuvim (Law, Prophets, Writings). Though the arrangement is different from our English Bible, it has the exact same books (Cf. Luke 24:44).

QUESTION 2: How did the Bible get written down?

ANSWER: Exod 24:4; 34:27; Deut 17:18; 31:9, 24; Jer 30:2; 36:1-4, 17-18; 2 Pet 1:20-21

SUMMARIZE:

EXPLANATION

“Inscription” is the process of writing down the revealed Word of God. The Holy Spirit “moved” (2 Pet 1:21) the writers of Scripture in such a way that He used their personalities, backgrounds, and vocabulary with the result that what was written was the inerrant Word of God.

QUESTION 3: How did the original writings get copied and handed down through the centuries?

ANSWER: The term “transmission” describes the ancient process of copying Hebrew (OT) and Greek (NT) manuscripts to preserve them for future generations and to distribute them for greater use. Since there were no printing presses, the texts had to be copied by hand. In this way they were “transmitted.”

EXPLANATION

The copying process of the Old Testament (originally written in Hebrew)

The Masoretic scribes (A.D. 500-1000) in charge of the Old Testament manuscript copying used a very meticulous system of transcription and had a deep reverence for the text. God used their almost obsessive respect for the text to preserve the text’s accuracy. They had specific rules on the type of ink and the quality and size of parchment sheets. No individual letter could be written down without having looked back at the copy in front of them. The scribe could not write God’s name with a newly dipped pen (lest it blotch). They were so meticulous that they counted all the paragraphs, words and even letters, so they could know by counting, if they had done it perfectly. They knew the middle letter of each book so they could count back and see if they had missed anything.

#### 1. Masoretic manuscripts

We actually have very few complete or nearly complete Old Testament manuscripts existing today. There are 4 or 5 really significant Masoretic manuscripts that are the basis of the best Hebrew Bible available today. These copies were made between about A.D. 900 and A.D. 1000 by the Masoretes.

#### 2. The Septuagint evidence

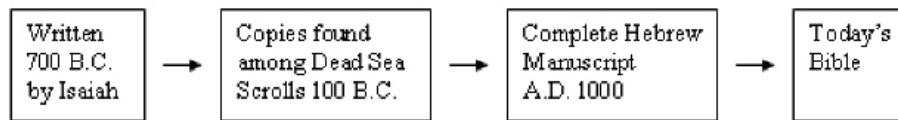
The Septuagint is a translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into the Greek language which was made in the 2nd or 3rd century B.C. There are about 300 existing copies of the Septuagint. This was the common Hebrew Bible used and quoted by Jesus and the apostles (who lived in a Greek culture, of course).

Although written in Greek, scholars can generally determine what Hebrew words were being translated in the Septuagint. It provides evidence that the Hebrew Bibles were copied extremely well for all the years between the Septuagint translation (2nd/3rd century B.C.) and our best existing Hebrew copies (A.D. 900-1000).

### 3. The Dead Sea Scrolls

Since the oldest complete copy of a Hebrew Old Testament in existence is dated about A.D. 1000, that's a long time after the originals were written (1450-400 B.C.). But there are portions that date back farther. Most significant are the Dead Sea Scrolls, which were discovered in caves in 1947 by an Arabian shepherd boy. These well-preserved Hebrew text fragments date back to 100 B.C. They include many Bible portions, including some complete books. Their value to the credibility of our Bible is that amazingly, there is virtual agreement between these Hebrew texts and the ones dated 1,100 years later! This proves how accurately the scribes copied for all those years.

Example of Isaiah in the Dead Sea Scrolls: Through all the years of copying, the text of Isaiah remained virtually identical.



The evidence shows that our Old Testaments today are extremely accurate reflections of the original manuscripts.

The copying process of the New Testament (originally written in Greek)

#### 1. The reliability of Greek manuscripts

The reliability of the New Testament Greek texts is even more certain than the Old Testament texts. The New Testament was written between A.D. 45 – A.D. 90. Some fragments of Greek texts exist that date back to A.D. 120 and A.D. 150. That's only 35-100 years after the originals that Paul, John, Luke and others wrote! Another big help to Greek textual scholars is the fact that there are 4,000-5,000 New Testament Greek manuscripts (partial or complete) existing. By comparing these many copies, scholars can weed out many possible copying mistakes.

So there are two factors confirming that the Greek texts, available to scholars today, are very accurate reflections of the original writing. 1) We have copies dated closely to the time of the original writing. 2) We have lots of copies.



### THE STREAM OF GOD'S PURE WORD

**The Autographs →**  
(no pollution)

**Transmission →**  
(very little pollution)

**Translation →**  
(very little pollution)

**Interpretation**  
(drastic pollution)



The following chart compares the New Testament manuscript evidence with other Greek literature (considered accurate by historians) from the same era.

Manuscript	Date of Oldest Manuscript Existing	Copies
Plato	1,200 years later	7
Caesar	900 years later	10
Herodotus	1,300 years later	8
Aristotle	1,400 years later	5
New Testament	Only 35-100 years later	4,000-50000

Once again we see that God has sovereignly preserved His word in virtually accurate form. We can be confident that the Greek texts, used by scholars making modern translations are very accurate.

Note on some differences in English translations

Sometimes as we compare two translations of the New Testament, we find a substantial difference, such as verses or phrases being omitted (John 5:3-4; 7:53-8:11; Mark 16:9-20; 1 John 3:7,8, etc.). Some modern Bibles (NIV) also footnote a lot of smaller details (words, etc.) that differ in some manuscripts.

The debate centers on two theories about which Greek manuscripts are the best. One theory (Critical Text view) is that the oldest manuscripts are the most accurate. The theory is that the oldest manuscripts are most significant although they are few. The other theory (Majority Text view) is that the type of manuscripts that survived in greatest numbers are the most accurate (even if they are less ancient). Most modern translations are based on the critical textual theory (NIV, NASB, ESV, etc.). The King James and the New King James Versions are based on the majority textual theory.

This explains why occasionally a significant disagreement is found in the New Testament between the KJV and Modern Translations (Example: Are Mark 16:9-20 and John 7:53-8:11. Regardless, the discrepancies are usually not major and affect no doctrines at all. You will not come up with a false doctrine or false gospel from any of the major English translations today (with the exception of versions like the New World Translation of the Jehovah's Witnesses).

QUESTION 4: Why are there so many English translations of the Bible? Which one is best?

ANSWER: The fact that there are so many English Bible translations is both a blessing and a problem. It is a blessing in that the Word of God is available to anyone who needs it in an easy-to-understand, accurate translation. It is a problem in that the different translations can create controversy and problems in Bible studies, teaching situations, etc. The differences between the translations can also be a subject of great division within the church body.

It is good to have at least 3 or 4 of the major translations KJV (King James Version), NIV (New International Version), NAS (New American Standard), NKJV (New King James Version), ESV (English Standard Version), NLT (New Living Translation), HCSB (Holman Christian Standard Bible) for comparison's sake. If a verse or passage in one translation is a little confusing, it can be helpful to compare it side-by-side with another version. It is difficult to say which translation is the "best." "Best" would be determined by a combination of the translation method personally considered best and your interpretation of the textual data underlying your translation. For example, the KJV and NAS attempted to take the underlying Hebrew and Greek words and translate them into the closest corresponding English words as possible (word for word, or formal equivalency), while the NIV and NLT attempted to take the original thought that was being presented in Greek and Hebrew and then express that thought in English (thought for thought, or dynamic equivalency). Many of the other translations attempt to "meet in the middle" between those two methods (HCSB). Paraphrases such as The Message or The Living Bible can be used to gain a different perspective on the meaning of a verse, but they should not be used as a primary Bible translation.

There are many more Bible translations than the seven mentions above. It is wise to have a personal method for determining whether a particular Bible translation is accurate. A good technique is to have a set of Scripture verses you know well (i.e. you have studied in depth), and look those verses up in a translation you are unsure of. A good idea is to look at some of the most common verses which speak of the deity of Christ (John 1:1, 14; 8:58; 10:30; Titus 2:13) to make sure a Bible translation is true to the Word of God. Despite the multitudes of English Bible translations, we can be confident that God's Word is truth, and that it will accomplish His purposes (Isaiah 55:11; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Hebrews 4:12).

## **APPLICATION**

1. What would you tell someone who believes there are other books not included in the Bible that we are "missing" or have been "lost" but are now available?
2. Why do you think inscripturation is important? What do you think might have happened if God's revelation was never written down?

## **RECOMMENDED RESOURCES**

7 Crucial Questions about the Bible (B&H, 1994) by James C. Denison. Out of print but used copies available on amazon.com. An excellent overview of the Bible and how to study it.

Did God Write the Bible? (Crossway, 2007) by Dan Hayden. A good introduction to the nature of the Bible and how it came to be written and translated.

Living By the Book: The Art and Science of Reading the Bible, rev. and updated (Moody, 2007) by Howard Hendricks and William Hendricks. An excellent guide to interpreting the Bible.

Search the Scriptures: A Study Guide to the Bible, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (InterVarsity, 2004). Provides a guide to reading through the entire Bible in three years with questions about the text to study.

LifeWalk: Through the Bible Every Year (LifeWay). Monthly magazine goes through the Bible in a year with simple and clear outlines. Call 800-458-2772 or online at [lifeway.com/lifewalk](http://lifeway.com/lifewalk).

For these and many other recommended books about the Bible such as commentaries, see my online book store (under "Biblical Studies") at [www.frontlinemin.org/bookstore.asp](http://www.frontlinemin.org/bookstore.asp).