Section 2 – What We Believe

4. God's Word - The Bible

What it Is, How We Got it, and Why We can Believe it

These notes are taken from a Membership Class first created by Rev. Byron Brown, PhD and revised and edited with Rev. Jared Berry. Used with Permission.

"Every word of God is flawless; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. Do not add to His words, or He will rebuke you and prove you a liar." –Proverbs 30:5–6

Doctrinal Belief on God's Word - The Bible

We believe that all 66 books of the Bible, both Old and New Testament, are fully inspired by God. They are God's revelation to man written by men fully inspired by the Holy Spirit. They are without any mixture of error (inerrant) and will not lead any astray (infallible). We do not place any book on the same level of authority as the Bible. The Bible is the supreme authority for matters of faith and conduct.
(2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20-21; Matthew 5:18; John 8:31-32; 2 Peter 3:14-16)

1. What are the Scriptures?

The Scriptures are the divinely inspired words of God (2 Tim 3:16, 2 Pet 1:19-21). The word scripture comes from the Greek word "graphe", meaning writing. The word bible comes from the Greek word for book. The Holy Bible means the "Holy Book". It contains 66 separate books (39 Old Testament and 27 New Testament).

The scriptures are made up of:

- 3 different languages (Hebrew, Greek, and a bit in Aramaic)
- Written over more than 1,400 years
- By 40 authors
- On 3 continents (Asia, Africa, and Europe)
- Books containing: history, geography, sermons, letters, music, architectural documents, legal documents and more.

- Ancient Papyrus (reed paper – Old Testament) and Parchments (Animal skin paper – New Testament) with chapter divisions added in the AD 1200's and a verse system finished in 1551.
- It is the most printed book in human history according to the Guiness Book of World Records website[1]
- The two largest religions in the world depend upon its existence.

2. Definitions

Inspiration of Scripture – We believe that God is the source behind all of the biblical writings and acted through the Holy Spirit with the biblical writers and editors to communicate what God wished to communicate.
(2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21; 3:14-16)

Inerrancy of Scripture – We believe that in the original manuscripts the Bible contains no "errors" of any sort and is completely truthful on all matters on which it teaches such as history, science, and biology.

Infallibility of Scripture – We believe that the Bible is completely trustworthy as a guide to salvation and the life of faith and will not fail to accomplish its purpose.

3. How were the 66 books chosen? (Canon of Scripture)

"The Canon of Scripture is the list of all the books that belong in the Bible."

Canon is a word meaning "a measuring rod." The canon is a standard that all scriptural books must meet. The books of the Bible shared traits proving they were authoritative. The criteria for an inspired book resulted from the commonalities among those sacred books the Holy Spirit had inspired and chosen for the canon of sacred scripture.

The six criteria are: [2]

1. Was it written by a prophet/apostle of God?
(Deut. 18:18–22; 1 Peter 1:20–21)

[1] https://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/best-selling-book-of-non-fiction , 2024
[2] https://www.biblicaltraining.org/blog/curious-christian/7-10-2012/what-criteria-were-used-determine-canon-scripture

2. Was it written by those associated with a recognized prophet or apostle?
(e.g. Luke - Paul's partner in ministry, Mark – Peter's partner in ministry).

3. Truthfulness - Does it tell the truth about God?
(Gal. 1:8; Deut. 13:1–5, 18:22)?

4. Was it faithful to previously accepted canonical writings?
(e.g. Hebrews)

5. Was it accepted/Confirmed by the Jewish people or prophet (O.T.) and Jesus, or an apostle (N.T.)?
(1 Thess. 2:13; Deut. 31:24–26; Josh. 24:26; 1 Sam. 10:25; Dan. 9:2; 2 Peter 3:16; 1 Tim. 5:18; Col. 4:16; 1 Thess. 5:27)?

6. Church usage and recognition
This has more to do with the New Testament. The Old Testament was accepted much sooner because of what Jesus said in Luke 24:44. However, some books became affirmed by the early church by their usage and was officially affirmed at the Council of Carthage in A.D. 397

Who approves the Canon?
"The work of the early church was not to bestow divine authority or even ecclesiastical authority upon some merely human writings, but rather to recognize the divinely authored characteristic of writings that already had such a quality. This is because the ultimate criterion of canonicity is divine authorship, not human or ecclesiastical approval." Wayne Grudem[3]

4. What about the Apocrypha?

Apocryphal Books
The Hebrew canon was closed and settled with the final book of the Old Testament, Malachi, around 400 B.C. Malachi concluded with the promise that the next event in redemptive history would be the coming of John the Baptist who would prepare the way for Jesus (Mal. 3:1, 4:5–6 cf. Matt. 3:1–17, 17:9–13).

During the 400 years of silence between the end of the Old Testament and the coming of Jesus, many apocryphal books were written. While they were read by

[3] Grudem, Wayne, *Systematic Theology*, 68.

some of God's people they were not considered Holy Scripture. Later they were canonized by the Catholic Council of Trent in 1546 to defend Catholic beliefs like purgatory after the Reformers discovered it had no basis in scripture. Even though, Jerome who wrote the Catholic Latin Vulgate Bible translation stated that the Apocrypha were "not books of the canon" they were only "books of the church" that were helpful for believers.

Jesus accepted the original Old Testament canon of the Law, Prophets, and Psalms. (Matt. 5:17, Luke 24:44). Jesus spoke of the Old Testament as existing from Abel (Genesis) to Zechariah (Malachi) in Luke 11:49-51 and Matthew 23:34-35 which excludes the Apocrypha.

5. How did Jesus view Scripture?

a. Actual people, historical events, and straightforward facts Examples:

- Noah
  (Matt. 24:37–39; Luke 17:26–27)
- Moses as lawgiver
  (Matt. 8:4, 19:8; Mark 1:44, 7:10, 10:5, 12:26; Luke 5:14, 20:37; John 5:46, 7:19)
- Jonah
  (Matt. 12:39-41, 16:4, 16:17; Luke 11:29-30, 32)

b. Fulfillment of the Old Testament Law, Prophecies, and Revelation of Christ

Jesus taught that the entire Old Testament was fulfilled in Him
(Luke 24:25-47)

Jesus taught that the purpose of the Old Testament was to reveal himself
(John 5:39)

Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah.
(Luke 4:21; Matt. 11:10 cf. Luke 7:27; Mark 9:12–13; Luke 18:31–33; Luke 21:22; Matt. 26:24; Mark 14:21; Luke 22:37; Matt. 26:31 cf. Mark 14:27; Matt. 26:53–56 cf. Mark 14:49; Luke 24:25–27, 24:44–47; John 5:39–47, 13:18 cf. Ps. 41:9; John 15:25 cf. Ps. 35:19; John

17:12)

c. Authentication of Old Testament authors

Moses (Mark 7:10),

Isaiah (Mark 7:6; Matt. 13:14),

David (Mark 12:36),

Jonah (Matthew 12:38-42)

Daniel (Matt. 24:15).

d. Infallibility and Truth of the Scriptures

Jesus taught that the Scripture could not be broken (John 10:35; Matt. 5:18; Luke 16:17).

Jesus also promised that the Holy Spirit would come to help us understand scripture (John 14:25–26, 16:23).

6. How did the Apostles view Scripture?

a. As God's Word

Paul used Scripture and God's spoken word interchangeably

(Gen. 12:3 cf. Gal. 3:8; Ex. 9:6 cf. Rom. 9:17).

The New Testament teaches that what the Bible says is akin to what God says. (Gen. 2:24 cf. Matt. 19:4–5; Ps. 95:7 cf. Heb. 3:7; Ps. 2:1 cf. Acts 4:24–15; Isa. 55:3 cf. Acts 13:34; Ps. 16:10 cf. Acts 13:35; Ps. 2:7 cf. Heb. 1:5; Ps. 97:7 cf. Heb. 1:6; Ps. 104:4 cf. Heb. 1:7). (1 Pet. 1:10–12; 1 Cor. 2:12–13).

b. As Sacred Scripture

(Matt. 21:42, 22:29; 26:54, 56; Luke 24; John 5:39, 10:35; Acts 17:2, 11, 18:28; Rom. 1:2, 4:3, 9:17, 10:11, 11:2, 15:4, 16:26; 1 Cor. 15:3–4; Gal. 3:8, 3:22, 4:30; 1 Tim. 5:18; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20–21, 3:15–16).

The New Testament authors quote the Old Testament as sacred on roughly 300 occasions.

7. Does Scripture have any errors or contradictions?

God cannot speak falsely (2 Sam. 7:28; Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18), so all of Scripture is true and without any error or contradiction (Num. 23:19; Ps. 12:6, 119:89, 96; Prov. 30:5) in the original manuscripts.

But, the Bible also teaches the following:

- God's thoughts are much higher than ours (Isa. 55:9).
- God has secrets that He has not revealed to anyone (Deut. 29:29).
- We sometimes see dimly (1 Cor. 13:12).
- We tend to suppress the clear truth of God's word because of our unrepentant sin (Rom. 1:18–19).

Therefore, if it appears that there is a contradiction in Scripture, we must humbly assume that we—not God's word—are somehow in error. God leaves provision for seeming "contradictions" by telling us that some things in His Scriptures are very hard to understand (2 Peter 3:15–16). This does not mean that we cannot know the truth; it does mean that we only know it in part (1 Cor. 13:9) and must live by faith and trust God.

8. Can Scripture be written today?

Hebrews 1:1–2 tells us that God has spoken to us through Jesus and that we have no need of any more revelation beyond what was recorded of His life and work and the subsequent apostolic explanation. The Book of Revelation deals with the end of all things and tells us to expect no more Scripture than what we already have (Rev. 22:18–19). Any new book of the Bible would require:

- eyewitness verification
- new work of God after 2000 years of silence
- zero contradiction with the rest of Scripture
- perfect prophecy without any error

Lastly, the Scriptures warn us about adding to them (Deut. 4:2; Prov. 30:5–6).

9. How did we get our English Bible?

The existence of the Bible is actually a fascinating and miraculous process that many volumes have been written to explain. Nevertheless, below is a five–fold sequence that has occurred for us to have the Bible to read.

God → Revelation/Inspiration → Transmission → Translation → Interpretation → Application → Your Life

Step #1 – **Revelation** is the miraculous event whereby God reveals Himself and His Truth to someone and inspires them through the power of the Holy Spirit to write down what He has to say perfectly in the original copy which is called the autographa.

Step #2 – **Transmission** is when the autographa was carefully copied by trained scribes so that other copies could be made available for people to read. While these hand written copies have the occasional minor error (i.e. spelling or punctuation) they were accepted as accurate and authoritative by: God's people (e.g. Deut. 17:18 cf. 1 Kings 2:3; Ezra 7:14; Neh. 8:8), Jesus (e.g. Matt. 12:3–5, 21:16, 42; Luke 4:16–21, 10:26), and the Apostles (Acts 17:2, 18:8).
The early church tested all teachings against the existing scrolls (Acts 17:11).
God's people have always relied on manuscripts they have proven to be accurate and trustworthy.

Step #3 – **Translation** occurs when language scholars translate the Bible from its original languages (Hebrew, Greek, or Aramaic) to our readable native language. Many famous works of western civilization are translated from other languages. Today, the Bible has been translated into nearly 3000 languages. The first translation of the English Bible was initiated by John Wycliffe and completed by John Purvey in AD 1388.

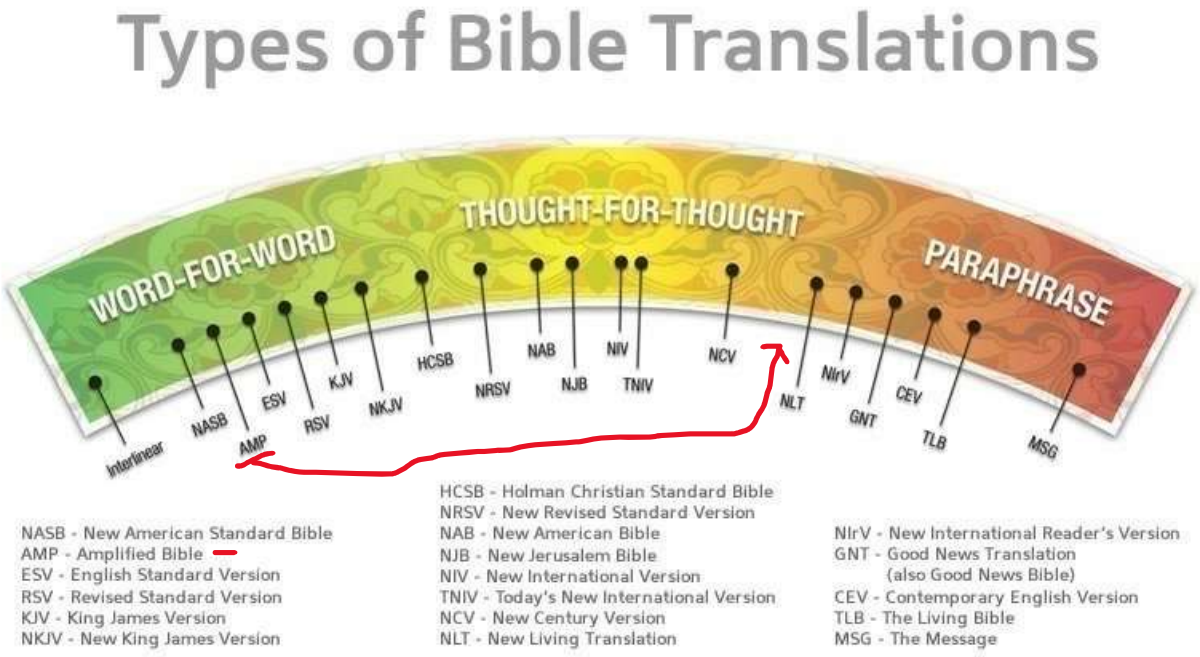
Step #4 – **Interpretation** occurs when someone reads the Bible and determines the meaning of the verses they read. Each text of the Bible has only **one** true interpretation. So, we must be careful to read the truth out of the Bible instead of our beliefs and desires into it.

Step #5 – **Application** is taking what we learn from the principles in the Bible and changing our thoughts and actions so our life follows the Bible. There are a seemingly infinite number of applications to a text of the Bible. For example, when the Bible says that we should love people the applications for that principle are seemingly endless.

In this five–step process we see how God speaks to us and cares deeply about our lives. While step #1 is the only one that is guaranteed to be perfect, the other steps are indeed accurate though we must be increasingly careful as we move through them because the opportunity for error increases at each step.

10. Why Are There Different Bible Translations?

In translating the Bible into English, three general categories of translation are most common. Word for word translations, thought for thought translations, and paraphrases. The same three options are also used in the translation of other ancient books into English.



Word for word translations make a special effort to carefully interpret each word from their original Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic into English.

Best for: Studying issues where technical accuracy matters

Drawback: can be harder to read, may miss some poetic meaning in the text

Best translations: *New American Standard Bible* (NASB), *English Standard Version* (ESV), *New King James Version* (NKJV), The *King James Version* (KJV) – old English word for word can be hard to read

Thought for thought translations attempt to convey the full nuances of a passage by interpreting the scriptures entire meaning and not just the individual words.

Best for: Capturing thoughts or meaning contained in the original text

Drawbacks: May add words not in the original text to convey meaning

Best translations: *New International Version* (NIV).

Paraphrased translations pay even less attention to specific word meanings than thought for thought translations in an attempt to give the poetic feeling of a passage.

Best for: Easy reading and capturing the feeling of passaged

Drawbacks: Paraphrased loose translation can be misleading or misunderstood easily, often lacks verse numbers due to paraphrasing

Common Translations: *The Message*, *The New Living Bible*, and *The Amplified Bible (AMP – Does both word for word and paraphrase in brackets)*.

Poor Translations and Not Recommended:

- Jehovah's Witness' ***New World Translation*** - written by editors with no working knowledge of the original languages. Among other issues.
- Politically correct attempts to remove the masculine names for God in Bibles like the ***New Revised Standard Version*****.**
- Brian Simmons' ***Passion Translation*** which deliberately adds to verses not in the original texts to make them more charismatic and support a certain theological view. The author also claims God took him to heaven and showed him a missing chapter 22 in the book of John.

It is helpful to invest in a good study Bible with helpful commentary notes (Not all commentaries are created equal). Pastor Jared recommends **the ESV Study Bible**. It was the first study Bible to ever receive the "Christian Book of the Year" award

by the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association (ECPA), that same year it also won "Best Study Bible."

11. Why Should I Trust that the Bible is Accurate?

Dr. Daniel B. Wallace (Christian) vs. Dr. Bart Ehrman (Agnostic/Skeptic): "Is the Original New Testament Lost?" – Chapel Hill, NC in 2012[4]

The following includes notes taken from a debate between two leading New Testament scholars: Dr. Daniel B. Wallace and Dr. Bart Ehrman. These notes are from Wallace's argument.

We have a massive amount of ancient manuscripts:

- 5,600 Greek– average manuscript is 450 pages long
- 5,000 Other languages
- 10,000 Latin Manuscripts

In total that's 20,000+ Manuscripts.

We also have 1 million + quotations of the New Testament from early church patristic fathers.

"If all other sources for our knowledge of the text of the New Testament were destroyed, [the patristic quotations] would be sufficient alone for the reconstruction of practically the entire New Testament." Quote of Bruce Metzger and Bart Erhman (Wallace's Opponent) read by Daniel B. Wallace

How does the New Testament compare to other ancient literature?

Average Classical Greco-Roman Author

- 20 surviving manuscripts, none earlier than 300 years after writing

New Testament

- 20,000 surviving manuscripts, 124 earlier than 300 years after writing

[4]Bart Ehrman & Daniel Wallace held one of five debates on February 1st, 2012 at 7:00 PM, located in the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Memorial Hall Performing Arts Theater.

Livy & Tacitus – Majority sources of our Roman History

- Only 25% of Livy's work survives today
- 1/3rd of Tacitus' work survives today

Scholars of these Greco/Roman authors must often fill gaps in their text just to make it readable due to the lack of available manuscripts. They have to use their best educated guess in order to do so. New Testament scholars do not have this problem due to the massive amount of manuscripts.

Over 1400 years of manuscripts there has been only 2% change. Would you buy a stock if it only grew 2% in 1400 years? It's very little change and any changes are easy to spot because they don't match the many manuscripts copies we have.

Accuracy

With 20,000+ manuscripts many of those manuscripts have tears, holes, spelling errors, and mistakes. 99% of those variants in the New Testament manuscripts are neither meaningful (would change the texts meaning) nor viable (possibly authentic). Most are spelling and grammatical errors. Less than 1% have any effect on how the text should read.

Skeptic Dr. Bart Erhman, from the appendix in his own book admits:
"Q: Why do you believe core tenets of Christian orthodoxy to be in jeopardy due to these scribal errors in the manuscripts?
A: *Essential Christian Beliefs are not affected by textual variants in the manuscript tradition of the New Testament."* – Dr. Bart Erhman in Misquoting Jesus

Although we do not have the original manuscripts we have overwhelming evidence that originals would hardly be any different from what scholars have reconstructed today. **If Skeptics held Greco/Roman authors to the same standard you would have to throw out millions of facts about Greek and Roman world** like Plato, Ceaser, Alexander the Great, etc. because "we have no idea what they REALLY said." This would be an absurd leap of faith.
Simply put the New Testament is the most well attested document of the ancient world. If it is not reliable than neither is any other ancient document.

The Bibliographical Test

The bibliographical test seeks to determine the **quantity** and **quality** of documents, as well as how much later they are than the originals. The quantity of New Testament manuscripts is unparalleled in ancient literature.

AUTHOR	DATE WRITTEN	EARLIEST COPY	TIME SPAN	NUMBER OF COPIES	ACCURACY
Homer	Ca. 850 BC	–	–	<2400	
Herodotus	Cs. 484-425 BC	Ca. 1st AD	400-500	75	
Thucydides	Ca. 460-400 BC	ca. 1st AD	400+	20	
Livy	Ca. 59 BC – 17 AD	Ca 4th century	400+	27	
Tacitus	Ca. AD 56-120	9th century	800+	3	
New Test.	Ca. AD 60	Mid 2nd century	About 100 years	> 20,000	

Old Testament Accuracy

Critics of the accuracy of the Old Testament routinely claimed that it was in fact a series of fables and legends that had developed over hundreds of years because there were not enough copies of ancient manuscripts to alleviate their skepticism. A simple shepherd boy dealt a deathblow to their criticisms in 1947. He wandered into a cave in the Middle East and discovered large pottery jars filled with leather scrolls that had been wrapped in linen cloth. Amazingly, the ancient copies of the books of the Bible were in good condition despite their age and harsh climate because they had been well sealed for nearly 1,900 years. What is now known as **The Dead Sea Scrolls** are made up of some 40,000 inscribed ancient fragments. From these fragments more than 500 books have been reconstructed, including some Old Testament books such as a complete copy of Isaiah. These scrolls being 1000 years earlier than previous known manuscripts proved the remarkable accuracy of the OT text over those 1000 years.