

BIBLIOLOGY

UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE

SYLLABUS

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THE SOURCE OF THE BIBLE

REVELATION

Psalm 19:1-6, Genesis 1-3, John 1:18, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, 2 Peter 1:21

The Greek word for revelation is the word *apokalupsis*, which is translated as “disclosure”, or an “unveiling”. This is a great word for describing the purpose of the Bible. It must be clearly understood that the Bible was written as a communique, a letter of sorts, from God to mankind. This letter from God then, in simple terms, is the **content** of truth that God desired for us to know.

This letter has many purposes, from instructing on doctrine and practice, but the motivating purpose of it is to tell us about God. It is important to note that God does communicate to us

through two primary ways: general revelation (unwritten knowledge of God), and specific revelation (written knowledge of God).

GENERAL

Psalm 19:1-6 makes the case that creation itself testifies to us, communicates to us if you will, about the character and nature of God Himself. Although this passage is speaking directly about the nature of creation as a testifier of God, it also indirectly speaks about the nature of God. We understand this passage to be informing us about the person of God, specifically in relationship to His desire in relating to us. The theory would be that, if God didn't want us to know Him personally, then why would He create in such a way that it would "declare His glory"? The answer to this is simple, God does desire us to know Him, and He went to great lengths to insure that we would.

Consider the creation account (Genesis 1-3) of the first three chapters of Genesis. As we read about the initial creative plan of God, we find that the desire of God was to create beings that would be like Him and relate to Him in an intimate way. In the fall of Adam and Eve we discover that this was indeed the central point of God's creation, so much so that this relationship is precisely the thing that was broken due to their sin. In this way, even the fall of mankind into a state of sin and separation from God affirms the idea that God communicates with people in a personal, non-written way.

SPECIFIC

We also read in the Bible that God specifically states that he is a communicative God through His Word. In 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Paul explains the spiritual back story to the Bible. He gives us an understanding of how the Bible came to us, namely that through various writers, over a span of 1400 years, there is actually only one author, God Himself. These verses provide for us a clear perspective on not only the importance of the Bible, but also the motivation behind it. We understand that all of the Bible is given by God and it has a number of foci: to teach, reprove, correct, and train in righteousness. The key phrase in this passage, related to the concept of revelation, is the phrase "God-breathed". This is a unique phrase to the Greek new Testament and is a literal translation of the original language expression. Its imagery is quite vivid as it portrays God revealing Himself to us through His own word that literally comes up from within His very being.

2 Peter 1:21 also gives us a simple description of the process of specific revelation through human beings. This process is extremely important to understand as it explains the key components to understanding the doctrine of revelation:

- *"not produced by the will of man"* Of first importance in this verse is the notion that the Bible did not originate with people. Although people assisted God in the physical task of writing the Bible, the content (even the words themselves) came from God's supernatural work in them.

- *“men spoke from God”* In this next clause we read that the physical process was through the avenue of people whom God selected and supernaturally empowered to communicate His very words and truths to all people.
- *“carried along by the Holy Spirit”* Lastly, this verse explicitly states that the Bible came through the empowering of the Holy Spirit, both in the sense that He gave content but also that He empowered the process.

INSPIRATION

2 Timothy 3:16-17, 2 Peter 1:21, Romans 9:1-3

To quote Paul Enns, “Inspiration is necessary to preserve the revelation of God. If God has revealed Himself but the record of that revelation is not accurately recorded, then the revelation of God is subject to question. Hence, inspiration guarantees the accuracy of the revelation¹”. The primary concern in inspiration is the **implementation and preservation** of the content that God gave. Inspiration is a key to maintaining the authority of the Bible as the word of God because it anchors the revelation process in the supernatural working of the Holy Spirit to maintain its internal consistency and unity of message.

The challenge in understanding inspiration is in the union of God and man in the writing process of the Bible. One way to perceive this interaction is to view the Bible as a book with dual authorship. To prevent a potentially false conclusion in using this term, each “author” had a unique role in writing process. The role of God as the author of the Bible is exclusively in reference to the *content* of the Bible. The role of man as the author of the Bible is in the realm of style, expression, and explanation of the Bible’s content. In this sense, God maintains His rightful place as the source of the content and theological direction of the Bible, and mankind maintains his place as the one who was entrusted by God to express and explain the content that God originated. There is however a need to explore more deeply the *means* by which God insured that this “co-authorship” process would faithfully communicate His *message*.

MEANS AND MESSAGE

In the last clause of 2 Peter 1:21, Paul explains this work of the Holy Spirit as him “carrying along” the Bible writers in their process of writing the Bible. This is an important concept to understand as it speaks most prominently to the ultimate authority of the Bible in our lives. We must deeply consider this issue, and the internal claims that pertain to it, if we are to view the Bible correctly. This idea of being “carried along” by the Holy Spirit is God’s way of explaining to us the process by which the purity of the content of the Bible was maintained. In other words, for God to use human authors to physically write down His message, He had to have a process in place to insure the purity

¹ Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook Of Theology*

of the message. This is where the Holy Spirit came in, as he “carried them” and the process itself, along.

Although God used human authors to write down his message, He did so in such a way that maintained the purity and consistency of the message. The Bible, for it to truly be the word of God, had to originate with God and be completely sourced in Him. Not only this, but God so chose to use the unique gifting, styles, and personalities of each Biblical author to *convey* the essential message that He was inspiring them to write. This is a profound concept to say the least, that God could both sovereignly source His message, but also sovereignly guide each writer to maintain unity of meaning across the broad literary landscape of the Bible. It is then, in this broad sense, that God “inspired” others to write down His words, thoughts, stories, and doctrines so that they would be compiled into one consistent and unified message for mankind.

INERRANCY

Romans 3:4, 2 Timothy 3:16, Genesis 1:27-31, Malachi 3:6, James 1:17, Psalm 11:4-6

E. J. Young provides a suitable definition of inerrancy: “By this word we mean that the Scriptures possess the quality of freedom from error. They are exempt from the liability to mistake, incapable of error. In all their teachings they are in perfect accord with the truth”² This definition is comprehensive and touches on all of the significant components of the doctrine of inerrancy. These components are: 1) freedom from error, and 2) internally consistent with truth.

In Romans 3:4 and 3 Timothy 3:16, we see the Bible presented as an internally consistent message that has is born out of God who is the source of truth. This is a key internal claim of the Bible which impacts both our understanding of it and our hermeneutic. We can view the Scriptures as a trustworthy source of truth and we also can approach the study of it with an understanding that it is internally consistent, not contradictory, in its revelation of and teaching in truth. This is a profoundly important issue in how we view and approach the Bible. Due to the link of the content with its source (God), we must understand that meaning can be found and must be consistent. This connection between book and source is the central issue in establishing the doctrine of inerrancy.

THE NATURE OF GOD

At the heart of the issue of Biblical inerrancy is the nature of God Himself. In this perspective, we realize that God is the source of the Bible’s content, therefore the veracity, consistency, and sustainability of the message of the Bible is inextricably linked to its author who is God. A few key verses speak to this issue and provide clarity and claim to it.

- In Malachi 3:6, God specifically states that He “does not change”, meaning that His very character is one of pure consistency.

² E.J. Young, *Thy Word Is Truth*, pg. 113

- James 1:17 reads that there is no “variation or shadow due to change” with God. Not only does God not change, but there is no instance of variation or diversion of God from His character. This eliminates even the slightest shift in the consistency of the Bible’s message. So even when we

HERMENEUTIC CONSIDERATIONS

As we begin to grasp the issue of inerrancy, we start to realize that we must establish some practical understandings and applications of inerrancy in relationships to how we understand and interpret the Bible.

- Inerrancy includes various styles.
- Inerrancy includes variety of perspectives (i.e. in narrative accounts).
- Inerrancy does not always include every detail in all contexts or accounts.
- Inerrancy includes stylistic and personally defined quotations of others passages.
- Inerrancy cannot contradict itself.

These simple perspectives are important to recognize as you study and interpret the Bible. The conviction that we approach the Bible with is one of assurance in the inerrancy of it because of its origins in God Himself. That being said, we also must recognize these “challenges” to interpretation that provide opportunities for deeper study, but never do they expose a lack of consistency.

THE TEXT OF THE BIBLE

CANONICITY

Canonicity is the process by which the various “books” of the Bible were determined to be sourced in God and considered as part of His complete message to mankind. Paul Enns writes,³“The word *canon* is used to describe the inspired books. The word comes from the Greek *kanon* and probably also from the Hebrew *qaneh*, signifying a “measuring rod.” This issue of canonicity is vital for a number of reasons, but two of them are uniquely significant in the life of a believer: 1) personal confidence in the authority of the Bible that we have, and 2) defending the Bible authenticity before the skeptical world. In the first area, canonicity provides a deep personal confidence and motivation to study and apply the Bible to our lives when we understand its veracity and authenticity as the word of God and not of man. In the second area, much of the world challenges the premise of God’s existence and authority over mankind due to their skepticism of the claims of the Bible as truly inspired by and maintained by God Himself.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

³ Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook Of Theology*

Much of the debate over the canon of the Bible developed over centuries, due to the slow process of the entire Bible itself (1,400 years, 40+ authors), but we can recognize a series of events that specifically led to the ultimate sealing of the Bible in its present state.

DATE	EVENT
AD 95	<i>Clement of Rome</i> mentions at least eight New Testament books in a letter.
AD 108	<i>Polycarp</i> acknowledges fifteen letters.
AD 115	<i>Ignatius of Antioch</i> acknowledges about seven books.
AD 170	<i>Muratorian Canon</i> included all the New Testament books except Hebrews, James, and one epistle of John.
AD 185	<i>Irenaeus</i> recognizes twenty-one books.
AD 170-235	<i>Hippolytus</i> recognizes twenty-two books.
AD 363	<i>Council of Laodicea</i> concludes that only the Old Testament and the twenty-seven books of the New Testament were to be read in the churches.
AD 367	<i>Athanasius</i> cites only the 27 New Testament books as "Bible".
AD 393	<i>Council of Hippo</i> officially affirms the conclusion of the Council of Laodicea and canonizes the present day Bible.
AD 397	<i>Council of Carthage</i> officially prohibits the use of any other variation of the "Bible" to be read.

In terms of the practical process that was followed in determining the authenticity of a particular book of the Bible, there were a series of tests that were administered. These tests were primarily applied to the ultimate canonization of the New Testament books, but also apply in principle to the Old Testament. The four primary tests were authorship (OT prophets/NT apostles), acceptance, content, and inspiration.

- *Authorship*. In the Old Testament, each section (Luke 24:44) of Bible had to be affirmed by its respective author(s) (i.e. The Law was written by Moses, the Prophets were written by affirmed prophets of God, the Psalms/Writings were written by God appointed authors). In the New Testament, the author had to be an apostle or have a connection with an apostle (i.e. Mark wrote under Peter's authority, and Luke wrote under Paul's authority).
- *Acceptance*. A book that was to be accepted as from God and canonical had to be accepted by the church at large.

- *Content.* The book must reflect consistency of doctrine with what has been established in other Bible contexts and in orthodox teaching.
- *Inspiration.* The book must reflect the quality of inspiration, meaning that it should bear evidence of high moral and spiritual values that would reflect a work of the Holy Spirit.

MODERN CONFIRMATION

There has indeed been much “ancient” scrutiny and testing over the canon of the Bible. Although much was settled in the first 400 years of the church, this testing process has continued throughout the ages until the present. Due to the ever increasing doubt of the world over the veracity of the Bible, the church has been forced to continue to consider this matter in greater detail. This present day challenge has been primarily focused on the issue of the original source texts that were the original Bible and the preservation of the central message of those texts over thousands of years. “The work of copying the ancient manuscripts was a tedious exercise, but the Jews very early developed strict rules for their work. Rules regulated the kind of parchment, the number of lines to be written, the color of the ink, and the manner of revision. When parchments began to show wear, the Jew reverently buried the manuscripts. As a result, until the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran, the oldest extant manuscripts were dated from a.d. 900.”⁴

In the Old Testament, there are four major categories of manuscripts that have been uncovered and constitute its base.

- *Dead Sea Scrolls (125 BC)* The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, provided manuscripts one thousand years older than previously available. Their discovery and subsequent comparison with previous manuscripts concluded that there was no significant difference between the Isaiah scroll at Qumran and the Masoretic Hebrew text dated one thousand years later.
- *Septuagint (250 - 150 BC)* The Septuagint is a Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament to accommodate the dispersed Jews who had lost the Hebrew language. It is based on a Hebrew text one thousand years older than our existing Hebrew manuscripts.
- *Samaritan Pentateuch (Fourth Century BC).* This translation of the books of Moses was made to facilitate the worship of the Samaritans at Mount Gerizim (as a rival to Jerusalem). Minor differences with the Masoretic text are present, related only to matters of grammar and spelling.
- *Aramaic Targums.* Following Israel's return from captivity in Babylon, the Jews had abandoned Hebrew for Aramaic. Thus the Scriptures needed translated into Aramaic for the Jews. These Targums (meaning “translations”) were the result. They are a loose retelling of the biblical accounts, but still provide a valuable background for the study of the NT besides witnessing to the text of the OT.

⁴ Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook Of Theology*.

In the New Testament, there are also four major categories of manuscripts and full texts that help validate the long standing Bible that we use today.

- *Papyrus Manuscripts (AD 200's)* These manuscripts are old and an important witness. For example, the Chester Beatty Papyrus dates from the third century.
- *Uncial Manuscripts (AD 300-600)*. Approximately two hundred forty manuscripts are called uncial manuscripts and are identified by capital letters. Each Codex ("book") contain parts, and in some cases, nearly the whole of the New Testament Greek text.
- *Minuscule Manuscripts*. There are some twenty-eight hundred minuscule manuscripts that are not as old as uncial manuscripts.
- *Versions (AD 100-400s)*. A number of early versions of the New Testament exist that have been translated into various languages (Syriac, Coptic, Latin).

In all of these cases, and with the ever growing field of textual archeology and preservation, we continually find ourselves with an even more consistent message, validated throughout millennia and preserved by the hand of God. We can truly be confident that the Bible we use today, is in fact the original message of given by God through his messengers and directed at all of mankind.

THE PRESERVATION OF THE BIBLE

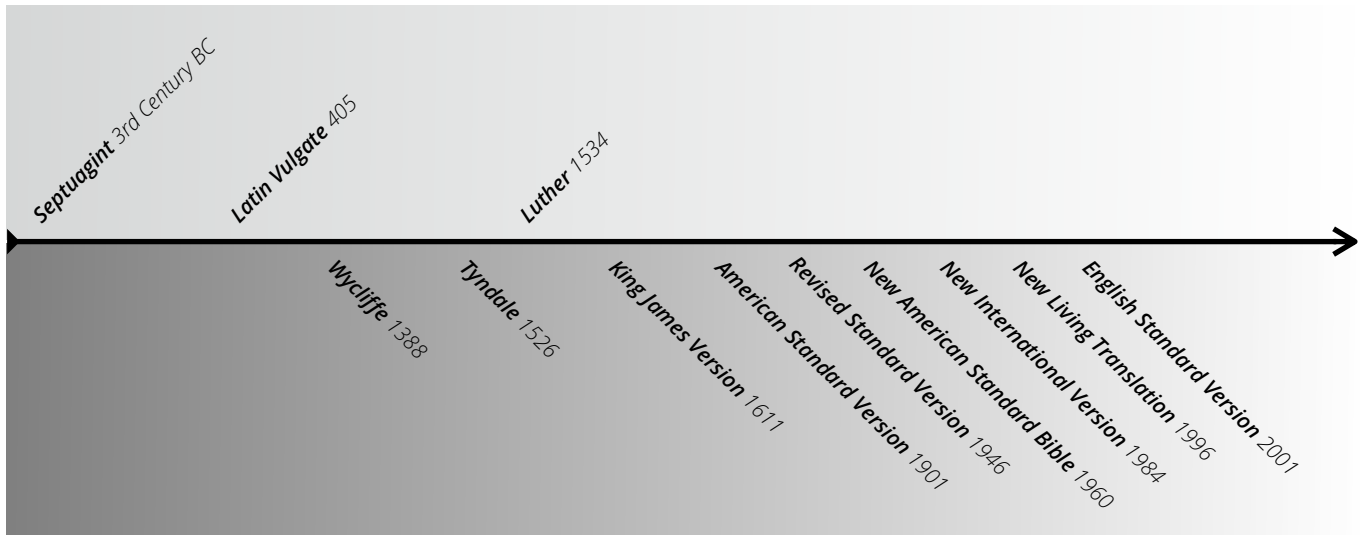
HISTORY OF TRANSLATION

The history of Bible translation is rich and dates back to the the 3rd century BC when Greek translators began to translate the Old Testament Hebrew scriptures into the Greek language. John Wycliffe was the first translator of the original language manuscripts into the English language in 1388.

The fundamental aim of Bible translation has always been the accessibility of the Bible to all people. The conviction comes from a true understanding of Biblical revelation, and a desire to see all people interact with God through His word. In the days of Wycliffe, this came at a great cost because it was in direct opposition to the fundamental structure and authority of the Catholic church. Many early Bible translators faced great persecution and even gave their lives for this cause.

The translation of the Bible into many "vulgar" languages was triggered most significantly by John Wycliffe, a fourteenth century philosopher, priest, and theologian who began to question the Catholic church's fundamental division between clergy (professional priests) and laity (volunteer members) of the church. The distinction they drew was that only clergy could actually, interpret, and ultimately apply the bible to people's lives. This struck a chord of dissent not only in Wycliffe, but in many of his contemporaries and also those who followed in later years. This disagreement over the propagation and engagement with the Scriptures, by ordinary people, would be the wellspring of the Reformation.

Beginning with Wycliffe and continuing on for generations, the charge of making the Bible accessible to everyone continued for centuries and still continues to this day. Of the 6,800 distinct language groups in the world, 1,534 already have portions of the Bible in their native languages. Currently 2,658 more language groups have new translation projects in progress. Although these statistics are encouraging,



TRANSLATION METHODOLOGY

Bible translation is a very detailed process that is aimed at the effective re-expression of biblical truth from one language to another. When you consider the vast differences in structure, syntax, and vocabulary from language to language, you begin to realize the immense challenge of translating effectively. It is due to these complexities that the translation process requires a series of detailed steps to insure the accurate transmission of meaning from one language to another.

The translation process requires a number of basic steps to insure the faithful transmission of the Bible into a new language:

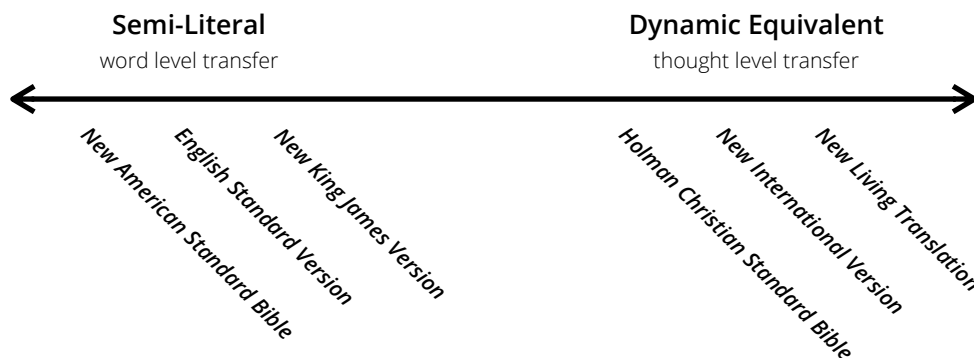
1. **Exegesis** of the passage in the source language (Greek/Hebrew/Aramaic) and other semi-literal English language translations. Although this step addresses and defines key terms and concepts, it is primarily for the purpose of determining the meaning of the passage on the complete thought (proposition) level. Exegesis also focuses on how the complete thoughts relate to each other and how the flow of thought moves from one complete thought to another (discourse).
2. **Re-Expression** of the passage into the target language.

3. **Context check** of the translation to insure that none of the central components of the translation content is missed in the re-expression step.
4. **Revision** by native speaker of the target language through listening, correcting grammar and style, so as to maintain effective communication into the target language.
5. **Checking** of the translation with various native speakers which focuses on insuring effective communication of the truth to various listeners.
6. **Detail check** of the content, grammar, and expression of the translation.

THE TRANSLATIONS OF THE BIBLE

CHOOSING A TRANSLATION

In the scope of Bible translations there is a range of styles, from the more semi-literal translations to the more dynamic equivalent ones. In the english language there are hundreds of translations, landing on every spot on this continuum. Because of the large number of options for the english speaker, it is important to think through which translation might be best for the various purposes of spiritual life.



We recommend that you select an essentially literal translation as your primary translation for studying the Bible. This will insure that your study is least affected by the nuanced theological bent of some of the more dynamic equivalent translations. It is the expressed purpose of these semi-literal translations to stick to the original language as much as possible in terms of the words used, which ends up helping you better understand what was actually said and allows to decipher the intended meaning. The best semi-literal translations are the English Standard Version (ESV), New American Standard Bible (NASB), and the New King James Version (NKJV).

We also recommend that you employ at least one additional dynamic equivalent translation as part of your reading and study process. To better grasp the overall flow of thought and "spirit" of the

passage, it is very helpful to read the passage often from a dynamic equivalent translation. The best dynamic equivalent translations are the New Living Translation (NLT), the New International Version (NIV), and the Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB).

FURTHER STUDY

1. *The Moody Handbook Of Theology, Paul Enns*
2. *From God To Us, Norman Geisler & William Nix*
3. *Evidence That Demands a Verdict, Josh McDowell*
4. *One Bible - Many Versions, Dave Brunn*
5. YouVersion Bible App