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DID GOD REALLY SAY?

What is truth?¹ Pontius Pilate asked this question of Yeshua (Jesus) and since then it has been the subject of much thought and discussion. The question could be said to go back further than Pilate to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden when Satan asked “Did God really say...?”² Whatever its origin, and since we live in a post-modern society in which there is opposition to any concept of revealed and absolute truth, there is clearly doubt in the minds of some people as to the veracity and reliability of the Bible.

The purpose of this study is to give an overview of the process by which the Bible came into being and to supply evidence of the compelling foundation it provides for Christian faith and, more importantly, for each individual’s walk with Yeshua.

My research into this topic was instigated by an evening my church spent looking at the Didache.³ I was powerfully struck by the difference between reading the Bible and reading the Didache. There seems to me to be a power and weight to the Bible which was lacking in the Didache. There is no doubt it is a living and active word but how did it come into being? It didn’t just drop into Adam’s lap, leather-bound and inscribed “*to Adam and his descendants – with love from God*”. Nevertheless, the story of its provision and preservation is no less amazing.

Having commenced this study (and found myself somewhat overwhelmed by the vast array of material on the topic) my perseverance has been fuelled by what I perceive to be a current lack of trust in the Bible today.

In our post-modern era, the question Satan asked Eve in the Garden of Eden is still one he uses today –

“DID GOD REALLY SAY?”

1 John 18:38

2 Genesis 3:1 (NIV)

3 Didache (which in Greek means “Teaching” is the short name of a Christian manual compiled before 300AD. The full title is The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles.

In order to answer this question I will begin by taking a look at the origin of Scripture. Who actually wrote it and how was it preserved to reach us today?

THE ORIGIN OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

The earliest written word of God was the Ten Commandments, written by God Himself on stone tablets – twice! These events are recorded in Exodus⁴ and are dated between 1500BC and 1300BC.

There are those who would probably have more confidence in Scripture if all the text had been provided in this manner, written directly by God on stone tablets – or perhaps more conveniently in book form – but this was not the case. Apart from in Daniel 5, where a hand is sent by God to write on the wall as a warning to King Belshazzar, none of the rest of Scripture was delivered without human involvement.

In terms of chronology after the Ten Commandments, the next section of the Bible to be recorded was the Torah – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. This is reckoned to be dated between the 14th and 12th Century BC. The remaining books of what we know as the Old Testament, named by the Jewish people as the Tanakh⁶, are dated between the sixth and fifth centuries BC. Around 30 people were involved in writing the Tanakh⁷ and it was completed somewhere around 500BC, in mostly Hebrew manuscripts.⁸ Somewhere between 250BC and

4 Chapters 24, 31, 32 and 34

5 Daniel 5:5

6 Tanakh comes from the three components of the Old Testament – the Torah (teaching) –the Nevi'im (prophets) and the Ketuvim (writings). The divisions are as follows: Torah: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy; Nevi'im: Former – Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings; Latter – Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel; Minor – Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi; Ketuvim – or Hagiographa – Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Five Scrolls – Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther. Memorial – Daniel, Ezra and Nehemiah (one book), Chronicles

7 See Appendix I – Human Authors of the Old Testament

8 Half of Daniel, part of Ezra and one verse in Jeremiah were initially recorded in Aramaic.

200BC a translation from Hebrew into Greek was completed – this is known as the Septuagint.⁹

Moses was attributed with the authorship of the Pentateuch – the first five books of the Bible – for many years but in the nineteenth century the JEDP Source Theory attributed the first five books of the Bible to four different sources. Some of these sources were also credited with other books such as Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings. The first two letters of JEDP refer to the names used for God in the passages which the sources were purported to have written – J (Jahwist) used YHVH – God’s name. Elohist used Elohim. The D from JEDP refers to Deuteronomist, who was suggested to have written Deuteronomy and the P to the Priestly writers. The theory was a response to perceived inconsistencies in the text of Scriptures, such as different names used for God and different emphases. However, the strongest evidence against this theory, in my view, is the Bible itself. There are 85 references to Moses in the New Testament, many of which refer to Moses as the author of the Law or Torah – see for example Mark 10:5, Mark 12:19, Luke 24:27 and Luke 24:44. Furthermore, since the Scripture clearly makes reference to Moses being in a particularly close relationship with God, it seems logical and reasonable to assume that the first five books of the Bible would be entrusted to him.

SELECTION AND RECOGNITION

Sadly nobody thought to include a record of who compiled the Old Testament and in what particular situations. A number of theories have been suggested, based on both Scriptural evidence and on other ancient writings.

The Traditional Theory, recorded by David Kinche (1160–1232) and Elias Lavita (1469–1549) credits Ezra the Priest (who lived between 480BC and 440BC) with the responsibility of selecting and ordering the books. After the time of Ezra, no further books were added to the Tanakh and the Old Testament canon¹⁰ was considered

9 The Septuagint is from the Latin word for “seventy”, since seventy men were reportedly involved in its translation.

10 The word CANON comes to English from Greek, via Latin, and has developed two meanings – a) a list (of books) and b) a rule or standard. (See FF Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*)

complete. II Maccabees¹¹ suggests Nehemiah as the collator and II Esdras¹² (Chapter 14: 19–48) indicates the loss of the original texts with Ezra, inspired by the Holy Spirit, rewriting it. This suggestion is maintained by Irenaeus in the second century AD, when he states

*“God... inspired Esdras, the priest of the tribe of Levi, to compose anew all the discourses of the ancient prophets, and to restore to the people the laws given them by Moses”.*¹³

However for this to be true, the Hebrew people would have had to have very little regard for the Scriptures and this is very unlikely.¹⁴

The Critical Theory on the authorisation of the Tanakh suggests a process of stages for the acknowledgement of the Scriptures, corresponding to its three sections. The Torah, recorded by Moses (to whom God spoke face-to-face), would have been first to be made part of the canon of Scripture in the period after the return from the Babylonian exile. This process was recorded in 2 Kings 22 and Nehemiah 8. Late in the third century BC the books of the Prophets were assembled. According to this theory, the third division, the Writings, was not closed until the first century AD, when the council met at Jamnia.¹⁵ Since this theory depends on the now largely disproven alleged council of Jamnia, it cannot be given much credence. Furthermore, Yeshua and His disciples clearly had a recognised set of Scriptures, see for example Mark 7:13, so this theory holds less credibility.

In 164BC Judas Maccabaeus compiled a list of the prophets and writings which were recognised as Scripture. He expressed some doubt over the inclusion of Esther,

11 II Maccabees is one of the Apocryphal books, written around 124BC.

12 II Esdras is another book from the Apocrypha.

13 Ecclesiastical History, Book V., chap. viii

14 See the section later in this paper entitled Preserving the Text.

15 The Council of Jamnia, allegedly held in Yavneh, was a hypothetical late 1st-century council at which the canon of the Hebrew Bible was supposed to have been finalised. First proposed by Heinrich Graetz in 1871, this theory was popular for much of the twentieth century. However, it was increasingly questioned from the 1960s onward and the theory has been largely discredited. (McDonald & Sanders, editors, *The Canon Debate*, 2002, chapter 9: Jamnia Revisited by Jack P. Lewis.)

Ruth and Song of Songs. However Josephus, a noted historian who was born in approximately 30AD, around the time of the death and resurrection of Yeshua, wrote the following in *Against Apion* 1:7 and 8

because every one is not permitted of his own accord to be a writer; nor is there any disagreement in what is written. They being only prophets that have written the original and eldest accounts of things, as they learned them of God himself; by inspiration: and others have written what hath happened in their own times, and that in a very distinct manner also. For we have not an innumerable multitude of books among us, disagreeing from, and contradicting one another: [as the Greeks have:] but only twenty two books: which contain the records of all the past times: which are justly believed to be divine.

Josephus goes on to describe the content of these 22 books which correlates exactly with the 39 books of our Old Testament. He records the Scripture as being complete at the time of the Persian King Artaxerxes I, around 400BC.

Furthermore, throughout His teaching, Yeshua often referenced the Scriptures and many of the writers in the New Testament do the same. The teaching of the early church was firmly based on the Tanakh – this is an inescapable fact, as there are 263 direct quotations from the Tanakh in the New Testament and 370 allusions to the teaching of the Tanakh.

It would seem reasonable to name Ezra as the collator of the books. Certainly he is described in Scripture as being a skilful scribe and a scribe of commandments (Ezra 7:6, 11). By the time he lived the books included were available and the Jewish people would have certainly needed their guidance.

PRESERVING THE OLD TESTAMENT TEXT

It seems to be impossible to definitively prove how the books were compiled, but once assembled, how has the Tanakh survived for so many years and has it changed beyond all recognition from the original text?

That's a good question!

NOT CHINESE WHISPERS

One of the reasons people doubt the reliability of the Scriptures is because of what we call Chinese Whispers. If you speak a sentence to someone and ask them to transmit it to another for them to pass it on again, the content of the sentence by the fifth or sixth person would vary enormously. To a lesser degree the same is true for written records, especially if the handwriting is difficult to decipher. The incidence of human error would be too great to preserve the original text for decades, let alone for millennia. With this in mind, and with the understanding of how the transmission of Scripture was carried out (through memory and repetition), we could say Scripture cannot possibly be the same today as it was at the start, can it?

Fortunately, God had this one covered!

GOD'S INJUNCTION AND JEWISH OBEDIENCE

The Bible records God's instructions to write the original copy of the Torah and also the instruction to read it regularly. Every seven years the whole book was to be read, as instructed in Deuteronomy 31:9–13. The word Scripture actually means 'reading', meaning it was designed for oral transmission rather than to be written and read. However, the existence of a written copy is proven by Deuteronomy 31:26

“Take this Book of the Law, and put it beside the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there as a witness against you.”¹⁶

God's intention was to have a master document against which any copies could be corroborated, hence *“as a witness against you”*. God demonstrates His awareness of people's propensity to edit documents to fit their own agenda, since He adds a warning at the end of Revelation against the consequences of adding anything to the Bible (God will add the plagues named in the book to anyone adding to the Scripture) or of taking away from the words (God will take away the person's share

16 It may seem strange to us to think of Moses having a book but the original Hebrew word (Sepher) also means writing, letter, document, bill and book-roll. Since books were not 'invented' until much later, it would be unlikely to be an actual book as we know it but more likely a scroll.

in the tree of life).¹⁷ It was God’s intention for us to engage with His word and not edit it!

Moses and his people, having received God’s word, carefully followed God’s instruction in Deuteronomy 11:19–23

“Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall teach them to your children, speaking of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land of which the LORD swore to your fathers to give them, like the days of the heavens above the earth. For if you carefully keep all these commandments which I command you to do – to love the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways, and to hold fast to Him – then the LORD will drive out all these nations from before you, and you will dispossess greater and mightier nations than yourselves.”

They took (and still take) the instruction to “bind them as a sign on their hands and as frontlets between their eyes” very literally, using Tefillin or Phylacteries¹⁸, and also to speak of them often with their children, since they taught (and still teach!) large portions of Scripture to their children. This is evidenced by the fact that there are many mnemonic devices in the text.¹⁹ In today’s culture since we have the capability of carrying many books around with us electronically, it is inconceivable that such large amounts of text could be memorised but at the time of Moses, and for some considerable time afterwards, it was common practice. Indeed, Socrates is famous for having warned people not to use books, as he thought it would

*“create forgetfulness in the learners’ souls, because they will not use their memories”.*²⁰

17 Revelation 22:18 – 19

18 Tefillin are small square leather boxes containing slips inscribed with scriptural passages, traditionally worn on the left arm and on the head by observant Jewish men.

19 These mnemonic devices are not evident to us in our translated scripture but were obvious in the original Hebrew.

20 Plato, The Phaedrus – a dialogue between Socrates and Phaedrus written down by the pupil of Socrates, Plato, in approximately 370 BC. (<http://www.units.miamioh.edu/>)

Our brains are still capable of retaining more than we can imagine, as is evidenced by the capability of many Jewish children to learn the Torah to this day.

The people who received the original Scriptures recognised the importance of what they had received and put in place a system which protected the written copying of God's word, from which those who learned the Scriptures by heart would work. This protected us from the inaccuracies of human error which would have altered them beyond reliability or trustworthiness.

Jewish scribes were particularly respected within the Jewish culture, because of the precise way in which they prepared themselves and their materials, as well as the particular attention to detail which their work involved. For example, the copying of any error was considered to be a sin and a process was developed in order to avoid mistakes. This process was listed in the Hebrew Talmud.²¹ Included in this exhaustive (and exhausting) list was the need to use particular manuscript material and dedicated black ink exclusively for the copying of Scripture. Each individual word was read aloud and alone before being written and when the title "God" was to be written, the pen had to be wiped clean. In order to write the actual name of God – the Tetragrammaton YHVH²² – the scribe had to first wash his body. There had to be a certain distance between every letter in the text and between each word. Every word and each individual letter was counted. As the process went on, each page was carefully checked and if there were any errors on a page the whole page was condemned. If there were three mistakes on one page, the whole manuscript was condemned. (Now you can see why I said exhausting!). This is just a small selection of the rules and regulations observed to preserve the integrity of the original text. This helps us to understand the close correlation between the copies held today and the Dead Sea Scrolls found at Qumran.

In fact the accuracy of the original text of the Old Testament/Tanakh was confirmed by the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. They were found in 1946 by a Bedouin

technologyandhumanities/plato.htm)

21 Talmud: the body of Jewish civil and ceremonial law and legend comprising the Mishnah and the Gemara.

22 Translated as the LORD in our Bibles today. For further study on the use of God's name see *The Divine Names and the Holy Trinity* by RK Soulen and *The Name Quest* by John Avery.

shepherd boy at Qumran, on the western shore of the Dead Sea, and included the oldest known copy of the entire book of Isaiah and copies of parts of every other book in the Tanakh except Esther. The manuscripts were not exclusively Scripture as they included many other writings from the time. These were dated to between 335 and 324 BC and rather astonishingly, the Scriptures matched the existing copies to within 99.5%. The differences actually have very little effect on the meaning of the text; in fact, they don't even affect the pronunciation.

The Scripture itself attests to why this would happen. Both Isaiah 40:8 and 1 Peter 1:25 state that grass and flowers fade *“But the word of the LORD endures forever”*. Whilst man might suggest the loss and re-inscribing of the Scriptures or may cast doubt as to the accuracy of them, God sits in heaven and laughs at man's arrogance – knowing His intention to provide evidence of the unchanging and constant nature of His word through (of all people) a Bedouin child!

On top of the careful copying system instigated by the Scribes, there were other Jewish regulations designed to catch copying errors. These safeguards were to ensure the identification of any errors. The Midrash²³ records the following Jewish traditions:

*“Before his death, Moses wrote 13 Torah Scrolls. Twelve of these were distributed to each of the 12 Tribes. The 13th was placed in the Ark of the Covenant (with the Tablets). If anyone would come and attempt to rewrite or falsify the Torah, the one in the Ark would “testify” against him. (Likewise, if he had access to the scroll in the Ark and tried to falsify it, the distributed copies would “testify” against him)”*²⁴

Following the disappearance of the Ark of the Covenant sometime around the sixth century BC, the proof text was kept in the Temple in Jerusalem and when the Temple was destroyed in 70AD, Jewish scribes developed a system to periodically check for scribal errors. Today this protocol of keeping a proof text for comparison continues to be followed, which explains the phenomenal integrity of God's word in the Tanakh.

23 The Midrash, developed between the 2nd and 11th centuries, was an in-depth rabbinical study of the interpretation of the Tanakh writings (analogous to a Bible Commentary).

24 Midrash (Devarim Rabba 9:4)

THE NEW TESTAMENT

Of course, the original Scriptures as recorded by the Hebrew people didn't include the New Testament. This was (obviously) added subsequent to the life, death and resurrection of Yeshua. The New Testament was written by eight or nine men²⁵, five of whom were apostles, consisted of 27 books. It was written in the first century AD and distributed in common Greek.

It is interesting to note that Yeshua did not write any of the Scriptures, although He is

*“The Word that became flesh and lived for a while among us”.*²⁶

He was clearly literate, as He wrote in the sand when speaking with the woman caught in adultery²⁷ and also read the Scriptures in the synagogue²⁸. It seems He brought the message He needed to bring and trusted the Holy Spirit to fulfil His part of the task; John 16:13 clearly indicates that the Holy Spirit has the role of leading the disciples into 'all truth', so Yeshua focused on His task and trusted the Holy Spirit with His! It is just as well for us that many of His followers sought to record in writing what Yeshua taught. Many of the writers of the time of Yeshua and in the decades following His death and resurrection attest to the veracity of Yeshua's words as being as authoritative as those of the Tanakh, including people such as Clement of Rome (around AD 96)²⁹ and Ignatius, the Bishop of Antioch (around AD 110)³⁰.

There has been some suggestion that the originals of the New Testament books were written in Hebrew but there is no surviving evidence of this. However, in David Daniell's biography of William Tyndale (1494–1536),³¹ there are some interesting comments with regard to Tyndale's work in translating the New Testament. Tyndale, who lived in an era where most books were only available in Latin (in

25 see Appendix II, Authors of the New Testament

26 John 1:14

27 John 8:6

28 Luke 4:16

29 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Epistle_of_Clement

30 <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0109.htm>

31 David Daniell *William Tyndale, A Biography*

Oxford University Library, of the 6,000 books available, only 60 were in English³²), was an excellent Hebrew student at a time when few people in England knew of the existence of this language, as well as being “one of the most formidable Greek scholars of the time.”³³ On more than one occasion in Daniell’s account of Tyndale’s translations reference is made to the Hebraized Greek that Tyndale recognised in the New Testament. For example he refers to “*New Testament Greek-coloured-by-Hebrew*”³⁴ and notes that “*hidden in some Greek expressions lies a controlling Hebrew form*”.³⁵ The most compelling comment, in my view, is when Daniell quotes directly from Tyndale’s work *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, C.II.4

*“The sermons which thou readest in the Acts of the Apostles and all that the apostles preached, were no doubt preached in the mother tongue. Why then might they not be written in the mother tongue? As if one of us preach a good sermon why may it not be written?”*³⁶

Finally Daniell again comments

‘Tyndale understood how much Hebrew there is in parts of the New Testament and not just when the Gospel writers or Paul or Peter are quoting the Old. That he had found in the New Testament a Hebraized Greek is something to which he will return.’

Robert Wakefield (an English scholar and Hebrew lecturer who died in 1537) agreed with Tyndale. Daniell records that

*“Like Tyndale, he insists that New Testament Greek cannot be understood without seeing the Hebrew in it.”*³⁷

It is perhaps somewhat unrealistic to imagine the New Testament believers having the letters which now comprise our New Testament in their own language – and, as

32 Hall’s Chronicle, containing the History of England, page 817, 1809

33 David Daniell *William Tyndale, A Biography* Page 324

34 David Daniell *William Tyndale, A Biography* Page 43

35 David Daniell *William Tyndale, A Biography* Page 44

36 David Daniell *William Tyndale, A Biography* Page 229

37 David Daniell *William Tyndale, A Biography* Page 293

previously stated, there are no original examples of Hebrew copies of these books, so this remains a question for us to raise with the original disciples (if we think of it) when we reach heaven.

It is widely suggested that the canon of Scripture, including the New Testament, was not settled until the 4th century AD, and some think the Council of Nicaea in AD325 was responsible for its acceptance. However, there is strong evidence in the writings of the early second century that a set of books had already been recognised as Scripture. Indeed in 2 Peter 3:15–16, Peter reminds his readers of the divine inspiration of Paul’s letters.

In 1 Timothy 5:18, Paul parallels a portion of Luke’s Gospel with a portion of Deuteronomy, identifying both as Scripture:

For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,”
(Deuteronomy 25:4)

and,

“The labourer is worthy of his wages”. (Luke 10:7)

Interestingly, Paul and Luke were well known as travelling companions, so when Paul quotes Luke’s gospel in this way, it could well have been the result of late night fireside discussions.

WARTS AND ALL

Another strong element of confirmation of the reliability of the New Testament is its honesty. Most people recording their life events for future posterity would not include their own mistakes. However, we find Peter’s denial of Yeshua before the cock crows recorded³⁸, along with indicating the first witnesses of Yeshua’s resurrection being women (who at the time of the events were forbidden to give

38 See Matthew 26:75; Luke 22:54; John 18:15

evidence in Jewish courts).³⁹ The argument between Paul and Barnabas would also have been omitted.⁴⁰

EVERY CLOUD...

Evidence of the acceptance of the New Testament books by around 144AD is proven by a major protagonist against the books themselves. Marcion of Sinope (c85–c160AD) was the son of a Bishop and a wealthy ship owner from Turkey. He had some very strange theories and tried to establish a cult in Rome, thereby finding himself excommunicated from the church. In his mind, the God of the Tanakh was the evil creator whom Yeshua had come to destroy. He accepted only the Gospel according to Luke and some of Paul's writings, rejecting especially the Tanakh completely. He was strongly anti-Semitic and wanted a Bible which contained only an edited version of Luke and ten Pauline letters. However, his rejection and denial of many of the books strongly prove their widespread use and acceptance at the time of Marcion's activities. There are those who believe that Marcion's work forced the church to formalise the acceptance of the books of the New Testament in a way which otherwise may not have happened.

So this cloud certainly did have a silver lining!

HISTORICAL ACCURACY

Historical accuracy also offers testimony to the trustworthiness of the Scriptures. Since I have neither archaeological nor historical qualifications, I will ask three noted professionals to speak in this regard:

Frederick Fyvie Bruce (1910-1990) was head of the Department of Biblical History and Literature at the University of Sheffield and later the Rylands Professor of Biblical Criticism at the University of Manchester. In his book, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*⁴¹ he states:

39 See Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20

40 See Acts 15

41 Downers Grove, IL 60515, Inter-Varsity Press, 1964. pp. 33, 44-46.

“The earliest preachers of the gospel knew the value of... first-hand testimony, and appealed to it time and again. ‘We are witnesses of these things,’ was their constant and confident assertion. And it could have been by no means so easy as some writers seem to think to invent words and deeds of Yeshua in those early years, when so many of His disciples were about, who could remember what had and had not happened. And it was not only friendly eyewitnesses that the early preachers had to reckon with; there were others less well-disposed who were also conversant with the main facts of the ministry and death of Yeshua. The disciples could not afford to risk inaccuracies (not to speak of wilful manipulation of the facts), which would at once be exposed by those who would be only too glad to do so. On the contrary, one of the strong points in the original apostolic preaching is the confident appeal to the knowledge of the hearers; they not only said, ‘We are witnesses of these things,’ but also, ‘As you yourselves also know’ (Acts 2:22). Had there been any tendency to depart from the facts in any material respect, the possible presence of hostile witnesses in the audience would have served as a further corrective.”

Grant Reid Jeffrey (1948–2012) was a Canadian Bible teacher of Biblical prophecy/eschatology and biblical archaeology. In his book, *The Signature of God* he states:

“Can we trust the Bible? The answer is an overwhelming YES! The reason for this confident statement is that for the past one hundred and fifty years many brilliant scholars have conducted detailed archaeological examinations at thousands of sites throughout the Middle East. The results of their discoveries have proven that the Bible is reliable and accurate in every single area where its statements could be tested.”⁴²

Millar Burrows (1889–1980) was the Director of the American School of Oriental Research in Jerusalem at the time of the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls and also served as the Professor of Archaeology at Yale University. He says:

“On the whole... archaeological work has unquestionably strengthened confidence in the reliability of the Scriptural record. More than one archaeologist has found his respect for the Bible increased by the experience of excavation in Palestine. Archaeology has in many cases refuted the views of modern critics.”⁴³

42 Grant R. Jeffrey *The Signature of God* WaterBrook Press; 3 Revised edition (July 20, 2010)

43 Millar Burrows, *What Mean These Stones?* (New York: Meridian Books, 1956), p.1.

Need I say more?

THE BIBLE – BUT NOT AS WE KNOW IT!

By the beginning of the 2nd century we had the whole Bible and it's pretty much stayed the same ever since, right?

Wrong!

Sadly, in a lot of ways, the format of the Bible we now have varies a great deal from the original used by people in the early church. As the believing community moved away from its Jewish roots, a number of changes were made. In the days of Ezra, the Tanakh composed of only 22 books, not 39 as ours has today. This was not to say there was less material, it was just arranged in a different manner. Various books were combined into one book, such as the twelve Minor Prophets. The arrangement was set out according to the TaNaKh – the Torah (Teaching), the Nevi'im (Prophets) and the Ketuvim (Writings). Obviously at this stage they weren't books – they were scrolls but they were stored and kept in the order above – a hierarchical order which deliberately placed the Torah first, the Prophets second and the Writings third.

The earliest evidence of this arrangement stems from the prologue to the book Ecclesiasticus which specifically mentions on three occasions the three parts of the canon. The author says,

“Many great things have been communicated to us through the Law and the Prophets, and the others who followed after... my grandfather Jeshua, after devoting himself for a long time to the reading of the Law and the prophets and the other books of our forefathers...”

Here the author clearly states that the canon contains three recognised parts; and these parts, having titles and sections, show that by the writer's time (about 180 BC), the canon was considered closed.⁴⁴

In Luke 24:44–45, Yeshua confirms the correct order of the Tanakh when He says:

44 <http://www.insight.org/resources/articles/bible/how-we-got-the-old-testament.html?print=t> Wayne Stiles

“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.” And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.

The Psalms was the first book in the Ketuvim – the Writings – so Yeshua confirms the order, Torah (or Law) – Prophets – Writings.

When the 27 books of the New Testament were added to these 22, this made the number 49, which is seven times seven, seven being the perfect and complete number according to Jewish understanding. In the early second century, the religious leaders decided to change the number of books in the Tanakh to make the total 24 rather than 22. This added up to 51, an insignificant number. There are those who suggest that any study of numerology is purely conjecture and a waste of time, but the changes which ensued from this first alteration had more effect than just the number of books in our Bible.

When Latin began to replace Greek as the common language during the fourth century, there were a variety of Latin translations which began to circulate, many of them inaccurate. Since the Church needed an official translation, Jerome (347–420AD), the theological adviser to Pope Damasus, was given the job of producing what became the Bible of the Middle Ages. Jerome studied in Bethlehem with the Rabbis and translated directly from Hebrew. Although he did not want to include the disputed Apocryphal books, as he did not believe them to be Scripture, he translated two, Tobit and Judith (quickly and without as much care as he gave to the Tanakh). When his translation was published, it included his translations of those two books and Old Latin translations of the other Apocryphal books. His translation was called the Latin Vulgate (vulgate meaning vulgar or common). Even more changes were made to the order and composition of the Scriptures in this version. Jerome divided even more of the original books to make 39, which is what we have now. He also rearranged the New Testament; previously the order was Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, followed by Acts, the general Epistles, then the Pauline Epistles (including, interestingly, Hebrews⁴⁵) and finally the Apocalypse (Revelation). Jerome rearranged it to give precedence to Paul’s letters, which were

45 There is some dispute about the authorship of Hebrews, with Paul, Luke, Barnabas, or Apollos all being contenders.

written to emerging church communities in a prevailing Gentile context, giving highest position to Romans. This was to give higher honour to the Roman church and to lessen the priority on the Jewish roots of the Scriptures. However, Paul himself testifies to the priority of “to the Jew first” (Romans 1:16) and also mentions the other apostles “who came before him” (Galatians 1:17). Although Paul is often referred to as the chief of the apostles he refers to himself as the least of the apostles in 1 Corinthians 15:9.

This is what Ernest Martin wrote, in his book *Restoring the Original Bible*⁴⁶:

“Let us look at the situation with the New Testament first. The last century saw the advent of what we call the modern scholarly criticism of the biblical texts and manuscripts. These pioneer scholars were very good at their task. Indeed, when they printed their final results of surveying the early New Testament manuscripts, they all without exception placed their arrangements of the books in the same order.

The order that they accepted was that of the manuscripts from which they had done their work. They felt compelled in their scholarly editions to arrange the books as they found them positioned in the manuscripts because the overwhelming evidence from those early documents demanded it. As an example, note Scrivener’s words after surveying over 4000 New Testament manuscripts:

‘Whether copies contain the whole or a part of the sacred volume, the general order of the books is the following: Gospels, Acts, Catholic Epistles, Pauline Epistles, Apocalypse [the Book of Revelation]’⁴⁷

Martin makes the observation that in the 20th century, it is only possible to obtain one copy of the New Testament Scriptures in their original order. This is Ivan Panin’s *Numeric English New Testament*⁴⁸.

46 *Restoring the Original Bible* by Ernest L. Martin, Ph.D.

47 F.H.A. Scrivener, *Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament*, 4th ed., vol. 1 (London, 1894), p. 72.

48 Ivan Panin, *Numeric English New Testament*, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform (7 Jan. 2013)

TRANSLATIONS

By 500AD the Bible had been translated into more than 500⁴⁹ languages, but only a century later the Roman Catholic Church decreed the Bible should be only available in Latin, thus excluding access for ordinary people. This ban was effective for more than 300 years, until the first copy of the New Testament⁵⁰ was produced in 995 in Anglo Saxon. (There doesn't seem to be a record of who was responsible for this translation.)

The centuries passed and Latin continued to be a language which excluded common people. The clergy clung to the Latin Vulgate, as it meant the people were forced to rely on them to translate and explain the Scriptures. Fortunately, John Wycliffe, sometimes called the Morning Star of the Reformation, defied the Roman Catholic clergy. In 1384 he translated the first English Bible from the Latin Vulgate (all 80 books including the Apocrypha), writing the copies by hand (a process taking ten months) and recruiting travelling preachers, called Lollards, to spread God's Word in English. Wycliffe's Bibles, and later his bones, were burned, but he had sparked The Reformation.

In the 1450's Johannes Gutenberg developed the printing press and his first work was to produce copies of the Latin Vulgate Bible. Forty-eight copies (not all complete) still exist today and they are considered to be amongst the most valuable books in the world.

William Tyndale, who was fluent in seven languages, left England to work on the first English translation based on the original Hebrew and Greek. In 1525, smuggled copies of his New Testament began circulating throughout England.

49 Interestingly, according to the Wycliffe Bible Translators website, in 2015 we still have only 531 languages with a complete Bible available to them. <http://wycliffe.org.uk/wycliffe/about/vision-whatwedo.html>

50 Note how far the church had moved from her Jewish roots –already it was considered acceptable to have the New Testament without the Tanakh.

“I had perceived by experyence how that it was impossible to stablysh the laye people in any truth, excepte the Scripture were playnly layde before their eyes in their mother tongue.” William Tyndale⁵¹

Tyndale was executed in 1536 for heresy at a time when owning a Bible in English was a capital offence. His dying prayer was for the King of England’s eyes to be opened. This prayer was clearly answered two years later, when King Henry VIII commissioned the translation of the Great Bible for the Church of England, largely based on Tyndale’s work.

The Luther Bible is a German language Bible translated from the original Hebrew and ancient Greek by Martin Luther. The New Testament was first published in 1522 and the complete Bible, containing the Old and New Testaments and Apocrypha, in 1534. Martin Luther (1483–1546) later published about 100,000 copies of his German translation, and soon translators across Europe made God’s Word available in every major language.

James I (1564–1625), alarmed by all the versions appearing, commissioned a group of biblical scholars to produce an authorised version, combining the best of earlier translations and working primarily from Tyndale’s version. The Authorised Version, or the King James Version, written in the language of the day, appeared in 1611, the first Bible produced by an authorised group of scholars. In the preface to this version the scholars say that their purpose *was not to produce a new translation but to make a good one better.*

Interestingly, the name James used in the New Testament wasn’t available when the Bible was written – the original text would have shown Ya’acov. Usually the name Jacob is used for Ya’acov, however, King James wanted his name to appear in the Bible and so he replaced Ya’acov with James.⁵²

There are two other problems raised with regard to the Scriptures.

51 <https://wycliffe.org.uk/wycliffe/about/history-ofbt.html>

52 The name James was not in use until the 13th century.

PROBLEM ONE: ORIGINAL LANGUAGE

Hebrew, the original language of the Old Testament, is not an exact language, being more poetic than specific. I have heard it said it is a beautiful language but not one you would want to use to build a spaceship. There are many idiosyncrasies within the language and difficulties in terms of being definitive about the translation. For example, the word *ayin* can mean eye or spring. (“It’s all about context!” I can hear my Old Testament Hebrew teacher cry!) Unless everyone is prepared to undertake a thorough study of the Hebrew language, we will always have to rely on the translation skills of those who have learned this ability. I am given to understand (having never studied it) that Greek is more scientific and easier to translate, but there are still difficulties in translation, even when the meaning is more specific.

There are generally three approaches to translation. Literal translation or word for word, which attempts to directly translate each individual word (examples include the New King James Version and New American Standard Bible).

Secondly Dynamic Equivalent or thought for thought which aims to convey the undergirding message of the words whilst retaining the accuracy. Examples of this style include the New International Version and the Revised English Bible.

Thirdly there is the paraphrase or Free Translation, which aims to deliver the message of the Bible using modern language. Examples of this style are The Message and The Living Bible.

Since we do not communicate in single words, as words have to be contained within the context of a sentence to have any real meaning, a literal word-by-word translation can lose much of the originally intended meaning. However, with the thought for thought translations the reader is dependent on the discernment of the translator to have an accurate understanding of the intended thought which was to be conveyed. An example of the problems this can cause is found in James 2:2, where the word *sunagógé* is often translated church. Had James intended to convey the word church, he would have used the Greek word *ekklésia*. Many translations, however, use the word church and some use assembly. However, the true meaning is probably intended to be a group of Messianic believers meeting in their synagogue.⁵³

53 For further reflection on this point, see *Receive the Truth* by Alex Jacob, page 51

Another example of the problems suffered by translators is the varying translations of 1 Corinthians 11:10. The Greek interlinear gives the words as

“(she) ought the woman authority to have on the head”

The literal translation offers

“the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head” (NKJV)

and the Dynamic Equivalent (NIV) would suggest

“the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head”.

A paraphrase would say

“a woman should wear a covering on her head as a sign that she is under man’s authority” (LB)

but my personal favourite is the Nicholas King Version, which gives us

‘the woman ought to have control over her head’

For me, this is where faith steps up to the plate! If I believe God to be amazing Creating God who made the Universe and all that is within it (and I do) and if I believe He earnestly wants to communicate with His creatures (and I am sure of that too) then it is not too far a stretch of my understanding to believe He will reveal Himself through His word to those who earnestly seek Him. We may never agree about some of the detail in the translations and we may have a list of questions to pull out of our pockets when we get to heaven (always assuming we have pockets there) but if it impacts our relationship with Him and we diligently seek Him, He will show us His truth!

PROBLEM TWO: PERSONALITIES

People also can get in the way, both the people who were used to write and record the Scriptures and those who have been used to translate those Scriptures from the original. If they had a particular axe to grind, they would be able to twist and

change the Scriptures to suit their own agenda. I have already reported that the name James would not have appeared in the original scrolls, but was added by the egocentric King James and now a whole book is named after him. (I wonder what we will call the author of that book in Heaven?)

This is where my belief in the sovereignty of God steps in. The God Who knows our thoughts afar off and Who is familiar with all our ways⁵⁴ is surely able to select authors and translators to fit the task He had for them. Just as He was able to use a donkey to speak to Balaam⁵⁵ and also was able to prepare John the Baptist to make ready the way for Yeshua,⁵⁶ He prepared the various authors and scribes to record the Words of Life for future generations. I would consider Tyndale to be another such man – his passionate desire to ensure that all people had access to the Bible led him to make the following comment to a learned man:

“If God spare my life, ere many years I will cause a boy that driveth the plough shall know more of the Scripture than thou dost.”⁵⁷

His passion, as we have already seen, led to his early death for this terrible “crime”.

THE THREE STAGES OF REVELATION

In his excellent and detailed book *“The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible”*,⁵⁸ Warfield refers to two stages of revelation of God brought to us.

“There is the revelation which God continually makes to all men: by it His power and Divinity are made known. And there is the revelation which He makes exclusively to His chosen people: through it His saving grace is made known.”

The first is determined as the creation around us all and the second as the Holy Scriptures. Psalm 19 would confirm this theory very clearly, moving as it does from

54 Psalm 139

55 Numbers 22

56 Matthew 3 and Mark 1

57 David Daniell, *William Tyndale A Biography*, Page 1

58 BB Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, 1948 The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company

the glory of God's creation and the universality of that message (verses 1–6), to the salvation available to us through His perfect word (verses 7–11) and finishing with our response to both of these revelations (verses 12–14).

It is tempting to suggest consideration of a third revelation in the life and teachings of Yeshua, which give a deeper and fuller understanding of the New Covenant promised in Jeremiah 31. Since the Bible clearly teaches that Yeshua is The Word, it could be argued that the person of Yeshua is a fuller and deeper explanation of the Tanakh. (See John 1:1)

If you accept Yeshua as a third revelation, a fourth revelation may also be included in the form of the personal communication between the Holy Spirit and each believing individual. Without the inspiration of and interaction with God's Holy Spirit, we would not have even the vaguest possible chance of understanding His word to us, and since there aren't instructions specific to our day-to-day lives, such as 'the job you've just applied for is not going to be a blessing but a curse' (or the other way round) in the Bible, it is vital to have a daily living relationship with God the Father through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Whatever we think of how many different ways God has revealed Himself to us, the Scriptures are part of the whole revelation and it is very clear in the Scripture that the word of God to man is foundational to our relationship with Him. Psalm 19 is joined by a whole host of other Scripture, from both the Tanakh and the New Testament (including 2 Timothy 3:16 of course) in declaring the inspiration of God's word to us.

TODAY

The Bible is the all-time best seller, having sold 6,001,500,000 copies. There are 6,900 languages spoken in the world today only 531 of which have the complete Bible, so there are still 98,000,000 people without a Bible. It is estimated that annually 100 million copies of the Bible are sold.⁵⁹

And yet... how many believers actually read their Bible on a regular basis? I was privileged to be inculcated with good habits as a young believer with regard to

⁵⁹ Statistics from Wycliffe Bible Translators at <http://wycliffe.org.uk/>

reading and studying God's Word.⁶⁰ However, I recently attended a Christian Conference where the results of an honest survey of people's Bible reading habits were reported. I was horrified to learn that only twenty per cent of believers profess to read their Bible on a regular basis. Today we have more facility and (most of us) freedom to read God's word than ever before. There are study programmes and commentaries freely available online for instance. God is a relational God, He earnestly desires to communicate with us. I love the way Jonathan Allen puts it in his daily devotional:⁶¹

It is the words of Yeshua that make covenant with us. His words are the living water that well up inside us (John 4:14) and bring us His life in abundance (John 10:10). We ignore His words at our peril; we distance ourselves from His blessing when we treat the Scriptures casually; we kill the covenant when we study the Scriptures only as an academic exercise without letting the Spirit wash us with their meaning. God is constant and does not change; His word is not dated or old-fashioned. On the contrary, it touches our souls and makes covenant with us in every way and every age. We must not dilute it or dumb it down, we must not pull its punches as if it is too strong for the people we meet – some of them need that knock-out blow! – and we must allow the Spirit room and liberty to work. For it is according to these words God makes covenant with mankind.

God really did say!

The question has to be asked:

Are we listening?

⁶⁰ For help with developing Bible reading habits, see the appendix to Alex Jacob's book *Prepare the Way*

⁶¹ *When You Lie Down & When You Rise Up – Daily Readings in Shemot – Exodus* by Jonathan Allen, Elisheva Publishing ©2011

APPENDIX I – AUTHORS OF THE BIBLE: TANAKH⁶²

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy = Moses – 1400 B.C.

Joshua = Joshua – 1350 B.C.

Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel = Samuel/Nathan/Gad – 1000–900 B.C.

1 Kings, 2 Kings = Jeremiah – 600 B.C.

1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah = Ezra – 450 B.C.

Esther = Mordecai – 400 B.C.

Job = Moses – 1400 B.C.

Psalms = several different authors, mostly David – 1000–400 B.C. Other authors of Psalms include Moses (Psalm 90), Solomon (Psalms 72 and 127), the sons of Korah (Psalms 42–49; 84–85; and 87–88), the sons of Asaph (Psalms 50 and 73–83), and Ethan the Ezrahite (Psalm 89). A number of Psalms are also written anonymously.

Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon = Solomon – 900 B.C.

Isaiah = Isaiah – 700 B.C.

Jeremiah, Lamentations = Jeremiah – 600 B.C.

Ezekiel = Ezekiel – 550 B.C.

Daniel = Daniel – 550 B.C.

Hosea = Hosea – 750 B.C.

Joel = Joel – 850 B.C.

Amos = Amos – 750 B.C.

Obadiah = Obadiah – 600 B.C.

Jonah = Jonah – 700 B.C.

Micah = Micah – 700 B.C.

Nahum = Nahum – 650 B.C.

Habakkuk = Habakkuk – 600 B.C.

Zephaniah = Zephaniah – 650 B.C.

Haggai = Haggai – 520 B.C.

Zechariah = Zechariah – 500 B.C.

Malachi = Malachi – 430 B.C.

⁶² <http://www.gotquestions.org/Bible-authors.html>

APPENDIX II – AUTHORS OF THE BIBLE: NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew = Matthew – A.D. 55–75

Mark = John Mark – A.D. 50–75

Luke = Luke - A.D. 60 – 75

John = John - A.D. 60 – 90

Acts = Luke - A.D. 65

Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians,
Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus,
Philemon = Paul – A.D. 50–70

Hebrews = unknown, most likely Paul, Luke, Barnabas, or Apollos – A.D. 65

James = James (actually, Ya'acov!) – A.D. 45

1 Peter, 2 Peter = Peter – A.D. 60

1 John, 2 John, 3 John = John – A.D. 90

Jude = Jude – A.D. 60

Revelation = John – A.D. 60–90

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