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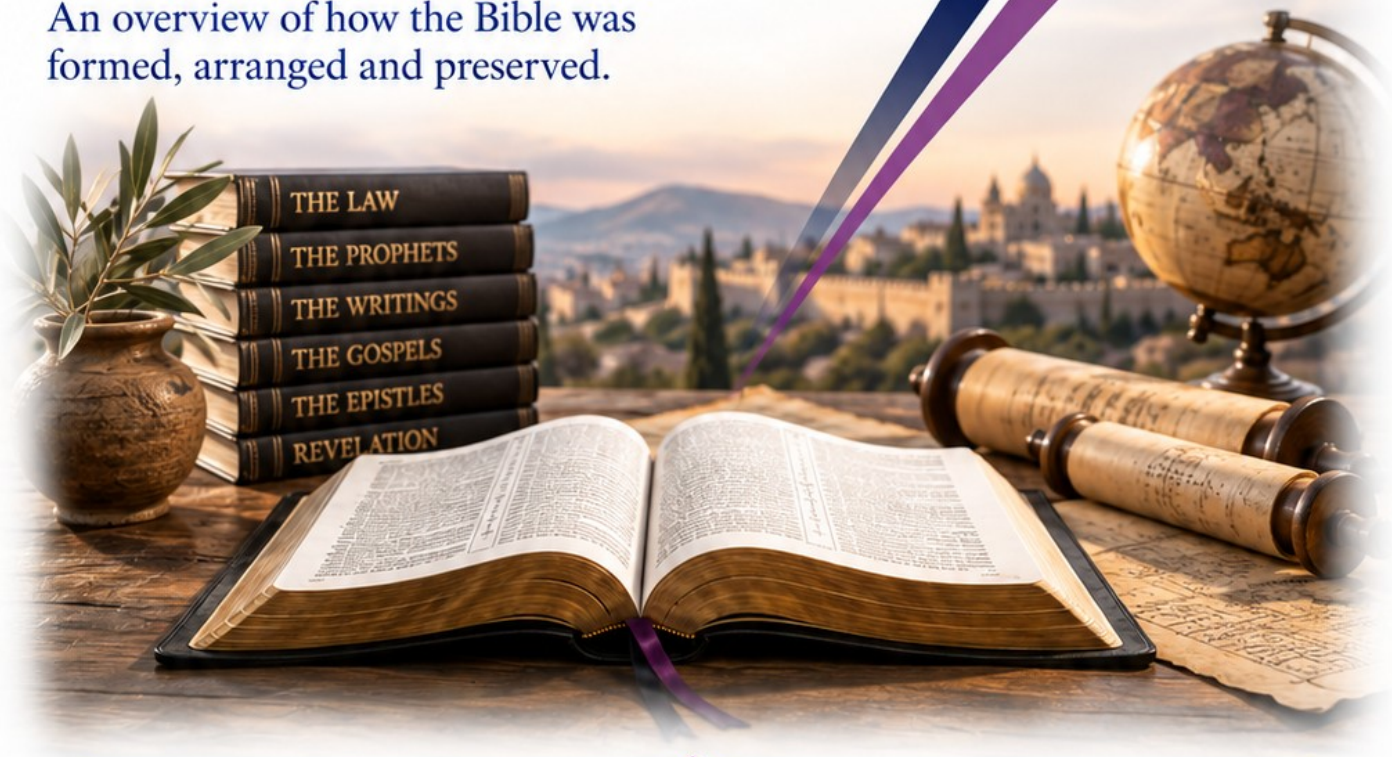
STUDY GUIDE 4

Understanding *the* Bible

STUDY GUIDE 1 OF 8:

The Bible — Structure, Formation and Preservation

An overview of how the Bible was formed, arranged and preserved.



Equipping and empowering for effective service

2 Timothy 2:2

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE STUDENT

My Study Plan

Preparing a Study Plan before starting this Study Guide will assist you in completing it within a designated timeframe. It also helps in developing the discipline required for studying God's Word effectively.

Proverbs 16:3:

> *Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established.*

My Study Guide Journal

Keep a record as you progress through your Study Guide, including the Personal Responses for each section, for future reference and goal setting.

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- Infallibility and authority belong only to God and His Word.

COGMA therefore strongly advises that you prayerfully study the content of each Study Guide with the heart of a Berean (**Acts 17:10–12**).

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PREFACE

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This Study Guide begins the module Understanding the Bible. We will first consider how the Bible was structured, formed and preserved, and then move through the major divisions and books of Scripture from the Old Testament to the New Testament.

The Bible: Its Structure, Formation and Preservation provides the foundation for the Study Guides that follow. We will consider how the Scriptures were written, gathered, copied, translated and preserved. We will also examine the arrangement of the Bible, the inspiration of Scripture, the canon and the manuscript evidence that helps us understand how the Bible has come down to us.

The purpose of this Study Guide is not simply to provide historical information. It is to strengthen our understanding of the Scriptures and prepare us to study their contents more carefully as we continue through this module.

Most importantly, we will keep one truth before us throughout our study: the Scriptures were preserved so that God's truth might be known, and throughout them all we are directed towards Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why were the Bible preserved to make God's truth known and direct readers to Jesus Christ?

Personal Reflection

When you open the Bible, do you seek only information, or do you expect God's Word to draw you nearer to Jesus Christ?

Action Step

Read a Bible verse that points to Jesus. What does it reveal about Him, and how should that truth change the way you approach the Bible?

INTRODUCTION

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The Bible did not appear as one complete book at a single moment in history. Its writings were given over many centuries through different men whom God used to record His Word for the generations that would follow.

These writings came from different periods, places and circumstances, yet together they form one united testimony. God caused His Word to be written so that His truth would not depend only upon memory or oral tradition, but could be preserved and passed faithfully from one generation to another.

The Scriptures were copied, gathered, recognised, translated and preserved through many centuries. Understanding something of this process helps us appreciate the Bible we hold today and gives us a clearer understanding of its structure, formation and preservation.

This Study Guide will therefore examine how the Bible is arranged, how its books were written and gathered, how the canon of Scripture was recognised, and how the biblical text was

copied and transmitted through history. We will also consider the translation of the Scriptures into other languages and the evidence that helps us understand how carefully God's Word has been preserved.

Throughout this study, one truth must remain central. The Scriptures were not preserved simply to give us historical knowledge, but to reveal God's truth and direct us to Jesus Christ, of whom the Scriptures testify.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How did writing, gathering, copying and translating the Bible allow God's truth to reach later generations?

Personal Reflection

Which part of the Bible's formation or transmission have you assumed without examining it carefully?

Action Step

Examine one belief you have held about how the Bible was preserved. What do the facts in this section require you to reconsider?

THE BIBLE: ONE BOOK, TWO TESTAMENTS, SIXTY-SIX BOOKS

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What Is the Bible?

The Bible is not one book written by one human author at one time. It is a collection of sixty-six individual books, written over many centuries, yet brought together as one body of Scripture.

The word Bible comes from a Greek word associated with books or a collection of books. This helps us understand why the Bible may be described as a library, containing many different writings while still presenting one united testimony.

The books of the Bible include history, law, poetry, wisdom, prophecy, Gospel records and letters. Although their styles and immediate purposes differ, together they reveal the dealings of God with humanity and direct us towards Jesus Christ. Jesus said in **John 5:39**:

> *"Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me."*

The Scriptures therefore must not be treated simply as a collection of ancient religious writings. Their testimony leads us to Jesus Christ.

One Bible Made Up of Many Books

Although the Bible contains sixty-six books, Christians receive them together as one collection of Scripture. The individual books were written by different men, in different places and during different periods of history, but they belong together because they form one continuing testimony of God's purpose.

This unity becomes particularly clear when we see how later Scriptures build upon what God had already revealed. The New Testament repeatedly refers back to the writings of the Old

Testament, while the Old Testament contains promises, prophecies, patterns and expectations that are fulfilled and explained in the New Testament.

Paul wrote in **Romans 15:4**:

> *"For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope."*

The things written in earlier generations therefore continue to teach us. They help us understand the unfolding purpose of God and prepare us to understand the fuller revelation given in Jesus Christ.

The Old Testament

The first thirty-nine books of the Bible form what we call the Old Testament. These books record God's dealings before the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh and contain the Law, the history of Israel, wisdom and poetry, and the writings of the prophets.

The Old Testament is not unimportant simply because it is called *"old."* It contains the historical and prophetic foundation necessary for understanding many truths revealed more fully in the New Testament. Jesus Himself regularly referred to these Scriptures and, after His resurrection, explained that the writings already known to His disciples had spoken concerning Him.

Luke wrote in **Luke 24:44**:

> *"And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me."*

Jesus referred to the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms. These broad divisions describe the Scriptures that were already recognised among the Jewish people before the New Testament writings were completed.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How did Jesus' reference to the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms affirm the continuing place of the Old Testament?

Personal Reflection

Have you neglected the Old Testament because it is called old, and what has that meant for your reading of the Bible?

Action Step

Read an Old Testament verse about Christ. What assumption about the value of the Old Testament should you correct in your own study?

The New Testament

The final twenty-seven books form what we call the New Testament. They begin with the four Gospel records of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, followed by Acts, the Epistles and the Revelation of Jesus Christ.

The New Testament records the coming of Jesus Christ, His ministry, His death and resurrection, the beginning and spread of the Church, and the instruction given to believers through the apostles. It also explains how many things written beforehand reached their fulfilment in Jesus Christ.

The writer of Hebrews describes Jesus as the One through whom the better covenant was established. He wrote in **Hebrews 7:22**:

> *"By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament."*

The word testament is closely connected with the idea of a covenant. The Bible therefore contains the writings associated with the former covenant and the writings that reveal the better covenant established through Jesus Christ.

The Old and New Testaments Belong Together

The Old and New Testaments should not be treated as two unrelated collections. The New Testament cannot be properly understood without the historical, prophetic and spiritual foundation found in the Old Testament, while the Old Testament reaches towards the fulfilment revealed in Jesus Christ.

Luke records that Jesus demonstrated this connection when speaking with two disciples after His resurrection. Luke wrote in **Luke 24:27**:

> *"And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself."*

Jesus did not separate Himself from the Old Testament Scriptures. He showed that Moses and the prophets had spoken concerning Him. This gives us an important principle for understanding the Bible:

- The Old Testament prepares the way for Christ;
- The New Testament reveals the fulfilment in Christ;
- Together they form one Scriptural testimony centred upon Jesus Christ.

The Books Are Arranged by Category

The books of the Bible are not arranged primarily according to the order in which they were written or the exact chronological order of the events they describe. Instead, they have largely been grouped according to their type of writing and subject.

This is important for students to understand. The position of a book in the Bible does not necessarily tell us when it was written or when the events within it occurred.

The books of the Old Testament are commonly grouped as:

- The Law: 5 books;
- History: 12 books;
- Wisdom and Poetry: 5 books;
- The Prophets: 17 books.

The books of the New Testament are commonly grouped as:

- The Gospels: 4 books;

- Acts: 1 book;
- The Epistles: 21 books;
- Revelation: 1 book.

These divisions provide a simple framework for understanding the overall structure of the Bible. The Study Guides that follow will examine these groups in greater detail.

The Structure Prepares Us to Study

Knowing the structure of the Bible helps us understand what kind of writing we are reading and where it fits within the wider Scriptural account. A historical book should not be approached in exactly the same way as a Psalm, a prophecy or an Epistle.

For this reason, understanding the arrangement of the Bible is an important first step before studying its individual books. It enables us to see not only where each book belongs, but also how the different parts of Scripture work together as one testimony.

The Bible contains many books, but its message is not fragmented. From the writings of Moses through the prophets and into the New Testament, the Scriptures continually direct us towards the purpose of God revealed in Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do the Bible's different kinds of books form a united testimony instead of a fragmented message?

Personal Reflection

Which biblical category have you overlooked or read as though it were the same kind of writing as every other book?

Action Step

Choose a Bible book you rarely read. How will recognising its purpose change the way you study it this week?

GIVEN BY INSPIRATION OF GOD

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The Bible was written by men, but Scripture does not present itself as simply the thoughts, opinions or religious experiences of those men. God worked through them so that what they wrote communicated the truth He intended to be recorded.

This is essential to understanding the authority of the Bible. If Scripture were simply human writing, it would carry no greater authority than any other ancient religious book. However, the Bible declares that its source is God Himself.

All Scripture Is Given by Inspiration of God

Paul explained the divine origin and purpose of Scripture in **2 Timothy 3:16-17**:

> *"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works."*

Notice the expression *"given by inspiration of God."* The Scriptures were not simply produced because religious men decided to write about God. God was working through those whom He chose so that His truth would be recorded and preserved.

Paul also explains why Scripture was given. It is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness, so that the people of God may be equipped to live according to the truth.

Therefore, inspiration is not simply an interesting fact about how the Bible originated. It explains why Scripture carries authority in what we believe and how we live.

Holy Men Were Moved by the Holy Ghost

Peter gives further explanation concerning how God worked through the writers of Scripture. Peter wrote in **2 Peter 1:20-21**:

> *"Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."*

Peter makes the source very clear. The prophecy did not come *"by the will of man."* The writers were real people with their own backgrounds, personalities and experiences, but the origin of the message was not simply human imagination. They *"spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."*

God therefore used human writers without making Scripture simply human. The men wrote, but God was directing the giving of His Word.

God Used Human Writers

The Bible was written through many different people over a long period of history. Among its writers were kings, prophets, shepherds, priests, fishermen and other servants of God.

Their backgrounds were very different, and the circumstances in which they wrote were also different. Some wrote during times of peace, others during war or captivity. Some wrote history, others prophecy, poetry, wisdom, Gospel records or letters.

God did not remove the individual characteristics of these writers. Their personalities, vocabulary and circumstances can often be recognised in what they wrote, yet God worked through them to communicate His truth.

This helps us understand why the Bible contains such a variety of writing while still presenting one united Scriptural testimony. The writers were many, but behind their writings was the same God.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How could God use writers with different backgrounds and styles while giving one divine message?

Personal Reflection

Have differences between biblical writers led you to overlook their shared divine message?

Action Step

Compare two Bible writers discussed here. What does their shared testimony challenge you to believe about God's Word?

Different Writers, One Divine Message

The unity of Scripture is remarkable because its books were not written by one human author during one lifetime. They were written over many generations and under very different circumstances, yet they continually connect with one another.

Promises made in earlier Scripture are taken up later. Prophecies anticipate events that are subsequently fulfilled, while truths introduced in one part of Scripture are developed and explained elsewhere.

At the centre of this united testimony is Jesus Christ. The Scriptures form one continuing testimony of God's work of redemption through Him. Jesus Himself said in **John 5:39**:

> *"Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me."*

The unity of Scripture should therefore not be understood simply as agreement between many ancient writings. Its unity is seen especially in the way its testimony continually directs us towards God's purpose revealed in Jesus Christ.

The Authority of Scripture

Because Scripture is given by inspiration of God, it must be allowed to speak with authority. Our beliefs cannot finally rest upon tradition, personal opinion or what a religious organisation has always taught.

The Word of God must be the standard by which teaching is examined. When our understanding differs from Scripture, it is our understanding that must change. Jesus repeatedly treated the Scriptures as authoritative. He appealed to what was written and expected the Word of God to be received as truth.

This principle is important throughout the entire Understanding the Bible module. We are not studying the Bible simply to learn facts about ancient books. We are learning to understand accurately the Word God has given.

The Word of God Is Quick and Powerful

The Bible is ancient, but its truth is not dead or powerless. The writer of Hebrews describes the Word of God as "quick," meaning living or alive. He wrote in **Hebrews 4:12**:

> *"For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."*

The Word of God reaches beyond outward behaviour. It exposes the thoughts and intentions of the heart and brings us face to face with truth.

This does not mean that the printed pages themselves possess life independently of God. Jesus Christ is the living Word, and the written Scriptures bear faithful testimony to Him and communicate the truth God has given.

God's Word Is Settled

Human opinions change continually, but the truth of God does not change with each generation. The Psalmist expressed this confidence plainly in **Psalm 119:89**:

> *"For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven."*

God's Word does not depend upon changing social values or popular opinion. What God has established as truth remains true regardless of whether people accept or reject it.

This gives the believer a stable foundation. We do not need to create truth for ourselves because God has already spoken.

God's Word Will Not Pass Away

Throughout history, people have opposed, restricted and attempted to destroy the Scriptures, yet God's Word has continued from generation to generation.

Personal Response

Key Truth

What do the authority and enduring character of God's Word mean for a believer's foundation of truth?

Personal Reflection

Where are you allowing a changing opinion to carry more weight than God's settled Word?

Action Step

Consider an opinion you have given more authority than the Bible. Which verses will you read, and what are you prepared to change?

THE FORMATION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

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The Old Testament did not begin as thirty-nine books bound together in one volume. Its writings were given over many centuries as God directed His servants to record His words, His dealings with His people, their history, songs of praise and wisdom, and the messages delivered through His prophets.

From the beginning, God showed that His words were to be preserved for generations that had not yet been born. What He revealed was not intended only for those who first heard it, but also for those who would later read, learn and understand His truth.

God Commanded His Words to Be Written

One of the earliest clear examples is found during the ministry of Moses. After Israel fought against Amalek, God specifically commanded Moses to make a written record of what had taken place. Moses wrote in **Exodus 17:14**:

> *"And the LORD said unto Moses, Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua: for I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven."*

Notice the words *"Write this for a memorial in a book."* God did not intend the account to depend only upon human memory. He commanded that it be written so that there would be a continuing record of what He had said and done.

The same principle is expressed elsewhere in Scripture. The Psalmist wrote in **Psalm 102:18**:

> *"This shall be written for the generation to come: and the people which shall be created shall praise the LORD."*

The written Word therefore served generations beyond those who first received it. God caused His truth to be recorded so that people yet to come could know what He had revealed.

The Law Was Written and Preserved

Moses was given a particularly important responsibility in recording the Law of God. These writings were not treated casually, but were preserved as an authoritative record for Israel. Moses wrote in **Deuteronomy 31:24-26**:

> *"And it came to pass, when Moses had made an end of writing the words of this law in a book, until they were finished, That Moses commanded the Levites, which bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD, saying, Take this book of the law, and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may be there for a witness against thee."*

These verses tell us plainly that Moses *"made an end of writing the words of this law in a book."* The written Law was then placed in connection with the ark of the covenant so that it would remain as a witness among the people.

This shows that the preservation of Scripture was important from an early period. God's Word was not simply spoken and then forgotten. It was written and deliberately kept.

Personal Response

Key Truth

What does Moses' writing of the Law show about the early preservation of God's words?

Personal Reflection

How has the account of written and preserved revelation changed your view of the Old Testament's origins?

Action Step

Read the account of Moses preserving the Law. How will you treat God's written Word more carefully because of what you learn?

The Law Was Read Before the People

The purpose of preserving the written Law was not simply to store it. God intended His people to hear it, learn it and obey it. Moses wrote in **Deuteronomy 31:10-13**:

> *"And Moses commanded them, saying, At the end of every seven years, in the solemnity of the year of release, in the feast of tabernacles, When all Israel is come to appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose, thou shalt read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Gather the people together, men, and women, and children, and thy stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the LORD your God, and observe to do all the words of this law: And that their children, which have not known any thing, may hear, and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as ye live in the land whither ye go over Jordan to possess it."*

Notice the repeated emphasis upon succeeding generations. The adults were to hear God's Word, but their children were also to hear and learn it.

The preservation of Scripture was therefore directly connected with teaching the next generation. God's truth was written so that it could continue to be heard, understood and obeyed.

God Continued to Give Written Revelation

The Law of Moses was only the beginning of the Old Testament Scriptures. As Israel's history continued, God used other servants to record events, messages, songs, wisdom and prophecy.

Kings rose and fell. Israel experienced victory, failure, division, captivity and restoration. These events became part of the Scriptural record because they revealed the dealings of God with His people.

God also spoke through prophets who delivered His messages to Israel and Judah. Their warnings, promises and prophecies were preserved so that later generations could understand what God had spoken. Songs, prayers and wisdom were also preserved, and the Old Testament grew over many generations as God continued to give His Word through those whom He chose.

The Law, the Prophets and the Psalms

By the time of Jesus, the Old Testament Scriptures were already recognised as an established collection. Jesus referred to these Scriptures using three broad divisions. He said in **Luke 24:44**:

> *"And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me."*

Jesus referred to:

- The Law of Moses;
- The Prophets;
- The Psalms.

These expressions broadly describe the Old Testament Scriptures known by the Jewish people. They also show that the Old Testament was not simply a collection of unrelated writings, but a recognised body of Scripture.

Most importantly, Jesus said that these writings contained things *"concerning me."* The Old Testament had been written and preserved over many centuries, but its testimony ultimately pointed towards Jesus Christ.

The Scriptures Known by Jesus

When Jesus and the apostles referred to *"the scriptures,"* they were referring primarily to the writings we know as the Old Testament. The New Testament had not yet been completed when Jesus walked upon the earth.

These were the Scriptures Jesus read, quoted and used when teaching others. He treated them as authoritative and showed that their promises and prophecies were being fulfilled in Him.

After His resurrection, Jesus did more than quote isolated verses. He showed His disciples how the Scriptures as a whole pointed towards Him. Luke wrote in **Luke 24:27**:

> *"And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself."*

This gives us an important principle as we continue through the Understanding the Bible module. We must not study the Old Testament simply as ancient Jewish history. We must understand how its writings form the foundation for the revelation and fulfilment found in Jesus Christ.

The Languages of the Old Testament

The Old Testament was not originally written in English. Most of it was written in Hebrew, the language closely associated with the people of Israel.

Smaller portions were written in Aramaic, a related language that became widely used in the ancient Near East. These were the languages in which the Old Testament writings were originally preserved before they were later translated into other languages.

Understanding this helps us appreciate the process by which Scripture has come to us. The English Bible we read today stands at the end of a long history of writing, copying, preserving and translating the biblical text.

The Septuagint: The Old Testament in Greek

As Greek became widely spoken throughout much of the ancient world, the Old Testament Scriptures were translated into Greek. This translation became known as the Septuagint.

The translation began in the centuries before Christ and became especially important because many Jewish people lived in Greek-speaking regions and no longer used Hebrew as their everyday language. Having the Scriptures available in Greek enabled them to read and understand the Old Testament in a language familiar to them.

The name Septuagint is traditionally connected with the account that a group of Jewish scholars took part in the translation. Whatever the details of that tradition, the important point for this Study Guide is that the Old Testament Scriptures were available in Greek before the time of the New Testament Church.

This demonstrates another stage in the history of the Bible. The Scriptures were not only preserved in their original languages. They were also translated so that people who spoke another language could read and understand them.

From Written Revelation to Recognised Scripture

The formation of the Old Testament took place over many centuries. God first commanded His Word to be written, and He continued to use His servants to record the Law, history, wisdom, songs and prophetic messages that became part of the Scriptures.

Those writings were preserved and passed from generation to generation until they formed the recognised body of Scripture known to Jesus and the apostles. Jesus described them as the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms, and He showed that their testimony pointed towards Him.

The Old Testament was therefore already established before the writings of the New Testament began to appear. We can now turn to the next stage of the story and consider the formation of the New Testament.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How did the Law, Prophets and Psalms become the Bible known by Jesus before the New Testament was written?

Personal Reflection

Which stage in the Old Testament's formation do you need to understand more carefully before making claims about it?

Action Step

Trace how the Old Testament was handed down. What mistaken idea about its origin or importance will you correct?

THE FORMATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

BACK TO CONTENTS

The New Testament was formed differently from the Old Testament, but the same principle remained: God caused His truth to be written and preserved for those who would follow. The twenty-seven New Testament books arose from the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, the witness of those who knew Him, the spread of the Gospel, and the instruction given to the early Church.

These writings were not produced at one time or arranged in the order in which they were written. They appeared over a period of years as the Gospel spread and as written records and apostolic instruction became necessary.

Jesus Christ and the Apostolic Witness

The foundation of the New Testament is Jesus Christ. The Gospel was first proclaimed by those who had heard His teaching, witnessed His works and could testify concerning His death and resurrection.

Before the New Testament books were completed, the message of Jesus was being preached and taught. Those who had been with Him carried His words and the testimony of what He had done to others. John later explained the importance of this firsthand witness in **1 John 1:1-3**:

> *"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."*

John repeatedly emphasised what they had heard, seen and handled. The New Testament testimony was therefore connected with people who could bear witness to Jesus Christ and what God had revealed through Him.

Why Written Gospel Records Were Needed

As the Gospel spread beyond Jerusalem and into other regions, written records became increasingly important. The words and works of Jesus needed to be preserved accurately so that believers who had never personally seen Him could know with certainty what had taken place.

Luke explained his purpose clearly at the beginning of his Gospel. He wrote in **Luke 1:1-4**:

> *"Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word; It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed."*

Luke refers to those who were *"eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word."* He then explains that he was writing an orderly account so that Theophilus might *"know the certainty"* of the things in which he had been instructed.

This shows why written Gospel records were so valuable. They preserved the testimony concerning Jesus Christ so that it could continue to be taught accurately from generation to generation.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why were written Gospel records needed as the apostolic witness spread beyond Jerusalem?

Personal Reflection

Has Luke's careful approach challenged the way you listen to, repeat or trust accounts about Jesus?

Action Step

Read **Luke 1:1-4**. *How does Luke's care for an accurate record challenge the way you repeat or explain Bible accounts?*

The Four Gospel Records

The New Testament begins with four Gospel records: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Each presents the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, while each writer also brings particular details and emphasis to the account.

Matthew and John were among those closely connected with the ministry of Jesus, while Mark and Luke were associated with those who had firsthand knowledge of the events they recorded. This eyewitness connection is an important part of understanding how the Gospel records were preserved.

John explained the purpose of his own Gospel near its conclusion. He wrote in **John 20:30-31**:

> *"And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name."*

John did not attempt to record everything Jesus had done. He selected what was necessary so that those who read might believe that Jesus is the Christ and have life through His name.

Acts Preserved the Continuing History

Luke's Gospel records the life and ministry of Jesus, while the book of Acts continues the historical account after His resurrection. Acts records the spread of the Gospel from Jerusalem into other regions and preserves many important events concerning the early Church.

Acts therefore provides a historical bridge between the Gospel records and the Epistles. For this reason, Acts is naturally studied together with the Epistles as the New Testament story continues.

Luke begins Acts by connecting it directly with the Gospel he had already written. He wrote in **Acts 1:1-2**:

> *"The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen:"*

The same Theophilus addressed in Luke's Gospel is addressed again in Acts. The two writings therefore belong together as a continuing historical account.

Letters Were Written to Congregations and Individuals

As the Church spread, apostles and other recognised servants of God wrote letters to congregations and individuals. These writings became known as the Epistles.

Some letters addressed questions and difficulties within particular congregations, while others gave instruction, encouragement, warning and teaching. Although many were originally sent to particular people or congregations, their value extended far beyond their first recipients.

Paul's letter to the Colossians shows that these writings were shared between congregations. Paul wrote in **Colossians 4:16**:

> *"And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the Church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea."*

The letter was not to remain only with the congregation that first received it. Paul instructed that it should also be read elsewhere, showing how apostolic writings began to circulate among the churches.

The Epistles Were Read Publicly

The Epistles were intended to be heard and understood by the believers. Paul specifically instructed that his writings should be read before the congregation. He wrote in **1 Thessalonians 5:27**:

> *"I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren."*

This public reading helped preserve and spread apostolic instruction. Believers who had never personally met Paul or the other writers could still receive the teaching God had given through them.

The written Epistles therefore became an important means by which doctrine and instruction were preserved. Their circulation also meant that the same teaching could be shared among believers in different places.

Apostolic Writings Were Recognised as Scripture

The New Testament itself gives evidence that apostolic writings came to be recognised alongside other Scriptures. Peter referred to Paul's letters and placed them in connection with "the other scriptures." Peter wrote in **2 Peter 3:15-16**:

> *"And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction."*

Peter refers to Paul's *"epistles"* and then speaks of those who distorted them *"as they do also the other scriptures."* This shows that the writings of Paul were not regarded simply as private correspondence.

The letters were being received as authoritative teaching among the people of God. Over time, the other inspired New Testament writings were likewise recognised and preserved.

Twenty-Seven New Testament Books

The New Testament contains twenty-seven books. These include the four Gospels, Acts, twenty-one Epistles and Revelation.

These books were not written in the order in which they appear in our Bibles today. Some of Paul's letters were among the earlier New Testament writings, while the arrangement of the completed New Testament follows literary groupings rather than strict chronology. The arrangement can be understood simply:

- The Gospels record the coming and ministry of Jesus Christ;
- Acts records the spread of the Gospel and the history of the early Church;
- The Epistles contain instruction written to congregations and individuals;
- Revelation is the final prophetic book of the New Testament.

The detailed contents of these books will be considered later in this module. At this stage, our purpose is to understand how the writings arose and were preserved as part of the New Testament.

From Apostolic Witness to Written Scripture

The New Testament therefore grew out of the witness concerning Jesus Christ and the needs of the early Church. The Gospel was preached, the events concerning Jesus were recorded, the history of the Church was preserved, and inspired letters were written and circulated among the believers.

These writings were not preserved simply because they were old or because respected men had written them. They were valued because God's people recognised in them the authoritative testimony and instruction God had given through those whom He had chosen.

The next question is therefore important: How were the writings that belonged to Scripture distinguished from other religious writings? To answer that question, we now turn to the Canon of Scripture.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How did the Gospels, Acts and apostolic letters carry the witness of Jesus into written the Bible?

Personal Reflection

Which New Testament writing have you treated as isolated from the apostolic witness that produced it?

Action Step

Choose a New Testament writing and identify its intended readers. What will you change in how you read its witness to Jesus?

THE CANON OF SCRIPTURE

BACK TO CONTENTS

As the writings of the Old and New Testaments were produced and preserved, an important question arose: Which writings belonged to Scripture? Many documents were written in ancient times, but not every religious or historical writing was recognised as the inspired Word of God.

The collection of books recognised as Scripture became known as the canon. Understanding the canon helps us see the difference between the writings God inspired and other ancient writings that may contain useful history or religious thought but do not carry the authority of Scripture.

What Does "Canon" Mean?

The word canon originally carried the idea of a reed or measuring rod. From that physical meaning, it came to describe a standard or rule by which something could be measured.

When applied to the Bible, the canon refers to the recognised collection of writings accepted as inspired Scripture. These writings were recognised as authoritative and binding because they were received as the Word of God.

The idea of a measuring rod is therefore helpful. Not every writing claiming religious authority could simply be accepted. It had to be considered in relation to the truth God had already revealed.

God Inspired the Scriptures

It is important to understand the order correctly. The books of the Bible were not made inspired simply because God's people later placed them within a recognised collection.

God was the source of their inspiration from the beginning. As we have already seen, Paul wrote in **2 Timothy 3:16-17**:

> *"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works."*

God's people therefore did not create inspired Scripture. They were required to recognise and preserve the writings God had given.

The authority of Scripture comes from God, not from the later approval of men.

God's People Recognised the Scriptures

God's people had to distinguish between writings that belonged within Scripture and other writings that did not. Matters considered included the source of the writing, the person through whom it had come and whether its teaching agreed with the Scriptures already recognised.

This was necessary because many writings existed during both Old and New Testament times. Some were historical, some religious, and others claimed spiritual importance. However, the existence of an ancient religious writing did not automatically make it Scripture.

The question was not simply: Is this an old religious book? The more important question was: Does this writing belong to the inspired revelation God has given?

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why did God's people need to recognise which writings belonged within the Bible when other religious writings existed?

Personal Reflection

Have you confused recognising inspired writings with granting inspiration to a writing by human decision?

Action Step

Review the difference between God inspiring a book and people recognising it. What belief about the Bible's authority needs correcting?

The Old Testament Canon

By the time of Jesus, a recognised body of Jewish Scripture was already in use. As we saw earlier, Jesus referred to these writings as the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms. He said in **Luke 24:44**:

> *"And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me."*

Jesus did not speak as though the Scriptures were an uncertain collection still waiting to be established. He referred His disciples to writings they already knew and accepted as Scripture.

Throughout His ministry, Jesus repeatedly appealed to what was written. This shows the authority He recognised in the Old Testament Scriptures and provides an important foundation for understanding the Old Testament canon.

The New Testament Writings Were Also Recognised

A similar process can be seen developing within the New Testament period. The writings of the apostles were circulated, read among congregations and treated as authoritative instruction.

We have already seen that Paul commanded his letter to be read to the believers and shared with another congregation. Peter later referred to Paul's Epistles in connection with "the other scriptures." Peter wrote in **2 Peter 3:15-16**:

> *"And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction."*

Peter refers to Paul's *"epistles"* and then speaks of those who distorted them *"as they do also the other scriptures."* This shows that Paul's writings were being treated as more than personal correspondence. They were recognised alongside other Scriptures as writings carrying spiritual authority.

Agreement With Revealed Truth

Agreement with already accepted Scripture was an important consideration when recognising biblical writings. A writing that contradicted the truth God had already revealed could not properly be received as another revelation from the same God.

God does not contradict Himself. Therefore, the recognised books of Scripture form a harmonious testimony rather than a collection of competing teachings.

This does not mean that every book says the same thing in the same way. Different writers addressed different circumstances and subjects, but the truth they communicated belongs to one consistent revelation of God.

Why Not Every Ancient Religious Writing Is Scripture

Ancient literature contains many religious writings that are not part of the Bible. Some may provide historical information or help us understand the world in which biblical events occurred, but historical interest does not give a document Scriptural authority.

Writings rejected from the canon could contain historical difficulties or teaching inconsistent with accepted Scripture. The existence of such writings does not mean they belong beside the books God inspired.

We should therefore distinguish between:

- Writings that may be historically interesting;
- Writings that may provide background information;
- Writings recognised as inspired Scripture.

Only the last category forms the biblical canon.

The Canon Is a Recognised Collection of Inspired Writings

The word canon therefore describes more than a list of old books. It refers to the recognised collection of writings received as the inspired and authoritative Word of God.

The idea of the canon can be summarised in four important thoughts:

- It originally referred to a reed or measuring rod;

- It came to mean a norm or rule;
- It refers to the collection of writings recognised as inspired by God;
- Those writings are received as authoritative.

The canon did not give God's Word its authority. The canon identifies the writings that God's people recognised as belonging to the Word He had given.

The Word of God Endures

The formation and recognition of the canon also brings us back to the preservation of Scripture. The writings were not preserved by accident. The Word of God has continued from generation to generation.

Isaiah wrote in **Isaiah 40:8**:

> *"The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever."*

Generations pass and human writings come and go, but God's Word remains. The books of Scripture were written, recognised and preserved because God intended His truth to continue to be known.

Having considered which writings belong to the recognised collection of Scripture, we can now ask another important question: How were those writings copied and transmitted through the centuries? This brings us to the next section, Manuscripts, Copying and Transmission.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does the recognised canon distinguish the enduring Word of God from other ancient religious writings?

Personal Reflection

Which claim about the canon do you need to test against the section's account of revealed truth and recognition?

Action Step

Examine one claim about an ancient religious writing. What will you change about how readily you accept claims of biblical authority?

MANUSCRIPTS, COPYING AND TRANSMISSION

BACK TO CONTENTS

The original writings of the Bible were produced long before the invention of printing. Each book had to be written by hand, and when further copies were needed, they also had to be copied by hand.

This raises an important question: How were the Scriptures transmitted from one generation to another while preserving the words that had been written?

What Is a Manuscript?

A manuscript is a document written by hand. Before books could be printed in large numbers, every copy of a biblical book had to be produced individually.

The original documents written by Moses, the prophets, the apostles and the other biblical writers have not survived to the present day. The materials upon which ancient documents were written naturally deteriorated through age and use, so additional copies were necessary if the writings were to continue from generation to generation.

This means that the Scriptures known in later generations depended upon manuscripts that had been carefully copied from earlier manuscripts.

Why the Scriptures Had to Be Copied

We have already seen that God intended His Word to be preserved for those who would come afterwards. As earlier manuscripts became worn through use, new copies had to be made so that the Scriptures could continue to be read and taught.

The need for copying did not make the Scriptures unimportant. Rather, the importance placed upon the written Word resulted in considerable care being taken in producing new copies.

The preservation of Scripture therefore involved both transmission and copying. The words were transmitted from generation to generation because people continued to reproduce the manuscripts from which they read.

The Work of Jewish Scribes

The Old Testament was preserved for many centuries through the work of Jewish scribes. These men gave careful attention to copying the Hebrew Scriptures because they regarded the writings as sacred.

A scribe could not simply rewrite the text casually from memory. Detailed procedures developed to reduce the possibility of mistakes and to ensure that the new copy agreed closely with the manuscript from which it was being copied.

> The care of the scribes demonstrates how seriously the Jewish people regarded the words entrusted to them. Paul later referred to this responsibility when speaking about the advantage given to the Jewish people. He wrote in **Romans 3:1-2**:
>
> > *"What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God."*

The Jewish people had been entrusted with *"the oracles of God."* The copying and preservation of the Hebrew Scriptures formed an important part of carrying those writings from one generation to another.

Personal Response

Key Truth

What did the Jewish scribes' care in copying and checking contribute to the transmission of the Hebrew Bible verses?

Personal Reflection

What does the care taken by Bible copyists reveal about the attention you give to God's Word?

Action Step

Read about the work of the ancient copyists. How will their care affect the way you handle and quote God's Word?

Care in Copying the Hebrew Scriptures

A number of regulations were traditionally associated with the copying of Hebrew Scripture. These regulations illustrate the seriousness with which the task was approached.

Among the practices described were:

- The writing was to follow prescribed forms;
- The ink and writing materials were carefully controlled;
- Words were not simply to be written from memory;
- Individual words and letters were checked;
- The completed manuscript was compared with earlier copies;
- Errors were treated seriously rather than being ignored.

The purpose of such procedures was clear: The copyist was not free to change the text according to personal preference.

This careful approach does not mean that no copying variation could ever occur. It does show, however, that preserving the wording of Scripture was regarded as a serious responsibility rather than a casual exercise.

Checking the Completed Copies

The work did not necessarily finish when the last word had been copied. Scribes also used checking procedures involving the counting of words, verses and letters.

These checks provided another means of identifying copying mistakes. If a manuscript differed from the expected pattern, the difference could be investigated rather than simply passed to the next generation.

This helps us understand that manuscript transmission involved more than repeatedly rewriting documents. There were deliberate efforts to check the accuracy of what had been copied.

New Testament Manuscripts

The New Testament writings also had to be copied as they were circulated among believers. Paul's instruction that his letters should be read in different congregations shows why additional copies would become necessary. Paul wrote in **Colossians 4:16**:

> *"And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the Church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea."*

As the Gospel spread into different regions, copies of the Gospel records, Acts and the Epistles could be carried to congregations that did not possess the original document. In this way, the New Testament writings were transmitted through handwritten manuscripts just as the Old Testament writings had been before them.

Many manuscript copies therefore came into existence over the centuries. Their existence provides an important opportunity to compare the biblical text preserved in different places and periods.

Why Many Manuscripts Are Valuable

When several ancient manuscripts preserve the same biblical writing, they can be compared with one another. This allows differences between copies to be identified and the transmitted text to be examined carefully.

A large number of Greek New Testament manuscripts have survived. The important principle is not simply the number itself, but the opportunity such manuscripts provide for comparison.

If only one ancient copy existed, there would be nothing with which to compare it. When many copies survive, scholars are able to examine where those manuscripts agree and where copying differences appear.

This manuscript evidence therefore gives us valuable information concerning the transmission of the New Testament text.

The Dead Sea Scrolls

One of the most significant manuscript discoveries concerning the Old Testament occurred near the Dead Sea during the twentieth century. Ancient scrolls and fragments were discovered in caves near Qumran, and the collection became known as the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Among these discoveries were biblical manuscripts or fragments representing nearly all the books of the Old Testament. These manuscripts were much older than many Hebrew biblical manuscripts that had previously been available for comparison.

Their discovery therefore provided an important opportunity. Much older copies of portions of the Old Testament could now be compared with Hebrew texts preserved through later centuries.

The Great Isaiah Scroll

Among the best-known discoveries was a substantial manuscript of the book of Isaiah known as the Great Isaiah Scroll. Its age made it particularly valuable because it allowed the wording of Isaiah from a much earlier period to be compared with later Hebrew manuscript traditions.

The comparison showed a remarkable continuity in the transmission of the text. There were differences of spelling and wording in places, but the manuscript provided strong evidence that the book of Isaiah had been transmitted with considerable care.

This is important because the Great Isaiah Scroll comes from many centuries before the surviving Hebrew manuscripts that had previously formed the principal basis for comparison. The discovery therefore provided another historical witness to the careful transmission of the Old Testament.

Copies Do Not Replace the Inspired Source

It is important to distinguish between inspiration and transmission. Inspiration concerns God's giving of His Word through the biblical writers, while transmission concerns the copying and preservation of those writings through later generations.

The scribes and copyists were not producing new revelation. Their responsibility was to preserve and transmit what had already been written.

This distinction helps us understand the process clearly:

- God inspired His Word;
- His servants wrote it;
- Later generations copied it;
- The manuscripts were transmitted and compared;
- The Scriptures continued to be available to those who followed.

The manuscript history therefore forms an important part of understanding how the Bible has come down to us.

From Manuscripts to Translation

For many centuries, the Scriptures existed in languages that most English-speaking people today could not read. The Old Testament was written mainly in Hebrew, while the New Testament was written in Greek.

Preserving the manuscripts was therefore only part of the story. If people speaking other languages were to read the Scriptures for themselves, those writings also had to be translated.

We will now consider how the biblical writings moved from their ancient languages into the English Bible.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do surviving manuscripts and translation help later readers receive writings first preserved in ancient languages?

Personal Reflection

Which assumption about copies, original writings or translation has this section challenged for you?

Action Step

Review one manuscript or translation example. What careless assumption will you avoid when speaking about how the Bible reached us?

THE PRESERVATION AND RELIABILITY OF SCRIPTURE

BACK TO CONTENTS

We have now followed the Bible from its inspiration and formation through the copying of manuscripts and the translation of Scripture into English. This brings us to an important question: Can we have confidence that the Word of God has been preserved through the generations?

The Bible itself repeatedly declares that God's Word endures. The manuscript evidence, the care taken in copying Scripture, and discoveries from history and archaeology also give us reasons to understand that the biblical writings have been transmitted with remarkable care.

God Promised That His Word Would Endure

The preservation of Scripture begins with God rather than with human ability. The same God who inspired His Word intended that His truth should continue to be known by later generations.

Isaiah wrote in **Isaiah 40:8**:

> *"The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever."*

People and generations pass away, but the Word of God remains. The preservation of Scripture is therefore consistent with God's declared purpose that His truth should continue from generation to generation.

Jesus expressed the same confidence concerning His words. He said in **Mark 13:31**:

> *"Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away."*

Everything belonging to this present world is temporary. The words of Jesus, however, will not pass away.

The Words of the LORD Are Pure

The Psalmist describes the words of God as pure words and expresses confidence in God's preservation. He wrote in **Psalm 12:6-7**:

> *"The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever."*

The emphasis is upon both the purity and endurance of God's words. What God has spoken is precious, and His truth is not to be treated as though it were temporary or disposable.

This principle helps explain why the Scriptures were copied, guarded and transmitted so carefully. Those responsible for preserving them understood that they were handling words regarded as sacred.

Nothing Was to Be Added or Taken Away

God repeatedly warned His people against changing what He had commanded. His words were not to be altered according to human preference. Moses wrote in **Deuteronomy 4:2**:

> *"Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you."*

The same principle appears in Proverbs. Solomon wrote in **Proverbs 30:5-6**:

> *"Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him. Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar."*

These Scriptures show how seriously God's Word was to be treated. Those who received it were not given authority to rewrite it according to their own ideas.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why did the command not to add to or take from God's words make faithful copying and guarding important?

Personal Reflection

Where have you been careless about what a Bible verse says before repeating or applying it?

Action Step

Check the full wording and surrounding verses of a Bible quotation you often use. What must you correct in how you explain it?

The Care of the Scribes

We have already considered the careful work of Jewish scribes who copied the Old Testament Scriptures. Their procedures included checking words, letters and other features of the copied text against the manuscripts from which they worked.

Such procedures do not mean that every manuscript copy was absolutely identical in every small detail. They do demonstrate, however, that the copying of Scripture was approached with exceptional seriousness.

The scribes understood that they were not creating a new message. Their responsibility was to preserve and transmit the words that had already been handed down.

Ancient Manuscripts Provide Evidence for Comparison

Many ancient manuscript copies of biblical writings have survived. These manuscripts come from different periods and places, allowing the transmitted text to be compared across a wide body of evidence.

This is particularly valuable with the New Testament, for which many Greek manuscripts and manuscript fragments are available. When different copies are compared, similarities and differences can be identified rather than remaining hidden.

The existence of many manuscripts therefore gives scholars an opportunity to examine how the text was transmitted. This ability to compare surviving copies is an important part of understanding the reliability of the biblical text.

The Witness of the Dead Sea Scrolls

The Dead Sea Scrolls provide important evidence concerning the transmission of the Old Testament. Their discovery brought to light biblical manuscripts that were considerably older than many Hebrew manuscripts previously available for comparison.

Among the most significant discoveries was the Great Isaiah Scroll. Comparing this ancient manuscript with later copies of Isaiah showed substantial continuity in the wording of the book, even though variations of spelling and wording were present.

The importance of this evidence should be understood carefully. The Dead Sea Scrolls do not remove every question concerning manuscripts, but they demonstrate that the Old Testament text was being transmitted with considerable stability across many centuries.

History and Archaeology

Archaeology and historical discovery provide additional evidence supporting the historical setting of the Bible. Discoveries connected with people, places and kingdoms mentioned in Scripture can help us understand that the biblical writings belong within real historical settings.

Evidence concerning King Herod, Pontius Pilate, the house of David, and ancient writing that existed before the time of Moses provides independent historical information connected with people and cultures mentioned in Scripture.

Archaeology should not be expected to prove every statement in the Bible. Many events leave no archaeological evidence, and discoveries must be interpreted carefully. However, archaeology can provide useful confirmation of the historical world described in Scripture.

Scripture and the Natural World

Scripture contains verses that describe features of the natural world. For example, Job speaks of God hanging the earth *"upon nothing,"* while other verses describe the earth, mountains and channels of the sea.

Job wrote in **Job 26:7**:

> *"He stretcheth out the north over the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing."*

These verses can be interesting when considered alongside our knowledge of the natural world. However, we should allow Scripture to speak according to its own purpose and context rather than forcing every poetic description to function as a modern scientific statement.

Our confidence in Scripture does not depend upon finding a scientific prediction hidden in every ancient expression. The stronger foundation is the testimony of Scripture itself, together with the historical evidence of its careful transmission and preservation.

Confidence Without Exaggeration

We do not strengthen our confidence in the Bible by making claims that go beyond the evidence. The history of Scripture is already remarkable without exaggeration.

We have seen that the biblical writings were:

- Given over many centuries;
- Carefully copied and transmitted;
- Preserved in numerous ancient manuscripts;
- Translated into other languages;
- Compared across manuscript traditions;
- Supported in many places by historical and archaeological evidence.

None of these facts by itself proves divine inspiration. Inspiration rests upon God's giving of His Word, while manuscript and historical evidence help us understand how that Word has been transmitted to us.

Keeping these two matters distinct gives us a stronger position. God inspired the Scriptures, while the surviving historical evidence enables us to examine their transmission through the generations.

The Scripture Cannot Be Broken

Jesus expressed complete confidence in the authority of Scripture. He said in **John 10:35**:

> *"If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken;"*

The statement *"the scripture cannot be broken"* shows the seriousness with which Jesus regarded the written Word. He did not treat Scripture as an uncertain collection that could simply be ignored when inconvenient.

This same confidence should guide our approach to the Bible. We study its formation and preservation not so that we can place human history above Scripture, but so that we can better understand the remarkable way these writings have come down to us.

Preserved From Generation to Generation

From Moses writing the Law to the prophets recording the messages of God, from the apostles writing the New Testament to scribes producing manuscripts, the Scriptures have passed through many generations. They have crossed languages, nations and centuries, yet they remain available to us today.

That history should cause us to value the Bible we possess. What we can now open and read easily represents centuries of writing, copying, preservation and translation.

Most importantly, the Scriptures were not preserved simply so that an ancient religious document could survive. They were preserved so that the truth of God might continue to be known and so that the testimony concerning Jesus Christ could reach generation after generation.

We have now considered the structure, inspiration, formation, canon, transmission, translation and preservation of the Bible. We can therefore bring this Study Guide to its conclusion by returning to the central purpose of Scripture: the Scriptures testify of Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How can manuscript comparison, the Dead Sea Scrolls and other evidence support confidence in the Bible without exaggeration?

Personal Reflection

Which claim about the Bible's reliability have you accepted or repeated without checking the evidence?

Action Step

Examine one claim about the Bible's preservation and its limits. What will you now say more accurately when others ask about its reliability?

CONCLUSION: THE SCRIPTURES TESTIFY OF JESUS CHRIST

BACK TO CONTENTS

We began this Study Guide by asking how the Bible came to us. We have seen that its writings were inspired, recorded, recognised, copied, translated and preserved through many generations so that the truth of God could continue to be known.

Yet the purpose of Scripture is greater than preserving an ancient record. The Bible continually directs our attention towards Jesus Christ and the purpose of God revealed in Him.

The Scriptures Were Given to Make the Truth Known

Paul reminded Timothy that he had known the Scriptures from childhood and explained what those Scriptures were able to do. Paul wrote in **2 Timothy 3:15**:

> *"And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."*

The Scriptures were able to make Timothy *"wise unto salvation,"* but Paul immediately identifies where that salvation is found: *"through faith which is in Christ Jesus."* The written Word directs us beyond the page to the One in whom salvation is found.

This is why understanding the Bible must involve more than knowing its history, structure and arrangement. Those things are valuable, but they prepare us to understand the message God has preserved within the Scriptures.

The Scriptures Testify of Jesus Christ

Jesus plainly identified Himself as the central subject to whom the Scriptures pointed. He said in **John 5:39**:

> *"Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me."*

The people Jesus addressed possessed the Scriptures and searched them carefully, yet possessing or studying Scripture was not enough if they failed to recognise the One of whom those Scriptures testified.

This gives us an important principle for every Study Guide that follows. We must never become so occupied with the books of the Bible that we lose sight of Jesus Christ, to whom they direct us.

Beginning at Moses and All the Prophets

After His resurrection, Jesus demonstrated how the Scriptures were to be understood. Luke wrote in **Luke 24:27**:

> *"And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself."*

Jesus began with Moses and continued through the prophets, showing how the Scriptures spoke concerning Him. The Old Testament was therefore not simply a collection of laws, histories, poems and prophecies. Within those writings was a continuing testimony pointing forward to Christ.

Later in the same chapter, Jesus stated the principle even more clearly. He said in **Luke 24:44**:

> *"And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me."*

The Law, the Prophets and the Psalms all contained things *"concerning me."* Jesus Christ is therefore not an addition placed at the end of the biblical story. He is the fulfilment towards which the Scriptures had been pointing.

Preserved for the Generations to Come

Throughout this Study Guide, we have followed the Bible through a long history. The Scriptures were written, manuscripts were copied, translations were produced and the Word of God passed from one generation to another.

That preservation has given us an extraordinary privilege. We can open the Bible in our own language and read the same Scriptural testimony that has been handed down through centuries.

The purpose of that preservation is not simply that we might possess a Bible. It is that we might know the truth contained within it and come to understand Jesus Christ more fully.

As we continue through the module Understanding the Bible, we will now begin examining the major divisions and books of Scripture. We will start with the Old Testament, considering the Law, History, Wisdom and Poetry, while remembering the principle established in this Study Guide:

The Scriptures have been preserved so that God's truth may be known, and throughout them all, Jesus Christ is revealed.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does the conclusion connect the preservation of the Bible with its testimony of Jesus Christ?

Personal Reflection

Has this teaching changed what you seek when you open the Bible: facts alone or the truth that leads to Christ?

Action Step

Read an Old Testament verse pointing to Jesus. What will change in your own purpose for reading and trusting God's Word?

SUBMISSION TO COGMA FOR APPRAISAL

Instructions

Complete this section after you have finished the Study Guide. It must be completed online.

The link is located at the bottom of the online Study Guide — https://cogma.com.au/study-guides/

Your answers should reflect your understanding, your personal response, and how you intend to live by the truth you have studied. Answer honestly and be specific.

1. Main Truth

How do the two Testaments and many books form one Bible? Explain why inspiration gives the Bible authority, and why that matters when you read its varied writings.

2. Understanding

How did written revelation in the Old Testament and the witness of Jesus Christ and the apostles become the Old and New Testament Bible verses recognised by God's people?

3. Personal Reflection

Which teaching about the care of scribes, the Dead Sea Scrolls, or manuscript comparison has most affected your confidence in the Bible, and why?

4. Response to Truth

How will you respond personally to the conclusion that the Bible testify of Jesus Christ, beginning with Moses and the Prophets?

5. Action Step

Choose one Old Testament verse and a related New Testament verse that point to Jesus. What will you reconsider about the purpose of Bible study because of their shared testimony, and when will you begin?

6. Early Response

Have you begun comparing those two verses? Explain what you discovered and what changed in your thinking or attitude. If not, identify what has held you back.

7. Ongoing Practice

What ongoing practice will help you read the Bible in context, understand its different books, and handle claims about its preservation with care?

8. Doctrinal Clarity

How do inspiration of the original Bible verses, recognition of the canon, careful copying, and the evidence of surviving manuscripts differ, and how do they relate to the reliability of the Bible?

9. Living the Truth

In a real conversation with someone who questions the Bible's reliability, how will you explain the manuscript evidence and God's promise that His Word endures with confidence without exaggeration?

10. Final Response

Bring together the Bible's inspiration, the recognition of its books, the care taken in copying them, and the witness of the Bible to Jesus Christ. What has become clearer to you, and how should that change the way you read and trust God's Word?