

Developing a Sturdy Faith – The Bible III

Remarks

-  Q1 – How many books sold (2.5b)
-  Q2 – Translated into how many languages (2,200)
- Q3 – How many books in OT? (39)
- Q4 – How many books in NT? (27)

First the Facts and Nothing But the Facts

The bible is not actually a book – it's a collection of ancient books – bound together to create a volume:

- 40 authors (kings, fishermen, a tax collector, a doctor, a tent maker ...)
- Over 1600 year period

Bible Contents

This single volume is actually split into 2 divisions or classifications –

-  Old Testament (1600BC and 400BC)
- New Testament (50AD and 90AD**)

If we review the contents briefly, we see that the Old Testament was made up of 3 basic classes of writings:

-  The Law (or Torah - Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy)
- The prophets (major/minor)
- The Writings (history, poetry, songs)

The New Testament is denoted as the writings that describe the life and ministry of Jesus – and were written by:

- people who either knew him personally (Matthew, John)

- had encountered him (Paul)
- were under the direction of those who were his disciples (Luke)

The New Testament was 4 groupings:

-  The Gospels (witness accounts of Jesus life)
- Acts – or what the disciples did after Jesus was resurrected & ascended to heaven
- Letters (or Epistles) – written to the churches and/or individuals
- Revelation (Prophecy)

Curiously, there were 400 years of silence between the Old and New Testaments!

*** Acts was Luke's 2nd book – his first was Luke. Acts was before 70AD (destruction of Jerusalem is not mentioned yet incredibly significant – so safe to assume was before that event). No mention of death of James (A.D. 62), Paul (A.D. 64), and Peter (A.D. 65). All gospels did not record Jerusalem's destruction (fulfilment of prophecy Matt 24:2). All Paul's letters were written pre 64AD (his death!) – so they too are early.*

Old Testament

Oral Accounts

Before the written word, the earliest accounts of events (the creation story, the flood, tower of Babel) were handed on from generation to generation in songs, narratives, and poetry. These oral accounts were passed on with great detail and accuracy.

Moses

Along comes Moses who penned the first 5 books of the bible at around 1500BC and from this time onwards writings started to appear.

Scribes, Priests, Prophets and Poets

Scribes, Priests, Prophets and Poets of the Hebrew people kept a record of their history with God along with their inspired insights and hopes.

Due to the weight of importance of these writings, they were copied and re-copied many times with great accuracy and care.

These would become the Hebrew Bible (around 800BC).

The Septuagint

Alexander the Great conquered Europe in 400BC. Greek then became the common language of the people and in the 300BCE, the Hebrew bible was translated into Greek for those Jews living outside Palestine (especially those living in Alexandria in Egypt).

 This Greek translation was called the **Septuagint**. It contained an extra 7 books (not found in the original Hebrew Bible called the Apocrypha – these were later removed from the Hebrew bible as not considered inspired).

Conventional thought is that the Jews in Palestine used the Hebrew bible up to and including during the time of Jesus (Jesus spoke Aramaic – but often quoted from Greek and Hebrew texts - Aramaic is close to Hebrew).

New Testament

Greek remained the language of the people for hundreds of years – and so the NT was written in Greek (the ancient form of Greek was called **Koine Greek**).

The earliest writings of the NT are Paul's letters to churches explaining the Christian faith and guiding on moral and ethical conduct.

Other believers wanted Paul's writings as well so they were copied and circulated amongst the believers and indeed amongst the churches of the regions.

Then the gospels were written along with other letters (Timothy, Philemon), exhortations, sermons and writings.

Canonised Bible

The church then put together a collection that most accurately testified to Jesus Christ.

 There were 2 councils of church leaders – one at **Nicea** in 325AD – the other 50yrs later at **Carthage** (a town in Africa). In 397AD the church officially recognised the canon of the New Testament.

They had to meet certain requirements:

- | | |
|------------------------|--|
| 1. Who wrote them | - attributed to the apostles (or close companions) |
| 2. Accepted everywhere | - acknowledged by all major Christian communities |
| 3. Used in Services | - already used widely when Christian communities met |
| 4. Consistent Message | - similar to accepted Christian writings |

So they listed 27 books of NT and 39 books of OT - but the Apocrypha was curiously included (to the OT) and yet not considered inspired.

The Vulgate

 It was then translated into other languages – It was important to the early church that as many people as possible should have access to the Bible.

The most significant early translated version was the Vulgate (405CE) – Jerome (347-420CE) spent 20yrs living and studying in Palestine translating the Hebrew Bible and Greek NT – into Latin (the ‘vulgar’ language – or common language of the people). This became the official text of Western Christianity.

The Church Closes Ranks

Latin became the language of the elite and educated – priests, noblemen, kings. So the common man was no longer able to read the scriptures for themselves – and so the Roman Catholic church alone controlled the interpretation of God’s word.

The Roman church felt that people reading the bible themselves presented a challenge to the church’s authority and they determined to be the sole custodians of the scriptures. So it became a crime to possess or circulate non-Latin copies of the bible (i.e. Common language bibles that people could read).

John Wycliffe

 John Wycliffe – a churchman and political figure rejected the church’s control and with a team of folks translated the Vulgate into English (1384CE).

The church went nuts! They even dug up Wycliffe’s body from his grave and burnt it!

Anyone reading, owning, copying or circulating the English bible was murdered, or imprisoned and tortured.

And so it was another 100 years before another attempt was made to unlock the stranglehold the church maintained over the scriptures.

Return to Original Languages

 Onto the scene arrives **William Tyndale** (1494-1536CE).

He believed people had a right to read the bible in English so he set about translating it. He went to Germany where he translated the original Greek into English in 1526CE (so not from the Latin Vulgate).

This was the first truly English New Testament.

Smuggled into England - Tyndale then went back to Antwerp to work on the Old Testament – but he was betrayed, imprisoned, condemned a heretic & publically executed.

When he was burned he cried out, “Lord, open the Kings’ eyes!”

Three years later, King Henry VIII commissioned the printing of the Great Bible in 1539CE – his edict was “***that a copy of the Great Bible be placed in every parish***”.

King James 1611

 Along comes King James and he had a team of Scholars work on the KJV Bible (1611AD).

They worked from the original Hebrew & Greek

- manuscripts (known as the Textus Receptus - “received text”)
- using 5500 manuscripts
- team of 53 scholars
- 7yrs

In 1612 the first hand-held bibles were sold.

The Manuscripts

So while for many years the scriptures were translated into lots of different languages – French, Italian, German, Latin, Greek – we now have an English bible that is translated from the original Hebrew and Greek manuscripts.

And many of those manuscripts are still with us today.

 So how many manuscripts do we have for the bible? By way of comparison – other literary works (whose validity is not questioned) are based on the following manuscripts:

- Plato 7 manuscripts
- Caesar's Wars 10 manuscripts
- Aristotle 49 manuscripts
- Homer 643 manuscripts

Parts of the New Testament have been preserved in more manuscripts than any other ancient work, having over 20,000 in existence:

- 5,800 complete or fragmented Greek manuscripts,
- 10,000 Latin manuscripts and
- 9,300 manuscripts in various other ancient languages

Dead Sea Scrolls

The DSS were found 2kms from the Dead Sea in Israel in 1946-56.

- Discovered by a young boy throwing rocks into a cave
- Agreed that they were written between 300-100 BCE (over 2300yrs old)
- 981 different texts were found in 11 caves
- preserved due to the dry climate of that area.

What was found:

- Genesis
- Isaiah
- Jeremiah
- Psalms

In Summary

 **Isaiah 40:8 (NKJV)**

The grass withers and the flowers fades, but the word of our God stands forever.