



BIBLICAL TRAINING CENTER

March 3, 2019

How Did We Get Our Bible?

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“The Bible” Is Not Just A Single Book

- It’s more like a **library** or collection of books.
- “**66 books** written by **40 different** authors over **1500 years!**”
- So how did this book come together as “the Bible”?

Very Brief Overview

- 1) Old Testament – Before Moses (Genesis)
- 2) Old Testament – From Moses onward
- 3) New Testament

Part 1 – Old Testament Before Moses

Moses is said to be the author/editor of Genesis.

Let’s talk about: Creation/Fall account (Gen. 1-4), Adam’s genealogy (Gen. 5), Noah’s Flood (Gen. 6-9), spread of nations (Gen. 10-11). God calling Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (Gen. 12-38). Jacob’s descendants going down to Egypt (Gen. 39-50).

Question: Where did Moses get Genesis from? (before his time!)

There’s a lot we don’t know! Some options:

- #1 – Genesis was passed down on clay tablets
(Pictograms currently date to 3500 BC, cuneiform back to 3200 BC)
 - Adam (a very smart man) wrote it all down and it was passed down through Noah
 - Each generation adds own history
 - Would make most of Genesis first-hand account
 - AKA: “Wiseman hypothesis” or “tablet theory”
 - Moses, as prince of Egypt, would have access to royal library

- #2 – God directly revealed it to Moses
 - Moses had direct access to God’s presence (i.e., burning bush: Ex. 3:3,6; would talk face-to-face: Ex. 33:10,11, etc.)
 - Moses was up with God for 40 days
 - Additional revelation was given (saw vision of Tabernacle: Ex. 25:8, 9; Heb. 8:2,5; 9:11,24; instructions for burnt offerings, priesthood, ephod, daily offerings: Ex. 25-31; God was revealing a lot!)
- #3 – Some combination of #2 and #3
 - We know SOME revelation must have been directly revealed: no human was present before Creation day 6!

Part 2 – Old Testament from Moses onward

Let’s talk about Exodus to Malachi: Covenant at Sinai, conquest under Joshua, Kingdom under Saul/David, Babylonian captivity.

Question: When were all these OT books recorded?

- The text was recorded at/near time the events happened.
 - Clues within text: “still there to this day” (Gen. 19:37; Josh. 7:26; Gen. 35:29, many of these all throughout OT)
 - Cultural specificity: the text lines up with archaeological artifacts (see work of Dr. Steven Collins)
 - Sickle Sword – “smote with edge (singular) of sword”
 - Philistine temples supported by “two middle pillars” – Samson in Judges 16:29
 - Prices of slaves — Joseph sold for 20 shekels, correct price at Middle Bronze Age

Question: How did the people know these writings were really from God?

- God did **supernatural acts (miracles)** to confirm what the prophets were saying was true
 - Moses - God gave miracles to prove that Moses was really speaking on behalf of God (Ex. 4; staff to snake; leprosy; later plagues; parting sea)
 - Elijah, Elisha – warning people with signs/wonders to turn from God (2 Ki. 1:12)
 - Signs are confirmation that the Words really are from the Lord (Lk. 5:23,24)

Question: When did the people recognize the Old Testament?

- Eventually scribes compiled what they saw as inspired writing into collection (a canon)
 - We're not sure when OT canon ratified
 - Some say Ezra/second Temple (c. 5th century BC)
 - Talmud (commentary) suggests 450 BC
 - Some say Hasmonean dynasty (c. 140 BC)
 - They divided into three sections: Teaching, Prophets, Writings (Tanak)
 - Pharisees: accepted all sections
 - Sadducees: accepted Torah; prophets not given same authority.
 - By time of NT we can see Jesus/apostles view was that OT was inspired, infallible and inerrant.

Part 3 – New Testament

Let's talk about: The events of Christ's life (Matt, Mark, Luke, John), spread of church in Acts, various NT letters (Romans, 1 Peter, James, etc.)

Question: *Jesus never wrote a book! So how did we get the New Testament?*

- Short answer: from his followers
- There's insight from history about who authored them
 - Papias (AD 70-163), disciple of John
 - Said Matthew originally wrote his gospel in Hebrew.
 - Said Mark wrote down the Gospel Peter preached.
 - Said John wrote his Gospel
 - Irenaeus (AD 130-202)
 - "Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect, while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome, and laying the foundations of the church. After their departure, Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, did also hand down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter. Luke also, the companion of Paul, recorded in a book the Gospel preached by him. Afterwards, John, the disciple of the Lord, who had leaned upon his breast, did himself publish a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia." (*Against Heresies*, vol. 3)
 - Clement of Alexandria (AD 150-215)
 - Peter preached in Rome; people begged Mark, who had followed Peter for a while, to write out Peter's preaching.
 - Also said John composed his Gospel.

- There's evidence Gospels were written soon after the events they speak about
 - John A. T. Robinson (extremely liberal scholar) dated:
 - Matthew – AD 40 to about AD 60 - as early as **6 years from Jesus!**
 - John – about AD 40 to 65AD - as early as **6 years from Jesus!**
 - Mark – about AD 45 to AD 60 - as early as **11 years from Jesus!**
 - Luke - before AD 57 to 60AD
 - William F. Albright (former liberal archaeologist)
 - "...there is no longer any solid basis for dating **any book** of the New Testament after about **AD 80**" (*Recent Discoveries in Bible Lands*, 136, emphasis mine.)

Question: How can we know the testimony is accurate?

- The disciples had unusual training
 - Lived/travelled with Jesus for 3 years
 - Intense teacher with intense training!
- Jesus often repeated his teaching
 - Repeated messages from town to town
 - C.f. Sermon on Mt vs. sermon on the plain
- Jesus promised Holy Spirit would guide
 - John 14:26 – “The Holy Spirit... will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.” – not just left to natural abilities
 - John 16:13 – “when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth.” – Not just all kinds of truth, but all remaining revelation of New Covenant.
 - Reasonable to say NT material is the “all truth” Jesus promised.
 - Especially see this with Paul (who wrote 13 of 27 NT books).
 - Paul persecutor of church, then saved.
 - Was the last apostle (“as one born out of due time” [1 Cor. 15:8]) but given revelation having tremendous clarity about salvation (Romans, Gal, Eph, Col, etc.).

Question: When did they start identifying NT books?

- The rise of heresy meant they needed to identify books
- Church persecution prevented anything formal
- Began to see formality once Christianity legalized at Edict Milan in 313 AD.
- Problem by that time was rise of heresy
 - Gnostics circulated many forged gospels, “acts” and epistles

- Montanus (c. 101- c. 200) claimed to be the mouthpiece of the Holy Spirit; people wrote down teaching and began to circulate it.
- They had to decide which writings were legitimate inspiration.
- This is when we start to see canon lists to identify which books should be read in the churches (e.g., Muratorian Canon c. AD 170).
- A little later at the synods at Hippo (AD 393) and Carthage (397) the entire New Testament canon of 27 books was formally ratified.

Question: How did they determine canonicity?

- **Apostolicity** – was it written by an apostle or associate?
 - The apostles (“12 plus Paul”) asserted their authority (e.g., Peter: 1 Pet. 1:1; 2 Pet. 1:1; John: Jn. 21:24; 1 Jn. 1:1-4; Paul: 1 Cor. 14:37; Gal. 1:8-9)
- **Receptivity** - did the church receive it?
 - Yes! Remember these letters were copied by hand and circulated.
 - To receive was to obey the apostles’ teaching.
 - *Public reading proves writings received.* These letters were read in the churches. E.g., Ignatius of Antioch (martyred c. AD 110) shows great familiarity with Paul’s letters (1 Corinthians, Ephesians, Romans, Galatians, Philippians, Colossians, and 1 Thessalonians), makes clear references to John’s writings, and makes allusions to the synoptic Gospels.
 - *Citations prove writings received.* “Within about two hundred years after the first century, not only every book but nearly every verse of the New Testament was cited in one or more of the Fathers—over thirty-six thousand citations by the Fathers.” (Geisler, *From God to Us*, 137, 138)
- **Consistency** - consistent with good theology.

Key Terms

- **Canon** – We say that the 66 books of the Bible make up the canon of Scripture. This means they are recognized as authoritative. “Canon” comes from ancient word for “reed” and carries idea of being a standard by which other things should be measured.
- **Inerrancy** – The Bible is without error (John 17:17; Heb. 6:18). Partial inerrancy asserts it is without error when it speaks about salvation only. Full inerrancy asserts that it is without error on any topic (salvation, history, science, etc.).
- **Infallibility** – The belief that Bible cannot fail because it is the Word of God and God cannot fail (Matt. 5:18).
- **Inspiration** – The teaching that the Bible is from God. It is “God-breathed” (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:21).

Recommended Resources

- **Simple overview of just NT canon:**
 - Geisler, Normal L., and Shawn Nelson, *Evidence of an Early New Testament Canon*. Matthews, NC: Bastion Books, 2015.
- **More detail, layperson-friendly:**
 - Geisler, Norman L., and William E. Nix. *From God to Us: How We Got Our Bible*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2012.
- **More detail, more for academic:**
 - Kruger, Michael. *Canon Revisited*. Crossway, 2012.
 - Kruger, Michael. *The Question of Canon*. InterVarsity Press, 2013.
 - Linnemann, Eta. *Biblical Criticism on Trial*. Kregel Academic & Professional, 2001.
 - Metzger, Bruce. *The Canon of the New Testament*. Clarendon Press, 1997.

Deeper Q & A

Question #1 – You mention a high view of Scripture. What does this mean?

- Scholars have either a high view or low view of Scripture:

Starting Point #1 High View of Scripture	Starting Point #2 Low View of Scripture
“ Conservative View ”	“ Liberal View ”
Held since early Church	Age of Reason / Enlightenment (17/18th c.)
Miracles, prophecy & supernatural activity are possible	Miracles... not possible
Biblical people, places, events are real	Not real – Bible full of myths, errors
Trusts authorship & dates (i.e., single Isaiah)	Questions authorship & dates (multiple Isaiahs)
Bible innocent until proven guilty	Bible guilty until proven innocent

- Today’s lecture was based on a high view of Scripture.

Question #2 – I’ve heard about “hidden” gospels and books that did not make it into the Bible. What is this about?

It’s important to know about the apocryphal and pseudepigraphal writings.

- Apocrypha (means “hidden” books)
 - e.g. Tobit, Judith, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, Sirach, Baruch, 1&2 Maccabees; additions to Esther, additions to Daniel called Bel and the Dragon (Dan. 14), Prayer of Azariah, Susanna.
 - Were included in 3rd c. BC Greek Translation of OT (LXX) but never part of Hebrew Bible.
 - Roman Catholic Church, for example, includes apocrypha in OT but hold them as deuterocanonical (not same authority).

Examples of problems:

- Purgatory (2 Macc. 12:41 ff.)
- Justification by faith plus works (Tobit 12:9; 14:10–11; Ecclus. 3:30; 1 Macc. 2:52)
- Prayers for dead (2 Maccabees)
- Use of magic/superstition (Tobit 6:5-7)
- Historical errors (Judith 1:5)

- Pseudepigrapha (spurious or pseudonymous writings)
 - **Fake gospels:** Gospel of Thomas, Gospel of the Ebionites, of Peter, of James, of the Hebrews, of the Egyptians, etc. (about fifty)
 - **Fake “Acts”:** Acts of the Apostles; Acts of John, of Peter, of Paul (Paul is here described as a short, bald man with a large nose and bowlegged), of Andrew and of Thomas.
 - **Fake epistles:** The Kerygma Petrou, Epistle to the Laodiceans, the Pseudo-Titus Epistle, etc.
 - **Fake apocalypses:** The Ascension of Isaiah, Apocalypse of Peter, etc.

Examples of problems:

- Acts of John **denied Jesus’ physical body** – “Sometimes when I meant to touch him [Jesus], I met with a material and solid body; but at other times when I felt him, his substance was immaterial and incorporeal, as if it did not exist at all...” (Metzger, *Canon of the New Testament*, 177)
- Acts of Peter – Peter heals his **crippled daughter** but then **commands her to be crippled again**. (Metzger, *Canon of the New Testament*, 179)
- Apocalypse of Paul – Angel comes to man living in Paul’s house and reveals **secret location of box with Paul’s shoes** he wore when evangelizing; also contains additional revelation. (Metzger, *Canon of the New Testament*, 186)

Question #3 – Were there any debated books?

- Yes. Most NT books were accepted very early (see Geisler and Nelson, *Evidence of an Early NT Canon*, 2015).
- However, the following were initially debated:
Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude and Revelation
- By 367 AD the list of questionable books was down to:
Revelation, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John and Jude.
- A little later at the synods at Hippo (AD 393) and Carthage (397) the entire New Testament canon of 27 books was formally ratified.
- Some OT books are still debated among Christian groups today (see next).

Question #4 – Do all Christian groups have the same biblical canon today?

For the most part, there is agreement today among Christians that all 39 OT and 27 NT books belong in the canon. Non-protestant groups do accept some additional books with different levels of authority. Here’s an overview:

- Protocanon: Used in public services and basis for doctrine.
- Deuterocanon: Used in public services but not basis for doctrine.
- Tritocanon: Good “for reading” but not used in service or doctrine.
- Additional: Found in Bibles but not considered canonical.

	Protestant	Roman Catholic	Orthodox	Lutheran	Anglican
27 NT books (Matt. to Rev.)	■	■	■	■	■
39 OT books (Gen. to Mal.)	■	■	■	■	■
3 Ezra			■		■
4 Ezra			■		■
5 Ezra			■		■
6 Ezra			■		■
Additions to Esther				■	■
Greek Esther		■	■		
Judith		■	■	■	■
Tobit		■	■	■	■
1 & 2 Maccabees		■	■	■	■
3 Maccabees			■		
4 Maccabees			■		
Prayer of Manasseh			■	■	■
Wisdom		■	■	■	■
Sirach		■	■	■	■
Psalms of Solomon			■		
Baruch		■	■	■	■
Letter of Jeremiah			■		■
Letter of Baruch			■		
Apocalypse of Baruch			■		
4 Baruch			■		
Prayer of Azariah		■	■	■	■
Susanna		■	■	■	■
Bel and the Dragon		■	■	■	■
1 Enoch			■		
Jubilees			■		

Chart adapted from Eli Evans, *Canon Comparison* (Bellingham, WA: Faithlife, 2014).