

How the Bible Came to Be

What does the term “Bible” mean?

- From the Greek *ta biblia* which means “The Books”

What is the value of studying the Bible?

- Wisdom and inspiration that guided the generations before us.
- Contains insights into the meaning of human life.
- Most important source for our Western culture (i.e. expressions & words we use).
- Has profound influence on modern religious thought.
- Most complete history of the ancient past that we possess.

The Bible consists of two testaments, the Old and the New Testaments. The word “Testament” means the same thing as covenant. A covenant is an agreement between two parties. In the bible, it is an agreement between God and his people.

The number of books recognized by the Catholic, Protestants, and Jewish faiths vary.

- 46 books in the Catholic OT
- 39 in the Hebrew/Protestant Old Testament
- Catholics and Protestants agree on all 27 books of the NT

Historically, Jews, Protestants and Catholics disagree on the number of books which comprise the complete canon of the Old Testament because the Greek translation of OT, called the Septuagint, had seven more books than the Hebrew version; most Jews lived outside Palestine and spoke Greek, so this version was more widely used. Most Christians were Greek-speaking Gentiles and used this translation also. The Council of Trent in 1546 gave solemn approval to this Greek version. Protestant Reformers in the 16th century demanded a return to the Hebrew version and created a division among Christians on the issue.

- For Catholics, we believe that the Bible grew out of the living tradition of the people.
- For the Protestants, they believe that the church grows out of the Bible.
- As Catholics, we believe in both Scripture and the Traditions of the early Church.
- Scripture grows out of the Tradition of the Church because it is written Tradition.

How the Bible came about

- The bible evolved over the course of 44 generations
- It was written:
 - by many different people
 - In several languages including Hebrew, Aramaic, & Greek
 - In many places including Mesopotamia, Greece, Babylonia, Egypt, & Palestine.

Old Testament Overview

The Jewish Scriptures (OT) were written and collected over a period of about 1000 years. It contains the story of God’s agreement with Abraham, and a brief history of Abraham’s descendants’ struggles to form a nation of faithful worshippers. The first Christians used the OT as their Bible; later they also wrote and used their own Scriptures.

Law / Pentateuch – rules of conduct and worship; the beginnings of Israel as a nation

- Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy

Prophets – history of the uniting of the 12 tribes; God’s prophecies

- Hosea, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, Joshua, Amos, Obadiah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Joel, Daniel, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, Jonah

Writings – history, poetry, song; wisdom for living and philosophy

- Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon (Canticle of Canticles), Ruth, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Job, Proverbs, Lamentations, Esther. Ezra, Nehemiah, Psalms

OT Timeline

1100 B.C.

- Traditions of the tribes of Israel were written down, after centuries of being passed from generation to generation by word of mouth.

400 B.C.

- The books of the Law (rules for guiding one's life according to God's will), Prophets (encouraging Israel back to God's path), and most of the Writings (history, poetry, song) were standardized.

3rd to 1st century B.C.

- The OT was translated into Greek for the Jewish colonists. This version, called the Septuagint, contained the OT books of regarded by Jews of Palestine and of the Dispersion. The Christian Old Testament can was formed from it
- Eventually, some of those writings began to be recognized as sacred, meaning the Word of God expressed through the words of particular men, but speaking to people of every time and place.
- Certain books were also disputed, their sacred authority was questioned (i.e. Ecclesiastes, Esther, and the Song of Songs)

98 A.D.

- At Jamnia, certain Jewish rabbis called Pharisees, establish criteria for determining the sacred character of books.
- The following guidelines for used: (1) it had to be written before 400 B.C.; (2) it had to be originally written in the Hebrew language; and (3) the moral character was judged.
- The seven books of the Septuagint, called the apocryphal writings, were rejected by some Jews and accepted by others.

Apocrypha (hidden in the head of the) / Deuterocanonical (2nd canon) – accepted only by Roman Catholics, Eastern Catholics, and Anglicans because these books were only found in the Greek version of the OT

- Baruch
- Tobit
- 1 & 2 Maccabees
- Judith
- Wisdom of Solomon (Wisdom)
- Sirach (Ecclesiasticus)
- parts of Esther and Daniel

New Testament Overview

The Christian Scriptures (NT) contain the basis of the Christian faith; the story of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and his message to humanity. It also contains stories about missionary activities of Christ's followers and their letters of encouragement to new Christian communities. The books of the NT complete the OT and provide guidelines for organization of the Church, its moral teachings, and definitions of beliefs. The NT was written to fill the new needs of the growing Church that had to answer the questions that the Christian converts were asking about Christ and his teachings and to fight against heresies or false teachings.

Gospels – the story of Christ; his teachings; foundation of the NT

- Mathew, Mark, Luke, & John

Acts of the Apostles – story of the early Christian Church and how its missionaries spread Christianity throughout the known world.

- Acts

Epistles – letters to churches and people; mostly written by St. Paul

- Ephesians, Philippians, Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Galatians, Philemon, Hebrews, James, Colossians, 1 & 2 Peter, 1, 2, & 3 John, Jude

Revelation – John's vision of a great struggle between Christ's Church and Satan; the final victory of the Kingdom of God.

- Revelation

NT Timeline

95 A.D.

- The epistles (letters) were collected and became part of public worship along with the book of Acts.
- St. Paul wrote many of these epistles or letters which were read before congregations as sermons.

65 – 100 A.D.

- The oral tradition of Christ was written into Gospels by four men addressing different communities in eras.

100 – 105 A.D.

- Epistles written by other apostles, such as James, Peter, John, and Jude, were also read during public worship.

150 A.D.

- The four Gospels were gathered together in standardized.

180 A.D.

- The Gospels and epistles were combined into one collection as a statement of Christian belief and one source of faith.

Why was the New Testament written so long after Jesus' death?

- Jesus never wrote anything down, so the proclamation of his teaching and life did not depend on something written.
- Early Christians thought that Jesus' second coming was very soon. There wasn't a need to write for the future.
- It was only when the first generation of the apostles began to die that the testimonies were written down to preserve it for the future generations.

- When do we believe the four gospels were written and what do we know about who wrote them?
 - ✓ Mark: around 70 AD (John Mark, a companion of Paul, then Peter)
 - ✓ Matthew: 80-90 AD (One of the twelve--the tax collector)
 - ✓ Luke: 80-90 AD (A companion of Paul)
 - ✓ John: 90-100 AD (One of the twelve--the beloved)
- ✓ The actual authors are most likely anonymous, but were written by people who were faithful to the traditions of their named author.

What was the reason for writing the Gospels?

- ✓ To proclaim the Good News, which is the living encounter of the risen Lord -- not only back then when the scripture was written, but here and now. They were written to help us believe.
 - ✓ Scriptures give us the witness of the preachers. The gospel writers give us an honest portrait of who Jesus Christ is and was. So no matter when or where the gospel is preached to us, it has the ability to change us. Each generation can recognize and walk with Jesus, not just the apostolic community.
 - ✓ The best way to read and understand the scriptures is through the Church, because it reflects the traditions of our faith. (The gospels are an encounter with the risen Lord within the living community.)
 - ✓ The gospels give us the truth about Jesus, which is necessary for our salvation.
 - ✓ In Paul's letters, the gospel means a powerful encounter of God. The written gospels are meant to encounter God in the text as if you were hearing it proclaimed to you.
- Why do we think the Synoptic Gospels come from similar sources?
 - ✓ There are remarkable agreements in the wording--even the parenthetical material.
 - ✓ For the most part, the three Gospels agree on how the gospels flow: not chronological, but by topic.
 - ✓ Luke tells us he is using sources.
- Describe the stages that took place in developing the New Testament.
 - ✓ Jesus lived. He taught, preached, performed miracles, was a healer, was crucified, suffered, died and rose from the dead.
 - ✓ The Good News was preached and evangelization happened. This was the oral tradition.
 - ✓ The oral tradition was recorded in writing to preserve it for future generations and for preaching.
 - ✓ Throughout the stages, was the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Through the tradition of the church, the Holy Spirit inspired the authors, the text itself, and those who read and interpret the text.
- What gospels are called the Synoptic Gospels?
 - The term synoptic comes from the Greek *syn*, meaning "together", and *optic*, meaning "seen".
 - ✓ Mark
 - ✓ Matthew
 - ✓ Luke
 - ✓ John is not a Synoptic Gospel because it contains much different material than the others, and therefore the text does not seem to use the same sources.

- What is "Q"?
 - ✓ The material found in the Matthew and Luke's gospels, not found in Mark.
 - ✓ 235 verses are common only to Matthew and Luke.
 - ✓ It probably consists of both written and oral traditions.
 - ✓ It is uncertain exactly what the source is.

Dei Verbum, #19

- The sacred authors wrote the four Gospels, selecting some things from the many which had been handed on by word of mouth or in writing, reducing some of them to a synthesis, explaining some things in view of the situation of their churches and preserving the form of proclamation but always in such fashion that they told us the honest truth about Jesus.
- For their intention in writing was that either from their own memory and recollections, or from the witness of those who "themselves from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word" we might know "the truth" concerning those matters about which we have been instructed (see Luke 1:2-4).

What is oral tradition? What are some of its strengths and weaknesses?

Communication in the ancient world was mostly oral and societies that rely on oral tradition look at knowledge and history far differently than do people accustomed to reading. (1) Memories of people who rely on oral tradition are generally much better than ours. Traditions were constantly updated and enlivened by new examples. (2) Oral cultures in ancient Near East had almost positive dislike for exact facts and specific dates. Actual details of historical events were far less important to ancient people than was the pattern by which it was explained and the essential primeval event to which it was compared. They used past history to explain convictions for the present time or a particular points of view.

The Septuagint (our Old Testament version)

Hellenistic culture (Greek influence spread by Alexander the Great who tried to rule the world in the 4th century B.C.) had a tremendous influence on almost every culture it encountered. Many of the Diaspora Jews, for example, spoke Greek, and as a result, the Hebrew Scriptures were translated from Hebrew into Greek at Alexandria, a major center of Diaspora Jews. This Greek translation of the Old Testament is called the Septuagint because, tradition holds, seventy-two scholars were said to have worked on the project. It is now believed that more than seventy-two scholars worked on the translation and that at least some of the work was completed outside Alexandria.

The Greek translation of the Old Testament took decades to complete. Ptolemy Philadelphus (285-246 B.C.), the king of Egypt, requested a translation of the Pentateuch for his renowned Library of Alexandria. The process began around the year 250 B.C., and by 132 B.C., the entire Hebrew Scriptures were translated.

The Greek translation of the Scriptures would be tremendously influential. The authors of the New Testament, also writing in Greek, used the Septuagint for quotations from the Old Testament. The translation also allowed for non-Jews to read and become acquainted with the Old Testament. As Christianity spread in the first centuries A.D., this Greek translation would become very important to Gentile converts who otherwise would not have been able to read the Hebrew text.

The Vulgate Bible

The Vulgate Bible, originating from the word "vernacular" or common person's language, was translated by St. Jerome, in his hermitage at Bethlehem. He put the most comprehensive translation from the original languages into Latin, a translation called the Vulgate ("people's book" or) because at the time Latin was the spoken language

of most people in the West. Prior to Jerome, Christians outside Palestine mainly relied for their knowledge of the Old Testament on the Septuagint, which had been written in Greek. Jerome, however, translated directly from the Hebrew. Use of the Bible was facilitated by the invention of the book—pages of manageable size bound together so as to allow them to be turned over one by one, replacing long unwieldy scrolls that had to be laboriously unrolled. Gradually, the Greek word for a book (biblia) came to have only one meaning, the Bible.

Some books (Esther, Maccabees) appeared in the Septuagint but not in other compilations, and among local churches there were even some differences as to the books of the New Testament. St. Athanasius, the patriarch of Alexandria (d. 373), was the first to list definitively the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, and a few years later, the Council of Rome officially established the canon ("rule") of the Scripture, decreeing precisely which books belonged there.

The Canon of Scripture

By the early third century, the universally accepted books of the New Testament canon were the following: the four Gospels, thirteen of St. Paul's Epistles, Acts, Revelation, 1 and 2 Peter, and 1, 2, and 3 John. After much discussion among various Church authorities including Origen, Eusebius, St. Athanasius, and St. Jerome, a definitive Canon was declared at a large synod in A.D. 382 in Rome. Though it took a few more years for churches in Africa and Gaul to accept the canon, by the end of the first decade of the fifth century, the Western Church possessed the complete Canon of the New Testament. The Church in the East, though it had not made nor recognized any formal statement concerning the Canon of the New Testament, generally accepted what the West had affirmed, except for some lingering disputes over the legitimacy of the book of Revelation. The Canon of the Old Testament took longer to be officially determined, though for many centuries St. Jerome's Vulgate was taken as standard for ecclesiastical usage. Finally, in 1546 at the Council of Trent, the Church made its final definitive statement concerning the Canon of Scripture.

A History of Our Use of the Bible

Sometimes Christians talk about the Bible as though Christ brought it with him from Heaven. The reality is that none of the Gospels or other books of the New Testament had even been written when Christ ascended into Heaven. The earliest works are dated to about AD 40 or AD 50, and the Book of Revelation was not composed until around the end of the first century. So when the first Christians gathered in the early years of the Church, "Scripture" to them referred to the writings of what we today call the Old Testament.

The books of the Old Testament by then had been around for varying lengths of time, from a couple hundred years to perhaps a thousand years. In about the third century BC, a group of seventy Jewish scholars put together a canon of forty-six books, including the Pentateuch, the writings of the prophets, wisdom literature, and historical books, and translated them into Greek, at a time when the Greek language was dominant among the Jewish population. This canon, today called the Septuagint (from a Greek word for "seventy"), was adopted by the early Church as the inspired books of what came to be called the Old Testament.

Some years after the Ascension, the books we find in the New Testament began to be written. Some were Gospels, accounts of the life and ministry of Christ, composed from the memories of the Apostles and what they had preached for many years already. The Book of Acts is an account of the early Church community and the spread of the Faith throughout the known world, largely focusing on the evangelizing ministry of Sts. Paul and Peter and their companions. Some books began as pastoral letters written by St. Paul and others to encourage the faithful in churches they had founded or to address problems and concerns that had arisen in faith or practice. Revelation is attributed to St. John, a work of prophecy based on visions he was given while in exile.

There were many other "gospels," letters, and books of alleged visions written during these years as well. Some of these other books were written by people whose beliefs were opposed to what the Church was teaching, perhaps in

an attempt to gain credibility for their particular erroneous teachings. Others may have been authentic letters from Church leaders. But were they "Scripture"? With so many books in circulation, the Magisterium had to discern which books were inspired and which were not. It was the councils of the Church that determined the twenty-seven books that are in the New Testament. So the Septuagint Old Testament and the New Testament together make up the seventy-three books of the Bible.

Later, when the Protestant Reformation created a split in Western Christianity in the sixteenth century, the Protestant reformers decided the Septuagint was not an accurate rendering of the Old Testament books. They went back to a still earlier list of books held sacred by the Jews. In so doing, the reformers effectively rejected seven books of the Old Testament. That is why the Bible used by Protestants is smaller than the complete Bible used by Catholics.

Scripture has always been integral to the prayer and liturgical life of the Church. In the early Church, during the time Christianity was viewed as a sect of Judaism, Christians attended Jewish synagogue services on the Sabbath and heard readings from the Old Testament proclaimed. On Sundays, the Christians would gather in private homes to celebrate the Eucharist, and heard both the Old Testament Scriptures and the preaching about the life and message of Christ—the oral tradition that led to the writings of the New Testament. As the liturgy of the Catholic Church developed, the readings from Scripture were always prominent. Today's Catholic liturgy, the Mass, includes readings from the Old and New Testaments, including the Psalms, and many of the prayers of the Mass are based on texts from the Bible. All the sacramental celebrations and the Liturgy of the Hours, the official daily prayer of the Church, are deeply rooted in Scripture (cf. CCC 1190).

It is sometimes charged that the Catholic Church for many centuries discouraged her faithful from reading the Bible, and did not make Bibles available to the people. This is patently untrue. First of all, literacy was a problem in the early Church and almost to the Middle Ages, and before the advent of the printing press books in general were uncommon and very expensive. Most people could not read, and so the Scriptures had to be read to them, proclaimed, and taught in the liturgy and preaching.

Nevertheless, it was the Church that first made the Bible more accessible to the common people. In the fourth century, St. Jerome translated the Bible from various manuscripts into a very common form of Latin, in what is called the Vulgate Bible. Latin was the language spoken throughout the Western Roman Empire, and so a Bible rewritten in the language of the people was more easily understood.

In the Middle Ages, the Church advanced literacy among the people immensely through her systems of monastic schools and universities. Scripture became much better known during this time. The Vulgate Bible remained the standard Bible in all of western Christendom for more than a thousand years.

The Church today continues to encourage Catholics to use the Bible in personal prayer (cf. CCC 2653-2654). Prayerful study, reading, and meditation, particularly the practice of *Lectio Divina*, have been strongly endorsed by recent Popes. Scripture study and prayer groups using Scripture are also a common part of parish life.

Recall the words of St. Jerome that "ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ." This is a strong statement on the importance of Scripture in the life of the Church.

Recommended Translations of Scripture for Catholics

- NAB – New American Bible (most common)
- NABRE – New American Bible Revised Edition (our lectionary for Mass)
- RSV – Revised Standard Version (used by most scholars)
- NRSV – New Revised Standard Version (updated language)
- NJB - New Jerusalem Bible