

HOW THE BIBLE CAME TO US?

Thursday Bible Study
ACA Avadi Church
01 February 2024

2 Timothy 3:16-17, NIV

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be **thoroughly equipped for every good work**”.

- The word *Bible* comes from the Greek word *biblia*, which means “books.”
- This is a more accurate description of what the Bible is—a collection of many books, like a library.

THE SURFACES

- During its history, the books of the Bible were written upon a number of different surfaces.
- There is evidence from the writings of the Bible with respect to what surfaces it was written upon. They include the following:

1. Stone

- One of the most ancient of all writing surfaces was stone. Job mused:

Job 19:23-24 NIV

Oh, that my words were recorded, that they were written on a scroll, that they were inscribed with an iron tool on lead, or engraved in rock forever!

- We also read that the Ten Commandments were written upon stone tablets. The Book of Exodus says the following:

Exodus 34:1 CEV

One day the LORD said to Moses, “Cut two flat stones like the first ones I made, and I will write on them the same commandments that were on the two you broke.”

- Therefore, we have a couple of instances where Scripture speaks of engraving or writing something in stone.

2. Wooden Tablets

- Some of the notes made by the prophets Habakkuk and Isaiah were perhaps written upon wooden tablets. We read the following:

Habakkuk 2:2 HCSB

The LORD answered me: Write down this vision; clearly inscribe it on tablets so one may easily read it.

- Isaiah also spoke writing on a tablet. He wrote:

Isaiah 30:8 God's Word

Now, write this on a tablet for them, and inscribe it in a book so that it will be there in the future as a permanent witness.

- Thus we have biblical evidence that tablets were also used to record Scripture.

3. Clay Tablets

- Clay tablets were popular in the ancient Middle East for the straight lines of cuneiform script.
- However, they were not as adaptable to the Hebrew script with its curved lines.
- It is possible that some of the early books of the Bible, including possible sources for the Book of Genesis, were written upon clay tablets.
- The above materials would only have been suitable for texts of short length. The writing of the biblical books probably employed other surfaces.

4. Papyrus

- Papyrus is one of the most ancient writing materials known to humans.
- It was used in Egypt three thousand years before the time of Christ.
- This surface was made from the papyrus plant which grew in swampy areas in the delta of the Nile River.
- Papyrus is referred to in the Bible. We read the following in the Book of Job:

Job 8:11 God's Word

"Can papyrus grow up where there is no swamp? Can rushes grow tall without water?"

- Actually, the English word, "Bible" is derived from the word *byblos* which is a word for papyrus.

5. Leather

- Another surface used was leather.
- Leather scrolls had the advantage over papyrus in that they did not wear out as quickly.
- Of all the ancient materials used for writing, only papyrus and leather were capable of being adapted to a scroll format.

6. Animal Skins (Parchment)

- The skins of animals were also used to receive writing in the ancient world. This is known as parchment or vellum.
- Parchment was the main surface used for books from the fourth century A.D. until the Middle Ages.

2 Timothy 4:13 -

Bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas when you come—and the books, especially the parchments.

7. Paper and the Printing Press

- It had been invented in the first century A.D. in China and the knowledge of its manufacture came to Europe during the eighth century.
- Finally, with the invention of the printing press, the Scriptures were mass-produced.

THE SCROLLS

- It is very likely that all biblical books were initially written on scrolls.
- The papyrus scrolls were made by gluing sheets of papyrus together and then winding the strips around a stick.

- The leather scrolls were made by sewing together a number of pieces.
- This was a difficult form of book to work with because it required both hands: one to hold the scroll, and the other hand to slowly draw out the sheets.
- After the scroll had been read, the reader would reroll it.

- **The standard size of a papyrus scroll was ten inches high and about thirty feet long.**
- This standard scroll size was probably the reason that the first five books of the Bible, the books of Moses, were divided into five equal parts.
- While First and Second Samuel are two different books in modern English Bibles, the Jews considered them as one book.
- The same holds true for the books of Kings and Chronicles.
- Each of these books could be written on a single scroll in Hebrew.

- However, when the Old Testament was translated into Greek, it was necessary to use two scrolls for each of these books.
- This is due to the fact that Greek writing uses more space than the Hebrew because it has vowel letters, while the original Hebrew did not.
- Hence we now have First and Second Samuel, Kings and Chronicles.

- **The only biblical scroll that was found complete was the one from Isaiah.**
- There were seventeen leather sheets that were sewn side by side to make this scroll.
- The scroll had fifty-four columns with twenty-nine to thirty-two lines of writing. The entire scroll had 1,633 lines.

- Jesus read a portion from the scroll of Isaiah in a synagogue in Nazareth. Scripture records the event as follows:

Luke 4:16-20 NIV

He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

- This passage speaks of Jesus unrolling the scroll.
- He would have held the book in both hands and unrolled it with his left hand.
- To reach chapter 61 of Isaiah, Jesus would have had to unroll most of the scroll and then roll it up again.

THE SCRIBES

- Scribes were special because they could read and write; literacy was not widespread.
- The biblical books had to be copied over again and again so that they could be preserved for other people to read them.
- The process of rewriting the books of the Bible was not always perfect—sometimes mistakes were introduced or words were added or dropped.
- We call this whole process, including the accurate copies and the mistakes, the transmission of the text.
- That is, the text is transmitted (and sometimes changed) by scribes who copied the ancient scrolls over and over again.

THE SCRIPTURE CODEX

- The Codex or book form.
- The codex was different from the scroll.
- It was made with papyrus sheets which were assembled in leaf form and written on both sides.
- There is good evidence that the codex was invented by Christians in the first century A.D. to arrange the different biblical books into one volume and make the passages easier to find.
- There are remains of papyrus codices containing Greek texts of the Old and New Testament books that have survived from the first and second centuries A.D.
- At first, the codices were made of papyrus. However, it was soon discovered that parchment, or treated animal skins, could also be written on both sides.
- These animal skins were more durable and would last longer than papyrus.
- The parchment codex made it possible to produce many, or all, of the books of the Bible in a single volume.

Some Advantages of the Codex over the Scroll

- The scribe could write on both sides of the papyrus or parchment manuscript rather than just on the one side.
- Because the codex had writing on both sides, only half as much space was used to write the document. The scroll was much more wasteful because only half of it was used.
- The codex was much easier to carry. It allowed Christians to put their sacred books into one bound volume instead of carrying a number of scrolls.
- The scroll was awkward to use. To find a particular passage it may have involved unrolling several feet of the scroll. A person could find a particular passage much easier in a codex.

- The Septuagint was almost always the source text for the Old Testament at this stage. This was a translation from Hebrew into Greek, completed around 130 BC, for Greek-speaking Jews
- It was what Paul used when quoting the Old Testament.
- The first translation of the Scriptures in the Christian era was into Syriac around 170 AD, as spoken in Damascus!

- Around 382 AD, Jerome, began producing a new translation in Latin, known as the Vulgate
- John Wycliffe emerged in 14th century England translating the Scriptures from the Vulgate into Middle English for the ordinary people.
- After his death Wycliffe was excommunicated, his body exhumed and burnt.
- Jan Hus and others in Prague produced Scriptures in Hungarian and Bohemian.
- Hus was declared a heretic and promptly burnt at the stake.
- By 1600, printed versions of the entire Bible had appeared in 15 European languages.
- William Tyndale's translation of the Bible into the English of the 1530s stands out for English speakers.
- The King James Version, published in 1611, retained much of Tyndale's groundbreaking work.
- Pandita Ramabai, a high caste Indian convert to Christianity, provides a remarkable example. At 24, she found herself destitute: an impoverished, orphaned widow. She learnt Greek and Hebrew in order to translate the Scriptures into Marathi, and completed her translation just before her death in 1922.
- The history of Bible translation into Tamil begins with the arrival of Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg (German missionary) at the Danish settlement of Tranquebar in 1706.
- He had a remarkable gift for languages and he was tireless in diligence and made rapid progress.
- He had completed the translation of the New Testament within five years of his arrival in the Tamil area; it was published in 1714, and by 1719, the year of his death, he had finished the Old Testament up to the Book of Ruth.
- The remaining work was completed by another German missionary, Benjamin Schultze, and published in Tranquebar in 1728.
- Philip Fabricius, also a German, spent twenty four years on the translation of the Bible which was published in 1777.
- The British and Foreign Bible Society was established in the 19th century. The translation of scripture in several Indian languages in association with William Carey began to emerge.
- Even in the Tamil area Dr. Buchanan reported in his memorable journey in 1806 that there was a 'great cry for Bibles'.
- The first project of the Bible Society in Tamil was given to C. T. E. Rhenius (born 1790), a German, who had come to work under the Church Missionary Society at Tirunelveli.
- He brought out the New Testament in 1833.
- In 1840 the Bible Society published its first edition of the whole Bible in Tamil: the Old Testament consisting of the translation of Fabricius and the New Testament that of Rhenius.
- a revision committee representative of several missions working in South India, with Dr. Henry Bower as chief translator, was appointed in 1857.
- The New Testament was published in 1863 and the Old Testament in 1868; but the renderings of the Bower Committee aroused grave dissatisfaction in north Ceylon and a conference of delegates from both sides was called.
- A mutually accepted version of the whole Bible called the Union Version, because of the representative character of those who had produced it, was published in 1871.

- In effect it displaced all previous versions and won its way into the affection of all Churches in India and Ceylon.
- The Lutheran Church continued to use the Fabricius version.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE BIBLE

1. OLD TESTAMENT

- The Old Testament was written in ancient Hebrew
- Short sections in the books Daniel and Esra have also been written in Aramaic.
- Originally the OT was written on **22** scrolls
- It contains a total of **39** or **43** individual books.

The Books of the Hebrew Bible are grouped into three divisions:

1. **Torah** (Instruction, or Law; also called the Pentateuch): Genesis to Deuteronomy
2. **Nevi'im** (Prophets): the historical books from Joshua to Esther, and the more direct prophetic section from Isaiah to Malachi
3. **Ketuvim** (Writings): the remaining five books from Job to Song of Solomon.

The Old Testament Scriptures are familiarly spoken of by Jesus as:

Luke 24:44-45

44 Then He said to them, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in **the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms** concerning Me." 45 And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.

1. THE LAW (TORAH)

The **Law** (Torah) consists of the 5 books of Moses and is therefore called the *Pentateuch* (*Five-Scrolls*).

The individual scrolls are:

- Genesis (in the Beginning, Beginning Scroll),
- Exodus (Excerpt Scroll),
- Leviticus (Levites, Priest Scroll),
- Numbers (Numbers Scroll), and
- Deuteronomy ("Second Law", or Repetition Scroll).

2. THE PROPHETS (Nevi'im)

- Often God's prophets were revealed during times of a national crisis.
- God used them to provide direction and wisdom during those times of crises.
- They were also used by God to remind His people of their covenant relationship to a Holy God.
- When they strayed and broke His covenant, He gave warning through the prophets and by means of His message attempted to persuade His people to return to Him.

The **Prophets** consist of 3 parts:

[1] the early ones (Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings)

- the Former Prophets telling the story of the Israelites from the crossing of the Jordan

[2] The three great prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel) and

- the 586 B.C. destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem

[3] The 12 little prophets.

- Babylonian exile

3. THE WRITINGS (Ketuvim)

- The Writings consist of homilies, poems, prayers, proverbs, and psalms of the people of Israel.
- The **Writings** (Ketuvim; also called Psalms, since the Psalms first appear)
- **They were written on 11 scrolls (50% of the OT)**
- They contain 12+5=17 single books.
- They are a collection of songs, sayings and wisdom that describe the relationship of the church to God.
- The **first part** consists of 7 books of Wisdom and Poetry (5 books of the Psalms, Proverbs and Job).
- The 150 Psalms (Greek *biblos psalmon* = Book of Songs; e.g. mentioned in Acts 1:20) were indeed written on one scroll,
- but originally they consisted of 5 books, which are now divided into chapters (1-41, 42-72, 73-89, 90-106, 107-150).
- The **second part** consists of the 5 Festival Scrolls (Megillot), a collection of writings, which were read at feast days.
- The order of the books is determined by the harvest times:
 1. **Song of Songs** (March/April; Passover; feast of first fruits),
 2. **Ruth** (May/June; Pentecost, Shavuot; wheat harvest),
 3. **Lamentations** (9th of Av; July/August; an annual feast day in Judaism which commemorates the anniversary of a number of disasters in Jewish history, primarily the destruction of both the First Temple by the Babylonians and the Second Temple by the Romans in Jerusalem),
 4. **Ecclesiastes** (September/October, Feast of Tabernacles, Soukkot; olive and grape harvest) and
 5. **Esther** (February/March; Purim).

The **third part** consists of the Revelation of Yahweh (YHWH) to Daniel, historical information's and restoration.

- The last books of the OT and of the NT are closely related.
- This applies in particular to the book of Daniel, which is likewise connected with the Revelation of the NT.
- The two Books of Chronicles (as the last books of the OT) mention the summary of the OT church, as chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation summarize the NT church.

2. THE NEW TESTAMENT

The New Testament naturally divides into three parts.

- *First*, the **four Gospels** as laying the foundation of Christianity in the revelation of the person and work of the Lord.
- *Second*, the **Acts**, in which are detailed the historical annals of Christianity for about 34 years — marvellous record of primitive missionary enterprise.
- *Third*, the **Epistles** embrace the whole circle of Christian truth and doctrine, and the regulation of Christian life and service.