

We Believe the Bible¹ is the Word of God

"I believe the Bible is the best gift God has ever given to man. All the good from The Savior of the world is communicated to us through this Book."

— Abraham Lincoln

"The Holy Scriptures are our letters from home."

— Augustine of Hippo

"The primary purpose of reading the Bible is not to know the Bible but to know God."

— James Merritt

Introduction

Instructions come with most things you buy these days. A car comes with an owner's manual. If you get a new gadget – anything from a camera to a blender - you will find a user's manual in the box. If we take time to read through the manual we will read some things that we already know, but we will also discover some innovations in this particular product that are new to us. We will also learn how to operate the product most effectively so that we can enjoy its benefits for a long time.

There are some people who figure they have had a product like this before, know how it works, and consider reading the manual to be a waste of time. Cars are simple: Put the key in, twist and drive. How hard is that?

God has given us an instruction book. Some parts are admittedly hard to understand. But most of the instruction is clear and user friendly. The challenge for us is that we don't always like to apply the parts we understand. As Mark Twain once remarked, "It ain't the parts of the Bible that I can't understand that bother me, it's the parts that I do understand."

¹ The Old and New Testaments, inerrant as originally given, were verbally inspired by God and are a complete revelation of His will for the salvation of men. They constitute the divine and only rule of Christian faith and practice. (See C&MA Statement of Faith).

But what makes the Bible different from other books? Why is it considered to be the word of God? How do we make sense out of this huge book? There are other books which are purported to be special and authoritative – isn't the Bible just another book like these? How do we know the Bible is accurate?

Interesting Facts that Distinguish the Bible

The Bible is the best-selling and most translated book of all time. Although on a given week or month, other books might outsell the Bible, this has remained consistent over time: more copies of the Bible have been sold than any other book ever written.

The Bible was the *first* book to ever be translated into another language. In about 250 B.C., the Old Testament (as we call it today) was translated into Greek by 70 scholars and thus became known as the Septuagint, which means the 70, and is usually abbreviated LXX.

The Bible is also the *most* translated book. As of 2016 the full Bible “has been translated into 554 languages, giving over 5 billion people access to Scripture in the language they understand best. The New Testament is available in another 1,333 languages, reaching another 663 million people. At least one book of the Bible is available in a further 1,045 other languages, spoken by 281 million people.”² This makes a total 2,933 languages that have at least some portion of the Bible. Thus at least some portion of the Bible is available to approximately 43% of the world's languages.³ No other book has been translated into more languages than the Bible.

The Bible has been and continues to be relevant in every epoch of world history – whether in times of war or peace, in the Dark Ages or in our modern technological age. Millions of people have found nourishment, help, and encouragement from

² <https://www.wycliffe.org.uk/wycliffe/about/vision-whatwedo.html>

³ The State of the Bible survey, which was conducted by the Barna Group and surveyed 2,000 Americans, found that 72 percent of Americans believe the Gospel is available in all of the world's languages. However, the report states that only 43 percent of languages actually have Bible translations available.
<http://www.christianpost.com/news/bible-not-available-in-57-of-world-languages-most-americans-believe-the-bible-is-available-in-every-language-137423/>

its pages. It is the only book in the world that is read and valued by people from all walks of life and every age group.

No other book has withstood the tests of time, criticism or persecution as the Bible has. In regard to time, it has not only remained relevant, but has also been miraculously preserved through the centuries even though it was originally written on perishable material. More attempts have been made to burn ban, or outlaw the Bible than any other book in the history of the world, yet it still thrives as the most cherished book ever and its availability continues to increase in response to the continually growing demand. This does not prove that the Bible is the word of God, but it does beg the question, “Why has the Bible brought such positive and negative attention?” Why do people all over the world want to have it available to them? What is so special about the Bible?

Again, while this does not prove that the Bible is God’s word; it shouts that it is worthy of our attention and study.

The Description and Contents of the Bible

The word Bible comes from the Greek word *biblos*, which means book. This may seem confusing, because the Bible is a book that is a collection of books. The Bible can properly be called one book because of the way it stands together in unity. Amazingly, God employed over 40 authors to write the 66 books that comprise the Book. It was written over a period of at least 1,500 years by authors who for the most part didn't know each other personally. There are 39 books that are considered to be the Old Testament books and 27 are referred to as the New Testament. The backgrounds of these various authors are very diverse. They came from different social and occupational backgrounds. God employed political leaders, generals, cup bearers, shepherds, fishermen, tentmakers, physicians, royal attendants, tax collectors, and kings to pen written instructions for our benefit. Not only did these authors have different occupations, but they lived in different countries found on three different continents, wrote in different languages and lived in different times – spanning centuries. They wrote under different circumstances: prisons, the desert, the mountains, a palace, on journeys and in exile.

All of this in itself is indication not only of the uniqueness of the Bible but also its amazing consistency. If you were to select just 10 authors today from our nation and ask them to write on just a few controversial subjects, would they all agree? Yet, amazingly the authors of the Bible agree on hundreds of controversial subjects.

Language of the Bible

The Bible, though written by authors whose native tongues differed, was written in two primary languages. The Old Testament was mostly written in Hebrew and the New Testament was written in Greek. A few books were written in Aramaic; which is a Semitic language similar to Hebrew.

The Old Testament

The Old Testament announces a promise originally given to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3 and further developed in Genesis 15:4-7. Included in this promise are a land for Israel, a nation, and a blessing through Israel to all nations. These three are further developed throughout the Old Testament and eventually completely fulfilled in the New Testament.

The Old Testament books are conveniently arranged according to their type: The Law, History, Poetry, Wisdom and Prophecy. The books of the Law are also referred to as the Pentateuch. There are 5 books of the Law: Genesis through Deuteronomy. Even though these books are considered Law because the law was received during the time of their writing and they record the written law, they also provide much early history. These books are considered to have been written by the hand of Moses. There are 12 books categorized as historical, beginning with the book of Joshua and continuing through Esther. There are 5 Poetic books: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon; and 17 prophetic books, most authored according to the name they bear.

Law (Pentateuch)	History	Poetry
-----------------------------	----------------	---------------

Genesis Exodus Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy	Joshua Judges Ruth 1&2 Samuel	1&2 Kings 1&2 Chronicles Ezra Nehemiah Esther	Job Psalms Proverbs Ecclesiastes Song of Solomon
--	--	---	---

Of these 17 prophetic books, 5 are considered Major Prophets due to the length of their books: Isaiah through Daniel. There are 12 Minor Prophets: Hosea through Malachi. It is helpful to realize that the prophets lived at various times throughout the history of Israel. Some of their ministries overlapped.

Major Prophets	Minor Prophets		
Isaiah Jeremiah Lamentations Ezekiel Daniel	Hosea Joel Amos Obadiah	Jonah Micah Nahum Habakkuk	Zephaniah Haggai Zechariah Malachi

Are Any Books Missing?

Often people ask why the editions of the Bible published by the Roman Catholic Church have more books in their Bible. The Latin Vulgate translated about A.D. 400 became the authorized version of the Roman Catholic Church. Twelve books called the Apocrypha (meaning hidden) were included in this translation. They had never been included in the Old Testament nor in any Protestant editions. It is also important to note that the early church fathers quoted abundantly from all the books of the Bible. Yet, none of them ever quoted from the Apocryphal books. Therefore, while the Apocrypha may make for some interesting reading, its contents have never been considered inspired by the Protestant Church.

Chapter & Verse

Chapter and verse numbers were not in the original MSS.⁴ Chapters were designated around A.D. 1214. And verse numbers were incorporated around A.D. 1500. In fact, the original New

⁴ MSS is the abbreviation for manuscript.

Testament MSS did not even have word divisions and look similar to this:

typically scrolls were written like
 this without spaces between wo
 rd punctuation or capital letters.⁵

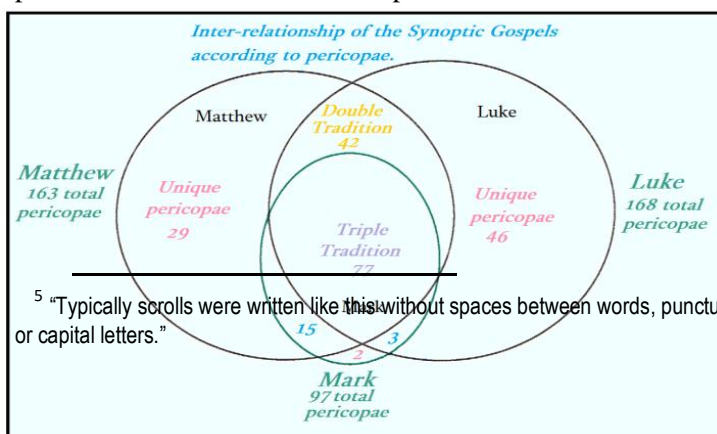
Yet the educated reader would easily know the divisions between words.

The Old Testament though it has separation between words, it did not include any vowels. Thus, the phrase “This phrase has no vowels would look like this: “ths phrs hs nvwls.” A scribe or otherwise educated person was able to know which vowels to use and where they should be placed. Current editions of the Old Testament include marks that look like punctuation called “points” to indicate the vowels.

The New Testament

The New Testament was written in Greek. The first four books are categorized as the Gospels. Three of these (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) are called synoptic Gospels. Synoptic means that the contents and stories of these books show significant overlap and are often in a similar sequence and wording.

The fourth Gospel, John, has virtually no overlap with the other books. The western church refers to these four books as the Gospels; while the Eastern Church avoids the use of the plural emphasizing their multifaceted unity in giving account of the one Gospel. Each of these books also has a theme or emphasis which gives a slightly different perspective of Jesus. Matthew presents Jesus as Messiah or king with the genealogy giving the ancestry of Joseph who was in the kingly line. Mark presents Jesus as servant. Luke presents Jesus to the Gentiles as



⁵ “Typically scrolls were written like this without spaces between words, punctuation; or capital letters.”

<http://www.jerusalemerspective.com/wp-content/uploads/1989/05/inter-relationshipSG.png>

Note: A pericopae is a literary unit.

the Son of Man, and savior of all humanity, with the genealogy given through Mary's ancestry.

John is the gospel of belief, and was written to show the world that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. It has virtually no overlap with the other three Gospel accounts.

The next book, Acts, is a book of history. The Gospels could also be considered historical since they give the history of Jesus life. Acts begins with the commissioning of the disciples (1:8), the ascension of Jesus, and the coming of the Spirit upon the church (2:1ff) at Pentecost. Thus it gives us an account of how the church began - starting with the early mission endeavors of the apostles and continuing through Paul's journeys.

Next are the letters of Paul. These include Romans, which is a letter written to the church in Rome. Through it God gives us a very in-depth theological discussion of salvation and its benefits to the believer. The Pauline letters (epistles) include Romans through Philemon. The **non**-Pauline letters include Hebrews, James, 1st and 2nd Peter, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John, and Jude. The book of the Revelation to John was also a letter written to the churches in Asia Minor, but it is in a separate category called apocalyptic. It describes the events that will lead up to the return of the Lord Jesus according to his promise.

Gospel(s)	History	Pauline Epistles	
Matthew Mark Luke John	Acts	Romans 1 & 2 Corinthians Galatians Ephesians Philippians	Colossians 1 & 2 Thessalonians 1 & 2 Timothy Titus Philemon

Other Epistles		Apocalyptic/Prophetic-Epistle
Hebrews James 1 & 2 Peter	1,2,& 3 John Jude	Revelation

How the Bible was Assembled

The question may come to our mind, "How did this particular group of writings come to be put together as the Bible?" Some have questioned whether books were left out of the Bible. Others have suggested that some books don't belong in the Bible. These are reasonable concerns since the Bible tells us we are to stake our eternal destiny on its teaching.

The Bible is divinely inspired. In regard to the Old Testament, "Unfortunately no ancient texts survive to explain how the process of canonization happened and what criteria was used to determine which books should be included. The process may well have occurred in stages over several centuries, and individual books were probably viewed as special long before the different sections of the canon were finally closed."⁶ Josephus (A.D.37-95) had this to say: "We have not tens of thousands of books, discordant and conflicting, but only twenty-two⁷ containing the record of all time, which have been justly believed to be divine." He then refers to the five books of Moses, thirteen books of the prophets, and the remaining books. He also said, "From Artaxerxes until our time everything has been recorded, but has not been deemed worthy of like credit with what preceded, because the exact succession of the prophets ceased. But what faith we have placed in our own writings is evident by our conduct; for though so long a time has now passed, no one has dared to add anything to them, or to alter anything in them."⁸ All the current books of the Old Testament were included in the ancient list to which Josephus refers.

⁶ T.D. Alexander in NIV Zondervan Study Bible, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI. 2015 p. 3

⁷ The reason for the difference in number from our 39 is that some books are grouped into one. For instance the 12 Minor Prophets are grouped as one book. Ezra and Nehemiah are in one book.

⁸ Gleason L. Archer, A Survey of Old Testament Introduction, Moody Bible Institute, Chicago, IL, 1964, p. 71

In regard to the New Testament, the early church automatically accepted any writing that was from an apostle who intended it to be preserved as Scripture. However, some writings were not given through the apostles. In fact, we do not even know the identity of the human writer of Hebrews. These books were included based on the testimony of credible witnesses, such as Paul for Luke and Acts.

Inerrant

This term simply means “without error.” The entire contents of the Bible were delivered and recorded by the original penmen without error. Some may wonder how it was possible for the disciples, who we now recognize as the apostles, to remember all that Jesus taught. We are told in the Bible that it was through the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus had promised, “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.” (John 14:26 ESV) Jesus also said, “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.” (John 16:13-14 ESV) So, as the New Testament was being written it was being guided by the Holy Spirit, error-free and word-by-word, according to God’s intent. So what God had done through Moses and the prophets of the Old Testament, he also did through the apostles.⁹

Any discrepancies or problems we have in our current copies of the Bible are the result of men. Yet remarkably, even our current copies in various translations are consistent and miraculously accurate. God has graciously, faithfully protected the Bible throughout many generations of reproduction and translation. He has given men great respect for his word. As a result, they have taken great care throughout the tedious, manual

⁹ See also 1 Corinthians 14:37; 2 Corinthians 13:3; 2 Peter 3:2; and Acts 5:4 among others on the authority of the apostles.

process of making copies. Let's look at the evidence of the Lord's protective hand.

The Old Testament

During the Old Testament era, the scribes went through a great deal of effort copying, not phrase by phrase, or even word by word, but *letter by letter* to assure an accurate copy. The number of letters was counted in books and in sections of books to assure accuracy. If the right number did not come up or there were inaccuracies of any sort, the copy would be destroyed. Old manuscripts (MSS) were also burned. Due to wear from use, damage such as cracks in the copy could occur, potentially obscuring portions of the text. In order to make sure that these did not contribute to the corruption of the succeeding copies, these worn copies would be ceremonially burned after the newer copies were completed and verified. The effectiveness of this meticulous care is evidenced in the Dead Sea scrolls. These scrolls were discovered by a shepherd boy in the Qumran caves near the Dead Sea in 1948. The remarkable thing about these scrolls is that they dated back to around 200 years before Christ. They were scrolls of the Old Testament books along with some other ancient writings. When these were compared to what we have today, the difference was negligible; and there was no doctrine (teaching) affected. For instance, in comparing one chapter out of the book of Isaiah to our current Bible, there were only three letters in question (comprising the word *light*). This made no difference whatsoever in the meaning of the text, and is just one example of how God has preserved the Bible for centuries. No other book in the world throughout history even comes close to the way the Bible has been protected. It is truly miraculous.

The New Testament

When it comes to the New Testament, God used another means to help us know what the original MSS said. In many cases we have literally thousands and tens of thousands of MSS of the New Testament. Through textual research and comparison we are able to discover with a very high degree of confidence what the original text said. It is a process of determining the age of a MSS and also the number of MSS of various MSS families to determine the actual word(s) of the

original. There are over 13,000 MSS of the New Testament currently available for research.

It is a fact that much of the history we consider to be accurate in our history books is based on as few as 1 to 10 available MSS. And we trust our world history books based on only a few available copies of original texts for support. Yet the Bible literally has thousands of available copies of texts to verify the actual words of our contemporary editions of the New Testament.

It is also important to know that not one doctrine of faith or practice is affected by those areas in the Bible that contain debated text.

In addition to the abundance of MSS evidence for our New Testament text we also have the numerous quotations¹⁰ from the early fathers of the church. Virtually all of the New Testament could be reconstructed through their voluminous quotations alone. Thus we have another means of knowing what the original MSS said.

Verbally Inspired

We believe that the Bible was verbally inspired. This means that “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17 ESV) “Verbally inspired” means that the words as originally given were the exact words that God intended to use. God sought to communicate the ideas he wanted to get in our minds by using precise language in the original MSS. We have mentioned previously that certain words such as the Hebrew word for “one” were used in reference to God, which carries a special nuance of meaning that includes the possibility of plurality. The fact that *Elohim* is used in the plural instead of the singular in Genesis 1 is a further example of verbal inspiration. It is these sorts of details to which we refer throughout the Bible when we talk about

¹⁰ Over 36,000 citations by seven church fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement of Alex. Origen, Tertullian, Hippolytus, and Eusebius. - See Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, Campus Crusade for Christ Inc., San Bernardino, CA 1972 p. 55

verbal inspiration. God knows Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic. He said what he meant and he guided the original authors to write what he said, whether or not they always realized what they were doing at the time.

Illumination

By the term illumination we mean that God through the Holy Spirit opens the reader's eyes and heart to understand God's word so that it becomes meaningful to them. God is faithful through his word. Countless people throughout history have had their eyes opened to the truth as they read the Bible. An illustration of illumination is seen in Luke 24:27 where Jesus explains the word of the Bible to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Though he "interpreted to them all the Scriptures . . . concerning himself," the two seem unaware. But in verse 31 we are told that after Jesus broke bread, "their eyes were opened, and they recognized him." (Luke 24:31 ESV) Thus, God illuminates so that we can see and understand.

Even those who have come to the Bible with a critical attitude have often come away changed through reading it. "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12 ESV) God through the Holy Spirit effectively uses his word to accomplish his purpose in the world and in people's lives: "so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55:11 ESV) The word is the sword of the Spirit of God. We are challenged through Paul, "and take . . . the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God," as an important part of our active protection. It is the means by which we can bring the message of God to others. (Ephesians 6:17 ESV)

Interpretation

How we understand the Bible is as important as knowing it to be God's word. This book will do us little good if while knowing it to be of divine origin we completely get it wrong in our understanding. As stated above, the Holy Spirit does work in the hearts of people to bring understanding as they read the

Bible. However, it is also important to remember that the Bible is not of private interpretation. That is to say, I am misled if I take a portion of scripture either out of context, or give it my own personal spin which is contrary to its clear meaning and how it has been consistently understood through the ages. God reminded us of the importance of this through Peter. Knowing that men have a tendency to twist words to fit their desires, he warned us that his word is not subject to personal interpretation: “knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation.” (2 Peter 1:20 ESV)

Complete Revelation

Complete revelation means that the Bible gives us everything that we need for our faith and practice. We do not need additional books or revelations. The Bible itself is complete. There will not be more books added to it at some future time in world history. For the believer this means that we have everything we need to know about salvation and experiencing a relationship with God. No additional information is needed.

Rule for Faith & Practice

The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the only organs through which, God confirms a knowledge of his will about what we are to believe concerning himself, and what duties he requires of us.

In order for us to discern the Lord's will on a matter one needs to ask the following questions under the prayerful direction of the Holy Spirit:

What do the Scriptures say regarding the topic in question? Do they address it directly?

Are there historical examples found in the Scriptures that reveal God's attitude toward the matter?

Are there Biblical principles that apply to the matter?

Conclusion

It is for these reasons and many others that we can have confidence that as we read the Bible we can know that it is the word of God. Though there have been numerous questions raised over the years, the testimony of the Bible has consistently

been shown to be reliable - time and again. The Bible is without doubt the most significant, life changing book of all time. It is extremely worthy of our time and attention

These materials were created and compiled by Rev. Bruce A. Overstreet, D.Min., for training in the C&MA Statement of Faith.