

# History Of The Bible

Gospel Foundation Of Faith: Shelf 1 — Volume 2

Jesus said, *“Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away”* (Mt 24:35). It is thrilling to examine how God has providentially guarded His word in order to provide for people of all ages His will in written form. The very fact that the Bible has survived schemes to destroy it, gives witness to the fact that it has been held in great esteem by all people throughout all history. Regardless of all the attacks against it, the Bible lives on in the hearts of those who have been changed by its precepts and promises.

No other book has been preserved throughout history as the Bible. The manner by which the Bible has been providentially preserved indicates that there is something different about this book than all other ancient books. Thousands of manuscripts and versions of the Bible have been preserved throughout history. If the Bible were just another book, then we would at least wonder why people have given so much attention to preserving it. Our conclusion to the great care by which the Bible has been preserved is in the fact that humanity has considered the Bible to be more than just another book. Those who have sought to preserve the Bible have given their testimony that it is the inspired word of God.



**1. T or F:** The fact that the Bible has been respected and preserved in history for thousands of years is evidence that it is not simply the product of human ingenuity.

## ~ Preservation Of The Bible ~

It was always God's intention to use man's ability to preserve His word for His people. Since He did not intend to speak directly to man continually through the inspired spoken words of people, God chose that

throughout the history, inspired chosen people would write His word on writing materials in languages that could be understood by all people.

## ~ Bible Writing Materials ~

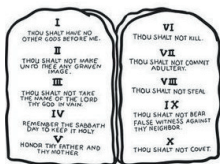
God used writing materials of this world in order to preserve His word. In order to preserve His instructions and commands, God resorted to the invention of language and writing materials in order to preserve His word. These materials were stone, clay, potsherd, wood, leather, papyrus and vellum. Ancient writers used these materials in various ways and at various times. The ancient scribes seemed to always follow the principle of using those materials that were close at hand, the best available, and the most durable.

### Stone Writing Materials

Stone was the most permanent writing material that was invented by man. When something was “written in stone,” its existence was guaranteed for centuries. Some of the oldest historical inscriptions in the world we have today were written on stone. The **Code of Hammurabi** (a king of ancient Babylon) is an inscription on stone that dates back to about 2,000 B.C., the time when Abraham was in Babylon. Stone inscriptions in Egypt extend beyond 3,000 B.C. The first written laws of God that were given to His people were inscriptions by the finger of God on tables of stone. The occasion for this inscription was the time immediately after Israel’s departure from Egyptian captivity when the Israelites

The First Written  
Commandments  
For Israel Were  
The Ten  
Commandments.

were at the foot of Mount Sinai. From the day of the creation of Adam and Eve to the exodus of Israel from Egypt, God had communicated His will directly to man through the inspiration of prophets (Hb 1:1). However, at Mount Sinai God determined to inscribe the principles of His law for Israel on tables of stone (See Ex 31:18; 34:1,28).



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**2. T or F:** The ten commandments were first written on papyrus paper.

### Clay Writing Materials

The demand of people for a writing material that could easily be produced eventually led to the use of clay. Small tablets of clay could be produced on which instructions and commands could quickly and easily be written. The use of clay as a writing material was very prominent in the Assyrian and Babylonian empires. The Assyrian Royal Library at Nineveh, that dates back to about 650 B.C., consisted of thousands of clay tablets.



The use of clay for writing dates back as far as 3,100 B.C. The clay that was used for writing was first worked and made pliable. After a smooth surface was made, a rigid sharp instrument was used to mark the various figures of writing on the surface of the soft clay. After the inscription was made, the clay was usually baked or allowed to dry in the sun, thus securing the inscription for centuries to come.

### Potsherd Writing Materials

Potsherds were broken pieces of pottery. This source of writing material was generally used by the poor, or during a time of crisis when material was quickly needed. A good example of potsherd writing material is the Lachish correspondence during the invasion of Palestine by Babylonian forces in 588/587 B.C. Because potsherd was usually a small broken piece of pottery, the inscriptions that were made were very brief. Nevertheless, in the field of biblical archaeology, discoveries of inscriptions on potsherds have been very important in tracing the history of civilization throughout the land of Palestine.



Potsherd of Lachish Letter during Babylonian invasion of Judah around 588 B.C.

### Wood Writing Materials

Wood was not generally used as a writing material because of its lack of durability and the great difficulty by which to make a smooth surface for writing. Therefore, it was often shunned as a material

for preserving sacred laws and codes. There are few examples of wood writing materials. Numbers 17:2 is an example of wood being used for writing in Bible times. Some also suggest that Isaiah 30:22 and Habakkuk 2:2 are instances where wood was used for writing.

### Leather Writing Materials

The use of leather as a writing material signaled the beginning of a new era for the preservation of the word of God. Leather was a more advanced material, though its use as a writing material is dated early. The use of leather dates back to the Fourth Dynasty of Egypt. The historical records of Thutmose III were written on leather. It is believed that leather as a writing material dates back to as far as 3,000 B.C.

The Jews primarily used leather for the transmission of the Old Testament. Though the Ten Commandments were first written on tablets of stone, it is likely that Moses inscribed the first five books of the Old Testament on sheets of leather. Since stone would have been too cumbersome, and papyrus paper had not yet been invented, the books of Genesis through Deuteronomy were undoubtedly written on sheets of leather.

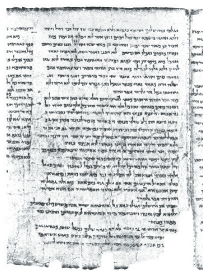
The Most Common Writing Material Of Ancient Times Was Stone, Clay And Leather.

### Papyrus Writing Materials

The invention of papyrus paper was the most significant invention of man that affected ancient writings. Papyrus paper was made from the papyrus plant that commonly grew along the banks of the Nile River in Egypt. The stem of the plant was sliced, woven, pressed and allowed to dry in the sun. There is evidence that papyrus was used as a writing material as early as the Fifth Dynasty of Egypt from 2,500 to 2,350 B.C. During the first century A.D., this was the most popular writing material that was used throughout the Roman Empire. It is likely that the original autographs (the original writings) of the New Testament writers were written on papyrus paper. This is true because papyrus paper was available and

any other material as leather would have been difficult to obtain.

Throughout the centuries that followed the initial inscriptions of the word of God, many copies of the Old and New Testaments were written on papyrus. Papyrus paper was less expensive than leather, and thus, numerous copies could be made of the text of the Bible for extensive distribution throughout the ancient world. Fortunately, thousands of discoveries have been made of portions of the early copies of various texts of the Bible that were written on papyrus paper. These discoveries are now used in the work of biblical investigation in order to produce final texts of the Scriptures from which translations are made.



Parchment leaf  
from Dead Sea  
Isaiah scroll

### Vellum Writing Materials

This writing material would be classified as the elite writing material of the ancient world. Vellum was a fine quality of leather that was prepared on both sides for writing. Second in use to papyrus paper, this material was used by the early Christians for making copies of the New Testament books. It was used by the secular world for more than a thousand years after its initial discovery. Because it was used extensively by the early Christians, we have today many copies of the books of the Bible that were written on vellum.

- 3. T or F:** Some portions of the Bible were written in the languages of angels.
- 4. T or F:** All portions of the Bible were written on common writing material of the day.

## ~ Languages Of The Bible ~

God used man's languages in order to preserve His word. God uses the languages of men to communicate to men. It is thus through the language of men that God has chosen to communicate His will in written form. He has used three languages through

which to communicate His inspired word throughout history.

### Hebrew

From the many nations of the world, and because of His promise to Abraham, God chose Israel as the nation through whom He would bring His Son into the world (Gl 3:29). Ancient Hebrew was the language of the nation of Israel at the time God determined to have His laws written in order to direct the nation. Ancient Hebrew was “the Jews’ language.” It was thus the language into which the Old Testament Scriptures were first written (2 Kg 18:26,28; Ne 13:24).

Ancient Hebrew was a language that was closely related to such languages as Syriac, Aramaic, Akkadian and Arabic. The ancient Hebrew alphabet had twenty-two consonants. However, since the alphabet contained no vowels, the words of the language were written in consonants only. For example, the Hebrew word for God was originally written *YHWH* (transliterated into English letters). The Masoretic scribes, whose work it was to make copies of the Old Testament between A.D. 500 and A.D. 1000, later added vowels to the original words in order that the ancient pronunciation of the words not be lost. *YHWH* was then spelled *YaHWeH*.

### Aramaic

From the ninth century B.C. until the first century A.D., Aramaic became a commonly spoken language in the aristocratic class after the Babylonian captivity. By the time of Hezekiah around 700 B.C., Aramaic was a language that was spoken by the Jewish leaders, but not by the common people (See 2 Kg 18:26). Aramaic was the language of the nations that surrounded Israel, and thus the language environment into which Israel went into captivity.

When the Jews were in Babylonian captivity, they learned Aramaic, which was the language of their captors. After their seventy years of Babylonian captivity, therefore, Israel brought back to Palestine a generation of young people who fluently spoke the

Aramaic language. It is thus believed that Aramaic became the language of Palestine after the Babylonian captivity. By the time of Jesus, it is probable that Aramaic became the common language of Palestine, and thus the language Jesus used during His ministry here on earth.

- 5. T or F:** Aramaic was the language that was spoken by many of the nations that surrounded Israel.
- 6. T or F:** The common language that was spoken by the nation of Israel was Aramaic.

Some portions of the Old Testament have Aramaic influence. Portions that are believed to have been originally written in Aramaic are Jr 10:11; Dn 2:4 – 7:28; Ez 4:8 – 6:18; 7:12-26. There are also a few words and phrases of Aramaic in the New Testament. These include: *talitha cumi* (“little girl, get up” - Mk 5:41), *ephphatha* (“be opened” - Mk 7:34), *eli, eli lama sabachthani* (“My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” - Mt 27:46), and *abba* (“father” - Mk 14:36, Rm 8:15, Gl 4:6).

- 7. T or F:** Jesus never spoke in the Aramaic language.
- 8. T or F:** The common language that was spoken during the time of Jesus was *koine* Greek.

### Greek

Because of the great influence of the Greek Empire three centuries before Jesus walked on this earth, the Greek language became the common trade language of the ancient world. The Greek language

The New Testament  
Was First Written  
In *Koine* Greek.

that was spoken by the common people was referred to as *koine* Greek. ***Koine*** means “common.” The New Testament manuscripts were originally written in *koine* Greek in order that they be universally read throughout the world.

There is no evidence that the original manuscripts of the New Testament were written in any other language than Greek, except for minor portions of Aramaic as listed above. Therefore, when we discuss New Testament manuscripts as the **Codex Sinaiticus**, **Codex Vaticanus** or **Codex Alexandrinus**, we

are talking about manuscripts that were written in *koine* Greek. When Bible students refer to a Greek word in the text of the New Testament, reference is being made to a *koine* Greek word.

## ~ Collection Of Bible Books ~

The word “**canon**” comes from the Greek word *kanon* which originally meant a “measuring rule.” From the fourth century, the word has been used by Bible students to refer to the collection of individual Old and New Testament books and letters into what is now called the Bible. Therefore, in reference to the Bible, the word “canon” is used to refer to a **standard by which books are ruled inspired, and thus, considered authoritative to be brought together as the word of God.** Canonical books are those books that were accepted as inspired by the early Jews and Christians. Jews or Christians, therefore, accepted those books that were in the canon of Old Testament Scriptures as the inspired word of God. The same was done by Christians in reference to the New Testament.

The Word “Canon”  
Is Used By  
Bible Students  
To Refer To The  
Gathering Together Of  
Inspired Bible Books.

When Bible students study the canon of the Bible, they work in areas of what is commonly called **higher and lower criticism.** These are not negative studies of the Bible as the words may suggest. On the contrary, these are simply fields of study wherein Bible students closely examine manuscript evidence for the preservation of the text of the Bible. They are studies that closely examine ancient texts in the original languages in which biblical texts were first written.

### Higher Criticism

Higher criticism is essentially an examination of the biblical text with the purpose of determining the authorship, age, date, literary styles, and composition of the examined Bible document. Those who work in the field of lower criticism work to investigate the Hebrew text of the Old Testament and the Greek



text of the New Testament. The student who works at the level of lower criticism in his or her Bible studies investigates all possible textual evidence of both the Old and New Testaments. Every student of the Bible at one time in his or her studies plays the part of the lower and higher critic. These studies are the depth to which some students of the Bible seek to go in order to determine the communication of God to man through the writing materials, language skills, and determination of people to preserve copies of the Scriptures for believers of all history.

Unity Can Be  
realized Only  
When The Bible  
Is Our  
Only Authority.

- 9. T or F:** The word “canon” is used in reference to the collection of individual Bible books into one volume.
- 10. T or F:** Higher criticism refers to Bible study that is more important than a study of the Bible through lower criticism.

### Textual Criticism

The most common term that is used to refer to lower criticism is **textual criticism**. As introduced in the previous point, this field of study investigates the history of the accepted canon of Scriptures. The textual critic establishes for us today a history of the transmission of the biblical text. He seeks to give us a text of the Scriptures in as accurate a form as possible. It is the responsibility of the textual critic to accumulate from all manuscript sources, information by which he or she can produce a single text from which a translation can be made. The textual critics must consider all Hebrew manuscripts in reference to the Old Testament, and Greek manuscripts in reference to the New Testament. All versions that have been made from the original languages, as well as all quotations from the text of the Bible are considered by the textual critic in order to write a single text from which translations are made.

We Have The Text  
Of The Bible  
Today As God  
Desired That We  
Have It.

### Tests Of Canonicity

Before any book of the present Bible became a part of the canon of Scriptures, it had to pass various

tests by the people of God who originally accepted a particular book as Scripture. Therefore, all sixty-six books of the present Bible canon that we now have were considered inspired by those to whom they were first written. However, when higher and lower critics today examine the present books of the Bible, they ask and answer many of the following questions in order to determine the canonicity of each book of the Bible.

- ▶ Did the Jews to whom the Old Testament Scriptures were first written accept as inspired the specific Old Testament book under consideration?
- ▶ Is the book endorsed, that is, considered inspired by other inspired writers of the Bible?
- ▶ Did the first century Christians accept as inspired the specific New Testament document under consideration?
- ▶ Was the specific New Testament book under consideration written in the first century?
- ▶ Were the Old Testament books recognized to be inspired by Jesus and the New Testament writers?
- ▶ Does the specific Old Testament book under consideration fit into the Divine chain of prophets who recognized one another's writings?
- ▶ Does the book under consideration harmoniously fit into the theme of God's plan of redemption that is maintained throughout the Bible?
- ▶ Does the specific book speak with inspirational authority, that is, does it claim to be inspired from God?
- ▶ Does the document under examination contradict the teachings of other documents that are accepted as inspired?
- ▶ Does the document under examination have a "sense of inspiration," that is, does it have the literary nature of an inspired book?
- ▶ Was the writer of the book accepted as an inspired man of God?
- ▶ Is the book historically accurate?
- ▶ Does the writer of the document write with inspirational integrity?

**11. T or F:** A document was considered part of the Bible only when it claimed to be inspired by God.

**12. T or F:** When a particular document was proved to be inspired, it was then added to the canon of Scriptures.

These are only a few of the broad areas that are surveyed in studying the canonicity of ancient docu-

ments in their relationship to those books that we call God's word. Every student of the Bible should consider these subjects when doing his own in-depth studies of the Scriptures. Because every book of the present Bible passes the preceding close scrutiny, we can truly be confident that the sixty-six books of the Bible are truly in the Bible because God wanted them to be accepted as His word to man.

### ~ Accuracy Of Bible Text ~

One of the major unjust criticisms against the text of the Bible is that it contains many "errors" as the result of being copied over the centuries. This criticism often comes from those who know little or nothing about the Bible, or the means by which God wanted the Scriptures to be preserved throughout the centuries. God wanted to use uninspired human hands to make copies of inspired Scripture in order to allow dedicated men to have the responsibility of transmitting the biblical text from one generation to another.

#### The History Of Transmission

A **variant reading** is where manuscript evidence may produce a variation of words or wording in a specific phrase. For example, Mark 4:24 reads in some manuscripts, *"Take heed what you hear. With what standard you measure, it will be measured to you."* In other manuscripts the Greek text reads, *"Take heed what you hear, for with what standard you measure."* The difference of reading between the words "with" and "for with" constitute a variant reading. Almost all variant readings are of this nature, that is, they are minor and do not affect any doctrinal principles of the Bible.

No Variant Reading Affects Any Teaching.

Some variant readings are more complicated than the example of Mark 4:24. We find a more complex reading when comparing 2 Kings 8:26 with 2 Chronicles 22:2. There is a variant reading concerning the age of Ahaziah when he came to the throne. 2 Kings 8:26 reads that he was twenty-two years old

and 2 Chronicles 22:2 reads that he was forty-two years old. This is one of those variant readings that can easily be explained in reference to the Hebrew text. The Jews used letters to express numbers. Since the Hebrew letters for “forty” were so similar to those for “twenty,” it is evident that some copyist transcribed the wrong letter. The account in 2 Kings is beyond doubt the correct age. If Ahaziah were forty-two when he came to the throne, as is stated in 2 Chronicles, then he would have been born two years before the birth of his father who died at the age of forty (2 Kg 8:17,24).

Many variant readings are the result of an unintentional slip of a copyist’s hand. Some were the result of copyists trying to make parallel accounts agree where there was a supposed contradiction. Some manuscripts had explanatory notes placed in the margins by those who were students of the Bible. These notes were later inadvertently inserted into the text by a scribe who thought they were part of the original text that had been left out by a previous scribe. Whatever the source of each variant, all variant readings can be classified as human error. And this is the point. God was willing to use the fallibility of man in order to preserve His word throughout history. This may seem like a

**We Must Not  
Conclude That The  
Presence Of  
Variant Readings  
We Can Have No  
Confidence In  
The Bible.**

risky business when considering the word of God. However, when one fully understands the process of copying and distributing the Scriptures throughout history, the problem is not as great as it first appears. In fact, the more one understands the means by which God used fallible men to preserve the Scriptures, **the greater one’s faith becomes in the fact that we have the word of God today in the form that God wanted us to have it.**

One of the first things to understand about variant readings is that they have only a minor effect on the reading of the text. **No variant reading affects any doctrinal matters in the entire Bible.** Most

are variations of prepositions, names, places, characters and the listing of weights and dates. The fact is that there are few variant readings. Though critics of Christianity have completely blown out of proportion the supposed problem of variant readings, they have unjustly proclaimed to a relatively biblically uninformed audience an unfair attack against the Bible.

**13. T or F:** Variant readings are intentional errors made by the Bible writers.

**14. T or F:** Making copies of the Scriptures was done by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

### ~ Accuracy Of Transmission ~

The preceding helps us to better understand the will of God in allowing men to copy and transmit the Scriptures in order that they be preserved for all humanity for all history. Though God inspired the writers of the original autographs, we might wonder why He did not inspire those scribes who dedicated themselves to copy the Scriptures. The answer to this inquiry lies in the fact that **God does not do for man what man can do for himself**. One must, therefore, begin to understand God's method of preserving the Scriptures by understanding why God used man in the first place to preserve the text of the Bible.

We Have Faith  
That We Have  
The Bible As  
God Wanted  
Us To Have It.

In order to understand why God used uninspired men to preserve the text of the Bible, we must not forget the tremendous accuracy by which the Bible has been transmitted throughout the centuries by godly men who have had a reverential attitude toward the Scriptures. The "miracle" of the preservation of the text of the Bible is truly inspiring.

An example of the accuracy of the biblical text was proved by the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947. In particular, the Isaiah Scroll was one of the most interesting documents of this discovery. The oldest text of Isaiah prior to the Dead Sea discov-

ery was the Masoretic text that dated around **A.D. 850**. The Isaiah Scroll of the Dead Sea discovery dated around **150 B.C.** Therefore, **there is a nine hundred year difference between the origins of these two texts.**



Complete scroll of Isaiah that was discovered in the Dead Sea caves in 1947. Dates from 175 B.C. to A.D. 68.

When the Isaiah text of the Dead Sea discovery was compared with the Masoretic text, there were only a few minor differences between the two. Such is a magnificent testimony to the accuracy by which the Bible was copied throughout nine hundred years of history. It is for this reason, therefore, that God knew that people had the ability to preserve His word in an acceptable manner.

Another example was the discovery of a portion of the Psalms at the Jewish stronghold of Masada, a fortress constructed by Herod in the southern Dead Sea area in the first century B.C. The portion of the Psalms that was discovered dated twenty or thirty years prior to A.D. 73, the date Masada fell to the Romans. When this portion of Psalms was compared with the Masoretic text of A.D. 850, it was almost exactly identical with the Masoretic text of Psalms. There are several centuries between the portion of Psalms that was discovered at Masada and the Masoretic text of Psalms. And yet, the integrity of the Bible text stands firm.

The discovery of manuscripts that were produced only a few years from the writing of the original autographs proves that we have God's word today in an accurate form. **We have God's word exactly as He wanted us to have it.**

- 15. T or F:** The existence of the Dead Sea Scrolls proves that the text of the Bible has been copied accurately over several centuries.
- 16. T or F:** The Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in a village outside Rome.
- 17. T or F:** We have the text of the Bible today as God wanted us to have it.

## CLASSROOM DISCUSSION

1. What did Jesus mean when He said that His word would not pass away?
2. Why did God preserve His word in written form?
3. What was the reason why the inspired writers of the Bible used different writing materials?
4. What were the most common writing materials that were used for making copies of the word of God?
5. What were the common languages of the Old and New Testaments that were used to initially transcribe the Scriptures?
6. What were some of the languages into which some portions of the Old Testament Scriptures were recorded?
7. What does the word *koine* mean?
8. What does the literary science of high criticism mean in reference to the Bible?
9. What does the literary science of lower criticism mean in reference to the Bible?
10. What are some of the tests of canonicity that determine when an ancient text belongs to the canon of the Bible?
11. What is a variant reading?
12. Why do we believe that we have the text of the Bible as God would have us have it today?



## ABBREVIATIONS OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis - **Gn**, Exodus - **Ex**, Leviticus - **Lv**, Numbers - **Nm**, Deuteronomy - **Dt**, Joshua - **Ja**, Judges - **Jg**, Ruth - **Rt**, 1 Samuel - **1 Sm**, 2 Samuel - **2 Sm**, 1 Kings - **1 Kg**, 2 Kings - **2 Kg**, 1 Chronicles - **1 Ch**, 2 Chronicles - **2 Ch**, Ezra - **Er**, Nehemiah - **Ne**, Esther - **Et**, Job - **Jb**, Psalms - **Ps**, Proverbs - **Pv**, Ecclesiastes - **Ec**, Song of Solomon - **Ss**, Isaiah - **Is**, Jeremiah - **Jr**, Lamentations - **Lm**, Ezekiel - **Ez**, Daniel - **Dn**, Hosea - **Hs**, Joel - **Jl**, Amos - **Am**, Obadiah - **Ob**, Jonah - **Jh**, Micah - **Mc**, Nahum - **Nh**, Habakkuk - **Hk**, Zephaniah - **Zp**, Haggai - **Hg**, Zechariah - **Zc**, Malachi - **Ml**

## NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew - **Mt**, Mark - **Mk**, Luke - **Lk**, John - **Jn**, Acts - **At**, Romans - **Rm**, 1 Corinthians - **1 Co**, 2 Corinthians - **2 Co**, Galatians - **Gl**, Ephesians - **Ep**, Philippians - **Ph**, Colossians - **Cl**, 1 Thessalonians - **1 Th**, 2 Thessalonians - **2 Th**, 1 Timothy - **1 Tm**, 2 Timothy - **2 Tm**, Titus - **Ti**, Philemon - **Pf**, Hebrews - **Hb**, James - **Js**, 1 Peter - **1 Pt**, 2 Peter - **2 Pt**, 1 John - **1 Jn**, 2 John - **2 Jn**, 3 John - **3 Jn**, Jude - **Jd**, Revelation - **Rv**

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