

## 13. How did we get the Bible?

Ask just about any Christian how we got the Bible. The majority will shrug their shoulders and say, "I don't know." Some smart-alecks will respond, "From the Chapel Bookstore." Brilliant, Einstein!

Interestingly, many Christians still are somewhat unsure as to exactly how we came to possess God's Word. Consider for just a moment if a friend or coworker were to ask you to describe how we got the Bible. What would your answer be?

### A. THE STRUCTURE OF THE BIBLE

#### 1) The Old Testament

- Books of law (a.k.a. Pentateuch) – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy
- Books of history – Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah
- Books of wisdom – Esther, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon
- Major prophets – Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel
- Minor prophets – Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

#### 2) The New Testament

- The Gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke, John
- Epistles
  - \* Pauline Epistles – Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon
  - \* General Epistles – Acts, Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Jude
- Apocalyptic Book – Revelation

Again, many Christians may not come up with an answer why we have the New Testament. Was it 'Plan B' because the Old Testament didn't work for God? Absolutely not! The OT was written to show us how sinful we are without our Savior Jesus through the eyes of the law of God. And the NT shows us the life and sacrifice of Jesus and His teachings through His apostles so that we can live the holy and sanctified lives that bring honor and glory to the Lord.

*Hebrews 9:22 And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission.*

In other words, the OT is to prophesy the NT and the NT is to fulfill the OT.

### B. THE OLD TESTAMENT

It was almost 3500 years ago when Moses wrote the first five books of the Old Testament. While we still have his words with us today, those original documents have been destroyed long ago. So how do we know what we have today is what Moses penned many years ago?

The answer lies in how those words arrived in our hands. In ancient times, there were diligent Jewish scribes who spent their entire careers copying material. These individuals were very meticulous in regard to providing an exact duplicate of the original document.

One group of scribes, known as the Masoretes, set its standards much higher than all the other scribes. The Masoretes counted every single letter, word, and verse of the Old Testament in order to preserve its accuracy.

Then an obvious question arises: If these men spent their entire lives doing nothing more than making thousands of copies of the Old Testament, then why do we not have innumerable copies still in existence? The fact is, only scarce copies from these ancient scribes are still in existence today.

The reason so few remain has to do with the people responsible for making the copies. They took great pride in their ability to copy without error, so that anytime a copy began to fade or show signs of wear, the scribes would either burn it or bury it in the ground. They did not want anyone obtaining a poor copy that could be misread or recopied incorrectly. After all, it was God's Word that they were responsible for accurately passing on to unknown descendants.

We learned about the Dead Sea Scrolls from Qumran. These scrolls gave us a complete set of the OT with the exception of the Book of Esther.

In your bulletin, you have a couple of sheets of "Timeline of Bible Translation History". It probably is way more than you need to know. But it is a nice thing to have around if you choose to dig deeper.

The ancient Hebrews had a clearly defined body of Scriptures. The Word of God was recognized from the very beginning, and there was no doubt which books belonged. The Jews did not arrange their books in the same way as Christians do, however, and some books were combined - e.g., 1 and 2 Samuel were one Book, so were 1 and 2 Kings as well as 1 and 2 Chronicles. But the content was the same.

Jesus verified that the OT writings were always Scripture when He quoted from the OT and claimed, "It is written". Apostle Paul had no doubt that the Jews were entrusted with the very oracles of God. Let me put it in this way: The church inherited the OT, and Jesus defended, encouraged and exemplified faithful submission to these writings as an inspired canon.

Some of you are wondering what the canon of the Bible is. I will explain that to you shortly. Don't run ahead of me now.

# Timeline of Bible Translation History

- 1400 BC: The first written Word of God: The Ten Commandments delivered to Moses.
- 500 BC: Completion of All Original Hebrew Manuscripts which make up The 39 Books of the Old Testament.
- 200 BC: Completion of the Septuagint Greek Manuscripts which contain The 39 Old Testament Books AND 14 Apocrypha Books.
- 1st Century AD: Completion of All Original Greek Manuscripts which make up The 27 Books of the New Testament.
- 315 AD: Athenasius, the Bishop of Alexandria, identifies the 27 books of the New Testament which are today recognized as the canon of scripture.
- 382 AD: Jerome's Latin Vulgate Manuscripts Produced which contain All 80 Books (39 Old Test. + 14 Apocrypha + 27 New Test).
- 500 AD: Scriptures have been Translated into Over 500 Languages.
- 600 AD: LATIN was the Only Language Allowed for Scripture.
- 995 AD: Anglo-Saxon (Early Roots of English Language) Translations of The New Testament Produced.
- 1384 AD: Wycliffe is the First Person to Produce a (Hand-Written) manuscript Copy of the Complete Bible; All 80 Books.
- 1455 AD: Gutenberg Invents the Printing Press; Books May Now be mass-Produced Instead of Individually Hand-Written. The First Book Ever Printed is Gutenberg's Bible in Latin.
- 1516 AD: Erasmus Produces a Greek/Latin Parallel New Testament.
- 1522 AD: Martin Luther's German New Testament.
- 1526 AD: William Tyndale's New Testament; The First New Testament printed in the English Language.
- 1535 AD: Myles Coverdale's Bible; The First Complete Bible printed in the English Language (80 Books: O.T. & N.T. & Apocrypha).
- 1537 AD: Tyndale-Matthews Bible; The Second Complete Bible printed in English. Done by John "Thomas Matthew" Rogers (80 Books).
- 1539 AD: The "Great Bible" Printed; The First English Language Bible Authorized for Public Use (80 Books).

- 1560 AD: The Geneva Bible Printed; The First English Language Bible to add Numbered Verses to Each Chapter (80 Books).
- 1568 AD: The Bishops Bible Printed; The Bible of which the King James was a Revision (80 Books).
- 1609 AD: The Douay Old Testament is added to the Rheims New Testament (of 1582) Making the First Complete English Catholic Bible; Translated from the Latin Vulgate (80 Books).
- 1611 AD: The King James Bible Printed; Originally with All 80 Books. The Apocrypha was Officially Removed in 1885 Leaving Only 66 Books.
- 1782 AD: Robert Aitken's Bible; The First English Language Bible (KJV) Printed in America.
- 1791 AD: Isaac Collins and Isaiah Thomas Respectively Produce the First Family Bible and First Illustrated Bible Printed in America. Both were King James Versions, with All 80 Books.
- 1808 AD: Jane Aitken's Bible (Daughter of Robert Aitken); The First Bible to be Printed by a Woman.
- 1833 AD: Noah Webster's Bible; After Producing his Famous Dictionary, Webster Printed his Own Revision of the King James Bible.
- 1841 AD: English Hexapla New Testament; an Early Textual Comparison showing the Greek and 6 Famous English Translations in Parallel Columns.
- 1846 AD: The Illuminated Bible; The Most Lavishly Illustrated Bible printed in America. A King James Version, with All 80 Books.
- 1885 AD: The "English Revised Version" Bible; The First Major English Revision of the KJV.
- 1901 AD: The "American Standard Version"; The First Major American Revision of the KJV.
- 1971 AD: The "New American Standard Bible" (NASB) is Published as a "Modern and Accurate Word for Word English Translation" of the Bible.
- 1973 AD: The "New International Version" (NIV) is Published as a "Modern and Accurate Phrase for Phrase English Translation" of the Bible.
- 1982 AD: The "New King James Version" (NKJV) is Published as a "Modern English Version Maintaining the Original Style of the King James."

## **C. THE NEW TESTAMENT**

The NT was written between approximately A.D. 35 and A.D. 100. Unlike the scribes who copied the Old Testament, people who copied the NT Books did not see the need to bury or burn old, worn-out copies of the Scriptures. As a result, we still possess literally thousands of manuscripts of the NT.

## **D. CANONIZATION OF THE BIBLE**

"Canon" is derived from the Greek word "Kanon," signifying a 'measuring rod'. Thus, to have the Bible "canonized" meant that it had been measured by the standard or test of divine inspiration and authority. It became the collection of books or writings accepted by the apostles and leadership of the early Christian church as a basis for Christian belief. It is the standard by which all Christians throughout the generations live and worship.

So how was the canon decided?

### **1) The Old Testament**

The books accepted by the Jewish community originated over a period of approximately one thousand years.

Here are the guidelines they used for the OT:

- Was the book written by a prophet of God?

Generally the prophecy book would have statements of "thus says the Lord," or "the word of the Lord came."

- Did miraculous signs or accuracy of fulfillment serve as confirmation of a prophet's message?
- Was the book internally consistent with the revelation of God found in the teachings of other canonical books, especially what God gave through Moses?

The OT was canonized at the Council of Jamnia in A.D. 90.

### **2) The New Testament**

Here are the guidelines they used for the NT:

- Did the book come through the apostles of the Lord or through persons under the guidance of an apostle, such as Luke or Mark?
- Did the book come with the power of God and be effective for changing lives?
- Was it generally accepted by the people of God?

Determination of the New Testament canon took place over a period of years, reaching its final form at the Synod of Carthage in A.D. 397.

By now, someone would have a question, "In what authority did they choose which books for the Bible?" I believe that the answer is rather simple: The same God who inspired 40 authors for over almost 4000 years period, inspired the group of godly people to choose the right Books to make a compilation for the Bible.

Then again some others might think, "Yo preacher, what about those books known as "the Apocryphal books"? Why are they not included in the Bible? Are they chopped liver?" I am glad that you are wondering about that.

## **E. WHAT ABOUT THE APOCRYPHAL AND THE LOST BOOKS?**

Apocryphal means "hidden" and it is a group of 14 books which were written between 400 B.C.-100 B.C., not considered canonical, but included in the Septuagint

and the Latin Bible Vulgate as part of the Old Testament. However, they were usually omitted from Protestant editions of the Bible.

While the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches treat some of these books as Scripture, Protestant Christians never have. Here are the reasons:

**1) The Jews never considered them as part of the Hebrew Scriptures.**

They believed that there was, throughout that period, no voice of the prophets in Israel. For the Jews, God's revelation of the Scriptures through the prophets ended around 430 B.C. with the Book of Malachi.

**2) Jesus and the apostles never considered the Apocryphal as part of the Scriptures.**

Although there are hundreds of quotations and references to the OT in the NT, never did Jesus or the apostles quote from the Apocryphal. Incidentally, the authors of the Bible do refer to other books, but this does not make them Scripture. For example, Jude 14-15 refers to the book of Enoch, which is not part of the Roman Catholic Apocryphal.

**3) Unlike the OT prophets, none of the books of the Apocryphal ever claimed divine authority.**

**4) The Apocryphal contains teachings that are clearly unbiblical - for example, they encourage prayers for the dead, teach salvation by works, and they even include an account where God is shown to be assisting someone in a lie.**

Many of the "lost Gospels" or "Gnostic Gospels" teach that Jesus was God, but not man. This is a heresy known as 'Docetism', which was prevalent in the second and possibly even first centuries. In fact, the popular gospel of Thomas likely teaches that Jesus is a divine teacher, but it is quite doubtful whether he is even human. Many of the infancy gospels, such as the infancy gospel of Thomas, etc., were written to explain how Jesus was basically non-human by having the child Jesus perform amazing miracles that were never mentioned in any other Gospel.

## ***F. THE JESUS SEMINAR'S SCHOLARS VERSION***

The late 1980s began wide exposure for the Jesus Seminar, a group of extreme-left scholars who would study a passage of the Gospels and then gather together and vote on whether a particular saying of Jesus was actually to have been said by Him by voting.

This group likewise took upon itself the task of reevaluating, and overthrowing, the entire consensus of Christian history in granting to the second-century Gnostic Gospel of Thomas to be fully canonical status, to the point of publishing this work right along with the four canonical Gospels. If truth be told, the fellows of the Jesus Seminar believe the gospel of Thomas to be more relevant and useful to historical inquiry than the Gospel of John. That is a heresy from hell.

## ***G. OXFORD'S INCLUSIVE VERSION***

This version seeks to introduce Christians to a "politically correct" version of the New Testament and Psalms, starting with the New Revised Standard Version as a base text. With such words as "Father/Mother God" and "divine Child" - instead of the "Son of God", Oxford's Inclusive Version should never, ever find a place in regular usage among God's people.

A quick glance at just some of its renderings explains why:

"We have Abraham as our father and Sarah and Hagar as our mothers." (Matt. 3:9 – OIV)

*Matthew 3:9 And think not to say within yourselves, we have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.*

"For God so loved the world that God gave God's only Child, so that everyone who believes in that Child may not perish but may have eternal life." (John 3:16 – OIV)

*John 3:16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*

## **H. NO OTHER GOSPEL**

*Galatians 1:6-9 I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, 7 which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. 9 As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.*

A friend of mine once told me that he'd like to read the entire gospel of Thomas. So I took him out to the desert and put him out of his misery. Just kidding.

If you have enough time to read garbage like that, use that time to read and learn more about the true Gospel of Jesus Christ. Why in the world would you put yourself under any influence of a heresy unless you read it to counteract against it?

The Bible we have has survived through tremendous persecutions from kings, emperors, tyrants, even clergies just like the Lord prophesied.

*Matthew 5:18 For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.*

Next time we are going to study the church history, we will learn what the religious people did to keep the Bible away from the believers of Jesus Christ.

## **I. A FEW THINGS TO REMEMBER**

1) Don't neglect your Bible. If you do, you will neglect your own spiritual health.

2) A well-worn Bible is a sign of a well-fed soul.

3) Sin will keep you from the Bible, and the Bible will keep you from sin.

4) The Word of God is perfect, powerful enough to transform us and can give us wisdom to obey His commands.

*John 14:15 If you love Me, keep My commandments.*

*John 15:10 If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.*