

Chapter 2 – Concerning the Holy Scriptures

Q1. What are the Holy Scriptures?¹

A. The written Word of God (John 5:39, 2 Tim. 3:15).

Our question uses the word “holy” to speak about the Scriptures. What is holy? It means to be set apart for God or to be sinless. Think about the tabernacle worship. Israel had normal tools, like forks, that were only allowed for use in the tabernacle. Why are they called holy? Because it is the Word of God. God is holy. The Bible is given by the Holy Spirit. How do we call that giving by the Holy Spirit? Indeed, inspiration. Think for example about a good friend that inspires you. Then he gives you great ideas. We work them out in writing or painting. When we speak about inspiration of the Bible it is a bit different. The Holy Spirit inspired the Bible writers. He guided their minds. When for example Moses wrote, the Holy Spirit gave him the ideas and words in his mind. But He guided it in such a way that the writers did not make any mistakes. There were no errors. In the New Testament, the word “inspiration” literally means “God-breathed.” Think about the creation of Adam. After God formed his body, He breathed in his nose. Then Adam became a living being. How was Adam then? Yes, without any mistakes. He was made perfect.

Our question not only speaks about holy in itself but more specifically about the Scriptures. Why is the name Scriptures used? Simply said it means a writing. Think about the word “inscription.” Then you carve words in wood, metal, or stone. What happens if you do it well? It remains always there. Think about some pottery that found with a 3000 years old inscription. We are still able to read those words. We can also think of that when we speak about the Bible. These words are as it were ‘carved’ on paper. They will remain forever. What is another name for the Scriptures? The Bible. That is a Greek word which means “books.” Why would we call it books? As we saw a previous time, the Bible has different human authors. It is a collection of books. The Bible has 66 books in total, 39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament.

In our answer it speaks about a “written” book. What do we need for writing? A person, idea, pen, ink, and paper or some other material to write upon. Think about writing a letter to a friend. You need some material and ideas to write him or her. What is the advantage when you write it instead of speaking it? Indeed, it is more trustable. It is less changeable. In our answer it speaks about the written “Word of God.” Why is it the Word of God? We can say, God speaks through this book to humans. It is His words that are put on paper. Another question to think about, is it enough to have a Bible to be saved? No, man by nature is blind. He needs the Holy Spirit to bring the matters in his heart. The question now is, was there always a Bible? What do you think? This is what we think of in our next question.

Q2. Has there always been a written word?

A. No, prior to the time of Moses there was no written word.

Why do we even ask this question? It is simple, the Word of God is needed for salvation. But how can God’s Word be communicated? We have different options. First, written on paper, and second, spoken with the mouth. Can you give an example that God’s Word was spoken? Yes, to Abraham. God called him out of Ur. Let’s give an example of these two possibilities of communication. You

¹ Literally, “Q. What do we understand by the Holy Scriptures? A. The written Word of God.”

have a new worker at your farm. You need to teach him how the tractor works. What are your options? The first option is to give him a written manual. The other option is to speak to him and pointing things out in the tractor. Both options will work. In our question it is about the “written Word.” Did the Bible, as we have it, always exist?

Before we can answer that question, we must think about time. When did time begin? At creation. That was about 4000 years before the coming of Christ. For us this is about 6000 years ago. What is the answer? Was there always a written Word of God? The answer says, “No, before the time of Moses there was no written Word.” Why is Moses mentioned? He was the first Bible writer. What books did he write? The following five:

- 1. Genesis. That means beginning. Think of the beginning of the earth.
- 2. Exodus. That is, the way out. Think of the exit out of Egypt.
- 3. Leviticus. Levi was the forefather of priests. This contains laws for the tabernacle.
- 4. Numbers. This book has many counting of the people of Israel.
- 5. Deuteronomy. Deutero means second, nomos means law. A repetition of the law

We call these five books the Torah. That means a law or teaching. This reminds us what Jesus said about the Old Testament. He called them the “law and the “prophets.” No, the mentioning of Moses does not mean that he invented the alphabet. That existed already. But if we think about Bible, we can say that it was not only written by Moses. Who also wrote a part of the Bible in the time of Moses? That was God Himself. Think about the law that was given at Sinai. We read that God wrote the Ten Commandments in the tables of stone. Now we have to think about an important question. Did Adam have a Bible? Did he have God’s Word on paper? No. He did not. Who else lived before Moses’ time? Noah and Abraham. Possibly they had some histories that we have in the Bible on paper. But the difference is that they were not “officially inspired” and “faultless.” That means, such writings did not have any official authority. You can think about the first laws of the United States. When the Puritans came across the ocean, they lived according to some laws. But these laws were unofficial. Most of them were spoken rules. Only later it was written on paper and made official. But what would be the issue when Adam, Abraham and Noah would not have the Word of God? There could never be saved. So, how is it possible that they saved? We see this in question 3.

Q3. How did God then communicate His Word prior to Moses?²

A. By oral communication and special revelation to the patriarchs. (Gen. 18:1; Gen. 28:12)

In other words, how did God make Himself known to people? How could people be saved in the time before Moses? Do we remember? We have two ways of communication: written and spoken. In our answer, we see that God used “oral communication.” We could say, God spoke to them for communication. The word “oral” comes from a Latin word that means “mouth.” In other words, the mouth is used to communicate. How would that have looked like? Think of a father or a mother in Abraham’s time. They spoke to their children. They told them what they needed for salvation. A question about, how do we use this method today? Think of our classroom. What do we have? Indeed, we use textbooks. But also we will have a teacher that speaks. He tries to communicate by speaking the knowledge that is needed. What are some examples that God spoke to people? Adam in the garden, “Where art thou?” (Gen. 3:9), and later the mother promise, “I will put enmity

² Literally, “Q. How did God then reveal His Word? A. By speaking orally to the fathers and by other revelations.”

between thy seed and her Seed” (Gen. 3:15). Again later, God told Noah to go into the ark.

But God also made himself known in another way. We call this “special revelation.” That means, God revealed Himself directly to people without having it put on paper first. What are the different ways of special revelation? We see five in the Old Testament,

- 1. Spoken words. Think of Adam (Gen. 3:15)
- 2. Dreams. An example is Joseph (Gen. 37)
- 3. Visions. God revealed Himself in this way to Abraham (Gen. 15:1)
- 4. Angels. Two appeared to Lot (Gen. 19)
- 5. The Angel of the LORD (Ex. 3). Who is that? Jesus before His birth in Bethlehem.

Let us think a bit more about God’s special revelation. What is the most special revelation of God’s Word? Think about the beginning of John’s gospel. What do we read? Indeed, “In the beginning was the Word” (John 1:1). What does this refer to? Jesus’ coming as human being. What is Jesus? God in person.

Now, the question is to whom did God reveal Himself in the time before Moses? Our catechism says “the patriarchs.” What is a patriarch? It is indeed a difficult word. But we can hear some elements that we might know. We hear the word “pater.” How does that sound like? Indeed, “father.” That is also its meaning. Further, we hear the word “arch.” This reminds you of Michael, the arch-angel. “Arch” means “chief or head.” So, Michael is the head of the angels. He rules over them. If we combine the two, we can say that patriarchs are forefathers. This is specifically true for Israel. What are the names of some patriarchs? Think of the three important ones. Indeed, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Now our catechism says that God spoke to them. Do you know of an example? Yes, God called Abraham out of Ur (Gen. 12). How did God do that? He simply spoke to him. The question makes clear that these patriarchs had a knowledge about God that was saving. This means that Abraham knew Jesus Christ. How do we know? Jesus Christ said about Abraham, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad” (John 8:56). So, we see that people before the time of Moses did know about God. Some did know Him in a saving manner. This was not via the Bible but by God’s special revelations.

Q4. How did God’s people preserve God’s communications among themselves?

A. The fathers transmitted it to their children (Gen. 18:19).

The Bible text in the answer reads, “He [Abraham] will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment” (Gen. 18:19). Let us first think about the word “preserve.” What is the issue? In the time before Moses, nothing of the Bible is written on paper. What is preservation? It means that you want to keep intact and to keep something safe. Think for example about milk. We have different ways that we can store milk. You can preserve it in the fridge for about seven days. But what if you would like to keep milk longer? Then you can put it in the freezer. In this way, you can keep milk for about six months. Another possibility is to pasteurize it. That means to heat milk for a time at a certain temperature. With this method, you can keep milk also for about six months. Our question speaks about preserving God’s Word. Or to keep it intact. How is that done?

The question asks, how did people preserve what God had told them? We could have different options. We can write things down or tell others by mouth. We call this transmitting. What is that? Literally it is to hand something down. Simply said, you try to get something from one person to the other. How can we transmit something? We have different ways to do that. We could use light (fiber) or radio waves (cellphone). Other possibilities are sound, contact or writing. Think about a ship that is wandering in the sea in a big storm. Finally, the captain sees a lighthouse. The light flashes around. The captain knows, there is a harbor. Did anyone talk? No. But the flashing light for him is enough to know where the coast is. In our catechism we speak about transmission in the time before Moses. Nothing was officially written down. How did children know what God had said? Fathers and mothers taught their children by mouth. Imagine for a moment that you would sit at the table. Father would call his children around the table. He would instruct the children in what the LORD had commanded. He would say, “This is what the LORD has said.” Today, we do actually the same. Fathers and mothers teach the Bible in the home. One difference is that our parents have also a written Bible. Where do we find an example in the Bible that this method happened? Yes, Abraham taught his family. Remember, even when we do not specifically read about it, it still happened. Think about this. Abel offered by faith. How does someone get faith? That is by hearing God’s Word (Rom. 10:17). This means that Abel, in one way or another, had heard about God’s Word. Or think of Enoch. He walked with God. That can only if He knew that God existed. It was told him.

But the question is, do we not get problems if we try to transmit God’s word by speaking? We can have challenges to remember things in our memory. We often tend to forget things. Think about telling a story that you have heard to someone else. You can leave out or add things to it. That can be unintentionally. Think of the following example. It is a game that children sometimes do. They whisper a sentence in the ear of one child. He has to tell it to the next, and that child to the next. The last one has to tell what he has heard. Often it is totally different from what the first person had said. How can God’s Word then be preserved in this way? That is what we will look at our the next question.

Q5. Why could this be done better in those times?

A. In those days

- (1) men lived longer,
- (2) they are fewer in number,
- (3) God revealed Himself more frequently, and
- (4) Satan's devices were less.

The question says, is it not an issue to transmit God’s Word by speaking? And the answer is, no. In the time before Moses this was possible. But why? Four different things are mentioned. The first reason is that “men lived longer.” How long do people live today? That is 120 years maximum. This is the result of the flood. After that moment, the age of man declined strongly. The oldest living person is “Kane Tanaka,” a Japanese woman. She is 119 year and 2 months.³ The oldest male in the world is only 112 years old. But how long did people live before the flood of Noah? Let us think about few of them. Lamech, the father of Noah, lived 777 years. He died just before the flood. If you go back in time, you see that Adam lived 930 years (Gen. 5). But who is the oldest person in the

³ Note, this was at the time of teaching this catechism lesson. She died at April 19, 2022.

Bible? Yes, that is Methuselah. He was 969 years old (Gen. 5:21-27). Think about that. If you were born in 2000, you would die in 2969. What would you see? Many changes in technology, many wars, and your great-great-grandchildren. Let's think about another question. Who of his descendants could Adam have known? We mean his great-great-grandson? Yes, that was Lamech, the father of Noah. Lamech was the seventh generation from Adam. When he was born, Adam lived for another 56 years.⁴ We go further in time and think about Noah. Who could Noah have known of his descendants? Yes, Abraham. This man was the tenth generation from Noah. These two overlap each other for about 39 years. So, people indeed lived longer.

A second reason, our answer says, is that “they are fewer in number.” How many people live on earth today? That is about 8 billion. But what about the time of the flood? The Bible is silent about that. No, it is not true that all people before the flood preserved God's Word. Think about the generation of Cain. But others did, for example, the line of Seth.

A third reason, our answer says, is that “God revealed Himself more frequently.” In other words, God spoke more often to people directly. What is a good example? Indeed, God said to Abraham to go out of his country. What are some ways that God revealed Himself? Four types,

- 1. Spoken. Think of God to Abraham.
- 2. Visions. Other times God revealed Himself in visions to Abraham.
- 3. Dreams. A great example is Joseph.
- 4. Theophanies. A difficult word that means God appears in a physical form.

What are some examples that God appears in a theophany? First, in things. For example, God spoke to Moses in the burning bush. Second, God appeared in human form. Think of the three men that came to Abraham. Third, in the appearance of the Angel of the LORD. The occurrence to Manoah and his wife is a great example. Maybe you ask, but why does God in our days no longer reveal Himself in such ways to man? For example in dreams or with an audible voice. That is a great question. The answer is that we have the written Word of God. We can find God's will in this Book. That means that we have to read and study it. Otherwise, we cannot get to know God and His will. But at exceptional occasions God still reveals Himself in dreams. This sometimes happens in Muslim countries. But do you know what God then always says? You can get a Bible at this address or from that person. He points back to His own Word.

The last reason is that “Satan's devices were less.” In other words, the devil did less attacks than he does today. How do we know that Satan's attacks more today? This is said in Revelation. There we read, “Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time” (Rev. 12:12). What are some attacks of the devil? False preaching, keeping people busy, and persecution. Let us now look at the next question.

Q6. Who caused the Holy Scriptures to be written?

A. God. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Tim. 3:16).

This question and answer speaks of the ultimate author of the Bible. Who is it? The answer says,

⁴ <https://www.dropbox.com/s/pvblbuk92v81mqd/1a%20-%20Age%20Chart.pdf?dl=0>

“God.” We know that God exists of three persons, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Which of the three do we mean? The Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:22). What is the result of one ultimate author? That the Bible is one unified Book. That means there are no contradictions. Yes, it is true that it can be a challenge with difficult passages. But if we study more in depth, we see that the Bible does not contradict itself. But what part of the Bible do we exactly speak about? The answer speaks of “all Scripture.” That is from the first chapter of Genesis until the last chapter of Revelation. It shows that every single word, sentence, and chapter is inspired by the Holy Spirit. Why is it important to mention that? Today we hear so often that only some parts of the Bible are from God and other parts from the Bible writers. Others argue that the Bible is a fiction book. It contains myths and stories. But no more than that. Again others say that parts of the Bible contain errors. But what is the issue then? It is up to the reader to decide what comes from God and what not. On the other hand, we believe that all of the Bible is given by God. It has no errors. How is it then given? The catechism says by “inspiration.” Inspiration means that the Holy Spirit influenced the Bible writers in such a way that they wrote all what He wanted them to write. And this happened without mistakes. Moses, Isaiah, Mark, and John have all written a part of the Bible. We see that in the styles of the different books. And at the same time, the Holy Spirit guided them in that work. Therefore, we have a perfect Bible.

Q7. Who did God choose to write them?⁵

A. The Old Testament was written by the Prophets, and the New Testament by the Evangelists and Apostles (Ex. 17:14; Rev. 1:19).

The teacher begins with “who,” and not “what.” This means that God did not write His Word on paper or stone by Himself. But what means did God use? The “who” shows that human beings were involved. Is that not interesting?

In the answer, the catechism makes a difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament. What is the Old Testament? It is the first part of our Bible. From Genesis till Malachi. How many books has the Old Testament? That is 39 books in total. Now, our teacher says that these books are written by the prophets. What is a prophet? Simply said, it is a spokesman that speaks in the name of another. He receives his authority from the other person. Think about this example. Let’s say that the current president sends a messenger to another country. What is this messenger allowed to say? Is that his own opinion? No. He needs to tell what the president asks him to say. The same is true for prophets. They spoke in the name of God. Maybe a challenging question, was Moses a prophet? And if so, where do we read that? We find this in Deuteronomy, “And there arose not a *prophet* since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face” (Deut. 34:10). Indeed, Moses is called a prophet in the Bible. Was David then a prophet? Where do we read that? This we find in the New Testament. Peter said, “the patriarch David, he is both dead and buried...Therefore, being a *prophet*” (Acts 2:29-30). Thus, David was a prophet as well.

What about the New Testament? Who wrote it? Before we think about that question, we need to know what the New Testament is. What is it? It is the last part of our Bible. From Matthew until Revelation. Simply said, the New Testament is the fulfillment of prophecies that were spoken in the Old Testament. But what is a testament? It is a last will. You need the death for the testator before someone can receive the inheritance. When it comes to the Old and New Testament, we can say that

⁵ Literally, “Q. By whom hath He caused them to be written?”

Jesus died to give an inheritance to His people. Now, our catechism answer says that the New Testament is written by two groups of people. The first is evangelists. What is an evangelist? Literally, someone who brings good news. We read that one evangelist was Philip (Acts 21:8). The second group are apostles. What is an apostle? That comes from the verb “to send away from.” They received the Holy Spirit. Someone needed to have certain qualifications to be an apostle. What are they?

- 1. He is a witness of the resurrected Christ (1 Cor. 9:1).
- 2. He is chosen by Christ or the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:15).
- 3. He has the ability to perform signs and wonders (Acts 2:43).

How many apostles do we have? No, not twelve but thirteen. Indeed, it is the twelve disciples that followed Jesus. Matthias replaced Judas. But who is the thirteenth? That is Paul. So, now it is clear who the human authors of the Bible were. But who inspired them? That is our next question.

Q8. Who inspired their writing of Holy Scriptures?⁶

A. The Holy Ghost. “Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Pet. 1:21). The question is about inspiration. What is that? We find an answer in the Bible. Those men were moved by the Holy Spirit. They were carried. But how were they moved? Did the Holy Spirit hold their hand? No. But He guided their minds in such a way that the Bible writers wrote what He wanted. Think for a moment of a father that want to teach his child to drive a tractor. Most of the time, he lets the young boy drive and steer. But the father keeps an eye on the situation. As long as it goes well, he lets the child steer the wheel, speed up and decelerate. But when it goes wrong, the father guides him back on track.

Another question, did the Holy Spirit inspire only ideas or also word for word? The latter is true. This is what we call plenary inspiration. Plenary stands for complete inspiration. But notice that this inspiration is not mechanical as if the Bible writers were a typing-machine. It is not that the Holy Spirit “typed the right key” in the mind of the Bible writer to pen down the words. Do you know some examples of *mechanical inspiration*? Yes, we find it in Islam. Mohammed had to write exactly what ‘angel Gabriel’ told him to write. The same is true for Mormonism. Joseph Smith received the golden plates. He translated them into human language. But this is not the case for the Bible. That is why we have different styles between various books. How is it possible that each writer has a different style? Were they not inspired by the same Holy Spirit? Yes, but the whole human being of the Bible writer was involved. This includes his character, personality, education, and society. We call this *organic inspiration*. Let us look at some examples. Paul received university training under Gamaliel. He was highly educated. We can see this back in his letters. Another Bible writer is Peter. He is a simple fisherman. A rough person. This is also visible in his letters. They are not as nicely written as Paul’s. Again another is David. We know that he loved music. This is what we see back in the Psalms. So, every Bible writer has his own style of writing.

At the same time, we say that the Holy Ghost inspired the Bible writers. What are some other names for the Holy Ghost? Indeed, Holy Spirit or the Spirit of Christ. But who is the Holy Spirit? He is the third person of the trinity. Is He on the same level as the Father and Son? Maybe you think not, but

⁶ Literally, “Q. By whom were they inspired in writing?”

He is. He has the same authority and worthiness as the Father and the Son. Think about the government. All senators have the same authority. Yes, they are different persons, belong to a different party, and have their own background. If we think about the Holy Spirit, what are some of His tasks? Yes, He regenerates, points to Jesus Christ, and helps preachers in proclaiming the Word. But who did the Holy Spirit inspire?

Our answer says that “holy men” were inspired. Why is that? Were they perfect? No. That is not the meaning of holy here. But they were converted. They knew God in their heart. But can there be unconverted prophets, apostles or evangelists? Yes. Think of Caiaphas. He prophesied that it was better that one man would die than the whole nation. He did while he was in the office of high-priest. Another is Balaam. He prophesied that a star would rise out of Bethlehem. This happened. But we know that Balaam was unconverted. But if the Bible writers, who were inspired, were not perfect, did they then make mistakes when they wrote the Bible? Let’s look at the answer in our next question.

Q9. Could these men err in their writing?

A. No: the Holy Spirit led them into all truth. John 16:13.

The question is if the men have made mistakes when they wrote the Bible. Why is that such an important question? If they made mistakes, then the Bible is no longer trustworthy. On the other hand, if the Bible is written without errors it is an extra reason that God will preserve it. And the answer says that they did not make any mistakes. So, the Bible that we have has no errors. How is that possible when the Bible writers were sinful men? For this it is good to think for a moment about the growth of Jesus in the womb of Mary. She was a sinful person of herself. But the Holy Spirit overshadowed her. In that way Jesus developed and was born as a sinless child. The same we can say about the Bible writing. The Holy Spirit guided them that they could not make any mistakes.

But in what did these men not err? The question says “in their writing.” It means, this is only applicable when they wrote the books of the Bible. No, they were not always led in such a way by the Holy Spirit. They have made mistakes in their live. Think about Peter with the Galatians. Before, he ate with gentiles. But then some Jews came. And Peter separated himself from the gentiles. This was incorrect. That is why Paul rebukes him openly for what he does. So, Peter was not without mistakes. And what is the answer? Could the Bible writers make errors in their writing?

The answer says, “no.” That means all what they wrote down was without error. We call this infallible or inerrant. So, we can say that this proves that the whole Bible is from God. Each book, each chapter and each verse. For us, it means that we should read it with all reverence. We should see it as God directly speaking to us. A letter from God. Imagine that you receive a letter from the governor. It is signed. How would you read it? Not very careful? Especially when the letter contains things that are to your advantage. But why could these men not make any mistakes? They were led.

Our answer says, the “Holy Spirit led them into *all* truth.” What is one of the properties of the Holy Spirit? He is perfect. Let me give an example. Let’s say that your neighbor is an expert in repairing trucks. If he instructs you how to do it, will he make mistakes? No. He knows what he is doing. The same is true for the Holy Spirit. But we have to read careful. He led in *all* the truth, not just in parts

of it. Yes, all these truths are necessary for salvation. So, we can say that all what we need to know for salvation is found in the Bible. No, this does not mean that the Bible contains all the history of the world. How many children had Adam and Eve? How long had they been in paradise before the fall? The Bible does not tell us. It is even the case that not all of Jesus' life on earth is in Scripture. We hardly know anything of the first 30 years of His life on earth. What does this show? That we do not need tradition for salvation. We are not like the Roman Catholics. They would say that tradition reveals hidden things that we need to know for life and salvation. But as protestants we believe that the Bible is sufficient. Therefore, we need to study the Bible time and again. We can say that even with that we have enough work to do. Of course, we may use external trustworthy sources. But ultimately they are under the authority of the Scriptures. So, as answer on our question, we can say that the Bible is trustworthy and without error.

Q10. How many testaments are there in the Holy Scriptures?

A. Two: The Old and the New Testaments (2 Cor. 3:14, Heb. 9:15).

This question speaks about the “testaments.” Sometimes these testaments are called the Old Covenant and New Covenant. What is a covenant? It is a binding agreement between two parties. This agreement has promises and threats. Promises if a party keeps the agreement, and threats if he does not keep it. Think about marriage. That is also a covenant. You promise to remain with the other party until death parts you. A divorce is thus a breaking up of that covenant. That is a serious matter!

Other times is spoken of a testament. What is a testament? We sometimes call this a last will. It means that someone, for example a child, inherits the property his parents. Let's say that father makes a testament. When he dies the farm will go to his son. After many years the father passes away. What will happen? The son will inherit the farm. But what is needed to ‘activate’ that testament? Yes, the death of the person that made the testament. Well, the Bible speaks also about testaments. That means there is a people that receives an inheritance. But how is it activated? By the death of the testator. That is Jesus Christ. And this testament is activated, He died indeed.

In our answer is spoken of “two” testaments. The Old and New Testament. What is the difference between the two? First we have the *Old Testament or Old Covenant*. It is God's special arrangement with Israel. God made that covenant when He brought Israel out of Egypt. We read in Jeremiah, “Not according to *the covenant* that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake...saith the LORD” (Jer. 31:32). This covenant has promises. What are they? That God would deliver them out of Egypt. God would provide them all kinds of blessings. Israel would be cleansed from sin by the sacrifices. Not that God did not forgive sin. But this was depicted in the sacrifice of an animal. And what was all part of the old covenant? Priests, animal sacrifices, and access to God via the (high)priest. Had this covenant also a law? Yes. An external law. The passage in Jeremiah shows that this law was constantly broken.⁷ Think in relation to this covenant about the tabernacle worship. God had given many laws. Israel transgressed those laws. Then they had to bring an animal for sacrifice. After that, the Israelite was forgiven. In summary, we can say that this Old Testament looked forward to the coming of Jesus Christ. Everything was depicted in the laws and sacrifices under that Old

⁷ <https://www.gotquestions.org/old-covenant-vs-new-covenant.html>

Testament.

What is the *New Testament or New Covenant*? This is God’s agreement with the believer in Jesus Christ. We read in Hebrews, “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more” (Hebr. 10:16-17). Does this covenant have promises? Yes, indeed. What? The forgiveness of sin, eternal life, and to know God in with one’s own heart (Hebr. 9:15). And what is part of this covenant? Not a normal priest but the only High Priest, Jesus Christ. Also, the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Moreover, direct access to God without a human mediator. And what is the relation of this covenant with the law? No, this is not an external law. But God promised to write the law in the hearts of the true believers. In summary, we can say that the Old Testament is a visible picture of salvation, and looks forward to the coming of Christ. The New Testament is the fulfillment of what was depicted and promised in the Old Testament. All was fulfilled with the coming and death of Christ. Our Bible exists of two testaments. The Old Testament, the first part of our Bible, and the New Testament, the last part of our Bible. But what were the languages wherein they were written? That is what we find in our next questions.

Q11. In what language was the Old Testament written?

A. In the Hebrew language, with a small part in the Aramaic language.⁸

This question and answer are about the language of our first part of our Bible. Why is this question asked? Because the original Bible is not written in English. Why is that important to know? It means that we have only a translation. Any translation comes to the original. In English, we have many different Bible translations. These translations can mainly be divided in two main categories. The first is a *paraphrase or dynamic equivalence*. The person tries to translate the “message” to the target English. It does precisely follow the original language. Think of the New International Version (NIV). The other group exists of *literal translation*. These translators try to stay as close as they can to the original language. One of their statements is to translate the Bible literal as possible and as free as necessary. Sometimes there are phrases that cannot be translated literally, for example an expression. Then the translator will try to convey that expression in its meaning instead of the literal words. Think for this group of translations of the King James Version (KJV) or the New American Standard Bible (NASB). Let us show a translation difference in a verse in of Matthew,

- The NIV translates, “And [Jesus] said: “Truly I tell you, unless you *change* and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:3).
- The KJV says, “And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye *be converted*, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:3).

Do you hear the difference? The first translation has “change,” the latter “be converted.” Is conversion a change? Certainly. But is every change conversion? No. We can say this, that the first one can be outward, the second is a thorough inward change. Both translations do reflect the original language. The word has the meaning, “change (one’s mind), and turn.” Here the KJV is better. What is the best translation in the English language? This is the King James Version. It is the most faithful one, though at times it can be more difficult to read than other translations.

⁸ Literally, “A. In the Hebrew, and a small part in the Chaldean language.”

The question continues to ask about the language of the Old Testament. Before we think about the language, we have to spend some time on the order of books. This differences between our English Bible and the Hebrew Bible, the original language. What is the order in Hebrew and English?

Hebrew Order

- (1) Law
- (2) Prophets
- (3) Writings

English Order

- (1) History Books
- (2) Poetry
- (3) Prophets (Major, Minor)

This difference in order means that the last book of the Old Testament also differs. What is the last book in the Hebrew Bible? No, not Malachi but 2 Chronicles. Also, the categories differ. Some books are in the Hebrew Bible under the prophets while we believe that they belong under history. What is an example? The book Joshua. The Hebrew Bible calls it a book of the Prophets, we say that it belongs to the Historical books. Let us think about another difference. Who do we believe to be among the Prophets? Daniel. He is one of the Major Prophets. But the Jews place it under the Writings. The same is true for the Psalms. We call this Poetry but the Jews a Writing.

Let us now think about the language of the Old Testament. What is it? Most parts are written in the “Hebrew language.” May we ask you, why did God choose this language? The answer is simple. It was the language of Israel. They were the people that God whom God gave His Word. How does Hebrew look like? Let us show a sentence in Genesis,

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים (‘‘And God said,’’ Gen. 1:3)

Hebrew is much different from English. It reads from right-to-left instead of left-to-right. Hebrew has consonants. They are always the bigger letters. For example the mem (מ). You can compare it to our M in English. Hebrew has also vowels. These are in general the smaller dots above or under the big letters. For example, the tsere is .. .

But a part of the Old Testament is written in another language, ‘‘Aramaic’’ or ‘‘Chaldean.’’ This was the language when Israel was in Babylon. It looks very much like Hebrew. Only the spelling and some words are a bit different. You can compare with the difference between Spanish and Italian. Think for example about the word justification. In Spanish, it is ‘‘justificación,’’ and in Italian ‘‘giustificazione.’’ Now you ask, what parts are written in Aramaic? We only find it in the books Ezra (67 verses), Daniel (200 verses) and Jeremiah (one verse). The exact places are Ezra 4:8–6:19, 7:12-26, Dan. 2:4–7:28, and Jer. 10:11. Remember that even Jesus spoke Aramaic. How do we know? He said it on the cross, ‘‘Eloi, Eloi, Lama Sabachtani’’ (Matt. 27:46). That means ‘‘My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?’’ So, we can say that the Old Testament is written in Hebrew and Aramaic, and that we have different translations in the English language. Let us ask such questions also about the New Testament.

Q12. In what language was the New Testament written?

A. In the Greek language.

Why is this question asked? Is the New Testament not written in the same language as the Old Testament? The answer is no. It is written in Greek. Maybe you ask, why Greek? This was the world language in the days of Jesus. Most people spoke this language. Both Jew and Gentile knew

this language. Think about the tribes that were scattered abroad (James 1:1). That is why it was best to write the Bible in Greek. It is the same as we find with other world languages. Around the time of the reformation, Latin was the main language. That is why much of that time is written in Latin. Think also of today, what is the world language? English. So it was with the New Testament. Greek was the world language. Therefore, it was easiest to write the New Testament in that language.

How does Greek look like? Maybe you are curious. Let us show an example from the Gospel of Mark. We look at the first verse. What do we read?

Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ	(Greek)
Arche tou euangeliou Iesou Christou	(Transliteration)
“Beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ”	(English, Mark 1:1).

Greek is more like English. It is written from left-to-right. The only difference is that Greek letters are used. Many English words are related to Greek. Think about evangelizing, bringing the good news, that is related to the Greek “euangelion,” which means “good news.”

We have two main streams of manuscripts in the Greek language, the original language of the New Testament. A manuscript is a document with the written text of the Bible. The two main streams are,

- **1. Received Text.** Traditional for translations until 1900ths. Basis Geneva Bible, KJV.
- **2. Critical Text.** Basis of most modern translations. Think of the ESV, NIV, NASB.

Why is this an important thing to consider? Are they not the same? No. If you study these mainstreams manuscripts, you will find many differences. We say that the Critical Text is problematic. And still, it is the basis for most modern translations. One of those translations is the English Standard Version (ESV). Why is this text problematic? First, many verses or parts of verses are left out. This counts for 650 changes in total. One example is in John 8, the history of the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11). Second, this text contains errors. One example is the phrase “only-begotten God.” Theologians do agree that this cannot phrase be true. Consider the following verse in John,

- New American Standard Version '95 translates, “No one has seen God at any time; the *only begotten God* who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him” (John 1:18).
- King James Version says, “No man hath seen God at any time; the *only begotten Son*, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him” (John 1:18).

Interestingly, many modern translations, which are based on the wrong Critical Text, see the issue of this verse. What do they do? They translate it away! They will translate it as, “the one and only God.” But the original manuscript of the Critical Text clearly says “only-begotten God.” Do you see how ‘smart’ these theologians are to keep their wrong basis?

Now we come to the next. The defense of the King James Version. There are some reasons why we would defend this translation. First, it is based on a faithful Greek Text, the Received Text. This has been the Greek text that was used for all translations until the 1900ths. It has been preserved throughout the ages past. Second, this version is faithfully translated from the original. It is as literal as possible and as free as necessary.

The last thing that we will discuss of the New Testament is the order of books. This is as follows,

- **I. History.** Gospels and Acts
- **II. Letters.** Paul's Letter's (Church, Personal, Hebrews)
General Letters (James, Peter, John, Jude)
- **III. Future.** Revelation.

We see that we have a faithful translation of the New Testament in English. Let us read it as well.

Q13. Is the entire Bible a divine book?

A. Yes, because it contains things that could only proceed from God.

The question does not speak about a part of the Bible but about the "entire Bible." Why is the word "entire" added and not just spoken of "Bible"? Because some believe that only parts of the Bible are from God. Others believe that the Old Testament is no longer valid for us. But we as Reformed believe that the whole Bible is the Word of God. No part can and may be excluded. This means that the history of Israel is not different from the words of Jesus (in red letters). All is God's speaking. What does then count as the entire Bible? That is both Old Testament and New Testament. It is from Genesis to Revelation. Every book, chapter and word, yes, every letter is God's Word. Let us therefore realize when we read the Bible that God speaks. That is why the question continues to speak about a "divine book." This phrase means that it came from God. We can say that the whole Bible is inspired by God. He is the ultimate author even though He uses human beings.

But is the whole Bible a divine book? The answer says, "Yes...it contains things." This means that not each part of the Bible directly shows that it is a divine book. But there will be parts in it that show it. What are things that could be from humans? Think about certain laws. Humans could have thought them out. For example, the law of Moses says, "Thou shalt not steal." Everyone in the world agrees that this is not allowed. Even non-Christian nations will say that this is the case. Besides, we find histories in the Bible. Someone could have written it after doing much research. It would be similar than writing a book about the history of the United States of America. You do your research and then write this book. What are some examples of this in Scripture? The exodus out of Egypt. Moses could have written it 'without God.' We do not say that this is the case. But we say that Moses has experienced this exodus himself and could have written it by himself. We can also thin about other parts of the Bible like poetry or Paul's letters. The latter contain many greetings and pieces of advice. But this does not take away that the Bible contains things that can only come from God. Such things are evidence that it is a divine Book. After reading it, you must come to the conclusion that this Book must be from God. Let's say that you receive a letter from the government. On the top of the letter you see an official stamp. This shows that the whole letter comes from the government. We can say this, a part on the letter, the stamp, proves that the whole letter is from the same author. This means that the whole letter has authority. The same is true for the Bible. We will find 'stamps' in the Bible that prove it is from God.

Our catechism answer call such stamps things that "could only proceed from God." Only God knows these things. Only He can reveal them. Either it is impossible that humans can know it, or it could only be understood when we got new technology. Think for example about the stars. Today, NASA has telescopes. But could Job know all this information? No, and still he writes fascinating

information about certain star groups. What are some divine stamps in the Bible? We will see that in our next question.

Q14. What are some of those things?

A. (1) *Mysteries*

such as God is triune; creation out of nothing in six days; Jesus is God and man, the Mediator, etc.; and

(2) *Prophesies* of future events that were fulfilled at the exact time and place.

This question gives proves that the Bible must be a divine book. What things are mentioned in our answer? Two: 1. Mysteries, 2. Prophesies.

So the first reason is that it contains *mysteries*. What are mysteries? Things that are difficult to understand. Things that can only be known by special revelation. These cannot come up into a person's mind. Let us give a clear example. Why did Abraham have to circumcise his children on the eight day? Why not on the seventh or the ninth? The main answer is of course that God commanded him. But is there maybe another reason? Something that God knew and man did not? Yes, there is. On this day blood clotting is the best. First, vitamin K is not in the body until day 5 – 7. If a person does not have that, he would bleed to death. So, circumcision could not happen until day 5 or maybe even later. Second, prothrombin, which causes blood clotting, is 110 percent on day eight. After that moment, it turns to 100 percent. Only one day in a person's life it is higher than normal. That is on day eight. Notice that Abraham could not have known this. Only in 1872, Alexander Smith discovered it. Let us give another example. Think about the Old Testament laws for cleaning. Jews had a high hygiene. This protected them against many illnesses. One of these is the Black Death. Many contracted this illness, except the Jews. Why? They simply lived according to God's law. They took care of hygiene. But let us turn back to our answer. We thought about the fact that the Bible is divine. The first reason we pointed out is that it contains mysteries. What is one of those mysteries? That Jesus is both God and man. Which human would have ever invented that? None. That is why other religions deny that Jesus is God. This is true for both Islam and Jehovah's Witnesses. They say that God can never became human.

The second reason is *prophesies*. What are prophesies? Simply said it is to foretell what will happen in the future. God had spoken through prophets. They prophesied what would take place. This happened indeed. These prophesies were fulfilled. But if a prophecy would only be a thought of man, how can he then predict the exact moment and place? That is hardly possible. But many prophesies spoken in the Bible have been fulfilled. What are some examples? One is the exile to Babylon. God had warned Israel. If they would not turn from their sin, He would bring them into exile. And it happened. Another example is the birth of Christ. This would take place in Bethlehem. Micah had foretold, "But thou, Beth-lehem Ephratah...out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting" (Micah 5:2). This is exactly fulfilled when we read in Matthew, "Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea" (Matt. 2:1). These two things prove that the Bible is a divine book. But what about other books?

Q15. Are the apocryphal books the Word of God?

A. No, because they contain fictitious things *contrary* to the Word of God. They were never acknowledged as divine by the Jewish Church, to whom the oracles of God had been committed (Rom. 3:2).

What does the word “apocryphal” mean? It comes from the Greek *apokryptos* (ἀπόκρυφος). What do you hear? Crypto. You can think about cryptocurrency, like the bitcoin. People like to hide it from the government. The word apocryphal means, “hidden or hard to understand.” But what are these apocryphal books? Most of them were written in the time between the Old and New Testament. So, after Malachi and before Matthew. What is the problem of these books? They contain errors and teachings against the Bible. The latter is not for every book or chapter, but we will find them. Let us give two examples. First, one apocryphal book speaks of prayer for the dead. We read in the Maccabees, “Wherefore he made the propitiation for them that had died, that they might be released from their sins” (2 Macc. 12:45). This is one of the reasons the Roman Catholic Church says you can pray for the dead. They would say that some of the dead are in purgatory, a temporal hell. Such prayers can release them from their sins. But what does the Bible say? “[There shall not be found] a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a *necromancer*. For all that do these things are an abomination unto the LORD” (Deut. 18:11-12). A “necromancer” is someone that communicates with the dead. Do you see what the book of the Maccabees promotes is unbiblical? This makes clear it cannot be a book inspired by God. Second, we find historical errors in the apocrypha. In Judith, it says, “It was the twelfth year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, who ruled over the Assyrians in the great city of Nineveh” (Judith 1:1). But what does the Bible say? Nebuchadnezzar reigned in Babylon. Do you see why they cannot be books given by God?

Maybe you ask, are we then allowed to read apocryphal books? What do you think? It is allowed, but we need to be careful. And certainly, they do not have any authority. Our Belgic Confession says, “The Church may read [apocryphal books] and use them for instruction. Only as long as they do agree with the Bible. Also, they do not have authority” (BCF, Art 6). Such books can have historical value. Think about the Jews that fought in the time between the Old Testament and New Testament. Also, we can find theologically some nice and interesting passages, like the prayer of Manasseh, “I have sinned, O Lord, I have sinned, and I acknowledge mine iniquities: wherefore, I humbly beseech thee, forgive me, O Lord, forgive me, and destroy me not with mine iniquities. Be not angry with me for ever, by reserving evil for me; neither condemn me to the lower parts of the earth” (Prayer of Manasseh 1:12-13). What does that remind of? Yes, indeed, Daniel’s prayer (Dan. 9). Has Manasseh truly prayed this prayer? We do not know. But if it is the case, it would have been a very solemn and Biblical prayer.

What is another reason that we do reject the apocrypha? The answer says, they were “never acknowledged...by the Jewish church.” You will not find the apocrypha in the Hebrew Bible, our Old Testament. They were added when the Greek translation of the Old Testament was produced. Yes, the Jews denied that any authority belonged to these books. Josephus writes that Jews believed that only the 22 books were inspired of God. These books are the same as our 39 Old Testament. Notice that they do not say this of the apocryphal books. Another example is Philo’s commentaries. He was a first century Jewish scholar. He used the Septuagint as his Bible, the Greek Translation of the Old Testament (LXX). He wrote a commentary that commented on each book of the Bible.

However, the apographe are lacking. It shows that he did not think they had any authority. So, we can say that apographe can be useful, but we need to be careful in reading them. They have not any authority and are certainly not inspired by God.

Q16. Are the Holy Scriptures perfect or imperfect?

A. Perfect. “The law of the LORD is perfect” (Ps. 19:7).

What does the word “imperfect” mean in our question? Then the Bible would be defective or incomplete, or have flaws and faults. What would then be a problem? Then we do not know what is true in Scripture and what is not. We would not know how we should live. But what is the answer of our catechism? Thankfully that the Scriptures are perfect. Let us have a closer look at the Bible text that is mentioned.

In the answer, the Bible text speaks about the “law of the LORD” when it wants to prove the perfection of the Bible. What is the “law” in that verse? Maybe you answer, “Of course, the Ten Commandments.” That is certainly part of it. You say, “Does it speak about the ceremonial laws?” So, the laws in of the temple worship? Yes, that is also meant. But the law here is more. In the original, we have the word “Torah.” What do you think it speaks of? Yes, in the first place, the five books of Moses. But it also points to the rest of the Old Testament. “Torah” means law, instruction, or a prophetic teaching. We use words like this at times in the same way. If you ask someone’s hand, what do you do? Do you ask only for the person’s hand? No. The hand in that case points to the whole person. You ask the other party to marry you. The same is the case with the word “law” in our text. At times, it only speaks of the Ten Commandments or another law. But at other times, it refers to the whole Bible.

Let us now think whether the Bible is perfect or imperfect. What does our answer say? Indeed, “perfect.” Let us first give an example of something that we call perfect. Maybe in the future you will buy a car that is perfect. It has all what you need. It satisfies all your requirements. But is that car really perfect? No, it can have many improvements. Is that what we mean when we say that the Bible is perfect? No. The dictionary gives three different senses for the word “perfect.” They are,

- 1. It satisfies all the requirements.
- 2. It is entirely without fault.
- 3. It is a faithful reproduction of the original.

Which of the three is meant in our answer? Yes, the second and third. The Bible is complete, intact, and trustworthy. If we read it, we can trust it. But how is it possible that the Bible is perfect? Because God Himself is perfect. God is free from error or imperfection. Think about a perfect engineer that has to write a manual. If he does his work faithfully in writing, the manual is perfect too. Otherwise, he is not a perfect engineer. What does it mean to us that the Bible is perfect? That we may not add things to it or leave things out. That would destroy the perfection of the Bible.

What about translations? Are Bible translations perfect or imperfect? They are imperfect. This translating work is done by humans. This is even true for the most faithful translations. And of course, we desire to have a translation that is as faithful as possible. What is then needed to have a faithful translation? The translator needs to be a true child of God. He has to be governed and ruled

by the LORD. He wants to seek God’s honor.

But why are translations not perfect? For two reasons. First, the translator can use a wrong word in translating. He can think that the original word has a certain meaning, but he might be wrong. Second, the original word can have multiple meanings. For the translation, you can only use one word, not a whole description of the original word. This means that the other meanings are lost in the translation. Let’s say that you have to translate “bank” into Spanish. Which word would you use? The word “bank” can point to different things: a financial bank or the bank of a river. So, depending on the context, you translate it one way or the other. The same is true in the original languages of the Bible. Words can have multiple meanings. For example the Hebrew word “chesed” can mean, “faithfulness, loyalty, and loving-kindness.” But you can only translate it with one word. It can even be that the author meant the word to have all those meanings. But in translating, you lose two of them. Do you see that translations, therefore, are imperfect, no matter how faithful you translate? But what about the original documents? Are we missing things or do we have errors in it?

Q17. Has any part of the Holy Scriptures been lost or falsified?⁹

A. No, they are as entire and pure as they ever were (Matt. 5:18).

In thinking about the original documents, the question speaks of “any part.” It is about the smallest part of the Bible. The question is, therefore, about each book, chapter, and verse. We have our Bibles, but are any parts missing? Are there things “lost”? Then we do no longer have these parts. Let’s give an example of losing something. You travel to another destination. You take two large suitcases and one small one with you. But on the way, you lose the smaller one. Years later, you receive a call from the airline that they found your small suitcase. Is that what happened with the Bible? Are parts lost or might be found later? But what if we find new ‘gospels’? For example, a document about the life of Jesus when He was between 2 and 12 years old. Should we add it to our Bible? Something like that has happened. Some years ago, they found the Gospel of Judas. The headlines of the newspaper said, “The lost gospel is revealed...It was hidden for 1700 years.” In 2006, they published this ‘gospel.’ Also, National Geographic spend time on it in one of their broadcasts. Some theologians said that this was an important discovery. What was the content of this document? It revealed some conversations between Jesus and Judas. Two things are interesting. First, the picture of Judas is much different. He is no longer a betrayer but Jesus’ favorite disciple. Jesus even worked with Judas to plan His own death. Second, Judas did not kill himself. He was the first martyr. The other eleven disciples stoned him to death. What should we think of this ‘gospel’? The answer is simple. It does not contain the same message as the rest of Scripture. It contradicts the inspired Word of God. We have to reject it. This document is not God’s Word. What do we then have to do if we find new ‘parts of the Bible? We can acknowledge that they can be useful and even historically correct. But we have to say that they are not inspired. They will never be or become God’s Word. We can add to this the following. God has preserved His Word in such a way that His Word was available to the churches throughout the centuries. So, we can say that nothing of the Word of God has been lost.

The next question is then, are there maybe parts of the Bible that have been “falsified”? What is that? That certain things are changed in order to deceive the readers. In other words, the question is,

⁹ Literally, “Q. Is no part of the Holy Scriptures lost or falsified?”

do we have a different Bible than the original? Have people made intentional mistakes during the copy process? The answer is no. Let us think about an example of falsifying. Let's say that you have a credit card. The company keeps your history as a record. Now, you have had some troubles in the past. You ask this company to remove some data so that it makes you look better. That is what we call to falsify. When we speak about the Bible, why would people want to falsify it? There are good reasons for it. Some people do not like that the Bible shows that Jesus is God. Others desire to make God's people look better. So, the question is, is our Bible falsified? The answer is no. We have the same Bible as the original writers. This means that the Bible is faithfully copied. How do we know? For this, we should know more about the copy process of the Hebrew Bible. The copyists needed to fulfill some requirements in their copy process. What are they? Columns had to be between 48 and 60 lines. They would count the letters, words and paragraphs, and write down these things down. They would note the middle letter of a page and of the whole Old Testament. They would record the number of letters and words in each column. After the copy was finished, a review would take place within one month. No error was permitted. Do you see how faithful they copied the Scriptures? A proof of this we have with the Dead Sea Scrolls. These scrolls were found in 1947. Scholars compared them with the Hebrew manuscripts of our Bible. They were almost identical. But what about the New Testament? There are more than 5000 copies available of the Greek Manuscripts. It is true that there are some differences between those copies. But we can say that most differences are insignificant. For example, some words would miss the last "n." This is the case for the manuscripts of our King James Bible. But we have to tell you that there are indeed falsified manuscripts circulating. They are called the Critical Text. Some would say that the changes in these manuscripts are 'accidental.' But interestingly, many of those changes often make Jesus look more human. For example, in a number of cases the word Christ is left out when it speaks about "Jesus Christ." Let us show you another example in Timothy,

- The King James Version says, "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: *God* was manifest in the flesh" (1 Tim. 3:16). This verse shows that Jesus as God became human.
- The English Standard Version says, "Great indeed...is the mystery of godliness: *He* was manifested in the flesh" (1 Tim. 3:16). This leaves out that Jesus was God.

Even though such falsified manuscripts are circulating, we can say that our Bible is not falsified. Why is that? Because God took care of it. He has even promised to do so. We read in one of the Psalms, "The words of the Lord are pure words...Thou shalt keep them, O Lord, *Thou shalt preserve* them from this generation *for ever*" (Ps. 12:6-7). So, we can say that we have a faithful and complete Bible.

Q18. May human traditions be added to the Holy Scriptures?¹⁰

A. No, the Holy Scriptures alone are sufficient. "In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matt. 15:9).

Let us think about "human traditions." What are some examples of traditions? For example, some say that biking on Sunday is not allowed while others have no problem with that. Some say that we can only wear certain colors with our clothing, but others would not agree on those colors. We have a

¹⁰ Literally, "Q. Are human traditions necessary besides the Holy Scriptures? A. By no means; the Holy Scriptures alone are sufficient."

certain order of worship in the church. This can differ from other churches. What is an example of a non-Biblical tradition? How do we celebrate our birthday? Some prepare a special breakfast the person that turned another year. In our catechism it speaks also about traditions. It looks mainly to the Roman Catholic Church. They have added a number of traditions to the Bible. What are some of them? The sign of the cross, the worship of Mary, praying in Latin, or fasting on Fridays. Are all such traditions wrong? Not at all, if they do not go against Scripture. We too can have good traditions. The order of worship gives structure in the church. The same is true for the place we like to sit in church. Another helpful tradition is chapters and verses in our Bibles. They are not in the original but added by theologians. Chapters were added around AD 1240 and verses in AD 1445. So, not every tradition is wrong. They can even be helpful.

But the catechism asks if those traditions are to be added to the Bible. That means, do such traditions have the same authority? What do you think? The Roman Catholic Church says that they are binding. You must keep them. If you do not, you place yourself outside the church. This means you can no longer be saved. But before we look down on Roman Catholics, let us think about ourselves. Are there some of such traditions in our circles? If others do not keep them, we think that a person has no salvation? Yes, we do. But the Bible proves that some traditions do not need to be kept. Think about Jesus. He did not keep the Sabbath according to the rules of the Pharisees. This gave friction between Jesus and the Pharisees. What is the answer? Do we need to add such traditions to the Bible?

Our answer says, the “Holy Scriptures alone are sufficient.” No, this does not mean that traditions cannot be helpful. They can. Think about many catechism books and other teaching tools. Think of confessions like the Three Forms of Unity or the Westminster Standards. These documents are needed. They express the doctrine of the Bible. But we have to say that the Bible alone is sufficient for salvation. Rather, if we add anything to it, one’s salvation is in danger. God said, “If any man shall *add* unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book” (Rev. 22:18). What is the problem with the Roman Catholic traditions? They are placed above the Bible. It means that the church has more authority than the Bible. They would say, you can not understand the Bible without the priest or pope. But is that true? No. If that is true, then another issue arise. The pope can change traditions. He can declare new things with God’s authority. In what way is that problematic? In history, popes have contradicted each other. How could their statements be true? How can they be spoken with God’s authority? That cannot be true. Therefore, our answer is that traditions are useful, but they are under the authority of the Bible.

Q19. Are the Holy Scriptures plain or obscure?

A. The Bible is plain in the things necessary to salvation. “Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Ps. 119:105).

What does it mean that the Scriptures are “plain or obscure”? Plain means clear. Obscure is another word for hidden or difficult to understand. Let’s say that you have two rooms. The one has much light and the other only little light. On the table lies an old map. This old map helps you to find your way. In which room is it easier to find your route? Of course, in the room with much light. That one is not obscure or dark. But why is the question asked in our catechism? We can find many difficult things in the Bible. No, this time it is not about the original languages but what we have in English.

But the answer says “plain.” No, it does not say that the Bible is plain in all things. Why? As said, there are difficult things in Scripture. What are some of those difficulties? First, certain doctrines. For example election and reprobation, God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility, and baptism. Second, seeming contradictions. For example, did Jacob travel to Egypt with 70 or 75 people? Are we saved by faith alone, as Paul puts it, or also by works, as James writes? Third, difficult words. Then we can think of the difficulty to translate some words. “Behemoth” is such an example (Job 40:5). It is an animal, but what kind of animal is it exactly? Another difficulty can be the pronunciation of certain words. Think about the name YHWH. Do we have to say Jehovah or Yahweh? We are not fully sure. On the other hand, we have things in the Bible that are clear to us. What are some of those things? First, histories. Think of Israel out of Egypt, the fight between David and Goliath, and the death of Jesus on the cross. Second, the basics of salvation. It is easy to understand that we have a wrong heart, that we need payment by Jesus Christ, and that we need to ask for forgiveness. Psalm 119 makes clear that parts of Scripture are plain, “Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light on my path” (Ps. 119:105). No, the Bible is not a spotlight. But you can compare it with a small oil lamp. It is just enough to take the next step on the road. Think for example about a dark barn. The barn is a mess. But you need to find something. You only have a flashlight. Would you be able to find what you need? Yes, you have enough light. Much can be dark in the barn, but you will be able to find what you need. Let’s now apply this to teaching children. Where would you begin in teaching them the things of the Bible? Yes, you read many histories to them. You tell them who they are before God. You say how wrong their heart is. You explain that they need to pray God for forgiveness. Are the things you tell them true? Sure. But is it everything? No. They would not be able to understand the more difficult things. But the basics are clear to them. Think about a child that scoops water out of the ocean with a cup. Is it real water? Yes. Is it all the water of the ocean? No, that would be too much. The ocean is wide and large. But what he has in his cup is real ocean water.

What then are things wherein the Bible is clear? The answer says, “the things necessary for salvation.” What is salvation? It is to be saved from sin and eternal destruction. It means that this person will be brought to eternal happiness. Jesus said, “Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and *become as little children*, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:3). What does this verse show? That we often think too difficult when it comes to salvation. But what does it reveal more? That every person can be saved. The Bible is enough for salvation. You need not another book. No, you can never appear before God and say you could not be saved because the Bible was not clear. God would then say, “The way of salvation was plainly revealed. The problem is that you did not want it.” Why then do people often complain that the Bible is too difficult to read? Is it not because they do not read it enough even less study? But is their complaint true? Maybe for some. But more often it is not the whole picture. How can it be that young people can easily study difficult topics at school? That is because they are personally interested in it. This often lacks in studying Scripture. What do you need to do in reading the Scriptures? Begin with easy parts. For example, Genesis, Exodus, or the Gospel of John. Yes, the Bible has many things that we can understand with our mind. But we need more for salvation. What do we ultimately need when we read the Bible? The light of the Holy Spirit. That is why we need to pray the Holy Spirit to give light. Will He give it? Yes. Jesus said that those who will pray the Father for the Holy Spirit will receive Him. But the main issue is that there is no desire to read the Bible. There is no desire to

pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. But are there than not things that are difficult in Scripture? Does not even Peter say so? Yes, that is what we will look at in our next question.

Q20. Doesn't Peter say that in the epistles of Paul there are some things hard to understand (2 Peter 3:16)?

A. The truth of a thing may be clearly revealed, even though the matter in itself may be difficult to comprehend.¹¹ That is true with all scriptural mysteries, as the triune existence of God, etc.

What does Peter say in the text mentioned? “Our beloved brother Paul...hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are *some things hard to be understood*, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest...unto their own destruction” (2 Pet. 3:15-16). Paul received high education. He wrote the main doctrine of Scriptures in a very clear manner to others. And now Peter reads his letters. But he sees that certain things are difficult for him to grasp. But what was Peter? He was a fisherman and rough. He had low level of learning. What are things that Peter finds difficult? When we compare it to the previous verses, he speaks about the judgment day and the realization of the new heaven and the new earth (2 Pet. 3:13-14, Rom. 8:19, 1 Thess. 4:15). But what writings does Peter exactly refer to? He speaks of the “epistles of Paul.” That means his letter to churches, like Corinth, and other persons, like Timothy and Titus. An epistle is another word for a letter with instruction. And what is the answer?

Our answer says on Peter's complaint, “A truth...may be clearly revealed;...the matter...is difficult to comprehend.” What does this sentence mean? Simply this, a person can write things very plain, but not every reader might be able to understand. Is this possible? Yes. Think about this. A seminary professor can write a book about the sentence structure in Hebrew. His writing is clear. But do all people understand what he wrote? No. Only those with some basic knowledge of Hebrew will be able to read the book. What is the issue here? Is that the writing of this professor? No, but it is the limited knowledge of Hebrew by the student. How can this be resolved? The student can study more about the language or ask this professor to explain the matter in different terms.

But why would God allow for such difficult passages? God wants us to study His Word. He did not give an “easy manual.” We can say this, the Bible is easy enough a child can understand it and difficult enough that a professor can study it for years. What are some other reasons for difficult passages in the Bible? Greendyk points out two things. First, that someone understands that he needs wisdom from God. Second, to encourage the person to study the Bible more. If the whole Bible was easy, people would only read it once. But when one sees difficulties, he needs to compare it and study it.

When we study the Bible, do we need to do it carefully? Absolutely. Why? We see two dangers. First, some study the Bible as ‘theologian.’ They want to understand it all. They want to stand above the Bible. They desire to judge what is right and wrong. But that is not the right way to study. What does a person needs to do? To accept and believe all that is written in Scripture, even though he does not understand it. We call this to be in subjection to the Word. Let us give an example. Father asks his son to cleanse the milk tank. The child does not understand why that is needed. He thinks that it is without value. What if he would not listen? Would that cause trouble? Yes. On the one hand, to his father. On the other hand, the tank is no longer usable as storage for milk. Second,

¹¹ Literally, “...hard to be understood, as is the case...”

others want to know things that are not revealed in the Bible. Are they elected? The Bible does not tell us. Or, what was in God's mind from all eternity? What is the order of His thinking? The Bible is silent about that. This kind of study is dangerous. It makes blind. It reminds of an example that Greendyk gives. He says, "Let's say that you would study the sun. You do this by staring constantly to it. What is the result? Blindness." Well, this is also true for studying things in relation to God that are not found in Scripture. It can cause darkness and blindness.

How then do we need to study the Scriptures? Let us give you some practical tips. First, begin with prayer. This is first and foremost. We need the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Second, simply read the Scriptures. Begin with short times of study, like five minutes, and then built up its time, until a half our or an hour. Also, start with easy passages, like Genesis, Esther, or the gospels. Later you study more difficult passages, like the prophets and Peter's letters. When you study, you should not forget to read also the reference texts. They can shed light upon your passage. Third, use commentaries and study Bibles. Yes, it is good to be careful. You need faithful books. Some good commentaries are those of Matthew Henry or Calvin. Fourth, read other religious books. You can also think of listening to audiobooks. For example, the writings of Ryle, and Pilgrim's Progress of Bunyan. So, in this way, a few tips to read the Scripture thoroughly and faithfully.

Q21. Must we read the Holy Scriptures?

A. Yes. "Search the Scriptures, for in them ye thig ye have eternal life and they are they which testify of me" (John 5:29).

In other words, do we have to read the Bible? The question speaks about "read." But what is not meant here? Skimming, pictures, shows, reading the headlines. We do this when we 'read' the newspaper or news on the internet. Then we skim the headlines and the things we find important. Is that how we need to read the Bible? No. The Bible text that is used in our answer is even stronger. We need to "search" the Scriptures. What difference between reading and searching? Reading can be done relaxed, without any need, or even done casually. Searching means to read with focus and need. So, we need to study the Bible. We are to read it for our profit. Let's say that one day you drive down the highway and your car breaks down. You find in the back of your car a manual. How will you read it? Relaxed? No. You search it with urgency. You seek the section that describes what is needed to solve the issue. Also, you search for it until you have found it. That is the way how we need to read Scripture. With a need and with urgency.

Do we then have to read the Bible? Our answer says, "yes." No, it is not optional. The answer does not say, maybe. But it says "yes." Let's imagine that you sent your boyfriend or girlfriend several messages. But he or she does not read them. Does that person truly love you? No. If it is right, he or she must read it. What if the person desires not to read them? Then the relation is not going to work. But who are to read the Bible? Only professors? No. The question is about "we." That means, each one of us. We can never say, it was not meant for me. It is true that there are exceptions. Think of blind or handicapped people. But God has given them other means, like an audio Bible. But in our question, we speak about a normal person. And we may assure that all of us belong to this category, even though we might have different capacities.

How then do we need to read the Bible? Is it to research the facts? Is it to make a timeline of all Biblical persons and events? Do we need to compare challenging passages? Those things are not

wrong. We are even encouraged to do so. But that is not meant in our answer. The purpose of reading Scripture is twofold. We find that in the text mentioned. First, to have eternal life, second, to have a testimony of Jesus Christ. No, it is not to search the facts, nice things, or points of interest. But it is ultimately for salvation and the glory of God. The first reason to read Scripture is for “eternal life.” What is eternal life? Is that to live forever? No. Those in hell do that as well. But eternal life here means that such people will receive close communion with God. They will enjoy God always. It is true that those have experienced the disruptions of that eternal life. But they have also experienced the love of God and His peace in their heart. Later, they will enjoy that communion forever. That is why searching the Scriptures is so important. The second purpose is to “testify of Me.” Who is that? Jesus Christ. He speaks in this verse. And to know Him is eternal life. But how do we exactly need to search the Scriptures? That is our next question.

Q22. How must we search the Scriptures?

A. (1) In the fear of God (Ps. 111:10); (2) with a praying heart (Ps. 119:18); (3) reverently (Isa. 66:5); (4) attentively and (5) with spiritual judgment (1 Cor. 2:13).

This question speaks more in depth how a person needs to study. In what way does he need to do it? What attitude is necessary? Do you need to seek as a professor? Does one need to have a critical attitude? Is it to find errors in Scripture? No! Do we then need to seek as a chicken? Determine what we like and what not? Pick what fits us and leave the rest? No. Certainly not. But the answer gives five different things. All have to do with our attitude. It has to do with what we think and how we behave. What are they?

First, studying the Scriptures needs to be “in the fear of God.” What is the fear of God? Does it mean to be afraid? It is true that God’s people learn to fear for their life. But that is not what the “fear of God” is. It is to have a deep childlike reverence. It is like a little child that looks up to his father. At the same time, he will fear his father when he does something wrong. We can say that there is reverence which is based on love. But what is needed for the fear of God? True conversion, regeneration, and a new heart. Then the person realizes that God exists. God is real. They begin to understand when they read the Bible that God speaks. One of the Psalms says, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments” (Ps. 111:10).

Second, it ought to be done “with a praying heart.” Why do we need to pray? Because we are so ignorant of ourselves. This is even true after receiving grace. That is why we need the light of the Holy Spirit besides our Bible. But what are some ways that someone can pray? It can be with the mouth only, in a demanding way, or with a proud heart. Think of the Pharisee in the temple and the apostle Paul before his conversion. But what do we need? To pray with our heart. That means, it must come out of our heart. And what do we then need to pray? “Lord open my eyes. Give me attention to thy Word. Give me true reverence. Grant me understanding of the Scriptures.” This is what we find with the writer of one of the Psalms, “Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law” (Ps. 119:18).

Third, we need to study the Scriptures “reverently.” What is reverent? Is that to shout? To have some quick words to God? Is that to throw with our Bible? No! Certainly not. Let’s give an example. One day you sit in class. When the teacher comes in, you say, “Hey guy. Noddy boy.

Please, check my exam of last week as quickly as you can. I expect you to give a high grades. If not, I will tell my dad.” Do you think that the teacher will accept such language? No. Why? It shows no respect at all. How about God? Would He hear prayers that are irreverent? No! God would be offended. But how can you see that a person prays reverently? In the attitude of his body, the tone of his voice, and the words he uses. These things can show that he has deep respect. You can feel that he has an impression of God’s majesty. Think about Isaiah. When he saw a vision of God, he cried out, “Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts” (Isa. 6:5). He realized who he was in the sight of God. Is that a child of God? Yes. But Isaiah is so overwhelmed. Then the question comes to us, how can we read the Bible reverently? Then we try to understand who speaks. That is God. He is the Majesty. No, then you do not see the Bible as just another ‘book,’ or ‘letters on paper,’ but the living Word of the highest God. Isaiah describes such readers that have reverence as follows, “Hear the word of the LORD, ye that *tremble at his word*” (Isa. 66:5).

Fourth, the Bible needs to be read “attentively.” That means with all possible attention. Practically, we can say that you plan time to study your Bible. You put your phone away. You try to sit in a silent room. No, you do not quick reading but truly try to study the passage. And is that often not the issue today? Is that not why many want to have an easy translation? They do not study the Scriptures but want to quickly read it. But we encourage you, study the Word. Study it! Use all means possible.

Lastly, we see in our answer that it needs to be “with spiritual judgment.” No, not in a judging or critical spirit. But with spiritual discernment. In Corinthians, it says, “Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual” (1 Cor. 2:13). Then you try to understand the Bible in a spiritual way. Then you will compare the text with other passages of Scripture.

Let’s now give some practical tips in how to study the Bible. First, the time of Bible study. Begin with short passages. Read for five minutes or just a chapter. Then make it gradually longer. Add every time five minutes more until you reach a study time between a half our and one hour. Second, the difficulty of a passage. Begin with easy passages and work towards more difficult ones. For example, Genesis and John are easier. After you studied them, you can go to the prophets and doctrinal passages. Also, study first the things that are needed for salvation. For example, who am I? Who is Jesus Christ? In a later stage you can study more difficult passages that are not directly necessary for salvation. Then you can think of election and the different views of baptism. Third, the study itself. Set aside a specific time each day. For example, each morning at 7am you will study for 30 minutes. Study first a whole paragraph, then the chapter and then the whole book. It would be good to begin with small books like Jonah or Ruth. To have some clarity, you could separate paragraphs in your Bible by drawing a line between them. After this, look at the context. What did happen before? What happens after the verse? Moreover, use questions while studying. For example, who wrote this? What is the target audience? Next is to outline your passage. This gives you a better overview. The following step is to look for keywords. Think verbs and words that are repeated. You can use markers to color the same kind of words. This gives you a visible picture of

your passage. Then check the reference texts. What do they say? Wherein do they differ? In the fourth place, use other sources. You can think of a Study Bible or commentaries. They can be a helpful resource. Also, you can use certain tools in trying to understand the Bible in the original languages. Bible software like Logos Bible software and apps as MySword can be useful. In this way, you have some useful tips for studying Scripture. But do not forget that the reading of Scripture has one goal, to know God and the sinner's salvation.