

ReGroups 5/7/23

Making of the Bible: More Than A Book

Prepared to Answer

Just the mention of the word “Bible” immediately brings to mind the Christian sacred texts. Almost everyone has heard of the Bible, even if they’ve never even held one. “The Bible” has become so synonymous with being the definitive source of information, that the phrase is borrowed by all sorts of people and groups to refer to their own go-to resource for answers and information. The Bible has been such a mainstay in every society over the past 2000 years and probably the greatest influence over every generation and culture.

For those who respect and revere it, we don’t really question where it came from or how it came together. However, because of the prevailing, overarching light it has cast over the world, it has also drew its share of criticism. Many have tried to undermine it and discredit it. Many detractors of Christianity have successfully caused multiple generations of students and impressionable minds to doubt or disbelieve the Bible.

These same people often come to us and want us to explain our side or convince them to dust off this skepticism, yet most of us aren’t prepared to even begin to have those sorts of conversations. We’ve always believed that the Bible was God’s Word and our faith in it has never really been shaken.

This is one of the main reasons why its important that we learn the story of the Bible. Learning how it came together doesn’t challenge or threaten its integrity or sanctity, but will only raise our confidence and sharpen our skills at leveraging it to win others to Christ.

In **1 Peter 3:15**, Peter implores all of us to be able to defend and explain our faith. While this can refer to our own testimony, it certainly includes knowing how Christianity was organized and expanded, as well as how the Bible came together.

Have you ever found yourself in a conversation with someone who didn’t believe the Bible? Have you ever felt unable to engage with someone who was asking all sorts of questions about it? Don’t you think we should know the story behind the Bible, on top of the stories within it?

The Books

Did you know that the phrase/title “The Bible” is not mentioned in the Bible? This phrase originates from one of the early church leaders, named John Chrysostom. In reference to the selected 66 books, he proposed that the collection be called “*Ta Biblia*” or “*The Books*”.

The Bible has never referred to a *single* book, but rather *sixty-six different* books. These books came together over a period of a thousand plus years, were written by kings, physicians, tax collectors, farmers, fishermen, singers and shepherds across three different continents. Yet the reason they were chosen by the early church leaders is because it was concluded that they all pointed to a *single, grand subject* and expounded on how a *single event* changed everything.

Have you ever considered how the Bible is a collection of many books, written across many years? How might this detail bolster the credibility of the Bible? How does this add emphasis to the unified subject that all 66 books share?

Were the Bible to have been written all at once, years after all of the stories took place, it would raise many questions about accuracy and validity. However, seeing that the first book was written around 1500 BC and the last one was written around 100 AD, it makes the finished product that much more marvelous. *Wouldn't you agree?*

The Old Testament

We know that the Old Testament which we have in our Bibles is the exact collection of books that the Jews hold up as their Sacred Texts. When Jesus talked about the Scriptures, He would have been referring to the same books that we have in our Old Testament. We can confirm this based on a statement Jesus makes in **Matthew 23:34-35**, where He is condemning the Religious Leaders of his generation for not listening to God's Word and how it set the stage for Him.

In this passage He references the martyrs of the Old Testament, beginning with Abel in **Genesis 4:8** and ending with Zechariah in **2 Chronicles 24:20-21**. The Hebrew Bible begins with Genesis and ends with 2 Chronicles, therefore it's safe to say this was Jesus' way of affirming that the established Jewish texts were *indeed* God's Word to Ancient Israel, and should be preserved as such going forward.

Maybe you're wondering, why is the Hebrew Bible organized differently than our Old Testament? This is an important question and helps further explain how the Bible came together. The books of the Hebrew Bible are in chronological order, as in Genesis was written *first* and 2 Chronicles was written *last*. Our Old Testament is put together in more of a topical order, with *some* sense of chronology.

The ordering of the Hebrew Bible actually helps explain a lot about how it eventually came to be one larger book. So let's break this down section by section:

1) The Torah (Genesis - Deuteronomy):

These books were written by Moses, during his time at Mt. Sinai and throughout the 40-year wilderness journey. **Exodus 24:1-18** gives us a glimpse of what Moses' experience at Sinai was like, as he and a team of elders began hearing revelation from God and documenting Israel's history and God's Law. We hear the first mention of the "Book of the Covenant" in this passage (v7), which is where the Hebrew word "Torah" comes from. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy are often referred to together, as the Torah.

Discuss how Moses was given these books and how they prepared Israel for their time as a nation. How do they still inspire and guide us to this day?

2) Israel's Pre-Exilic Story (Includes historical books, poetry, and prophets)

Joshua picked up the baton after Moses, and continued to contribute to the Israel's story as they made conquest of the promised land. We read about Joshua possessing the Book that Moses started and adding more to it in **Joshua 1:7-8 and 24:26**. From Joshua, the torch was passed to Samuel to Nathan then to Elijah then to Hilkiah then to Jeremiah. You can see how God's Word came to Samuel, Nathan, and Elijah in these verses: **1 Samuel 3:21, 2 Samuel 7:4, 1 Kings 17:1-7**.

Israel fell away from God after the days of Elijah and **2 Kings 22:8-13** tells us how God's Word was rediscovered, when Josiah set out to rededicate the Temple. It's commonly believed that Jeremiah wrote the history about the last days of Israel as a free nation, seeing that the end of 2 Kings and Jeremiah's own book are basically identical. Israel and its people are exiled because there was just *too great a disconnect* between the people and their God. No amount of religion could reconcile them or help them overcome their sin.

All of the stories, songs, poem, and prophecies reveal an incomplete Israel that couldn't achieve its dream through the Old Covenant. **How do these stories point us to the New Covenant?**

2) Israel's Post-Exilic Story (Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Zechariah, Haggai, Malachi, 1 and 2 Chronicles)

It's during this time that the Hebrew Bible as we know it came together as one complete book. Daniel was instrumental with revealing God to the Babylonian and Persian kings, which led to the Jews being sent back to resettle the land. Under leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah, the nation would rebuild, while a trio of prophets encouraged and inspired them in their efforts.

Ezra was tasked with restarted the priesthood, and would reintroduce God's Word to the newly regathered Israel, see **Ezra 7:6-10**. When the nation is formally being rededicated under Nehemiah's leadership, Ezra is there to read from the Scriptures and consecrate them to the Lord, see **Nehemiah 8:1-9**.

Part of Ezra's efforts to inspire this new generation would be to see to it that the Scriptures be brought together from beginning to end. So, the official canon of the Hebrew Bible is authorized and finalized by him. He would write 1 and 2 Chronicles as a way of retelling and summarizing Israel's history and would set these in place as *the final books* of the Hebrew Bible.

- 1 Chronicles begins with connecting Israel all the way back to the very beginning, see **1 Chronicles 1:1**.
- 2 Chronicles concludes with the word from Persia, allowing Israel to resettle their land, see **2 Chronicles 36:22-23**.

Ezra wanted God's people to know that the story of Redemption didn't end with the Exile, but Israel had more to offer the world. Obviously, we know the rest of the story. The last prophet, Malachi, points towards the work continuing and reaching its fulfillment: **Malachi 1:11, 3:1**. **How does Ezra relate to Moses, and d do they roles they play add to the completed Bible's trustworthiness? How does the way the Old Testament ends point us to Jesus and the Church age to come?** So, now we know how the Old Testament came together and why the particular books which were included made their way into the Jewish Scriptures. Next week we will discuss the New Testament and how it came together. **Before you dismiss, spend some time discussing what you've learned tonight and make note of any questions you may have.**