

How We Got the Bible

Class Day #1

By Scott Spencer

Introduction: If I were to ask you “What is the number one selling book year after year?” what would your answer be? If you answered “the Bible”, you would be correct. Have you ever wondered how we got the Bible? In this lesson we hope to answer that question. It will be especially helpful for both the student and the teacher to acquire a copy of Neil R. Lighfoot’s book, “How We Got the Bible” as reliable resource.

I. The Origin of the Bible

A. Bible by definition means “book(s)”.

B. There are total of 66 books in the Bible; 39 OT and 27 NT books.

C. The earliest evidence we have of the Bible been written was by Moses 1500 B.C. He authored the Pentateuch, a collection of the first five books in the Old Testament.

D. The Bible was not the first manuscripts written. Early writing includes: • 3500 BC Sumerian limestone tablet • 3000 BC Egyptian hieroglyphs were being developed • 1400 BC Palestinian governors of cities write various letters.

II. Materials Used to Write the Bible

A. The earliest material used to write on was stone. Perhaps our minds reflect back to drawings and inscriptions on walls of stone made by man long ago. A famous example is the Moabite Stone and the Siloam Inscription dating back to 850 B.C. and 700 B.C.

B. Clay was another material often times used. The countries of Assyria and Babylonia wrote on clay tablets dating back as far as 2500 B.C.

C. Wood was not just for burning, it was also used to write information on. In the city Athens in the fourth century B.C., tablets of wood were used to communicate official notices. Wooden tablets have also been found from ancient Egypt and Palestine.

D. Leather was a common material used for hundreds of years. Although it is not specified in the Bible, one can ascertain from the scriptures that it was a material often used (Jer.36:23).

E. Papyrus played a significant role in the New Testament. The papyrus plant grew along the Nile River. It was commonly used during the fourth century B.C. There is little doubt that most of the New Testament was penned on papyrus.

F. Vellum or parchment is high quality calf skin that was used by time New Testament manuscripts were penned. King Eumenes of Pergamum is credited with its discovery between the years of 197-158 B.C.

G. Paper can be traced back to the second century B.C. in China. It became a common form of use by the thirteenth century A.D.

III. The Language of the Bible

A. Hebrew. Nearly all of the original Old Testament was written in Hebrew. (The original language does not have vowels!) Many KJV and ASV English Bibles print the Hebrew characters in Ps 119.

B. Aramaic – related to Hebrew, this was the common language in Palestine after the time of the exile (500 BC), and would have been the spoken language of Jesus. o Aramaic in the Old Testament – two words in Gen 31:47, one verse in Jer 10:11, six chapters in Daniel (2:4b—7:28), and several chapters in Ezra (4:8-6:18;7:12-26). Aramaic in the New Testament includes: Jesus says “talitha cumi” (little girl, get up) in Mk 5:41; and also “Abba” (Aramaic for Father) Jesus says “Eli, eli, lama sabachthani” (My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?) Mt 27:46 ☐ Maranatha (1 Cor 16:22) means “Our Lord, come!”).

C. Koine (common, Hellenistic) Greek – this is the common language, and is the language of the NT.

IV. Biblical Manuscripts

A. "Biblical manuscripts" are manuscripts (something written by hand) in the original languages. Since the original Biblical manuscripts have not survived, we base translations on the oldest reliable copies.

B. Septuagint (LXX, from the Latin *versio septuaginta interpretum*, "translation of the seventy interpreters") • Translation of the Hebrew Bible and related material into Koine Greek near 2-3C BC. • This is the translation quoted by Paul in the NT, and also quoted and used by the early Christians. • According to legend, Greek King of Egypt Ptolemy II Philadelphus had 72 scholars (6 from each of the 12 tribes) translate the Torah from Biblical Hebrew into Greek, for inclusion in the Library of Alexandria. • All books of the OT are included in the LXX, but not in the same order we have today.

C. Our oldest vellum copies of the Bible include these 4 "Uncials" (all capital letters) of the LXX (OT) & NT: • Codex Vaticanus (Vatican Codex, Codex B, Uncial 03) – 4th century manuscript, 759 vellum leaves. Nearly all of the Greek OT and NT. Contains the most complete copy of the NT known to exist. • Codex Sinaiticus (Sinai Bible, Uncial 01) – 4th century manuscript, 402 vellum leaves and 17 fragments. This codex contains most of the LXX and all of the NT. • Codex Alexandrinus (Alexandria Codex, Codex A, Uncial 02) – 5th century, 773 vellum leaves. The majority of the LXX and NT. (Full photographs are at the library's web site.) • Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus (Codex C, Uncial 04) – 5th century, 209 surviving leaves. This was a "rescript" (overwritten Ephraem the Syrian's treatises).

D. Dead Sea Scrolls. What about the Dead Sea Scrolls? • A collection of 972 texts and fragments found between 1946 and 1956 in caves near the Dead Sea. Traditionally thought to be the writings of a Jewish sect called the Essenes (408 BC-318 AD) • Writing was in Hebrew, Greek, and forms of Aramaic, about 40% of this material is text of the OT • Mostly written on parchment; also on papyrus and bronze.

E. Vulgate – 4th century translation of the Bible into Latin • Jerome was commissioned in 384 AD to translate the Gospels from the best Greek sources. • A few years later, he translated all of the Old Testament from the original Hebrew. • Earliest substantial copies include the Codex Amiatinus (8th C) and Codex Fuldensis (6th C). • There are dozens more copies of Jerome’s Vulgate, and many more copies of early Latin translations.

F. Masoretic Text (MT) – This is the authoritative Hebrew Bible (Old Testament), or Tanakh • TaNaKh is an acronym of the first Hebrew letter of each of the Masoretic Text's three subdivisions: Torah ("Teaching", also known as the Five Books of Moses), Nevi'im ("Prophets") and Ketuvim ("Writings"). • The MT was copied, edited and distributed by a group of Jews known as the Masoretes (7th – 10th century). • Our oldest copy of the MT is from 9C.

V. The Canon

A. The first century Christians didn’t have the complete revealed Word of God like we do today. The primary source of inspirational reading came from the Old Testament. Although letters were written by apostles and would be copied and delivered to N.T. Christians (Col.4:16).

B. Inspired books were not the only books being distributed short after the first century. Uninspired books were written as well. The term “canon” helped readers distinguish the difference between an inspired book as opposed to an uninspired book. The word “canon” simply means O.T. and N.T. books that are looked at as divinely inspired by God.

C. Historical evidence points to Athanasius of Alexandria 367 A.D. who published all 27 N.T. books that we recognize today as being divinely inspired.

VI. The English Bible

A. The Bible would be both mass produced and reproduced by many scholars and scribes.

B. The following timeline reveals as much:

- Old English: 5th-12th century Anglo-Saxon English, grammar is similar to classical Latin.
- Middle English: 12th-15th century, developed from late Old-English in Norman England.
- 1455 - Gutenberg - uses his 1450 printing press to publish a Latin Bible (an edition of the Vulgate) 48 copies survive.
- 1522 - Luther's Bible - (German) translated from the Hebrew and ancient Greek
- • 1525 (NT), 1535 (OT) - Tyndale Bible - (All of NT, about half of OT)
- 1535 - Coverdale Bible - First complete English translation of the entire Bible.
- 1537 - Thomas Matthew's Bible -Based on Tyndale's NT and Coverdale's OT
- 1539 - The Great Bible / Cromwell Bible.
- 1560 - Geneva Bible - one of the most historically significant translations into English.
- 1568 - Bishop's Bible - Authorized by the Church of England, this is the basis for the KJV.
- 1582 - Douai-Rheims Bible -Translation from the Vulgate into English for the Catholic Church.
- 1611 – King James Bible of 1611.

VI. Modern Versions

A. There are many English versions of the Bible. Some of those becoming popular after the King James include:

- 1880's: England's English Revised Version (ERV) – intended to replace the KJV of 1769
- 1901: Americans produced the American Standard Version (ASV) as a response to the ERV (It was revised 1971, becoming the New American Standard Bible/Version – NAS, NASB, NASV).
- 1973: The New International Version (NIV) is easier to understand than the NASB (and remains a best-seller)
- 1982: The New King James Version (NKJV).

- 2002: The English Standard Version (ESV) attempts to be accurate (like NASB) and the readable (like NIV).

Conclusion: It is comforting to know that God's Word has been preserved through the centuries. It reaffirms what the Apostle Peter shared with us from (1Pt.1:24-25). My we faithfully proclaim as the psalmist did in (Ps.1:2), "But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he mediates day and night."

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