



God's Word Is Complete

Lesson Overview

We know the New Testament is God's Word and that it is true. We realize that the Bible—both the Old and New Testaments—is the complete, written Word of God.

Key Passages

John 14:25–26, 21:24–25; Revelation 22:18–19;
Deuteronomy 4:2, 12:32; Proverbs 30:6

What You Will Learn

- The role of the Holy Spirit in writing the New Testament.
- The approximate date of the closing of the canon of Scripture.

Memory Verse

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.

Prepare to Learn

Scriptural Background

The Old Testament closed with a warning of judgment (Malachi 2:2) and the promise of a Messiah (Malachi 4:2). And then waiting. Four hundred years of silence from God . . . until the fulfillment of the greatest event in history—the coming of the Messiah.

The New Testament—reflecting the fulfillment of the promised Messiah through Jesus Christ—was written primarily by the apostles. In John 14:26 we find that Jesus empowered the apostles through the Holy Spirit to recall, write, and interpret His life, words, and deeds. Jesus said, “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.” Jesus again promised His apostles a special revelation of truth through the Holy Spirit in John 16:13: “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.”

The Apostle John verifies himself as an eyewitness to the events he wrote about: “This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his

testimony is true” (John 21:24). And God officially warns against tampering with Scripture—admonishing that no words be added to or taken from this sacred book (Revelation 22:18–19). We can be confident that the writings of those empowered by Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are inspired, inerrant, and infallible.

As the New Testament letters began to be gathered and read throughout the church, we find evidence that they were already being included as part of the Old Testament canon and described as “Scripture.” The Apostle Peter makes such a claim about Paul’s writings in 2 Peter 3:15–16 when he puts Paul’s epistles in the same category as the “other Scriptures.”

We can rest assured that the New Testament canon has now completed the Word of God. We are reminded of this truth through biblical, historical, and archaeological findings. Not only that, we know it is God’s Word because as we read it, we hear God’s voice throughout every book—and as children of God we never tire of it. It is the Word of our Creator God—revealing the divine power that grants us everything needed to live a life of godliness through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord (2 Peter 1:3).

Historical/Apologetics Background

In His divine providence, God, not man, has determined through the Holy Spirit the books that make up the Bible. The early church, shortly after Christ's death and Resurrection, had no discussion about what made a book equal to the Old Testament Scriptures. It was universally accepted that if a letter came from Peter or Paul, it was deemed Scripture.

However, it wasn't long before people began to add their own letters, thoughts, ideas, and gospels—desiring to fill in the gaps with what they believed should be included. Because of this, during the first 200 years of church history, certain questions were adopted to serve as the litmus test for the books added to the Bible. Those questions are:

- Was the book or letter written by an apostle or under the direction of an apostle?
- Did the writing resound with the truth of God? Did it speak with the voice of authority as the Word of God and not the words of men?
- Were these writings used from the earliest of times? Attempts to include other writings from much later dates have been made. They have been rejected because the material is too new to have been apostolic.
- Did most churches accept these writings as the New Testament canon? Before the middle of the first century, 20 of the 27 books of the New Testament were universally accepted. And only a few

churches questioned the other books.

- Did the writings conform to what the church taught? Because there was general agreement as to what the Christian message actually was, this question ruled out false teachings attempting to taint the truth.

All of the books of the Bible regarded as Scripture have been examined according to these questions, and have proven to be the Word of God. Yet still today we see that people attack the authenticity and reliability of the Scriptures. The Bible is increasingly regarded as irrelevant due to the apathy of our culture toward things of God and especially His Word. Consequently, we hear very little about the history of the Bible. As we take a quick look at the books of the New Testament below, remember that these books stood the test based on the questions mentioned above as they were included in the canon of the New Testament.

- The Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John provide accounts of Jesus' life, death, and Resurrection during his three-year ministry. Matthew, Mark, and Luke were written between AD 55 and 68; John was probably written in the 90s.
- The book of Acts provides an account of the history of the early church and the spread of Christianity after Christ's Resurrection.

Acts was written by Luke in the mid-60s.

- The Pauline epistles—Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon are 13 pastoral letters written by Paul as he endeavored to grow Christ's church in truth and sound doctrine. These letters were written between AD 51 and 65.
- The General epistles—Hebrews, James, 1 & 2 Peter, 1, 2 & 3 John, and Jude are letters written to believers by five different people. They include doctrinal and practical advice and were sent out to churches. These letters were written from the late-40s (James' letter) to the 90s (John's letters).

Most of the New Testament books were added to the Old Testament Scriptures by the early church and were considered the complete inspired canon around 150 AD—this is called the Muratorian Canon. However, due to false teachers and further attempts to change this compilation, other councils—general meetings of the Christian church—met to eliminate any confusion and bring unity to the church. The Council of Carthage in 397 finally affirmed publicly that the 66 books we have today were the divinely inspired Word of God—not to be added to or taken away from (Proverbs 30:5–6; Revelation 22:18–19).

For more information on this topic, see the Online Resource Page.

Studying God's Word

Why are there exactly 27 books in the New Testament?

Take notes as you study the following passage.

John 14:25–26

A Common Thread

Complete the A Common Thread worksheet.

Take notes as you study the following passages.

Revelation 22:18–19

Deuteronomy 4:2, 12:32; Proverbs 30:6

God's Word in the Real World

1. It is commonly claimed that the Bible was compiled by the Council of Nicaea in AD 325 by influential people, especially the Roman Emperor Constantine. How would you respond to such claims?

2. How do we respond to claims that the New Testament was written hundreds of years after the lives of the apostles?

3. How does what we have discussed today challenge ideas that you may have had about the New Testament?
4. What about today's lesson gives you encouragement or assurance about your faith?

Prayer Requests
