

APOLOGETICS – Defending & Propagating Your Faith

HOW WAS THE BIBLE WRITTEN?

Material Taken From *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, Josh McDowell (Nashville, TN.: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 17-22.

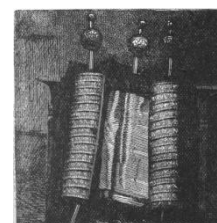
Many people have questions about the background of the Bible, its divisions, and the material used for its production. This section will familiarize you with its construction, and give you a greater appreciation of how it was compiled.

WRITING MATERIAL

PAPYRUS: The failure to recover many of the ancient manuscripts (a manuscript is a handwritten copy of the Scriptures) is primarily due to the perishable materials used for writing. “All... autographs,” writes F. F. Bruce, “have been long lost since. It could not be otherwise, if they were written on papyrus, since ... it is only in exceptional conditions that papyrus survives for any length of time” (Bruce, BP, 176) Among the writing materials available in biblical times, the most common was papyrus, which was made from the papyrus plant. This reed grew in the shallow lakes and rivers of Egypt and Syria. Large shipments of papyrus were sent through the Syrian port of Byblos. It is surmised that the Greek word for books (biblos) comes from the name of this port.



The English word paper comes from the Greek word for papyrus (papyros). (Ewert, ATMT, 19-20) The Cambridge History of the Bible gives an account of how papyrus was prepared for writing: MThe reeds were stripped and cut lengthwise into thin narrow slices before being beaten and pressed together into two layers set at right angles to each other. When dried the whitish surface was polished smooth with a stone or other implement. Pliny refers to several qualities of papyri, and varying thicknesses and surfaces are found before the New Kingdom period when sheets were often very thin and translucent.” (Greenslade, CHB, 30) The oldest papyrus fragment known dates back to 2400 b.c. (Greenlee, INTTC, 19) The earliest manuscripts were written on papyrus, and it was difficult for any to survive except in dry areas such as the sands of Egypt or in caves such as the Qumran caves, where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered. Papyrus enjoyed popular use until about the third century a.d. (Greenlee, INTTC, 20)



PARCHMENT: Parchment is the name given to “prepared skins of sheep, goats, antelope and other animals.” These skins were “shaved and scraped” in order to produce a more durable writing material. E F. Bruce adds that “the word ‘parchment’ comes from the name of the city of Pergamum in Asia Minor, for the production of this writing material was at one time specially associated with that place.” (Bruce, BP, 11)

VELLUM: Vellum was the name given to calf skin. Vellum was often dyed purple. In fact, some of the manuscripts we have today are purple vellum. The writing on dyed vellum was usually gold or silver. J. Harold Greenlee notes that the oldest leather scrolls date from around 1500 B.C.

Other Writing Materials Ostraca:

This unglazed pottery was popular with the common people. The technical name is “potsherd.” Ostraca has been found in abundance in Egypt and Palestine. (Job 2:8)

Stones: Archaeologists have found common stones inscribed with an iron pen.

Clay Tablets: Engraved with a sharp instrument and then dried to create a permanent record (Jer. 17:13; Ezek. 4:1), these tablets provided the cheapest and one of the most durable kinds of writing material. **Wax Tablets:** A metal stylus was used on a piece of flat wood covered with wax.

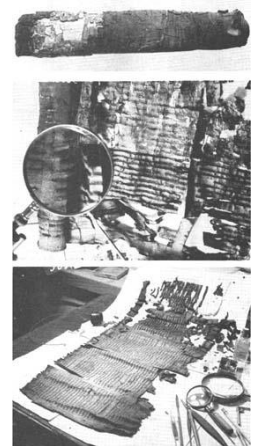


Writing Instruments: Chisel: An iron instrument used to engrave stones. Metal Stylus: "A three-sided instrument with a leveled head, the stylus was used to make incursions into clay and wax tablets." (Geisler, GIB, 228) Pen: A pointed reed "was fashioned from rushes (*Juncus maritimus*) about 6-16 inches long, the end being cut to a flat chisel-shape to enable thick and thin strokes to be made with the broad or narrow sides. The reed pen was in use from the early first millennium in Mesopotamia from which it may well have been adopted, while the idea of a quill pen seems to have come from the Greeks in the third century b.c." (Jer. 8:8) (Greenstone, CHB, 31) The pen was used on vellum, parchment, and papyrus. Ink: The ink in the ancient world was usually a compound of "charcoal, gum and water." (Bruce, BP, 13)

Forms of Ancient Books: Rolls or scrolls were made by gluing sheets of papyrus together and then winding the resulting long strips around a stick. The size (Greenlee, INTTC, 21) of the scroll was limited by the difficulty in using it. Writing was usually limited to one side of the scroll. A two-sided scroll is called an "b>phylloxy" (Rev. 5:1). Some rolls have been known to be 144 feet long. The average scroll, however, was only about twenty to thirty-five feet long.

Codex or Book Form: In order to make reading easier and less bulky, the papyrus sheets were assembled in leaf form and written on both sides. Greenlee states that the spread of Christianity was the prime reason for the development of the codex-book form

Types of Writing: Uncial Writing "Literary works ... were written in a more formal style of handwriting, called uncials. This 'book-hand' was characterized by more deliberate and carefully executed letters, each one separate from the others, somewhat like our capital letters." (Metzger, TNT, 9) Geisler and Nix note that the "most important manuscripts of the New Testament are generally considered to be the great uncial codices that date from the fourth and later centuries. These appeared almost immediately following the conversion of Constantine and the authorization to make multiple copies of the Bible at the Council of Nicea (325)." (Geisler/Nix, GIB, 391) Probably the two oldest and most significant uncial manuscripts are Codex Vaticanus (about a.d. 325-350) and Codex Sinaiticus (A.D. 340).



Three stages (from top to bottom) in the painstaking procedure of unrolling a Dead Sea Scroll, in this case the Genesis Apocryphon (The Shrine of the Book, Israel Museum)

Minuscule Writing: Minuscule writing was "a script of smaller letters in a running hand [connected] ... created for the production of books" around the beginning of the ninth century.

Spaces and Vowels: The Greek manuscripts were written without any breaks between words, while the Hebrew text was written without vowels until these were added by the Massoretes between the fifth and tenth centuries A.D. Both practices seem odd and confusing to most modern readers. But to the ancients, for whom Greek or Hebrew was their native tongue, these practices were normal and clearly understood. The Jews did not need vowels written out. As they learned their language they became familiar with how to pronounce and interpret it.

Likewise, Greek-speaking peoples had no trouble reading their language without breaks between words. As Metzger explains: "In that language it is the rule, with very few exceptions, that native Greek words can end only in a vowel (or a diphthong) or in one of three consonants, v, p and q. Furthermore, it should not be supposed that scriptio continua presented exceptional difficulties in reading, for apparently it was customary in antiquity to read aloud, even when one was alone. Thus despite the absence of spaces between words, by pronouncing to oneself what was read, syllable-by-syllable, one soon became used to reading *scriptio continua*." (Metzger, TNT, 13)

Divisions

Chapters: Old Testament The first divisions were made prior to the Babylonian captivity, which began in 586 b.c. The Pentateuch was divided into 154 groupings, called sedarim which "were designed to provide lessons sufficient to cover a three year cycle of reading" (Geisler, GIB, 339).

During the Babylonian captivity but prior to 536 b.c., the Pentateuch was “divided into fifty-four sections called parashiyyoth These were later subdivided into 669 sections for reference purposes. These sections were utilized for a single-year [reading] cycle” (Geisler, GIB, 339)

Around 165 b.c., the Old Testament books called the Prophets were sectioned. Finally, “after the Protestant Reformation, the Hebrew Bible for the most part followed the same chapter divisions as the Protestant Old Testament. These divisions were first placed in the margins in 1330.” (Geisler, GIB, 339)

New Testament The Greeks first made paragraph divisions before the Council of Nicea (A.D. 325), perhaps as early as a.d. 250. The oldest system of chapter division originated about A.D. 350, and appears in the margins of Codex Vaticanus. However, these sections are much smaller than our modern chapter divisions. For example, in our Bible the Gospel of Matthew has twenty-eight chapters, but in Codex Vaticanus, Matthew is divided into 170 sections. Geisler and Nix write that “it was not until the thirteenth century that those sections were changed, and then only gradually. Stephen Langton, a professor at the University of Paris and afterward Archbishop of Canterbury, divided the Bible into the modern chapter divisions – about 1227. That was prior to the introduction of movable type in printing. Since the Wycliffe Bible (1382) followed that pattern, those basic divisions have been the virtual base upon which the Bible has been printed to this very day.” (Geisler, GIB, 340)

Verses Old Testament In the Old Testament, the first verse indicators “were merely spaces between words, as the words were run together continuously through a given book.... After the Babylonian captivity, for the purpose of public reading and interpretation, space stops were employed, and still later additional markings were added. These Verse’ markings were not regulated, and differed from place to place. It was not until about A.D. 900 that the markings were standardized ” (Geisler, GIB, 339)

New Testament: Verse markings similar to what we have in our modern Bibles did not appear in the New Testament until the middle of the sixteenth century. They actually followed the development of chapters, “apparently in an effort to further facilitate cross-references and make public reading easier. The markings first occur in the fourth edition of the Greek New Testament published by Robert Stephanus, a Parisian printer, in 1551. These verses were introduced into the English New Testament by William Whittingham of Oxford in 1557. In 1555, Stephanus introduced his verse divisions into a Latin Vulgate edition, from which they have continued to the present day.” (Geisler, GIB, 341)

Who Decided What to Include in the Bible? The question concerning how it was decided which books would become part of the Bible is the question of canonicity. A discerning person would want to know why some books were included in the canon while others were excluded.

Meaning of the Word Canon The word canon comes from the root word reed (English word cane, Hebrew form ganah and Greek form kanon). The reed was used as a measuring rod, and came to mean “standard.”

The third-century church father Origen used the word “canon to denote what we call the ‘rule of faith/ the standard by which we are to measure and evaluate.” Later, the term meant a “list” or “index” (Bruce, BP, 95). As applied to Scripture, canon means “an officially accepted list of books” (Earle, HWGOB, 31) It is important to note that the church did not create the canon; it did not determine which books would be called Scripture, the inspired Word of God. Instead, the church recognized, or discovered, which books had been inspired from their inception. Stated another way, “a book is not the Word of God because it is accepted by the people of God. Rather, it was accepted by the people of God because it is the Word of God. That is, God gives the book its divine authority, not the people of God. They merely recognize the divine authority which God gives to it ” (Geisler/Nix, GIB, 210)

Tests for Inclusion in the Canon From the writings of biblical and church history we can discern at least five principles that guided the recognition and collection of the true divinely inspired books. Geisler and Nix present the principles as follows (Geisler/Nix, GIB, 223-231):

1. Was the book written by a prophet of God? "If it was written by a spokesman for God, then it was the Word of God."
2. Was the writer confirmed by acts of God? Frequently miracles separated the true prophets from the false ones. "Moses was given miraculous powers to prove his call of God (Ex. 4:1-9). Elijah triumphed over the false prophets of Baal by a supernatural act (1 Kin. 18). Jesus was 'attested to ... by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him' (Acts 2:22) [A] miracle is an act of God to confirm the Word of God given through a prophet of God to the people of God. It is the sign to substantiate his sermon; the miracle to confirm his message."
3. Did the message tell the truth about God? "God cannot contradict Himself (2 Cor. 1:17-18), nor can He utter what is false (Heb. 6:18). Hence, no book with false claims can be the Word of God" For reasons such as these, the church fathers maintained the policy, "if in doubt, throw it out." This enhanced the "validity of their discernment of the canonical books."
4. Does it come with the power of God? "The Fathers believed the Word of God is 'living and active (Heb. 4:12), and consequently ought to have a transforming force for edification (2 Tim. 3:17) and evangelization (1 Pet. 1:23). If the message of a book did not effect its stated goal, if it did not have the power to change a life, then God was apparently not behind its message." (Geisler, GIB, 228) The presence of Gods transforming power was a strong indication that a given book had His stamp of approval.
5. Was it accepted by the people of God? "Paul said of the Thessalonians, 'We also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of Gods message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God' (1 Thess. 2:13). For whatever subsequent debate there may have been about a books place in the canon, the people in the best position to know its prophetic credentials were those who knew the prophet who wrote it.

Hence, despite all later debate about the canonicity of some books, the definitive evidence is that which attests to its original acceptance by the contemporary believers" (Geisler, GIB, 229) When a book was received, collected, read, and used by the people of God as the Word of God, it was regarded as canonical. This One instance is when the apostle Peter acknowledges Paul's writings as Scripture on par with Old Testament Scripture. (2 Pet. 3:16)

The Incorrect View	The Correct View
The Church is Determiner of Canon	The Church is the Discoverer of Canon
The Church is Mother of Canon	The Church is Child of Canon
The Church is Magistrate of Canon	The Church is Minister of Canon
The Church is Regulator of Canon	The Church is Recognizer of Canon
The Church is Judge of Canon	The Church is Witness of Canon
The Church is Master of Canon	The Church is Servant of Canon

The Christian Canon (New Testament) - Tests for New Testament Canonicity

The basic factor for recognizing a book's canonicity for the New Testament was divine inspiration, and the chief test for this was apostolicity. "In New Testament terminology" write Geisler and Nix, "the church was 'built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets' (Eph. 2:20) whom Christ had promised to guide into 'all the truth' (John 16:13) by the Holy Spirit. The church at Jerusalem was said to have continued in the 'apostles' teaching' (Acts 2:42). The term apostolic as used for the test of canonicity does not necessarily mean 'apostolic authorship,' or 'that which was prepared under the direction of the apostles.'" (Geisler/Nix, GIB, 283)

They go on to state, "It seems much better to agree with Louis Gaussen, B. B. Warfield, Charles Hodge, J. N. D. Kelly, and most Protestants that it is apostolic authorship, or apostolic approval, that was the primary test for canonicity, and not merely apostolic authorship." (Geisler/Nix, GIB, 283)