

How We Got the Bible: Text and Canon

By Matthew Quintana¹

Spring 2018

¹ Much of the following information is adapted with consent from the class notes and lectures of Dr. Ray Lubeck of Multnomah University. *Do not copy or reproduce these notes without permission.*

Table of Contents

I. Introduction.....	2
A. <i>What Questions are We Asking in This Study?</i>	
B. <i>What are the Goals of This Study?</i>	
C. <i>Defining Terms</i>	
II. The Formation of the Hebrew Bible.....	3
A. <i>The Hebrew Bible</i>	
B. <i>The Hebrew Language</i>	
C. <i>The Autographs</i>	
D. <i>Earliest Arrangement of Books in the Hebrew Bible</i>	
E. <i>Earliest Manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible</i>	
F. <i>Early Translations of the Hebrew Bible</i>	
G. <i>New Testament Witness to the Hebrew Bible</i>	
H. <i>Early Jewish Witnesses to the Hebrew Bible</i>	
I. <i>Masoretic Text</i>	
J. <i>Early Christian Witnesses to the Hebrew Bible</i>	
K. <i>Chapter and Verse Divisions</i>	
L. <i>The Bottom Line</i>	
III. The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha.....	8
A. <i>What are the “Apocrypha”?</i>	
B. <i>What should we do with the Apocrypha?</i>	
C. <i>Conclusion</i>	
IV. The Formation of the Greek Bible.....	10
A. <i>The Greek Language</i>	
B. <i>The Autographs</i>	
C. <i>The Manuscripts</i>	
D. <i>The Enemies of the Greek Bible</i>	
E. <i>Erasmus</i>	
F. <i>Textual Criticism</i>	
G. <i>Rules of Textual Criticism</i>	
H. <i>Varieties of Manuscripts</i>	
I. <i>Reconstructing the Text</i>	
J. <i>Today’s Greek Text</i>	
H. <i>Canon Formation</i>	
V. Translation and Translation Theory.....	18
A. <i>The Goals and Purpose of Bible Translation</i>	
B. <i>Translation Theories</i>	
C. <i>Excursus: The Myth of a “Literal” Translation</i>	
D. <i>Why New and Updated Translations are Necessary</i>	
E. <i>Pros of Each Theory</i>	
F. <i>Cons of Each Theory</i>	
G. <i>Difficulties in Translating the Bible</i>	
H. <i>What to do Instead of Bickering Over Bible Translations</i>	
I. <i>Conclusion</i>	
VI. Appendix.....	26
A. <i>The Hebrew Alphabet</i>	
B. <i>The Greek Alphabet</i>	
C. <i>The Translation Spectrum</i>	

Introduction

I. What Questions are We Asking in This Study?

- A. How did we get the Bible? What was the process of formation for the Old Testament and the New Testament?
- B. Do we have the right books in our Old and New Testaments? What about the Apocrypha? Should we have them in our Bibles?
- C. After so many years, can we trust that the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts we have today are reliable? Could the text have been corrupted and altered?
- D. Why are there so many different Bibles out there today? Do we need different translations? What makes a good translation? And which translation is the best?
- E. Can I depend on other humans' translations of the Bible? Can I trust that my Bible is the inspired Word of God?

II. What are the Goals of This Study?

- A. To be able to answer these previous questions.
- B. To learn basic facts regarding the text and canon of the Bible, including the process of how the Old and New Testament came into being and the process of translation.
- C. To be able to defend attacks against the Bible in our current culture and society.
- D. To possess a heightened sense of wonder, gratitude, and worship toward God for his gracious act of revealing himself to us in his Word.
- E. Most importantly, to leave with great encouragement, and a deepened faith that the Bible you hold in your hands is in fact the inspired Word of God, and that it is thus authoritative over your life.

III. Defining Terms

- A. The title "Text and Canon" refers to the general topic in biblical studies having to do with the biblical languages, the formation of the Bible, the translation of the Bible, and the process of copying and preserving the Bible.
- B. The term *text* simply refers to the text itself of Scripture. The words that form sentences, paragraphs, chapters, and entire books.
- C. The term *canon* refers to the list of books which are considered God's Word, and therefore authoritative for faith and conduct.

The Formation of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament)

I. The Hebrew Bible

- A. The terms “Hebrew Bible” and “Old Testament” are essentially interchangeable, however, the term “Old Testament” seems to diminish the value of the content. By distinguishing between the “old” and “new” testaments, we seem to imply that the newer testament is better, when this is not the case.
- B. The Hebrew Bible consists of 24 books, which correspond to the 39 in our Old Testament.
- C. The reason it is called the “Hebrew Bible” is because of the language it was written in: Ancient or Biblical Hebrew.

II. The Hebrew Language

A. The Hebrew Alphabet:

ת ש ר ק (ך) צ (ף) פ ע ס (ן) נ (ם) מ ל (ך) כ י ט ח ז ו ה ד ג ב א

- 1.. Hebrew began with what is called a Paleo Script, but after the Babylonian captivity, they switched to the Aramaic script. Aramaic was the *lingua franca* of the world, and they learned it in captivity.
- 2. One challenge with Hebrew is that many of the letters look very similar. This can make reading manuscripts difficult.
- B. The Hebrew text was originally written without vowels.
 - 1. Masoretic vowel pointing added from 500-1000 AD in order to preserve the oral reading tradition.
 - 2. Because of their high view of Scripture, the scribes refused to add any letters to the text. So instead, they created a system of dots and dashes that are placed above, in, and below letters to indicate vowels.
- C. There are also several Aramaic sections in Scripture.
 - 1. About half of Daniel and half of Ezra, plus some individual verses.
 - 2. Aramaic and Hebrew are cousin languages; think of them like Spanish and Portuguese.

III. The Autographs

- A. Autographs are the very first writings of any biblical text, the original produced by the author.
 - 1. The autographs are not to be confused with manuscripts. A *manuscript* is a hand-made copy of an existing text, though it is often used currently to refer to any copy.
- B. Unfortunately, we have almost zero information about the original texts of Scripture, because there are no surviving autographs of the Bible that we are aware of today. Instead, we have hundreds of copies of *manuscripts*.

IV. Earliest Arrangement of Books in the Hebrew Bible

- A. The earliest known arrangement of the Hebrew Bible is the three-part “**TaNak**.”
 - 1. It gets its name from an acronym based off the three divisions: **T**orah (Instruction), **N**evi'im (Prophets), **K**etuvim (Writings).
 - 2. Rather than the 39 books that we count in our Old Testament, the Hebrew Bible counts the same exact books as 24.
 - 3. This is the order followed within modern Hebrew Bibles (e.g. BHS, JPS).
- B. Here are how the books are divided:
 - 1. **Torah**: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy

2. **Nevi'im**: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings (Former Prophets); Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, The Book of the Twelve (Latter Prophets)
 3. **Kethuvim**: Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles
- C. Side note: There are books mentioned in the Hebrew Bible that are not considered canonical.
1. For example: The Annals of the Kings of Judah (1 Kings 14:19, 15:31, 16:5, *et al.*); The Records of the Seers (2 Chronicles 33:19); The Book of Jashar (Joshua 10:13, 2 Samuel 1:18); The Annals of Solomon (1 Kings 11:41); etc.
 2. However, just because they are mentioned *does not* mean they should be included in our Bibles. These have never been considered canonical, and in fact, we have no copies of any of these books.
- D. Evidence of the TaNaK
1. Quote from Dead Sea Scrolls: “The **Book of Moses**, and the words of the **Prophets** and of **David**.”
 2. The Hebrew Bible itself shows this structure. For example, note the connections between Joshua 1, Malachi 3-4, and Psalm 1. Also, the connection between Proverbs 31 and Ruth. Also, the connection between Deuteronomy 34 and Joshua 1.
 3. We will continue to see evidence of this three-part structure as we explore other witnesses to the Hebrew Bible. The TaNaK is extremely important.

V. Earliest Manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible

A. Dead Sea Scrolls

1. Beginning in 1946, there was a major discovery in some caves along the Dead Sea in modern day Israel. A dozen caves containing hundreds of manuscripts were found around the Dead Sea, near an ancient community called Qumran.
2. A group of Jews called the Essenes lived at Qumran from about 500 BC to 68 AD. They were a radical, right-wing cult with a massive library.
3. In the caves at Qumran, copies of every single book of the Hebrew Bible (except Esther) were found. We now have thousands of fragments from 225 Biblical manuscripts.
 - a. The most popular books found at Qumran were: Psalms (37 mss), Deuteronomy (30 mss), Isaiah (21 mss), Genesis (24 mss), Exodus (18 mss).
4. Along with the biblical manuscripts, there were 670 manuscripts of non-canonical works, including community guidelines, biblical commentaries, etc. There were also a few manuscripts written in Paleo-Hebrew, which would be extremely old, from prior to the Babylonian captivity.
5. The Dead Sea Scrolls are an incredible discovery and may be one of the most important archeological finds of all time. Prior to the DSS, the oldest complete manuscripts we had of the Hebrew Bible were from 1000 AD. The DSS brought manuscripts over 1000 years older than this.
 - a. The DSS help give us greater confidence in our current Bibles, because they confirm the text of the Hebrew Bible we had already been using. When we compare the manuscripts we have that are 1000 year apart, there are only minor differences, which gives us incredible confidence in the preservation of these texts. Moreover, these differences are mostly all spelling differences, or small scribal errors such as copying a word twice, or forgetting a single word.

B. Samaritan Pentateuch

1. To this day, the Samaritan people have maintained their own copy of the Pentateuch, that is, the first five books of the Bible.
2. There are some differences between the Jews and Samaritans, one major one being that the Samaritans only use the first five books of the HB!
3. The Samaritan Pentateuch is important because it exists as an independent witness to the wording of the first five books of the Bible.

VI. *Early Translations of the Hebrew Bible*

A. The Septuagint (LXX)

1. This is a very early and very important translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek. The translation took place around 250-150 BC in Alexandria, Egypt.
2. You will often see the Septuagint referred to as the LXX (the roman numerals for 70), because tradition has it that it was 70 Jewish scholars who worked on the translation.
3. We have some very early manuscripts of the Septuagint: John Rylands Papyrus 458 (2nd Century BC); Papyrus Fouad 266 (100 BC); Several partial DSS manuscripts.
4. The earliest *complete* manuscripts of the Septuagint are from the 4th century AD (Codex Alexandrinus, Codex Vaticanus, and Codex Sinaiticus).

B. Aramaic Targums

1. These are early translations of the Hebrew Bible into Aramaic from around the time of Christ, completed around 100 AD.

C. Three other major Jewish translations of the Hebrew Bible into Greek:

1. Aquila: 120 AD.
2. Symmachus: 170-200 AD.
3. Theodotion: 1st-2nd century AD.

VII. *New Testament Witness to the Hebrew Bible*

A. The New Testament is an extremely important witness to the Hebrew Bible, because it shows us what books Jesus and the Apostles considered Scripture and is also a witness to the text of the Hebrew Bible from which they were quoting.

B. Quotations and allusions

1. There are over 350 direct quotations to the Hebrew Bible in the New Testament, and there are thousands of allusions.
2. Approximately 30% of the New Testament is based off of quotations or allusions from the Hebrew Bible.

C. The New Testament refers to the Scriptures in the plural, seemingly indicating that there is some kind of collection.

1. Matthew 5:15-18; Luke 24:25, 44-45; 1 Corinthians 15:1-8 all imply some kind of definite boundaries or canon of Scripture.

D. Two important passages

1. Luke 24:44 "He said to them, 'This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the **Law of Moses**, the **Prophets**, and the **Psalms**.'"
 - a. By referencing the three different sections of the TaNaK, Jesus shows that the Hebrew Bible he was using followed the three-part structure of the TaNaK.
2. Luke 11:50-11 "This generation will be responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed...from the blood of **Abel** to the blood of **Zechariah**." (cf. Mat. 23:35)

- a. If Jesus was referring to the first and last death in the Bible, based on a chronological order, it would be Abel in Gen. 4:8, and Uriah in Jer. 26:20-23. However, canonically, the first and last death would be Abel and then Zechariah in 2 Chron. 24:20-22. Rather than quoting the first and last chronologically, Jesus quotes the first and last canonically. The first death in the first book of the TaNaK, and the last death in the last book of the TaNaK.
- E. There are also several places in the New Testament where quotes are drawn from all sections of the TaNaK.
 1. *John 19:36-37* "These things happened so that the Scripture would be fulfilled..." → Quotes from [Ex. 9:12](#); [Num. 12:46](#); [Zech. 12:10](#); [Ps. 34:20](#)
 2. *Romans 10:18-21* "Hearing the word of Christ..." → Quotes from [Deut. 32:21](#); [Is. 65:1-2](#); [Ps. 19:4](#)
 3. *Romans 15:8-12* "As it is written..." → Quotes from [Deut. 32:43](#); [2 Sam. 22:50](#); [Is. 11:10](#); [Ps. 18:49, 117:1](#)
 4. *Hebrews 1:5-13* "He says..." (v. 6, 6, 7, 8, 10, 13) → Quotes from [Deut. 32:43](#); [2 Sam. 7:14](#); [Ps. 2:7, 45:6-7, 102:25-27, 104:4, 110:1](#)

VIII. Early Jewish Witnesses to the Hebrew Bible

- A. Ecclesiasticus (aka The Wisdom of Sirach)
 1. This is an apocryphal book from 160 BC. It says, "Many great teachings have been given to us through the **Law** and the **Prophets** and the **Others that follow them.**"
- B. Philo
 1. Philo was a Jewish scholar in Alexandria, Egypt (25 BC—45 AD). In describing a Jewish sect, he said, "In each [house] there is a consecrated room...They take nothing into it, neither drink, nor food or anything else necessary for the needs of the body, except **Law** and words spoken by God through the **prophets** and **Psalms and the other books** that foster and perfect knowledge and piety."
- C. Josephus
 1. Josephus was a Jewish scholar who worked for Rome, around 90 AD. He listed 22 books in the Hebrew Bible, which correspond to our 39. He also claimed that the canon was closed.
- D. Jamnia/Yabneh
 1. This was a Rabbinic academy on the coast of Israel that operated from 70-117 AD. The Rabbis there agreed with the existing opinion concerning which books were God's Word.
- E. 4 Ezra 14:45
 1. This is a pseudepigraphal book written about 100 AD. It refers to the "24 books meant to be read by all."
- F. Babylonian Talmud
 1. The Talmud is Jewish commentary on the oral law and Rabbinic law, compiled from around 70-200 AD. Tractate *Baba Bathra* 14b-15a of the Talmud lists out the 24 books canonical Hebrew Bible (corresponding to our 39).

IX. The Masoretic Text (MT)

- A. A group of Jewish scribes called "Masoretes" produced what we now refer to as the Masoretic Text. These scribes were *extremely meticulous*, and copied manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible from 500-1000 AD. They were so meticulous in their copying, that a manuscript from 1000 AD is essentially just as good as one from 500 AD.

- B. The earliest *complete* manuscript of the Masoretic Text is the Leningrad Codex from 1008 AD.
 - 1. The Aleppo codex was the oldest but was damaged and now contains only about two-thirds of the Hebrew Bible (930 AD).
- C. There were two major copying centers for the Masoretic Text: Babylon and Tiberius. The Masoretes also added vowel pointing and textual notes (called *Masorah*).
- D. The Masoretic Text is extremely important because of its stability. It has become the base edition of almost all modern Hebrew Bibles, and is the text used for translation of the Old Testament for English translations.

X. Early Christian Witnesses to the Hebrew Bible

- A. Origen (about 240 AD)
 - 1. Origen was an early Christian scholar who undertook the production of a six-column Bible, called the *Hexapla*, made up of the Hebrew text, a Greek transliteration, Aquila's translation, Symmachus' Translation, the Septuagint, and Theodotion's translation. Origen listed out 22 books in the Hebrew Bible, corresponding to our 39 books.
- B. Jerome (4th century AD)
 - 1. Jerome was a scholar commissioned by the Roman Catholic Church to translate the Bible from Greek and Hebrew into the common Latin of the day. The translation is called the *Vulgate*, and it became the official Bible of the Roman Catholic Church.
 - 2. Jerome accepted the 22 books of the Hebrew Bible, corresponding to our 39 Old Testament books. He was pressured to translate the apocryphal books, but refused, because he did not believe they were Scripture. However, under immense pressure, he eventually let others translate the apocryphal books.

XI. Chapter and Verse Divisions

- A. Chapter divisions were not in the original text, but were added much later by Stephan Langton, the Archbishop of Canterbury, who lived from 1150-1228 AD.
- B. Verse divisions were not added until even later. Robert and Henry Estienne added them in the mid 16th century.
- C. It is important to remember that these divisions were not in the original text and are therefore not *inspired*. For the most part, these men did a good job, but at some points he definitely blew it (For example: Genesis 2!) Don't let these essentially arbitrary division distract you from reading books as a unified whole, as the authors intended.

XIII. The Bottom Line

- A. There are a large amount of witnesses that agree on two things:
 - 1. *Which books belong in the Hebrew Bible:* However they are numbered, whether there are 22, 24, or 39 books, all of these witnesses agree on which books belong in the canon of the Hebrew Bible.
 - 2. *The wording of the text of the Hebrew Bible:* With all the different textual witnesses, such as the Masoretic Text, the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Targums, Talmudic Commentary, Origen, Dead Sea Scrolls, and the Septuagint, we can be extremely confident in wording of the text of the Hebrew Bible.
- B. These witnesses are extremely diverse, yet they agree on these two things. Many of these people were completely at odds with each other in regards to theology and beliefs, and many lives hundreds of years apart, yet they all agreed on which books belong in the Hebrew Bible, and the wording of the text of the Hebrew Bible.

The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha

I. What are the "Apocrypha"?

- A. The Apocrypha are a collection of popular Jewish literature that was mostly written during the time between the Old and New Testaments (i.e. the "Intertestamental Period").
- B. There are 15 books which are considered apocryphal: The Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus (aka Sirach), Tobit, Judith, 1 Esdras, 2 Esdras, 1 Maccabees, 2 Maccabees, Baruch, The Letter of Jeremiah, Additions to Esther, Prayer of Azariah, Susanna, Bel and the Dragon, and the Prayer of Manasseh.
 1. The Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox church holds to these books as Scripture. Rather than calling them "Apocrypha," they refer to them as the "deuterocanonical" books.
- B. What about the Pseudepigrapha?
 1. These are the same types of books as the Apocrypha, however, they were never considered Scripture by anyone. Neither Protestants, Catholics, or Eastern Orthodox include them in their Bibles.
 2. Here are some examples of pseudepigraphal books: Jubilees, 1 and 2 Enoch, 2 and 3 Baruch, Psalm 151, 3 and 4 Maccabees, The Martyrdom of Isaiah, etc.

II. What should we do with the Apocrypha?

- A. Here are ten reasons why we **should not** accept the Apocrypha as Scripture
 1. *The Jews rejected it:* The Jews have never regarded the apocryphal books as Scripture. All the Jewish witnesses we looked at before (Josephus, Aquila, Theodotian, Symmachus, the Talmud, Jamnia, etc.) did not mention these books as canonical, nor did they imply that they were considered Scripture. Instead, the Jews understood that these were simply books written by Jews about Jews, and used them for study and edification, but never as Scripture. Moreover, the Jews believed that prophecy and new special revelation from God ceased with the closure of the TaNaK.
 2. *The Dead Sea Scrolls:* In the caves at Qumran, 225 manuscripts from the TaNaK (every book but Esther) were discovered, along with 670 manuscripts of non-canonical writings from the people at Qumran. Of the 15 apocryphal books, only 3 passages were found: a few parts of Sirach and parts of Tobit, and a tiny portion of the Epistle of Jeremiah.
 3. *The Septuagint (LXX):* It is often claimed that the Septuagint translation included the Apocrypha, but that is anachronistic (i.e. it belongs to a period other than that being portrayed). The oldest complete manuscripts of the LXX that we have today (Alexandrinus, Vaticanus, Sinaiticus) are from the 4th—5th century and they include the Apocrypha, *however* most of the Apocrypha was written *after* the LXX was originally translated. These manuscripts are from 600 years after the translation was completed. The LXX was translated from 250-150 BC and the Apocrypha was written from 150 BC–100 AD, so the original translation of the LXX could not have included the Apocrypha.
 4. *Language and Autographs:* Though no autographs exist for either the Hebrew or Greek Bible, we have original language manuscripts. With the Apocrypha, the original languages are unknown. We have no autographs, and we have no clue whether they were originally written in Hebrew or Aramaic, or if they were written in Greek, like most of the manuscripts we have of them today.

5. *Internal claims*: There is not a single claim within the Apocrypha to inspiration, or any implication that it is the word of God. This is different than the actual books of the Old and New Testaments.

6. *Origen*: In his massive work, the *Hexapla*, Origen did not include any of the Apocrypha. If he was going to write out the entire Hebrew Bible *six times by hand*, you would think he would want to be clear on which books were actually Scripture, and he would not want to leave any out!

7. *Jerome*: When he translated the Bible into Latin (i.e. the *Vulgate*), Jerome refused to translate the Apocrypha because he did not believe they should be in the Bible. Though, under intense pressure he allowed others to translate it.

8. *Council of Trent*: It was not until the Council of Trent in 1546 that the Roman Catholic Church officially recognized the “deuterocanonical” status of the Apocrypha. In large part, these books were accepted as part of the Counter-Reformation to validate church practices that could not be scripturally supported otherwise.

9. ***The New Testament***: No author of the New Testament *ever quotes or alludes* to the Apocrypha, though they quote and allude to the Old Testament copiously. If these books were considered Scripture, you would assume that the writers would reference them just as often as the other books of the Hebrew Bible. (*Side note*: The book of Jude quotes and alludes to the pseudepigraphal books 1 Enoch and the Assumption of Moses. However, *no one* has ever believed that either of these books were canonical.

10. ***Jesus***: Jesus anchors his identity in the story of the Hebrew Bible, however, he makes *no reference* to the Apocrypha, and he also implies closure of the TaNaK (Luke 11:50-51, 24:44). This shows that Jesus himself did not consider the apocryphal books to be Scripture.

III. Conclusion

- A. Based on the ten reasons stated above (which are not exhaustive), we can clearly and confidently say that the apocryphal books *should not* be included in the Christian canon and are not to be identified as Scripture.
- B. Though the Apocrypha should not be considered Scripture and thus should not be included in our Bibles, there are several uses for them. For one, these books can act as any other book and can speak things that are in fact true, as long as they align with Scripture. Also, the Apocrypha provide us with valuable historical information, and show us how Jews were interpreting and applying their Scriptures. They also act as a witness to the true books of the Hebrew Bible, as we saw last session.

The Formation of the Greek Bible (New Testament)

I. The Greek Language

A. The New Testament was written entirely in Koine Greek. Since we referred to the Old Testament as the Hebrew Bible in order to avoid the stigma of the word “old,” it will be helpful to refer to the New Testament as the “Greek Bible.”

B. Greek is the earliest Indo-European language. The order of letters and letter names are comparable to Hebrew.

1. For example, Hebrew begins with Aleph, Bet, Gimel, and Dalet. Greek begins with Alpha, Beta, Gamma, and Delta.

2. Here is the entire Greek alphabet:

α β γ δ ε ζ η θ ι κ λ μ ν ξ ο π ρ σ (ς) τ υ φ χ ψ ω
Α Β Γ Δ Ε Ζ Η Θ Ι Κ Λ Μ Ν Ξ Ο Π Ρ Σ Τ Υ Φ Χ Ψ Ω

C. Because of the influence of Alexander the Great, Greek became the international trade language (i.e. the lingua franca) from around 330 BC to 330 AD. The type of Greek that was spread was called “Koine,” which is the Greek word for “common.”

1. The fact that Greek became the international trade language is significant, because it gave the Western world a single, common language through which the Gospel could be preached and understood. It seems that in God’s providence, he was preparing the world for the spread of the Gospel. Furthermore, God chose to reveal himself in the common language of the day, in a way that was accessible and understandable to everyone, whether poor or rich, educated or not.

II. The Autographs

A. Again, the autographs are the original texts that were written by the author. Just as with the Hebrew Bible, we do not have any surviving autographs of the Greek New Testament.

B. However, we can see that New Testament authors recognized *immediately* when Scripture was being written. Contrary to popular belief, it was not some men in a church council hundreds of years later who decided which books were Scripture; these books were immediately acknowledged by the Apostles and authors of the New Testament as Scripture.

C. Three Key Passages:

1. *1 Timothy 5:17* “For the Scripture says, ‘Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain,’ and ‘The worker deserves his wages.’”

a. Paul introduces these two quotes with the customary introduction for a quote from Scripture: “The Scripture says.” What follows is a quote from Deuteronomy (25:4), and then Paul quotes from the Gospel of Luke (10:7). Thus, Paul recognizes Luke’s writing as Scripture, equating it with the Hebrew Bible!

2. *2 Peter 3:16* “[Paul] writes the same way in all of 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.”

a. Here Peter equates Paul’s writings with the other Scriptures. The Greek phrasing in this passage makes it explicit that Peter is including Paul’s writing in the same category as the other Scriptures.

3. *1 Thessalonians 1:13* “And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe.”

- a. Paul acknowledges his own work as “the word of God,” and commends those who recognize this as well.
- D. This goes to show, that while the ink was wet, the New Testament authors knew that this was not regular writing, but instead knew that what they had just written was the Word of God.
- E. Side note: Understanding 1 Corinthians 7:12
 - 1. In 7:10, Paul says, “To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord).” In verse 12, he says, “To the rest I say this, (I, not the Lord).”
 - a. Was Paul saying this as opposed to God? Like he put a pause on writing the Word of God, and added his own, fallible thoughts?
 - 2. This *is not* what happened. In his writings, Paul consistently uses the term “Lord” to refer to Jesus, the second member of the Trinity. He is not claiming to say something independently of the Holy Spirit, but something that goes beyond what *Jesus* had already said during his earthly ministry. During his time on earth, Jesus had given the commands Paul gives in verse 10. However, while he was on earth Jesus did not mention what Paul says in verse 12. Rather than saying something contrary to God, Paul is expanding on something Jesus never quite touched on.

III. The Manuscripts

- A. The manuscripts of the Greek Bible were copied quickly and in a number of places. There were specific production centers where this copying occurred.
- B. The five manuscript copying centers were in Rome, Carthage, Byzantium, Caesarea, and Alexandria.
- C. These different copying centers developed into four major “text families”: (1) Western: Rome and Carthage, (2) Byzantine: Byzantium, (3) Caesarean: Caesarea, and (4) Alexandrian: Alexandria.
- D. The manuscripts of the Greek Bible were not as carefully copied as those of the Hebrew Bible, and so things are much different in regards to the manuscripts of the New Testament. With certain manuscripts being copied in certain places, each “family” developed its own tendencies. Manuscripts that created and then copied from would “pass on” their traits to the next generation. So for example, if in Byzantium, a certain scribe made an error in copying one of the manuscripts and then this flawed manuscript was then copied from for another manuscript, this could get passed on to a bunch of other Byzantine manuscripts, leading to a mistake that was common in manuscripts from that family. Since most manuscripts we have are not first generation (that is, manuscripts copied directly from the autographs), we must use the process of textual criticism to trace back through the families and detect possible copying mistakes. We will talk about this more in depth later.

IV. The Enemies of the Greek Bible

- A. Judaism (70 AD—132 AD): Especially after the destruction of the temple, there was increased hostility between the two religions. When Rome threatened to destroy the temple, Jewish Christians had no theological incentive to help them fight, for the church was now the temple (Ephesians 2, 1 Peter 2). The Jews were thus very opposed to the idea of new canonical writings claiming to carry on the story of the Hebrew Bible.
- B. Marcion (c. 150 AD): Marcion was one of the first “heretics” of Christianity. He believed that the God of the Hebrew Bible was inferior to the God of the Greek Bible, and thus believed the Hebrew Bible was inferior to the Greek Bible in general.
 - 1. Marcion only accepted Paul’s writings and a shortened version of Luke’s gospel as Scripture and rejected all other books of the Bible.

C. Gnostics (2nd Century): This early group of false teachers brought in additional books that they believed were inspired, adding “secretive” books that they believe gave them special information about God.

1. For example, books such as: the Apocryphon of John, Gospel of Truth, Apocalypse of Adam, Gospel of Thomas, etc. These books were not found until recently, and were written in the Coptic language around the 2nd and 3rd century, after the New Testament had been completed.

D. Islam: The Muslims had a major impact on the New Testament through the destruction of manuscript copying centers. They ended up overthrowing four of the five production centers.

1. They overthrew Caesarea in 638 AD, Alexandria in 640 AD, Carthage in 698 AD, and eventually Byzantium in 1453 AD.
2. They never overthrew Rome, *however*, the church in Rome started using the Vulgate in the 4th Century, which meant that effectively, no more manuscripts were being copied in Rome, except for in Latin.
3. So for 700 years, the only place producing manuscripts was Byzantium. That means today we have many more Byzantine texts than from any other family.

V. *The Influence of Erasmus (1469-1536)*

A. Erasmus was a scholar who ended up putting together the first Greek Bible. He used a few very late Byzantine-family Greek manuscripts at the library in Basel to produce an edited Greek New Testament.

B. At the time, there was a race between scholars to be the first to get a Greek New Testament to the printing press. This led to a hurried and somewhat sloppy work by Erasmus, as he was rushing to get the first copy to the press. He had used only about half a dozen manuscripts, and between them, there were over a dozen verses missing. In his haste, he back translated them from the Latin Vulgate into Greek and called it good. He later was ashamed of this and went back and revised his work and published another edition.

C. This first printed edition of the Greek Bible was released in 1515. A later revised edition of his work was released by Beza in 1604 and then by the Elzevir’s in 1633.

D. The Elzevir’s 1633 edition became the standardized Greek text for centuries, which became known as the *textus receptus*. Erasmus’ text was used as the base text for the KJV and all other translations until the late 1800’s, such as the Geneva Bible, Coverdale Bible, Luther Bible, etc.

VI. *Textual Criticism*

A. Textual criticism may be defined as “the discipline of restoring the biblical authors’ original words by comparing and contrasting the various copies and translations of the Bible.” (Jason DeRouchie, *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament*, 129).

1. In textual criticism, scholars compare all the manuscript evidence, from manuscripts in the original languages (Greek and Hebrew), early translations (the Septuagint, Targums, Vulgate, etc.), and other textual witnesses such as lectionaries and commentaries. After comparing and contrasting these different witnesses to the text, they then make an educated decision as to what the original reading likely was. Through this process, we can become convinced of the reading of the original autographs.

B. Textual criticism is different between the Greek and Hebrew Bible. With the Hebrew Bible, we have fewer manuscripts, but the quality is very good. The scribes were very copious and meticulously copied the Bible. With the Greek Bible, the opposite is true. Rather than quality,

we have an extremely large quantity. The scribes were not reckless, however, they were nowhere near as careful as the scribes of the Hebrew Bible.

C. Through the process of textual criticism we can reconstruct the autographs with only a small degree of uncertainty.

1. "The net result is that there is near unanimous agreement among biblical scholars that the Greek text used to translate our contemporary English versions is very close to the original text of the New Testament. In the small percentage of passages that remain uncertain, one can be sure that the original is either in the text or is the alternative found in the footnote." (Gordon Fee and Mark Strauss, *How to Choose a Translation for All Its Worth*, 113).
2. Scholarship shows that of the entirety of the New Testament, *less than one percent* of the text is truly in question. That is, out of the entire Greek Bible, there is less than one percent where there are variants that are in any way significant. For the Hebrew Bible, the number is nearly the same.
3. At first, the practice of textual criticism may sound unsettling. However, it should really increase our trust in the Bible. Through the process of textual criticism, we seek to discover the original text of Scripture that God inspired, and by this process, we may be convinced of the accuracy of the texts we have today. Is the text of our Hebrew and Greek Bibles today accurate? The answer is a resounding yes. Through textual criticism we may become even more convinced that the Bible we hold in our hands today is the Word of God.
4. Your faith *is not* hanging in the balance over any text critical issue. When we deal with text critical issues, 99% of the time it is something extremely minor, like a spelling mistake or a missing letter or word. There is no major text critical issue that changes any major doctrine or theological position.

VII. Rules of Textual Criticism

A. What follows are some basic "rules" of textual criticism that scholars follow. In reality, they are really more like guidelines by which scholars make decisions on a verse by verse basis. Obviously, most of you will never be making these decisions on your own and evaluating all the text critical data, however, I just wanted to expose you to these principles so that you know what scholars are looking for, and when you see a footnote or study note in your Bibles regarding a text critical decision you will have an idea what went into the process of making that decision.

B. We should give preference to...

1. The shorter variant reading, *because* copyists rarely omitted words, but sometimes added clarifying words. For example, in 1 John 5:7-8, it appears that this verse was an addition inserted to clarify an otherwise obscure and difficult passage.
2. The more difficult reading, *because* copyists sometimes attempt to clarify problematic or ambiguous passages. This means that a reading that disagrees with a parallel passage is more likely original, because a scribe was likely to attempt to harmonize the differences between the two passages (i.e. Luke 11:2-4 in comparison to Matthew 6:9-13).
3. The older reading, *because* the older the manuscript, the closer in time to the original. For example, Matthew 6:13a is not in the earliest manuscripts, and appears to be added later. In fact, it is found only in manuscripts of the Byzantine family, which in general tends to give more expansive readings.
4. The reading with the best manuscript support. There is a certain order in which scholars generally treat manuscripts (Alexandrian → Caesarean → Byzantine →

Western). For example, the story of the woman caught in adultery in John 7:53-8:11 is not found in any early manuscripts or in any of the best manuscripts. Thus, it is almost certainly not original.

5. The reading which best explains the rise of all the alternatives, *because* all deliberate (and most unintentional) changes have an explanation (i.e. Romans 8:1, 4).

6. The reading which best fits the author's vocabulary, style, and context. For example, Paul reserves the word *kurios* exclusively for Jesus, while referring the God the Father as *theos* or *pater*. So, later Byzantine texts that say "Lord God" (*theos kurios*) would not be authentic, because this is not how Paul uses the term anywhere else.

VIII. Varieties of Manuscripts

A. Oldest fragments: Papyri

1. Papyrus is a reed plant that grows in the arid Mediterranean climate that is woven together and used as paper. Unfortunately, papyrus does not stand up very well to age, and only survives well in dry, arid climates. Thus, the only place where it really survived was in Alexandria.

2. We have some partial New Testament manuscripts that are very old, dated as early as 94 AD. The earliest fragment we have is from 94 AD, and contains John 18:31-33, 37-38.

3. We have 131 papyri manuscripts and fragments (as of July 2016).

B. Oldest complete manuscripts: Uncials

1. Uncials, also referred to as "majuscules," are capital letter manuscripts from the 4th and 5th century. The uncials are very old and serve as some of the most important witnesses to the New Testament text.

2. The most important uncials are:

a. Codex Sinaiticus (Ⲙ) [4th Century]: Contains the entire Septuagint and New Testament.

b. Codex Alexandrinus (A) [5th century]: Contains the entire Septuagint and almost all of the New Testament.

c. Codex Vaticanus (B) [4th century]: Contains the entire Septuagint and almost all of the New Testament.

3. We have 323 uncial manuscripts (as of July 2016).

C. Minuscules

1. Minuscules, also referred to as "cursives," are later manuscripts that were written in lowercase/cursive. So, if you are looking at a manuscript and it is written in all capital letters, you know it is very old. If it is written in all lowercase, it was written after the 5th century. While the minuscules are from a later period, we have a way more of them than uncials.

2. We have 2,932 minuscule manuscripts (as of July 2016).

D. Lectionaries

1. Lectionaries are ancient Scripture reading portions that contain hand written copies of Scripture and were mostly used in church liturgies.

2. We have 2,463 copies of lectionaries (as of July 2016).

IX. Reconstructing the Text

A. When reconstructing the text of the Greek Bible through textual criticism, this is the general order that scholars follow:

1. Source One: Greek New Testament Manuscripts. As of July 2016, we have 5,849 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament.

- a. Papyri
 - b. Uncials
 - c. Minuscules
2. Source Two: Lectionaries
3. Source Three: Early Translations. We have tens of thousands of manuscripts of ancient translations of the Greek Bible which provide witness to the original text.
- a. Syriac Peshitta (c. 431 A.D.)
 - b. Coptic (Egyptian dialects) from the 3rd and 4th century
 - c. Armenian (North of Mesopotamia) from the 4th century
 - d. Georgian (North of Armenia) from the 5th century
 - e. Ethiopic (5th and 6th century)
 - f. Latin (Vulgate, 4th century): We have more than twice as many Latin manuscripts as Greek.
4. Source Four: Church Fathers
- a. We have tons of copies of works from the early church fathers, including: sermons, commentaries, correspondences, etc.
 - b. The church fathers wrote so prolifically that if we did not have a single Greek manuscript or lectionary, we would still have the entire New Testament, not missing a single verse. In fact, they quote Scripture over 1 million times.

X. Today's Greek Text

A. Rather than using only a few manuscripts from one text family as Erasmus did, scholars now use manuscripts from all text families. Today's Greek text takes into account (1) Greek manuscripts, (2) Lectionaries, (3) Translations, and (4) Church Fathers. With all these witnesses in hand, scholars create the best possible "eclectic" texts. The standard modern Greek Bible is the USB5 and the NA28, which serve as the base for almost all English translations.

B. With the Hebrew Bible, we don't have all that many manuscripts. We have some major Masoretic Texts, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and a bunch of witnesses to the canon. With the Old Testament, the controversy is more over the books than the text, whereas with the New Testament, the controversy is more over the text than the books. With the Hebrew Bible, we have fewer textual witnesses, with remarkably little variation between them. With the New Testament, the situation is the exact opposite. Instead, we have tens of thousands of witnesses to the text of the Greek Bible, but these witnesses have a lot more variation between them.

C. Bottom line

1. With tens of thousands of witnesses to the text of the Greek Bible, there is absolutely no way that anyone could have "hijacked" it in order to get it to read the way they wanted.
 - a. This is exactly what is behind the thinking of Dan Brown and the *Da Vinci Code*.
2. However, it is simply not possible for someone to have changed the wording of the text or the canonical books through some church council or private conspiracy. We have different manuscript centers, centuries apart from one another, and thousands of witnesses to the original texts. No one could possibly have taken over all of these to produce their own reading.

XI. Canon Formation: Comparing Views

A. There are many different views on the formation of the New Testament canon. Before we examine what appears to be the most coherent and the correct view, it will be helpful to look at some historically popular views.

B. The Roman Catholic View

1. The apostles had divinely sanctioned authority for all matters of faith and doctrine.
2. The popes and magisterium (ruling authority) are invested with the same authority as the original apostles through “apostolic succession.”
3. So it is the church who chooses the right canon (list of books).
4. Therefore, it makes no difference in what century this is determined. Once the magisterium decides, it is authoritative, fixed, infallible, and binding.
 - a. Historically, the final decision was made in 1546 at the Council of Trent (which included the deuterocanonical/apocryphal books).

C. Liberal View

1. The books that are in the Bible(s) were written by ancient men, shaping and reflecting the beliefs of their day.
2. Their origin was entirely human, not “inspired” by God.
3. Therefore, the selection of the books which came to be regarded by various communities of belief (i.e. Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, Jewish) was also done by humans, usually for self-authenticating, political purposes.
4. Thus the idea of a “canon” is artificial and entirely arbitrary. A “canon” is entirely a human construct which people use to endorse their preferred beliefs.

D. Traditional Protestant and Fundamentalist View

1. God inspired the inerrant books of the Bible.
2. The church then recognized these as God’s Word immediately.
3. The only disagreement with our current books were the result of people holding to false or mistaken views (i.e. Catholic, Orthodox).
4. The canon is reconfirmed to us today by a “criteria of canonicity.”
 - a. The problem with this view is that these “criteria of canonicity” are entirely modern concepts, and most of these “criteria” are ambiguous, subjective, or just plain wrong.

E. Modernized Protestant View

1. God inspired the New Testament authors to write books to establish the doctrine of the early church.
2. The selection process which determined the list of canonical books was done by the church councils of the 3rd—5th century
3. Since the councils themselves possess no ultimate, definitive authority (and who says their decisions were correct?), the question of canon must remain an open one.
 - a. While most proponents of this view would not outright admit this, it is true for them at least in theory. What if we found one of the “lost letters” of Paul? Or one of those other books mentioned in the Hebrew Bible? Couldn’t a new church council be formed in the 21st century to add a book or two to the canon?
4. Since errant, fallible humans decided which books are “inerrant,” this calls into question the very notion of inerrancy.

F. Modified Conservative View (*The best option*)

1. The term “canon” is used in different ways, leading to confusion. It appears that there are three different stages in canon development.

a. First Stage (1st Century): It **actually was** God’s Word, and the original authors and the apostles immediately knew that it was. The true identity of the text was the inspired Word of God, which was known immediately by the authors.

b. Second Stage (2nd Century at the latest): It was recognized and used as God’s Word within the Church, extending and equivalent to the already-established Old Testament canon. In this stage, it actually **functioned** as Scripture.

c. Third Stage (3rd—4th century): Formalized lists were compiled to indicate which books were **regarded** as God’s Word in the face of challenges. Up until this point, there was no need for such a list. It was only when Gnostic arguments and Marcion’s arguments were brought up that the church felt the compulsion to list out what book *had already* been operating as canonical.

Modern Translations and Translation Theory²

I. The Goals and Purpose of Bible Translation

A. What is translation?

1. Definition: the process of translating words or text from one language into another.

B. What is the main goal of translating the Bible?

1. The goal of translation is to accurately convey the meaning of the original text into the receptor language.

C. What makes a translation “good”?

1. *Accurate*: The main goal of translation is to accurately reproduce the meaning. When moving from Hebrew and Greek to English (or whatever language) the goal is to reproduce the meaning, rather than the form. While there are difference theories on how exactly this should be accomplished, (almost) everyone agrees that conveying meaning is the primary focus.

2. *Clear*: A good translation should be just as clear to modern readers of the English language as the Hebrew or Greek was clear to its original readers.

3. *Natural*: A translation should sound like common, normal, and natural English. Languages are constantly changing and growing, which is one of the reasons we need new and updated translations.

4. *Audience-Appropriate*: It is good for different translations to target specific audiences. For instance, there are translations for children, or for non-native English speakers. Translations should seek to have a vocabulary and style that is understandable to most people, and that would be appropriate to be read aloud in church.

II. Translation Theories

A. The Spectrum of Bible Translations

1. There are a bunch of different “translation theories,” but I think the most helpful way to understand this topic is by viewing all of them on a spectrum. The farthest to the left, we have translations that are more form-based, and the farthest to the right are the translations that are more meaning based. Along this spectrum, it is helpful to plot five different points.

B. The Five Points on the Spectrum

1. *“Literal” or “Word for Word”*: Although we will later see that the terms “literal” and “word for word” are inaccurate when it comes to Bible translations, it is helpful here to make a point: There is only one example of a truly “literal” translation, and that is an interlinear Bible. Interlinear Bibles list the words in the original language in their original order, and then include a basic “gloss” or definition under each word. Reading an interlinear like it is a normal translation would lead to nothing but confusion. Thus, an interlinear is not really a translation, but rather is helpful for showing the word order and form of the original.

2. *Formal Equivalence*: These types of translations attempt to maintain the formal structures of the original Hebrew and Greek and try to consistently reproduce the form

² Much of the content of this section is adapted from Andy Naselli, *How to Understand and Apply the New Testament: Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology*, pg. 50-78, and Bill Mounce, “Is the Two-Fold Formal/Functional Sufficient?: Five, Not Two Basic Translation Theories,” and “The Myth of a Literal Translation.”

of the original into English. Also, formal equivalent translations try to minimize the interpretation of the scholars while translating.

3. *Functional or Dynamic Equivalence*: This translation theory prioritizes reproducing the meaning of the original into English, even if this means losing some of the form of the original. In most cases, these translations will follow the form of the original when it makes sense in English, but when it doesn't, they will move to a more functional translation. Ultimately, their goal is to reproduce meaning, which means that an additional amount of interpretation is involved, which may be problematic. However, it does produce a more understandable translation, which is good.

4. *Natural Language*: This category is technically an extension of the prior one, however, the distinction is important. Natural language translations see no value in reproducing the original form, and thus exclusively focus on reproducing meaning. These translations attempt to convey the meaning in a way that will evoke the same response in the readers as the originals did. These translations introduce even more interpretation, and sometimes can introduce things that are not included in the original languages in order to achieve natural English style and readability.

5. *Paraphrases and Contemporary Relevance Versions*: Technically speaking, a paraphrase is a rewording of the original text for the purpose of simplification *in the same language*. So, this means that any version that is moving from Greek or Hebrew to English, no matter how dynamic it is, cannot be correctly called a paraphrase. However, it may be helpful to call these "contemporary relevance versions." These versions are going to so prioritize meaning, readability, and modernity, that they will remove essentially all cultural perspectives from the text in order to connect to the modern reader. These *should not* be called "Bibles," because at any point it is difficult to tell what is the Bible and what is the author's attempt to make the message of the Bible relevant to their own culture. There are extreme amounts of interpretation in these versions, and thus there is a real danger if the author is interpreting things wrongly. In this category are *The Message*, *The New Testament in Modern English*, the original *Living Bible*, and the *Passion Translation*.

III. Excursus: The Myth of a Literal Translation

A. It is extremely common for publishers, advertisements, and many Christians (both scholars and lay people) to refer to translations that are consistently more form based as "literal" or "word for word." However, this is extremely inaccurate and just not helpful. I believe that the word "literal" does not "literally" mean what we say it means, and by using this word, we are leading to confusion as to what a "literal translation" is, and more importantly, what it means for a translation to be accurate.

B. The basic meaning or sense of the word "literal" has to do with *meaning*, not *form*. All English dictionaries define the word as primarily meaning "without embellishment" or "free from exaggeration." Again, the emphasis of the word "literal" is in regards to the *meaning* being conveyed, not the *form*. Thus, a "literal" translation is one that is primarily faithful to the *meaning* of the author, not the *form*.

C. Some dictionaries offer "word-for-word" or "verbatim" as a secondary and less common definition of the word literal. But if this is what we mean when we use the word in regards to translations, then no translation qualifies as literal, not even an interlinear!

1. Bill Mounce provides a helpful example: "Take something as simple as τοῦ θεοῦ. What is its literal translation? 'Of God?' First of all, we do not have a genitive case in English, and so we must turn a foreign grammatical construction into a prepositional

phrase, 'of God.' Secondly, no translation would write 'the God' but simply 'God' since we know the article is functioning in Greek as a part of a proper name, which we don't do in English. And then of course we have to capitalize, 'God,' So how is it 'literal' to translate τοῦ θεοῦ as 'of God?'"

D. If all scholars did was translate words, a "literal" translation would produce nothing but meaningless phrases. In fact, no one should even desire a "literal" translation in this sense, because if we followed this definition, we would be reading an interlinear not a translation!

1. For example, this is what we would read for John 3:16—"in this way for he loved the god the world so that the son the only he gave in order that each the believing into him not he perish but he has life eternal."

2. Bill Mounce says, "These are the English words that "literally" represent the Greek words. But no one thinks this is translation, so why would someone ask for a "literal translation of the Bible? Any publisher that advertises their Bible is a "literal" translation should only be selling interlinears. My point is simply this: We miscommunicate when we claim a literal translation goes word-for-word when in fact there is a not a single verse in the Bible where they actually do."

E. Some argue that a very formal translation is important because they reflect the underlying Hebrew or Greek structure. However, English is so different from both of these languages, that even the most formal translations diverge from the underlying structure quite frequently. This would then confuse someone who doesn't actually know the original languages, because they might think they are reading a translation that is following the original structure, when in reality, the passage they are reading is not following the structure.

1. Certainly, formal translations are needed and have their place, but we must not believe the lie that a certain translation is always going to copy the form of the original. And besides, if you know Hebrew or Greek well enough to gain insight from the original structure, then why not read the Bible in Hebrew or Greek?

F. It is also important to realize that words themselves do not have "literal" meanings. Instead, each word has what is called a "semantic range." Bill Mounce illustrates this by saying that each word has a bundle of sticks, with each stick representing a different (but perhaps related) meaning. One of the sticks may certainly be larger than the rest, representing the core idea of the word, or what might be called the "gloss," which is what someone who is a learning a language would memorize. But in reality, the "gloss" is just one meaning among many.

1. Take for example the word "key." What does "key" literally mean? Well, there is no "literal" meaning of the word "key!" It has no core meaning; There is no big stick in its bundle. "Did you lose your key?" "What is the key to the puzzle?" "What is the key point" "What key is that song in?" "Press the A key" "He shoots best from the key" "I first ate key lime pie in Key West in the Florida Keys."

G. Because words do not have "literal" meanings, a word-for-word translation is unrealistic. Meaning is not conveyed by single words, but instead is conveyed through groups of words, sentences, and paragraphs which are bound together by grammar and understood within a particular context. Therefore, meaning requires a context larger than an individual word, and accuracy has to do with meaning, not with form.

H. Even in translations that are more formal, such as the ESV and NASB, there are times where dynamic translations are absolutely necessary. Sometimes, these translations end up translating a passage more dynamically than a consistently functional translation like the NIV! It is important to see translations as on a spectrum, not just fixed in one place. The translation method varies from passage to passage, and book to book.

I. As we will look at later, there are even more difficulties when trying to translate metaphors and idioms “literally.”

J. So, I hope this shows that there is no such thing as “literal” or “word for word” translation, and that even if there was, you would not want one! We must understand that a true “literal” translation, in the most common sense of the word, is one that conveys the meaning of the original words into the receptor language without exaggeration or embellishment.

IV. *Why New and Updated Translations are Necessary*

A. *Manuscript Discoveries*: One of the major reasons new translations are needed is that we are continually finding more and more manuscripts. For example, in the late 1940s we found the Dead Sea Scrolls, which were a massive discovery for Old Testament scholarship. All the findings from these manuscripts have just recently been released, and newer translations are able to take into account these findings.

B. *Better Knowledge of Hebrew and Greek*: Another important reason is that our knowledge of the Biblical languages is constantly growing. We know way more about ancient Hebrew today than we did during the 1600s. For instance, there are places where the translators of the KJV simply did not know what a Hebrew word meant, so they just transliterated it and called it good. Today, we know a lot more and can solve that problem.

C. *Changes in English*: Also, the English language is constantly changing and growing. This means that new translations are necessary. If you read the 1611 KJV, it doesn’t make much sense, even though it was written in English. This is because the English language has changed so much! A good example of this is in regards to gender in translation, which we will talk about later.

D. *Different Reading Levels*: Different translations are necessary for different groups of people. For example, an adult probably won’t be reading the same translation as a child, or a native English speaker might need a different translation than someone who is learning English as a second language.

E. *Different Uses*: There are also different uses for Bibles, and hence different translations are required to fulfil these needs. For example, you might use a different translation for personal study than you would for public reading in the church.

V. *Pros of Each Theory*

A. *“Literal” or “Word for Word”*: Interlinears are helpful for viewing the structure and word order of the original language when studying a passage or translating.

B. *Formal Equivalence*: These translations are less interpretive than others, and therefore the reader is less likely to be confused as to what the text says as opposed to what the text means. Also, a formal translation will favor ambiguity because the translators aren’t interpreting as much, which can be helpful for studying and for the advanced student. These translations may be helpful for preaching or teaching from, since there is less need to correct the translation. Another plus is that readers will be able to pick up word patterns easier because this approach tries to translate the same Greek and Hebrew words with the same English words as much as possible. Lastly, it enables English readers to follow the argument better in Epistles because they more consistently render logical connectives such as “therefore,” “but,” or “for,” and also more consistently translates participles and other subordinate words and clauses as syntactically subordinate to the controlling verb and clause.

C. *Functional or Dynamic Equivalence*: The main benefit of a functional translation is that when it is done correctly, it is more accurate than a formal translation because it conveys the meaning better. This produces a more understandable translation, which is in fact the purpose of translation. Dynamic translations create readable Bibles that do not require a scholar or pastor

to explain, except in some circumstances. Even the lay person can read the Word of God. Also, these translations may be more clear, because sometimes maintaining a more Hebrew or Greek structure introduces ambiguity into the text that was not there in the original. Functional translations are appropriate for those without a high literary ability like children or poorly educated people.

D. *Natural Language*: These versions have the same benefits as functional equivalence translations, however, they are even easier to understand. By using natural English, these translations are understandable by the average reader, even those who are not educated in “Biblish” or “Christianese.”

E. *Paraphrases and Contemporary Relevance Versions*: These publications can be helpful for providing very simple summaries and explanations of the text to those who don’t understand, such as children or new believers. When rightly interpreted, these books offer the meaning of the text super clearly. By sacrificing historical accuracy, the text becomes culturally relevant.

VI. Cons of Each Theory

A. *“Literal” or “Word for Word”*: Interlinears are going to make no sense if read like an actual translation and will not convey meaning as well (or at all).

B. *Formal Equivalence*: Because formal translations attempt to follow the original structure and form, the text can occasionally be ambiguous and thus not as accurate as a translation that conveys the meaning. Also, because formal translation put so much emphasis on the gloss or one word, a translation can occasionally be misleading. By sticking to a more formal rendering into English, these translations often read very “woodenly” and occasionally make no sense. They can be very hard to follow for long periods of time, especially in narratives. The language of these translations often isn’t natural and understandable. As we saw earlier, there is no such thing as a “literal” or “word for word” translation, though these types of translations are often advertised as so, which is misleading. These translations may obscure the fact that ultimately it is the meaning of the text which is inspired and that must be conveyed as we translate.

C. *Functional or Dynamic Equivalence*: Because these translations focus more on meaning than form, they require more interpretation by the translators. This is good when they get it right but can introduce pollution to the text when they get it wrong. This is why it is important that there are footnotes with alternate readings. These translations often lose the benefits of a formal translation, such as the ability to follow repeated words and the logic of the argument in an epistle. Moreover, because this translation type is in a sense a mediating category, it may sometimes be hard to understand.

D. *Natural Language*: By completely abandoning the original form, these translations lose all the benefits of a formal translation. Furthermore, there is much more interpretation that is introduced, which may be dangerous, as ideas that are not included in the Greek or Hebrew may be introduced in order to make sense in natural English. Lastly, these versions may read so naturally that you cannot tell that though the Bible is God’s Word for us today, it is also an ancient book rooted in real history.

E. *Paraphrases and Contemporary Relevance Versions*: These books carry the same cons as the last group, however, to a greater extent. So much interpretation is introduced that there is extreme danger, especially when the interpretation is off. Often, these publications are the work of one author, and thus there are individual theological biases introduced to the text (i.e. The Message, the Passion Bible). At any given point, it is hard or even impossible to tell when you are reading the Bible and when you are reading the author’s comments. Again, these works should not be considered Bibles, and though they can be helpful in certain situations, should never be used for regular individual study, public reading of Scripture, or preaching.

VII. Difficulties in Translating the Bible

A. *Idioms*: An idiom is a group of words or a phrase where the meanings of individual words do not add up to the meaning of the phrase. Modern English is full of idioms, such as: “break a leg” = good luck; “a piece of cake” = an easy task; “an arm and a leg” = a great expense; “let the cat out of the bag” = prematurely share a secret; etc. Idioms are extremely difficult to translate, because if you translate them in a form-based way, you almost certainly won’t convey meaning, and you will confuse the readers.

1. For example, in Hebrew, God is often described as אָרְרַךְ אֶפְיָם (see Ex. 34:6).

Translated formally, this says “Long of nose.” Wow! God has a long nose! Did you know that? In reality, this is a Hebrew idiom that means “slow to anger.” That is how the NIV translates this phrase.

B. *Metaphors and Similes*: A simile is a comparison using the words “like” or “as,” and a metaphor is a comparison without using those two words. When translating, it is often difficult to decide whether a metaphor should be translated in a form-based way or a meaning-based way. It is a judgement call, and all translations do some of both. Sometimes, a metaphor that is translated formally will make sense in the receptor language, sometimes it won’t.

1. Bill Mounce shared a story about a time where he was speaking in China, and he used the phrase “straddle the fence.” As soon as he said it, he realized he hadn’t seen any fences in China, and later asked the translator what she said. She had translated his metaphor as “a foot in two boats.”

2. Additional difficulty is introduced when there are metaphors which carry theological meaning or significance. For example, almost all translations say that Jesus is the “Lamb of God” in John 1:29. But what if you were translating for a tribe that had never seen a lamb? What if the parallel animal in their culture was a pig? Should we call Jesus the “Swine of God?” That probably makes you cringe, because you know that mixing up pigs and sheep will confuse other themes in the Bible, especially ones like sacrifice and holiness. So sometimes a translator must leave the cultural distance and simply educate the readers.

C. *Euphemisms*: A euphemism is a mild or indirect word or expression that you substitute for one that might be too harsh or blunt when it refers to something unpleasant or embarrassing. For example, in English we say “I need to go to the bathroom” instead of “I need to defecate.”

1. In Hebrew and Greek, there are euphemisms that if translated formally, would not convey meaning. So instead, we must translate them in another way, either substituting an equivalent euphemism in English, or by simply conveying the meaning in English.

2. For example, Hebrew often uses the verb יָדַע to refer to sexual intercourse (see Gen. 4:1). The word in Hebrew is usually glossed as “to know.” Some translations keep this euphemism and say, for example, “Adam knew his wife Eve” (ESV). Others substitute a culturally equal euphemism, such as the NIV which says “Adam made love to his wife Eve.”

D. *Audience Appropriate/Dignified Translations*: The concept of euphemisms is also connected to that of creating an appropriate and dignified translation. As we mentioned earlier, one of the qualities of an excellent translation is that it is audience-appropriate. Especially for a church gathering or for reading with children, this becomes very important.

1. A good example is in 1 Samuel 20:30a, where Saul says to his son: בְּנֵי־נָעֻת הַמְרִדוֹת
The NASB, ESV, NIV, and others translate this as “You son of a perverse, rebellious woman!” The NET says, “You stupid traitor!” The NLT says, “You stupid son of a whore!” These are all fine translations, but a really culturally equivalent translation into English

that would carry the same meaning as the Hebrew would be “You stupid son of a b_____!” However, out of sensitivity to various readers and public settings, it is probably best not to translate it this way.

D. *Money, Weights, and Measures*: Because we use different measurements than people did in ancient times, we must ask how we should handle these terms in Scripture. Some translations decide to translate the Greek or Hebrew word into English, and then add a footnote with the modern equivalent. Others do the opposite.

F. *Gender in Translation*: This final difficulty is a major obstacle, and is especially relevant today. There are many different views on the subject, and the topic is often one of major argument. The question is in regards to how gender specific terms should be translated in Scripture. English is a changing language, and while the words “man” and “he” and “him” used to refer to a person in general, this is no longer the case. However, the languages of Hebrew and Greek use words that function like English used to, where a masculine word stands for a person in general. Because English is changing, many Bible translators are calling for language that accommodates these changes. Some people, however, believe that this should not be done, and argue that people who suggest it should be done are liberal, politically correct, and feminists.

1. The reality is, English has changed. Many people today do not hear “man” and “he” generically, and thus if we leave these words when we are talking about people in general, they will be confused and will not hear the message of the Bible. Bill Mounce shared a story of walking into his daughter’s bedroom and finding a Bible verse taped to her wall, but she had crossed out “he” and written “she.” She then asked her dad, “The Bible is for me too, and not just for my brother, isn’t it?”

2. Because the English language has changed, I believe translations should intentionally clarify gender. This leads to the approach of a “gender accurate translation.” When the original author was referring to men in specific, masculine terminology is used. When the author was referring to both men and women, inclusive language is used. This concept is in fact biblical, as there are times where a New Testament author quotes the Hebrew Bible in a gender inclusive way. For example. Romans 5:15 quoting Isaiah 52:7, 2 Corinthians 6:18 quoting 2 Samuel 7:14, etc.

3. What this does not mean is that a translation should seek to neutralize or remove all gender-specific references. This would be wrong, and is clearly unbiblical.

4. This whole process is very complicated, because often gender in language is very complex. For example, Hebrew and Greek both have gendered nouns, whereas English doesn’t. However, sometimes the gender of the noun does not match the biological gender. For example, the plural form of “fathers” in Hebrew is feminine, but this does not mean that all fathers are women. Also, in some efforts to change an originally singular word that is standing for both men and women, a translation that makes the word plural may change the original meaning.

5. Another special problem with languages that seek to accurately translate gender is in regards to passages that are originally referring to Jesus. For example, in some translations, Psalm 8:4-7 are changed from masculine singular nouns and verbs to neutral plural verbs. However, both in the context of the Psalms, and based off its quotation in Hebrews 2 and 1 Corinthians 15, this passage is clearly in reference to Jesus. So, changing the gender specific language changes the meaning.

6. Overall, updating Bible translations so that they conform to the standard use of English today is a good thing, as long as it can be done in a way that does not obscure or change the meaning of the original text.

- a. “If you’re going to offend non-Christians, offend them only with what the Bible teaches—not how you translate it. This is not about being politically correct or embracing a radical feminist agenda. It’s about communicating accurately and clearly.” –Andy Naselli (*How To Understand and Apply the New Testament*, 72)

VIII. *What to Do Instead of Bickering Over Bible Translations*

- A. *Regularly Benefit from the Strengths of Multiple Translations*: All translations have their strengths and weaknesses. By using multiple translations, we can get the best of all worlds.
- B. *Thank God for Good Bible Translators and Translations*: Bible translation is extremely difficult. In English, we are extremely blessed to have such a wide variety of good, evangelical translations. We should never take this for granted and should praise God for this, especially when there are millions of people who do not have this luxury.
- C. *Be Careful When You Criticize a Translation*: Again, Bible translation is so incredibly complicated, and is such a meticulous process, that we should be careful when criticizing. Especially when we know little to nothing about Hebrew or Greek and the process of translation, and we are talking about scholars who spent years translating a particular version!
- D. *Recognize How Similar English Translations Are*: Rather than focusing on how translations differ, recognize that they also share a lot in common. In fact, they are more similar than you might realize.
- E. *Understand that Different People Have Different Opinions*: This is not a topic of salvific importance. You aren’t going to hell because you use the NIV, while someone else uses the ESV. Have respectful discussion, learn from those who disagree, and realize that though important, this issue should not separate Christians.

IX. *Conclusion*

- A. Suggested Translations (in order of most formal to most functional): NASB, ESV, NRSV, CSB, NIV, NET, NLT.
- B. As I have mentioned, it is extremely helpful to use multiple translations with multiple purposes. For instance, when I study, I use the ESV, however, when I am doing my daily reading I prefer the NIV. By using different translations, you can be sure that there is a consensus in meaning (not necessarily wording), which grants certainty that there has been no pollution that has occurred in meaning during the translation process from the Hebrew or Greek to English. Whether or not you have physical copies of all these translations, you can find them free online or on an app for your phone.
- C. We have so many good translations out there, you can be confident that you are reading the Word of God, and that the Bible you hold in your hands, whether it is the ESV, NIV, NLT, or CSB, is the inspired and authoritative Word of God.

The Hebrew Alphabet					
ו vav	ה hē	ד dalet	ג gimel	ב bēt	א ’aleph
ך kaph (final form)	כ kaph	י yōd	ט ṭēt	ח ḥēt	ז zayin
ס samek	ן nūn (final form)	נ nūn	ם mēm (final form)	מ mēm	ל lamed
ק qōph	ץ tsadē (final form)	צ tsadē	ף pē (final form)	פ pē	ע ’ayin
		ת tav	ש shīn	ש śīn	ר rēsh

Letter	Name	Pronunciation
א	'aleph	// <i>Not heard in English</i> (represented by ' in the name of this consonant)
ב / בּ	bēt	/b/ as in <i>boy</i> (בּ) and /v/ as in <i>verse</i> (בַּ)
ג / גּ	gimel	/g/ as in <i>girl</i>
ד / דּ	dalet	/d/ as in <i>door</i>
ה	hē	/h/ as in <i>help</i>
ו	vav	/v/ as in <i>verse</i>
ז	zayin	/z/ as in <i>zoo</i>
ח	ḥēt	/h/ <i>Not used in English</i> (this is a rough /h/ sound like when you clear your throat)
ט	ṭēt	/t/ as in <i>top</i>
י	yōd	/y/ as in <i>yard</i>
כּ / כ (ך)	kaph	/c/ as in <i>cup</i> (כּ) and /ch/ as in the Scottish word for lake, e.g. “ <i>loch</i> ness” (כַּ)
ל	lamed	/l/ as in <i>lake</i>
מ (ם)	mēm	/m/ as in <i>man</i>
נ (ן)	nūn	/n/ as in <i>next</i>
ס	samek	/s/ as in <i>sand</i>
ע	'ayin	// <i>Not heard in English</i> (represented by ' in the name of this consonant)
פּ / פ (ף)	pē	/p/ as in <i>park</i> (פּ) and /ph/ as in <i>phrase</i> (פֶּ)
צ (ץ)	tsadē	/ts/ as in <i>nets</i>
ק	qōph	/k/ as in <i>conquer</i> (sounds similar to כּ, but is pronounced further back in the throat)
ר	rēsh	/r/ as in <i>role</i> (the /r/ is rolled with the tongue in the front of the mouth)
שׁ	śīn	/s/ as in <i>sand</i> (sounds the same as ס)
שׂ	shīn	/sh/ as in <i>ship</i>
תּ / ת	tav	/t/ as in <i>top</i> (sounds the same as ט)

The Greek Alphabet

A α
alpha

B β
beta

Γ γ
gamma

Δ δ
delta

Ε ε
epsilon

Z ζ
zeta

Η η
eta

Θ θ
theta

Ι ι
iota

Κ κ
kappa

Λ λ
lambda

Μ μ
mu

Ν ν
nu

Ξ ξ
xi

Ο ο
omicron

Π π
pi

Ρ ρ
rho

Σ σ ς
sigma

Τ τ
tau

Υ υ
upsilon

Φ φ
phi

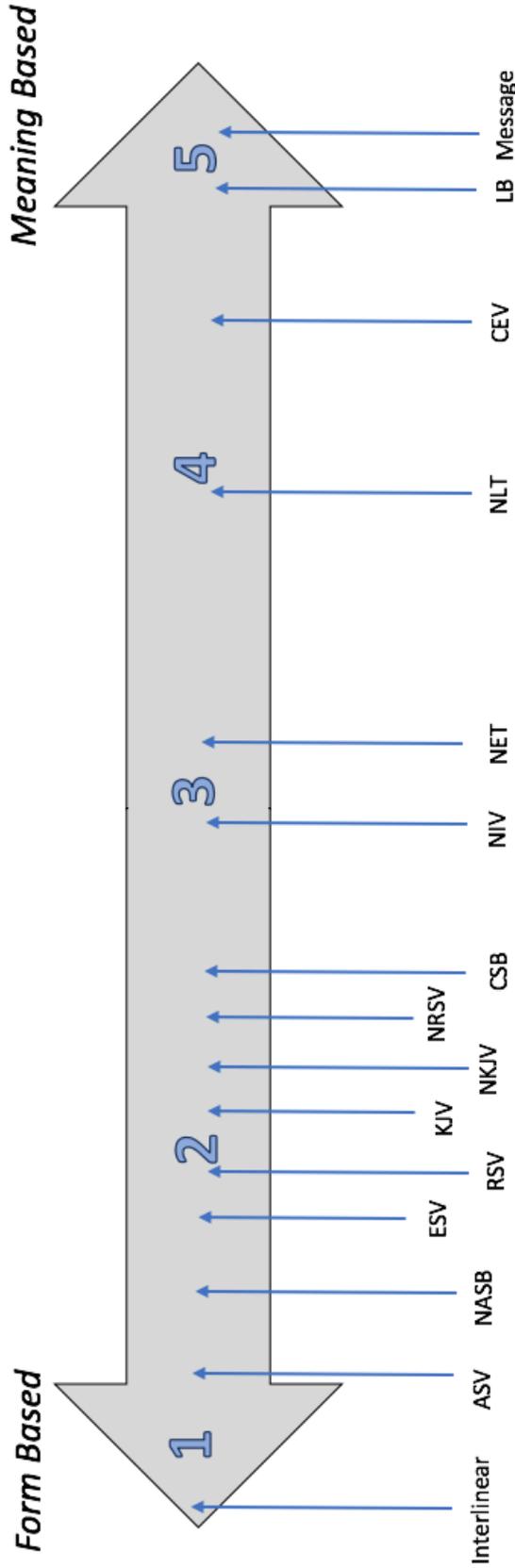
Χ χ
chi

Ψ ψ
psi

Ω ω
omega

Letter	Name	Pronunciation
A α	alpha	/a/ as in <i>father</i>
B β	beta	/b/ as in <i>bible</i>
Γ γ	gamma	/g/ as in <i>gone</i>
Δ δ	delta	/d/ as in <i>dog</i>
E ε	epsilon	/e/ as in <i>met</i>
Z ζ	zeta	/z/ as in <i>daze</i>
H η	eta	/ē/ as in <i>obey</i>
Θ θ	theta	/th/ as in <i>thing</i>
I ι	iota	/i/ as in <i>intrigue</i> (the iota can be either short /i/ or long /ī/)
K κ	kappa	/k/ as in <i>kitchen</i>
Λ λ	lambda	/l/ as in <i>law</i>
M μ	mu	/m/ as in <i>mother</i>
N ν	nu	/n/ as in <i>new</i>
Ξ ξ	xi	/x/ as in <i>axiom</i>
O ο	omicron	/o/ as in <i>not</i>
Π π	pi	/p/ as in <i>peach</i>
P ρ	rho	/r/ as in <i>rod</i>
Σ σ ζ	sigma	/s/ as in <i>study</i>
T τ	tau	/t/ as in <i>talk</i>
Υ υ	upsilon	/u/ as in the German <i>ü</i> (or as the /u/ in <i>universe</i> or the /oo/ in <i>book</i>)
Φ φ	phi	/ph/ as in <i>phone</i>
X χ	chi	/ch/ as in as in the Scottish word for lake, e.g. “ <i>loch</i> ness”
Ψ ψ	psi	/ps/ as in <i>lips</i>
Ω ω	omega	/ō/ as in <i>tone</i>

Translation Philosophy Spectrum



- 1. "Literal" or "Word for Word":** Although the terms "literal" and "word for word" are inaccurate when it comes to Bible translations, it is helpful here to make a point: There is only one example of a truly "literal" translation, and that is an interlinear Bible. Interlinear Bibles list the words in the original language in their original order, and then include a basic "gloss" or definition under each word. Reading an interlinear like it is a normal translation would lead to nothing but confusion. Thus, an interlinear is not really a translation, but rather is helpful for showing the word order and form of the original.
- 2. Formal Equivalence:** These types of translations attempt to maintain the formal structures of the original Hebrew and Greek and try to consistently reproduce the form of the original into English. Also, formal equivalent translations try to minimize the interpretation of the scholars while translating.
- 3. Functional or Dynamic Equivalence:** This translation theory prioritizes reproducing the meaning of the original into English, even if this means losing some of the form of the original. In most cases, these translations will follow the form of the original when it makes sense in English, but when it doesn't, they will move to a more functional translation. Ultimately, their goal is to reproduce meaning, which means that an additional amount of interpretation is involved, which may be problematic. However, it does produce a more understandable translation, which is good.
- 4. Natural Language:** This category is technically an extension of the prior one, however, the distinction is important. Natural language translations see no value in reproducing the original form, and thus exclusively focus on reproducing meaning. These translations attempt to convey the meaning in a way that will evoke the same response in the readers as the originals did. These translations introduce even more interpretation, and sometimes can introduce things that are not included in the original languages in order to achieve natural English style and readability.
- 5. Paraphrases and Contemporary Relevance Versions:** Technically speaking, a paraphrase is a rewording of the original text for the purpose of simplification *in the same language*. So, this means that any version that is moving from Greek or Hebrew to English, no matter how dynamic it is, cannot be correctly called a paraphrase. However, it may be helpful to call these "contemporary relevance versions." These versions are going to so prioritize meaning, readability, and modernity, that they will remove essentially all cultural perspectives from the text in order to connect to the modern reader. These *should not* be called "Bibles," because at any point it is difficult to tell what is the Bible and what is the author's attempt to make the message of the Bible relevant to their own culture. There are extreme amounts of interpretation in these versions, and thus there is a real danger if the author is interpreting things wrongly.