

How We Got the Bible

By Kyle Pope



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Guardian of Truth Foundation

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A special word of thanks is due to the elders of the Olsen Park church of Christ: Ken Ford, Charles Kelley, and Patrick Ledbetter. In 2007, at their request, this study was first prepared and presented to the congregation. Shortly after this, the material was organized into its present form.

Introduction



The Bible is the most important book in history. It has influenced billions of people throughout the ages. Laws have been fashioned upon its teachings, nations have been established upon its principles, and human souls have rested upon its promises. Yet, how is it that this book came to us? How was it transmitted from the mind of God to the hands of man? What process led to the formation of this wonderful book that we have before us?

In considering the question of how we got the Bible, we should recognize that this is not a question that is unique to the Bible. We could consider in history or literature studies how the writings of Shakespeare were preserved. The historian or the political scientist might consider how the constitution was developed from the Magna Charta and other efforts into the great monument of liberty which defines our nation. What is different about the Bible is the fact that it presents to man answers that no other text can offer. As a result, understanding its transmission to man is not just the isolated study of secluded scholars but it should concern all people because so much rests upon the validity and reliability of the biblical text.

In this study, we look at what is known about this process. We will look at both the Old and the New Testaments to consider what is understood about the formation of Scripture. We will look at the dramatic history of the Bible coming into English. Then,

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we will end our study with a consideration of how modern discoveries of biblical manuscripts have affected today's translations. Lord willing, our study will bolster faith and help to overcome doubts. It is my prayer that this study will strengthen the reader against the assaults of the enemy and grant to him a greater confidence in the Bible as the complete, inerrant, and wholly inspired word of God.

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Divine Inspiration



We must start our consideration of this subject with a clear understanding of what is at issue. Either the Bible is the word of God, or it is a man-made piece of literature that has led to the death, persecution, and life upheaval of all of mankind. There can be no middle-ground. The Bible does not offer an indefinite appraisal of itself. It makes clear declarations throughout that it is from God.

Bible Claims of Inspiration

Paul told Timothy, “*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*” (2 Tim. 3:16, 17, NKJV). Peter declared, “*...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*” (2 Pet. 1:20-21). Paul told the Christians in Thessalonica, “*For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe*” (1 Thess. 2:13). Such assertions leave no doubt that those who penned Scripture were claiming to do so by the inspiration of God.

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The Nature of Inspiration

This claim of “inspiration” is more than the emotional motivation an artist might draw from a beautiful scene of nature. It claims to have been directly influenced and produced by God. René Pache in his book, *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture*, found phrases in the Bible such as “Thus says the Lord” or “The word of the Lord came to _____” 3808 times (65, 81).

The nature of inspiration has been described with a number of names. The inspiration of the Bible involved:

- **Plenary “Full” Inspiration.** From the Latin word *plenus*, meaning “full,” plenary inspiration describes the fact that all of Scripture is inspired.
- **Verbal Inspiration.** Every word of Scripture is inspired. Not only the words of Jesus, but all of the writers of Scripture were led in the very words that they used to produce Scripture.
- **Dynamic Inspiration.** Although the personality and environment of the writer were allowed to show through, the Holy Spirit held absolute control of over the outcome. As a result, when the words of Scripture were penned, it was in fact God speaking through these inspired writers to reveal His word.

Each of these descriptions address some true aspect of the nature of biblical inspiration. The Bible is wholly inspired in every word and phrase. It was revealed under the control of the Holy Spirit working through men of freewill and individual personality.

Discussion Questions

1. What are some statements which the Bible makes about itself which show that it claims to be inspired of God?
2. What is meant by the three different terms which describe inspiration?

The Formation of the Old Testament



We can not understand the process of the transmission of the Biblical text without first considering the tools that were available to biblical writers. To do this we need to briefly consider what is known about the written language which God used to communicate His word.

The Bible was revealed in three languages. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew (with a few passages in Aramaic) and the New Testament in Koine Greek (with a few words in Aramaic) . There is great evidence of Divine providence in the timing and use of these languages.

Writing Material in Scripture.

While modern man has seen the computer revolutionize how we communicate with one another, the Bible was revealed at one of the earliest stages in which human beings communicated thoughts and values in written form. This was done through a few basic media:

1. Tablets – of stone or clay were impressed, engraved, or stamped. The Bible describes this media a number of times. Jeremiah writes, *“The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron; With the point of a diamond it is engraved on the tablet of their heart, And on the horns of*



Ancient Tablet

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your altars” (Jer. 17:1). The Law of Moses records, “*And when He had made an end of speaking with him on Mount Sinai, He gave Moses two tablets of the Testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God*” (Exod. 31:1).

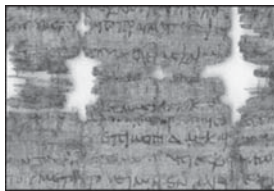
While there were Old Testament passages that were written on tablets, none of these has been preserved. What has come down to us are...

2. Scrolls – made from *papyrus* (dried plant stalks pressed and glued together) or *parchment*

(dried, scraped animal skins) sewn together and put into a roll. The Bible describes this media as well. Jeremiah wrote, “*Take a scroll of a book and write on it all the words that I have spoken to you against Israel, against Judah, and against all the nations, from the day I spoke to you, from the days of Josiah even to this day*” (Jer. 36:2). Ezekiel writes, “*Now when I looked, there was*



Parchment Scroll



Papyrus Manuscript

a hand stretched out to me; and behold, a scroll of a book was in it. Then He spread it before me; and there was writing on the inside and on the outside, and written on it were lamentations and mourning and woe” (Ezek. 2:9).

We should understand that, from what we know, a “book” in the Old Testament and (most of the New Testament) was a scroll. It would not be until Christian times that the *codex* (a bound collation of pages written on both sides) would be developed.

Appendix: Choosing a Translation



We have considered the process which led to the formation and preservation of Scripture. *Where do we go from here?* Unless we have had the opportunity to study Greek or Hebrew, we are forced to rely upon English translations. How do we choose a good translation for the study of God’s word? First, let’s review what makes one translation different from another.

Why Do Translations Differ?

We noted earlier some reasons why translations differ.

1. *Differences in language.* Languages communicate different things in different ways. Idiomatic expressions can be unique to a particular language. How can these ideas be carried into another language? Even within the same language, meaning can change over time.

2. *A different textual basis.* If a translation relies on modern discoveries, variants will occur. A word will be added or left off. One translation may say “Christ” where another says “Jesus.” These variants should not lead one to doubt the reliability of the text. Most biblical variants involve minor differences in word order, spelling, and synonymous wording.

3. *Different doctrinal perspectives.* No matter how one might try to avoid it, we can not remove ourselves from the influence our own beliefs have on our choices. If I am translating something and encounter a couple of ways something could be rendered—one which supports my beliefs and another which does not, I am mostly likely to choose the alternative which supports my beliefs.

4. *Style of translation.* There are at least four styles of translation. We can illustrate with a brief survey of some English translations how different philosophies of translation affect the outcome, value, and profitability of a translation for use in Bible study.

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Chester Beatty Papyrus P⁴⁶



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