CHARTING THEBIBLE CHRONOLOGICALLY

ED HINDSON & THOMAS ICE



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To

Dr. John C. Whitcomb

Defender of the Faith

Biblical scholar, chronologist, theologian, and apologist

whose books and charts have blessed, informed, and challenged us both

for a lifetime of ministry.

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Introduction

THE IMPORTANCE OF BIBLICAL CHRONOLOGY

HE BIBLE IS UNIQUE when compared with all other "holy books" of the world's religions. One reason the Bible is different is the fact it is the only religious work rooted in past history that also predicts future history. All other religions of the world, unless they rely on the Bible at some point, do not rise or fall on whether they are historically true. These other religions are based upon a philosophy or an ethical way of life and do not stand or collapse on whether they are historically accurate. While the Bible certainly contains theology and ethics, still, it stands on whether what it says actually happened in history or will occur in the future. Because the Bible is God's revelation of Himself and it presents His outline and interpretation of history, it follows that biblical chronology is included in God's Word and is an extremely important element in His revelation to mankind.

Many religions and worldviews believe history is an endless cycle of events continually repeating themselves, and thus they conclude that life is meaningless because, from their perspective, it is going nowhere. By contrast, the biblical view of history is *linear* and not

circular. That is, history has a beginning and an ending. It is going somewhere and has purpose and meaning. It began in a garden and is moving toward a city, with a cross in between.

The writer of Hebrews said, "By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible" (Hebrews 11:3). In this context, the Greek word translated "worlds" (*aiönas*) means "ages" (*aeons*) or "periods." Also, the word "prepared" is better understood as "created." Thus, God is the creator or author of the ages or epochs of history. This could only be if He were the planner and implementer of history. God planned all the events in history and revealed their meaning, purpose, and significance through His Word. This is why studying the chronological data presented in the Bible is so important! As we look carefully at biblical chronology, we gain a proper understanding of the flow of events and their relationship to one another in God's plan.

The Bible tells us who we are as human beings, our purpose for being here on planet Earth, how long we have been here, what we are called to do, and where we are headed in the future. In the chronological revelation within the Bible, we see that God created the heavens and the earth in 6 days a little over 6000 years ago. This indicates that the earth is young in relation to other viewpoints concerning the matter of origins. This is true regardless of all of the false speculations to the contrary by fallen mankind. God has communicated this information to us through His written revelation known as the Bible.

The master foldout chart at the beginning of this book attempts to depict the chronological relationships and progression of important people, places, events, and developments throughout history. We see the life spans of pre-Flood men averaging 930 years, but no one makes it to 1000 years. We see the call of Abraham, the slavery of the Hebrews in Egypt, and the exodus led by Moses. We see the Jewish people's entrance into the land of Israel, Israel's kings, the temples, and the dispersions into the Gentile nations. Christ is born, ministers, dies for the sins of the world, is resurrected, and ascends to heaven. The church is born on Pentecost and the church age is now approaching 2000 years of gospel preaching throughout the world. The uniqueness of the Bible appears again as the book of Revelation discloses the future: The rapture of the church, the 7-year tribulation, Christ's second coming, then Christ's millennial kingdom, followed by the

transition into the eternal state after the Great White Throne Judgment. The final pages of the biblical revelation take us to the new heavens, the new earth, and the new Jerusalem—the glorious holy city of God.

The authors of this book take God's Word seriously, believing that it contains accurate history and a clear revelation of the future. In this book we offer an attempt to chart out those aspects of Scripture that provide us a summary of times and events in God's plan for mankind. Wherever we have a difference of opinion on some minor details, we have deferred to Dr. Ice's chronology on the charts. Our desire is to aid believers in their attempt to grasp the reality of God's Word so that it will help them to trust Him more in the course of living out their daily lives.

The Bible clearly reveals that history is not just a cyclical series of meaningless events. Rather, it teaches us that history is progressing—in a linear manner—through God-ordained happenings that are moving this world toward the goal of the glorification of God for all eternity. The apostle Paul tells us, "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen" (Roman 11:36).



WHY A CHART BOOK ON BIBLE CHRONOLOGY?

HERE'S A POPULAR PROVERB that suggests "a picture is worth a thousand words." If that is true, good charts are worth a thousand words when it comes to illustrating chronological relationships as revealed in the Bible. The value of chronology charts is that they enable us to pinpoint the timing of the events described in Scripture and show their relationship to each other. With a chart, we can summarize a subject or theme that, in written form, might take pages to explain. In this book, you will find virtually all the key chronological information from the Bible and how it relates to the passage of time.

One key distinctive of biblical Christianity is that God knows and reveals the past, the present, and the future (Isaiah 46:8-11). Only God can do that. Thus, the past and future are settled, and are not open to change. This means we can look at the charts in this book with an assurance that the biblical teachings they portray have taken place or will take place precisely as the Bible says. Because God conceived His plan for history before creation, we can have confidence that events from the past and future have and will take place exactly as He has

decreed. Such a realization enables us to fully participate in God's ongoing plan for history with great confidence.

Our prayer is that *Charting the Bible Chronologically* will enable you to gain a better grasp of what Scripture reveals about what has happened, what is happening, and what will happen in the future.

A Timeline of History According to the Bible

It is often said that the big questions in life are these: Who are you? Where did you come from? And, Where are you going? The Bible has the answers to all three questions. The Lord says,

Remember this, and be assured; recall it to mind, you transgressors. Remember the former things long past, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, "My purpose will be established, and I will

accomplish all My good pleasure"; calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of My purpose from a far country. Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it (Isaiah 46:8-11).

Because God has revealed Himself through Scripture, an informed believer should clearly know who he is in Christ, where he has come from, and where he is going.

Unless one knows everything, he cannot know anything with certainty because what he thinks he knows may be affected by what he does not know. Because the God of the Bible knows everything, and because He has revealed some things to humanity through His Word, we can have certainty about those things which He has revealed. Biblical Christianity is rooted and grounded upon revelation from God, which is why we can know with certainty what happened at creation and what will happen in the future. God has revealed it in the Scriptures! There are some who say we Christians are bigots because we claim to possess truth and correct knowledge as revealed to us in the Bible. They will never understand why we are so confident that we see specific issues so clearly.

By contrast, the unbeliever's starting point is with the rejection of God's revelation, which is why he cannot understand how anyone can have certainty when it comes to knowledge about the past or the future. Yet the God of the Bible not only claims to have been an eyewitness to creation, He is said to have actually been the One who created the heavens and the earth. Because He is sovereign over the future, He can be certain about what will unfold in the days ahead as well.

The apostle Peter dealt with this very issue in his second and final epistle when he said,

Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with *their* mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For *ever* since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation." For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God *the* heavens existed long ago and *the* earth was formed out of

water and by water, through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water. But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men (2 Peter 3:3-7).

These last-days scoffers, which may even include some from within the church, start by rejecting God's Word. They are said to follow "after their own lusts." The Greek word translated "lusts" is *epithumia* and means "a great desire for something, longing, craving." Unlike our English word *lust*, which always has a negative connotation, this Greek word can denote something that is good. However, in this context, it clearly refers to something evil. It's clear that the scoffers start with their own feelings, thoughts, and inclinations rather than with the Word of God. Therefore, they have corrupt motives that lead to their scoffing about God's knowledge of the past and the future.

In 2 Peter 3:5, the phrase "for when they maintain this," is better translated "for this they deliberately, or willingly, overlook." The text says it is a willful exclusion of past historical events that leads these scoffers to their errant conclusion that "all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation." Their assumption is that Christ will not fulfill His promises regarding the future.

The chronological data in this chart book is based almost exclusively upon what the Bible itself says. We accept this at face value and have built our charts upon a straightforward reading of God's Word. There is a place for critical interaction, but that is left for others. We are simply attempting to lay out what Scripture plainly says about the order in which things have happened, or will take place. For those who trust the Bible as the Word of God, it's vital to know what it says and what the implications are of those statements.

Only in the Bible do we have enough of the proper information in order to compose a chart that provides a comprehensive overview of history. Only God was there when it all began, and He is quite capable of communicating what He did to bring about the heavens and the earth and fill them with His creatures. Only God knows the end from the beginning. Not only that, He has determined our future, and it will surely come to pass. It is those who scoff at the Word of God who

offer mere speculation about the past and the future. It is those who believe that present processes are the key to the past and future who hold to uniformitarian speculation. The Bible, on the other hand, provides plenty of information that makes it possible for us to chart the past, present, and future.

The Creation

At some point in eternity past, God created the heavens and the earth in six literal days and rested on the seventh day (Genesis 1:1–2:3; Exodus 20:11), thus establishing the pattern for our seven-day week. Adam was created to rule over and subdue creation, starting with the garden in Eden. Eve was fashioned from Adam's side so that all of Adam's prodigy would have his DNA, resulting in the genealogical solidarity of the human race. It appears that within a short time Adam, influenced by Eve, cast the entire human race into sin by eating the forbidden fruit. Thus, Adam and Eve did not live long in their pre-Fall innocence. Satan and a third of the angels fell into sin before Adam, and probably fell sometime between Genesis 2 and 3.

Before the Flood, the average life span of an individual was 930 years. That doesn't include Enoch, who never died, but instead, was raptured to heaven at the age of 365 years. The amount of knowledge accumulated by people must have been amazing because so many of them lived almost a millennium. The pre-Flood environment was clearly healthier for people than the post-Flood, but the longer life spans also meant that humanity had many more opportunities to descend more and more into sinfulness. As Genesis 6:5 says, "The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Further, there was the problem of fallen angels procreating with human women (in the Bible, all angels who are manifest in physical form are male) and producing a hybrid the Bible calls "Nephilim" (Genesis 6:4). The continued procreation of these hybrids would eventually render the human race unsavable because they would corrupt the DNA of Adam. So 1656 years after creation, God brought the global Flood in order to destroy the pre-Flood world and its inhabitants and start over with Noah and his wife, their three sons, and their wives.

The Flood

The Flood was a further cursing of mankind—before it, people lived an average of 930 years, and afterward, the average life span eventually dropped to about 70 to 80 years. Then 166 years later, when Nimrod and others built the Tower of Babel, God caused them to speak different languages so they could not coordinate their efforts to unite in rebellion against Him. The Tower of Babel was an attempt to bring the kingdom of man in opposition to God. About 250 years later, God called Abram out of Ur of the Chaldeans (right in the heart of Babylon) and began to build a counter-response against the kingdom of man. God then made promises to Abraham—through the Abrahamic Covenant—that from him would come a nation, Israel, that would produce the Messiah who would make it possible to offer salvation to mankind.

The Abrahamic Promise

Because the Bible provides numbered genealogies in Genesis 5 and 11, we are able to see how many years it was from creation to the call of Abraham, which was 2083 years, or 1927 BC. While the Abrahamic Covenant was made almost 4000 years ago, the Lord did not create the nation of Israel and put them in their land for another 470 years. The Jews, God's chosen people, have been in the land of Israel since about 1400 BC. After building the Jewish population while they resided in Egypt, God used Moses to lead the nation out in 1446 BC, freeing them from the oppression of one of the most totalitarian governments in the history of the world. After 40 years in the wilderness, Joshua led the people of Israel into the land of Canaan. After that came the times of the Judges, which lasted about 250 years, during which time the nation longed for a king. God gave the people three successive kings that reigned over a unified nation for 120 years.

Then Solomon's sons split the nation into two parts—the north and the south. The divided kingdoms went on for another 250 years, until the Northern Kingdom was taken into captivity by the Assyrians in 721 BC on account of persistent idolatry. The Southern Kingdom was taken captive by Babylon about 150 years later, and Jerusalem

and Solomon's Temple were destroyed in 586 BC. Seventy years later, about 50,000 of the Jewish people returned from Babylon to the land of Israel and rebuilt the Second Temple.

Most of the Old Testament was written during the time from the exodus until the exile. The last Old Testament book to be written was Malachi, around 430 BC. The period spanning the next 400 years—until the birth of Jesus—is called the silent years or the Intertestamental Period. It is during this time that most of the 69 weeks of years (483 total years) prophesied in Daniel 9:25 transpired.

The New Testament

The birth of Jesus around 4 BC brought new life and hope into Israel. Jesus' public ministry began in AD 29, aided by the ministry of his cousin John the Baptist. Jesus presented Himself to the people of Israel through His teaching ministry, which was accompanied with miracles of all kinds. During His final week on earth before His crucifixion, Jesus fulfilled to the very day the first 69 weeks of years, or 483 years prophesied in Daniel 9:25, when He entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday (Luke 19:28-44). Four days later, Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecy when He was crucified by His own people, placed in a tomb for 3 days and nights, then raised from the dead. After Jesus conquered sin and death, He spent the next 40 days teaching His disciples about the kingdom. Then He ascended into heaven, where He currently makes intercession for the saints. As He ascended, angels declared to the disciples that Jesus will one day return physically to earth (Acts 1:11).

Jesus' death, burial, resurrection, and ascension was not the end of His ministry. In many ways, it was just the beginning. On the Day of Pentecost, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit upon the disciples and others, which led to the founding of the church, the body of Christ (in AD 33). The newly born church grew quickly, spreading first to thousands of Jewish converts within Jerusalem, then to Jews and Gentiles throughout Judea, and then by the end of the book of Acts, to the outer reaches of the known world at that time (Acts 1:8). The first book in the New Testament canon was James, written around AD 45. The final book in the canon of the New Testament—and the entire

Bible—was Revelation, written in AD 95 by John while he was on the island of Patmos.

The Fate of Israel

In AD 70, judgment came upon Israel for rejecting Jesus as their Messiah. In August of that year, Roman soldiers destroyed Jerusalem and the Second Temple. The global dispersion of the Jewish people began at this time, although a remnant still lived in the land, which has been the case ever since the beginning of the nation. The Jews within Israel managed to regroup and rise up against the Romans in AD 132 during the Bar Kokhba Revolt. Rome came again and destroyed Jerusalem and sent most of the Jews into the diaspora. The Jews remained largely scattered until a movement began in the 1880s as some began to return and resettle the land. Against all odds, the modern state of Israel was founded in 1948 with less than a million Jews. Today, more than a third of all Jews worldwide have returned to Israel.

Growth of the Church

Meanwhile, the church continued to grow steadily, and around 280 years after her founding, for all practical purposes, she took over the Roman Empire, her greatest adversary. The church became so powerful throughout Europe during the Middle Ages that it dominated civil governments and became very worldly. The Reformation, which generally began in the early 1500s, led to a recovery of the gospel and in many ways a revival of biblical Christianity. The modern Protestant missionary movement began in the late 1700s as all forms of Christianity went on to become the largest religion in the world. Even today the gospel continues to spread rapidly, and it can be said that the gospel message has circled the globe going from west to east and now back to Jerusalem.

Promise of the Future

Today many believers are living in anticipation of the rapture of the church, which will end the current church age and lead to God's end-time program, which includes the national conversion of Israel to Jesus as their Messiah and the saturation of the entire world with the preaching of the gospel during the 7-year tribulation. Jesus will return to planet Earth at the second coming to rescue a converted nation of Israel and will judge unbelievers in preparation for His 1000-year reign from Jerusalem.

During this time, Jesus will reign upon David's throne, while Israel, as His sub-regent, will rule over the nations. The curse that was applied in Genesis 3 and 8 will be totally removed, except death will still be a possibility for some mortals. Worship of the Lord will occur in the Fourth Temple, which, according to Ezekiel, will be brought from heaven. The sacrificial system will also be reestablished for the cleansing of the priests, temple, and implements.

Christ's sacrifice on the cross will continue to be the only basis on which people have their sins forgiven. The church, as the bride of Christ, will rule with Christ during this period (Revelation 3:21). Mortals who are born during the Millennium will still have to trust Christ as their Savior if they want to obtain eternal life.

At the end of the 1000-year reign, Satan will be loosed from the abyss so he can once again deceive the nations. Thousands of unbelieving Gentiles will be attracted to his final rebellion and will surround Jerusalem. The Lord will make short work of these rebels and strike them down with a bolt of lightning from heaven. This will be the last event in all of history.

There will be a transition from history to the eternal state via the Great White Throne Judgment. By the end of history, all believers will have been resurrected and will receive their new, glorified bodies, which will enable us to function for all eternity. All unbelievers from throughout history will then have their day in court. Because they never trusted Christ as their Savior and received forgiveness of their sins, they will be evaluated on the basis of their good works, with God's righteousness being the standard. This means that not one person who rejected Christ will be able to earn their way into heaven. All of them will be cast into the Lake of Fire—for eternity.

At the end of history, the current heavens and earth will be totally destroyed because they are still tainted by sin. God will create new heavens and a new earth completely free of sin. The new earth will have a New Jerusalem where the saints will live forever in unbroken fellowship with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Righteousness and evil will be forever separated, and eternity will not be long enough for humanity to thoroughly grasp the glory and greatness of God. For those who have received Jesus as their Savior, the best is yet to come. For unbelievers, there is a terrible future in store for all eternity. This is what the Bible, God's revelation of His plan for history, reveals with absolute certainty.



HOW WE GOT OUR BIBLE

HE BIBLE IS THE MOST DETAILED revelation of God and His wonderful plan for the future of mankind. There are other ways He has revealed Himself—through the heavens, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the power of the cross to change lives today. But the most detailed revelation He has given is the Bible itself. This amazing book was compiled in the most unusual manner of any book ever written. God the Holy Spirit inspired more than 40 holy men, mostly prophets, to write the 66 books that comprise this library. It contains what we need to know about salvation, how to live the Christian life, the nature and plan of God, the end times, and the second coming of Christ.

No other book has ever been so loved or hated. The Bible has been loved by multitudes through the centuries, many of whom have had life-changing experiences as they read, studied, and followed its timeless principles for living. It has been hated by atheists, freethinkers, and other secularists whose belief systems assume there is no God. If there is no God, then there is no divine inspiration. Never mind that these

skeptics cannot explain the remarkable accuracy and consistency of the Bible, which was written over a 1500-year period by mostly ordinary men. The Bible has been the subject of more persecution and book burning than any book in history, yet it is the bestselling book of all time. It is also the only reliable source of information about the future. In fact, the ability of God to write history in advance, which is the definition of prophecy, is one of the proofs of the divine origin of Scripture. Dr. John Walvoord, the dean of prophecy scholars in the twentieth century, identified 1000 prophecies in Scripture, 500 of which have been fulfilled literally. The obvious conclusion is that the 500 yet to be fulfilled, which deal with future end-time events, will also be fulfilled literally.

Because the Bible is the source of all the historical data and prophecies described in this chart book, it's important to understand how the Bible came to be, how it was preserved through the centuries, and how we can be confident that it is the same revelation God gave to man thousands of years ago when it was first written.

An Overview of the Bible

The Bible has two major sections: the Old Testament and the New Testament. Let's look first at the Old Testament.

The Old Testament

There are five basic categories of books in the Old Testament:

- 1. Law 5 books—Genesis to Deuteronomy
- 2. History......12 books—Joshua to Esther
- 3. Poetry...... 5 books—Job to Song of Solomon
- 4. Major Prophets. 5 books—Isaiah to Daniel
- 5. Minor Prophets 12 books—Hosea to Malachi

The account of God, creation, man, his origin and fall, the Flood, and the earliest civilizations is presented simply and clearly in the 50 chapters of Genesis, the first book of the Bible. Genesis has been a prime target of critics for years. Their greatest attack has been leveled against the authorship of Genesis—they say, "Moses was too far removed from the original events to speak accurately." These objections dissolve when we understand that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Timothy 3:16 kJv). So it was God who wrote Genesis through Moses.

What's more, archaeological discoveries have indicated that writing is as old as man, which means it is highly probable that Moses had received written accounts of many of the events from those who actually participated in them. The other 38 books of the Old Testament were written during or just after the time they describe. God selected men from various walks of life through whom He "breathed" His Word. Among the writers were priests, prophets, herdsmen, kings, and judges. All worked faithfully, largely without ever having met the others, and yet the whole Bible is one continuous, consistent, and unique message of salvation.

Due to the passage of time and the fragile nature of writing materials such as clay, papyrus, and leather, we do not have the original

writings produced by these men. But we do have numerous ancient copies of these writings—copies that are considered extremely reliable. The accuracy of today's Bible text has been significantly confirmed by the Dead Sea scrolls, which, when compared to the current texts, reveal a near-perfect match.

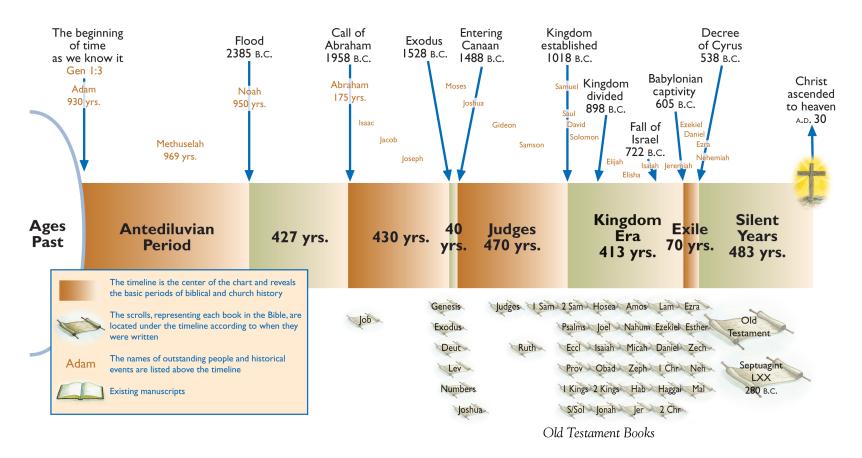
The word *canon*, which means "measuring rod" or "rule," is the title given to those religious writings that have met the exacting standards required for inclusion in the Old Testament. The work of canonizing the Old Testament was done during the days of Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. After Israel's captivity in Babylon, a council of 120 men was formed, with Ezra as its president, for the purpose of reconstructing the worship and religious life of the Jewish people after their return from Babylon. It's possible that this group of spiritual leaders, or certainly their successors, brought together the many religious writings that now comprise the Old Testament. Josephus, a noted Jewish historian, mentions 22 books which this group believed to be divine, and he listed those books. It is significant that the list corresponds exactly with the Old Testament in today's Bibles—our 39 books are exactly the same in content as their 22 books! (Back then, they combined several books, such as 1 and 2 Kings.)

Before a book could be included in the Old Testament, the council asked, "Is it divinely inspired?" "Was it written by a prophet or spokesman for God?" "Is it genuine, and can it be traced back to the time and place as well as the writer?" It's worthwhile to note that Jesus and the apostles quoted from the Old Testament more than 600 times, indicating their approval of the selected texts. It is with utmost confidence, then, that we can accept the Old Testament as God's divinely inspired Word.

Between the Testaments

The first translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into another language was called the *Septuagint*. Seventy scholars were brought to Alexandria, Egypt, to create this Greek translation (hence the name the *Septuagint*, or LXX, or 70). The work began around 280 BC and was completed about 100 years later. This work is significant to us

How We Get Our Bible



because it proves the Old Testament was canonized by this time. It is also important because its agreement with the original Hebrew text shows that the translators took great care to create an accurate work.

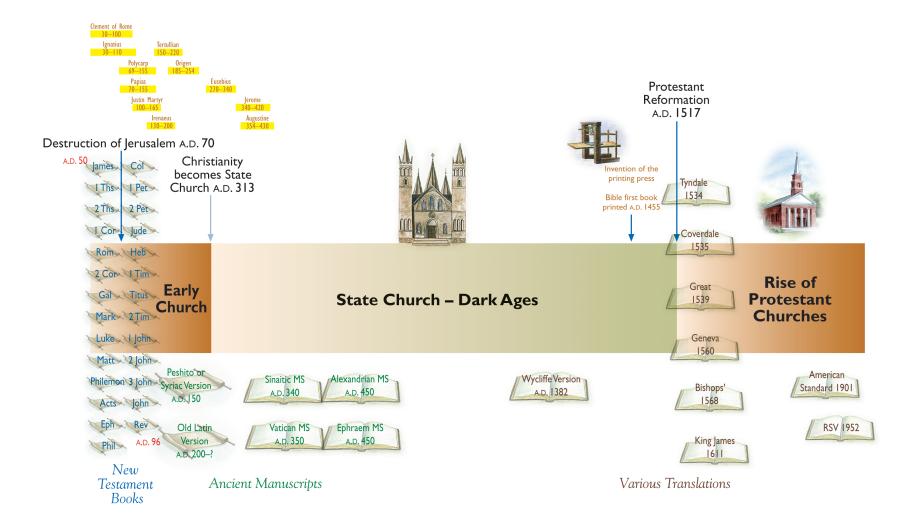
When our modern-day Bibles are compared with the ancient Hebrew texts, Greek Septuagint, and Greek texts, very few differences are found. This clearly suggests the Bible has been accurately preserved like no other ancient book.

The *Apocrypha* is the title given to 14 books that are included in the Roman Catholic Bible. These books were written in the era between the Old Testament and the New Testament. They contain fanciful stories and contradictory statements that immediately reveal that they are not

on the same par as Scripture. They have never been accepted by the Jews as inspired writ, were not quoted by Jesus nor any of the apostles, and were not recognized by the early church. They were "slipped in" with a translation of the Greek Septuagint during the fourth century AD and were recognized by the Catholic Church at the Council of Trent in 1546. They have never been accepted by the Protestant church.

The New Testament

The New Testament is not arranged chronologically. The accompanying chart lists the 27 books as they were written, beginning with James about AD 50.



The New Testament is divided into five sections:

1. The Gospels	4 books—Matthew,
	Mark, Luke, and John
2. The History of	
the Early Church	1 book—Acts
3. Paul's Epistles	14 books—Romans to Hebrews
4. General Epistles	7 books—James to Jude
5. Prophecy	1 book—Revelation

The New Testament's Authority

From the start, the early church used the Old Testament in their services with the same authority as did the Jews in their synagogues. As the New Testament books were completed, they were given the same respect as the prophets or Moses and were used right along with the Old Testament Scriptures. In fact, in 1 Timothy 5:18, the apostle Paul quotes from Luke 10:7, citing it as "scripture." He evidently regarded Luke's Gospel as Scripture before he wrote his great message on biblical inspiration in 2 Timothy 3:16. In 2 Peter 3:1-2, the apostle Peter placed his and the other apostles' writings on par with those of the Old Testament prophets. He also showed in 2 Peter 3:15-16 that he was

familiar with Paul's writings and regarded them with the same degree of authority reserved for the Old Testament writers. This seems to be the common perspective of all the early church leaders.

The Original New Testament Manuscripts

The original manuscripts of the New Testament books were written on papyrus, which is the name of an aquatic plant in Egypt. The manuscript material came from this plant, and its fragile nature made it difficult for these manuscripts to survive. During the fourth century, vellum came into use, a much-improved writing material. There are several copies of the New Testament from this era that have survived through today.

Altogether there are more 5000 copies of the New Testament that survive from the ancient world. By comparing these handwritten copies, biblical scholars are able to verify the original text of the Bible with incredible accuracy.

Ancient Translations of the New Testament

The New Testament was originally written in Greek, and the work of translating it into other languages began early.

The Peshito or Syriac translation was written in Syrochaldaic, or Aramaic. Translated before AD 150, it has always been regarded with utmost respect and became the official Scriptures of the Eastern churches. From it, translations have been made into Arabic, Persian, and Armenian.

The Latin Vulgate, translated by Jerome in the fourth century, became the Bible of the Western churches and, for more than 1000 years, was the chief source of nearly every version of the Scriptures made in the West.

There are two important facts confirmed by these ancient translations: One, the New Testament was completed by the second century; and two, the authenticity of our New Testament can be traced back to within 100 years or less of the apostles. Even the book of

Revelation, written by John on Patmos in AD 95, was given instant acceptance by the early church as the fitting conclusion to the library of God.

Hundreds of other manuscripts—both versions and translations written into still other languages—appeared during the second and third centuries. These were destroyed by the Roman emperors, particularly Diocletian, who ordered the destruction of the sacred writings of the Christians.

When Emperor Constantine professed Christianity in AD 312, he authorized Eusebius, known as the father of church history, to prepare 50 copies of the Scriptures to be used in churches. The question naturally arose: Which religious books are regarded to be Scripture? Through his research the answer become obvious: the 27 books of the New Testament, because they had been universally accepted since the earliest days of the church. Constantine also found that the books about which there had been some questions did not seem to be such that they should be omitted, for usage had long established their being recognized as inspired Scripture along with the other books. The tests of canonicity were much the same as they were for the Old Testament: Was this written by an apostle or a close associate of an apostle? Does it agree with the doctrine of the Lord and His apostles? Is it genuine with regard to facts, the date of writing, and the author? And, was it accepted for use in the early church? The 27 New Testament books we use today were formally ratified by the Council of Carthage in AD 397, which recognized only the books that had already been used by the church for more than three centuries.

The Ancient Manuscripts of the Bible

The most ancient existing manuscripts of the entire Bible are shown on the "How We Got Our Bible" chart. They comprise only a fraction of those in existence. It has been stated by scholars that we have more than 5800 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, and 19,000 copies of ancient versions (mostly of the Latin Vulgate). Add those up, and we have around 25,000 manuscripts of all or parts of the

New Testament, not to mention the 1700 fragments of the Hebrew Old Testament and the 350 copies of the Greek Septuagint.

Josh McDowell, in his book *God-Breathed: The Undeniable Power* and Reliability of Scripture, states,

Once archaeologists completed their search of the Qumran caves—eleven caves in all—almost 1,050 scrolls had been found in about 25,000 to 50,000 pieces (a number that varies depending on how the fragments are counted). Of these manuscripts, about three hundred were texts from the Bible, and many of the rest had direct relevance to early Judaism and emerging Christianity. Every book of the Old Testament was represented, except for the book of Esther, and the earliest copies dated from about 250 BC.¹

No other ancient document comes even close to having such numbers back up its authenticity.

Sinaitic Manuscript-AD 340

This manuscript, written in Greek, is now in the British Museum. In 1844, Dr. Constantin Tischendorf discovered this manuscript by accident in the Monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai. He saw some pages of it in the hall waiting to be used to light the monastery fires and recognized they might have significance, so he rescued them. Eventually the manuscript was given to the Czar of Russia and, after the Revolution of 1917, it was sold to the British Museum for the sum of \$500,000.

Vatican Manuscript-AD 350

This manuscript, written in Greek, is in the Vatican Library in Rome, Italy. It was revealed for the first time in a Vatican Library catalog in 1481. It was not opened to the public until the nineteenth century, after Tregelles, a famous English Bible scholar, was permitted to study it for several days. He claimed that he had memorized it and could reproduce it. Then the pope, in 1889, permitted this manuscript to be photographed and released to the libraries of the world.

Alexandrian Manuscript-AD 450

This was written in Greek, probably in Alexandria, Egypt. It is currently in the British Museum. It was presented to King James I of England in 1627.

Ephraem Manuscript-AD 450

Written in Greek and located in the National Library of Paris, France, this manuscript is thought to have been written in Alexandria. It was scrubbed clear by someone who did not recognize its worth, and the discourses of Ephraem, a Syrian father of the fourth century, were copied on it. It was given to the French Library in Paris, where a student noticed the faint writings underneath the Syrian text. Later, chemicals were applied that helped bring out much of the original writing.

From this point onward in time, we have many other Bible manuscripts, including the Beza Manuscript of AD 550, which is in the Cambridge University Library, Cambridge, England. The Claromontanus Manuscript (AD 550) is in the National Library of Paris. The Washington Manuscript (AD 550) is now in the National Library, Washington, DC.

The writings of the early church fathers comprise a great bridge between the ancient manuscripts and the original New Testament writings. These men were the earliest leaders of the Christian church after the days of the apostles. Some of the most important are listed on the chart along with the time they lived. For the most part they were well-educated men and voluminous writers. They quote repeatedly from the New Testament—for example, Clement referred to Matthew, Luke, Romans, Corinthians, Hebrews, 1 Timothy, and 1 Peter. Ignatius referred to the Gospels as "the word of Jesus." Polycarp, a disciple of the apostle John, in a very short letter that takes only ten minutes to read, quoted from two-thirds of the books in the New Testament. Irenaeus quoted from the New Testament 1800 times, and Tertullian did the same 7200 times. In fact, even though only a small percentage of the writings of the early church fathers have survived to the present day, they still contain all but 11 verses of the New Testament.

This indicates that we can trace the actual words of the New Testament to within a very few years of the original manuscripts.

Various Translations of the Bible

Latin Vulgate-AD 450

Translated by Jerome from Hebrew, Greek, and Latin manuscripts. The Vulgate become the official Bible of the Roman Catholic Church for more than 1000 years.

Wycliffe's Version-1382

John Wycliffe was the first person to translate the Bible into English. He is called "The Morning Star of the Reformation."

Tyndale's New Testament

Translated on the European continent from Erasmus's Greek New Testament (1519 and 1522 editions).

Coverdale Bible-1535

Translated by Miles Coverdale, this is the first version that was printed in English.

Geneva Bible-1560

This version is the work of William Whittingham, who was the first to use the verse and chapter divisions found in our modern-day Bibles. He did his work with a group of English exiles living in Geneva, Switzerland. The Geneva Bible was also the first Bible to contain extensive study notes and was a favorite of the Puritans.

The King James Version-1611

After King Henry VIII severed his country's ties with the Catholic Church, a need arose for an English version of the Bible that could be used in the Protestant churches. On July 22, 1604, King James I announced that he had appointed 54 men as translators, the only

qualification being that they should be "proficient as Bible scholars." The translation work was the most thorough ever done up to that date. Six different groups of scholars would first translate a given section of the Scripture, and then their translation was examined by the five other groups. A committee of six was selected from all the translators to be the final authority in translation matters.

The King James Version stood for many years in a class by itself. Its smooth-flowing older-style language, based heavily on Wycliffe's 1382 version, gave it a majestic note not shared by any other translation up to that time. Up through the latter half of the twentieth century, it was the most popular English Bible version available. We do not possess the actual manuscripts from which the King James Version was translated, but the ancient manuscripts that have been discovered since 1611 verify its accuracy and reliability.

The American Standard Version-1901

This Bible is a revision of the English Revised Version of 1895, which was a very thorough translation itself. The ASV is regarded by conservative Bible scholars as the most reliable and best translation available today. Since its translation it has been updated and retitled the New American Standard Bible, and it is the version many Greek scholars choose because they believe it comes the closest to the original languages.

Many Modern Translations-1950 to Today

The last half of the twentieth century saw such a proliferation of English translations that there are too many to mention here—including the New King James Version (NKJV), the New International Version (NIV), and the English Standard Version (ESV). Numerous other translations and paraphrases have added to the many millions of Bibles that are printed every year. In addition to the many English translations, the Bible has been translated into more than 2000 languages, including all the major languages of the world: Spanish, French, Russian, German, Portuguese, Chinese, Japanese, Hindi, and Arabic, thus making the Word of God available worldwide.

3

CREATION WEEK

HE BIBLE SAYS IN GENESIS 1:1, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." These seven words in the Hebrew text are the title of the opening book of Scripture and summarize everything that is unfolded step by step in the following verses. The second verse provides three circumstantial clauses, setting the stage for the days of creation that follow in verse 3. These clauses state the condition of the earth as it was when created out of nothing. The first clause says, "The earth was formless and void." Second, we are told that "darkness was over the surface of the deep." And third, "the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters." These three statements describe the circumstances present as God began the creation week of seven literal days.

Genesis 1:3 is the main clause describing the first act in forming the present universe. Thus, there is no basis in the text, nor any reason from the context, to see a gap or period of time between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2. The creation of the universe is described as God speaking the world into existence *ex nihilo* (from nothing). It is pictured as an instantaneous appearance of matter from which the world was constructed, rather than an unformed mass left from the judgment of a prior world.

God formed His creation during the first three days of creation week and filled it on the second three days. On day one God made light and called it day. The darkness He called night, and He separated the light from darkness (Genesis 1:3-5). On day two God separated the waters above from the waters below, with the sky in between (Genesis 1:6-8). He called the sky heaven. On day three God separated dry land from the waters below (Genesis 1:9-13). He called the land earth and also made every kind of plant.

The seven days of creation week are divided into three segments. The first three days correct the condition of "formlessness," while the next three days fill the "void" condition mentioned in verse 2. Then on the seventh day, God rested from His creation work of the previous six days and declared that His handiwork was very good (Genesis 1:31–2:3). The creation was deemed very good because God had formed it and filled it. What God had done would be similar to a person building a house and then stocking it with all the needed furnishings.

After the first three days had passed, God spent the next three "filling" His creation. On day four He made the luminaries to fill the sky: the sun for the day, the moon for the night, and the stars in the

The Creation Week

(Genesis 1)

Day One	Day Two	Day Three	Day Four	Day Five	Day Six	Day Seven
divide light from darkness	divide upper waters from expanse lower waters	divide lower waters from dry land	to fill the luminaries: sun, moon, and stars	to fill the earth: fish and birds	to fill the earth: beasts and man	God ceases creation and rests from His work
FORMLESS To correct the "without form" condition, three acts of "dividing"				VOID correct the "voi three acts of "f		REST

sky (Genesis 1:14–19). The luminaries were also given for signs, seasons, days, and years. Some speculate that the angelic realm was also created on the fourth day because Genesis 1:16 concludes with "He made the stars also." It is observed that throughout Scripture, there is a relationship between the physical stars and angels. If so, then this explains why the "morning stars" (angels) were able to sing for joy at the conclusion of the creation week (Job 38:7). On day five God filled the sea with fish and other creatures and the air with birds (Genesis 1:20-23). On day six He made land animals, reptiles, insects, and finally, one man and one woman (Genesis 1:24-31). God mandated

that humanity was to multiply, subdue the earth, and rule over it (Genesis 1:28).

God's workweek ended after the sixth day, and He rested on the seventh (Genesis 2:1-3). He did not rest because He was tired, for it is impossible for Him to get tired. Instead, He rested on the seventh day because He had completed all that He had purposed to do, and this perfectly functioning universe was said to be especially good. This means that whatever God did to create the original universe is no longer in operation in the manner in which it was at that time. However, God never rests from sovereignly ruling and sustaining His creation.