

## What Is the Bible

### Where Did the Bible Come From?

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#### Day 1:

How did we get the Old Testament?

There wasn't much debate about what books were considered part of the Old Testament because the Jewish people already accepted and organized those Scriptures. Leaders read them in the Temple and later in synagogues all over Israel and the Roman Empire.

But if you feel doubt about our modern leather-bound Old Testaments, what people discovered in 1946 just might settle it for you. Eric Metaxas talks about this in his video for The Curiosity Collective.

*"We live in a time where you keep hearing stuff like, 'Oh the Bible was changed in the Middle Ages by the monks,' and that we don't know what [the Bible] really says. Upon investigation, that's not true," he said.*

When local shepherds discovered the Dead Sea Scrolls in Israel in 1946, archaeologists began investigations and confirmed that these ancient scrolls of paper were Bible manuscripts.

*"[The Dead Sea Scrolls] are documents of the Old Testament that had been hidden in jars in the desert, where it's dry, where they're preserved, for two thousand years," Metaxas said. "We don't have to guess whether the monks changed it or not, let's just read it. It's letter for letter the same as it is today.*

Meaning, Let's say your grandmother made a copy of a letter your great-grandmother wrote, and your mother eventually made a copy of that copy and gave it to you. It's possible to think that your mother changed some language to make it more understandable, or left something out she didn't want you to read. But what happens if you find the copy your grandmother made and it is exactly the same as the one your mother copied? You might be more willing to believe that the copy you have matches the original. That's why, as we continue to find more and more ancient copies of the Bible, we are more and more convinced that we have the correct Bible today.

*"These manuscripts contain material now considered to be part of the Hebrew Bible. Every book is represented among the Dead Sea Scrolls, except the book of Esther. These are the oldest known copies of biblical works," according to The Leon Levy Dead Sea Scrolls Digital Library.*

## Day 2

How did we get the New Testament?

The New Testament came together a little differently and is probably the more debated section of the Bible. When the prophets like Jeremiah, Daniel, and Hosea wrote scripture, Jewish people did not tend to question if it was from God. However, New Testament writers like Paul experienced a different story. Their gospel accounts and letters were more debated when the church was agreeing on the canon of Scripture.

*“In the New Testament, it’s a little bit more of a process,”* Timothy Paul Jones said in his video, *How Was it Decided Which Books Would Be put in the Bible?* *“There was a very clear vision from the earliest stages of church history about what types of books are the books that Christians –the church– should view as authoritative.”*

After Jesus Ascended to heaven, the church would gather to read Scripture together and pray. As the gospels, Paul’s letters, and other New Testament books were written, the church would read those in gatherings as well. Justin Martyr, a Christian apologist, wrote about these gatherings in 150 A.D.

*“By this early date, the memoirs of the apostles were considered as important to the teaching of the church as the writings of the prophets,”* according to a BibleStudyTools.com article, *“Who Decided What Went into the Bible?”*

But over time, some churches didn’t like reading Hebrews, and another church didn’t like reading Revelation. There were even influencers who completely rejected the Old Testament or tried to add new prophecies. Controversies like these pushed church leaders to question and settle which books were truly inspired by God. They used a set of guidelines to recognize which books belonged in the New Testament. Lifeway’s article, *“Establishing the New Testament Canon,”* talks about three guidelines:

1. *“Apostolic Origin: The early Christians essentially asked, ‘Is this particular work under question the work of one of the apostles?’ Or, ‘If it is not the work of the apostle himself, was it produced under the supervision of and with the stamp of approval of one of the apostles?’*
2. *Recognition by the Church: If the churches at Ephesus, Jerusalem, Antioch, Rome, and Carthage, for example, accepted a book as authoritative, then chances were strong that the church as a whole would give it serious consideration for inclusion.*
3. *Apostolic Content: This criterion asked whether a book’s content agreed with the doctrine the apostles taught when they were still alive. If anything was contrary to the apostles’ actual teaching, it was considered not the Word of God.”*

These guidelines helped unify the church and the New Testament, then a few different events in the 4th century made it all official.

*“In 367 [A.D.], Athanasius, the bishop of Alexandria, wrote an Easter letter that contained all 27 books of our present New Testament. In 393 [A.D.] the Synod of Hippo affirmed our current New Testament, and in 397 [A.D.] the Council of Carthage published the same list.*

### Day 3

Who wrote the Bible?

According to Bibleinfo.com, God used 40 people to write down his words. Most of those writers didn't know each other, and they came from different backgrounds ranging from shepherds and fishermen to prophets and kings.

But really, it was God who wrote the Bible, right?

Eric Davis talks about the Bible as the inspired Word of God in his article, "What Does it Mean that the Bible Was 'Inspired?'"

*"It does not mean that Scripture is merely the product of significant human achievement. Instead, inspiration means this: God the Holy Spirit superintended the human writers of the 66 books of the Bible such that what they wrote were God's inerrant words to humanity in the original writings. In doing so, God did not violate the respective personalities, abilities, and contexts of the human authors from which they wrote. God acted upon them in a real context, with real need, to exercise his care for his people, with the result that the 66 books of the Bible are the without-error revelation of God in their original writings."*

## Day 4

What about the Apocrypha?

“Outside the Holy Land some Jews included twelve to fifteen other books as part of Scripture, what we now call the Apocrypha. (Apocrypha means “those hidden away.”) Early Christians differed over whether these extra books should be considered Scripture or not. Those nearest Palestine tended to exclude them. Those closer to Rome tended to include them.

The Apocrypha was never accepted by the Jews as Scripture, but the early church was divided on whether those books should be part of Scripture or not. The earliest Christian evidence is decidedly against viewing the Apocrypha as Scripture, but the use of the Apocrypha gradually increased in parts of the church until the time of the Reformation.

The fact that these books were included by Jerome in his Latin Vulgate translation of the Bible (completed in A.D. 404) gave support to their inclusion, even though Jerome himself said they were not “books of the canon” but merely “books of the church” that were helpful and useful for believers. The wide use of the Latin Vulgate in subsequent centuries guaranteed their continued accessibility, but many people rejected or were suspicious of these books for three reasons:

1. They had no Hebrew original behind them.
2. Their exclusion from the Jewish canon.
3. The lack of their citation in the New Testament.

We must conclude that they are merely human words, not God-breathed words like the words of Scripture:

1. They do not claim for themselves the same kind of authority as the Old Testament writings.
2. They were not regarded as God’s words by the Jewish people from whom they originated.
3. They were not considered to be Scripture by Jesus or the New Testament authors.
4. They contain teachings inconsistent with the rest of the Bible.

The Apocryphal books have value for historical and linguistic research, and they contain a number of helpful stories about the courage and faith of many Jews during the period after the Old Testament ends, but they have never been part of the Old Testament canon, and they should not be thought of as part of the Bible. Therefore, they have no binding authority for the thought or life of Christians today.

During the sixteenth-century Reformation, Martin Luther spoke strongly against the Apocrypha. In reaction the Roman Catholic Church convened a council in Trent, where they declared the Apocrypha to be canonical. To this day Catholics and Protestants disagree on this issue. Catholics uphold the Apocrypha. Protestants believe that the Apocrypha is useful but not inspired.”

## Day 5

The Bible from Aramaic to English and beyond!

New Testament authors likely spoke Aramaic at home, Hebrew in “church,” and Greek at work. While the Old Testament books were written in Hebrew, the New Testament books were written in Greek to reach the whole Roman Empire, beyond the Hebrew-speaking Jews, but some populations in the Empire knew no Greek, so, early translations appeared in various languages, notably Latin (becoming the standard language of the Western Empire), Syriac, and Coptic. Despite the early translators’ zeal, they didn’t always possess a good command of Greek. Soon many Old Latin manuscripts, poor in quality and often differing from each other, were in circulation.”

Saint Jerome, who had a great command of the Biblical Greek and Hebrew languages, finished his Latin translation in 405 A.D. That translation is called the Vulgate, and it made the Bible more accessible to literate people in the Roman Empire. Liturgy and art helped share the Bible’s message and themes to the illiterate. After the Roman Empire fell and English began to replace Latin as a standard language in the West, this Latin translation played a huge role in keeping the Bible accessible to as many people as possible.

“The influence of Jerome’s scholarly work is felt today,” Cary Summers, President of the Museum of the Bible said. “When the Bible was first translated into English, it was based in large part on Jerome’s Latin Vulgate.”

Wycliffe Global Alliance reported that by the end of 2017, the complete Bible has been translated into 670 languages, and at least some of the Bible has been translated into 3,312 languages.

For almost all purposes, our translations give us all that we need to study God’s words and to meet him in his word. Yet it is good to know that many of our pastors and other scholars are also reading Scripture in Greek and Hebrew, as it helps them to understand God’s word more precisely. It is as if they are zooming in with a higher magnification and resolution. As we have seen, sometimes circumstances prevent us from zooming in as far as we would like. This happens when there are some remaining problems in the wording of the Greek and Hebrew originals. We can see the lay of the land, but the fine detail is less clear. But, these textual problems are mostly small, and none of them influences what Scripture teaches as a whole.