

How We Got the Bible

Lesson 2 - The Birth of the Bible

INTRODUCTION

1. Aim: To learn how the books were made in the beginning and appreciate them.
2. A collection of books written and gathered over the centuries (66 books over 1600 years)
3. "Bible"-from biblia (Latin for "the books")
4. "The Bible is honored today because in the past it grew under the favorable and directing influence of Him who is the Author of all things"

Discussion

I. THE CODEX

A. The coming of the codex

1. For centuries, the scroll was the form of papyri or leather documents
2. For papyrus, sheets were glued end to end; for leather, skins were stitched end to end
3. Writing was usually on the smooth side only, occasionally on both sides (cf. Rev. 5:1)
4. Columns were three to four inches wide

B. Scrolls were about thirty-five feet long and ten inches high

1. Such length needed for longer New Testament books such as Matthew, Luke and Acts
2. Such length necessitated Luke and Acts being published in two volumes

C. Just as papyrus gave way to parchment, the scroll gave way to the codex

1. Originally, the term for the Roman writing tablet; eventually, the term for any book with leaves
2. The invention of the codex was revolutionary
3. Using a scroll required tedious unrolling with one hand and rolling up with the other hand
4. Placing sheets together, folding them and stitching them in the middle allowed easy opening, carrying, writing on both sides, combining more books into one volume
 - a. The first codices were made of papyrus, later of parchment
 - b. Four sheets were put together to form a "quire"
 - c. With parchment, hairy side placed next to hairy side, smooth side placed next to smooth side
 - d. The early Christians were the first group to make extensive use of the codex, no later than A.D. 90

II. Early form of the Bible

- A. Temporary, oral form: At first, God spoke directly to the fathers, such as, Adam, Noah, Abraham
- B. More permanent, written form: God wrote:
 - 1. Through Moses (ca. 1500 B.C.)
 - 2. The memorial concerning Amalek (Exod. 17:14)
 - 3. The words of the covenant made at Sinai (24:4)
 - 4. The Ten Commandments (34:27-28)
 - 5. The journeys of the children of Israel in the wilderness (Num. 33:2)
 - 6. The Book of the Law - to be kept in the Ark of the Covenant (Deut. 31:9, 24)
 - 7. The Song of Moses (32:1-43; cf. 31:22)
 - 8. Others who identified the authorship of Moses (Josh. 8:31; Judg. 3:4; 2 Kings 14:6; Ezra 6:18; Mal. 4:4; Mark 12:26; Luke 2:22; 24:44; John 7:19)
 - 9. Through Joshua (Josh. 24:26) and others (1 Sam. 10:25; Jer. 36:2)
- C. Others consulted the previous writers (Dan. 9:2; Neh. 8:1)
- D. The Old Testament was completely assembled together about the time of Ezra (ca. 400 B.C.): Josephus wrote that no book was added to the Hebrew Bible since Malachi
- E. The New Testament was written in about 50 years (A.D. 50-100)
 - 1. They were inspired books mostly written as letters to churches and individuals
 - 2. Letters written first and were to be read and exchanged wherever Christians assembled (1 Thess. 5:27; Col. 4:16)
 - 3. The life of Jesus was recorded from oral accounts (Luke 1:1-4; John 20:30-31), being necessary because of the gradual deaths of eye-witnesses, and was followed by the history of the primitive church (Acts)
 - 4. Revelation closes the New Testament with the prospect of a triumphant Christ
- F. The early Christians treasured the New Testament books as Scripture (2 Pet. 3:16; cf. 1 Tim. 5:18 w/Luke 10:7)

III. The form of our Bible today 2 parts (Old and New Testaments or "Covenants")

A. Old Testament

1. In the English Bible: the Law, History, Poetry and Prophecy (Major & Minor Prophets)
2. In the Hebrew Bible (Luke 24:44):
 - a. The Law: Gen.-Deut.
 - b. The Prophets (primarily "forth-tellers" not "fore-tellers")
 - c. Former: Josh.-2 Kings
 - d. Latter: Isa., Jer., Ezek., the Twelve
 - e. The Writings: Psa., Prov., Eccl., Esth., Dan., Ezra/Neh., 1-2 Chr.

B. New Testament:

1. History (Gospels and Acts)
 - a. Sketches of the life and teachings of Jesus
 - b. The "synoptics": Matt., Mark and Luke
 - c. John's unique perspective
 - d. History of the primitive church, Acts = "Luke, part 2"
2. Letters of doctrine
 - a. Paul's
 - (1) Pre-imprisonment: Rom., 1-2 Cor., Gal., 1-2 Thess.
 - (2) Prison epistles: Eph., Phil., Col., Philem.
 - (3) Latter years: 1-2 Tim., Tit.
 - (4) Heb.: traditionally ascribed to Paul, author unknown
 - b. General or Catholic ("universal") letters
 - (1) Jas., 1-2 Pet., 1-3 John, Jude
 - (2) Early order in N.T.: gospels, Acts, general epistles, Paul's letters (including Heb.)
3. Prophecy: symbolic language summarizing messages of previous books and giving a prophetic foretaste of future glories (Rev.)

IV. The languages of the Bible

A. Hebrew

1. Akin to other Semitic languages: Aramaic, Syriac, Akkadian (Assyrian-Babylonian), Arabic

2. Written right to left (wonderful for lefties!)
3. Sample of Hebrew alphabet (section headings KJV & ASV for Psa. 119)
4. Written without vowels (similar to Eastern European languages)

B. Aramaic

1. O.T. usage: Gen. 31:47 (place); Jer. 10:11; Dan. 2:4-7:28; Ezra 4:8-6:18; 7:12-26
2. Language of the Jews from ca. 500 B.C. (cf. Neh. 8:8)
3. Borrowed alphabet from Hebrew, though languages are distinct
4. Dead Sea Scrolls (1000 years older than our previously oldest manuscripts) confirm the transitions between Hebrew and Aramaic in Daniel
5. Language of Jesus and the early church
 - a. "Talitha cumi" (Mark 5:41)
 - b. "Ephphatha" (7:34)
 - c. "Eloi, Eloi lama sabachthani" (Mark 15:34; cf. Matt. 27:46)
 - d. "Abba" (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6)
 - e. "Marana tha" (1 Cor. 16:22)

C. Greek

1. The language of the New Testament
2. The "universal" language of the Roman world
3. Actually, the koine ("common") Greek of the day; unlike scholarship of the 19th cent., that said that the N.T. was written in an inspired "Holy Ghost" Greek dialect
4. N.T. reflects much Semitic idiom
 - a. "Truly [amen] I say to you"
 - b. "It came to pass"
 - c. "Behold"
 - d. "And... and,"
5. N.T. gives distinctively Christian flavor to ordinary Greek words
 - a. "Love" "Grace" "Peace" "Faith" "Humility" "Life"
 - b. "Gospel" "Salvation" "Justification" "Apostle" "Church"

V. "In Praise of Ancient Scribes"

- A. Trained scribes were highly prized throughout the ancient world
 - 1. Mesopotamia and Egypt
 - 2. Professional scribes copied most Hebrew documents
 - 3. Roman and Greek utilized many scribes simultaneously to produce "best-sellers," marketed worldwide
 - 4. As the number of Christians grew, more copies of the Scriptures were needed
- B. The setup for a trained scribe
 - 1. Standing for short documents; sitting on a bench or stool with a codex across his knees
 - 2. A sharpened reed pen with carbon black ink; later other colors used
 - 3. A sponge for erasures; a penknife for sharpening the pen; a piece of pumice for smoothing the writing surface
 - 4. Columns were marked off with a stylus, producing a nearly invisible line
 - 5. Multiple copies would be made in a writing room or scriptorium, staffed by a reader who would read aloud the texts to many scribes who would write the text
- C. The benefits of the scribal work
 - 1. Origen's use of the scriptorium led to the great Christian library at Caesarea
 - 2. Through the Middle Ages, scriptoria kept knowledge of ancient texts alive
 - 3. Concluding notes sometimes included at the end of the manuscripts - Colophon
 - a. Name
 - b. Date of completion
 - c. Summary of their work
 - (1) "With great sweat and toil"
 - (2) "The end of the book-thanks be to God!"
 - d. Other notes
 - (1) "He who does not know how to write supposes it to be labor; but though only three fingers write, the whole body labors"
 - (2) Writing bows one's back, thrusts the ribs into one's stomach, and fosters a general debility of the body"

- (3) "By reading the divine Scriptures [the scribe] wholesomely instructs his own mind, and by copying the precepts of the Lord he spreads them far and wide. What happy application, what praiseworthy industry, to preach unto men by means of the hand, to untie the tongue by means of the fingers, to bring quiet salvation to mortals, and to fight the Devil's insidious wiles with pen and ink! For every word of the Lord written by the scribe is a wound inflicted on Satan. And so, though seated in one spot, the scribe traverses diverse lands through the dissemination of what he has written... Man multiplies the heavenly words, and in a certain metaphorical sense, if I may dare so to speak, three fingers are made to express the utterances of the Holy Trinity. O sight glorious to those who contemplate it carefully! The fast-travelling reed-pen writes down the holy words and thus avenges the malice of the Wicked One, who caused a reed to be used to smite the head of the Lord during His Passion." [Cassiodorus, *Cassiodori Senatoris Institutiones*, edited by R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford: University Press, 1937), I. XXX. I]

Conclusion

1. The Bible is a collection of books written over a period of 1400 or 1500 hundred years
2. It was completed near the close of the first century A.D.
3. The order of books in our English Bibles basically follows the Greek version that was widely used in the early church.
4. Hebrew and Greek were the primary languages with some portions in Aramaic.
5. The scribes who copied the scriptures performed an amazing work in preserving the Bible.

Sources Consulted

1. How We Got The Bible 3rd Edition by Neil R. Lightfoot
 2. Rocky Whitely Oldham Lane church of Christ Abilene, TX
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