

OLD TESTAMENT BIBLICAL LITERACY

LESSON 1

Bible History - An Overview of the Origins of the Bible

1. We hold a New International Version Study Bible (“N.I.V. Study Bible”).

A. WHAT IS IT?

1. A collection of books written over a 1500 year period of time. There are many authors, not all of whom are known. The original writings were in four different languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek and Latin. The Bible is divided into two parts: the Old Testament (“OT”) and the New Testament (“NT”). The books are not always in chronological order. The chapter and verse divisions were added later, they were not in the original books.

St. Jerome in the 4th century referred to these scriptures as “the Holy Books.” The Greek for “the Books” was “Ta Biblia”. Over the years, this was moved into the singular form in the latin and, when the English article “the” was added, became “The Bible”.

2. The Bible is God’s communication to man about God, man, their history and their future.

Unlike many other religions (Mormonism, Islam, etc.) experience pre-dated revelation in Hebrew/Christian faith.

3. Internal claims:

a. 2 Timothy 3:16

“All scripture is inspired
(*theopneustos*) by God and is
profitable for teachingÉ

Theopneustos = God breathed.
God has “exhaled” scripture.

b. 2 Peter 1:21

“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.”

c. Matthew 22.43

“He said to them, “How is it then
that David, speaking by the
Spirit, calls him “Lord?” For he
saysXXX”

d. John 14.26

“But the Counselor, the Holy
Spirit, whom the Father will send in
my name, will teach you all things
and will remind you of everything I
have said to you.”

4. Claims of faith and orthodoxy

Josephus, in speaking of the Old Testament, referenced the “holy books” as divine pronouncements of unquestionable authority that originated within the prophetic period and were under divine inspiration.

St. Thomas Aquinas (1250's): “The Holy Spirit is the principal author of the Scriptures, men were his instruments.” (*Quodl.* 7, art. 14).

Westminster Confession of Faith (1646): “The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man, or church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received because it is the word of God.” (Ch. I, art. IV).

Pope Leo XIII (1893): “Inspiration is a supernatural impulse by means of which the Holy Spirit excited and moved the sacred writers to write and helped them whilst they wrote in such a way that they could conceive exactly, wished to report faithfully and expressed with infallible accuracy, all that God commanded them to write and nothing else.” (*Providentissimus Deus*)

B . WHERE DID THE BIBLE COME FROM?

1. A committee of scholars from many denominations put out the N.I.V. translation of scriptures.
2. These scholars had two big chores:
 - a. Figure out what the original (“autograph”) scriptures said.
 - b. Figure out how to most accurately translate that into everyday English.
3. What Did The Original/Autograph Scriptures Say? How accurate is our Old Testament?
 - a. A bit on the history of writing:
 1. The O.T. references writing as early as the time of Moses (Ex. 17:14; 24:4; 39:14; Dt. 27:3; 31:24).

What does archeology teach us?

2. Archeology

Earliest written forms in the Near East include various Semitic languages.

Well prior to the time of Moses, the Akkadians used expanded cuneiform word letters. Syllable signs and other written forms for their Semitic language (2500-2000 B.C.).

Aramaic itself predates 900 B.C. An actual non-biblical specimen of Aramaic ("The Melgart Stele") dates in the range of 900 B.C. Egyptian texts (1570 B.C. to 1150 B.C.) use Aramaic forms when speaking of Canaanite people. Scholars conjecture the Aramaic influence on Semitic language resulted from nomadic invaders from North Arabian deserts infiltrating Canaan.

The first Aramaic form in the O. T. is found in Gen. 31:47 with the name given by Laban to the stone heap Jacob had given a Hebrew name to.

Egyptians used hieroglyphics since well before the time of Moses. In 1904, archaeologist Sir Flinders Petrie discovered writings employing an alphabetic script used by Semitic slaves. Petrie dated the inscriptions around 1500 B.C. (Moses era).

Hebrew writing itself has been dated as before the Grezer calendar (1,000 B.C.). There were clearly professional scribes by shortly after King David.

(Non-biblical Hebrew texts dating from the reign of Jeroboam II were found in Samaria).

Writing surfaces included stone, clay tablets, occasionally metal (gold, silver, copper and bronze), broken pottery, wood, animal skins and papyrus. Archaeology demonstrates this as does the Bible also:

Gold: Ex. 28:36

Stone: Ex. 24:12; 34:1; Dt 4:13, 27:2

Wood: Nm 17:2; Ezek, 37:16

c. Old Testament

1. The O. T. was written by many different people over a long period of time.
2. The original language of the O. T. was Hebrew with small portions written in Aramaic.
3. The oldest “printed” Hebrew text is 1488. Prior Hebrew texts are handwritten.
4. Until recently, the oldest Hebrew manuscripts dated from 850-1,000 A.D. The oldest complete Hebrew Old Testament (“The Leningrad Codex”) was copied 1008 A.D. These old manuscripts are called “Masoretic

texts.” The Hebrew scholars who hand copied/wrote them were called “Masoretes.” The Masoretes were active between 500 A.D. and 1,100 A.D. They took great care to copy the sacred Hebrew text letter by letter. They would count verses words and even letters to verify proper copying. In the 500’s, the Masoretes also added vowel marks to aid and preserve pronunciation.

5. The Dead Sea Scrolls (“DSS”) have provided new copies of O. T. books that date back past 200 B.C.

6. We have copies of the O. T. that were translated into other languages.

1. Greek (“Septuagint”)

Our oldest Septuagint manuscripts (save those found in the Dead Sea Scrolls) date from c. 350 A.D. The Hebrew scriptures were translated into Greek in the 300’s and 200’s B.C.

2. Latin (“Vulgate”)

3. Syriac (“Peshitta”)

7. NET - NET: We have good understanding of how O.T. Texts originally read.

- D. N. T. - Will be covered later
- E. Who Decided What Books Belong in the O.T.?

CANON = Collection of Authoritative Texts

1. The Pentateuch (first five books of Moses/O.T.) (a/k/a the law) was set aside as holy by all Hebrew/Samaritans without question. History does not unfold how these books came together beyond the internal biblical evidence. (Ex. 24:4ff; Dt. 31:9ff; etc.)
2. The second major part of the O.T. Canon is "The Prophets." These are divided into the "Former Prophets" (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings) and the "Latter Prophets" (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekial and "the twelve."). These became canon by virtue of authorship, conveyed history, and the fact they became true. (The measuring stick for a prophet was accuracy of prophecy).
3. The third part of the O.T. Canon is "The Writings." These included the Psalms, Proverbs, Chronicles, etc. These were regarded as holy because of their authors, purpose, and historical connections.
4. By the N.T. times, the O.T. was referred to as "scriptures."

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