

BIBLE 1106

THE HISTORY OF THE CANON

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II. THE FORMATION OF THE BIBLE

The history of God's divine formation of the Bible is an interesting and fascinating study. In section one of this **LIGHTUNIT**, you learned the theological doctrines of God's ministry to and through His Word. In this section of the **LIGHTUNIT**, you will observe the historical applications of those doctrines which occurred when God moved faithful men to record His revelation. The Bible was compiled over a period of fifteen hundred years, and God used over forty men to write His Word. The end product, God's complete and final Word, was a

certainty in the mind of God in eternity past, before the foundation of the earth.

To gain an understanding of and an appreciation for the miracle of the Bible, you will study the history and formation of the Word of God in this section of the **LIGHTUNIT**. First, you will investigate the need for writing down God's Holy Word. Second, you will study the formation of the Hebrew Old Testament. Finally, you will study the formation of the New Testament.

SECTION OBJECTIVES

Read these objectives. When you have completed this section, you should be able:

2. To reconstruct the need for written **revelation**.
3. To summarize the formation of the Old Testament **Scriptures**.
4. To appraise the formation of the New Testament Scriptures.

VOCABULARY

Study these words to enhance your learning success in this section.



apocryphal
delegate
idiograph

patriarch
phonograms

pictograph
Torah

PREPARATION OF THE REVELATION

Man existed upon the earth for generations without having a written record of God's Holy Word. God's nation, which began with Abraham (Genesis, Chapter 12), existed for over six hundred years before Moses was moved by God to write the Law. Why did God have man wait so long to record His revelation? We know from our study of the book of Genesis that God did communicate to His people, but this revelation was written down only after their release from bondage in Egypt.

Understanding God's plan for His written Word centers on two major issues. The first concerns God's eternal plan and perfect essence. The second concerns man and his limitations.

God's plan. Those who believe in a perfect and eternal God recognize that nothing God institutes is done by accident or chance. God had a perfect plan for His revelation to be written down, and He had a perfect plan for the time this writing was to occur.

Prior to the time of the Exodus, God's faithful people existed within a family environment. Adam, who lived 930 years, was the head or **patriarch** of his family and was also the spiritual leader. Through oral tradition he communicated God's Word to his children and his children's children. Noah assumed this same spiritual responsibility within his family and among his kin. When God chose Abraham to be the father of a mighty nation, Abraham became the

patriarch of this family. The responsibility of leadership passed from Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. Within the close family environment found in the first book of the Bible, oral communication of God's Word was relatively easy.

The believers of the Genesis account were not without God's Holy Word, but the Word came to them as it was passed from father to sons and so on.

During the 430 years of captivity in Egypt, the Hebrews were a separated people who were first freemen and later slaves. This separation from the mainstream of Egyptian culture forced the Hebrews to depend upon the God their elders would tell them about. Within Egypt, however, Israel grew and soon numbered two and one-half million people. As God prepared to return His people to the land He promised them, He also planned a change in the way they were to receive His Word. As the family of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob grew into a large nation, God provided for them a written record of His Word.

In leading His people out of Egypt in 1440 B.C., God brought them to a land of their own. Although families would continue to retain their importance, the structure of the Hebrew society would expand in numbers and in territory. The nation needed written revelation from their Lord God. As a nation, Israel also needed laws to regulate actions and to preserve freedoms. These laws would not come from man but from God and would be recorded in the **Torah**, the books of the Law written by Moses. The Torah became a written constitution for the nation Israel.

The history of God's people and His dealings with them reveal two reasons for God putting His revelation into written form. First, Israel had grown from a family to a nation, and the growing divergence and separation of the people required a written revelation. Second, as a nation, Israel needed written laws to indicate national responsibilities and to ensure individual freedoms. The written record of God would be their constitution.

Man's limitations. The written record of God's revelation did not begin until the time of Moses, a time which might have been determined by man's limitations in the art of writing. Man's ability to record the revelation of God and the tools required to compose such a divine record were progressively developed throughout the history of man.

The activity of reducing thoughts to writing began about 3200 B.C. The first written records were composed of **pictographs**, single symbols representing individual material objects. Some alphabets use letters that are derived from pictographs. The Hebrew letter *aleph*, for example, was originally the symbol for an ox. The Hebrew letter *beth* represented a house, and the *gimmel* pictured a camel. Certain limitations existed in pictographic written communication. Any nonmaterial object could not be pictured, and concepts and ideas could not be written down.

The limitation of pictographs was overcome with the development of the **idiograph**, which used thousands of symbols to illustrate ideas as well as objects. The Chinese language is written in idiographs. The continuing expansion of language required so many idiographs that this system of writing became almost impossible to master. Hence, a system of **phonograms** was developed, using a symbol to stand for a sound in a language.

The pictographs of the Hebrew alphabet were developed into phonograms. The *beth*, for example, no longer was the symbol for a house but the symbol for the *B* sound within the Hebrew language. All the languages of the Bible, Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, are phonogram languages, or alphabetical languages. From such discoveries as the



God Used Faithful Men to Record His Word

Amarna Letters of 1400 to 1350 B.C. and the Ras Shamra epic of the eleventh century B.C., we know that phonogramic, alphabetic, writing was used in the ancient world of Moses' day.

Some critics of the Old Testament have supposed that, since the Hebrews were slaves in Egypt, they probably could not read or write. Such supposition, however, is not supported by Biblical or archaeological facts. In the Sinai a turquoise mine has been discovered which dates from the period of the Hebrews' sojourn in Egypt. This mine was owned by Egyptians and worked by Hebrew slaves. Above the ground a pagan altar to an Egyptian god can be found, but below ground, in the caverns where the Hebrew slaves worked, the walls abound with Hebrew phonograms that tell the story of Israel's one true God. If these Hebrew slaves could read and write, how much more could Moses who was raised by Egypt's royal family.

The earliest materials for writing were chisels and stone. Examples of this writing material include the Behistun Rock of Persia, the Moabite Stone of Palestine, and the Rosetta Stone of Egypt, which were discoveries of antiquity. When God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses, they were divinely written on stone tablets (Exodus 32:15-16). In addition to stone, early

man used clay tablets and lead (Job 19:24) on which to write. If all the books of Moses had been written on stone, clay, or lead, the mass and weight of the material would have made such writing impossible to store and to transport.

At the perfect time in God's plan, man began to write on papyrus. Our English word *paper* comes from the Greek word *papyrus*. Papyrus was manufactured in Egypt and Syria and came from the papyrus plant which grew in shallow lakes and rivers. The reed of the plant was cut into thin strips and then pressed together to form large sheets. One side was polished smooth, making a fine surface upon which to write. The sheets were then pressed together to form rolls or scrolls. This light and easy-to-handle material became the paper upon which God's Word was written (Exodus 24:7).

The calamus was an ancient and widely used pen. It was a thin reed of coarse grass which was hollow and sharpened to a point. The hollow cavity held the ink, which was made from root and gum diluted with water. The point of the calamus had to be kept sharp; therefore the writer carried a small knife to periodically cut a new point. The modern designation of *pen knife* comes from the practice of sharpening the calamus.



Complete these statements.

- 2.1 God's nation Israel existed for over _____ years before Moses wrote the Law.
- 2.2 Prior to the Exodus, God's people existed within a _____ environment.
- 2.3 Adam communicated God's Word to his children through _____.
- 2.4 Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were the _____ of their families.
- 2.5 Israel was in Egypt for _____ years.



Complete these activities.

- 2.6 Describe the two reasons God gave Israel a written revelation prior to their entrance into the land.
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
- 2.7 What was the limit on man's part that prevented him from having a written revelation until the fifteenth century B.C.? _____



Match these items.

- | | | | |
|------|-------|-------------|------------------------------------|
| 2.8 | _____ | idiograph | a. represents a material object |
| 2.9 | _____ | Egypt | b. could represent ideas |
| 2.10 | _____ | lead | c. represented a sound |
| 2.11 | _____ | Palestine | d. Behistun Rock |
| 2.12 | _____ | pictographs | e. Moabite Stone |
| 2.13 | _____ | calamus | f. Rosetta Stone |
| 2.14 | _____ | Persia | g. manufactured in Syria and Egypt |
| 2.15 | _____ | phonograms | h. an ancient pen |
| 2.16 | _____ | ink | i. root, gum, and water |
| 2.17 | _____ | papyrus | j. mentioned in Job 19:24 |
| | | | k. Hebrew letter <i>beth</i> |

FORMATION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

The structural divisions and arrangement of the books of the English Old Testament come from Jerome's work on the Latin translation of the Bible, the Vulgate. Jerome (A.D. 342-420) was familiar with other divisions but chose the divisions found in the Septuagint as a pattern for the Latin Bible. When the Jews of Alexandria, Egypt decided to translate the Hebrew text into Greek (about 250 B.C.), they instituted some dramatic changes in the grouping and divisions of the books. Some of these changes were made because the space required to write a passage was greater for the Greek language than for the Hebrew. The Hebrew alphabet included no vowels, allowing room for more than one word (for example, I and II Samuel) to be contained on one scroll. The Greek language included vowels, requiring more room for a word in the Septuagint than in a Hebrew scroll. Therefore, the Septuagint translators divided each of several scrolls into two books. A more radical change concerned the Hebrew Bible's three divisions, the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings; these divisions were expanded in the Septuagint to four, adding a separate section for the poetical books.

The Lord Jesus Christ used extensively the Old Testament Scriptures during His earthly ministry. The Lord frequently quoted and used the Septuagint, which had enjoyed popular reception among the Jews of Jesus' day. In Luke 24:44 the Lord referred to the Old Testament, using its Hebrew divisions: "... the law of Moses, ... the prophets, and ... the

psalms. . . ." When pronouncing judgment upon the religious leaders of His day, the Lord stated (Matthew 23:35; compare Luke 11:51), "That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zecharias, son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar." This verse refers to events that span the entire Hebrew Old Testament. The murder of Abel is recorded in Genesis, Chapter 4, and the murder of Zecharias is recorded in II Chronicles 24:21. In the Hebrew order of the sacred Scriptures, II Chronicles is the last book. The Lord's statement would include all the martyrs of the entire Old Testament period, according to the Hebrew order of the Scriptures.

The Jewish historian Josephus (A.D. 37-95) referred to a threefold division of the Old Testament. He stated (Contra Apionem, I, 8) that the Hebrew Scriptures contained these books: "... five belonging to Moses . . . the prophets who were after Moses, wrote that which was done in their time . . . The four remaining books . . . hymns to God and precepts. . . ." In the prologue of the **Apocryphal** book Ecclesiasticus (about 190 B.C.), mention is made of the threefold division according to "... the law and the prophets and the other books of our fathers."

Although absolute certainty is impossible, considerable evidence indicates that the Lord Jesus Christ and the believers of His day used the Hebrew divisions of the Scriptures when

referring to the Old Testament. Other ancient and more recent divisions of the Bible should not be considered wrong. The important issue is that the books and their content were accepted

into the canon. In this study about the formation of the Old Testament, you will follow the Hebrew division of the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings.

The Hebrew Old Testament	The King James Old Testament
The Law (Torah) 1. Genesis 2. Exodus 3. Leviticus 4. Numbers 5. Deuteronomy The Prophets (<i>Nabhiim</i>) A. Former Prophets: 1. Joshua 2. Judges 3. Samuel 4. Kings B. Latter Prophets: 1. Isaiah 2. Jeremiah 3. Ezekiel 4. The Twelve The Writings (<i>Kethubim</i>) A. Poetical Books: 1. Psalms 2. Proverbs 3. Job B. Five Rolls (<i>Megilloth</i>): 1. Song of Songs 2. Ruth 3. Lamentations 4. Esther 5. Ecclesiastes C. Historical Books: 1. Daniel 2. Ezra-Nehemiah 3. Chronicles	The Law (Pentateuch) 1. Genesis 2. Exodus 3. Leviticus 4. Numbers 5. Deuteronomy History 1. Joshua 2. Judges 3. Ruth 4. I Samuel 5. II Samuel 6. I Kings 7. II Kings 8. I Chronicles 9. II Chronicles 10. Ezra 11. Nehemiah 12. Esther Poetry 1. Job 2. Psalms 3. Proverbs 4. Ecclesiastes 5. Song of Solomon Prophets A. Major 1. Isaiah 2. Jeremiah 3. Lamentations 4. Ezekiel 5. Daniel B. Minor 1. Hosea 2. Joel 3. Amos 4. Obadiah 5. Jonah 6. Micah 7. Nahum 8. Habakkuk 9. Zephaniah 10. Haggai 11. Zechariah 12. Malachi