Basic Bible

by
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PREFACE

The Bible is the sacred Scripture for Christians, easily the most widely read book in the history of Western Civilization. The following studies examine some very basic aspects of the Bible, its external characteristics, some general guidelines for reading and understanding it, an overview of its basic history, and an examination of its composition, canonization and preservation through roughly three millennia.

In one respect, such an examination might seem to threaten the Bible's sacred character. To analyze, categorize, and detail a document might appear to strip it of its mystery and power. Yet the Bible itself discourages the reader from such a magical approach. The mystery and power of the Bible will not be diminished by this exercise, and in some ways, the Bible might even become more profound to us. The Bible was not written in some spiritual language, but the common language of common people. It was not written as a set of theological propositions, but as a sacred history in which God revealed himself in the historical plane of human events as well as in the vertical plane of religious experience. Unlike the Vedas and Upanishads of the Hindus, which are considered to have power merely in the recitation and chanting of their rhythms, the Bible's power comes first of all from its meaning. To be sure there are indeed poetic cadences and rhythms as well as various literary devices and genres in the Bible, but the power of the Bible does not depend upon these. In fact, some of these more esoteric features are often lost in the process of translation, but the power of the Bible remains. Rather, the power of the Bible is in its content, not merely its form. Hence, an examination of its form will not empty it of its significance.

At the same time, an examination of its form is not a pointless exercise. In fact, an awareness of the Bible's form is important if one is to fully appreciate its meaning, for form and content are not isolated from each other. Even more important, an awareness of the Bible's form will preserve the reader from approaching it as a magical book, which is the essence of paganism. The Bible is sacred, and it is the Word of God in the words of humans -- but it is emphatically not a magic book. It is in this spirit and attitude that the following studies will proceed.

The Bible -- The Book of Books

...from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

2 Ti. 3:15

The Bible as a Book

The word "Bible" is derived from the Greek word *biblia* (= books) , which in turn comes from the term *biblos* (= the inner bark of the papyrus, a reed used by the Egyptians as a writing material) . By the 5th century, Christians were using this word to describe their collection of writings. From the Greek language, *biblia* was incorporated into Latin, later the Old French, and finally emerged in English as "Bible".

Divisions of the Bible

The Bible is one book, yet at the same time a library of books.

The Covenant Divisions

The Bible is first of all divided into two covenants or testaments. This division has been a common designation since the 2nd century, and it distinguishes between the strictly Jewish and strictly Christian Scriptures. What Christians call the Old Testament, Jews call the Hebrew Bible. The Old Testament, together with the New Testament, composes the Christian Bible. The Hebrew term *berith* (= covenant, testament) comes from the Old Testament and indicates a binding agreement between two persons or parties. The idea of an Old and a New Covenant comes from the Bible itself. The contract made between God and Israel at Sinai was described in the "Book of the Covenant" (Ex. 24:7; 2 Kg. 23:1-3) and Paul speaks of the law of Moses as the "old covenant" or "old testament" (2 Co. 3:14). In Christian usage, the term "old testament" eventually came to refer to the entire collection of books in the Hebrew Bible.

The term "new covenant" or "new testament" comes from the promise of Jeremiah that God would establish another covenant in the future (Je. 31:31-34) . At the Last Supper, Jesus used the term covenant to refer to his sacrificial death (Mt. 26:28), and later Christians understood that Jeremiah's prophecy had been fulfilled in Jesus Christ (He. 8:6-12). In the atonement of Christ, God made a new covenant with the human race concerning forgiveness of sins which was inaugurated in the life and death of Jesus. By the end of the 2nd century, Christians began calling their collection of distinctively Christian writings the "New Testament", and these were recognized

alongside the Old Testament as equal in authority.

The Book Divisions

The former part of the Bible, the Old Testament, contains 39 separate documents (in the Protestant edition). The latter part of the Bible, the New Testament, contains 27 separate documents. These book divisions apply especially to the English Bible, though not necessarily to earlier versions, as will later be discussed.

The Passage Divisions

The division of biblical documents into shorter passages occurred over a period of time. Originally, there were no such divisions. In fact, the earliest divisions to be made were simply spaces between the words and punctuation. Many ancient languages, including Greek, were written in a running hand without word divisions or punctuation. To write in this manner in English immediately makes clear the challenge of these earliest divisions.

THENWHATBECOMESOFOURBOASTINGITISEXCLUDEDONWHATP
RINCIPLEONTHEPRINCIPLEOFWORKSNOBUTONTHEPRINCIPLEOFFAITH
FORWEHOLDTHATAMANISJUSTIFIEDBYFAITHAPARTFROMTHELAW
(Ro. 3:27-28).

Besides word division and punctuation, the Hebrew language was written without vowels, and again, a sample of consonantal writing in English demonstrates how much is expected of the reader, e.g., *NTHBGNNNGGDCRTDTHHVNSNDTHR TH*" (= in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth) . By the 10th century, vowels in the form of small dots and dashes had been added by Jewish scholars to the Hebrew consonants.

Paragraphing in the New Testament had begun by the 4th century, though each translation of the Bible has maintained the freedom to alter previous paragraphing according to the interpretation of the translator(s) . Modern chapter divisions were completed by the 13th century, and verse divisions began appearing in the 16th century.

The Languages of the Bible

The Bible is written in three languages. Most of the Old Testament has been written in Hebrew. A very few areas of the Old Testament (parts of the books of Daniel and Ezra) were written in Aramaic, an international language of diplomacy in the ancient Near East and spoken by the Jews after their Babylonian exile. Aramaic was the spoken language of Jesus, and a few words and phrases have been retained in the New Testament without being translated. The bulk of the New Testament,

however, is written in Greek, the international language of the Roman Empire.

Order and Categories of Books

The English Bible has been arranged partly topically and partly chronologically. This inconsistency is somewhat confusing to most readers, but the tradition has been so long standing that it is unlikely to be changed. As far as chronology is concerned, the Old Testament is obviously older than the New Testament. However, within the Old Testament, the various books are grouped together topically as much as chronologically. Within the New Testament, the order of books gives no clue as to the chronology in which they were written, though they do preserve a partial chronology with respect to the order in which events happened (i.e., the events of the Gospels occurred before the events in Acts) . The gospels are grouped together topically, the letters of Paul topically (and apparently according to length, with the longer ones first and the shorter ones last) , and the miscellaneous letters by the others have been arranged according to length. Revelation is last due to its content.

ENGLISH OLD TESTAMENT[1]

The Pentateuch (the Law) - 5 Books

Genesis	Numbers
Exodus	Deuteronomy
Leviticus	

History - 12 Books

Joshua	2 Kings
Judges	1 Chronicles
Ruth	2 Chronicles
1 Samuel	Ezra
2 Samuel	Nehemiah
1 Kings	Esther

Poetry - 5 Books

Job	Ecclesiastes
Psalms	Song of Songs
Proverbs	

[1] One should distinguish between the chronology in the English Old Testament and the chronology in the Hebrew Bible. Though they contain the same materials, the order of arrangement is different. The English Old Testament more nearly follows the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament in about 250 BC, rather than the order in the Hebrew Bible.

Major Prophets - 5 Books[2]

Isaiah
Jeremiah
Lamentations
Ezekiel
Daniel

Minor Prophets - 12 Books

Hosea
Joel
Amos
Obadiah
Jonah
Micah
Nahum
Habakkuk
Zephaniah
Haggai
Zechariah
Malachi

NEW TESTAMENT

Gospels – 4 Books

Matthew
Mark
Luke
John

History – 1 Book

Acts of the Apostles

Paul's Epistles (Letters) – 13 Books

Romans
1 Corinthians
2 Corinthians
Galatians
Ephesians
Phillipians
Colossians
1 Thessalonians
2 Thessalonians
1 Timothy
2 Timothy
Titus
Philemon

General Epistles (Letters) – 8 Books

Hebrews
James
1 Peter
2 Peter
1 John
2 John
3 John
Jude

Prophetic – 1 Book

Revelation

[2] The designations of "major" and "minor" have to do with the length of the books. Lamentations is a short book, but since it was believed to have been composed by Jeremiah, it follows his longer work.

Origin of the Bible

Christians believe that the Bible is the Word of God in the words of humans. This belief means that the Bible can be examined from two perspectives, a theological one and an historical one.

Authorship

The Bible claims to be inspired, that is, it claims to be the joint activity of both God and humans (2 Ti. 3:16; 2 Pe. 1:21). As such, it embraces three elements -- cause, human agency, and product. God is the prime mover in the origin of Scripture. The prophet or writer was the means by which and through which God spoke. The Holy Spirit employed the attention, investigation, memory, fancy, logic -- in short, all the faculties of the writers. The result was a divinely authoritative book.

The exact number of biblical writers is unknown since many of the books are anonymous (i.e., Joshua, Hebrews, etc.). A common figure is that there are about 40 authors, but this is an approximation. Often a name became linked with a book by tradition, either Jewish or Christian, but the exact authorship is still a task for scholarly study. It is even possible, and in some cases likely, that a given book may have had more than one writer involved in its production. Over a period of roughly 1500 years, the documents of the Bible were slowly produced, collected and preserved.

History of Transmission

The process by which the Bible has come to us has many facets.

Early Forms and Sources

In some cases, the biblical writers had sources to aid them in their composition, sources that are no longer available to us today (cf. 1 Kg. 11:41; 14:19, 29; 15:7, 23, 31; Lk. 1:1-4, etc.). Also, in many cases there was an oral form before there was a written form. This factor is especially important in the study of the four gospels, whose components first circulated as parables, stories, sayings, and so forth prior to being recorded.

Autographs

When scholars refer to the autographs of the Bible, they refer to the actual writings that were set down by the biblical authors. None of these original manuscripts have survived, at least to our present knowledge. Scholars work from ancient copies of these autographs, called manuscripts.

Canonization

Canonization is the process by which the books of the Bible were gathered into an authoritative collection. The term "canon" is applied to those books which were so accepted. Both the canons of the Old Testament and the New Testament were settled over a period of time. The Old Testament canon was informally accepted and in use well before the time of Christ, and it was formally accepted by the Jews near the end of the 1st century at Jamnia. The New Testament canon was formally accepted in the early 4th century, though its informal acceptance and general usage was earlier.

Translation

When the Bible is translated out of the original languages into another language, such a translation is called a version. Translation is the task of scholars, and because language is always in the process of changing, translation is always an ongoing discipline.

Interpretation

Interpretation is the method by which one studies the Bible so as to understand its message. The science of interpretation is called hermeneutics.

The Old Testament

There are two events in the Old Testament that occupy center stage. The most important event is the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt under the leadership of Moses. All events prior to the exodus anticipate it, and all events after the exodus look back to it. The Genesis narratives are the pre-history of the nation before the exodus, while the events succeeding the exodus are all interpreted in light of the mighty redemptive action of God who brought Israel out "with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm". The exodus was not merely a political deliverance. It was the choice of a nation through which God would channel....

....his own divine self-disclosure,

....the history of salvation in which God would intervene on the human plane, and

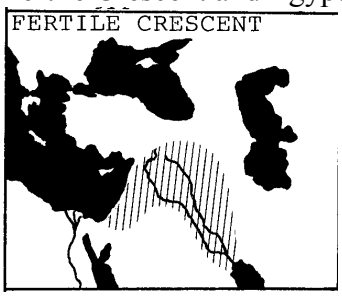
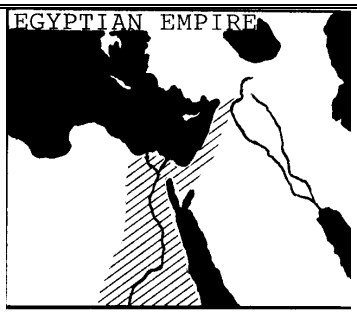
....an inspired record of salvation and revelation.

The other most important event in the Old Testament is the exile of the Israelites by Assyria and Babylon. The national entity which had been formed in the exodus was broken by exile. The disintegration of the nation began when its monarchy divided into the north and the south. By repeatedly breaking covenant with God, both nations brought judgment upon themselves. The writing prophets of the 8th, 7th and 6th centuries BC all were consumed with the message of coming doom. When the tragedy finally occurred, Israel had lost her king, her temple, and her land. It is out of the exile that the hope for a messiah was born. In the exile, the final

preparations for God's future redemptive acts were set in motion -- preparations that would set the stage for the birth of Jesus of Nazareth.

A Walk Through the Old Testament

To grasp the enormity of the events in the Bible and to synchronize them with known secular history is no small task. A brief sketch of the most important people, events, biblical books and their correlation with secular history will be helpful.

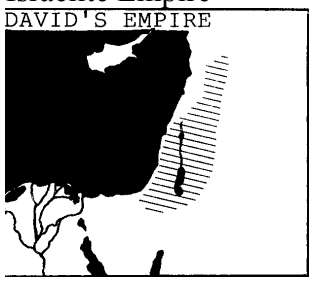
Sacred History	Time	Books	Secular History
The Primeval Period			
Stage 1 of the pre-history of Israel Creation – Adam's Family Fall Flood – Noah's Family The Nations	?	Genesis 1-11	Primitive humans
The Patriarchal Period			
Stage 2 of the pre-history of Israel Abraham – God selects a family Isaac Jacob Joseph	2000 - 1550 BC	Genesis 12-50	Civilization begins in the Fertile Crescent and Egypt 
The Egyptian Sojourn			
The sons of Israel become slaves in Egypt	1550 – 1300 BC	Between Genesis and Exodus	Transition from the Middle Kingdom to Egyptian Empire
Exodus / Conquest			
The family of Israel becomes a nation and secures a homeland Moses - Torah Aaron - Priesthood Joshua - Holy War	1300 – 1250 BC	Exodus Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy	
Tribal Confederacy			
Religious unity, but no central government	1250 – 1020 BC	Judges Ruth 1 Samuel 1-9	Invasion of the Sea Peoples and settlement in Southwest Canaan (Philistines)

Deborah – Military
Gideon – Deliverers
Samson
Samuel

The Monarchy

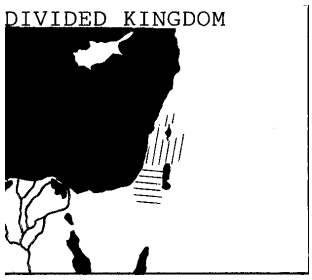
The Israelites are ruled by kings 1020 – 587 BC

United Kingdom 1020 – 921 BC — 1 Samuel 10-31; 2 Samuel; 1 Kings 1-11



Israelite Empire

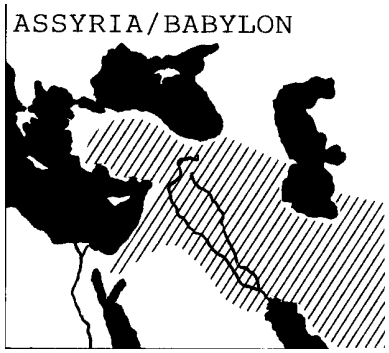
Divided Kingdom
Northern and Southern nations



Judah	Israel				
Rehoboam	Jeroboam	921	921	1 Kings 12-22	Rise of Assyria
Hezekiah	Ahab	to	to	2 Kings	
Josiah	Elijah	587	721	1 & 2	Rise of Babylon
	Elisha	BC	BC	Chronicles	

Israel is deported to Assyria in 721 BC
Judah is deported to Babylon in 587 BC

Amos
Hosea
Isaiah
Micah
Jeremiah
Zephaniah
Joel
Jonah
Nahum
Obadiah
Habakkuk



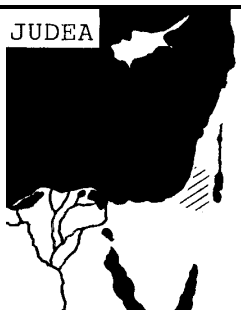
The Exile

The Jews of the southern nation live in Babylon 587 – 538 BC — Lamentations; Ezekiel; Daniel

Synagogues begin

Rise of Persia

The Restoration

The Jews return to Palestine with Persian permission. *A second temple is built*	538 – 430? BC	Ezra Nehemiah Esther Zechariah Haggai Malachi	

Between the Testaments

Often called the "Silent Years" because prophetic inspiration was believed to have ceased	430 – 4 BC	Apocrypha Apocalyptic	Rise of Greece Rise of Rome 

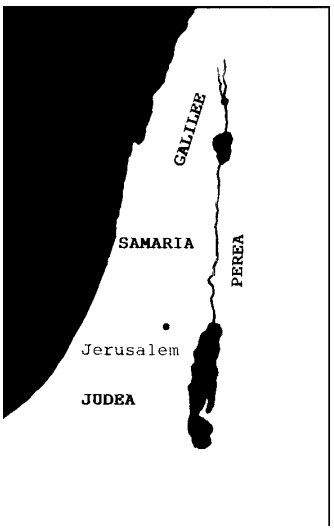
The New Testament

The most important event of the New Testament is the ministry, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Everything in the New Testament is grounded in this theme. The proclamation of this event is called the *kerygma* (= preaching) while the event itself is called the *euangelion* (= gospel, good news). The significance of the gospel is that in the person and work of Christ, God has graciously revealed himself most fully and decisively for the salvation of women and men. The two primary realities of this salvation are grace and faith.

A Walk Through the New Testament

Sacred History	Time	Books	Secular History
Jesus' Birth and Infancy			
The miraculous nature of Jesus' birth sets the stage for Jesus' self-proclamation that he "..came from God."	4 BC	Matt. 1-2 Luke 1-2	Death of Herod the Great Augustus, Caesar in Rome
Years of Silence:			
Jesus grows to manhood and learns the carpenter's trade			Rulership in Judea passes to Roman Procurators
The Preparation Period			
The initiation of Jesus' ministry			
Ministry of John the Baptist Jesus' Baptism The Temptation	26AD?	Matt. 3-4 Mark 1 Luke 3-4	Herod Antipas, Tetrarch in Galilee
Early Judean Ministry			
Jesus initiates his ministry in Judea	27AD?	John 1-4	Pontius Pilate, Procurator
Galilean Ministry			
The heart of Jesus' public ministry was conducted in Galilee, his home province		Matt. 5-19 Mark 2-9 Luke 5-9 John 5-6	
<u>Stage 1</u> Call of Disciples Sermon on the mount Healings / Miracles Popularity Criticism			
<u>Stage 2</u> Sabbath Conflicts Choice of Apostles Various teachings Death of John Feeding Miracles			
<u>Stage 3</u>			

Withdrawal from Galilee
More Miracles
More Teachings



The Closing Period

After the collapse of the Galilean campaign Jesus began moving toward Jerusalem for the passion	30 AD?	Matt. 19-28 Mark 10-16 Luke 10-24 John 7-21	
Trip Toward Jerusalem Passing through Perea; Final Days in Jerusalem; Passion and Resurrection; Appearances			

The Primative Church

The new life of the church commences with the Spirit at Pentecost	30AD?		
The Jerusalem Church	30-46 AD?	Acts 1-12	Herod Agrippa, King of Judea
Hellenistic Mission	46-68 AD?	Acts 13-28 Paul's letters	Felix and Festus Procurators Nero, Caesar in Rome

Jewish Wars

Rome Destroys Jerusalem	70 AD		

Christian Persecution

Christians face martyrdom from the imperial government	90s AD	Revelation	Domitian, Caesar in Rome

A Correlative Reading of the Old Testament

The following is an order for reading the Old Testament that attempts to correlate the different sections so that they can be better understood in relationship to each other. Such an attempt is ambitious, since it proceeds upon several grounds, i.e., similarity of subject matter, historical chronology, dating of documents, and so forth, and as such cannot satisfy all these criteria at once. Furthermore, there is much scholarly debate about some of the foregoing issues. Still, the attempt has enough benefits in it to make it worthwhile.

Genesis 1; Psalm 33, 104
Genesis 2; Psalm 8, 139; Proverbs 31:10-31; Song of Songs 1-8
Genesis 3-11
Job; Psalm 88
Genesis 12-50
Exodus 1-13
Exodus 14; Psalm 77, 124
Exodus 15-18
Exodus 19; Psalm 29
Exodus 20-23
Exodus 24; Psalm 119
Exodus 25-40
Leviticus 1-27
Numbers 1-19
Numbers 20; Psalm 105
Numbers 21; Psalm 136
Numbers 22-36
Deuteronomy 1-4
Deuteronomy 5; Psalm 19
Deuteronomy 6-30
Deuteronomy 31; Psalm 81
Deuteronomy 32-34; Psalm 90
Joshua 1-2
Joshua 3; Psalm 68
Joshua 4; Psalm 66, 114
Joshua 5-11
Joshua 12; Psalm 47
Joshua 13-23
Joshua 24; Psalm 95
Judges 1-21; Ruth 1-4

1 Samuel 1-15
1 Samuel 16; Psalm 78
1 Samuel 17; Psalm 23
1 Samuel 18; Psalm 35
1 Samuel 19; Psalms 22, 36, 59, 70
1 Samuel 20
1 Samuel 21; Psalms 13, 34, 56
1 Samuel 22; Psalms 4, 5, 31, 52, 55, 142, 143
1 Samuel 23; Psalms 6, 54
1 Samuel 24; Psalms 17, 57
1 Samuel 25; Psalm 37, 141
1 Samuel 26
1 Samuel 27; 1 Chronicles 12:1-22; Psalm 144
1 Samuel 28-31; 1 Chronicles 10
2 Samuel 1-4; Psalms 30, 58
2 Samuel 5; 1 Chronicles 11:1-9; 12:23-40; 14; Psalms 20, 40, 110, 133
2 Samuel 6; 1 Chronicles 13, 15-16
2 Samuel 7; 1 Chronicles 17; Psalm 2
2 Samuel 8; 1 Chronicles 18; Psalms 9, 21, 60, 71, 108
2 Samuel 9
2 Samuel 10; 1 Chronicles 19; Psalm 16
2 Samuel 11; 1 Chronicles 20:1-3
2 Samuel 12; Psalms 32, 51
2 Samuel 13-14
2 Samuel 15; Psalms 3, 61, 63
2 Samuel 16; Psalms 7, 12, 41
2 Samuel 17; Psalms 62, 132
2 Samuel 18
2 Samuel 19; Psalms 27, 109
2 Samuel 20; Psalms 11, 25, 28
2 Samuel 21; 1 Chronicles 20:4-8; Psalm 140
2 Samuel 22; Psalm 18
2 Samuel 23; 1 Chronicles 11:10-47; 27; Psalm 26
2 Samuel 24; 1 Chronicles 21; Psalms 38, 146
1 Chronicles 22-24
1 Chronicles 25; Psalm 150
1 Chronicles 26, 28
1 Kings 1; 1 Chronicles 29

1 Kings 2; Psalm 39
1 Kings 3; 2 Chronicles 1; Psalms 42, 45, 72, 149
1 Kings 4; Psalm 111, 112; Proverbs 1:1--22:16
1 Kings 5; 2 Chronicles 2
1 Kings 6; 2 Chronicles 3; Psalms 15, 113, 122, 127
1 Kings 7; 2 Chronicles 4; Psalms 134, 135
1 Kings 8; 2 Chronicles 5-6; 7:1-10; Psalms 24, 46, 48, 50, 65, 84, 87, 99, 125
1 Kings 9; 2 Chronicles 7:11-22; 8
1 Kings 10; 2 Chronicles 9:1-28; Psalms 67, 75, 128
1 Kings 11; 2 Chronicles 9:29-31; Ecclesiastes 1-12; Psalm 1, 49
1 Kings 12; 2 Chronicles 10-11; Psalm 76
1 Kings 13-14; 2 Chronicles 12
1 Kings 15; 2 Chronicles 13-16
1 Kings 16-21
1 Kings 22; 2 Chronicles 17-20
2 Kings 1-7; 8:1-15
2 Kings 8:16-24; 2 Chronicles 21
2 Kings 8:25-29; 2 Chronicles 22:1-6
2 Kings 9:1-13
2 Kings 9:14-29; 2 Chronicles 22:7-9
2 Kings 9:30-37; 10
2 Kings 11; 2 Chronicles 22:10-12; 23
2 Kings 12; 2 Chronicles 24; Psalm 101
Psalms 91, 92, 93, 100
2 Kings 13
2 Kings 14; 2 Chronicles 25; Amos 1-9
2 Kings 15:1-7; 2 Chronicles 26; Psalm 82; Isaiah 6
2 Kings 15:8-31; Jonah 1-4; Hosea 1-14
2 Kings 15:32-38; 2 Chronicles 27; Isaiah 1-5
2 Kings 16; 2 Chronicles 28; Isaiah 7-8; 9:1--10:4; Psalm 83
2 Kings 17; Isaiah 10:5--12:6; 13-23
Isaiah 24-27
2 Kings 18-19; 2 Chronicles 29-31; 32:1-23; Isaiah 28-33;
36-37; Psalms 43, 44, 64, 73
Isaiah 34-35
2 Kings 20; 2 Chronicles 32:24-33; Isaiah 38-39; Proverbs
22:17--31:9; Micah 1-7
2 Kings 21; 2 Chronicles 33; Psalm 14

2 Kings 22; 23:1-30; 2 Chronicles 34-35; Zephaniah 1-3;
Jeremiah 1-10, 18-20; Nahum; Psalms 86, 94
2 Kings 23:31-37; 24; 2 Chronicles 36:1-14; Habakkuk 1-3;
Jeremiah 11-17, 23, 25-26, 35-36, 45-48
Ezekiel 1-32
2 Kings 25; 2 Chronicles 36:15-23; Psalms 53, 69, 74, 79, 80, 89, 102, 106, 130, 137; Lamentations 1-5; Jeremiah 21-22, 24, 27-34, 37-44, 49-52; Ezekiel 33-37
Ezekiel 38-39
Ezekiel 40-48
Daniel 1-12
Isaiah 40-66
1 Chronicles 1-9
Psalms 120, 121, 123, 131
Ezra 1; Psalms 98, 115, 126, 148
Ezra 2-3; Haggai 1-2; Zechariah 1-8
Ezra 4; Psalm 129; Obadiah
Ezra 5-6
Malachi 1-4
Nehemiah 1-5
Nehemiah 6; Psalm 147
Nehemiah 7-13
Psalms 116, 117, 118
Ezra 7-10
Psalms 85, 96, 97, 103, 107
Esther 1-10; Psalm 10
Joel 1-3
Zechariah 9-14
Psalms 138, 145

A Correlative Reading of the New Testament

There are two primary areas to correlate in the New Testament in terms of parallel passages: the four gospels with each other, and the letters of Paul with the narratives of Acts. The other New Testament documents may be added according to a general chronology (which is admittedly debated by scholars), but as with the Old Testament, even though a correlative reading can never satisfy all the criteria involved, it is nevertheless worth the effort.

Matthew 1:1; Mark 1:1; Luke 1:1-4; John 1:1-18

Luke 1:5-56

Matthew 1:2-17; Luke 3:23-38

Matthew 1:18-25

Luke 1:57--2:40

Matthew 2:1-23

Luke 2:41-52

Matthew 3:1--4:11; Mark 1:2-13; Luke 3:1-22; 4:1-13; John 1:19-34

John 1:35--4:42

Matthew 4:12-17; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:14-15; John 4:43-46a

Luke 4:16-30

Matthew 4:18-25; 8:1-4, 14-17; 9:1-17; 12:1-21; Mark 1:16--3:19a; Luke 4:31--6:16

Matthew 5-7; Luke 6:17-49

Matthew 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10; John 4:46b-54

Luke 7:11-17

Mark 3:19b-21

Matthew 12:22-50; Mark 3:22-35; Luke 11:14-23

Luke 11:24-36

Luke 8:1-3

John 5

Matthew 8:18-34; 9:18-26; 13:1-52; Mark 4-5; Luke 8:4-56

Matthew 11; Luke 7:18-35

Matthew 13:53-58; 14:1-36; Mark 6; Luke 9:1-17; John 6:1-59

John 6:60-71

Matthew 15-16; Mark 7-8; Luke 9:18-27; 12:1, 54-56

Matthew 17:1--18:5; Mark 9:1-41; Luke 9:28-50

Matthew 18:6-9; Mark 9:42-50

Matthew 18:10-35; Luke 15:3-7

Matthew 19:1-2; Mark 10:1; Luke 9:51-62

Matthew 9:27-38; Mark 10:46-52; Luke 18:35-43

Matthew 10
Luke 10:1--11:13
Luke 11:37-54
Luke 12:2-53, 57-59; 13:1--17:37
Luke 18:1-14
John 7:1--10:21
Matthew 19:3-30; Mark 10:1-31; Luke 18:15-30
Matthew 20:1-16
John 10:22--11:57
Matthew 20:17-34; Mark 10:32-45; Luke 18:31-34
Luke 19:1-27
John 12:1-19
Matthew 21:1--25:46; Mark 11-13; Luke 19:28--21:38
John 12:20-50
Matthew 26:1-35; Mark 14:1-31; Luke 7:36-50; 22:1-38; John 13
John 14-17
Matthew 26:36--27:66; Mark 14:32--15:47; Luke 22:39--23:56; John 18-19
Matthew 28:1-15; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-43; John 20
Matthew 28:16-20; Mark 16:9-20; Luke 24:44-53; John 25
Acts 1-15
Galatians 1-6
Acts 16
Philippians 1-4
Acts 17
1 Thessalonians 1-5
2 Thessalonians 1-3
Acts 18
1 Corinthians 1-16
2 Corinthians 1-13
Romans 1-16
Acts 19
Ephesians 1-6
Acts 20-28
Colossians 1-4
Phi lemon
1 Timothy 1-6
Titus 1-3
2 Timothy 1-4

James 1-5
1 Peter 1-5
Hebrews 1-13
Jude
2 Peter 1-3
1 John 1-5
2 John
3 John
Revelation 1-22

Correctly Handling The Word

> *Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.*
>
> 2 Timothy 2:15

Better Bible study should he the goal of every growing Christian. If the Bible is the Word of God in the words of humans, then the believer who reads the Scriptures must be serious in the attempt to understand what they say as well as avoid making them say something which they does not intend. Enter the discipline of hermeneutics! Hermeneutics, or the science of interpretation, is not so much a look at what the Bible says as it is *how* the Bible says what it says with a view toward understanding it's meaning.

At the very beginning, one's approach toward interpretation is related to one's assumptions about the Bible. If one approaches the Bible like Christians through the centuries have done, that is, as the fully inspired and accurate authority for the life of the church, then one will be careful to approach it reverently and with great care.

The Primary Goal

The task of any Christian who reads the Bible is twofold. First, one must understand what the text meant for its first hearers and readers. This part is called interpretation. Second, one must be able to discover the relevance of that original meaning for the modern reader. This part is called application. As obvious as this two-fold task may seem, it is here at "square one" that a correct handling of the Word often breaks down.

What Might Hinder Understanding?

Various factors may block the reader from the primary goal, sometimes before he/she even picks up the Bible. Some of these factors might be:

A Careless Attitude

Does the Bible need to be interpreted? Only a momentary reflection should give an affirmative answer. If Paul encouraged Timothy to "correctly handle" the Word, he surely implies that there are incorrect ways to handle it also (2 Ti. 2:15). Every literary work must be interpreted, whether the Bible, Shakespeare, or the Constitution of the United States.

Modern Culture

Our culture is not that of the ancient Near East where the Bible was written. Furthermore, there are diverse cultures reflected within the Bible itself. The culture of Abraham, for instance, was not the culture of Paul. To properly understand what the Bible meant to its first readers, one must be willing to examine the culture that surrounds it.

Application Without Interpretation

Frequently, the believer is in such a hurry to find out what God has to say to him/her personally through the Word that he/she neglects the all-important step of finding out what it meant to its first readers. Such a method can be disastrous. There are no short-cuts! Interpretation must always precede application.

Pre-Understandings

Virtually all readers come to the Bible with preconceptions and presuppositions. Most have been conditioned by the religious beliefs with which they grew up -- correct or not. These beliefs, even if correct, are not easy to uproot, and if one is not careful, such presuppositions will bias his mind as he looks to the Scriptures so that he reads meaning *into* the Word of God rather than extracting the intended meaning *out of* it. The primary task of the interpreter of Scripture is not to prove that he/she is right in his/her preconceptions, but to discover what the text meant to its original readers. Only then can one address the further question of application.

Dogmatism

One of the easiest snares in which to fall is the refusal to recognize one's own human limitations, or to put it another way, to assume that one's own way of looking at things must surely be correct and all others wrong. The wise interpreter will freely admit his/her own tendency toward error and thereby build a tolerance for others when he/she thinks that they might be wrong. Two principles will be helpful here:

The Bible is Sufficient, but not Exhaustive: The Bible will not necessarily tell us everything we might wish to know, even about things that are themselves

introduced in it.

The Bible is More Clear in Some Places than in Others: It would be a mistake to think that every text is equally clear. For reasons just such as culture and language, there are some passages from which one must withhold dogmatic judgment. On one occasion, for instance, Paul refers to a subject about which he had previously given extensive teaching, but without access to this body of instruction, we would be wise to proceed with caution in interpreting (2 Th. 2:5). This is why obscure passages must give way to more clear passages.

Finally, no one has a monopoly on truth. The Bible warns against being preoccupied with obscurities (1 Ti. 1:3-8; 4:6-7; 6:20; 2 Ti. 2:16-18; Tit. 3:9-11). As one person has said, "The kingpin in every cultic machine is the obscurities in the Bible."[3]

Humility, Sincerity and Workmanship

If pride is the bane of sound interpretation, it follows that one must strive for its antithesis (2 Ti. 2:15, 23-26), a humble, sincere and skilful handling of God's Word. Theological humility along with a deep devotion to the Bible's truth must be held together.

Lessons from the Past

Without entering into a tedious examination of history, it will be instructive to at least mention something about the strengths and weaknesses of biblical interpreters who have preceded us.

The Rise of Allegorism[4]

Allegorism as a method of interpreting the Old Testament arose among the Jews in the two centuries before Christ. Its premise was that there is a hidden meaning in Scripture beyond the face value meaning. To be sure, there are indeed areas of Scripture that are allegorical (Ezekiel 16 for example), but allegorism as a system sees hidden meaning as a prevailing characteristic of Scripture. Unfortunately, during the 2nd and 3rd centuries after Christ, many Christian interpreters began adopting allegorism as a primary interpretive method. Eventually, this method gained a dominant position and was largely characteristic of the church until the Reformation in the 16th century.

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[3] A. Rendalen, "The Gospel Versus 'The True Church,'" *Verdict* (Mar. 1981) 5.

[4] B. Ramm, *Protestant Bible Interpretation*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970) 24-45.

Brief Examples of Allegorism

To Origen (185?-254?), the fact that Rebekah drew water for Abraham's servant meant that everyone must meet Christ by coming to the wells of Scripture. In the 5th century, one preacher interpreted Herod's slaughter of the children two years old and under as meaning that only trinitarians would be saved (i.e., anything less than "three" was damnable heresy). Medieval interpreters could not only see the word "Jerusalem" in any given passage as representing a city, but also as representing the church, the human soul and heaven, and all this at the same time! Augustine's famous interpretation of the 153 fish in John 21:11 is instructive. He, along with others, reasoned that since the number 153 is the sum of the numbers 1 through 17, and since the number 17 is made up of 10 added to 7, and since 10 is the number of law and 7 is the number of grace, the allegorical message in the passage was concerning law and grace.[5] A more recent example is the fact that in Psalm 46 of the KJV, the 46th word from the beginning is "shake" while the 46th word from the end is "spear". Since Shakespeare was 46 years old in 1611, when the KJV was first published, the priority of the KJV is alleged to be divinely established.

The Problem with Allegorism

Allegorism' s chief problem is its subjectivism. It generally tells us more about what is in the mind of the interpreter than what is in the mind of the biblical writer. If allegorism is allowed as a prevailing method, the Bible can be made to mean virtually anything one wants it to mean. The only limits on the interpreter is the size of his/her imagination! Today, perhaps the most serious expression of allegorism is to be found in the uncontrolled typology of some well-meaning conservatives.

The Rise of Letterism[6]

At the opposite extreme from allegorism is letterism. This approach, which also developed among the Jews before the time of Christ, was characterized by an intense devotion to details of the text, so much so, that they often missed things essential and created mountains out of the incidental. This system was typical of the rabbinic Judaism of Jesus' day, and he criticized it sharply (Mt. 23:23-24).

The Return to a Balanced Literalism[7]

One of the most important accomplishments of the Protestant Reformation was

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[5] For this and other bizarre interpretations of the 153 fish, see F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983) 401.

[6] Ramm, 45-48.

[7] Ramm, 51-59.

a return to the literal meaning of Scripture. Under the influence of Luther and Calvin, the allegorism that had dominated the medieval church was rejected. In its place were put sound principles of interpretation that are the foundation of biblical exegesis today. Literalism does not deny that the Scriptures use figurative language. However, literalism also holds that one should only treat a passage figuratively if there is good reason to believe that the biblical writer intended it to be so received.

The Language of the Bible

God's revelation came to us in human language -- three languages to be exact, Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. Every language has its own special character, and the biblical languages are no exception. It is here, especially, that the wise interpreter should respect the research of biblical scholars.

Some General Characteristics of Language

Words, which are symbols of ideas, are the basic building blocks of any language. The definition of words in a given language is affected by *etymology* (that is, how words are formed), *comparative usage* (that is, how words are used in parallel passages in the same literary composition), *cultural usage* (that is, how words are used in a particular period of history or in other contemporary literature), and *developmental usage* (that is, how words change meaning over periods of time).

Grammar is the set of principles by which words are combined into larger units of thought. Often referred to as "rules", it is worth pointing out that grammar is largely a summary of how a given language works than it is a pre-existing set of laws that are rigid and unchanging.

Syntax is the relationship between words, phrases and clauses. Words are not static units of meaning, but rather, they are idiomatic and semantic symbols whose nuances are affected by what surrounds them. This is easily seen in the English language, where expressions such as "saved by the bell", "kicking the bucket", "striking while the iron is hot" and "once in a blue moon", carry far more meaning as a unit than they do simply as the sum of the definition of the individual words.[8] Biblical languages, like English, also have semantic and idiomatic characteristics. To fail to appreciate or to fail to be aware of these possibilities is as misleading as the preacher who told his foreign audience that he was "tickled to death to be there". His interpreter translated his statement by saying the preacher was so happy to be present that he "scratched himself 'til he died."

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[8] For the origin of these and other similar idioms, see N. Ewart, "Saved by What Bell?" *Readers' Digest* (May 1989) 165-168, condensed from *Everyday Phrases: Their Origins and Meanings* (United Kingdom: Blandford Press, 1983).

Genre refers to literary style. The documents of the Bible come in several literary genres, each of which have characteristics that are peculiar to it. The Bible contains poetry, narrative history, apocalyptic, parables, and so forth. These literary forms cannot be read in a flat way that ignores their character. It would be like reading the allegory *Animal Farm* and concluding that it was a book about agriculture.

Some Particular Characteristics of Biblical Languages

Both Hebrew and Aramaic are consonantal languages, that is, they were written without vowels. At times this characteristic makes translation of the Old Testament more difficult. Though some people are disturbed by textual footnotes, the wise interpreter will not ignore variant possibilities. *All* translators make decisions in ambiguous cases. The translations with footnotes at least tell the English reader where those major decisions have been made.

Precision within languages vary. It is a common cliché that New Testament Greek is more precise than English. Such a statement is only partly true. New Testament Greek is more precise in some respects, as in for instance, its high degree of inflection and verbal options. On the other hand, it is less precise in some respects, as in for instance, its broad use of the genitive case. Furthermore, the original writings of the Bible were written in an ancient style which did not have punctuation, spacing between words, paragraphs. All of these interpretive conveniences are products of the translators. Chapters and verses were not added to the Bible until the Middle Ages.

Why So Many Translations?

There are many reasons, historical and otherwise, why there are a great many translations of the Bible. However, the following are several reasons why it is valid to have more than one translation. First, languages constantly change. The English of Chaucer was not that of Shakespeare, nor Shakespeare's English that of Thomas Jefferson. Therefore, the work of translation is an ongoing task in order to keep pace with the shifts that come over the years. Second, manuscript study in the original languages is also an ongoing task. There are available today many more and much older manuscripts of the Bible's books than, say, 300 years ago. Discoveries such as the Dead Sea Scrolls are extremely important for biblical translators. Finally, all translations are limited by the ability of the translator(s) . New translations constantly strive for greater accuracy in getting at what the biblical writers wanted to say.

The Cruciality of Context

Everyone knows what it feels like to have someone repeat his words out of

context. Wars have been started for such things! In fact, in 1870 the Franco-Prussian war began over an incident when Bismarck released to the press an edited form of a dispatch that normally would have caused little notice, but after being reduced from 200 words to 20 words, it incited France to a call to arms.[9] Some of the most serious errors of biblical interpretation have arisen out of an ignored, distorted or misplaced context. The real tragedy is that often a passage, even though stripped of its context, will be given and received with authority simply because it comes from the Bible. All interpreters must remember that there is no authority whatsoever in a passage used out of its setting.

Following are some crucial areas of context to consider when interpreting the Bible.

Biblical Context

It is of primary importance where in the context of the whole Bible a particular passage is located. Each Testament, Old and New, has unique features of its own that must be considered. There is such a thing as a theology of the Old Testament and a theology of the New Testament. Also, the Bible is more than a book -- it is a library of books. Each book of the Bible has key themes and individual characteristics. For instance, to properly interpret a passage in the Colossian epistle, one must know something of the Colossian heresy. To interpret passages in the Book of Revelation, one ought to know something of the history and theology of martyrdom as well as something of the apocalyptic genre of writing. Apples in the context of the Song of Songs 2:5, where they refer to an aphrodisiac, are not to be interpreted with the same force as apples in Joel 1:12, where they refer to the produce of the fruit-farmer.

Literary Context

The Bible is not just a book of maxims, though certainly it contains maxims. Most of the Bible is written so that ideas flow into one another. Usually a biblical statement does not stand alone, but it must be interpreted in light of what has preceded it and what follows it. Even after one has located a passage within a particular topic, he/she must still carefully consider the immediate context of the passage. This often involves reading two or three paragraphs on either side of the passage. Often a particular writer in Scripture will exhibit certain tendencies in his writing. Just as there are Old Testament and New Testament theologies, each with a distinctive character, there are Pauline, Lukan and Johannine theologies, each with a distinctive character. By finding parallel statements by the same writer, light can often be shed on a particular passage.

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[9] T. Wallbank and A. Fletcher, *Living World History* (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1958) 461.

Problems in Context

Parallels in biblical documents by different authors may also help to interpret passages when the various writings are addressing the same subject. Many Bibles have ready-made cross-referencing indices either as a center column, in the margins, or in the back of the Bible. Some serious cautions are in order, however. It is imperative to be aware that while these kinds of parallelisms are often helpful, they can also be misleading, especially if one automatically assumes that a particular writer uses a word or phrase identically with another writer. Paul speaks of faith and works (Ro. 4:3-4; Ep. 2:8-9), and James speaks of faith and works (Ja. 2:14-24) , but they do not use the words or concepts in precisely the same way. Similar wording does not necessarily give similar meaning. Even the same word can be used in a variety of ways, depending on the context.

A further caution should be given regarding proof-texting. Proof-texting is the statement of a proposition about doctrine and then the citation of a list of texts which "prove" the proposition to be true. Very often this sort of method strips the various cited passages of their context. The use of proof-texts can be legitimate as a sort of biblical footnoting, but only so long as sound contextual interpretation precedes it.

Finally, some areas of Scripture, especially the Old Testament wisdom literature, have very little immediate context. Therefore, one must rely more heavily on parallelisms and word studies to extract the meaning.

Sacred History

> *And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.*
>
> Luke 24:27

There is a difference between history in general and sacred history. History in general attempts to describe the movements of world civilizations and their causes, focusing upon those persons and events which seem to historians to most affect the structure and condition of the world. Sacred history, on the other hand, often intersects only incidentally or in some cases not at all with persons and events that are highly significant in the general assessment. Instead, sacred history focuses upon those persons and events which are important for the self-disclosure of God in human history. Abraham is unknown in ordinary history, yet he is extremely important in sacred history. The exodus is not mentioned in the annals of the ancient world, but it is the primary salvation event of the Old Testament. The nation of Israel was for most of its existence a minor force in the ancient Near East, yet God chose that clan of slaves to be his special people. Jesus of Nazareth is barely mentioned in the secular history of the first two centuries AD, yet in sacred history he is the single most

important figure in the scheme of the universe.

Thus sacred history, recorded in the Bible, is selective history. It claims divine inspiration (2 Ti. 3:16; 2 Pe. 1:20-21) , and it is organized along the lines of what God considers significant in the divine scheme of things, not what humans consider significant for their social projects.

The Geographical Setting

The setting for the sacred history of the Old Testament is the ancient Near East, an area that embraces Mesopotamia, Syria, Palestine (Canaan) and Egypt. Altogether, these areas are called the Fertile Crescent. Of these four areas, Palestine (which gets its name from the Philistines) is by far the most important. In the New Testament, the geographical thrust of sacred history moves westward in the expansion of the early Christian church so that it embraces the Mediterranean world, especially Asia Minor, Greece and Italy.

Following are some of the most important geographical features of these areas.

Rivers: Tigris, Euphrates, Jordan, Nile

Lakes: Galilee, Dead (Salt)

Seas: Red, Mediterranean

Mountain Ranges: Sinai, Central Palestine

Deserts: Sinai, Negev, Arabia

Cities in Mesopotamia: Ur, Haran

Cities in Palestine: Jerusalem, Samaria, Antioch

Cities in Africa: Alexandria

Cities in Asia Minor: Ephesus, Colossae

Cities in Greece: Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth

Cities in Italy: Rome

The Formation of the Nation Israel

The majority of the Old Testament describes the national experience of a small Palestinian nation called Israel, a nation that developed from the posterity of 12 clans which in turn were sired by 12 sons of one desert nomad (Ex. 1:1-5). The formation of the nation began in Egypt, where this family was enslaved by the Pharaohs and ruthlessly worked in the various state building projects (Ex. 1:6-14).

Moses

From among this group of slaves, a son was born by the name of Moses (Ex. 2:1-2). By providential circumstances, this child was reared in Pharaoh's court (Ex.

2:10). When grown, however, he was forced to flee the country after defending a fellow clansman against an Egyptian slave-master (Ex. 2:11-15) . Forty years later, God appeared to him on Mt. Sinai (also called Horeb) to call him as the leader who would set his clansmen free and form them into a nation (Ex. 3:1-12).

The Exodus

Moses' return to Egypt set up the most tremendous contest one could imagine. It was not merely a contest between Moses and Pharaoh, but rather, a contest between Yahweh God and the deities of Egypt. In a series of terrible plagues (Ex. 7-11) , God demonstrated his power over the gods of Egypt and his gracious choice of Israel as his people (Dt. 7:6-9). In the final plague, called the Passover, every firstborn son in Egypt died (Ex. 12:12-13). With mighty power, Yahweh delivered the people he had chosen (Ex. 12:50-51; Dt. 6:20-23).

The danger was not over, however. Pharaoh was quick to pursue the fleeing refugees (Ex. 14:5-9). Once again, in a mighty display of power, Yahweh saved his people when he drowned the entire Egyptian army in the waters of the Red Sea (Ex. 14:19-22, 26-31).

The Giving of Torah

From the Red Sea, the Israelites went to Moses' previous home, the Sinai mountains where Moses had seen Yahweh in the burning bush (Ex. 19:1-2). Here God gave to them a law, summarized in the decalog (10 Commandments) but expanded to include social, moral and religious directives (Ex. 20:1-17).

The law given at Sinai came in two important forms. Some laws were apodictic, that is, they were commands in the form of "you shall" and "you shall not" (i.e., 10 Commandments). Other laws were case laws, that is, they were directives concerning what to do in given circumstances. Case laws usually begin with "if such and such a condition exists.... then you shall do so and so" (cf. Ex. 21:18-19).

The Sojourn

From Sinai, the Israelites were to proceed northeast toward Palestine, a land God had promised to give to them as their own (Nu. 13:1-2). At the southern borders, however, the clans became fearful of the wars that would certainly result if they attempted to enter the land (Nu. 13:30--14:4). Because of their lack of confidence in Yahweh, God sent them back to stay in the Sinai desert until that generation had been replaced by a new one (Nu. 14:26-35). After 40 years of waiting, they again prepared to enter Canaan, this time from the east side of the Jordan (Dt. 1:3-5; Josh. 1:1-3).

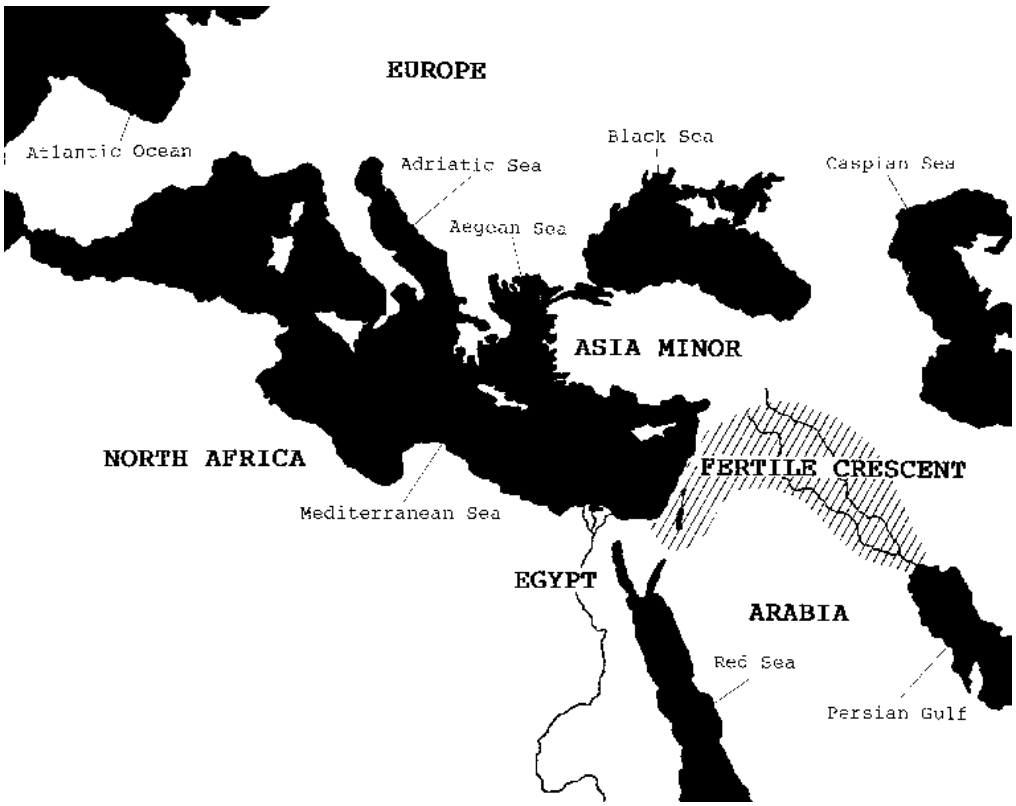
The Primordial Events

While the formation of the nation Israel begins in Egypt with the exodus, important questions still need to be answered about their national existence. How did they get to Egypt, for instance, and where was God before he appeared to Moses? Beyond that, how did the world itself get here? What was the nature of this God who appeared in fiery bushes, who chose people to be his own by gracious sovereignty, yet strictly disciplined them in the desert? These questions are answered in the collection of ancient traditions called the Book of Genesis.

Genesis has two major sections, chapters 1-11 and 12-50. In the first section Yahweh God is described as the Creator of the universe and all its creatures. However, also is described a great human rebellion against God, a rebellion which began with the first humans (Ge. 3) and continued in their offspring (Ge. 4:1--6:8). So severe was this rebellion that God annihilated with a tremendous flood all but one man, Noah, and his family (Ge. 6-9) . Still the rebellion did not cease. Humans seemed intent upon self-aggrandizement (Ge. 10:8-12; 11:1-9). Out of this milieu of rebellion, God chose a man to whom he would begin to reveal himself.

This man, Abraham, begins the second section of Genesis. To this nomad and his descendants, Isaac and Jacob, God continued to reveal himself in providence, in angelic visitations, and particularly in covenantal promises (Ge. 12-38). He promised this family great posterity and land, so much so that all the nations would ultimately find blessing through them (Ge. 12:1-3). God called Abraham to leave his home in Mesopotamia and journey to Palestine, which in the course of time he did. However, God was very selective about whom he chose as the heirs to his promises. It was not all of Abraham's children, but only those selected by God that were to be heirs to the promise (Ge. 21:1-13; 27-28). Abraham's grandson, Jacob (also named Israel), descended into Egypt with the entire clan, some 70 persons in all (Ge. 46).

There they remained until the time of Moses.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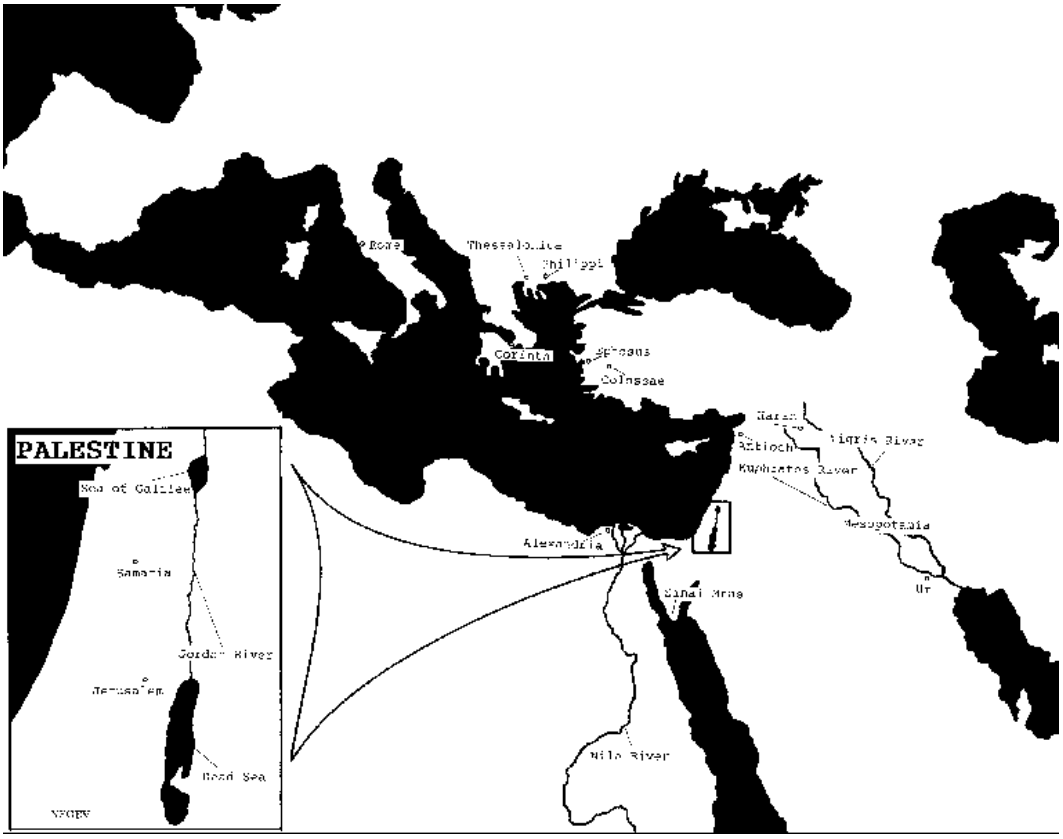
PALESTINE
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Jordan River
Jerusalem
Dead Sea
Negev
Rome
Thessalonica
Philippi
Corinth
Ephesus
Colossae
Haran
Antioch
Tigris River
Euphrates River
Mesopotamia
Alexandria
Ur
Canal Area
Nile River

The National History of Israel

The relationship between God and Israel, which began in the exodus and was firmly established in the giving of *Torah* (= the instruction) on Sinai, was patterned after an ancient Near Eastern treaty called covenant.[10] In this covenant, Yahweh was the Great King, and Israel was the vassal. Periodically, this covenant was to be renewed, as it was after the 40 year sojourn in the desert (Dt. 5:1-6). The foundation of this covenant was to be Israel's exclusive loyalty to Yahweh alone (Dt. 6:3-9). Yahweh made it quite clear that his choice of the nation Israel was due to his gracious love, not Israel's own attractiveness (Dt. 7:7-10).

In such a covenant, obedience was paramount for the good favor of God, the Great King. To obey was to receive blessing; to disobey was to receive severe discipline (Dt. 28) . The national history of Israel, then, is to be read in light of this covenant. God evaluates both the leaders and the people according to the terms of the covenant. A special section of the Old Testament is given to this history (Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings).[11]

The Conquest of Canaan

The first duty of this desert clan was to invade Canaan, a loosely affiliated group of city-states in central Palestine. In the invasion, the Israelites were to engage in a holy war of extermination (Dt. 7:1-6; 20:16-18).

The reader should understand this initial invasion to be the first stage of conquest, the stage in which Israel gained the upper hand. However, a second stage was also envisioned, a sort of mopping-up operation of the various enclaves of Canaanites that had not yet been exterminated (Jos. 13:1-7). The entire land was divided by lot (Jos. 13-19), and each tribe was responsible to complete the conquest in its own territory. Here the nation failed in its call to holy war. For several generations, the enclaves of Canaanites existed as thorns in the sides of the various tribal clans (Jg. 1:1, 19-36). This failure at holy war was a serious violation of Israel's covenant with God (Jg.2:1-4).

The Judges

A number of military leaders, both men and women, arose to lead Israel in her perennial conflict with the Canaanites. These leaders, called *shophetim* (judges), were never successful in gaining more than a temporary respite (Jg. 2:10-23) . Most

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[10] Actually, scholars can be even more specific in identifying the covenant formulary as patterned after the ancient Hittite Suzerainty Treaty, cf. J. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion* (Minneapolis: Seabury, 1985) 26-30.

[11] Scholars call this section Deuteronomistic History (D-History) , that is, the history of the nation as it is evaluated in terms of the covenant described in Deuteronomy.

serious was the threat of the Philistines, a military aristocracy in southwestern Canaan which had migrated from the Aegean Islands. Israel's lowest point came when the Philistines destroyed Shiloh, the central shrine, and captured the ark, the visible representation of the covenant (1 Sa. 4) . Israel tottered on the very brink of extermination.

The Beginnings of the Monarchy

In desperation, the clans united in their call for a king (1 Sa. 8), and Yahweh provided them with Saul. This first monarch, however, failed to observe the laws of holy war (1 Sa. 15) . Eventually, he succumbed to paranoia and insanity (1 Sa. 18-24, 26, 28, 31). In his place, Yahweh called a shepherd named David, a man who was truly after God's own heart, because he was totally dedicated to holy war (1 Sa. 13:13-14; 16-17). In his reign, David consolidated the nation, exterminated her enemies, built a new capital, organized the government, and centralized a religious shrine on Mt. Zion in Jerusalem (2 Samuel). David was the single most important individual in Israelite history since the time of Moses. Yahweh established a special covenant with David, guaranteeing his dynasty (2 Sa. 7).

The Nation Divides

When David's son, Solomon, ascended to the throne, he sowed the seeds for political disintegration. Expensive state building projects, heavy taxation, and forced labor for citizens left the nation crying for relief (1 Kg. 12:1-15). When Solomon died, the nation divided into two smaller states, the southern one loyal to David's dynasty and the northern one loyal to whomever proved to be strongest at the time (1 Kg. 12:16-33) . From this point on, the two nations existed as separate second-rate powers, sometimes even at war with each other. The kings of the south were evaluated in D-History according to their faithfulness to David's pattern (1 Kg. 15:3, 11, etc.). The kings of the north were each condemned because they maintained the religious syncretism of Jeroboam I (1 Kg. 15:26, 34, etc.).

The Prophets

In a balance of power against the kings of both nations, a new institution gained prominence -- the office of the prophet. The prototype was Elijah, the desert preacher who boldly challenged the Canaanite Baal cult to a duel of power (1 Kg. 17-18) . Later, other prophets arose who wrote down their oracles, oracles that called Israel back to her covenant faith (Je. 3:6-20), condemned her for social injustice (Is.1:21-23), warned her of terrible judgments to come in the near future (Am. 3:13-14; 5:18-20), and challenged her with God's moral demand (Mic. 6:6-8).

The Exile

In the end, both nations fell to the Mesopotamian empire-builders, Assyria and Babylon (2 Kg. 17:1-23; 25:1-21; La. 1; Ps. 137).

The Nation Israel Reassesses Herself

The exile is the second most important historical event in the history of Israel, second only to the exodus itself. Because of the exile, Israel was forced to reevaluate her faith in Yahweh and her self-understanding as the people of God. The destruction of Israel's homeland, culture, politics and temple meant that all external marks of unity were now gone. Only the unity of faith remained. Previously, Israel had thought of herself as impregnable (2 Sa. 7:16; Ps. 46:1-7; 48:4-14; 125:1-2), even though the prophets warned against such an assumed eternal security (Mi. 2:6, 11; 3:5-7, 9-12; Je. 7:1-15; 26:1-19). The exile, however, brought home the bitter truth that the kingdom of God did not equal the kingdom of Israel (Ps. 137:1-9).

The Remnant Returns

When Cyrus the Great of Persia issued an edict allowing displaced peoples to return to their homelands, many (though not all) of the exiled Jews in Babylon began making the trek toward home (Ezra 1) . This community of Jews were given the name "the remnant" by the prophets (Is. 10:20-22; Ezr. 9:8; Ne. 1:2), a word meaning "the survivors". The remnant no doubt hoped that they would see the fulfillment of Isaiah's glowing promises of restoration (Is. 66:18-21). However, while the first flush of excitement was intense (Ps. 126:1-6), the reality was much more somber (Hag. 1:5-6; 2:3; Ezra 3:10-13). Even though a second temple was built and Jerusalem restored (Ezra 6:15; Ne. 6:15), the hope for ultimate peace was pushed into the unknown future (Zec. 6:12-13; 8:1-23; 9:9-10). The Old Testament prophets conclude on a note of anticipation, not merely fulfillment (Mal. 3:1-4).

A New History

The remnant community which returned to Palestine produced a second history of itself.[12]

This history focused on the family of David, and as such, it contains a strong emphasis on the southern nation of Judah but offers only cursory treatment of the

[12] The first history had been the national story told in Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings, a history which provided a sequel to the Pentateuch. This second history covers approximately the same time period, beginning with Adam and his descendants (1 Chr. 1:1) and extending through the rebuilding of the temple and Jerusalem by the remnant community. Scholars have designated this second history as "The Chronicler's History", and it is found in Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah.

northern nation of Israel before her exile. A major theme in this second history is temple worship, and great detail is given to both the first and the second temple in Jerusalem as the center for Jewish worship (1 Chr. 22--2 Chr. 7; Ezr. 1-6) Another theme is the importance of fidelity to Torah. The exile is explained as a judgment due to unfaithfulness to God (2 Chr. 36:15-21). The remnant was strongly encouraged toward absolute loyalty toward Torah (Ne. 8:1-8; 9-10). In this reassessment of herself, the nation of Jewry truly became the "people of the book", a people dedicated to the keeping of Torah.

Hebrew Wisdom

Alongside the histories of Israel and the prophets who warned and instructed the nation, there developed another voice which is significant for understanding the Old Testament. This is the voice of Hebrew wisdom. Wise individuals often stood beside the prophets and priests to give counsel (Je. 18:18). Sayings of the wise were eventually collected and preserved (Pro. 22:17; 24:23). The source of wisdom was the careful observation of everyday life (Pro. 1:20-21) coupled with an intense devotional reverence for God (Pro. 1:7; 2:1-11; 8:12-14).

Wisdom was usually set down in poetic form,[13] and it included short and pithy observations about life (such as found in the Book of Proverbs) as well as longer treatments regarding the philosophy of life. Job, for instance, addresses the problem of evil in the world, while Ecclesiastes addresses the meaning and purpose of life. The Song of Songs addresses the beauty of conjugal love.

The Books of the Old Testament

The books which Christians call the Old Testament (the Hebrew Bible for Jews), were all finished before the time of Jesus. It is worth noting that they have been collected topically, not chronologically, in our English Bibles. Following are the books of the Old Testament arranged according to a general chronology:

<u>Torah</u> (also called the Pentateuch)
Genesis
(pre-history of the nation)
Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy
(formation of the nation)
Genesis

[13] Hebrew poetry, unlike English poetry, emphasizes the parallelism of ideas more than sounds. Phonetic devices, while present within Hebrew poetry, are not as central as they are in English poetry. Fortunately, this means that Hebrew poetry translates reasonably well into languages other than Hebrew.

Deuteronomic History	Chronicler's History
(produced before the exile)	(produced after the exile)
Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings	1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah

8th Century Prophets
Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah

7th Century Prophets
Jeremiah, Zephaniah

6th Century Prophets
Ezekiel, Daniel

6th/5th Century Prophets to the Remnant
Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

Prophets of Indeterminate Periods
Nahum, Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Habakkuk

Wisdom Literature and Poetry
Psalms, Proverbs, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs
Job

Other Books
Ruth
(during the time of the judges)
Esther
(after the exile and return of the remnant)

Between the Testaments

The period between the Testaments is often called the "silent years", a designation that for Jews meant that the prophetic Spirit was quenched and would not become active again until the coming of Messiah. For many Christians, the period between the Testaments is silent for another reason: they assume nothing of significance happened in that 400 year span. This latter assumption is unfortunate, because it creates an artificial separation of the Old Testament from the New Testament. The development of ideas and the progress of history in the period between the Testaments is crucial if one is to fully comprehend how the New Testament relates to the Old Testament, and especially, if one is to appreciate the background against which the events of the New Testament are placed.

Jewish History

The history of the Jews following the return of the remnant was, for the most part, a succession of political disappointments. Still under the authority of Persia, when Cyrus' edict for repatriation was given, the Jews in Palestine passed over to the Greek Empire under Alexander the Great in 333 BC. Here they found themselves in a tug-of-war between two factions vying for power within the larger Greek empire, Egypt and Syria. Palestine was ruled over by each, first by the Ptolemaic family in Egypt and later by the Seleucid family in Syria. Eventually, after a bitter revolt by a Jewish priest and his aroused Jewish freedom fighters (the Maccabean Revolt), the Jews in Palestine won independence in 168 BC. For the next century, this Maccabean family (also called the Hasmoneans) ruled over the Jews in Palestine as priest-kings. In 63 BC, the Roman general Pompey invaded Palestine, making it a part of the expanding Roman Empire.

The Effort to Hellenize the Jews

Jews who were scattered throughout the ancient world began to feel the impact of Greek culture. While under the Syrian Seleucid family, the Jews in Palestine were subjected to an intense missionary effort to persuade them to adopt Greek culture as well. Jews were urged to accept Greek ideals in politics, sports, art, secularism and religion. Orthodox Jews, in particular, were incensed by these efforts, and when Antiochus Epiphanes, the Syrian ruler, attempted to wipe out the Jewish religion altogether, the Maccabean family (*Maccabaeus* = "the Hammerer") led the successful revolt for independence.

The Religion of Palestinian and Non-Palestinian Jews

It must be remembered that all Jews did not return to Palestine as part of the post-exilic community. While their respective religious orientations were in many ways similar, Jews within and Jews outside Palestine were also different in some ways. The intertestamental period prepared the way for the emergence of two great religions, Judaism and Christianity. For most Jews, a tradition had to be fashioned that could function in a world without a temple, without Zion and without a native land. The tendency was for the temple to be replaced with the synagogue, the daily sacrifice with daily prayer, the altar with the family table, and Mt. Zion with the family home.[14] (Christianity, of course, arrived at a completely different conclusion as to the way of God.)

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[14] Levenson, 180-181.

The Institutions of Judaism

There were three main institutions of Judaism that developed in the intertestamental period.

The Temple: Rebuilt by the remnant, this second temple was the only place where sacrificial worship was permitted. Three annual feasts came to dominate temple worship, Passover, Pentecost and Booths. Practically speaking, the temple had the greatest availability to those Jews in Palestine, though Jews in other lands attempted to make pilgrimages when possible. When Herod came to power in Palestine, he refurbished the temple, thus giving rise to the expression "Herod's Temple".

The Sanhedrin: This was the Jewish ruling body in Palestine composed of 70 elders plus the high priest. The body had both legislative and judicial power in religious and some civil affairs as allowed by Rome.

The Synagogue: This was by far the institution most familiar to Jews everywhere. Formed by Jews in the exile, synagogues became the Jewish centers for study and worship. Rabbis and scribes taught in the various synagogues. It should be noted that the synagogues had no official "church" capacity in connection with the temple priesthood.

The Documents and Oral Traditions of Judaism

The Jews were not only steeped in the traditional values of the Old Testament, they were obliged to make those values relevant in a world much different than that of their ancestors. This can be observed in the way they treated their Scriptures and in the development of new ideas and approaches to their traditions and to their future.

The Septuagint Version (LXX): Jews in Alexandria, Egypt (70 of them according to Jewish tradition) helped to facilitate the adjustment of the Jewish community to the new Greek culture by translating the Hebrew Bible into Greek in about the mid-200s BC. This Greek translation of the Old Testament became the version used by most of the New Testament writers.

The Apocrypha: A number of documents describing the history, traditions and wisdom of the Jews were written before and during the Maccabean period which were translated into Greek and included as part of the Septuagint. Later, Jewish theologians would not accept these writings as part of the authoritative listing of sacred Scriptures (canon), but due to their association with the Greek Old Testament, they are still included in some Christian versions of the Bible.

The Pseudepigrapha: Also appearing during the dark days of Seleucid oppression was a new genre of Jewish literature called "apocalyptic". Usually written

under the pseudonym of an Old Testament character, these writings predicted the imminent collapse of the present world system in vivid and creative symbolism. The biblical books of Daniel and Revelation were strongly influenced by this literary style.

Oral Law: During the intertestamental period, Torah became for the Jews the supreme religious authority. Around Torah, however, there grew up a mass of interpretation called the “tradition of the elders” (cf. Mk. 7:3) and a mass of extra-Scriptural laws called the "oral law". This oral law was intended as a legal fence around Torah, a way of halting a person before he found himself even close to breaching Torah. Eventually, Torah itself came to be considered by many as having two parts, written and oral, and for some the oral law was of equal or even greater authority than the written Torah.

The Sects of Judaism

There were several different thought streams within Judaism, some political, some religious, and some both.

Pharisees: Descendants from the Hasidim (the orthodox Jews who revolted against Hellenization), the Pharisees were lay people, not clergy. They upheld both the written and oral Torah. They believed in resurrection and an after-life as well as in angels. Their primary sphere of influence was in the synagogue. Ultimately, they were the only Jewish sect to eventually survive the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

Sadducees: Of priestly stock from wealthy families, the Sadducees’ sphere of influence was largely in the temple and the Sanhedrin. They upheld the authority of written Torah, but they rejected the notion that the oral law was binding. In general, they were more open to Hellenistic ideals, and unlike the Pharisees, they rejected the notions of resurrection, after-life and angels.

Essenes: A reactionary group which withdrew from Jewish society to live in a desert commune (probably Qumran), this group considered itself to be the only pure form of Judaism. Its members considered the temple priesthood to be corrupt and believed that God would soon intervene to purify his house. They copied Old Testament texts, wrote their own commentaries, and developed a rule book for behavior. Many of these documents were preserved in caves and discovered in 1947 as the “Dead Sea Scrolls”. The leader of the Qumran commune was one called the “Teacher of Righteousness”. In 68 AD, the Essenes were destroyed by the Romans.

Zealots: Zealots were Jewish freedom fighters whose ideals were adopted from the original Maccabean revolt and transferred over into a bitter hatred of Rome. Popular especially in Galilee, the rural hill country of Jewry, these patriots

made a famous last stand in 74 AD at Masada that ended in mass suicide.

People of the Land: Most of the Jews living in Palestine did not belong to any of the above groups. They were merely small farmers and trades-people who attended their local synagogues and observed the various religious differences from a more or less neutral position.

Messianic Ideals in the Time of Christ

It is a popular misconception that the Jews in Palestine and elsewhere had a single collective notion of what messiah was to be. This assumption cannot be upheld. There were different streams of thinking with regard to the hope for a messiah-king of David's line who would rule the kingdom of Israel as God's viceroy.[15] For some, the notion of messiah had receded into the background so that it was not indispensable to the future of Israel. For others, a messiah was expected to come through the priestly clan of Levi. To be sure, many held to the popular concept of a Davidic messiah, a zealot with a heart after the Old Testament ideal of holy war who would liberate the Jews from their Gentile oppressors. In fact, a whole series of "false messiahs" arose before and after Jesus of Nazareth who attempted this very thing (cf. Ac. 5:36-37; 21:38). In 135 AD, the bar Kochba revolt, squelched by Rome, was a messianic movement of this sort. Other groups, like the Qumran community, conceived of not one but two messiahs, a priestly messiah and a kingly messiah. Even in the New Testament there is evidence of diverse ideas, such as, the belief that messiah was to be born at Bethlehem (Mt. 2:4-5) and the counter belief that his birthplace was to be unknown (Jn. 7:25-27).

Jesus of Nazareth

While Judaism at large found a new way of interpreting the Old Testament tradition in terms of the synagogue, daily prayer, the Jewish home and the family table, a completely different way of understanding the Old Testament was begun in the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth.

His Life

Jesus was born in about 4 BC, the child of a Galilean virgin (Mt. 1:18-25). Relatively little is known of his childhood and early adulthood, but at about the age of 30 (Lk. 3:23), his public life was inaugurated with his baptism by John in the Jordan River (Mk. 1:9-11). Like Israel in the sojourn, he was driven into the desert where he was tempted for 40 days, but unlike Israel in the sojourn, he emerged in the power of the Holy Spirit and began to preach (Lk. 4:1-15). His message was that the

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[15] See discussion in D. Russell, *Between the Testaments* (Philadelphia: Fortress,1965)119-142.

reign of God was being inaugurated (Mt. 4:17, 23-25; Lk. 11:20). His public ministry was accompanied by many signs, such as, cures, exorcisms and nature miracles. Jesus' public ministry extended for a period of between one and three years.[16] The general chronology of Jesus' life can be sketched in from the accounts in the gospels, though caution should be given about attempting too much precision inasmuch as the gospels' primary concern was not chronology per se.

- Baptism of Jesus by John
- Great Galilean ministry
- Crisis in the Galilean ministry resulting in Jesus' withdrawal
- The last journey to Jerusalem
- The triumphant entry and cleansing of the temple
- The passion of Jesus:
  - The final meal with the 12
  - Prayer on the Mt. of Olives at Gethsemane
  - The betrayal and arrest
  - The desertion by the disciples
  - The examination before Caiaphas, the High Priest
  - The trial before Pilate, Procurator of Jerusalem
  - The crucifixion on Golgotha
  - The burial
  - The empty tomb narratives and resurrection appearances

Who Was Jesus?

One of the primary purposes of the four accounts of Jesus' ministry, death and resurrection, documents which we call "gospels", is to answer the question, "Who was Jesus?" The evangelists address this question in more than one way. On the one hand, they describe the miracles of Jesus, miracles which often enough raise the question quite specifically and which contain an implicit answer (Lk. 8:24-25; Jn. 9:30-33). On some occasions, Jesus himself posed the question (Mt. 16:13-16; 22:41-46) . On still other occasions, the answers are offered from the mouths of those who came to believe in Jesus (Mt. 16:16; Mk. 15:39; Jn. 11:27).

An important part of the answer to the question is to be found in the various titles which are given to Jesus in the gospels. The most important of these titles are:

Messiah (Christ)

The popular ideal for messiah was primarily political, an ideal that Jesus

[16] The exact length of Jesus' ministry is debated. In the 4th gospel there are three Passovers with which to reckon (Jn. 2:13; 6:4; 11:55), but there is uncertainty as to whether or not these are necessarily different Passovers to be assessed as chronological, see discussion G. Ogg, "Chronology of the New Testament," *New Bible Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1982) 202.

resolutely refused for himself (Mt. 5:38-48; Jn. 6:14-15; 18:33-37). Apparently, Jesus was reluctant to have people acclaim him in any messianic terms until after his death and resurrection so that his self-understanding of messiahship would not be confused with the popular one (Mk. 1:44; 5:43; 7:36; 8:26; 9:9). Jesus' emphasis was that the messiah must suffer, die and be resurrected (Lk. 9:20-22, 44; 12:50; 13:32-33; 14:25-27; 17:24-25; 18:31-33).

Son of David

A messianic designation, this title has its roots in both the Old Testament and intertestamental literature as the one from David's line who would deliver Israel (Mt. 1:1; 9:27; 12:23; 15:22).

Servant of Yahweh

Based on the prediction of a vicarious sufferer for the sins of others (Is. 53), Jesus is identified with the figure of the Servant of Yahweh (Mt. 8:17; Lk. 22:37; Mk. 10:45; Jn. 12:38).

Son of Man

This title, found exclusively on the lips of Jesus as a self-designation, has roots in the vision of Daniel concerning a heavenly figure who would descend to establish God's kingdom in the world (Da. 7:13-14; Mt. 26:63-64).

Lord

"Lord", for the Jewish people, meant both a title of respect, such as our word "sir", and also a Greek rendering for the Hebrew *Adonai*, a designation for Yahweh. In the first instance, the title reflects the master-disciple relationship between Jesus and his followers. In the second, it reflects the belief that in Jesus there was divine Lordship (cf. Lk. 2:11; Mt. 7:21-23).

Son of God

The evangelists are very insistent that Jesus was the Son of God (Mk. 1:1), a title that carried with it the connotation of uniqueness (Mt. 4:3, 6; 11:27; 16:16; Mk. 15:39; Lk. 1:32; 22:70-71; Jn. 1:14, 18; 20:17). Especially in John, the title Son of God reflects the belief that Jesus was divine, the one who was pre-existent and was sent from heaven by the Father (Jn. 1:14; 3:34; 5:36, 38; 6:46; 7:29; 11:42; cf. 17:4-5).

The Teaching of Jesus

The teachings of Jesus revolved around his proclamation of the reign of God

and how the subjects of God's reign should live. Perhaps the most significant collection of these teachings is found in what is popularly called Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount" (Mt. 5-7). Though for the most part Jesus' methods did not differ substantially from the ones traditionally used in Judaism, he did develop extensively the use of parable, the short illustrative, fictional story drawn from familiar life situations.

For his disciples, Jesus' teachings became the core of ethical standards by which all life was to be lived. The central motivating force behind all ethics is love, and according to Jesus, true love for God and true love for one's neighbor fulfills all of God's requirements (Mt. 22:34-40; cf. Ro. 13:8-10).

The Life of the Early Christian Communities

The New Testament document entitled "Acts"[17] is the second volume of Luke's writings, Luke being the most extensive author in the New Testament. In it Luke describes the progress of the early Christian communities as they spread throughout the Roman world. This theological history emphasizes the crossing of national and racial barriers by Christian missionaries and the action of the Holy Spirit which empowered these early witnesses to proclaim the story of Jesus (Ac. 2). Geographically, it moves from Jerusalem to Rome (Ac. 1:8).

The Jerusalem/Jewish Church

The first nucleus of disciples formed a Christian congregation in Jerusalem. They met regularly in one of the temple courtyards and in homes (Ac. 2:46; 3:11; 5:12, 20-21, 25, 41-42). Early on, a stubborn resistance by the Jewish leaders to the Christian message caused the apostles to come under the public eye. Peter and John publicly healed a cripple in the temple (Ac. 3), and they were interrogated by the Sanhedrin for their boldness (Ac. 4). The Jewish leaders had the apostles flogged for continuing to preach about Jesus (Ac. 5:12-42). Eventually, a severe persecution broke out, so severe that one Christian leader was publicly stoned to death and an apostle was executed (Ac. 7; 12:2). Shortly thereafter, many Christians were forced to flee from Jerusalem for safety inasmuch as the Jewish leaders had found a devastating inquisitor in a rabbinical student, Saul of Tarsus (Ac. 8:1-3).

The Beginnings of a Non-Jewish Church

These early Christians continued to preach to their fellow Jews about Christ, and up to this time, Christianity was considered by most outsiders to be merely

[17] The full title is "The Acts of the Apostles", though primarily it only treats one of the 12, Peter, along the great missionary, Paul.

another sect of Judaism (Ac. 11:19). However, in time the circle of Christians expanded to include non-Jews as well. In Samaria, a non-Jewish church was begun (Ac. 8). In Caesarea Philippi, a Roman officer and his household were converted (Ac. 10). In Syrian Antioch, a multi-national, multi-racial church was started (Ac. 11:19-26; 13:1).

The Conversion of Saul

Meanwhile, an event of tremendous significance occurred to the grand inquisitor of the Sanhedrin. On his way to Damascus to arrange for the extradition of Christians, he was personally confronted by the resurrected Christ in a vision and became a Christian himself (Ac. 9). Other Christians, naturally enough, were fearful about accepting his new faith (Ac. 9:26-30), and eventually Saul ended up in the international church of Antioch (Ac. 11:25-26).

The Gentile Mission

It is from Antioch that the Christians appointed missionaries to carry the Christian gospel to the provinces of Asia Minor (Ac. 13:2-3). Saul, also called Paul,[18] quickly emerged as the champion missionary. Much of the remainder of Acts describes three missionary tours in which Paul established Christian congregations in Asia Minor and Greece (Ac. 13-14, 16-21). After that, Paul was arrested in Jerusalem for allegedly bringing Greeks into the Jewish temple (Ac. 21:27-36). He was taken to Rome for an imperial trial (Ac. 22-28).

The Letters

There are a number of documents in the New Testament which were written as letters, some to individuals, some to local congregations, some to groups of churches and some to unknown recipients.[19] Some of these letters were the first documents to have been written by Christians, earlier even than the four gospels.

The Letters of Paul

Thirteen of the New Testament letters have the name of Paul attached to them. In general, Paul's letters are written to combat theological heresies, to reaffirm the faith and direction of the churches, and to answer ethical and theological questions.

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[18] Saul is a Hebrew name and Paul is a Greek name. Luke uses both names, apparently according to whether Paul was working among Jews or Gentiles.

[19] There is scholarly debate about the authorship of several of the letters, a debate that in some instances began in the 2nd century and that in other instances is a product of modern scholarly investigation. The scope of this study prevents addressing this issue here except to mention that it exists. It is fair to point out, however, that the Christians who accepted and who began to read these letters as Scripture considered them to have the authority of the apostles behind them, just as they did for all the New Testament documents.

His usual style is patterned after the normal letter form of the ancient world with an opening, a thanksgiving/blessing, a body (usually theological), a paraenesis (ethical injunctions), and a closing. The chronology of his letters is debated at some points, but the following is a possible chronology:

Second Tour Letters

Galatians (regarding the heresy of compulsory circumcision and legalism)

1 Thessalonians (regarding enduring persecution and awaiting the return of Christ)

2 Thessalonians (regarding a misunderstanding about the end of the age)

Third Tour Letters

1 Corinthians (regarding the ethical/theological problems of factionalism, incest, lawsuits, marriage, food offered to pagan gods, the Lord's Table, spiritual gifts, and the resurrection)

2 Corinthians (regarding Paul's change of plans to visit, the nature of Christian ministry, an offering being collected for impoverished Christians, and a defense against detractors who thought Paul to be a weak leader)

Romans (regarding the human dilemma, God's saving grace, the relationship of the Jewish race to the Christian church, and a proposed visit to Rome)

Prison Letters

Colossians (regarding the heresy of those who would say Christ is not sufficient)

Philemon (regarding the conversion and return of a slave)

Ephesians (regarding the unity of the church and God's eternal purpose)

Philippians (regarding Paul's imprisonment, humility, a proposed visit by mutual friends, and a thanksgiving for special gifts)

Personal/Pastoral Letters

1 Timothy (regarding qualifications for leadership and church order)

Titus (regarding order and leadership in the church of Crete)

2 Timothy (farewell address and encouragement towards faithful

stewardship of the gospel)

Non-Pauline Letters

The non-Pauline letters, sometimes called "general letters" (due to their perceived general application) or "catholic letters" (due to their universal appeal), were written at various times during the latter half of the first century.

James (proverbial exhortations to Christian living)

Hebrews (demonstrates Christ's ascendancy over the law of Moses; author unknown)

1 Peter (regarding Christian living and the place of the suffering church in God's purposes)

2 Peter (regarding the danger of false teachers and the end of the world)

1 John (regarding a recent division in the church over the nature of Christ; emphasizes the virtue of love)

2 John (regarding the danger of deceivers who do not believe in the full humanity of Jesus)

3 John (regarding a factional leader who is dividing the church)

Jude (regarding the doom of heretics)

The Apocalypse

The final book in the New Testament is perhaps the strangest. It is written in the combined style of intertestamental apocalyptic and Old Testament prophecy. Because of its extensive use of enigmatic symbolism, the book has had a varied interpretation throughout the history of the church. One thing all agree upon, however, is that the book depicts the certain victory of God's people in a deadly struggle with the powers of evil, the disintegration of the present world system, and the heavenly rewards of the righteous.

How the Bible Came to Us

I am a man of one book.

Thomas Aquinas

Sir, if the Bible be not true, I am as very a fool and madman as you can conceive; but if it be of God, then I am sober minded.

John Wesley

The answer to the question, "How did the Bible come to us," must be given on two levels, a theological level and an historical level. Theologically, Christians believe that God is the ultimate author of the Bible, either revealing or motivating its contents directly to humans or guiding them in the research and assembly of its message from other sources. This claim, of course, is a claim of faith. That the Bible was produced by various writers over several hundred years, no one doubts. That its author was ultimately God, many people doubt. By its very nature, the claim that God is the ultimate author of the Bible cannot be verified empirically, since it is based on the testimony of the Bible about itself. At the same time, it is not merely a blind optimism. There are reasonable grounds for believing that God has spoken to humans, not the least of which are the universal human conviction that humans are personal rather than impersonal, that there are moral categories of right and wrong, and that true knowledge of reality over fantasy is possible.[20]

Historically, the answer to the question may be traced in the same way that any other historical process may be traced. Archaeological discovery, the preservation, examination and assessment of ancient records, and the translation of the Bible from its original languages into our own language are all parts of that process. Christians believe that God had a hand even in this historical chain of events, but whether or not one accepts this claim, the fact remains that the Bible has been written and preserved, and this historical process can be empirically verified by believers or non-believers.

The Theological Side of the Question

The theological side of the answer as to how the Bible came to us can be summarized by examining three important theological terms: revelation, inspiration, and authority.

Revelation[21]

The term revelation means the disclosure of what was previously unknown. In the first place, God revealed himself by speaking directly to humans and by intervening in human history. He called Abraham from Ur to go to the land of Canaan (Ge. 12:1-2), he rescued the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt (Dt. 26:5-

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[20] For a more detailed discussion and defense of the reasonableness of the Christian claim, see F. Schaeffer, *He Is There And He Is Not Silent* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1972).

[21] A special distinction is to be observed between the terms "special revelation'' (God's redemptive acts and inspired record) and "general revelation" (the inference of the existence of God by observing nature and/or by an innate impression received through one's conscience) , cf. K. Kantzer, "The Communication of Revelation," *The Bible: The Living Word of Revelation*, ed. M. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1968) 62-71. Here we are speaking only of the former.

10), and he allowed these same Israelites to be exiled from their land because of their disobedience and lack of fidelity (Ne. 9:26-35). Second, God gave a divine record and an interpretation of these mighty acts, a record which provides a trustworthy source of knowledge about God and his workings (2 Pe. 2:10-21). Finally, God gave the crowning aspect of revelation in the incarnation of his Son, Jesus Christ (He. 1:1-3). The earliest Christians, many of whom were eyewitnesses of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, add their testimony in order to verify that this final revelation of God truly occurred (Jn. 20:30-31; 21:24-25).

Christians believe in what is called "progressive revelation", that is, the fact that God's revelation of himself in word and act progressed throughout the history recorded in the Bible so that later revelation built upon previous revelation (Dt. 32:2). God did not fully reveal himself to humans in a single moment, but he gradually revealed more and more of himself until he had fully delivered what he had to communicate in the person of Jesus Christ (He. 1:1-3) and in the completion of Holy Scripture (2 Ti. 1:13-14; Jude 3). Thus, revelation in the Bible is more like a musical composition that moves toward a crescendo than it is like a book dropped out of heaven on our heads.

Inspiration

When Christians say that the Bible is inspired, they mean that the Bible was written by humans under the special influence of the Spirit of God (2 Ti. 3:16) . Thus, there is a remarkable interchangeability of the terms "God" and "Scripture" (Ro. 9:17; Ga. 3:8). When the biblical writers speak, God speaks (Mt. 22:43; Ac. 28:25; Ro. 3:2; 1 Co. 14:37; He. 3:7). It is appropriate, then, to say that the Bible is the Word of God in the words of humans. Furthermore, it is important to note that the Bible's own testimony about itself declares that this inspired word did not originate in the human will, but rather, God's spokesmen only spoke as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Pe. 1:20-21).

Two terms have originated in Post-Reformation history to describe the extent of biblical inspiration. One is "verbal inspiration", an expression meaning that the inspiration of the Bible extends to the human language which is in it and that this human language is adequate to express what God intended.[22] A belief in verbal inspiration stands against the idea that the Bible only gives general insights. The other term is "plenary inspiration", an expression meaning that the inspiration of the Bible extends to all of its parts. A belief in plenary inspiration stands against the idea that some parts of the Bible are inspired while other parts are not. When

[22] J. Packer, "The Adequacy of Human Language," *Inerrancy*, ed. N. Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980) 197ff.

compounded, the term "verbal-plenary inspiration" attempts to express what the Bible says about itself as the Word of God.

At the same time, it is also important to observe that the inspiration of the Bible did not cancel out the personalities and literary characteristics of its human writers. Biblical writers made use of existing sources in their researches (Nu. 21:14-15; Jos. 10:13; 1 Ki. 11:41; Lk. 1:1-4). They even occasionally quote from non-Israelite and non-Christian literary works (Pr. 30-31; Ac. 17:28; 1 Co. 15:33)[23] as well as repeat popular clichés (1 Sa. 24:13; Tit. 1:12). Diverse literary styles and grammatical peculiarities in the original languages abound among the various authors. Biblical writers also made use of pre-existing biblical documents, such as 1 and 2 Chronicles which draws heavily, and in some cases verbatim, from the earlier documents of 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings.[24] Certain independent oracles were preserved and brought together into collections long after they were written (cf. Pr. 25:1). Biblical writers inject their own human emotions into their works (Ga. 1:6; 3:1; Phil. 1:7-8).

All this is only to say that equal attention must be given to the documents of the Bible as both the Word of God and as the words of humans. As the Word of God, a reverence should be extended to the Bible that can never be extended to any other document in the world. As the words of humans, the Bible is capable of historical study just as all other human documents may be studied. In short, the origin of the Bible is fully divine and fully human, and in order to do justice to the statements of the Bible about itself as well as to the character of the Bible as it is, this paradox must be retained.

Authority

The authority of the Bible is directly tied to its divine inspiration. If the Bible is indeed the Word of God, then it bears the highest possible authority because God himself vouches for it. The Scripture cannot be broken (Pr. 30:5-6; Jn. 10:35). The authority of the Bible is not the authority of an irresistible force, like gravity, to which one cannot help but succumb. People do indeed refuse to submit to it (Ac. 7:51-53) as well as nullify it by extraneous loyalties (Mt. 15:3-6). Rather, the authority of the Bible is that which determines what is true and right in religious teaching and what is not (Mk. 12:24, 27). It is the recognized standard which determines Christian faith and a Christian lifestyle that is in a right relationship with

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[23] That Proverbs 30-31 is by non-Israelites is generally agreed upon, cf. E. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964) 315. The first quotation in Ac. 17:28 is from a poem attributed to Epimenides, a Cretan poet, and the second is from *Phainomena* by Aratus of Cilicia. The quotation in 1 Co. 15:33 is from *Thais* by Menander.

[24] The parallelisms are too numerous to cite here, but one may begin tracing them in 1 Sa. 31 and 1 Chronicles 10.

God and his will (Mt. 19:3-6; Ro. 4:3, 22-24; 2 Ti. 3:14-15; 4:2-4; 2 Pe. 3:16).

Having said that, the question must still be answered as to whether or not the Bible can stand by itself, that is, whether or not it can speak clearly to every generation without the aid of an external, governing authority. This question is answered differently by different Christians. Roman Catholicism, for instance, maintains that inasmuch as every interpreter brings to the Bible his/her own presuppositions (as is evidenced by the variety of semi-Christian cults), the Roman church itself serves as the official interpreter of the Bible.[25] The Protestant view, derived from Martin Luther and John Calvin, is that if the Bible is read literally, that is, if its natural meaning is followed (allowing, of course, for its study in the original languages and the giving of attention to grammar, the times, circumstances, conditions of writing, and context), then the meaning of Scripture is clear and stands above any ecclesiastical authority.[26]

Particularly with the rise of the scientific examination of the Bible in the last two centuries, the terms "infallibility" and "inerrancy" with regard to the Bible have become important for conservative Christians.[27] These terms are used to indicate that "when all the facts are known, the Scriptures in their original autographs and properly interpreted will be shown to be true in everything which they affirm."[28] The most definitive statement of biblical inerrancy is contained in "The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy," a statement produced by the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, a group of international biblical scholars. To affirm inerrancy, of course, is not to deny that the Bible contains culturally conditioned descriptions, grammatical irregularities, and the language of observation rather than the language of science -- in short, language as it is normally used in the everyday world. At the same time, to believe in inerrancy is also to believe that there is no final conflict between the Bible, God's speech in Scripture, and the universe, God's speech in nature.[29]

The Historical Side of the Question

The historical side of the question, "How did the Bible come to us," may be answered in three very broad categories relating to the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the translation of the Bible into English

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[25] See the brief but instructive discussion in D. Stacey, *Interpreting the Bible* (New York: Seabury, 1979) 73-80.

[26] B. Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970) 53-55, 97-161.

[27] While these two words are sometimes used with distinct nuances of meaning, here we shall be using them as synonyms, cf. P. Feinberg, "Bible, Inerrancy and Infallibility of," *EDT* (1984) 142.

[28] P. Feinberg, "The Meaning of Inerrancy," *Inerrancy*, ed. N. Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980) 294.

[29] For a careful analysis of the harmony between science and the Bible, see B. Ramm, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954).

The Old Testament

The documents of the Old Testament were written and collected independently of the documents of the New Testament, so the history of the Old Testament must to a large degree be treated separately as well. It should be remembered that what Christians call the Old Testament, the Jews refer to as the Hebrew Bible. While Christianity sees the Old Testament as a preparation for the New Testament, Judaism sees it as essentially complete in itself.

The Autographs

The original writings (autographs) of the Old Testament writers were composed and collected over a long period of time, though exactly how long is unclear since the dates of the various books are not known with certainty. Several hundred years at least were involved, and possibly well over a millennium. The autographs were written primarily in Hebrew, the language of the ancient Israelites, which developed along with other northwest Semitic languages in the third and second millennium BC. Hebrew has close linguistic connections with Ugaritic, Phoenician, Moabitish, and Edomitish, and it contains a variety of loan words from still yet other languages in the ancient Near East.[30] Furthermore, like other languages, Hebrew contained dialects (cf. Jg. 12:6).[31] In addition to the bulk of the Old Testament which is in Hebrew, a small selection of passages relatively late in the writing cycle appear in Aramaic, a Semitic dialect closely related to Hebrew (these Aramaic sections of the Old Testament are Ezra 4:8--6:18; 7:12-16; Da. 2:4b--7:28; Je. 10:11).[32]

Today, none of the autographs of the Old Testament have survived. Arguably the earliest monumental inscription in ancient Hebrew is the Gezer Calendar from perhaps the 10th century BC. What we depend upon for the text of the Old Testament are ancient copies (manuscripts) which in turn were copied from other even more ancient copies.

The Canon

The term canon, derived from an ancient word for a measuring rod, is used by Christians to refer to the standard or norm for what constitutes Holy Scripture. The Canon of Scripture is the collection of those books considered to be sacred and authoritative as opposed to those which are not. The question, then, is how did the books of the Old Testament gain this status?

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[30] A. Jeffery, *IDB* (1962) II.553, 559.

[31] C. Gordon, *IDBSup* (1976) 393.

[32] A. Jeffery, *IDB* (1962) I.185.

The Old Testament does not directly address the issue of when and how the history of canonization took place, but this process can be extrapolated from various ancient historical sources. Jewish traditions which developed in the period before Christ (and sometimes accepted by Christians as well) held that the sacred writings of the Old Testament, which had been destroyed by the Babylonians, were supernaturally recalled in their entirety by Ezra (2 Esdras 14:37-45) and/or collected by Nehemiah and others (2 Mac. 2:13-14). A group called the Great Synagogue, allegedly under the directorship of Ezra, was believed to have established the Old Testament Canon (*Baba Bathra* 14b-15a). This more or less legendary view, widely accepted until the end of the 19th century, can no longer be upheld.[33] Rather, the canon of the Old Testament seems to have been recognized in a more progressive way, with several crucial junctures in history.

Even in the Old Testament itself, certain important recognitions which approximate what we mean by "canon" occurred, and these recognitions can be traced in the three primary divisions of the Hebrew Bible.[34] The law of Moses was delivered to the Levites for public reading every seven years (Dt. 31:9-11, 26), and this same law was passed from the era of Moses to the succeeding generation (Jos. 1:7-8; cf. 8:31; 23:6). By the time of the Israelite monarchy, the Mosaic code was still the official rule (1 Ki. 2:3). Though it was frequently disobeyed (2 Ki. 14:6; 21:8), and at least some portion of it was lost and eventually rediscovered (2 Ki. 22:8ff.), the law remained the recognized standard for Israelite faith and conduct.

The first two sections, called the Law and the Prophets respectively, as well as the majority of books in the third section called the Writings, were clearly recognized long before the Christian era (Sirach 49:4-10). Jesus himself refers to these same three sections (Lk. 11:50-51; 24:44).[35] So, also, does the first century Palestinian Jewish historian, Josephus,[36] and the first century Alexandrian Jewish scholar, Philo.[37]

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[33] B. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 51-52.

[34] The Hebrew Bible, while it contains the same contents as the English Bible, was arranged somewhat differently into a threefold division. This division was first recognized as early as about 175-200 BC in the Prologue to Sirach where there is described "the law, the prophets, and the later authors". This threefold division is as follows:

The Law (Torah): Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy

The Prophets (Nebiim)

Former Prophets: Joshua, Judges, Samuel (1 and 2 Samuel) and Kings (1 and 2 Kings)

Latter Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, The Twelve (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi)

The Writings (Kethubim) Psalms, Proverbs, Job, the Five Rolls (Song, Ruth, Lamentations, Esther, Ecclesiastes) , Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles (1 and 2 Chronicles)

[35] In Lk. 11:50-51, the murder of Abel (which is described in Genesis 4, the first book of Torah) and the martyrdom of Zechariah (which is described in 2 Chronicles 24:20-21, the last book of the Writings) seem to be inclusive of the three major divisions. In Lk. 24:44, the Law and the Prophets are clearly recognizable, while the Psalms is the first book in the third section called Writings and possibly was used representatively of the whole.

[36] *Against Apion*, I.8.

There were, however, two other historical developments that have a bearing on the canon of the Old Testament. One is the Jewish Council of Jamnia, a group of Jewish rabbis who met at Javneh in the late first century AD. Up until that time, the third section of the Old Testament seems to have been somewhat fluid, with the possibility open for some discussion as to the admission of fresh documents or the eviction of others. Objections had apparently been raised against Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Song, and Esther. Also, the Book of Ezekiel, in the second section of the Hebrew Bible, had come under scrutiny.[38] However, the Jamnia conclusion was to reaffirm the canonical status of all the books of the Hebrew Bible.[39]

The other development occurred in Alexandria Egypt, where there was a large Jewish settlement. There a major translation was made of the Jewish sacred writings from Hebrew into Greek (called the Septuagint = LXX) . This translation project, which began in the 3rd century BC, included all the books of the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings.[40] However, it also included several other Jewish writings which were composed in the intertestamental period, books called the Apocrypha.[41] Since the early Christian church frequently used the LXX as their version of Holy Scripture in the Greek-speaking Mediterranean world, books from the Apocrypha were also used for public reading by Christians. Some early Christians recognized various apocryphal books as canonical, while others viewed them, or at least some of them, as noncanonical. This ambivalence about the Apocrypha continued until the Protestant Reformation, when the Reformers rejected the Apocrypha as noncanonical, though they continued to print the apocryphal books between the Old Testament and the New Testament in the major English translations, at least until 1827 when they did so no longer due to the influence of the Puritans.[42] The Roman Catholic Church, on the other hand, accepted most of the apocryphal books into their canon, and they remain in the Roman canon today.[43]

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[37] *De Vita Contemplative*, III.25.

[38] The questionable books are called *antilegomena* (= disputed) while the unquestioned books are called *homologoumena* (= undisputed).

[39] F. Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments,* 3rd. ed. (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1963) 97-98.

[40] S. Soderlund, 'Septuagint," *ISBE* (1988) IV.400ff.

[41] The *Apocrypha* (= esoteric, hidden) consisted of 1 and 2 Esdras, Tobit, Judith, Additions to Esther, Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach (also called Ecclesiasticus) , Baruch (with an appendix called the Letter of Jeremiah) , Song of the Three Holy Men (also called the Prayer of Azariah) , Susanna, Bel and the Dragon, Prayer of Manasseh, and 1 and 2 Maccabees.

[42] T. Davies, "Apocrypha," *ISBE* (1979) I.l6lff.

[43] In Roman Catholic Bibles, the following apocryphal books are included as part of the Old Testament canon: Tobit and Judith (following Nehemiah), Additions to Esther (appended to the end of Esther), 1 and 2 Maccabees (following Esther), Wisdom of Solomon (following the Song), Sirach (following Wisdom), Baruch (following Lamentations) , Song of the Three Holy Men (inserted between Daniel 3:23 and 3:24), Susanna (attached as chapter 13 of Daniel), and Bel and the Dragon (attached as chapter 14 of Daniel).

The Jews, for their part, eventually rejected the LXX as an official Bible (preferring instead the Hebrew text), and accordingly, they rejected the canonical status of the Apocrypha as well, especially when it became clear that the LXX was the favorite "Bible" of the Christians.[44] Christians, then, are left with two Old Testament canons. The Roman Catholic canon roughly parallels the LXX (and draws from early Christian assent to apocryphal books), while the Protestant canon parallels the Hebrew Bible (and draws from early Christian dissent to apocryphal books).

There are two other groups of Jewish writings which deserve mention, neither of which are canonical, but both of which are significant for the background of Jewish thought. The first is the Pseudepigrapha, a collection of Jewish works written largely during the intertestamental period in honor of and inspired by the heroes of the Old Testament. At least one of these works is directly quoted in the New Testament.[45] The second is the Jewish Talmud, the massive collection of Jewish scholarly commentaries and expansions upon the Mishnah, which in turn was the Jewish philosophical law code with roots in the oral traditions of Israel.

Preservation

The preservation of the Old Testament may be discussed along two major lines, the text in the original languages and the text as translated in the very early versions.

The Text in the Original Languages

The primary text of the Old Testament has been preserved in what is called the Masoretic Text (= traditional text). This Hebrew text derives from the work of Jewish scholars, and we may trace it backwards with reasonable confidence. The earliest copies of the Masoretic Text are from roughly the 9th through the 11th centuries AD. The reason our copies go back no earlier is because Jewish scribes held such a reverence for the Old Testament text that they buried their old copies rather than allow them to be profaned. While waiting for burial, such "retired" manuscripts were kept in a secret storage room (called a *genizah*), and in one instance, a *genizah* has been discovered that held several hundred years worth of fragments and documents, thus giving us a good deal of insight into the Masoretic Text even prior to the 9th century.[46]

The full canonical status of these apocryphal books was not made by the Roman church until the Council of Trent (1546), cf. F. Bruce, "Tradition and Canon of Scripture," *The Authoritative Word*, ed. D. McKim (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983) 66-68; J. Turro and R. Brown, Canonicity," *JBC* (1968) II.523-524.

[44] E. Wurthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament*, trans. F. Rhodes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) 50-51.

[45] Jude 14 quotes 1 Enoch 1:9, and several New Testament passages make allusions to pseudepigraphical works.

[46] Bruce, *Books and Parchments*, 115-117.

Hebrew was a consonantal language (without vowels), and the Masoretic scholars, from about the 5th century on, began to develop vocalizations of the text for public reading, that is, a system of dots and dashes (called vowel points) under, over and within the Hebrew consonants in order to aid in pronunciation. By the 9th and 10th centuries, this pointing of the text achieved a more or less standard form and has remained to this day.[47]

Even earlier, in about 100 AD, an authoritative consonantal text of the Old Testament was established by the Council of Jamnia. While we have no extant copies of this text, we do know from other historical indications that it underlies the present Masoretic Text.[48]

In addition to the Masoretic Text, there is a second consonantal text of Torah preserved independently by the Samaritans called the Samaritan Pentateuch. (The Samaritans regarded Torah alone as canonical.) This text has roots as far back as the establishment of the Samaritan Temple on Mt. Gerizim in about 400 BC, and in some 2000 places it agrees with the LXX over against the Masoretic Text (though most of them with only minor significance).[49]

Finally, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, a collection of scrolls was discovered in caves near the Dead Sea, scrolls which date all the way back to a century and more before Christ. These scrolls, popularly known as the Dead Sea Scrolls, were preserved by a Jewish sect (probably the Essenes) who had established a desert commune at Qumran. The scrolls, which contain sections of various length from every book in the canonical Hebrew Bible except Esther as well as many other Jewish writings, are now the oldest witnesses to the Old Testament in its original language.[50]

The Text in the Early Versions

Also important for our knowledge of the text of the Old Testament are the important ancient versions, that is, early translations of the Hebrew text into other languages. The LXX has already been described above, but mention should also be made of several others. These include the Aramaic Targums, the translations made by the post-exilic Jewish community due to the fact that Aramaic had replaced Hebrew as the common language. They also include the Syriac Version, a translation made by unknown persons beginning perhaps as early as the mid-first century. Others include the Old Latin, the Vulgate (also in Latin), and the Coptic, Ethiopic,

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[47] Wurthwein, 21-27.

[48] Wurthwein, 15-16.

[49] Bruce, *Books and Parchments*, 125-132.

[50] Y. Yadin, *The Message of the Scrolls* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957); W. Lasor, "Dead Sea Scrolls, *ISBE* (1979) I.883-897.

Armenian and Arabic Versions -- all translations made by Christians.[51]

Textual Criticism

Textual criticism of the Old Testament (sometimes called lower criticism) is the scientific discipline of determining from the available manuscripts and versions the earliest form of the Old Testament text in the original languages. The standard edition of the Hebrew Old Testament is based on the Masoretic Text, because it is complete and carefully preserved. At the same time, it is recognized that several ancient versions are considerably older than our oldest copies of the Masoretic Text, and while fragmentary, the Qumran scrolls antedate the Masoretic Text by about 1000 years. Scholars compare these various manuscripts and versions in order to determine as closely as possible, the text of the original.[52] A rough order for the relative value of manuscripts and versions is as follows:[53]

Masoretic Text
Dead Sea Scrolls
Septuagint
Samaritan Pentateuch
Syriac Peshitta
Aramaic Targums
Vulgate
Old Latin
Coptic
Ethiopic
Arabic
Armenian

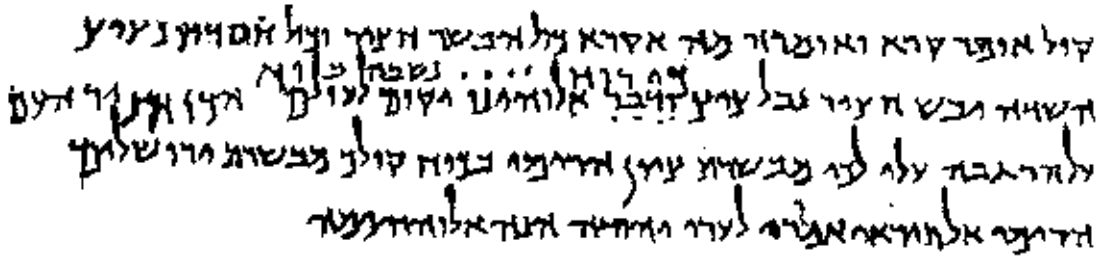
[51] Wurthwein, 75-100.

[52] J. Thompson, "Textual Criticism, OT," *IDBSup* (1976) 886 - 891

[53] Wurthwein, 112.

The Text of the Old Testament (Isaiah 40: 6-9)

Dead Sea Scrolls (Qumran Scrolls); unpointed Hebrew



Masoretic Text (Biblia Hebraica Szuttgartensia)
Pointed Hebrew

ו קוֹל אֹמֵר קְרָא וְאָמַר מַה אֶקְרָא
כָּל־הַבָּשָׂר חָצִיר וְכָל־חַסְדּוֹ כְּצִיץ הַשָּׂדֶה׃
ז יָבֵשׁ חָצִיר נָבֵל צִיץ כִּי רוּחַ יְהוָה נָשְׁבָה בּוֹ אָכֵן חָצִיר
ח יָבֵשׁ חָצִיר נָבֵל צִיץ וּדְבַר־אֱלֹהֵינוּ יָקוּם לְעוֹלָם׃ ס
ט עַל הַר־גָּבֹהַ עֲלִי־לָךְ מְבַשֶּׂרֶת צִיּוֹן
הָרִימִי בַכֹּחַ קוֹלֵךְ מְבַשֶּׂרֶת יְרוּשָׁלַם הָרִימִי אַל־תִּירָאִי
אִמְרִי לְעָרֵי יְהוּדָה הִנֵּה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם׃

Septuagint Text (LXX); Greek

6 φωνὴ λέγοντος Βόησον· καὶ εἶπα Τί βοήσω; Πᾶσα
σὰρξ χόρτος, καὶ πᾶσα δόξα ἀνθρώπου ὡς ἄνθος χόρτου· 7 ἐξη-
ράνθη ὁ χόρτος, καὶ τὸ ἄνθος ἐξέπεσεν, 8 τὸ δὲ ῥῆμα τοῦ θεοῦ
ἡμῶν μένει εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα. 9 ἐπ' ὄρος ὑψηλὸν ἀνάβηθι, ὁ εὐαγγελι-
ζόμενος Σιων· ὕψωσον τῇ ἰσχύι τὴν φωνήν σου, ὁ εὐαγγελιζόμενος
Ιερουσαλημ· ὑψώσατε, μὴ φοβεῖσθε· εἰπὸν ταῖς πόλεσιν Ιουδα
Ἰδοὺ ὁ θεὸς ὑμῶν.

The New Testament

The documents of the New Testament were written during the first century of the Christian church.[54] When Jesus ascended into heaven, he left no extensive

[54] While the authorship and dating of some New Testament books are still being debated, even the widest variation

blueprints for the community of faith he had begun; rather, he left the disciples with his teachings and the memories of his life, death and resurrection, and he promised that the Holy Spirit would lead them into the truth (Jn. 14:26; 15:26-27; 16:7-15). Jesus did not in fact command his disciples to write documents, and it was not until approximately two decades after his ascension that they formally began this writing process. To be sure, the followers of Jesus were not without Holy Scripture. Their Bible was the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament), and they quoted it and alluded to it, largely from the LXX version. However, certain factors were eventually decisive in stimulating these early Christian leaders to write and the early Christian community to collect and preserve their writings.

Why the New Testament Was Written

There is no formal statement as to why the New Testament, at least as a body of literature, was written, though there are some brief indications from individual books. Luke, for instance, wrote to give an orderly account and to reaffirm the story of Jesus (Lk. 1:3-4). John wrote to instill and to reaffirm faith in Jesus (Jn. 20:30-31). Paul wrote to remind his listeners of the gentile mission (Ro. 15:15-16; Ep. 3:3), and others wrote to give exhortation (He. 13:22), to encourage Christians who were under attack (1 Pe. 5:12), and to stimulate wholesome Christian behavior (2 Pe. 3:1). In all this, there is no indication that any New Testament writer envisioned the eventual production of a New Testament on the order of the Old Testament. At the same time, the impetus to write at all must have arisen out of some rather common assumptions, and these can be suggested with a fair degree of certainty.

In the first place, there were many theological questions which had to be addressed. The crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth had been a brutal shock to his disciples. They had hoped that he would be the messiah, but they were not prepared for the uncertainty and fear that engulfed them when he was executed on a gibbet as a criminal against the state. The resurrection, of course, reoriented them toward the future and calmed their immediate fears, but a host of questions still remained to be answered. Why did Jesus die? What is resurrection, and what does it mean for the community of faith? How could Jesus be cursed of God (hung on a cross) and anointed of God (the messiah) at the same time? Who really was/is Jesus? Is he God, and if so, how? How should the teachings of Jesus be used, and what is their relationship to the Old Testament? What is the relationship between the Jesus-Jews

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of dating involves less than a hundred years. It is rare for any scholar to date a New Testament document earlier than the mid-lst century, though there may have been preliminary accounts of Jesus' life which were later incorporated into the gospel narratives (cf. Lk. 1:1-4) . The most liberal dating for the latest New Testament documents does not usually extend beyond the first quarter of the second century. Most conservative evangelical scholars place the earliest New Testament documents at about the mid-lst century (either Galatians, 1 Thessalonians and/or James) and the latest document at about the mid-90s (Revelation).

and the other Jewish sects? What about the gentile nations? What forms of worship are appropriate to borrow from Judaism? Who are the leaders of the new community, and how should power be transferred if they should die? What constitutes a Christian? What is the relationship of Christians to the Roman government? All these questions and more cried out for resolution. The documents of the New Testament address just such questions as these. Of course, many of these questions are raised in local church settings, and the answers given have a very practical and immediate end. On the other hand, what was written to them was also written for us, for the answers to these questions extend beyond merely any local setting.

Another stimulus toward writing and collecting was what is sometimes referred to as the "delay of the *parousia*",[55] that is, the fact that Jesus did not return in his second advent as soon as he was expected. That many early Christians expected Jesus to return in their own lifetimes is evident. Some believed that Jesus had even promised John that he would live to see this event, though this belief was a misconception (Jn. 21:22-23). It is not unlikely that Jesus' statement, "Some standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power" (Mk. 9:1//Mt. 16:28/ILk. 9:27), was understood to mean that Jesus would return in the lifetimes of the apostles. The fact that Jesus described the interval between his ascension and his second advent in terms of a "little while" reinforced this belief (Jn. 14:2-3, 18, 28; 16:5, 16-18, 22). The ascension itself, while it was accompanied by a promise of Christ's return, provided no clear information about how long it would be until he returned (Ac. 1:9-11). Jesus' own teaching simply ended with the injunction, "Watch" (Mk. 13:32-37). However, by the mid-lst century, there were Christians who began to die, and even more important, there were apostles who began to die (Ac. 12:2; 1 Co. 15:6) . As the number of these first generation Christians and leaders began to be depleted, it was only natural for the surviving community to collect and hold in high esteem their writings so as to maintain a strong link with those who had actually participated in the historical Christ events.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the Christians considered the Old Testament to have ended on an unresolved note. The resolution -- the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises -- they believed to be in Jesus (Lk. 24:44-47). We may assume that the apostles shared the popular Jewish belief that with the last of the canonical writing prophets the Holy Spirit's inspiration to write Scripture had been stilled.[56] However, God had kept his promises concerning the messiah, and Jesus as

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[55] The word *parousia* (= presence, coming) is the most widely used New Testament word to refer to the return of Jesus at the end of the age.

[56] It was traditionally believed among the Jews that when the last of the prophets died, the Holy Spirit (in terms of inspiring Holy Scripture) had become silent, cf. D. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964) 80-82; J. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology* (New York: Scribners, 1971) 80-82; E. Schweizer, *TDNT* (1968) Vi.332-455. See also 1 Mac. 4:46; 9:27; 14:41.

Lord and Christ had to be proclaimed.

The actual writing of the New Testament documents was largely practical. The letters of Paul and others were sent to specific local congregations or groups of congregations in order to answer specific questions, settle specific disputes, correct specific heresies, give direction in moral and ethical issues, and above all, to proclaim the gospel. The four gospels, though they are composed quite differently than the letters, were also written to specific congregations and communities.[57] Over the process of time, the New Testament documents were collected and read in the churches, just as were the Old Testament Scriptures, and in fact, such public reading was encouraged (1 Th. 5:27; Col. 4:16; Rev. 1:3). The letters of Paul were already recognized as being on the same level with Old Testament Scripture even before the writing of the New Testament was completed (2 Pe. 3:15-16).

The Autographs

The original autographs of the New Testament writers were written in Greek, with the exception of a few words and phrases which were preserved in Aramaic, a language closely related to Hebrew.[58] The questions may well be raised as to why the gospels were not written in Aramaic, since Aramaic was the language of Jesus, and why Paul's letter to the Romans was not written in Latin.

The fact of the matter is that most areas of the Roman world were bilingual, that is, they spoke not only their national dialects, but they also spoke what had become an international language -- Greek. Thus, the transfer of ideas without the problems of language barrier was important for the early Christians, and the Greek language became an important pathway for evangelism.[59]

The Greek language of the 1st century was not uniform. There were at least two major divisions, literary Greek, which followed the classical tradition and which tended to be somewhat artificial since it was separated from the spoken language, and

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[57] Only Luke gives us direct information as to his intended reader, a Greek named Theophilus (Lk. 1:3; Ac. 1:1). However, it is generally conceded that the other gospels were also written to Christian communities rather than as abstract biographies. While the actual congregations who received them are still debatable, a scholarly guess with varying degrees of scholarly support is as follows:

Matthew (to Christians in Syrian Antioch)
Mark (to Christians in Rome)
John (to Christians in Asia Minor, probably Ephesus)

[58] Aramaic was the mother-tongue of Jesus and the apostles, and in some cases, the actual words of Jesus and/or actual expressions of the apostles have been preserved without translation, i.e., *Boanerges* = Sons of Thunder (Mk. 3:17); *talitha cumi* = little girl, get up (Mk. 5:41); *corban* = devoted to God, banned (Mk. 7:11); *ephphatha* = be opened (Mk. 7:34); *hosanna* = save, now (Mk. 11:9-10); *abba* = pappa (Mk. 14:36; Ro. 8:15; Ga. 4:6); *golgotha* = the skull (Mk. 15:22//Mt. 27:33//Jn. 19:17); *Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani* = My God, my God, why have you abandoned me (Mk. 15:34//Mt. 27:46); *maranatha* = Our Lord, come (1 Co. 16:22). Some personal names come to us in Aramaic also, such as, *Tabitha* = gazelle (Ac. 9:36, 40) and *Cephas* = rock (Jn. 1:42; 1 Co. 1:12, etc.).

[59] M. Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970) 16-17.

Koine (or common) Greek, the language of the average person which was widespread in its usage as opposed to being dialectical.[60] It is *Koine* Greek in which the New Testament is written, and just as one might expect in any collection of documents by various authors, the New Testament writers' command of the language varied. Mark's Greek, for instance, is rather rough, Luke's is highly polished, John's is prone to short sentences, Paul's to long sentences, and the Greek of Revelation is characterized by deviations from standard grammar.

As with the Old Testament, none of the New Testament autographs have survived, though the distance between the originals and our earliest copies is much shorter for the New Testament than for the Old Testament. Furthermore, while there is a scarcity of examples of ancient Hebrew outside the Old Testament, there is an abundance of written records in *Koine* Greek, ranging from personal letters, to bills of lading, to official documents, and so forth.

The Canon

Just as the canon of the Old Testament was fixed through an historical process among the Jews, so the canon of the New Testament was similarly fixed by Christians. The test of canonicity for both Old Testament and New Testament was inspiration, that is, they were tested by the implicit question, "Were these books inspired by God?" By the very nature of the case, the documents of the New Testament could not bear the overt certification by Jesus as did the documents of the Old Testament canon. Nevertheless, every branch of Christianity agrees on the canon of the New Testament, whether Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox or Protestant, even though the first official recognition of the 27 books of the New Testament (with no additions or subtractions) did not occur until 367 AD.[61] How did Christians come to settle on just these 27 books, especially since there were other Christian writings produced during the same period?[62]

The earliest recognition of New Testament writings was spontaneous and instinctive, while the rationale for the canon was developed later.[63] In our earliest Christian writings outside the New Testament, writings which are referred to as the "Apostolic Fathers", various documents of the New Testament were already being used as Scripture alongside the Old Testament.[64] Of course, no official canon could

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[60] E. Colwell, *IDB* (1962) II.480-481.

[61] This first full canon list of the New Testament, just as we have it today, was given in the 39th Easter letter of Athanasius of Alexandria in 367 A.D., cf. R. Meye, *ISBE* (1979) I.605.

[62] For instance, 1 Clement was probably written within the lifetime of the Apostle John near the end of the 1st century AD, cf. J. Michaels, *ISBE* (1979) I.204.

[63] F. Bruce, "Tradition and the Canon of Scripture," *The Authoritative Word*, ed. D. McKim (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983) 70.

[64] R. Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1969) 202-210; N. Geisler and W.

have been established in the broad geographical spread of the church until all the documents had been produced, had become known, and had been disseminated throughout the congregations in the empire. This collection and dissemination occurred in smaller units, such as, the Pauline letters and the four gospels.[65]

The first actual effort to produce an official canon of New Testament documents was by the heretic Marcion in about 140 AD.[66] Marcion rejected the Old Testament outright, only accepted Luke's gospel due to Luke's association with Paul (though even then he excised from its text any passages incompatible with his own doctrines), and listed ten of Paul's letters (omitting the pastorals). This arbitrary action by Marcion served as one catalyst to encourage the church as a whole to work toward a more acceptable canon. While Marcion was expelled from the church at Rome because of his bizarre views, the question of canon remained open to some degree for the next couple of centuries. By 180 AD and after, diverse canon lists were drawn up by various Christian leaders in the various parts of the empire. Some, such as the Muratorian Fragment,[67] define themselves as a canon list for the "whole church". In time, the various national churches came to occupy increasingly similar points of view. It is out of this growing unanimity that Athanasius published his canon list in the 39th Easter letter of 367 AD. Afterwards, various other Christian leaders reaffirmed this canon in their respective canon lists in other parts of the empire.[68]

To complete this discussion of canon, it is only fair to point out that most of the New Testament documents were exempt from dispute and were accepted and cited as Scripture by most Christians throughout the empire. The disputed books of the New Testament were largely confined to Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, and Revelation.[69] On the other hand, there were some Christian writings which were accepted as Scripture by some churches, but which did not gain eventual acceptance by the entire church. The most important of these books were the Shepherd of Hermas, the Didache, the Apocalypse of Peter, 1 and 2 Clement, the

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Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible* (Chicago: Moody, 1968) 186-190.

[65] Meye, 603-604.

[66] Marcion's heresy consisted of a tendency toward gnostic thought and a belief in two gods, one who was the just, fierce, bellicose god of creation, whom the Jews worshiped, and the other who was radically different in that he was loving, peaceful, and infinitely good, whom the Christians worshiped, cf. J. Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970) I.140-142.

[67] The Muratorian fragment, named after its Italian discoverer Muratori, is a canon list mutilated at the beginning, but it seems to have included Matthew and Mark since it lists Luke as the "third" gospel, and in all, it listed 22 books of our canonical 27, cf. Bruce, *Books*, 109-110.

[68] Meye, 604-605.

[69] The technical term for the disputed books, as in the Old Testament, is *antilegomena* (= disputed), a title given to them by Eusebius in the 4th century, cf. ISBE (1979) I.141. The books not under question are called *homologoumena* (= undisputed).

Epistle of Barnabas, and the Acts of Paul and Thecla.[70] These latter belong to a group of writings which are usually called the New Testament Apocrypha, that is, books accepted by some but not by all. An even larger collection of Christian writings during the first few centuries should also be mentioned, works usually referred to as the New Testament Pseudepigrapha and which were not considered canonical by orthodox Christianity. These were accepted in some marginal and heretical circles. In this collection there are more gospels, acts, epistles and apocalypses attributed to the various apostles and/or other New Testament characters, though such attributions are not to be taken as historical.

Preservation[71]

The preservation of the New Testament text may be discussed in six broad categories, the first three of which are considered to be the most valuable because of their age. The available manuscript base for the Greek New Testament is very large, numbering over 5000 documents containing either all or part of the New Testament.

The Papyri (Approximately 2nd--4th Centuries A.D.) The most ancient New Testament manuscripts were written on papyrus sheets, a writing surface similar to paper which was manufactured from the split stems of the papyrus plants which grew in the marshy region of the Nile Delta. Our very earliest extant portion of a New Testament manuscript is written on papyrus, a fragment of John's Gospel (18:31-33), which was penned in the early 2nd century. Biblical papyri are labeled by the lower case letter "p" with a number following, e.g., p46 (= Chester Beatty Papyri, Ann Arbor, MI, about 200 AD).

The Uncials (Approximately 4th--9th Centuries A.D.) There were two Greek penmanship styles in antiquity, one of which was a more formal, carefully executed hand in all upper case letters called "uncials". Biblical manuscripts written as uncials are labeled by capital letters in Greek, Hebrew or English and/or Arabic numbers prefaced by a zero, e.g., B or 03 (= Codex Vaticanus, Rome, 4th century AD). Some of the most valuable manuscripts we possess, particularly the codices Sinaiticus, Vaticanus, and Alexandrinus, are uncials.

The Minuscules (Approximately 9th--15th Centuries AD) The second Greek penmanship style in antiquity was a cursive or running hand which could be written more rapidly. Everyday documents, such as, letters, accounts, receipts, petitions, and deeds were often written in this style. Biblical

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[70] Geisler and Nix, 202-204.

[71] B. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University, 1968); K. Aland et al., eds., *The Greek New Testament*, 3rd ed. (West Germany: United Bible Societies, 1975) xii-iiii.

manuscripts written as minuscules are labeled by a simple Arabic number, e.g., 33 (= 9th century AD manuscript).

Lectionaries (Approximately 9th--l5th Centuries A.D.) Following the custom of the synagogue, the early Christians adopted the practice of publicly reading scripture (cf. 1 Ti. 4:13). A regular schedule of scriptural readings from the gospels and epistles was developed, often following the holy days of the Christian year. Manuscripts with biblical passages written in the order of the lesson schedule were produced, called lectionaries, and these collections, even though they contain only selected paragraphs of scripture, are also witnesses to the New Testament text. Biblical texts found in lectionaries are labeled by a lower case italicize "*l*" followed by an Arabic number, e.g., *l* 181 (= a lectionary from 980 AD).

Versions (Beginning in the 4th Century AD) The documents of the New Testament were also translated into several ancient languages, such as, Latin, Syriac, Coptic, Gothic, Armenian, Ethiopic, and so forth.

Fathers (Beginning in the 2nd Century AD) The Christian leaders in the early centuries of the Christian church, often called the "Church Fathers", frequently quoted passages of scripture in their writings. These also form a body of witness to the text of the New Testament.

Textual Criticism

As with the Old Testament, biblical scholars engage in the scientific discipline of determining from the available manuscripts the earliest form of the New Testament text. The history of New Testament textual criticism begins in earnest with the invention of printing. Prior to that time, no concerted effort was made to compare manuscripts inasmuch as any given text was localized by the very nature of the case. With the advent of printing, however, a Greek text could be printed and circulated.

Two important printed texts appeared early in the 16th century. The first was the Complutensian Polyglot (the Hebrew and Greek texts of the Old Testament with a Latin translation, and a Greek text of the New Testament along with the Latin Vulgate translation). The other was Erasmus' edition of the Greek New Testament, a critical edition established by comparing the Greek New Testament manuscripts available to him. Since that time, the science of textual criticism has been refined due to advances in the theory of evaluating the various Greek texts and due to the increasing availability of more and earlier manuscripts.[72]

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[72] For a full discussion of the history of textual criticism, see K. and B. Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, trans. E. Rhodes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 3-47.

Today, it is generally recognized that the various Greek New Testament texts fall into geographical families, that is, bodies of manuscripts which are similar to each other because they were copied and recopied in the great centers of Christianity. Thus, one may speak of a "Western Text" (Rome and the western side of the empire), an "Alexandrian Text" (Alexandria and North Africa), and a "Byzantine Text" (Constantinople and the eastern side of the empire).

X = Citation or Allusion
O = Named as Authentic
? = Named as Disputed

	Individuals											Canons			Translation		Councils	
	Ignatius (executed 110?)	Polycarp (69? - 155?)	Didache (120?)	Ireneaus (130? - 202)	Justin Martyr (100? - 165?)	Clement of Alexandria (150? - 220?)	Tertullian (160? - 230?)	Origen (185? - 254?)	Eusebius (260? - 340?)	Jerome (340? - 420)	Augustine (354 - 430)	Marcion (in Rome 140?)	Muratorian Fragment (200?)	Athanasius (367)	Old Latin (200?)	Old Syriac (400)?	Nicea (325)	Hippo(393)
Matthew		X	X	O	X	X	X	X	O	O	O		O	O	O	O	O	O
Mark		X		O	X	X	X	X	O	O	O		O	O	O	O	O	O
Luke		X	X	O	X	X	X	X	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
John		X		O	O	X	X	X	O	O	O		O	O	O	O	O	O
Acts		X		O	X	X	X	X	O	O	O		O	O	O	O	O	O
Romans		X	X	O	X	O	X	X	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
1 Cor		X	X	O	X	O	X	X	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
2 Cor		X		O	X	O	X	X	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Galatians		X		O	X	O	X	X	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Ephesians	X	X		O	X	X	X	X	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Phil	X	X		O		O	X	X	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Col	X	X		O	X	O	X	X	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
1 Thes.	X	X	X	O	X	X	X	X	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
2 Thes.	X	X		O	X	X	X	X	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
1 Timothy		X	X	X		O	X	X	O	O	O		O	O	O	O	O	O
2 Timothy				X			X	X	O	O	O		O	O	O	O	O	O
Titus				X		O	X	X	O	O	O		O	O	O	O	O	O
Phmn	X								O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Hebrews				X		O	X	?	O	O	O			O		O	O	O
James									?	O	O			O		O	?	O
1 Peter		X		O	X	O	X	O	O	O	O			O		O	O	O
2 Peter								?	?	O	O			O			?	O
1 John		X		O		O	X		O	O	O		O	O	O	O	O	O
2 John		X		X				?	?	O	O		O	O	O		?	O
3 John								?	?	O	O		O	O	O		?	O
Jude				X		O	X		?	O	O		O	O	O		?	O
Rev			X	O	X	O	X	O	O	O	O		O	O	O		O	O

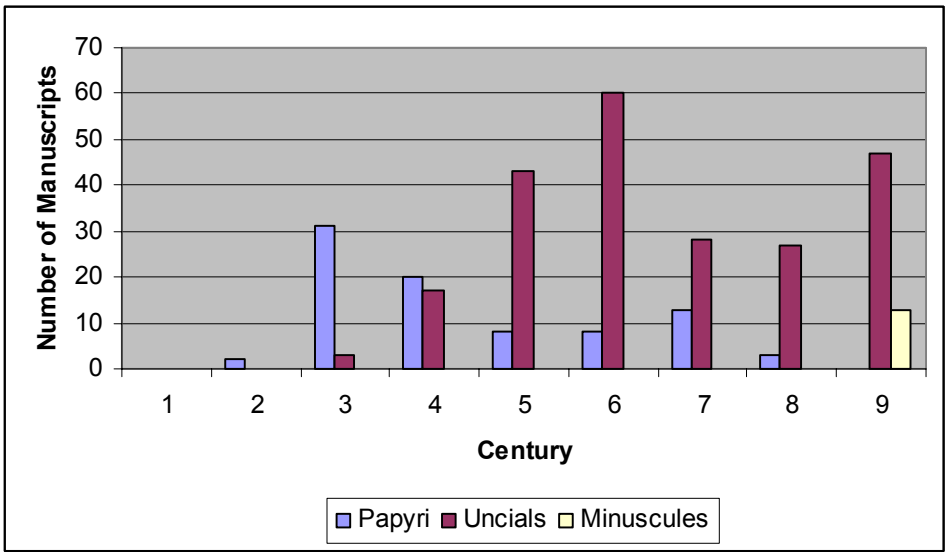
Other text types are possible as well, though the above three are the most widely recognized. Furthermore, the modern biblical scholar has access to critical Greek New Testament printed texts, that is, Greek texts of the New Testament with an apparatus which lists the most significant textual variations and the manuscripts in which these variations occur.[73] From these critical Greek texts, translators and scholars can use the science of textual criticism to work backwards toward the original.[74]

Canon Lists

Some idea of the various assessments of the New Testament canonical books in the first five centuries of Christianity can be surveyed in the foregoing chart.[75]

Relative Number of New Testament Manuscripts

The following chart has been adapted from Aland, *Text*, 82.

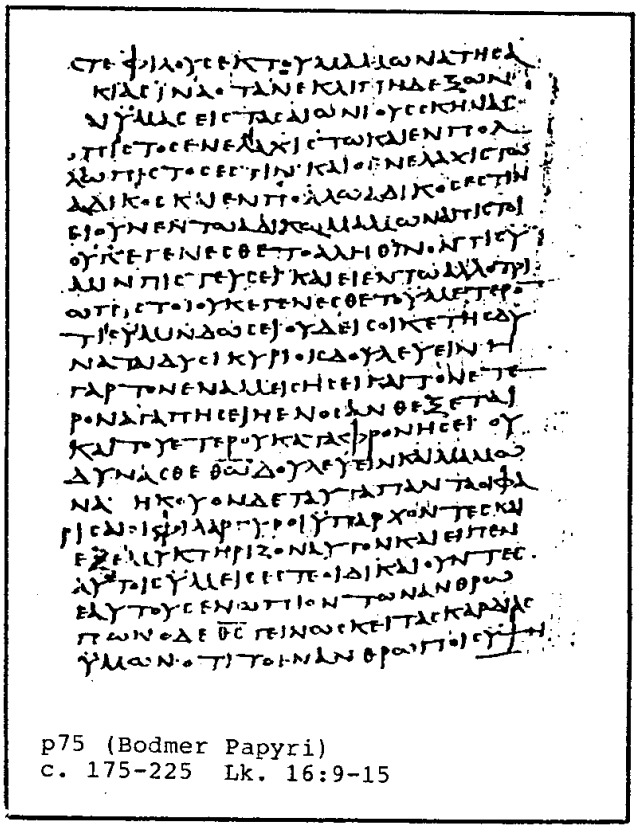


[73] Two of the most widely acclaimed are Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1979) and K. Aland et al., eds., *The Greek New Testament*, 4th ed. (West Germany: United Bible Societies, 1975).

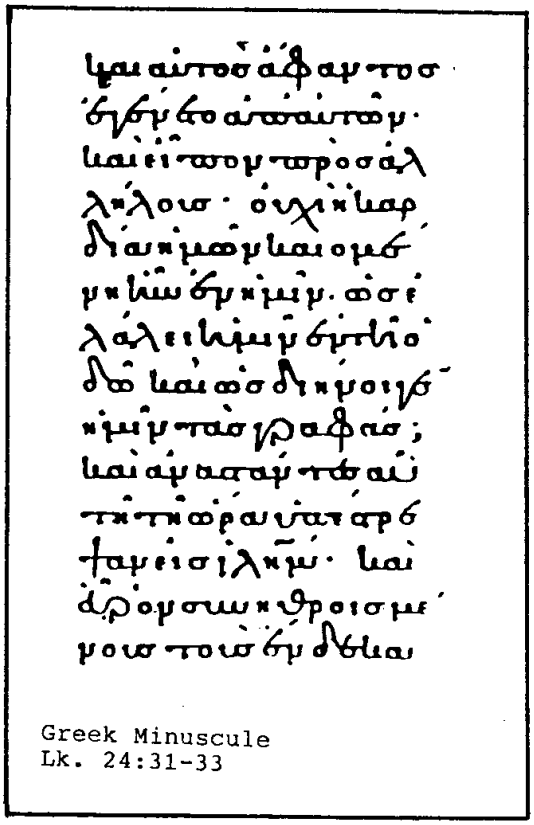
[74] For thorough introductions to the science of textual criticism, see J. Greenlee, *Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964) and/or K. and B. Aland, *The Text of the New Testament,* trans. E. Rhodes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987).

[75] Adapted from Geisler and Nix, 193.

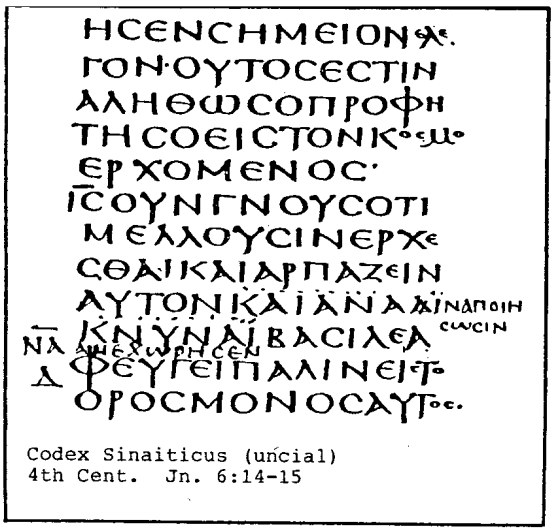
The Text of the New Testament



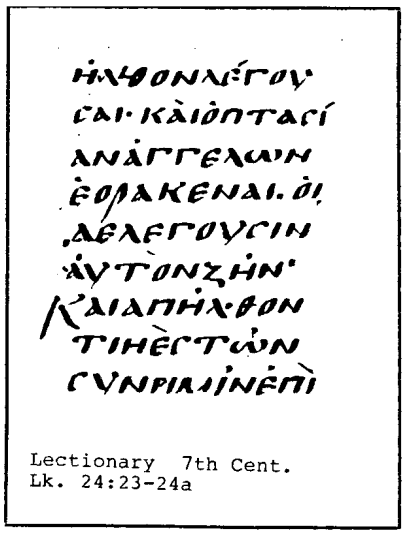
p75 (Bodmer Papyri)
c. 175-225 Lk. 16:9-15



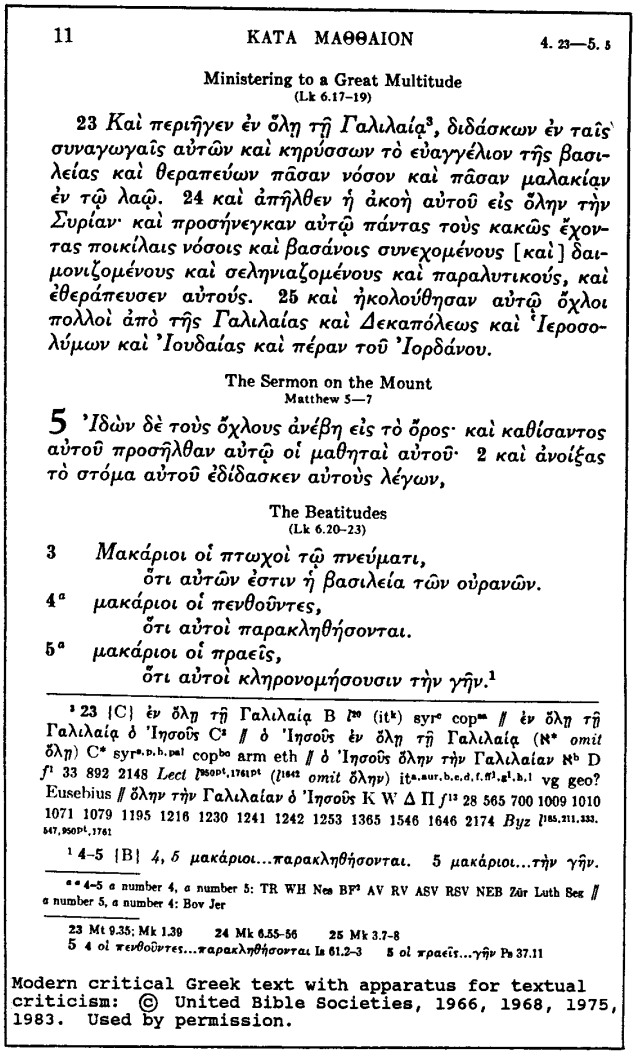
Greek Minuscule
Lk. 24:31-33



Codex Sinaiticus (uncial)
4th Cent. Jn. 6:14-15



Lectionary 7th Cent.
Lk. 24:23-24a



11 KATA MAΘΘAION 4. 23—5. 5

Ministering to a Great Multitude
(Lk 6.17–19)

23 Καὶ περιῆγεν ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ Γαλιλαίᾳ[3], διδάσκων ἐν ταῖς συναγωγαῖς αὐτῶν καὶ κηρύσσων τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς βασιλείας καὶ θεραπεύων πᾶσαν νόσον καὶ πᾶσαν μαλακίαν ἐν τῷ λαῷ. 24 καὶ ἀπῆλθεν ἡ ἀκοὴ αὐτοῦ εἰς ὅλην τὴν Συρίαν· καὶ προσήνεγκαν αὐτῷ πάντας τοὺς κακῶς ἔχοντας ποικίλαις νόσοις καὶ βασάνοις συνεχομένους [καὶ] δαιμονιζομένους καὶ σεληνιαζομένους καὶ παραλυτικούς, καὶ ἐθεράπευσεν αὐτούς. 25 καὶ ἠκολούθησαν αὐτῷ ὄχλοι πολλοὶ ἀπὸ τῆς Γαλιλαίας καὶ Δεκαπόλεως καὶ Ἱεροσολύμων καὶ Ἰουδαίας καὶ πέραν τοῦ Ἰορδάνου.

The Sermon on the Mount
Matthew 5—7

5 Ἰδὼν δὲ τοὺς ὄχλους ἀνέβη εἰς τὸ ὄρος· καὶ καθίσαντος αὐτοῦ προσῆλθαν αὐτῷ οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ· 2 καὶ ἀνοίξας τὸ στόμα αὐτοῦ ἐδίδασκεν αὐτοὺς λέγων,

The Beatitudes
(Lk 6.20–23)

3 Μακάριοι οἱ πτωχοὶ τῷ πνεύματι,
ὅτι αὐτῶν ἐστιν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν.
4[a] μακάριοι οἱ πενθοῦντες,
ὅτι αὐτοὶ παρακληθήσονται.
5[a] μακάριοι οἱ πραεῖς,
ὅτι αὐτοὶ κληρονομήσουσιν τὴν γῆν.[1]

[3] 23 {C} ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ Γαλιλαίᾳ B $\mathfrak{P}^{70}$ (it^{k}) syr^{c} cop^{sa} // ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ Γαλιλαίᾳ ὁ Ἰησοῦς C^{2} // ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ Γαλιλαίᾳ (ℵ* *omit* ὅλῃ) C* syr^{s,p,h,pal} cop^{bo} arm eth // ὁ Ἰησοῦς ὅλην τὴν Γαλιλαίαν ℵ^{b} D *f*^{1} 33 892 2148 *Lect* $\mathfrak{P}^{50vid,1761vid}$ ($\mathfrak{P}^{1642}$ *omit* ὅλην) it$^{a,aur,b,e,d,f,ff^{1},g^{1},h,l}$ vg geo? Eusebius // ὅλην τὴν Γαλιλαίαν ὁ Ἰησοῦς K W Δ Π *f*^{13} 28 565 700 1009 1010 1071 1079 1195 1216 1230 1241 1242 1253 1365 1546 1646 2174 *Byz* $\mathfrak{P}^{185,211,333,547,950vid,1761}$

[1] 4–5 {B} *4, 6* μακάριοι...παρακληθήσονται. *5* μακάριοι...τὴν γῆν.

[a a] 4–5 *a* number 4, *a* number 5: TR WH Nes BF^{2} AV RV ASV RSV NEB Zür Luth Segˣ // *a* number 5, *a* number 4: Bov Jer

23 Mt 9.35; Mk 1.39 24 Mk 6.55–56 25 Mk 3.7–8
5 4 οἱ πενθοῦντες...παρακληθήσονται Is 61.2–3 5 οἱ πραεῖς...γῆν Ps 37.11

The English Bible

Occasionally one hears a complaint about the plethora of English translations of the Bible, as though multiple translations threatened to somehow subtract from the Bible's authority. This attitude betrays a lack of awareness of just how significant it is to be able to have the Bible in one's own language. William Tyndale was martyred for this cause (1536), and the task of producing Scripture in one's own language figured prominently in the persecutions of John Wyclif (1329?-1384), Jan Hus (1374-1415), Martin Luther (1483-1546) and other reformers. Thus, the availability of the Bible in English is not to be taken lightly, and in fact, is to be deeply appreciated. Since the writers of the New Testament took pains to write in the common language of their world (*Koine* Greek as opposed to Classical Greek, Aramaic, Latin or Hebrew) Christians can follow their cue as to the advisability of having Holy Scripture in one's native tongue.

Early English Translations[76]

Although the first complete Bible in English appeared in 1382 (Wyclif's Version), various parts of the Bible had been available to the Anglo-Saxons at much earlier dates. In the early centuries of Christianity, the original British churches had done well enough with the Latin Vulgate, but with the barbarian invasions, the Roman withdrawal from Britain, and the subsequent re-evangelization of Britain by Christian missionaries, the need arose for biblical material suitable for those without Latin backgrounds. Caedmon (7th century) and others rendered Biblical stories in verse and song as Anglo-Saxon poetry. The Venerable Bede apparently finished translating part or all of John's Gospel by 735. Alfred the Great (848-901) encouraged the translation of the Ten Commandments and some Psalms, and paraphrases of the gospels (glosses made by writing between the lines of Latin biblical texts) were appearing by about 950. By about 1000, the gospels had been translated without an accompanying Latin text (called the Wessex Gospels), and so the process went on. No complete translations were available, but miscellaneous translations of various passages appeared periodically.

With the Norman Conquest (1066), Anglo-Saxon translation waned inasmuch as the Normans did not speak it and the language of Britain was in the process of making its shift toward Middle English. Eventually, Anglo-Saxon became unintelligible altogether and was abandoned. By the end of the 12th century, a poetic version of the Gospels and Acts, along with a commentary, was composed by Orm, an Augustinian monk. By the middle of the 13th century, Genesis and Exodus had appeared, and by the end of the century, the Psalms. Again, however, no complete Bible was available but only various comparatively small selections. Furthermore, none of these were very widely read, even by the clergy, let alone the commoners.

The Wyclif Version

By the 14th century, the vision for the entire Bible in the common language was born in the heart of the scholar John Wyclif. Assisted by various scholar-friends, such as Nicolas of Hereford and John Purvey, Wyclif carried the task forward until by 1382 the whole Bible had been translated into Middle English from the Latin Vulgate. Though Wyclif himself died in 1384, his version was joyfully received by laypersons and enjoyed a wide usage for about 150 years. These efforts at translation were costly, however, not only because copies were all hand-written and therefore very expensive, but also because they were opposed by the church and state authorities. English laws were legislated so that anyone who read the Scriptures in

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[76] W. Smith and G. Bromiley, "English Versions," *ISBE* (1982) 11.83; J. Branton, *IDB* (1962) IV.760-761; M. Abrams, ed., *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 3rd. ed. (New York: Norton, 1975) 1-19.

the mother tongue, "....should forfeit land, catel, life, and goods from their heyres for ever." In 1415, Wyclif's Version was officially condemned, and in 1428, his body was exhumed and burned.

Renaissance and Reformation Bibles[77]

With the revived study of ancient Greek and Hebrew by Renaissance scholars, the examination of the Scriptures in their original languages became increasingly important. This, plus the Reformation ideal which placed Holy Scripture as the central Christian authority, heightened the desire for accurate translations in the common language. When printing was invented, a technological vehicle was discovered which could make the Bible widely available. The Dutch scholar Erasmus (1466?-1536) encouraged translation efforts on the continent, and William Tyndale (1492?-1536) did the same in Britain. To one cleric who belittled his work, Tyndale retorted, "If God spare my lyfe, ere many yeares I wyl cause a boye that dryveth the plough shall know more of the scripture than thou doest." When Tyndale could no longer work in England because of bitter opposition, he fled to the continent where he continued to translate. By 1525 he finished the New Testament, and fundraising was shortly begun in England to purchase copies.[78] Some wished to buy it to read, others to burn. The vehemence with which Bible translation was opposed is mirrored in a speech by Cochlaeus:

> *The New Testament translated into the vulgar tongue is in truth the food of death, the fuel of sin, the veil of malice, the pretext of false liberty, the protection of disobedience, the corruption of discipline, the depravity of morals, the termination of concord, the death of honesty, the well-spring of vices, the disease of virtues, the instigation of rebellion, the milk of pride, the nourishment of contempt, the death of peace, the destruction of charity, the enemy of unity, the murderer of truth.*

In Holland, the church authorities finally caught up with Tyndale, and on October 6, 1536, he was strangled and burned alive. As he died, his final words were, "Lord, open the King of England's eyes."

Following Tyndale, various other English translations became available. Miles Coverdale (1535) and Thomas Matthew (1537) produced translations. The Great Bible (1539) was published, as was the Taverner Bible (1539), the Geneva Bible (1560), the Bishop's Bible (1568), and the Douay (Douai) Version (1609-1610).

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[77] Smith and Bromiley, 84-85; Branton, 761-762.

[78] An excellent biography of William Tyndale's life is available in B. Edwards, *William Tyndale: The Father of the English Bible*, rev. ed. (Farmington Hills, MI: William Tyndale College, 1982).

Eventually, in 1604, King James of England ordered that a translation be made which was consonant with the original Greek and Hebrew. A task force of scholars was appointed, and while the Bishop's Bible was selected to be the basic starting text (the KJV is thus a revision), the versions of Tyndale, Matthew Coverdale, the Great Bible, and the Geneva Bible were all to be available for comparison. The King James Version[79] was published in 1611, though it fought for acceptance for some 40 years since it was the "new version,[11] and therefore, suspicious. Eventually, however, it won the day and remained the primary English Bible for over three centuries, though it was surpassed in sales by the New International Version in the late 1980s.

Revising the King James Version

Although various minor English translations appeared between 1611 and the middle of the 19th century, none arose to challenge the KJV. However, during the 19th century, increasing pressure was exerted toward a major revision due to the growing availability of older and better manuscripts in the original languages as well as the gradual shifting of the English language itself.[80] In 1881 the first major revision was finished called the English Revised Version (RV). The American Standard Version (ASV), also a revision of the KJV, appeared in 1901. Still later, the Revised Standard Version (RSV) appeared in 1952 and has been widely received by both scholars and laypersons.

20th Century Translations

The 20th century has seen an unparalleled increase in Bible translation into the English language. Some of these translations have been prepared by individual scholars and others by committees. Unlike the RV, ASV and RSV, which were largely revisionary in nature, these translations most often have been made directly from the Greek and Hebrew texts. Following are a sampling of the most important of them:[81]

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[79] The King James Version is sometimes called the Authorized Version, though this is probably a misnomer, since there was no formal appointment of it by either King, Parliament or anyone else.

[80] For a catalogue of archaisms in the KJV which are due purely to the shifting of the English language since 1611, see, L. Weigle, *IDB* (1962) III.582-589.

[81] Reviews of the various newer translations with some assessment of their strengths and weaknesses can be found in F. Bruce, *History of the Bible in English*, 3rd. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978) 153-269 or S. Kubo & W. Specht, *So Many Versions?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975).

Full Bibles (OT and NT)[82]

Moffat	*A New Translation of the Bible* (1928) by James Moffat, Scottish scholar
JB	*Jerusalem Bible* (1966) by Roman Catholic scholars (includes the Apocrypha)
NEB	*New English Bible* (1970) by British and Scottish scholars
NAB	*New American Bible* (1971) by Roman Catholic scholars (includes the Apocrypha)
NASB	*New American Standard Bible* (1971) by American scholars (a revision of the ASV)
NIV	*New International Version* (1978) by scholars from various English speaking countries

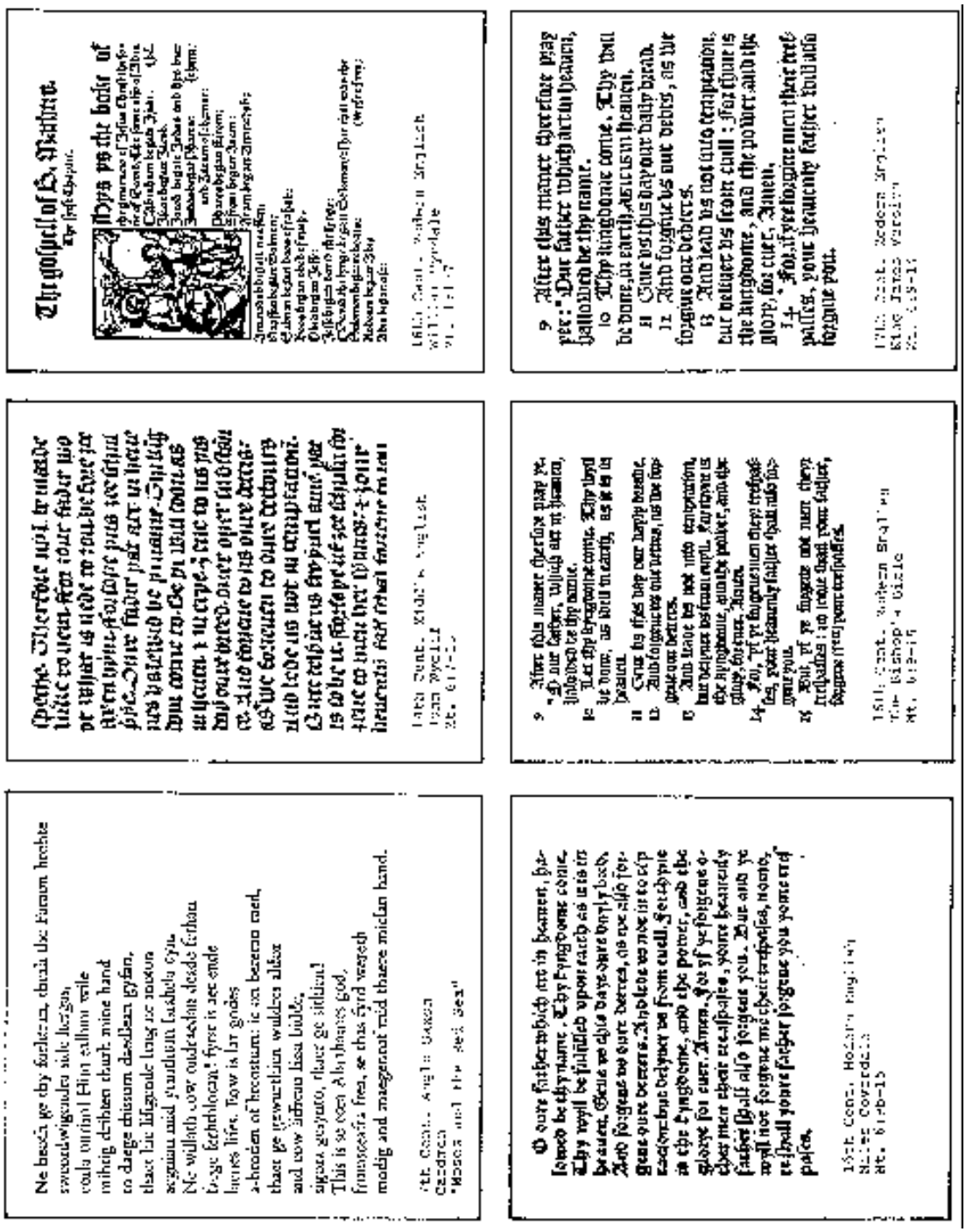
New Testaments:[83]

Weymouth	*New Testament in Modern Speech* (1903) by Richard Weymouth, British scholar
TCNT	*Twentieth Century New Testament* (1904) by British scholars
TEV	*Good News for Modern Man: Today's English Version* (1966) by the American Bible Society
Phillips	*The New Testament in Modern English* (1958) by J. B. Phillips, British scholar

[82] There are two quite popular editions of the Bible which are not included in the above list inasmuch as they have unique characteristics which set them apart from formal translations. One is the *Amplified Bible* (1965), which provides alternative readings and additional words not in the original which are designed to bring out the various nuances more clearly. The other is the *Living Bible* (1971), which is not a translation at all, but rather, a paraphrase by Kenneth Taylor using highly idiomatic English.

[83] A convenient resource for modern New Testament translations is C. Vaughan, ed., *The New Testament from 26 Translations* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967). Drawing from 26 different versions of the New Testament, this volume juxtaposes a selection of translations for each verse.

The English Bible



The Closing of the Canon

There is one further area of importance that ought to be addressed with regard to how the Bible came to us, and that is the question of the closing of the canon of Scripture. To understand how this inquiry is to be framed, it will be helpful to distinguish the question of a "closed" canon from other canonical questions, such as

the historical "fixing" of the canon and the "extent" of the canon.

Earlier in the study, it was explained how the canons of the Old Testament and the New Testament were fixed. However, this historical description still does not answer the question as to whether or not the canon should be considered closed, and in fact, this latter question must be answered on theological grounds rather than historical ones. While the fixing of the Old Testament canon by the Jews and the New Testament canon by the Christians is a question of "fact", the closing of the biblical canon is a question of "ought". One of the generally accepted marks of cultism, at least so considered by the mainstream of Christianity, is an openness to extra-biblical revelation, and by implication, an open canon.[84] The Mormon scriptures and the Muslim Koran are sacred books recognized alongside the Bible by their respective religious faiths. The writings of persons like Charles Russell (Jehovah's Witnesses) and Ellen White and William Miller (Seventh Day Adventists), while not ostensibly regarded as Holy Scripture, are at least treated authoritatively alongside the Bible by loyal followers. Hindus may very well accept the Bible as containing sacred thoughts, but they certainly give more weight to their own scriptures, the Vedas, Upanishads, and especially, the Bhagavad Gita.

Furthermore, the question of the closing of the canon is not the same as the question of the extent of the canon. Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism and Protestantism do not completely agree upon the extent of the Old Testament canon (the Roman Church includes apocryphal books, while the Protestants do not).[85] All three major branches of Christendom, however, agree that the canon should be considered closed.

An Historical Watershed--the 16th Century

Up until the time of the Reformation in the 16th century, the question of the canon was treated with some amount of ambivalence. The general practice at the time of Jerome (early 5th century) was to hold the books of the Hebrew Bible as superior and the apocryphal books as writings which the church did not recognize within the canon of Scripture but which were nevertheless read for the edification of the people. In time, however, this distinction was largely forgotten, and it was not until the Protestant Reformation that a serious issue was made of it.[86] Although the whole church had earlier agreed upon the canon of the New Testament, in the Reformation even the New Testament canon underwent scrutiny. Luther, always outspoken, gave to the apocryphal books an inferior rank, and even said, **"**I hate

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[84] See, for instance, the comments in D. Breese, *Know the Marks of Cults* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1975) 25-31.

[85] R. Harrison, *ISBE* (1979) I.599.

[86] F. Bruce, "Tradition and the Canon of Scripture," *The Authoritative Word*, ed. D. McKim (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983) 66-67.

Esther and 2 Maccabees so much that I wish they did not exist." Still, Luther translated the Apocrypha into German and placed its books in an intermediate position between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Some Reformers, particularly those of Geneva, rejected the Apocrypha outright, while the Roman Church, at the Council of Trent (1546), declared that all the books of the Vulgate (which included the Apocrypha) were canonical without distinction.[87]

Within the New Testament, Luther also assigned a lower rank to Hebrews, James, Jude and Revelation. Calvin had serious doubts as to whether 2 Peter was written by Peter (though he speculated that a disciple of Peter might have composed it).[88] Since that time, the question of the closing of the canon has been raised at various times. With the discovery and translation of the Pseudepigrapha, the discovery of various documents from the Qumran community, the uncovering of the Nag Hammadi texts (Gnostic), not to mention the not infrequent promulgation of recent writings as being inspired by the Holy Spirit, the question of the closing of the canon is a pertinent one. What, for instance, should one do if Paul's "lost" letters to the Corinthians or the Laodecians were discovered (cf. 1 Co. 5:9; Col 4:16)? Does the historical fact of the "fixing" of the canon, and the Protestant (or, for that matter, Roman Catholic) decisions about the "extent" of the canon correspond to the "ought" of the closing of the canon? This is the question. It is especially acute for Protestants inasmuch as they affirm authority in Scripture alone (*sola Scriptura*).

The Test of Tradition

While the question of the Old Testament canon can be said to have been settled, given the difference between Roman Catholics and Protestants, the question of the New Testament canon is of a different kind, since Christians believe that they are yet living under the new covenant which the New Testament discloses. The Roman Church, of course, appeals directly to its own ecclesiastical authority, and thus for Roman Catholics the matter is settled here as well. The free churchman, however, cannot answer the question in the same way as Roman Catholics, unless he/she is willing to grant special authority to his/her denomination, to local congregational leaders, or to a subjective, "I just feel that it must be so." Rather, the free churchman usually answers the question on the basis of Christian tradition, that is, that the Bible as it has been received has been recognized throughout the centuries as the inspired Word of God. To be sure, he/she may also apply the test of "apostolicity", that is, New Testament books were either written by apostles or by those so closely associated with apostles that they fall under the category of apostolic

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[87] Bruce, "Tradition," 66-67; R. Harrison, *ISBE* (1979) I.600.

[88] Bruce, "Tradition," 77-78.

authority if not apostolic authorship. Still, it is Christian tradition that is the strongest factor in defining the closing of the canon. At this point, Christians are obliged to trust the work of the Holy Spirit in the early church with regard to the canon. In fact, this tradition is so strong in many Protestant churches, even by those who ostensibly reject traditionalism, that the affirmation of a closed canon is more assumed than addressed.

Narrowing the Canon

Some would advocate a "canon within the canon", that is, a kind of rule or principle which would elevate certain parts of Scripture while relegating other parts to a secondary status. This is not unlike the position of Luther, who made the rubric *was Christum treibet* (= what presses home Christ) the principle for distinguishing between the "capital" books and the four New Testament documents which he regarded as secondary.[89] Various persons have adopted this sort of approach, including Thomas Jefferson, who did a "scissors and paste" editing of the teachings of Jesus according to his liking. The danger of this kind of methodology, of course, is that it is highly susceptible to recreating the authority of the Bible in one's own image. Any given theological bias is bound to affect the way a "canon within the canon" principle is applied, whether Liberation Theology, Feminism, the Liturgical Movement, Process Theology or even Evangelicalism itself. Some Christians have done in a practical way what they would have been horrified to do in a formal way. They have so emphasized some parts of Scripture over other parts that they have, in effect, established a "canon within the canon" without even realizing it. It is in order to prevent this sort of subjectivizing of the Word of God that evangelicals remain firmly committed to the full 66 books of the Bible which were recognized by the early church and transmitted through the ages.

Widening the Canon

Those who would widen the canon with other newly discovered ancient works or works freshly written must also answer the tradition of the Christian church. The position of some, Mormons for instance, is that prophetic revelation is still being given in the sense of Scripture.[90] The problem with such an approach is that it militates against the sufficiency of the Bible. If other revelations are necessary and forthcoming in order for one to know the full counsel of God, then Christ cannot be the final event, and the Bible, as it has been delivered to us, cannot be considered as sufficient. Christ can only be one in a series of events. Yet everywhere the New Testament proclaims Christ to be the final event. In him all the promises God has

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[89] Bruce, "Tradition," 78, 82.

[90] W. Martin, *Kingdom of the Cults* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1977) 158-159.

made find their "yes" (2 Co. 1:20). Though God spoke in former times by the prophets in various ways, in the last days he has spoken by his Son (He. 1:1-3). In Christ God has given everything that is necessary for life and godliness (2 Pe. 1:3). Christ is the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last (Re. 22:13). In Christ dwells all the fullness of the Deity in bodily form, and Christians have already been given fullness in Christ (Col. 1:18-19; 2:9-10). The witness of the apostles and prophets has become the foundation for the church (Ep. 2:20). John the Baptist asked, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" The overwhelming answer of the New Testament is that Jesus is indeed the one, and there is no one else.

If Christ is God's fullest expression of revelation, and if Christ chose those who should bear authoritative witness to his Word, and if early Christians accepted only those works which were written by apostles or by evangelists who were so closely associated with the apostles that they carried apostolic authority, then a widening of the canon is a direct affront to and depreciation of the Christ event itself, as well as, an indictment against the sufficiency of the New Testament witness to that event.[91] It is for this reason that evangelicals consider the canon to be closed. Not only so, but the fact that the New Testament directs Christians into the future toward the consummation of the Christ event in his *parousia* (= presence) argues that there is not some intermediate revelation to be given. The New Testament points believers toward the blessed hope, not an additional revelation.

[91] R. Meye, *ISBE* (1979) I.605-606.