

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, March 11, 2026 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

HOW WE GOT THE BIBLE

How We Got the Bible – Textual Criticism, Translation & Interpretation *2 Timothy 3:16-17, 2 Peter 1:19-21*

Our key passage for our study has been *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 may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”* This is an important passage that tells us where God’s Word came from (God) and what it does (“... it is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness”). Scripture make this internal claim about itself, but the external evidence confirms and validates these claims. Peter even tell us in *2 Peter 1:19-21*, our other key text for this study, that God’s Word is “completely reliable. *“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)*

So far in our study on how God’s Word came to us we have looked at God’s part in our receiving God’s Word. We’ve talked about how we could not know God apart from Him revealing Himself to us, so we dug into God’s revelation of himself and His inspiration of man to begin to record what God revealed. Then we talked about the transmission of what God had inspired, the writing down of what was revealed. Last time we were together we talked about canonicity, the canon of Scripture, and how the precise 66 books that make up our Bible came to be recognized as the inspired Word of God. A few key take away from last week’s study that are very important to remember are:

Key Takeaways on the Canon of Scripture:

- (1) **The canon is closed** – There is no new revelation or books being added to the Bible. It's a closed canon.
- (2) **The writing of Scripture were canonical the moment they were written** – That is Scripture was Scripture the moment the pen touched the parchment, the moment God spoke it (revealed it) and inspired man to write it down. Technically man did not determine what was “canonical,” God did.
- (3) **The basis of Christianity is found in the authority of Scripture** - If we cannot identify what Scripture is, then we cannot properly distinguish any theological truth from error.

In this study we want to move pretty quickly through the next several steps of how God's Word came to us. This study will talk about our part in receiving God's Word and what we do with it. In this study will look briefly at textual criticism, translation and interpretation.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

Someone has written;

It's not enough to own a Bible, you have to open it.

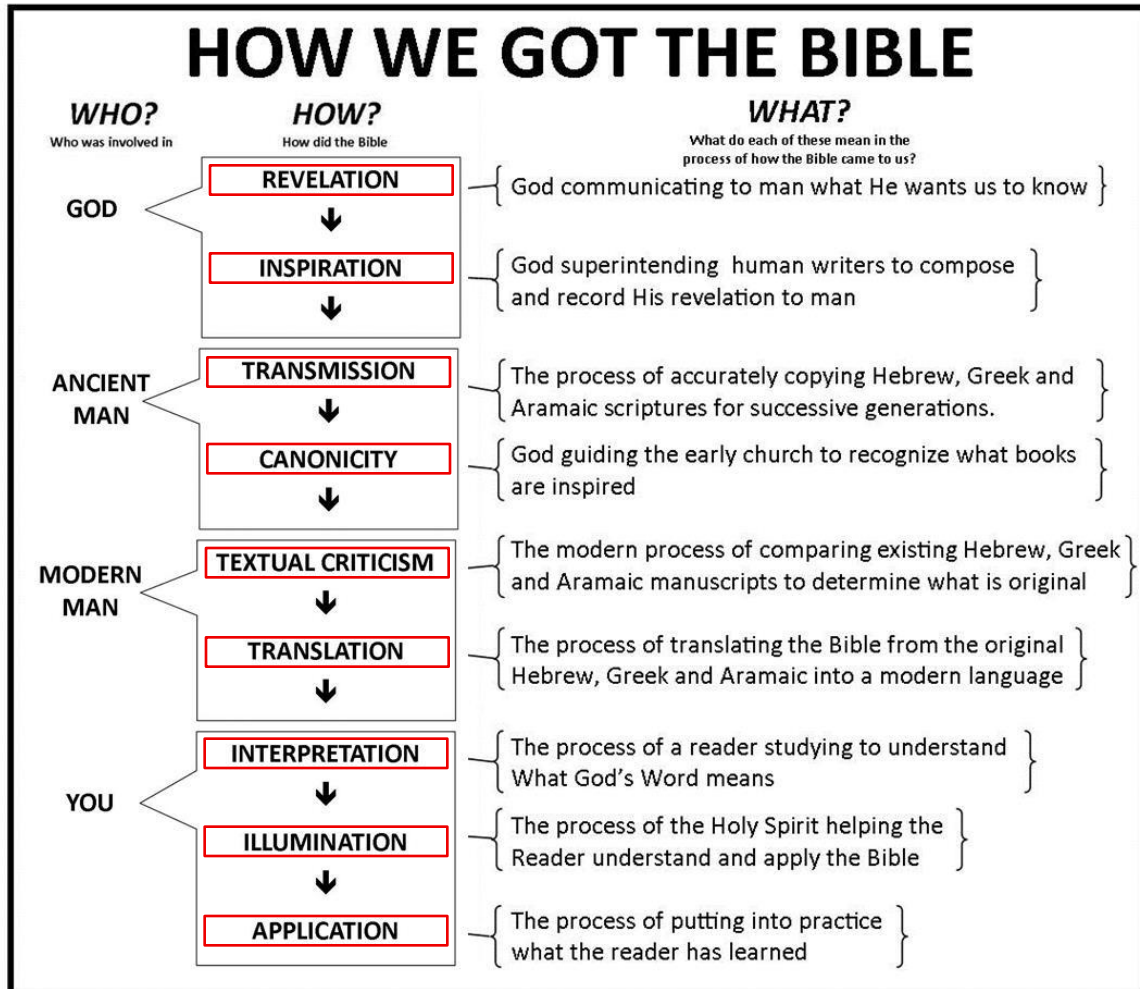
It's not enough to open your Bible, you have to read it.

It's not enough to read your Bible, you have to study it.

It's not enough to study your Bible, you have to apply it.

It's not enough to apply the Bible, you have to live it.

Do you think this reflects how “most” people approach God's Word? Why or why not? What do you think is being said here? Why is this so important? Why do you think more people don't approach God's Word this way?



Again, in this study we want to briefly take a look at our part in receiving and putting into practice Gods' Word. We are going to look briefly at textual criticism, translation and interpretation. Let's begin with a quick look at "textual criticism."

A LOOK AT TEXTUAL CRITICISM

"Textual Criticism" has as its intended purpose to help us perhaps answer a few important questions regarding the Bible

Questions that Textual Criticism May Help Us Answer:

1. If the "original manuscripts" don't exist, how do we know for certain what they said? – By the science of textual criticism we are able to arrive at the original manuscripts actual words with certainty.
2. How do we know for certain that the Bible we are reading today hasn't been changed or altered in some way?

3. How can we be certain that the original wording of Scripture hasn't been lost through hundreds and thousands of years of translation?

WHAT IS TEXTUAL CRITICISM? WHY IS THE TEXTUAL CRITICISM OF THE BIBLE NECESSARY?

Today, a book is printed from a text that has been written by the author. The work is produced under the supervision of that author. Consequently, we can be confident that the printed form of the work accurately represents the author's original writing. This, however, is not the case with works written before the invention of printing in the fifteenth century. A number of important points need to be made...

Important Points in Understanding Textual Criticism:

(1) The originals of most ancient writing have been lost –

2 Important Words in the Discussion:

1. Manuscripts / What is a manuscript? = Handwritten documents - Before the fifteenth century, all books were produced by hand. Handwritten documents are called manuscripts (abbreviated mss.). In fact, the word, "manuscript" comes from the Latin word meaning, "something that has been written by hand."
2. Autographs / What is an autograph? = The originals of ancient works - With rare exceptions, the originals of ancient works (also called the autographs) have been lost. The only things that have survived are manuscript copies of ancient works. The texts that have survived are copies separated from the autographs by hundreds and in some cases, thousands of years.

Before we can begin to interpret these works, we must first of all determine what they originally said.

(2) Textual Criticism is the art and science of recovering an ancient document -

The science of attempting to reconstruct the text of documents is known as "textual criticism."

- The person who practices textual criticism is known as a textual critic.
- While the word, "criticism" usually carries the idea of finding fault with something, this is not the case here. Rather, the term is used with the idea of weighing and evaluating the available evidence to come up with the original wording of a text.
- Textual criticism collects and examines the evidence about written works in an attempt to recover the original text.
- Therefore, textual criticism is not criticizing the Bible.

- Because no originals exist of the sixty-six books of the Bible, textual criticism must be applied to Scripture to reconstruct the true text.

(3) There are **two extremes** with respect to **Textual Criticism of the Bible** - When we look at the subject of the textual criticism of the Bible, we find two extreme positions that are sometimes held.

2 Faulty Extreme Position in Looking at Textual Criticism:

1. **Textual Criticism is not needed** - One position holds that there is no need for any textual criticism. There are those who do not believe that any textual criticism should be applied to Scripture. They argue that God has preserved His Word intact through certain Greek and Hebrew manuscripts. These manuscripts should be the basis of every translation that is made into another language. No other manuscripts should be consulted except these certain ones that have been “providentially preserved.” *This position will usually be held by people who have a very, maybe even ultra conservative view (fundamentalist) of the Bible*
2. **There is no hope of finding the original text** - While the other position believes there is no hope of finding the original text. On the other hand, there is the position that it is not possible to recover the original text of Scripture. It is argued that the best we can do is to recover the latest edition of the biblical books that was edited by others than those who wrote the original. *Those who hold this position will be mostly held by those who have a very liberal attitude toward Scripture*

Each of these positions is incorrect.. neither of these positions is the correct one. Textual criticism must be practiced on the biblical books because there is no one manuscript, or group of manuscripts, that perfectly preserve the original reading. Yet, we do believe that it is possible to discover what the authors originally wrote. There is no need to assume that the text was changed to such a degree that we no longer have the authors’ original words. The original text can be recovered through the science of textual criticism.

A Definition of Textual Criticism: *Textual criticism is a method used to determine what the original manuscripts of the Bible said.*

What is “textual criticism”? Simply stated, textual criticism is a method used to determine what the original manuscripts of the Bible said. There are several very important parts to that definition that help us to understand exactly what textual criticism does and why it’s important.

3 Important Parts to the Definition of Textual Criticism:

1. **The problem... “Original Manuscripts”** - Here is the definition again of textual criticism, “Textual criticism is a method used to determine what the original manuscripts of the Bible said.” Therein lies the problem that textual criticism seeks to solve. The original manuscripts of the Bible are either lost, hidden, or no longer in existence. We don’t have them and that is the problem that textual criticism seeks to solve or at least help us with.
2. **The process... “Determine”** - Here is the definition again of textual criticism, “*Textual criticism is a method used to determine what the original manuscripts of the Bible said.*” What we do have is tens of thousands of copies of those original manuscripts dating from the 1st to the 15th centuries A.D. (for the New Testament) and dating from the 4th century B.C. to the 15th century A.D. (for the Old Testament). In these manuscripts, there are many minor and a few somewhat major differences. Textual criticism takes us through a process of “determining” from all those copies and fragments what the original text actually said with assurance or certainty.
3. **The procedure... “Method”** – To do this there is a method, and that method is called “textual criticism.” Many actually refer to “textual criticism” as a science of research. It is indeed a very technical research science that takes place to determine with certainty what the original text of the Bible said. This method called “textual criticism” is very important because it helps us to know that what we have in the Bible today is actually what it claim to be... the actual inspired Word of God as He revealed it to us.

What exactly does this method of “textual criticism” look like? How is it done? Here is what we are going to do to help us begin to develop an understanding of how textual criticism works. I am going to give you the three (3) methods of textual criticism with a brief description of each. Then we are going to take an actual vote to see which method you actually feel makes the most sense and would most help us arrive at what the original manuscript of the Bible said. Then we will take a deeper look at what method of textual criticism is actually used for what translation and which one today is considered the most reliable for helping us arrive at the original manuscript.

3 Methods of Textual Criticism: There are three primary methods to textual criticism...

1. **The Textus Receptus** - The first is called the Textus Receptus. The Textus Receptus is more than just a method of textual criticism. It was a manuscript of

the Bible that was compiled by a man named Erasmus in the 1500s A.D. He took the limited number of manuscripts he had access to and compiled them into what eventually became known as the Textus Receptus. **The Textus Receptus is a critical Greek text of the New Testament. It serves as the foundational manuscript for many Protestant translations, notably the King James Version (KJV) and the New King James Version (NKJV). The term "Textus Receptus" translates to "Received Text" in Latin, and it refers to a series of printed Greek New Testament texts that began with Erasmus's edition in 1516. The Textus Receptus is the textual basis behind the King James Version and New King James Version.**

2. **The Majority Text Method** - A second method is known as the Majority Text. The Majority Text takes all of the manuscripts that are available today, compares the differences, and chooses the most likely correct reading based on which reading occurs the most. For example, if 748 manuscripts read "he said" and 1429 manuscripts read "they said" - the Majority Text will go with "they said" as the most likely original reading. *There are no major Bible translations that are based on the Majority Text.*
3. **The Critical or Eclectic Text Method** - The third method is known as the critical or eclectic method. The eclectic method takes an "eclectic" approach and involves considering external and internal evidences for determining the most likely original text. External evidence makes us ask these questions: in how many manuscripts does the reading occur? what are the dates for these manuscripts? in what region of the world were these manuscripts found? Internal evidence prompts these questions: what could have caused these varying readings? which reading can possibly explain the origin of the other readings? *The New International Version, New American Standard, New Living Translation, and most other Bible translations use the Eclectic Text.*

How have these methods affected our Bible today? Which method was used in translating the Bible I read? These methods actually begin to help us formulate different translations that we have today and how they work and what they say?

3 Methods of Textual Criticism and the Bible Translations Based in Them:

1. **Textus Receptus = King James and New King James** – The King James Version and the New King James Version which is simply a modernized translation based off of the King James Version both use the Textus Receptus as its method of textual criticism to determine what the original manuscripts said. *What do you think might be the problem with this?*
2. **The Majority Text Method = World English Bible, Hebrews Names Version, Green's Literal Translation** – When the methods are first described to someone,

the person typically picks the Majority Text as the method that should be used. It is essentially the "majority rules" and the "democratic" method, and it seems on the surface to make the most sense to the most people because if most of the manuscripts and fragments say it one way surely that must be what it said. Right? However, there are virtually no translations of the Bible based on this method... at least not any well-known translation, only a few obscure and relatively unknown translations use this method! *Why do you think that might be the case?*

3. **The Critical or Eclectic Text Method = English Standard Version, New International Version, New Revised Standard Version, New American Standard, New Living Translation (most modern translations)** – Some consider this the most reliable and surest method of textual criticism, however, this could be questioned given who is in charge of the textual criticism. This is the method that virtually all of our “modern” translations today use... the New International Version, the New American Standard Bible, the English Standard Version, the New Living Translation.

THE SITUATION WITH THE TEXT OF THE OLD TESTAMENT AND NEW TESTAMENT

The great majority of the Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew. There were a few parts written in Aramaic, a language similar to Hebrew. The Aramaic sections of the Old Testament are found in [Daniel 2:4-7:28](#), [Ezra 4:8-6:18](#); [7:12-26](#); and one verse in ([Jeremiah 10:11](#)). The remainder was written in the Hebrew language. Biblical Hebrew is also known as “classical Hebrew.” **It is interesting to note that the term, “Hebrew” (in reference to the language) is not found in the Old Testament to describe the language that was spoken by the people.** Instead, we have other designations...

2 Designations for Hebrew in the Old Testament:

- (1) **The language of Canaan** – Isaiah calls it the language of Canaan. We read in Isaiah 19:18, *“⁸ In that day five cities in the land of Egypt will speak the language of Canaan and swear by the Lord of hosts; one will be called the City of Destruction.”* Here Hebrew is called *“the language of Canaan”*
- (2) **The language of Judah** - In the Book of Nehemiah the Hebrew language is called “the language of Judah.” Scripture says in [Nehemiah 13:24](#), *“²⁴ And half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and could not speak the language of Judah, but spoke according to the language of one or the other people.”*

Whatever we call it; Hebrew, the language of Canaan or the language of Judah; this is the language in which God chose to reveal His Word to humanity before the coming of Jesus Christ, the long-awaited Messiah, to the earth.

The Necessity of Old Testament Textual Criticism

The various books of the Old Testament were written from approximately 1400 B.C. to 400 B.C. As can be expected with books written so long ago, the originals have long since vanished. In order to reconstruct what the Old Testament text originally said, we have to apply the principles of textual criticism. We have no other choice. Therefore, textual criticism for the Old Testament is necessary for several reasons...

3 Reasons Textual Criticism is Necessary for the Old Testament:

- (1) **Date/Age of text** - The first book of the Old Testament was written some 3,400 years ago and the last one some 2,400 years ago. Therefore, the writing of the Old Testament encompassed approximately 1,000 years
- (2) **Disappearance/Decaying of text** - The originals of each book have long since vanished
- (3) **Differing/Variations of manuscripts** - The copies that we have differ in some respects. No two manuscripts read exactly alike, though many find agreement

Therefore, the textual critic must do his work to reconstruct the text

The Necessity of New Testament Textual Criticism

In the first century, Greek was the international language. The books of the New Testament were originally written in the common Greek of the day called *koine*. They were composed from approximately A.D. 50 to 90. **Today, we do not possess the autographs (originals) of the various New Testament books.** As is true with the Old Testament, we are dependent upon copies and copies of copies to reconstruct the text. Again, we must apply the science of textual criticism to the New Testament to discover the original wording of the text. Therefore, textual criticism of the New Testament is also necessary for three basic reasons...

3 Reasons Textual Criticism is Necessary for the New Testament:

- (1) **No original autographs** - We do not possess any of the original writings of the New Testament. Like the Old Testament, we are dependent upon copies to reconstruct the text
- (2) **Discrepancies in manuscripts** - The copies of the New Testament manuscripts we now possess differ in some respects from each other because of scribal mistakes that have crept into the text. As is true with the Old Testament, no two manuscripts are exactly alike. While the differences are mostly accidental, there are differences among the manuscripts
- (3) **Vast amounts of manuscript evidence** - In the case of the New Testament, there is an abundance of material to evaluate

Before any type of biblical interpretation can begin, we must first determine what the text originally said. Therefore, textual criticism of the Scripture is an absolute necessity.

SOME IMPORTANT OBSERVATIONS ABOUT TEXTUAL CRITICISM

There are a number of important observations that should be made about the science of textual criticism. They include the following...

5 Observations About Textual Criticism:

- (1) **Textual Criticism is not limited to the Bible** - Textual criticism is not limited to the Bible. No originals exist of any of the classical writers such as Plato, Aristotle or Euripides. Likewise, none of the original writings of the early Christians still exist, or even the original works of William Shakespeare. Therefore, textual criticism is a discipline that is used for any ancient or modern work where the originals have vanished
- (2) **The rules are the same for all written documents** - The rules by which the textual critic seeks to discover the original text of a document are the same for the Bible as they are for non-biblical documents. There are no special rules that need to be applied when attempting to reconstruct the text of Scripture. The text of the Bible is evaluated and reconstructed in the same way as we would evaluate the writings of Shakespeare. **Of course, that does not mean that the Bible and Shakespeare have the same value. The Bible is unique in the fact that it is God's sole revelation of Himself to the human race.** Yet to reconstruct the text of each document, the same principles must apply.
- (3) **Believers and unbelievers practice Textual Criticism the same way** - Textual criticism is practiced by both believers and unbelievers. While they may disagree as to the nature of the Bible, there is no disagreement when it comes to the subject/science of textual criticism. Both use the same Hebrew Old Testament and the same Greek New Testament. Both examine the same manuscripts and the same variant readings that are found in the manuscripts. When examining the text, the same rules are applied by both believers and unbelievers and the same conclusions are drawn. Therefore, the practice of textual criticism is not a battleground between believers and unbelievers
- (4) **The practice of Textual Criticism is not easy** - The practice of textual criticism is not easy. One must attempt to reconstruct a document by working backward with the evidence that still exists. Sometimes there is an abundance of evidence to help reconstruct a text, while at other times there is little evidence to follow. Whatever the case may be, reconstructing an ancient text is both an art and a

science. It is a science because there are certain rules to follow, but it is an art because these rules cannot be applied in a mechanical way

- (5) **The present text of the Bible is an accurate representation of the original -** Something has to be said about where the evidence eventually leads. ***When all the facts are in, it will be seen that the text of the Bible has been transmitted to us in a very accurate way.*** We can be confident that the Bible we read today represents what was originally written. Consequently, competent translations of Scripture are the authoritative Word of God. We can read them with confidence and rely on the promises contained within its pages. The great textual scholar of the last century, **Sir Frederic Kenyon**, put it this way, ***“The Christian can take the whole Bible in his hand and say without fear or hesitation that he holds in it the true Word of God, handed down without essential loss from generation to generation throughout the centuries.”*** (Sir Frederic Kenyon, *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts*, New York, Harper and Row, 1958, p. 55) There is more. ***Even if we would adopt every possible alternative reading that is found in Hebrew and Greek manuscripts, the text would still read basically the same!*** (*Consensus of Theologically Conservative Scholarship*)

Indeed, the story of the Bible would be essentially the same, and the reader would get the same central message of who God is and what He wants from His creation. Therefore, when we put the Bible through the art and science of textual criticism, it demonstrates that God’s Word comes through loud and clear.

CONCLUSION

The absence of the original manuscripts of the Bible does not undermine its reliability, trustworthiness, and full authority of Scripture, the Bible as we know one iota. God word is secure and trustworthy... fully reliable and authoritative for multiple reasons...

3 Reasons the Absence of the Original Autographs Doesn’t Diminish the Bible:

- (1) **God’s message has been faithfully preserved through thousands of early copies** – Remember we have more manuscript evidence for the Bible than any other ancient writing by far. It’s actually 6,000 to 10

| 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 | 4,000-6,000 |

(2) **The science of textual criticism ensures we can reconstruct the originals with **high confidence**** – Both the amount of manuscript evidence and the closeness of manuscript evidence to the actual occurrence of the event(s) support the high probability of accuracy

(3) **Chiefly, the promises of God to preserve and protect His Word gives us full guarantee by faith (*that God’s Word has been perfectly preserved and is fully trust worthy*)** –

- **Isaiah 40:8, “*The grass withers and the flowers fades, but the Word of the Lord endures forever.*”**
- **Matthew 23:35, “*Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.*”**
- **1 Peter 1:25, “*The Word of the Lord remains forever. And this Word is good news that was preached to you.*”**
- **Psalm 119:89, “*Your word, Lord, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens.*”**
- **Psalm 12:6-7, “*The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. You shall keep them, O Lord, You shall preserve them from this generation forever.*”**

The loss of the original manuscripts is neither surprising nor detrimental. Through careful copying, the abundance of early manuscripts, and the discipline of textual criticism, God’s word has been faithfully transmitted across millennia. Christians can trust that the essential message of the Bible has been preserved and remains accessible, alive, and active, fulfilling the promise that God’s word endures beyond the physical page.