

The Bible

How do we know the Bible is the Word of God?

Internal Evidence

(1) The Bible itself declares or assumes itself to be the Word of God – “The Lord said...”
(Deut. 6:17-19; Josh. 1:8; Ex. 24:4, 7, 12)

(2) Jesus & NT writers assumed OT to be “scripture” -- the Word of God

Jesus spoke of the whole OT (Matt. 22:29), the “Law and the Prophets” (Luke 16:16), individual OT books (Matt. 22:43, 24:15), OT events (Matt. 19:4-5, Luke 17:27), and even letters and parts of letters in the OT (Matt. 5:17-19*) as having divine authority. He called the scriptures the Word of God (John 10:35). He refers to OT stories as history, not myth [e.g., creation (Luke 11:15), Adam and Eve (Matt. 19:4-5), Noah and the flood (Matt. 24:37-39), & Jonah and the whale (Matt. 12:39-41)].

*Note: Mt. 5:18 – “jot” = Hebrew letter *yod*, smallest in that alphabet; “tittle” – an accent mark

NT writers also consider OT to be scripture: 2 Tim. 3:16; Hebrews 1:1-2; 2 Peter 1:21.

(3) NT also deemed “scripture” (2 Peter 3:16, 1 Timothy 5:18; see also John 14:26)

2 Timothy 3:16 is a key verse: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” Note that Paul had already described one of the gospels (Luke) as “scripture” in a quote in 1 Timothy 5:18) – it therefore makes sense that when he used the term “scripture” in his second letter to Timothy, he was thinking not only of Old Testament books but also of the New Testament books that had been written up to that time. By the time 2 Tim. 3:16 was written, all of the NT books had been written except for 2 Peter, Hebrews, Jude, and the apostle John’s writings, so it is reasonable to conclude that Paul was including these books in his reference to “all scripture.” The apostle Peter uses the same Greek word for “scripture” to describe the writings of the apostle Paul in 2 Peter 3:16.

(4) Doctrinal & ethical superiority of the Bible over all other books.

(5) The power of the Bible to affect the reader.

External Evidence

(1) Unity in Diversity –

The Bible was written over a period of 1600+ years by kings, peasants, philosophers, fishermen, physicians, statesmen, scholars, poets & farmers who lived in different cultures, had different experiences & who were quite different in character – themes are progressively developed throughout, culminating in the person and work of Christ.

(2) Fulfilled Prophecy: 2000+ fulfilled prophecies, over 300 fulfilled by Jesus.

(3) Archeological Confirmation – the Bible’s accuracy and reliability have been repeatedly confirmed by archeological discoveries

(4) Reliability of Source Documents

24,000 full or partial manuscripts dating back to 130 A.D. to 350 A.D. (compare with Tacitus, the Roman historian: 20 copies in existence, the earliest copy dated 1,000 years after it was written). In addition, there are some 86,000 quotations from NT books contained in writing of early church fathers and Lectionaries, sufficient to reconstruct all but 11 verses of the NT.

(5) Influence & Authority – deemed reliable by the church for nearly 2,000 years.

(6) Changed lives – what if the Bible had never been written?

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Inspiration of the Scriptures

The Bible originated in the mind of God, not in the mind of man. It was given to man by inspiration. It is important to understand this term because its biblical meaning is different from that which we often give this word in everyday language. The Bible is not inspired in the same sense that the writings of a great novelist are inspired, or as Beethoven's music was inspired.

Inspiration in the biblical sense means that God superintended the human authors so that, using their own individual personalities and writing styles they composed without error His revelation to humanity in the words of the original autographs (writings). Through the inspiration provided by the Holy Spirit, each book is precisely what God wanted written.

See 2 Timothy 3:16. "Inspiration" literally means "God-breathed" in the Greek. Because scripture is breathed out by God, it is true and inerrant in its original form.

God is true (Romans 3:4).

God breathed out the Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:16).

Therefore, the Scriptures are true (John 17:17).

Seven key factors in inspiration ("verbal plenary inspiration"):

- Divine origin and causality
- Human agency
- Written verbally (in words)
- Plenary (meaning all of scripture is inspired, not just parts of it)
- Only the "Autographs" (the original documents penned by the biblical writers) are inspired
- Because scripture is inspired, it is inerrant
- Because scripture is inspired and inerrant, it alone has final authority for our faith and practice

The inspiration of which the Scriptures speak applies only to the text as produced by the writers. There have been some errors in copying, though these are fewer and less significant than one might think.

2 Peter 1:21 says that "prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." [The same verb ("carried along") describes the wind moving a ship in Acts 27:15-17.] Even though human beings were used by God in writing the scriptures, they were all literally "carried along" by the Holy Spirit in what they wrote.

Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would provide an accurate recounting of the events of His life (John 14:26). See also 1 Corinthians 2:13, 14:37; Galatians 1:11-12; and 1 Thessalonians 2:13.

How we view revelation and inspiration with regard to the Bible will determine how we view the Bible's authority. If we believe and affirm that the Bible is God's revelation to us, then the authority of scripture cannot be separated from the authority of God.

Christians consider the Bible (OT and NT) to be authoritative and the basis for our faith and practice.

Background & structure of the Bible

Written over a span of 1600+ years by 40+ different authors.

Old Testament was written from around 1500 B.C. (Job may have been written as long ago as 2,000 B.C.) to about 450 B.C.

OT was written in Hebrew (1/2 of Daniel, 2 verses of Ezra written in Aramaic)

39 Books in the OT:

Genesis through Deuteronomy: **the Law** ("Pentateuch," the Books of Moses, Torah)

Joshua through Esther: **History**

Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon: **Wisdom literature/poetry**

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel: the **Major Prophets**

Hosea through Malachi: the **Minor Prophets**

There is a gap of about 400 to 450 years between the end of the OT and the time of John the Baptist.

[During the intertestamental period, the 14 books of the Apocrypha were written. Not considered scripture by the early church; not part of the Hebrew canon; never quoted by Jesus or any of the NT writers. Part of the Septuagint (a Greek translation of the OT by 70 Hebrew scholars in 3rd century B.C.) and included in the Catholic Bible as of the Council of Trent in 1546.]

New Testament books were written from about 40 A.D to 90 A.D.

NT was written in Greek – the "universal" language of the greater Mediterranean area at that time.

27 "books" of NT are not arranged in order of when they were written, but topically:

Matthew, Mark, Luke, John = the **Gospels**: Jesus' life, death, resurrection & teachings

Acts of the Apostles: the **History of the early church**

Romans through Philemon: **Pauline Epistles** (from the longest to the shortest)

Hebrews through Jude: **Non-Pauline Epistles**

Revelation: **Apocalyptic Prophecy** (vision of the end times & second coming)

How "canon" was formed

"Canon" is a Greek word for the collected books of the Bible as a "standard" or "measure of truth."

It is not known exactly when the OT canon was completed, although the OT as we know it was viewed as a completed collection at the time of Christ. The Septuagint put the OT books in the order they are in today. Jesus quoted from the OT extensively, and verses from virtually every book of the OT are quoted in the NT.

The 27 NT books were formally compiled as the NT canon at the Council of Carthage in AD 397. Individual books had been acknowledged as scripture before that time & most were accepted in the era just after the apostles.

Formation of the NT Canon:

1st Century -- NT books were written to meet needs of the early churches -- most of the epistles were written before the Gospels.

2nd Century -- Books were copied and shared from church to church; used to define Christian beliefs.

3rd Century -- Books were gathered into groupings of Gospels & Epistles, with some variation from place to place. Provided authoritative guidance for faith and practice.

4th Century -- Representatives of churches came together in Councils & formally recognized the 27 NT books as divine revelation. They did not so much *select* these books as *recognize* them under God's guidance as inspired writings on three bases:

1. All were written by the Apostles or their immediate associates.
2. The content of each individual book was consistent with that of all the books taken together as a whole in teaching sound doctrine.
3. All were used by the churches since the time of their writing, were recognized as authoritative, and had proven their value as God's word in the life and worship of churches throughout the Roman Empire.

There are other writings from the 1st, 2nd, & 3rd centuries, such as the Gnostic Gospels: these were never part of the Canon and are not considered to be inspired or authoritative.

For further reference on the Bible:

- *A Ready Defense*, by Josh McDowell (Section 1)
- *What the Bible Is All About*, by Henrietta C. Mears
- *What if the Bible Had Never Been Written?*, by James Kennedy