

How God Has Sovereignly and Faithfully Made His Word Available for Our Use



Questions We Will Answer in This Series:

- Where do our Bibles come from?
- How do we know that our Bibles are reliable?
- How can we better understand and appreciate our Bibles and how they are put together?
- How can we respond to attacks from those who make false claims about the Bible?
 - The DaVinci Code
 - Anti-Christian College Professors and Curriculum
 - Unbelievers, Skeptics, and Followers of False Religions
 - Liberal News Media (e.g. National Public Radio)

Vocabulary

- **Revelation**
 - The way God gave information *directly* to the prophets and apostles
- **Prophet**
 - A man used by God to write the Old Testament Scriptures based on revelation given to them by God
- **Apostle**
 - A man used by God to write the New Testament scriptures based on revelation given to them by God
- **Inspiration**
 - The process where God uses imperfect men (prophets and apostles) writing in their own words to produce the perfect Word of God.
- **Manuscript**
 - A book or document written before the invention of the printing press.
- **Preservation**
 - The process God used to preserve manuscript copies of His Word for use by His people throughout all ages
- **Illumination**
 - The work God does in the heart of a Christian to cause them to rightly understand and apply God's Word



Vocabulary - Quiz



- **Revelation** is (choose one of the following):
 - When a group of rebels get together and try to overthrow the government
 - When an object goes through a complete 360 degree circle
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 - What the boy said to the teacher that he thought was being too hard on him.
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Vocabulary - Quiz



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 - A type of tournament in which an individual or team is eliminated from the competition after one defeat
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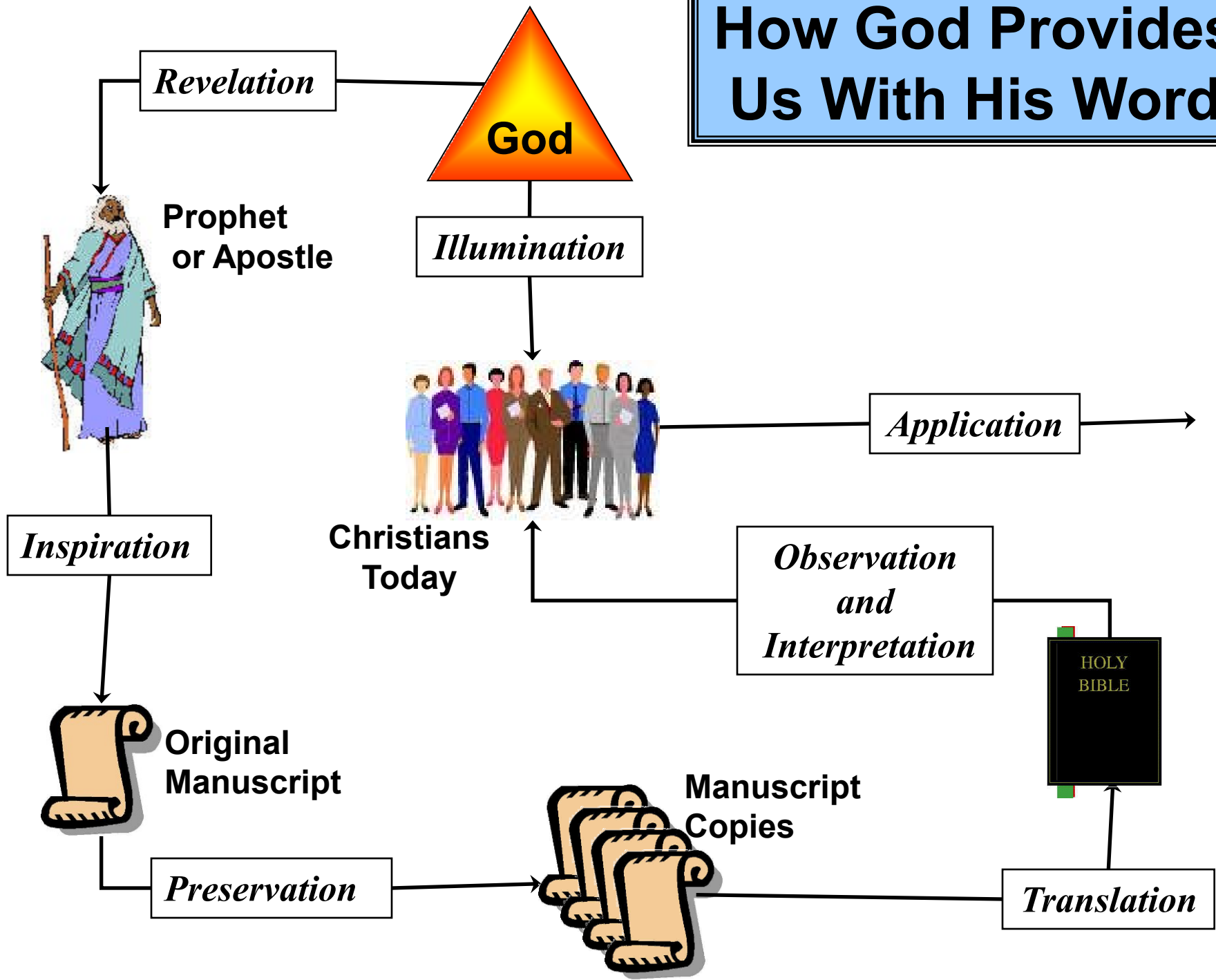


Vocabulary - Quiz



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How God Provides Us With His Word





Revelation

**How did God reveal
Himself to man?**

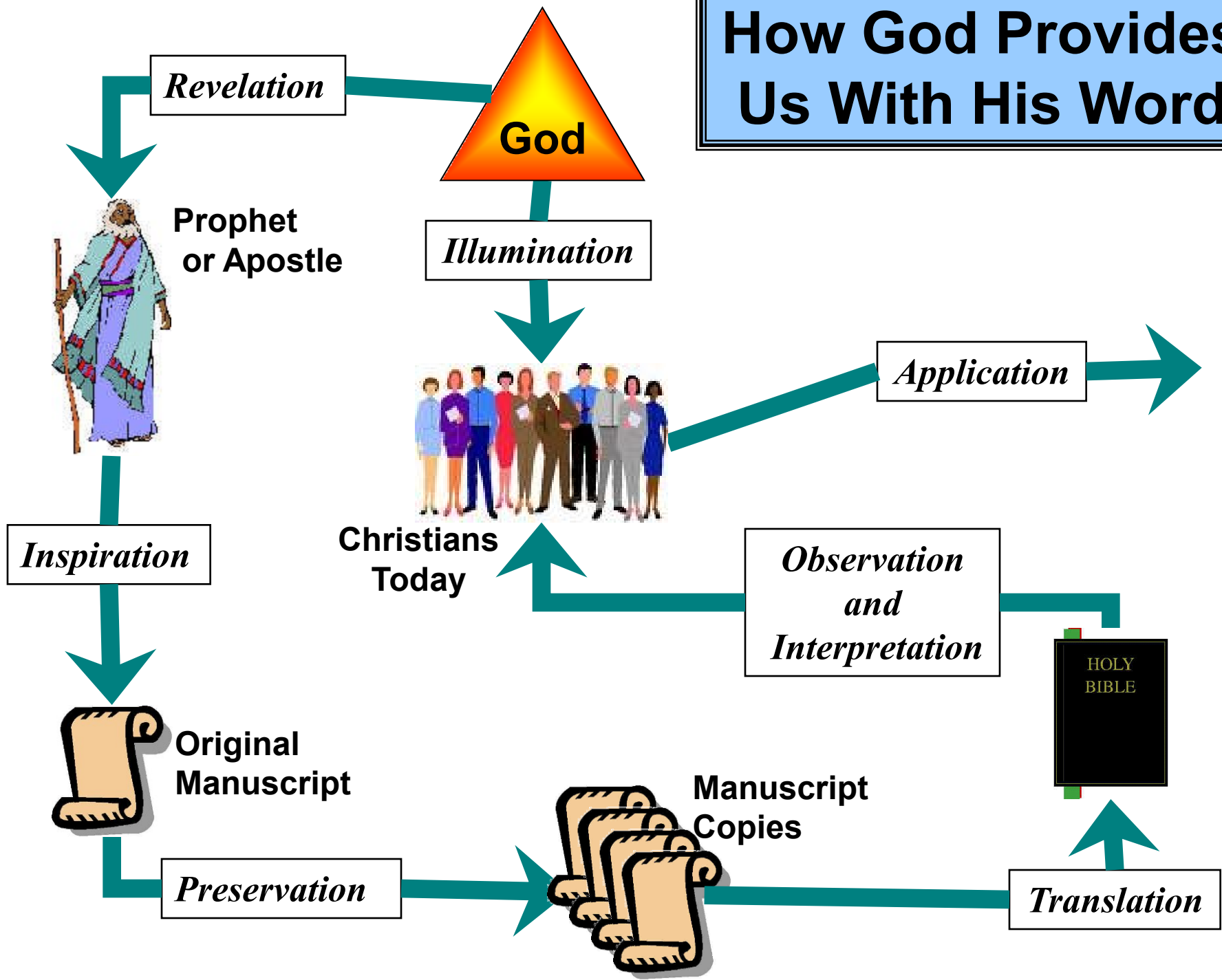
Hebrews 1:1 - *Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets . . .*

- God sometimes spoke in a **voice from heaven**:
 - Genesis 22:11 - *But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!”*
- God sometimes spoke to men in a **dream**:
 - Genesis 28:12-13 – *And [Jacob] dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, "I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring...*
- God sometimes spoke to men in a **vision**:
 - Isaiah 1:1 - *The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.*

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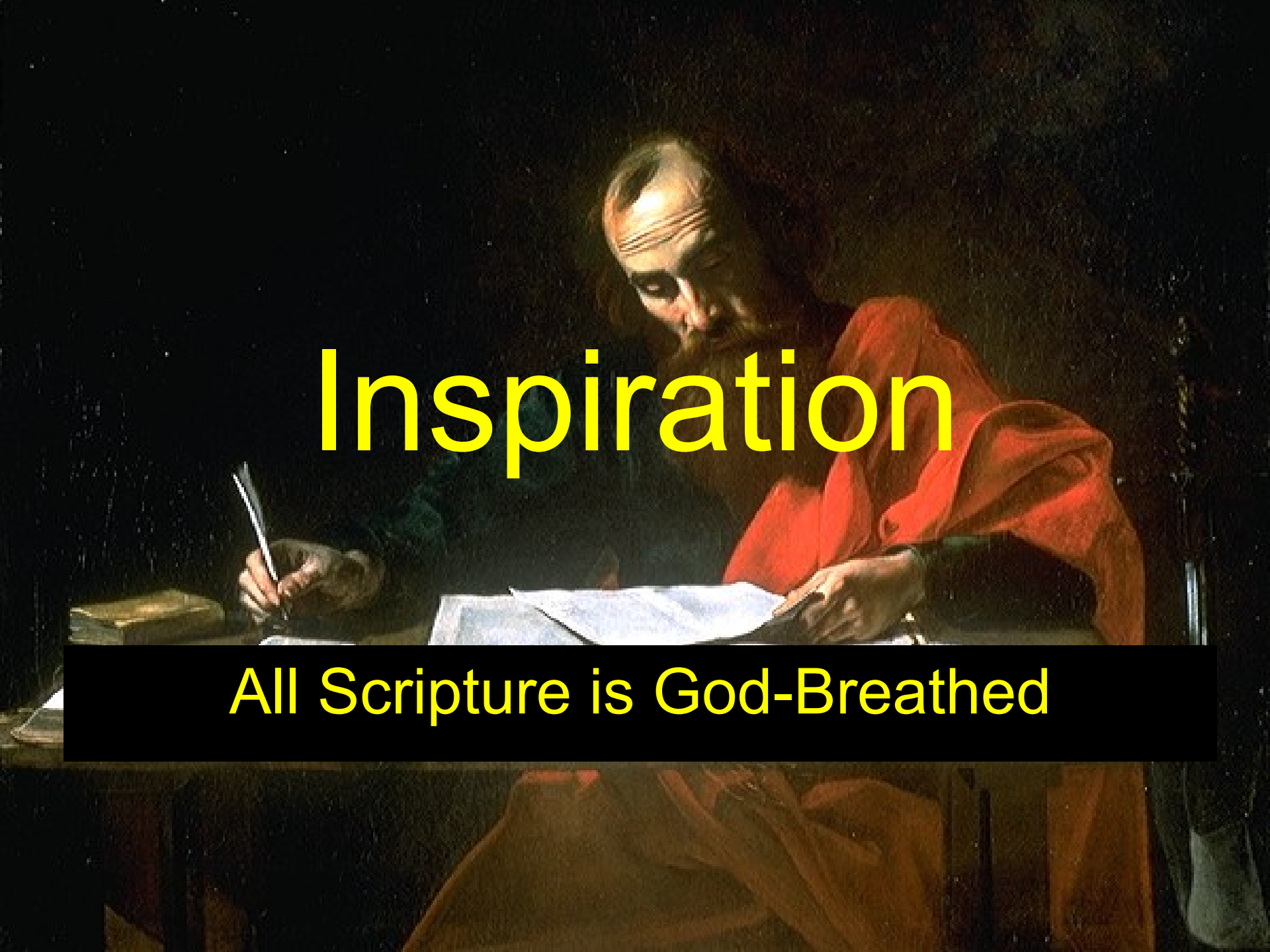
- God sometime spoke with men “**face to face**”:
 - Exodus 33:11 - *Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.*
- God sometimes spoke with men through **angel(s)**:
 - Zechariah 1:14 - *So the angel who talked with me said to me, “Cry out, Thus says the LORD of hosts: I am exceedingly jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion...”*
- On one occasion, God **etched** His Word **on** tablets of **stone**!
 - Exodus 31:18 – *And [the LORD] gave to Moses, when he had finished speaking with him on Mount Sinai, the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God.*

How God Provides Us With His Word



Revelation

**God gave information
directly to the prophets
and apostles**



Inspiration

All Scripture is God-Breathed

Inspiration

- As we have already seen, *inspiration* is the process where God uses imperfect men (prophets and apostles) writing in their own words to produce the perfect Word of God.
 - 2 Timothy 3:16-17 - *All Scripture is breathed out [or “inspired” (NASB)] by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.*
 - 2 Peter 1:20-21 - *...no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. 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*

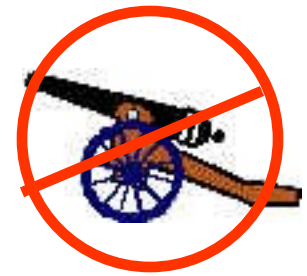
Inspiration

- When the apostles and prophets wrote inspired, God-breathed, scripture, what they wrote was considered to be the very words of God!
 - Matthew 22:31-32 - [Jesus speaking to the Sadducees said:] *Have you not read [in Exodus 3:6] what was said to you by God: “I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”?*
 - Acts 1:16,20 - [Peter speaking to the early disciples said:] *Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus... For it is written in the Book of Psalms, “May his camp become desolate, and let there be no one to dwell in it” [Psalm 69:25]; and “Let another take his office.” [Psalm 109:8]*
 - Acts 4:24-25 - [The early Christians prayed to God saying] *Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, [in Psalm 2:1-2] “Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain?”*

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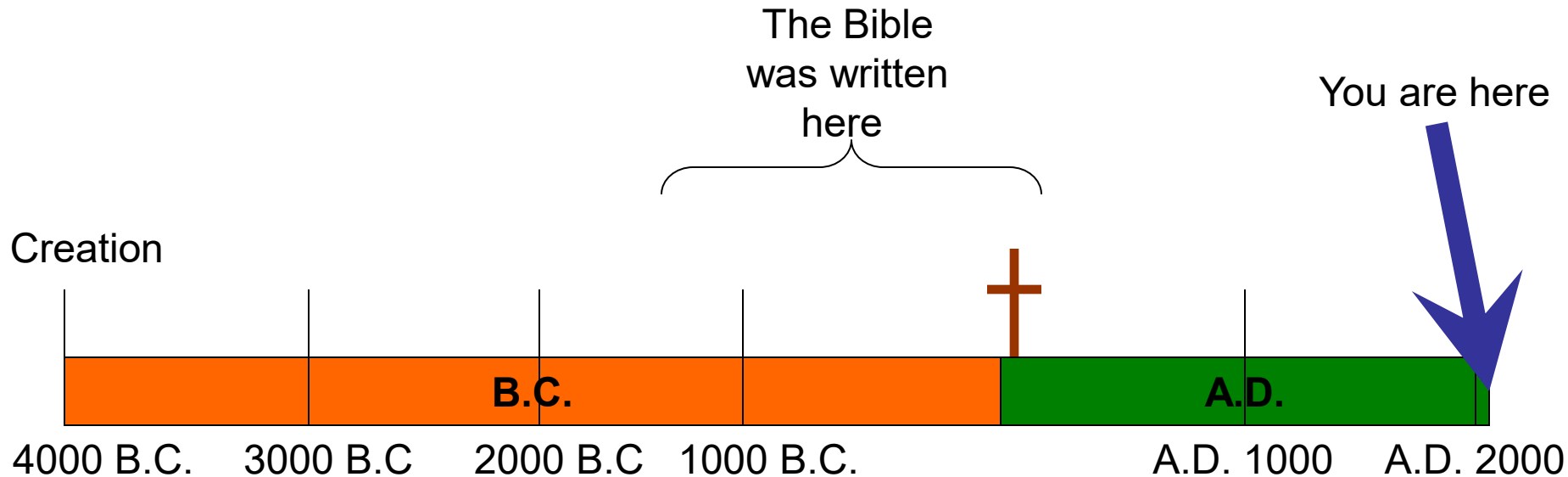


The Canon

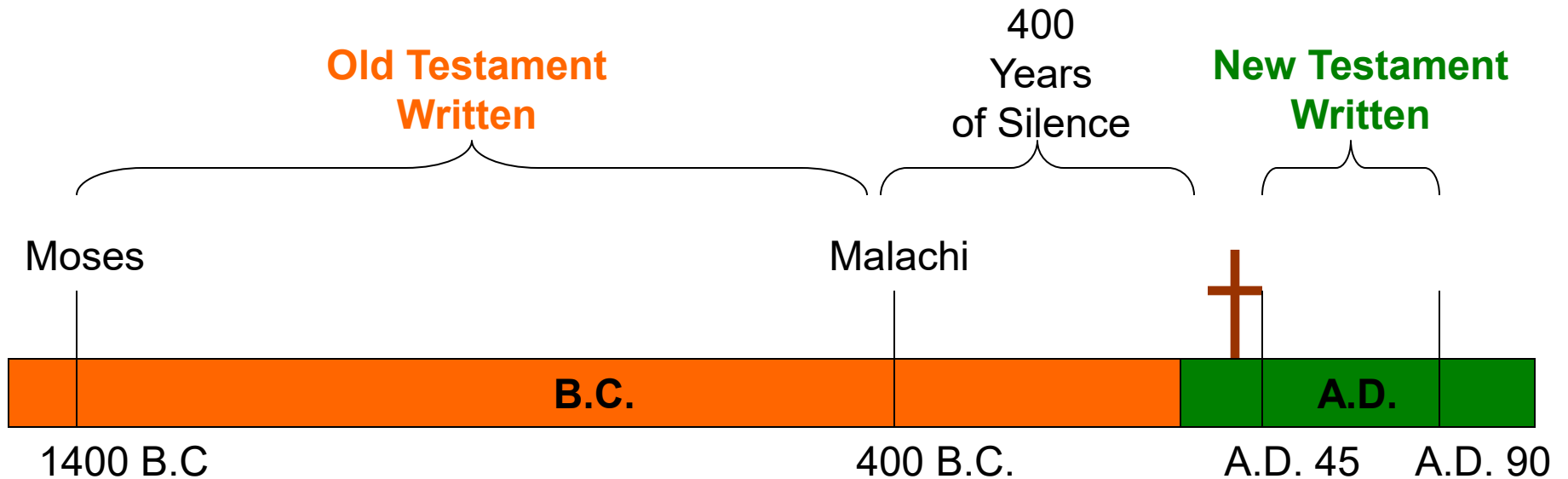


- The collection of all “God breathed” writings which we have in our Bibles is sometimes referred to as the “**canon** of Scripture”.
- The word “canon” is from a Greek word meaning “**measuring rod, rule or norm of faith**”.
- The Biblical writings are called a “canon” because they are the **standard** by which all other writings **measured**.
- How did these writings become a part of our Bibles? In other words, where did the 66 books of the Bible come from and how were they gathered together in one book as we have them today?
- To answer this question, we will now look at the process that God used to give us His Word.

Timeline of All History



Bible Timeline





How God Produced the Old Testament

How God Produced the Old Testament

- During the time of the Exodus (1400 B.C.) God told Moses to create a written record (in Hebrew) of what He had communicated to him on Mount Sinai:
 - **Exodus 34:27** - *And the LORD said to Moses, “Write these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.”*
- Later other Jewish prophets were instructed by God to do likewise:
 - **Isaiah 30:8** - *And now, go, write it before them on a tablet and inscribe it in a book, that it may be for the time to come as a witness forever.*
 - **Jeremiah 30:2** - *Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Write in a book all the words that I have spoken to you.*
- From the time of Moses to the time of Christ, God gave the Jews His written Word in a collection of writings that continued to grow throughout much of their history. These writings make up what we now know as the Old Testament:
 - **Romans 3:2b** - *... the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God.* [“the very words of God” (NIV)]

How God Produced the Old Testament

- The Jews recognized from the very beginning that these writings were the very words of God in written form! Consequently they read them and studied them both publicly and privately.
 - **Exodus 24:7** – [Moses] *took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.”*
 - **Deuteronomy 6:6-9** - *And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.*

How God Produced the Old Testament

- Because they did not have copy machines, when the Jews needed to make a copy of these writings (because either a particular copy was wearing out or they needed an extra one) they had to make a hand-written copy!
 - Deuteronomy 17:18-19 - *And when [a king] sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, approved by the Levitical priests. And it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them.*
- Because the significance of these writings, the Jews tried to be very careful when making these copies so as to avoid making mistakes.

How God Kept His Word From Being *Corrupted* by False Prophets

- At times, **false** prophets would arise in Israel. The Israelites were to carefully test men who claimed to speak for God as prophets.
- Prophets had to demonstrate they were **true** prophets from God by predicting near future events.
- If a so-called prophet made a prediction, and the predicted event did not happen, then he proved that he was a false prophet was to be put to death!
 - **Deuteronomy 18:19-22** - *And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him. But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die. And if you say in your heart, “How may we know the word that the LORD has not spoken?”-- when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him.*

How God Kept His Word From Being Corrupted by False Prophets

- Even if the prophet's prediction ***came true***, but the prophet was enticing them to follow other gods they were still to be put to death!
 - Deuteronomy 13:1-5 - *If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or wonder that he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, "Let us go after other gods," which you have not known, "and let us serve them," you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams. For the LORD your God is testing you, to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear him and keep his commandments and obey his voice, and you shall serve him and hold fast to him. But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has taught rebellion against the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you out of the house of slavery, to make you leave the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.*

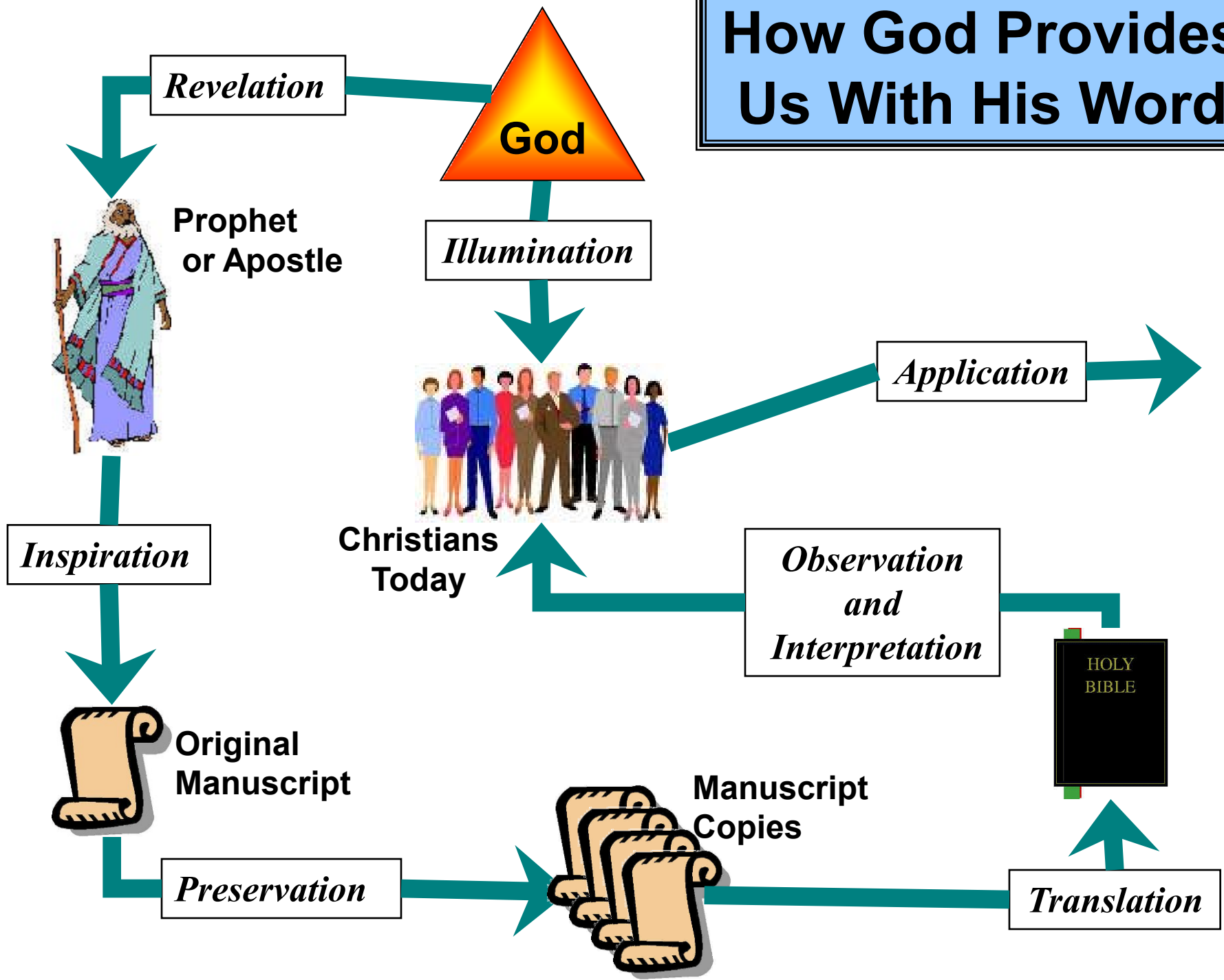
God Affirmed the Old Testament through His Son, Jesus



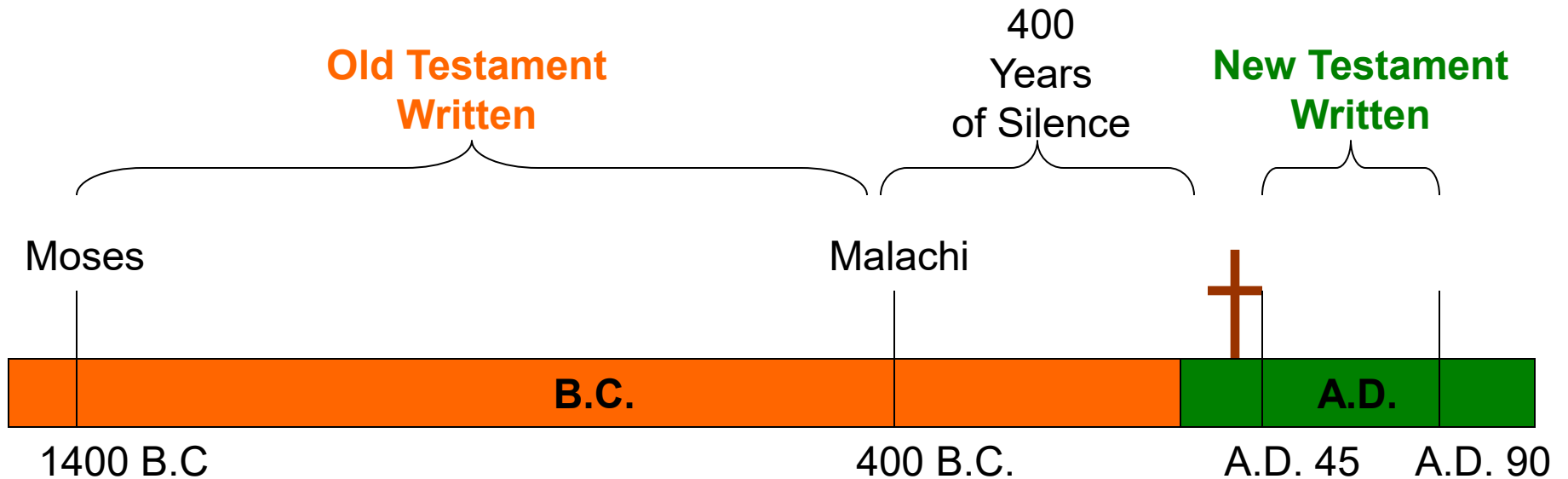
God Affirmed the Old Testament through His Son, Jesus

- During His earthly ministry, Jesus affirmed that the Old Testament scriptures that existed at that time were the inspired Word of God:
 - Matthew 22:29, 31-32 - *But Jesus answered them, “You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. ... as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God: [in Exodus 3:6] ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not God of the dead, but of the living.’”*
 - Matthew 26:53-54 – [Jesus speaking:] *Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?*
 - Luke 24:27 - *And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, [Jesus] interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.*
 - John 10:35b - [Jesus speaking:] *Scripture cannot be broken*

How God Provides Us With His Word



Bible Timeline



The 400 Year Period of Silence Between the Old and New Testaments

- Between the completion of the Old Testament the birth of Christ, there was a 400-year “period of silence” in which no inspired writings were added to the canon.
- Nevertheless there were some significant events that took place during this period of time:
 - The writing of the Septuagint
 - The writing Old Testament Apocrypha

The Septuagint

The 72 translators receiving gifts from Ptolemy

The Septuagint

- It was during this “period of silence” (between the Old and New Testaments) that the first translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into another language was produced.
- A letter written in the second century B.C. (the *Letter of Aristeas*), claims that 72 Jewish translators were sent from Jerusalem to produce a Greek version of the Old Testament at the request of Ptolemy II, an Egyptian king.
- Because of this, the translation has been called the Septuagint (abbreviated LXX) for the seventy plus scholars that translated it.
- Many scholars question some of the details given in this letter concerning the translation of the Septuagint.

The Septuagint

- Scholars now believe that the Septuagint was produced by Jewish settlers living in Alexandria, Egypt who, because of where they lived, no longer spoke Hebrew as their ancestors had, but instead spoke Greek – yet they continued to embrace the Jewish faith.
- Therefore these Jews needed a Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures so that they could read the scriptures in their own language.
- To meet this need, a team of scholars are thought to have begun the Septuagint translation around 300 B.C. and completed it around 132 B.C.

The Septuagint

- The Septuagint translation later became widely used by Greek speaking Jews throughout the Roman Empire, including the writers of the New Testament.

Example of How It Helps to Know About the Septuagint

Footnotes on Genesis 5:22-24

(Found in the ESV Study Bible)

Enoch walked with God¹ after he fathered Methuselah 300 years and had other sons and daughters. Thus all the days of Enoch were 365 years. Enoch walked with God, and he was not,² for God took him.

¹Septuagint *pleased God*

²Septuagint *was not found*

The Old Testament Apocrypha



The Archangel Leaving the Family of Tobias - by Rembrandt (1606-1669)

The Old Testament Apocrypha

- During the 400 year “period of silence” a group of historical and religious books were written which came to be known as the Old Testament **Apocrypha**.
- Some of the books of the Apocrypha contain helpful historical information (such as 1 Maccabees).
- But unfortunately a number of these books contain historical errors as well as religious teachings that contradict Biblical teaching.
- Roman Catholics mistakenly teach that the books of the Apocrypha should be included in the Bible.

The Books of the Apocrypha

No.	Name	When	Description
1	1 Esdras	150 B.C.	Tells of the restoration of the Jews to Palestine after the Babylonian exile. It draws considerably from Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah, but the author has added much legendary material.
2	2 Esdras	A.D. 100	Is an apocalyptic work, containing seven visions.
3	Tobit	Early 2 nd cent. B.C.	Is a short novel. Strongly Pharisaic, in tone, it emphasizes the Law, clean foods, ceremonial washings, charity, fasting and prayer. It is clearly unscriptural in its statement that alms giving atones for sin.
4	Judith	150 B.C.	Fictitious and Pharisaic. The heroine of this novel is Judith, a beautiful Jewish widow. When her city was besieged she took her maid, together with Jewish clean food, and went out to the tent of the attacking general. He was enamored of her beauty and gave her a place in his tent. Fortunately, he had imbibed too freely and sank into a drunken stupor. Judith took his sword and cut off his head. Then she and her maid left the camp, taking his head in their provision bag. It was hung on the wall of a nearby city and the leaderless Assyrian army was defeated.
5	The rest of Esther	100 B.C.	Esther stands alone among the books of the Old Testament in having no mention of God. We are told that Esther and Mordecai fasted but not specifically that they prayed. To compensate for this lack, the Additions have long prayers attributed to these two, together with a couple of letters supposedly written by Artaxerxes.
6	The Wisdom of Solomon	A.D. 40	Was written to keep the Jews from falling into skepticism, materialism, and idolatry. As in Proverbs, Wisdom is personified.
7	Ecclesiasticus	180 B.C.	Somewhat like the canonical Book of Proverbs. It also contains much practical advice.
8	Baruch	A.D. 100	Represents itself as being written by Baruch, the scribe of Jeremiah, in 582 B.C. Actually, it is probably trying to interpret the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The book urges the Jews not to revolt again, but to be in submission to the emperor.
9	The Letter of Jeremiah	A.D. 100	The sixth chapter of Baruch contains the so-called "Letter of Jeremiah," with its strong warning against idolatry-probably addressed to Jews in Alexandria, Egypt.

The Books of the Apocrypha

No.	Name	When	Description
10	The Song of the Three		Follows Dan. 3:23 in the Septuagint and the Vulgate. Borrowing heavily from Psalms 148, it is antiphonal like Psalms 136, having 32 times the refrain: 'Sing praise to him and greatly exalt him forever.
11	Susanna	1 st cent. B.C.	Our Book of Daniel contains 12 chapters. In the first century before Christ a thirteenth chapter was added, the story of <i>Susanna</i> . She was the beautiful wife of a leading Jew in Babylon, to whose house the Jewish elders and judges frequently came. Two of these became enamored of her and tried to seduce her. When she cried out, the two elders said they had found her in the arms of a young man. She was brought to trial. Since there were two witnesses who agreed in their testimony, she was convicted and sentenced to death. But a young man named Daniel interrupted the proceedings and began to cross-examine the witnesses. He asked each one separately under which tree in the garden they had found Susanna with a lover. When they gave different answers they were put to death and Susanna was saved.
12	Bel and the Dragon	1 st cent. B.C.	Was added at about the same time and called chapter 14 of Daniel. Its main purpose was to show the folly of idolatry. It really contains two stories. In the first, King Cyrus asked Daniel why he did not worship Bel, since that deity showed his greatness by daily consuming many sheep, together with much flour and oil. So Daniel scattered ashes on the floor of the Temple where the food had been placed that evening. In the morning the king took Daniel in to show him that Bel had eaten all the food during the night. But Daniel showed the king in the ashes on the floor the footprints of the priests and their families who had entered secretly under the table. The priests were slain and the temple destroyed. The story of the Dragon is just as obviously legendary in character. Along with Tobit, Judith, and Susanna, these stories may be classified as purely Jewish fiction. They have little if any religious value.
13	The Prayer of Manasseh	2 nd cent. B.C.	Was composed in Maccabean times as the supposed prayer of Manasseh, the wicked king of Judah. It was obviously suggested by the statement in 2 Chron. 33:19-“His prayer . . . and how God was entreated of him . . . behold they are written in the sayings of the seers” Since this prayer is not found in the Bible, some scribe had to make up the deficiency!

The Books of the Apocrypha

No.	Name	When	Description
14	1 Maccabees	1 st cent. B.C.	Is perhaps the most valuable book in the Apocrypha. For it describes the exploits of the three Maccabean brothers – Judah, Jonathan, and Simon. Along with Josephus it is our most important source for the history of this crucial and exciting period in Jewish history.
15	2 Maccabees	1 st cent. B.C.	Is not a sequel to 1 Maccabees, but a parallel account, treating only the victories of Judas Maccabaeus. It is generally thought to be more legendary than 1 Maccabees.



Reasons to Exclude the Apocrypha from the Old Testament Canon

- The Jews, who were entrusted by God with the Old Testament scriptures (Rom 3:2), did not include the Apocrypha in the Hebrew canon.
 - The Apocrypha was *never* included as a part of the Hebrew Bible.
 - **Philo** (20 B.C. – A.D. 40) Alexandrian Jewish philosopher - quoted the Old Testament often, but he never quoted from the Apocrypha
 - **Josephus** (A.D. 30 – 100) Jewish historian – excluded the Apocrypha when he listed the books of the Old Testament. Also Josephus never quotes from the Apocrypha as scripture.
 - The **Babylonian Talmud** states: “Our Rabbis taught since the death of the last prophets, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, the Holy Spirit of prophetic inspiration departed from Israel.” (Tosefta Sotah 13:3)

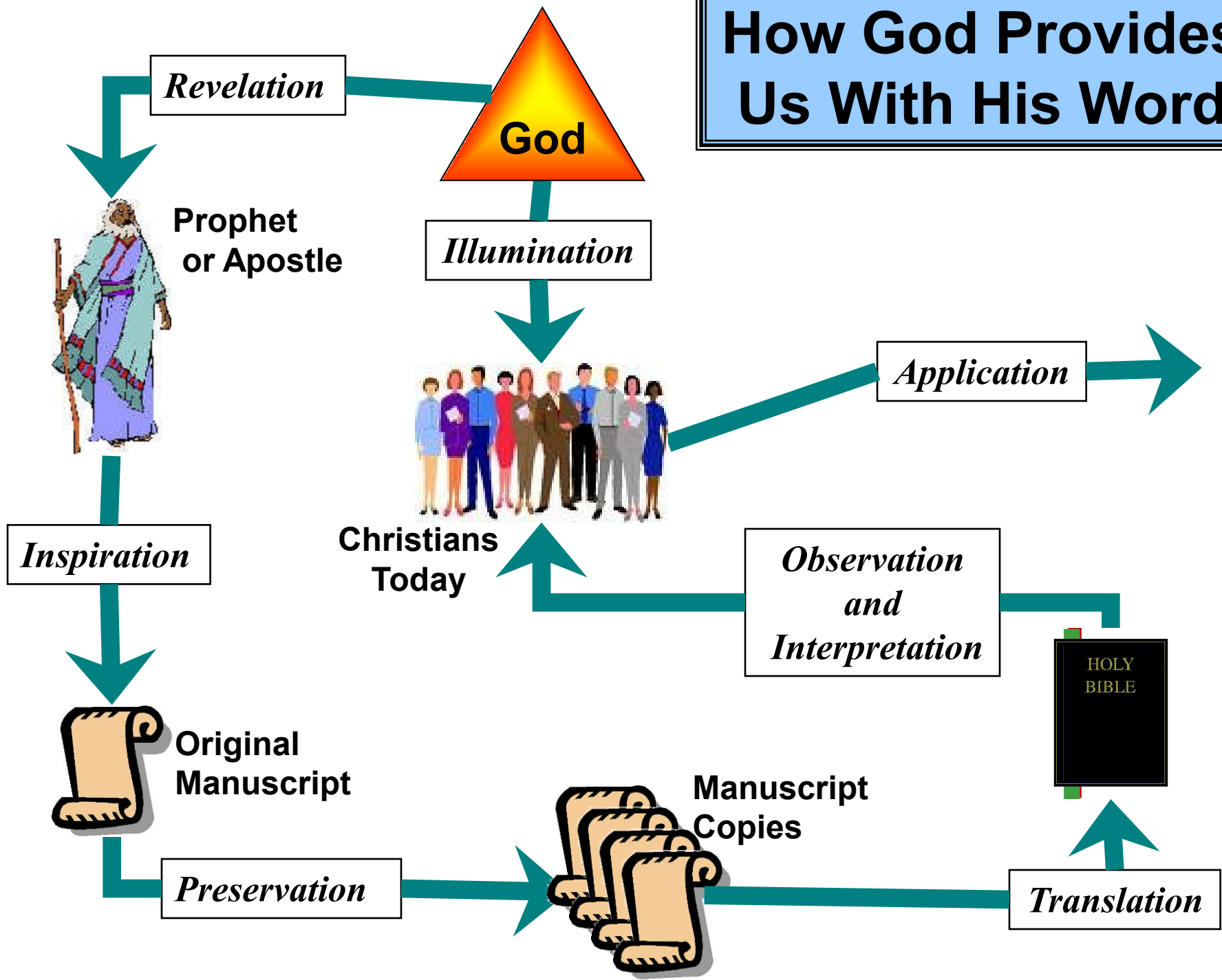
Reasons to Exclude the Apocrypha from the Old Testament Canon

- The early church fathers who were most familiar with the Hebrew Old Testament (such as Jerome) recognized that the Apocrypha was not a part of the Old Testament canon.
- Jesus and the writers of the New Testament never quote from the Apocrypha as Scripture
- The Apocrypha never claims to be inspired
- In a few places the Apocrypha seems to actually deny inspiration:
 - 2 Maccabees 15:37b-38 - *So I too will here end my story. If it is well told and to the point, that is what I myself desired; if it is poorly done and mediocre, that was the best I could do.*

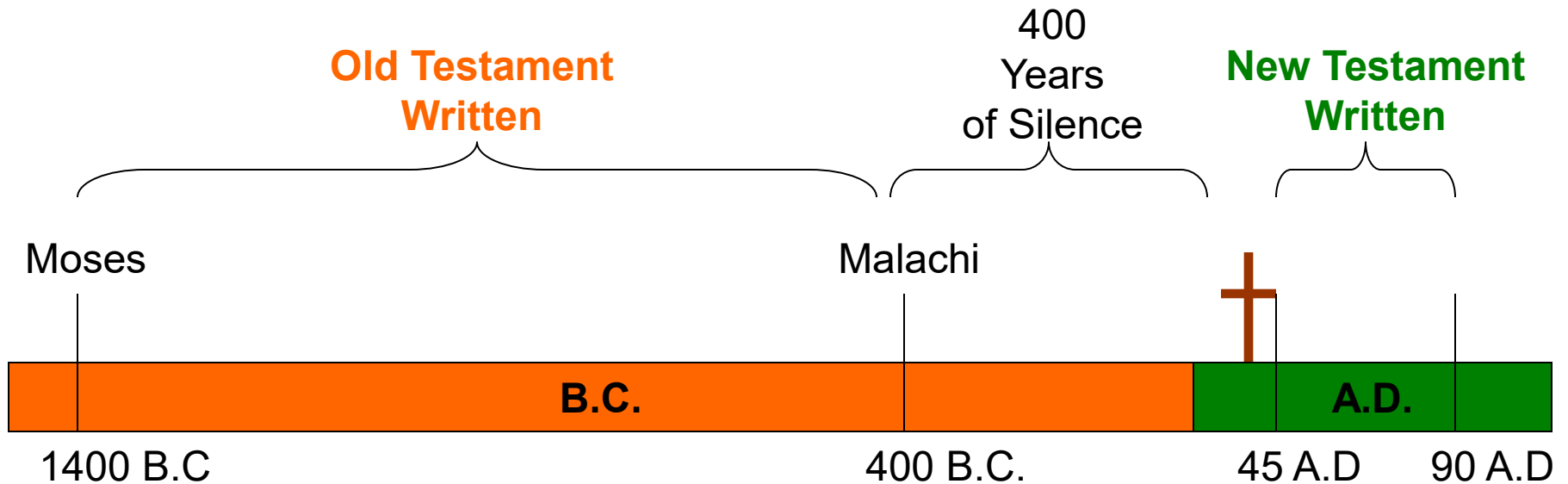
Reasons to Exclude the Apocrypha from the Old Testament Canon

- **The Apocrypha contains historical errors**
 - For example, Judith 1:1 teaches that Nebuchadnezzar “ruled over the Assyrians in the great city of Nineveh”, but reality he was ruler of Babylon
- **The Apocrypha contains doctrinal errors**
 - Prayers and Offerings for the Dead (2 Maccabees 12:43-46)
 - Forgiveness and Salvation by Almsgiving (Tobit 4:11;12:9)
 - Suicide spoken of as noble (2 Maccabees 14:41-42)

How God Provides Us With His Word



Bible Timeline



How God Produced the New Testament



How God Produced the New Testament

- The opening line in the book of Hebrews tells us:
 - Hebrews 1:1-2 - *Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.*
- The Old Testament, although given by God, was given only through the prophets.
- The New Testament, is the revelation of the incarnate Son of God!



How God Produced the New Testament

- Towards the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus told His apostles that He was leaving but that He would later send the **Holy Spirit** to teach them:
 - 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 that I have said to you.*
 - John 15:26b-27 - *the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.*
 - John 16:12-14 - *I still have many things to say to you...When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth..., and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for He will take what is mine and declare it to you.*

How God Produced the New Testament

- A little later that same night, Jesus reiterated this same idea in His prayer to the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane:
 - John 17:8, 18, 20 - *For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them... As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world... I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word.*
- After His ascension, Jesus did indeed empower His apostles (through the Holy Spirit) and command them to reveal His word to others and, at times, to record those words in writing. For example in the book of Revelation, the apostle John writes:
 - Rev 1:10-11 - *I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches..."*

How God Produced the New Testament

- In his letter to the church at Ephesus, the apostle Paul, describes how during New Testament times Christ (through the Holy Spirit) empowered His apostles and prophets to reveal to others things that had previously not been known about Christ:
 - Ephesians 3:4-5 – *When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.*
- In that same letter, Paul describes the revelation given to the apostles and prophets during New Testament times as the church's foundation:
 - Ephesians 2:19b-21 - *You are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.*

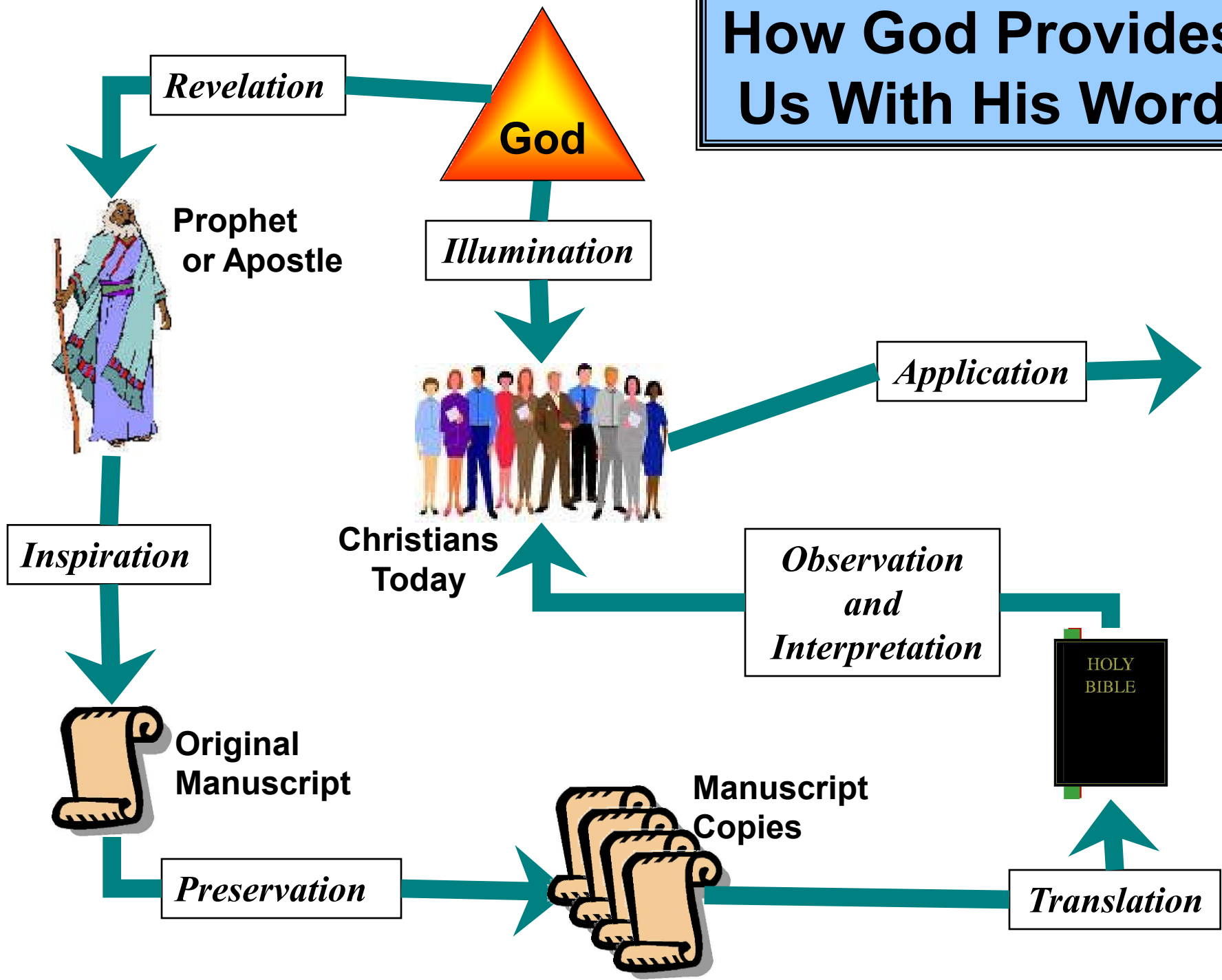
How God Produced the New Testament

- The New Testament books that we have in our Bibles today were originally written by the apostles, or in some cases men who worked closely with the apostles.
- Some of the New Testament books are an inspired account of the events that took place in the life of Jesus and in the early church (i.e. the Gospels or the Book of Acts).
- However, a the majority of the New Testament books are inspired letters written by the apostles to churches or individuals.
- These inspired writings were widely circulated in the early church in much the same manner as Paul encouraged the Colossians to do with his letter to them:
 - Colossians 4:16 - *And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea.*

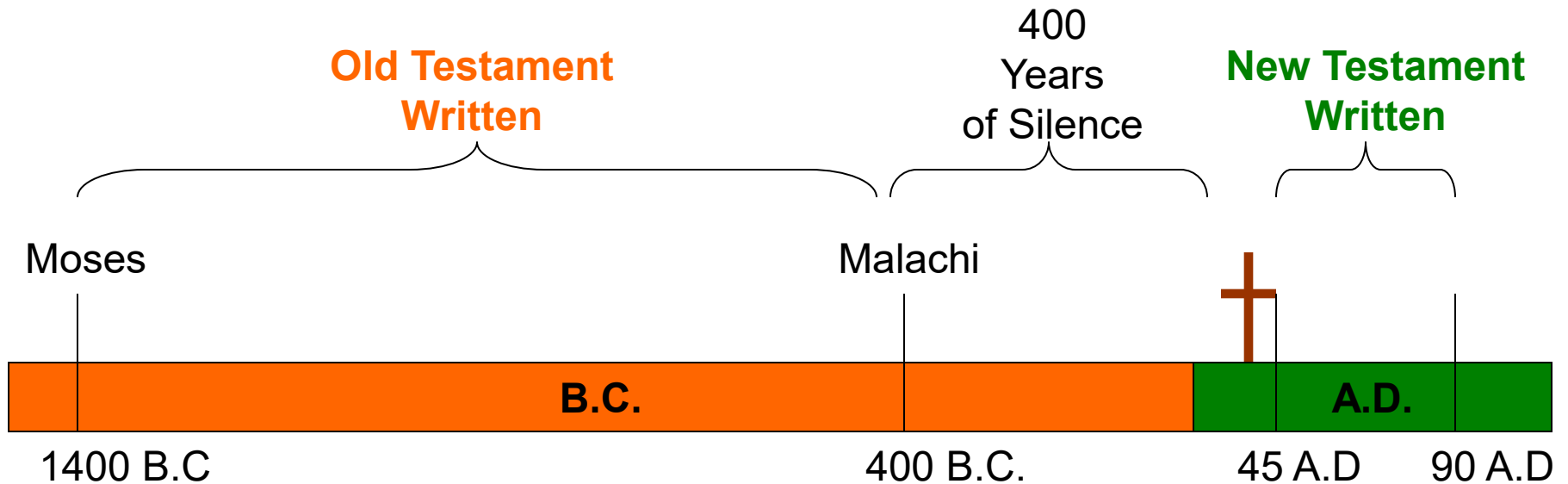
How God Produced the New Testament

- The New Testament writers recognized that their writings were authoritative and were as much a part of the scripture as the Old Testament writings:
 - 2 Peter 3:15-16 - *Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.*
 - 1 Corinthians 14:37 - *If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord.*
 - 1 Thessalonians 2:13b - *...when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God.*
 - 1 Timothy 5:18 - *For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,” [Deut. 25:4] and, “The laborer deserves his wages” [Luke 10:7].*

How God Provides Us With His Word



Bible Timeline





Early Christian Heresies

The Nag Hammadi codices

Early Christian Heresies

- As the apostles began to die off, their writings continued to be circulated. But it didn't take long for the apostolic writings to come under attack!
- But this should not surprise us because throughout the history of the church, there have always been false teachers and heretical religious movements – even during the days when Jesus and the apostles walked the earth! Which is why they constantly warned us about false teachers:
 - **Matthew 7:15** – *Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.*
 - **Galatians 2:4-5** – *Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in--who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery-- to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.*
 - **2 Peter 1:21 - 2:1** – *But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies...*
 - **1 John 4:1** – *Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.*

Early Christian Heresies

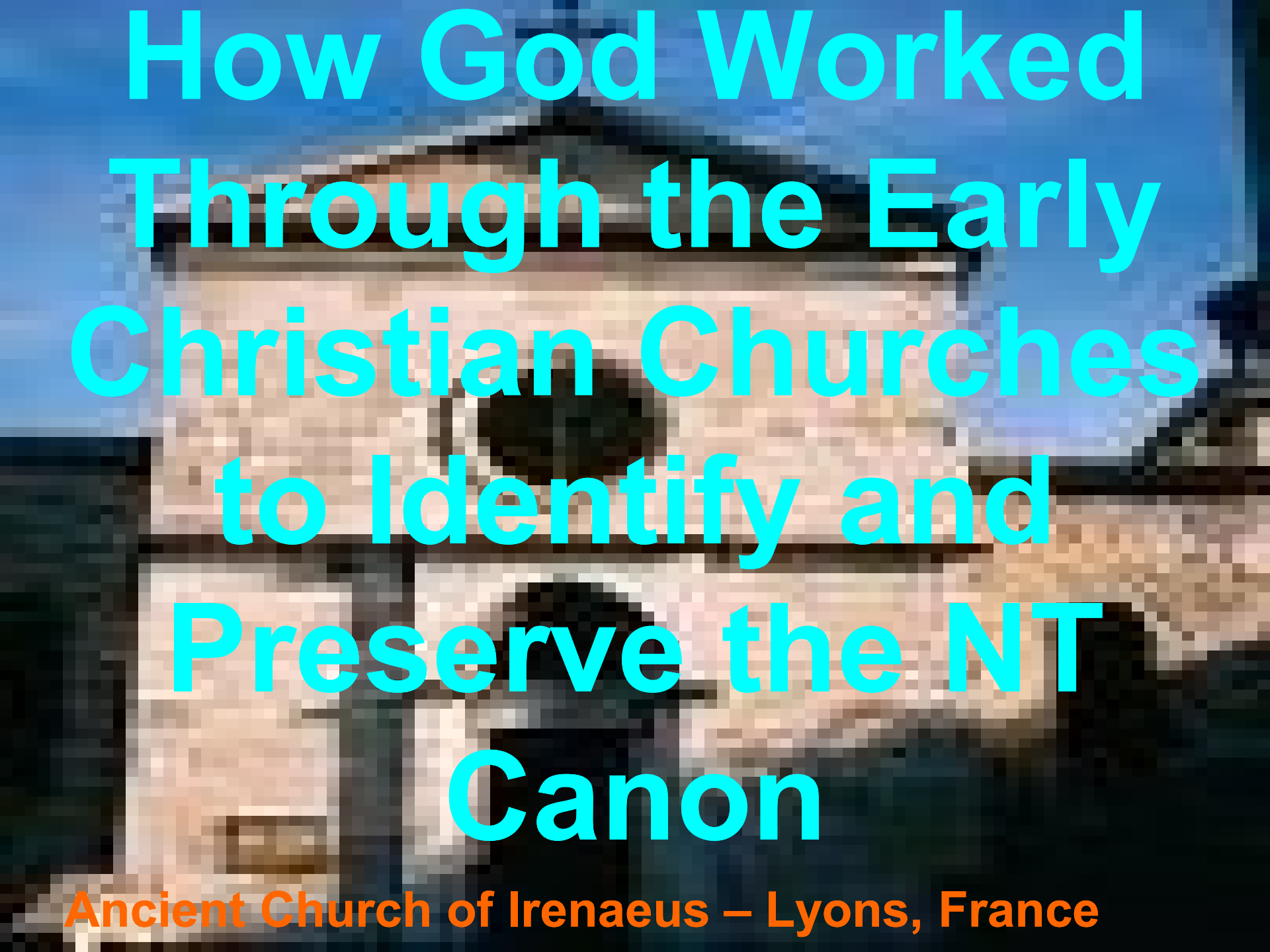
- One such heretical movement that arose in its earliest form sometime in the first century was a movement that eventually came to be known as “Gnosticism” (from the Greek word *gnosis* which means “knowledge”)
- Not everyone who was a part of this movement believed the same thing, but there do seem to be some common ideas that were held by many in this movement. Some of these ideas are:
 - That we must be initiated into a secret *gnosis* or “knowledge” in order to be saved
 - That the universe is governed by two opposing gods – one who is good and one who is evil. This idea is known as “dualism”.
 - That all physical matter is evil and “spirit” matter is good.
 - That there are “layers” of gods and spirit beings between us and the good god.
- The scriptures teach against such ideas. In fact some of the books in our NT (especially Colossians and 1 John) condemn false teachings that appear to have come from an early form of Gnosticism and were beginning to infect the thinking of Christians in the first century.

Early Christian Heresies

- During the second century (A.D. 101-200) Gnosticism began to infect certain groups of Christians in growing numbers.
- These so-called “Christian” Gnostics began to produce their own literature in order to promote their false gospel.
- Several Gnostic “gospels” were produced over the next two centuries along with other literature from the Gnostic perspective. Among these are
 - the “Gospel of Judas” (A.D. 130-180),
 - the “Gospel of Thomas” (A.D. 140-200),
 - the “Gospel of Philip” (A.D. 180 – 350)

Early Christian Heresies

- At about this same time, another movement arose which was started by Marcion (A.D. 110-160).
- Marcion was influenced by Gnosticism, but his greatest error was that he was extremely anti-Jewish and wanted to **remove** any books from the Bible that in his view were corrupted by Jewish teaching. He especially preferred the writings of Paul.
- Marcion threw out:
 - The entire OT!
 - All the NT except for (most of) Luke and 10 of Paul's letters



How God Worked Through the Early Christian Churches to Identify and Preserve the NT Canon

Ancient Church of Irenaeus – Lyons, France

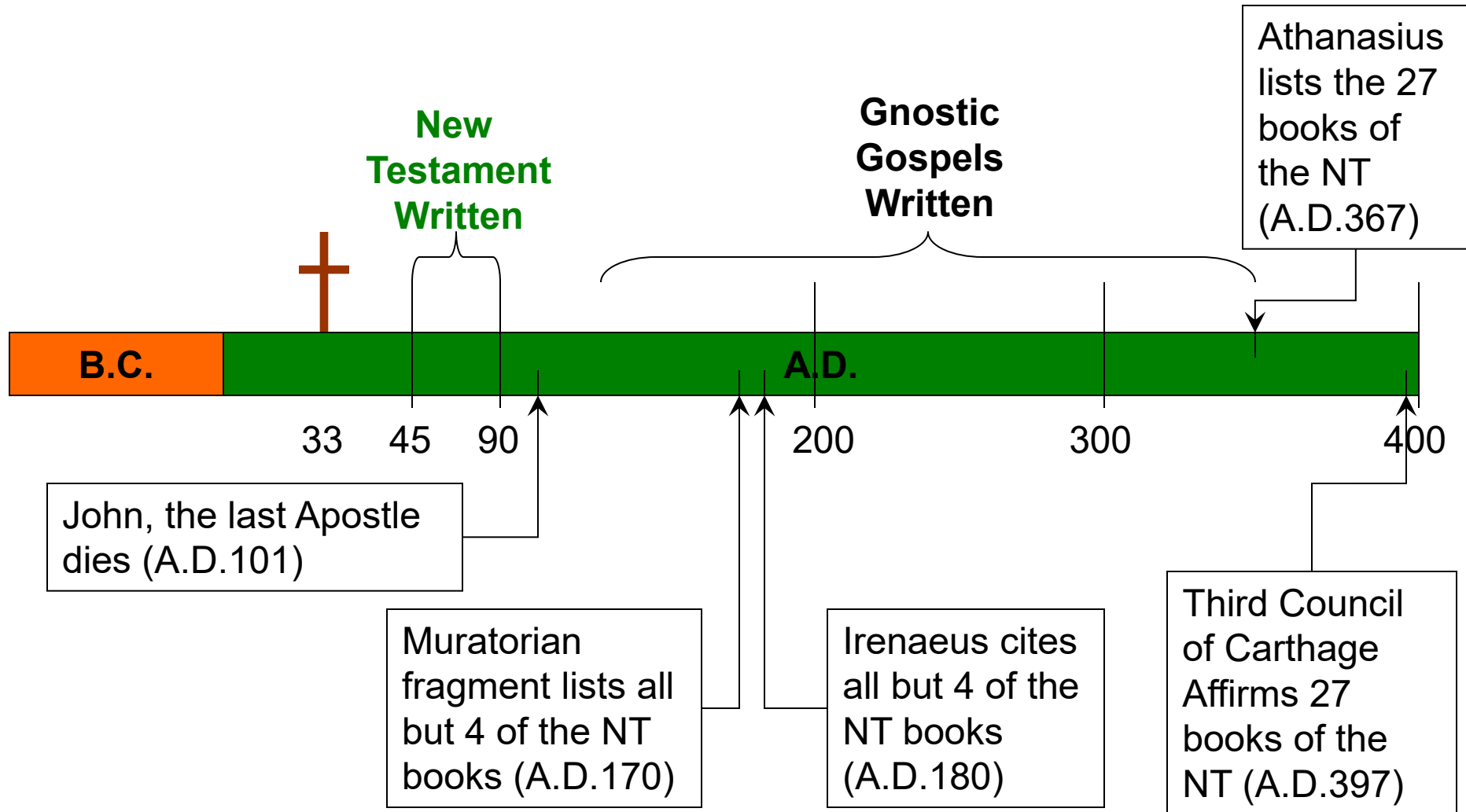
How God Worked Through the Early Christian Churches to Identify and Preserve the NT Canon

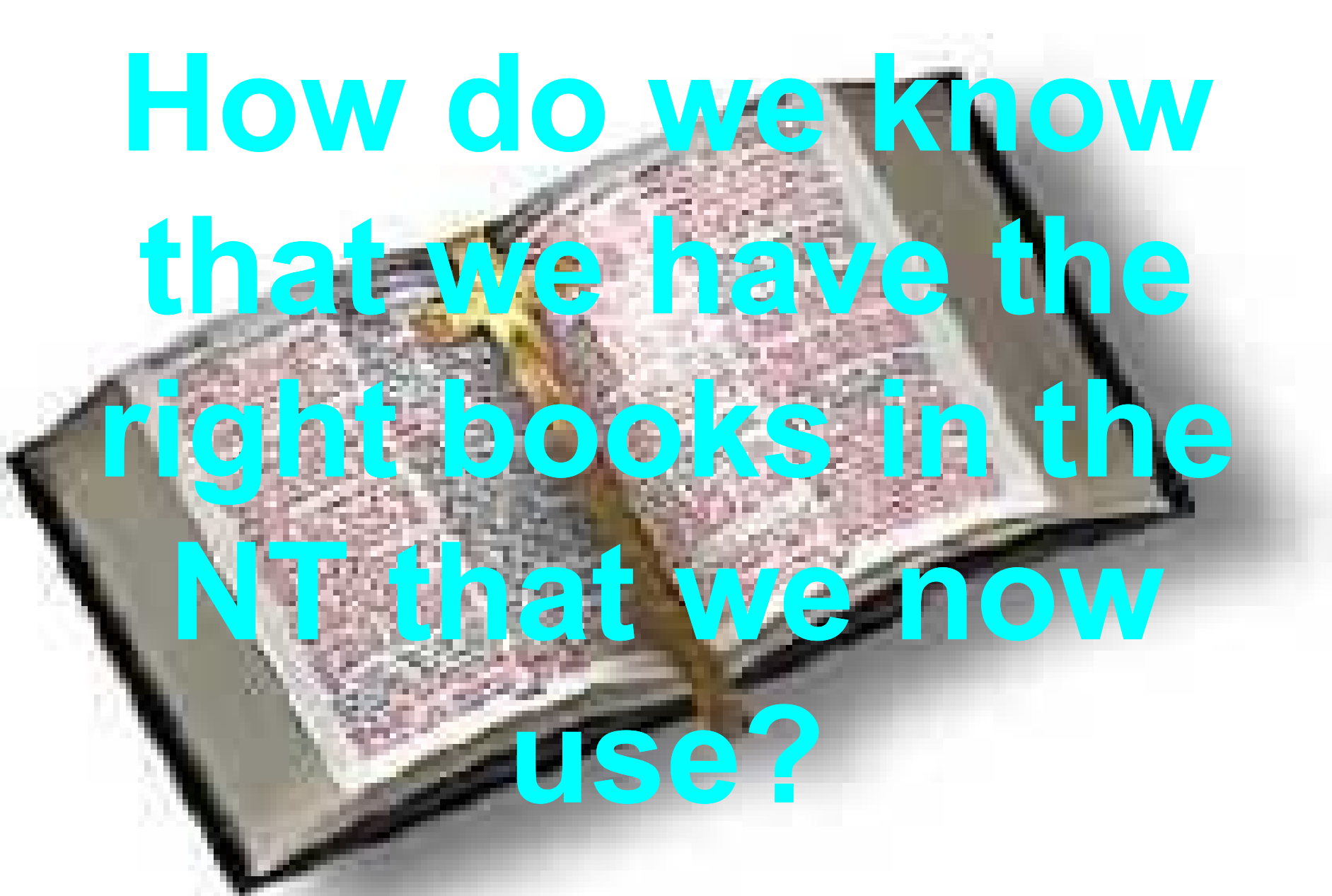
- Due to the rise of false teachers and heretical documents which some were claiming had religious authority, there arose a need for Christians to be able to **test** whether or not a particular book could be considered a part of the true canon of scripture or not.
- The early Christian churches used a three fold test to determine if a document in question was to be considered a genuine part of scripture:
 - **Apostolic Origin** – It had to have been produced by an apostle or in close association with an apostle.
 - **Harmony with Scripture** – It must be in harmony with other known NT or OT literature. If the teachings of the document contradicted other well established scripture, it would be doubted.
 - **Truthfulness** – If it contained things which were absurd or otherwise out of character with the Truth, it would be rejected as part of the Canon of Scripture.

How God Worked Through the Early Christian Leaders to Identify and Preserve the NT Canon

- Christians began to apply these tests to the documents that were circulating in the second and third centuries and they began to list the books which the churches had generally come to agree were a part of the true canon of scripture.
- Some of these lists have survived and are available to us today:
 - A manuscript known as the **Muratorian fragment** (a translation of a document dated at about **A.D. 170**) contains an authoritative list of all but four (Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter) of the books that are in our modern NT.
 - **Irenaeus** (A.D. 130–202) was a student of Polycarp, who is said to have been tutored by the Apostle John. Irenaeus' book *Against Heresies* (written around **A.D. 180**) quotes from all the current books of the NT, except a few of the shortest letters (Philemon, James, 2 Peter, and 3 John).
 - A list was suggested by the great Alexandrian theologian, **Athanasius** in **A.D. 367**. Athanasius listed all 27 of the books of the New Testament that are found in our Bibles today.
 - In **A.D. 397**, the **Third Council of Carthage**, of which the famous theologian **Augustine** was an influential member, and churches throughout the Roman empire likewise acknowledged these same 27 books as the New Testament canon. From that point forward, the issue has generally been considered settled.

Timeline of NT Canon



A stack of several old, leather-bound books is shown at an angle. The books have worn, brown leather covers and some have visible text on their spines. A small, dried yellow flower is placed on top of the stack. Overlaid on this image is large, bright cyan text.

**How do we know
that we have the
right books in the
NT that we now
use?**

**Note: Much of the information in this section was gleaned
from Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology* (p.65-67)**

How do we know that we have the right books in the NT that we now use?

- Ultimately, our confidence that we have the right books in our NT is based on the faithfulness of God. We know that God loves His people, and it is supremely important that God's people have His words for they are our life (Deut. 32:47; Mat 4:4).
- The preservation and correct assembling of Scripture should be seen by believers, then, not as a part of church history that happened after God provided for our salvation, but as a part of the history of salvation itself. After all we have to have the Word of God in order to believe it and be saved!
- Therefore, just as God was at work in creation, in the calling of His people Israel, in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, and in the early work and writings of the apostles, so God was at work in the preservation and assembling together of the books of scripture for the benefit of His people.

How do we know that we have the right books in the NT that we now use?

- Christians today should not presume to take it upon themselves to attempt to add to or subtract from the books of the canon: the process was completed long ago as we have already seen.
- Nevertheless, it is helpful to examine the history of how we received our present day canon, because it helps confirm our conviction that the decisions made by the early church were correct decisions.
- One historical fact that is worth noting: Today there are no strong candidates for addition to the canon and there are no strong objections to any book presently in the canon.

How do we know that we have the right books in the NT that we now use?

- Even when we examine those writings that some are claiming today should have been included in the canon, we find that they contain teachings that either contradict the Scriptures, are utterly absurd – or both!
- The “**Gospel of Thomas**” (A.D.140-200), for example contains the following **absurd** statement: *Simon Peter said to them: “Let Mary go away from us, for women are not worthy of life.” Jesus said: “Lo, I shall lead her, so that I may make her a male, that she too may become a living spirit, resembling you males. For every woman who makes herself a male will enter the kingdom of heaven” (par.114)*
- This flies in the face of clear scriptures which teach that man and woman are both made in the image of God (Gen 1:27) and while the scriptures teach that men and women have differing roles in certain areas (e.g. women are not allowed to teach or have spiritual authority over men 1 Tim 2:12) in terms of their standing before God: **There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.** (Gal. 3:28)

How do we know that we have the right books in the NT that we now use?

- The **Gospel of Phillip** (180-350) contains numerous **absurd** statements that either contradict the scriptures, are nonsensical, or both:
 - *Adam came into being from two virgins, from the Spirit and from the virgin earth. (verse 90) – cf. **the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. (Gen 2:7)***
 - *The soul of Adam came into being by means of a breath. The partner of his soul is the spirit. His mother is the thing that was given to him. His soul was taken from him and replaced by a spirit. When he was united (to the spirit), he spoke words incomprehensible to the powers. (verse 87) - ???*
 - *Some said, "Mary conceived by the Holy Spirit." They are in error. They do not know what they are saying. When did a woman ever conceive by a woman? Mary is the virgin whom no power defiled. (verse 18) – cf. **an angel of the Lord appeared to [Joseph] in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit". (Mat 1:20)***

How do we know that we have the right books in the NT that we now use?

- The **Gospel of Phillip** (180-350) contains numerous **absurd** statements that either contradict the scriptures, are nonsensical, or both:
 - *Those who say that the Lord died first and (then) rose up are in error, for he rose up first and (then) died. (verse 22) – cf. **For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. (1 Cor 15:3-4)***
 - *By perfecting the water of baptism, Jesus emptied it of death. Thus we do go down into the water, but we do not go down into death, in order that we may not be poured out into the spirit of the world. When that spirit blows, it brings the winter. When the Holy Spirit breathes, the summer comes. (verse 115) - ???*

How do we know that we have the right books in the NT that we now use?

- The Infancy Gospel of Thomas (A.D. 140-170) – not to be confused with the so-called Gospel of Thomas – claims to contain stories about Jesus in his youth. But these stories contradict the character of Jesus making him out to be a hot-tempered murderer, for example!
- *The son of Annas the scribe was standing there with Jesus. Taking a branch from a willow tree, he dispersed the waters which Jesus had gathered. When Jesus saw what had happened, he became angry and said to him, “You godless, brainless moron, what did the ponds and waters do to you? Watch this now: you are going to dry up like a tree and you will never produce leaves or roots or fruit.” And immediately, this child withered up completely. Then, Jesus departed and returned to Joseph's house. The parents of the one who had been withered up, however, wailed for their young child as they took his remains away. Then, they went to Joseph and accused him, “You are responsible for the child who did this.” (Chapter 3)*
- This contradicts what the NT teaches that Jesus: *in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.* (Heb 4:15)

How do we know that we have the right books in the NT that we now use?

- All other existing documents that had any possibility of inclusion in the canon by the early church are similar to these examples in that they either:
 - Were ***not*** produced in association with an ***apostle***
 - ***and/or***
 - Explicitly ***contradict the scriptures***
 - ***and/or***
 - Include ***absurd teachings*** that clearly make them unworthy to be included in the NT.