

Introduction to the Bible

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HOW WE GOT OUR BIBLE

(Origin and Growth of the English Bible)

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PURPOSE: To understand that the Bible is the inspired Word of God and has been preserved through the centuries.

- I. **What the Book is all About:** Its theme or subject is a history of God's plan for redemption of man from sin through Jesus Christ.
 - a. Various names have been ascribed to it: (1) Bible: the word comes from a Latin and Greek work meaning, "book or books." (2) The Word of God: God speaking to His people (3) Scriptures or Holy Scriptures: the word means "writing." Before the time of the printing press, copies were written by hand.
 - b. The Author of Authors of the Bible is described as God speaking through holy men. About 36 to 40 holy men were moved by the Holy Spirit to write exactly what God wanted written. Please refer to II Peter 1:21.
 - c. The Bible contains various types of literature. For example, we find history in the book of Genesis. Poetry is displayed in the book of Psalm. Biography can be read in the book of Mark. We can study Philosophy in the book of Ecclesiastes. Prophecy is foretold in the book of Isaiah. An example of a letter is found in the book of Timothy. We view drama in the book of Job. Even romance can be analyzed in the book of Ruth.
 - d. The original form of the Bible was not as we know it today. Parts of the Bible were originally written probably on stone, clay, tablets, papyrus, sheepskin, and scrolls.
 - e. The Bible as we know it today and even in its earlier forms did not come to us all at one time. It was written over a period of sixteen centuries. That is to say, 160 years from 1500 B.C. to 100 A.D.
 - f. The original language was not in English.
 - i. The Old Testament was written in the Hebrew language.
 1. A few chapters were written in Aramaic.
 - ii. The New Testament was written in Greek.
- II. **The Oldest Manuscripts:** The word manuscripts mean "written by hand." None of the original manuscripts of Moses, David, Paul, etc., are in existence today. The oldest copies of the Bible today were made from other copies of the original.
- III. **Three Oldest, Most Complete Hand-Written Copies of the Bible:**
 - a. The **Alexandrian manuscript:** It was once a part of the great library in Alexandria, Egypt, and is now located in the British Museum.
 - b. The **Vatican manuscript:** This manuscript was found and the remains remain in the library of the Vatican City, Rome, Italy.
 - c. The **Sinaitic Manuscript:** This manuscript was found by Count Tischendorf in the waste baskets of St. Catherine's Convent at the foot of Mt. Sinai. Though first placed in the library at St. Petersburg, Russia, it is now located in the British Museum.
 - d. None of these ancient manuscripts had been found when the King James Authorized Version was translated in 1611.

IV. Ancient Versions of the Bible:

- a. **The Septuagint**: This version is called the Bible of LXX because tradition says that 70 men took 70 days to translate the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek. It was made at Alexandria about 285 B.C. This is the version that was used by Jesus and His disciples.
- b. **The Samaritan Pentateuch**: It was not strictly a version, but the Hebrew text perpetuated in Samaritan characters.
- c. **Peshito or Syriac**: This is a version of the whole Bible. The date of its writing is uncertain. It is apparently a translation into the common language of certain portions of Syria.
- d. **The Vulgate**: This version is the entire Bible translated into the Latin language by Jerome at Bethlehem. It was completed about 400 A.D. For 1,000 years it was the standard Bible in the Catholic Church.

V. **English Versions:** During the Dark Ages, very little Bible translations were attempted. There were a few minor translations made of portions of the Bible. The Word of God was locked up in the Latin tongue which was unknown to the common people.

- a. **John Wycliffe 1320-1384:** He was a great English scholar and Bible student who began translating the whole Bible into common English. He translated the New Testament about 1380. Copies of it were made by hand because the printing press was not invented until 1450 A.D. Exactly how much of the Bible he translated is uncertain before his death. His friends completed the work after his death. Before his death, Wycliffe was cast out of the church (excommunicated) and his translation condemned because he made the Bible available to the English man in his own language.
- b. **William Tyndale: 1523-1530:** William Tyndale made a more accurate translation into English from the original Hebrew and Greek. Printed copies of this version were distributed in England. For having done this, Tyndale was burned at the stake.
- c. **Miles Coverdale:** Since Coverdale was a friend of Tyndale, he used much of Tyndale's works as well as the Latin version and other versions.
- d. **Matthew's Bible: 1537:** The writing of this version is credited to John Rogers, a friend of Tyndale. He used a combination of Tyndale's works as well as the works of Coverdale.
- e. **The Great Bible: 1539:** This Bible translation is a combination of Tyndale, Coverdale, and Matthews. It was a large-size volume chained to the reading desk in the churches, where people flocked to hear the reading of the Word of God.
- f. **The Geneva Bible: 1560:** This Bible translation was made at Geneva by scholars who fled from England during the persecution by Queen Mary. It was a revision of the Great Bible collated with other English translations. It was a scholarly version, handy I size, and for many years a popular Bible in England.
- g. **The Bishop's Bible: 1568:** This Bible translation was prepared under the direction of the Archbishop of Canterbury during the reign of Elizabeth. Mainly it is a revision of the Great Bible and the Geneva Bible. It was used chiefly by the clergy. It was not a popular version with the common people.
- h. **The Douay Bible: 1582-1610:** This Bible is a Roman Catholic version made from the Latin Vulgate. The New Testament was published at Rheims. It contains controversial notes. It is the generally accepted English version of the Roman Church.
- i. **The King James or Authorized Version: 1611:** This is the translation now generally used by the English-speaking people. It was made by 47 scholars under the authorization of King James I of England. It used the Bishop's Bible as well as the Hebrew and Greek texts and other English

translations were consulted with the viewing of obtaining the best results. It has held first place throughout the English-speaking world for over three centuries.

- j. **American Revised Version: 1881-1884:** This translation was produced by 83 English and American scholars. It is a revision of the Authorized Version or King James Version. It also used some of the most ancient copies of the original Scriptures. Some of the ancient manuscripts were King James Authorized Version.
- k. **American Standard Version: 1900-1901:** It has been well received and is being used widely in bible study.
- l. Today, many new **“Contemporary”** translations appear on the market to share the Good News in the language of today. Among these are:
 - m. The Good News Bible
 - n. The New American Standard Version
 - o. The Living Bible
 - p. The New International Version: A superior modern translation from original languages produced by the New York International Bible Society. Over 10 years of work by an outstanding international team of more than 100 Bible scholars.
 - q. The New English Bible

VI. **Chapter and Verse Divisions:** The chapter and verse divisions were not inspired and were not in the original writings. The chapter divisions were made in 1236 A.D. The verse divisions were made in 1551 A.D.

VII. **One Central Character:** The one central character of the Bible as well as the main character of the Bible is The Lord Jesus Christ. He is the greatest “Wonder of the Bible.” No other religion offers a *living* Savior.

VIII. **Definitions of Terms Used:**

- a. Canon: an official list of the Books of the Bible which is considered to be the inspired Word of God.
- b. Apocrypha: a list of 14 books considered by most Biblical scholars as not being inspired by God. They are not considered a part of the Bible as we have it today, but are considered good reading in respect to their historical values.
- c. Inspiration: to breathe into; God moving men to speak as He. (See II Timothy 3:16 and II Peter 1:31)
- d. Manuscript: sacred writings written by hand. Earliest form of versions of the Bible.
- e. Versions: a translation of the Bible into another language.

IX. **Ten Basic Reasons for Believing the Bible to be the Word of God**

- a. Testimony of Christ
- b. Fulfilled prophecies
- c. Unity of the Bible
- d. Superiority of teaching to other books
- e. Omnipotent against men’s attacks
- f. Its influence is power to lift men to God
- g. Character of those who accept or reject the Bible
- h. The inexhaustible depth of the Bible
- i. As we grow in knowledge and character, wisdom and holiness, we grow toward the Bible
- j. The testimony of the Holy Spirit

ABOUT THE BIBLE

Purpose: To understand the categories and divisions of the bible.

- I. What is the Bible?
 - a. The Bible is a written account of activities and experiences between God and man as recorded by inspired men of God; it is an account of God reaching for man and man's responses to go. The word "Bible" means many books; a library of books.
- II. What are the two parts of the Bible?
 - a. The Old Testament and the New Testament
- III. What are the four divisions of the Old Testament?
 - a. The four divisions of the Old Testament and their respective books are as follows:
 - b. The Torah (Law Books) – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy
 - c. The Historical Division – Joshua, Judges, Ruth, I Samuel, II Samuel, I Kings, I Chronicles, II Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther.
 - d. Poetical Division – Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, songs of Solomon
 - e. Prophetic Division:
 - i. Major Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel.
 - ii. Minor Prophets: Lamentations, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.
- IV. What is the difference between the Major Prophets and the Minor Prophets?
 - a. All prophets are significant the Major Prophets produced a greater volume of writings the Minor Prophets.
- V. Name seven key characters of the Old Testament.
 - a. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (Israel), Moses, Elijah, David, and Isaiah
- VI. What are the four division of the New Testament?
 - a. The Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John)
 - b. History – The Acts of the Apostles
 - c. Letters – Paul's letters : Romans, I Corinthian, II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, I Thessalonians, II Thessalonians, I Timothy, II Timothy, Titus, And Philemon. Johannine Letters: I John, II John, III John. Other letters: Hebrews, James and Jude
 - d. Hidden Writings (Apocalypse) – Revelation
- VII. What is the Gospel?
 - a. The Gospel is the good news of what happened that short time God was in Jesus Christ on earth reconciling the world unto Himself.
- VIII. What is the significance of the Gospel to the Christian?
 - a. The Gospel to the Christian is the supreme revelation of God in and through Jesus Christ as it tells of what Jesus said and did, and how He died to redeem mankind. The Gospel is the standard by which all other books of the Bible are judged and used. The Gospel also fulfills the law and prophecies. It is the substance of a Christian's faith.
- IX. Who wrote one third (1/3) of the New Testament?
 - a. The Apostle Paul
- X. Name seven (7) key characters in the New Testament.
 - a. Jesus Christ
 - b. Peter
 - c. Paul

- d. Mary (mother of Jesus)
- e. Silas
- f. John (Jesus' Disciple) and
- g. John the Baptist.

XI. Will the Bible save you?

- a. No, only through faith and believing on Jesus Christ can one be saved. The Bible serves as a guide, strength, and comfort to aid the believer to live in Christ.

XII. How many books are there in the New and Old Testament?

- a. There are twenty-seven in the New and thirty-nine in the Old.

SUMMARY OF THE BOOKS IN THE BIBLE

(Old Testament, Apocrypha and New Testament Books Old Testament)

Purpose: *To give a brief synopsis of each book in the Old Testament, Apocrypha and New Testament*

Genesis - Genesis is the first book of the Bible. It begins with two versions of the creation story, neither of them intended to be scientific but telling us why we are on earth. In the story of Adam and Eve, it tells us that we are responsible, under God, for the care of all creation. It then continues with the stories of the patriarchs: Abraham (who enters into a covenant (or treaty) with God), Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.

Exodus - Exodus is the second book of the Old Testament, and is part of the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible. Jews refer to these books as "The Torah". At times, they are referred to as "The Law", although "Torah" means *teaching*. Exodus centers on the rescue of God's chosen people from captivity in Egypt and the making of the great covenant, or agreement with God, at Mount Sinai.

Numbers - Numbers begins with the first census of Israel, and is named for it. After several chapters containing laws, the narrative section begins in Chapter 9. It follows the people of Israel from near the southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula to Moab, east of Palestine, over a period of 38 years. Numbers is not a history in the modern sense but rather a record of how God acted in history: as an indicator of how he would act again on behalf of his people.

Deuteronomy - Deuteronomy is a book of instruction, or torah. It is the fifth book of the Bible. It recasts Israel's mission and destiny, mostly by restating the history of the people recorded in the first four books. It emphasizes teaching and learning for all generations. Moses speaks on God's behalf, with authority, to the assembled people of Israel, as they prepare to enter the Promised Land.

Joshua - Joshua tells of the conquest of the Promised Land (Palestine). God had promised to their forefathers that they would one day occupy this territory. The book begins with the crossing of the Jordan. It then relates the stories of military victories, achieved under his guidance, through which the people of Israel came to control all of the hill country and the Negev Desert. It describes the allotment of land to each of the tribes and ends with Joshua's final address to the people.

Judges - The people of Israel are now settled in the Promised Land. Judges tells the story of the gradual conquest of much of Palestine not already held. It tells of reverses, times when the people of Israel were subjugated by pagan peoples, attributing this misfortune to deviation from God's ways. Each

time, a "judge", a wise charismatic leader, arises as God's spokesperson and frees Israel from its oppressors.

Ruth - This is a short story set in the period before 1000 BC, when warlords ruled Israel: they raised a militia in time of need, and stayed on to settle disputes in the community. It is a book about love and fidelity, of how Ruth, a Moabite widow in a Jewish family brings her widowed mother-in-law back to enjoying life. Near the end of the book, Ruth bears a son who becomes David's grandfather. This carries a message: marrying foreigners is acceptable. When it was written is uncertain, but this message gives us a clue: at various times, pagans were blamed for Israel's sorry state of morals. Pagans came to Israel through intermarriage, so marrying non-Israelites was, at least, opposed. This occurred twice: during the time of Josiah and Jeremiah (about 600 BC) and of Nehemiah (about 450 BC).

1 Samuel - At one time, the first and second books of Samuel formed a single book. They were separated in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures known as the Septuagint (about 250 BC). 1 Samuel begins with the story of Samuel: hence the name. 1 Samuel is the first of four books which tell the story of Israel's monarchy. Samuel anointed the first king. We then read about King Saul, and later about David's rise to prominence.

2 Samuel - At one time, the first and second books of Samuel formed a single book. They were separated in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures known as the Septuagint (about 250 BC). 2 Samuel begins with the story of David's rule, first as he gradually gained control of the whole of Judah (the south), and then when he was king of both Judah and Israel (the north.)

1 Kings - The two books of Kings were originally one. They continue the story of the monarchy begun in 1-2 Samuel. 1 Kings begins with the enthronement of Solomon and the death of David, recounts the reign of Solomon, the breakup of Israel into Israel in the north and Judah in the south, through to about 870 BC. While these books read like a political history - in which some kings are judged good and others bad - they trace the apostasy that led to the loss of national identity and autonomy.

2 Kings - The two books of Kings were originally one. They continue the story of the monarchy begun in 1-2 Samuel. 2 Kings begins with the enthronement of Solomon and the death of David. 2 Kings continues the story of the monarchies of Israel and Judah. It covers the period from about 850 BC to about 585 BC. During this period, Israel fell to the Assyrians (in 721 BC) and Judah to the Babylonians (586 BC). While these books read like a political history - in which some kings are judged good and others bad - they trace the apostasy that led to the loss of national identity and autonomy.

Esther - Esther is an unusual book of the Bible: it never explicitly mentions God (although there are probable implicit references). It is a short, thrilling, novel about the escape of Jews from annihilation in Persia. The story revolves around the royal court of Ahasuerus (Xerxes), who ruled from 486 to 465 BC. It is Esther, his Jewish queen, who risks her status (and perhaps her life) to reverse the royal edict and have the vizier hanged. Written much later, it explains the origin of the Jewish festival of Purim, one of only two feasts not prescribed by Mosaic Law. Its themes of divine help to persecuted Jews and the destruction of all their enemies are also found in other books probably written after the Exile, such as Judith and Daniel.

Job - The book of Job is about suffering: it seeks to answer the question: why does God allow the faithful to suffer? The first two chapters, which are in prose, tell of a legendary figure of Judaism called Job. In this story (which may be extremely ancient), a very righteous man is tested: is he as godly as he seems, or is his godliness only an appearance, a result of his acquisition of wealth and his position as father of a dynasty? His continuing fidelity through deprivation of all that he possesses demonstrates that he is truly godly. (In the final act of the drama, God restores his greatness.) Most of the book is poetry, and appears to have been written later. It is largely concerned with the meaning of divine justice and suffering. Through dialogues with Job's so-called "friends", we see Job learn that wisdom is God-given. Humans cannot find the way to it; God gives it to those who worship him.

Psalms - Psalms is a collection of collections. The psalms were written over many centuries, stretching from the days of Solomon's temple (about 950 BC) to after the Exile (about 350 BC.) Psalms are of five types: hymns of praise, laments, thanksgiving psalms, royal psalms, and wisdom psalms. Within the book, there are five "books"; there is a doxology ("Blessed be ... Amen and Amen") at the end of each book.

Proverbs - A proverb is a pithy statement expressing some truth in a striking way which is easy to remember. Most of this book is instructions given by a scholar (or father) to a student (or son) on how to lead a moral life, with proper respect for God. Life involves choices; it is important that one be informed, trained and persuaded to make the right ones. The objective of life is attainment of wisdom, i.e. integrity in God's eyes. Wisdom brings rewards: 22:4 says: "The reward of humility and fear of the Lord is riches and honor and life". 9:10 says "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight." Put another way, 1:7 says "The fear of the LORD is instruction in wisdom, and humility goes before honor." The opposite of being wise is being a fool; "fools despise wisdom and instruction."

It is difficult to date Proverbs. Sayings and poems appear to have been formed into an anthology after the Exile (in the 400s BC), but some of the sayings probably date back to Solomon's time. Solomon was known for his wisdom. Some of the sayings are known in other ancient Near East cultures; they have been acculturated to the Jewish tradition.

Song of Solomon - This book is also known as the *Song of Songs* (the opening words of the book) or *Canticle of Canticles*. *Song of Songs* is the Hebrew idiom for the superlative, the greatest song. It contains poems, or songs, of Israel. The poems are about love and devotion, and are set as a dialogue between a woman (the bride) and a man (the bridegroom). It is possible that some poems date back to Solomon; however, the occurrence of Persian and Greek words in others suggests a later date. Such poetry was in vogue in the Near East in the 400s and 300s BC.

Judaism has seen these songs as having another level of meaning: the love between God and his people; the man and woman are then the Lord and Israel. Christians have also allegorized mutual love: in our case, between Christ and the Church. But the basic meaning is literal: love, including sexual love based on human instincts, is blessed, a part of God's creativeness, and creation, to be valued and enjoyed.

Isaiah - This book can be divided into two (and possibly three) parts. Chapters 1 to 39 were written before the exile, from about 740 BC to about 700 BC. These were difficult times for the southern kingdom, Judah: a disastrous war was fought with Syria; the Assyrians conquered Israel, the northern kingdom, in 723 BC, and threatened Judah. Isaiah saw the cause of these events as social injustice, which he condemned, and against which he fought valiantly. Chapters 40 to 66 were written during and after the Exile in Babylon. They are filled with a message of trust and confident hope that God will soon end the Exile. Some scholars consider that Chapters 56 to 66 form a third part of the book, written after the return to the Promised Land. These chapters speak of hope and despair; they berate the people for their sin, for worshipping other gods. Like *Second Isaiah*, this part speaks of the hope that God will soon restore Jerusalem to its former glory and make a new home for all peoples.

Jeremiah - From Chapter 1, we know that Jeremiah was either born or began his ministry in 627 BC. During his life, Babylonia succeeded Assyria as the dominant power in the Middle East. He was a witness to the return to worship of the Lord (instituted by the Judean king Josiah), and then (after Josiah's death in battle in 609), the return of many of the people to paganism. When Babylon captured Jerusalem in 587, Jeremiah migrated to Egypt. God called him to be a prophet to Judah and surrounding nations, in the midst of these political and religious convulsions.

Lamentations - In 587 BC, the Babylonian army destroyed Jerusalem and its Temple, and deported many of the inhabitants, leaving only the poor and weak. The five poems which make up this book were almost certainly written in Palestine at this time of political, social and religious crisis. Perhaps these laments were recited at the site of the Temple. An ancient tradition holds that the author was Jeremiah - largely because 2 Chronicles 35:25 says that he uttered a lament upon the death of King Josiah at Megiddo; however, Lamentations mourns the loss of the city, not the king. Lamentations is therefore considered anonymous.

Ezekiel - Ezekiel was a prophet and a priest. His ministry began before the conquest of Judah in 587 BC, and continued in exile in Babylon. This book is the foundation for both Jewish and Christian visionary or apocalyptic literature, e.g. Revelation (or The Apocalypse.) It is a book that contains many strange things (strange because we do not understand them, e.g. Ezekiel eating a scroll), but the prophet's message to the exiles is clear: he assures his hearers of God's abiding presence among them, and he emphasizes God's involvement in the events of the day, so that Israel and all nations "will know that I am the Lord". For the first time, we see the importance of the individual in his relationship to God. To a dispersed and discouraged people, he brings a message of hope: hope that God will restore them to their homeland and the temple.

Joel - The first verse tells us that this book is by Joel "son of Penuel". We do not know who this Joel is, for he is not mentioned elsewhere in the Old Testament; however, the text does tell us something about him. First, he was a prophet. There are twelve prophetic books at the end of the Old Testament, of which Joel is one. Second, he has an appreciation of worship in the Temple. He mentions various officials, but never a king, so he probably lived after the return from exile. The earliest he could have written is then 515 BC, when the Temple was rebuilt. Sidon is mentioned. It was destroyed in 343 BC, so Joel wrote before that date. He starts by describing a locust plague and a drought, which he sees as God's punishment. The effects are catastrophic, like *the day of the Lord*. The people repent, and God

restores their fortunes. Again God is in their midst. Israel recognizes God's saving presence and is vindicated, and other nations are (or will be, at the end of time) judged harshly.

Jonah - Jonah is a prophet, but he is unlike any other for whom a book is named in the Old Testament. Some (e.g. Jeremiah) heard the word reluctantly but then fully embraced the ministry to which God called them, but Jonah tries his best (and his worst!) to avoid doing God's will: he is a caricature of a prophet. The book opens with God's call to Jonah: "Go at once to Nineveh ... and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before me." Jonah's reaction is to try to escape God's presence. When called a second time, he does travel to the capital of Assyria, and its residents repent of their waywardness. A message of this book is that God does care about other peoples, even those who are Israel's enemies.

Micah - Micah was the last of the eighth-century prophets. He was from south-western Judah, west of Hebron. He is preoccupied with social justice and is totally independent of political and religious leaders. Times are bad: Assyria has captured Damascus and Samaria. Jerusalem was besieged in 701 BC. But danger was internal too: leaders accepted bribes; merchants cheated their customers; pagan gods were worshipped along with the Lord. Micah preaches about sin and punishment; people have rejected God. The coming punishment is due to their sin. Even so, there is hope for the future: a remnant will form the nucleus of a new Israel, and its leader will be a true shepherd, one who brings peace.

Zephaniah - In 1:1, Zephaniah tells us that he is descended from Hezekiah, most likely the king who ruled Judah 715-687 BCE. This prophet's intimate knowledge of Jerusalem and affairs in the court, and the absence of a theme found in other prophetic books - denunciation of the king - suggest that he was of royal descent. 1:1 also tells us that his ministry began in the reign of King Josiah, the great reformer. But his denunciation of corruption in religious affairs suggests that his prophecies date from before the reforms of 621 BCE. The book predicts doom for Judah for failing to follow God's ways and adverse judgment on other nations, too; however, the final chapter promises comfort and consolation for those inhabitants of Jerusalem who waits patiently for the Lord and serves God as a community. They will rejoice when God comes into their midst.

Malachi - We know of no prophet named Malachi, so it is likely that this book is named after a passage well known in later Judaism: 3:1 speaks of "my messenger", *malaki* in Hebrew. The book was written generations after the people returned to Israel and restored the Temple. The prophet addresses his message of judgment to corrupt priests, and gives hope of a future messenger from God. God will then come to judge, purify, and end the era. This messenger, per 4:5, was expected to be Elijah.

Apocrypha / Deutero-Canonical Books

Sirach - Sirach is also known as Sira and Ecclesiasticus, probably meaning church book, an indication that it was used by the early Christian community. It is in the Apocrypha of the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, and is considered Deutero-canonical by Roman Catholics. Adherents to Judaism excluded it from the Bible, as did the Protestant Reformers. We know (from 50:27) that Jesus Ben Sira, a native of Jerusalem, wrote it. Ben Sira ran a school in biblical studies for young Jewish men. Written about 180 BC, it is faithful to the author's Jewish heritage and tradition and makes use of ideas from other cultures where they are compatible with his heritage.

Wisdom - Wisdom has been a book of the church since the earliest times. For some Christians, it is part of the Apocrypha ("hidden books"); for others, it is in the Old Testament. Until this book was written (about 50 BC), the best that could be hoped for when one died was to exist in some indeterminate state. Wisdom tells us that being made in the image of God includes sharing with him in immortality. Only the godly, the ethical, will be granted eternal life; those who choose to deviate from God's ways will be punished and will disappear into nothingness.

Baruch - This book is set during the Babylonian exile (soon after 600 BC) but it was probably written between 200 and 60 BC. It is attributed to Jeremiah's friend and secretary, Baruch. In Jeremiah 43:1-7, both men are reported to have been taken to Egypt (in 582 BC) but a later tradition says that Baruch went to Babylonia. Baruch 1:15-2:19 is largely a rewrite of Daniel 9:4-19, so Baruch was written after Daniel. As is the case with several books in the Apocrypha, most of the book is passages copied or paraphrased from Old Testament books. Jeremiah's Baruch was meticulous; he would not have made the many errors to be found in 1:1-14.

New Testament

Matthew - This gospel is the first in the New Testament, but it was probably the second to be written. Scholars recognize that it borrows material from Mark, and from a *sayings* source containing sayings of Jesus and known as Q (for Quelle.) The author shows an understanding of Jewish culture and religion not found in the other gospels. It was probably written about 50 to 60 AD, possibly for a largely Jewish audience.

Mark - As witnesses to the events of Jesus' life and death became old and died, the need arose for a written synopsis. Tradition has it that Mark, while in Rome, wrote down what Peter remembered. This book stresses the crucifixion and resurrection as keys to understanding of who Jesus was. When other synoptic gospels were written, i.e. Matthew and Luke, they used the Gospel according to Mark as a source. Mark is most probably the *John Mark* mentioned in Acts 12:12: his mother's house was a meeting place for believers.

Luke - Luke is the third synoptic (or quasi-chronological) gospel in the New Testament. Its author, traditionally Luke the physician who accompanied Paul on some of his missionary journeys, draws on three sources: Mark (via Matthew), a collection of sayings (known as Q for *Quelle*) and his own source. It is a gospel that emphasizes God's love for the poor, the disadvantaged, minorities, outcasts, sinners and lepers. Women play a more prominent part than in the other gospels. Luke never uses Semitic words; this is one argument for thinking that he wrote primarily for Gentiles.

John - John is the fourth gospel. Its author makes no attempt to give a chronological account of the life of Jesus (which the other gospels do, to a degree), but rather "...these things are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name." John includes what he calls signs, stories of miracles, to help in this process.

Acts - This book is the sequel to the gospel according to Luke. Beginning with Jesus' ascension, Luke tells the story of the beginnings of the church. By no means a comprehensive history, it does however describe the spread of the church from Jerusalem to all of Palestine, and as far as Greece. The episodes he reports show how Christianity arose out of Judaism. He shows us something of the struggles the

church underwent in accepting Gentiles as members. The Holy Spirit guides and strengthens the church as it spreads through much of the Roman Empire.

Romans - Romans is the first epistle in the New Testament, although not the first to be written. Paul wrote it to the church at Rome, which included both Jews and Gentiles. His primary theme is the basics of the good news of Christ, salvation for all people. The book was probably written in 57 AD, when Paul was near the end of his third missionary journey around the Eastern Mediterranean. It is unusual in that it was written to a church that Paul had not visited.

1 Corinthians - Corinth was a major port which also commanded the land route from the Peloponnesus peninsula to central Greece. An industrial and ship-building centre, it was also a centre for the arts. Its inhabitants came from far and wide. In this epistle, Paul answers two letters he has received concerning lack of harmony and internal strife in the Corinthian church, a church he had founded. Paul wrote this letter from Ephesus (now in Turkey), probably in 57 AD.

2 Corinthians - This is a letter, written in the style common in the first century AD. From the text, we know that Paul wrote it in Macedonia after leaving Ephesus, probably in the autumn of 57 AD. It gives us a picture of Paul the person: an affectionate man, hurt to the quick by misunderstandings and evil-doing of his beloved fellow Christians, yet happy when he can praise them. The letter's prime intent is to combat evils which have arisen in the Christian communities in the Achaian peninsula of Greece.

Galatians - There were some teachers in Galatia who claimed that a convert to Christianity must first embrace Judaism, that a Christian must observe Mosaic Law. Paul wrote this letter to rebut this argument, to insist that one comes into union with God through faith in Christ, and not through ritual observances. This book is a charter of Christian liberty; it was instrumental in transforming Christianity from a sect of Judaism into a world religion. Galatia is in central Turkey, and was settled soon after 300 BC by Celts. In 25 BC, the province of Galatia was extended southwards. (Modern-day Ankara is in Galatia.)

Ephesians - This letter of Paul was written from prison, probably in Rome. Whilst the Bible states that it was written to the church at Ephesus, the some early manuscripts do not contain an addressee in 1:1. This would imply that Ephesians was a circular letter, sent to a number of churches. If so, it introduced a new idea into letter writing: we know of no other circular letters from this period. This book celebrates the life of the church, a unique community established by God through the work of Jesus Christ, who is its head, and also the head of the whole creation.

Philippians - Paul wrote to the church at Philippi, a prosperous Roman colony in northern Greece, from prison. We do not know whether this imprisonment was in Ephesus or in Rome. It appears that he was held under house arrest. It is possible that the epistle is actually made up of three letters. It contains many personal references, exhorts members of the Philippian church to live the Christian life and to good ethical conduct, introduces Timothy and Epaphroditus as his representatives, and warns against legalists and libertines. Lastly, he thanks the Philippian community for their material support.

Colossians - Colossae was a city in what is now southwestern Turkey. It had flourishing wool and textile industry and a significant Jewish population. It seems that most Christians there were Gentile. Although long thought to be written by Paul, today this epistle is considered non-Pauline for a number

of reasons. The most compelling is that it emphasizes what God has already done for his people: Paul tells us what God is going to do in the future (although some argue that Paul shifted his viewpoint in later life.) It gives descriptions of false teachings which were being promulgated in the churches. Some scholars consider this evidence of later authorship. In the ancient world, writing in the name of a respected author was accepted and regarded as an honor.

1 Thessalonians - This letter is perhaps the oldest book in the New Testament. Paul (with Silvanus and Timothy) founded the church there during his second missionary journey, and as is recorded in Acts 17, was forced to leave the city due to persecution. Many Greeks who already worshipped God, many pagans and "important women" became Christians. The letter was written from Athens to strengthen the new Christians in their faith.

1 Timothy - 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus are known as the *Pastoral Epistles* because the author addresses the needs and responsibilities of the leaders of Christian communities. The styles and themes of these letters are so similar that many think they were written by the same person. Although they claim to be written by Paul, the structure of the church they show and the specific content of their teaching indicate that they were written a generation or so after Paul. 1 Timothy begins by emphasizing the importance of correct belief and by cautioning against false teachers. The leaders are mentioned as bishops, deacons and elders. The term used here for the coming of Christ is not found in Paul's letters but is common in pagan Greek writings. In those days, a writer sometimes honored an earlier leader by writing in his name.

2 Timothy

1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus, together known as the *Pastoral Epistles*, are markedly different in vocabulary and literary style from epistles we know to be Paul's. They also present a more institutionalized church. For these reasons, most scholars believe that the *Pastorals* written a generation or so later than the letters we are sure are Pauline. 2 Timothy is the most personal of the *Pastorals*: most of it is directed specifically to Timothy. From the Book of Acts, we know that Timothy was from Lystra in Asia Minor, and was the son of a Greek father and a Jewish mother who had become a Christian. He accompanied Paul on his travels.

Titus - In the letter to the Galatians and in 2 Corinthians, Titus is mentioned as Paul's companion. The author writes to Titus, giving instructions for the management of new churches in Crete. But was the author Paul, or was the book written in his name, out of respect for him and his theology? Titus, 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy, together known as the Pastoral Epistles, are markedly different in vocabulary and literary style from epistles we know to be Paul's. They also present a more institutionalized church. For these reasons, most scholars believe that the Pastorals written a generation or so later than the letters we are sure are Pauline.

Hebrews - Apart from the concluding verses (which may have been added later), this book is a treatise (or sermon) rather than a letter. Its name comes from its approach to Christianity: it is couched in Judaic terms. The identity of the author is unknown; Origen, c. 200 said that "only God knows" who wrote Hebrews. The book presents an elaborate analysis, arguing for the absolute supremacy and sufficiency of Christ as revealer and mediator of God's grace. Basing his argument on the Old

Testament, the author argues for the superiority of Christ to the prophets, angels and Moses. Christ offers a superior priesthood, and his sacrifice is much more significant than that of Levite priests. Jesus is the "heavenly" High Priest, making the true sacrifice for the sins of the people, but he is also of the same flesh and blood as those he makes holy.

James - Although James opens like a letter, it is an exhortation to ethical conduct. Christians find themselves in an alien world, full of immorality and evil; they are called to a faith that is not merely theoretical or abstract, but acted upon, in every aspect of their lives. In a situation where trials and tribulations abound, and where the poor suffer at the hands of the rich, the author exhorts them to joy, endurance, wisdom, confident prayer and faithful response to the liberating word of God, as they await the second coming of the Lord. The recipients appear to be a group of Jewish-Christian communities outside Palestine. Traditionally, the Church has seen the author of this book as James, the brother of our Lord; however, its excellent Greek style, late acceptance into the canon, and absence of concerns about ritual purity suggest another author. The author seems to have written in the name of James, thus giving the book authority.

1 Peter - An elder in Rome wrote this pastoral exhortation to those in charge of churches in Asia Minor. ("Babylon" is a common code-name for Rome; see Revelation 17:5-6.) The opening greeting claims that Peter is the author, but today most scholars agree that it was written in his name, to give it authority (a common practice at that time.) The addressees appear to be Gentiles, rural folk, both resident aliens and household slaves, in Asia Minor. Christians can expect to suffer, to be ostracized, to be "called names": they are in the midst of a pagan culture. Though they are "aliens" in this world, God has given them "a new birth ... into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading" (1:3-4).

2 Peter - The author wrote this letter because he realized that he was approaching death and wished to leave to his fellow Christians a testimony: a statement of what being a Christian entails, how they should live in order to be judged worthy of the kingdom when Christ returns. Most scholars believe that the author was not Peter because, from internal evidence, it was not written until at least 90 AD, by which time Peter was dead. For example, it refers to Paul's letters as "scripture". His letters only became part of the collection of Christian writings long after Paul's death.

1 John - This epistle was addressed to a general audience, unlike those written by Paul. It shares a style, phrases and expressions with the Gospel according to John, so it is very likely that both were written by the same person. It appears to have been circulated to various churches. The author seeks to combat heresy specifically that the spirit is entirely good but matter is entirely evil. John tells his readers that morality and ethical behavior are important for Christians.

Jude - The epistle was evidently written to warn the church against immoral teachers and alarming heresies that were endangering the faith of believers.

Revelation - This is the last book of the Bible and is in a way a summary of the whole of the Bible. It is an apocalypse, a vision which foretells the future and presents an understanding of the past. It tells of the struggle between good and evil, and the ultimate victory of Christ. Writing in symbolic language, its author urges Christians to keep faith in a period of persecution. It is hard to understand because we do not know the meaning of the symbols (e.g. animals) it uses.