

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, February 11, 2015 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

ALL ABOUT THE BIBLE
How We Got the Bible – Transmission
2 Timothy 3:16-17, 2 Peter 1:19-21

*“¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the servant of God^[a] may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”
- 2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NIV)*

“¹⁹ We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, 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. ²⁰ Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation of things. ²¹ For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” – 2 Peter 1:19-21 (NIV)

FOR REVIEW

Let’s review just a little bit where we have been in our study “All About the Bible.” This study is primarily concerned with how we got the Bible, is it reliable and how to get the most out of it. We began our study by look at what the Bible says about the itself. You know... the claims that the Bible makes about itself. Our two key text for what the Bible claims about itself and the key texts for our study are:

2 Key Bible Texts for What the Bible Claims for Itself:

1. **2 Timothy 3:16-17** – Claims that the Bible is inspired by God and is profitable for us.
2. **2 Peter 1:19-21** – Claims that the Bible came from God and goes a step further in tell us how men got it from God. Namely that man got it straight from God as *“they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”*

Observation: *Based on these two verses we must affirm that at some point our faith in the claims of the Bible must be relied upon for the ultimate acceptance and believe in the Bible as the Word of God. The Bible claim it and therefore we must choose to either believe it by faith and place the full force of our being on that claim or reject it. From this point the study of how we got the Bible and how it has been preserved by God for us becomes based solely on our understanding of what the Bible says about itself and the external evidences that point to and reinforce those claims. A major point to understand in a study like this is that it may not answer all your questions, may leave you feeling a bit vulnerable about the reliability of the Bible, and may leave you with more questions. That is why faith must be our beginning place*

in accepting God's Word as itself. With that said there is more external evidence that points to the Bible's claims about itself, its reliability and trustworthiness and authenticity, and the fact that it is the Word of God as it claims... there is more evidence of these things than there is for any other piece of literature or sacred writing every produced by man.

Now we began our study, a couple of weeks ago by looking at a diagram/chart of how the Bible came from God to us. Here is a simplified version of it.

GOD: Revelation → Inspiration → ANCIENT MAN: Transmission → Canonicity → MODERN MAN: Textual Criticism → Translation → ME: Interpretation → Illumination → Application

So far we have covered the first two... revelation and inspiration. For review, and before we go on lets define again these first two steps on the way the Bible came to us just for clarification:

First Two Steps on How God's Word Came to US:

- 1. Revelation** – Revelation is God communicating to man what He wants us to know (Hebrews 1:1). We said there are two type of revelation by which God reveals Himself to us: (1) General Revelation, and (2) Special Revelation. General revelation is the “general” ways that God may be known and seen... primarily through what He has made or His creation and created order of things. Special revelation is a “special” way God has chosen to reveal Himself to us. The Bible is God's “special revelation” of Himself to us.
- 2. Inspiration** – Inspiration is God superintending human writers to compose and record His revelation to mankind (2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Peter 1:21). We looked at several different theories of the inspiration of the Bible (the Neo-Orthodox view – the Bible is not the Word of God, but God can use them to speak to individuals, denies the Bible as the Word of God, rather the Bible is a witness to God; the Dictation method – sees God as the author of Scripture and the individuals human agents as secretaries taking dictation; Limited inspiration – sees Scripture as primarily the work of man therefore has errors with limited inspiration from God; Plenary Verbal inspiration – every single word in the Bible is the very word of God... plenary means complete or full, verbal – means the very words of Scripture... this is the traditional and orthodox view of the inspiration of Scripture from most Christians). What Scripture claims for itself in 2 Tim. 3:16 and 2 Pet. 1:21 supports the “plenary verbal inspiration” of Scripture. Men spoke (or wrote) ***“as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (God).”***

THE QUESTION OF TRANSMISSION

The next step in the process of how God's Word, the Bible, came to us is the subject of “transmission” or the transmission of Scripture, the Bible to man. That is, how was it accurately written down or copied so that what we have today is reliable. How did it get from God's mouth to paper, so-to-speak. Let's begin by defining what we mean by “transmission” more clearly.

A Definition of Biblical Transmission:

“Transmission is the ancient process of accurately copying Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek scriptures for successive generations.”

The term “transmission” describes the ancient process of copying Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek manuscripts to preserve them for future generation and to distribute them for greater use. Since there were no copy machines, the texts had to be copied by hand. In this way they were “transmitted.”

So that begs the question, is the Bible which I own and read today the real Bible? Or has it been distorted? How can I believe the Bible if I do not even know if it is accurate? Nowadays, there are scores of English versions of the Bible. Many people wonder how accurate these Bibles are. When people ask about the accuracy of the Bible, there are two different issues they might have in mind:

2 Important Questions of Transmission

- 1. Is the Bible really from God?** – While this question also deals with the two topics we have already covered, revelation and inspiration, it is also an important question that subject of the transmission of the Bible may help us to answer. Remember that according to our key text, **2 Timothy 3:16-17**, “¹⁶*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,* ¹⁷*so that the servant of God^[a] may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*”, the Bible make the claim of itself that it is from God. That is what the phrase “God-breathed” or “given by inspiration of God” (the Greek word “theopneustos” = God-breathed) means.
- 2. Has the Bible been accurately preserved over the centuries?**

This study examines the question of how the text of the Bible has been copied and preserved over the centuries. This is what is commonly known as “transmission” of the Bible.

This study will primarily focuses on the second question, trying to figure out how the Bible has been passed down from the original form to the texts used today for modern translations. Specifically, it’s the accuracy of the transmission, not the translation. We will be looking at that one in a future study.

THE PROBLEM OF TRANSMISSION

Why is this even an issue? What is the problem with the subject of transmission!

- 1. The Biblical Languages** - Besides the fact that the original Bible and modern Bibles are in different languages poses something of a problem. We know the Bible was originally written in three language; Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. Why is this a problem with transmission? We for us today we must recognize that the Bible was originally transmitted in those three ancient languages and get those correctly and properly translated into our language become something of a problem. This issue will be discussed further in the study under the subjects of both “translation” and “interpretation.” Suffice it to say that the Bible was originally transmitted in language that if foreign to most.
- 2. The Extinct Nature of the Original Manuscripts** – Despite what may believe and what is often stated there is not an existing original manuscript of the Bible. This is one of the major problems... in that the original manuscripts don't exist anymore. So we can't compare modern Bible versions directly to the originals... they simply don't exist.

- 3. The Date of Manuscript Evidence** - The manuscripts which we do have are not the original manuscripts. As already stated, they do not exist. To explain, the oldest manuscripts of the Old Testament go back to 250 BC. Yet, the Old Testament was being written over a period of time long before that, from 1400-400 BC. That's a long time, especially for the earliest books – nearly 1200 years between original and copy. Again, we have not original manuscript of the Bible... what is left are copies of the original Bible manuscripts, and these do not all match each other perfectly. This fact has led many people to doubt the accuracy of the Bible's transmission. However, we shouldn't be too hasty and conclude that an accurate biblical text is a lost cause. This is the subject of transmission and how God has perfectly preserved His Word.

COPYING THE BIBLE

Let's first look at exactly how Jewish and Christian scribes over the centuries did their job and what the scholars who study this area have learned about the surviving Bible manuscripts. The term "transmission" really describes the ancient process of copying Hebrew and Greek manuscripts to preserve them for future generation and to distribute them for greater use. Since there were no copy machines, the texts had to be copied by hand. In this way they were "transmitted."

The original writings of scripture were done on a variety of materials. This may alert us to some of the problem with the original manuscripts and why they don't exist and why there are other later documents that do.

3 Original Material and Tools With Which the Bible Was Written (Transmitted):

1. **Stone** – Exodus 24:12; Deuteronomy 5:22; Joshua 8:31-32
2. **Papyrus** – Papyrus was made by pressing and gluing two layers of split papyrus reeds to form a sheet. This is probably what is mentioned in 2 John 12 ("paper") and Revelation 5:1 ("scroll/book")
3. **Animal skins** - There were three primary types of animal skins used for writing; (1) vellum – calf or antelope, (2) parchment – sheep or goat, and (3) leather – cow or bull. The use of parchment is actually mentioned in 2 Timothy 4:13.
4. **Various writing tools** - To inscribe on these materials a variety of tools were used, including stylus, chisel, pen and ink.

Some of this may answer the question of why we don't have the original copies which were penned by the Bible writers? A number of factors caused the disappearance or destruction of ancient manuscripts.

4 Problems Arising From These Material:

1. **Decay** – They were normally written on papyri (ancient paper-like material) or animal skins. Over time, these materials would decay and no longer be readable.
2. **Age and Use** - Simply being used for many years could also ruin the manuscripts.
3. **Weather/Climate Conditions** - In many areas of the world, humidity destroyed them. The only reason we have some manuscripts from as far back as 250 BCE is that they were found in desert areas with very low humidity.
4. **War** - In times of war manuscripts were sometimes destroyed as part of the pillaging.

NOTE: The Bible is not unique in this aspect – the earliest copies of other ancient writings are missing for similar reasons.

The copying process of the Old Testament (originally written in Hebrew and some Aramaic)

1. **Early copying** - At first, during the Old Testament era, the only copies of the scriptures were kept at the temple (At first only the 1st 5 books – the Law). For many years, even the copies of the Law were lost, until they were found during Josiah's reign ([2 Kings 22:8-23:3](#)). As the books of history (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, etc.), the books of poetry (Job, Psalms, etc.) and the prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc.) were written and gathered together, scribes began to copy the scriptures for use in various synagogues and for private purchase and study.
2. **The Masoretes** - The Masoretic scribes (A.D. 500-1000) in charge of the Old Testament manuscript copying used a very meticulous system of transcription and had a deep reverence for the text. God used their almost obsessive respect for the text to preserve the text's accuracy. They had specific rules on the type of ink and the quality and size of parchment sheets. No individual letter could be written down without having looked back at the copy in front of them. The scribe could not write God's name with a newly dipped pen (lest it blotch) and even if the king should address him, while writing God's name, he should take no notice of him. They were so meticulous that they counted all the paragraphs, words and even letters, so they could know by counting, if they had done it perfectly. They knew the middle letter of each book so they could count back and see if they had missed anything.

Some Existing Old Testament Manuscripts:

1. **Masoretic manuscripts** - We actually have very few complete or nearly complete Old Testament manuscripts existing today. There are 4 or 5 really significant Masoretic manuscripts that are the basis of the best Hebrew Bible available today. These copies were made between about A.D. 900 and A.D. 1000 by the Masoretes.
2. **The Septuagint evidence** – The Septuagint is a translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into the Greek language which was made in the 2nd or 3rd century B.C. There are about 300 existing copies of the Septuagint. This was the common Hebrew Bible used and quoted by Jesus and the apostles (who lived in a Greek culture, of course). Although written in Greek, scholars can generally determine what Hebrew words were being translated in the Septuagint. It provides evidence that the Hebrew Bibles were copied extremely well for all the years between the Septuagint translation (2nd/3rd century B.C.) and our best existing Hebrew copies (A.D. 900-1000).
3. **The Dead Sea Scrolls** - Since the oldest complete copy of a Hebrew Old Testament in existence is dated about A.D. 1000, that's a long time after the originals were written (1450-400 B.C.). But there are portions that date back farther. Most significant are the Dead Sea Scrolls, which were discovered in caves in 1947 by an Arabian shepherd boy. These well-preserved Hebrew text fragments date back to 100 B.C. They include many Bible portions, including some complete books. Their value to the credibility of our Bible is that amazingly, there is virtual agreement between these Hebrew texts and the ones dated 1,100 years later! This proves how accurately the scribes copied for all those years. Example of Isaiah in the Dead Sea Scrolls: Through all the years of copying, the text of Isaiah remained virtually identical. The evidence shows that our Old Testaments today are extremely accurate reflections of the original manuscripts.

The copying process of the New Testament (originally written in Greek and some Aramaic)

2 Important Facts About Greek Manuscripts:

- 1. Writing Materials** - The New Testament books were originally written in papyrus sheets (plant material – see above) or parchment (animal skin – see above).
- 2. Writing Mechanics** - Writing at that time was done all in capital letters with no punctuation or division between words (uncial). So all the copies from the 1st to about the 6th century A.D. were done that way. This form is sometimes responsible for confusion by Greek textual scholars today who need to determine where one word stops and the next begins. By the 7th or 8th centuries, Greek manuscripts were put into small letters with punctuation, word, and paragraph divisions (miniscule). Both types of ancient manuscripts exist today.

The reliability of Greek manuscripts:

The reliability of the New Testament Greek texts is even more certain than the Old Testament texts. The New Testament was written between A.D. 45 – A.D. 90. Some fragments of Greek texts exist that date back to A.D. 120 and A.D. 150. That's only 35-100 years after the originals that Paul, John, Luke and others wrote! Another big help to Greek textual scholars is the fact that there are 4,000-5,000 New Testament Greek manuscripts (partial or complete) existing. By comparing these many copies, scholars can weed out many possible copying mistakes.

2 Important Factors Confirming Greek New Testament Manuscripts: So there are two factors confirming that the Greek texts, available to scholars today, are very accurate reflections of the original writing.

- 1. Date of the Copies** - We have copies dated closely to the time of the original writing.
- 2. Number of Copies** - We have lots of copies... around 4,000 to 5,000

The following chart compares the New Testament manuscript evidence with other Greek literature (considered accurate by historians) from the same era.

Manuscript	Date of Oldest Manuscript Existing	Copies
Plato	1,200 years later	7
Caesar	900 years later	10
Herodotus	1,300 years later	8
Aristotle	1,400 years later	5
New Testament	Only 35-100 years later	4,000-50000