

# **Lecture 3**

The Bible: God's Amazing Book

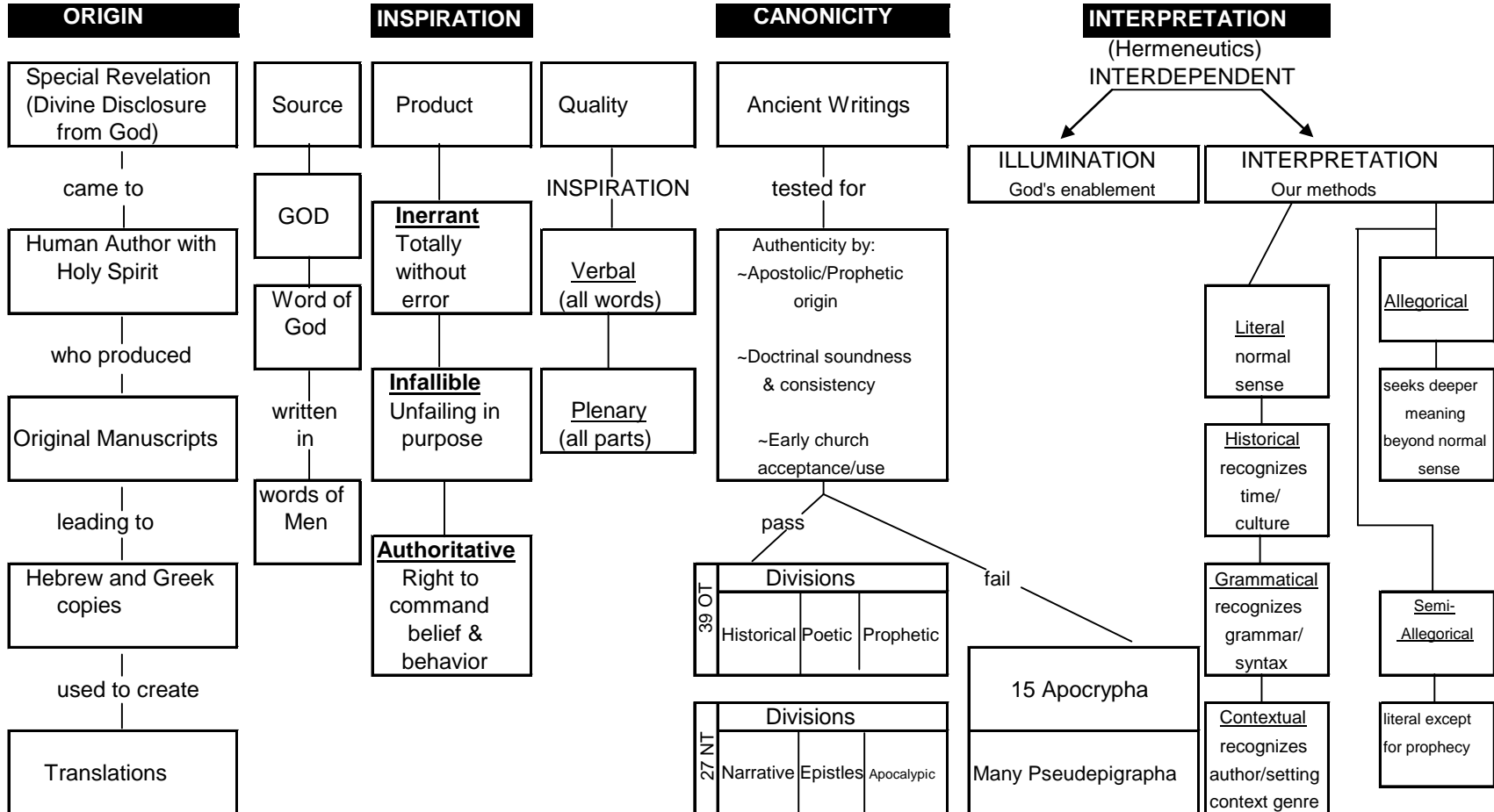
# Bibliology

How did the Bible come to us ?

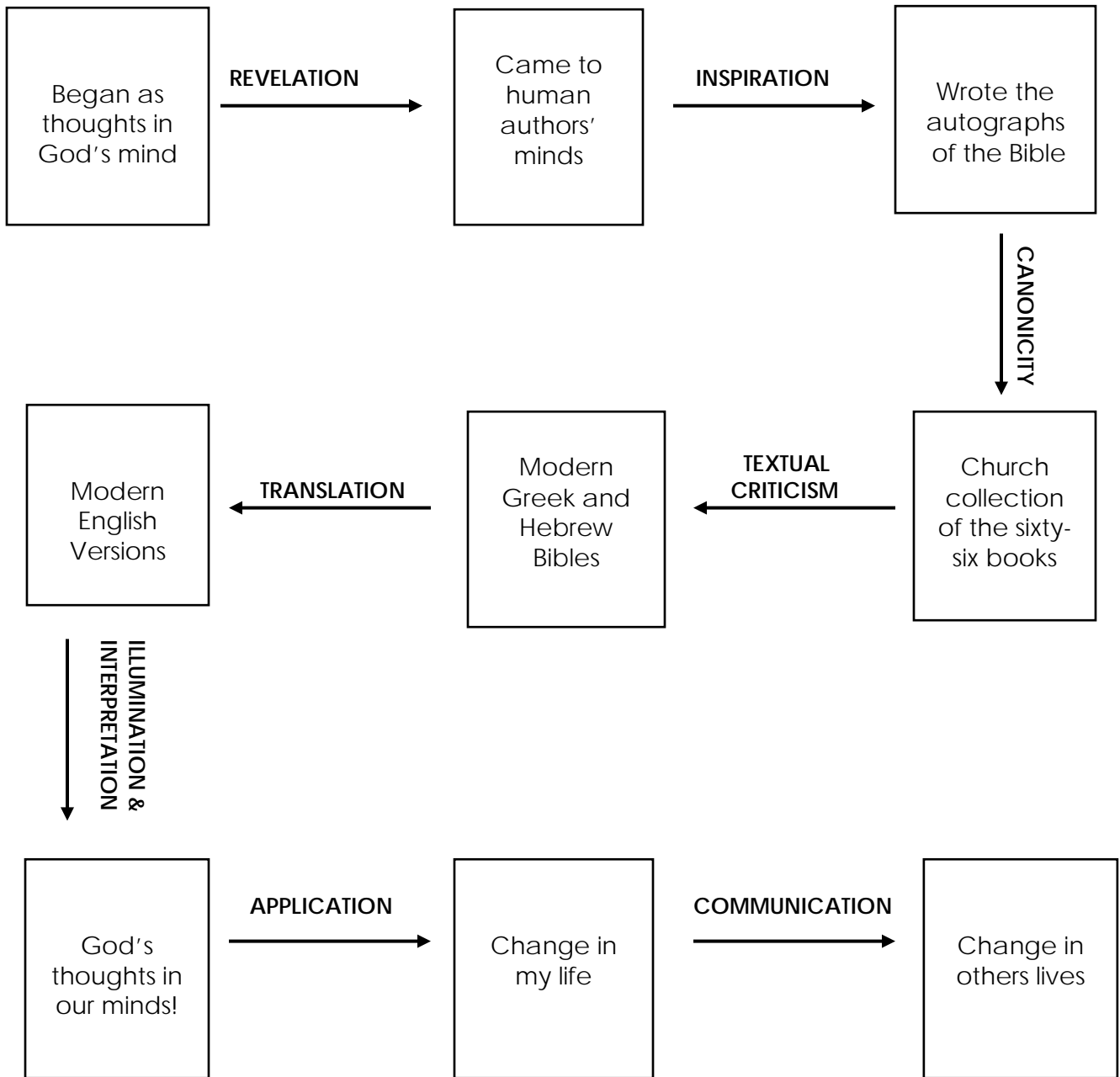
How do we know the Bible is reliable?

How did the ancients recognize the books of the Bible?

How do we interpret the Bible?

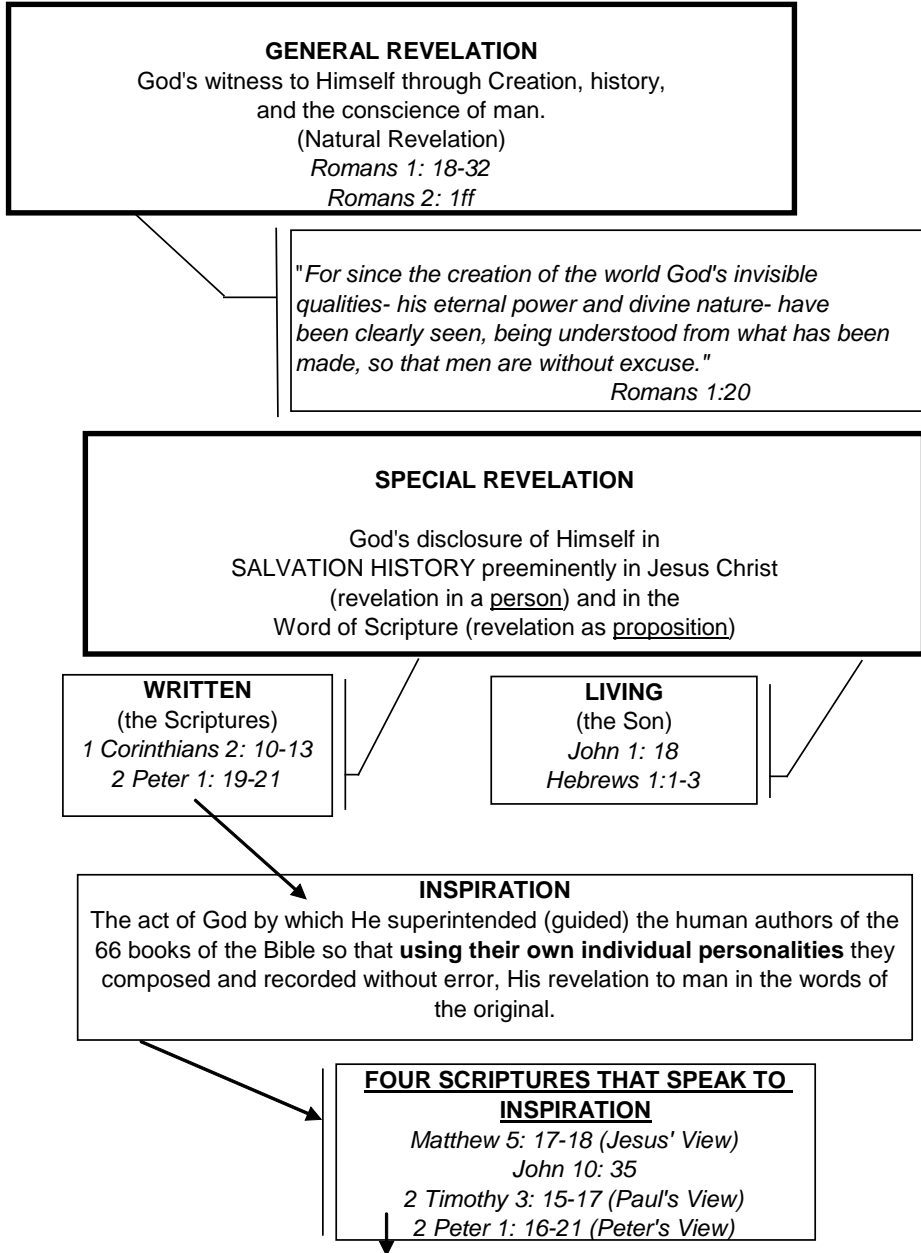


# How Our Bible Came to Us



DEFINITION: The act of God by which He has made known what was otherwise unknowable. It is the truthful disclosure of God to His creation.

*Akokalupsis = "to unveil, to uncover; to reveal"*



## Bibliology: Key Word and Concept

### *What?*

**REVELATION**  
 “The act of God by which He has made known what was otherwise unknowable.”  
*Apokalupsis* – “to unveil, to uncover”

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>GENERAL</b></p> <p>“God's witness to Himself through creation, history, and the conscience of man.”</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>SPECIAL</b></p> <p>“God’s disclosure of Himself in Salvation History (revelation in a person) and in the interpretive word of Scripture (revelation in proposition).”</p>
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<b>HISTORY</b> Judges Ruth	<b>CREATION</b> Psalm 19:1-3 Rom. 1:18-20	<b>CONSCIENCE</b> Romans 1:19 Romans 2:14-15	<b>WRITTEN</b> I Cor. 2:10-13 II Peter 1:19-21	<b>LIVING</b> John 1:18 Hebrews 1:1-3
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### *How?*

**INSPIRATION**  
 “The act of God by which He superintended/controlled the human authors of the 66 books of the Bible so that using their own individual personalities they composed and recorded without error, His revelation to man in the words of the original.”

### *Result*

**INERRANCY**  
 “The quality of being free from all falsehood or mistake which safeguards the truth that Holy Scripture is entirely true and trustworthy in all its assertions.”  
 Matthew 5:17-18; John 10:35; 17:17; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21

### *Result*

**INFALLIBILITY**  
 “The quality of neither misleading or being misled which safeguards the truth that Holy Scripture is a sure, safe and reliable guide in all matters to which it speaks.”

### *Responsibility*

**INTERPRETATION**  
 “The process of determining the biblical author's intended meaning.”

### *Resource*

**ILLUMINATION**  
 “The work of the Holy Spirit, which assists the reader in gaining both the sense and significance of God’s written revelation.”  
 John 16:12-15; I Corinthians 2:9-16

### *Response*

**APPLICATION**  
 “The process of determining the current relevance of Scripture and then actively responding.”  
 James 1:19-27

**Jesus' view of Scripture**

**Matthew 5:17-18**

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to, fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.”

**John 10:35**

“...the scripture cannot be broken...”

**John 17:17**

“Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.”

\*A message of Jesus' view of the Bible may be accessed at <http://www.danielakin.com> , “What Did Jesus Believe About the Bible: Matt. 5:17-18,” or *SBJT* 5.2 (Summer 2001) 80-88.

**Paul's view of Scripture**

**2 Timothy 3:15-17**

“...and how from infancy you have known the holy scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed, and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting; and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

**Peter's view of Scripture**

**2 Peter 1:16-21**

“...And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of Man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”  
(vv. 19-21)

## **VARIOUS VIEWS OF INSPIRATION**

(These views are covered in detail in Systematic Theology. For example, see *Theology for the Church*, 128-138).

1. NATURAL THEORY - no supernatural element in Scripture. The Bible is simply an “inspiring” book or piece(s) of literature.
  2. ILLUMINATION - (mystical) "Spirit inspired" writings on the same level as any of history's or today's Spirit inspired writings.
  3. DYNAMIC - (Partial) "CONTAINS" the Word of God and is without error in areas of doctrine and salvation. It may be, however, in error in the areas of science, history, etc.; (Infallibility of purpose)
  4. NEO-ORTHODOX - Inspired, but not without error due to *human element*. The Bible BECOMES the Word of God in existential encounter, but it IS NOT the Word of God.
  5. MECHANICAL DICTATION - Writers were *passive instruments* in the hands of God like a typewriter to a typist.
  6. \*VERBAL/PLENARY – GOD SUPERINTENDED THE HUMAN AUTHORS SO THAT IN THEIR OWN WORDS VIA THEIR INDIVIDUAL PERSONALITIES THEY WROTE THE SCRIPTURES AND THEY ARE INSPIRED FULLY, TO THE VERY WORDS, AND ARE WITHOUT ERROR IN ALL THAT THEY AFFIRM.  
INERRANT - Without error.  
INFALLIBLE - Incapable of teaching non-truth or leading one astray.  
INSPIRATION - God breathed.
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### **\*INSPIRATION EXTENDS TO...**

1. The writing (not merely the idea)
2. The words (not simply the word)
3. The tenses of verbs - Mt. 22:31-32
4. The letters of words - Gal. 3:16
5. The smallest parts of letters - Matt. 5:17-18

### **A HELPFUL CLARIFICATION**

“*Phenomenal*” language = language in the phenomenal perspective is from the vantage point of the viewer... i.e. how it was observed, not necessarily the technical/analytical view. (E.g. Sunrise/sunset - the sun actually does neither! But that is our observation). This is usually how the Bible speaks.

## VARIATIONS ON THE DOCTRINE OF INERRANCY

### 1. ABSOLUTE INERRANCY

- Affirms plenary/verbal inspiration while trying to distance itself from a mechanical dictation view of inspiration.
- Affirms the accuracy of the Bible in all matters, including science and history “to a great degree of precision!” (Harold Lindsell)

### \*2. CRITICAL (NATURAL) INERRANCY

- Makes cautious use of critical methodologies such as form and redaction criticism.
- Affirms the truth of everything in the Bible to the degree of precision intended by the author.
- Usually regards biblical references to scientific matters as phenomenal (how they appeared to the writer).
- Does not seek to harmonize every detail of Scripture because it recognizes that the authors wrote for different purposes. - (Al Mohler; Danny Akin; J. I. Packer; D. A. Carson; *Chicago Statement*).

### 3. LIMITED INERRANCY

- Affirms the Bible is inerrant in all matters of faith and practice, as well as matters which can be empirically verified.
- Inspiration does not grant modern understanding; hence the Bible may contain errors of science or history, but it did secure fully truthful teaching about belief and behavior. (I. H. Marshall).

### 4. NUANCED INERRANCY

- Affirms that how one understands inerrancy depends on the type of biblical literature under consideration.
- Some portions, such as TEN COMMANDMENTS; seem to have been given through a mechanical dictation form of inspiration. The epistles and historical materials might be described as given by verbal inspiration. A book like Proverbs seems to require a more free view (poss. dynamic view). (Clark Pinnock).

### 5. FUNCTIONAL INERRANCY (Infallibility of purpose)

- Affirms that the purpose of the Bible is to bring people to salvation and growth in grace. The Bible accomplishes its PURPOSE without fail.
- Affirms that the Bible is sufficiently accurate in factual matters to accomplish its PURPOSE, but seeks to avoid describing the inerrancy of Scripture primarily in terms of FACTICITY. Instead, it speaks of the Bible in terms of trustworthiness and faithfulness. (Jack Rogers, Donald McKim).

### 6. SPONTANEOUS INERRANCY (View from the Pew!)

- An expression of simple trust and faith in the Bible.
- Often marked by little, if any awareness of, or interest in scholarly discussions of the doctrine of inerrancy. (Ma and Pa Baptist).



## **The Difference Between Original Autographs and Original Texts**

If you're looking for a way to critique the authority of Scripture, there are seemingly endless options. There are historical critiques (e.g., many of these books are forgeries). There are logical critiques (e.g., the Gospels contradict themselves). There are moral critiques (e.g., God is immoral to order the slaughter of entire cities). And there are hermeneutical critiques (e.g., no one can agree on what the Bible means).

In recent years, however, a more foundational challenge has arisen. All of the above critiques are essentially the same; they all argue the words of the Bible are not true. But this newer and more foundational challenge is not about whether the words of the Bible are true, but whether we have the words of the Bible at all.

At the core of this challenge is the fact that we only have handwritten copies of these books we treasure. And, in reality, we only have copies of copies of copies. And given that scribes made mistakes, and that the transmission process was imperfect, how can we be sure that these texts have been preserved? How can we be sure we actually have the words of Scripture?

Bart Ehrman's best-selling book *Misquoting Jesus* focuses on this issue as it pertains to the New Testament text:

What good is it to say that the autographs (i.e., the originals) were inspired? We don't have the originals! We have only error-ridden copies, and the vast majority of these are centuries removed from the originals and different from them . . . in thousands of ways.

If Ehrman is correct, then he has uncovered the single thread that would unravel the entire garment of the Christian faith. There is no need to critique the content of the New Testament if we don't even have the New Testament.

But is this argument cogent? I think not. There are two places it can be challenged: (1) the role of the autographs and (2) the degree of corruption in the extant manuscripts.

## Role of the Autographs

Ehrman's focus on the autographs (or the absence of them) is not unusual in modern critiques of biblical authority. However, this sort of argument often creates the impression (even if it is unintentional) that the autographs are the original text—almost as if the original text were a physical object that has been lost.

But the original text is not a physical object. The autographs contain the original text, but the original text can exist without them. A text can be preserved in other ways. One such way is that the original text can be preserved in a multiplicity of manuscripts. In other words, even though a single surviving manuscript might not contain (all of) the original text, the original text could be accessible to us across a wide range of manuscripts.

Preserving the original text across multiple manuscripts, however, could only happen if there were enough of these manuscripts to give us assurance that the original text was preserved (somewhere) in them. Providentially, when it comes to the quantity of manuscripts, the New Testament is in a class all its own. Although the exact count is always changing, currently we possess more than 5,500 manuscripts of the New Testament in Greek alone. No other document of antiquity even comes close.

Even though we do not possess the autographs, textual scholars have acknowledged that the multiplicity of manuscripts allows us to access the original text. Eldon Jay Epp notes, “The point is that we have so many manuscripts of the NT . . . that surely the original reading in every case is somewhere present in our vast store of material.”

Gordon Fee concurs: “The immense amount of material available to NT textual critics . . . is their good fortune because with such an abundance of material one can be reasonably certain that the original text is to be found somewhere in it.”

Of course, one might wonder why God chose to preserve the text in this manner. Why not just preserve the autographs? Why didn't God just allow Christians to keep the autographs sealed away in a vault somewhere? For one, it is historically unlikely that the autographs could have survived until the present day, especially if they were being regularly used.

But it is also possible that God may have not wanted the autographs to survive. One can imagine how easily (and quickly) such documents would become objects of veneration, if not worship. They might have become the equivalent of Gideon's ephod ([Judges 8:27](#))—a good gift the people begin to treat as an idol.

Of course, we cannot know for sure why God providentially did not preserve the autographs. But, in one sense, it is fitting. It reminds us that the Word of God, like God himself, is not bound to a physical location or to a physical object. It is a Word that is not contained. It is a Word that goes forth.

### Corruption of the Manuscripts

If, as we have seen, there are good reasons to think that the original text is preserved across the entire manuscript tradition (as opposed to being contained in a single manuscript), then there is still the question of how we identify the original text. How do we distinguish the original text from textual changes or corruptions? Can this even be done?

Ehrman would suggest it cannot. The reason for his skepticism is that the copies we possess are “error-ridden” and contain “thousands” of differences. In other words, the manuscripts are in such poor shape, so full of corruptions, that no methodology could extract the original text from them.

Again, this is a vast overstatement. While there are certainly many, many textual differences (hundreds of thousands, in fact), the key point is that the vast majority of these scribal changes are minor and insignificant—e.g., spelling mistakes, use of synonyms, and word-order changes. In the end, these do not substantively change the meaning of the text.

Of course, there are more substantive textual changes (much fewer in number) that do affect the meaning of the text. But these changes would only be a problem if we could not identify them as changes. Or to put differently, these kinds of variants would only be a problem if we could assume that every one of them was as equally viable as every other.

Thankfully, textual scholars can determine, with a relative degree of certainty, which of these readings were original and which were not. There are still some gray areas, some instances where a choice between variants is unclear. But, generally speaking, we can have confidence that the words we read are the words of the original authors.

Historically, Christian affirmations of biblical authority are often expressly restricted to the “autographs.” And there are obvious reasons for this view. Biblical authority does not apply to whatever a later scribe might happen to write down—it applies to what the biblical authors actually wrote.

But does the lack of autographs mean such affirmations of biblical authority are meaningless? No, because the authority does not reside in a physical object, but in the original text. And the

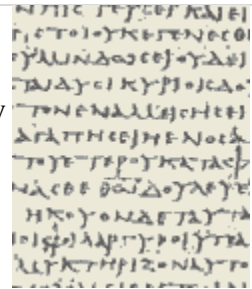
original text has been preserved in another way, namely through the multiplicity of manuscripts.

**Michael J. Kruger** is president of Reformed Theological Seminary's Charlotte, North Carolina, campus, where he also serves as professor of New Testament. He is the author of *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books* (Crossway, 2012). He blogs regularly at [Canon Fodder](#).

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-difference-between-original-autographs-and-original-texts>

# Manuscript evidence for superior New Testament reliability

by [Matt Slick](#)



The New [Testament](#) is constantly under attack, and its reliability and accuracy are often contested by critics. If the critics want to disregard the New Testament, then they must also disregard other ancient writings by Plato, Aristotle, and Homer. This is because the New Testament documents are better preserved and more numerous than any other ancient writings. Because they are so numerous, they can be [cross checked](#) for accuracy . . . and they are very consistent.

There are presently 5,686 Greek manuscripts in existence today for the New Testament.<sup>1</sup> If we were to compare the number of New Testament manuscripts to other ancient writings, we find that the New Testament manuscripts far outweigh the others in quantity.<sup>2</sup>

Author	Date Written	Earliest Copy	Approximate Time Span between original & copy	Number of Copies	Accuracy of Copies
Lucretius	died 55 or 53 B.C.		1,100 yrs	2	----
Pliny	A.D. 61-113	A.D. 850	750 yrs	7	----
Plato	427-347 B.C.	A.D. 900	1,200 yrs	7	----
Demosthenes	4th Cent. B.C.	A.D. 1100	800 yrs	8	----
Herodotus	480-425 B.C.	A.D. 900	1,300 yrs	8	----
Suetonius	A.D. 75-160	A.D. 950	800 yrs	8	----
Thucydides	460-400 B.C.	A.D. 900	1,300 yrs	8	----
Euripides	480-406 B.C.	A.D. 1100	1,300 yrs	9	----
Aristophanes	450-385 B.C.	A.D. 900	1200	10	----
Caesar	100-44 B.C.	A.D. 900	1,000	10	----
Livy	59 BC-AD 17	----	???	20	----
Tacitus	circa A.D. 100	A.D. 1100	1,000 yrs	20	----
Aristotle	384-322 B.C.	A.D. 1100	1,400	49	----
Sophocles	496-406 B.C.	A.D. 1000	1,400 yrs	193	----
Homer (Iliad)	900 B.C.	400 B.C.	500 yrs	643	95%
New Testament	1st Cent. A.D. (A.D. 50-100)	2nd Cent. A.D. (c. A.D. 130 f.)	less than 100 years	5600	99.5%

As you can see, there are thousands more New Testament Greek manuscripts than any other ancient writing. The internal consistency of the New Testament documents is about 99.5% textually pure. That is an amazing accuracy. In addition, there are over 19,000 copies in the Syriac, Latin, Coptic, and Aramaic languages. The total supporting New Testament manuscript base is over 24,000.

Almost all Biblical scholars agree that the New Testament documents were all written before the close of the First Century. If Jesus was crucified in A.D. 30., then that means the entire New

Testament was completed within 70 years. This is important because it means there were plenty of people around when the New Testament documents were penned--people who could have contested the writings. In other words, those who wrote the documents knew that if they were inaccurate, plenty of people would have pointed it out. But, we have absolutely no ancient documents contemporary with the First Century that contest the New Testament texts.

Furthermore, another important aspect of this discussion is the fact that we have a fragment of the Gospel of John that dates back to around 29 years from the original writing (John Rylands Papyri A.D. 125). This is extremely close to the original writing date. This is simply unheard of in any other ancient writing, and it demonstrates that the Gospel of John is a First Century document.

Below is a chart with some of the oldest extant New Testament manuscripts compared to when they were originally penned. Compare these time spans with the next closest, which is Homer's *Iliad*, where the closest copy from the original is 500 years later. Undoubtedly, that period of time allows for more textual corruption in its transmission. How much less so for the New Testament documents?

Important Manuscript Papyri	Contents	Date Original Written	MSS Approx. Date Time Span	Location
<b>P<sup>52</sup></b> (John Rylands Fragment) <sup>3</sup>	<a href="#">John 18:31-33, 37-38</a>	circa A.D. 96	circa A.D. 29 yrs 125	John Rylands Library, Manchester, England
<b>P<sup>46</sup></b> (Chester Beatty Papyrus)	<a href="#">Rom. 5:17-6:3, 5-14, 8:15-25, 27-35, 10:1-11, 22, 24-33, 35, 16:1-23, 25-27</a> , Heb., 1 & 2 Cor., Eph., Gal., Phil., Col., <a href="#">1 Thess. 1:1, 9-10, 2:1-3, 5:5-9, 23-28</a>	50's-70's	circa A.D. 200 Approx. 150 yrs	Chester Beatty Museum, Dublin & Ann Arbor, Michigan, University of Michigan library
<b>P<sup>66</sup></b> (Bodmer Papyrus)	<a href="#">John 1:1-6:11, 35-14</a> :26, fragment of 14:29-21:9	70's	circa A.D. 200 Approx. 130 yrs	Cologne, Geneva
<b>P<sup>67</sup></b>	<a href="#">Matt. 3:9, 15, 5:20-22, 25-28</a>		circa A.D. 200 Approx. 130 yrs	Barcelona, Fundacion San Lucas Evangelista, P. Barc.1

If the critics of the [Bible](#) dismiss the New Testament as reliable information, then they must also dismiss the reliability of the writings of Plato, Aristotle, Caesar, Homer, and the other authors mentioned in the chart at the beginning of the paper. On the other hand, if the critics acknowledge the historicity and writings of those other individuals, then they must also retain the historicity and writings of the New Testament authors, after all, the evidence for the New Testament's reliability is far greater than the others. The Christian has substantially superior criteria for affirming the New Testament documents than he does for any other ancient writing. It is good evidence on which to base the trust in the reliability of the New Testament.

This article is also available in: [Español](#), [中文](#)

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- [1.](#) Norman Geisler & Peter Bocchino, *Unshakeable Foundations*, (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2001) p. 256.
  - [2.](#) The above chart was adapted from three sources: 1) *Christian Apologetics*, by Norman Geisler, 1976, p. 307, 2) the article "Archaeology and History attest to the Reliability of the Bible," by Richard M. Fales, Ph.D., in *The Evidence Bible*, Compiled by Ray Comfort, Bridge-Logos Publishers, Gainesville, FL, 2001, p. 163, and 3) *A Ready Defense*, by Josh McDowell, 1993, p. 45.
  - [3.](#) "Deissmann was convinced that p52 was written well within the reign of Hadrian (A.D. 117-38) and perhaps even during the time of Trajan (A.D. 98-117)" (Footnote #2 found on pg. 39 of *The Text of the New Testament*, by Bruce M. Metzger, 2nd Ed. 1968, Oxford University Press, NY, NY). Bruce Metzger has authored more than 50 books. He holds two Masters Degrees, a Ph.D. and has been awarded several honorary doctorates. "He is past president of the Society of Biblical Literature, the International Society for New Testament Studies, and the North American Patristic Society."--From, *The Case for Christ*, by Lee Strobel, Zondervan Publishers, 1998, Grand Rapids, MI: pg. 57.

## Related Articles

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<https://carm.org/manuscript-evidence>

# Where did the Bible come from?

<http://markdriscoll.org/where-did-the-bible-come-from/>

July 31, 2013

Mark Driscoll



*How did we get the Bible? Can we be sure that our Bible today is the same as what God inspired to be written? Pastor Mark Driscoll explains the fascinating story of how the Bible got from God to us in this second installment of his blog series, which provides a guided tour of topics such as **what is the Bible**, principles for interpreting the Bible, and misconceptions about the Bible.*

As New Testament scholar Daniel B. Wallace has said, “Before the year 1881, you had three choices for an English Bible translation: the KJV, the KJV, or the KJV.” In our day, we are tremendously blessed to have a variety of English Bible translations that we can access easily. With so many to choose from, however, it’s helpful to understand why multiple translations exists, what’s the difference between them, and how we came to have any Scripture in our language at all.



Many volumes have been written to explain the miraculous and fascinating process necessary for the Bible's existence. To summarize, I'll explain the five-step process that has occurred for you to read the Bible:

1. Revelation
2. Transmission
3. Translation
4. Interpretation
5. Application

The story of how the Bible got to us from God is a captivating one, and it begins with *revelation*.

## 1. Revelation

Revelation is the miraculous event whereby God revealed himself and his truth to someone and inspired them, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to write down what he had to say—perfectly (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20–21). This original copy is called the *autograph*.

By comparing the ancient manuscripts, we find that the vast majority of the variations between them are minor elements of spelling, grammar, and style, or accidental omissions or duplications of words or phrases. Overall, 97 to 99 percent of the New Testament can be reconstructed beyond any reasonable doubt, and not one Christian doctrine is founded solely or even primarily on disputed passages.

Remarkably, the Scripture quoted in the works of the early Christian writers (mostly AD 95–150) are so extensive that virtually the entire New Testament can be reconstructed from quotations alone, except for eleven verses (mostly from 2 and 3 John).

*Not one Christian doctrine is founded solely or even primarily on disputed passages.*

Critics of the accuracy of the Bible routinely claim that it is in fact a series of fables and legends that have developed over hundreds of years, because there are not enough copies of ancient manuscripts to alleviate their skepticism. But a simple shepherd boy dealt a serious blow to their criticisms in 1947.

This boy wandered into a cave in the Middle East and discovered large pottery jars filled with leather scrolls that had been wrapped in linen cloth. Amazingly, the ancient copies of the books of the Bible were in good condition because they had been well sealed. What are now known as

the **Dead Sea Scrolls** are made up of some forty thousand inscribed ancient fragments. From these fragments, more than five hundred books have been reconstructed, including some Old Testament books, such as a complete copy of Isaiah.

## 2. Transmission

The next aspect of how we got our Bible is *transmission*. Transmission occurred when trained scribes carefully copied the manuscript so that other copies could be made available for people to read.

While these handwritten copies have the occasional minor error in punctuation or spelling, called *variants*, they were accepted as accurate and authoritative by God's people (e.g., Deut. 17:18; cf. 1 Kings 2:3; Ezra 7:14; Neh. 8:8).

For example, the apostles, who were the senior leaders in the early church, taught from copies of the books of the Bible (Acts 17:2; 18:8), and the early church tested all teachings against the existing scrolls (Acts 17:11). Furthermore, Jesus himself taught from copies of the books, not the autographs, and treated them as authoritative (e.g., Matt. 12:3–5; 21:16, 42; Luke 4:16–21; 10:26). God's people have always relied on manuscripts, and these writings have proven to be accurate and trustworthy.

Tragically, opponents of Scripture have attacked its trustworthiness by falsely stating that our current English translations are built upon poorly transmitted copies. However, the *bibliographical test* of Scripture flatly refutes this false argument. This test determines the historicity of an ancient text by analyzing the quantity and quality of copied manuscripts, as well as how far removed they are from the time of the originals.

*Jesus himself taught from copies of the books, not the autographs, and treated them as authoritative*

The quantity of New Testament manuscripts is unparalleled in ancient literature. There are about 5,800 Greek manuscripts and about 15,000 manuscripts in other languages.

As the following chart illustrates, both the number of transmitted manuscripts we possess of Scripture and their proximity in date to the autographs are unparalleled when compared to other ancient documents.

<b>Author</b>	<b>Work</b>	<b>Date Written</b>	<b>Earliest MSS</b>	<b>Time Gap</b>	<b>Manuscripts</b>
Homer	<i>Iliad</i>	800 BC	c. 400 BC	400	1,757
Herodotus	<i>History</i>	480-425 BC	10th C	1,350	109
Sophocles	Plays	496-406 BC	3rd C BC	100-200	193
Plato	Tetralogies	400 BC	895	1,300	210
Caeser	<i>Gallic Wars</i>	100-44 BC	9th C	950	251
Livy	<i>History of Rome</i>	59 BC-AD 17	Early 5th C	400	150
Tacitus	<i>Annals</i>	AD 100	1st half: 850, 2nd: 1050 (AD 1100)	750-950	2+31 15th C
Pliny, the Elder	<i>Natural History</i>	AD 49-79	5th C fragment: 1; Rem. 14-15th C	400 (750)	200
Thucydides	<i>History</i>	460-400 BC	3rd C BC (AD 900)	200 (1,350)	96
Demosthenes	Speeches	300 BC	Some fragments from 1 BC. (AD 1100)	1,100+ (1400)	340
New Testament		AD 50-100	AD 130 (or less)	40	5,795

As the scholar who did [the research for this chart](#) put it: “Although there has been an increase in the number of non-NT [New Testament] ancient manuscripts, nothing has changed regarding the applicability of the bibliographical test. Even Homer’s *Iliad*, which has seen the greatest manuscript increase, is still dwarfed by the NT, which has more than three times the Greek manuscripts as the *Iliad*. When one adds the fifteen thousand manuscripts in other languages, and then considers that almost the entire NT could be reproduced by the quotations of the early

church fathers, one must maintain that, despite the increase of non-NT ancient manuscripts, the NT remains in a class by itself: it is by far the most attested ancient work.”

Put simply, if someone seeks to eliminate the trustworthiness of the New Testament, then to be consistent they would also have to dismiss virtually the entire canon of Western literature and pull everything from Homer to Plato to Aristotle off of bookstore shelves and out of classroom discussions. The transmission process of Scripture is without peer.

### 3. Translation

The third step in getting the Bible from God to you is *translation*. Translation occurs in service to people who want to read the books of the Bible but are not familiar with the original language in which they were written (Hebrew, Greek, or Aramaic). Teams of language theory scholars carefully undertake the painstaking process of translating the original languages into the languages of other peoples. Today, the Bible has been carefully translated into nearly three thousand languages. While the thought of a translation may concern some people, the fact is that most of Western literature has also been translated—because we don’t use their original languages either. The first translation of the English Bible was initiated by John Wycliffe and completed by John Purvey in AD 1388.

*The quantity of New Testament manuscripts is unparalleled in ancient literature.*

In translating the Bible into English, four general categories of translation are most common: word-for-word, thought-for-thought, paraphrases, and corruptions. The same four options are also used in the translation of other ancient books into English.

- I. **Word-for-word** (also known as literal translations) make a special effort to carefully interpret each word from the original Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic into English. Word-for-word translations emphasize God, the divine author of Scripture, over the human reader of Scripture. The result is a striving for the precision of what the Bible says, much like one would expect in other important communications, such as legal documents, marriage vows, or contracts. Word-for-word translations are generally at a high-school reading level.

Word-for-word translations tend to be the best for studying because of their accuracy, though they sometimes lose the poetic nuances of the original languages. Probably the best word-for-word translations are the English Standard Version (ESV), the New American Standard Bible (NASB), and the New King James Version (NKJV). The

King James Version (KJV) is also a word-for-word translation, but because of its use of archaic English, it is very difficult for some people to read. The NASB was widely regarded as the most scholarly word-for-word translation until the arrival of the ESV. It did not become widely popular, however, because of its tight copyright and sometimes stiff translation of poetry that lost some of the beauty of the original writings. Thankfully, the ESV has preserved the degree of accuracy present in the NASB while also doing a better job of translating the poetic parts of Scripture in a more fluid manner.

The philosophy of word-for-word translation guided virtually every English Bible translation until the middle of the twentieth century. At that time, thought-for-thought translation became popular.

- II. **Thought-for-thought** (also known as dynamic equivalence or functional equivalence) translations attempt to convey the full nuance of each passage by interpreting the Scripture's entire meaning and not just the individual words. Thought-for-thought translations may include words that were not included in the original text in an effort to give the same meaning that the reader of the original languages would have had.

The best and most widely read thought-for-thought English translation is the New International Version (NIV). Other thought-for-thought translations include Today's New International Version (TNIV), New Living Translation (NLT), Contemporary English Version (CEV), and the Good News Bible (GNB). The benefit of thought-for-thought translations in general, and the NIV, my favorite thought-for-thought translation, in particular, is that they are easy to understand and make the Bible accessible to a wide number of people.

Going one step further than thought-for-thought translations are paraphrases, which combine both Scripture and interpretive commentary into the translation method.

- III. **Paraphrases** pay even less attention to specific word meanings than thought-for-thought translations in an attempt to capture the poetic or narrative essence of a passage. For this reason, many paraphrased translations do not even have verse divisions in them. Examples of paraphrased translations include The Message (TM), The Living Bible (TLB), and The Amplified Bible (AMP).

IV. **Corruptions** are “translations” of Scripture that clearly seek to undermine the teaching of Scripture. These “translations” are very poor and should not be used as credible translations for study. These include the Jehovah’s Witness translation called the New World Translation, which was written in large part to eliminate the deity of Jesus Christ.

#### 4. Interpretation

After translation, the fourth step is *interpretation*, which occurs when someone reads the Bible in a language they can understand and determines the meaning of the text they read by the enablement of God the Holy Spirit. We must be careful to read the truth out of the Bible (*exegesis*) rather than reading our beliefs and desires into it (*eisegesis*).

The Bible is to be interpreted literally, but there are plain-literal and figurative-literal portions of the Bible. We begin by assuming the plain-literal meaning, and if that seems absurd then we go with a figurative-literal interpretation. A figurative-literal Scripture teaches a truth in a poetic way and often uses the words “like” or “as” to tip us off that figurative language is being used. But even when figurative language is being used in Scripture, it is still communicating a literal truth. I’ll discuss this more in a future post.

#### 5. Application

Finally, the fifth step of getting the Bible is application, which is the result of taking what we learn from the principles in the Bible and making changes in our thoughts and actions by the empowering grace of God the Holy Spirit, so that our life is congruent with the Bible. There are a seemingly infinite number of applications for a text of the Bible. For example, when the Bible says that we should love people, the applications for that principle are endless.

In this five-step process—revelation, transmission, translation, interpretation, and application—we see how God speaks to us and cares deeply about our lives. We also see how the chasm between God and us is graciously filled by God’s revelation, which is more accurate and true than any human speculation (such as religion and philosophy).