

History and Authenticity of the Bible
Lesson 16
The Inerrancy of the Bible

By
Dr. David Hocking

Brought to you by
[The Blue Letter Bible Institute](http://www.blbi.org)
<http://www.blbi.org>

A ministry of
The Blue Letter Bible
<http://www.blueletterbible.org>

To be a part of the canon they had to have evidence of divine inspiration. Here are the key words: must be proven by the testimony of the writers themselves, by Jesus Christ Himself, by eye-witnesses of what is recorded, by the witness of the Holy Spirit in the believers as they read the books, and by archaeology and historical accuracy. Wow, they actually considered those things? Oh yes! We still do today.

When you look at the Book of Mormon, you have no record anywhere of the testimony of any biblical writers that anything in that book belongs in the Bible. But contrary to popular opinion, we have a lot of remarks by the writers of the New Testament and Old Testament concerning other writers of the Old and New Testament. So you see, early Christians were wise on inspiration. They kept asking the question, "What is the evidence of divine inspiration? And if it is there, then we should expect to see it proven by the testimony of the writers or by Jesus Himself."

How do I know that David, when he was running around those limestone caves really had God speak to him directly like he says? There wasn't anybody there checking on it. And the answer is that we have Jesus Christ Himself saying in the gospels that "David, by the Spirit said..." Do you see? This seems like a simple issue but it's not. When Luke wrote, he spoke about the eye-witnesses. When you read in the book of [Acts 1:1](#), "The second treatise, O Theophilus," then you immediately know that he is referring to the Gospel of Luke.

You see throughout the Bible, those who study this issue—and this is a whole science—we have two kinds of criticism, class. We have higher criticism and we have lower criticism, and they don't refer to the height level of the critic. Okay? Higher criticism deals with matters like authorship, history, background, dates, etc., whether the writers quote one another. That is higher criticism. It doesn't mean they are liberals. There are liberal higher critics and there are fundamental higher critics. Lower criticism refers to the actual text, manuscript evidence. And

again they may be liberal in theology or fundamental. But inspiration was a very critical matter. Is there any evidence?

Also you know, when the early believers would read a book, if the early believers who had the Holy Spirit in them, if the Bible is true in 1 John 5 about the witness of the Spirit and about the Spirit bearing witness with our spirit, Romans 8, then we should see some evidence among all the believers as they read the chapter and pass it around. Let's everybody read it and what do we think? Now that wasn't the only test.

But folks, listen to me. If the Holy Spirit is truly in you, then one of the things that happens in you is He bears witness with your spirit as to the validity of what you read in the Bible. I trust that many, many times when I read something like in the Book of Mormon or somewhere else. I don't feel anything. It's not because I'm against the Mormons. There is nothing in there that compares with the impact of the Bible. I know it in my heart. Am I the final authority? No. But it's one of the evidences. And when all the Christians were unanimous, that's from God. And then when all the Christians were unanimous and said, that's nonsense. Well of course it wasn't accepted into the canon if they all rejected it by reading it.

Considerations for Canonicity

LANGUAGE:

Hebrew, Greek or Aramaic?

AUTHORSHIP:

Prophet or Apostle?

INSPIRATION:

Evidence: Divine, Human, Archaeological & Historic?

ACCEPTANCE:

Circulated, Read, Evaluated & Discussed?

COMPLETION:

Theological, Logical, Factual, Experiential & Biblical?

This brings me to number four, which is related to it, namely acceptance. To be a part of the canon, the books needed to be circulated, read, and accepted without reservation as being divinely inspired. That's the other interesting thing. They didn't take any doubtful books, none of them. They took only that which was unanimously accepted by the churches. Which I think is a rather interesting argument. In other words, they took the position when in doubt, throw it out.

The three major periods of history in which these issues of the canon were evaluated and discussed:

Historic Periods of Evaluation

- Circulation and Gradual Collection
(A.D. 70-170)
- Extensive Theological Writing
(A.D. 170-303)
- Formal Collection and Acceptance
(A.D. 303-397)

We have what's called Circulation and Gradual Collection. That was just in a hundred-year period from the end of the destruction of Jerusalem to about 170 A.D. It includes some of the most important church leaders that you could ever know. Why?—because they wrote voluminously and they had contact with the apostles. Polycarp was a disciple of John himself. We have men like Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Polycarp, Marcion, Papillus. And other writings included the Epistle of Barnabus, the Didache—the Didache means teaching. The expanded title is *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*. I read it in graduate school and it's an interesting volume. It quotes about early church practices. It's dated from the first century A.D. And apparently it might have come from the apostles trying to let the churches know what was to be practiced and what wasn't. It deals with baptism. It deals with communion. It deals with bishops and deacons. And it tells people about church order and it's of course, quoting a lot from the New Testament.

We have also *The Shepherd of Hermas*. Has anyone ever told you that the view that the Lord would come before the Tribulation was designed by a Scottish woman named MacDonald and came into America through Darby and the Plymouth brethren as a rather late view of

prophecy on pre-trib and that there's no evidence at all in church history for any pre-tribulational view. Not true. In my prophecy notes, which I didn't bring here, I have a whole passage out of *The Shepherd of Hermas* that's definitely pre-tribulational. And this is one of the earliest books we have. Is it in the Bible? No, because it's not written by an apostle or prophet. It was not inspired of God. But it's a wonderful book. It's just a book that was written by Christians.

We have also what's called the Extensive Theological Writing period. For about, oh I don't know, 160 years—something like that maybe less, 130 years—you have Irenaeus, Clement, Tertullian, Origen. Some of those names might be familiar. You might have heard them at some point, though you know very little about them. But they were just unbelievable in the amount of literature that they wrote.

Origen is probably one of the most prolific writers. He was from the Alexandrian school of textual criticism in Egypt. He was an allegorical man. He didn't strongly emphasize the literary, historical value of things; but rather saw the interpretation of it. He was a brilliant man. One of the things he did was put six different translations into columns next to each other. That was very helpful for us when we discovered it. Because then we could see a comparison of what was the original text. But he used a lot of manuscripts that I think were very questionable. And we'll talk about that before we're through here.

We also have a period called Formal Collection. The word here, just to remember it, is church councils. When we talk about Formal Collection and Acceptance, we're talking the fourth century A.D., namely 303 to about 397, and the church councils were basically accepting what was already universally read and accepted by the churches. But it needed to be done because of all these spurious books that we now call pseudo-graphic writings. I have a volume called *Pseudo-graphic Literature* and it has all these books and it's interesting to read them. But they are not in the Bible. So these church councils had to deal with this. Do these belong in the Bible? And it was a very, very important period of time. A lot of people criticize the church councils.

Jehovah's Witnesses love to tell you that many of the doctrines we believe now came out of these church councils. That's not so at all. Church councils simply were publicly dealing with what was already an issue among the people.

But there's a fifth issue about canonicity and that's completion—the reasons why the Bible was considered to be a complete and final revelation from God; therefore, nothing could be added to it. Although they kept considering all the books that people said should be added, but they also taught that it was a complete, final revelation.

Why the Bible Is Complete and Final

Theologically: Contains everything we need to know

Logically: Early church fathers' close involvement

Factually: No attempts to change until Council of Trent

Experientially: Has the power to change lives

Biblically: God's personal testimony of completion

First of all, we have a theological reason. The believers looked at all that they had and said how can you add to it? They read other books and they didn't contribute anything. The theological reason for a completed Bible is that nothing is omitted that believers need to know. I actually still believe what those early Christians believed. I believe there isn't anything you need to know that isn't in the Bible. "Well, it doesn't tell you how to fix a toilet." Well, it might tell you about your attitude while you do. Everything of the spirit, everything of the mind, everything of the emotions, everything of the will is all in the word, everything I need to know, the truth

about all of it. As a matter of fact, the truth about decisions in life is found in the Bible. And the older I get the more I realize the Bible has everything in it that I need.

It amuses me sometimes—and I've had more books than I know what to do with—but I still refer to them. But you know, I guess it bothers me that we in this culture who have all of this, we've come to believe that we need all of it—that the Bible's not enough. Twenty-five years ago I was in the poorest country, according to the United Nations, that's on the face of the globe. The average salary was less than a hundred dollars a year. There are no paved roads in the country. The little huts that are along the roads, that's just about all they've got—agricultural. No industry. And I spent several wonderful weeks out there preaching the gospel, staying in those huts, and living with those dear friends. And I can still remember coming down the road to those villages and seeing one chair—a chair was a luxury—one chair sitting in the village alongside the road. And that was the pastor's chair. And the pastor of the church would sit on that chair with his Bible that he just got in his own language. And that's all he had. And he was studying, reading. He had no other books to go to. He had no concordances. No computers, never been to Bible college. And all over that country, I preached at churches that had thousands and thousands of people in them, coming to know the Lord.

You see, there's something about all this that bothers me. You should know by now that I'm not against education. But I do believe that you can get educated beyond your intelligence. Where you don't think straight any more because you're so educated. I think we better understand that the Bible and the Holy Spirit is all that you need to build a ministry. You don't need anything else.

Now I'm not going to go out of here and tell you all not to get anything else. "To whom much is given, much is required," so we ought to take advantage of the books that we have. But just understand that to say we don't have everything in the Bible would make church leaders in

the first few centuries roll over in their graves. They wouldn't believe you. How can you call yourself a Christian and say that? Nothing is omitted that believers need to know in that Bible.

One of these African pastors came to visit me in the States, a dear guy, Simone Pierre Nabazuina—Simon Peter. He preached like him too! But he was a dear friend of mine. And I'll never forget when he walked into my office, the first pastor's office that he had ever seen. And he looked at those books. He fell down on his knees. His eyes wide open and started crying. He was so overwhelmed with all we have to help us, and he had nothing. You know I can't forget that. I'll never forget it. Maybe the Lord wanted me to know that so I could talk to you about it. Be very careful what you say about the Bible. I don't take lightly when people try to tell me this is not a complete and final revelation or that God spoke to them the other night and it's really Scripture and should be added. I don't believe in progressive revelation. I believe in final completed written revelation. And it's very important to me.

It's not only theological, it's logical reason. The early church fathers and leaders were closer to the issue. Isn't it a little bit of arrogance for us to be 1900 years away and say that we understand more? If these men felt they had a completed Bible and they were unanimous in it and even had church councils to list them, what makes us think that there should be some more?

A guy came up to me recently and said, "Hey what do you think about the Gospel of Thomas?"

I said, "Absolutely nothing. God bless you but I don't want to have anything to do with it."

"Well, have you read it?"

"Yes."

"Well, what do you think about it?"

I said, "I think it's a bunch of nonsense."

Do you understand the devil's trap? Do you understand what he is getting us to do?

I'm telling you folks, these things may seem simple to you, but we've got a battle out there! A guy came up to me and said, "Is it true that Revelation was written in the late 1800's, you know the last book of the New Testament?"

I said, "No it was written in the first century A.D."

"You're kidding!" He was just as serious as he could be. He said, "Well how do you know it was earlier?"

I said, "Because we've got manuscripts of it."

"Wow! Gee, the other guy must have been wrong."

You know I wouldn't tell you these things, folks, unless they happened. These things are happening. You never saw that kind of stuff forty, fifty years ago. You never saw it. There was a deep respect and devotion to God's word. What I see now, I see Satan's using all kinds of things just getting people not to think it's a big issue. You know what else I think he's done? He's got us so we don't carry our Bibles and bring them to religious meetings anymore.

I got in a pastor's car the other day, looked all around, I opened the glove compartment. He said, "What are you doing?"

I said, "I'm just looking for your Bible or a New Testament."

"Well, I don't have it with me all the time."

I said, "Why not?"

He said, "David, you're impossible."

I said, "How do you know you're not going to have a flat tire and somebody there is going to need to hear the word of God! You ought to have something here." You need the Bible. I think there's something seriously wrong, friends. I believe our pastors need to get more serious about what's actually happening out there.

You know my dad used to say, "When you go to church, make sure you're fully dressed. You got your Bible?" That's what he used to say. Fully dressed...is he talking about my shirt, or what? No, you always carry your Bible!

I've lived long enough to watch now what's happening. And my dear student friends, please understand that the Bible is the word of God. It has everything in it you need to know. When we talk about what books are in the Bible and the canon of the Bible, when we talk about the completion of the Bible, nothing is omitted. And these early guys that came to that conclusion, they were closer to the issue.

But there's also a factual reason and that is that no attempt was made to change the canon until the Council of Trent. What was the Council of Trent? Well, Luther nailed his Ninety-five Theses on the door of Wittenberg in 1517; the Council of Trent was 1540—a counter-reformation movement by the Roman Catholic Church—a reaction to objections by the Reformers that church tradition was more important than the Bible.

Do you think that maybe, we have traditions that we hold onto that maybe are not in the Bible? How about celebrating Christmas? Now, mind you, I'm not for throwing out Christmas. But I tell you something, we're gong to make sure that we talk about the incarnation and virgin birth. We make sure we're going to read the Bible because that's the only thing that's important. But have churches kind of picked up the tradition? Sure they have with the yule log, the trees, the ornaments—it's interesting.

There's also an experiential reason the Bible is considered to be a complete and final revelation from God. It has the proven power to save and change lives. There's a biblical reason, however, that we are very concerned about. God indicates that His written word would be a complete and final revelation. Now we've dealt with some of this, especially the last line of Scriptures we have walked through. "That in the last of these days in which God spoke, He spoke unto us by His Son" ([Hebrews 1:2](#)). And then Revelation 1 saying "it is the revelation of Jesus

Christ." And that book saying you can't add or take away. Jude 3 says, "Once and for all delivered to the saints." But let's just look at some others.

Look at [Exodus 20:1](#). It's just a little different kind of look at this. Have you ever read this statement? It's just a simple very short verse. "And God spake all these words." Do you believe that the Bible is the word of God? "God spake all these words." That's what it says.

[Deuteronomy 4:2](#)—you might have wondered where [Revelation 22:18-19](#) came from—it's a quote from the Old Testament. "Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall you diminish ought from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you." God never gave people freedom just to add whenever they want. This is the revelation of God and all the way through He indicates it's complete and final. Do you understand? It's not telling you when it's going to end, but it's telling you that God spoke all this and you can't add to it or take away from it. So the issue of direct revelation is very important. Extremely important!

In [Deuteronomy 8:3](#), right at the last phrase Jesus quoted. "Man doth not live by bread alone but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live" ([Matthew 4:4](#)). This came out of the mouth of God; it didn't come out of the mouth of men.

[Psalm 19:7](#) is a wonderful psalm on the word of God. "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul. The testimonies of the Lord are sure, making wise the simple."

The word is to complete, to finish a project. The law of the Lord is complete. That means you can't add to it. Whatever it was, it came from the mouth of God and it's done. In other words, all these statements are implying a complete revelation. The law of the Lord is complete. It's a finished project.

[Psalm 119:89](#), "Thy word is forever settled in heaven."

[Proverbs 30:5-6](#), "You can't add or take away from"—again, the message of Revelation

In other words, that is enough to say canonicity deals with how we know that we got all of the books we're supposed to have that came from the mouth of God. And those five tests were definitely considered by the early church in determining what is the word of God. That battle was fought and won over and over again. There were never any disputes until the Council of Trent, 1540 A.D. And we know the reason for that. The thing I'm trying to point out is, isn't it interesting we're in the battle again, a battle that was fought long ago.

But the worst battle of all is manuscript evidence. These are some of the most critical issues of all. First of all class, when you read MS it means one manuscript; when you read MSS that's the abbreviation for more than one manuscript. Okay. Let's see if we can handle the Old Testament.

The greatest evidence for the authenticity of the Old Testament was the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947. Fragments were found in fourteen caves, and included portions from every book of the Old Testament except Esther. There were numerous portions from Deuteronomy, as well as commentaries and manuals on communal life at Qumran; which is where they were discovered. But the most important thing is rarely noticed by people. The expression "it is written" appears frequently in the Dead Sea Scrolls, but clearly refers to authority of canonical Scriptures. No non-canonical writings are ever referred to in this manner in all of the Dead Sea Scrolls. And there are tons of non-canonical writings. But they never say "as it is written." Why? Because that little phrase to the scribes who were doing that at Qumran represented the authority of God and His word. Now, isn't that interesting? No non-canonical have it. You say, "Well that's an argument from silence." But all the canonical writings have it. Do you understand? So you've got a double whammy there as it relates to the authority of God's word, known 150 years before Christ.

Interesting stuff! When I say interesting, of course all of Scripture is interesting, but there's a mention of a teacher of righteousness in the *Manual of Discipline*. And it's interesting.

I've read a lot of it. I don't believe it refers to Jesus, but what I think is the value of it is that it shows that one hundred years before Christ there was tremendous messianic expectancy. There were a lot of these so-called messiahs—all of that.

A student's voice: Are there any other books they found there in the Dead Sea Scrolls?

Besides the Bible?—oh yeah, lots of them! Those are what we mean by non-canonical.

That is they don't belong in the canon of the Bible, but they had a lot of literature.

Our earliest Hebrew text that we had before the Dead Sea Scrolls, just round it off about 1000 A.D., the ninth century actually, but about 1000 A.D. and it's called the Masoretic text. Masorite meaning tradition, and that's our earliest one. So you see, we've got a gap here of over a thousand years. And what happens here is that when we compare the Dead Sea Scrolls to the Masoretic text, we notice the Hebrew's the same. Now that's not always true in Greek; you see wide variation, but it is very true in Hebrew. So, that remarkable identity and similarity and agreement was powerful. It also emphasizes to us the Jews are extremely careful and amazingly accurate in their copying of biblical writings.

I have been on trips to Israel when we go to the Shrine of the Book—the Shrine of the Book looks like a giant, ice cream cone. Inside of that building, called the Shrine of the Book, is the Dead Sea Scrolls' copies of the Scripture. And in the middle, the major shrine is of the scroll of Isaiah; which is scores and scores of feet long. You can walk all the way around it, the entire book of Isaiah. And I have often brought people, as we were touring through there; I pulled out a Hebrew Bible of today and showed them the text that we are reading. So people could actually match it with the verse that is behind the glass. And you know it really is interesting. I've done it with other text like from Habakkuk and other fragments that are around in the various displays. And that's a remarkable thing, when you think of a thousand years' difference and the copying is so accurate! I wish that were more true in the New Testament, but it isn't. But it definitely is true in Hebrew. They are much more careful and much more exact.

Now in the New Testament, how many Greek manuscripts of the New Testament are there? Five thousand, five hundred have been cataloged. Now class, there's a difference between saying something is discovered and something is cataloged. A lot of manuscripts that were discovered or picked up out of the Middle East were put in somebody's museum basement and have not been put on display because they have not been cataloged. That means no one has really read them. It might be surprising to you. But often men will say that some of the greatest things that possibly we could ever discover might still be in the basements of all these Middle Eastern museums around the world. And that's true. Often they find things down in the basement. Stacks of stuff that they've taken from some dig and it takes years to go over that, you understand. So it isn't all immediately assimilated. They are still working on the Dead Sea Scrolls and that was found in 1947. So it takes time.

But there are 5,500 cataloged manuscripts, there are 10,000 Latin manuscripts. Latin is very important because it's the first language, the language of the Roman Empire, into which the Greek New Testament was translated and many, many times. Another 4,000 in other languages, and 86,000 separate references quoted in the writings of the church fathers. This volume of evidence is unparalleled in the history of ancient writings, meaning before the inventing of printing. When was printing invented, class?—1450 A.D. What was the first book printed? The German Bible! Now, before that everything was copied by hand. So, can you believe it? All of these manuscripts copied by hand?—before printing, enormous amount of evidence!

I've been told for years that next to the Bible the ancient manuscripts that have been copied the most were the writings of Demosthenes and that there was about four hundred copies. But saying even 200 or 400 or 500, next to 5,500 Greek, 10,000 Latin, 4,000...do you understand? The evidence of the Bible is absolutely overwhelming.

We have more evidence to determine the original autographs, which is our issue here. Inerrancy is without error in the original autographs. We have more evidence than any other book

in all of history. I know more about the Bible's original autograph than I know about whether George Washington really existed or not.

It's time to quit, but I want you to understand that the science of textual criticism which looks at manuscript evidence has become such a threatening thing to people that they have been scared of it or intimidated or just don't want to listen to it or whatever. Class, we're going to break it down and make it as simple as possible. But it is the issue concerning the Bible in the present time. And it's becoming hotter and hotter with every passing year. It's getting very severe because it deals with inerrancy.

Do you believe that the Bible is a complete and direct and final revelation from God, totally sufficient for all matters of faith and practice and totally without error in the original manuscripts? The majority of Christians do not believe what I just said. You are a minority if you believe what I just said. Be interesting to see in the years ahead how you handle this.

Let's pray.

Father, I pray that You will continue to give us a heart to know Your word, to understand the importance of it being without error. That it is the sufficient, final, complete revelation from God in written form. I pray, Lord, that everyday will be Thanksgiving to us, for You told us to give thanks always for all things. So, thank You, Lord. Thank You that You want to use us more than we want to be used, in Jesus' name. Amen.