

HOW DID WE GET THE BIBLE? [PART 2]

Presented by

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[NOTE TO THE READER: This is the first of a three-part series that was presented on a single Sunday by Tyler (part one), Blake (part two), and Justin (part three).]

In Tyler's lesson, he posed the question, "How did we **get** the Bible?" He provided part of the answer to that question. Now, I would like to provide another part for you to consider. The Bible contains two divisions, which we recognize as **The Old Testament** and **The New Testament**. The Old Testament, which in our English Bibles contains 39 books, begins in the book of Genesis with a discussion of the origin of the Universe, and ends in the book of Malachi with the promise of a coming Messiah. Throughout the Old Testament, the general theme is, "Someone is coming." The New Testament, which contains 27 books, begins in the book of Matthew with an announcement about the birth of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, and ends in the book of Revelation with a promise of eternity in heaven with God for all faithful Christians. The general theme of the New Testament is, "Someone has come."

Moses wrote Genesis—the first book of the Old Testament—around 1,500 B.C. And John penned the book of Revelation—the last book of the New Testament—around A.D. 100. Today, we do not have any of the original books for either of the two testaments. All we have are copies that were produced through the millennia by men known as scribes, whose task was to produce copies of various types of documents. But if we do not have any of the original books, how can we know that the Bible we possess today contains the same material that God inspired men to write down in the first place? There are three things that help us answer such a question.

First, a special group of scribes known as Masoretes were the ones whose job it was to make copies of Old Testament books. These scribes operated by **very** strict rules, and were so determined to produce accurate copies of God's Word that they even counted every single verse, word, and letter of the Old Testament books they copied in order to ensure that the copies they made were accurate. Second, across the centuries, thousands of copies of both Old and New Testament books were made. We still have many of those copies today, which allows us to compare copies from a wide variety of different sources. By doing this, we can see just how accurate the copies actually are. Third, in 1948 the Dead Sea scrolls were discovered in the Middle East. These scrolls, which are copies of the Old Testament, were produced between 200 B.C. and A.D. 100. This means that they were extremely close to the dates of the actual writing of much of the Old Testament. When the Dead Sea scrolls were compared to other copies of the Old Testament, they matched up incredibly well—which showed us that the Old Testament had, in fact, been copied faithfully from generation to generation.

When it comes to the New Testament, we have even more copies—over 5,700 manuscripts in all. And some of those manuscripts go back to around A.D. 130—just a few years after the New Testament was written. Furthermore, writings from the first and second centuries are in existence today that contain many quotations from the New Testament. And these quotations match the actual text of the New Testament almost perfectly in every instance. With such amazing evidence at our disposal, it is clear that the New Testament we possess today is indeed a faithful reproduction of the New Testament books as God gave them to the men who wrote them.

But did you ever wonder if the right books ended up in the Bible? Many religious writings were produced during Old and New Testament times. Why did some end up in the Bible, while others did not? During Old Testament times, the Jews used two rules to determine if a writing was from God. First, the material had to have come either from a prophet or from someone to whom God had spoken. People like Moses, Ezekiel, and Isaiah were well known as prophets. Other people—like Daniel, David, and Solomon—were well known as individuals to whom God had spoken. Second, the writing had to be firmly recognized as having come from God, and had to be widely used by the Israelites. As you might expect, God’s people treasured the writings He gave them. For example, when Moses wrote down God’s commandments in what became known as “the book of the law,” that law was kept in the tabernacle where it could be protected. Later, Nehemiah began a library in which he placed books that had been written by various prophets because such writings were precious to the Israelites. By 425 B.C. the Old Testament books were finished, and by the time Jesus was born, the Jews of His time were using the same 39 books that we have today in our Old Testament.

A similar process gave us the New Testament with its 27 books. No man, or group of men, decided which books should be included or omitted. Rather, books were included because: (a) they were known to have come from God—that is, they contained a “thus saith the Lord”; (b) they were written by a prophet of God—like Peter or Paul; (c) they could be proven to be genuine—such as the Book of Luke, known to have been written by Luke; (d) they possessed the ability to change people’s lives—like Paul’s letters; and (e) they were accepted and widely used by Christians.

Some books are not found in the Bible, even though they were written at the same time as books that are. One day you may hear someone talk of the books of the Apocrypha. The word “apocrypha” refers to that which is hidden or concealed. These books, which were written between 200 B.C. and A.D. 100, are not found in our Bibles for several reasons. First, none of the books was recognized by early Christians as being a part of the New Testament. Second, Jesus and the New Testament writers never quoted from the Apocrypha. Third, the Apocrypha contains “weird” teachings. For example, one book talks about how Jesus was playing with some of His friends when He was a young child. However, those children made Him angry, so He turned them into birds! But God’s Son never would do such a thing!

We know today that by roughly the end of the first century A.D., the 66 books we have in our Bibles were the same books used by early Christians. God has protected those books down through the centuries so that we can use them to learn about Him, Christ, and the church. How blessed we are that God gave us the Bible! Now, let us turn our attention to how we know that the Bible is “inspired of God.”