How Did We Get the Bible?

The Bible makes claim that it came from God; concerning the Old Testament Paul wrote “All Scripture is inspired of God and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16); even the New Testament is called “Scripture;” Paul called the gospel “Scripture” (1 Timothy 5:18); Peter referred to Paul’s epistles as “Scripture” (2 Peter 3:15-16); all Scripture, OT and NT, are said to be writings that are “breathed out” by God; Jesus used similar language when He referred to the Word of God as coming from “ the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4).

Some will argue this is circular reasoning; you cannot prove Scripture with Scripture; the Bible is not one book but 66 books written by 40 different authors over a period of 1500 years; most authors did not know each other; if all 66 books were written by one person over his lifetime, we could claim circular reasoning.

The Recorders of Sacred Scripture

The contributors of Scripture... the Bible was written by 40 authors from different walks of life— including kings, peasants, philosophers, fishermen, poets, statesmen, scholars; Moses was a political leader trained in the universities of Egypt, Joshua was a military general, Nehemiah was a cupbearer, Daniel was a prime minister, Solomon was a king, Amos a herdsman, Matthew a tax collector, Peter a fisherman, Paul a rabbi, Luke a doctor.

Two books were written by Gentiles, Job and Luke; two were named after women, Ruth and Esther.

Scripture was written in different places; Moses wrote in the wilderness, Jeremiah in a dungeon, Daniel on a hillside and in a palace, Paul in prison, Luke while traveling across Asia Minor, John on the isle of Patmos.

Scripture was written on 3 different continents: Moses from the Sinai in Africa; Ezekiel from Babylon in Asia; Paul from Europe.
Scripture was written in 3 different languages; OT was written in Hebrew with a smattering of Aramaic; 2 Kings 18:26-28 it is called “the language of Judah;” Isaiah spoke of it as “the language of Canaan” (Isaiah 19:18); Aramaic was the common language of the Near East until the time of Alexander the Great (6th century to 4th century BC); the NT was written in Greek, the universal language at the time of Christ and the early Church.

The communication from God to human authors…. God spoke in various ways to the prophets (Hebrews 1:1); sometimes orally, the phrase “Thus saith the LORD” appears approximately 1900 times in the OT; sometimes by dreams, visions, and angels; from the creation of the flood, God used longevity of life, eyewitnesses overlapping from generation to generation to pass on revelation by oral tradition; Adam was a contemporary of Noah’s grandfather Methuselah; the average age from Adam to Noah was 857 years; it was easy in pre-deluvian years to keep the message truthful (Genesis 5); after the flood God raised up prophets like Moses, Samuel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc.

In the NT God revealed His Word by the Holy Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets (Ephesians 3:5); concerning the book of Revelation it came from Jesus to His angel to John.

The character of Scripture… Regardless of how it was communicated it is clear that “All Scripture is inspired by God...” (2 Timothy 3:16); the word “inspired” means “God-breathed;” Peter tells us that “no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men were moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Peter 1:20-21); the word “moved” (pheromenoi) means “to be borne along” or “to be carried along” like a branch carried along by a rushing current; the writers were literally immersed in the revelation as they were moved along by the Spirit to communicate it by written word.

Therefore, we affirm the original autographs were written without error as the Holy Spirit guided the authors to communicate God’s truth; each writer used his own vocabulary while being overseen by the Spirit to guarantee accuracy; every word was inspired (2 Peter 1:20-21); every letter was inspired (Matthew 5:18) all grammar was inspired (Galatians 3:16); Jesus said concerning Scripture, “Your word is truth” (John 17:17).
The Recognition of Scripture  
Concerning the Old Testament

The finding of the book of the Law in the days of King Josiah... (2 Kings 21-23; 2 Chronicles 34)...The discovery of the Book of the Law when repairing the temple caused repentance and revival among the people; the Book of the Law are the five books of Moses.

The Book of the Law was recognized as Scripture during the reign of Josiah in 621 BC and confirmed by Ezra reading from it in the days of Nehemiah (Nehemiah 8: 7-8).

God is the center of the Law; everything in the Law of Moses points to God.

The function of Ezra in assembling the Old Testament... According to the Talmud, the Jewish commentary on the Law, Ezra the scribe, about 400 BC compiled the OT.

The faithfulness of the scribes in preserving the Scriptures... Around 180 BC the Jewish scribes divided the Hebrew Scriptures into 3 divisions of 24 books. They are 1) the Law (Torah), five books of Moses; 2) the Prophets (Nehlim) which includes former prophets: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings and latter prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and The Twelve (minor prophets) which range from Hosea to Malachi; 3) The Writings (Kethubhim) which include Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles. 
The books were named after the first verb; Genesis was called “Beginning;” Exodus was called “Names:” Leviticus was named “Called;” Numbers was named “Spoke;” Deuteronomy was named “Words.”

Writings determined as Scripture were said to be canonized, the word “canon” comes from the root word for reed used as a measuring rod and eventually meant standard, later it meant list or index; the criteria for determining canonicity: Does it have a recognized prophet’s authority; does it offer Messianic hope; does it show God in action; does it emphasize ethical monotheism and social justice; does it contain prophetic messages of Israel’s fall, her return to the land, and her future glory?
The Mishrah, a codification of traditional oral laws committed to writing in 200 AD, gives an unbroken historical tradition of people responsible for preserving the Scriptures from Moses to the Council of Jamnia in 90 AD when the books declared inspired by God were ratified; to the Jewish rabbis all revelation ceased with the prophet Malachi and the completion of the rebuilding of Jerusalem in 396 BC.

The finalizing of the Old Testament Scriptures...

1. *Based on the testimony of Jesus*... Jesus verified the OT by quoting from it often; one-tenth of His words came from the OT; of the 1800 verses of His teachings, 180 verses is Christ quoting the OT; Deuteronomy is the book He most quoted; He customarily referred to the OT as “the Scriptures” (Matthew 21:42; Mark 14:49; John 5:29); His purpose was to fulfill the law (Matthew 5:17); He said, “Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35); when He met the two men on the road to Emmaus after His resurrection He taught them from the Scriptures beginning with Moses and the prophets (Luke 24:27).

2. *Based on quotes from the New Testament writers*... There are 320 direct quotes in the NT from the OT and over 1000 references; Paul referred to the OT as “Holy Scriptures” (Romans 1:2; 2 Timothy 3:15; and “The oracles of God” (Romans 3:2).

3. *Based on the Sopherim*... The word means “counters” and from the completion of the OT text in 396 BC until the time of Jewish scribes known as Masoretes in 500 AD, these Jewish scribes called the Sopherim made copies of the Scriptures by counting every letter, word, and line of the text to make sure it matched up from the copied text; if an error was made they started over; their object 100% accuracy.

4. *Based on the Septuagint*... Around 250 BC, 70 Jewish scholars met in Alexandria, Egypt to translate the Hebrew Scriptures from Hebrew into Greek; work completed around 100 BC; each scholar worked separately for 70 days before coming together to compare; the importance of the Septuagint is it gives us our listing of OT books and the names for our OT books; it was the Bible of Jesus and the apostles and is the first book to be translated from one language to another.
5. Based on the Council of Jamnia... Once Christianity took off and there were claims of new divine revelation, a group of Jewish rabbis met in Jamnia, Galilee in 90 AD to reaffirm their Scriptures and declare that all revelation ceased in 396 BC at the completion of the rebuilding of Jerusalem; there were to be no more prophets; this was their way of rejecting Jesus as Messiah.

6. Based on the Masoretic Text... Our OT is primarily translated from the Masoretic text, the word means “hedge; between 500 and 950 AD these Jewish scribes followed the practice of the Sopherim in copying Scripture; they developed vowel markings to the Hebrew text and then destroyed the Sopherim manuscripts which could have dated back to 400 BC; they put a distance of 1300 years between the Masoretic text and the time of Ezra the scribe; this caused skeptics to doubt the OT; they also refused to pronounce the name of God YHWH (I AM) and added the vowel markings of the word LORD (aDoNaY); thus you have YaHoWaH giving us the name Jehovah, “I AM LORD.”

7. Based on the Dead Sea Scrolls...Greatest archaeological find of our lifetime; closes the gap between the Masoretic text and Ezra by 900 years; discovered in March 1947 when a Bedouin shepherd named Mohammed looking for his lost goat in the rock hills of Qumran pitched stones into a cave and cracked a clay jar which contained leather scrolls wrapped in linen cloths; these jars contained portions of every OT book but Esther and a complete manuscript of Isaiah; they close the gap to the time of Ezra by about 300 years and they verify the accuracy of the Masoretic text.

Concerning the New Testament

The communication by the Holy Spirit to recognized apostles and prophets for the New Testament Churches... This revelation is the “foundation” upon which the Church is to be built (Ephesians 2:19-22; 3:3-5).

The NT letters were written between 45-65 AD with John’s writings between 95-98 AD; concerning the Gospels, Irenaeus (130-202) as quoted by Eusebius (260-340) wrote: “Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter transmitted to us in writing those things which Peter had preached; and Luke, the attendant of Paul, recorded in a book the gospel which Paul had declared;” gospels were written after the deaths of Peter and Paul which would mean after 65 but before 70 AD as there is no mention of the destruction of Jerusalem.
The circulation of the New Testament Scriptures... Letters from apostles were copied and sent to another church (Colossians 4:16); these letters began to circulate so that by 170 AD at least 22 of the 27 NT books had been recognized as Scripture as recorded in the Muratorian Canon discovered in 1740 by an Italian priest named Muratori; those books missing: Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter, and 3 John; first listing of all 27 books was put together by Athanasius of Alexandria, Egypt in 367 AD.

The criteria for determining the New Testament canon...

1. Based on the claim that all Scripture is God-breathed (2 Timothy 3:16).
2. Based on the contributors as recognized apostles and prophets; chief test was apostolic approval (Ephesians 2:20).
3. Based on the content; it had to have the authority of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 2:2).
4. Based on the conscience of the Church; it had to distinguish between true and false doctrine (Galatians 1:6-9).
5. Based on the confirmation of Councils... The Synod of Rome (382 AD), The Synod of Hippo (393 AD), The Synod of Carthage (397 AD) all ratified what the Church had already accepted.

We might also add the counsel of the Holy Spirit in making the selection of the 27 books in our NT

The credibility of the New Testament... There is tremendous textual evidence for the reliability of the NT; we have 5,300 Greek manuscripts dating from 120 to 700 AD; 250 date back to the second century; add over 10,000 Latin Vulgate versions and over 9,300 other translations that date back from the 2nd to the 8th centuries; 24,000 manuscript copies of portions of the NT predate the invention of the printing press in 1440; the earliest is the Ryland Biblical Papyrus, a fragment of the Gospel of John dated 120 AD.

No other document of antiquity can approach such number of attestation: the Iliad by Homer, 900 BC is second with 643 manuscripts that still survive; earliest copy 400 BC or 500 years after written; the complete text dates from 13th century AD.

F.F. Bruce, textual critic wrote: “There is no body of ancient literature in the world which enjoys such a wealth of good textual attestation as the New Testament.”
Our modern English translations have come from four major manuscripts:

1. The Vatican Manuscript (Codex B)... Discovered in 4th Century and is the best witness for the New Testament; contains almost all of OT and NT in the Greek language.

2. The Sinaitic Manuscript (Codex Alpha)... Discovered in St Catherine’s Monastery on Mt Sinai in 1844; contains most of OT and NT in Greek.

3. The Alexandrian Manuscript (Codex A)... Discovered in Alexandria, Egypt contains both OT and NT with many missing leaves; dates back to 5th century and not as reliable as the other two.

4. The Received Text (Textus Receptus)... It consists of 10 Greek manuscripts of both the OT and NT, none earlier than the 10th century; first Greek text published by a Catholic scholar named Erasmus in 1516; the basis for the German Lutheran Bible and the William Tyndale Bible (1525); King James authorized the Received Text for publishing the Authorized Version in 1611.

If we had no manuscripts we would still have all the NT except for 11 verses; Sir David Dalrymple (1726-1792), a Scottish judge and historian wrote 3 volumes on early Christian history called *Remains of Christian Antiquity*; he was a careful student of the early Church fathers; in studying their writings from the 2nd and 3rd centuries he wrote: “I have found the entire New Testament except eleven verses.”

J. Warner Wallace, author of *Cold Case Christianity* could not confirm what Dalrymple wrote but he did confirm that the early church fathers such as Ignatius, Polycarp, and Clement confirmed everything you need to know about Jesus.

Bruce Metzger, eminent scholar and professor at Princeton said that the NT is 99.5% consistent with the manuscript evidence with only a .05 variance in the text; these variances have more to do with spelling and grammar then doctrinal errors.

As we spend time in the study of Scripture we ought to rejoice that we can hold in our hand the Word of God. Amen!