

## **SESSION ONE: Introduction & Formation of the Hebrew Bible<sup>1</sup>**

### **Introduction**

#### **I. What questions are we asking in this study?**

- A. How did we get the Bible? What was the process of formation for the Old Testament (OT) and the New Testament (NT)?
- B. Do we have the right books in our OT and NT? What about the apocrypha? Should we have them in our Bibles?
- C. After so many years, can we trust that the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts we have today are reliable? Could the text have been corrupted and altered?
- D. Why are there so many different Bibles out there today? Do we need different translations? What makes a good translation? And which translation is the best?
- E. Can I depend on other humans' translations of the Bible? Can I trust that my Bible is the inspired Word of God?

#### **II. What are the goals of this study?**

- A. To be able to answer these previous questions.
- B. To learn basic facts regarding the text and canon of the Bible, including the process of how the OT and NT came into being and the process of translation.
- C. To be able to defend attacks against the Bible in our current culture and society.
- D. To possess a heightened sense of wonder, gratitude, and worship toward God for his gracious act of revealing himself to us in his Word.
- E. Most importantly, to leave with great encouragement, and a deepened faith that the Bible you hold in your hands is in fact the inspired Word of God, and that it is thus authoritative over your life.

#### **III. Defining Terms**

- A. The title "Text and Canon" refers to the general topic in biblical studies having to do with the biblical languages, the formation of the Bible, the translation of the Bible, and the process of copying and preserving the Bible.
- B. The term *text* simply refers to the text itself of Scripture. The words that form sentences, paragraphs, chapters, and entire books.
- C. The term *canon* refers to the list of books which are considered God's Word, and therefore authoritative for faith and conduct.

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<sup>1</sup> Much of this information is adapted with consent from the class notes and lectures of Dr. Ray Lubeck of Multnomah University. *Do not copy or reproduce these notes without explicit permission.*

## The Formation of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament)

### I. The Hebrew Bible

- A. The terms “Hebrew Bible” and “Old Testament” are essentially interchangeable, however, the term “Old Testament” seems to diminish the value of the content.
- B. The Hebrew Bible consists of 24 books, which correspond to our 39 books in the OT.
- C. The reason it is called the “Hebrew Bible” is because of the language it was written in: Ancient or Biblical Hebrew.

### II. The Hebrew Language

#### A. The Hebrew Alphabet:

1. ת ש ר ק צ (ך) פ ע ס נ (ם) ל (ך) כ י ט ה ז ו ה ד ג ב א
2. Hebrew began with what is called a Paleo Script, but after the Babylonian captivity, they switched to the Aramaic script. Aramaic was the *lingua franca* of the world, and they learned it in captivity.
3. One challenge with Hebrew is that many of the letters look very similar. This can make reading manuscripts difficult.

#### B. The Hebrew text was originally written without vowels.

1. Masoretic vowel pointing added from 500-1000 AD in order to preserve the oral reading tradition.
2. Because of their high view of Scripture, the scribes refused to add any letters to the text. So instead, they created a system of dots and dashes that are placed above, in, and below letters to indicate vowels.

#### C. There are also several Aramaic sections in Scripture.

1. About half of Daniel and half of Ezra, plus some individual verses.
2. Aramaic and Hebrew are cousin languages; think of them like Spanish and Portuguese.

### III. The Autographs

#### A. Autographs are the very first writings of any biblical text, the original text produced by the author.

1. The autographs are not to be confused with manuscripts. A *manuscript* is a hand-made copy of an existing text, though it is often used currently to refer to any copy.

#### B. Unfortunately, we have almost zero information about the original texts of Scripture, because there are no surviving autographs of the Bible (either OT or NT) that we are aware of today. Instead, we have hundreds of copies of *manuscripts*.

### IV. Earliest Arrangement of Books in the Hebrew Bible

#### A. The earliest known arrangement of the Hebrew Bible is the three-part “**TaNak**.”

1. It gets its name from an acronym based off the three divisions: **T**orah (Instruction), **N**evi'im (Prophets), **K**etuvim (Writings).
2. Rather than the 39 books that we count in our Old Testament, the Hebrew Bible counts the same exact books as 24.
3. This is the order followed within modern Hebrew Bibles (e.g. BHS, JPS).

#### B. Here are how the books are divided:

1. **Torah**: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy
2. **Nevi'im**: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings (Former Prophets)  
Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, The Book of the Twelve (Latter Prophets)

3. **Kethuvim**: Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles

C. Side note: There are books mentioned in the HB that are not considered canonical

1. For example: The Annals of the Kings of Judah (1 Kings 14:19, 15:31, 16:5, *et al.*); The Records of the Seers (2 Chronicles 33:19); The Book of Jashar (Joshua 10:13, 2 Samuel 1:18); The Annals of Solomon (1 Kings 11:41); etc.
2. However, just because they are mentioned *does not* mean they should be included in our Bibles. These have never been considered canonical, and in fact, we have no copies of any of these books.

D. Evidence of the TaNaK

1. Quote from Dead Sea Scrolls: “The **Book of Moses**, and the words of the **Prophets** and of **David**.”
2. The Hebrew Bible itself shows this structure. For example, note the connections between Joshua 1, Malachi 3-4, and Psalm 1. Also, the connection between Proverbs 31 and Ruth. Also, the connection between Deuteronomy 34 and Joshua 1.
3. We will continue to see evidence of this three-part structure as we explore other witnesses to the Hebrew Bible. The TaNaK is extremely important.

V. Earliest Manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible

A. Dead Sea Scrolls

1. Beginning in 1946, there was a major discovery in some caves along the Dead Sea in modern day Israel. A dozen caves containing hundreds of manuscripts were found around the Dead Sea, near an ancient community called Qumran.
2. A group of Jews called the Essenes lived at Qumran from about 500 BC to 68 AD. They were a radical, right-wing cult with a massive library.
3. In the caves at Qumran, copies of every single book of the Hebrew Bible (except Esther) were found. We now have thousands of fragments from 225 Biblical manuscripts.
  - a. The most popular books found at Qumran were: Psalms (37 mss), Deuteronomy (30 mss), Isaiah (21 mss), Genesis (24 mss), Exodus (18 mss).
4. Along with the biblical manuscripts, there were 670 manuscripts of non-canonical works, including community guidelines, biblical commentaries, etc. There were also a few manuscripts written in Paleo-Hebrew, which would be extremely old, from prior to the Babylonian captivity.
5. The Dead Sea Scrolls are an incredible discovery and may be one of the most important archeological finds of all time. Prior to the DSS, the oldest complete manuscripts we had of the Hebrew Bible were from 1000 AD. The DSS brought manuscripts over 1000 years older than this.
  - a. The DSS help give us greater confidence in our current Bibles, because they confirm the text of the Hebrew Bible we had already been using. When we compare the manuscripts we have that are 1000 year apart, there are only minor differences, which gives us incredible confidence in the preservation of these texts. Moreover, these differences are mostly all spelling differences, or small scribal errors such as copying a word twice, or forgetting a single word.

B. Samaritan Pentateuch

1. To this day, the Samaritan people have maintained their own copy of the Pentateuch, that is, the first five books of the Bible.

2. There are some differences between the Jews and Samaritans, one major one being that the Samaritans only use the first five books of the HB!
3. The Samaritan Pentateuch is important because it exists as an independent witness to the wording of the first five books of the Bible

## VI. Early Translations of the Hebrew Bible

### A. The Septuagint (LXX)

1. This is a very early and very important translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek. The translation took place around 250-150 BC in Alexandria, Egypt.
2. You will often see the Septuagint referred to as the LXX (the roman numerals for 70), because tradition has it that it was 70 Jewish scholars who worked on the translation.
3. We have some very early manuscripts of the LXX: John Rylands Papyrus 458 (2<sup>nd</sup> Century BC); Papyrus Fouad 266 (100 BC); Several partial DSS manuscripts.
4. The earliest *complete* manuscripts of the LXX are from the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD (Codex Alexandrinus, Codex Vaticanus, and Codex Sinaiticus).

### B. Aramaic Targums

1. These are early translations of the Hebrew Bible into Aramaic from around the time of Christ, completed around 100 AD.

### C. Three other major Jewish translations:

1. Aquila: Rigidly formal translation; 120 AD.
2. Symmachus: Dynamic and idiomatic translation; 170-200 AD.
3. Theodotion: Great translation of Daniel that was actually accepted by the church; 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> century AD.

## VII. New Testament Witness to the Hebrew Bible

A. The New Testament is an extremely important witness to the Hebrew Bible, because it shows us what books Jesus and the Apostles considered Scripture, and is also a witness to the text of the Hebrew Bible from which they were quoting.

### B. Quotations and allusions

1. There are over 350 direct quotations to the Hebrew Bible in the New Testament, and there are thousands of allusions.
2. Approximately 30% of the New Testament is based off of quotations or allusions from the Hebrew Bible.

C. The NT refers to the Scriptures in the plural, seemingly indicating that there is some kind of collection.

1. Matthew 5:15-18; Luke 24:25, 44-45; 1 Corinthians 15:1-8 all imply some kind of definite boundaries or canon of Scripture.

### D. Two important passages

1. Luke 24:44 "He said to them, '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**.'"
  - a. By referencing the three different sections of the TaNaK, Jesus shows that the Hebrew Bible he was using followed the three-part structure of the TaNaK.
2. Luke 11:50-11 "This generation will be responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed...from the blood of **Abel** to the blood of **Zechariah**." (cf. Mat. 23:35)
  - a. If Jesus was referring to the first and last death in the Bible, based on a chronological order, it would be Abel in Gen. 4:8, and Uriah in Jer. 26:20-23. However, canonically, the first and last death would be Abel and then Zechariah

in 2 Chron. 24:20-22. Rather than quoting the first and last chronologically, Jesus quotes the first and last canonically. The first death in the first book of the TaNaK, and the last death in the last book of the TaNaK.

- E. There are also several places in the NT where quotes are drawn from all sections of TaNaK
1. John 19:36-37 “These things happened so that the Scripture would be fulfilled...”
    - a. Quotes from [Ex. 9:12](#); [Num. 12:46](#); [Zech. 12:10](#); [Ps. 34:20](#)
  2. Romans 10:18-21 “Hearing the word of Christ...”
    - a. Quotes from [Deut. 32:21](#); [Is. 65:1-2](#); [Ps. 19:4](#)
  3. Romans 15:8-12 “As it is written...”
    - a. Quotes from [Deut. 32:43](#); [2 Sam. 22:50](#); [Is. 11:10](#); [Ps. 18:49](#), [117:1](#)
  4. Hebrews 1:5-13 “He says...” (v. 6, 6, 7, 8, 10, 13)
    - a. Quotes from [Deut. 32:43](#); [2 Sam. 7:14](#); [Ps. 2:7](#), [45:6-7](#), [102:25-27](#), [104:4](#), [110:1](#)

#### VIII. Early Jewish Witnesses to the Hebrew Bible

##### A. Ecclesiasticus (aka The Wisdom of Sirach)

1. This is an apocryphal book from 160 BC.
2. It says, “Many great teachings have been given to us through the **Law** and the **Prophets** and the **Others that follow them.**”

##### B. Philo

1. A Jewish scholar in Alexandria, Egypt (25 BC—45 AD)
2. Describing a Jewish sect: “In each [house] there is a consecrated room...They take nothing into it, neither drink, nor food or anything else necessary for the needs of the body, except **Law** and words spoken by God through the **prophets** and **Psalms and the other books** that foster and perfect knowledge and piety.”

##### C. Josephus

1. Jewish scholar who worked for Rome, around 90 AD.
2. Listed 22 books in the Hebrew Bible, which correspond to our 39. He also claimed that the canon was closed.

##### D. Jamnia/Yabneh

1. This was a Rabbinic academy on the coast of Israel that operated from 70-117 AD.
2. The Rabbis there agreed with the existing opinion concerning which books were God’s Word.

##### E. 4 Ezra 14:45

1. This is a pseudepigraphal book written about 100 AD.
2. It refers to the “24 books meant to be read by all.”

##### F. Babylonian Talmud

1. The Talmud is Jewish commentary on the oral law and Rabbinic law, compiled from around 70-200 AD.
2. Tractate *Baba Bathra* 14b-15a lists 24 books (corresponding to our 39).

#### IX. The Masoretic Text (MT)

A. A group of Jewish scribes called “Masoretes” produced what we now refer to as the Masoretic Text. These scribes were *extremely meticulous*, and copied manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible from 500-1000 AD.

1. They were so meticulous in their copying, that a manuscript from 1000 AD is essentially just as good as one from 500 AD.

B. The earliest *complete* manuscript of the Masoretic Text is the Leningrad Codex from 1008 AD.

1. The Aleppo codex was the oldest, but was damaged and now contains only about two-thirds of the HB (930 AD).

- C. There were two major copying centers for the Masoretic Text: Babylon and Tiberius. The Masoretes also added vowel pointing and textual notes (called *Masorah*).
- D. The Masoretic Text is extremely important because of its stability. It has become the base edition of almost all modern Hebrew Bibles, and is the text used for translation of the OT for English translations.

#### X. Christian Witnesses to the Hebrew Bible

##### A. Origen (about 240 AD)

1. Undertook the production of a six-column Bible, called the *Hexapla*, made up of the Hebrew text, a Greek transliteration, Aquila's translation, Symmachus' Translation, the Septuagint, and Theodotion's translation.
2. Origen listed out 22 books in the Hebrew Bible, corresponding to our 39 OT books.

##### B. Jerome (4<sup>th</sup> century AD)

1. Jerome was commissioned by the Roman Catholic Church to translate the Bible from Greek and Hebrew into the common Latin of the day. The translation is called the *Vulgate*, and it became the official Bible of the Roman Catholic Church.
2. Jerome accepted the 22 books of the Hebrew Bible, corresponding to our 39 OT books. He was pressured to translate the apocryphal books, but refused, because he did not believe they were Scripture. However, under immense pressure, he eventually let others translate the apocryphal books.

#### XI. Chapter and Verse Divisions

A. Chapter divisions were not in the original text, but were added much later by Stephan Langton, the Archbishop of Canterbury, who lived from 1150-1228 AD.

1. It is important to remember that these divisions were not in the original text and are therefore not *inspired*. For the most part, Langton did a good job, but at some points he definitely blew it! (For example: Genesis 2)

B. Verse divisions were not added until even later. Robert and Henry Estienne added them in the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century.

#### XIII. The Bottom Line

A. There are a large amount of witnesses that agree on two things:

##### 1. Which **books** belong in the HB

- a. However they are numbered, whether there are 22, 24, or 39 books, all of these witnesses agree on which books belong in the canon of the Hebrew Bible.

##### 2. The wording of the **text** of the HB

- a. With all the different textual witnesses, such as the Masoretic Text, the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Targums, Talmudic Commentary, Origen, Dead Sea Scrolls, and the LXX, we can be extremely confident in wording of the text of the Hebrew Bible.

B. These witnesses are extremely diverse, yet they agree on these two things. Many of these people were completely at odds with each other in regards to theology and beliefs, and many lives hundreds of years apart, yet they all agreed on which books belong in the Hebrew Bible, and the wording of the text of the Hebrew Bible.