

What is the Bible Building Blocks Week 2-

What is the Bible? Before we discuss what is the Bible, we first must understand that our singular Book we buy at Mardel's or from Amazon was originally not a singular book. It was a collection of writings. These writings vary in authorship, literary styles, and various original languages.

The Bible we have today is broken up into two distinct portions. One is the first 39 books which were written in the Hebrew language and is commonly known as the "Old Testament."

Within the "Old Testament" is four major sections:

- 1- The Pentateuch (Torah/law)
- 2- Former Prophets (Historical Books)
- 3- The Writings (Poetry)
- 4- The Latter Prophets (Prophecy)

The second portion of our traditional English Bibles is 27 books which were written in Greek and called the "New Testament."

Within the "New Testament" is five major sections:

- 1- Canonical Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John)
- 2- The Acts of the Apostles
- 3- 14 Epistles of Paul
- 4- 7 General Epistles
- 5- The Book of the Revelation

The "New Testament" is written by 40 different authors over thousands of years with many different cultural influences, backgrounds, literary styles, and genres.

For those with a Messianic background all these books are traditionally broken down into three major sections which is where we get the term “Tanakh”:

- 1- The Torah
- 2- The Prophets
- 3- Brit Hadassah

Who Wrote the Bible? As we dive into this, we must first acknowledge that a good portion of the Bible was written after events transpired. Moses wasn’t alive at the creation of the earth, and most of the Gospels weren’t written in real time. Luke for example in Chapter one notes that he wrote his Gospel after research and interviews with others. This has cause some to seek human error within the texts and sometimes create a justification for nullifying portions of the texts. This is errant given the words in 2 Timothy chapter 3 verses 16-17:

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God^[a] may be complete, equipped for every good work.

This coupled with the testimony of Peter (remember Jesus says he will build his church on Peter the rock) in 2 Peter chapter 1 verses 20-21:

knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. ²¹For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

God used humans with different cultural backgrounds, experiences, literary styles, and education levels to pour out His divine revelations utilizing many different types or styles of writings. There is poetry, legal codes, stories, personal letters, apocalyptic revelations, and drama to build a beautiful narrative from cover to cover.

How Did We Get the Bible We Have Today? Before our modern Canon of the Bible the Jewish Leadership of Jesus' time had identified the 39 books of the Old Testament into three categories:

- 1- The Law of Moses
- 2- The Prophets
- 3- The Psalms

In the Gospel of Luke chapter 24:44-45 Jesus said:

Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,

After Jesus' death and resurrection, the Apostles began writing letters to churches to encourage and counsel them in the faith. In 2 Peter chapter 3 verses 15-16 we see:

And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, ¹⁶as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.

Peter equated the writings of Paul to Scriptures of Old.

In 367 AD we have the oldest documented list of the New Testament writings called Athanasius's list. Josephus is credited with the first list of Old Testament writings dating to the first century. Josephus list included 22 books which aligns with the current 39 books in modern Bibles. Josephus was confirmed by Philo of Alexandria also in the first century.

The New Testament writings were starting to be authoritative in the first century according to Luke, Timothy, and 2 Peter. This continues in the second century when Papias received at least the Gospels of Mark, Matthew, 1 Peter, 1 John, Revelation and maybe some of Paul's epistles. By the middle of the second century, Justin Martyr had established a fourfold Gospel collection to read with the Old Testament books. In that collection he included 22 of the current 27 books.

Throughout history there have been various different Codex's, Lists, so today when we see different accepted Canons from the Catholic perspective and Protestant perspective this should not surprise anyone.

So, we aren't going to solve centuries old arguments over what is and isn't considered authoritative.

Septuagint or Masoretic Text? The Septuagint is the oldest surviving Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. It is traditionally believed that it was compiled by seventy-two Jewish scholars sometime during the third century BC. With the rise of the Roman Empire, Greek was a common language utilized during the Roman reign. The Septuagint was a popular resource for Jews who lived in places under Roman rulership.

The Masoretic text is considered the authoritative version of the Hebrew Bible by Jews today. It was codified around the ninth century by a group of Jewish scholars known as the Masoretes. The Masoretes name was derived from the Hebrew word "Mesorah" which means traditions.

In a lot of the text both are very similar, and it is important to note the Hebrew text especially when both manuscripts are in agreement. However, when they differ it is important to look at both. This is where we get the differing verbiage of the different English translations. A good modern English translation considers the Septuagint, the Masoretic text, and the Dead Sea Scrolls.

It has been said that the differences in the Masoretic text vs the Septuagint was due to the Jews scholars intentional desire to minimize any influence that could point to Jesus in the text. This isn't well documented and could only be used as speculation of their motives.

2 Timothy 2:23 tells us:

Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels.

Given the date of the creation of the Septuagint it is safe to say the Apostles most likely had some influence from that text during their studies, and growth.

Yet we are blessed because most good English translations have utilized the texts of both to put forth the Bibles we have now.

Extra Biblical Texts- Books like Enoch, Jasher, and others have become a hot topic in many seeking the truth of God's entire word. Some have argued the Catholic Church hid these from us, or that Constantine didn't want us to have the full revelation of God.

Enoch's composition date isn't known but speculated to be between 300 to 200 BC. It is also commonly known that it is a collection of many writings that span a period of time. Due to the varying collections, dates, it is widely believed what we know as the books of Enoch have multiple authors and given the timing of collection Enoch could not have been the actual author of the books.

We find similar inconsistencies with Jasher and other writings. Just like we use books from Robert Morris, Jack Deere, NT Wright, Michael Hieser and Jewish Sages to help us further understand concepts, context, and cultural influences, I'm not willing to say they cannot offer similar elements to your studies, but to elevate them to authoritative Word of God status seems to be void of centuries of study, debate, and wisdom.

Conclusion-

The Bible we have today is the authoritative word of God. It comes with historical evidence to serve as the foundation of why it has stood centuries, a world hell-bent on destroying or finding fault with its texts and has proven when studied, meditated on, applied, and prayed into, to stabilize the transformative work through salvation of the Holy Spirit.