

## HOW THE BIBLE CAME TO BE

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As part of today's overview, we want to provide you with some background on how the Bible came to be. This is a good thing – seems like we should know at least something about this book since we are entrusting our eternal souls to what it says and promises – don't you think?

Various religions have their holy books. Often these are reported as revelations coming through various means such as visions, dreams, or messages spoken directly by God or an angel. But the origin of the Bible is accounted for in quite a different way. The Bible is rooted and grounded in history. The Bible came from the experiences of specific people, in identifiable places, at particular times. The Bible deals with the creation and meaning of human life on this planet from within the stories of the people who lived here. It is holy in the sense that it tells us about the interaction of God and people in our world in the midst of everyday life.

It is the most circulated book in the history of the world. It's been this way since the innovation of the Gutenberg press in the 1450s, when the Bible in Latin was the first large book to be printed by moveable type. The Bible has been translated into more languages than any other work ever written. More books have been written about the Bible than any other subject, and the single person about whom more books have been written than anyone else comes from the Bible – Jesus.

Who wrote the Bible? God. 2 Timothy 3:16 tells us that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God. However, God Himself did not physically write the Bible, which is interesting because we know He can write – He wrote the 10 Commandments on the tablets for Moses, right? I'll bet His penmanship was impressive. He chose to inspire 40 different authors from various walks of life including, but not limited to, shepherds, fishermen, kings, and a doctor. Moses was the biggest contributor to the Old Testament in writing the first five books – known as the Pentateuch. The apostle Paul wrote 14 books of the New Testament – over half of it.

Most Bible scholars agree that the Bible was written over approximately 1,500 years beginning in about 1,500-1,450 B.C. beginning with what many scholars believe to be the oldest book – the book of Job. Others hold that the Pentateuch (the first 5 books of the Old Testament) came first. The last book written appropriately turns out to be the last book of the Bible – Revelation – believed to be written in 95 A.D.

The Bible was written to tell a lost and sinful world that the God of the Bible is the Creator of the heavens and the earth and of humanity. The message of the Bible is God loves His creation, and His original plan was to have an intimate relationship with them; however, sin has separated people from this relationship. It goes on to document the countless proofs of His acts of love, mercy, and grace to prove His character first to a single nation – the Nation of Israel - and then, ultimately, to the whole world. It is written to reveal Jesus Christ, as the promised One, the Messiah, the Savior of the world and how He changed human history by lowering Himself to become a human, live an exemplary life of truly submitting to the Father, and to give His life as a sacrifice for all those who would come to believe in Him. Most importantly, it was written with a promise – a promise of eternal peace with God via the forgiveness of sins by having faith in the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus, the Lamb of God, and the resurrection of His Son and Jesus' return to rule and reign forevermore. The message is the same from beginning to end and in each book of the Bible.

Although written across three continents – Asia, Africa, and Europe – the action of the Bible centers in Israel, a country the size of New Jersey. Jerusalem is the focal point – Jews, Christians, and Muslims all hold this city as sacred. Jerusalem is mentioned 656 times in the Bible. Over the centuries it has been destroyed 17 times - and 18 times it has been rebuilt.

The survival of the Bible is remarkable. Acting on a decree by the mad tyrant Antiochus Epiphanes in 167 B.C., his henchmen tried to destroy all copies of Jewish Scripture. The books of the Law that they found were torn in pieces and burned. Anyone found possessing the book of the covenant was sentenced to death. The Roman emperor Diocletian instituted the “Great Persecution” against Christians in the year A.D. 303. He attempted to exterminate the church and decreed that every manuscript of the Bible was to be seized and destroyed.

The modern Protestant Bible contains sixty-six books: thirty-nine books of the “Old Testament” and twenty-seven books of the “New Testament.” Most Protestant believers recognize these books as our “canon.” Canon comes from a Greek word, meaning reed, or measuring rod, and is used today to denote books that have been catalogued together because of their authority and divine inspiration. Determining the canon of Scripture was a process conducted first by Jewish rabbis and scholars and later by early Christians. The formation of the canon was born out of a belief in absolute truth.

The Old Testament Jews classified the collection of books into three divisions: the Law, the Prophets and the Writings. The twenty-four books contained in the Law, the Prophets and the Writings, are represented in our modern Bible by thirty-nine books. This number was derived by separating the books of Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, and Ezra-Nehemiah, into two books each. Also, the Jewish collection contained a single book called “The 12.” This book is today represented in our Bible by the twelve “minor” prophets - from Hosea through Malachi. By A.D. 250, there was nearly universal agreement on the canon of Hebrew Scripture.

The books of the New Testament document the apostles spreading the gospel of Jesus through the verbal medium of preaching and teaching. Eventually, the church because of its growth, “felt a need for a written account of the teaching of Jesus.” The process of the recognition and collection began in the first centuries of the Christian church. A series of “councils” of godly men followed these principles to determine whether a New Testament book was truly inspired by the Holy Spirit:

- 1) Was the author an apostle or have a close connection with an apostle?
- 2) Was the book being accepted by the body of Christ at large?
- 3) Did the book contain consistency of doctrine and orthodox teaching?
- 4) Did the book bear evidence of high moral and spiritual values that would reflect a work of the Holy Spirit?

Very early on, some of the New Testament books were being recognized. Paul considered Luke’s writings to be as authoritative as the Old Testament. Peter recognized Paul’s writings as Scripture (2 Peter 3:15-16). Some of the books of the New Testament were being circulated among the churches such as Colossians 4:16.

The only issue that remained was the Apocrypha – books written in the time between the Old and New Testament that ultimately were deemed not to be divinely inspired, with some debate and discussion continuing today. The vast majority of Hebrew scholars considered the Apocrypha to be good historical and religious documents, but not on the same level as the Hebrew Scriptures.

The earliest list of New Testament books, recognized as canon by the church, was provided by Athanasius of Alexandria (A. D. 367). This list, containing 27 books, is “exactly like our present New Testament” according to Josh McDowell’s book *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*.

This is obviously a very short summary of how the Bible came to be – there is much, much more I could add. As I mentioned, it is good to know how the Bible came to be since we are entrusting our eternal destiny with it. Hopefully, for each believer, the greatest proof of the Bible’s authorship, authenticity, and

power is how it has changed each of us. Living a life devoted to the truths of Scripture should produce stories of restoration, deliverance, forgiveness, freedom, joy, and most importantly, love. There's an old saying that for every 100 people, one will read the Bible and 99 will read the Christian. We're not perfect, and that should be a selling point to the grace of God – He accepts us as we are, but He will not leave us where we are.

The Acts of the Apostles begins with a group of followers who Jesus took as they were, but He did not leave them where they were. I hope you see what God did with ordinary people like us and turned the world upside down – or, better said, right side up. He did that with them, and since Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever, He can do that with us. Amen?