

How we got the Bible

Lesson Purpose: The purpose of this lesson is to help students understand how we got our Bible. To do this we will describe the history of the Bible; that is, we will see how, over time, the Bible came to be. We will also examine the process by which the people of God recognized which books to include in the Bible, and those which should not be included. This is also known as the process of canonization. In sum, this will help us understand how we got our Bible.

Main ideas:

- The historical development of the Bible
- The process of canonization

Lesson Preview:

I. Charting our Course

- A. The Bible: our prized possession
- B. WWSA: What would a Skeptic ask?
- C. Knowledge is power, and defending the faith
- D. Our two-fold purpose

II. The historical development of the Bible

- A. Here we will attempt to understand how the Bible came to be assembled in its present form
- B. Overview of writing process
- C. How it actually happened
- D. The closing of the canon; or, “What about the other books?”

III. The process of Canonization

- A. In this section we will attempt to understand 2 things: (1) what criteria was used to discover which books to include as Scripture, and (2) how do we know that the books included as Scripture were *really the words of God?*
- B. Canonization: the method that has always been used and is still in use today.¹
- C. Internal and External evidence

¹ In this section I will demonstrate that the method used to discover the inspiration of a given text is essentially the same process which has always been utilized by the people of God throughout the centuries.

Outline

I. Charting our Course

A. The Bible: our prized possession

1. As stated in our previous lesson, the Bible is our source of life. It is our authority. The Bible is also clear, in that it is able to be understood. And most importantly, the Bible is necessary and sufficient for the life of the believer. Therefore, it seems as though the foundation of the Christian religion is the veracity of the ideas found within Scripture.

B. WWSA: What would a Skeptic ask?

1. However, many people reject the claim that the Bible is a book of divine origins. Some may acknowledge its value, while others curse it as a source of evil. But in any case, the point is that many reject the Bible as a revelation of God.
2. Skeptics will likely present the following objections
 - a) How do you know the Bible is book from God?
 - b) How do you know that the content of the Bible is true?
 - c) There are many other religious texts, what makes you think that your text is any truer than someone else's?
 - d) The bible is a collection of books which were simply selected by a church council (e.g. the Council of Carthage 397 a.d.).
 - e) The Bible was written by man; therefore, it cannot be true.
 - f) The Bible is book by man about God; not a book by God about man.
 - g) The Bible has been translated so many times that the original message has probably been distorted or all together lost.

C. Knowledge is power and defending the faith

1. If we are able to come to a correct understanding as to the origin of the Bible, then we will be better situated to put our trust in it. Therefore, we need to have good answers to the above questions.
2. Not only must we answer the above questions for the sake of our own life, we must also answer the questions for the sake of others. We must "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have."² If we want others to put their faith in the good news of Christ, then they too need to be persuaded of the veracity of Scripture. Thus, they need answers to the questions as well.

D. Our two-fold purpose

1. In order to understand how we got the Bible we look at two main topics
 - a) First, we will look at the historical development of the Bible
 - b) Second, we will look at the process of canonizations

II. The historical development of the Bible

A. Here we will attempt to understand how the Bible came to be assembled in its present form

B. Overview of writing process

1. General vs Special revelation
 - a) General revelation refers to the disclosure of God, which is accomplished by examining the created world and the existence of

² 1 Peter 3.15

morality. General revelation is that which is given to all people. Special revelation, on the other hand, refers to the more detailed disclosure of God, which is able to lead to justification and sanctification. Special revelation is primarily found in the words of Scripture and is not necessarily given to everyone.

2. God decides to reveal himself/his plans
 - a) The truths found in Scripture (i.e. special revelation) reflect God's *unilateral decision* to reveal Himself to Man. Thus, Christianity is a revealed religion.³
3. God's words are manifested by decrees, written records, and in the person of Christ. All are the "Word of God"
 - a) God has revealed or spoken to Man in different ways. The first way God has spoken is through decrees. "A decree of God is a word of God that causes something to happen. These decrees of God include not only the events of the original creation but also the continuing existence of all things..."⁴
 - b) Second, God has spoken to us through inspired writings. These writings have come about as men of God were inspired (i.e. led and safe-guarded against error). Thus, the written records that we have in the Bible reflect the very words of God.
 - c) Third, God has also spoken to us by the Incarnation. John said that the Word became flesh; which is a description about Christ: Christ *is* the embodiment of all that Scripture teaches. Thus, no one can completely know God and his plans who doesn't know Christ.

C. How it actually happened

1. Overview

- The Bible is a collection of 66 books written by many men, over a period of approximately 1500 years (c 1500 b.c. –c. 90 a.d). Concerning the timing of when the books were written, Wayne Grudem notes that:
 - the writing of Scripture primarily occurs in connection with God's great acts in redemptive history. The Old testament records and interprets us the calling Abraham and the lives of his descendants, the exodus from Egypt and the wilderness wanderings, the establishment of god's people in the land of Canaan, the establishment of the monarchy, and the Exile and return from captivity...The Old Testament closes with the expectation of the Messiah to come...It is not surprising that no further Scripture would be written until this next and greatest event in the history of redemption occurred.⁵
- How the Bible was written in 5 sentences: **God chooses Moses** to record and expound God's plan to turn the Hebrew people into a blessing unto the nations. After the "Book of Moses"⁶ had been written, **other men of God were led to add to it**; this included books of history and poetry, which described both God and his plans. As the Hebrew people began to turn their backs on God, He sent **Prophets** to call them back to obedience. Then, **the one promised by Moses and the Prophets is born**; of which his life is recorded in the Gospels. **The Apostles of Christ are then sent out to tell the good news of Christ**, the records of which are found in the letters of the New Testament.

2. Step-by-step of how the Bible came to be:

- Moses: the first spokesmen of God.

³ FreeDictionary.com, *A religion founded primarily on the revelations of God to humankind*

⁴ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan 1994), 48

⁵ *Ibid.*, 60

⁶ An expression used to refer to the first five books of the Old Testament; also known as the Torah.

1. Moses encounters God, and God writes the 10 commandments. Moses then presents this revelation to the Hebrew people as the words of God.
 2. Moses was given further revelations from God, which were then added to the original word of God (i.e. the 10 commandments).
 3. Ultimately, the led to the writing and compiling of the first five books of the OT: The Torah. This collection is also known as “The Book of Moses” and “The Law.”
- Adding to the book of Moses: Judges and Kings.
 - Calling everyone back to the Covenant: the Prophets.
 - The Promised One arrives: the Gospels.
 - Explaining Christ and Christian living: the writings of the Apostles (Jn 14.26, Jn 16.13-14).

D. The closing of the canon; or, “What about the other books?”⁷

1. 4 Reasons to reject the Apocrypha (the only other realistic contender):
 - i. They do not claim to be of the same authority as the rest of the Bible
 - ii. They were not accepted by the Jewish people for whom they were written to
 - iii. They were not considered inspired by Jesus or the other NT authors
 - iv. They contain teachings inconsistent with the rest of Scripture

⁷ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan 1994), 59-60

III. The process of Canonization

A. In this section we will attempt to understand 2 things: (1) what criteria was used to discover which books to include as Scripture, and (2) how do we know that the books included as Scripture were *really the words of God*?

B. Canonization: the method that has always been used and is still in use today.⁸

- a. People asked “Was this book written by a prophet?”
- b. People asked, “Does it claim to be from God?”
- c. People asked, “Does it tell the truth of God” (i.e. correspond with previous revelations)?
- d. People asked, “Does this writing possess life-changing power”?
- e. People asked these questions of both the old and new testament

C. How do we know that the books we have are really from God?

- a. Internal and External evidence
 - i. Internal evidence
 1. Does the Bible speak to us? Can we sense God speaking to us through the pages? Jesus did say that “my sheep hear my voice.”
 2. The Bible changes lives
 - ii. External evidence
 1. Prophecy
 2. It answers the “Big Questions” unlike any other book
 3. The testimony of Jesus
 - a. Consider the following syllogism⁹:
 - 1) The NT as history shows that
 - 2) It is reasonable to believe in the deity of Christ, who
 - 3) Taught us to accept the Bible as the word of God

⁸ In this section I will demonstrate that the method used to discover the inspiration of a given text is essentially the same process which has always been utilized by the people of God throughout the centuries.

⁹ Norman Geisler, *Why I am a Christian* (Grand Rapids MI: BakerBooks, 2006), 199.