

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA, NY
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“ DEFENDING THE FAITH” (Apologetics - 5)

Review of Previous Study

- 1) **What does the Bible claim?** In other words, what does it teach? What is its message?
- 2) **Is the Bible relevant?** Does what the Bible have to say relevant to every man, woman and child regardless of their background, their culture, or when they lived in history?
- 3) **Is the Bible reliable?** Can we trust what the Bible teaches? Is it consistent? Has it stood the test of time?
- 4) **What has the Bible produced?** In other words, how has it changed lives, how has it affected human history, and how has it impacted our world?

God communicates to us through natural and special (supernatural/divine) revelation. This revelation is called God’s Word in the Bible. God’s Word reveals God’s person and character, His will and ways, and His future plans. It also addresses the nature of man, our purpose, and our destiny. In the Old Testament, it is known in the Hebrew as **dabar**. These words and events were eventually written down by the prophets beginning with Moses. However, with the coming of Christ we have the Word of God in person! The Greek word for this revelation is **logos**. The apostles of God and those closest to the apostles (John Mark, Luke, and the writer of Hebrews) wrote down the teachings, witness, miracles, and events of Jesus while on earth as well as the growth and struggles of the early Church. These writings became the New Testament. All of God’s word is not man-made or originated in the heart of man but was given to them and to us by the inspiration (guidance and power of the Holy Spirit). Thus, God’s living Word is the means of God’s revelation. It has been written down by God’s inspiration (via the Holy Spirit) and it is understood through the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, the Bible addresses and answers most of life’s basic questions.

A few key passages that affirm the above means of God’s revelation are as follows:

2 Timothy 3:16-17: *“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness that the man of God might be adequate, equipped for every good work.” Recall the Greek word for “inspired is “theopneustos” which literally means “God-breathed.”*

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

2 Pet. 1: 20-21: *“But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, 21for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”*

V. Is the Bible Reliable?

A. How did we get the Bible? Some in and certainly many outside the Church contend that the Bible cannot be error free. Hence, they do not consider God’s Word to be infallible or inerrant. Yet, let’s look at what the Lord God says concerning His Word in addition to the passages

quoted above: **Ps. 12:6-7: “The words of the LORD are pure words; as silver tried in a furnace on the earth, refined seven times. You, O LORD, will keep them.”**

Ps. 89:34: “My covenant I will not violate, nor will I alter the utterance of My lips.”

Is. 40:8: “The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever.”

Ps. 119:89: “Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven.”

Mt. 5:18: Jesus said, “For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.”

1 Peter 1:25 quoting Is. 40:7-8 in caps: “For, “ALL FLESH IS LIKE GRASS, AND ALL ITS GLORY LIKE THE FLOWER OF GRASS. THE GRASS WITHERS, AND THE FLOWER FALLS OFF, 25BUT THE WORD OF THE LORD ENDURES FOREVER.” And this is the word which was preached to you.”

The word, “**canon**” from the Greek *kanon*, means a “rule” or “standard for measurement.” First used in the fourth century, this term was applied to Scripture to denote what was considered the standard or rule of God’s revelation. The process which led to the various books being considered inspired and thereby part of the Canon of Holy Scripture a long and complex one. We can only hit on the highpoints. Let’s begin with the...

1. The Hebrew Bible (the Christian Old Testament)

a. Moses – recall that following God’s command Moses had put the words of God’s Law and Writing down for a record and witness of the divine covenant (**Ex. 24:3-8; 12: “Then Moses came and recounted to the people all the words of the LORD and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice and said, “All the words which the LORD has spoken we will do!” 4Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD. Then he arose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain with twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel. 5He sent young men of the sons of Israel, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as peace offerings to the LORD. 6Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and the other half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. 7Then he took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!” 8So Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, and said, “Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.....12Now the LORD said to Moses, “Come up to Me on the mountain and remain there, and I will give you the stone tablets with the law and the commandment which I have written for their instruction.”)**

Though God often spoke through Moses orally, Moses also wrote down God’s commands (**Ex. 17:14; 24:4.7; 34:27; Num. 33:2; Dt. 28:58, 61**). He also is considered to be the author of the first five books of the Old Testament. His authorship was affirmed by Jesus in **Jn. 5:45-47: “Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope. 46“For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me. 47“But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?”**

These five books are known to the Jews as the **Pentateuch** or **Torah**. They serve as the foundation for the Hebrew Scriptures. We know this from Jewish history. When the Book of the Law was found by the high priest Hilkiah, it was read first to the King and then to the congregation (**2 Kings 22-23; 2 Chron. 34**). It was read to the people by Ezra (**Neh. 8:9.14-17; 10:28-39; 13:1-3**). Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures the Pentateuch is revered, **Joshua 1:7, 8:31; Hosea 8:12; Daniel 9:11**, to name a few examples. As a result, the Pentateuch is always the first section in the Hebrew Bible. Though Moses was one of the earliest and greatest prophets (**Num. 12:6-8**), more were expected to follow (**Dt. 18:15-22; 34:10**).

b. **Samuel** – was the next prophet who wrote down God's Word (1 **Sam. 10:25**; 1 **Chron. 29:29** – “*Now the acts of King David, from first to last, are written in the chronicles of Samuel the seer, in the chronicles of Nathan the prophet and in the chronicles of Gad the seer, 30 with all his reign, his power, and the circumstances which came on him, on Israel, and on all the kingdoms of the lands.*” which was mainly historical in nature and served as a basis for 1 & 2 Kings and 1 & 2 Chronicles). We know other prophets also wrote down their oracles – c.f. **Is. 30:8**; **Jer. 25:13, 29:1**; **Ez. 43:11**; **Habakkuk 2:2**; **Dan. 7:1**; **2 Chron. 21:12**.

c. **Why did they write down God's Word?** 1) to preserve it for the future as a memorial (**Ex. 17:14**) or witness (**Dt. 31:24-26**); 2) that it might be there for the time to come (**Is. 30:20**); and 3) to send it to another place (**Jer. 29:1**; **36:1-8**; **2 Chron. 21:12**); The unreliability of oral tradition was well known to the Old Testament writers. For example, the Book of the Law was lost during the wicked reigns of Manasseh and Amon. When it was rediscovered by the priest Hilkiah as already noted above, its teaching came as a great shock, for it had been forgotten (**2 Kings 22-23**; **2 Chron. 34**). Not all the writers of the Hebrew Scriptures were prophets; some were kings (David and Solomon) and others wise men (e.g. some of the Proverbs and Psalms).

d. **the Tanak** - as noted earlier, the Hebrew Bible is divided into three sections – the Law, the Prophets and the Writings or *Hagiographa* (literally “sacred writings” – from which we get the word, “holy scriptures”). **Chronicles** (our 1 & 2 Chronicles) is the last book (scroll) of the Hebrew Bible. Recall this order is affirmed by Jesus in **Mt. 23:35** and **Lk. 11:51** with the phrase “*from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah*” and refers to all the martyred prophets from one end of the canon to the other, from **Genesis 4:3-15** to **2 Chronicles 24:19-22**. The recognition of this sacred threefold division was highlighted by the Hebrew term **Tanak** which became the Jewish acronym for their Holy Scriptures as **Ta** represented the *Torah* (Law), **Na** – *Neviim* (the Prophets) and **K** - *Ketuvim* (the Writings).

e. **the intertestamental period** – various additional writings came to be that were commonly called the **Apocrypha**, but these were never considered to have the same authority as the earlier writings. They were considered additional lesser writings but had been translated into Greek and included along with the Tanak in what would become known as the *Septuagint* (see notes below on p. 5). *First century Jewish historian, Josephus, and Jewish philosopher, Pliny, both wrote that such books were not considered by Jews to have the same authority as their Hebrew Scriptures. Note that while Jesus and the writers of the New Testament both affirmed the Hebrew Scriptures as God's Word, they never quoted from any of the books that were considered Apocryphal.* Yet, the books of the **Apocrypha** are contained in the Bibles of Roman Catholics, Anglicans, and Orthodox Christians. Why? When Jerome, an early church leader developed the famous *Vulgate*, a Latin translation of the Old Testament he used the Hebrew and Aramaic Bible as his primary source, but he also translated the additional writings from Septuagint that were not part of the Hebrew Bible as well. He called the texts “*Apocrypha*” which means “*obscure*” and he insisted that they should never shape any “doctrines of the church.” However, when the great theologian Augustine of Hippo went ahead with a newer Latin translation of the Holy Scriptures a couple decades later, he believed that the additional texts should be also considered God's Word. Three ensuing Church Councils (meetings of the bishops of the church) affirmed this and as a result the Apocrypha became part of Roman Catholic and Orthodox Bibles. In the Anglican and Lutheran traditions, we can read them for some historical background and for spiritual wisdom but not to establish any doctrine for the reasons mentioned above. The Roman Catholic Church reaffirmed the status of the Apocrypha at the Council of Trent in 1546 after the Protestant Reformation in order to justify the doctrine of purgatory.

2. the New Testament

Recall Jesus' words in **John 14:26** – “*But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you. John 16:13: But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to*

come. 14“*He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you.*” The Holy Spirit will be the One guiding the Church to know what teachings should be included and maintained.

Church father and writer, **Tertullian**, was one of the first to use the term, “***New Testament,***” in **190 AD**. The Apostle Paul commands in **I Thess. 5:27** that his letter be read to all the believers and considers his word to be the “***the Lord’s commandment***” in **I Cor. 14:37**.

The Apostle Peter also highlighted that even Paul’s letters were beginning to be seen as on the same level as the teachings of Jesus as well as the Hebrew Bible. Note **2 Peter 3:15-16**: “***and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, 16as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.***”)

In **95 AD** **Clement of Rome** wrote to the Christians in Corinth **freely using material from Matthew and Luke**. He is familiar with Romans and Corinthians and there are also reflections on **1 Timothy, Titus, 1 Peter and Ephesians**. In addition, throughout the later 1st and during the 2nd centuries the early Church Fathers (e.g. **Clement, Polycarp, and Ignatius**) **quote extensively** from the New Testament books thereby demonstrating the trust they placed in them. Even the heretic **Marcion (c. 150 AD)**, defined a limited canon of his own, rejecting the entire Old Testament, and only keeping Luke’s Gospel (except chapters 1 and 2) and Paul’s letters except the Pastoral ones (1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon). **This shows that there was already a common understanding of what was considered “inspired” by the early Church.**

Towards the end of the second century **Justin Martyr** treated the writings of the New Testament on par with the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament), stating that the same voice that spoke through Abraham and the prophets was the same voice that spoke through the apostles.

During the third century there was general agreement in both the West and the East on which NT books were considered inspired. There was some debate over some of the general epistles (Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 & 3 John, and Jude) and the book of Revelation, in that not all churches and leaders viewed them as inspired. Finally in the early 4th century, Bishop and historian Eusebius writes in his *Church History*, that it was **universally agreed upon that the four Gospels, Acts, the letters of Paul (including Hebrews), 1 Peter, 1 John, and Revelation were canonical.** The majority, including Eusebius, believed James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John and Jude were also canonical. However, the *Acts of Paul*, the *Didache*, and the *Shepherd of Hermas* were classified as “spurious” and still other writings listed as “heretical and absurd.”

In **367 AD**, **Bishop Athanasius of Alexandria** writes in his *Festal Letter* concerning the 27 New Testament books, “*let no one add to these, let nothing be taken away.*” Then at the Council of Carthage in 397 AD, the bishops decreed that “*aside from canonical Scriptures nothing is to be read in church under the Name of Divine Scriptures*” except the 27 NT books.

Thus, contrary to the erroneous conclusion by many secular and some “liberal” Christian scholars that the Church created the Canon by some hierarchal decree, the Church in fact “discovered” God’s Word over the course of time and human experience. Undoubtedly, the Holy Spirit was working through the saints to put together God’s final witness for humanity. *Why is the Canon closed?* Jesus Christ has completed the first part of His mission and has given us all that we need until His return. Moreover, all those who walked with Christ and witnessed His resurrection have gone on to be with the Lord. Finally, it is fitting that Revelation, the last book of the Bible warns that no one add to or take away from the words of the book of this prophecy (**Rev. 22:18-19** “***I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; 19and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.***”).

VI. The Preservation of God's Word

Now we come to the question, **how was God's Word preserved?** If we can see why the books that we have in the Bible are inspired, how do we know that what we read today in the Bible is the same that the people read 2000 or more years ago? To answer that question, we need to look at how the Scriptures were first put together. However, before we continue it should be noted that we have more ancient manuscripts and fragments of the Old and New Testament than any other ancient document. Homer's epic poems, *the Iliad and the Oddysey* (800 BC) are very distant seconds with only about 1800 manuscripts and fragments and these are mostly dated 1800 years after the time – though some fragments on clay have been dated to 300 BC. So too the works of Plato with only 200 manuscripts, the earliest dated to 895 AD – 1400 years later than when Plato lived!

1. The Old Testament

a. Masoretic Text – written in Hebrew, these manuscripts refer to the Hebrew Bible that were copied by the Marosetes, Jewish scholars and scribes who lived in Tiberius on near the Sea of Galilee and flourished from 500-1000 AD. They standardized the traditional Hebrew consonantal text by adding vowel pointing and marginal notes. The oldest dated Masoretic manuscript is dated 895 AD. These Hebrew copies were considered the earliest known preserved copies until 1947. **Renowned biblical scholar FF Bruce writes,** *“The Masorettes were well disciplined and treated the text with the greatest imaginable reverence, and devised a complicated system of safeguards against scribal slips. They counted for example, the number of times each letter of the alphabet occurs in each book; they pointed out the middle letter of the Pentateuch and the middle letter of the whole Hebrew Bible, and made even more detailed calculations than these.”*

b. Dead Sea Scrolls - these are the hundreds of ancient manuscripts that were found in a cave in Qumran near the Dead Sea in 1947. This was a treasure trove of valuable Hebrew manuscripts dating from the first century AD and earlier. It contained a complete scroll of Isaiah with a date of at least 100 BC and portions of all our Old Testament books except Esther, with the oldest fragment being from Exodus and dated about 250 BC! Amazingly, when compared with the Masoretic Texts (see above), they are remarkably similar, **the only differences found in spelling and grammar.** For example, of the 166 words in Isaiah 53, there are only seventeen letters in question. Ten are a matter of spelling, four are minor stylistic changes such as conjunctions and the remaining three letters comprise the word, “light” which is added to verse 11 but does not affect the meaning greatly. Thus, **after 1000 years of transmission there is only one word in question and it doesn't even affect the meaning of the passage!**

c. Septuagint LXX - much older than the Masoretic text, this was a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures undertaken by 70 Jewish scholars in Alexandria, Egypt during the 3rd century BC. After the conquests of Alexander the Great, Greek became the common language of much of the Near East. So, Jews thought it wise to translate their Hebrew Bibles into Greek. Later, the Septuagint, was used by the early Church because it was written in Greek, and thereby could reach the Gentiles more effectively. Thus, today's scholars have these copies to compare and contrast with the other Hebrew manuscripts, to determine the accuracy of the written texts.

d. Other manuscripts and fragments - one can also add the Syriac, Aramaic and Latin manuscripts and additional fragments of the Hebrew Scriptures that have been discovered as well as the quotations of the Old Testament by the early Church Fathers.

2. The New Testament - the oldest known manuscript is a fragment of John's Gospel containing **John 18:31-34, 37-38**, dated around 110-125 AD. There is also a manuscript known as **the Chester Beatty Papyrus II** containing all of Paul's epistles except the pastorals, which is thought to be dated around 150 AD.

Some of the most important NT papyrus manuscripts are as follows:

a. Codex Sinaiticus – circ 350 AD. discovered in the 19th century by Constantin von Tischendorf in St. Catherine’s Monastery situated at the foot of Mount Sinai. It contains the entire New Testament.

b. Codex Vaticanus – held in the Vatican library since at least 1481, but not made available to scholars until the middle of the 19th century, this codex dated slightly earlier than *Codex Sinaiticus* has both the Old Testament and New Testament in Greek, excluding the last part of the NT from Heb. 9:15 – Revelation and the Pastoral Epistles.

c. Codex Alexandrius – dated from the 5th century AD it contains almost the entire New Testament.

Add to these over five thousand other Greek manuscripts and fragments of individual NT books and over 19,000 in other languages (Latin, Ethiopic, Slavic, Armenian etc.) it is easy to see why we can know that our New Testament today is virtually identical to the original autographs.

Recall from our previous study that both Jesus and Paul recognized the inspiration of the *Hebrew Scriptures* (the Old Testament). Moreover, Paul believed his writings were inspired (1 Cor. 4:2; 15:3; 1 Thes. 2:13; 4:15.) Peter believed the other apostle’s writings were inspired (2 Pet. 3:1-2: ***This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you in which I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, that you should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken by your apostles.***) and Peter believed Paul’s writings specifically to be inspired as noted earlier - 2 Peter 3:15-16: ***“and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, 16as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.”***)

C. So how did the Scriptures become “Holy” Scriptures, the very Word of God? What were the factors that led to certain writings being considered God inspired versus man-made?

1. Did it come from those who had direct contact with the Lord (ie. a known prophet or apostle) or someone who had a close relationship with one of the above?
2. Did it speak with authority concerning the things of God?
3. Did it fit within the Divine Covenants God made with man?
4. How often was it used – was it essential to the life of the faith community?
5. Was it universally accepted – used by the people of Israel and groups of early Christians?
6. Was it universally applicable?
7. Did it focus on Jesus Christ?

D. The Lost Gospels? – much as been made of the two dozen or so “lost” gospels. They really were never lost, just never accepted by the early Church and for good reason! Titles like *the Gospel of the Savior, the Gospel of Thomas, the Acts of John* suggest authority because the names of Jesus or the apostles were attached to the writings. However, upon closer analysis, these works are spurious as they are dated well into the second century, are usually related to Gnostic heresies, and/or have exaggerated accounts of what Jesus and His apostles did. There were also Christian writings among these like *the Gospel of Peter* and *Apocalypse of Peter* that did not necessarily contradict the Gospels but they could not be connected to the original apostles or made additional or obscure theological points and claims that were not found in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.