

# HOW DID THE BIBLE COME ABOUT ?

## Notes from a sermon

The Bible gets its name from the Greek for books - biblia, but these books are no ordinary books and their difference is summed up in one verse found in 2 Timothy 3:16. These words are inspired - God breathed words as we are repeatedly told eg Hosea 1:1, Joel 1:1 and 2 Peter 1:21.

In fact the religion of the Bible is the oldest religion on the earth for it goes back to Adam. Only later did Animism, Spiritism and Polytheism develop, as sin separated men from God. Later still, hundreds of years after Abraham, Hinduism came about, Buddhism a thousand years later still. Last of all came Islam some 600 years after Christ, but the Muslims ignore Revelation 22:18.

At first, the history of God's dealings with the Patriarchs was handed down orally, but by the time of Abraham writing had become quite common. Nevertheless we have no evidence that any of the Bible was written down then. Over 500 years were to pass before Moses wrote down the first five books of the Bible - the Pentateuch, Exodus 24:3-4.

Before that God had made known His will verbally and personally to the Patriarchs, Genesis 2:16, Genesis 4:6, 6:13, 12:1, 26:1-2, 28:10,13. I'm sure you have often wished God would speak to you as He spoke to the Patriarchs. I know I have. We can safely assume from the evidence of the scriptures that God first made known His laws to Adam. I can only imagine what it would be like to have God Himself instruct you in His law.

It would be hard to forget those instructions ! And for sure we would pass them on to our children. That was why Cain could recognise right from wrong - Genesis 4:7. Similarly Noah understood which animals were clean and unclean, Genesis 7:2.

So, God's way was passed down the generations, but it was often only preserved in one family - most of mankind choosing to reject that revelation, and worship animals, spirits, the sun or the moon, or many false gods. After the flood it seems it was passed down within Shem's family until God called Abraham out of a nation that worshipped many gods, to found a holy nation, Deuteronomy 14:2.

It is interesting to note that not all, even in that family, worshipped God. Joshua 24:2. However Shem still lived during most of Abraham's life for they overlapped over 100 years, long enough for Abraham to learn much from his ancestor, and to put it into practice.

The nation of Israel was to learn God's way from Moses' writing of the Law after the Exodus, but that revelation proved to be a lengthy and continuous process. Deut 29:29.

So, how did the various books of the Bible come to be included in what we call the canon? The word canon comes from a Summerian word - the word for reed. Papyrus was of course a reed, used to make the first paper, so maybe there is a connection to the first written books of the bible.

No one can show for sure exactly how the books we know so well, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy came to comprise the Pentateuch. The answer must be by Divine prerogative - they proved themselves worthy in practice. The books which ended up on the canonical list were the ones that proved themselves to be God's word over the centuries. They were the ones that God preserved when the temple fell into ruin during the reign of Manasseh, and were rediscovered by Hilkiah the priest - 2Chronicles 34:14-16. They were the books that upheld the Jews faith during their captivity in Babylon.

Ezra is credited to the editing of these first five books of the Law and finalising their place in the canon, while Nehemiah helped gather the historical books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings and the prophetic books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the 12 minor prophets.

When the first two parts of the canon were closed, the third part, the scripture - Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah and Chronicles were still open, but by the time of Josephus in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD the complete O.T. canon was identical to that of today, and included no other books. Indeed that they were accepted before the time of Christ is evidenced by His own words in Luke 24:44, and by the fact that He quoted from most of them.

It was from this accepted canon of the O.T. that the Apostolic church drew its teaching, but as time went by to those scriptures were added readings and authentic documents about the life and death of Christ. At first the living Apostles provided both spoken and written testimony, but after their death the church added to the gospels their letters because these provided valuable, inspired guidance on Christian behaviour. By the time the Apostle John died in AD 100 all of the books of the New Testament were regularly being read by the churches.

What about the books we call the Apocrypha ?

Well, this Greek word means "hidden" - no one knows the date, origin and authorship of most of them. These books were never acknowledged by the Jews or the Christian church to be canonical or authoritative. Josephus states in his 1<sup>st</sup> century work 'Against Apion' book 1 sect 8, that the Jews have only 22 divinely inspired books. He counted all the Minor Prophets as one, and in fact that works out at 24 but it certainly leaves no room to include the Apocrypha ! That was still the case in the 300's AD, but later Popes began to declare the Apocrypha canonical and so it is included in some Catholic Bibles still, today.

Now some people have noticed that other books are referred to in the Bible - eg.

Joshua 10:13	Jasher
Numbers 21:14	Book of the wars of the Lord
1 Kings 11:41	Book of the acts of Solomon
1 Chronicles 29:29	Books of Samuel the seer, Book of Nathan the prophet
2 Chronicles 9:29.	Prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite and visions of Iddo the seer.

Should these books, most of which have been lost have been in the Bible ? The existence of these books which at the time provided independent evidence to the truth of the Bible, no doubt provided additional details which were not considered by God to be vital, because the chosen books contained all that God cared to preserve for our admonition – 1 Corinthians 10:11.

The difference between these books, and secular accounts of Christ's word (Luke 1:1-2) and life and the books of the Bible is that they record events no doubt written from memory, and as a consequence they do not altogether agree with the God inspired records of the prophets and evangelists, and so they found no place in the canon of scripture. It is a mistake to regards any parts of them which may have survived as having divine authority.

It is significant that despite the decision of the Popes, the Apocrypha has never been accepted as Scripture. Men cannot make that to be scripture which by its nature is not scripture , no matter who tries !

On the other hand there are books in the Bible which at first were only recognised as the "word of the Lord" by the "poor of the flock" Zechariah 11:11 The writing of Jeremiah was at first rejected and he was imprisoned. Jeremiah 36:5-6,23,24. Other prophets were killed.

But sooner or later a tree is known by its fruit and every part of the word of God eventually asserted its own authority. Hebrews 4:12. So the removal of uninspired books was perfectly natural – they were crushed out of existence by comparison to the weight of the Holy scriptures. Hebrews 12:27.

Actually very few manuscripts of the Bible go back to the 1<sup>st</sup> millenium AD. The Samaritans have preserved a text of the Pentateuch that goes back to 400BC. This has only minor differences to the writings of the Hebrew scribes called the Masoretes who produced the masoretic text our Old Testament is based upon. Another important translation of the Hebrew Old Testament was made in Alexandria Egypt in 200 BC. This was a Greek translation there who could not read Hebrew and it is called the Septuagint, which is Latin for 70, the number of scholars who produced it.

This was immediately rejected by the Jews who could read Hebrew as a lax and unorthodox translation because it departs too far into paraphrase rather than translate each word as did the masoretic texts. Some people have suggested that many of the quotations from the Old Testament in the New are from the Septuagint. The apostles however, wrote most of the New Testament in Greek, though they would have been familiar with Hebrew from the synagogue. Acts 22:37, 23:2. They would have translated straight from the Hebrew, guided by the Holy Spirit. Sometimes their translations match the Septuagint translation, sometimes they differ, sometimes they match the original Hebrew, and sometimes they match neither. In some cases there is extra meaning added eg. Psalm 32:1-2. Romans 4:6-8 (without works). When the writers

recognised these differences they dare not alter a letter ! What better evidence can we have of God's involvement in the New Testament ?

The most important verification of the accuracy of our Bibles is the Dead Sea Scrolls, produced about 200 BC. Amongst these are complete scripts or fragments of every Old Testament book except Esther, and essentially they are almost identical to our Old Testament, the differences being insignificant.

So we see that the New Testament canon was not the result of pronouncements by Popes or Church councils. Like the Old it was determined by the needs of the church and the major factor governing selection was the hand of the apostles. The fact that the whole church came to agree on the canon is remarkable because the agreement was not in the least contrived.

Once God had revealed Himself and His Plan of salvation it was necessary that this information was documented. It needed the hand of God to ensure that this fixed written material was gathered together so that the Truth could never be lost, and the gospel passed down the generations.

And God has continued to preserve this most precious book, and will do for all eternity. Luke 21:33.