

# Where the Early Church Got the Bible

*“But know this first of all, that no prophecy of the Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation. For no prophecy at any time was produced by the will of man, but holy men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Pet. 1:20-21).*

How did we get the Bible? Can we be sure that our Bible today is the same as what God inspired to be written? Here’s the fascinating story of how the Bible got from God to us

As New Testament scholar Daniel B. Wallace has said, “Before the year 1881, you had three choices for an English Bible translation: the KJV, the KJV or the KJV.” In our day, we are tremendously blessed to have a variety of English Bible translations that we can access easily. With so many to choose from, however, it’s helpful to understand why multiple translations exists, what’s the difference between them and how we came to have any Scripture in our language at all.

Many volumes have been written to explain the miraculous and fascinating process necessary for the Bible’s existence. To summarize, I’ll explain the five-step process that has occurred for you to read the Bible:

1. Revelation
2. Transmission
3. Translation
4. Interpretation
5. Application

The story of how the Bible got to us from God is a captivating one, and it begins with revelation.

## 1. Revelation

Revelation is the miraculous event whereby God revealed himself and his truth to someone and inspired them, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to write down what he had to say—perfectly (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:19–21). This original copy is called the autograph.

By comparing the ancient manuscripts, we find that the vast majority of the variations between them are minor elements of spelling, grammar and style, or accidental omissions or duplications of words or phrases. Overall, 97 to 99 percent of the New Testament can be reconstructed beyond any reasonable doubt, and not one Christian doctrine is founded solely or even primarily on disputed passages.

Remarkably, the Scripture quoted in the works of the early Christian writers (mostly A.D. 95–150) are so extensive that virtually the entire New Testament can be reconstructed from quotations alone, except for 11 verses (mostly from 2 and 3 John).

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Critics of the accuracy of the Bible routinely claim that it is in fact a series of fables and legends that have developed over hundreds of years, because there are not enough copies of ancient manuscripts to alleviate their skepticism. But a simple shepherd boy dealt a serious blow to their criticisms in 1947.

This boy wandered into a cave in the Middle East and discovered large pottery jars filled with leather scrolls that had been wrapped in linen cloth. Amazingly, the ancient copies of the books of the Bible were in good condition because they had been well sealed. What are now known as the Dead Sea Scrolls are made up of some 40,000 inscribed ancient fragments. From these fragments, more than 500 books have been reconstructed, including some Old Testament books, such as a

complete copy of Isaiah.

## **2. Transmission**

The next aspect of how we got our Bible is transmission. Transmission occurred when trained scribes carefully copied the manuscript so that other copies could be made available for people to read.

While these handwritten copies have the occasional minor error in punctuation or spelling, called variants, they were accepted as accurate and authoritative by God's people (for example, Deut. 17:18; see also 1 Kings 2:3, Ezra 7:1, Neh. 8:8).

For example, the apostles, who were the senior leaders in the early church, taught from copies of the books of the Bible (Acts 17:2, 18:8), and the early church tested all teachings against the existing scrolls (Acts 17:11). Furthermore, Jesus himself taught from copies of the books, not the autographs, and treated them as authoritative (e.g., Matt. 12:3–5; 21:16, 42; Luke 4:16–21, 10:26). God's people have always relied on manuscripts, and these writings have proven to be accurate and trustworthy.

Tragically, opponents of Scripture have attacked its trustworthiness by falsely stating that our current English translations are built upon poorly transmitted copies. However, the bibliographical test of Scripture flatly refutes this false argument. This test determines the historicity of an ancient text by analyzing the quantity and quality of copied manuscripts, as well as how far removed they are from the time of the originals. In the next devotional, we will examine this fact in greater detail.

*Have you ever read ancient literature such as Aristotle, Plato or Homer? Have you ever considered that you are reading from translations of the copies of the original manuscripts and that we have to trust such work anytime we read ancient*

*literature? {eoa}*

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