

How We Got the Bible

Making Life Count Ministries

www.makinglifecount.net

Where Did the Bible Come From?

Take a look at your Bible and think backward. You probably bought it from a bookstore. Where did bookstore get it? From a publishing company.

Where did it come from before that? A translation committee.

Where did the translation committee get it? From manuscripts.

If you keep going back, everything can be traced to a prophet writing it down.

Over the years people made copies which came from the original documents, which are the manuscripts we have today.

Facts about the Bible

The Bible was written by over 40 authors who were inspired by God, over 1,500 years from different ethnic backgrounds, living on three continents and from various walks of life. The Old Testament contains 39 books and the New Testament 27 books, totaling 66 books. The Jewish Bible has the same books, but combines them into 24 books. Why? The twelve minor prophets were considered one book. 1 & 2 Samuel were considered one book. The same holds true for 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah.

Old Testament, Septuagint and New Testament

The Old Testament was written in Hebrew, with a few chapters in Aramaic (Daniel 2-7, Ezra 4-7, Jer. 10:11). The Roman historian Josephus said that the Old Testament was completed and closed by 424 BC. Josephus, who was born immediately after Jesus was crucified, declared that since the death of Artaxerxes (424 BC) "no one had dared to add anything to the Jewish Scriptures, to take anything from them, or to make any change in them." (Josephus, *Against Apion* 1.8).

Septuagint is the Greek translation of the Old Testament. Septuagint means "70" in Latin. Seventy Jewish scholars translated the Old Testament into Greek around 200 BC. When the New Testament quotes the Old Testament, most quotes come from the Septuagint.

The 70 translators of the Septuagint added 14 non-biblical books that were not found in the Hebrew Bible. These 14 extra books are known as the Apocrypha. The Protestant Bible keeps only the books in the Hebrew Bible. The Roman Catholic Bible contains the Hebrew Bible but also includes the extra books (the Apocrypha) from the Septuagint.

The New Testament was written in Greek. When Jesus lived on earth, Greek was the language of the world. The New Testament writers had completed their work within about 60 years after Jesus' crucifixion. Most New Testament books were written between AD 50 and 96 by the apostles or someone closely associated with them.

An apostle means "sent one," and was a Jewish legal term that denoted the power of authority. In other words, the "sent one" had the authority to act and speak in the name of the sender. Jesus installed His apostles as His authoritative spokesmen. This is important to keep in mind when considering the authority of the New Testament. The apostles were witnesses of the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who recorded these events as eye-witnesses.

The apostles wrote their letters, gospels, and revelations to the churches. The churches, recognizing the authority of these writings, made copies and passed them to other churches, which was how the New Testament was spread throughout the Mediterranean world.

Eventually, the writings were combined into collections. By 200 AD, the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were combined into one book. Justin Martyr, writing about 150 AD said

that the churches were reading the four gospels in their weekly gatherings. Tatian, who was a disciple of Justin Martyr, combined the four gospels as a single text called the Diatessaron in 170 AD.

What is the “Canon”?

The Canon is the 66 books recognized as the Word of God, the Bible. It is transliterated from the Greek word *kanon*, which means “a builder’s rule.” There are two reasons for having a system for acknowledging the writings of Scripture as authoritative and from God.

1. False teaching. They had no printing presses or computers, so everything was written on parchments. Anyone could claim to have a message from God and write their own book, which some did. These counterfeit books were called pseudepigrapha, which means “false writings.” See 2 Peter 2:1-3, 1 John 4:1-3, Jude 3-4. An example of a false gospel is the Gospel of Thomas.
2. To read the Scriptures in worship services. 1 Tim. 4:13 says, “Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching.”

When was the Bible recognized as one book? The Roman historian Josephus declared that since the death of Artaxerxes (424 BC) “no one had dared to add anything to the Jewish Scriptures, to take anything from them, or to make any change in them.” (Josephus, *Against Apion* 1.8). Although the 39 Old Testament books had been regarded as Scripture for over four centuries, the Council of Jamnia (90 AD) officially recognized them as Scripture.

The New Testament Gospels and the Epistles were copied and circulated among the churches for over two centuries. The Council of Hippo (393 AD) and the Council of Carthage (397 AD) met to codify the books that had already been accepted as divinely inspired by the church.

Three tests were used to identify which books met the criteria of being divinely inspired.

1. Apostolic origin. By the time of the New Testament writings, the Old Testament had been accepted by the Jews as the authoritative Word of God. In the New Testament, the source had to be an apostle or someone closely associated with an apostle. Matthew, John, and Paul had all seen the resurrected Christ. The only non-apostles were Luke (who traveled with Paul), Mark (who accompanied Peter), and Jude who was Jesus’ half-brother.
2. Sound in doctrine. The writings had to line up with the teachings of Christ, apostles, and Old Testament. 2 Tim. 3:16 says, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.”
3. Recognized by the early church. The early church fathers and councils recognized the 39 Old Testament books and the 27 New Testament books. See 2 Peter 3:15-16, 1 Thess. 2:13

God inspired the original manuscripts, which we no longer have. The material they wrote on only lasted about 40 years, so the copyists had to keep making new manuscripts to preserve the text from being destroyed. The manuscripts we have today are copies made from the original manuscripts, so how do we know that what they copied is accurate?

Copying the Manuscripts

They had no copying machines or duplicating presses, so the manuscripts had to be copied by hand. This task was done by scribes, who patiently copied the Scriptures when the original scrolls became too worn to use any longer. The Jewish scribes valued the Scriptures so much that they counted every letter on every page they copied. The word for scribes, *sopherim*, literally means, “the counters” because they counted, not only every word, but every letter.

The middle letter of the manuscript was marked, as was the middle word of each major section of a book. If the letters of the copy didn’t match up with the original, they destroyed the entire page and started over.

Before a scribe began his work each day, he tested his reed pen by dipping it in ink, writing the name *Amalek*, and then crossing it out. This custom came from Deut. 25:19 which says, "You shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven." The following information comes from <http://www.biblebb.com/files/howbible.htm>

1. Each column of writing could have no less than forty-eight, and no more than sixty lines.
2. The ink must be black.
3. They must verbalize each word aloud while they were writing.
4. They must wipe the pen and wash their entire bodies before writing the word "Jehovah," every time they wrote it.
5. There must be a review within thirty days, and if as many as three pages required corrections, the entire manuscript had to be redone.
6. The letters, words, and paragraphs had to be counted, and the document became invalid if two letters touched each other. The middle paragraph, word and letter must correspond to those of the original document.
7. The documents could be stored only in sacred places (synagogues, etc).
8. As no document containing God's Word could be destroyed, they were stored, or buried, in a genizah—a Hebrew term meaning "hiding place." These were usually kept in a synagogue or sometimes in a Jewish cemetery.

By the time Jesus was born, the most recent Old Testament book, Malachi, had been copied and recopied over a span of more than 400 years. The books of Moses had been copied for more than 1,400 years! (Imagine copying Declaration of Independence for over 230 years).

We have over 14,000 manuscripts today: 5,000 Greek manuscripts, 8,000 Latin manuscripts, and 1,000 manuscripts in other languages.

Compared to non-biblical manuscripts:

We have only 7 manuscripts of the writings of Plato (380 BC).

We have only 5 manuscripts of the writings of Aristotle (350 BC).

The Gospels—The oldest Greek manuscript we have is the Rylands Fragment dated 135 A.D. It's a papyrus fragment discovered in Egypt that quotes from John 18. John died around 100 AD. From this discovery we know that the Gospel of John had to have been copied and circulated before it reached Egypt where it was found.

Mistakes Made by Copyists

Some minor mistakes were made in copying, which are called *textual variants*. The Bible manuscripts are 99.5% in agreement, with the variants only consisting of less than a half percent. The mistakes are minor blunders and none of the variants affects any major doctrine. Some variants occurred when scribes mistakenly copied the line above or below. Other variants are simply misspelled words. Occasionally a well-meaning scribe would change a word thinking he was making a correction to the text. An example of this is found in **Matthew 19:24**—"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." A scribe changed *kamelon* (meaning "camel") to *kamilon* (meaning a "rope" or "cable") to make it more believable. This change didn't appear until it was found in a 5th century manuscript. All the manuscripts before this had "camel," so translators agree that the correct word is *kamelon*.

Bible translators usually use the oldest manuscripts because they are closest to the original text. They also look at the majority evidence. In other words, when comparing manuscripts where there is a discrepancy, what do the majority of manuscripts say? Suppose you asked a hundred people to copy a letter and then you destroyed the original. If 99 copies were identical but one copy had a misspelled word (a textual variant), which do you suppose is the correct spelling in the original document? You can safely assume the 99 copies are correct and not the one with the misspelled word.

The Dead Sea Scrolls

In 1947, a shepherd boy was throwing rocks in a cave and heard something break. Inside the cave, archaeologists found jars of ancient manuscripts, which had been preserved for 2,000 years. Dead Sea scrolls were found in 11 caves. They found 28 nearly complete scrolls and the 100,000 fragments of another 875 manuscripts, and multiple portions of every book of the Old Testament except Esther. They found 25 copies of Deuteronomy.

As they explored other caves, they found a copy of the entire book of Isaiah. When they compared the Dead Sea Isaiah manuscript with the book of Isaiah we have today, they were identical except for the spellings of a few words. This proves that the rules they used to make ongoing copies of manuscripts for over 2,000 years kept it true to the original text.

Finding 4th Century Manuscript Codex Sinaiticus

As the story goes, in 1844 Russia's Tsar Alexander sent a biblical scholar named Constantin von Tischendorf to the St. Catherine monastery at Mt. Sinai to search for manuscripts. While working in the library, Tischendorf noticed a waste basket containing some loose manuscript pages. He recovered 129 leaves and, in a discussion with the monastery's librarian at the time, learned that two basket loads of similar "waste paper" had already been burned in the monastery's furnace. Tischendorf started his manuscript collection but was only allowed to take 43 leaves, which he took back to Europe.

Tischendorf returned to the monastery in both 1853 and 1859. On his last visit, a monk showed him a heap of loose leaves, wrapped in cloth. It turned out to be the Codex Sinaiticus Greek manuscript of the entire Bible, which was copied in the 4th Century AD, making it the earliest complete manuscript copy of the New Testament in existence.

After some negotiations, Tischendorf paid the monastery 9,000 rubles for this priceless manuscript (about \$18 in today's money). And that's how, in 1859, the Codex Sinaiticus was moved from Mount Sinai to Saint Petersburg, Russia.

In May 1975, during restoration work, the monks of St. Catherine's monastery discovered a room beneath the St. George Chapel which contained numerous parchment fragments. Among these fragments, they discovered 13 missing Old Testament pages from the Codex Sinaiticus.

The manuscript is currently regarded by the monastery as having been stolen. The Greek Orthodox monks keep a framed copy of a note left by Tischendorf promising to return the manuscript. Conveniently left out of the church's revised history is how the monks of the 1850s sold the manuscript to the Russians in return for some influence in church politics and 9,000 rubles.

Most of the modern Bible versions use the Codex Sinaiticus manuscript that Tischendorf found as one of their main source manuscripts in translating. If he hadn't gone to that monastery in 1859, that manuscript might have been burned up in a fireplace by some monks trying to keep warm.

You have permission to copy and distribute this material.

Making Life Count Ministries

P.O. Box 680174

Prattville, Alabama 36068

www.makinglifecount.net