

## **Background to the Bible and its Development**

The Bible has a unique origin. Here are some basic principles to know.

- 1) The Bible is considered by historic Christianity to be the Word of God, written in concept by God's Holy Spirit who motivated different human authors to write using their own handwriting and even their own idioms, with the outcome being the very Word of God.
- 2) The Bible was written by roughly 40 different human authors over a period of nearly 1900 years.
- 3) The Old Testament has 39 books and was written primarily in the Hebrew language, the language of the Jewish (Hebrew) people. It has few letters that are recognizable to us, and reads from right to left across the page.
- 4) The New Testament has 27 books and was written primarily in the common Greek language, the language used by people throughout the Roman empire. It has some letters that are similar and familiar; the Greek language has many "loan words" in law and medicine that we use in the English language today.
- 5) Few people could read and write in the ancient world.
- 6) There weren't books per se, but scrolls made of vellum/parchment (animal skins) and later papyrus (paper from plants) were very expensive and valuable treasures and were meticulously cared for.
- 7) Before there were copy machines, there was a very precise occupation called a Scribe. The job of the scribes was to copy, single letter by single letter, each line of a text. For the Bible, a Scribe might take many years to copy a single book of the Bible.
- 8) The manner of copying was designed to create exact replicas. For example, a scribe might look at the original and see the letter Aleph (like the letter A) on the top right of the scroll. He would take the ink and make an Aleph on the top right of the new scroll. Then he would go back and see what the second letter was, a Daleth (like the letter D), and go to the scroll and put a Daleth there. He would continue this slowly, letter by letter, across the line. Then he would count each of the letters in the original. Then he would count each of the letters on the copy. Then he would call his supervisor over to count and check. Then he would go on to the second line. Phew! If there was an error, one of two things would happen: 1) they would throw the scroll and start over (very costly; it might mean the end of a career, so they were very careful); or 2) they would note the error in the margin with the correction.
- 9) Over thousands of years, this process has preserved with a great deal of accuracy what the original manuscripts said. There are no existing originals of the books of the Bible, but there are so many copies and they match so closely that there is a great deal of confidence knowing that what we have is very essentially what was originally given by God and written down.
- 10) Where there are questions about the text, they are nearly all very minor things. Many are names and spellings. Amazingly, there is no basic core doctrine or belief that is under textual question. There are a few places where you can see some differences. For example, largest variation occurs in John 8, where the story of Jesus forgiving the woman caught in adultery is not in all of the versions/copies. In the CSSB, you can check this out for yourself if you are interested. The Bible text does point out what the missing text is, and does not base any core doctrine on this "questionable" text.
- 11) The different "books" of the Bible were written at different times, by different people, and in different places, but the Old Testament Hebrew people generally considered these to be sacred so preserved and kept the growing collection over the 1500 years from when Moses received from

God the content for Genesis through Deuteronomy through the last of the Old Testament books written, possibly Esther.

- 12) The New Testament was written by various authors ... the gospels, Matthew (a disciple of Jesus who was with Him throughout His ministry), Mark (who was mentored by St. Peter and was probably the author who wrote Peter's recollections), Luke (who never met Jesus but being trained as a physician, presumably did considerable research with interviews and original sources to produce his Gospel), and John, who was also a disciple of Jesus. Luke also wrote the Acts of the Apostles, which is a history of the first 35 years of Christianity. These books circulated from the late 40's AD as authoritative accounts of the life of Jesus (and enough people were still alive who know the facts to make these accounts accurate). The rest of the New Testament is letters, also known as epistles. These letters were written by Apostles (like Peter, Paul, John, James, Jude) to churches, who kept them, copied them, and circulated them to neighboring churches, revering these letters as the Word of God.
- 13) Of course, there were many other writings at this time, but these books were generally treated as unique from the beginning, preserved with great care, and were collected by the end of the late second century, combined with the Old Testament, and bound under one cover as the Bible (the book of books).
- 14) Today, you can get translations or paraphrases of the Bible. A translation comes directly from the Hebrew or Greek. A paraphrase is a retelling from the English. As you know from other study, using the original sources is best, so a translation is generally the most accurate, though a paraphrase is helpful in readability.
- 15) The CSSB is chosen because a) it has a very accurate and universally accepted translation directly from the Hebrew and Greek into modern American English; and b) it has numerous other resources that students find helpful for their study.
- 16) Although there are often big news accounts challenging the truth, accuracy, or veracity of the Bible, and stories make headlines when a "new" book of the Bible is discovered or a conspiracy theorist suggests a church coverup, over all, the Bible as we have it today is almost universally accepted as the revelation of God to humans about what is critical to know about God's love for humans and His way of salvation.
- 17) The Bible is not a science textbook, yet it has detail that is important for scientists. It contains fascinating peeks into ancient cultures, but isn't exhaustive. There are gaps of time between Biblical books where we have no idea of historical detail except from other sources. There are credible facts, for example, the details that scholars use regardless of belief to study how ancient sailors dealt with storms at sea, drawn from the account of Paul's shipwreck in Acts 27.
- 18) Overall, there is no absolute proof that the Bible is the word of God. However, Christians generally believe and accept *by faith* that Jesus is the Savior, and from that belief grow other related beliefs, including that the Bible is God's inspired and authoritative Word, and that it is the source to study when seeking God's will or direction, a doctrine or belief.
- 19) The Bible can be read in broad and lengthy sections to give an overview of history, for example, the life of David in 1 and 2 Samuel when compared with 1 Chronicles; or the book of Acts.
- 20) The Bible is also often read in very fine, careful, and painstaking detail, looking at each word and its tense and setting and context, like that done when exploring doctrines like Baptism or Holy Communion. Both approaches are part of serious Bible study.

Overall, many find the Bible enjoyable to read and study.