

HOW THE BIBLE CAME TO US PART 1

The book we know as the Bible began to come into existence over 3,000 years ago. The earliest books were written by Moses for the Hebrew speaking people, known as Israelites in history.



Cuneiform writing on Clay Tablet

Moses may have had access to information written on clay tablets before the Flood (see Genesis 5 ‘This *is* the book of the generations of Adam”) which provides a genealogy from Adam to Noah and his sons.

The first five books, collectively known as the Pentateuch, describe the origin of the Israelites; how they sprang from the patriarchs Abraham,

Isaac and Jacob. Jacob had twelve sons and from these came the twelve tribes of Israel. Jacob and his family of some 70 persons came from the land of Canaan into Egypt, as a result of a famine. In time the Egyptians considered these Israelites to be a threat to their nation and enslaved these descendants of Jacob as described in the Book of Exodus.

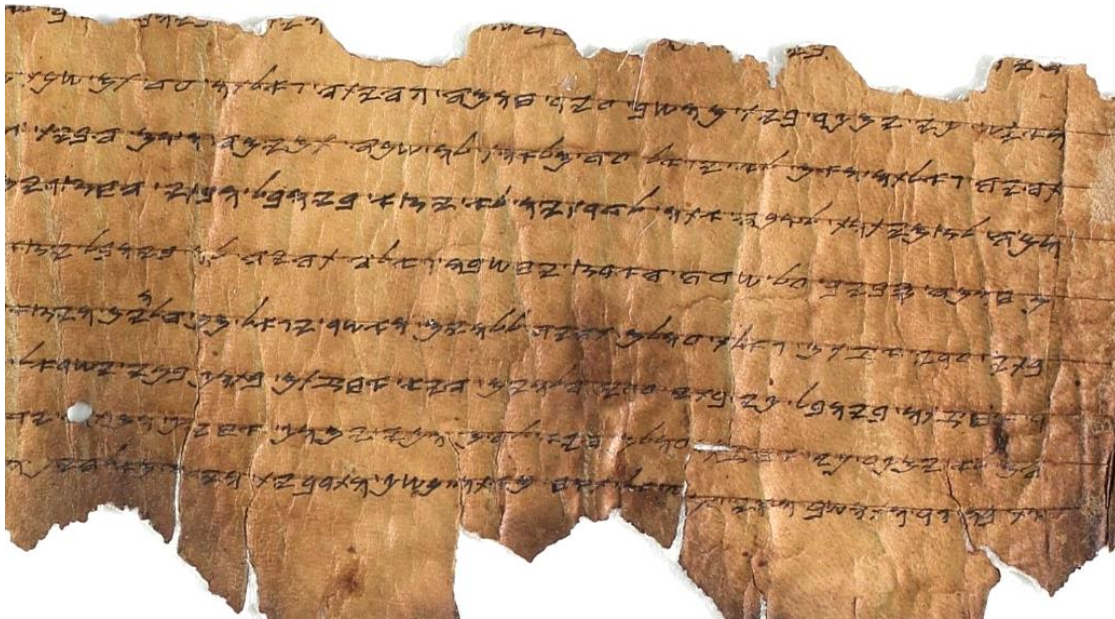
This second book, describes how the Israelites, under Moses, escaped from Egypt through Divine intervention and dwelt in the vicinity of the land of Midian and the wilderness above Sinai. While in the wilderness, Moses received from God the Law, designed to unite the Israelites into a nation. 40 years later, they emerged on the borders of the land God had promised to the patriarchs and there, after driving out the former inhabitants, the tribes settled from Beer-Sheba in the south to Dan in the north; eventually becoming a kingdom. However, the nation did not observe the laws of their God, and as a result, the nation dwindled and went into decline. The Old Testament, besides the Law of Moses, relates the subsequent history of this people until about 400 B.C. It also contains the writings of the prophets sent by God an endeavour to turn Israel back to the Law He had given them, but to no avail. In addition, the Old Testament contains 150 Psalms, religious songs for worship, praise and meditation and also books of wisdom.

The Hebrew books were written on scrolls and the utmost care was taken when copying a scroll, to ensure that it was done accurately. The scribes

underwent a period of training before they were allowed to copy a sacred text. For these the rules were as follows:-

- 1) They could only use clean animal skins, both to write on, and even to bind manuscripts.
- 2) Each column of writing could have no less than forty-eight, and no more than sixty lines.
- 3) The ink must be black, and of a special recipe.
- 4) They must verbalize each word aloud while they were writing.
- 5) They must wipe the pen and wash their entire bodies before writing the word "Yahweh," every time they wrote it.
- 6) There must be a review within thirty days, and if as many as three pages required corrections, the entire manuscript had to be redone.
- 7) The letters, words, and paragraphs had to be counted, and the document became invalid if two letters touched each other. The middle paragraph, word and letter must correspond to those of the original document.
- 8) The documents could be stored only in sacred places (synagogues, etc)
- 9) As no document containing God's Word could be destroyed, they were stored, or buried, in a genizah - a Hebrew term meaning "hiding place." These were usually kept in a synagogue or sometimes in a Jewish cemetery.

In this way the true text was maintained, and that this was so, was proved by the discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls in 1947, for they dated back to between 200BC and 300BC. It was found that the Text of these scrolls differed little from the text used in modern Jewish Bibles. So notwithstanding the passing of 2000 years the text of the Old Testament has been faithfully maintained.



The Paleo-Hebrew Leviticus scroll. Courtesy of the Leon Levy Dead Sea Scrolls Digital Library

Material: - Tanned Leather; Size 100.5cm. x 10.9cm; Writing Paleo Hebrew letters
Produced between 2nd and 1st century BC. Discovered 1956 Qumran Cave 11

The New Testament documents the life of Jesus of Nazareth, who claimed to be Israel's Messiah, and the writings of his apostles recording his teaching, describing his actions, the manner of his death, and most important of all, his resurrection and ascension. In time the text of the Bible was no longer written on scrolls of parchment, but the early followers of Jesus Christ began to use book form for easier reference. The Bible is described as consisting of the Old Testament and the New Testament, the New does not repudiate the Old but rather fulfils it as indicated by the many references to the Law and the prophets in the New Testament.

The Old Testament was translated into Greek about 250 BC. This translation was called the Septuagint after the Latin word for "seventy". While the New Testament was written in Greek between AD 40 and AD 90. Afterwards both were translated into Latin in AD 382 by Jerome, a Latin priest who resided in Bethlehem. The Jerome Bible was adopted by the Roman Catholic Church and no other was available in Western Europe for 1,130 years, when Erasmus produced a New Greek translation of the New Testament. The first five books of the Bible known as the

Pentateuch were translated by seventy elders sent to Egypt from Jerusalem by the high priest Eleazar at the request of King Ptolemy Philadelphus of Alexandria who wanted the Jewish Scriptures in his library. Eventually all of the Old Testament was translated along with other non-sacred, uninspired writings known as the Apocrypha.



William Tyndale 1494 – 6 October 1536)

The Bible was brought to England quite early on, but it was probably this Latin version of Jerome, known as the Vulgate. A few translations into Anglo-Saxon are known, but in the main the Bible was only available in Latin until about 1360, when John Wycliffe, believing that the Bible should be understood by ordinary folk, translated it into the English of the day. Abroad in Europe similar movements began, which gave rise to the Reformation, of whom Martin Luther was a leading light. In England in 1530 the first printed Bible in English appeared, the work of William Tyndale, who was eventually put to death, at the urging of the Catholic Church, for heresy. Other versions of the Bible appeared until the publication of the King James Version in 1611; a

book which, more than any other, was taken to the heart of the English speaking people, and which proclaimed the truth of Christianity far and wide.

Since then there have been many revisions and versions; currently the Bible is published in over 100 different versions and in most of the world's languages. In this way the Bible came to the English speaking people. But the question is, what have they done with it? A survey by the Bible Society concluded that between 1815 and 1975 2.5 Billion Bibles had been printed, but more recent estimates put that at 5 Billion. According to the Economist, 100 million copies of the Bible are sold or given away every year. Annual Bible sales in USA are worth between \$425 million and \$650 million. Gideon International gives away a Bible every second. The Bible is available, all or in part, in 2,426 languages covering 95% of the world's

population. It is not only the bestselling book of all time, it is the bestselling book of the year every year!

One country with the greatest demand for the Bible has been Communist China; since 1987 some 50 million Bibles have been distributed to Chinese people, but the demand could be as great as 90 million. Remarkably, in 2008 the world's largest Bible printing facility, known as the Amity Printing Company opened in Nanjing with the potential to print 12 million Bibles a year. They actually produce 23 Bibles every minute.

If the sales of the Bible and the Koran are considered, the predictions of the Atheistic Evolutionist camp that the world will become more secular and less religious, the opposite seems to be increasingly the case. The Atheistic Evolutionist dogma does not provide answers to the problems which beset human beings at every stage of their experience, while the Bible deals specifically with the problems of human nature

The most prolific producer of Christian Missionaries is now South Korea. The next biggest Bible publishing houses are in South Korea and Brazil. An interlinked global network of 140 national or regional Bible Societies pool resources to reach its collective goal of putting the Bible into the hands of every man, woman and child on the planet. But there is a difference between getting and understanding the Bible. Americans buy 20 million new Bibles every year to add to the four the average American already has at home. Yet the state of American Biblical knowledge is abysmal. A Gallup survey found that less than half Americans can name the first book of the Bible. Only a third knew who delivered the Sermon on the Mount (Billy Graham was a popular answer) while a quarter did not know what is celebrated at Easter; 60% could not name half the Ten Commandments, 12% thought Noah's wife was Joan of Arc. George Gallup described America as a nation of Biblical illiterates!

The situation in the United Kingdom is no better. According to Durham University survey: - "Knowledge of the Bible is declining with fewer than 1 in 20 people being able to recite the 10 commandments; 62% did not know the parable of the Prodigal Son; 60% couldn't name anything about the Good Samaritan; 40% didn't know that the tradition of giving Christmas gifts came from the story of the wise men bringing gold, frankincense and myrrh to the infant Jesus. Only 5% could name all the 10 commandments, 16% could not name any. The survey showed that despite the success of the musical 'Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor

Dreamcoat,' 57% knew nothing about Joseph and his brothers. One respondent said David and Goliath was the name of a ship, while another thought Daniel- who survived being thrown into the lion's den – was 'The Lion King'. Half of under 45's could not give accurate information about Samson and Delilah, compared to a quarter of over 45's. Similarly 33% of under 45's couldn't name anything about the Feeding of the 5,000 compared to 12% of over 45's. Church-goers also showed a lack of Biblical knowledge; 72% knowing nothing about Daniel in the lion's den; and 57% unable to talk accurately about the stilling of the storm when Jesus calmed the Sea of Galilee.

So in view of these trends we might be led to ask how it is that a book which has obtained a world-wide circulation became so neglected in those countries where its influence was previously so great. Who is responsible for the decline, both in the knowledge and understanding, of the Bible? What is it about the Bible that such ancient writings of which it is comprised should have become such a prominent publication?

Taking a closer look into the Bible, we find that it is not just one book it is a whole collection. There are 66 books (or sections) in all, divided into two main sections, 39 of them comprise the Old Testament and 27 make up the New Testament. We have seen how the Old Testament is an historical record of the ancient Israeli people, later all regarded as Jews, down to approximately 411BC with the return of the Jewish Captives from Babylon and the restoration of Jerusalem, roughly co-incident with the birth of the Greek Philosopher Plato. The prophecy of Daniel however takes the Bibles chronology down to the time of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

The Gospels are four accounts about Jesus' activities compiled by those who knew him and were eyewitnesses, or those who knew those who were eyewitnesses, and most importantly, giving their explanations as to why they believed Jesus to be the Son of God and Israel's Messiah. The book of the Acts relates how the followers of Jesus carried his teaching to all nations; then follows a number of letters to communities of Christians, some written from prison; while the last book, the Revelation, is about the history of Christianity, conveyed in prophetic symbolism which concludes with the second appearing of Jesus Christ to establish the Kingdom of God on earth.

The Bible is a unique book. It was written over a period of 1500 years, the work of more than 40 writers, many of whom attributed their message to divine inspiration. The Lord Jesus and the apostles regarded the Old Testament scriptures as the Word of God. Their explanation for this is that they were divinely inspired, “holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit”. (2Pe 1:21) These writers came from very different backgrounds: from kings, government officials, fishermen and farmers, poets, physicians and teachers, priests and prophets. As already indicated, it is written in three languages, and was written on three continents: Asia, Africa and Europe. It alludes to every type of human activity, from horticulture, to husbandry; from tent making to masonry, from metal casting to embroidery. It contains references to anatomy and medicine, battle scenes and field sports; laws to govern society from marriage; to sanitation. It contains history, biography, counselling, travelogues, news reports and prophecy.

Yet though written by so many individuals from differing localities separated by hundreds of miles; writing in times and generations centuries apart and in different circumstances; from persecution and captivity to freedom and high authority. Yet the information contained in the Bible is woven into one continuous and magnificent theme and purpose. Is there any other book so old, attracting the attention of so many, in daily use by millions around the world; but still imparting useful and practical information beneficial to men and women today? There are other writings as old as this but they are all in museums or collections: the province of experts, with very little relevance to the world today.

However, we believe that the only explanation for this is because the Bible is what it claims to be: **the Word of the living God**. If this is so, how is it that, since there is really only one Bible, there are so many different churches, denominations, sects and sub-sects? Is it really so difficult to understand the Bible that none are able to agree as to its meaning? For if that is the case, how can it be of assistance to modern life?

This brings us then to consider the Bible as “a book that is sealed”. This has reference to the way ancient literature was stored. Books as we know them did not come into existence until about the 2nd century AD; prior to that the information was written on scrolls of varying length. If the scroll was sealed, then



Scroll of the Law AD 1300

it could only be opened by an authorised individual; if it was delivered with a broken seal, it was an indication that the contents had been read by a person, or persons, other than the intended recipient. Prior to writing on scrolls, information was written on clay tablets; these too would be sealed by enclosing them in a clay envelope. Breaking open the envelope the tablet within could then be read. So we see then that a sealed book was a book that was designed to be read only by the authorised recipient.

A book in itself appears as a very appropriate symbol of knowledge. An open book is a significant emblem of the treasures of knowledge. There is a passage of scripture in the prophecy of Isaiah which serves to illustrate this subject: *“The Lord has poured upon you the spirit of deep sleep and has closed your eyes; the prophets, the rulers and the seers has He covered. The vision of all has become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one that is learned, saying, Read this I pray you, and he says, I cannot for it is sealed; that is closed, as opposed to being opened. And the book is delivered to one that is **not** learned, saying, Read this I pray you, and he says, I am not learned.”* Then follows an explanation where we are shown the meaning of the prophecy’s analogy. *“Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draws near me with their mouth and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the **wisdom of men**; behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder. For the wisdom of their wise men shall perish and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid.”* Is.29:10-14.

What we are being taught here is that the nation of Israel was privileged above all nations to have received a revelation from God. They had been given laws and instructions for the regulation of society far superior to any other nation. But though they boasted of their superiority, they chose to ignore God’s rules and do their own thing. They chose to be idol worshippers, they chose to oppress their neighbours and to be adulterers, thieves and liars; treading down the poor and

cheating the fatherless. Because of this general hypocrisy and wickedness of Israel, God threatened to close the eyes of their teachers and cause the wisdom of their wise men to fail. All this has been replicated in the history of Christianity and the effects have been similar. The Jews, for their sins, were left to be blind to the meaning of their prophecies. They were unable to identify their Messiah when he came, but rejected him and brought upon themselves the judgments of God; even so has a similar blindness happened to those professing Christianity.

In respect of the Jews, this is illustrated in the method of Christ's teaching. In Matt.13:34 Jesus spoke to the multitude in parables and without a parable he said nothing to them. In the previous verses, 10-11, we learn how his disciples asked Jesus, *"Why do you speak to them in parables?"* He answered them, *"Because it is given to you to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given."* The multitude could not understand because the knowledge was lost to them. But in fact that knowledge was available in the law and the prophets, but neither the learned nor the unlearned could interpret it correctly. In Is.29:9 the reason is given: they were "drunken but not with wine; they stagger but not with strong drink. For the Lord had poured out upon them the spirit of deep sleep and closed their eyes, their prophets and rulers and their seers has He covered." They had lost sight of the true teaching of the Kingdom of God, and the information provided that would identify the Messiah.

Instead they had embraced the philosophies of those who had conquered them, first the Greeks and then the Romans, which taught immediate reward in Elysium and punishment in Tartarus at the instant of death. They expected Elijah to come first and restore all things; and the kingdom to be recreated with observation, when their invincible Messiah should sit on the throne of David. They could not conceive that "he must first suffer many things and be rejected of their generation," Acts 2:30, and afterwards by resurrection, to sit on David's throne. Neither did they understand that, being a Jew by descent did not guarantee them a place in the Kingdom, but that those who would possess it must first be righteous and then made immortal by resurrection from the dead. They supposed that when the Messiah came, he would promote them to honour and glory; little dreaming that, as Jesus taught, the first shall be last; and that poor peasants from Galilee, out of which no good thing ever came in their estimation, poor peasants and Gentile dogs should be first in the Kingdom of God.

The Kingdom correctly understood is the key to the parables, and indeed, to the whole Bible; for the Bible is the Book of the Kingdom of God. It is absurd for people to talk about understanding the Bible if they do not understand the true doctrine of the Kingdom. It is as if one should claim to understand “The enzymatic amplification of beta globin genomic sequences” though entirely ignorant of biology or biochemistry and genetic analysis! **To understand the Bible, it is necessary to comprehend its essential elements first.**