



God's Word Is Complete

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Key Themes

- The New Testament is God's Word.
- God's written Word is complete.

Key Passages

- John 14:25–26, 21:24–25; Revelation 22:18–19

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Describe the role of the Holy Spirit in writing the New Testament.
- Provide examples of the eyewitness nature of the New Testament.
- Identify the approximate date of the closing of the canon.



Lesson Overview



Come On In

As students come into the classroom, they should find and mark John 14:25, John 21:24, and Revelation 22:18 in their Bibles.

Provide envelopes containing Memory Verse strips. Students should practice putting the strips in the correct order to make the memory verse. They should then quietly work with a partner to practice reciting the verse from memory.

- Print and cut Memory Verse strips (from Lesson 3) on the Resource DVD-ROM; one set for each student.



Studying God's Word

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

- Study the Prepare to Share section.
- Go Before the Throne.



Activity: A Common Thread

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The students will examine many passages that describe the eyewitness nature of the New Testament.

- Print A Common Thread worksheet from the Resource DVD-ROM for each student.



Prepare to Share

SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

Study these background passages as you begin to prepare for this lesson: John 14:25–26, 21:24–25; Revelation 22:18–19.

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. Silence 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. We find that Jesus empowered the apostles through the Holy Spirit to recall, write, and interpret the life, words, and deeds of Jesus. Jesus said in John 14:26, “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 things that I said to you.” Jesus again promised His apostles a special revelation of truth through the Holy Spirit in John 16:13: “However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.”

The Apostle John verifies himself as an eyewitness to the events he wrote about: “This is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote 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 and described as “Scripture,” including them as part of the established Old Testament canon. 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 “rest of the 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 allows us everything needed to live a life of godliness through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord (2 Peter 1:3).

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. All of the books of the Bible regarded as Scripture fulfill these requirements.

- 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.

Still today we see how people attack the authenticity and reliability of the Scriptures. We must be on our guard against such attacks—and confidently turn to the Word of God to weigh the truth of any claim.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Bible is increasingly regarded as not relevant due to the apathy of our culture toward things of God and the authority of 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, keep in mind that these books stood the litmus 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’s life, death, and Resurrection during his three-year ministry. Matthew, Mark, and Luke were written between AD 55–68; John was probably written in the 90s.
- The book of Acts—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’s 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 attempts to change this compilation, other Councils—general meetings of the Christian church—met to eliminate the 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 from (Proverbs 30:5–6).

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



BEFORE THE THRONE

Father, thank you for giving us your complete and accurate Word to study. Please help me to cherish it, appreciate it, and continue to grow in my commitment to it. Help me recognize any effort I may have made to add to your Word and give me discernment to evaluate the many false teachings today for what they are—attacks on your truth as revealed in your Word. Dear Lord, I pray you will move in the hearts of the students to come to love your Word, look to it alone for guidance, and, through it, come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ our only Savior.

➤ **Pace your lesson!** You can use the provided clocks to indicate the time each section should be completed to keep the lesson on schedule. While teaching, you can compare your anticipated times with the actual time and shorten or drop sections as necessary.





Review

Last week we talked about how the Old Testament canon came to us.

- ? **Who can summarize how Jesus used the Old Testament Scriptures on the road with the two disciples?** *He showed them how He was present throughout the OT, looking to it as an authoritative source.*
- ? **How did the account we read in Jeremiah confirm what we learned about “holy men of God” recording God’s words?** *Jeremiah spoke the words he heard from God while Baruch actually wrote with ink on the scroll. This aligns nicely with the 2 Peter 1:19–21 verses.*
- ? **What two evidences for the preservation of Scripture did we discuss?** *Even though*

Jehoiakim burned the scroll with the prophecy from Jeremiah, it was recorded again, along with many other words, and we have that record today. Also, the Dead Sea Scrolls give great confirmation of the accuracy of the transmission of the Old Testament text.

Today we will be discussing the collection of writings we know as the New Testament. We will build on the foundation we have been laying over the past two weeks. The same truths about the inspiration of the texts recorded by the Old Testament writers apply to the New Testament as well. We will see the connection in the first passage we examine.



➤ Have students find and mark John 14:25, John 21:24, and Revelation 22:18 in their Bibles.

➤ Have students practice putting the Memory Verse strips in the correct order. They should then quietly work with a partner to practice quoting the verse from memory.

John 14:25–26



Studying God’s Word

READ THE WORD

Let’s read John 14:25–26 together. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

EXAMINE THE WORD

Now that we have read the text, let’s take some time to observe what it is saying to us. This process is an important part of understanding what God’s Word is telling us.

Observe the Text

- ? First of all, who wrote this book? *John.*
- ? Who was John? *He was one of Jesus’s apostles.*

That’s right. He was one of Jesus’s apostles—and he was also one of Jesus’s very closest friends.

- ? Do you think John knew what he was talking about when he spoke about Jesus? *Yes.*

- ? **Who are the people in these verses?** *Jesus is speaking to the 11 disciples—Judas Iscariot being absent.*
- ? **Where and when did this take place?** *In the upper room during the Last Supper, just before the Crucifixion.*
- ? **Are there any figures of speech in the text?** *No, the passage is very direct.*
- ? **What does the passage tell us about the Father, Jesus, and Holy Spirit?** *Jesus assures the disciples that the Holy Spirit will be sent by the Father in the name of the Son.*
- ? **What was the Holy Spirit going to do for the disciples in verse 26?** *Teach the disciples all things and help them remember everything Jesus had told them.*
- ? **What is the main point of the passage?** *The Holy Spirit is responsible for teaching and reminding the apostles of the truth they will need in the future.*

Discover the Truth

Now that we have asked questions about the text, let's tie those ideas to the origin of the New Testament.

- ? **Why did Jesus give the Helper—the Holy Spirit—for the disciples?** *He would teach them and help them remember everything Jesus had done.*
- ? **So, who inspired all the New Testament writers—including John—to write the Bible?** *The Holy Spirit.*
- ? **What impact does this passage have on our understanding of how the New Testament authors produced their writings?** *The Holy Spirit brought to remembrance the experiences they were writing about and taught them things they did not know. These words were then recorded in the original autographs (manuscripts) of the writers. Under divine inspiration, they recorded the words revealed to them by God the Holy Spirit.*

There is a bit of debate about exactly when each of the books of the New Testament was written, but there is general agreement. Most would say that the writings were complete, with the exception of Revelation, before the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in AD 70. The earliest were written 10–30 years after Christ's ascension. This has led many critics to claim that there must be many errors in the writings.

- ? **If you tried to write an account of something that happened 10 years ago, would you get all of the details correct?** *Probably not.*
- ? **So what makes these writings, which are describing historical events, different from what one of us would write?** *Under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, these authors recorded the events accurately.*





A Common Thread

MATERIALS

- A Common Thread worksheet for each student
- Pencils

INSTRUCTIONS

Have the students examine the passages on the worksheet, filling in the columns with the appropriate information. Direct the discussion with the questions that follow.

To help illustrate the next point in our lesson, I want you to break into small groups and complete this worksheet. Read over a few of the passages and see if you can identify a theme, then fill in the key phrases from each passage that connect these passages together. Have the students break into small groups and complete the activity. Give them at least ten minutes to complete the task before discussing the questions below. If you are short on time, have each group look up only one or two of the passages.

CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

? After looking over all of these passages, what is the common thread or idea that is

woven throughout? *The people recording the events were eyewitnesses to the events.*

? How can this be combined with the truth from John 14:25–26 to make a powerful argument for the authority of the New Testament? *Having experienced the events they were to later record, the writers were then taught and guided by the Holy Spirit to accurately record their experiences and other events.*

Let me read John 21:24–25 to you. It is printed on your worksheet. *Read the passage.*

The Apostle John affirms that he, along with the other apostles, witnessed these events and is accurately presenting the accounts. These eyewitness testimonies, guided by the Holy Spirit, are the foundation for the teachings found throughout the New Testament. They only represent a fraction of the events in the life and ministry of Christ, but they authoritatively demonstrate Christ's work on earth.



READ THE WORD

Our third point for today asks the question: Why do we have exactly 27 books in the New Testament?

Revelation 22:18–19

Let's read Revelation 22:18–19 as we begin to address this question. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

- ? Who is the author? *The Apostle John.*
- ? Who is the audience? *Everyone who reads the words.*
- ? What are the two commands in this passage? *Not to add or take away from the prophecies in the book.*

- ? **What are the consequences described for violating the commands?** *The plagues described in the book will be placed upon the individual, and they will be removed from the Book of Life and the holy city.*
- ? **What “book” is referred to in verse 18?** *The passage is referring specifically to the book John has just written—Revelation.*
- ? **What is the “Book of Life” mentioned in verse 19?** *This is in reference to the record of those who will inherit eternal life in heaven (see Philippians 4:3; Revelation 3:5, 13:8, 17:8).*
- ? **Are there other passages in Scripture that relate to this passage?** *Deuteronomy 4:2, 12:32, and Proverbs 30:6 contain the same idea.*
- ? **What is the biblical and historical context of the passage?** *Biblically, this is the last book in the Bible. Historically, this book was likely the last book written, around AD 90, when John was the last surviving apostle.*
- ? **What is the main point of the passage?** *Don't add to or take away from God's words.*

Discover the Truth

- ? From this passage we see a clear warning against adding to or taking away from the words of God. We said that the warning in verse 18 specifically applies to Revelation, but is it proper to extend this warning to the entirety of Scripture? Is this a verse that supports the closing of the canon? *These are a few rhetorical questions to get the class thinking.*

We mentioned several other verses that echo this idea. Let's read them now. *Read Deuteronomy 4:2, 12:32, and Proverbs 30:6.*

These are passages that come near the beginning, middle, and end of Scripture. Some say this is proof that the canon is not closed and that we continue to receive revelation from God. However, these are warnings that should give us pause when considering this idea. By connecting several ideas together, we can build a case for the close of the canon at the end of the first century.

We identified the book of Revelation as the final writing, both historically and biblically, in the Bible. Because this is the last book in the Bible and written by the last living apostle, it is not unreasonable to suggest that this warning, in the last section of Scripture, should rightly apply to all of Scripture. However, we must be careful not to stretch the context too far.

So, let's look at how the early church viewed the writings of the apostles to see if we can confirm our conjecture that the canon is closed with Revelation.

- ? **Were the books included in the New Testament put there because they were authoritative, or are they authoritative because they were included in the canon?** *Accept a few responses to see where the thinking is. We understand that the books were included because of their authority, but this may not be the common understanding.*

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

It is commonly claimed by skeptics that the books were chosen to be included because they fit with the teachings of the people in power at the time. They would suggest that many other books were not included because they conflicted with the ideas the powerful or elite wanted to promote. However, this is a false belief. The real reason that the other writings were set aside is because they were not authoritative. Time for a little history lesson!

The early church used five basic criteria to determine which writings should be included.

1. Was the book or letter written by an apostle or under the direction of an apostle?
2. 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?
3. Were these writings used from the earliest of times?
4. Did most churches accept these writings as the New Testament canon?
5. Did the writings conform to what the church taught?

Before the middle of the first century, 20 of the 27 books of the New Testament were universally accepted as authoritative. And only a few churches questioned the other books. It was not necessary to write down a list of the books that were authoritative because it was commonly agreed upon—until false teachers began adding their own writings and editing the inspired writings to their own liking. One of these men was Marcion (*pronounced mar-shun*). He denied many fundamental teachings and rewrote the Gospels and Paul's letters to fit his teachings. As he became popular, the church had to respond. Through writings against these heresies, the early church fathers and councils began to formalize the canon that was already practically endorsed.

? Does anyone know the time period when we can identify a list of the New Testament books? *The oldest complete list is known as the Muratorian canon and is dated at AD 150. This list of 22 books seems to be in response to Marcion's attacks on Scripture.*

Although there were a few minimally disputed books, assembling lists of books used by early church fathers like Ignatius (c. 35–108), Polycarp (69–155), Irenaeus (died AD 202), Origen (c. 185–254), Clement (c.150–c. 215), Tertullian (c. 160–c. 220 AD), and others shows that the set of 27 books we have today was their authoritative source in matters of doctrine and practice.

Written confirmation of the 27 books came from the Synod of Hippo in AD 393 and by the Council of Carthage in 397. The affirmation of these books only goes to demonstrate the authority that they already possessed as the inspired texts recorded by these holy men of God. They did not *become* Scripture at these meetings; they *already had* that distinction.

As we survey the big picture, the New Testament canon was complete with the writing of Revelation sometime around AD 90. Although there were challenges to the finality in the early church, we can be confident that those books which we now have in the canon are there because they are authoritative, not because some church fathers said they belonged. God used men to record the truths witnessed by many, and we have that as the New Testament today.



Applying God's Word

WHAT YOU HEARD IN THE WORD

We have covered three basic points today, but we have barely scratched the surface in telling how the New Testament came to be. There are entire books written on this topic, and I hope this may spark some of you to look into this further. Let's review the ideas and then discuss some ways to apply what we have learned. Next week we will continue with this same idea, but look at some modern attempts to add to the Bible.

- ? **How was the Holy Spirit involved in the recording of the New Testament?** *He taught and brought to remembrance all of those things that God willed to record through these men. They recorded the inspired texts.*
- ? **What common thread do we see with all of the writers of the New Testament?** *They were all recording eyewitness accounts. All of the writers were disciples of Christ or recording on behalf of disciples (e.g., Luke wrote alongside Paul).*

GOD'S WORD IN THE REAL WORLD

One of the most common arguments against the Bible is the claim that it was written and assembled hundreds of years after Christ and the apostles were alive. However, most of the books were written before AD 70 and all were completed by AD 90. This puts them all within 60 years of Christ's death!

- ? **It is commonly claimed that the Bible was compiled by the Council of Nicaea in AD 325. How would you respond to such claims?** *This is a commonly perpetuated myth, but this council dealt mainly with the Arian heresy. There is no record that canonicity was discussed at this council. The Muratorian canon had been written over 150 years before this. It is important to remember to correct people's mistakes in a loving way. In 1 Peter 3:15, we are instructed to give an answer for the hope we have with "meekness and fear."*
- ? **How do we respond to claims that the New Testament was written hundreds of years after the lives of the apostles?** *Since we have quotes from the various letters and books and a list of those books within 100 years after the death of the apostles, this is a claim based on faulty information.*

- ? How does what we have discussed today challenge ideas that you may have had about the New Testament? *Discuss any misconceptions and encourage anyone with more questions to research them further. The Answers in Genesis website has many resources that can answer these types of questions.*
- ? What about today's lesson gives you encouragement or assurance about your faith? *Allow for answers.*
- ? What questions have been raised by this lesson? What will you do (or can I help you with) to answer these questions? *Allow for answers.*



MEMORY VERSE

Psalm 19:7–11 The law of the Lord is perfect,
converting the soul;
the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise
the simple;
the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the
heart;
the commandment of the Lord is pure,
enlightening the eyes;
the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever;
the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous
altogether.



GROUP PRAYER TIME

Be sure to pray with your class before you dismiss them.

- Praise God for giving us a revelation of Himself and the life of Christ.
- Ask God to open up truths in His Word as the students study through the week.
- Pray for wisdom as the students share what they are learning with friends and classmates.