

Question from last week: How Christians Receive Special Revelation?

Christians receive special revelation from God primarily through the Bible and the person of Jesus Christ. Special revelation is distinct from general revelation (which is knowledge about God available through nature and reason) because it is direct, specific, and redemptive, revealing God's nature, will, salvation, and the person of Jesus in ways that cannot be known otherwise.

- **Through Scripture (without error):** The Bible is considered the inspired and authoritative written special revelation of God. It contains God's direct communication, teachings, promises, and the story of salvation culminating in Jesus Christ. Christians engage with God's special revelation by reading, studying, and hearing the biblical text, which reveals God's truth and will (2 Timothy 3:16-17, Hebrews 4:12).
- **Through Jesus Christ (without error):** Jesus is the ultimate special revelation, God's Son who lived as a human being. Seeing, knowing, and believing in Jesus reveals God's character and redemptive plan personally and fully (John 14:9, Hebrews 1:1-3).
- **Through Personal Experience and Spiritual Means (with possible error):** Christians may experience God's revelation through prayer, the inward witness of the Holy Spirit, and sometimes through dreams or visions. However, these personal experiences are always expected to align with the Bible and the revelation of Jesus. They do not add new doctrine but deepen understanding or guidance.

Christians get special revelation by encountering God's communicated truth in Scripture and Jesus Christ and responding in faith and obedience. Though God can reveal Himself in personal ways (miracles, prophecy, dreams), these are always judged by and subordinate to the Bible and the revelation in Jesus Christ.

Manuscript Counts: We have access to complete manuscripts and partial fragments, some dated as early as the second century.

- Greek manuscripts: approximately 5,800–5,856.
- Latin manuscripts: around 10,000.
- Other ancient language manuscripts: about 9,300–8,130+ in Coptic, Syriac, Armenian, and others.
- Total manuscripts: 20,000 to 25,000 (including all translations and fragments).
- No other work of ancient literature comes close to this number; for comparison, Homer's Iliad, the second-best attested, has fewer than 2,000 manuscripts.

How does this influence our confidence that we do have access to the original reading of the first autographs of Scripture? --God has preserved the Scriptures throughout history for us today.

The Masoretes, who were involved in the transmission and copying of the Old Testament, were extremely rigorous in making sure that they did not make errors or changes to the text. These scribes treated the text with great reverence. There were all kinds of rules they had to follow, but just to name a few:

- No word or letter was to be written from **memory**.
- Strict **spacing** regulations between letters and words. If a space didn't measure up, start over! – This encouraged clarity and legibility.
- They counted the number of **verses** in a book and noted what the middle verse of the book was.
- They did the same with the number of letters and the **middle** letter in a book.

There were a lot of other ceremonial-type regulations they had to follow too, and the purpose was to remind the scribes at all times that they were dealing with sacred text.

The New Testament is slightly different, in that we have far more manuscripts available to us than we do with the Old Testament. This is good because it gives scholars plenty of data for textual criticism, but it also means there are more **variations** or errors.

Still, Christian scribes attempted to be very meticulous and faithful in the copying of the New Testament. Around the year 800, for an example, the monks in Constantinople acted as scribes, and they had some pretty serious penalties set in place for their duties, and even their attitudes when they made a mistake and had to start over again.

(Textual criticism: The process of examining all surviving manuscripts in order to determine the reading of the original autographs.)

Penalties and penances were given to them for things like: focusing on the message rather than simply **copying** the text, failing to maintain a **neat** workspace and neat parchment, or even breaking a pen in anger after making a **mistake**, among other things.

Assuming we are using a good English translation, these factors give us a high degree of certainty regarding the accuracy of the Bible we have today:

- The **meticulous** work of scribes throughout history
- Scholars can do textual criticism with the many **manuscripts** they have access to
- Only dealing with **small** differences, rather than serious differences that would vastly impact our understanding of theology
- The fact that our God is **sovereign and** is absolutely capable of preserving His Word.

English Translations of the Bible

The first complete English translation of the Bible was produced by John Wycliffe and his followers in the late 1300s (Wycliffe Bible, completed around 1382), translating from the Latin Vulgate into Middle English.

- John Wycliffe's Bible (**1382**): First complete English Bible translation, hand-written and based on the Latin Vulgate.
- William Tyndale (**1526**): First printed English New Testament, translated directly from Greek; he was the first to use original biblical languages. He was martyred by the Church for this translation.
- Coverdale Bible (**1535**): First complete printed English Bible, using Tyndale's work plus translations from Latin and German texts.
- Other Early Translations: Matthew Bible (1537), Great Bible (1539), Geneva Bible (1560), and King James Version (**1611**), each following in rapid succession

Textus Receptus:

- Compiled by **Erasmus** in 1516 from a small handful of late medieval Greek manuscripts, some of which were incomplete (notably in Revelation), leading Erasmus to back-translate missing verses from Latin into Greek.
- Represents the traditional text underlying the King James Version and a few other older translations. The **NKJV** is simply a modern translation of the KJV.
- Includes some readings not found in any Greek manuscripts, due to editorial choices or reliance on the Latin Vulgate.

Eclectic (Critical) Text:

- Developed by comparing thousands of ancient **Greek** manuscripts from all textual families, including Alexandrian, Byzantine, Western, and others; examples are the Nestle-Aland (NA) and United Bible Societies (UBS) editions.
- Prioritizes older, more widely attested manuscripts, and favors readings that best explain variations across witnesses.
- Revised continually as new manuscript **discoveries** are made; most modern translations (NIV, ESV, NRSV, etc.) use the eclectic text.
- Seeks to reconstruct the text closest to the originals by weighing evidence, rather than relying on a specific manuscript tradition.

Impact and Differences:

- There are thousands of minor differences between the two texts (about two percent); most are trivial, and no major Christian doctrine is affected.
- Some famous verses and wordings in the King James Version (from the Textus Receptus) do not appear in modern translations based on the Eclectic Text because they cannot be found in the earlier manuscript evidence.

Table: Key Differences

Aspect	Textus Receptus	Eclectic Text (Critical)
Source Manuscripts	Few, late medieval Greek	Thousands, all periods/families
Method	Editorial selection, Latin influence	Full manuscript comparison, textual criticism
Modern Usage	KJV, NKJV	NASB, NIV, ESV, NRSV, most modern Bibles
Notable Issues	Included Latin back-translations, unique readings	Continuously revised, more evidence-based
Doctrinal Impact	No effect on core doctrine	No effect on core doctrine

Word for Word

Thought for Thought

Paraphrase

Interlinear – NASB – AMP – ESV – RSV – KJV – NKJV – HCSB – NRSV – NAB – NJB – NIV – NCV – NLT – GNT – CEV – TLB – MSG

Example: Luke 4:4

NKJV (Representing the TR):

But Jesus answered him, saying, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.'"

NASB (Representing the NA/UBS):

And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone.'"

Greek text of the TR:

καὶ ἀπεκρίθη ἰησοῦς πρὸς αὐτὸν λέγων, γέγραπται ὅτι οὐκ ἐπ' ἄρτῳ μόνῳ ζήσεται ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἀλλ' ἐπὶ παντὶ ῥήματι θεοῦ.

Greek text of the NA/UBS:

καὶ ἀπεκρίθη πρὸς αὐτὸν ὁ ἰησοῦς· γέγραπται ὅτι οὐκ ἐπ' ἄρτῳ μόνῳ ζήσεται ὁ ἄνθρωπος.

Example: John 1:18

KJV (Representing the TR): *No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.*

ESV (Representing the NA/UBS): *No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.*

Greek text of the TR:

θεὸν οὐδεὶς ἑώρακε πώποτε· ὁ μονογενὴς υἱός, ὁ ὢν εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς, ἐκεῖνος ἐξηγήσατο.

Greek text of the NA/UBS:

θεὸν οὐδεὶς ἑώρακεν πώποτε· μονογενὴς θεός ὁ ὢν εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκεῖνος ἐξηγήσατο.

Two main approaches to translation methods:

1. Formal (literal) – **Word for word**
2. Functional (dynamic equivalent) – **Thought for thought**

Every translation falls somewhere on the **spectrum** of formal to functional. No translation will be entirely one or the other.

Q: What would be the downside of an entirely literal, word for word translation?

A: It would be hard or impossible to understand at points, which defeats the purpose of translation.

There are difficulties in going from Greek to English A few examples:

- Word order
- Use of definite article
- Verbs

Example Ephesians 4:1

Q: What would be the downside of an entirely functional, thought for thought translation?

A: The translator is doing the work of interpreting the Bible for us, rather than merely translating.

Q: What would you say is the ideal mix of formal and functional translation philosophy for proper interpretation of the Bible?

A: As close to a literal translation as possible, while ensuring readability and understandability. ESV and NASB do this well.

Q: What might be a good use for paraphrases or more functional versions?

A: They could be used as more of a commentary, someone's explanation of the text. It might help get the idea across in modern language, but that is assuming that they have first interpreted the text rightly.

Canonicity

The term "canon" can be defined as the closed **collection** of both Old Testament and New Testament documents that constitute authoritative Scripture.

Original Meaning – from the Greek word "kanon" which is the equivalent of the Hebrew word "qaneh" which means "reed".

Derived Meaning – Certain reeds were often used as a measuring device, and so the word "kanon" came to mean a standard or rule. It was applied to a list or index, and so the term "canon" was associated with the standard list of texts that comprised the OT and NT Scriptures.

The Old Testament Canon

The Old Testament continually claims to be the Word of God: “Thus says the Lord...” Also, Jesus taught from all portions of the Old Testament, and when He did, the Pharisees never once questioned the authority of the Old Testament Scriptures.

He stated that the Scriptures were from the Law to the Prophets, to the Psalms or Writings (Luke 24:44: Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”)

Jesus and the NT authors quote roughly 295 times from the OT and never from an Apocryphal book. The apostles also quote from nothing but the OT canon when speaking about divinely inspired Scripture. The Roman Catholic Church accepted the apocryphal books as canonical, while Protestants did not and still do not. The decisive reason for rejecting the Apocrypha is their absence from the Hebrew Bible. The Jews witness is against the Apocrypha. Also, none of the apocryphal writings are cited as Scripture by Jesus or the apostles in the New Testament.

The principal reason behind the Roman Catholic Church’s decision to canonize the Apocryphal books was that several key books were supportive of church teachings, especially for purgatory and prayers for the dead (2 Maccabees 12:45-45). These teachings are found nowhere else in the NT or OT writings but were critical to the Roman Church’s practices and teaching. Additionally, some of them were written during the “400 Years of Silence” between the end of the prophets and the coming of Christ. To accept a book written during that silent period of revelation is contradictory.

Ultimately, there is no good biblical reason to regard the apocrypha as inspired Scripture.

The New Testament Canon

All texts in the New Testament canon were written by the end of the first century AD and the death of the apostles. Discussion on whether these were inspired and canonical continued into the fourth century, but there were only a small number of them that remained in question for that long.

By the fourth century, the church almost unanimously acknowledged what we now know as the 27-book New Testament canon. Now all major branches of Christianity (Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox) accept the same New Testament canon.

Criteria for Canonicity: Old Testament

(attested by Josephus, a Jewish historian from the time of Christ)

With regard to the Old Testament, the traditional and essential criterion for canonicity has been that the book must be prophetic. Writings were accepted as canonical because they were in a general sense “prophetic,” meaning that the writers were inspired to write the words of God.

Additional criteria included:

- Consistency with the Pentateuch (the first 5 books of the OT by Moses) and other Scripture.
- Factually accurate
- Authored or supervised by a person recognized as authoritative
- Acceptance by the Jewish community

Criteria for Canonicity: New Testament

For the New Testament, the same essential criterion was utilized—the writing is “prophetic,” meaning that the author was inspired to write the words of God.

Three other criteria for canonicity are worthy of mention:

- Apostolicity—Authored or supervised by an **apostle**
- Orthodoxy—**Consistency** with the apostolic gospel and teaching
- Catholicity—Accepted by the **universal** church

Alternate Views of Canonicity

Radical critics argue that the biblical canon is an imposed set of normative writings chosen because of their theological slant by those who won the struggle for power in the ancient church against those who lost. Feminist theologians argue that the leaders of the ancient church imposed these patriarchal writings to marginalize women and demean sexuality. Liberation theologians argue that the church chose a Eurocentric canon while suppressing African Christianity.

Others refer to the process of canonization as an act of revelation itself. Early in the Reformation, Roman Catholics argued that the church acted to make certain writings Scripture.

These alternate perspectives view canonization as the action of the church on certain writings, making them authoritative.

However, we would say that canonicity is **determined** by God (inspiration; prophecy) but **recognized** by the community of the church.

Is the Canon Closed?

We have no explicit biblical testimony that it would close at a specific time or event. However, there are some good reasons to consider the canon closed:

- **Theological** reason: the apostolic age was unique in that the apostles witnessed and recorded the climax of revelation: the deeds, words and significance of Jesus Christ.
- **Historical** reason: the church has never accepted as canonical any other writing written after the close of the apostolic age.
- **Hypothetical** reason: it is historically and providentially improbable that a canonical writing intended by God for the faith and practice of the church was lost and then would be found later.

Traditional Protestant View	Traditional Roman Catholic View
The church recognized the Biblical books as inspired texts.	The church authorized the Bible.
The Bible and God's Word created the church.	The church created the Bible.
The Bible alone is inspired.	The Bible and church tradition are authoritative.
Revelation has ceased.	Revelation is continuing.
The Apocrypha is not accepted as inspired.	The Apocrypha is accepted as inspired.

Homework: Select four translations that we talked about. Select a passage from the Bible (at least two verses long) and write out how these translations render this passage. Mark or highlight the differences among the four translations. Summarize your observations.