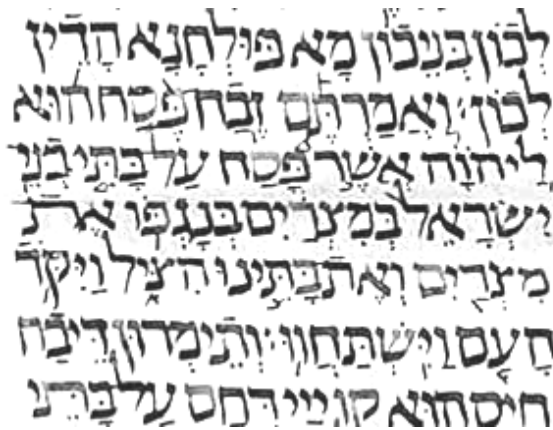


God's Word in Our Hands

Sunday School Fall 2026



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Revelation: God Makes Himself Knowable

God's Word in Our Hands

I. Man needs God's self-revelation.

- A. Since God is infinite, and we are finite (Isa 55:8–9; 1 Tim 6:16), an unbreachable gap exists between the Creator and his creation. This fundamental distinction has always existed and will continue forever.
- B. Therefore, the human mind unaided can never know God (Rom 8:7). The only way that man can know about God is through God's self-revelation.
- C. We assume two things along with the Bible: that God exists (Gen 1:1), and that God has revealed himself (1 Cor 2:9–10).

II. God's self-revelation can be classified in two ways:

- A. **General revelation** is God's witness of himself to all men, mediated through the created order (Rom 1:18–19; Acts 14:17; Ps 19:1–4; Rom 2:15). It is called "general" because it is a universal witness to his existence and it also tells something of His character (Rom 1:20). Since it is available to everyone, it condemns all men for perverting this revelation (Rom 1:18). General revelation provides a background and a necessary starting point for the second category, special revelation.
- B. **Special revelation** is the knowledge of God in concrete form given to a certain person or a particular community. It enables us to know God. Since God has revealed a knowledge of himself, he must be "knowable."

III. God has revealed himself through several channels.

- A. **Nature** reveals God to every human being. This is a form of general revelation. Psalm 19:1–4 tells us that "the heavens declare the glory of God." Isaiah 40:26 tells us to look up at the skies and see Who has created all the stars. Paul told the people of Lystra that God had revealed himself by showing them kindness and allowing the rains to come and their crops to grow (Acts 14:15, 17).

However, there are some limitations to this channel of revelation. First, although this revelation is accessible to every person, each one without exception rejects it. Romans 1:18 says they "suppress the truth by their unrighteousness." The Bible does not concede a philosophical atheism, only a practical atheism. Second, although nature does reveal much about God, there are many things it does not reveal. For example, it says nothing of God's love, mercy, or grace, and so it is incomplete. Last, the curse of sin obscures the revelation of God in nature (Rom 8:20–22).
- B. God has revealed himself in **the nature of man**. When God created man, he said that he would make man in his own image and in his likeness (Gen 1:26–27). Every person carries the image of God, although it is marred by sin (cf. Gen 9:6; Jas 3:9). Since it is available to every human being, this is a form of general revelation. Again, this channel is limited because it is partial and an infinite God cannot completely reveal himself in a finite human being. Also, this channel is obscured by sin (John 3:19–20).

- C. The Bible records many instances of God's **direct revelation**; that is, he spoke directly (and it seems audibly) to many different individuals. The Old Testament records over 3,000 instances of this channel of revelation. For instance, God spoke directly to Adam (Gen 2:16–17), Noah (Gen 6:13–21), Abraham (Gen 12:1–3), and Samuel (1 Sam 3:10). Since God's self-revelation was only given to certain individuals, this is a form of special revelation.

This constitutes a limitation of God's self-revelation in this channel: it was not available to all. Neither was this revelation complete—God dealt very specifically with individuals, telling them certain things that he wanted. In order to reach others beside the initial recipients, it had to be accurately passed down. As the records of these revelations were passed down, they were corrupted by sinful men. This is why there are many ancient “flood stories” and “creation epics.”

- D. God also reveals himself through his **mighty acts**, such as miracles and providence. Miracles are supernatural, unrepeatable, and contrary to the established laws of science. Providence is God's indirect dealing with the universe through common means.

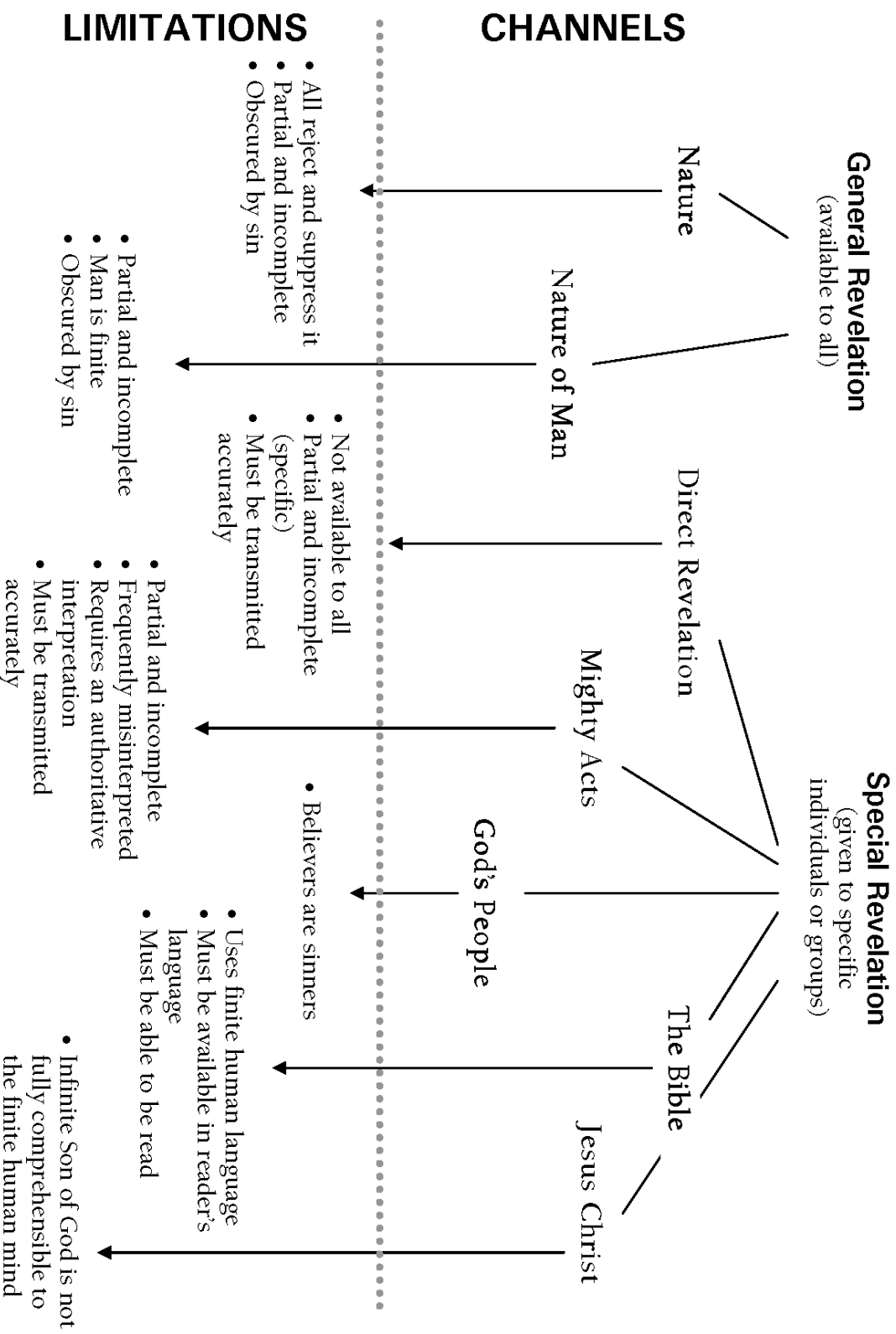
The difficulty with mighty acts was that they too were partial in their revelation. While spectacular, they often revealed little about God's person. They were also frequently misinterpreted (e.g., John 12:28–29). The meaning of a mighty act is lost unless an infallible interpreter with an authoritative interpretation from God is present (e.g., the rainbow—Gen 9:12–17; the Red Sea parting—Exod 14:21). Just like direct revelation, this revelation was corrupted as the tradition was passed down.

- E. **God's people** are the light of the world (Matt 5:13–15), as well as a letter from Christ, known and read by all men (2 Cor 3:2–3). When the world observes the lives of believers, it should see what God is like (Exod 19:6)—for example, he is loving (1 John 4:7, 19) and holy (1 Pet 1:16). However, this channel is imperfect because even the best of believers are sinners and so the revelation of God is obscured.

- F. The **Bible** reveals God's existence. It is in the Bible that God has spoken and revealed himself to us. The writer of Hebrews says that God spoke to the fathers through the prophets (1:1). Not everything about God is revealed in the Bible, but God has revealed everything necessary for salvation (2 Tim 3:15). These things are all revealed in an inerrant and perfect form. However, there are some limitations even to the Bible. It is limited because it uses finite human language. The Bible must be translated into other human languages, and something is always lost in the translation. In addition, many either cannot read or do not have access to the Bible in their own language.

- G. **Jesus Christ** was the perfect revelation of God the Father. He was Emmanuel, “God with us” (Matt 1:23), and the one in whom all the fulness of the Godhead dwelt in bodily form (Col 2:9). Jesus himself said, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:8–9). He was an exact representation, a one-for-one revelation of God (Heb 1:2–3). He is the complete, perfect, and final revelation of God (John 1:1, 14, 18). God could not have revealed himself more fully than he did in Jesus. What is said of Jesus Christ cannot be said of any of the other channels: “whoever has seen me has seen the Father.” However, even this channel is not without limitation. Although God has revealed himself infinitely in the person of Jesus Christ, he is not fully comprehensible to the finite human mind.

God's Self-Revelation



IV. The Bible is superior as a channel of revelation now because:

- A. It includes the revelation from all the other channels. In the Bible, we read of how God has revealed himself through the other channels.
- B. It gives this revelation in its original, pure form. While human traditions are corrupted as they are passed down, the Bible remains the only source of pure and infallible revelation.
- C. It gives the correct interpretation of the other channels. Scripture not only records the other channels which require an interpretation in order to be meaningful, but also their inspired interpretation.
- D. It is superior since Christ is not physically here now.
- E. It presents the only authentic revelation of Jesus Christ. Very little information remains outside the Bible concerning Jesus Christ. God did not allow sinful, unsaved men to testify authoritatively about his Son (cf. Mark 1:24–25; Acts 16:16–18).

V. In conclusion, we can say two things about biblical revelation:

- A. Biblical revelation is **propositional**. It is given in truth statements, concepts, ideas, thoughts and words. As we already said, if God reveals himself so that he can be known, this revelation must be in a form that the human mind can handle. Non-propositional thought is “unthinkable,” since this fact must be assumed in order to be disproved.
- B. Biblical revelation uses **human language**. This is the vehicle that God has chosen to reveal himself to man. God created language and created man using and speaking language from the beginning. Even though language is finite, it can express the revelation of God—granted, it cannot reveal *everything* about an infinite God, but it can express revelation. In fact, Jesus Christ himself used human language to express truth about God.

Inspiration: God Speaks His Word into Scripture

God's Word in Our Hands

I. The Definition of Inspiration

- A. 2 Timothy 3:16–17 — “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”
 1. **Inspiration includes the entire Bible** (“*All Scripture*”). Sometimes we use the word *plenary*, which means complete. We also say inspiration is *verbal*, meaning that it extends to the words, not just the thoughts of Scripture. God did not just inspire the thoughts of Scripture—he guided every word so that it was exactly what He wanted (Num 22:38; Jer 1:9; 1 Cor 2:13).
 2. **Inspiration has to do with the written product** (“*Scripture* is breathed out by God”). The word translated “Scripture” literally means “writings,” and is used in the New Testament to speak of the Old Testament writings (e.g., John 2:22; 19:36; Acts 8:32). The Bible *writers* were not themselves inspired; the Bible *writings* were inspired. Everything that a Bible writer wrote was not necessarily inspired. For instance, Paul speaks of another letter he penned to the Corinthians that has not been preserved and thus, must not have been inspired (2 Cor 2:4).
 3. **The Bible is the Word of God** (“breathed out by *God*”). The KJV translates “given by inspiration of God” from one Greek word, which means quite literally, “God-breathed.” The words of Scripture are given to us as God himself breathed them out.
- B. 2 Peter 1:21 — “For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”
 1. **Inspiration is a work of the Holy Spirit** (“they were carried along by *the Holy Spirit*”). These men of God were being controlled by the Holy Spirit as they penned the words of the Bible.
 2. **Inspiration is a divine procedure** (“men spoke *from God*”). Prophecy did not take place because the prophets wanted it to, nor did the prophets produce the writings out of their own creativity; the whole process was guided and controlled by the Holy Spirit of God.
 3. **It does not tell us *how*** the Holy Spirit influenced the writers during the process of inspiration. They did not reproduce the words of God mechanically like a typewriter. Each writer used his own writing style and vocabulary, but inspiration guaranteed that the result was the Word of God.
 4. **Inspiration applies only to the original documents**, called the *autographs*. The Holy Spirit does not perform another work of inspiration when the Bible is copied or translated. The original documents, coming from the pens of Paul, Moses, John, Isaiah, and the rest of the Bible writers, were inspired.

- C. “Inspiration is a superintendence of God the Holy Spirit over the writers of the Scriptures, as a result of which these Scriptures possess Divine authority and trustworthiness, and, possessing such divine authority and trustworthiness, are free from error” (E. J. Young, *Thy Word Is Truth*, p. 27).
- D. “We believe in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as verbally inspired by God and inerrant in the original writings, and that they are of supreme and final authority in faith and life” (COB Constitution, Article II.).

II. The Results of Inspiration

A. Infallibility

1. Infallibility means that the Bible is incapable of error or mistake. Everything the Bible predicts will happen, everything it promises will hold true, and it will never be destroyed (John 10:35).

Jesus said, “For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished” (Matt 5:18).

An “iota” is the Hebrew letter *yôd*, the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet.

The dot (or “tittle”) refers to the small distinctions between Hebrew letters that makes one letter distinct from another. It could be compared to the difference between the tail on a “q” or a “g”.

2. Because it is infallible, the Bible, properly understood, does not contradict itself.
3. Some have used infallibility to mean something less than inerrancy. How the Bible can be infallible but not inerrant is an impossibility.

B. Inerrancy

1. Inerrancy means that the Bible is without error. Everything it says is true.

2. The Bible claims that it is inerrant (Ps 12:6; John 17:17). The kind of Bible in which we believe is directly proportionate to the kind of God in whom we believe. If we do not believe that the Bible is truthful, then we cannot believe in a God who is truthful.
 - a. God, who breathed out the Scriptures, is Truth (John 3:33; Rom 3:4; Titus 1:2).
 - b. Jesus Christ, the Word of God, is the truth (John 14:6).
 - c. The Holy Spirit, who is the agent in inspiration, is Truth (1 John 5:6).
3. Inerrancy does not mean that all the writers used the same writing styles, gave the same amount of detail, or used the same descriptions. For example, the Gospel writers described the same events from different perspectives, using different details, but all the accounts are true.

C. Authority

1. Since the Bible is inspired, it is the authoritative Word of God.
2. The Bible is as authoritative as if God were physically speaking directly to us (cf. Luke 16:31).

D. The Bible is both a divine and a human book.

1. Because of God's work of inspiration, the Bible is both a human and a divine book. It is divine because it is God's Word, his revelation to men. It is also a human book because it was written by humans using human language.
 - a. Some have viewed the Bible as an entirely human book and claimed that, just like all human writing, the writers of Scripture made errors, wrote things that were incorrect, and sometimes embellished their writings with fiction. This cannot be so, since the Bible is God's inspired Word.
 - b. Others have put so much emphasis on the fact that the Bible is a divine book, they practically ignore the fact that it is also a human book. Instead of reading the words and understanding what they mean in their context, they appeal to some special "Holy Spirit meaning" for the Bible, supposing that whatever they think or feel or pops into their head while reading the Bible must be from God. They fail to recognize that the Bible is also a human book, written by men to specific people at a definite time in history.
2. The Bible makes this clear in many places when it claims that "God said" and other places when it claims that the human writer said the same thing (e.g., cf. Ps 97:7 and Heb 1:6). This is how the early Christians could say that God spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of David (Acts 4:25).
3. This means the human writers wrote exactly what God wanted, and God wanted to communicate what the human writers wrote.

4. Therefore, we understand what God meant by understanding what the human authors meant: using the received laws of human language. This means that we use the same laws of language (what a noun is, how a verb functions, what words mean, etc.) to understand Scripture that we do to understand any human communication.
 - a. The *univocal nature of human language*: any word has a singular meaning in a given context (it can't mean everything).
 - b. *Authorial intent*: the meaning of any communication is determined by the intention of author. (Note: this must be assumed in order to try to disprove it.) If we deny that the meaning is tied to the intention of the author, then no objective basis for meaning remains. The Bible means whatever any person wants it to mean.
 - c. The importance of *context*: since we don't have access to the biblical authors, we must determine the author's intention from the written text.
 - d. *Meaning/significance distinction*: although each text has only one meaning (what the author intended), that meaning could have significance in (be applied to) many situations. However, the text can never mean what it never meant (e.g. Gen 22:8).

E. Perspicuity

1. Perspicuity refers to the clarity of the *message* of Scripture. While there are many interpretational details that can be difficult to understand, the main message of Scripture is clear.
2. We do not need "special understanding" to know what the Bible means. We do, however, need new life (regeneration) from the Holy Spirit of God in order to *accept* and *obey* what the Bible says (Rom 8:7–8; 1 Cor 2:14).

F. Inspiration and copies of the original manuscripts

1. Copies of Scripture partake of inspiration only as they accurately reproduce the originals.
2. Copies of Scripture can only be called inerrant if they accurately reproduce the originals.

Canonization: The Church Recognizes God's Word

God's Word in Our Hands

I. The Canonization of Scripture

- A. *Canonization* involves the collecting and development of an official listing of the documents of Scripture. Since the books of the Bible were not all written at the same time or in the same geographical location, they had to be collected and then an official list made as to which books were inspired and which were not.
- B. The *canon* of Scripture is the collection of divinely inspired and authoritative sacred writings.
- C. The key test of *canonicity* is inspiration.

II. The Old Testament Canon

- A. The requirements for Old Testament canonicity.
 - 1. *Prophetic origin*: was the book written by a man of God, a prophet, one who spoke for God?
 - 2. *Truthfulness*: did the book tell the truth about God, man, etc.? Specifically, was it faithful to the Law of Moses?
 - 3. *Acceptance*: was the book accepted by God's people, the nation of Israel?
- B. The canonization of the Old Testament was relatively simple, since Old Testament prophets generally spoke to the nation of Israel (e.g., Moses and the Law, David and the Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc.).

III. The New Testament Canon

- A. The canonization process for the New Testament was more complicated than Old Testament canonization.
 - 1. Geographically, greater distances were involved. New Testament books were written and sent across the Roman Empire.
 - 2. Culturally, different audiences were involved. Individuals and churches received letters and circulated them, while some epistles were intended to be read and circulated generally (e.g., James, Hebrews, et al).
 - 3. Ultimately, no official church body or leader was responsible. Contrary to the assertions of the Roman Catholic Church, there was no one local church or church leader who determined which writings should be included.
- B. The early church did not *decide* which books were inspired; rather, they *recognized* that the books were inspired.

- C. The early church employed four general principles to determine which books were canonical:
 - 1. *Apostolicity*: was the book written by an apostle? This included the twelve apostles, Paul, and some of the close associates of the apostles, such as Mark and Luke.
 - 2. *Catholicity*: was the book addressed to and relevant to the church as a whole?
 - 3. *Orthodoxy*: was the book in keeping with the content of the faith of the church?
 - 4. *Traditional usage*: was the book used in the worship and teaching of the church?
- D. Ultimately, God *providentially* preserved the books that he had inspired, thus keeping them from being “lost” or falling into disuse.

IV. Material Outside the Canon of Scripture

Among the many writings that aspired to be part of Scripture, there are two categories of uninspired books.

- A. *Pseudepigrapha*: the word means “false writings.” These books were forged by people claiming to be an apostle or church leader and usually written imitating the style of a canonical book. About 65 books are commonly placed in this category today, including the Book of Adam and Eve, 1 and 2 Enoch, The Assumption of Moses, and Psalm 151.

Apocalyptic Literature:

1 (Ethiopic) Enoch
 2 (Slavonic) Enoch
 3 (Hebrew) Enoch
 Sibylline Oracles
 Treatise of Shem
 Apocalypse of Zephaniah
 The Fourth Book of Ezra
 Greek Apocalypse of Ezra
 Vision of Ezra
 Apocalypse of Sedrach
 II (Greek) Baruch
 III (Greek) Baruch
 Apocalypse of Abraham
 Apocalypse of Adam
 Apocalypse of Elijah
 Apocalypse of Sophoniaiah

Testaments:

Testament of Reuben
 Testament of Simeon
 Testament of Levi
 Testament of Judah
 Testament of Issachar
 Testament of Zebulun
 Testament of Dan
 Testament of Naphtali
 Testament of Gad
 Testament of Asher
 Testament of Joseph
 Testament of Benjamin
 Testament of Job
 Testament of Abraham
 Testament of Isaac
 Testament of Jacob
 Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs
 Testament of Moses (The Assumption of Moses)
 Testament of Solomon

Expansions of the Old Testament and Legends:

Letter of Aristeas
 Book of Jubilees

Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah
 Joseph and Asenath
 Life of Adam and Eve
 Pseudo-Philo (Biblical Antiquities)
 The Lives of the Prophets
 Ladder of Jacob
 Jannes and Jambres
 History of the Rechabites
 Eldad and Modat
 History of Joseph

Wisdom and Philosophical Literature:

Ahiqar
 3 Maccabees
 4 Maccabees
 Pseudo-Phocylides
 The Sentences of Syriac Menander

Prayers, Psalms, and Odes:

More Psalms of David (Psalms 151–155)
 Prayer of Manasseh
 Psalms of Solomon
 Hellenistic Synagogal Prayers
 Prayer of Joseph
 Prayer of Jacob
 Odes of Solomon

Fragments of Lost Judeo-Hellenistic Works:

Theodotus
 Aristobulus
 Demetrius the Chronographer
 Aristeas the Exegete
 Eupolemus
 Pseudo-Eupolemus
 Artapanus
 Cleodemus Malchus
 Thallus
 Justus of Tiberias
 Pagan Witnesses to Sibylline Oracles
 Pseudo-Hecataeus
 Philo the Epic Poet
 The Tragedian Ezekiel
 Pseudo-Orpheus

- B. *Apocrypha*: the word means “hidden or concealed.” These fifteen books were written in the time between the Old and New Testaments (ca. 200–50 B.C.). In 1546, the Roman Catholic Church declared that 12 of these 15 books were canonical, and so they include them in their Bible.

Name	Genre	Synopsis
1 Esdras	Historical	A translation of the Hebrew text of Ezra with the addition of a story about three men in the court of Darius.
2 Esdras	Apocalyptic	A series of seven revelations from the angel Uriel concerning the great mysteries of the moral world.
Tobit	Religious romance	The story of a Jewish exile encouraging piety and teaching salvation by works (12:8–9).
Judith	Religious romance	The story of a pious Jewish widow who defeats the Assyrians by her trickery.
Additions to Esther	Legendary	Additions to the book of Esther; usually included in the respective place in the book.
Wisdom of Solomon	Wisdom	Additional proverbs by Solomon.
Ecclesiasticus	Wisdom	Many maxims on various topics, also called Ben Sirach.
Baruch	Prophetic	A mosaic of sentences drawn from canonical books, claiming to have been written by Baruch, the scribe of Jeremiah.
Letter of Jeremiah	Prophetic	A letter written by Jeremiah to the exiles in Judah.
Additions to Daniel	Legendary	Three separate books supplying more detail about the characters in the book of Daniel: the Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men, Susanna, and Bel and the Dragon.
Prayer of Manasseh	Legendary	The repentant prayer of King Manasseh

1 Maccabees	Historical	A generally historically reliable account of the Jews in the second century B.C.
2 Maccabees	Historical	Another less reliable account of Jewish history.

Several arguments can be made against including the apocryphal books in the canon (i.e., arguing that they are not inspired).

1. Historically, the Jews never accepted them as part of their Scripture (Old Testament).
2. Neither the New Testament nor Jesus himself directly quotes or refers to any of these books as authoritative or canonical.
3. They contain historical and chronological errors, as well as unbiblical and sometimes heretical teaching.
4. The apocryphal books are generally of a lower level of writing and subject matter. They are often fanciful and sometimes absurd. For example, consider this summary of the plot of the book of Tobit.

“Tobit of the tribe of Naphtali was exiled to Nineveh where he zealously observed the Law of Moses. Tobit became blind when some bird droppings fell in his eyes, and so he prayed to die. At the same time in the distant city of Ecbatana in Media, Tobit’s kinswoman Sarah also prayed to die because Asmodeus, a demon-lover, had successively murdered seven of her husbands before the marriages could be consummated. God heard their prayers and sent the angel Raphael to help them. Tobias, the son of Tobit is sent with a guide, Azariah, who is the archangel Raphael in disguise, on a mission to Media. Along the way Tobias catches a large fish in the Tigris River. Azariah instructs Tobias to save the heart and liver to burn, producing an odor which will repel the demon plaguing Sarah. The gall of the fish can be used to anoint the eyes of Tobit to cure his blindness. Arriving in Ecbatana, Tobias marries Sarah and routs Asmodeus with the magic incense. Tobias returns home with the special cure suggested by Azariah and restores Tobit’s sight.”

Preservation: God Protects His Word

God's Word in Our Hands

I. God will preserve His Word (Ps 119:152, 160).

- A. God's Word cannot be destroyed. "The word of the Lord remains forever" (1 Pet 1:25; cf. Isa 40:8).
- B. Since God's Word is infallible and completely trustworthy, not even one part will fail. "For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished" (Matt 5:18).
- C. God's Word is permanently authoritative. "...Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35).

II. God has preserved His Word providentially.

- A. Preservation is related to inspiration. Since God has inspired infallible and authoritative writings, it follows that those writings continuously stand as the indestructible Word of God.
- B. God has not chosen to preserve the text *miraculously*; rather, he has chosen to preserve it *providentially*. He does not promise to preserve the text via perfect and infallible copies and translations.
- C. There is no miracle of perpetual inspiration going on today to ensure that every copy of Scripture is perfect. We can prove that by attempting to copy a line of biblical Greek.

ΤΟΡΗΜΑΚΥΡΙΟΥΜΕΝΕΙΕΙCΤΟΝΑΙΩΝΑ

No miraculous act of God enables someone to copy these words correctly; rather, one must pay careful attention to detail, knowing that as a human, he is subject to error.

- D. Preservation does not necessarily mean that every person at every time had *access* to every part of Scripture.
 - 1. Manasseh and Amon, kings of Judah, had apparently destroyed every known copy of the Law (2 Kgs 22:8).
 - 2. At many times in history people did not have the Bible in a language they could understand. For example, the Levites in Ezra's day read the Law aloud in Hebrew and then gave an oral Aramaic translation (Neh 8:8).
 - 3. Even today there are roughly 1,600 language groups that do not have a translation of the Bible.
- E. While the Bible teaches the ultimate indestructibility of God's Word, the Bible does not state how or where this will occur.

III. God has preserved his Word in the copies.

- A. Only the autographs, the original manuscripts coming from the pen of the biblical writers, were inspired (2 Pet 1:21).
- B. Copies are inspired (derivatively) and therefore authoritative only as they accurately reflect the original. If I am entrusted with a message from a high-ranking official, I am not at liberty to deliver a different message and still claim that authority. The only way I can claim that authority is by delivering the message completely and accurately.
- C. The Bible records several instances of making copies of God's Word (Deut 17:18; 31:24–26; 2 Tim 4:13).
- D. There is no single manuscript, printed text, or version that is without error. No two manuscripts agree in every place. God has given us thousands of manuscripts and so it is proper to say that God has preserved his Word in the totality of manuscripts.

IV. Conclusions

- A. God has preserved his Word providentially in the many copies we have of Scripture. There are only eleven existing Greek manuscripts of Homer's *Odyssey*. Compare that to the 5,800–6,000 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, in addition to over 20,000 manuscripts of ancient versions in other languages.
- B. While every part of Scripture was not always available to every person (this is one of the limitations of the Bible as a channel of revelation), God will not let his infallible Word be completely destroyed.
- C. Nowhere does the Bible promise that God's Word will be preserved in one version or even one family of manuscripts. Since the Bible is both a human and divine book, we must make use of all available resources to understand the Bible.

Transmission: Men Pass Down God’s Word

God’s Word in Our Hands

I. Transmission necessarily involves copying of the text.

- A. Transmission is possible because the Bible is both a human and divine book. As we said previously, God used men to write down his Word. They wrote God’s Word in human language, so it can be copied using those same words.
- B. We also said that copies of Scripture are only inspired and inerrant as they accurately reproduce the originals.
- C. We do not possess the original manuscripts, called the *autographs*, only copies.

II. Transmission of the Old Testament Hebrew manuscripts.

- A. The Old Testament was copied more systematically than the New Testament, especially by a group of Jewish scribes called the Masoretes (ca. A.D. 500–1000). The text that had been copied up until this time only included the consonants. These scribes developed symbols to indicate the spoken Hebrew vowels. The vowels were traditionally pronounced, but the Masoretes were the first to reduce them to writing. They also developed a system of accent marks and marginal notes. The word “Jehovah” in English comes to us because of the work of the Masoretic scribes.

A Note on the <i>Tetragrammaton</i> (the LORD)		
יהוה	YHWH (“Yahweh”)	“the LORD”
אֲדֹנָי	’adonay (“adonai”)	“Sir, lord, master”
יְהוָה	yehowah (“Jehovah”)	“the LORD”

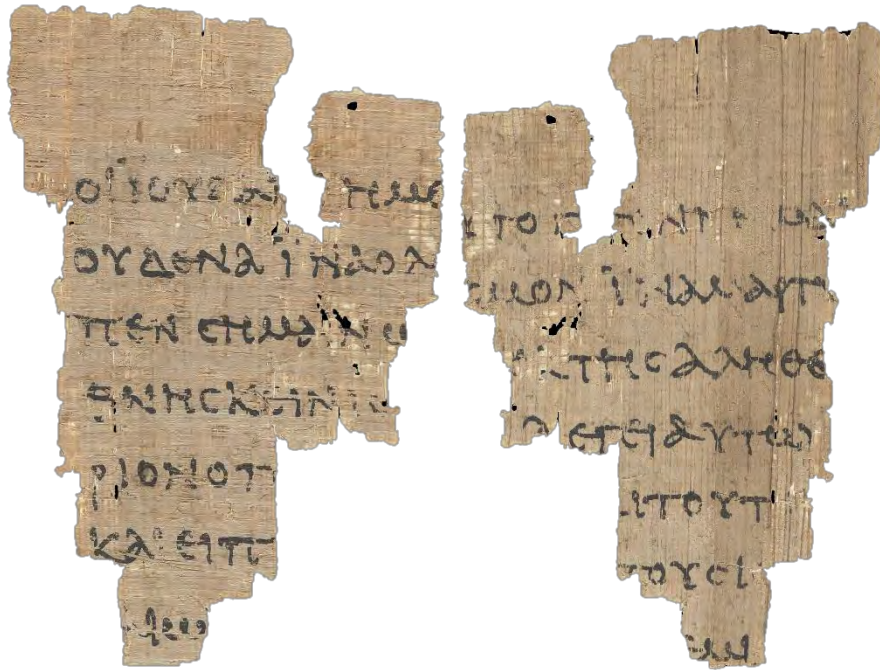
- B. The Hebrew Old Testament is arranged differently than our English Bibles.
 - 1. The order of books in our English Bibles comes from the Latin Vulgate (translated by Jerome ca. A.D. 382–406).
 - 2. The books in the Hebrew Old Testament are grouped into three divisions: the Law (*Torah*), the Prophets (*Nebi’im*), and the Writings (*Kethubim*).
 - 3. Jews today do not call it the “Old Testament,” since to call it “old” would imply there is a “new” testament. Instead, they call it *Tanakh*, which is an acrostic from the first letters of the three divisions.

The Law	The Prophets	The Writings
1. Genesis 2. Exodus 3. Leviticus 4. Numbers 5. Deuteronomy	Former Prophets 6. Joshua 7. Judges 8. Samuel 9. Kings Latter Prophets 10. Isaiah 11. Jeremiah 12. Ezekiel 13. The Twelve	14. Psalms 15. Job 16. Proverbs <i>Megilloth</i> (The Scrolls) 17. Ruth 18. The Song 19. Ecclesiastes 20. Lamentations 21. Esther Historical Books 22. Daniel 23. Ezra-Nehemiah 24. Chronicles

4. Jesus reflected this arrangement of the Scriptures when he talked about the things “written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms” (Luke 24:44). Here “the Psalms” stands for the Writings, since the book of Psalms came first and was the largest book in the Writings.
 - a. The Law consists of the first five books written by Moses.
 - b. The Prophets consist of the “Former Prophets” (some of the historical books as we know them) and the Latter Prophets. “Former” and “latter” refer to before and after the captivity. Remember that to be accepted as inspired, an Old Testament book was to be written by a prophet (Matt 26:56). Notice that the twelve minor (shorter) prophets are lumped together as “The Twelve.”
 - c. The Writings are further broken down into three groups: the poetic books (Psalms, Proverbs, and Job), the *Megilloth* (which means “rolls” or “scrolls”), and the historical books (all written after the exile).
5. Notice also that there are only twenty-four books. The three books that have two parts in our English Bibles (Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles) were divided for practical reasons. Ezra and Nehemiah are joined together (both describing the same time period and similar events and both written by Ezra). “The Twelve” (minor prophets) count as one. Sometimes Lamentations was appended to Jeremiah and Ruth to Judges to make twenty-two books (cf. Josephus, *Contra Apion*, 1.8).

III. Transmission of the Greek manuscripts.

- A. About 6,000 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament exist. These can be classified four ways: papyri, uncials, miniscules, and lectionaries.
1. *Papyri* are documents written on papyrus leaves. These are the oldest manuscripts, and so most are only fragments. The oldest ($\mathfrak{P}^{32}$) is a scrap of the gospel of John, containing parts of 18:31–34, 37–38, about two inches by three inches. It is dated around A.D. 100–125, roughly ten to thirty years after John wrote his gospel!



2. *Uncials* are the next oldest type of manuscript, and the name represents the type of lettering used. They were copied on vellum (animal skins), and usually put together in a codex, or book form.



3. Miniscule lettering was developed around the beginning of the ninth century A.D. It was a running script (cursive) that was able to be produced quickly. This is the largest group of manuscripts, as well as the latest. The minuscules were produced until the invention of the printing press (ca. 1440) made hand copying unnecessary.

Below is an example of a minuscule manuscript, Minuscule 33 (using the Gregory-Aland cataloging system), called the "queen of the cursives." This manuscript, which you can find at the National Library of France in Paris, was copied in the ninth century and contains several OT prophets and all the NT except Revelation. This folio (page) is about 15x10".



4. *Lectionaries* were the “Sunday School quarterlies” and “responsive readings” of the early church. Different New Testament texts, not necessarily in order, were grouped in daily and weekly lessons and readings. This group contains both uncial and minuscule lettering.
- B. The copyists of the early Greek manuscripts tended not to be professional scribes. The early Church made and circulated copies of the epistles which the apostles wrote to them (Col 4:16). Thus, the copies were not copied by professional copyists like the Masoretes, but believers of the early Church.
- C. These early copies were produced in running script, with no breaks between words, punctuation, or capitalization. Sometimes this created confusion later when scribes attempted to break the letters into words.

For example, look at this line from 1 Thessalonians 2:7. In this example, four different important manuscripts started with two “n”s and then later editors “erased” the second “n.”

ΣΡΙCΤΟΥ ΑΠΟCΤΟΛΟΙ ΑΛΛΑ ΕΓΕΝΗΘΗΜΕΝ ΗΤΙΟΙ ΕΝ ΜΕCΩ ΥΜΩΝ ΕΑΝΤΡΟΦΟCΘΑΛΠΗΤ	
ΕΓΕΝΗΘΗΜΕΝ ΗΤΙΟΙ	“we were gentle” (KJV, ESV)
ΕΓΕΝΗΘΗΜΕΝ ΝΗΤΙΟΙ	“we were like little children” (NIV, NLT)

- D. Other differences (or “variants”) in copying occurred when one scribe would read a manuscript out loud and a room full of other scribes would copy it. A very common variant is exchanging “our” for “your” or vice versa (e.g., Eph 5:2). The Greek words are almost identical; “our” is pronounced hay-MOWN and “your” is pronounced hoo-MOWN. Others involved exchanging a synonymous word for another, skipping a line or a few words, and confusing words that sounded alike or looked alike.

IV. Arriving at a Hebrew/Greek text.

- A. We do not possess the original manuscripts, only copies. Therefore, we must determine how the original manuscripts read.

This discipline is called *textual criticism*. In this context, “criticism” is not a bad word, in the sense of picking apart or disparaging the text of Scripture. Rather, the word criticism comes from a Greek word meaning “to judge or discern,” and it is the science of surveying the manuscript evidence and determining how the original text of Scripture read.

- B. These different manuscript bases sometimes give different readings. For example, compare John 1:18 in the KJV and the ESV.

KJV	“No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.”
ESV	“No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.

The reason for the differences between the two versions is because some Greek manuscripts have the word for “Son” and some have the word for “God.” These manuscripts are all documented and can be researched and verified, if one has the time and desire. Neither group of translators picked words trying to make Jesus more or less God, or by some other arbitrary method. They were following the Greek texts they had.

- C. There are basically three methods or philosophies of textual criticism.
1. The King James Version and the New King James Version are translated from a Greek text family called the *Textus Receptus* or Received Text. This text was compiled by Erasmus of Rotterdam in 1516. This text family relies on manuscripts from the 12th to 15th centuries.
 2. A second position relies on the majority of manuscripts. At any given difference, all the manuscripts are tallied up, and whichever reading has the most manuscripts supporting it is deemed to be correct.
 3. Most other modern versions are built on a Greek text called the minority text, the eclectic text, or the critical text (again, from the use of “critical” as mentioned above). Here editors have looked at each variant individually and chosen (hence, “eclectic”) which reading seemed to have been original based on the manuscript evidence and how scribes might have arrived at a different reading.

For example, if one manuscript has “Lord Jesus,” one reads “Jesus Christ,” and one reads simply “Jesus,” we might deduce that the words “Lord” and “Christ” were added by well-meaning scribes. Clearly, those phrases occur in many places in the Bible, so someone might have inserted them in order to harmonize with another similar verse.

As another example, 1 John 5:7–8 reads very differently in modern English versions than it does in the King James Version.

English Standard Version (ESV)	King James Version (KJV)
⁶ This is he who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not by the water only but by the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth.	⁶ This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth.
⁷ For there are three that testify:	⁷ For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.
⁸ the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree.	⁸ And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.

This is not because one translation decided to “leave out” some words or was trying to “deny the Trinity.” The additional information is found in about ten Greek manuscripts dating from the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries. No earlier manuscript of this passage (about 500 exist) includes these words. It seems quite clear that passage was added by later scribes.

- D. Textual criticism cannot be avoided. Since we do not have the original autographs, everyone must do textual criticism. If you accept any text of Scripture, you are accepting the conclusions of the scholars who did textual criticism.

Translation: God's Word in Our Language

God's Word in Our Hands

I. Translation is necessary.

- A. Translation is the only possible way for us to understand the Bible because it was written in Hebrew (Old Testament), Greek (New Testament), and Aramaic (Ezra 4:7–6:1; 7:12–26; Dan 2:4–7:28). Short of learning these ancient languages, we will never understand the Bible without a translation.
- B. However, we said previously that translation was one limitation of the Bible as a channel of special revelation. Something is always lost in a translation, because translation always involves interpretation. Whenever something is translated into another language, there is no mathematical equation (this word “equals” this). Rather, it takes some creativity on the part of a translator. Therefore, there is no such thing as a perfect translation.
 1. There is no “point-to-point” correspondence between languages; rather, it is an area to an area. For instance, the word “love” in English can mean many different things. We “love” ice cream, we “love” our church, we “love” our country, and we “love” our family members.
 2. Words only have meaning in a given context. There is no intrinsic meaning that is bound up in a group of letters. Words are symbols that represent ideas. What does the word *mine* “really mean”? It all depends on context! It could be a verb, a noun, or even a pronoun, but it depends on its context.

For example, some have said that *agape* love is God's love and *phileo* love is man's love. However, in Matthew 24:12, Jesus warns about the apostasy during the Tribulation and says that men's *agape* love will wax cold. On the other hand, in John 5:20, Jesus said that the Father *phileo* loves the Son. Therefore, we must be careful since these distinctions break down.
 3. We cannot count on etymology, or the roots of a word, to give a word a certain meaning. For instance, a “butterfly” has nothing to do with “butter,” and a “pineapple” has nothing to do with either a “pine” or an “apple.”

One of the Greek words often translated “repentance” is a compound word from “change” and “mind.” Therefore, some have assumed that repentance involves merely admitting facts about Jesus Christ and maybe sin. However, when one studies the context of this word, we see that there is a mental, emotional, and volitional aspect to the activity.
- C. Translation is possible because the Bible is both a human and divine book. As we have said previously, God used human men to write down his Word. They wrote God's Word in human language, so it can be translated into other human languages.

II. Translation has been done ever since Scripture was given.

- A. The Levites in Ezra's day read aloud the Law in Hebrew and then gave an oral Aramaic translation (Neh 8:8).
- B. The New Testament church used the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Old Testament. It is quoted many times in the New Testament, sometimes where it has a different reading than the Hebrew Old Testament (e.g., cf. Heb 11:21; Gen 48:1).

III. Translations can be called God's Word.

- A. Translations of Scripture partake of inspiration and inerrancy, but only as they accurately reproduce the originals.
- B. To accurately reproduce the originals, we must first accurately determine the original text (textual criticism).

IV. Methods of translation.

- A. **Formal equivalency** is a technical name for a philosophy of translation that strives to be very literal. By "literal" we are referring to a word-for-word translation. The translators are trying to make the forms (words) equal. This is ideal, since we believe that the very words of the original manuscripts are breathed out by God (verbal inspiration).
 - 1. However, as we said earlier, this is actually impossible, since languages do not have a point-to-point correspondence. The King James Version is an example of a formal equivalent translation, but even the KJV sometimes had to use several words to translate one Greek word.

θεόπνευστος ("God-breathed")	"given by inspiration of God" (2 Tim 3:16)
προσωπολήμπτης ("face-receiver")	"respector of persons" (Acts 10:34)
τετέλεσται	"It is finished" (John 19:30)

- 2. A formal equivalent translation must sometimes deviate from a strictly literal translation because Greek and English are very different languages.
For example, a Greek plural neuter subject takes a singular verb. Hebrews 2:14, which says in English, "the children *are* partakers of flesh and blood," reads in Greek, "the children *is* partakers of blood and flesh." (Note also that "flesh and blood" are reversed because it sounds better in English.)
- 3. Sometimes a formal equivalent translation keeps these anomalies in place, sacrificing readability to try to represent the original more faithfully.

For instance, when a Greek speaker was recounting a narrative that took place in the past, they used present tense verbs to make the story more vivid (we do this in colloquial English, too). This makes a narrative passage sometimes switch back and forth from past tense to present tense.

Mark 10:17–31 (KJV)	
“Jesus said” (v. 21)	past tense
“Jesus saith” (v. 23)	present tense
“Jesus saith” (v. 24)	present tense
“They were astonished” (v. 26)	past tense
“Jesus saith” (v. 27)	present tense
“Jesus said” (v. 29)	past tense

- B. Another way of translating is called **functional equivalency**. This method seeks to express the original idea in the clearest possible way to the reader. In the Gospels, we often find the phrase, “he answered and said.” A functional equivalent translation might replace this phrase with “he replied.”
- C. A **paraphrase** seeks to use other words to restate what the text says in a way that is most understandable to the reader. It may substitute current idioms for biblical phrases. A paraphrase is easy to read and understand, but it may be less precise since many details are left to the interpretation of the person who translated it.

Bible translations can be put on a scale from less literal to more literal. Each has its own unique characteristics, strengths, and weaknesses.

<i>Message</i>	TEV	NLT	NRSV	NIV	RSV	KJV	NKJV	ESV	NASB
Paraphrase Less literal Easier to read			“Functional equivalency”					“Formal equivalency” Very literal More difficult to read	

V. We ought to reject unacceptable positions on Bible translations.

- A. *Only one translation is inspired.* Based on what we have already learned about inspiration, clearly no translation is “inspired” in the same sense as the original manuscripts. Remember that any translation is valid only as it accurately represents the original manuscripts. We also said that there is no one “right way” to translate anything; therefore, there is also no “one and only” translation of the Bible.
- B. *One translation is right; all others are wrong.* Oftentimes people fall into this position unwittingly, trying to prove that other translations “change” God’s Word. However, that sword swings both ways. This is the logical fallacy of *begging the question*, assuming what we are trying to prove.

Remember that with translations the question is not how much one translation differs from another, but how well a translation reflects the *original*. This is the measure of a translation.

- C. *I like this translation; everybody else must use it.* The first part of this statement is acceptable, since we all have preferences and differences in taste. One person may find a translation difficult to read while another may prefer it. The unacceptable part is forcing one’s preferences on others.
- D. *There are too many translations out there; it is too confusing, so I will use only one.* Translations are tools that can help us greatly in understanding the Word of God.

VI. Our response to different translations should be carefully balanced.

- A. On the one hand, we do not want to go to the extreme of saying one version is God’s Word and all other translations are perversions. We do not want to make an English Bible version a test of fellowship or call someone a heretic because they use a different translation than we do.
- B. On the other hand, we do not want to say that all translations are equally good. We need to be aware that some versions are really paraphrases, which simply try to put God’s Word into their own words. Some Bibles are translated by men who do not believe the Bible is inspired and inerrant.
- C. Using other versions for study and comparison is a good and profitable activity. Sometimes reading the Bible in another version “jars” us out of simply repeating words we have heard for years. Other times different wording helps us understand better and gives meaning to archaic and obsolete phrases. It is helpful to have a common translation for corporate worship that allows responsive reading and memorization.
- D. Keep in mind that God did not inspire his Word in English. Throughout history, great revivals and reformations have taken place when the Bible has been translated into the language of the common people. We should thank God for the opportunity to have the Word of God in such great abundance in our language.