

How We Got Our Bible

To grow as a Christian the Word of God must be paramount in our lives. How can we be certain that this book is the Word of God? How did God get His Word from His mind onto the pages of the Bible we hold in our lap? James B. Williams has a book entitled, *“From the Mind of God to Mind of Man.”* How does God get His Word from His mind into your mine? Here are the steps God took.

Step One: Revelation

When God speaks, He does not mumble. God has revealed Himself in two ways. God revealed Himself generally and specially.

A. God has revealed Himself generally through nature or creation as seen in Psalm 19:1-6. “The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows His handiwork.”

Spurgeon said, “Creation is an outstretched hand pointing to God.” General revelation is sufficient to condemn the sinner but not sufficient to save. Paul declared this limitation in Romans 1:20.

B. God has revealed Himself specially in Scripture which David stated in Psalm 19:7-14. “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul.”

Step Two: Inspiration

A. Revelation is truth that God has communicated to man.

B. Inspiration is the means God used to write down revelation.

1. The origin of Scripture is recorded in 2 Timothy 3:16. Puritan Thomas Watson said, “The

Old and New Testaments are the two lips of God by which He has spoken to us.”
Scripture

did not originate with man. The Bible is the Word of God.

2. The method of inspiration is recorded in 2 Peter 1:21.

a. There is a human instrumentality in the method. Peter says, “holy men of God spoke” or

wrote is Peter’s idea that he makes clear in 3:16. Scripture did not originate with man but

God used man in the recording of inspired Scripture.

b. There is the divine instrumentality also. Peter continues his thought that “holy men of

God spoke or wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.” When the Holy Spirit superintended the writing of Scripture, the Holy Spirit suspended the ability of the writers to make mistakes. Therefore what they wrote was without error.

Step Three: Canonicity

A. The canon of Scripture is the list of 66 books that belong in the Bible. The short answer is, “Because God only inspired 66 books.”

B. The study of the canon of Scripture answers these questions, “Why are there only 66 books in the Bible?” “Who decided on these 66 books?” “What about Paul’s lost letter in 1 Corinthians 5:9?”

There are two answers. One is incorrect and the other is correct.

1. God decided when He inspired the 66 books later recognized godly believers.
2. The Roman Catholic Church decided and therefore included 14 other books called the Apocrypha. It was not until 1546, that the RCC declared the Apocrypha part of the canon or list of books that belonged in the Bible. These books are rejected because they contradict the message of the 66 inspired books. For example, apocryphal Judith and Tobit teach salvation by works. There are 250 New Testament quotes of Old Testament books and none from the Apocrypha.

Step Four: Textual Criticism

We do not possess the original writings of the apostles and prophets. We carry around a copy of a copy of a copy, etc. So how can we be confident that through the copying process, God has preserved His Word? For example, there are 5000 existing New Testament manuscripts in part or whole of the New Testament which is a miracle in itself. There are only 9-10 copies of Caesar’s *Gallic Wars*. “Modern scholars believe they have a fairly exact rendering of Shakespeare’s “Hamlet,” since a handful of copies of the play made within 200 years of its original writing exist. But the New Testament is without question the most documented book in history” (Adrian Rogers. *Back to the Basics, Vol 1* page 20).

Of the 5000 copies of the New Testament, no two are the same. The textual critic helps us determine the exact wording of the Bible. There are three well known textual critics: Jerome, Erasmus, and the KJV translators.

Erasmus is the most well known textual critic. Erasmus produced the first published Greek New Testament in 1516. His fourth edition became the basis for the Textus Receptus which in turn became the basis for the KJV. Erasmus compared 4 or 5 manuscripts to produce the KJV.

Step Five: Translation

God wants His Word in the common language of the people and He accomplishes this purpose through translations.

1. When the Greek language under the influence of Alexander the Great replaced Hebrew and Aramaic, God in His providence produced the Greek translation of the Old Testament called the Septuagint in 200 B.C. The LXX was the Bible of the first century believer. The LXX was Jesus Bible. All of the OT quotes in Hebrews are from the LXX not the Hebrew and Aramaic.

2. When the Roman Empire defeated the Greeks and Latin replaced Greek as the common language of the people, God in His providence led Jerome, a textual critic who used the Old Latin Bible, to write the Latin Vulgate in 405. The Latin Vulgate is important for two reasons

a) It was the Bible of the people for 1000 years.

b) Jerome's Latin Vulgate became the basis for the first English Bible in 1350, Wycliffe's Bible.

3. When English replaced Latin as the common language of the common people, God in His providence produced English translations.

a) The first was the John Wycliffe English N. T. translation in 1380 and two years later the O.T. Wycliffe wanted to reform the corrupt RC whose priesthood generally was immoral. For this reason, Wycliffe is called, "The Morning Star of the Reformation." Wycliffe believed if the common people had the Bible in their own language, they would demand a reformation of the church. Since 1229, the RCC had forbidden the use of the Bible to laymen. "The Word was precious or rare in those days" (1 Samuel 3:1).

Because Wycliffe knew no Hebrew and no Greek, he translated directly from the Latin Vulgate into the English vernacular. Wycliffe's traveling preachers whom he trained called the Lollard's went everywhere preaching and circulating Wycliffe's English Bible. The RCC was infuriated that laypeople had the Bible. One RCC Bishop complained, "The jewel of the clergy has become the toy of the laity."

In 1401, King Henry IV enacted a statute making "heresy" a secular crime punishable by burning. The RCC courts began trying "heretic" and hauling convicted ones over to the secular courts for burning. The lay preachers, the Lollards, undaunted continued to preach and disseminate the English Bible. Then the RCC in England did what no other country had ever done. They forbade the circulation of the Bible in the common language of the people.

A penalty of burning was enforced for anyone owning or even reading the English Scriptures. In 1414 another Church decree banned Wycliffe's books and warned that anyone who was caught reading the English Bible would "forfeit land, cattle, life, and goods from their heirs forever."

The price of one copy of Scripture was expensive antedating the invention of the printing press. Many Christians were willing to pay large sum of money just to read the Scriptures

for an hour or two. People would give a whole load of hay just to have the Scripture for an hour. We are unlike the believers of Wycliffe's day. We are inundated with English Bibles. Also we are unwilling with freedom to read, study, memorize and meditate.

After Wycliffe died the RCC ordered Wycliffe's books burned, his bones dug up and burned and scattered over the river flowing through Lutterworth, Wycliffe's town.

b) The next important English Bible is William Tyndale

William Tyndale was born 100 years after John Wycliffe's death and had the advantage of the most important invention since the wheel, the invention of the printing press. Tyndale was both a scholar and reformer. Tyndale once remarked to a critic, "If God spares my life, ere many years, I will cause the boy that drives the plough in England to know more of the Scriptures than you do."

Because of England's prohibition of English translations, Tyndale had to leave his homeland in 1524 and never see it again. That would be comparable for you or me leaving the USA in order to help spread God's Word. In Germany, Tyndale, printed and published in 1525 the first complete NT in English from the Greek. Within a year, friends were smuggling the small copies into England in bales of cloth, in sacks of flour, and in other imported goods and thus into the hands and hearts of the people.

Tyndale was viciously betrayed by a friend who turned Tyndale over to the authorities. Tyndale was imprisoned in 1536 in a dungeon near Brussels. Tyndale wrote this despondent letter,

I suffer extremely from the cold in the head being afflicted with a perpetual cough. My overcoat has been worn out. My shirts also are worn out. I also wish my jailor's permission to have a candle in the evening for it is wearisome to sit alone in the dark. But above all things, I entreat and beseech your clemency to be urgent with the Procureur, that him may kindly suffer me to have my Hebrew Bible, Grammar, and Dictionary that I may spend my time with that study."

The RCC found Tyndale guilty of heresy and handed him over to the secular government for execution. On October 6th, 1536 governmental authorities led him to the stake and strangled and burned him in the prison yard. In a loud voice, his dying words rang out, "Lord, open the king of England's eyes."

God answered Tyndale's prayer. The next English Version had a picture in the front, showing King Henry VIII approving of and giving out the English Bible, The Great Bible of 1539. Even before Tyndale's death, German printers had published the Coverdale Bible translated into English based largely on Tyndale's Bible.

Various publishers disseminated approximately 50,000 copies of Tyndale's own Bible before his death. Tyndale's translation forms the basis of the KJV in phrasing, vocabulary, and musical rhythm and constitutes 4/5's of the KJV.

Step Six: Interpretation

Here are some basic principles of interpretation:

1. Each text must be interpreted literally (in the normal sense of language grammar).
 - A. When God speaks, He makes sense (Job 38).
 - B. This is how the Bible interprets itself (Micah 5:2 in Matthew 2:6).
2. Each text must be interpreted according the historical setting.
 - A. What the text meant to the original audience must first be found out, before what does it mean to me.
 - B. This is the historical-grammatical method of interpretation.
 - C. Is Matthew 10:5-6 for me?
3. Each text must be interpreted in its cultural setting. In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul is dealing with a church crisis in a first century culture. Today the issue is not women wearing a head covering but an unwillingness to follow male leadership in the church.
4. Each text must be interpreted in its context. What does it mean to "endure unto the end" in Matthew 24:13. The context is the seven year Tribulation Period not today.
5. Each text must be interpreted according to its literary characteristics.
 - A. There is General Hermeneutics: Principles of interpretation for all Scripture.
 - B. There is Special Hermeneutics: Principles of interpretation for specific kinds or genres of Scripture.
6. Each text must be interpreted according to the principle of non-contradiction.

Step Seven: Application

After we answer the questions, "What does the passage say?" and "What does the passage mean?" then we are ready to answer the question, "How this passage change my life?"

Step Eight: Communication

Now, I am ready to share with others what God has taught me and changed in my life. This was Ezra's method of Bible study as recorded in Ezra 7:10: "For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek (study) the law of the LORD, and to do it (apply), and to teach (communicate) in Israel statutes and judgments."