

HOW WE GOT OUR BIBLE And WHY WE BELIEVE IT IS GOD'S WORD

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CHAPTER ONE

STRUCTURE AND HISTORY OF THE BIBLE

OUR English version, and probably most of the translations of the Bible, consists of sixty-six Books, thirty-nine in the Old Testament and twenty-seven in the New, and is regarded with special consideration by all Christians because it is held to be the record of the divine religion of Redemption.

The Old Testament shows how this religion was prepared through many centuries; the New tells how it was at length provided and proclaimed.

The keynote of the former is, therefore, *Preparation*, and this is twofold:

- The preparation of the Redeemer for the people;
- The preparation of the people for the Redeemer.

The keynote of the latter is *Manifestation*, and this is also twofold:

- The manifestation of the Redeemer in Person,
- The consequent manifestation of his grace in the redeemed, both individually in believers and corporately in the community of Christians, which we call the church.

Thus both Testaments together form a complete record of human sin and divine salvation, the former making the latter necessary.

- Sin is seen in its nature and consequences,
- Salvation in its character and effects.

The Books of the Old Testament are the product of at least thirty authors and cover a period of at least a thousand years.

They are made up of:

- History,
- Legislation,
- Poetry,
- Philosophy
- Prophecy.

The Jewish Old Testament, following the classification of the Hebrew text, is in three parts;

- The law,
- The prophets,
- The psalms.

The law consists of the first five books of the Bible and on this account is called the *Pentateuch (five rolls)*.

Note - It may be said in passing that there is no trace in the historical tradition of the Jews of a *Hexateuch (six rolls)*, including Joshua).

The second division of the Hebrew Bible, called the prophets, includes the historical books of Judges, Samuel and Kings, and the prophetic books proper with the exception of Daniel, which because it is apocalyptic rather than, as the other prophetic books, strictly predictive, is in the third section.

The historical books are called "*the former prophets*" because they are written from a religious standpoint and are not mere historical annals. They were pretty certainly the work of prophets or prophetic men.

The third part of the Hebrew Bible is so called from the first book in it, and the rest of it consists of those Books which are not found in the other two parts. Our English Old Testament has a different order and comes from the Greek Version of the Old Testament (*the Septuagint*).

It consists of four parts:

- Pentateuch,
- History,
- Poetry,
- Prophecy.

The New Testament numbers twenty-seven Books, and is the work of eight authors, covering only about fifty years. Of the eight authors, five were apostles of CHRIST and three were associates of the apostles.

The New Testament has three main parts:

- History, contained in the Gospels and Acts;
- Doctrine, in the Epistles;
- Prophecy, in the Revelation.

These three provide respectively the *commencement*, the *course*, and the *culmination* of the Christian religion.

There is a striking connection between the Old Testament and the New beyond the general unity mentioned above. The Old Testament emphasizes the three aspects of the divine Saviour: the *prophet*, the *priest*, and the *king*. These answer to the three deepest necessities of man.

- He requires a prophet to reveal GOD;
- He requires a priest to redeem from sin;
- He requires a king to rule his life for GOD.

Each of these is emphasized in the Old Testament, and in general can be associated with sections of its Books.

The New Testament fitly shows how this threefold need is met in CHRIST as Prophet, Priest, and King; revealing, redeeming, and ruling. The full title "**Jesus Christ our Lord**" suggests this:

- JESUS the Prophet,
- CHRIST the Priest,
- The Lord the King.

Such is the Bible as we have it today. But how did it come to be what it now is? There has been a gradual growth, and the steps of this we must note.

At first and for a long time the revelation of GOD was oral. "The word of the Lord came to Abram" (Genesis 15:1).

This was sufficient for ages. But the time came when it was necessary to put the divine revelation *in a written form*. It would seem as though a book were essential for the maintenance and continuance of religion, and it is at least interesting and perhaps also significant that all the great religious systems of the world have their sacred books.

Literature is the nearest possible approach to reliability. This is a point which will need fuller consideration at a later stage.

There are traces in the Old Testament of a gradual growth *by accretion*.

The Jewish tradition associates Moses with the commencement of the Scripture, and there is no doubt of the essential truth of this position. Certainly there is no other tradition attaching to the books; and in view of the tenacity with which the Jews kept their national traditions, this belief about Moses calls for adequate explanation.

A careful study of passages found throughout the Old Testament shows this development, indications being found at almost every period, of growth and additions to the existing writings.

Among others the following passages should be noted:

“And the LORD said unto Moses, Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua: for I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven” (Exodus 17:14).

“And Moses wrote their goings out according to their journeys by the commandment of the LORD: and these [are] their journeys according to their goings out” (Numbers 33:2).

“And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of [that which is] before the priests the Levites” (Deuteronomy 17:18).

“This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success . . . And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God, and took a great stone, and set it up there under an oak, that was by the sanctuary of the LORD” (Joshua 1:8; 24:26).

“Then Samuel told the people the manner of the kingdom, and wrote it in a book, and laid it up before the LORD. And Samuel sent all the people away, every man to his house” (I Samuel 10:25).

“Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples . . . To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isaiah 8:16, 20).

“Take thee a roll of a book, and write therein all the words that I have spoken unto thee against Israel, and against Judah, and against all the nations, from the day I spake unto thee, from the days of Josiah, even unto this day” (Jeremiah 36:2).

“In the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem” (Daniel 9:2).

“And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded to Israel” (Nehemiah 8:1).

These references, taken from each period of the history, indicate a gradual growth of the Jewish Scriptures.

The complete volume is associated by tradition with Ezra, and there are no valid reasons for doubting this, especially as it harmonizes with the testimony of the well-informed and representative Jew, Josephus, who, writing in the first century of the Christian Era, said that no book was added to the Jewish Scripture after the time of Malachi.

As to the preservation of the gradually growing volume through the ages from Moses to Ezra, it has been pointed out by that eminent *Egyptologist, Professor Naville*, that it was the custom among Eastern nations to deposit their books in their sanctuaries, and there is every likelihood that the Jews did the same. The copy found by Hilkiyah was probably this temple copy (II Kings 22:8).

The New Testament was also marked by a gradual growth.

At first came the *oral accounts* of the life of CHRIST and the presentation of the Christian message.

Then followed the *apostolic letters*, confirming and elaborating their oral teaching.

These letters were read in the assemblies of the Christians (I Thessalonians 5:27; II Thessalonians 3:14).

The next stage was the *interchange of these letters* among the churches (Colossians 4:16).

Not long after the need of a record of the life of the founder was felt, and as a result came our Gospels (Luke 1:1-4; John 20:31). The story of the early church naturally followed (Acts), and the Apocalypse fitly crowned the whole with its outlook on the future.

As the primitive churches had the Old Testament volume in their hands, it was a constant reminder of the need of an analogous volume of the New Testament, though everything was so very gradual and natural that it is only when the process is complete that it is realized to have been also manifestly supernatural.

At this point the important question arises how we can be sure that our Bible today really represents the books which have been thus naturally and simply collected into a volume.

The answer is that it is quite easy to prove that our Bible is the same as the church has had through the centuries.

We start with the printed Bibles of today and it is obviously easy to show that they correspond with the printed Bibles of the sixteenth century, or the time when printing was invented.

From these we can go back through the English and Latin versions until we reach to the great manuscripts of the fourth century as represented by the three outstanding codices known as:

- The *Codex Sinaiticus* (in Petrograd),
- The *Codex Vaticanus* (in Rome)
- The *Codex Alexandrinus* (in the British Museum).

Then we can go back still farther and compare the use of Scripture in the writings of the Fathers of the third century, and from these work back to the second century when versions in several languages are found.

From this it is but a short step to the time of the apostles and the actual composition of the New Testament writings.

There is no reasonable doubt that we possess today what has always been regarded as the Scriptures of the Christian Church.

The proof as to the Old Testament can be shown along similar lines.

Our Old Testament is identical with the Bible of the Jews at the present time. This is the translation of Hebrew manuscripts dating from several centuries past, and the fact of the Jews always having used the same Bible as they do today is a proof that all through the ages the Christian Church has not been mistaken in its inclusion of the Old Testament in its Bible.

An additional evidence of great value is the fact that the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek *about two centuries before CHRIST*, and this translation is essentially the same as the Hebrew text from which we get our Old Testament.

The additional books which are found in the Greek Old Testament, called the Apocrypha, were never part of the Jewish Scriptures, and were never regarded as Scripture by those who knew the Hebrew language. These books were not written in Hebrew, and were not included in Scripture by any body of Christians until the Church of Rome arbitrarily decided to include them at the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century. In addition to other points which could be mentioned, these books contain inaccuracies in history and doctrine, which make it impossible for them to be regarded as part of the Word of GOD for man.

These are some of the facts which are connected with our Bible as we now have it, and from them we can proceed to consider the various points which are involved in our belief that the Bible is for us the Word of GOD, and as such, the rule of our faith and practice.

QUESTIONS

1. Into how many Books is the Bible divided? How many in the Old Testament? How many in the New Testament?
2. Why is the Bible regarded with special consideration by all Christians? What is the keynote of the Old Testament? What is the keynote of the New Testament?
3. How many Old Testament writers were there? How long a period was covered in the writing of the Old Testament?
4. How many New Testament writers were there? How long a period was covered in the writing of the New Testament?
5. What arrangement of Books was followed in the Hebrew Old Testament? In what New Testament passage is this arrangement referred to? What is the New Testament arrangement of the Books? What do these sections respectively provide?
6. What aspects of CHRIST, essential to man's need, are specially emphasized in the Old Testament? How does the New Testament show that this need is met? How does our Lord's full title suggest this?
7. What does the Old Testament show concerning the method of its formation? Whom does Jewish tradition associate with its beginning? Whom does it associate with its completion? What explanation has been offered to account for the preservation of the volume?
8. What was the method of the formation of the New Testament? State the probable general order of the appearance of the several groups of Books.
9. Can we be sure that our Bible of today really represents the Books originally collected into one volume? How may this be shown as to the Old Testament? How may this be shown as to the New Testament?
10. What is the Apocrypha? Was it included in the canon of the Hebrew Old Testament? By what authority does it appear in certain modern editions of the Bible?

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