

HOW WE GOT OUR BIBLE (Part I)

How the Bible has come down to us is a story of adventure and devotion. It is a story of toil and faith of those who sometimes by great cost, even loss of their life, have passed down from generation to generation the invaluable message of salvation.

The starting point of the Bible is preceded and determined by another story, the history of ancient books and writing. To know something of the early history of writing and the origin of ancient books will provide an interesting background for the history of the Bible and at the same time will contribute immeasurably to how the Word of God had its birth.

My intent and purpose of writing this article is for you, the reader, to have a greater appreciation for that One Book which we often take for granted.

The whole history of the Bible is contingent upon two things:

1. The history of writing
2. The history of the materials used in the making of letters and books

The Art of Writing

The Bible is a very old Book, but it is not by any means the oldest book in the world.

Skeptics and critics of the Bible have advocated that writing was unknown at the time of Moses (1500 B.C.), therefore he could not have written the first five books of the Bible. But history proves them wrong.

Discoveries made within the last century show that writing was a well-established art long before Moses or Abraham or even before the Flood. Excavations in Egypt and in Babylonia have discovered inscriptions dating back to the time of Sargon 1, 2750 B.C.

Materials Written Upon

-Stone: In almost every region of the world the oldest writings found are written in stone, including the famous Moabite Stone, the Siloam Inscription, and the Rosetta Stone which you can see for yourself at the British Library.

The oldest writings in Egypt and Babylonia are written in stone. In Exodus 31:18 we read, "And He gave to Moses. . .the two tables of the Testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God."

-Clay: In time, clay became the predominant material for writing. Huge libraries of clay tablets have been unearthed, such as the king of Assyria, Ashurbanipal's (650 B.C.), containing thousands of tablets on all sorts of subjects.

-Wood: In Greece as well as other countries, wood was often whitewashed so as to receive the ink. Notices to officials were commonly written on wood.

-Leather: For hundreds of years, leather or animal skins played an important role in the history of the Bible. Leather is not so named in the Old Testament but was unquestionably the principal material used for literary purposes by the Hebrews. The Jewish Talmud, a code of traditional laws, required that the Scriptures be copied on animal skins.

-Papyrus: The papyrus plant grew in abundance along the Nile River. Using their skills, the Egyptians would cut the plant into thin strips, laying them side by side to form a sheet. A second layer was placed across the first and fused to it by moisture and pressure.

The sheets were joined side by side to make a scroll, the average being 30 feet long and 9 inches wide. Later, single sheets were put in book form: The Codex.

-Vellum or Parchment: These two words are used interchangeably. The King of Egypt cut off the supply of papyrus from King Eumenes in Asia (200 B.C.). This resulted in King Eumenes' improvement of animal skins, which became known as vellum (veal).

Vellum was beautiful, especially when dyed purple and inscribed with gold or silver letters. This was the material used for more than a thousand years in making copies of the New Testament. Vellum proved to be so durable that papyrus was no longer desirable.

Let me quote Paul's instruction to Timothy, "When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls (Codex-books) especially the parchments." (II Tim. 4:13)

The Story of Paper

The Chinese, 200 years before Christ, invented paper from a fibrous material and kept it secret for a thousand years. In the eighth century A.D., Arabs took some Chinese as prisoners who were skilled in the art of making paper, but it was not until the 18th century that paper became the predominant material.

The Birth of the Bible

The word "Bible" is taken from the word "Biblos" which means 'the books'. But the Bible is more than a collection of 66 books; it is a treasured library of Sacred Books, all of the 40 authors being under the Divine guidance of the Holy Spirit, as Peter wrote:

"Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved along by the Holy Spirit." II Peter 1:20-21

For the first 2500 years God spoke directly to men such as Adam, Noah, Abraham, and Moses. But now, through Moses, God's purpose to reveal Himself would be through the Written Word. He inspired Moses to write the first five books of the Old Testament.

The Law, The Prophets and Psalms

Jesus said to His disciples, *"This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms"* (Luke 24:44).

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." II Timothy 3:16-17

39 Old Testament Books

Historical(17): The first five books of the Old Testament are historical and are called "The Law" in the Jewish Torah. They are Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

The next twelve books are also historical: Joshua, Judges, Ruth, I Samuel, II Samuel, I Kings, II Kings, I Chronicles, II Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther.

Poetic(5): Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon.

Prophetic(17): The first five are "Major Prophets": Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel. The last twelve are referred to as the "Minor Prophets": Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.

(Part II will appear in next month's issue.)

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APOLOGIA

Editor's note: This is an excerpt from a letter to a brother in Malawi, answering various questions. Due to the length of the actual questions asked, these have been paraphrased.

QUESTION: What kind of oil is used in verses such as Mark 6:13 and James 5:14, and what healing powers does it have?

ANSWER: Both Mark 6:13 and James 5:14 enjoin the use of oil for those who are sick.

"And they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them." Mark 6:13

"Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord:" James 5:14

The oil under consideration is olive oil. It is referred to in many passages such as Exodus 27:20, Deuteronomy 8:8, and Romans 11:17 & 24 and in many other passages simply as "oil." Olive oil DOES NOT GUARANTEE healing from an illness or accident. James 4:13-15 plainly explains that all we hope or ask for is dependent upon the will of God:

"Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that."

He may or may not see it best to respond favorably to our prayers. Remember that God did not heal Paul even though he prayed to God three times for healing of his infirmities (2 Cor. 12:8-10).

Anointing with olive oil as noted in James 5:13-15 is practiced by some in America. This is usually done under extremely serious situations, for it requires the request of the one who is sick, the presence of elders, anointing with oil (usually upon the sick person's forehead), and prayer. Sometimes this anointing is accompanied by fasting. Note carefully that this DOES NOT constitute a miracle, but the answer by God to the "prayer of faith."

The next three verses (16-18) show that the faithful prayer is what is under consideration and not a MIRACLE on the part of the brethren.

"Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit." James 5:16-18

QUESTION: Why are immodest events recorded in the Bible such as Lot's daughters taking advantage of their father in order to bear children, and how should we address them in the pulpit?

ANSWER: Genesis 19:32-36 records the improper sexual relationship promoted by Lot's two daughters. This should not have occurred, but the Bible often records what really happened whether or not it was proper. The daughters gave wine to their father so as to make him drunk. In that state of not being fully aware of what was happening, Lot was taken advantage of by his daughters. Verse 35 states, *"And he perceived not..."* Lot was not aware of what his daughters were doing.

Drunkenness is spoken of in the Bible of having such an effect:

"Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise." Proverbs 20:1

"Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek

mixed wine. Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things." Proverbs 23:29-33

It is true that such passages as Genesis 18:11 (where note is made of Sarah's passing the age of childbirth) suggest such matters as might be uncomfortable to mention in public. Such expressions, however, were placed in the Bible through inspiration of God and are certainly not improper to be used. I find it best in reading or speaking about such matters to simply read exactly what the Bible says and make few of my own comments.

QUESTION: Why don't the four gospels tell the same account of Jesus' resurrection?

ANSWER: Seeming contradictions in the gospel records of Jesus' resurrection are explained by recognizing that four writers are penning by inspiration what they considered sufficient to picture in words what had taken place.

It is not required that each give the COMPLETE scene, but only that which would record the resurrection. Matthew 28:5 speaks of two women and one angel but does not mention being in the cave. Mark 16:4-5 records the angel (as a young man) speaking to the women "on the right side" while in the cave. Luke 24:3-4 speaks of "two men" who were actually angels, for often in the Bible angels took human forms. John 20:1-2 mentions only Mary Magdalene and no other woman, but this does not mean that there were not others accompanying her.

We must be sure in Bible understanding to not reach improper conclusions by not putting together the whole picture and allowing some writers to leave out some things which other writers might include.

Let me illustrate by another situation just prior to the crucifixion of Jesus. In the garden Jesus asked His disciples and they said that TWO swords were among them (Luke 22: 38). Knowing what was about to take place, Jesus said, "It is enough."

As the group apprehended Jesus, Matthew 26:51 informs us that one of the disciples "*drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest's, and smote off his ear.*" Matthew did not tell

us who drew the sword, the servant's name, or which ear was cut off. Mark 14:47 records the event exactly as Matthew.

Luke 22:50 tells us that the servant's RIGHT ear was cut off, but he does not tell us who used the sword or the servant's name: *"And one of them smote the servant of the high priest, and cut off his right ear."*

John 18:10 ties together all four of the records. He writes that Peter was the one who used the sword, it was the right ear of the servant, and the servant's name was Malchus: *"Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus."*

Matthew, Mark, and Luke were all correct, but they did not record the COMPLETE story as did John. So it is with the resurrection; each writer told the true story, but some writers included more than the others.

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GOSPEL MEETINGS

<u>DATES</u>	<u>PLACE</u>	<u>SPEAKER</u>
April 30 - May 2	Church of Christ at Claud Eclectic, AL	Various Speakers
May 3-7	Van Lear Van Lear, KY	James McDonald (Woodbury, TN)
May 17-21	Hopkinsville Hopkinsville, OH	James McDonald (Woodbury, TN)
May 20-23	Noble Noble, GA	Joe Hill (Hager Hill, KY)
May 27-30	Goochtown Eubank, KY	Hunter Bulger (Fort Deposit, AL)
May 28-30	Verona Verona, KY	Joe Hill (Hager Hill, KY)
May 28-30	Willow Oaks Russell Springs, KY	James McDonald (Woodbury, TN)

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

1. Which of Noah's sons was cursed for seeing his father's nakedness?
2. How did Ruth meet Boaz?
3. What was Solomon's opinion of childhood and youth?
4. According to Luke's account, what was Zacharias' punishment for not believing the angel Gabriel concerning the birth of Zacharias' son, John the Baptist?
5. The Corinthian Christians were instructed not to associate with those who referred to themselves as brothers yet were what?

ANSWERS NEXT MONTH . . .