

How the Bible Came to Us - #2
How the Christian Bible Came To Be

1. In the 1st century of our era, a tiny group of the followers of Jesus—who were initially thought of as being a Jewish sect—began their rapid spread of Christianity across the Mediterranean world. Instead of remaining as a Jewish sect, it soon became a predominantly Gentile religion. But it continued to claim what we know as the Old Testament in its Greek form—known as the Septuagint—as its foundational Scripture.
2. The New Testament was written over a very short period of time (about 50 years). Most of its writers ended up being martyrs.
3. Christians differed from Jews because of their interpretation of the Jewish Scriptures in light of the life, ministry, and death of Jesus Christ. The New Testament writers made it clear that they regarded their Christian experience as the culmination of the much longer Jewish history.
4. To understand the process of the development of the New Testament, it is best to think of it as coming out of a very divided Jewish community of the 1st century. The story of the New Testament is quite different from that of the *Tanakh*—the Jewish Scriptures or the “Old Testament”—for the following reasons:
 - a) According to conservative estimates, the Hebrew Scriptures were written over a period of approximately 1100 years. By contrast, the New Testament Scriptures were written within a 50-year period by a cohort of people who were essentially a group of friends.
 - b) While the books of the “Old Testament” or Jewish Scriptures were written almost exclusively by the leaders of that people—including Moses, kings, prophets, members of the royal family, and priests—the New Testament arose as a result of the evangelistic efforts and claims of the followers of Jesus Christ—fishermen, tax collectors, a Pharisee, a Greek doctor, and other “ordinary” people.
 - c) The Old Testament Hebrew Scriptures were written primarily in ancient Hebrew with a small amount of Aramaic. The New Testament was written in *Koine* Greek which was the widely-spoken language of the Mediterranean world at that time. The ability to read had become much more widespread and the Greek version of the Old Testament Scriptures known as the Septuagint was adopted and claimed as the Scriptures of the Christians.
 - d) While the Hebrew Scriptures remain distinctly identified with the Jewish people, the New Testament clearly reflects the goal of its writers to spread the gospel message to everyone, including Gentiles.
5. We have spoken about some of the contrasts between the Hebrew “Old Testament” Scriptures and the Christian “New Testament” Scriptures. What similarities do they have in their development?
 - a) Clearly, both sets of books emerged from the experiences of communities. But the Hebrew Bible grew out of a national presence, and thus, is better documented archaeologically. The New Testament writings were produced by a minority under conditions of persecution, and therefore, very little archaeological evidence has remained.
 - b) Both the “Old Testament” Hebrew Bible and the “New Testament” Scriptures arose among a variety of writings—many of which have been lost or discredited. Both oral and

scribal activities were involved in their composition. But it is almost always impossible to know the full history of a given book.

c) The precise dating of most of the books of either the Old Testament or the New Testament is a matter of scholarly guesswork. There are few ways to externally verify the dating of any of the books.

6. Christians had one huge issue to deal with in their writing and in the communities in which they lived: How does one convince a skeptical world that a “crucified criminal” could rise from the dead and achieve the status of God? What kind of evidence could they produce that Jesus was, in fact, alive? Even that He was Deity?
7. The early Christians sought to relate the story of Jesus to the Old Testament Scriptures as they understood them, to suggest that the life and death of Jesus had enormous implications for the lives of Christians on a day-by-day basis, and to indicate that His coming again would impact the entire world in the future.
8. Letters and Gospels were the two main forms of communication which formed most of the New Testament:
 - a) Letters were written by early church leaders to individual churches or small groups of churches.
 - b) The Gospels were written soon after many of the Letters. They were attempts by three of the disciples and a companion of Paul—Dr. Luke—to recount the story of the life and death of Jesus.
 - c) Dr. Luke extended his volume on the life of Christ into an additional volume about the early history of the church, primarily focusing on events affecting Peter and Paul.
 - d) Near the end of his life, the apostle John was given a revelation of Jesus Christ in the form of an apocalyptic book. It begins with three chapters including short letters to individual churches, follows with a variety of visions, and ends with the promise of the new earth.
9. The Christian church recognized those 27 books as being of primary authority. But there were many other compositions written about the same time. Some claimed to have been written by the same authors as the recognized books, but were, in fact, pseudepigraphical or written by a person other than the claimed author. Later, a number of books appeared which were written by early church fathers, some claiming to have been written by the earlier apostles but many of the books correctly identified their authors.
10. Even the technology of book production changed about the time of the New Testament composition. Instead of being written on scrolls, these writings were initially recorded in codices or early “books.” The codex was easier to produce, cheaper, easier to transport, and provided easier access more quickly to a variety of passages.

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