

## How the Books of the Bible Were Chosen (Part 2)

Further comments on the Old Testament:

What we know as the Old Testament was recognized as the authoritative Scriptures as early as the 5-4<sup>th</sup> century BC. The Septuagint (LXX) was a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures beginning around the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC and contained our 39 books, and became the accessible edition of the Bible which later Greek speaking generations quoted from, including Jesus and the authors of the New Testament. The Dead Sea Scrolls (cir. 2-1<sup>st</sup> century BC) included copies or fragments from every book of the Old Testament except for Esther. Other outside evidence for our books of the OT:

**2 Maccabees 2:13-14 (cir. 160 BC)** The same things also were reported in the writings and commentaries of Nehemiah; and how he founding a library gathered together the acts of the kings, and the prophets, and of David, and the epistles of the kings concerning the holy gifts. 14 In like manner also Judas gathered together all those things that were lost by reason of the war we had, and they remain with us.

**Josephus (cir. 90 AD), Against Apion 1:38-42** For we have not an innumerable multitude of books among us, disagreeing from, and contradicting one another, [as the Greeks have], but only twenty-two books, {g} which contain the records of all the past times; which are justly believed to be divine; 39 and of them five belong to Moses, which contain his laws and the traditions of the origin of mankind till his death. This interval of time was little short of three thousand years; 40 but as to the time from the death of Moses till the reign of Artaxerxes, king of Persia, who reigned after Xerxes, the prophets, who were after Moses, wrote down what was done in their times in thirteen books. The remaining four books contain hymns to God, and precepts for the conduct of human life. 41 It is true, our history has been written since Artaxerxes very particularly, but has not been esteemed of the like authority with the former by our forefathers, because there has not been an exact succession of prophets since that time; 42 and how firmly we have given credit to these books of our own nation, is evident by what we do; for, during so many ages as have already passed, no one has been so bold as either to add anything to them, to take any thing from them, or to make any change in them; but it is becomes natural to all Jews, immediately and from their very birth, to esteem these books to contain divine doctrines, and to persist in them, and, if occasion be, willingly to die for them.

Jesus and the NT authors quote the words of the OT approximately 300 times (uncertainty about the exact number arises because of a few instances where it is not clear whether it is an OT quotation or only an echoing expression using similar words). They regularly quote it as having divine authority, with phrases such as “it is written,” “Scripture says,” and “God says,” but no other writings are quoted in this way. Occasionally the NT writers will quote some other authors, even pagan Greek authors,

but they never quote these other sources as being the words of God (see Acts 17:28; Titus 1:12–13; Jude 8–10, 14–16), as they do the canonical OT books.<sup>1</sup>

**Luke 24:44** Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of *Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms* must be fulfilled."

**2 Timothy 3:14-17** But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it 15 and how from childhood you have been acquainted with *the sacred writings*, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,* 17 *that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.*

### I. The Eyewitnesses as the First Testimony to Jesus

Unlike the formation of the Old Testament Scriptures, the New Testament or New Covenant Scriptures did not take hundreds of years to come about. Since the lifetime of Jesus was probably less than 40 years, and he seems to have had a “public” ministry for 3-4 years, all of the writers of were in the same generation as Jesus. Therefore, the carriers of the message of Jesus were eyewitnesses to Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. These eyewitnesses simply had the Septuagint (LXX or Greek Old Testament) and their memory of what they had seen and heard from Jesus.

**Luke 24:13-27** That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, 14 and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. 15 While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. 16 But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. 17 And he said to them, “What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?” And they stood still, looking sad. 18 Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?” 19 And he said to them, “What things?” And they said to him, “Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, 20 and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. 21 But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened. 22 Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, 23 and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. 24 Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.” 25 And he said to them, “O foolish ones, and

<sup>1</sup> Charles E. Hill, “The Canon of Scripture” in *ESV Study Bible* (Crossway Publishers, 2008)



slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" 27 And *beginning with Moses and all the Prophets*, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

**Acts 1:6-9** So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" 7 He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and *you will be my witnesses* in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." 9 And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

**Act 2:29-33** "Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. 30 Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, 31 he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. 32 *This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses*. 33 Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing."

**1 Corinthians 15:1-19** Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, 2 and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you--unless you believed in vain. 3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in *accordance with the Scriptures*, 5 and that *he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve*. 6 *Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time*, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. 7 *Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles*. 8 Last of all, as to one untimely born, *he appeared also to me*. 9 For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. 11 Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed. 12 Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. 14 And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. 15 We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not

raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. 17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

**1 Peter 5:1** So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and *a witness of the sufferings of Christ*, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed...

So again, they had the Old Testament in one hand, and their memory of Jesus in the other hand.

## II. The New Testament Scriptures as the Record of the Eyewitnesses

The writing of what we know as the New Testament was simply the written record of the eyewitnesses to Jesus. Matthew was Levi, one of the Twelve, who wrote his account. Mark wrote down Peter's account of Jesus. Luke undertook an investigation for his account and interviewed the eyewitnesses, and leaning heavily on the apostle Paul. The apostle John wrote his account after the others were well circulated.

**John 19:31-37** Since it was the day of Preparation, and so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken and that they might be taken away. 32 So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him. 33 But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. 34 But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. 35 He who saw it has borne witness--his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth--that you also may believe. 36 For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken." 37 And again another Scripture says, "They will look on him whom they have pierced."

**John 20:30-31** Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

**John 21:24-25** This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true. 25 Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

**Luke 1:1-4** Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, 2 just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, 3 it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, 4 that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.

**Acts 1:1-3** In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, 2 until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. 3 He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

**2 Peter 1:16-21** For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. 17 For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," 18 we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. 19 And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, 20 knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. 21 For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

**Galatians 1:1 - 2:10** Paul, an apostle--not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead-- 2 and all the brothers who are with me, To the churches of Galatia: 3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, 4 who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, 5 to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen. 6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel-- 7 not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. 9 As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. 10 For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ. 11 For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. 12 For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I

received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. 13 For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. 14 And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. 15 But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, 16 was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone; 17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. 18 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days. 19 But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother. 20 (In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!) 21 Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. 22 And I was still unknown in person to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. 23 They only were hearing it said, "He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." 24 And they glorified God because of me. 2:1 Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. 2 I went up because of a revelation and set before them (though privately before those who seemed influential) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain. 3 But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. 4 Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in--who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery-- 5 to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you. 6 And from those who seemed to be influential (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)--those, I say, who seemed influential added nothing to me. 7 On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised 8 (for he who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised worked also through me for mine to the Gentiles), 9 and when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. 10 Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.

The evidence that these eyewitnesses agreed and stood in agreement is that there is agreement on the major events and teachings of Jesus. All you have to do is put the Gospel accounts side by side see such agreement. Also, the major apostles recognized each other's authority.

**2 Peter 3:15-18** And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, 16 as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which

the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. 17 You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. 18 But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

Moreover, they anticipated and encouraged that their writings would circulate to other church communities in their care.

**Colossians 4:16-18** And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea. 17 And say to Archippus, "See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord." 18 I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.