

HOW DID THE BIBLE COME ABOUT ?

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, *'All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.'*

These words are inspired – God breathed words, as we are repeatedly told eg Hosea 1:1, *'The word of the LORD that came unto Hosea, the son of Beeri, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel.'* Joel 1:1, *'The word of the LORD that came to Joel the son of Pethuel.'* and 2 Peter 1:21, *'For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.'*

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.

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, *'And Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD, and all the judgments: and all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the LORD hath said will we do. And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD, and rose up early in the morning, and builded an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel.'*

Before that, God had made known His will verbally and personally to the Patriarchs, Genesis 2:16, *'And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat.'* Other examples are in Genesis 4:6, 6:13, 12:1, 26:1-2, 28:10,13.

I'm sure you have often wished that 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, *'If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door.'*

Similarly, Noah understood which animals were clean and unclean, Genesis 7:2, *'Of every clean beast thou shalt take to thee by sevens, the male and his female: and of beasts that are not clean by two, the male and his female.'*

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, *'For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God, and the LORD hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth.'*

It is interesting to note that not all, even in that family, worshipped God. Joshua 24:2, *'And Joshua said unto all the people, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods.'* 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. Deuteronomy 29:29, *'The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.'*

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 that the books which ended up on the canonical list, were spoken to Moses by God and proved themselves worthy in practice. They were the ones that God preserved when the temple fell into ruin during the reign of Manasseh, and were rediscovered by Hilkiyah the priest – 2Chronicles 34:14-16, *'And when they brought out the money that was brought into the house of the LORD, Hilkiyah the priest found a **book of the law of the LORD given by Moses.** And Hilkiyah answered and said to Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD. And Hilkiyah delivered the book to Shaphan. And Shaphan carried the book to the king, and brought the king word back again, saying, All that was committed to thy servants, they do it.'*

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 1st 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. *'And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.'*

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 living. 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 1st 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, *‘all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.’*

The difference between these books, secular accounts of Christ’s word and life, (Luke 1:1-2) 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 regard 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, *‘And it was broken in that day: and so the poor of the flock that waited upon me knew that it was the word of the LORD.’*

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, *‘For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.’*

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, *‘And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removal of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.’*

Actually, very few manuscripts of the Bible go back to the 1st millennium 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 for those 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 translating 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.

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, *'Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.'* Romans 4:6-8 ('without works' inserted). *'Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness **without works**, Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.'*

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 under the guidance of God. 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 so for all eternity. Luke 21:33, *'Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away.'*

.....

The following extra information has been condensed from the introduction to 'The Holy Bible in its Original Order', by Fred Coulter.

It was early recognised by the Church Fathers that the New Testament Canon came into existence in the time of the Apostles. Augustine, in the 4th century stated "Distinguished from the books of later authors is the excellence of the canonical authority of the Old and New Testaments; which having been established in the time of the Apostles ..." (Contra Faustum Manuscript 11.5)

It was the Apostles themselves who put together the New Testament books, especially Paul, Peter and John, and with the exception of Revelation, all of the NT books were written long before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD.

Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, 1 Thessalonians 2:12-13, *‘That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory. For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it **not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God**, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.’* He with the help of Luke, Timothy, Mark, and Sylvanus was uniquely qualified to canonise his 14 Epistles, Luke and Acts.

Peter wrote that Paul’s epistles were to be considered scripture, 2 Peter 3:15-16, *‘And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him 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, as they do also **the other scriptures**, unto their own destruction.’*

Paul himself was quite clear about his God-given authority, 1 Corinthians 14:37, *‘If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.’*

Finally, the arrangement of the books in the New Testament was accomplished by the Apostle John in 96-99AD.

The Book of Revelation bears witness to: 1. ‘the word of God’, meaning that the revelation of Christ substantiates the entire word of God - Old and New Testaments; 2: ‘to the testimony of Jesus Christ,’ which is contained in the Gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John; and 3: Of all things that he [John] saw – the visions of Revelation.

Christ ended the Book of Revelation with a profound warning against anyone adding to or taking away from the words of the Bible, which of course has been ignored by **false** prophets, Revelation 22:18-19, *‘For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.’*

.....