

THE SCRIPTURES

PART 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE BIBLE

The Bible tells us the story of God. It reveals who He is and what He's done in history. It also reveals to us God's plan for saving the world. It invites us to enter into a personal relationship with God, because of what Jesus has accomplished for us. Jesus is what the story of the Bible is all about.

The Bible was NOT written to explain everything about life. It was not written to provide answers to all of our spiritual questions. For example, it doesn't tell us when God created the world, just that He did. It doesn't tell us about all of world history, just the history of one nation, Israel, through whom Jesus, the Savior of the world, came.

~ Refer to Discussion Questions ~

However, instead of being a light to the world, Israel and its kings became like the world and adopted its wrong notions about God, morality, and the meaning of life. Therefore, God sent men called "prophets" to warn Israel and call it back into faithfulness to God. These prophets also made predictions of the future, called "prophecies," including numerous promises of a coming King, the Messiah, who would save and rule the world. As a result, God's great plan for making Himself known to the world, through the

Because the Bible includes a history of Israel, it goes back in time some 4000 years, to that nations' beginning through a man named Abraham. The Bible then traces Abraham's descendants forming the nation of Israel and entering into a covenant relationship with God. This is a sacred promise to obey God's commandments and to be His special people. This history and the covenant were written down and intended to guide Israel into being a light to the world, showing everyone what God is like as they followed Him.

- *So lets talk about this. How much of the Bible have you read?*
- *Imagine if the Bible was written in a question/ answer format, rather than in story, as it is. What do you think it would be like to read it then?*

Messiah, is gradually revealed over time through the Old Testament.

If you've become a Christian recently or you're simply checking out Christianity, you've walked into a story that is already well under way. And if you don't know the theme of the story, the

movie we're in, chances are you're going to miss the main point when you read the Bible.

~ Refer to Discussion Questions ~

The main point or theme of the Bible, from Genesis (the first book) to Revelation (the last book) is God's plan for saving the world, for saving us. The Old Testament (the first half) reveals the formation of the nation of Israel, through which the Savior of the world would come.

In the New Testament, the 4 gospels announce that the Messiah has come to earth. They record not only Jesus' teaching and life, but also His death on the cross, which invites us back into a relationship with God. The rest of the New

HOW THE BIBLE WAS WRITTEN

The Bible was written by 40 different men, from all walks of life; from kings, to statesmen, to doctors, to farmers, to fishermen and shepherds. These men were part of the nation of Israel, and they recorded both what God had already done in the past; that is, history; as well as prophecies, the predictions of what God would do in the future. Consequently, this history and these prophecies were written down on scrolls and came to be regarded as "the Old Testament."

In the New Testament, the "Apostles," a group of men trained by Jesus, wrote letters to the churches they had started, giving specific instruction on how

- *What is an example of a great, yet confusing movie, where you need to understand "the big picture" before watching it?*
- *Have you ever read the Bible without "getting" the big picture first? If so, how did that go?*
- *What do you think is the main point of the Bible?*
- *We want to make sure we talk about what interests you. At this point, what questions do you have about the Bible?*

Testament is made up of "epistles," letters written to churches and to individuals, telling us how to live as followers of Jesus.

The purpose of this study is to (1) give a concise summary of how the Bible was written, (2) help you understand what Christians mean when they call the Bible "the word of God," and (3) provide evidence that supports that belief.

to follow Jesus--instruction that is still relevant to us today. Therefore, each of the churches had a collection of letters that the Apostles wrote to them. Once the thirteen letters of the Apostle Paul were written, they were brought together as a unit called "the Apostle." In the same way, once the four gospels were written, they were brought together as a unit called "the gospel." These gospels and letters were shared with other churches, organically forming the New Testament over time. As a result, the major crux of what we now call the New Testament, "the gospel" and "the Apostle," was accepted by the church before 90 A.D.

WHAT IT MEANS THAT SCRIPTURE IS "THE WORD OF GOD"

From the very beginning, these men believed that God had spoken to them and that they were responsible to communicate His message. As God told Jeremiah the prophet, "... I have put My words in your mouth"

(Jeremiah 1:9). In fact, this point separates the Bible from all other sacred writings. More than 2500 times, the scripture says "This is what the Lord says..." No other book claims to be the Word of God in the same way. The Christian belief is that since we cannot reach up and grasp God's mind on any topic, God reached down to the Bible is "God's Word," word "Bible" comes from Bible, therefore, means



reveal Himself. This belief, that is evident even in its name. The the Greek word for book. Holy "Holy Book."

The Bible, then, is unique in that it claims to have God as its author. For example, when Jesus referred to what Moses had said, back in the Old Testament, Jesus asked, "have you not read what was spoken to you by God?" (Matthew 22:31). In other words, though Moses had spoken, Jesus believed that God had spoken through Moses. It is for this reason that Jesus called scripture "the Word of God" (Matthew 15:6) and asserted that "the scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). If the Bible truly is the Word of God, we can trust it completely. Jesus Himself placed total confidence in the scripture as inerrant and infallible. "It is written...it is written...it is written," was Jesus' frequent expression of trust in the scriptures (Matthew 4:4,7,10).

So when Christians say scripture is the "Word of God," what we really mean to say is that its origin is not found in the mind of man, but in the mind of God. The writers of scripture wrote as God's Spirit revealed to them God's message.

"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." 2 Peter 1:20-21

The phrase "carried along" is used elsewhere in scripture to describe a ship being totally under

the control of a mighty wind. In other words, though God spoke through human beings, who themselves have a imagination and will, He did so in such a way that what we receive is precisely what God intended.

The origin of the message isn't the mind of the prophet, but in the mind of God. Just as any of us have intention in all that we say, scripture is the meaningful self expression of God. It says what God means for it to say. As a result, we're not free to interpret scripture however we want, but we must be careful to understand what God is trying to convey to us.

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

The phrase "inspired by God" literally means "God-breathed." In other words, it's as if God exhaled and out came the Bible, but inspiration is not mechanical. It's not as if God dictated His message and the writers, in a trance-like state, simply wrote it down. Instead, these men received God's Word, applied it to themselves, and delivered it to others using their own personality. So, inspiration does not mean that human beings were not involved. Inspiration means that God spoke His message through humans. To put it another way: the Bible is 100% the Word of God

AND 100% the word of men. Since the scripture is "God-breathed," it has the power to "equip us for every good work," that is, the Bible is what we need to grow as Christians.

*"For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."
Hebrews 4:12*

To say that the Bible is living means that because its origin is God, its words carry the same authority as God Himself. To encounter the Bible, then, is to encounter something powerful, something that knows us, something that cuts to the depths of our being; it is to encounter God Himself.

~ Refer to Discussion Questions ~

- *In your own words, can you explain how the Bible claims to be the Word of God?*
- *How does it affect you, if it does, to know that Jesus regarded scripture as the Word of God which cannot be broken?*
- *Of all that we've covered so far, what do you find yourself wanting to push back against, thinking, "I'm not so sure about that."*

ACTION POINT

Take some time this week to consider this question: What are the implications in your own life of the Bible being the Word of God?

PART 2: EVIDENCE FOR THE BIBLE

- *Who remembers the main points from part 1?*
- *Does anyone have any questions from what we've studied so far?*

There is a tremendous amount of evidence that the Bible is what it claims to be, the Word of God. Three of the most significant pieces of evidences supporting the Bible are (1) its power to change lives, (2) its eyewitness testimonies, and (3) its fulfilled prophecies.

1. ITS POWER TO CHANGE LIVES

“And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.” 1 Thessalonians 2:13

Because the Bible is the Word of God, when we believe its message about our sin and about Jesus' death for our sin, it changes us. Millions, if not billions of lives, have been changed simply by reading what the scripture says and believing it. Notice that the Bible is “at work” in us, when we read it with faith. People from various backgrounds--churched and unchurched, religious and atheist, seeking and agnostic--all proclaim the Bible's mysterious ability to transform us from the inside out, once we believe.

2. ITS EYEWITNESS TESTIMONIES

The reliability of Scripture is also confirmed through the eyewitness credentials of the authors. Moses, for example, participated in what he described in his writings. He was an eyewitness to Israel's captivity in Egypt, the exodus out of slavery, and the forty year journey to the promised land, all of which is accurately chronicled in the Bible's first five books. Many skeptical authorities grudgingly agree that the Old Testament is a remarkably accurate historical document.

The New Testament has the same kind of eyewitness authenticity. Matthew and John were with Jesus during His ministry, being two of the original twelve apostles called by Jesus. The gospel of Mark was not written by an apostle, but was dictated by one. Peter dictated his eyewitness experiences to Mark, his cousin, while Peter sat in prison, awaiting execution for his faith in Jesus. Luke, though not an eyewitness of Christ, gathered the testimonies of eyewitnesses, “carefully investigating everything” regarding the life of Jesus (Luke 1:1-3).

“Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.”

Luke 1:1-4

After the gospels, the New Testament contains letters, called “epistles,” which were written by the apostles to various churches and individuals. These were also written by eyewitnesses--Paul, Peter, John, James. Their testimonies provided bedrock confidence to the hearers that their experiences were authentic. Peter, for example, reminded his readers that the Apostles of Jesus “did not follow cleverly invented stories” but were “eyewitnesses of His majesty” (2 Peter 1:16). In the same way, John wrote “what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we beheld and our hands handled, concerning the Word of Life,” (1 John 1:1), that is, Jesus. Many New Testament authors later died for refusing to deny their testimonies, illustrating their certainty that what they wrote was the truth.

And the New Testament is not without secular support. Historians--some of them even enemies of Christianity--have confirmed many of the events, people, places, and customs chronicled in the New Testament. Historians like Flavius Josephus (before 100 AD), Suetonius (110 AD), the Roman governor Pliny the Younger (110 AD), and Tacitus (120 AD), all affirm historical New Testament references. Early church leaders such as Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Clement of Rome--all writing before 250 AD--also shed light on the New Testament’s historical accuracy. All this, as it says in Luke, “so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.”

3. ITS FULFILLED PROPHECIES

The scriptures also contain what are called prophecies, predictions that have come true, that validate its divine origin. Unlike any other book in the world, the Bible is the only one to offer specific predictions hundreds of years in advance of their literal fulfillment. The scriptures contain 1,817 individual prophecies, whereas there are no fulfilled prophecies in the Koran, in the Hindu Vedas or the Bhagavad-Gita, in the sayings of Buddha or Confucius, in the Book of Mormon, or anywhere else.

Nor are there any prophecies concerning the coming of Buddha, Krishna, Mohammed, Zoroaster, Confucius, Joseph Smith, or any other founder or leader of a world religion. The Jewish Messiah is unique in this respect. His coming was foretold in dozens of specific prophecies which were fulfilled to the minutest detail in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. These prophecies told when, where, and how He would be born (Daniel 9:25, Micah 5:2; Isaiah 7:14), and how He would suffer for the sins of the world yet rise again (Isaiah 52:14-53:12). It is impossible that these prophets had any idea of what was going to happen some 500 years later, except that God inspired their writing!

“For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, ‘My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure’”
- Isaiah 46:9-10

- Which of these three evidences is the most compelling to you personally?
- What affect does it have on you, knowing that the scriptures were written by eyewitnesses?
- What affect does it have on you, that many of the New Testament writers were killed for their testimony?

~ Refer to Discussion Questions ~

HOW WE GOT THE NEW TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES

We regard the entirety of Scripture as being God’s word, inerrant and true, and affirm the central truths of the historic orthodox Christian faith. Therefore, we value the scriptures as the sole basis of our beliefs, and as the supreme and final authority in faith and in life. - H2O Statement of Faith

Everyone has probably heard the myth of how we got the Bible. Somewhere around the Middle Ages, some monks or church leaders met, spread all the potential New Testament books on a table, and then voted. Thus, we decided upon the Bible, after much debate, picking some books, rejecting others, hundreds of years after they were written. The view that most people have of the Bible is pretty well summed up by Dan Brown in *The Da Vinci Code*. In it, historian Leigh Teabing states: “The Bible is a product of man, my dear. Not of God. The Bible did not fall magically from the clouds. Man created it as a historical record of

tumultuous times, and it has evolved through countless translations, additions, and revisions. History has never had a definitive version of the book” (page 231). The saying, “So Dark the Con of Man,” was used in this movie as a direct attack on the trustworthiness of the scriptures.

However, Dan Brown’s allegation against scripture is a sheer myth! And it is a myth which leads to questioning the scriptures as the word of God. How we got the scriptures is a complex, yet beautiful process, and should increase our confidence in scripture, not decrease it.

1. THE APOSTOLIC WRITINGS

The apostles wrote the gospels and epistles (letters) from around 45 A.D. to 95 A.D. to the churches that they were leading. Contrary to the thinking of many in our culture, all the scriptures were written in the first century, NOT hundreds of years after the events! Early on, the apostolic writings were regarded as holy scripture. For example, notice how Peter refers to Paul’s writings as scripture:

“For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, ‘My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure’”
Isaiah 46:9-10

These apostolic writings were used in worship, showing the Christian communities' reverence for them as scripture also. Justin Martyr, around 150 A.D., writes, "On the day called Sunday, all who live in the city or country gather together in one place. There, the memoirs of the apostles or the writing of the prophets are read for as long as time permits. When the reader is finished, the presiding brother verbally instructs us and urges us to imitate the good things that were read to us. Next we all rise together and pray."

The apostolic writings were regarded as holy scripture.

2. LOCAL CANONS

Paul's thirteen letters were organized as a collection called The Apostle, as these letters were uniformly accepted, copied, and shared among the churches. Scholar F.F. Bruce states: "What is important is this: from the early second century onward Paul's letters circulated not singularly but as a collection." In like manner, the four gospels were organized as a collection called The Gospel. This shows that they were universally accepted.

The Apostle and The Gospel were copied and shared by local churches, as well as the rest of what would become the New Testament. Some of these apostolic writings, such as 1 Peter, gained great popularity, since they were much longer and much more useful to the churches. Other apostolic writings were shorter, less useful, and limited to only a certain region of churches. 3 John, for example, is written to a single individual, Gaius, and is only 15 verses long. Its usefulness to other churches was limited and as it was written to one person, this letter was not shared as much by the churches.

The apostles were in different regions of the world, consequently the regions of churches where each apostle lived received different writings. The gospel of Matthew and the book of James were written in Palestine, Mark and Romans were written for the Christians in Rome, John's gospel and epistles, as well as the rest of the Pauline epistles were written in Asia Minor. Therefore, the churches in Asia Minor were much more likely to get a copy of 3 John than the church at Rome until these books were copied and spread around, a process which depended somewhat on their perceived helpfulness to the churches

Therefore, the local church developed collections, called "canons," that varied somewhat in which writings they had. Since Peter ministered predominantly to the Jews and Paul ministered predominantly to the Gentiles, it makes sense that the Church of Jerusalem, being largely Jewish, would deem 2 Peter as more valuable than the church of Thessalonica, which had been started by Paul.

Therefore, the church at Jerusalem might have ended up with a canon that included the Gospel, the Apostle, the writings of Peter and all 3 of John's letters. The church at Thessalonica might have ended up with a canon that included The Gospel, The Apostle, 1 Peter but not 2 Peter, and 1 & 2 John (but not 3 John).

Due to The Apostle and The Gospel being collections, local church canons had a great degree of uniformity, with minor differences based on the location of the church, as we've already discussed. The fact that these seventeen books were organized as collections before 100 A.D. makes the idea that the scriptures needed to be voted on to be approved by the church an allegation of ignorance.

3. THE EFFECT OF PERSECUTION

Since the church was persecuted for much of the first three hundred years, the church, at times, faced attempts to destroy all of their scriptures. For example, Diocletian called for the destruction of the Christians' sacred texts in 303 A.D., and Eusebius, a pastor, was imprisoned in this final attempt to blot out Christianity. For 10 years, the New Testament scriptures were hunted down by the Roman Empire, and publicly burned in the market places. It became important to finish the task of official canonization because it was important to know which scriptures were worth dying for. Eusebius, therefore, organized all the writings into 4 categories:

Category 1 - Universally accepted writings: these were books for which there was no dispute, such as the 4 gospels and Paul's 13 letters.

Category 2 - Disputed writings: these were books that were disputed, but familiar to the people of the church. As previously discussed, due to the slight differences in local canonization, some writings were not used by certain regions of churches, and therefore, they needed confirmation about books that other churches had used for centuries; James, 2 Peter, 2 & 3 John, Jude all fall into this category.

Category 3 - Spurious works: these are books that were helpful writings, but not to be considered for the canon, because they had not been written by an apostle; they were simply helpful writing, such as the Shepherd of Hermas.

Category 4 - Heretical, rejected books: these are books like the Gospel of Thomas that the church had always regarded as false.

The Edict of Milan (313 A.D.), under Constantine, for the most part ended the age of persecution, legalizing Christianity. In addition, Constantine financed 50 copies of the scriptures to be produced for use in Constantinople. Eusebius oversaw this project. While the exact contents of these Bibles are not certain, it is presumed that these copies contained the 27 books of the final New Testament canon.

4. FINAL CANONIZATION

The final steps of canonization were taken in the last half of the fourth century when the church leaders gathered together to make official what had been in practice for centuries and to come to unity on a few books that were disputed to some degree. The synods of Hippo (393 A.D.) and Carthage (397 A.D.) both affirmed this list of twenty-seven. However, it is important to realize these councils did not give authority to the scriptures; the councils merely recognized the inherent authority found in the scriptures, authority that the church had recognized for centuries.

- *How has this study changed your understanding of how we got the scriptures?*
- *Does this information increase or decrease your confidence in scripture?*
- *How would you summarize this process in 2-3 minutes?*
- *Again, of all that we've covered so far, what do you find yourself wanting to push back against, thinking, "I'm not so sure about that."*

SUMMARY

The apostles wrote the scriptures under the influence of the Holy Spirit. These scriptures were then guarded with their lives! Men and women died protecting the very scriptures we have today, so that "the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" would be the possession of all future generations, that all could discover the treasures of God's love found within its pages.

ACTION POINT

Share with a friend or a person in this class how the scriptures became the New Testament in your own words.