

How We Got our Bible

Our objective this morning is to take a quick look at how we got the bible that we have in our possession. For many people obtaining and appreciating how we got our bibles is as complicated as how we get a hamburger.

And of course the answer to the question as to how we get a hamburger;? it's simply a matter of going to McDonald's for a Big Mac. In like manner as to how we got our bible;? it's also only as complicated as going to your bookstore, Christian or otherwise for a nicely leather bound edition of the word of God.

But in reality the history of how and when we got our bibles is a little more complicated than merely swiping a credit card.

The O.T. Scriptures for example didn't come together over a period of weeks or months. It was in the making for over 1,100 years. The Pentateuch, or the first five books of the bible, were put together by Moses around 1,450 years before Christ.

Joshua and Judges around 1,000 B.C.; Psalms and Proverbs 800 B.C.; Isaiah around 700 B.C.; Jeremiah 540 B.C.; Ezekiel 500 B.C.; and Kings and Chronicles around 400 B.C.

Chronicles was actually the last set of books written and Jesus Himself confirms this in Luke's gospel.

Luke 11:49-51 ⁴⁹ "For this reason also the wisdom of God said, 'I will send to them prophets and apostles, and *some* of them they will kill and *some* they will ¹persecute, ⁵⁰ so that the blood of all the prophets, shed since the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, ⁵¹ from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the house of God; yes, I tell you, it shall be charged against this generation.'

In the context of God's judgment on those who have persecuted God's people Jesus uses the same kind of language we might use today when we say from A-Z, or from beginning to end.

And he does it by referencing two people: Abel and Zechariah.

In what book is Abel found?

In Genesis or the book of beginnings.

And in what book is the death of Zechariah found?

2 Chronicles 24:20-21 ²⁰ Then the Spirit of God came on Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest; and he stood above the people and said to them, "Thus God has said, "Why do you transgress the commandments of the LORD and do not prosper? Because you have forsaken the LORD, He has also forsaken you."
²¹ So they conspired against him and at the command of the king they stoned him to death in the court of the house of the LORD.

And so, what was Jesus saying in Luke as it relates to the beginning and the end of the O.T. Scriptures?

It begins with Genesis and ends with 2 Chronicles and every place in between you will find God's mouthpieces being killed for honoring Me, Christ says in Luke 49-51.

But, unlike the O.T. the N.T. Scriptures were put together in a mere 55 years. From around AD 40 until around AD 95 we have all of the gospels and epistles penned before the closing of the first century. And so, in about 1/5 of the time of the O.T. coming together we have the full NT revelation in place and being used by God's people to take the good news of Christ around the world.

As to the language of the Scriptures what were the languages used to pen the O.T. and N.T Scriptures?

The O.T. utilized Hebrew as well as Aramaic, a close cousin of Hebrew. Only about 12 chapters of the entire O.T. were written in Aramaic. The language used by the N.T. writers was koine Greek.

Does anyone know what the word koine means?

Common. And so, this type of Greek would have been utilized by the common man as opposed to the type of Greek that might have been used by the legal system or by the politically elite of the time.

Why would this have been important for those times?

Because most of the world was using Greek and so as not to confuse the Greek speaking people in Rome with a language that might have been a little different in Ephesus the common form of the language was the default language for both speech and writing.

We've talked about this before but how many books of the bible do we have in our Western bibles?

66 books of the bible. 39 O.T. and 27 N.T.

But the question needs to be raised, when the last book of the bible was written in the early 90's of the first century at which point was the church acknowledging these 27 books as being God-breathed?

Immediately. There wasn't a council that got together and decided which books were in and which books weren't, despite the fact that many councils attempted to do this very thing.

If God is writing a book with the specific intention of relaying the good news of how one may attain eternal life and how one may grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ will He leave it to chance, or God forbid, to mere humans, when it comes to deciding what is of God and what is not?

Keep in mind, when it comes to the voice of God being given to men, who in the triune Godhead has been made primarily responsible for that transmission of God's voice to men?

Acts 13:2-4 ² While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." ³ Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. ⁴ So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus.

Acts 28:25 ²⁵ And when they did not agree with one another, they *began* leaving after Paul had spoken one *parting* word, "The Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers,

Hebrews 3:7-11 ⁷ Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, "TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, ⁸ DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME, AS IN THE DAY OF TRIAL IN THE WILDERNESS, ⁹ WHERE YOUR FATHERS TRIED *Me* BY TESTING *Me*, AND SAW MY WORKS FOR FORTY YEARS. ¹⁰ "THEREFORE I WAS ANGRY WITH THIS GENERATION, AND SAID, 'THEY ALWAYS GO ASTRAY IN THEIR HEART, AND THEY DID NOT KNOW MY WAYS'; ¹¹ AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH, 'THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST.'"

Hebrews 10:15-17 ¹⁵ And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us; for after saying, ¹⁶ "THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL

MAKE WITH THEM AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS UPON THEIR HEART, AND ON THEIR MIND I WILL WRITE THEM," *He then says,* ¹⁷ "AND THEIR SINS AND THEIR LAWLESS DEEDS I WILL REMEMBER NO MORE."

And so, even though men have been given God's voice to be written down, no mere man can take credit for writing down anything other than what God desires they write down.

2 Peter 1:20-21 ²⁰ But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is *a matter* of one's own interpretation, ²¹ for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

It is true that men have debated which books would be included in the Canon of Scripture, but in the final analysis is there any book in the word of God that could ultimately be kept out or kept in if added by men, that God Himself did not want in the Canon, which as we should note is called God's word, not men's word?

Unless we believe that men have more authority than God, He will determine which books are in and which are out and He has done just that by bearing witness in the hearts of His people those things He desires for us to use to know Him and follow Him.

And so, the 66 books of the bible are acknowledged by men in a passive sense. The word of God is not authoritative because the church recognizes them, rather the word of God is authoritative based entirely on God's authority.

It would be like someone saying that the sun exists because I acknowledge its existence. Whether you or I ever existed the sun would be the sun because the sun exists.

In the same way, the word of God exists, not because anybody exists and acknowledges it, but because the Word of God is God-breathed. It simply exists because God makes it to exist. We can simply sit back and marvel at it.

From a human stand-point there were still tests by people to determine what books were of God and what books were not.

- 1) Apostolic authority
- 2) Antiquity; that is those writings that are closest to the event, (ie. The resurrection)

- 3) Consistent with the O.T., supporting all teachings of O.T.
- 4) Inspiration; the fact that the book speaks with God's authority
- 5) The fact that the church was already using these books as the authoritative word of God for their rule of faith and practice, by the end of the first century.

But what about the bible mentioning other books of antiquity? How does this fit in with the fact that the word of God is God-breathed and yet many of these other books are obviously not God-breathed?

For example, there are apocryphal books like the book of Jasher that is mentioned in Numbers 21:14, Joshua 10:13 and 2Sam. 1:18. You've got the annals of Solomon spoken of in 1Kings 11:41 and the annals of King David mentioned in 1Chr. 27:24.

How can these books be part of the very word of God, that is God-breathed, when in fact they are not?

Because simply quoting another book doesn't make that book God-breathed, but it does show us that God can use anything to get His message across and make that portion that He decides to use, God-breathed.

Acts 17:23-24 ²³ "For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴ "The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands;

Paul is quoting something written by a pagan when he acknowledges this inscription to an unknown God. Does quoting that inscription make the quote that which is God-breathed on its own?

Of course not. But because the Holy Spirit was placing Paul in that situation and prompting Paul to acknowledge what was written by a pagan, with the intention of lifting up the one true God as creator makes that quote God-breathed in the context.

What about the book of Enoch? Where is the book of Enoch in our bibles?

Jude 1:14-15 ¹⁴ *It was also about these men that Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam, prophesied, saying, "Behold, the Lord came with many thousands of His holy ones,* ¹⁵ *to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him."*

If God had chosen to include the book of Enoch in the O.T. Scriptures do you think that it would have made it the 67th book?

Did Enoch have to write a book in order to prophesy?

No more than we have the book of Donkey simply because the donkey spoke by the authority of God when addressing Balaam. God can and does use any means He desires and when He chooses to include that in His book, it is thus God-breathed.

But let's quickly move on to how we got our N.T. We have over 5,000 different Greek manuscripts that contribute to making up what we call the N.T. Scriptures. We have a few papyri documents dating back to the beginning of the 2nd century and many dating to the 3rd and 4th centuries.

The early documents were written in a style that is known as Uncial. All capital letters with no spacing and no punctuation. So all the letters ran together.

Later documents written in Greek took on the form we call Miniscule where letters are now in lower case and there are spaces between words with punctuation.

But when we take all of these manuscripts and begin to compile them we run into a problem. Some of them have mistakes despite the fact that many of these documents were compiled in what were known as Scriptoriums.

These were men designated because of their skills to write and pay attention to detail. There would be a number of these men in a room with a head-master presiding over their work and they would literally write for hours at a time as they copied copies of the word of God.

But as skilled as they were it was still possible to make mistakes. They didn't work under the best circumstances, dimly lit rooms, not sheltered much from cold or heat all take a toll when you labor for hours on anything.

And so, what ends up happening is that you have what are called textual variants. Now keep in mind that about 85% of all of the manuscripts have no textual variant, and of the 15% that do 95% of those are easily resolved by examining the context of the text.

For example, the word “and” or “as” may have been added or deleted, and so it’s easy enough to get a sense of what God was actually saying as you compare these to other manuscripts. But this does leave about 3/4 of 1% that are more difficult to deal with and demand more in-depth textual study.

The point is that as scholars compare the thousands of manuscripts and deal with these few exceptions we can have almost absolute assurance that every word we have in the word of God is in fact God-breathed.

There is no doctrine of the Christian faith that rests upon any textual variant, never, because no one verse actually defines a Christian doctrine.

But oddly enough these textual variants are a good thing that God has used to help us arrive at His true word because they provide the means of correcting human error.

For example, if we only had one text from one group in one place we wouldn’t know with any certainty if we had God’s words. Why might that be true?

Because we don’t know if that one group may have made any changes and then passed them along with their self appointed authority and then declared them to be God’s word.

Instead what we have are thousands of documents from all parts of the world written at different times by different people. It would be impossible to have any sort of conspiracy if you will, to have one group declare that this is the word of God with so many different witnesses.

And what is amazing is that with of all of these different people and the thousands of different documents they are all saying essentially the same thing, as we’ve noted, with few exceptions and those exceptions are easily dealt with. And those that are not easily dealt with are successfully dealt with to give us an accurate book that we can call God-breathed.

So, how do we get from koine Greek to our English bible?

Well, we need a translation from the Greek to English, and this has been going on since the 15th century starting in Europe. The problem we run into here is what approach do we take in translating from Greek to English?

In other words, do we translate the Greek language literally or do we translate it with the actual meaning of the words?

For example. There is a German phrase that all Germans fully understand in their own language. It goes like this. MORGAN SHTUNDIN HOTH GOLDEN MUNDEN. If you translate it literally it says, Morning hours have gold in their mouths.

Now to a German that makes all the sense in the world. To an English speaking person that translation from German to English may not help to get the real meaning, and yet this phrase may be close enough for you to really know what it's saying. Anyone want to take a stab at it by using a similar phrase we have in our language?

The early bird gets the worm. Sometimes a literal word for word translation would not communicate to us and so there needs to be a combination of literal along with striving for meaning.

Luke 9:44 ⁴⁴ "Let these words sink into your ears; for the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men."

How does that read in the NIV?

^{NIV} **Luke 9:44** "Listen carefully to what I am about to tell you: The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men."

Now, do we mistreat the Greek manuscripts from which we are translating if we choose words in English that may not be literal in the Greek?

We can if we are not staying true to the meaning of the Greek. And though we may not use the same phraseology that the Greek uses we still need to be consistent with the words used in the Greek to literally say what it's trying to say in English.

So, what version of the English bible do we use?

We would want to use a variety of English translations to help us get a sense of what God is saying to us English speaking people. The NASB, NIV, NKJV and on occasion using a paraphrase may give us a sense of what God is saying as we compare it with those translations that are more true to the Greek language.

The problem with a paraphrase is that left on its own it will eventually betray the words God gave to Greek speaking people like John, Paul and Peter. And part of the reason may surprise you. Most English paraphrases don't use the Greek text for its translation, it uses other English versions like the NASB, NIV and so on.

And so, they could be considered closer to a commentary of the bible than a true representation of the bible. And we all know that commentaries are not the word of God but the word of men. Commentaries are a good thing to help us understand certain passages but we wouldn't want to be so dependent on them that we use them to the exclusion to the written word of God.

The same is true of paraphrases. We can become lazy when it comes to the study of the word of God as we depend on men giving us their sense of what the word of God is saying.

The bottom line comes down to this. If God has spoken we want to know what He has said and is saying to us today in a language we understand. And when we know that what we have in our possession is His word then we know He has spoken to us in a way that transcends time. Because His word is timeless.

1 Peter 1:24-25 ²⁴ For, "ALL FLESH IS LIKE GRASS, AND ALL ITS GLORY LIKE THE FLOWER OF GRASS. THE GRASS WITHERS, AND THE FLOWER FALLS OFF, ²⁵ BUT THE WORD OF THE LORD ENDURES FOREVER." And this is the word which was preached to you.

And if this is God's eternal word for us we need to treat it and use it the way God intended for the purpose God had in mind.

1 John 5:13 ¹³ These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

That's where it starts. But here's where it takes us after we have this eternal life in Christ.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 ¹⁶ All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.