

Where the Bible Came From • 2 Peter 1:20-21

The Bible is the Number One best seller of all books in then entire world throughout history. It is among the oldest literature in the world. It is revered and believed by many of the world's major religions including Islam, Judaism and Christianity. The Bible has been translated into more languages than any other book ever written. It is the subject of great controversy and the source of immense comfort. Sales of Bibles soared after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, because people expected the Bible to provide them with help and comfort.

Yet the origins and authorship of the Bible are a mystery to most people—*where did the Bible come from anyway?* Did it supernaturally drop out of heaven on ancient golden tablets? Was it dictated to human data entry persons on behalf of the Almighty? Or, is the Bible ordinary literature, written by ordinary authors, that has been perceived as supernatural by the superstitions of succeeding generations?

And, why is it that some Bibles are different from other Bibles? There are so many different translations and versions for sale. Catholic Bibles have books that are not included in Protestant Bibles. Which Bible is the real Bible? In this and following sermons in this series we will be answering these and other questions.

Be sure to use your own Bible as you study these sermons. That's always a good idea so that you can check for yourself what is being taught.

Read surrounding words to pick up the context. Compare the passage being studied with other parts of the Bible. Write your own notes in the margin and underline words and verses that are especially for you.

Topics that will be covered in this series are: #1.) "Where the Bible Came From"; #2.) "How We Got the Old Testament"; #3.) "How We Got the New Testament"; #4.) "Making Sense Out of the Bible"; and, #5.) "Applying the Bible to Our Changing Lives".

Now let's examine where the Bible came from. The Bible claims to be both a divine and a super-

natural book. It is unique—unlike any other book or literature. The Bible is God's book. It is called the "Word of God". If that's true then the Bible stands alone in terms of its authority, influence and power in our lives. When the Bible speaks it speaks for God himself. Of course, if the Bible is not a divine and supernatural book then it can and should be treated like any other piece of literature. It is in the same category with the writings of Aristotle, Plato, Shakespeare or this Sunday's comic strips of literature. But II Peter 1:20-21 says:

Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

This is to say that the origin of the Bible is God. The Bible started with God. It was God's idea. He thought it up. He outlined it and planned the content. It is his book. The Bible was not someone else's idea.

In originating the Bible God used both revelation and inspiration. Revelation has to do with content. The Bible is loaded with information we could

never possibly know if God had not told us. There is no way we could have figured out that God created the heavens and the earth. There is no way we could know that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God and that his

death on the cross is the sole means of having our sins forgiven and being made right with God. There is no way we could guess that there is a Holy Spirit who is also fully God and comes to live inside every Christian. There is no way we could know about heaven, hell, prayer or prophecy if God had not told us. So, the Bible is full of things God has revealed for us to know.

But there is plenty of information known without God telling us—about the Egyptians, the Babylonians and the Romans; about Jewish customs and Roman laws; about agriculture, astronomy, geography and physiology. In other

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words, the Bible contains divine revelation we couldn't know from anywhere else, but not all the Bible is divine revelation.

The second supernatural act of God to give us the Bible was inspiration. Inspiration guarantees accuracy. Literally, the word "inspiration" means "out-breathed", but specifically it means that God gave his breath and life to the words of the Bible when it was written.

If you know art well you can tell from looking at a painting if it was from the hand of Renoir, Michelangelo, Picasso or Charles Schultz. Each has his own style that makes his art his.

When we say the Bible is inspired we mean that God is in it—that God is obvious in what the Bible says and what the Bible is. God is a God of truth; therefore the Bible is a book of truth. God is accurate and God's accuracy has been recorded in the Bible.

Maybe all this sounds too technical, but it is very important. If you are going to have a heart pacemaker placed in your chest you have a very high desire for content and accuracy. You want to know that it is a quality device and that it is properly installed. It is a matter of life and death. The Bible has content from God and accuracy from God. It is God's book.

But the Bible is also a human book. More than 40 different authors wrote it over a period of 1500 years. These authors were young or they were old; they spoke Hebrew and Greek; they were married and single, struggled with their sins, had good moods and bad moods and personalities that were unique to each one.

These Bible authors included David the poet, Moses the lawgiver, Luke a physician, Paul a theologian and Peter a fisherman. Each had his own distinctive style and his personality came through in his writings. You can see and feel the difference between the writings of Jeremiah in the Old Testament and John in the New Testament. They weren't very much alike.

Think of it this way. God planned the Bible. He knew what he wanted it to say. He recruited authors and gave them material, supervision and an assignment. They had to stay within the assignment but they had the freedom to be themselves.

Compare that to a research scientist at the University of Minnesota who has made some amazing discoveries in physics. She wants her graduate students to write up her discoveries. She shares her

research data with them and assigns papers for them to write. She allows them to work on their own but she edits for accuracy throughout the process and before the papers are sent to publishers. Every paper has her information and is accurate, but it is different and distinctive depending on the personality and style of the graduate student who wrote it.

The question is: Are these the professor's papers or are they the students' papers? The answer is "yes"—they are the papers of both. And so it is with the Bible. It is a divine/human book. The origin is divine giving content and guaranteeing accuracy. The origin is also human in writing style and personality. There is no other book like it.

The authors of the Bible mostly wrote in Hebrew and Greek. There are a few sections in Aramaic and some words and phrases from other languages, but the Old Testament is essentially written in Hebrew and the New Testament is written in Greek. This means that what we read is not what was originally written. Our English Bibles are translations from other languages.

Do we have the original writings? We do not. In some cases we have manuscripts that are historically very close to the time of writing and in other cases our earliest manuscripts are centuries after the time of original writing. The closest manuscripts are for the New Testament and the Old Testament manuscripts are farther removed from the original.

It is important to know that centuries of scholars have worked very hard to get as close to the original as possible. There are literally thousands of ancient manuscripts. There is a disciplined science of testing the paper, analyzing the ink and script and comparing manuscripts to each other. What we have with the Bible is overwhelmingly better than any other ancient writings. We have every reasonable confidence that our Hebrew and Greek texts today are very, very close to what was originally written.

But that begs a question: Can we really trust the Bible that we have? If we don't have the original manuscripts and if our Bibles are translations from other languages, isn't the danger that there have been a lot of distortions between where God started and what we have today?

It is a good question, but it shouldn't be a reason for worry. The manuscripts are excellent and the translations are many. You could learn Hebrew

and Greek (which I had to do in seminary) but comparing different translations to get at the original meaning and intent will be sufficient for almost all practical purposes any of us will ever face. Besides, if God revealed and inspired his truth in the first place, don't we believe that God will protect the transmission and translation of that truth so we get the message he wants us to have?

We are an especially blessed generation. In earlier centuries most people couldn't read, translations weren't available and Bibles were too expensive or unavailable for most people. We have greater access to the Word of God than any people at any time anywhere in history.

The origins of the Bible are more important than the organization of the Bible but it is also helpful to understand how the Bible is put together. The word "Bible" comes from the Latin word *biblia* meaning "books". The Latin word comes from the Greek word *biblos*, the name for the papyrus plant whose leaves were used for paper. Bible means "book" (or "books" because it is actually a library of 66 separate books all bound together into a single volume). Sometimes the Bible is referred to as "writings" or "scripture". They all mean the same thing; they are synonyms rooted in different languages.

Take a look at the Table of Contents in the front of your Bible. It shows that the Bible is divided into the Old Testament and the New Testament.

"Testament" means "covenant". A covenant is like a contract—an agreement between multiple parties. God had a special covenant with the people of Israel on how they were to live and relate to God. It included a lot of laws. Jeremiah predicted that the Old Covenant would eventually be superseded with a New Covenant. (*"The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah."* Jeremiah 31:31)

Around the end of the 2nd century A.D. Christians started referring to the earlier Hebrew books as the Old Covenant and the newer Greek books as the New Covenant. Along the way the words switched and they became known as the Old Tes-

tament and the New Testament.

Another way of thinking of the two parts is that the Old Testament is mostly about the nation of Israel and the Hebrew people; the New Testament is mostly about the church of Jesus Christ and all people.

The Old Testament is a library of 39 separate books. There are some differences between the organization and content of the Hebrew Bible, the Catholic Bible and the Protestant Bible. The Old Testament of the Protestant Bible is organized into four sections: Law, History, Wisdom, Poetry and Prophecy. Under Law are Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Sometimes they are referred to as the Books of Moses or the Pentateuch. Under History are Joshua; Judges; Ruth; I and II Samuel; I and II Kings; I and II Chronicles; Ezra; Nehemiah and Esther. Under Poetry and Wisdom are Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the little book of Song of Solomon. And under Prophecy is the biggest section of all—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations,

Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi.

Some of the books of the Old Testament are named for their content: Genesis, the book of beginnings; Exodus, exiting from slavery in Egypt. Most of the

books of the Old Testament are named for people: Ruth, Esther, Jonah, Nehemiah and more.

Understanding the organization of the Bible is very important much of the Bible is not in chronological order. Sometimes people think that they can pick up a Bible and read it straight through like a novel telling a story. The Bible is organized more like a daily newspaper with special sections for Nations News, Metro News, Sports, Business, Entertainment and ads.

The New Testament is a library of 27 books. The Catholic and Protestant New Testaments are pretty much the same. Of course, there is no Jewish New Testament. The New Testament is also organized into four different sections. They are the Gospels, History, Letters and Prophecy.

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The Gospels are the biographies of Jesus and are named after their authors—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. History is the book of Acts, the history of the early Christian church. The Letters include Romans; I and II Corinthians; Galatians; Ephesians; Philippians; Colossians; I and II Thessalonians; I and II Timothy; Titus; Philemon; Hebrews; James; I and II Peter; I, II and III John and Jude. The last section of the New Testament is Prophecy—the Book of Revelation.

Most of the New Testament books are named for either the author or the recipients. They are pretty much in chronological order but not necessarily in the order in which they were written. Like the Old Testament the books of the New Testament are organized much like a newspaper with sections. However, there are some overlaps—prophecies are not limited to Revelation but also appear in the Gospels and the Letters; history of the early church is not limited to Acts but also appears in the Letters and in Revelation.

To some this may initially seem confusing, but it is really quite simple once you get the basics. It is not unlike reading different newspapers or news magazines that are organized in slightly different ways.

Remember what is most important here. The Bible is God’s message to us. What God has to say is most important. Very near the conclusion of John’s biography of Jesus he said in John 20:31,

“These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in his name.” The purpose of the Bible is for us to believe in Jesus Christ and to have eternal life in his name!

Father, thank you for this book and for the amazing way you gave it to us. Thank you for its truths and thank you for its accuracy.

But, Lord, help us to get the essence of it and help us to know Jesus, the One the Bible is all about. And help us to experience the eternal life that you give to us through the Word of God.

We pray this in Jesus’ name.
Amen.

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