

Why Do We Accept the Bible Over Other Ancient Documents?

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There are many today who claim to have discovered some new documents, or lost books of the Bible, which they maintain should be part of the original Bible. Of course, these documents of antiquity are not documents that are reliable and trustworthy since they were never incorporated into the original canon of Scriptures by the apostles and early Church.

In this study we want to investigate why the Bible we possess today should be accepted as the final authority regarding faith and practice and why the Bible is the only authentic standard which should be accepted above all other ancient religious documents.

There are three reasons why we accept the Bible over other ancient records of antiquity.

1. Inspiration

Leigh Teabing in “The Da Vinci code” said: “The Bible is a product of man, my dear, not of God” (page 231). This is a false statement. The Bible claims to be the very words of God and not the words of man. How can this be? It’s because the Bible is inspired by God Himself.

2 Timothy 3:16

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”

The word “inspiration” means literally “God breathed” and suggests that God used the writers of Scripture as *vehicles* through whom He could speak forth His direct words. Therefore, what was spoken and recorded by these men were the exact words of God. The words they shared and wrote down are the very breath of God, or words that have been spoken by God Himself, even though men were used as the vehicles or instruments to bring God’s Word to us.

A Sailing Ship

2 Peter 1:21

“For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.”

God supernaturally influenced and revealed truth to the hearts and minds of the prophets and writers of Scripture (1 Cor. 2:13; 14:29-30, 36). As a result, they were able to speak forth and write (“many things to write” - 2 John 12; 3 John 13). God’s very words, while they were being carried or born along (supernaturally guided) by the Holy Spirit. Like a sailing ship being moved by the winds and currents of the ocean, so men were carried along by the Holy Spirit, so much so, they were able to speak and record the very words of God. As a result of inspiration, we can hold the Bible in our hands and know that we have in our possession the written Word of God.

Jesus said to His apostles in John 16:13, “... when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth...” The writing of the New Testament books is the ultimate fulfillment of this teaching and guiding ministry of the Spirit, which came upon the lives of the apostles, who were the writers of Scripture. Three important things can be seen in John 16:13: (1) The Guide - "the Spirit of Truth" (2) The Journey - "will guide you" (3) The Arrival - "into all truth" (the Bible).

Consider what the Bible writers claimed for their writings.

Isaiah 1:2 – “The LORD hath spoken.”

Jeremiah 10:1-2 – “Hear ye the word which the LORD speaketh” and
“Thus saith the Lord.”

Ezekiel 1:3 – “The word of the LORD came expressly unto Ezekiel.”

Jonah 1:1 – “The word of the LORD came unto Jonah.”

Micah 1:1 – “The word of the Lord that came to Micah.”

Zephaniah 1:1 – “The word of the LORD which came unto
Zephaniah.”

1 Corinthians 14:37 – “the things that I write unto you are the
commandments of the Lord.”

Ephesians 3:3 – “How that by revelation he made known unto me.”

1 Thessalonians 4:15 – “For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord.”

1 Timothy 4:1 – “the Spirit speaketh expressly”

2 Timothy 2:15 & James 1:18 – “the word of Truth.”

Revelation 19:9 - "These are the true sayings of God."

Experience or the Bible?

Referring to the Word of God Peter said, “We have also a more sure word of prophecy” (2 Pet. 1:19). Peter makes it clear that while he regarded his experience on the Mount of Transfiguration as a truthful witness (2 Pet. 1:16), the divine authority of Holy Scripture coming from men guided or “moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Pet. 1:21) had greater authority than experience. Paul also realized that the words he spoke were actually inspired by God (the very breath of God) and produced what are called the original manuscripts (autographs).

Inspired or Inspiring?

1 Thessalonians 2:13

“For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.”

People today will say that the works of Shakespeare are inspired. What they really mean is that these works are inspiring or something that is illuminating, enlightening, thought-provoking, and soul-stirring when read. However, the Bible is not merely inspiring. It is literally inspired by God. The words of Scripture are inspired in a literal sense. They are the very words and breath of God. No other work of antiquity can make this claim.

2. Transmission

Transmission is basically how the Bible was passed down and came to be in existence as we know it today. There are five stages of transmission.

The first stage of transmission involved the writing of letters by the apostles which were received in the churches during the last half of the first century. From the earliest times the Church had a working functional canon of inspired letters, even though all the letters were not yet written or gathered together in a Bible, as we know it today. The writing and recording of the Bible was promised to take place under the guidance and supervision of the Holy Spirit (John 14:25-26) and this recorded teaching became the apostolic foundation of the Church (Eph. 2:20).

Apostolic Authority

The apostles' doctrine was well known among the early Church (Acts 2:42). Copies of letters written by the apostles were carefully and meticulously made and circulated throughout the churches. Not all the churches immediately had copies of the letters, but eventually they were distributed among all the churches. Of course, while the apostles were alive they could authenticate their own writings. In other words, they could be checked by the men who actually wrote the letters (Gal. 6:11; 2 Thess. 2:2; 1 Pet. 1:1; 2 Pet. 1:1; 1 John 1:4; Jude 1:1; Rev. 1:1, 19). Apostolic authority was the final court of appeal (Acts 2:42 – "apostles' doctrine").

The second stage of transmission involved a growing group of books that were developed and recognized as inspired Scriptures. The belief that specific letters were inspired by the apostles and written for the Church was the common consensus and practice since the earliest days of Christianity (1 Thess. 5:27). The early Church accepted the apostolic writings as God's Word (1 Thess. 2:13) and distributed them throughout the churches (Col. 4:16). It's clear that the letters were intended for the whole church (1 Cor. 1:1; Rev. 1:3).

Circulation

There was a type of round-robin circulation of inspired books or letters that steadily grew among the churches. These documents were understood and accepted by the apostles as authentic Scripture (2 Tim. 4:13). Peter accepted Paul's writings as inspired and quotes them (2 Pet. 3:15-16), Jude quoted Peter (Jude 1:17-18 with 2 Pet. 3:3), and Paul cited Luke's Gospel as Scripture (1 Tim. 5:18 with Luke 10:7). It's obvious that the early church recognized a *growing body of literature* as the inspired Word of God.

Checks and Balances

A system of checks and balances was adopted by the early Church to authenticate what books were genuine. The following guidelines and questions were asked by early Christians to authenticate a book and determine the canon (rule or standard of truth) of Scripture (a fixed body of divinely inspired and authoritative writings).

- Was it written by an apostle or a close associate with the apostles (apostolic authority – Acts 2:42; Eph. 2:20; 1 Cor. 14:37)? *Apostolic authorship inevitably led to the exclusion of post-100 A.D writings.*
- Was it in harmony with other accepted doctrine or teaching (1 Tim. 1:10; Titus 1:9; 2:1)? Was it in agreement with the "rule of faith" or general traditional Christian teaching found in the Old Testament prophets (2 Pet. 1:21) and the teaching of the New Testament apostles (2 Thess. 3:6)?
- Was the document widespread and continuously accepted among the churches as inspired and apostolic in origin (1 Tim. 4:13; 2 Cor. 8:18)? Was there a general long-standing usage among many congregations?

The Poison and the Honey

Even during Paul's own day, he wrote: "For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God" (2 Cor. 2:17). This implies that as early as A.D. 60

there were those trying to corrupt Scriptures through tainted manuscripts and other spurious writings (2 Thess. 2:2). A heretic named Marcion (a member of a Gnostic sect) opposed the Christian writings with his own version of the Scripture in A.D. 135. The Church responded and declared what books were authoritative in a document that is today called the "Muratorian Fragment" that dates back to 175 A.D. *The early church did not want poison mixed with the honey!* The church during the first and second centuries did not want to accept false documents which did not correspond with the original autographs of Scripture.

Banned from the Bible!

There were books and writings banned from the Bible because they were never accepted by the early Church as God inspired writings. These include such writings as "The Shepherd of Hermes," "Epistle of Barnabas," "Gospel of Judas," and the "Didache" (the teaching of the apostles) since these books were never inspired by God. From the earliest times, the Church correctly discerned the writings that came to them and made sure they came from God.

Writings that were not authored by the apostles, nor inspired by God, include those that eventually came to be called the "Gnostic Gospels," "Lost Books of the Bible," and other writings such as the apocrypha. These fraudulent and counterfeit writings were banned from the Bible. Yes, banned from the Bible! The Church banned them from the Bible for they did not meet the criteria of being written by an apostle and contradicted statements in the inspired Bible which had been authenticated by the original apostles while they were living. Let's examine some of these alleged inspired documents.

Gnostic Nonsense!

The Gnostic gospels are attributed to the work of a Christian sect of people known as the "Gnostics," which existed in the early Church (*Gnosis* in Greek means "knowledge.") These gospels bear little resemblance to the canonical Gospels and present fictitious historical accounts. They do not seek to present a biography of the historical Jesus. Their focus tends to be

more on esoteric wisdom that the risen Jesus supposedly conveyed to the disciples after Easter. The Gnostics taught that a person did not have to go to God through Jesus but could approach God through inner enlightenment.

Why were the Gnostic gospels not included in the Bible? They were not included for several reasons. First, their origin could not be traced to the apostolic age and genuine apostolic authorship. Second, the Gnostic writings were condemned for their heretical teachings. These writings are nothing more than Gnostic nonsense which reinterpret the life and teachings of Christ based upon Gnostic philosophy. Jesus is seen more as a spirit than a human being. They promote philosophic descriptions of the origin of the universe, myths, magic, and mysticism - a false type of knowledge ("science falsely so called" - 1 Tim. 6:20).

Another Bible?

Today you can walk into a bookstore and purchase a Gnostic Bible. The claim is now made that there is another Bible. The Mormons claim there is "another testament." This is what the Gnostic Bible claims. The Gnostic Bible contains such books as "The Gospel of Peter," "The Gospel of Mary," "The Gospel of Philip," and "The Gospel of Thomas." Gnostic writings were eventually brought together, and the result was "The Gnostic Gospels."

The books mentioned above were written to bear the names of the apostles and other names in the Bible to try and sell them to the public domain. But the church was too smart and saw through these as false gospels. They were written long after (some 150 – 200 years) the other Gospel records were deemed inspired. Most of them are from the third and fourth centuries making them far removed from the earliest and most reliable eyewitness accounts of the apostles (2 Pet. 1:16; John 1:1). None of them were written by an apostle of Christ, or by someone who had direct contact with the apostles, since they were written long after the apostles were dead.

Dan Brown who wrote "The Da Vinci Code" used these Gnostic gospels as his primary source to gain the false accusations about Christ, Mary, and Christianity. From these sources he gathered the idea that the Gnostic form of Christianity is the true source and not what we have today in the Bible.

Another Testament?

Today people talk about the “new documents” that are discovered or “another testament of Jesus Christ” (Book of Mormon). These documents and books are aimed at disproving the accounts and teachings of the Bible. Of course, these are false or bogus records that were written, either after the canon of Scripture was verified by the apostles, or they were rejected by the early Church and existing apostles, as being not genuine and unworthy of consideration. The Book of Mormon was only published in 1830!

What did the early Church do with counterfeit writings? Every document that was found to be a forgery and false witness was deemed unreliable by the early church. Anything that was not stamped with the authority of the apostles was marked as untrustworthy and excluded from the holy writings. The early Church knew which documents were authored by the apostles and which were not. God did not make a mistake when He led the Christian Church to recognize what is and is not inspired. As early as the first century, the church recognized certain writings as bearing the stamp of the Holy Spirit.

Lost Books of the Bible?

I know there is much talk these days about the so-called lost books of the Bible. The cults, New Age, and liberals make all sorts of claims about how the Bible is missing books, books that help justify what they hope to believe, whether it's reincarnation, Mormonism, or feminism. One thing is certain. **The "lost books" were never lost!** They were known by the Jews in Old Testament times and the Christians of New Testament times but were never considered part of sacred Scripture. They weren't lost nor were they removed. They were never in the Bible in the first place. They failed the apostolic test of authorship and doctrine. As a result, they were repudiated and considered erroneous and unreliable writings. They were banned from the Bible!

The Apocrypha?

Why was the apocrypha not included in the Bible? There are ten reasons why the apocrypha was not included in the Bible.

#1

These books were examined by the custodians of Scripture (God's covenant people - the Jews) and were considered fraudulent and uninspired due to their content. The apocrypha, or what is sometimes called the hidden books, are mainly a collection of ancient Jewish writings (written somewhere around 200 years before Christ's birth) that were translated into the LXX (Greek version of the Old Testament) and the Latin Vulgate. The word *apocrypha* which is used to describe these writings was actually coined by the 5th-century scholar named Jerome. The point is this. These books were never incorporated into the Masoretic Text, a collection of God-inspired Hebrew texts of Scripture, which the Jews themselves considered canonical (Rom. 3:2; 9:4). Their designation by Jerome as being "obscure or hidden" books means they were not seen as part of the Hebrew Scriptures that were used by God's covenant people. Because of their lack of authenticity these books were not accepted as part of the Hebrew canon.

The Jewish people, to whom the Old Testament prophets wrote, knew which of the prophets were true, when Scripture was being prophesied and written. Each prophet needed to fulfill the requirements for God's representatives and authenticate their writings. Here was the test. False prophets were weeded out if their prophecies did not come true (Deut. 18:20-22) and if their alleged revelations or statements contradicted previously revealed truths (Deut 13:1-3.). Moses' books were accepted and stored in a holy place (Deut 31:26) as were Joshua's writings (Joshua 24:26).

The Hebrew writings were recorded and passed down through the generations and accepted by the Jewish people as Scripture (Isaiah 59:21). This is why Daniel retained a copy of Jeremiah (Dan. 9:2). It's also why Daniel quoted the law of Moses (Dan. 9:11). The Jews still retained copies of the writings of Scripture even after the temple was destroyed along with the original documents of Scripture (2 Chron. 36:17-19; Joshua 1:8; 1 Kings 2:3; Neh. 8:1). God's Word was preserved and providentially protected by God from loss and corruption.

The Old Testament saints knew there was a collected body of sacred revealed truth which could not be altered or changed in any way by other

spurious writings. In addition, Peter had a collection of Paul's writings (2 Pet. 3:15-16). Paul wanted the writings of sacred Scripture to be brought to him (2 Tim. 4:13). In other words, both the Jews and the early church recognized there was a circulating body of truth which was inspired by God and preserved as God's Word. *They knew what books were already accepted as God's truth and which ones failed the test.* The point is this. The apocryphal books were never acknowledged as sacred Scripture by the Jews, who were the custodians of the Hebrew Scriptures. In fact, the Jewish people rejected and destroyed the apocrypha after the overthrow of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

#2

The first century early Church did not recognize these books as Scripture. They never embraced these writings as being part of the accepted Hebrew canon of Scripture. Much later Augustine (400 AD) did recognize the apocrypha as Scripture. It was mainly from his influence that the apocrypha eventually became accepted by the Roman Catholic Church. The Catholic Church itself did not officially recognize and canonize the apocrypha as Scripture until the council of Trent in the 1500's.

The point is this. The official acceptance of the apocrypha occurred well after the New Testament was written and confirmed by the apostles and long after the final canonization of the Hebrew Scriptures by the Jews. This alone should prove the historical rejection of the apocrypha as Scripture. The Jewish custodians of Old Testament Scripture (Rom. 3:2) and the early apostolic Church (1 Tim. 3:15) rejected these writings as unauthentic claiming they were not written by God's prophets and apostles.

#3

Not one of the apocryphal books were written in the Hebrew language, which was used by the writers of Old Testament Scripture. All Apocryphal books are written in Greek, except one, which is extant only in Latin. This demonstrates the late writing of these documents (written during the intertestamental period) in relation to other Old Testament books and that the Jews did not value these books as their sacred Scripture.

#4

Moses' writings are cited throughout the Old Testament beginning with Joshua all the way to Malachi. (Josh 1:7, 1 Kings 2:3, Ezra 6:18, Jeremiah 8:8, Malachi 4:4). In other words, later prophets would cite earlier ones (Jer. 26:18, Ezek 14:14, Dan 9:2, Jonah 2: 2-9). In the New Testament Paul cites Luke (1 Tim. 5:18), Peter recognizes Paul's Epistles (2 Peter 15-16). The book of Revelation is filled with imagery largely from Daniel. *Sacred Scripture verifies and authenticates itself*. On the other hand no apocryphal book claims to be written by a prophet and not once is any apocryphal book authoritatively cited by a book written after it.

#5

The Reformers rejected the apocrypha. Calvin wrote, "I am not one of those, however, who would entirely disapprove the reading of those books"; his objection was to "placing the apocrypha in the same rank" with inspired Scripture ("Antidote" to the Council of Trent, pp. 67, 68). Likewise, Luther placed the apocrypha in an appendix to the Old Testament in his German Bible, describing them in the title as "Books which are not to be held equal to holy scripture, but are useful and good to read."

#6

None of the apocryphal writers laid claim to inspiration. No apocryphal book actually claims to be inspired by God. In fact, some either disclaim it, or reveal evidence of errancy. Several historical, geographical, and chronological mistakes can be found in the apocryphal books - errors that are not a characteristic of the 39 Old Testament books.

#7

Various credible ancient sources that frequently allude to, and quote from the Old Testament, exclude the apocryphal books from the canon. Philo (20 B.C.-A.D. 50), Josephus (A.D. 37-95), and Melito (A.D. 165-175), among others, rejected the apocrypha.

#8

The apocryphal books were not permitted among the sacred books during the first four centuries of the real Christian church. This is because the apocrypha contain fabulous statements which not only contradict the

"canonical" scriptures but contradict themselves. For example, in the two books of Maccabees, Antiochus Epiphanes is made to die three different deaths in three different places.

#9

The books of the apocrypha abound in doctrinal, ethical, and historical errors. Tobit claims to have been alive when Jeroboam revolted (931 BC) and when Assyria conquered Israel (722 BC). These two events were separated by over 200 years and yet the total lifespan of Tobit was 158 years (Tobit 1:3-5; 14:11)! Judith mistakenly identifies King Nebuchadnezzar as king of the Assyrians (1:1, 7) when in fact he was the king of Babylon (2 Kings 24:1). Tobit endorses the superstitious use of fish liver to ward off demons (6:6, 7).

The theological errors are equally significant. Wisdom of Solomon teaches the creation of the world from pre-existent matter (7:17). Second Maccabees teaches prayers for the dead (12:45-46), and Tobit teaches salvation by the good work of almsgiving (12:9). The book of Sirach teaches that almsgiving makes atonement for sin. "Whoso honoureth his father maketh an atonement for his sins...Water will quench a flaming fire; and alms maketh an atonement for sin" (Sirach 3:3, 30). Similarly, Tobit 12:9 states that "alms doth deliver from death, and shall purge away all sin." But the Bible states that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from every sin (1 John 1:7).

Surely the doctrinal and historical errors in the apocrypha are clear evidence *against* the divine inspiration of these books. The apocrypha teaches immoral practices, such as lying, suicide, assassination, and magical incantation. Of course, the Bible condemns all of these practices. For these reasons and others, the early church banned the apocrypha from the Bible and found it to be unreliable and uninspired.

#10

No Apocryphal book is referred to in the New Testament whereas the Old Testament is referred to hundreds of times. This is significant. Apocryphal books are never quoted in the New Testament. Although these writings existed in the first century, they never were quoted or explicitly cited by Jesus or the apostles in the New Testament. Such a fact truly is significant

when one realizes that the New Testament writers quote from, or allude to, the Old Testament (minus the apocrypha) approximately 1,000 times. In all, thirty-five of the thirty-nine Old Testament books are referred to in the New Testament.

Of course, the books of the apocrypha are not totally useless for they do provide some insight into ancient literature and life during the intertestamental period (the days between the writing of the Old and New Testaments). However, they form no part of Scripture. Their entrance and acceptance as inspired letters in the Catholic Bible is another testimony of Catholicism's rejection of absolute truth which is found only in the Bible instead of church dogma and extra-scriptural writings.

In summary, during the second stage of transmission a growing number of books were developed and recognized as inspired letters, which were written by the original apostles. All documents that were not penned by the apostles were never recognized as authoritative Scripture.

The third stage of transmission was the continued copying, circulation, and distribution of the writings among the churches. The process of the recognition, collection, and transmission of the New Testament epistles began in the first century of the Christian Church. Very early on, some of the New Testament books were being recognized and circulated among the local churches. Paul considered Luke's writings to be as authoritative as the Old Testament (1 Timothy 5:18; see also Deuteronomy 25:4 and Luke 10:7). Peter recognized Paul's writings as Scripture (2 Peter 3:15-16). Some of the books of the New Testament were being circulated among the churches (Colossians 4:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:27).

Copies

The books of the Bible were meticulously and effectively copied and distributed among the churches. We find that both Old Testament (Jer. 8:8; 36:28; Ezra 7:11; 1 Chron. 2:55; Deut. 17:18 - "he shall write him a copy") and New Testament Scriptures (2 Tim. 4:13) were carefully copied and used among families and churches (Deut. 6:7; 2 Tim. 3:15). Of course, the Bible was the first book ever printed on the printing press with moveable type

(Gutenberg Press, 1455, Latin Bible). This replaced the copying of the Bible and allowed for a much wider distribution and transmission of the sacred text.

Completion

By the end of the first century, all of the 27 books in our present New Testament Bibles had been written, received by some of the churches, and two thirds of them were considered inspired. The rest continued in circulation among the churches to gain full support. The remaining books that were not yet fully circulated, such as the Book of Revelation, were known and quoted as authoritative, even though they had not yet achieved wide circulation. It was only a matter of time before all of them would be categorized as Scripture.

The fourth stage of transmission was the acceptance of the 27 New Testament books following the apostolic days. The letters of tradition, which were previously accepted by the early Church, through widespread distribution, were now accepted in the post-apostolic era. The acceptance of these books occurred in the immediate generations that followed the apostolic age, or the days when the apostles lived upon earth. In the three centuries following the times of the apostles, church leaders cited every book of the New Testament as authoritative. This is added proof of their acceptance as sacred Scripture.

Confirmation

Clement of Rome mentioned at least eight New Testament books (A.D. 95). Ignatius of Antioch acknowledged about seven books (A.D. 115). Polycarp, a disciple of John the Apostle, acknowledged 15 books (A.D. 108). Later, Irenaeus mentioned 21 books (A.D. 185). Hippolytus recognized 22 books (A.D. 170-235). By the year 180 A.D. we also find the church quoting freely from the gospels. This gives added confirmation that certain books were already accepted, deemed apostolic in origin, and inspired.

History tells us that all 27 books of the New Testament, which had been passed down by Church testing, tradition, and transmission, appeared in an

Easter letter written by Athanasius the church leader. This was in A.D. 367. It is evident that God has preserved the Bible through the Church. He has deposited His Word with His people, and this is one reason why the Church is called “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15).

Custodians

The Jews were given the privilege of being custodians of the Old Testament Hebrew Scriptures (Rom. 3:2). The Jews were the means through which the Old Testament Scriptures were transmitted and preserved (Deut. 1:1; 31:24-30; Neh. 8:1-9). The Old Testament writers completed their 39 books over a period of about 1500 years. By Ezra’s day (fifth century B.C.) most of the books had probably been completed (Ezra 7:6, 11, 12; Neh. 8:8).

Of course, God gave the Church the privilege of being Bible custodians of the New Testament Scriptures (1 Tim. 3:15; 4:11; 6:2; 2 Tim. 2:2). They were to transmit (Matt. 28:19-20), recognize (2 Tim. 4:13), and safeguard (2 Cor. 2:17; Jude 3) the truth making sure that it remained pure and unpolluted. In short, the church was the means through which the New Testament Scriptures were passed down and preserved. The New Testament books appeared over a period of about 70 years after Christ’s death and resurrection.

The fifth and final stage of transmission occurred when the 27 books of our New Testament were officially ratified as Scripture by the Council of Hippo (A.D. 393) and the Third Council of Carthage (A.D. 397). After the legalization of Christianity in A.D. 313, the church councils were able to meet and officially set the texts of sacred Scripture and reject those that were heretical and forged.

Canon

The word "canon" comes from the rule or standard of law that was used to evaluate and determine if a book was true and inspired by God. The official canonization of Scripture, or the recognition and collection of books together as inspired truth, occurred in the fourth century. However, the important note is that all of these books of the Bible were already collected,

recognized, and finalized as inspired Scripture throughout the days of the early Church 300 years before any church council labeled them as Scripture.

a. Old Testament Canon

Jewish scholars agree that the Old Testament books were completed 400 years before Christ.

Erwin Lutzer said:

"At the council of Jamnia in 90 AD, the Old Testament books were ratified. The authentic books had proved their worth; the wheat had been separated from the chaff."

b. New Testament Canon

As previously stated, the Church had been calling the 27 books of the New Testament Bible "Scripture" for some 300 years, long before any official council deemed them as Scripture. The canon was already present in the apostolic age (the days when the apostles lived and wrote the letters) and it was during the apostolic Church when these inspired letters became known and circulated. In short, no politically engineered canonization process was needed to determine which books were genuine.

No church council had any knowledge that was not already available to early Christians concerning the inspiration of the Bible. The councils followed some similar principles, as the early Church did, to determine whether a New Testament book was truly inspired by the Holy Spirit: 1) Was the book written by an apostle? 2) Is the book being accepted by the Body of Christ at large? 3) Did the book contain consistency of doctrine and orthodox teaching?

Caretaking

Actually, it was God, and God alone, who determined which books belonged in the Bible. Bringing the books of the Bible together was simply a matter of God convincing His followers of what He had already decided upon ("the word of truth" - 2 Tim. 2:15). *The church recognized certain*

writings through the witness of the Holy Spirit. For instance, the Spirit confirmed to Peter that what Paul wrote was indeed Holy Scripture (2 Pet. 3:15-16). The human process of collecting the books of the Bible was superintended by the providence of God and it was actually God who brought the early Church to the recognition of the books He had inspired. God was the divine caretaker of Scripture.

Collection

The post-apostolic church eventually affirmed a canon which was a standard collection of accepted books for the entire Bible. God directed that the New Testament documents should be officially canonized or become an accepted standard of Scripture. As previously stated, official Church councils confirmed the books of the Bible, so they might remain intact as an entire collection of writings handed down by God. This official canonization occurred between the years 367 A.D and 397 A.D. Once again, no specific council was responsible for bringing the books together. The early Church had already recognized which books were inspired by the apostles during the days in which the apostles lived.

3. Preservation

The preservation of the Scriptures was ensured by the faithful and meticulous copying of Scriptures by the scribes (2 Chron. 34:14; Jer. 8:8; Matt. 13:52; Acts 4:5). Jesus Christ constantly appealed to the copies of Old Testament Scriptures as being true and reliable (Luke 4:17; Matt. 19:3-5; 21:16, 42; John 5:39). There can be no doubt that Jesus regarded the extant (existing) copies of Scripture in His day as the preserved Word of God. Jesus never questioned the integrity or authenticity of the Old Testament Scriptures (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10; Luke 24:27, 44; John 10:35). The same was true of the apostles, who quoted Old Testament Scripture, knowing that they were an accurate preservation of truth (Acts 1:16; 4:25; 15:21; 28:25; Heb. 1:1, 6-7).

Preserved by God

The copies of God's Word were always considered to be unchanging truth that had been passed down through the copying process. Copies of God's

Word were said to be holy (II Tim. 3:15), true (2 Tim. 2:15), unbreakable (Jn. 10:35), and worthy of belief (Jn. 2:22). The copies of the New Testament were circulated among the churches and deemed as sacred Scripture which had been preserved by God (2 Pet. 3:15-16; 1 Tim. 5:18; 2 Tim. 3:15-17; Col. 4:16; Rev. 1:4). This is why strong warnings (2 Cor. 2:17) and anathemas (Deut. 4:2; Rev. 22:18-19; Gal. 1:9) were placed on those who tampered with the preserved text of truth.

Providence of God

God's sovereign guidance was seen at work in preserving the sacred Scriptures throughout the passing generations. Preservation refers to the providential keeping of the original text from loss and alteration, throughout the centuries of time, so the words, meaning, and teaching of the Bible cannot be changed (Ps. 119:89,152,160; Is. 40:8; Mt. 5:18; 24:35; 1 Pet. 1:25). The primary *teaching* of these verses is that the Bible can be trusted. The primary *application* of this truth ensures us that God has providentially and supernaturally preserved His Word through the generations of time, so that the Bible we have today is an accurate witness and reflection of the original autographs.

In the above verses God intimated and implied that the Christian Scriptures would be preserved. If the Bible can be *trusted*, it's because the Bible has been *preserved* as a document of truth for every generation. If we believe that the writings of the Bible are true, then we must believe they have been providentially preserved through the ages.

God has given us the Scriptures and by His providence has exercised a remarkable care over the Bible, allowing it to be preserved throughout the ages in a state of purity (Ps. 119:140; Prov. 30:5). As a result, God has enabled the Bible to accomplish the purpose for which He gave it. In essence, the Bible can be trusted because the Bible has been preserved. The Bible we have today is the authoritative Word of God. You can't place confidence in the Bible without believing in the preservation of the Bible. Faith in the accuracy of the texts of Scripture and the preservation of Scripture are twin truths that cannot be separated.

Promoting Faith in God's Word

The verses we are going to consider under this heading are designed to promote faith in the preservation of the Scripture. God has given plenty of verses that inspire faith in our hearts regarding the trustworthiness of the Bible. The verses which are designed to promote confidence or trust in the Bible also necessitate God's plan to preserve the Bible throughout the passing generations. Our trust in the Bible is built upon God's faithfulness to preserve the Bible.

a. Fulfilled Prophecy

Matthew 5:17-18

"Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled."

In this text Jesus gave the promise of fulfilled prophecy. Jesus was teaching that He would fulfill every Messianic type, prediction, and prophecy concerning Himself in the Old Testament Scriptures (Matt. 24:27). He would also live by the pattern of God's Law or everything that was taught in the Old Testament Scriptures and by so doing authenticate the inspiration of the Old Testament Scriptures. In essence, during His earthly ministry Christ would fulfill both the *predictions* of the law concerning Himself and also the *patterns* of holy living that the law required. Christ fulfilled the law in every way.

How could Christ say this? It's because the Word of God was true and had been accurately preserved as God's truth throughout the centuries. The Jews possessed the truth and they could examine it and see its fulfillment in its predictions about Christ and His own pattern of living. *Fulfillment of prophecy naturally implies the preservation of the prophecy.* Jesus said all the prophecies regarding Himself would come to pass since the truth, as found in the Old Testament Scriptures, had not changed. It was preserved in an accurate manner and therefore the people could know the Scriptures and see their fulfillment in Christ.

We might mention at this point that the multitudes of predictive and fulfilled prophecies found in the Bible add even more authenticity to the Bible. For instance, the birth of Christ was predicted seven-hundred years prior to Christ's coming (Isaiah 7:14; 9:6; Matt. 1:22-23). Bible predictions relating to world empires that would arise, such as Media-Persia, Greece, and Rome, were in some cases predicted hundreds of years before they actually came into existence (Dan. 2:31-44). The fulfillment of prophecy is another sign marker that proves the authenticity of the Bible. The Bible is true and has been preserved for us as a reliable document authored by God.

Matthew 24:35

"Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."

In this text Jesus taught that Jewish people would know when the prophecies surrounding the end-times would be literally fulfilled. This is because His Word is true and would remain preserved as a body of truth that people could read and understand in the end times. Once again, fulfillment necessitates the preservation of the prophecy. The preservation of the Bible assures us that people will increasingly understand prophetic truth, as found in the Bible, during the end-times (Dan. 12:4).

b. Foundational Permanence

Psalm 119:89 (a *settled* word), Psalm 119:152 (a *secure* word), Psalm 119:160 (a *stable* word) and Isaiah 40:8 (a *standing* word), which is quoted in 1 Peter 1:23-25, all indicate that God's infallible decrees and moral laws never change. This is because God's unchanging decrees and laws are built upon a strong foundation of truth which cannot be altered or broken through the process of transmission. In short, the writers of Scripture believed God's Word was preserved since God's decrees, which were recorded in the Bible, could never be changed. The unalterable laws or decrees of God, which are presented in the Bible, are pictured as a permanent and unchanging foundation which cannot be moved.

God's Word is absolutely trustworthy. This is the thrust of all these verses. The Psalmist could place confidence in God's Word because it was true.

God's Word is forever settled in Heaven, unchanging, and enduring. Its foundation was strong, sure, and stable. Therefore, the Bible can be trusted forever. This assures us that the link from the original writings to the copies of God's Word which we have today cannot be broken.

These statements were given to provide faith in the trustworthiness and ultimate preservation of God's Word. If the Bible could be trusted, then the Psalmist also believed that it had been preserved for him. To argue otherwise would be ludicrous. These statements of Scripture express an attitude of belief in the trustworthiness of Scripture throughout the passing generations of time. It's an attitude of assurance or faith in God's Word, as a providentially preserved text of Scripture, which is absolutely true and trustworthy. Yes, the Bible can be trusted!

God's Plan

Think of it this way. Where there is truth there is also the preservation of Scripture. You can't have present-day truth without the past preservation of truth. If God's truth is "founded forever" (Ps. 119:152) and would remain "for ever" (Ps. 119:60) then surely God would preserve it through the generations. *These verses at least give God's intention and plan for preservation.* The fact is this. God has used the Jewish people in the Old Testament to pass down and preserve their Scriptures (Romans 3:2) and the church to pass down and preserve the New Testament Scriptures (1 Tim. 3:15). The eternal backup disk of God's Word is in Heaven (Ps. 119:89).

c. Future Promise

Isaiah 40:8

"The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever."

The context or setting of this verse gives the assurance and future promise of God's deliverance to His ancient people from Babylonian captivity. The verse suggests that God's people will be delivered since His Word is sure, dependable, infallible, and irrevocable. The people could look forward to their deliverance since God's Word never changes and His promises are sure.

Peter quotes this verse in 1 Peter 1:23-23 to indicate that God's Word is continually alive (Heb. 4:12) and will accomplish the purpose of regeneration in the hearts of people. Since our new life comes from a book that is eternal and which will never die, it stands to reason that God would preserve the truth of His Word throughout the generations, so that it can accomplish its life-giving work in the hearts of people. *The Bible does not follow the human laws of decay and death.* It follows God's divine laws of continued life and power. The Bible is not only a stable book, but an eternal book! Since the Word of God abides forever to bring salvation into the lives of people it will naturally be preserved forever throughout the ages. Only a book that is true and eternal can provide a salvation message that is true and eternal.

Reflecting the Originals

The point is this. We know from statements in the Bible and from historical data that God has preserved His Word. Both Jesus (Luke 4:16; Matt. 19:3-5) and the writers of Scripture placed their trust in the copies of the Scriptures (Acts 1:16; 15:21; Rom. 4:5; 2 Tim. 3:15; 4:13). The fact that we have only copies of the original writings of Scripture does not nullify the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible. This is because the words and accuracy of the Bible have been preserved as a body of truth for every generation. The remarkable agreement among thousands of existing ancient manuscripts confirms that the Bible has been providentially preserved in every generation as a document of truth that accurately reflects the originals. The Bible is *inspired* (God-breathed), *inerrant* (free from error), and *infallible* (incapable of error) because it accurately represents the autographs.

Reassurance of the End

Paul looked forward to the day when God's Word would be complete or finalized as revelatory prophecy and preserved as a completed book ("when that which is perfect is come" - 1 Cor. 13:10). Paul was reassured that the end would come when the transmission and gathering process of the books of the Bible would be completed. He saw a time when God's Word would be finalized and preserved as a body of unchanging and unalterable truth.

Jude attested to the fact that God’s Word was a body of revealed truth that had come together and been preserved for the Christian generations to come (“the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” - Jude 3). The term “the faith” refers to a body of truth that all Christians embraced and believed. Early Christianity recognized the Bible as a completed and preserved book, consisting of apostolic doctrine, which could not be altered or added to in any way.

Reliable Manuscripts

Today we see how God has providentially perpetuated His Word by means of multiple copies of reliable manuscripts. After two thousand years we have an extraordinary number of ancient manuscripts in existence for the New Testament. These preserved manuscripts prove the authenticity of the Bible and that God has providentially preserved His Word through the transmission process. As a result, the Bible we have today is inspired and inerrant since it accurately represents the original writings (autographs). In short, the Bible can be trusted since it reflects the accuracy of the original manuscripts.

There are now approximately 5,700 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, which agree to the accuracy of the Bible. Of the extant (existing) Greek manuscripts, fifty-nine have the complete text of the New Testament. Most have verses, chapters, or books of the New Testament. There are also more than 10,000 manuscripts in Latin and more than 1,000 in other languages. Some of the manuscripts date back to the early centuries of Christianity and less than one hundred years from the original writings.

Extant Ancient Manuscripts (Number in Existence by Language)	
Greek	- 5,700
Latin	- 10,000
Ethiopic, Slavic, Armenian	– 8,000
Other	- About 1,000
Total	- About 24,000

In some cases, manuscripts had dates on them. But the style of manuscripts (large and small letters) and the types of material they are written on (parchments or papyrus) give important clues to the historical time period in which they were written. Paul wanted to read the parchments or the precious copies of God's Word in his own day and time (2 Timothy 4:13).

Because of the continuing manuscript studies, we now have good reason to believe that most of the New Testament was completed between A.D. 47 and A.D. 70, and that all of it was completed by A.D. 95. The fact is this. These thousands of manuscripts were recorded in multiple places and yet have a remarkably accurate consistency between them proving the accuracy of the Bible. The majority of manuscripts are in agreement on all issues despite thousands of years of copying and translating. This is because the truth of God's Word can never be lost.

The Bible passes the historical test with flying colors. Some 24,000 known copies of ancient textual manuscripts, documents, and versions exist of the Bible, with nearly 5,700 of these being in the Greek language. By contrast, the document with the next highest number of copies outside the Hebrew Old Testament (which has over 1700 copies) is Homer's Iliad, with 643.

Records of History

Other historical records and writings by prominent ancient historians have far fewer copies: Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War, 8; Herodotus, The Histories, 8; Julius Caesar, Gallic Wars, 10. Furthermore, the time gap between the earliest preserved copies and autographs (original writings), or first manuscripts of the Bible, is much smaller for the New Testament than other secular works. For the New Testament, *the gap is about 90 years or less*, since most of it was first written before A. D. 70.

Dates that place the writing of the New Testament in the second century have been discredited by scholars in recent decades. Facts are stubborn things! The witness of historical facts point to the completion of the Bible in the first century. A fragment of John, dated to 125 A.D. is traditionally cited as the earliest copy known of any part of the New Testament. However, nine fragments of the New Testament were found in 1972 in a cave by the

Dead Sea. Among these fragments, part of Mark was dated to around 50 A.D., Luke 57 A.D., and Acts from 66 A.D. By contrast, the time gap is much larger for the pagan works mentioned above.

For Homer, the gap is 500 years (900 BC for the original writing, 400 BC. for the first copy), Caesar, 900-1000 years (100-44 BC. to 900 A.D.), Herodotus, 1300 years (480-425 BC to 900 A.D.) and Thucydides, 1300 years (400 BC to 900 A.D.). Hence, the New Testament can be objectively judged *more* reliable than these pagan historical works. This is because they have a much smaller time gap between when they were written and the first preserved copies. Also, the number of ancient handwritten copies of the Bible greatly exceeds the number of other ancient documents of antiquity.

We readily accept other books of history written by such authors as are listed above, even though documentary confirmation is far less substantial, and the copies are much further removed from the original autographs. Therefore, we can have significantly greater confidence in the accuracy of the transmission of the Bible over time. The text of the Bible is better preserved than the writings of Caesar, Plato, or Aristotle.

Recapping for Dummies!

Let's simplify what we have studied since most of us are unlearned about the historical records of witness that prove the Bible has been preserved throughout the passing generations. In short, the New Testament stands head and shoulders over all other major books of antiquity as an authentic and reliable source because of the large number of existing manuscript evidences that historically confirm the Bible. The multiplicity of ancient manuscripts in close proximity to the original writings which reflect and ratify the truth of the Bible we have today proves the historical accuracy of its transmission and preservation over many centuries of time.

The original writings of Julius Caesar are no longer around. We know what he wrote only by the copies we have. Only 10 copies still exist, and they were made 1,000 years after he died. Most ancient writers such as Plato, Aristotle, and Herodotus have less than a dozen copies of their writings and these were copied some 1,000 years after their originals. The Biblical

manuscripts are the exception. Literally thousands of preserved manuscripts remain in close proximity to the original writings which gives even more assurance of the preservation of the Bible. The Bible is here to stay!

2 John 1:2 declares:

“For the truth's sake, which dwelleth in us, and shall be with us for ever.”

The Bible is here to stay!

“The Bible stands like a rock undaunted
’Mid the raging storms of time;
Its pages burn with the truth eternal,
And they glow with a light sublime.

The Bible stands though the hills may tumble,
It will firmly stand when the earth shall crumble;
I will plant my feet on its firm foundation,
For the Bible stands.”

A Closed Book

We have a completed Bible today! There is no room for additions, other documents, lost books, or other testaments. The Bible has been inspired, transmitted, and accurately preserved for us in 66 books. It is complete.

Jude 1:3 concludes:

“Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.”

As previously mentioned, the body of revealed truth which all Christians believe and treasure is called “the faith.” The Bible is often called “the faith” (1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 3:8; 4:7) for it’s what Christians adhere to and believe apart from all other records of human antiquity. When Christians place their faith in the veracity (correctness and accuracy) of the Bible, based upon reliable records of antiquity and the inward witness of the Holy Spirit (John

16:13; 1 Pet. 1:22), they do so believing that God has preserved a document for them, which can be confidently embraced as absolute and final truth.

Warning is given to anyone who tries to add to the Bible or change its message.

Revelation 22:18 states:

“For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book.”

Most evangelical scholars affirm that Revelation was written in A.D. 95 or 96. This is based on accounts of the early church fathers that the Apostle John had been exiled on Patmos Island during the reign of Domitian who died in A. D. 96. The early church fathers (Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius, Irenaeus, and Victorinus) wrote that the apostle John experienced exile on the island of Patmos during Domitian’s reign. They wrote that the government allowed John to return to Ephesus after this emperor died. Domitian died in A.D. 96. Consequently, conservative interpreters date the writing of this book near A.D. 95 or 96.

The point is this. The dating of the book of Revelation is accurate. It was the final book that was written to complete the Scriptures. It serves as an *official closing* to the New Testament canon of Scripture. As a result, both prophets and their prophecies have ceased when the perfect canon of Scriptures was completed (1 Cor. 13:9-10). Since there are no more prophets there can be no more prophecies and ongoing revelation.

A Unique Book

Forty different authors writing over a period of 1,600 years penned the 66 books of the Bible under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:21; 2 Tim. 3:16). Four hundred silent years separated the 39 books of the Old Testament from the 27 of the New Testament. Yet, from Genesis to Revelation, they tell one unfolding story. Together they give consistent answers to the most important questions we can ask: What is truth? Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going? The Bible is the final authority and

gives us these answers. The Bible in its production, preservation, proclamation, and product, (changed lives) stands as the most unique book ever written.

“Holy Bible! book divine!
Precious treasure! thou art mine:
Mine to tell me whence I came;
Mine to tell me what I am.”

Conclusion

The Bible is the only book that is literally *inspired* by God (2 Tim. 3:16). It's the only book that has been *transmitted* and *preserved* without error since it reflects the original autographs (Ps. 119:60; 1 Pet. 1:25). God has promised to keep His Word from pollution and altered message. The Bible is unique among all other books of antiquity. The multiplicity of ancient manuscripts in close proximity to the original documents proves that the Bible is trustworthy. We can trust the Bible!

The three factors of **inspiration**, **transmission**, and **preservation** relate to the trustworthiness of the Bible. They provide us with the reassurance of the Bible's inspiration, inerrancy, and infallibility since it accurately reflects the words and teachings of the original writings.

Embracing the claims of the Bible and Jesus Christ is absolutely necessary to receiving the gift of eternal life (John 3:16-18; 14:6; 5:24).

Jesus said in John 6:47:

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.”