

Getting to Know the Bible

A Concise Introduction and Study Guide

Kevin L. Moore

Published by
World Literature Publications
96 Waimea Street
New Plymouth, New Zealand 4601
churchnp@netsource.co.nz
Fax: 64 6 7535681
C.D. and E-Book editions
are also available.

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Kevin L. Moore and
World Literature Publications

Cover Design: Betty Burton Choate
Layout: Rachael O'Donnell and Kevin L. Moore

First Printing USA
Second Printing USA, 2010

OrderFrom:
J.C. Choate Publications

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Winona, MS 38967
Phone: 662-283-1192
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E-Mail: choate@worldevangelism.org

Dedication

This book is dedicated to three men who continue to be an inspiration and example to me in the Lord's work: *Rod Kyle*, for his evangelistic zeal and expertise, *Rex Banks*, for his gentle spirit and depth of Bible knowledge, *Todd O'Donnell*, for his boundless energy in the service of God, and all three for not only knowing the Bible and its Author, but for living it day by day. Since a good woman is behind just about every good man, I must also mention *Gay*, *Sally*, and *Jeana* for the love and support enabling their husbands to continue in the right direction.

Acknowledgements

The material presented in this book contains little original information. Over the years I have been influenced by countless people, sermons, lectures, classes, books, articles, and discussions, all of which have contributed to the contents of this book. A number of sources are listed in the Bibliography, but no doubt several have been inadvertently omitted. Among those at whose feet I have been privileged to sit and learn more about the Book of books are Glenn E. Moore (my dad), Earl Edwards, Bill Nicks, Rod Rutherford, David Lipe, George Goldman, Jerry Dyer, Edwin Jones, Clyde Woods, Dowell Flatt, James Tollerson, Guy N. Woods, and Wayne Jackson. While I may not totally agree with everything these men have taught, I have certainly learned something from each one. At the same time, however, the conclusions presented in this book are based on my own personal study and I am, therefore, solely accountable.

Rod Kyle is responsible for proposing this work, offering useful suggestions for improvements and added material, and organizing the printing. Kent and Rachael O'Donnell deserve special recognition for their invaluable assistance with maps, charts, format, and graphics. These contributions have been indispensable.

Thanks to Sam Dilbeck and Alumni of the East Tennessee School of Preaching & Missions for their Computer Software recommendations (see Appendix 3).

Except for some quotations, spelling is in accordance with New Zealand English as per *The New Zealand Oxford School Dictionary*. 2nd edition. Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1995.

All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the *New King James Version*. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

The Publisher's Statement

I have known Kevin Moore for several years. I have been impressed by his ability, the books he has written, and his dedication in spreading the Lord's cause throughout the world.

He has gotten his education for the most part here in the States, has preached here, and has been a missionary in residence at Freed-Hardeman University, Henderson, TN, U.S.A. Kevin has served as a missionary in New Zealand both while single and after marriage. He and his family now live and work in Wanganui, New Zealand.

I am especially excited about Kevin's new book, **Getting to Know the Bible**. This book is filled with information that will build one's faith in the Bible as being the inspired word of God, supplies answers to the many questions that are often asked about the scriptures, and provides information that will help readers to better understand God's word.

I want to thank Kevin for writing this book, and thanks to Rod Kyle in New Plymouth, New Zealand for his follow-up work on it and for sending it to me for printing. This printing will serve both New Zealand and the U.S.A., and copies will be further circulated throughout the world. We also hope to print the book later in India.

To recipients, please read these lessons, study them along with your Bible, and share them with your friends. They will help you and bless you as you apply them to your life.

J. C. Choate
Winona, MS, U.S.A.
Oct. 9, 2002

Abbreviations

AD	<i>Anno Domini</i> = in the year of the Lord
<i>Adv. Haer.</i>	<i>Adversus Haereses</i> or <i>Against Heresies</i> by Irenaeus
<i>Ant.</i>	<i>Antiquities of the Jews</i> by Flavius Josephus
ASV	American Standard Version of the Bible
BAGD	Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich & Danker, <i>Greek Lexicon</i>
BC	Before Christ
BCE	Before the Common Era
<i>ca.</i> or <i>c.</i>	<i>circa</i> = approximately
CE	the Common Era
cf.	<i>confer</i> = compare
e.g.	<i>exempli gratia</i> = for example
et al.	<i>et alibi</i> = and elsewhere; or <i>et alii</i> = and others
etc.	<i>et cetera</i> = and others; and the rest; and so forth
f.	following (line, verse, page, etc.)
ff.	following (lines, verses, pages, etc.)
i.e.	<i>id est</i> = that is (to say)
IVP	InterVarsity Press
KJV	King James Version of the Bible
LXX	the Septuagint (Greek translation of the OT)
NASB	New American Standard Bible
N.B.	<i>nota bene</i> = note well
NIV	New International Version of the Bible
NKJV	New King James Version of the Bible
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version of the Bible
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
p.	page
pp.	pages
RSV	Revised Standard Version of the Bible
v.	verse
vol/s.	volume/s
vs.	verses

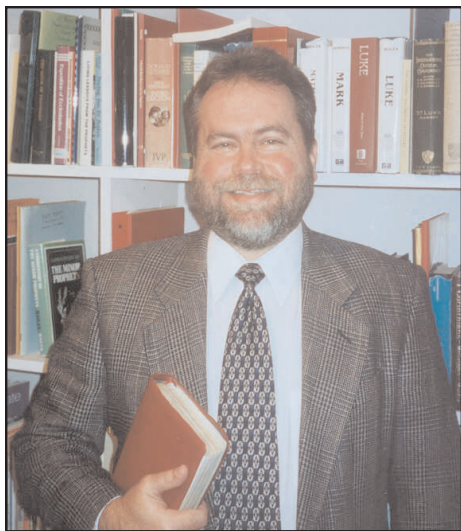
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About the author



Kevin L. Moore is a dual citizen of the USA and New Zealand. He has been preaching the gospel since 1981 and doing evangelistic work in N.Z. since 1987. He is a graduate of East Tennessee School of Preaching & Missions, holds BS and MA degrees from Freed Hardeman University, and is doing postgraduate studies towards a PhD through Victoria University of Wellington, N.Z.

Kevin has served as a pulpit preacher for *churches of Christ* in Sweetwater and Bells, Tennessee, and as evangelist for congregations in Wellington and Wanganui, N.Z. He has taught Bible and Missions courses at Freed Hardeman University and participated in campaigns, outreach efforts, lectureships, seminars, and gospel meetings in 13 countries.

He has written two other books, numerous tracts and articles, and developed the *Personal Bible Study* series for non-Christians and additional Bible study lessons for New Christians. He also serves as editor for *The Exhorter* and staff writer for *The Voice of Truth International*. Kevin is married to the former Lynne Hibbett, and they have two beautiful daughters, Loren and Kaitlyn.

Chapter 1

General Introduction to the Bible

The word “Bible” comes from the Greek *biblia*, plural of *biblion* (“book”), having become a singular noun as it passed through the languages of Latin, Old French, and finally English. There is only one book that can truly be termed *the* Book, namely the unequalled and unsurpassed volume we now call “The Bible.”

Composition of the Bible

The Bible is comprised of sixty-six separate books.¹ The two main divisions are the Old and New Testaments. The **Old Testament** is comprised of thirty-nine books and includes the following. **The Books of Moses** (Genesis - Deuteronomy), also known as the Pentateuch or Law [Torah]: records the beginning of the world (Genesis 1-11), the beginning of the Nation of Israel (Genesis 12-50), and the establishment of Israel’s Law (Exodus - Deuteronomy). **History of Israel** (Joshua - Esther): covers Israel’s turbulent history from about 1450 to 420 BC.² **Books of Praise and Wisdom** (Job - Song of Solomon): poetic and historical literature intended for instruction, counsel, and comfort. **Prophecy** (Isaiah - Malachi): warnings and promises concerning the future of Israel, surrounding nations, and the coming Messiah.

The **New Testament** is comprised of twenty-seven books. **The Gospels** (Matthew - John): biography of the life of Christ. **History of the early church** (Acts of the Apostles): the first thirty-two years of the church’s history, mostly focusing on the ministries of

Peter and Paul. **Epistles** (Romans - Jude): instructions to the early Christians. **Prophecy** (Revelation): a message of hope to suffering Christians.³

Chart 1

The Books of the Bible

The Old Testament - 39 Books

History

Genesis

The Law

Exodus
Leviticus
Numbers
Deuteronomy

History

Joshua
Judges
Ruth
I Samuel
II Samuel
I Kings
II Kings
I Chronicles
II Chronicles
Ezra
Nehemiah
Esther

Wisdom or Poetry

Job
Psalms
Proverbs
Ecclesiastes
Song of Solomon

Major Prophets

Isaiah
Jeremiah
Lamentations
Ezekiel
Daniel

Minor Prophets

Hosea
Joel
Amos
Obadiah
Jonah
Micah
Nahum
Habakkuk
Zephaniah
Haggai
Zechariah
Malachi

The New Testament - 27 Books

Gospels

Matthew
Mark
Luke
John

Church History

Acts

Pauline Epistles

Romans
I Corinthians
II Corinthians
Galatians
Ephesians
Philippians
Colossians
I Thessalonians
II Thessalonians
I Timothy
II Timothy
Titus
Philemon

General Epistles

Hebrews
James
I Peter
II Peter
I John
II John
III John
Jude

Prophecy

Revelation

Transmission of the Bible

The Bible was written by approximately forty different men over a period of about sixteen centuries. The first five books of the Bible (Genesis - Deuteronomy) were written by Moses around 1450 BC, and the last book of the Bible (Revelation) was written by the apostle John near the end of the first century AD. The Old Testament was originally written in the Hebrew language (with small portions in Aramaic⁴), by about thirty-two men, between 1450 and 420 BC in the region now called the Middle East. The New Testament was initially written in the Greek⁵ language, by at least eight different men, between AD 45 and 100 in regions surrounding the Mediterranean Sea.⁶

The Bible was first written primarily on papyrus and parchment [leather] scrolls. Papyrus was a writing material made from a water plant; parchment was made from animal skins. Because of the fragile and temporary nature of these writing materials, hand-written copies were made so the Scriptures could be distributed and kept available for future generations. Many of these manuscripts were copied with great care and meticulous accuracy; others were not. Over the centuries a number of mistakes occurred in the transmission of these documents, known today as “textual variants.” However, because of the vast number of biblical manuscripts still in existence (over 10,000),⁷ scholars can readily detect the inaccuracies and arrive at a very reliable text of the Bible. Most discrepancies involve things such as spelling, punctuation, reduplication, word order, etc., but no fundamental doctrine of the Bible is in doubt because of textual uncertainty.

Translation of the Bible

The Bible has been translated into almost every known language of man, and translation was being done in English (Anglo-

Saxon) as early as about AD 700. The earliest English translations of the Bible were those of Wyclif (1380), Tyndale (1525), and Coverdale (1540). Notable English versions over the years have been the *King James Version* (1611), *Revised Version* (1885), *American Standard Version* (1901), and *Revised Standard Version* (1952). Three of the more prominent translations, the KJV, ASV, and RSV, have been updated and revised: the *New King James Version* (1982), the *New American Standard Bible* (1971), and the *New Revised Standard Version* (1989). Another popular, though less accurate, English translation is the *New International Version* (1978). But be aware that there are strengths and weaknesses in all translations of the Bible.

A Word of Caution about Translations

A number of English Bibles available today are filled with the theological biases of their translators and do not accurately represent God's word. Some translations, such as the Jehovah's Witness *New World Translation* or the Roman Catholic *Douai Bible*, have been altered to convey the peculiar doctrines of these religious groups. Some versions, including paraphrases, tend to promote the particular religious views of the individuals who produced them, such as the *New English Bible*, the *Living Bible*, and *Today's English Version* ("Good News for Modern Man").

Notes

¹ The English Bible is further divided into 1,189 chapters, 41,173 verses, and 774,746 words. It takes an average reader about 70 hours and 40 minutes to read through the entire Bible.

² The abbreviation “BC” stands for “Before Christ” and represents the approximate number of years before the birth of Jesus. The abbreviation “AD” stands for the Latin expression *Anno Domini*, meaning “in the year of the Lord,” and represents the approximate number of years since the birth of Christ. Sometimes the alternative “BCE” (Before the Common Era) and “CE” (the Common Era) are used. The dates above are approximated and rounded off.

³ See **Appendix 1** for a brief synopsis of each OT and NT book.

⁴ Genesis 31:47; Ezra 4:8 - 6:18; 7:12-26; Jeremiah 10:11; Daniel 2:4 - 7:28. Aramaic (sometimes called “Syrian”) was a Semitic language, related to Hebrew and Phoenician, which gradually became the spoken language of the Jews, particularly after the Babylonian captivity (cf. 2 Kings 18:26; Isaiah 36:11).

⁵ From about 300 BC to around AD 500 the prevailing world-language was called *hē koinē dialektos* (“the common language”). The New Testament was not written in Classical or Modern Greek, but in *Koinē* Greek.

⁶ See maps **Appendix 5-A, B, C**.

⁷ The extant materials can be divided into the following categories: 1. Fragments of Greek papyri; 2. Greek parchment manuscripts divided into (a) Uncials (all capital letters) and (b) Minuscules (lower-case or cursive script); 3. Ancient versions in various languages; and 4. Quotations from early Christian writers.

?? Review Questions

1. The Bible was written by about how many different men?

2. The Bible was written over a period of approximately how many years?
3. The Old Testament was written primarily in what language?
4. In what language was the New Testament originally written?
5. Why were so many copies made of the Bible manuscripts?
6. How does this benefit us today?
7. Are all English translations of the Bible equally reliable?
8. The Bible is comprised of how many books?
9. The two main divisions of the Bible are what?
10. What translation of the Bible do you use as your main source of Bible study? Why?

Suggested Homework

Memorize the books of the Old Testament.

Recommended Reading

Neil R. Lightfoot, *How We Got the Bible*, Austin, TX: Sweet Publishing Company, 1962

Major Biblical Manuscripts

NAME	DATE
Magdalen Papyrus & Qumran 7Q5	AD 66
John Rylands	AD 94-127
Bodmer Papyrus II	AD 150-200
Diatessaron (Harmony of Four Parts)	AD 160
Chester Beatty Papyri	AD 150-200
Codex Vaticanus	AD 325-350
Codex Sinaiticus	AD 350
Codex Alexandrius	AD 400
Codex Ephraemi	AD 400
Codex Bezae	AD 450
Codex Washingtonensis (Freericanus)	AD 450
Codex Claromontanus	AD 500
Cairo Codex	AD 895
Aleppo Codex	AD 900+
Codex of the Prophets of Leningrad	AD 916
British Museum Codex	AD 950
Codex Babylonicus Petropalitonus	AD 1008
Reuchlin Codex of the Prophets	AD 1105

English Translations of the Bible

King James Version (Authorized Version)	1611
Revised Version	1885
Young's Literal Translation	1898
American Standard Version	1901
Modern Reader's Bible	1923
The Basic Bible	1950
Revised Standard Version	1952
Emphasized Bible	1959
The Amplified Bible	1965
Jerusalem Bible	1966
New English Bible	1970
New American Standard Bible	1971
Today's English Version (Good News Bible)	1976
New International Version	1979
New King James Version	1982
Simple English Bible (NT)	1983
Holy Bible from the Ancient Eastern Text	1985
New Century Version	1987
McCord's NT Translation	1989
New Revised Standard Version	1989
21st Century King James Version	1994
God's Word (Today's Bible Translation)	1995
New International Reader's Version	1996
Third Millennium Bible (New Authorized Version)	1998
International Standard Version	1998
Revised King James Version (NT)	2001

Chapter 2

Inspiration of the Bible

The Bible claims to have come from God and to be all-sufficient to meet man's spiritual needs (2 Timothy 3:14-17). The writers of the Bible allege to have received their information directly from God's Spirit (2 Peter 1:16-21). The apostle Paul affirmed that the Holy Spirit revealed God's message to specially chosen men, and when we read what was written we can then understand this divinely inspired revelation (Ephesians 3:1-5).¹ While these statements, in and of themselves, are not absolute proof that the Bible is in fact what it contends to be, the absence of any such claims would be a strong argument against it. But how can one know for sure whether or not these claims are genuine? Is there any proof?²

Confirmation of the Bible's Inspiration

A. The Bible's Remarkable Unity. The sixty-six books of the Bible were written over a period of about 1600 years by at least forty different writers. The writers of the Bible were separated by time, geography, language, and culture, yet they participated in writing a book that is perfectly united in theme and in purpose. If the Bible were merely the product of forty different human minds, we would expect it to be a disjointed compilation of contradictory ideas and themes. The unity of the Bible is convincing proof that it is the product of a single, superior Mind (2 Timothy 3:16).

B. The Impeccable Accuracy of the Bible. Archaeology has confirmed the Bible's credibility time and time again. For example, there are over forty references in the Bible to the Hittites (Genesis 23:10; 26:34; etc.), and the Bible was the only historical document that mentioned these people until 1906 when the ancient

capital of the Hittite nation was discovered in central Turkey. The Assyrian king Sargon is mentioned in the Bible only in Isaiah 20:1, but he was never mentioned in any other extant historical records until 1843 when his temple, palace and numerous records were discovered near Ninevah. In the late 1800s Sir William Ramsay set out on an archaeological expedition in Asia Minor to disprove the historical accuracy of the book of Acts, but after years of exploration he was forced to conclude that Acts is accurate in every detail. *Time* magazine reported: “. . . an inscription unearthed in 1961 at Caesarea confirmed for the first time that Pilate was a first century Roman governor, as the Bible reports” (15 August 1988, p. 51). Unlike the writings of men throughout history, the Bible is not filled with mistakes and inaccurate information.

C. **Fulfilled Predictive Prophecy.** There are over 800 prophecies in the Old Testament, many relating to the rise and fall of various governments or individuals, each one fulfilled in every detail. Over 300 Old Testament prophecies relate to the initial coming of the Messiah (cf. Luke 24:27, 44; John 5:39).³ Mathematician Peter W. Stoner estimated that if only *eight* of these prophecies were considered, the chances of one man fulfilling all of them is one in 100,000,000,000,000,000. It is statistically, mathematically, and humanly impossible that the fulfilled Bible prophecies happened by accident!

D. **Indestructibility of the Bible.** There has never been a book that has been under more attacks and attempted destruction than the Bible. Around 100 BC Syrian king Antiochus Epiphanes burned all copies of the Scriptures that could be found and made it a capital crime (punishable by death) to possess a copy. In AD 303 Roman emperor Diocletian ordered all Bibles destroyed, set out to exterminate Christianity, and had a medal engraved which stated: “The Christian religion is destroyed and the worship of the gods restored.” In the 1700s Voltaire said, “In less than a hundred years

the Bible will be discarded and Christianity swept from the earth.” But despite all these attacks and more, the Bible is still thriving. All along it has affirmed that “the word of the LORD endures forever” (1 Peter 1:23-25).

E. **The Bible’s Scientific Foreknowledge.** The Bible is not a science book, but if it is from God we would expect it to be scientifically accurate. Numerous scientific truths can be found in the pages of the Bible. It wasn’t until 1522 that it was scientifically confirmed that the earth is round, yet the Bible has stated it all along (Isaiah 40:22).⁴ The Bible affirms that the earth is suspended in space (Job 26:7), but this was not scientifically proven until 1650. The water cycle, discovered in 1790, is in the Bible (Job 36:27-28). Paths (sea lanes) in the ocean were discovered in 1860, yet they had already been mentioned in the Bible (Psalm 8:8). Fresh water springs in the sea were discovered in 1920, but the Bible had alluded to them centuries before (Job 38:16). The scientific law of Biogenesis, affirming that all life comes from preceding life and that of its kind, is a long-established doctrine of the Bible (Genesis 1:11-12, 20-25). The Second Law of Thermodynamics not only verifies what the Bible has stated all along, i.e. that the physical universe is deteriorating (cf. Psalm 102:25-26; Isaiah 51:6), but it also supports the biblical teaching of an *end* to the physical universe in the future as well as a *beginning* when all matter and energy were in full abundance (Genesis 1:1; 2:1; 2 Peter 3:10). Over 3,000 years before the discovery of Vitamin K, which is responsible for the blood-clotting element prothrombin, it was recorded in the Bible that circumcision was to be carried out only when the boy was eight days old (Genesis 17:12; Leviticus 12:3). Scientists now know that the only time in a newborn’s life when prothrombin climbs above 100% is the eighth day! It is not possible for these Bible writers to have been aware of these and many other scientific facts, thousands of years before their discovery, without the aid of divine guidance.

Notes

¹ See also Exodus 24:4; 35:1; 2 Samuel 23:1-3; 2 Kings 17:36-37; Acts 1:16, 20; 1 Corinthians 2:6-13; 11:23; 14:37; Galatians 1:11-12; 2 Peter 1:3; Hebrews 3:7; 4:7; 10:15-17; Revelation 1:10-11.

² Charles Wesley argued that the Bible must be the invention either of good men, of bad men, or of God. It could not be the invention of good men because they would not and could not make a book, telling lies the whole time they were writing it, saying “Thus saith the Lord,” when it was their own invention. It could not be the invention of bad men because they would not make a book that commands all duty, forbids all sin, and condemns their souls to hell for eternity. Therefore, the Bible must have been given by divine inspiration.

³ Messianic prophecies include: Genesis 3:15; 9:27; 12:3; 17:19; 18:18; 21:12; 22:18; 28:10-14; 49:10; Exodus 12:46; Numbers 24:17; Deuteronomy 18:15-19; Psalms 2:7; 16:9-10; 22:6-8, 16-18; 34:20; 35:11, 19; 38:13; 41:9; 45:6-7; 49:15; 68:18; 69:9, 21; 109:4, 25; 110:1, 4; Isaiah 7:14; 9:1-2, 6-7; 11:1-2; 35:5-10; 40:3; 42:1-9; 49:6; 50:6; 52:13-15; 53:1-12; 61:1-2; 62:11; Jeremiah 23:5-6; 31:15; 33:14-18; Daniel 2:44; 7:13-14; 9:24-26; Hosea 6:2; 11:1; Micah 5:2-3; Zechariah 9:9; 11:12-13; 12:10; Malachi 3:1.

⁴ The Hebrew word *choog*, when used with reference to the sky or heavens, signifies a dome or arch (Job 22:14). But when applied to the earth, as in Isaiah 40:22, the significance appears to be “circle” (ASV, N/KJV, N/RSV, NIV; cf. Proverbs 8:27).

?? Review Questions

1. The Bible claims to be from what source?
2. Is this claim, in itself, sufficient proof that the Bible is inspired of God?
3. What proofs are there to support this claim?

4. What is so remarkable about the unity of the Bible's message?
5. Are you aware of any archaeological discoveries that have shown inaccuracies in the Bible?
6. Why is it not possible for the prophecies of the Bible to have been fulfilled by accident?
7. Why do you think all the attempts to destroy the Bible have been unsuccessful?
8. Is the Bible scientifically inaccurate?
9. Considering the evidence, is it reasonable to reject the Bible as God's word?
10. What is the benefit of accepting the Bible's claim of divine inspiration?

Suggested Homework

Memorize the books of the New Testament.

Recommended Reading

Wayne Jackson, *Fortify Your Faith*, Montgomery, AL: Apologetics Press, 1974.

Chapter 3

The Canon of Scripture

The word “canon” (literally “cane” or “measuring rod”) is used to describe the list of books recognized as genuine, authoritative, and inspired of God. Early in history God began the formation of his inspired book. The Law of Moses was written in a book (Deuteronomy 31:24-26). Copies of this book were made (Deuteronomy 17:18; 2 Chronicles 17:9). Joshua contributed to the book (Joshua 24:26). Samuel wrote in a book and laid it up before the Lord (1 Samuel 10:25). This book continued to be acknowledged and held in reverence throughout Israel’s history (2 Kings 22:8-20). The prophets contributed to the sacred writings (Jeremiah 36:32; Zechariah 7:7-12). Isaiah makes reference to “the book of the LORD” (Isaiah 34:16). Ezra read this book of God publicly (Ezra 7:6; Nehemiah 8:1-8).

The Old Testament Canon

Jewish history recounts that when each Old Testament book was written, it was at that time recognized as inspired of God and placed in the tabernacle or temple with the accumulating group of sacred writings, and was carefully guarded. Copies were made as needed, and though many of these copies were eventually scattered or destroyed, after the Babylonian captivity Ezra reassembled and restored them as a complete collection. Revered as the word of God, no Jew would have ever intentionally added, removed or altered a single word in these sacred writings. In the first century AD this book was known as “the Scriptures” (Luke 24:27; John 5:39; Acts 17:2; Romans 1:2; 2 Timothy 3:15). These Scriptures were the same as the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament in our English Bible (cf. Josephus, *Against Apion*, 1.7,8). [See chart below – *Hebrew canon*]. There are approximately 300 quotations from these

writings in the New Testament, and no book outside these is ever quoted as Scripture.¹

The New Testament Canon

Sacred writings of the New Testament were gradually added to these Old Testament Scriptures. New Testament writers acknowledged the divine origin and authoritative nature of their writings (1 Corinthians 2:7-13; 14:37; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; Revelation 1:1-2). Although several of the epistles were addressed to individuals or single congregations, they were to be shared among others (Colossians 4:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:27). Peter recognized Paul's epistles as a well-known collection of writings belonging to "the rest of the Scriptures" (2 Peter 3:15-16). Paul quoted a passage found only in Luke 10:7 (cf. Matthew 10:10), referring to it as "Scripture" (1 Timothy 5:18).

Each of the early churches would have collected for itself a complete set of the writings proven to be, and accepted as, authentic documents from inspired writers.² The early churches took meticulous care to distinguish between genuine and counterfeit documents, held in high esteem the authentic writings, and communicated and distributed between themselves the necessary information promoting the well-being of the whole church.³ The New Testament canon was formed, not by any individual or congregation *deciding* which books belonged to it, but by a general *recognition* of the inspired writings.

The New Testament canon, as it exists in the English Bible today, is the same possessed by early Christians. This is confirmed by a host of ancient sources, including the Muratorian fragment, Eusebius, Epiphanius, et al. [See Appendix 5-E & F, *Ancient Testimonies*]. While the Council of Carthage in AD 397 formally pronounced the canonicity of the NT books as we know them today, this was mere-

ly a recognition of the books which Christians had already accepted as inspired for three centuries.

If the Bible is truly inspired of God and affirms that “the word of the LORD endures forever” (1 Peter 1:25), we must conclude that God has providentially ensured that the books which have been preserved over the centuries and comprise the Bible today are precisely what God wants us to have.⁴

The Apocrypha

The term “Apocrypha” means “hidden” or “concealed” and is applied to the fourteen books, mostly of uncertain authorship, written during the third to first centuries BC and generally considered non-canonical.⁵ These books were added to the Septuagint⁶ (Greek translation of the Old Testament), made during that period. But the apocryphal books were not in the Hebrew Bible and were never recognized by the Jews as part of the sacred Scriptures. These books are never quoted or referred to in the New Testament. They were never accepted by the early church as of divine origin.

When the Bible was translated into Latin in the second century AD, the Old Testament was not translated from the Hebrew Scriptures but from the Septuagint; thus the Apocrypha was added to the Latin translation. During the Reformation, Protestants rejected the Apocrypha as being no part of God’s word, just like the Jews and early Christians had done. It was not until the 1546 Council of Trent that the Roman Catholic Church declared these books canonical, and that is why they are in the Catholic Bible today. [*See chart below – Apocryphal Books*].

The Hebrew Canon of the Old Testament

Classification

of Books

Hebrew Names

English Names

Classification of Books	Hebrew Names	English Names
The Law (Torah)	<i>Bereshith</i> = "In the Beginning" <i>We'elleh Shemoth</i> = "Now These Are the Names" <i>Wayyiqra</i> = "And He Called" <i>Wayyedabber</i> = "And He Said," or <i>Bemidbar</i> = "In the Wilderness" <i>Haddehbarim</i> = "The Words"	Genesis Exodus Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy
Former Prophets	<i>Yehoshua</i> = "Joshua" <i>Shophetim</i> = "Judges" <i>Shemuel</i> = "Samuel" <i>Melechim</i> = "Kings"	Joshua Judges 1-2 Samuel 1-2 Kings
Latter Prophets	<i>Yesha'yahu</i> = "Isaiah" <i>Yirmeyahu</i> = "Jeremiah" <i>Yehezke'l</i> = "Ezekiel" <i>Hoshea</i> = "Hosea" <i>Yo'el</i> = "Joel" <i>Amas</i> = "Amos" <i>Obadyah</i> = "Obadiah" <i>Yonas</i> = "Jonah" <i>Michayahu</i> = "Micah" <i>Nahum</i> = "Nahum" <i>Habaquq</i> = "Habakkuk" <i>Tsephan-yah</i> = "Zephaniah" <i>Haggai</i> = "Haggai" <i>Zekar-yah</i> = "Zechariah" <i>Mal'aki</i> = "Malachi"	Isaiah Jeremiah Ezekiel Hosea Joel Amos Obadiah Jonah Micah Nahum Habakkuk Zephaniah Haggai Zechariah Malachi
The Writings (Hagiographa)	<i>Sepher Tehillim</i> = "Book of Praises" <i>Iyyôb</i> = "Job" <i>Mishle Shelomoh</i> = "Proverbs of Solomon" <i>Rûth</i> = "Ruth" <i>Shir Hashirim</i> = "The Song of Songs" <i>Qohleth</i> = "Preacher" <i>Ekah</i> = "Ah, How!" <i>Hadassah</i> [<i>Ester</i>] = "Esther" <i>Daniye'l</i> = "Daniel" <i>Ezer</i> = "Ezra" <i>Dibere Hayyamim</i> = "The Words of the Days"	Psalms Job Proverbs Ruth Song Solomon Ecclesiastes Lamentations Esther Daniel Ezra/Nehemiah 1-2 Chronicles

Apocryphal Books

TITLE	DATE (approx)
Letter of Jeremiah	317 BC
Judith	200-100 BC
Tobit	200-100 BC
Prayer of Manasseh	200-1 BC
Ecclesiasticus (Wisdom of Jesus Sirach)	180 BC Hebrew; 132 BC Greek
1 Esdras	150 BC
Baruch	150-60 BC
Additions to Esther (103 verses)	114 BC
Bel and the Dragon	100 BC
Prayer of Azariah & Song of Three Young Men	100 BC
1 Maccabees	90 BC
2 Maccabees	90 BC
3 Maccabees	75 BC
4 Maccabees	10 BC; AD 20-54
Wisdom of Solomon	10 BC in Egypt
2 Esdras	AD 100
Psalms 151	?
Proclamation of Peter	AD 100
Apocalypse of Peter	AD 135
Gospel of Nazareans	AD 135
Acts of Andrew	AD 150
Gospel of Ebionites	AD 150
Gospel of Hebrews	AD 150
Gospel of Nicodemus (Acts of Pilate)	AD 150?
Gospel of Peter	AD 150
Protoevangelium of James	AD 150
Gospel of Truth	AD 160
Acts of Peter	AD 185
Acts of Paul	AD 190
Gospel of Thomas	AD 200
Infancy Gospel of Thomas	AD 200
Acts of Thomas	AD 215
Acts of John	AD 225
Ascension of Isaiah	AD 225?
Epistle to Laodiceans	AD 300?

Notes

¹ Jude 14-15 refers to a prophecy of “Enoch, the 7th from Adam,” and a similar reference is found in the apocryphal *Book of Enoch*, leading many to conclude that Jude quoted from this non-canonical source. It is important to note, however, that Jude does not suggest his information came from anything Enoch had supposedly **written**, and even if Adam’s great-great-great-great grandson had actually put something into writing (over two millennia before the earliest OT books), these documents would have perished in the Flood of Noah’s day (although Noah could have preserved an oral tradition, cf. Tertullian). But even if it is presumed that the *Book of Enoch* (whomever the author) was a contemporary work from which Jude may have quoted, remember also Paul’s practice of sometimes using quotes from secular literature to emphasize a point (cf. Acts 17:28; 1 Corinthians 15:33; Titus 1:12) and the inadvertent prophecy made by Caiaphas (John 11:49-52; 18:14). However, while writings attributed to “Enoch” seem to have been known as early as the second century AD, the extant *Book of Enoch* (discovered about AD 1773) is actually a conglomeration of fragments of various authorship, and the date(s) of these writings is uncertain. If the ancient Jews and early Christians had known of these writings, they apparently did not consider them canonical. Because the extant *Book of Enoch* contains numerous parallels to passages in the New Testament (at least 49 passages from 16 different NT books), **it is much more likely that Jude’s epistle was the primary source from which the writer(s) of the *Book of Enoch* borrowed the prophecy in question.** Jude may have received knowledge of Enoch’s prophecy through inspiration, oral tradition, or some other means, but since Jude does not provide any more information, speculation is futile.

² Paul likely kept copies of several of the letters he wrote (a common practice in the Graeco-Roman world), perhaps included among the “books” and “parchments” he possessed (2 Timothy 4:13). Peter was familiar with these writings (2 Peter 3:15-16), and the entire collection could have easily been made available to the brotherhood by Timothy, Mark, and/or Luke after Paul’s death (2 Timothy 4:11-13). This possibility is made even more plausible by the fact that all extant manuscripts containing the epistles of Paul are remarkably consistent, not only in the number of the Pauline epistles they contain but also in the order they are arranged. It is not improbable that Paul pre-selected which of his letters to include in the published collection.

³ To test inspired writings and eliminate spurious ones, the following

questions were applied: (1) Does the writing claim to be inspired of God? (2) Was it written by an apostle? (3) If not, is it in keeping with apostolic teaching? (4) Is it accepted by faithful congregations? (5) Does it have the “ring of genuineness”?

⁴ The renowned NT translator, J.B. Phillips, observed: “In the whole task of translating the New Testament I never for one moment, however provoked and challenged I might be, felt that I was being swept away into a world of spookiness, witchcraft and magical powers such as abound in the books rejected from the New Testament. It was the sustained down-to-earth faith of the New Testament writers which conveyed to me that inexpressible sense of the genuine and the authentic” (*Ring of Truth*, p. 95).

⁵ These writings are often referred to as “the Old Testament Apocrypha,” but there are other apocryphal writings more closely related to the NT period and beyond, many of which are more accurately designated “pseudepigraphical” because they are ascribed to authors who did not and could not have written them (e.g. Enoch).

⁶ This is often abbreviated LXX (the Roman numeral for 70), indicating the approximate number of men who participated in the translation.

?? Review Questions

1. What is meant by the “canon” of Scripture?
2. When did the formation of the canon of Scripture begin?
3. Was it a common Jewish practice to carelessly transmit or alter the text of Scripture?
4. Are the books in our English Old Testament different from those the ancient Hebrews had?
5. What did New Testament writers acknowledge about the origin of their writings?

6. How was the New Testament canon formed?
7. Is the Roman Catholic Church responsible for the books in the New Testament canon?
8. Is it likely that we do not have access to some inspired writings that God wants us to have?
9. What is meant by the “Apocrypha”?
10. Were these apocryphal books considered inspired by the early Jews and Christians?

Suggested Homework

Read the book of Genesis.

Recommended Reading

Neale Pryor, *You Can Trust Your Bible*, Abilene, TX: Quality Publications, 1980.

Chapter 4

The Old and New Covenants

A “covenant” is an agreement between at least two parties, with conditions to be met and promises to be fulfilled. While a number of covenants are mentioned in Scripture (e.g. Genesis 6:18; 9:9; 17:9), two stand out in prominence. Understanding the differences between these two covenants is vital to interpreting the Bible correctly.¹

The Old Covenant

God made a covenant with the nation of Israel in about 1490 BC when Moses led them out of Egypt to Mount Horeb in the Sinai Wilderness (Exodus 19:1-25; Deuteronomy 5:1-22). While this covenant was based on “ten commandments” written on tables of stone (Deuteronomy 4:13), it also included about 613 additional statutes, judgements, and regulations.² This covenant, also known as the Old Testament (2 Corinthians 3:14), the Law of Moses (Malachi 4:4), the Law of God or simply the Law (Nehemiah 8:7-8), was comprised of discernible parts (cf. Luke 24:44), but there was still only one law to which the Jews were amenable (Romans 2:17-18).³

Although the promises of this covenant were conditional (Joshua 23:14-16) and Israel did not live up to their end of the agreement (Jeremiah 11:8-11), this covenant was never meant to be permanent.⁴ It was a temporary measure to help the Israelites remain faithful until the Messiah came into the world (Galatians 3:16-25), after which it had fulfilled its purpose and became obsolete (Hebrews 8:6-13).

The New Covenant

About six centuries before Christ arrived on the scene, God promised to make a new covenant with his people (Jeremiah 31:31-34). When Jesus died on the cross, this promise was fulfilled (Hebrews 9:15-17). This new covenant is a *better* covenant in that it is established on better promises (Hebrews 8:6), is intended for all people rather than a single nation (Luke 24:47; Ephesians 2:11-22), has a superior priesthood and more excellent Mediator (Hebrews 7:11-28; 12:24), provides the assurance of a greater rest and hope (Hebrews 4:1-16; 6:11-19), offers forgiveness of sins (Hebrews 8:12; 10:17), has a superior atoning sacrifice (Hebrews 9:11-28), and is everlasting (Hebrews 13:20).⁵ But, above all else, the New Covenant is “better” because it alone has the validation of a Savior, Jesus Christ (Hebrews 10:5-10).

The Perils of Confusing the Two Covenants

Even though the Old Testament has been annulled as a binding set of regulations, it still serves a useful purpose for our learning and admonition (Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:1-12). However, no one today is justified by that law (Romans 3:20-22). If someone wants to go back and observe any part of the old law, he is not only obliged to obey *all* of it, but in so doing he has lost his spiritual security assured only in the new covenant of Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:10; 5:1-4).

Many religious people today confuse these two covenants and fail to appreciate the important distinction between them. Some of the following Old Testament practices have been mistakenly adopted by a number of religious groups: Sabbath observance (Exodus 20:8-11), food restrictions (Leviticus 11:4-47), tithing (Malachi 3:10), an exclusive priesthood (Exodus 40:15), musical instruments and/or dancing in worship (Psalm 149:3), burning incense (Malachi

1:11), and others. But if some of these practices are going to be borrowed from the Old Testament, consistency demands that the rest be incorporated as well, including animal sacrifices (Exodus 20:24), polygamy (Exodus 21:10), killing the disobedient (Deuteronomy 21:18-21), circumcision (Leviticus 12:3), annual feasts (Exodus 23:14-17), a temple in Jerusalem (Isaiah 44:28), et al. But the Lord never intended for the two covenants to be indiscriminately blended together.

A number of allusions, quotations, and examples from the Old Testament can be found in the New Testament. General facts and principles such as the love of God, the necessity of obedience, consequences for disobedience, the importance of faith, etc., are continually relevant. But if an old covenant practice or requirement has not been placed in the New Testament by the Lord himself,⁶ it is a mistake to presumptuously go back under the old system which the Lord has deemed obsolete.

Notes

¹ Thanks to Jerry Dyer who first introduced me to the basic outline of this chapter several years ago.

² These were carefully counted by Jewish rabbis and divided into 248 affirmative and 365 negative precepts.

³ The Bible does not make a distinction between a so-called “moral law” and a so-called “ceremonial law.” The old covenant law certainly had both moral and ceremonial aspects, but the Bible consistently speaks of a *single* law for ancient Israel and contrasts that law with Christ’s new covenant system (e.g. John 1:17; 7:19; Romans 3:19; 4:13-16; Galatians 2:16). In Romans 2:17-25 Paul shows that the same law that addressed the moral issues of stealing, adultery, and idolatry also included ceremonial legislation on circumcision. In John 10:34 and 15:25 Jesus quoted Psalms 82:6 and 69:4 respectively, attributing both of these passages to the Jewish “law.”

⁴ The Hebrew word ‘*olam*’, commonly translated “forever,” is often used to describe various aspects of the Jewish law (e.g. Exodus 12:14-17; 27:21; 28:43; 29:28; 30:21; 31:17; Leviticus 6:18-22; et al.). But rather than signifying “without end,” it merely expresses simple duration and describes something that lasts as long as it was intended to last (cf. Deuteronomy 15:17; 1 Samuel 1:22-28; Isaiah 42:14).

⁵ The fact that the Lord *does not change* (Malachi 3:6; James 1:17; Hebrews 13:8) simply means that his character is immutable and his nature is consistent, but this has nothing to do with the *various* ways God has operated throughout human history. Even if God were to change his mind (cf. Genesis 6:6-8; 18:20-32; Numbers 16:20-24), this would not affect his consistent nature or suggest that his inherent attributes are changeable. God completed his work of creation long ago (Genesis 2:1), and even though he is no longer doing what he did in the beginning, the Creator himself is unchanged. Although God has communicated to man in a variety of *diverse* ways through the ages (Hebrews 1:1-2), the Lord himself remains the same. Under the old law God required a Levitical priesthood (Numbers 18), but God’s consistent nature is not impugned when the Bible says: “For the priesthood being *changed*, of necessity there is also a *change* of the law” (Hebrews 7:12). At one time God required such things as animal sacrifices,

circumcision, Sabbath observance, and a temple in Jerusalem, but all these items have been superseded by the new covenant of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 8:6-13). While God himself is changeless, the old covenant of the Jews has become obsolete (Hebrews 8:13), is changed, annulled, weak and unprofitable (Hebrews 7:12, 18), was merely a foreshadowing of things to come (Hebrews 10:1), was taken out of the way (2 Corinthians 3:14; Colossians 2:14; Hebrews 10:9), and we are no longer under it or justified by it (Galatians 2:16; 3:24-25). Despite the various covenants God has made in the past (Romans 9:4; Ephesians 2:12; cf. Genesis 6:18; 9:9; 15:18; Deuteronomy 5:2; Ezekiel 16:8; Malachi 2:4), the **new covenant of Jesus Christ** is the Lord's final covenant with mankind (Hebrews 13:20-21).

⁶ Basically nine of the “10 commandments” (Exodus 20:3-17) have been incorporated into Christ's new covenant system (Romans 13:9; etc.), so it is still sinful to commit murder, adultery, theft, etc., not because the “10 commandments” have been breached but because of what is legislated in the New Testament. In Romans 7:4-7, for example, Paul says that Christians “have become dead to the law” and “have been delivered from the law” (vs. 4, 6), which is the same law that includes the injunction, “You shall not covet” (v. 7), i.e. one of the 10 commandments (Exodus 20:17). But the teachings of Christ still do not allow covetousness (Luke 12:15; Ephesians 5:3). In contrast, there is no 7th-day Sabbath legislation (Exodus 20:8-11; 31:12-18) in the New Testament.

?? Review Questions

1. What is a “covenant”?
2. A covenant consists of what two fundamental components?
3. With whom did God make a covenant on Mount Horeb in the Sinai Wilderness?
4. What foundational aspect of this covenant was written on tablets of stone?

5. How can one know the covenant God made with Israel was not meant to be permanent?
6. What happened to the first covenant when the new covenant was instituted?
7. What purpose does the Old Testament serve today?
8. What are some ways in which the new covenant is superior to the old one?
9. What religious practices have some erroneously borrowed from the old covenant?
10. What is the danger of trying to incorporate portions of the old covenant into Christianity?

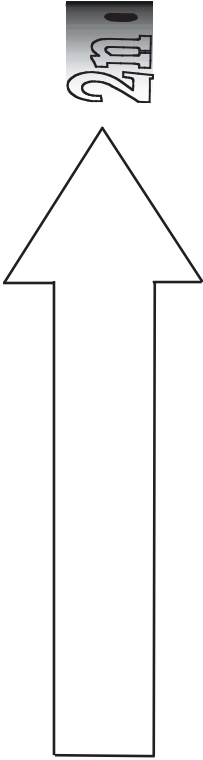
Suggested Homework

Read the book of Exodus.

Recommended Reading



Roy Deaver, *How to Study the Bible*, Plano, TX: Biblical Publishing Corporation, 1976.



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