

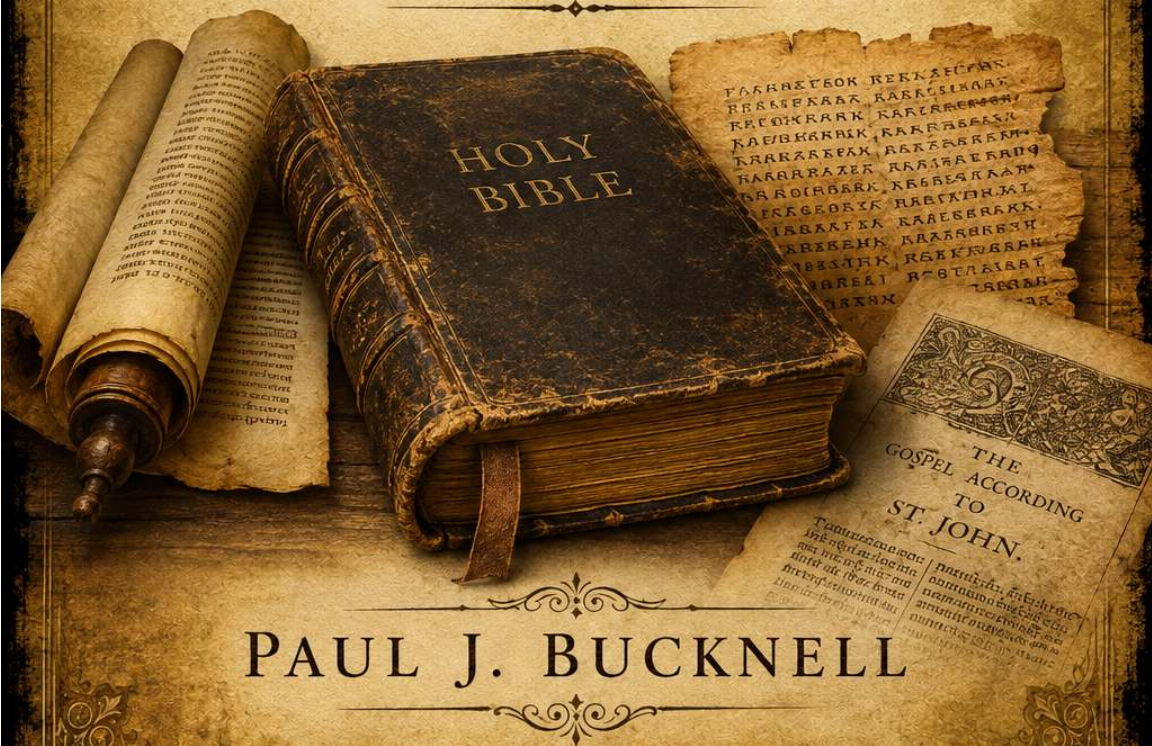
— The —

ORIGINS

of the

BIBLE

HOW THE SCRIPTURES CAME TO US
AND WHY WE CAN TRUST THEM



PAUL J. BUCKNELL

Books by Paul J. Bucknell

Allowing the Bible to speak to our lives today!

- ✦ *Overcoming Anxiety: Finding Peace, Discovering God*
- ✦ *Reaching Beyond Mediocrity: Faith's Triumph Over Temptation*
- ✦ *The Life Core: Discovering the Heart of Great Training*
- ✦ *Life in the Spirit! Experiencing the Fullness of Christ*
- ✦ *The Making of A Godly Leader: Isaiah 53, The Fourth Servant Song*
- ✦ *An Examination of Our Theological Conclusions*
- ✦ *The Godly Man: When God Touches a Man's Life*
- ✦ *Redemption Through the Scriptures/ Study Guide*
- ✦ *Godly Beginnings for the Family*
- ✦ *Principles and Practices of Biblical Parenting*
- ✦ *Building a Great Marriage*
- ✦ *The Lord Your Healer: Discover Him and Find His Healing Touch*
- ✦ *Christian Premarital Counseling Manual for Counselors*
- ✦ *Relational Discipleship: Cross Training*
- ✦ *A Biblical Perspective of Social Justice Issues*
- ✦ *A Spiritual Map for Unity*
- ✦ *Running the Race: Overcoming Lusts*
- ✦ *The Bible Teaching Commentary on Genesis*
- ✦ *The Bible Teaching Commentary on Romans*
- ✦ *Book of Romans: Bible Study Questions*
- ✦ *Book of Ephesians: Bible Studies*
- ✦ *Walking with Jesus: Abiding in Christ*
- ✦ *Inductive Bible Studies in Titus*
- ✦ *The Origins of the Bible*
- ✦ *Life Transformation: A Monthly ... on Romans 12:9-21*
- ✦ *1 Peter Bible Study Questions: Living in a Fallen World*
- ✦ *Satan's Four Stations: The Destroyer is Destroyed*
- ✦ *3 X E Discipleship (Discipler and Disciple)*
- ✦ *Take Your Next Step into Ministry*
- ✦ *Training Leaders for Ministry*
- ✦ *Study Guide for Jonah: Understanding God's Heart*

Check out our books at wwwFOUNDATIONSforFreedom.net

The Origins of the Bible

*How the Scriptures Came to Us and
Why We Can Trust Them*

Paul J. Bucknell

Book Information

The Origins of the Bible: How the Scriptures Came to Us and Why We Can Trust Them

Copyright © 2026 Paul J. Bucknell. All rights reserved.

Digital ISBN: 978-1-61993-126-8

Published by Paul J. Bucknell, USA

www.foundationsforfreedom.net | www.bffbible.org

Readers are free to copy and share this book, in whole or in part, for personal, family, church, school, educational, or ministry use, as long as the author's name, book title, and copyright notice remain intact. Printed copies can be offered at cost only. Written permission is required for commercial use, adaptations, translations, modifications, or inclusion in a commercial product.

Permissions and inquiries: pb@bffbible.org

Authorship and editorial assistance: This book was written by Paul J. Bucknell. Artificial intelligence tools were used only to assist with editing.

Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible® (NASB), unless otherwise noted. Copyright © 1960, 1971, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NIV are taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version® NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

The Origins of the Bible

The Origin of the Bible7

Why is it so important that we know the Bible is reliable?

The Transformation of the Bible.....11

How is the Bible different today from before?

The Canonization of the Bible15

How did the Bible come into being?

The Extent of the Bible.....19

Why aren't other books part of the Bible?

The Inspiration of the Bible25

How is the Bible different from other books?

The Reliability of the Bible Texts (Part 1)29

Doesn't the Bible have many mistakes?

The Reliability of the Bible Texts (Part 2)35

Lower Criticism: Detecting the accuracy of a Biblical text.

Choosing the Right Bible Version.....45

Does the Bible version make a difference?

A Conspiracy Against the Word of God?59

Does the Bible version make a difference?

The Relevance of the Bible.....73

Is the Bible relevant to my life?

Appendix 1: Further Studies77

Appendix 2: Fun Exploring.....79

Appendix 3: Author Introduction81



The Origin of the Bible

Why is it so important that we know the Bible is reliable?

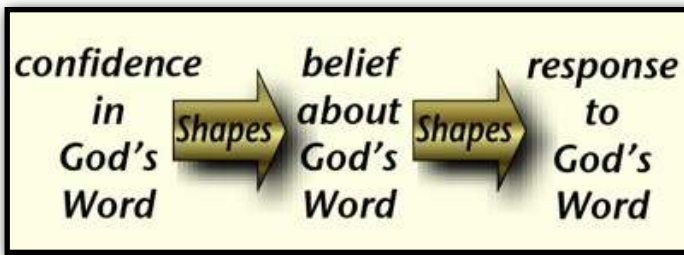
Our faith in God depends on our trust in God and His Son, Christ. This belief is mainly dependent on God's Word, the Bible.

**"SO FAITH COMES FROM
HEARING, AND HEARING
BY THE WORD OF CHRIST"
(ROMANS 10:17).**

The devil's success depends on how effectively he keeps people from knowing and trusting God's Word. He therefore tries to undermine the **knowledge and reliability** of the Scriptures. For the first 1500 years after Christ, the Scriptures were not widely available. They were handwritten primarily on scrolls, and reading was largely limited to society's elite. The evil one could quickly distort what God might have

said to someone, just as he did with Eve in the Garden of Eden.

With the advent of the printing press and the mass production of Bibles at lower prices, the evil one had difficulty keeping God's truth from His people. He managed for a while, however, by causing the church to insist on using only the Latin translation of the Bible (the Vulgate). Again, only those highly educated could read Latin. This only lasted a short period because God raised up bold translators willing to die to bring God's Word to the people in their own languages.



Satan again had to change tactics. He resorted to keeping as many people as possible from learning to read. God, however, burdened Christians with the task of reaching out to everyone by educating the masses. This was the origin of the Sunday School movement. They taught everyone to read so they could read the Bible. The devil decided to thwart this entire process.

Satan would allow everyone to be educated. He would, however, popularize education and take control of it. Today we see the evil one keep God's Word out of schools, diminish its impact with a slew of other books, and undermine the authority of God's Word. Meanwhile,

the Lord has raised up the homeschool movement, more Christian schools, and new educational systems. This last aspect is the focus of this book.

Satan began to undermine the reliability or trustworthiness of God's Word. This is the situation today. Christians hear all sorts of things about the Bible. They might hear about other scriptures, such as Gnostic writings. Or they might read a news clip about the Jesus Seminar, which

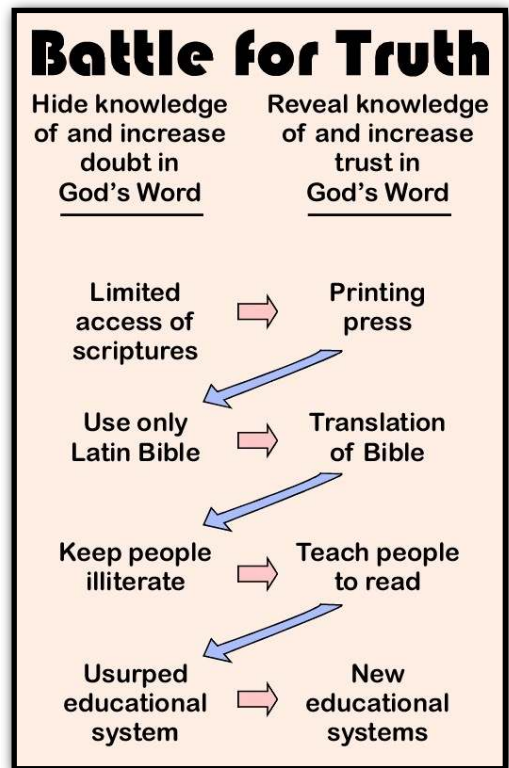
asserts that very little of the gospels is reliable. He has spread doubt chiefly through two means.

(1) Lack of information

Very few Christians know the origin of the Bible.

(2) Misinformation

When the facts are unknown, it is easy to pass along a lie and have people believe it.



They have nowhere to quickly find the facts. As a result, Christians end up hiding their mighty sword to fight off the enemy. They doubt that God's Word really works. What do you believe about the origin and reliability of God's Word?

If I don't believe God's Word is really trustworthy, ...

- ◆ Will I really commit myself to daily read and meditate on His Word?
- ◆ Will I stand up against this hostile world and say "Jesus is the only Way"?
- ◆ Will I wholeheartedly obey and follow the Lord and reject any compromise?

Let's build up our faith by asking five questions about the Bible's origin.

1. How is the Bible different today from before?
 - ◆ The Transformation of the Bible
2. How did the Bible come into being?
 - ◆ The Canonization of the Bible
3. Why aren't other books part of the Bible?
 - ◆ The Extent of the Bible
4. How is the Bible different from other books?
 - ◆ The Inspiration of the Bible Texts
5. Doesn't the Bible contain many mistakes?
 - ◆ The Reliability of the Bible Texts



The Transformation of the Bible

How is the Bible different today from before?

The Bible was formed over many years and in different cultures and situations. Think of Moses, brought up in Egypt (1500 BC), compared to David, the King of Israel (1000 BC). Five points are discussed below.

1. The Composition of the Bible

The Bible comprises 66 books, developed over 1,500 years by more than 40 authors.

- ◆ Old Testament (OT): 39 books from 1500 BC to 400 BC, mainly in Biblical Hebrew.
- ◆ New Testament (NT): 27 books, written from 33 AD to 70 (or 90 AD), were written in Koine Greek.

Until the late nineteenth century, many scholars thought this language was a 'heavenly' or biblical Greek! They

were not very aware of how the Greek language developed over time.

2. The Authors of the Bible

In contrast to what we might think, most authors were not part of a religious caste. The authors included kings and shepherds, fishermen and statesmen, and men from many different walks of life. They went from being ordinary men to God's prophets. Only at a few special times did God call them to use their prophetic gift to write down God's revelation for others to read.

3. The Books of the Bible

The 66 books that comprise the Bible were divinely orchestrated over a long time (about 1500 years) and a large geographical area. They hold in common two main points:

(1) A particular focus on Christ the Messiah, who brings God's grace into the world.

"The New is in the Old concealed, and the Old is in the New Revealed."

"The New Testament is veiled in the Old Testament and the Old Testament is unveiled in the New Testament" (Augustine).

(2) A claim and recognition of divine authority.

Peter the apostle described it this way,

“As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven--things into which angels long to look.” (1 Peter 1:10-12)

4. The Form of the Bible

Books as we know them are a relatively recent development. The multiplication of books is even more recent. Because of this, we need to carefully trace the historical record to identify the forms the original scriptures took.

Many ancient writings, like the Bible, were recorded on scrolls that were ‘scrolled’ up. Books were extremely rare; printing is a recent development. To save space on expensive, bulky materials such as stone, animal skins, and papyrus, punctuation was rare. Nor were there chapters or verses! Early Greek biblical manuscripts were commonly written in majuscule (all capitals) script, with little punctuation and without spaces between words. For example, there could be confusion over where a new line starts. Look at the English word in all caps, NOWHERE. It can be interpreted as ‘no where’ or

‘now here.’ Each has a different meaning but would be clear only by the context of the passage.

5. The Order of Bible books

The order of the Bible books is not inspired, only the original words. The Old Testament (lit. covenant) was, early on, introduced in two parts: the Law (i.e., Moses’ first five books) and the prophets, including the historical and poetical books (Mt 5:17; Mk 11:13; Lk 24:27). Josephus and the Talmud asserted that the prophetic line ended in Nehemiah’s day, with Malachi in 400 BC. The threefold (Lk 24:44) and fourfold organization came later. The Septuagint (LXX), the Greek translation of the Old Testament, popularized the fourfold division.

The New Testament follows a similar topical order (Gospels, Letters, Historical). Subdivisions are made for the many epistles (letters) through the authorship (eg., Pauline or Petrine Epistles).



The Canonization of the Bible

How did the Bible come into being?

Canonization is the process by which the community of God's people accepts certain scriptures as divinely inspired and authoritative. Note three distinctive aspects of this process:

- ✦ Progressive collection of authoritative scriptures
- ✦ Written by recognized anointed men of God such as prophets and apostles.
- ✦ Recognized and accepted as authoritative by the community of God's people

A. The Old Testament Canon

When the phrase 'the Law' or 'the Law and the Prophets' is used, it denotes what is accepted as authoritative among God's people. By referring to this twofold reference, we know that all the present OT

books were included. The close-knit Jewish community has always accepted these books as divine, even today. Jesus did too!

(1) Daniel 9:6 shows that the exile already accepted the two divisions.

“Moreover, we have not listened to Thy servants the prophets, who spoke in Thy name to our kings, our princes, our fathers, and all the people of the land” (Daniel 9:6).

(2) This twofold categorization is made ten times in the New Testament.

“On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 22:40).

“And he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God, and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening” (Acts 28:23).

There is no evidence that any authoritative books were accepted among the original books after 400 BC. The Spirit of God had departed from Israel, and the continuity of the prophetic line ceased. The intertestamental period (400 BC to Christ’s time) continued to affirm the same Law and Prophets.

B. The New Testament Canon

The canonization process for the New Testament is similar to that of the Old, even though the circumstances differed widely. While the Old Testament was kept mainly within the Israelite community and protected by the priests, the New Testament spread worldwide through Greek copies and translations into other languages.

Christians were wondering which books they should teach, what they would die for, and which books taught the truth. Many cults had their own books. In the second century AD, a heretic named Marcion argued that only Luke and ten of Paul's epistles should be included in the New Testament.

We know more about the process of canonization for the New Testament because of the many secondary documents. That said, the process was similar to that of the Old Testament. Canonization occurred over time as the community of God's people became familiar with the various books and obtained copies.

For example, some books were written for specific places, such as Rome (Romans), or even for individuals (3 John). It would take a reasonable amount of time for the document to circulate back to Antioch, Jerusalem, and the other Christian communities. Books that were questioned were often excluded from one part of the church.

“WHAT IS OF SPECIAL
INTEREST IS THE FACT
THAT BETWEEN THE TWO
EARLIEST BIBLES IN THE
CHRISTIAN CHURCH
THERE IS A RECOGNITION
OF THE CANONICITY OF
ALL 27 NT BOOKS.”
(NORMAN GEISLER)

Note how the Apostle Paul requested that the book be passed around.

“And when this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea” (Colossians 4:16).

Other New Testament references, the early church fathers, translations of the New Testament, and the ratification of the 27 books by the Councils of Hippo (393) and Carthage (397) all give us, without question, confidence in the New Testament as we know it today.

From God to Us by Geisler and Nix is used as one reference for this study.



The Extent of the Bible

Why aren't other books part of the Bible?

Christians did not accept all the books of the Bible equally. All accepted some. Some doubted the books' veracity. Other books were treated as scripture by some Christians, rejected by others, and rejected by all Christians.

Here is a list of books mentioned in the Bible that we do not possess.

- History of David by Samuel (1 Sa, Nathan, and Gad (1 Ch 29:29).
- History of Solomon by Nathan, Ahijah, and Iddo (2 Ch 9:29).
- History of Rehoboam by Shemaiah and Iddo (2 Ch 12:15).
- History of Abijah by Iddo (2 Ch 13:22).
- History of Jehoshaphat by Jehu the prophet (2 Ch 20:34).
- History of Hezekiah by Isaiah (2 Ch 32:32).

- History of Manasseh by unnamed prophets (2 Ch 33:19).
- History of other kings by prophets (2 Ch 35:27).

Unquestionably Accepted (homologoumena - spoken as one)

Old Testament: Always Accepted

- 34 of the 39 OT books fit into this category, starting with the Law.
- Once accepted as divinely inspired, always accepted.

New Testament: Always Accepted

- 20 of the 27 NT books were not questioned.
- All the church Fathers testified to their canonicity.

Accepted but questioned (antilegomena - spoken against)

Question on 5 Old Testament books

- Song of Solomon: too sensual but really beautiful.
- Ecclesiastes: too pagan, but the summary sets the standard.
- Proverbs: self-contradictory (Pr 26:4-5), but it isn't.

- Esther: no use of God's name, but God is very evident.
- Ezekiel: anti-Mosaic but nothing contradictory

Question of 7 New Testament books

- Hebrews: no evident author; made the books from the distant Western church seem suspicious.
- James: The Western church is not certain James was the apostle; doctrinal conflict (justification).
- 2 Peter was highly debated because of the suggested style difference between 1 and 2 Peter, but this is due to the lack of a scribe (1 Peter 5:12).
- 2,3 John were doubted because of the vagueness of who the 'elder' was and limited circulation.
- Jude was questioned because of a reference to the Book of Enoch (14-15), which was not part of the canon.
- Revelation was debated because of the doctrinal issue in chapter 20 and Montanists' misuse of the book. First recognized by the Church Fathers.
- Philemon, 1 Peter, and 1 John were at times recognized but more often omitted than disputed.

Other Versions

Much can be learned from studying early versions. Of course, we need to carefully monitor our conclusions. For example, some books had not yet reached the people when the translations were done. Perhaps they had reached them, but due to questions from some, they needed to be translated.

- The Old Latin version omitted Hebrews, James, 1 & 2 Peter.
- The traditional Syriac Bible omitted 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, and Revelation.

Only accepted by some (apocrypha – hidden or doubtful)

Here are some examples.

- **OT era examples:** 1, 2 Maccabees, Tobit, Ecclesiasticus, Prayer of Manasseh
- **NT era examples:** Epistle to the Corinthians, Shepherd of Hermas, Ancient Homily, The Didache

The Books of the Apocrypha

- The acceptance of the Apocrypha is largely due to their inclusion in the Septuagint by Greek scholars. Certain church fathers, such as Augustine, accepted them. They have historical value.

- The Apocrypha, however, were never accepted as authoritative by the Jewish community, nor do they claim to be. Jerome rejected their inspiration.
- The acceptance of these books by some shows their devotional value.
- These books, though, were never accepted as canonical, nor did they claim or possess the authority of the New Testament books.

Rejected by most (pseudepigrapha - false writings)

Here are some examples.

- **OT era examples:** The Book of Adam and Eve, Psalm 151, The Assumption of Moses, The Book of Enoch
- **NT era examples:** Gospel of Thomas, Gospel of Peter, Gospel of Nicodemus, Acts of Paul, Lost Epistle to Corinthians

The OT Pseudepigrapha

- More than seventeen books were written between 200 BC and 200 AD. Although they are often attributed to biblical authors, they have been treated as spurious and, at times, heretical. The Book of Enoch serves as an example.

The NT Pseudepigrapha

- By the 9th century, there were said to be 280 such books, all of which are nearly unanimously rejected.
- They are heretical and most often belong to cultic movements such as Gnosticism and Docetism.



The Inspiration of the Bible

How is the Bible different from other books?

A. THE FACT OF INSPIRATION (2 Peter 1:15-21; 2 Timothy 3:16)

- The Bible is God's Word.
- The Bible is simply the truth. It does not contain the truth only in certain parts. The Bible is God's Word.
- The Bible is not only a means by which God 'inspires' me with truth. The truth in God's Word is inspired whether it impresses me or not. Two statements capture the supreme value of God's Word.

"It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible."

"A thorough knowledge of the Bible is worth more than a college education."



"IN THE EXERCISE OF HIS WILL HE
BROUGHT US FORTH BY THE WORD
OF TRUTH, SO THAT WE MIGHT BE,
AS IT WERE, THE FIRST FRUITS
AMONG HIS CREATURES JAMES) "
.(1:18

B. THE MEANING OF INSPIRATION (2 Timothy 3:16)

- The word 'inspired' here literally means 'God-breathed.' Notice that it says 'all scriptures' are inspired, not the authors themselves. God performs an extraordinary miracle in bringing His Word into written documents.

- Revelation is the communication of divine truth to humanity. Most often, it needs to be written down. Certain revelations made known to a prophet were to be written down as directed by God's Spirit. This became a particular class of literature known as God's inspired Word.
- Illumination is the special understanding that comes to a person when reflecting on God's Word.
- Inspiration is when the Spirit oversaw a prophet's writing so that the very words God wanted were recorded as scripture.

C. THE MEANS OF INSPIRATION (2 Peter 1:19-21)

How did it happen?

"But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Peter 1:20-21).

God revealed it, and the Holy Spirit 'moved' or directed the prophet as he wrote it down. We see the writers' personalities in Scripture. God didn't dictate every letter to them but stirred and moved them. In the end, we see God move more than forty authors over 1500 years to create what we now have as the Bible. Because the Holy Spirit oversaw the process, the Bible acts as one book (1 Peter 1:10-13).

D. THE PURPOSE OF INSPIRATION (2 Timothy 3:16-17; Psalms 19:7-11, 119:97-98; Joshua 1:7; Acts 2:42).

God uses the Word of God to guide, protect, encourage, warn, and strengthen us. The Word of God has cleansing and convicting power. Through it, we are both humbled before God's Almighty presence and lifted up to see the excellent plan of redemption.

The Bible is necessary like no other book. We need to meditate regularly on it and then obey God's leading.

"Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go" (Joshua 1:7).

The Bible challenges evolution, decries popular psychology, and diminishes the world's powers. Once the Bible is accepted as the Truth, all philosophies, economies, religions, thought, and action come under scrutiny. If God has spoken, as He has, then we are responsible to Him.



The Reliability of the Bible Texts (Part 1)

Doesn't the Bible have many mistakes?

One of the key questions people are asking today is whether the Bible is reliable. What they usually mean is whether the Bible's texts are trustworthy.

Higher and lower criticism are two distinct fields of study and research. Unfortunately, many people need clarification on them. After distinguishing higher from lower criticism, this section will discuss the former. The next chapter will discuss lower criticism.

Higher Criticism	Lower Criticism
Detecting the genuineness of a Bible teaching.	Detecting the accuracy of a Biblical text.

Higher and Lower Criticism

This question has arisen only in the last few hundred years. **Higher criticism** has questioned the authenticity of the historical narrative as presented in the Bible. Higher critics, for example, would deny the historicity of Israel's Exodus from Egypt.

These presumptions strongly suggest that the Book of Exodus was merely a later story written to give Israel's people a national identity. When the average person hears these theories presented as facts, many become disillusioned with the Bible.

These questions ultimately lead us back to questions about the Biblical texts themselves. Lower criticism evaluates which Bible texts are most accurate. It asks, "Which Bible manuscripts should be used as the basis for modern Bible translations?" With such a large number of manuscripts, it is sometimes difficult to determine which is most accurate. The issue is even more complicated.

If the majority of manuscripts support one phrase or word choice, the issue seems clear. But if the manuscripts are evenly split between, say, "Jesus Christ" and "Jesus," which should be used? This study becomes intensive because many background issues further complicate the huge number of Greek manuscripts.

These questions have undermined many people's trust in the Bible and God. Many professors' primary goal is

to pass these doubts on. They should quit teaching, but their list of degrees grants them pseudo-authority.

If you wonder about the trustworthiness of the Bible, you need to better understand why people who claim to be Christians and scholars don't believe in the Bible. We have introduced the two fields of Higher and Lower Criticism (in the next section) and drawn a few conclusions.

Higher Criticism: Detects the genuineness of a Bible passage.

Higher criticism began in the late 1700s. They appointed themselves to evaluate the contents of the Bible. Unfortunately, as a whole, they did not believe the Bible to be true.

They based their interpretations on the presupposition that the Bible is not divinely inspired and that a conglomerate of unknown authors and editors assembled and modified it as they desired.

These Higher Criticism studies have been an enormous waste of time. Their bias against the Bible has so strongly shaped their conclusions that their studies are not worth reading.

For example, many of them would deny a literal Exodus. They think the Exodus story is merely something the Israelites later created as a national narrative. They have no basis for that view. They know it is not true and

therefore interpret the Bible in light of their presuppositions.

Many commentaries (all expensive) devote many of their pages to debating such theories. Not many of these supposed 'Bible scholars' take the Bible at face value.

If their statements shake you, read between the lines and see what their theories are based on. You will see it is all conjecture and that someone else's theories will shift their beliefs in another ten or twenty years. It is interesting to read older commentaries and see how ridiculous some of their conclusions are in light of modern discoveries.

Bottom Line of Higher Biblical Criticism

We can accept the Bible as it presents itself. [Noah](#) existed along with the ark. Moses did serve in the Egyptian court. Written languages did exist back then. Jericho had inward-falling walls; we have [proof](#) of that.

It is a shame that so many commentaries and seminary classes (even conservative ones) spend countless pages and lectures explaining these hypotheses, which are almost always rooted in unbelief. Remember, it is their presuppositions that undermine their studies.

We had better not listen to these false teachers unless they accept the Scriptures as Jesus did. The Jesus Seminar, for example, outright rejects Jesus' view of the Scriptures.

They trash what they want to avoid. They appoint themselves as judges greater than Jesus Himself. I would much rather have Jesus' perspective on the scriptures than what these so-called scholars teach.

Jesus said, "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished" (Matthew 5:17-18).

Note how Jesus clearly stated that even the smallest part of His Word is important! [Liberals](#) describe those professing Christians who adopt such forms of higher criticism and therefore lose confidence in the Scriptures and in salvation. Modern church history cannot be rightly understood without understanding how these (and now other) ideas have infiltrated the church.

What about Biblical Archaeology?

One might think that one only needs to consult biblical archaeology magazines to determine whether biblical events are historical. This would seem to be the most logical step, but the major archaeological magazines and projects are operated by those influenced by higher criticism. They distort the facts according to their persuasions. They would not even consider the possibility of an actual Red Sea crossing by the Israelites. This distorts their research findings.

Fortunately, the web is enabling other smaller-scale Biblical archaeologists who believe in the Bible to

publish their research. The facts are there. Time is on the side of truth. As time goes on, an increasing number of examinations of these archaeological sites are producing evidence that clearly supports the veracity of the Biblical account.



The Reliability of the Bible Texts (Part 2)

Doesn't the Bible have many mistakes?

Lower Criticism: Detecting the accuracy of a Biblical text.

An overview of the original Bible manuscripts can help one better understand the issues at stake.

Background of Lower Criticism

We do not possess the original Bible texts (autographs). We do have many thousands of manuscripts that are copies of the originals. It is best to think of our manuscripts as descendants of the originals. Each generation hand-copied its own. The originals became damaged or worn and were destroyed.

These manuscripts have their own family trees. The texts would be copied and then distributed to different

centers so they could be read aloud to their congregations.

Each Christian center would then have its own family tree. Once a copy reached the center, all the mistakes in that document would be repeated as scribes copied it. Their resemblance would be to the first one they received to copy.

Lower Criticism aims to identify the original ‘father’ text, the autograph, by comparing different textual families.

Given that our copies have been duplicated through numerous generations (see chart), we need to be concerned about the accuracy of the reduplicated texts. Lower criticism specializes in determining the original text.

A Critical Look at Lower Criticism

Lower criticism also developed from unbelief in the inspired scriptures. They evaluated the Bible like any other book.

We must be cautious about the assumptions of those conducting these critical studies. Westcott and Hort, in the 1800s, were scholars, but they were biased. They did not believe in God’s authoritative Word.

Many others of the [Liberalism](#) persuasion follow their trail and do not believe in the inspiration of the original autographs (see [inspiration](#)).

We have discussed their bias. Is there any value in their methodology, then? We think so.

The methodology needs to be separated from their assumptions. They thought that only a few major texts were old and based their conclusions on only a few manuscripts. They claimed to be eclectic but were, in fact, somewhat biased.

Today, we have others who uphold the veracity of the scriptures and fine-tune research to determine the original text.

We need to remember that most of the text is not in question. We are not ‘recovering’ a lost text. In most cases, the biblical text is clear and unquestioned.

Today’s studies focus on identifying the originals by examining the copies and their variations.

Bottom Line of Lower Bible Criticism

The primary result of the Lower Critics has been a better understanding of the reliability of Biblical texts.

One person asked me,

“I was however shocked to see that you too support the idea that the contents of the Bible should be determined by scientists who research the “most probable text” of the Bible in your article. Textual critique is an interesting subject, but cannot be applied to an infallible and holy book.”

I replied something like below,

Textual criticism is not applied to the autographs, the originals, but to the copies of the copies of the autographs. We in no way accept inferiority in the originals. We do, however, recognize that, as they were copied through the ages, there were minor changes (not making doctrinal differences for the most part), mostly consisting of spelling or copying mistakes.

For example, I have access to different Greek versions of a Bible verse. I am not trying to question the original or to think I have a better idea of what God should say (man does this far too often)! Our goal is to discover what God did say! Textual criticism is about identifying the original and living by it.

We acknowledge many variants across the thousands of manuscripts, but they are minor and do not affect the central meaning of the few passages they influence. These studies prove that the original documents are close to what we have in today's copies.

Reliability of The Old Testament Passages

The Old Testament faced a situation entirely different from that of the New Testament. They had one chief worship center.

The scribes specialized in copying the scriptures when the original texts were worn. They were extraordinarily

careful in copying these texts. They would count the letters going each way. If they found a single mistake, they would throw that page away. They did make occasional mistakes, such as reversing letters, but they did not dare tamper with God's Word. They preserved the integrity of the holy texts by burning defective copies. As a result, the number of copies spanned thousands of years.

Until recently, our oldest copies (manuscripts) of the Old Testament dated to the tenth century. Because of this long time span, many doubted their reliability. They could check its message against the Septuagint, written several hundred years before Christ. This was a Greek translation. But more recently, with archaeological findings, especially the Dead Sea Scrolls in the 1940s, the Hebrew (Masoretic) text has been shown to be accurately preserved. A recent advanced course I took on the Qumran community and their scrolls confirmed the reliability of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Reliability of The New Testament Passages

The New Testament manuscripts, on the other hand, are numerous. These 5,000-plus manuscripts date from the second century onwards. Those who ask whether the originals ever existed can find their answer here. They certainly did. Through their variants (differences), we can trace the manuscript family trees.

Do we find that the texts are reliable? Although one may hear of thousands of variants or errors, we must remember that they count the same error in the 5,000-plus manuscripts.

The careful examination goes on! [The Institute for New Testament Textual Research](#) reported 5,700 manuscripts as of 2023. Although there are many differences, Geisler and Nix estimated that fewer than 40 New Testament lines are in question. ([For further reading.](#))

“At most, we have 1/10 of 1% of the textual variants that are both meaningful and viable. And that is a very comforting thing right there. The differences. What textual variants do is that they don’t affect doctrine.” — Dan Wallace ([31:48](#)). Compared to the ancient classics like the Iliad, no ancient text is more reliable than the New Testament.

What is more helpful is knowing exactly what the differences are in the Greek text. At the foot of each page of the Bible, the Greek texts include footnoted variants for each verse. They indicate which texts support each variant. In this way, Lower Criticism has dispelled any fears of an unreliable text. One main advantage of studying Greek is the ability to read these footnotes! English translations mention only the most significant variants.

Perhaps we should note that some argue the New Testament originals were in Aramaic rather than Greek.

It is remarkable that this theory is being so strongly promoted. We should dismiss it because the manuscript evidence does not support the claim.

Egyptian texts are among the oldest because the dry climate helps preserve them. Alexandrian and 'neutral' texts originate in Egypt. Some argue that older is more accurate, but this is not necessarily true. Just because they survived longer in the dry climate does not mean they are more accurate.

Syrian (Byzantine) texts originated in northern Syria near Antioch. Western texts were gathered near Rome, the capital of the Roman Empire.

Why all the confusion?

Many people need to understand how the New Testament books were written, copied, and distributed. It is not as simple as we think.

There was no single New Testament Bible. Each New Testament book was written separately (except perhaps Luke and Acts) and sent to different people and places. These places had no faxes, computers, or telephones. Paper was not yet widely used or available. Reading the scriptures was common in churches. Copies were not easily made or preserved. The originals would be passed from church to church. (See the section on canonization).

“And when this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea” (Colossians 4:16).

Over time, the 27 documents (Bible books) would travel and end up in various Christian churches and centers. Each major Christian center would begin its own collection of NT scriptures (i.e., manuscripts) and make copies for those within its jurisdiction. Those who made these copies were scribes. Remember, writing was a specialized skill back in those days.

These centers would then unconsciously develop their own families of manuscripts through their copying. There would be slight variations in these manuscripts, but nothing significant. Remember, only a limited number of verse lines are in question. Alexandria in Egypt had the driest climate and the best-preserved scriptures. The Western texts were centered in Rome. Later, Byzantium became the empire's capital and a major center for Christianity. The picture below shows the three main Christian centers in 600 A.D.



Summary

In summary, we do not need to worry about missing anything when we read our translations. Significant differences, such as whether the Gospel of Mark has an extended ending, whether John 7:53-8:11 is included, or whether 1 John 5:7 is present, are usually footnoted in good translations. Nothing of great importance in these sections is found elsewhere in the Bible.

The main difference is whether we love, trust, and obey God's Word. We do not need to be scholars to do this. The more confidence we have in God's Word, the more we can grow as Christians. Where seeds of doubt have been sown in our hearts, we need to weed them out. Don't be afraid to search for the truth; only be fearful of believing falsehood! Satan seeks to create mistrust when none is needed.

Knowing God's Word and its reliability is crucial, but one also needs to understand how to meet God in the Scriptures.

**GOD SPEAKS AND EXPECTS
US TO LISTEN!**



Choosing the Right Bible Version

Does the Bible version make a difference?

The Bible was originally written in foreign languages, primarily ancient Hebrew and Greek. The original texts must be translated so we can read them.

Muslims don't think their scriptures should be translated, but the Christian scriptures counter that viewpoint for their Holy Bible. We like to think that the vast Roman Empire, with its Greek culture, was deliberately chosen to distribute God's saving message. We are to make disciples of all nations. People from every language belong to God's kingdom.

Translations, however, vary greatly even within the same language, such as English. These are called Bible versions.

Because there are so many English translations of the Bible, English readers have a choice of Bibles. I just looked up BibleGateway.com and found over 58 English translations of [Psalm 1:1](#)! Christians are right to ask, “Which version should I use?” The question has become almost ridiculous because of the many marketing techniques used to profit from selling them. Still, we face the same question, “Which Bible should we use?” Let us identify the process by which people should choose an English Bible.

#1 A Common Bible Version Used in Your Church

It’s fine to follow and use the version your church or pastor recommends. This is the most obvious choice.

Why? Simply because it is much more important to expose oneself to God’s Word through reinforcement. Hearing the Bible quoted and repeated helps one learn to use it more quickly and rightly. For example, one can much more easily follow a Bible study if one uses the version on which the leader based his analysis. Likewise, one can more easily follow a sermon using the Bible the pastor or teacher uses.

Many new Christians find an old King James Bible on their library shelf. They take it down and use it, but it is like an old rusty tool that doesn’t seem to work right. The KJV is good and trustworthy, but it was designed for another generation (the early 1600s).

We encourage new Christians to get a Bible used by their church. If your church uses the King James, that is fine. Its constant use will reinforce your learning, and you will get used to it. In this case, you might choose the New King James Bible for its updated vocabulary.

Jesus depended on God's Word. He knew it inside and out, even the Greek translation (Septuagint). We need to be like Him. Becoming acquainted with God's Word is one of the essential tasks for a Christian. We need to master His Word as one would a sharp sword. After we become familiar with the Bible the church uses, we explore other versions.

#2 Different Purposes for Different Bible Versions

Fewer churches still use the antiquated King James Bible (KJV), written in the 1600s. Some of these churches are traditionalists; others are protective conservatives. I gave up using tracts that relied on the King James Bible. I like it and grew up with that version, memorizing many Bible verses from it. I can understand and greatly respect it, but it serves poorly for teaching Christians and is plain lousy for communicating the glorious Gospel to non-Christians.

I spent half my time explaining the specialized terms the KJV uses rather than the meaning of the text. Perhaps the New King James Bible has addressed some of these problems. But it is so hard for churches or

individuals to change. This is becoming less of a problem, however.

Other churches propose using a more literal translation because looser versions distort the meaning. Some allege that ‘thought-for-thought’ translations are written because they despise the verbal [inspiration](#) of the scriptures. Perhaps a few have this motivation, but I don’t think it’s a problem.

Those who know several languages and do public translation know how foolish this argument is. Good translators communicate the original thought in the clearest way the hearers can understand. For example, the 1996 New Living Translation aims to reach native English speakers as the original scriptures did.

Literal translations can be poor because the hearers cannot easily understand the content. Paraphrase Bibles, such as the Living Bible, are too loose in their paraphrasing, especially for regular use. The NIV (New International Version), a thought-for-thought translation, is much more conservative, aiming to preserve the original presentation.

The NIV is a good public Bible because it provides smoother reading. But it is oversimplified in places. A reader does not need to think much. The NIV makes some interpretations that make otherwise clear passages unclear. It is debatable whether they are always clear. However, it is easily read, but it is not a study Bible.

We need to observe people reading the Bible for different purposes. Sometimes we read through a book of the Bible. We are not paying attention to the particulars. For this, a more readable version is helpful. We get the central point of what is written. NIV would be suitable for this.

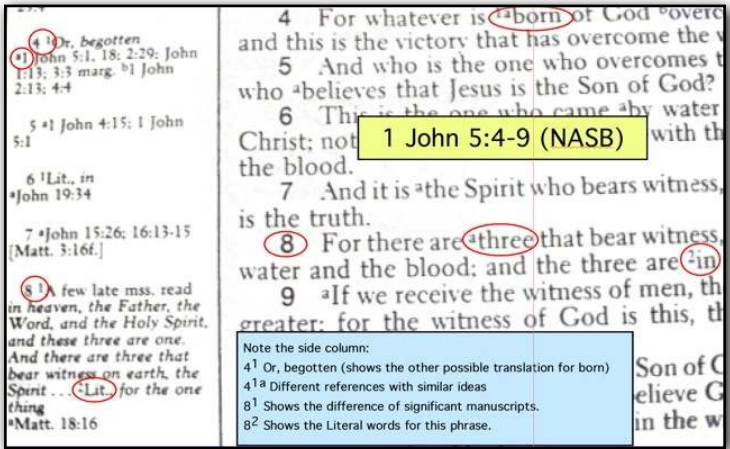
Study Bibles

- ♦ Please don't mistake real study Bibles for those that include the word in their titles, like the NIV Study Bible! These are not study Bibles.
- ♦ By 'study Bible,' they mean one with special aids and study notes alongside the Bible text. It is best not to have such notes in one's Bible because they tend to think for you. People tend to think their conclusions are correct, but sometimes they are wrong! However, they can also make many things clearer.
- ♦ A study Bible (at least used to be) is a Bible version that is more literal, word-for-word, and therefore enables a person to see what the text says for itself. The ESV or NASB would be a good study Bible compared to the NIV, which does some interpretation for you.

More often than not, we need to study the Bible, not just read it. "Thought-for-thought" translations are poor study Bibles. We tend to examine someone else's thoughts rather than the author's original words. We need a

“word-for-word” version to study the meaning of Bible passages.

The closer we get to the original, the easier it will be to understand what the author did or did not say. However, these study Bible versions are less readable. They are poor translations in one sense, yet they yield greater reward for the Bible student, which we all should become.



Memorization should always be from a more literal Bible, such as the NASB (New American Standard Bible), ESV (English Standard Version), or NKJV (New King James Version). When we [meditate](#) on God's Word, individual words are important. For some who study the Bible, transliterations are used, with every Greek word provided. One can read this quasi-English, but the translation is so poor that no one uses it for reading. They use it to see which Greek words are being used.

The most helpful versions include a narrow column of Bible verses that refer to other similar verses in the Bible (i.e., cross-references). The online Bible makes this easy. These references might lead to another New Testament verse or one from the Old Testament. The column, as in the picture above, also includes comments on another possible rendering (i.e., translation) because other manuscripts use a different word.

Conclusion

The Bible is used for different purposes depending on the occasion. We should at least have one ‘word-for-word’ study Bible, even if our church chooses to use another, easier-to-read Bible in the pulpit. Bible study and meditation require them. Yet let us not be too hard on those ‘thought-for-thought’ translations that help us better grasp the meaning of larger portions of Scripture. Each has its advantage.

#3 Dependability of English Bible Versions

This section gets a bit complicated. One might want to read the ‘Reliability of the Scriptures’ page before reading on. For some people, deciding on Bible versions comes down to which Bible manuscripts the version is based on.

Some people become dogmatic about their preferred version (usually those who use the King James Version). Some of their arguments are off the mark.

However, they do raise a few points worth remembering. If you want to understand this topic, there are many things to learn. We have put them in list form to simplify things.

Let's Remember

It doesn't make too much difference.

- We should be glad that we have so many English versions of the Bible. This is not true with any other language. We give thanks to John Wycliffe and to all he suffered to produce the first complete English translation in the 1300s, even though it was a translation from the Latin Vulgate.
- The Bible version is less important than the warm response of our hearts to God's Word. Remember the Parable of the Sower. If we read God's Word but do not act on it, we will be like the foolish man who built his house on the sand (Matthew 7:24-27).
- If we are concerned with accuracy, we can have two, three, or five Bibles open before us. However, God can certainly speak to us through any version of His Word.
- The originals (autographs) were inspired, literal, God-breathed. We don't have them, but we have more than 5,700 NT manuscripts that are incredibly close to the originals.

- The King James uses a different approach to evaluating the best texts to use than most other modern versions.
- In the end, both systems (Received Text (KJV) and Critical Text (NASB, NIV)) use the same process of prioritizing the best manuscripts and discerning which text is most reliable.
- The two systems differ in how they select their primary supporting texts.
 - ◆ Most modern Bible translations rely on a collection of Greek texts represented by the Nestle-Aland and United Bible Societies' critical editions. These editions largely follow the modern critical-text tradition, to which Westcott and Hort made an important early contribution. Sinaiticus and Vaticanus remain especially influential early witnesses, but modern editors weigh evidence from many manuscripts, ancient versions, and internal considerations; the method is no longer "older is better."
 - ◆ The Textus Receptus (Received Text), used as the Greek basis of the KJV and NKJV, belongs largely to the Byzantine textual tradition but is not identical to either the Byzantine text as a whole or the modern Majority Text.
 - ◆ Erasmus first published The Received Text, which was subsequently revised by others. This became the Greek basis for the KJV and NKJV. These

supporters have not been objective enough either. They act as if the Received Text has not undergone the process of selecting and prioritizing manuscripts for the English translation. It has.

- Furthermore, evaluating the accuracy of manuscripts does not mean one does not believe in verbal plenary [inspiration](#).

The Choice

Finding the Right Bible

- Bible versions are necessarily formed from different collations of Bible manuscripts and from comparisons of individual passages. This cannot be avoided. There is no perfect translation.
- Fortunately, the variations among the manuscripts affect only a small number of Bible passages. None of them involve any fundamental doctrine.
- God can work through all the versions and translations now in use. The Septuagint (LXX) was the Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures used in Jesus' day. The resulting translation differed from the Hebrew text in places. Jesus didn't criticize that poor translation of the Old Testament, but He did criticize our hearts! The exciting point is that this didn't keep the New Testament writers from freely quoting it.
- We should strive for the most accurate translations, using the most authentic manuscripts. However, it's a process. Languages can't be perfectly translated. We need to accept that and not be overly concerned. If so, learn the original languages! The Holy Spirit works through the process.
- Because we have many versions, we have ways to address the problems. We can use two versions to check the passages we are studying. Make sure one

is the King James and the other is something like the NASB, ESV, or NIV. You will see how minor the variations are if the versions differ. Praise God that His Spirit can illumine us through any Bible version!

- What version we use doesn't make that much difference. When I sit down to read my NASB, I plan to meet God. I could do the same with the NIV or the KJV. He speaks powerfully to me through His Word. As a teacher, I need to be a little more careful to ensure there is no textual problem in a particular verse, but this hardly ever occurs!
- Instead of breeding skepticism in the process, we should trust God to work through it. The most questionable passages to be careful of are Mark 16:9-20, John 8:1-11, and 1 John 5:8. I prefer the longer passages, but I understand why some might object to them as being added.
- Most other concerns are minor. For example, a verb tense might be in question. Is it past or future tense? Or should we use 'our' or 'your'? Manuscripts can differ.
- It is hard to decide! Bible translators have to make decisions for their translation, but they realize they can't be dogmatic about which was the original. A good Bible will note significant variants in the side margin.

If you have specific questions about texts that the modern versions have allegedly adulterated, please see

the later chapter on the King James version. Many espouse the King James Bible because they believe other versions are corrupted. A brother wrote asking about five of these supposedly perverted texts. I delved into them for those who are interested.

A Conclusion

Some people assert that certain manuscripts are more reliable than others. That is fine. Their faith will do them well.

But even with all of these questions, we can still have wonderful teaching times using the thought-for-thought NIV Bible! The work done behind the scenes is extensive. To be sure, more studies will produce more accurate texts, but it takes a tremendous amount of work.

I find that there are more questions about the real meaning of Bible passages from plain word studies than about the texts themselves. For example, a single Hebrew verb might have ten or more possible English translations! Which one is the right one? It is primarily determined by context. For speed, I rarely use my Hebrew and Greek Bibles in book form anymore, but I use free online resources. I can point to or click a word, and an abbreviated summary of its usage appears, complete with the Hebrew and Greek words (netbible.org). The availability of these resources will lead to more accurate and reliable texts in the future.

Any version can now, however, be used and checked in a matter of moments by such a website. AI can provide a comprehensive summary of varying interpretations of a Bible verse (but always be alert!).

Meditating on God's Word day and night is more important. Believe God's Word as Christ did. Be a doer, not merely a hearer.

KNOWING GOD'S WORD AND ITS
RELIABILITY IS IMPORTANT, BUT
KNOWING GOD THROUGH HIS
WORD IS EVEN MORE
IMPORTANT!



A Conspiracy Against the Word of God?

Does the Bible version make a difference?

A look at the conspiracy accusation by KJV supporters against modern Bible translations such as NIV, NASB, and other versions.

Some people have alleged that those who use other versions, such as the NIV and NASB, have succumbed to a subtle attack on the literal Word of God. Those who make this claim affirm that the Word of God is fully preserved in the KJV and that those who support these 'modern' versions have given way to the adulteration of God's Word.

A brother recently sent a kind inquiry that I could not help but answer. This is the right spirit in which to seek the truth. He asked five questions about textual translation to see whether there is (was) a conspiracy

(though he didn't say this). His questions are on the left; the answers are on the right.

(1) Luke 4:4

“And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, **but by every word of God**” (Luke 4:4).

In the NIV, the bold words are omitted. This could be nitpicking.

The central question we must face is whether there truly is a conspiracy against God's Word. If there were an attack, I believe it would be a consistent one. In other words, we would see the same problem in parallel passages. We don't see this, though. Please note the parallel verse in Matthew 4:4.

Luke 4:4

KJV And Jesus answered him, saying, “It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.”

NIV Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone.’”

Matthew 4:4

KJV But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, **but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.**

NIV Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man does not live on

bread alone, **but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.**”

Summary

The parallel verse includes the disputed words in Matthew 4:4. This suggests that the translators considered Luke 4:4 more accurate. Of course, they could be wrong in their judgment, but at least it is not because they are trying to alter the text.

2) John 3:15

“That whosoever believeth in him **should not perish**, but have eternal life” (John 3:15).

In the NIV, the bold words are omitted and replaced with ‘may.’ This change seems significant!

If there were a conspiracy to eliminate the concept of hell by erasing the word ‘perish’, they would have removed it from the next verse (John 3:16) as well! No matter how it is written, the meaning remains.

John 3:15

KJV That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

NASB that whoever believes may in Him have eternal life.

NIV that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.

John 3:16

KJV For God so loved the world, that he gave his only

begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him **should not perish**, but have everlasting life.

NASB For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him **should not perish**, but have eternal life.

NIV For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him **shall not perish** but have eternal life.

The real problem centers on whether the original text contains redundancy. The KJV (Byzantine Text - BYZ) prefers the longer text, while the other theory (Westcott-Hort - WH) omits the few words when certain Greek manuscripts do not include them. They believe they were probably added later.

(3) 1 Timothy 3:16

“And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory” (1 Timothy 3:16).

καὶ ἐδραΐωμα τῆς ἀληθείας. 16 καὶ ὁμολογουμένως μέγα
ἐστὶν τὸ τῆς εὐσεβείας μυστήριον
Ὅς² ἐφανερώθη ἐν σαρκί,
ἐδικαιώθη ἐν πνεύματι,
ὤφθη ἀγγέλοις,
ἐκηρύχθη ἐν ἔθνεσιν,
ἐπιστεύθη ἐν κόσμῳ,
ἀνελήμφθη ἐν δόξῃ.

In this verse, ‘one God’ is rendered ‘He who.’ For a long time, I thought this verse referred to Jesus.

This is a bit more complicated, but the issue is the same. The Westcott-Hort approach holds that the word “God” was added. **They follow the principle that the more unclear a text is, the more likely it is to be correct.** In other words, copyists, either intentionally or inadvertently, made slight adjustments to the text to make the sense clearer.

Please note that they do not deny that it refers to God. They don’t want to add anything to the original Greek text. Many manuscripts read “**Who**” rather than “**God**.” If there were a conspiracy, they would not have mentioned the support for the ‘God’ version.

1 Timothy 3:16

KJV And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: **God** was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.

NASB And by common confession great is the mystery of godliness: **He who** was revealed in the flesh, Was vindicated in the Spirit, Beheld by angels, Proclaimed among the nations, Believed on in the world, Taken up in glory.

NIV Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: **He** appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the

nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory.

BYZ (16) και ομολογουμενως μεγα εστιν το της
ευσεβειας μυστηριον **θεος** εφανερωθη εν σαρκι
εδικαιωθη εν πνευματι ωφθη αγγελοις
εκηρυχθη εν εθνεσιν επιστευθη εν κοσμω
ανεληφθη εν δοξη

WH (16) και ομολογουμενως μεγα εστιν το της
ευσεβειας μυστηριον **ος** εφανερωθη εν σαρκι
εδικαιωθη εν πνευματι ωφθη αγγελοις
εκηρυχθη εν εθνεσιν επιστευθη εν κοσμω
ανελημφθη εν δοξη

BYZ stands for the Byzantine Greek text, the textual tradition from which the Textus Receptus used by the KJV was largely derived. WH stands for Westcott-Hort, an important early Greek text that influenced many modern Bible versions.

BYZ has theos, meaning “God” (top yellow square above), while WH has hos, meaning “who” (bottom yellow square above). Many manuscripts support each reading. Which is true? A decision has to be made.

My NASB includes a side-column note “Some later mss. read God.” (mss = manuscripts). I wouldn’t buy a personal Bible without such a notation. But for the sake of learning, let us step into the world of Greek texts. Please go to the next question if you are not interested in the details.

At the bottom of the Greek Bibles are detailed footnotes. Remember, even though these do not list all the

supporting manuscripts, they give us a good sense of where things generally stand. Below is the detailed footnote from the UBS Greek New Testament (1968).

² 16 {B} ὅς Ν* Α ^{*vid} C* Gr ³³ 2127 ⁷⁵⁹⁹ syr ^{hmg} , pal goth eth ^{pp} Origen ^{lat} Epiphanius Jerome Theodore Euthérius ^{acc. to Theodore} Cyril Cyril ^{acc. to} Ps-Oecumenius Liberatus // ὅ D* it ^{ar, c, d, dem, div, f, g, mon, x, z} vg Ambrosiaster Victorinus-Rome Hilary Pelagius Augustine // ω 061 // ὅς or ὅ syr ^{p, h} cop ^{sa, bo} arm eth ^{ro} Ephraem? // θεός Ν ^e Α ² C ² D ^e K P Ψ 81 104 181 326 330 436 451 614 629 630 1241 1739 1877 1881 1962 1984 1985 2492 2495 Byz Lect Gregory-Nyssa Didymus Chrysostom Theodoret Euthalius // ὁ θεός 88	
^a α 1-2 α minor, α minor: TR Bov Nes BF ² AV RV ASV TT // α none, α minor: WH Zür Luth // α minor, α none: RSV NEB Jer Seg	
15 ἡ τις...ζῶντος Eph 2.19-22 Ae 1.9	16 Ὁς...σαρκί Jn 1.14 ἀνελήμφθη ἐν δόξῃ Mk 16.19;
4 1 ἐν ὑστέροις καιροῖς 2 Tm 3.1; 2 Pe 3.3; 1 Jn 2.18; Jd 18	

Here are a few of the notations used at the beginning, along with their meanings. Although it might look Greek, much of it is readable even without knowing Greek. Look carefully at the first notes.

16 – Refers to verse 1 Timothy 3:16, written above in the Bible.

{B} – This means they are reasonably sure “who” is the original written text. {A} means sure.

To better understand the other notations, we have organized this footnote into the following chart.

There is support for six different wordings. This is unusual. Most verses fully agree on all the words used. However, a little confusion can cause great confusion. The two lines are used to separate support for one wording from another. The Greek word(s) used in Greek texts are mentioned after the parallel lines.

- 1 ὅς Ν* Α*^{vid} C* G^{gr} 33 2127 1599 syr^{hmg, pal} goth eth^{pp} Origen^{lat}
Jerome Theodore Euth^{ae}erius^{ae} to Theodore^t Cyril Cyril^{ae} to
Ps-Oecumenius Liberatus
- 2 ὁ D* it^{ar, c, d, dem, div, f, g, mon, x, z} vg Ambrosiaster
Victorinus-Rome Hilary Pelagius Augustine
- 3 ω 061
- 4 ὅς or ὁ syr^{p, h} cop^{sa, bo} arm eth^{ro} Ephraem?
- 5 θεός Ν^o Α² C² D^o K P Ψ 81 104 181 326 330 436 451 614
629 630 1241 1739 1877 1881 1962 1984 1985 2492 2495 Byz Lect Gregory-Nyssa
Didymus Chrysostom Theodore^t Euthalius
- 6 ὁ θεός 88

- 1 hos = Who (masculine)
- 2 ho = Which (neuter)
- 3 o = Who (masculine)
- 4 hos or ho = Who or Which
- 5 theos = God
- 6 ho theos = the God

The two well-supported readings discussed here are hos ('who') and theos ('God').

(1) WH - hos (who)

Aleph (*), A*, C*, G, 33, 2127, L599, syr, goth, eth, Origen, Jerome, Cyril and other Church fathers.

(5) Byz - theos (God)

Aleph(e), A2 C D K P Psi 81 104 181 326 330 ...
Didymus, Chrysostom, and other Church fathers.

English or Greek letters indicate uncial manuscripts (capital letters). Most numbers represent minuscules (small letters - later manuscripts). syr, cop, and vg stand for translations (Syrian, Coptic, and Latin). The church fathers are listed afterward, including Origen and

Augustine. See how much great information is at the bottom of these Greek Bibles!

Please remember that this second chart has removed much information from the first to clarify the six readings. Use the full footnote above for comparison. There are only two major options: “Who” or “God.” An extensive amount of research went into this work at a time when the original texts were not easily accessible. The Byzantine Greek Bible has similar footnotes, though it presents them a bit differently.

The question of which wording is the original is more complex. The conspiracy overlooks support for both positions. Because of the multitude of texts, the translator must decide which texts to use. This is why each side holds tenaciously to its principles of selection (such as ‘more simple’ (WH), ‘less redundant’ (WH), use of Byzantine texts (BYZ), etc.).

You can see there is support on both sides. Until we unravel the problem a bit more, this tension will remain. KJV supporters must recognize that they do what they accuse the other side of doing - excluding evidence. I like “God” because it is more evident, but I am not sure it was originally stated this way. It is like many of our songs that refer to God without saying God. Poetry can be subtle.

(4) Luke 2:33

“And Joseph and his mother marveled at those things which were spoken of him” (Luke 2:33).

In the NIV, ‘Joseph’ is replaced with ‘his father.’ Is this a major error?

This argument suggests that the NIV created a theological problem (due to a perceived bias). It is not NIV’s problem as much as a difficulty that arises from the many Greek manuscripts. As in the prior cases, there is support for both sides.

Luke 2:33

KJV And Joseph and his mother marveled at those things which were spoken of him.

NASB And His father and mother were amazed at the things which were being said about Him.

NIV The child’s father and mother marveled at what was said about him.

There may have been a copyist who thought it theologically vague and substituted Joseph. Technically, Joseph was his father but not his biological father. Because Joseph had authority over him, the angel appeared to him. Luke 2:40-41 says,

“And the Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him. And His parents used to go to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover” (Luke 2:40-41).

(5) Luke 11:2-4

“And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, ‘**Our Father which art in heaven**, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. **Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth.** 3: Give us day by day our daily bread. 4: And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; **but deliver us from evil**” (Luke 11:2-4).

“The NIV omits all the bold. Why would they decide to do that?” Is it because they are trying to avoid such a doctrine?

As mentioned above, various texts support different sides. In this case, there was no conspiracy because the parallel passage in the same NIV version in Matthew 6 does not exclude the keywords. This is similar to question #1 above.

Matthew 6:9

KJV After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.

NASB Pray, then, in this way: ‘Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name.’

NIV This, then, is how you should pray: “**Our Father in heaven**, hallowed be your name,”

Matthew 6:10

KJV Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

NASB Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven.

NIV your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Matthew 6:14

KJV For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:

NASB For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

NIV For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

Summary of studies

Differences in choice are not necessarily due to bias. We know this is only in a few cases, where there are real manuscript issues that must be resolved. Beyond this, however, is the simple fact that the NIV or NASB are not avoiding doctrines because they quote the debated section more fully in other passages. There is a strong ‘King James only’ movement around, but its arguments lack support and consistency.

But what about the reliability of those who did the work?

We should recognize that many researchers and translators of the Scriptures do not know the Lord and perhaps do not even believe the Bible is God’s Word. Some people love research, including many commentators. Those who support the KJV (Received

Text) cite problems with the personal beliefs of Westcott and Hort. But there are also questions about Erasmus' faith, who gathered the manuscripts for the Received Text.

We need to move beyond this kind of argument, or we may end up not using any English translation! After all, who translated the Hebrew scriptures into Greek and formed the Septuagint (LXX)? We have no confidence that they feared the Lord. However, Jesus and other New Testament writers used the Septuagint.

Should we not instead assert that if God can raise an evil emperor like King Cyrus and call him His shepherd, we can trust God to raise unbelievers at times to do work that benefits His people? I believe so.

"IT IS I WHO SAYS OF CYRUS, 'HE IS
MY SHEPHERD! AND HE WILL
PERFORM ALL MY DESIRE.'
(ISAIAH 44:28).

Final Summary

We find absolutely no evidence of a conspiracy. If there was one, it was the poorest job ever done!

Instead, we find answers that clarify the real issues. Parallel texts give us insight into which words editors have added to or removed from the scriptures. WH believes the editors (copyists) added words, while the Byzantine (KJV) supporters believe they removed them.

We are still determining who is right. Fortunately, we do know which few texts are in debate. A few of them were mentioned above.

Despite these rendering problems, we can fully trust the scriptures themselves. There is no difference in meaning, only perhaps in clarity. No one is making up the text. There is support for both. The translators need to make a decision rather than leaving the choice to the reader. As you can see, it is a highly technical matter. Translating is challenging work.

The evil one uses this conspiracy issue to turn people away from loving the Word by distracting them with trivial arguments.

CAN WE GET BACK TO LOVING GOD BY LISTENING TO HIS WORD AGAIN?

And if there are accurate and genuine questions, can we not be more like this brother who thought through his questions and asked them kindly? This helps us join hands in seeking God's truth, even if we take different approaches.

I have added Appendix 1 to better understand how one uses Hebrew and Greek textual analysis.



The Relevance of the Bible

Is the Bible relevant to my life?

If we question the relevance of God's Word, it is often because His Word has little or no effect on our lives. Deep down, we wonder whether it is all true. There are two issues we need to address. Both have the same root problem.



Skeptic: Is the Bible Really God's Word?

God's Word is hidden from the life of a skeptic. They don't believe in God or the scriptures. Their desire to continue living in sin gives them extra motivation to keep the truth out.

"For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed" (John 3:20).

The skeptic raises many questions, but they are designed to keep the truth from them. The question a skeptic needs to ask themselves honestly is:

- ♦ Do you want God to be involved in your life?

Doubter: Is God's Word relevant to my life?

God's Word is hidden from the heart of the doubter. These Christians have lost confidence in the Scriptures. They are busy with life, making money, and spending time with friends, boyfriends, etc.

"These are the ones who have heard the word, and the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful" (Mark 4:18-19).

- ♦ God's Word does not seem relevant to them. Their lack of faith keeps God's Word in its sheath. They need to ask themselves:

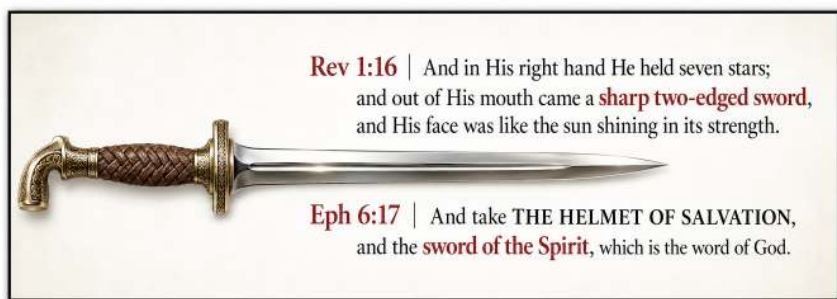
Have I put God's Word in my heart?

What symbol does the Bible use to speak of the relevance and power of God's truth?

That's right. A sword.

The Word of God is not a pillow and should not be treated as one. It is a sword.

“For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).



The Scriptures use the word ‘sword’ to describe God’s Word. But perhaps, if we were honest, many of us treat the Word of God more like a pillow. Frankly, this ought to be obvious. We don’t take pillows to fight a war - except for pillow fights! We take swords.

The Bible is necessary like no other book. The Bible is the sword of the Spirit (Revelation 1:16; Ephesians 6:17). It is all true.

The Bible challenges evolution, decries popular psychology, and diminishes the world's powers. Once the Bible is accepted as the Truth, all philosophies, economies, religions, thought, and action come under scrutiny. If God has spoken, and He has, then we are responsible to Him.

Fights

My brother and I fought when we were younger. We would start with words and escalate to fists, feet, and even books. Because our bedroom was in the basement of a large old house, we soon moved on to bigger and better things! Once, he grabbed a stick. Holding a book no longer worked for me!

We even got objects 5-6 feet long. But something changed when my brother reached high school. He had a selection of machetes, long knives used for slashing through thick tropical forests. When he returned with one of his long 3-foot blades, I knew he had won the fight! I scooted off to see what Mom was doing upstairs. I thank the Lord we never managed to hurt each other.

When the sword is drawn from its sheath, those around know something will happen. When God's Word is unleashed in our hearts, we have remarkable experiences with Him.



Appendix 1: Further Studies

Further studies on Bible translation and the original languages

1. 2 Thessalonians 2:3–5 — Revelations of the Future

Observe his translation alongside the NASB, then the discussion of Greek words, articles, and terms such as apostasy, apokaluptō, and naos. [Read the article](#)

2. Ephesians 1:18–23 — Christ’s Inexpressible Glory in the Church

Shows the interpretive value of the original language by discussing such details as the Greek preposition *hyper* and Paul’s head-body terminology for Christ and the church.

[Read the article](#)

3. Titus 1:5 — The Organization of the Church: Elders and Denominations

One of the stronger original-language examples explains the Greek terms **presbuteros** (“elder”) and **episkopos** (“overseer”), showing how English ecclesiastical terms and even denominational names developed from Greek vocabulary. [Read the article](#)

4. Jeremiah 17:9 Translations and Interpretations:

The Septuagint translation deviates widely from the original Hebrew. [Read the Article](#)

5. John 15:2 The Interpretation and Translation of “Lift up” over “Take away” The “lift up” translation best fits the context. [Read the Article](#)

Appendix 2: Fun Exploring

So what do I use for my Bible reading and study? I was raised on the King James Bible, but I only began reading it seriously after I came to know the Lord at about age 12 in the early 1960s. Later, when I started studying at Bible College, I began using the NASB regularly. I memorized much from that version. I continued to use the NASB, though some churches used the NIV. But in those days, we were limited to the Bibles we bought.

Once we entered the digital age, many Bible versions became freely available. So if we jump to 2026, I still use the NASB (not the newer one), but I regularly use the Berean Study Bible (BSB) and the recently discovered Legacy Standard Bible (LSB), which renders the divine name YHWH as ‘Yahweh’ rather than the traditional LORD.

When I study the Bible, I include foreign-language versions such as Hebrew, Greek, and Chinese. I can access all of them freely in the YouVersion app. I really like selecting one or a few verses and having the app display the different versions side by side. It’s amazing and pushes me deeper into God’s Word.

Appendix 3: Author

Introduction

Paul J. Bucknell, an active writer and international instructor, has authored **more than twenty-five books** on key Christian training topics. His books emphasize that the more we build our lives on the truth of God's Word, the more vital and vibrant our faith and lives become. During international training seminars for pastors and other church leaders, Paul applies God's Word to many aspects of Christian living. As founder of Biblical Foundations for Freedom, Paul provides printed and digital resources, video training courses, and an ongoing website ministry at www.bffbible.org and www.foundationsforfreedom.net. Paul and his wife, Linda, have eight children and many grandchildren.