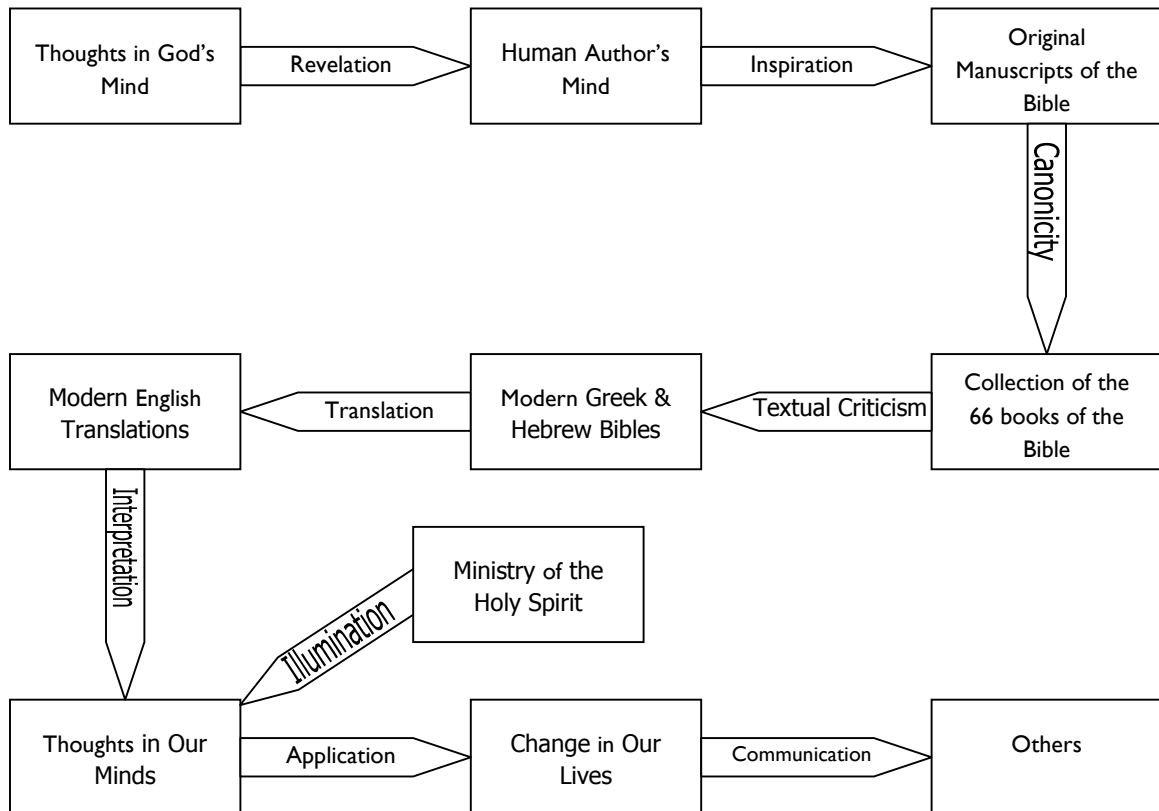


## I. The Process of Revelation

The process of the revelation of God's thoughts to our thoughts is illustrated in the chart below<sup>1</sup>:



This process will become the outline for our discussion of Bibliology, or the study of the Bible.

## II. The Revelation of God

By definition, God is beyond human understanding (Isaiah 55:8-9). However, to the extent that God has revealed things about himself, we can indeed describe the nature of God affirmatively. Therefore all we can know about Him is what He has revealed to us. Therefore the natural starting place in our study of theology is to define and understand God's revelation to us. There are two primary categories of God's revelation: general revelation and special revelation.

<sup>1</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, (Victor Books), 117.

## A. General Revelation

General Revelation is what God has revealed about himself generally to all humanity. It is found in three primary areas:

- Nature. God reveals his character through creation.
- History. God is involved in human history. He has preserved Israel. He has entered history himself as human in the person of Jesus.
- Human constitution. All humanity has an understanding of morality and an understanding of the supernatural.

However, to what extent has God revealed himself generally? Is God's general revelation and humanity's pursuit of logic sufficient to reach a saving faith outside of specific revelation from the church or scripture?

In Psalm 19 the Psalmist explains that the heavens and the expanse tell of God's glory and God's creativity. In Romans 1:19-20, Paul explains that the truth has been made evident within them and it has been revealed in creation to the point where they have no excuse (1:19b, 20b). Through this *natural revelation*, God's power and nature have been revealed. His invisible attributes, his eternal power, his divine nature have all been evident to the Gentiles (1:20).

These two passages indicate that God has indeed shown himself through his creation. While Romans 1 seems to indicate that even a fallen humanity can see God in creation, and as such they are without excuse. However Romans also states that humanity rejects this general revelation and instead worships the creation rather than the creator. It is therefore unclear from scripture whether or not a saving faith is possible outside of specific revelation. In fact, Romans 10 seems to indicate that without specific revelation, one can not be saved ("how will they believe if they have not heard.")

What we can state affirmatively is that the truth about God is actually present within creation and that even a fallen humanity to recognize God in creation.

## B. Special Revelation

### 1. The Word of God

However, God does not limit his self-revelation to nature. He has also provided special revelation. God has revealed himself through the Word of God. The term *word* in the Greek is *logos*, and it carries with it an expansive idea of not just language, but rationality and reason. God's self-revelation, His Word was with God at the beginning and was indeed God from the very beginning (John 1:1).

#### a. *Characteristics of the Word of God*

The special revelation through God's word has unique characteristics<sup>2</sup>:

- Special Revelation is Personal. God's revelation is not a set of theological truths, but a personal God presenting himself to persons.
- Special Revelation is Anthropic. God's revelation comes in forms that are part of the ordinary, everyday human experience. Humans do not need to learn the language of God, for God has revealed himself in the language of humans.
- Special Revelation is Analogical. God's revelation uses language which is qualitatively the same as the underlying truth, but is limited by finite human understanding. God's revelation uses analogies, symbols and metaphors in order for us to understand his nature.

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<sup>2</sup> Millard J. Erickson. *Christian Theology*. (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books, 2002), 177ff.

### *b. Manifestations of the Word of God*

God has revealed his Word in three ways:

- God reveals himself by History. It is not that God is revealed in history or through history, but that historical events actually are His revelation (John 14:9).
- God reveals himself through divine speech. God has communicated directly with prophets and apostles through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.
- God reveals himself through the incarnation. Jesus Christ's birth, life, words, death and resurrection are the most complete revelation of God (Hebrews 1:1-2)

At a point in time and space, the Word was revealed in flesh and dwelt among us. As a result, humanity was able to see the glory, the grace and the truth of God himself (John 1:14). The ultimate revelation of God is found in the person of Jesus.

## **2. The Scriptures as the Word of God**

According to the 20<sup>th</sup> century theologian, Karl Barth, Jesus Christ was not only the fullness of God's Word; the Jesus is himself the only reliable source of God's Word. Barth believed that the scriptures were only valuable in so far as much as they told us about Jesus. That is, the bible itself was not God's Word, but it only pointed us to and told us about God's Word, namely Christ.

However, while indeed Jesus is the ultimate Word of God, if the scriptures are flawed, then our understanding of God's Word is also flawed. Furthermore, the Jesus himself seems to have a high view of scripture. In Matthew 5:17-19, he states that He has come as a fulfillment of the scriptures, and that the scriptures will endure. In fact, Jesus uses the term "word of God" synonymously with the Scriptures throughout the Bible (John 10:35).

Jesus expounds on scripture. He defends scripture. He uses scripture to prove His teaching. Clearly, Jesus believed the bible to also be God's Word. According to the Word of God in flesh, the Word of God also is found in the scriptures. This begins our basis for the study of the bible, or Bibliology.

## **III. Inspiration**

The Bible then is God's special revelation. It is God's Word. This concept is captured in the theological term, inspiration. The word inspiration is found in 2 Timothy 3:16, where the original Greek is *theopneustos*, which literally means "God-breathed." But what are mechanics of this inspiration? How exactly did God breathe out his words into the Bible?

### **A. The Mechanics of Inspiration**

There are numerous theories as to what inspiration really means. Here are five of the most common theories of inspiration<sup>3</sup>:

- Natural inspiration - Human authors were inspired to write by God in the same way that a poet might be inspired to write poetry by natural events or conditions.
- Spiritual illumination – Human authors themselves are inspired by God in the same way God inspires any Christian today through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. It differs from natural inspiration in a matter of degree, but not in kind.
- Partial illumination – Parts of the Bible are inspired by God, especially in spiritual matters. But historical, scientific, or other non-spiritual matters are not inspired.
- Conceptual inspiration – God inspired human authors with the general concepts of the passage, but left the words and details to the author.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1989), 160-162.

- Verbal inspiration – God inspired human authors with each word, superintending even the details.
- Divine dictation – Human authors just took dictation from God as he spoke.

The best description of the process of inspiration is found in 2 Peter 1:21, as he describes the process of prophecy being passed to human authors:

*(2 Peter 1:21 NIV) For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*

Inspiration means, then, that the decision to write the scripture came from God, but human authors were used to speak as from God as the Holy Spirit carried them along. Therefore inspiration does not mean that God spoke the words and men wrote those words like a stenographer (with the exception of those several passages preceded by the words “Thus says the Lord.”). Human authors were involved in the writing, and the authors’ individual personalities and styles come through in the process.

Furthermore, inspiration is more than a “natural inspiration” similar to how a poet or musician might be “inspired” to write. Scripture has divine origin as the Holy Spirit supernaturally “carried” the authors. God motivated the human author to write, and he oversaw over the process to ensure the end result communicated His message.

The question, then, is how detailed was this oversight? Did the Holy Spirit oversee the general content, or did he oversee each word?

Jesus gives us a clear insight into the level of detail in Matthew 5:18:

*(Matthew 5:18) I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.*

It seems Jesus was concerned about each word and stroke of the pen, suggesting that the oversight of God was detailed down to the finest detail.

This is further affirmed by the way both Jesus and Paul used the scriptures. In Matthew 22, the Sadducees challenge Jesus regarding the truth resurrection. Jesus answers them by quoting scripture:

*(Matthew 22:31-32 NASB) But regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God: “I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?” He is not the God of the dead but of the living.*

Jesus’ argument is based on the tense of the verb “to be.” Because the scripture says “I am” rather than “I was” Jesus was able to prove the resurrection of the dead. If Jesus used even the very tense of a verb in scripture, He must have considered even the minor grammatical elements of scripture to be inspired by God.

Paul also uses minor grammatical elements in the development of his arguments. In Galatians 3:16, he demonstrates that the Abrahamic covenant was a Messianic promise because God promise was to Abraham and his “seed” as opposed to his “seeds.” If the Holy Spirit only inspired the concepts behind the words and not the words of scripture themselves, then Paul’s argument would not be of any value.

Inspiration, therefore, means that the Holy Spirit used human writers and their personalities, background, and style to communicate His Word through even the very words and grammar of those authors.

## B. Inerrancy

So if God superintended over the writing of each word, what does that mean about the veracity of the scriptures? If we believe God is a truthful God, his writings would also be truthful. This is the feeling of King David as he writes Psalm 19. David, in describing the Scriptures, uses adjectives such as perfect and sure (v. 7), right and pure (v. 8), clean and true (v. 9).

The theological term for this is “inerrancy.” Inerrancy means that the Bible, when correctly interpreted in light of the level to which culture and the means of communication had developed at the time it was written, and in view of the purposes for which it was given, is fully truthful in all that it affirms.

The question, however, is to what extent does the bible affirm truth? Is the bible true in all matters, or just matters of spirituality? Amongst theologians who hold to inerrancy, there are three primary views:

- Absolute Inerrancy. All matters, spiritual, historical, and scientific, are true.
- Full Inerrancy. The Bible is completely true, but its primary aim is not to make scientific or historical assertions, but theological and spiritual facts.
- Limited Inerrancy. The Bible is only true in theological or spiritual matters, not scientific or historical matters.

The Scriptures are the Word of God. God does not lie (Titus 1:2, Hebrews 6:18), and God is true (John 17:3). Therefore God’s words are true (John 17:17), and the Scriptures are true (Psalm 19:7-9). Therefore, it would seem that limited inerrancy has problems.

Nonetheless, while all of the bible is true, the bible does not contain all of the truth. There are many subjects on which the bible is silent. The bible’s primary purpose is to present spiritual truth. God gave the bible so that we might know Him, that we might be saved (John 21:31), and that we might be convicted of our sins and live righteously (2 Timothy 3:16-17, Hebrews 4:12, Psalm 119:9-11).

The bible presents these spiritual truths using certain human languages, within certain human cultures, and within certain historical events. As such, these truths must accommodate the limitations of those languages and cultures. The bible had to be written in a way that could be understood by the culture to which it was originally written. Because the ancient Jewish culture did not have our modern understanding of science, scientific facts are presented from the perspective of the original audience rather than from a technical perspective. For example, the sun is referred to as rising, even though our modern scientific knowledge tells us the sun doesn’t rise, but rather, the earth rotates on its axis. If the bible had used modern scientific language to explain the technical relationship between the sun and the earth instead of using the term “sunrise” and “sunset,” the original readers of the bible would have been confused and the deeper spiritual truth would have been lost in the process.

Furthermore, the bible must often explain the historical and geographic context into which spiritual truth is revealed. The bible provides historical and geographic truths primarily to develop the underlying spiritual truth. As such, the bible can not be expected to give the details which a modern historian might desire. In fact, the bible often uses broad generalities, numerical approximations, and paraphrasing of other texts as it outlines historical events. The facts may not necessarily be exact and are always presented from an ancient cultural perspective. However these facts must still be essentially correct or it makes God a liar.

With this perspective, the bible is without error and trustworthy for the contemporary reader. The bible is the very breath of God (2 Timothy 3:16), and the Holy Spirit oversaw all that it was written within it (2 Peter 1:21). God not only superintended its writing, but is actively involved in its ongoing preservation (Matthew 5:18). We can therefore trust in the authority, inspiration and inerrancy of the Scriptures.

## IV. Transmission

### A. Canonicity

According to 2 Timothy 3:16, all scripture is inspired by God. This begs the question, however, as to what books constitute all scripture. How do we know which authors and which books were truly inspired and which were not? Canonicity is the doctrine which establishes the extent of inspired scripture. The word *canon* means literally a measuring rod. The canon then becomes the measuring rod against which we measure an ancient document to see if it measures up to the level of scripture.

#### 1. Canonicity of the Old Testament

Jesus Christ's affirmation of the Old Testament canon is the basis for accepting these books as inspired. The 39 books found in our modern bibles were entirely contained in the Hebrew bible that Jesus would have used. However, they were split among 22 books which were grouped into either a three-fold (i.e. the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings or Psalms) or two-fold division (i.e. Law and the Prophets). Jesus referenced both the three-fold division (Luke 24:44) and the two-fold divisions of the Hebrew bible (Matthew 5:17, 7:12, 11:13, 22:40, Luke 16:16, 29, 31, 24:27). He defended his teaching by using scripture from all three divisions including the Law (John 5:46), the Prophets (Matthew 11:10), and the Writings (Luke 20:42). In contrast, Jesus never quoted or referred to any of the apocryphal books. Jesus' use of the Old Testament demonstrated His belief in its authority, even down to the smallest grammatical parts (Matthew 5:18, 22:31-33). Clearly the Son of God considered these books to be the inspired Word of God.

If as Christians we believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ, his testimony should be all the evidence we need of the inspiration of the Old Testament. Chafer states this well:

*It is logically impossible to question the inspiration of the Old Testament without questioning the character and veracity of Jesus Christ. It is for this reason that denial of the inspired Word of God leads to the denial of the incarnate Word of God.<sup>4</sup>*

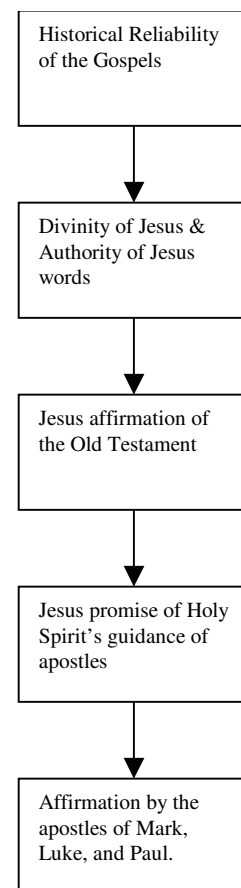
#### 2. Canonicity of the New Testament

##### a. *Apostolic Authority*

The authority of the Son of God also serves as a launching point to affirm the canonicity of the New Testament as well. In John 14:26 Jesus tells his disciples that the Holy Spirit will remind them of his words and will teach them all things. In John 16:13, Jesus again affirms the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit, and assures his disciples that the Holy Spirit will guide them into truth, revealing to them the meaning of Christ's death and resurrection.

From this we can deduce that the Holy Spirit oversaw the teachings of the apostles, and that their teachings are authentic. The apostles often invoke this Spirit guided remembrance as they share their credentials in their writings (2 Peter 1:16, 1 John 1:1-4, Hebrews 2:3-4). The apostles considered themselves as authoritative because they had seen, heard, and learned from Jesus and had been

#### Logical Flow for Authority of All Scriptures



<sup>4</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer. *Major Bible Themes*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 21.

reminded of these things by the Holy Spirit. We can therefore consider the writings of the apostles to be canonical.

*b. The Pauline Writings*

This argument, however, does not hold for the most prolific of the New Testament writers: the apostle Paul. Paul was not one of Jesus original disciples. He was not an eyewitness to Jesus deeds and words. This has caused many to doubt the inspiration of Paul's writings. Furthermore, Paul's writings reveal a more developed theology than the gospels and the general epistles. When this is combined with passages in the Pauline epistles that are contrary to early 21<sup>st</sup> century political correctness, it is easy to dismiss these 13 books of the New Testament.

However, Peter affirms the authority of Paul's writings, even going so far as to equate them with scripture:

*(2 Peter 3:15-16 NASB)...Our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, just as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.*

There were other non-apostolic authors as well, such as Mark, Luke, Jude, and perhaps the author of Hebrews. However each of writers was a close associate of an apostle and had tacit apostolic sponsorship. Namely, Luke was associated with Paul, Mark with Peter, and Jude with James. Therefore, these writers were considered authoritative due to their close association with the sponsoring apostle.

### **3. The Canon Affirmed**

The authority and inspiration of these 66 books was established at the time they were written. However, it became important for the church to codify which books were Scripture when non-canonical books began circulating and heresies grew.

Some scholars believe the Old Testament canon was probably first formalized at the Council of Jamnia in AD 90, a council of leading Jews. There is some controversy in Jewish scholarship as to whether or not the council actually set the canon. Nonetheless, the Old Testament seems to be established by the Jews in the late first century. In any case, it should be noted that the Jewish canon only confirmed what Jesus had already established regarding the Old Testament.

The development of the New Testament canon was a long process. Most of the New Testament books were immediately recognized as inspired and became an integral part of church life. The church did not see a need to formalize the canon, however, until certain heretics in the church began compiling their own lists of "inspired" books supporting their viewpoints. Furthermore, by the third and fourth centuries, a number of false gospels (known today as the "Gnostic" gospels) were proliferating.

Therefore it became necessary to determine which of the many books circulating among the churches were authentic in their apostolic authority. There was never a debate amongst the early churches as to the inspiration of the books written by the apostles. The debate came chiefly as to whether or not specific books were written either by the apostles or by someone sponsored by an apostle (e.g. Luke had Paul's sponsorship while Mark was sponsored by Peter).

The New Testament Canon was recognized at the Council of Hippo in AD 393. The church used a four-fold test given to determine whether a book should be included in "the canon," or the group of books accepted as Scripture<sup>5</sup>:

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<sup>5</sup> John McRay, "Bible, Canon of the." *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*.  
"<http://www.biblestudytools.net/Dictionaries/BakersEvangelicalDictionary/>"

- Was it written by an apostle or with an apostle's backing?
- Does the book claim to be inspired?
- Do the churches accept the content?
- Does the book have the feel of genuineness?

The church did not question the canon until the Protestant reformation. Some Lutheran churches began to question the books of Hebrews, 2 Peter, 2 John, 3 John and Jude. Luther himself had issues with the inspiration of the book of James as well. In reaction to this, the Roman Catholic Church came together in the Council of Trent (1543-63) and reaffirmed these books as part of the canon, but also adding the deuterocanonical books as part of the canon as well. These books, also known as the apocrypha, are primarily books written between the Old and New Testament. They have never been included in the Jewish canon, and were not considered by the church to be on-par with scripture until the Council of Trent.

The process of canonization did not make the books "inspired," but were used to help determine which books were already inspired.

## **B. Textual Criticism**

When we state that the scriptures are inspired and inerrant, we are speaking of the original autographs (i.e. the original documents written by the original authors). Unfortunately, we do not have any of the original autographs. Instead all we have are copies of copies of copies. However, because we have such an abundance of copies, and some of those copies are dated to within decades from when the original, scholars have been able to create, through painstaking study, editions of the original Hebrew and Greek scriptures which are as close as the original as we can determine. The science of comparing ancient manuscripts to determine a probable original text is known as textual criticism.

### **1. The Process of Textual Criticism**

#### *a. Interpreting the Uncials*

The earliest manuscripts look much different than modern writing. First, the chapters divisions were not added to the text until the 13<sup>th</sup> century, which verses not added until the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The earliest Greek manuscripts are in uncials, meaning they used all capital letters, and didn't provide any spaces in between the words. So for example, if we used uncials in English, John 3:16 would look like this:

FORGODSOLOVEDTHEWORLDTHATHEGAVEHISONLYBEGOTTENSONTHATWHOSO  
EVERBELIEVEDINHIMWOULDNOTPERISHBUTHAVEETERNALLIFE.

As if that weren't difficult enough, ancient Hebrew writing did not include any vowels. Psalm 23:1-1 would look like this:

THLRDSMSHPHRDShLLWNTHMKSMldWNNGRNPSTRSHLDmBSDQTwTRS.

You can imagine the difficulty modern scholars have in trying to determine the original. Sometimes this leads to some ambiguity.

THEREAPERSONTHEFIELD

Does this say, "the reapers on the field," or "there a person on the field?" Most of these ambiguities can be determined by context, and in only rare occasions has the interpretation of the uncials lead to disagreement among scholars.

### *b. Comparing the Copies*

In the children's game called telephone, one person whispers a phrase into the ear of another. Then that phrase is whispered to the next person, and so forth until the final person hears the message. The fun of the game comes when the last person says what they heard and compares that to the original message. Invariably the message has become corrupted through the transmission process.

This same problem arises in the hand written copies of the scriptures over the centuries. As scribes copied the scriptures over and over, small mistakes were made in the copying process. Part of the process of textual criticism involves comparing all the various copies we have the scriptures and looking for the mistakes made by scribes.

If you have numerous copies spread over a large geographic area, you may have numerous errors, but not all the errors will be the same. So, for example, all the manuscripts found in Egypt may have one error, but those found in Asia Minor might have a different error. By tracing back these errors to their sources, and then comparing these, scholars have been able to piece together a text today which is as close to the original as possible.

The best estimates today suggest that 97% of our New Testament and 90% of the Old Testament is beyond doubt<sup>6</sup>. Furthermore, none of the passages in question contain critical doctrinal teaching which would put our faith in doubt.

## **2. Tests for Textual Reliability**

There are four primary tests when determining the reliability of an ancient document:

1. How many copies of the document are available?
2. Where were the copies found?
3. What is the length of time between the original and the earliest copies?
4. What differences are there between the copies?

How does the scripture hold up to these tests?

### *a. The New Testament*

There are thousands of manuscripts of the New Testament dating back as early as the second century. The earliest dated portion of the New Testament is a fragment of the gospel of John, P52, which is dated to 125 to 130 AD. This is earlier than some more liberal scholars thought John was even written!<sup>7</sup> The number of manuscripts before 300 AD is limited because of the persecution the church faced under Emperor Diocletian. Diocletian sought to eliminate Christianity by not just burning churches and killing Christians, but by systematically burning books. The manuscripts after this period are far more numerous and located in primarily in monasteries around the Mediterranean.

The oldest manuscripts containing the full New Testament are from the fourth century. These are uncial manuscripts written on parchment. These include:

- *Codex Vaticanus* (B) - it has been housed in the Vatican in Rome since at least the Middle Ages.
- *Codex Sinaiticus* (Sin.) - it is located today in the British Museum. The Codex Sinaiticus has a colorful history. Originally found in 1844 in a garbage can in an Egyptian Monastery, this Codex was donated to the Russian Czar in the 1850s. The Soviets sold the codex to the British Museum in 1933.
- *Codex Alexandrinus* (A) - This text is believed to have originally come from Alexandria, Egypt. It is housed in the British Museum. It is dated to the fifth century.

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<sup>6</sup> William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg and Robert L. Hubbard. *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*. (Nashville TN: W Publishing Group, 1993), 69-74.

There are only two passages of scripture which show any major differences between these codices. Mark 16:9-20 and John 7:53-8:11 do not appear in the Codex Sinaiticus or the Codex Vaticanus, and most scholars today do not believe these passages to have been part of the original text.

Nonetheless, when you compare the number of manuscripts and the date between the original text and the earliest manuscript, there is no comparison between the bible and other ancient literature. If one is to doubt the textual reliability of the New Testament, then one can not state with any confidence that we know the original of any of the ancient text.

<b><u>Author</u></b>	<b><u>Written</u></b>	<b><u>1<sup>st</sup> Copy</u></b>	<b><u>Number</u></b>
Plato	424-347 BC	900 AD	7
Aristotle	384-322 BC	1100 AD	5
Caesar	100-44 BC	900 AD	10
Tacitus	100 AD	1100 AD	20
New Testament	45-100 AD	130 AD	14,000

### *b. The Old Testament*

The Old Testament presents unique challenges for the textual critic. The Jews had such regard for the scriptures, that when they became old and worn, they burned the scrolls. Furthermore, Jewish scholars established a “standard” Hebrew text between the seventh and tenth centuries, known as the Masoretic text. All copies of the Jewish scripture which did not match this text were destroyed.

There are thousands of copies of a Greek translation of the Old Testament, known as the Septuagint. This translation was completed in the second century BC in Alexandria, Egypt traditionally by 70 scholars, thus the term Septuagint, which means 70 in Greek. The most reliable codices from the fourth and fifth century AD include copies of the Septuagint. There are some differences between the Septuagint and the Masoretic text, but most of these can be attributed to translation differences.

In 1947 a shepherd boy in Palestine found the Dead Sea Scrolls. This was a copy of the Old Testament dating back to the second century BC in Hebrew. This is probably the most important archeological find of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. While there are differences found between the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Masoretic text, given that the Masoretic text comes nearly 1,000 years after the scrolls, it is remarkable how little difference has been found between these two copies. The differences between the Dead Sea scrolls and the Masoretic text are few and relatively insignificant.

### **3. The Greek Text Today**

The earliest printed edition of the Greek New Testament was edited by Erasmus in the sixteenth century. Erasmus did not have access to all the Greek manuscripts and actually translated parts of the book of Revelation from Latin back into Greek to complete his New Testament! Stephanus edited the first Greek bible which had our modern chapter and verse structure in 1550. The Elziver brothers edited the text which came to be known as the *Textus Receptus*, meaning the “text received by all.” This is the standard text used by the translators of the King James Version and was the standard until the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century there were a tremendous number of new manuscripts being discovered, not the least of which was the Codex Sinaiticus. This led to more reliable version of the Greek New Testament, including Westcott and Hort’s 1881 version, and the current standard text by Nestle, Aland and Metzger.

<sup>8</sup> Josh McDowell. *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*. (San Bernardino CA: Here’s Life Publishers, 1979), 48.

## C. Translation

### 1. The History of the English Bible

The English language has been blessed with a multitude of translations. The earliest translation of the bible into English was by John Wycliffe who translated from the Latin in the fourteenth century. Wycliffe was declared a heretic by the church, and even though he died of natural causes, the church had his remains exhumed and burned along with his books 12 years after his death.

William Tyndale was the first to translate from the Greek text into modern English. His 16<sup>th</sup> century translation is the basis for nearly every other English translation. He also was declared a heretic and was burned at the stake for his efforts to get the bible into the vernacular of the people.

The church and the English monarchy struggled to suppress English translations of the bible, until after the English reformation when King Henry VIII broke from Rome. After this numerous editions of English bibles were created. Finally, in 1611, King James I called the leading scholars of England together to create the *Authorized Version* of the bible. This translation was the standard for centuries, and has profoundly influenced the English language to this day. The influence of the King James Version on the English speaking world and on English speaking Christianity can not be understated.

However, today the King James Version is showing its age. First, the translation is based on the *textus receptus*, meaning it was translated from an older, less reliable version of the Greek text. Secondly, the language of 17<sup>th</sup> century England is not the language of today. In fact, the translators of the KJV used much of Tyndale's translation, which was already 100 years old and the language was already archaic even when first published.

Today, there are more translations of the bible into English than into any other language. As such, by comparing and contrasting the better of these translations, the modern English reader can have confidence that they understand the original text as well as can be possible without actually learning the original Hebrew and Greek.

### 2. Translations Today

Which translation, however, is the best? That is a difficult question to answer, because each translation was written for a different purpose. To understand which is "best" you have to understand the different philosophies of translations:

#### *a. Translation Philosophy*

##### *i. Literal translations*

Some translators attempt to follow the original languages as literally as possible. That is, each word is translated directly and consistently. There is less importance placed on readability in English and more importance placed on the original word order and grammar. Such translations are more consistent with the original text, but are much more difficult to read in English. Examples of literal translations are the King James Version (KJV), New American Standard Bible (NASB), and English Standard Version (ESV).

##### *ii. Dynamic Equivalence translations*

Other translations attempt to translate not each word, but each thought. These translations are much easier to read in English and capture the significant point of each passage. These translations are not as consistent in the translation of the words nor do they follow the original word order. This requires that the translator make some interpretative decisions in the process of translation. Examples of dynamic equivalence translations are New International Version (NIV) and the New Living Translation (NLT).

### *iii. Paraphrases*

Like a dynamic equivalent translation, the focus of the paraphrase is to make the text easier to read in English and to capture the impact of each passage. The author will take broad liberties, often amplifying and expanding from the original text. Paraphrases are useful for gaining an understanding of the original feeling of the passage. However, the paraphrase has significant interpretation done for the reader. Examples of paraphrases include the Message, the JB Philips translation and the Living Bible (LB).

### *b. Which is Best?*

There is a place for all three translation methods. A paraphrase is useful for understanding the feel or emotional impact of a passage, something which is frequently lost in a literal translation. However, for a detail verse-by-verse study or exegesis, a literal translation is best as it leaves most of the interpretative decisions to the reader. For general use, the dynamic equivalence makes a good compromise of readability and accuracy.

New translations are always welcome, because language continually changes. While the language of the King James Version is beautiful and poetic and has had significant impact on the English language, one must re-translate from the Elizabethan style of language to understand it today. Even the NIV and NASB are no longer contemporary, having been translated now two decades ago.

## **3. Translations into other Languages**

The bible is the most translated book in the world. As of 2005, according to Wycliffe Bible Translators, there are 422 languages which have the entire bible. Over 1,000 have a translation of the entire New Testament. Another 2,500 languages are in the process of having the bible translated. However, there are still over 2,500 languages on which no translation work has even started. This, however, represents a small percentage of people who do not have the bible in their native tongue.

## **4. Are Translations Inspired**

Often the multitude of translations causes people to doubt whether or not they can actually trust their English bibles. However, it is actually the great number of translations which provide us with an assurance that indeed we can trust and understand our bibles today. While there is no substitute for learning Greek or Hebrew, the layman can approach his English bible with confidence, knowing that the best scholarship available has created the best translations available. By comparing and contrasting the various English translations, we are able to gain an understanding nearly as good as reading the original.

While we say that inspiration applies only to the original autographs, to the extent that copies of those autographs and translations from the original represent the original autograph, our bibles today are also inspired. While we continue to grow in our understanding of what the original autographs might say, modern textual criticism and translation work has provided us with scriptures as close to the original as can be had. Therefore, trust your bibles, study your bibles, and consider them as inspired!

# **V. Understanding**

## **A. Interpretation**

While the scripture may be inspired and trustworthy, that does not mean we always understand what the bible means. There are many roadblocks to understanding the scripture

- The bible was written in archaic, foreign languages.
- The literary nature of the bible is strange to us, using forms which seem repetitive or unstructured.

- The bible was written into ancient cultures which have little resembles to modern life.
- The bible deals with peoples, places and times of which we have little understanding.
- The precepts of the bible can not be confirmed through any modern scientific means.

Therefore, the bible needs to be interpreted so we can bring the meaning of the Bible into a modern understand. *Interpretation* is the process of determining the true meaning of the Bible.

### **1. Methods of Interpretation**<sup>9</sup>

Today there are several ways bible scholars approach studying the bible. These approaches are based on presuppositions regarding the nature of the scriptures. That is, those who believe the bible to be inspired by God approach the scriptures much differently than those who don't. Likewise, there are those who believe the scriptures to have multiple layers beyond its obvious message. This has given rise to at least four primary academic approaches to Scriptures:

- Allegory – Interpreting the Scriptures to have a mystical or spiritual interpretation beyond the literal meaning of a passage.
- Liberal – Interpreting the Scriptures from an academic perspective which rejects the possibility of the supernatural or transcendental inspiration.
- Neo-Orthodox – Interpreting the Scripture from a perspective that believes the Bible can only imperfectly point us to the true Word of God, Jesus Christ.
- Literal or “Plain” – Accepting the literally rendering of the Scriptures unless the text specifically gives us reason not to.

### **2. Rationale for “Plain” Interpretation**

We have already demonstrated the inspiration of the scriptures. Therefore, the liberal and neo-orthodox approaches are not appropriate. Furthermore, the allegorical approach does not have any valid basis in the scriptures:

- Jesus never made an allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament. Paul only used allegorical interpretation on very rare occasions, and then only in a restrained manner<sup>10</sup>.
- Old Testament prophecies have been fulfilled literally, indicating that these prophecies were not meant to be considered as allegories.<sup>11</sup>
- 1 John 2:27 rejects the idea that there are multiple layers of meaning beyond the simple message of the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- Only the “plain” interpretation can be objective. If we use an allegorical approach, then interpretation becomes an exercise in creative thinking rather than an object attempt to discover truth.<sup>12</sup>
- Language, which was given by God, is intended to provide communication in a normal, plain manner.<sup>13</sup>

### **3. Principles of “Plain” Interpretation**

- Words are to be understood in their normal literal meanings. This does not mean figures of speech should be interpreted literally. If the text plainly reveals a figure of speech, simile, or other normal literary device, it should be interpreted as such. Furthermore, recognize that

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<sup>9</sup> Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970), 23-92.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Fink. “Allegory.” *Holman Bible Dictionary*, (Parsons Technology CD-ROM, 1994)

<sup>11</sup> Ryrie, 113.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

passages often discuss items as they appear to the observer rather than in scientific terms (e.g. the rising of the sun).<sup>14</sup>

- Words are to be understood according to their grammatical relationships.
- The passage is to be understood according to its literary style of the passage. Is it prose or poetry? Is it a legal dictate, epistle, or history?
- The passage should be understood in their historical and cultural context.<sup>15</sup> Ask to whom the original texts were addressed and how they would have interpreted the meaning.
- The passage is to be understood in the context of a passage. Compare the passage to nearby passages, to the entire book, and to other passages in Scripture.
- Understand the priority of scriptures. Give greater weight to clear passages than unclear passages. Understanding of the progression of revelation in the Bible (i.e. Old Testament defers to the New Testament).

## B. Illumination

To the unbeliever, the Word of God is foolishness and a stumbling block. But to the believer, it is the power and wisdom of God. According to the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:14-16, the unregenerate person can not accept the Word of God, because it is foolishness:

*But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one. For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ. (1 Corinthians 2:14-16)*

God's wisdom is only revealed by the Spirit of God (2:10). So the natural man who does not have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit can not understand God's wisdom (2:14). No one can know the mind of God. But because believers have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, believers have the mind of Christ (2:16), and therefore we can know and understand things of God.

Therefore the first prerequisite for doing theology is that a person needs to be a believer. Those who are not Christians will not understand or accept the Word of God. Indeed, no one can know the mind of the Lord, for He is so far above us that we can not comprehend Him or His precepts. But those who have believed in Jesus as the Christ and as their Savior have received the mind of Christ. Those with the mind of Christ are able now to comprehend the mind of God, and are able to comprehend the Word of God.

This is the doctrine of illumination. Illumination is the supernatural enabling allowing one to understand the meaning of the Bible. Illumination is God's Word coming to us. It is a work of the Holy Spirit who convicts us and calls on us to change while reading inspired scripture. If, in reading, hearing or studying the scripture, God reveals something of His nature, you gain a new spiritual insight, or you sense that God is calling you to change, that is illumination.

## C. Application

So what use is a truthful book? It depends on what the content and purpose of the book is. A truthful book about photography is only useful in learning about taking pictures. Its truthfulness doesn't serve us much except beyond its scope. To determine the usefulness of this truthful book, we must ask what its purpose is.

<sup>14</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *A Survey of Bible Doctrine*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972), 49.

<sup>15</sup> Chafer, 34.

King David, in the Psalm 19, we have already looked at describes the usefulness of the Scriptures, showing how this perfect book “restores the soul” and “makes wise the simple” (v. 7), “rejoicing the heart” and “enlightening the eyes” (v. 8). David then sums up the value of scripture stating:

*(Psalm 19:10-13 NIV) (The LORD’S judgments) are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. <sup>11</sup> By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. <sup>12</sup> Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults. <sup>13</sup> Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. Then will I be blameless, innocent of great transgression.*

The Bible gives us wisdom and enlightenment, refreshment and joy. It warns us, corrects us, and keeps us from sin. This is consistent with 2 Timothy, which states that the Bible is “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16 NASB).

This is the doctrinal principal of application. Application is not a statement of principles in the bible. Application is not a feeling of conviction or blessing that comes from the bible. Application is not a broad generalization of how we should live. Application is to put into practice the things scripture reveals. Application asks, "How do we live life differently in light of this?"

The bible is God’s revealed word. It is inspired, inerrant, and trustworthy, even in its modern English form. Therefore, we should read it, study it, memorize it, and meditate on it. We must make it the basis and proof text for all we believe and think. Finally, as it changes our beliefs and our thinking it should change our behavior and how we live.

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