

**EXAMINE THE EVIDENCE**  
“The BIBLE: A Message from God”  
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**INTRODUCTION:**

In my opinion there is no topic that is currently more important for the Christian church in the western world than the one we are going to examine tonight. The Bible is at the heart of the Christian faith and it is under attack as it has not been for many centuries. Both Christians and Jews have been known as people of the book because of the importance we place on the Bible and I perceive this topic as of utmost importance for all of us. But I wonder if there has ever been a period in church history when the reliability of the Bible itself has been the focus of such venomous rage as in our own time?

Many years ago a man who heard me speak on the radio accused me of being a bibliolater; in other words, he accused me of worshipping the Bible. Now there are worse things I could be accused of than that, at least I can put that word into print, but frankly it would be heretical to worship the Bible. We do not believe that there are four persons to the godhead; Christians worship only God – not the book we believe to have come from Him.

However, it is certainly no secret that I have a very high view of the Bible. This has come both from my heritage of growing up in the church and also from my personal study that has brought me to even love it. So when I read a book or watch a television program that blatantly says there are serious reasons to doubt the trustworthiness of the Bible it angers me because I understand how flimsy and weak those arguments are. And in spite of a footnote which may say the book is fictional, as is the case with The DaVinci Code, or the fact that a documentary program does include a Bible believer among the scholars, when the dust has settled the bottom line is that people are left with the smell of doubt. We all assume that these things wouldn't have been publicized if there wasn't a real and serious controversy among honest scholars who are in the know. For example, why don't we ever see a docudrama about the “controversy” over whether the earth is flat? The answer is that we all know it is round. But when we watch the TV program casting doubt upon the Bible most people are not equipped to sift through the baloney.

Now with that said I will confess that I don't look at biblical inspiration in quite the same light as I did when I was a young man. While I adhere completely to Bethel's doctrinal statement that the Bible is the Word God, fully inspired and without error in the original manuscripts, written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit with supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct, etc., I do not today understand this as a mechanical thing. I also take a lot more seriously the short phrase, “in the original manuscripts” than I used to. So I will assure anyone who happens to read these words that I have not in any way ceased to believe the innate truth of those words, but I have paid a lot more attention to what the words actually say and mean. And I also believe with all my heart that there are very few passages where we just don't know what the original words were.

Of course what is going on today is much broader than just casting doubt upon the Bible; Christianity itself is under attack. This becomes apparent quite regularly every year both at Christmas and Easter when the public debate is renewed over what to make of the virgin birth and the resurrection, and even as to how we Americans should refer to these holidays. But make no mistake about it, the battle isn't over Christmas or Easter, it is over Christianity – and it is centered on whether or not the Bible can be trusted as having come to us from first century Christians. So this is the topic of this presentation.

For most of us the matter was brought painfully to light through Dan Brown's Novel, The DaVinci Code. A few months later the vehement feelings were aired again in the vitriolic controversy over Mel Gibson's movie, "The Passion of the Christ." It also shows up in the seemingly endless television programs focused on the Bible and Christianity being aired on ABC, NBC and CBS, the History and Discover Channels, and even on the National Geographic channel! Most Americans have heard something about the Jesus Seminar where self-proclaimed Bible scholars voted with red, pink, grey and black beads on how certain we are that the words of the Bible even came from Jesus. We are in a culture war in America and the battle ground centers on the Bible. Who wrote it? Can the documents be trusted? Why are just four Gospels included when we now understand there could be as many as sixteen!?! In fact, we now read that there were competing "Christianities" as early as the first century AD and the question is raised as to whether the "right one" came out on top in the fourth century. Should we dare base our life decisions on a book that is accused of being fundamentally false? This is the scope of the battle.

Adding perhaps more serious fuel to the fire is the recent publication of two books, The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture; Lost Christianities, Lost Scriptures; and Misquoting Jesus, and Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why. Both books were written by Bart Ehrman, a man who has been called a "lapsed evangelical" but who is self-described as an agnostic. One of the very troubling things about this man is the fact that he is a graduate of both Moody Bible Institute and Wheaton College! It was while he was doing graduate work at Princeton Theological Seminary that he abandoned his trust in the Bible. If a person with this kind of a background could turn so far from the Christian faith then there is cause for concern to all of us.

Let me read you something that Ehrman wrote. "How does it help us to say that the Bible is the inerrant word of God if in fact we don't have the words that God inerrantly inspired, but only the words copied by the scribes – sometimes correctly but sometimes (many times!) incorrectly? We don't have the originals! We have only error-ridden copies, and the vast majority of these are centuries removed from the originals and different from them, evidently, in thousands of ways." Misquoting Jesus, p. 89-90.

Ehrman claims that there were alternate Christianities prior to AD 325 and that the Bible was intentionally altered by the scribes for theological and other reasons. The Case for the Real Jesus, p 67. He claims there are so many errors in the New Testament that it is impossible to recover the text with between 200,000 to 400,000 variants among the

manuscripts, "... more variants among the manuscripts than there are words in the New Testament!" The Case for the Real Jesus, p 67. I checked it out and found that there are only 180,552 total words in the entire New Testament. So for Mr. Ehrman to claim that there are possibly more than double the number of errors than there even are words in the New Testament says there is something deceitful in what he has done.

Here is the outline of what I intend to cover:

How did we get the Bible that we have today?

How accurate is the text that we have?

Can we trust that the Bible we have includes the "right" books?

Internal Evidences for the Truth of the Bible.

### **HOW DID WE GET THE NEW TESTAMENT THAT WE HAVE TODAY?**

The question seems simple but the answer is rather complicated. The fact of the matter is that what we hold in our hands is the result of copies being made of copies of copies of copies of copies, over and over for hundreds and hundreds of years. And the copies were all done by hand; no Xerox machines existed and the printing press was not invented until the fifteenth century. When we copy things by hand we can expect that mistakes will occur, and they did, and this is at the heart of the issue.

It would be nice to have the luxury of referring back to the original manuscripts held under glass in a humidity controlled room in some secure library defended against any possibility of harm or destruction. But that is not the case; we do not have the original autographs, they all turned to dust or were lost and destroyed centuries ago at best. What we have is those copies - and even then often times we have only fragments of the copies. We have things that have been translated into other languages and we have individual verses that were copied into letters or sermons that have survived. But make no mistake about it; we have a LOT of these copies as I will show you now.

*"The earliest complete manuscripts that lie behind our modern translations of the New Testament, such as Codex Sinaiticus and Codes Vaticanus, are both from the fourth to fifth centuries AD, their exemplars (manuscript copies from which they were copied) having also disappeared."* Searching for the Original Bible, p 46. So why do we believe we can trust the Bible? First, because of the mountain of material we do have, especially when we compare it to other ancient writings that are accepted without question. And second, because of the care most copyists used and the scholarship involved in finding the original wording. The following quotation is an interview of Dr. Bruce Metzger by Lee Strobel on ancient sources for other historical authors. Dr. Metzger speaks first.

"Consider Tacitus, the Roman historian who wrote his *Annals of Imperial Rome* in about AD 116," he began. "His first six books exist today in only one manuscript, and it was copied about AD 850. Books eleven through sixteen are in another manuscript dating from the eleventh century. Books seven through ten are lost. So there is a long gap between the time that Tacitus sought his information and wrote it down and the only existing copies.

“With regard to the first-century historian Josephus, we have nine Greek manuscripts of his work *The Jewish War*, and these copies were written in the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth centuries. There is a Latin translation from the fourth century and medieval Russian materials from the eleventh or twelfth century.”

Those numbers were surprising. There is but the thinnest thread of manuscripts connecting these ancient works to the modern world. “By comparison,” I asked, “how many New Testament Greek manuscripts are in existence today?”

Metzger’s eyes got wide. “More than five thousand have been cataloged,” he said with enthusiasm, his voice going up an octave.

That was a mountain of manuscripts compared to the anthills of Tacitus and Josephus! “Is that usual in the ancient world? What would the runner-up be?” I asked.

“The quantity of New Testament material is almost embarrassing in comparison with other works of antiquity,” he said. “Next to the New Testament, the greatest amount of manuscript testimony is of Homer’s *Iliad*, which was the bible of the ancient Greeks. There are fewer than 650 Greek manuscripts of it today. Some are quite fragmentary. They come down to us from the second and third century AD and following. When you consider that Homer composed his epic about 800 BC, you can see there’s a very lengthy gap.”

“Very lengthy” was an understatement; it was a thousand years! There was in fact no comparison: the manuscript evidence for the New Testament was overwhelming when juxtaposed against other revered writings of antiquity—works that modern scholars have absolutely no reluctance treating as authentic. The Case for Christ, p 77-78.

The interview then moved on to the question of how far back do we go in what we possess that is actually from the New Testament. What is the oldest piece that we have?

“Of the entire New Testament,” I said, “what is the earliest portion that we possess today?”

Metzger didn’t have to ponder the answer. “That would be a fragment of the gospel of John, containing material from chapter eighteen. It has five verses—three on one side, two on the other—and it measures about two and a half by three and a half inches,” he said.

“How was it discovered?”

“It was purchased in Egypt as early as 1920, but it sat unnoticed for years among similar fragments of papyri. Then in 1934 C. H. Roberts of Saint John’s College,

Oxford, was sorting through the papyri at the John Rylands Library in Manchester, England. He immediately recognized this as preserving a portion of John's gospel. He was able to date it from the style of the script."

"And what was his conclusion?" I asked. "How far back does it go?"

"He concluded it originated between AD 100 to 150. Lots of other prominent paleographers, like Sir Frederic Kenyon, Sir Harold Bell, Adolf Deissmann, W.H.P. Hatch, Ulrich Wilcken, and others, have agreed with his assessment. Deissmann was convinced that it goes back at least to the reign of Emperor Hadrian, which was AD 117-138, or even Emperor Trajan, which was AD 98-117."

That was a stunning discovery. The reason: skeptical German theologians in the last century argued strenuously that the fourth gospel was not even composed until at least the year 160—too distant from the events of Jesus' life to be of much historical use. They were able to influence generations of scholars, who scoffed at this gospel's reliability.

"This certainly blows that opinion out of the water," I commented.

"Yes, it does," he said. "Here we have, at a very early date, a fragment of a copy of John all the way over in a community along the Nile River in Egypt, far from Ephesus in Asia Minor, where the gospel was probably originally composed."

This finding has literally rewritten popular views of history, pushing the composition of John's gospel much closer to the days when Jesus walked the earth. The Case for Christ, p 79-80.

To sum up this section on the vast amount of New Testament material that we have at our disposal to draw from today, let me quote from Dr. Randall Price.

"The most important documents for recovering the original wording of the New Testament are the Greek manuscripts. These are a total of 5745 manuscripts (to date), divided into four classes according to the materials from which they are made or their particular style of writing. (The number after the name of the class is the number of copies that presently exist.)

1. *Papyri* (118). Manuscripts written in the second to sixth centuries AD on paper made from the papyrus plant into scrolls and written on with ink.
2. *Uncials* (317). Manuscripts written in the fourth to tenth centuries AD in large elegant "capital" letters that are disconnected from one another, although words were not separated and no punctuation was used. These are written on parchment (sheepskins or goatskins) or vellum (treated calfskin) with ink.
3. *Minuscules* (2877). Manuscripts written in the ninth to sixteenth centuries AD in smaller cursive script, in which the letters are connected to one another (written with a running hand).

4. *Lectionaries* (2433). Manuscripts in which the books of the New Testament are arranged for daily study and meditation, and not according to the canonical order.

The earliest manuscripts are those written on papyrus. These are the most significant for the early history and restoration of the original text. The earliest of these is a fragment of John 18 known as Papyrus 52 that dates to about AD 125. There is also a collection of five papyri manuscripts from Oxford University that brings the number of the earliest manuscripts (early as second century AD) to 15.

Several of the important early manuscripts dating to around AD 200 contain portions of the Gospels and epistles. Searching for the Original Bible, pp 77-79.

However, this is not the entire picture. “In addition to the Greek documents, he said, there are thousands of other ancient New Testament manuscripts in other languages. There are 8,000 to 10,000 Latin Vulgate manuscripts, plus a total of 8,000 in Ethiopic, Slavic, and Armenian. In all, there are about 24,000 manuscripts in existence.” The Case for Christ, p. 81.

### **HOW ACCURATE IS THE TEXT THAT WE HAVE?**

To what extent can we trust the Bible? The fact of the matter is that Christian scholars have labored for centuries using the very best source material and techniques available to find the original words that were written by the men who wrote the New Testament. These people have been both diligent and honest and they have succeeded to the extent that I have read from more than one source that the text we have today is 99% to 99.5% accurate to what was penned by the authors. Let me return again to the interview by Lee Strobel of Dr. Bruce Metzger when he directly asked him, “How many doctrines of the church are in jeopardy because of variants?”

“I don’t know of any doctrine that is in jeopardy,” he responded confidently.

“None?”

“None,” he repeated. “Now, the Jehovah’s Witnesses come to our door and say, ‘Your Bible is wrong in the King James Version of 1 John 5:7-8, where it talks about ‘the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.’ They’ll say, ‘That’s not in the earliest manuscripts.’”

“And that’s true enough. I think that these words are found in only about seven or eight copies, all from the fifteenth or sixteenth century. I acknowledge that is not part of what the author of 1 John was inspired to write.

“But that does not dislodge the firmly witnessed testimony of the Bible to the doctrine of the Trinity. At the baptism of Jesus, the Father speaks, his beloved Son is baptized, and the Holy Spirit descends on him. At the ending of 2 Corinthians

Paul says, ‘May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.’ There are many places where the Trinity is represented.”

“So the variations, when they occur, tend to be minor rather than substantive?”

“Yes, yes, that’s correct, and the scholars work very carefully to try to resolve them by getting back to the original meaning. The more significant variations do not over-throw any doctrine of the church. Any good Bible will have notes that will alert the reader to variant readings of any consequence. But again, these are rare.”

So rare that scholars Norman Geisler and William Nix conclude. “The New Testament, then, has not only survived in more manuscripts than any other book from antiquity, but it has survived in a purer form than any other great book—a form that is 99.5 percent pure.” The Case for Christ, p 84-85.

### **CAN WE TRUST THAT THE BIBLE CONTAINS THE RIGHT BOOKS?**

The charge is made in the DaVinci Code that the books of the New Testament were chosen only after a prolonged struggle between competing Christianities. Especially the New Testament teaching of the deity of Jesus has been attacked with the charge made that this is something Jesus neither taught nor believed Himself. Depending on which skeptic you read we are told that there are numerous other “gospels” that could have been included in the New Testament which were instead excluded because of political wrangling in the struggle for power. Dan Brown wrote that thousands of convincing documents exist that disprove Christianity. To this Dr. Erwin Lutzer responded, “Let’s call his bluff and insist that he find them and present them to the world! Of course it is a cheap shot to make such a claim without offering the tiniest shred of evidence. How desperate one must be to build a case for unbelief on imaginary documents.” The DaVinci Deception, p 123. Unfortunately, the bigger the lie and the more boldly it is told the more likely that we humans are going to believe it is true.

Dan Brown has probably been the most successful person to date in managing to convince large numbers of people to doubt that the four Gospels alone belong where they are in the Bible. He blatantly wrote that the Roman Emperor Constantine called the First Council of Nicea (AD 325) in order to get rid of competing gospels and to decide which books should be included in the New Testament. But the true fact of the matter is that the Council of Nicea had nothing to do with the question of the canon of the New Testament. The Bishops who came used the already existing New Testament to decide what it really taught about the nature of Jesus, specifically as to whether or not he was of the same substance of God or only similar to God. And, by the way, rather than being a cliff hanger vote the facts of history are that out of either 250 or 318 voting Bishops all but two signed the resulting Nicene Creed affirming that the Bible teaches the deity of Jesus. This means that not even 1% of the delegates failed to affirm their solid belief in what is probably the most radical claim that Christians make, and this less than 300 years after Jesus lived! Now, back to the conversation between Lee Strobel and Dr. Bruce Metzger.

“What about allegations that church councils squelched equally legitimate documents because they didn’t like the picture of Jesus they portrayed? How do we know that the twenty-seven books of the New Testament represent the best and most reliable information? Why is it that our Bibles contain Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, but many other ancient gospels—the Gospel of Philip, the Gospel of the Egyptians, the Gospel of Truth, the Gospel of Nativity of Mary—were excluded?”

It was time to turn to the question of the “canon,” a term that comes from a Greek word meaning “rule,” “norm,” or “standard” and that describes the books that have become accepted as official in the church and included in the New Testament. Metzger is considered a leading authority in that field.

“How did the early church leaders determine which books would be considered authoritative and which would be discarded?” I asked. “What criteria did they use in determining which documents would be included in the New Testament?”

“Basically, the early church had three criteria,” he said. “First, the books must have apostolic authority—that is, they must have been written either by apostles themselves, who were eyewitnesses to what they wrote about, or by followers of apostles. So in the case of Mark and Luke, while they weren’t among the twelve disciples, early tradition has it that Mark was a helper of Peter, and Luke was an associate of Paul.

“Second, there was the criterion of conformity to what was called the rule of faith. That is, was the document congruent with the basic Christian tradition that the church recognized as normative? And third, there was the criterion of whether a document had had continuous acceptance and usage by the church at large.”

“They merely applied those criteria and let the chips fall where they may?” I asked.

“Well, it wouldn’t be accurate to say that these criteria were simply applied in a mechanical fashion,” he replied. “There were certainly different opinions about which criterion should be given the most weight.

“But what’s remarkable is that even though the fringes of the canon remained unsettled for a while, there was actually a high degree of unanimity concerning the greater part of the New Testament within the first two centuries. And this was true among very diverse congregations scattered over a wide area.”

“So,” I said, “the four gospels we have in the New Testament today met those criteria, while others didn’t?”

“Yes,” he said. “It was, if I may put it this way, an example of ‘survival of the fittest.’ In talking about the canon, Arthur Darby Nock used to tell his students at Harvard, ‘The most traveled roads in Europe are the best roads; that’s why they’re

so heavily traveled.’ That’s a good analogy. British commentator William Barclay said it this way: ‘It is the simple truth to say that the New Testament books became canonical because no one could stop them doing so.’

“We can be confident that no other ancient books can compare with the New Testament in terms of importance for Christian history or doctrine. When one studies the early history of the canon, one walks away convinced that the New Testament contains the best sources for the history of Jesus. Those who discerned the limits of the canon had a clear and balanced perspective of the gospel of Christ.

“Just read these other documents for yourself. They’re written later than the four gospels, in the second, third, fourth, fifth, even sixth century, long after Jesus, and they’re generally quite banal. They carry names—like the Gospel of Peter and the Gospel of Mary—that are unrelated to their real authorship. On the other hand, the four gospels in the New Testament were readily accepted with remarkable unanimity as being authentic in the story they told.” The Case for Christ, pp. 85-87.

Dr. Bruce Metzger has also written extensively on the development of the canon of the Old Testament. So follow along as I briefly turn to him again in regard to that part of our Bible.

“The Torah (the five books of Moses) had already been canonized in some form possibly as early as 622 BC (when the true Torah was "discovered" and ceremoniously declared official by King Josiah)...

“The prophets, not including Daniel (which did not become part of the Hebrew canon until the synod of Jabneh...), appear to have been "canonized" by tradition alone sometime before the 4th century BC.

“The surest decision was made in the 2nd century BC when the Septuagint, an "official" Greek translation, was made by a council of seventy Jewish scholars in Alexandria.

“Evidence points to the completion of the OT canon by a Synod at Jabneh between 90 and 100 A.D., where an assembly of rabbis decided which books ... were to be regarded as genuine. Although there was no effective hierarchical organization to enforce adherence, by the following century the decision of this council came to be accepted by all parties, including the Christians.

“We know that Christians adopted the Jewish ruling on the OT canon, from a letter of Melito, bishop of Sardis (in Lydia) in the reign of Marcus Aurelius (AD 161-180), where he explicitly states that, to establish which OT books were authoritative, he went to Palestine and inquired among the Hebrews (Eusebius, *History of the Church* 4.26.13).”

Our Old Testament comes to us from what is known as the Masoretic Text. The oldest copy in existence today dates to the tenth century AD; its name comes from the Masoretes, Jewish scribes who copied and edited and preserved the Old Testament for many hundreds of years prior to that. We know that they were so exceedingly careful not to alter the text that they would only write in the margin what they “knew” should be the correct reading whenever they came to a disputed passage.

“Two scribal schools were involved in the production of the Masoretic Text: The Eastern, or Babylonian, school; and the Western, or Palestinian, school. The Palestinian school had two branches: the families of Aaron ben Moses ben Asher and the ben Naphtali in Tiberias (northern Israel). Although these two families upheld two separate textual traditions, between them there were only eight small differences in the consonantal text – and in fact, their traditions actually represented one text with minor variations.” Searching for the Original Bible, p 58.

However, when it comes to the Old Testament we are uniquely blessed to have the Dead Sea Scrolls which were discovered starting in 1947. Until that happened even the Masoretic Text was separated by a span of something like 1300 years from the time when the original copy of newest book in the Old Testament was written to the oldest copy we then possessed. All of that changed when a shepherd boy, looking for some lost goats, threw a rock into a cave in a cliff just a few miles south of Jericho on the northwest edge of the Dead Sea.

“...all doubts were laid to rest with the discovery in Cave 1 of a copy of the entire book of Isaiah dated to 125 BC, 1000 years earlier than the Aleppo Codex. This scroll, itself a many-generational copy, proved to be identical to the Masoretic Text of Isaiah in more than 95 percent of the text. The 5 percent variation consisted primarily of obvious slips of the pen and spelling alterations. This also proved to be the case for all of the other biblical scrolls among the Dead Sea Scrolls.” Searching for the Original Bible, p 65.

When we take the weight of all the evidence regarding the trustworthiness of the Bible as we possess it today, this is the conclusion that we are forced to draw.

“In regard to the New Testament, for over four-fifths of it, the Greek text is considered 100 percent certain, regardless of which text type might be favored by any critic. Moreover, regarding the entire Bible, through the science of textual criticism at least 95 percent of the original text of the Old Testament has been recovered, and 99 percent of the New Testament. Any historian would be thrilled beyond measure to have such a transcription rate for any ancient document.” Searching for the Original Bible, p 208.

## INTERNAL EVIDENCES FOR THE TRUTH OF THE BIBLE.

“The truth that the Bible is a book from God is seen in the fact that it has survived so much bad preaching.” Anonymous.

### Isaiah 40:8

<sup>8</sup>The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever."

I was taught from my childhood up that the Bible is a book from God. I accepted this at face value and got on with my life. I began my journey of personally believing that the Bible is a book from God when I was in Bible College. It hit me as I was required to read extended portions of it in the course of my studies when for the first time I saw the beauty and power of those words. My understanding deepened by several factors when I started to wrestle with the Apostle Paul's letter to the Romans and what the Grace of God is as expressed in the death of Jesus and what that means to me. It is hard to defend something that is fundamentally subjective, but it is a subjectivity based on the objective fact of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus and how it changed my life for the good. I don't want to be flippant about it but my fear of death was virtually gone in an instant of understanding. Probably for the first time I saw the power of the truth of God's Word to transform someone. By the end of my final year of Bible College I would read my Bible with an eager anticipation of what I was going to hear from God.

Since then my belief that God has spoken to us through this grand old book has only deepened. I have related many times how I came to an even more complete understanding in my last few weeks of seminary when I sat under the teaching of Dr. Lit-sen Chang. The Spirit of God truly touched my heart, soul and mind and by the end of a three week course I had come to believe more firmly than every before that the Bible is a book from God; I have not been the same since.

Of course, this is not to imply that everything has been smooth sailing for me. When I was in my early twenties I was challenged by someone who observed that Matthew 27:5 says that Judas hanged himself, while Dr. Luke states in Acts 1:18 that "*he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out.*" A rather graphic description to say the least! Nevertheless, it is an obvious contradiction and one that I was not able to reconcile through any commentary that I could find. So I was faced with a knotty question that has perplexed a lot of people over the years. I finally had to lay it to rest with the possibility that perhaps this was one of those textual issues. I remember that I reasoned: "Christianity is about the resurrection of Jesus, not about how Judas died." So I left it at that and moved on with the idea stuck in the back of my mind that perhaps I would ask the Lord about it someday. But what enabled me to do this was that growing conviction that the Bible is a book from God. It was a wise choice to place that pot on the back burner of my brain.

It was probably twelve or fifteen years later that a light of possibility as to what may have happened to Judas went on in my head. I was reading about how the ancient Persians would torture their enemies by throwing them from a cliff onto sharpened sticks stuck in the ground. Out of the clear blue the thought came, "that may have been how Judas

hanged himself.” Possibly what hanging meant to Matthew was to throw oneself onto a spear stuck in the ground, in which case the individual would be disemboweled and die as his intestines spilled out so that perhaps the alleged contradiction arises from our cultural understanding that to hang a person means a rope around the neck. I’m not certain that this is what happened to Judas but it surely is possible. The bottom line is that when it comes to understanding the Bible, in addition to textual things to consider we have to take into account cultural and historical matters as well. In many cases it is wise to not be rigidly dogmatic one way or the other as to how much we can trust the Bible. It is both a living document and one that was written in a specific cultural setting.

Since the Bible is a book that was obviously written by men, how can we say with any degree of confidence that it came from God? And if it did, what was the process of transmission? Is there any perceptible reason we can detect as to why God would have communicated to mankind through a book which would be so hotly debated over the centuries?

That the Bible at the very least came through human beings is very obvious. In fact, it is so directly blunt about it that we read at least 70 times in the Old Testament that, “The Word of the Lord came to me,” a phrase that is found repeatedly in the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel especially.

However, the process of inspiration does not always appear to have been one of dictation. For one thing, the style and personality of the various authors clearly comes through so that we see the legal mind of Moses, the poetic mind of David, and the scholarly mind of the Apostle Paul in the words each of them wrote. Peter the fisherman wrote differently than did John or James yet we believe all of them put down the words God intended. At the least I conclude that God is neither limited to one personality type nor is He unwilling to use the whole spectrum of human personalities.

At the same time, in the midst of the divergence of styles there is an amazing unity of theme and purpose. Though the individual parts of the Bible were written over a span of approximately 1600 years by a total of about forty different men there is a thread of agreement from start to finish on the most controversial and divisive subjects known to mankind. This unity in diversity virtually demands that a higher hand guided each individual human author.

Jesus certainly had a high view of the Scriptures. Listen carefully to what he said in the Sermon on the Mount. <sup>17</sup>*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.* <sup>18</sup>*I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.”* Matthew 5:17-18. And the Apostle Peter also viewed the writings of Paul as Scripture according to what he wrote in II Peter 3:15-16, <sup>15</sup>*Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him.* <sup>16</sup>*He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as*

*they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.*" This shows that it was very early in the life of the church that Christians began seeing these writings as being inspired by God.

So how did the various authors get the specific words to write? On some occasions it seems that it was by dictation, for example, look at the following passages which say Moses received from God the exact words which he wrote.

Exodus 17:14

*<sup>14</sup>Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it..."*

Exodus 24:3-4

*<sup>3</sup>When Moses went and told the people all the LORD's words and laws, they responded with one voice, "Everything the LORD has said we will do." <sup>4</sup>Moses then wrote down everything the LORD had said.*

Exodus 34:1; 27-28

*<sup>1</sup>The LORD said to Moses, "Chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones, and I will write on them the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke.*

*<sup>27</sup>Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel." <sup>28</sup>Moses was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights without eating bread or drinking water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant—the Ten Commandments.*

In other cases it appears that the inspiration was not so much in the sense of dictation as it was of the writer simply being touched by God. Here is how the Prophet Ezekiel expressed what happened to him, *<sup>1</sup>In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month on the fifth day, while I was among the exiles by the Kebar River, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God. <sup>2</sup>On the fifth of the month—it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin- <sup>3</sup>the word of the LORD came to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, by the Kebar River in the land of the Babylonians. There the hand of the LORD was upon him.* Ezekiel 1:1-3. What does it mean to you that he saw visions of God, and that the hand of the LORD was upon him? This all has to do with how Ezekiel received from God what he wrote into his book and it does not appear to be what we would call dictation.

And the poet/prophet/king David said it this way concerning instructions which he received for the construction of the temple, which was to be built by his son Solomon. *<sup>19</sup>"All this," David said, "I have in writing from the hand of the LORD upon me, and he gave me understanding in all the details of the plan."* I Chronicles 28:19 If God was so concerned about plans for a building then it is no stretch to believe that He would also be concerned about the book which He gave to mankind.

In a few cases it seems that God had instructed the writer of the Holy Word over the course of many years and then that person was commanded to write the lessons down. This might be the sense in which God spoke to and through the prophet Jeremiah. *<sup>1</sup>... this word came to Jeremiah from the LORD: <sup>2</sup>"Take a scroll and write on it all the words I have spoken to you concerning Israel, Judah and all the other nations from the time I began speaking to you in the reign of Josiah till now.* Jeremiah 36:1-2 And then

again in Jeremiah 30:1-2 we read this, <sup>1</sup>*This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: <sup>2</sup>"This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Write in a book all the words I have spoken to you.* I also believe this is what happened to the Apostles whom Jesus personally taught for those three years.

Therefore the teaching about inspiration is very similar in the New Testament as it is in the Old. The most direct passage is found in II Timothy 3:14-17 which says, <sup>14</sup>*But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, <sup>15</sup>and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>16</sup>All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup>so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.* Take note of several points which Paul makes about the Holy Scriptures:

- We can grow in our confidence in the Scriptures.
- The learning process can even begin in one's infancy.
- We learn it best from teachers who live it.
- The Scriptures will grant wisdom to the person who learns them.
- It will result in salvation.
- They were "breathed" by God.
- They will change and transform a person's life for the good.
- They will equip us to do a whole variety of good works.

So much more could be added but this has gone long enough. I will close with two very powerful passages from the New Testament.

II Peter 1:19-21

<sup>19</sup>And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. <sup>20</sup>Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. <sup>21</sup>For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Hebrews 4:12-13

<sup>12</sup>For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. <sup>13</sup>Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

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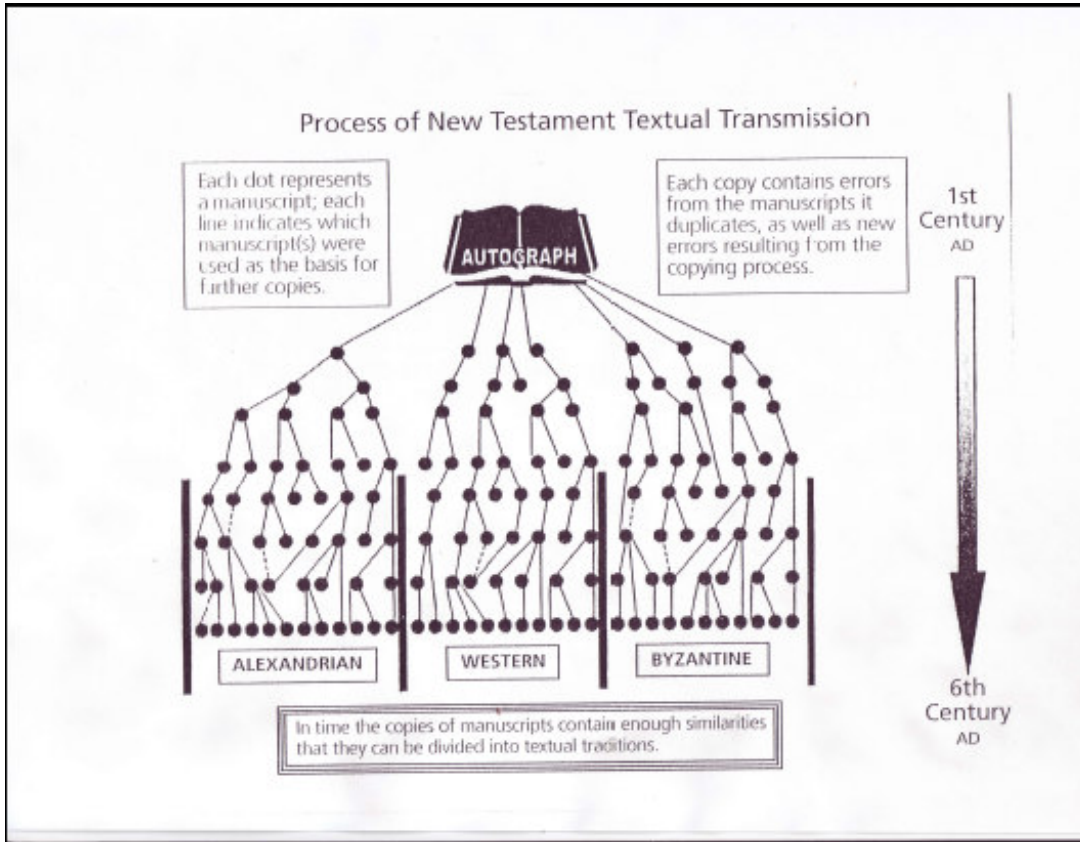
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## **First Council of Nicea (325)**

### **NICENE CREED**

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father [the only-begotten; that is, of the essence of the Father, God of God], Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made [both in heaven and on earth]; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down and was incarnate and was made man; he suffered, and the third day he rose again, ascended into heaven; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. And in the Holy Ghost. [But those who say: 'There was a time when he was not;' and 'He was not before he was made;' and 'He was made out of nothing,' or 'He is of another substance' or 'essence,' or 'The Son of God is created,' or 'changeable,' or 'alterable' — they are condemned by the holy catholic and apostolic Church.]



Searching for the Original Bible, Randall Price, p 228.