

Written by
Amos and
Jennifer Kwok



Come and See

A 25-lesson exploration
of the God of the Bible and
his message.

*Based on the
Interlocked
curriculum*

1. About the Bible

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to *Come and See*. Thank you for starting this 25-lesson Bible survey. Through these lessons, we will learn together. Our aims are to:

1. **Gain a good overview of the main message of the Bible.**



2. **Gain an understanding of the God of the Bible.**

We'll learn who He is and what He is like. We'll see that He is a Person who has taken the effort to make Himself known to mankind.



3. **Learn the Bible's perspective on mankind.**

We want to understand what the Bible has to say about mankind. What's our purpose? Why are there problems of suffering and evil? And does God have a solution to these problems?



4. **Understand who Jesus Christ is.**

Jesus Christ is the central person of the Bible. We'll look at His life, His death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead, and learn what it all means for mankind.



5. **Understand what a Christian is.**

We'll also look at how Christians are supposed to live and why people sometimes see a difference between what God expects of Christians and how Christians really behave.



6. **See what the Creator-God of the Bible says is going to happen in the future.**



We'll be using the Bible in this survey so each of you will have your own copy. This is so that you can see for yourself what the Bible says.

Before we go into the message of the Bible, it would be good to have some background on this book called "The Holy Bible". So let's begin by examining how the Bible came to be.

WHAT IS THE BIBLE?

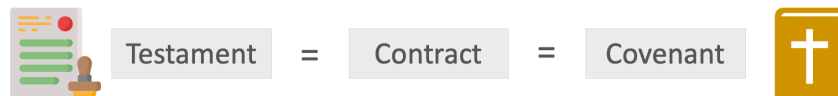
Let's open the Bible and take a look at the contents page.

See the list of titles? The Bible is not a single book.

What you're looking at is a list of books. The Bible is actually a collection of 66 books. Notice also how the list is divided into two sections: the Old Testament and the New Testament.

What is a Testament?

The word "testament" simply means "contract". Or a fancier word is "covenant". "Testament", "covenant" and "contract" are the same thing.



It may sound strange that the Bible is called a contract but that's exactly what makes it special. The God of the Bible made serious promises to mankind. And He willingly tied Himself to people through legal agreements.

The Bible contains the details of six major contracts that God made with people. (There are also a number of other smaller contracts.) While God doesn't keep on making new contracts, the six we will examine are the key ones that have shaped the course of human history. The Bible also records the behaviours of the contract parties to show if they have kept or broken the terms of the agreements.

Why has God made contracts? And why does He allow His words and actions to be recorded and scrutinised? Because He wants people to know Him. For example, we can learn a lot about a man by watching how he behaves. If this man makes a promise and writes it down as a contract, we can check if he is a man of integrity by observing if he keeps to the terms of the contract.

In the same way, God wants people everywhere to learn what He is like by how He behaves. He makes contracts and holds Himself to the terms of the agreements so people can observe what kind of a God He is. Does He keep His word? Does He deliver on His promises? Does He follow through on the discipline He has said He will carry out? The Bible shows us God's character through His actions.

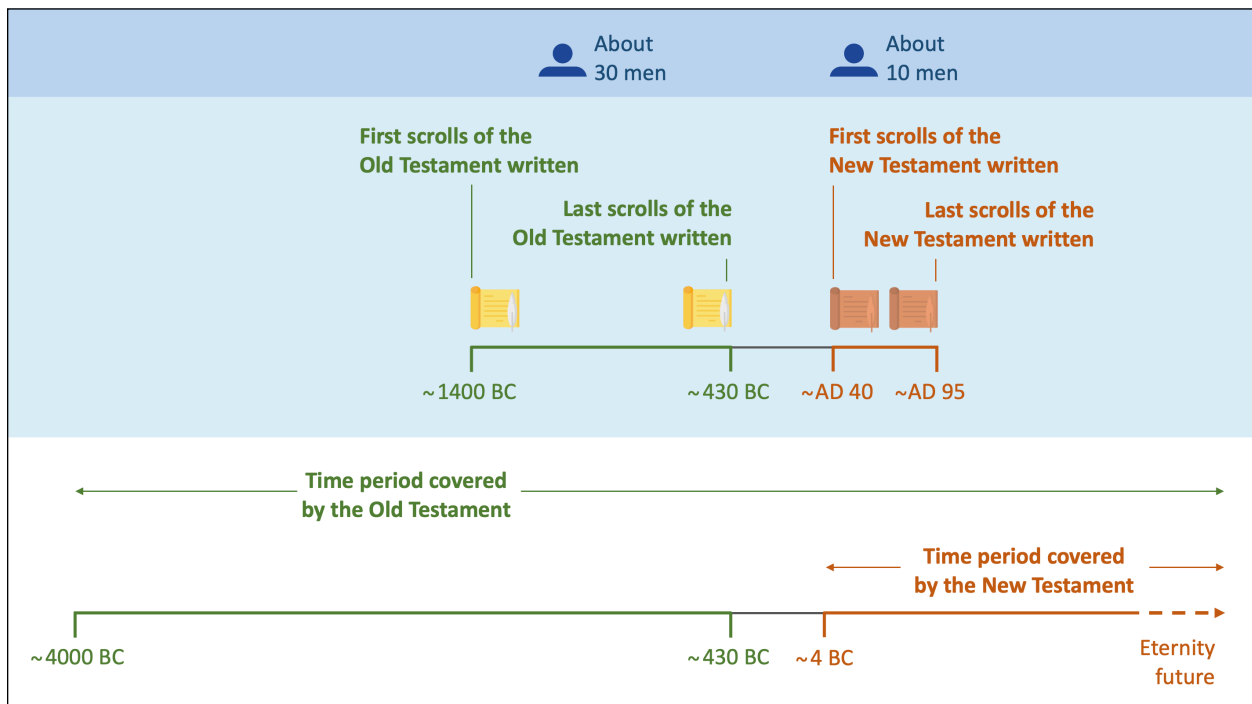
Another reason God has made covenants is that a contract defines a relationship. When God entered into a contract with specific people, He was defining their relationship. The people involved would know how to maintain a good relationship with God and what He expected of them. And the people would also know how God would bless or discipline them according to the terms of the contract.

Based on these contracts, the Bible is divided into two sections called the Old Testament and the New Testament.

The Old Testament	The New Testament
<p>The Old Testament is named this way because it refers to the earlier contracts that God made with mankind. There are 39 books in the Old Testament section of the Bible.</p>	<p>The New Testament focuses on a new contract. There are 27 books in the New Testament.</p>

HOW DID WE GET THE BIBLE?

Even though the Bible was written by 40 different writers over a span of 1,500 years, all 66 books have one consistent storyline and message.¹ This is because the ultimate author of the Bible is Yahweh, the Creator-God of the universe. Yahweh, as we will see, is the personal name of the God of the Bible.



Old Testament

In Old Testament times, Yahweh spoke to 30 different Jewish writers at different times. They wrote in Hebrew, the language of the Jews, and some wrote in Aramaic, the language of the Babylonians, which was a common language of their day.

Each writer was also known as a prophet. A biblical prophet was one who was appointed by God to be His spokesperson and writer. All the prophets had their own styles of writing and choice of vocabulary, but because they were guided and inspired by Yahweh, their message was consistent.

The people living at the time of the different prophets recognised and acknowledged them as true prophets chosen by God to record His history and truth. This was because God had told the people how to test whether a prophet had been sent by Him or not. Therefore, there was no doubt in the minds of the Jews which prophets in their own day were authorised to speak and write for God. (In a later lesson, we will explore how God authenticates His prophets.)

Moreover, most of the books were written at their time in history. So, much of what was written could be verified by the people living at that time.

The prophets wrote on long scrolls that were then rolled up and kept in boxes. So this meant there wasn't an exact, fixed order to the scrolls, like the first scroll, second scroll and so on.²



An Old Testament Scroll



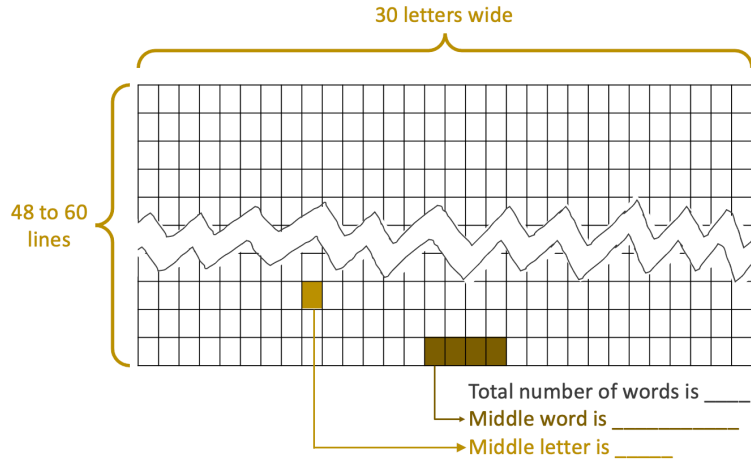
Scripture scrolls stored in a modern Torah box, called an ark

As the scrolls couldn't last forever, every effort was put in to make accurate copies of the original scrolls. Specially trained writers called scribes were given the task of making copies of the scrolls.

Just how particular were they in this work? To give an example, the Masoretes, one such group of scribes, had many safeguards to ensure that accurate copies were made.

- Each copy had to be written in columns that were 30 letters wide, with a certain number of lines (48–60) to each column.

- The total number of words, the middle word and the middle letter of each scroll were noted. The copy had to share the same total word count, middle word and middle letter.³



- No word was written from memory. Each letter had to be looked at, spoken out loud, and then copied over. The spacing between letters was measured by a thread to ensure even spacing and no overlaps.
- Copies that had errors were stored in a “genizah”. This is a Hebrew term meaning “hiding place”. These “genizahs” or storage areas were usually in a synagogue (a Jewish place of worship) or sometimes in a Jewish cemetery.

In this way, the Jews ensured the accuracy of Scripture over time. In fact, the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls gave even more assurance of this.

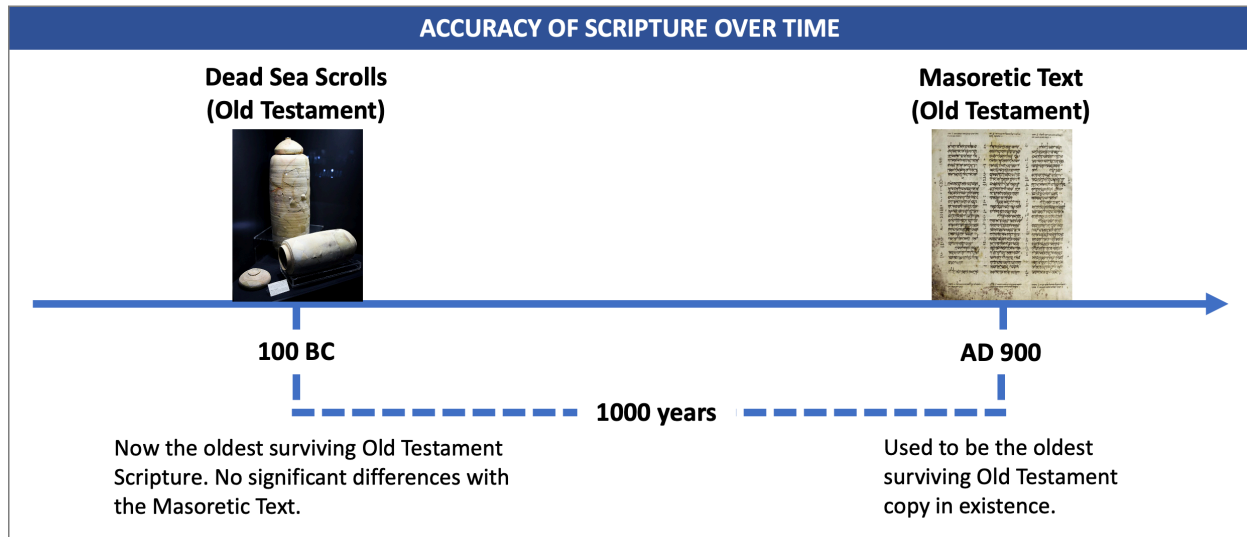
In 1946, a shepherd found scrolls sealed in clay jars in the Qumran caves surrounding the Dead Sea. These Old Testament scrolls were dated to 100 BC.⁴



The Psalms scroll that was discovered in Qumran

Caves in Qumran where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered

At that time, the oldest scrolls available had been produced by the Masorettes around AD 900. This means the Dead Sea Scrolls were 1000 years older than the Masoretic text. When they compared the scrolls, Bible scholars were amazed to see there were virtually no differences in the text of God's Word. While there were minor variations in punctuation, spelling of names and places, the meaning and message of the text had not changed.⁵



This is incredible proof of how carefully the scribes made accurate copies of the Old Testament scrolls. It gives us great confidence that the text we have today is virtually the same as what was originally written.



Throughout history until the present time, these scrolls have always been treated by the Jews as Scripture, the very words of Yahweh. There has never been any doubt in their minds about this.

The very same content of these scrolls is what Christians have today in the Old Testament portion of the Bible.

However, since the Bible is now presented in a book format, an order had to be created for its contents. So let's take another look at the contents page of the Bible. Look at the list of 39 books that make up the Old Testament.

These 39 books are arranged into three major categories: history, wisdom and the prophets.

- In the history section we have the following: Genesis to Esther.
- In the wisdom literature section we have the following: Job to Song of Solomon.
- In the prophets section we have the following: Isaiah to Malachi.

 HOLY BIBLE OLD TESTAMENT: 39 books			 TANAKH: 24 books	
History 1. Genesis 2. Exodus 3. Leviticus 4. Numbers 5. Deuteronomy 6. Joshua 7. Judges 8. Ruth 9. 1 Samuel 10. 2 Samuel 11. 1 Kings 12. 2 Kings 13. 1 Chronicles 14. 2 Chronicles 15. Ezra 16. Nehemiah 17. Esther			Torah (Law) 1. Genesis 2. Exodus 3. Leviticus 4. Numbers 5. Deuteronomy	
Wisdom 18. Job 19. Psalms 20. Proverbs 21. Ecclesiastes 22. Song of Solomon			Ketuvim (Writings) 14. Psalms 15. Proverbs 16. Job 17. Song of Solomon 18. Ruth 19. Lamentations 20. Ecclesiastes 21. Esther 22. Daniel 23. Ezra and Nehemiah 24. Chronicles (1 and 2)	
Prophets 23. Isaiah 24. Jeremiah 25. Lamentations 26. Ezekiel 27. Daniel 28. Hosea 29. Joel 30. Amos 31. Obadiah			Nevi'im (Prophets) 6. Joshua 7. Judges 8. Samuel (1 and 2) 9. Kings (1 and 2) 10. Isaiah 11. Jeremiah 12. Ezekiel 13. All 12 minor prophets	
The OLD TESTAMENT and the TANAKH share the same Scripture				

Note: The Tanakh is the name of the Jewish Scriptures. (It's an acronym that is formed by the first letter of each section: T, N, K.) The reason it has a different number of "books" compared with the English Bible is because in the Jewish Scriptures, a number of the books are combined (e.g., the books of 1 and 2 Samuel are combined into one). However, the content of the Scriptures are the same.

Now we say these books can be roughly divided into these three categories.

- But when you read through each book, you'll notice that the historical events are woven throughout the Old Testament.
- There is also wisdom literature scattered throughout. And the wisdom literature itself often contains history and prophecy.
- And within the prophets section, you will also find history and poetry.

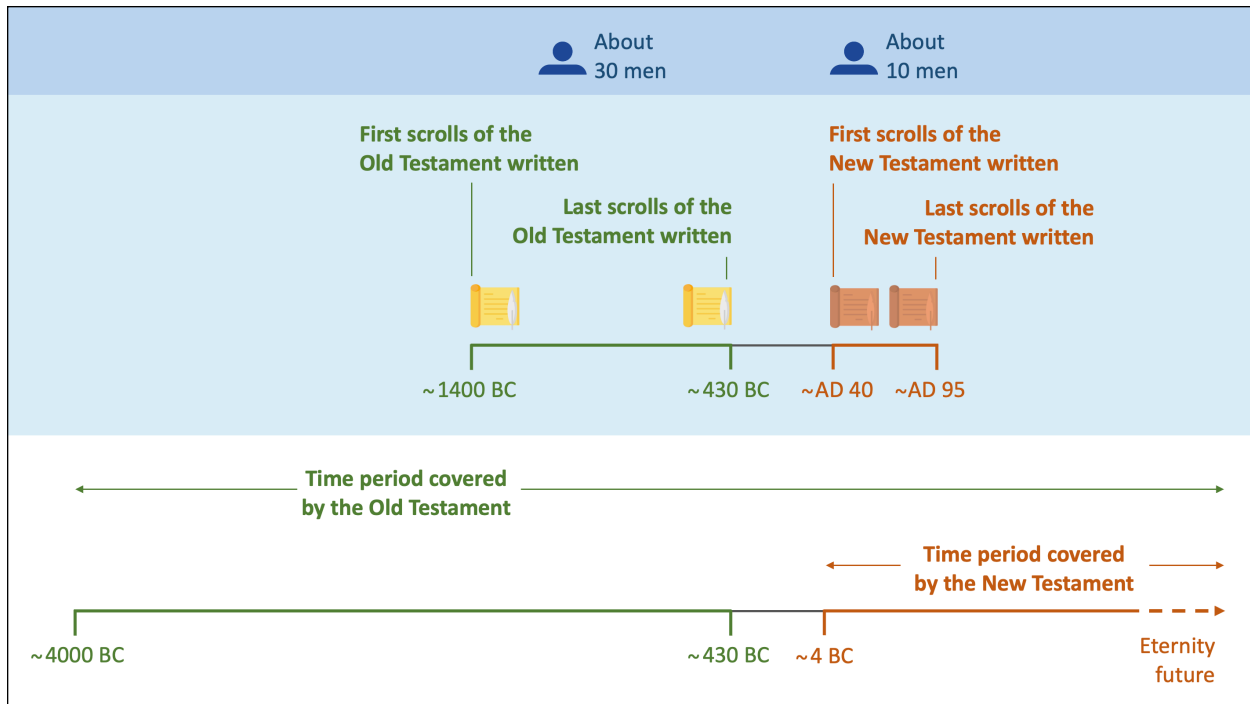
So take these three categories as rough guides to the different sections of the Old Testament.

But just as the Jews have never doubted that these are Yahweh's words, so Christians too, trust these are the very words of God.

New Testament


Let's take a look at the table of contents once more. This time, we want to focus on the collection of 27 books that make up the New Testament.

The New Testament continues the history of God and mankind. It picks up about 400 years after the completion of the Old Testament events and covers events happening from about 4 BC.



About ten writers wrote the New Testament. We believe all of them were Jewish. Unlike the Old Testament, the New Testament was first written in Greek. This was the common language used by the Roman Empire which was ruling at that time.

Let's take a closer look at the list of books.

 HOLY BIBLE NEW TESTAMENT: 27 books			
History	Letters		Prophetic
1. Matthew	6. Romans	17. Titus	27. Revelation
2. Mark	7. 1 Corinthians	18. Philemon	
3. Luke	8. 2 Corinthians	19. Hebrews	
4. John	9. Galatians	20. James	
5. Acts	10. Ephesians	21. 1 Peter	
	11. Philippians	22. 2 Peter	
	12. Colossians	23. 1 John	
	13. 1 Thessalonians	24. 2 John	
	14. 2 Thessalonians	25. 3 John	
	15. 1 Timothy	26. Jude	
	16. 2 Timothy		

The first four books are called Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. They are called the gospels. The word gospel is actually from old English. It literally means “good news”. These four gospels are eyewitness accounts of Jesus Christ during His time on earth. We’ll learn more about who He is and what He did when we get to that part of the Bible. These four books plus the book of Acts form the history portion of the New Testament. The gospel of Mark, which is the earliest gospel account, was written approximately 20 years after the events of Jesus’ life. This would have been around AD 55.

When the gospels were first written, many people who lived during the time of Jesus were still alive and could verify the details or dispute the accounts recorded in these books. As there was no dispute over the accuracy of the accounts, the early Christians readily used and shared the books among themselves.

The rest of the books in the New Testament are actually letters written to certain churches or people.

Just as He had done in Old Testament times, God also authenticated those whom He had chosen to write His New Testament Scriptures. So even while these letters were being written, there was no doubt among the early church as to whom God had chosen to write His Word.

These letters were then passed and copied from church to church throughout the whole Roman Empire. And these letters were used by the churches, along with the gospels.

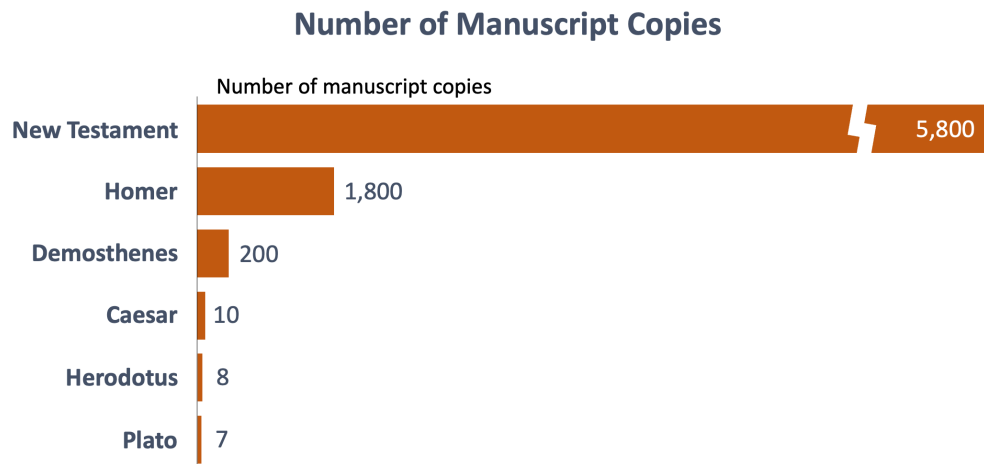
Then as the eyewitnesses died or were killed, more copies of the books and letters were made and passed on to other churches. In fact, because people wanted to know the truth, they also wanted their own copies of the documents.

The New Testament closes with the final book called Revelation. This book is very different to the other books and letters but is similar to other Old Testament books because God reveals information about future events that have not yet happened. Revelation was completed around AD 95.

Surviving manuscripts

Today, there are about 5,800 surviving handwritten manuscript copies of the New Testament in Greek. The earliest copies are dated between AD 90 and 150.

We can compare this number to the surviving manuscript copies of other important writers around the same era.



For example, Homer is famous for writing the *Iliad*, which is about the Trojan War. There are 1,800 manuscript copies of his works that survive.

The Roman general and politician, Julius Caesar, wrote many volumes about the wars he fought. Only ten manuscript copies of his writings survive.

Herodotus is often called the “father of history” because the way he researched, investigated and wrote about history forms the basis of how scholars today write about history. Of his writings, there are eight surviving manuscript copies.

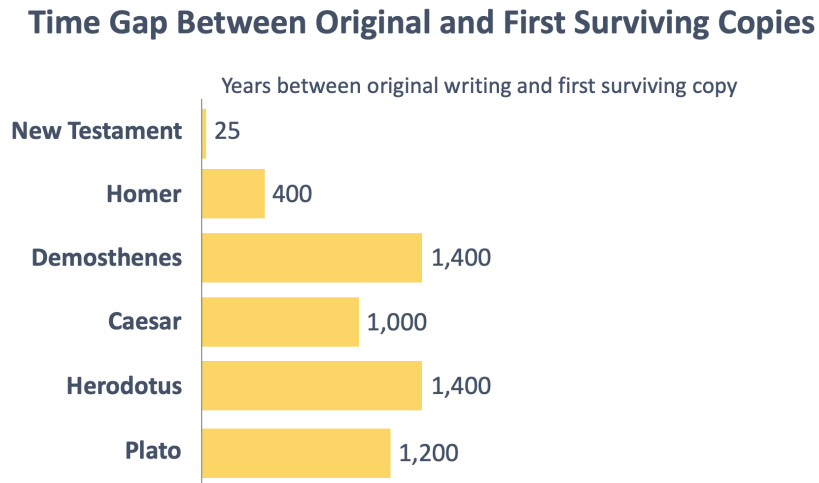
Plato wrote and taught much that became the basis for philosophy. But only seven manuscript copies of his writings survive.

We have only a few surviving manuscript copies of these writers’ works, yet scholars are confident we have the original words of these men. Part of our knowledge of history from this time period is based on these men’s writings.

In comparison, there are 5,800 Greek manuscript copies of the New Testament. Some of these manuscripts are complete New Testaments. Others are single books or pages, and some are just a few fragments of sentences. In addition, there are about 20,000 New Testament manuscripts in other languages including Latin, Syriac, Coptic and Arabic.

Because of this great number of existing manuscript copies, scholars are able to verify with great accuracy the original text of the New Testament.

What is also significant is that the earliest surviving copy of the New Testament was written about 25 years after the original was written.



In comparison, the earliest surviving copies of other important ancient documents were written between 400 to 1,400 years after their originals.

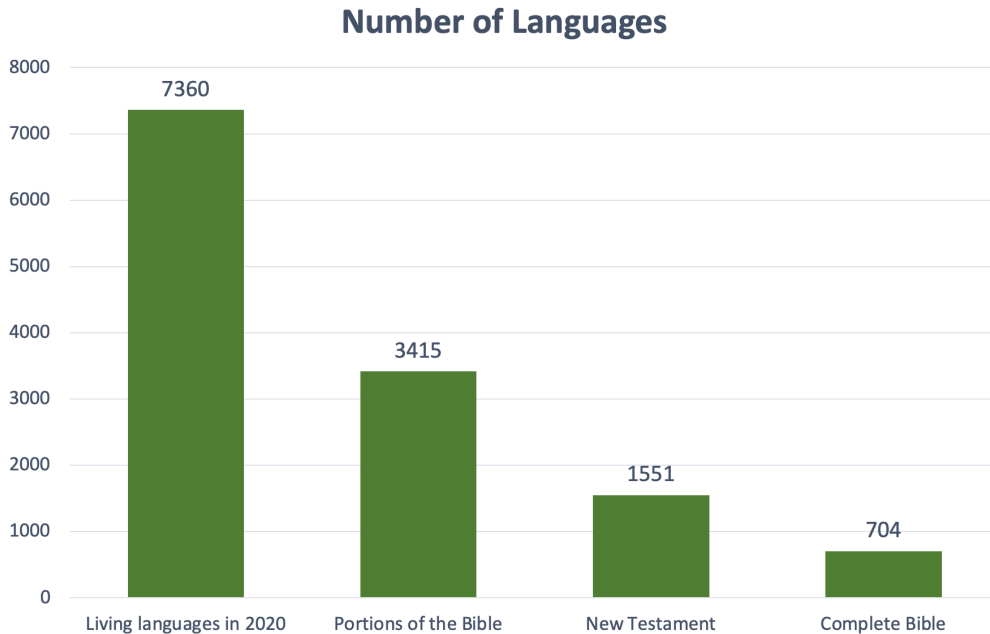
Such early copies of the New Testament add to the reliability and accuracy of the text we have today.⁶

What's more, not long after the New Testament books and letters were written, other Christian writers began quoting passages in their own writings. If we took all the New Testament quotations found in the documents of these other writers, we could also reconstruct almost all of the New Testament!

In other words, we can be very confident that the New Testament we have today is exceptionally accurate and that the message of the Bible has been saved for us.⁷

A note about translations

We've already mentioned that the original languages of the Bible are Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. Since then, the complete Bible has been translated into over 700 languages and portions of it have been translated into more than 3,400 languages.⁷



In English, there are many Bible versions. Why are there so many? There are many reasons but here's a simple explanation.

Some translations try to translate the biblical text word by word. Other translations try to translate phrase by phrase, or thought by thought. As you can imagine, these different translation styles result in different wording though the meaning of the message remains the same.

Another consideration is the reading level. Some Bibles require a higher reading level because they use more difficult vocabulary. Others appeal to those who prefer to read simpler English.

Just take a look at this example of a sentence from the Bible. The sentence is taken from the New Testament book of John. It is found in the third (3rd) chapter, verse 16. We write the reference as John 3:16.

John 3:16		
King James Version	English Standard Version	New Living Translation
For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.	For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.	For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.
Reading Level: Grade 12 (18 year old)	Reading Level: Grade 10 (16 year old)	Reading Level: Grade 6 (12 year old)

As this example shows, the message is the same. But notice the slight differences in wording based on how the translators chose to translate the original Greek text.

In other words, there are many good English translations of the Bible. If you go to any bookstore, the English Bibles they sell will usually be the most reputable and trusted translations. You can read any version that appeals to you.

To make this study easier, we will all be using the same English version. This is because we will be doing the reading and you will be following along in the text. So the Bible you have been given was chosen for the whole class simply to make it easier to follow along. (Unless otherwise stated, the Bible text found in these lesson notes are taken from the New Living Translation.)

When you read the Bible for yourself, you can choose to keep to this version or you can read a translation that you prefer.

YAHWEH, GOD OF THE BIBLE

How is it possible that over a period of 1,500 years, 40 men, living at different times and places and writing in different languages can each have written in a way that agrees with the writings of all the others? This is not possible for humans to accomplish by themselves. For example, if we gather a group of different people living in the same era and in the same place and have them write in the same language on a selected topic, we will end up with varying thoughts and opinions on that topic!

But as we read the Bible, we will notice that Yahweh claims to be the ultimate author of the entire Bible. He declares repeatedly that the words of the Bible are His very words. So God spoke, but used human authors to record His words. You will see that we will often speak interchangeably of a human writer's words and God's words.



In fact, as God describes Himself, we will see more and more that He is a Person. He is not a force like gravity, but an actual Person. He is a Person who is a spirit, meaning He does not have a body, but He is capable of thinking, speaking, feeling and acting. In fact, we will see that He is the ultimate being responsible for creating everything else.

From the next lesson onwards, we'll be reading the actual text of the Bible to see what God says. So it will be helpful to learn how to navigate or find our way through the Bible.

Let's go to the contents page again.

Look at the list of books that make up the New Testament. Find the starting page of the book called Second (2) Peter. Note there is a First (1) and a Second (2) Peter. This is because the author Peter wrote two letters. So look for the one with a number 2 in front of the name Peter. Then turn to the start of Second Peter.

Is everyone on the page? Great. Take a look at the first page of Second Peter. We call it a book but you can see that it's a letter and it's not very long. Just turn over the page and you will see that it takes up just a few pages.

Every book of the Bible is typically divided with what you see are some big numbers and some small numbers. First, let's focus on the big numbers. These are the chapter markers.

Then within each chapter, separating the words are smaller numbers in superscript. These are verse divisions. So the superscript "1" means that the words after it make up "verse 1".

2 Peter

Chapter

Verse

1

1 This letter is from Simon Peter, a slave and apostle of Jesus Christ.

I am writing to you who share the same precious faith we have. This faith was given to you because of the justice and fairness of Jesus Christ, our God and Savior.

2 May God give you more and more grace and peace as you grow in your knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord.

These chapter and verse divisions were not originally in the Bible. Initially, the text was just on a scroll without any chapter or verse numbers. However, they were added later to help people find particular passages more easily and quickly.

Scripture references, which are like "addresses", are typically written in this way:

book 2 Peter 1 20 verse
chapter

This verse is read out as "Second Peter Chapter One Verse Twenty" or "Second Peter One Twenty".

Let's go to this verse which is further down the page. Look for the verse that begins with the superscript "20".

Just to make sure you find the right verse, it's printed here as well.

(The leader reads aloud the verses.)

2 Peter 1:20–21

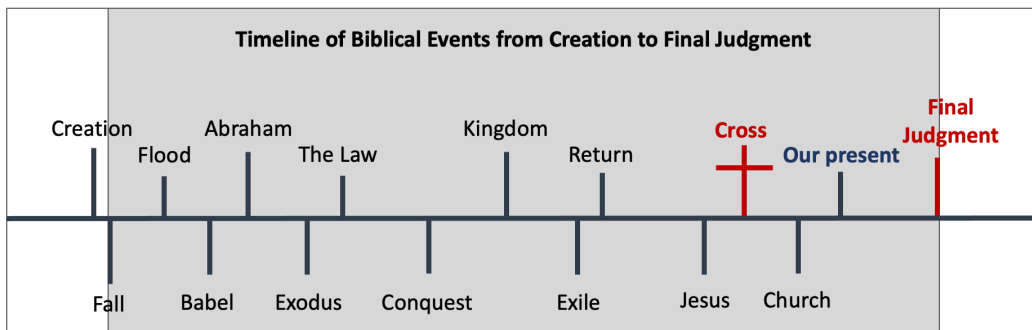
²⁰ Above all, you must realize that no prophecy in Scripture ever came from the prophet’s own understanding, ²¹ or from human initiative. No, those prophets were moved by the Holy Spirit, and they spoke from God.

In these two verses, the word “prophecy” refers mainly to the writing itself and the “prophet” is the human writer. Peter is saying that the true source of Scripture, meaning the words of the Bible, is not mankind. Rather, the Bible’s text are the very words of the Creator-God shared with all mankind through the prophets. God chose these prophets to record His words and they wrote through the inspiration of God’s Spirit. He is the originator of the words of the Bible.

These verses are found almost at the end of the whole Bible. We read them so you can see a sample of what the Bible claims about itself.

However, to understand the overall message of the Bible, we need to start at the beginning and work our way to the end. And this is what we hope to do with you.

In the next lesson, we will start going through the timeline of biblical events, covering the following topics.



- | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| 1 How the world came to be | 2 Why there is evil in the world | 5 God revealed His standards | 6 God taught about Himself | 9 The Saviour’s work | 10 The present age |
| 3 God judged the evil world | 4 God’s plan to reach the world | 7 How God’s people failed | 8 God’s rescue plan | 11 How the world ends | 12 God’s invitation |

In the meantime and till we meet again, if you’re interested in finding out more about how we got the Bible, check with the leader for recommended resources.

Endnotes

¹ Josh McDowell and Bill Wilson, *The Best of Josh McDowell: a Ready Defense* (San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life Publishers, 1992), 27.

² The left photograph "Torah inside of the former Glockengasse Synagogue in Cologne" by Willy Horsch. 2007. Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International license (CC BY-SA 4.0). <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Köln-Tora-und-Innenansicht-Synagoge-Glockengasse-040.JPG> (Accessed 16 Apr 2020.)

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³ J. I. Packer and Merrill C. Tenney, *Illustrated Manners and Customs of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1980), 68.

⁴ The left photograph "Qumran in the West Bank, Middle East" by Effi Schweizer. 2007. Public domain work. <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Qumran.jpeg> (Accessed 16 Apr 2020.)

The right photograph "Psalms Scroll" by the Israel Antiquities Authority, 1993. Public domain work. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Psalms_Scroll.jpg (Accessed 16 Apr 2020.)

⁵ The photograph "Two Dead Sea Scrolls Jars at the Jordan Museum, Amman" by Dr. Osama Shukir Muhammed Amin. 2018. Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International license (CC BY-SA 4.0). https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Two_Dead_Sea_Scrolls_Jars_at_the_Jordan_Museum,_Amman.jpg (Accessed 16 Apr 2020.)

The Masoretic text photograph "The Aleppo Codex (Deuteronomy)" by Ardon Bar Hama. From the Yad Yitzhak Ben Zvi Institute. 2007. Public domain work. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Aleppo_Codex_\(Deut\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Aleppo_Codex_(Deut).jpg) (Accessed 16 Apr 2020.)

⁶ Norman L. Geisler and Frank Turek, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 224–227.

⁷ "2020 Scripture Access Statistics," Wycliffe Global Alliance, accessed May 4, 2021, <https://www.wycliffe.net/resources/statistics/>.



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Special thanks to Angeline Ting for line editing. And a big thanks to the following who helped in shaping the material: Sam Christensen, Russ and Karyn Smyth, Jack and Brenda Lytle, Abi and Helene Penner, Johannes and Agatha Maryniok, and Heinz Waltermann.

Come and See

Edition 2

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Come and See logo design by Dylan Kwok.
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