

THE BIBLE

Lesson 1

The Origin and History of the Bible

Scripture Reading: 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21; 2 Sam. 23:2; Heb. 1:1-2; John 16:13; 6:63

I. The origin of the Bible:

- A. The Bible is God-breathed—2 Tim. 3:16:
 - 1. This tells us that the Scripture did not come out of man's thought, man's mind, but rather, it is God's breathing His thought and His word through His Spirit into and out of the writers; hence, the Bible contains God's elements and carries His flavor.
 - 2. As Christians, our greatest joy, or shall we say, our greatest blessing, is to be able to contact God and taste Him daily through the word of His breath—v. 16.
- B. The Bible is the speaking from God by men borne by the Holy Spirit —2 Peter 1:21:
 - 1. Since the Scripture is God's breathing His word out from men through His Spirit, no word of the Scripture can be of man's will; rather, men were borne by the Spirit and spoke out of God.
 - 2. The word, "men spoke from God, being borne by the Holy Spirit" (v. 21), has a twofold meaning: first, men were borne by the Spirit; second, men spoke from God.
 - 3. In the original Greek, being borne by the Holy Spirit means being carried along as a ship by the wind.
- C. The Bible is God's speaking in the prophets and in the Son—Heb. 1:1-2:
 - 1. The Old Testament is God's speaking in the prophets; the New Testament is God's speaking in the Son, our Lord Jesus—vv. 1-2.
 - 2. Hence, whether it is the speaking of the prophets in the Old Testament or the speaking of the Lord Jesus in the New Testament, both are God's speaking and both are of God.
- D. The Bible is the Holy Spirit's revelation—John 16:13:
 - 1. The Lord's word in verse 13 proves that after the Spirit's descension, what His disciples spoke and wrote was disclosed to them by the Spirit.
 - 2. Hence, the Lord's word here proves that after His ascension, all the books of the New Testament, written by His disciples, were of the Spirit's revelation and their divine authority was acknowledged by Him.

II. The writers and times of composition:

- A. The writers of the Old Testament included Moses, Joshua, Samuel, Ezra, Nehemiah, David, Asaph, Heman, Ethan, the sons of Korah, Solomon, Agur, Lemuel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, etc., at least thirty-two people; among them there were men of letters, statesmen, and military men; there were priests, kings, and prophets; and there were common people, shepherds, and farmers.
- B. The Gospel of Matthew was written by Matthew; Matthew was a tax collector of low estate, yet he was called by the Lord to be one of His twelve apostles.
- C. The Gospel of Mark was written by Mark; Mark was a very ordinary disciple.
- D. The Gospel of Luke and the Acts was written by Luke; Luke was a Gentile physician.

- E. The Gospel of John was written by John; the First, Second, and Third Epistles of John and Revelation were also written by John; John was a Galilean fisherman with little education, yet he was called by the Lord to be one of His twelve apostles.
- F. From Romans to Hebrews there are altogether fourteen books; they were all written by Paul; Paul was a radical member of the Judaic religion; moreover, he was a man of great learning; he was talented, competent, aggressive, and capable of outstanding achievements; He was especially called by the Lord in his early years to be the apostle to the Gentiles.
- G. The Epistle of James was written by James; James was a flesh brother of the Lord Jesus (Gal. 1:19); he was also a devout Christian who became a pillar of the church (2:9).
- H. The First and Second Epistles of Peter were written by Peter; Peter was a Galilean fisherman with limited education.
- I. The Epistle of Jude was written by Jude; he was also a flesh brother of the Lord.
- J. The first few books of the Old Testament—the Pentateuch—were written approximately in 1500 B.C.; the last book, Malachi, was written about 400 B.C.; therefore, the entire Old Testament of thirty-nine books took 1,100 years to complete.
- K. The first book of the New Testament, the Gospel of Matthew, was written around A.D. 37-40; the last book, Revelation, was written around A.D. 94-96; therefore, the New Testament was completed in over fifty years.
- L. Thus, in the completion of the entire Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, there was a time separation of 1500-1600 years.

III. The recognition of the Canon of Scripture:

- A. The Old Testament:
 - 1. In 457 BC the scribe Ezra compiled the Pentateuch and all the authoritative writings commonly recognized as Scripture then (i.e., our Old Testament), except Nehemiah and Malachi, which had not yet been written.
 - 2. By 400 BC the Old Testament as we know it (though not in the order that we know it) had gained public acknowledgement.
 - 3. The books of the Apocrypha, rejected by the Protestant Reformers and by most Protestants since then, were not in the collection of sacred writings prior to the Septuagint translation (i.e., the translation of the Old Testament into Greek).
- B. The New Testament:
 - 1. A comparison of local lists held by the various churches and teachers of the church points to a stable set of 27 canonical books.
 - 2. Some books were not included in some lists, and others are missing in other lists, but as a whole the lists point to the 27 books of the New Testament as holding authority in the early church by the second century AD.
 - 3. The epistles of James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, and Jude were disputed by some teachers (e.g., Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.25).
 - 4. A number of “pseudepigraphical” writings were rejected as Scripture during the early centuries of the church, though some were held to provide spiritual edification for the believers, somewhat like the many spiritual writings of the later church.
 - 5. In AD 367 the Canon was definitively fixed by Athanasius in his Thirty-ninth Paschal Letter for the eastern branch of the church.
 - 6. In AD 397 at the Council of Carthage (North Africa) the Canon was recognized universally for the western branch of the church.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

I. THE ORIGIN OF THE BIBLE

A. The Bible Being God-breathed

The Scripture is God-breathed (2 Tim. 3:16). This tells us that the Scripture did not come out of man's thought, man's mind, but rather, it is God's breathing His thought and His word through His Spirit into and out of the writers. Hence, the Bible contains God's elements and carries His flavor. As Christians, our greatest joy, or shall we say, our greatest blessing, is to be able to contact God and taste Him daily through the word of His breath.

B. The Bible Being the Speaking from God by Men Borne by the Holy Spirit

Since the Scripture is God's breathing His word out from men through His Spirit, no word of the Scripture can be of man's will; rather, men were borne by the Spirit and spoke out of God. The word, "men spoke from God, being borne by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:21), has a twofold meaning: first, men were borne by the Spirit; second, men spoke from God. In the original Greek, being borne by the Holy Spirit means being carried along as a ship by the wind. The writers of the Bible received God's inspiration, and they were under the power of the Holy Spirit, being borne and carried along by Him to speak out God's word. Furthermore, when they spoke, they spoke from within God. It was the Spirit of God carrying men along to speak, and it was also men speaking from within God. In other words, it was God speaking His own word from within men through their mouths.

Second Samuel 23:2 says, "The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue." This word was spoken by David. He told us that the words he spoke were the speaking of the Spirit of God through him, and that it was God's word that was in his tongue. Not only the Holy Spirit spoke through him, but also God's word was in his tongue and was spoken from his mouth. This is the Bible.

C. The Bible Being God's Speaking in the Prophets and in the Son

The Old Testament is God's speaking in the prophets; the New Testament is God's speaking in the Son, our Lord Jesus (Heb. 1:1-2). Hence, whether it is the speaking of the prophets in the Old Testament or the speaking of the Lord Jesus in the New Testament, both are God's speaking and both are of God.

D. The Bible Being the Holy Spirit's Revelation

John 16:13 says, "But when He, the Spirit of reality, comes, He will guide you into all the reality; for He will not speak from Himself, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come." The Lord's word here also proves that after the Spirit's descension, what His disciples spoke and wrote was disclosed to them by the Spirit. Hence, the Lord's word here proves that after His ascension, all the books of the New Testament, written by His disciples, were of the Spirit's revelation and their divine authority was acknowledged by Him.

The Scripture, therefore, is the word written by men under God's command (Exo. 34:27), the word of the Spirit of God spoken through men, the word of God spoken through man's mouth (2 Sam. 23:2), and the word spoken by men who were moved by the Spirit (Mark 12:36). The Old Testament is the word spoken by the prophets under God's command (Jer. 1:7), the word of God coming upon the prophet (Ezek. 1:3), and the word of the Spirit of God spoken through the prophets (Zech. 7:7; Acts 3:18; 28:25; Rom. 1:2; 1 Pet. 1:10-12). Some portions of the New Testament are God's speaking in the Lord Jesus (John 14:10), while other portions are words written by the apostles as taught by the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:13). The words written by the apostles as taught by the Spirit are as sacred as the Old Testament Scriptures (2 Pet. 3:15-16). Hence, the entire Bible

originates from God; every word and every sentence, every iota and every tittle (Matt. 5:18), are God-inspired. Hence, men should neither add to or take away anything from the Holy Scriptures (Rev. 22:18-19). (Truth Lessons—Level One, Lesson One, The Bible, pp. 1-4)

III. THE WRITERS OF THE BIBLE, THE PLACES WHERE IT WAS WRITTEN, AND THE TIMES WHEN IT WAS WRITTEN

A. The Old Testament

The Old Testament, from Genesis to Malachi, is composed of thirty-nine books. The writers included Moses, Joshua, Samuel, Ezra, Nehemiah, David, Asaph, Heman, Ethan, the Sons of Korah, Solomon, Agur, Lemuel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, etc., at least thirty-two people. Among them there were men of letters, statesmen, and military men; there were priests, kings, and prophets; and there were common people, shepherds, and farmers.

The books of the Old Testament were written in various places; some were written on Mount Sinai, some in the wilderness, some in the land of Canaan, some in Jerusalem, and some in Gentile lands.

B. The New Testament

The New Testament, from the Gospel of Matthew to Revelation, is composed of twenty-seven books.

The Gospel of Matthew was written by Matthew. Matthew was a tax collector of low estate, yet he was called by the Lord to be one of His twelve apostles. His Gospel was probably written in the land of Judea.

The Gospel of Mark was written by Mark. Mark was a very ordinary disciple. His Gospel was probably written in Rome.

The Gospel of Luke was written by Luke. Luke was a Gentile physician. His Gospel was probably written in a Gentile land.

The Gospel of John was written by John. John was a Galilean fisherman with little education, yet he was called by the Lord to be one of His twelve apostles. His Gospel was probably written also in a place of the Gentiles.

The Acts was also written by Luke the physician. This book was probably written also in a Gentile place.

From Romans to Hebrews there are altogether fourteen books; they were all written by Paul. Paul was a radical member of the Judaic religion. Moreover, he was a man of great learning; he was talented, competent, aggressive, and capable of outstanding achievements. He was especially called by the Lord in his early years to be the apostle to the Gentiles. All his books were written in Gentile places; some were written in prison at Rome.

The Epistle of James was written by James. James was a flesh brother of the Lord Jesus (Gal. 1:19); he was also a devout Christian who became a pillar of the church (Gal. 2:9), but retained a great deal of the background of Judaism. His Epistle was probably written in Jerusalem.

The First and Second Epistles of Peter were written by Peter. Peter was also a Galilean fisherman with limited education, but he was called by the Lord to be the first of His twelve apostles. Both of his Epistles were probably written in Gentile lands.

The First, Second, and Third Epistles of John were also written by John. They were all written in Gentile places.

The Epistle of Jude was written by Jude. He was also a flesh brother of the Lord (Jude 1; cf. Gal. 1:19). His Epistle was probably written in the land of Judea.

Revelation was also written by the Apostle John. This book was written in a Gentile place, probably on the island of Patmos.

C. The Times

The first few books of the Old Testament—the Pentateuch—were written approximately in 1500 B.C.; the last book, Malachi, was written about 400 B.C. Therefore, the entire Old Testament of thirty-nine books took 1,100 years to complete.

The first book of the New Testament, the Gospel of Matthew, was written around A.D. 37-40; the last book, Revelation, was written around AD. 94-96. Therefore, the New Testament was completed in over fifty years. Thus, in the completion of the entire Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, there was a time separation of 1500-1600 years.

IV. THE COMPLETION OF THE BIBLE— THE RECOGNITION OF THE AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE

A. The Old Testament

1. The Pentateuch

The five books of Moses in the Old Testament have always been recognized by the Jews as having come from God and having absolute divine authority, because they were revealed by God, written by Moses, and passed down through the generations by their fathers. Up to this day, although the Jews recognize the entire Old Testament as originating from God, they have always given the five books of Moses a special position. At least two or three copies of the Pentateuch are to be found in every Jewish synagogue throughout the world. The Jews may not have the other books of the Old Testament, but they will always have the five books of Moses.

2. The Other Books

The other books of the Old Testament, because of their value and authority, were also recognized, one after another, by God's people as having come from God. A certain writer has said that a tree does not necessarily need to have its name labeled, but it only needs to grow, blossom, and bear fruit, and then it will naturally be recognized by men as to what kind of tree it is. Similarly, it is not really necessary to mark out clearly whether the different books of the Bible are of God, for as each book passes through the test of time, its value and authority will spontaneously become manifest. This word is really well said and true. Following the Pentateuch, throughout the generations some among God's people were inspired to write the word of God. What they had written, after an extended period of testing by time, was recognized by God's people as having originated from God, because authority and power were found in their writings.

In 457 B.C., Ezra the scribe collected the Pentateuch and the authoritative writings generally acknowledged among God's people and arranged them to form the Old Testament. (However, two books—Nehemiah and Malachi—were missing because they were not yet written.) Both Josephus, the authoritative Jewish historian, and the Gentile historians confirmed this matter.

After Ezra, among the Jews there was a group of scribes called the Great Synagogue that continued to do the work of compilation and reviewing; the work was completed in 400 B.C. The Old Testament which they confirmed contained all the books we have today. Hence, by 400 B.C. not only the writing of the Old Testament was completed, but the Old Testament had also been confirmed and generally recognized. In any case, at the latest by 277 B.C., when seventy scholars translated the Old Testament into Greek, all the books of the Old Testament must have been established.

B. The New Testament

1. The Gospels

The Gospels and the Old Testament were frequently read in the early church meetings. Hence, among the books of the New Testament, the four Gospels were the earliest ones to be recognized by the church.

2. The Other Books

After the passing away of the apostles, confusion arose due to some who wrote books by assuming the identity of others. Hence, the leaders in the early churches, the so-called church fathers, collected all the writings of the apostles and ranked them together with the Gospels. Shortly after the martyrdom of Polycarp, all the churches generally agreed in their view concerning the New Testament except for Hebrews, James, 2 Peter 2 John, 3 John, Jude, and Revelation. There was still disagreement as to whether these seven books should be included in the Bible or not. Nevertheless, because these seven books were definitely written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, possessing divine authority and value, after another long period of testing by time, in the year AD. 397 at the council held in Carthage, which was in the northern part of Africa, the leaders of the churches gathered together and recognized these seven books as a part of the New Testament. They also announced that the New Testament was comprised of twenty- seven books, similar to what we have today. Hence, by A.D. 397, during the council of Carthage, the entire Bible, including the Old and New Testaments, was generally acknowledged and confirmed by God's people. (*Truth Lessons—Level One*, Lesson One, The Bible, pp. 6-10)

References and Further Reading:

1. *Truth Lessons—Level One*, Lesson One, The Bible
2. *On Knowing the Bible*, Chapter 2