



How Did We Get The Bible?

DISCOVERING GOD'S WORD BIBLE STUDY SERIES

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How did we get the Bible? Before an individual can rightly follow the things written in the pages of the Bible as being authoritative in life, he/she must first acknowledge that the words in the Bible are actually from God. And, a significant part of believing that the words contained in the Bible are actually the words of God is to trust that the words of God have been accurately and faithfully preserved in the Bible – and to know that we have not neglected any part of God's revelation. So, how did we get the words and books that are contained within the pages of the Bible? Let's investigate.

How God Revealed His Will To Mankind

If the Bible is to be believed, it claims to be the revelation of God's will to mankind. Consider a few examples of this claim of inspiration. First, listen to 2 Timothy 3:16-17. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."

The apostle Paul claimed that all Scripture is from God. The word "inspiration" means that it is God-breathed. Therefore, the Bible claims to possess the very words of God. And, since these words claim to be from God, they are useful to teach us what God wants us to believe, correct our lives in the areas that need to be changed, and lead us to live in the only ways that are pleasing and acceptable to God.

Second, listen to Paul's powerful statement that he made about his writing in 1 Corinthians 14:37. "If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord." Now, Paul could certainly not just write anything he desired to write and then accurately call it the "commandments of the Lord." Instead, this passage demonstrates that there is a claim of inspiration involved in the words we read in the Bible.

But, how did God's words arrive in written form? The answer is found in the work of the Holy Spirit. Prior to leaving this earth, Jesus (who taught God's will to mankind while He lived on this earth) promised the apostles that He would send them the Holy Spirit and that the Holy Spirit would teach them "all things" and bring to their remembrance "all things" that Christ had said to them (John 14:25-26). In John 16:13, Jesus is recorded as saying, "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come."

This was a work that the Holy Spirit was uniquely qualified to accomplish. 1 Corinthians 2:6-16 explains that just as no one knows the things in a man except the spirit of that man, no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. And, the passage says that the Holy Spirit (who searches the deep things of God) has revealed the things of God to us (see verse 10). Therefore, through the pages of the Divine inspiration, we can know the mind of God (verse 16)! The Holy Spirit has worked in the past to reveal the will of God to both "apostles and prophets" (see Ephesians 3:3-5), who have recorded that message in written form.

2 Peter 1:20-21, says, "knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." Thus, the words written in the Bible claim to have come directly from God, recorded by men who were inspired of the Holy Spirit.

But, it is one thing for the Bible to claim Divine inspiration (just as any book could do); it is another to prove that this is so. Please consider briefly, then, the question: Are the words contained in the Bible actually from God? Though the purposes of this overview study limits detail in this point, there is an overwhelming degree of internal evidence in the Bible that convincingly proves it to have originated with God.

First, only a book that originated with God could have 100% accuracy in its prophecies. In fact, just with regard to the prophecies of Jesus, there were over 300 individual prophecies that all happened in the exact way the Bible said they would happen. Second, the fact that the Bible was written over a period of approximately 1,600 years by at least 40 different human authors and contains no errors or contradictions is a proof of Divine inspiration. Certainly, no manmade book could accomplish any of these tremendous feats! Third, although the Bible is not a book of science, every time it touches upon the subject, it does so with 100% accuracy. In fact, the Bible revealed truths long before mankind ever discovered them. For instance, Isaiah 40:22 speaks of the "circle of the earth" long before mankind discovered that the world was round. All of these demonstrate that the Bible was not the work of mere men. Instead, it loudly declares Divine inspiration!

The "Canon" Of Scripture

God has revealed His will to mankind through the process that has been briefly described in this study. But, this still does not answer the question of how we have compiled all of the books

that have Divine inspiration. How can we be sure that we have the *right* books and have not excluded any that should be included?

This is the study of which books ought to be included as part of the “Canon” of Scripture. The word “canon” simply means a “rule” or “standard.” Today, there are 66 books that are most commonly viewed as canonical (39 books in the Old Testament and 27 books in the New Testament). Certainly, in order for all people to speak the same thing with regard to what the Bible teaches (as commanded by Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:10), it is vitally important for one list of books to be recognized as canonical. However, please recognize that this decision was not made by a church. For, man cannot make a book canonical. All he can do is recognize a book as canonical or reject it as such. Instead, this decision was made over the process of time and with the help of God’s providence.

So, the question is: How were the 66 books of the Bible recognized to be canonical and others rejected? First, consider the canonicity of the Old Testament books. By the time of the New Testament, there is good evidence that demonstrates the canon of the Old Testament had been fixed. Jesus and many of the New Testament writers quote and reference various portions of the Old Testament and label them as being written in Scripture (see Matthew 21:42). For instance, Jesus specifically references the divisions of the Old Testament as being “the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms” (Luke 24:44). He also never indicated any disagreement with the Old Testament books that were then recognized as Scripture by the Jews. These correspond with our 39 books we have today. In addition, the Jewish historian Josephus (writing about A.D. 95) recognized these same books – and recognized the same division of these books Jesus identified. Although there were others who also recognized these as canonical, this demonstrates that the Old Testament canon was settled by the time of Jesus – and should be noted that this canon did *not* include the Apocryphal books recognized by some today.

Second, consider the canonicity of the New Testament books. During the days of the New Testament, Christians read from the Old Testament Scriptures and from the letters that were being written to them and circulated among them. They had no completed New Testament. However, as time past and these letters were circulated, individuals with direct contact with those who wrote and received these books and letters began compiling, copying, and preserving them. Although some books were more easily recognized as being from God than others, this process was a gradual one that was filled with careful evaluation of the origin and contents of each book. They recognized the need for the contents of the books to be accurate, to harmonize, and to be from an apostolic source (or from one who had close ties to the apostles). By the middle of the second century, lists began to appear as to which books were recognized as being canonical. Although there were books that were tested that failed to meet the tests of canonicity (i.e. the Epistle of Barnabas, the Shepherd of Hermas, the Infancy Story of Thomas, the Gospel of Peter, etc.), by the conclusion of the fourth century A.D., the matter of which books were accepted by the majority was pretty well settled as our 27 books of the New Testament.

An Overview Of Translations

In addition to the issue of the Canon of the Scriptures, the question of how we got the Bible also involves the translation of this text into various languages (along with the preservation of these documents). So, for just a brief moment, I want to consider this subject.

The Old Testament was originally written primarily in the Hebrew language, with a small portion written in Aramaic. The New Testament was originally written in the Greek language. Although we do not have any of the original writings (commonly called “autographs”), we do have copies of copies. And, the amount of manuscripts that have been found are overwhelming evidence of God’s providence in preserving His word for all time. Furthermore, the overwhelming unity in these manuscripts also provides evidence for their Divine origin and preservation.

From these manuscripts, translations were made into other languages. Consider just a brief overview here. The Septuagint Version was a Greek translation of the Old Testament that was completed around 285 B.C. The Latin Vulgate was the work of Jerome and contained the translation of the entire Bible into Latin (around 400 A.D.). John Wycliffe, William Tyndale, and Miles Coverdale were some of the early workers to translate the Bible into the English language. Other early English versions included The Great Bible, the Geneva Bible, and the Bishops’ Bible. Then, in 1611, the Authorized Version (King James Version) was completed. Other translations have continued since this time to convey the words of God into the English language.

Conclusion

Today, we can be confident that the words contained in the 66 books of the Bible are the words of God. You are invited to study the subject further and settle these questions in your own mind. Many scholarly works have been written on the subject. But, as you do, please do not forget to consider the providence of God. Surely, the God who created the universe and everything therein could see to it that His word would be accurately preserved for mankind to learn and obey!

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