Lesson 1: How did the Bible come into being?

Purpose
To be amazed about the uniqueness of the Bible

Introductory remarks
Why should we have some understanding of how the Bible came to us?

• to realize that the Bible, like creation, is an AMAZING MIRACLE.

Why do we say that?

• although it was written on three continents (Africa, Asia and Europe),
• in three different languages (Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek),
• over a period of about 1500 years,
• by more than 40 authors (from all walks of life),
• the Bible as a whole forms a unit.

This unit makes the Bible UNIQUE among all books. The Bible did not just simply drop from the sky, but it came into being through a fascinating, but complicated PROCESS.

To best understand the process we need to be aware of:

• The Dispute;
• The Two Traditions;
• The Languages;
• The Councils and
• The Empires

The Dispute

The debate can be traced back to the first century AD when a need arose to translate the Jewish Bible from Hebrew into Greek.

After the Romans had sacked Jerusalem in 70 AD, there was another Diaspora of Jewish people all over the world. Many Jews settled in Alexandria. The Jews in the diaspora, started to talk the world language of that time, namely Greek.

The result was that over time the need arose to translate the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek. Therefore, in the third century, the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek, and is called the Septuagint.

The Septuagint included the Hebrew Bible and other writings (apocryphal), which were in circulation, especially in Alexandria.

These writings include 15 books, which were written between about 400 BC, and the time of Jesus.

These other writings gave rise to the dispute. These writings are known as the Apocrypha.

The word Apocrypha is derived from the Greek word “apokruptos”, which means “hidden” or “concealed”.

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It does not mean to hide something physically, but rather that these books were not meant for everyone to read. Perhaps only for a small group of believers who would be able to grasp and understand the hidden truths.

These books were apparently not used in the Christian gatherings and are therefore not regarded by Protestants as inspired. The Jews also did not include them in their Hebrew Bible. However, the Roman Catholic Church did include 12 of the 15 books in their Bible.

Roman Catholics argue that the Apocrypha was an integral part of the early church and should be included in the list of inspired Old Testament books.

What is the value of the Apocryphal Books?

They paint a picture of the cultural and religious attitudes in Judaism before the appearance of Christianity.

The books, which are included by the Jews, Roman Catholics and Protestants in their Bibles, are known as the canonical books. The word "canon" is derived from an Egyptian word, which means "reed", "measure" or "standard". Canon means it meets the requirement or standard.

In this case, the intention is: meeting the requirements for a holy or inspired book.

As a general summary:

- The Jews did not accept the Apocryphal books as part of their Bible.
- Protestants also did not accept the apocrypha as part of their Bible.
- The Roman Catholic Church accept 12 of the 15 apocryphal books.

However, Protestants, Roman Catholics, and Greek Orthodox Christians agree on the same 27 books for the composition of the New Testament.

The Two Traditions

The Bible evolved over a time span of approximately 1500 years. The time span can be divided into an ORAL TRADITION and a WRITTEN TRADITION.

The oral tradition is likely dated to the time of Abraham, around 1800 BC. Before anything in the Bible was written down, people told stories about God and God’s relationship with the people. The oral tradition lasted for centuries as families passed along the stories of their ancestors to each new generation before they were written down in a final form.

The oral tradition has steadily evolved in written tradition as societies in the Near East began to develop the art of writing.

These were written on papyrus, a paper-like material made from reeds, or on vellum, which was made from dried animal skins.

The books of the Bible were not written at one time. This process took centuries. While some books were being written and collected, others were still being passed on in storytelling fashion.

Probably the first written parts of Scripture were short pieces of poetry, dating to the time of the exodus around 1300 BC.
The **Old Testament**, in roughly the form as we know it, did not emerge until after the return from Babylonian exile, around 500-450 BC.

Likewise the **New Testament** underwent a similar process of development, although in a much shorter time frame.

The first letters of Paul were written around AD 45-50, the first Gospel (Mark) around AD 60, and the last of the canonical Epistles around AD 90-100.

**Rolls of papyrus** (plant material) and **parchment** (animal skin) were used.

### The Languages

Most of the original manuscripts of the Old Testament were written in **HEBREW**, although a few chapters of Ezra and Daniel were recorded in Aramaic (dialect of Hebrew), the language spoken by Jesus.

The New Testament was written in the first century AD in **GREEK** because it was the most spoken language around the Mediterranean at the time.

The first translations of the Bible were of the Hebrew Bible into Greek. It is called the **Septuagint**.

The conquest of **Alexander the Great** in the fourth century BC made Greek the most widely spoken language in the Mediterranean area. It, therefore, seemed a natural step to translate the Scriptures into Greek for the benefit of non-Hebrew-speaking Jews.

As the centuries after the resurrection unfolded, the dominant language spoken in the **Roman Empire** began to change. No longer was Greek the dominant language, but **LATIN**.

At the end of the fourth century, the Latin version of the Bible was translated from Hebrew and Greek. A priest named St. Jerome did most of the translation. It was reviewed in 1592 and had been accepted as the **official text** for the Roman Catholic Church.

The Latin translation is named the Vulgate (common language).

The first English translation of the Bible was by **John Wycliffe**. He translated the Bible into English from the Latin Vulgate because he did not know Hebrew or Greek.

The **Advent of Printing** greatly aided the transmission of the biblical texts.

The **King James Version** (1611 AD) is the translation from the original Hebrew and Greek into English. The Bible has been translated into more than **2,000** languages.

### The Councils

Three Councils (synods) played a very important role in the origin of the Bible.

They were:

- Jamnia (± 90 AD)
- Carthage (± 397 AD)
- Trent (± 1546 AD)
How did the Bible come into being?

The Council of Jamnia (±90 AD)

To combat the growing Christian Church (originally seen as just another Jewish sect), the leading Jewish rabbis gathered at Jamnia to give final clarity on what books should belong to their Holy Scriptures, the Old Testament. They determined that a number of books, which included the Christian Gospels, do not belong to the Jewish canon.

The Jewish canon contains the same books as the Old Testament of the Protestant Bible. The decisions of Jamnia had no effect on the early Christians - they continued to use the Bible books used by the Apostles.

The Council of Carthage (±397 AD)

So although the New Testament took shape over roughly 100 years and was virtually complete by the early second century AD, it took another two to three centuries for the church to begin defining the canon of the New Testament.

The Council merely gave their formal approval to the 27 books that had been around for centuries by the Church and seen as authoritative.

The Council of Trent (±1546 AD)

Many years later, the Reformation led to a lot of tension between Roman Catholics and the emerging Protestant believers.

Protestants did not recognize the Apocrypha as authoritative. Consequently it led to the Council of Trent (located in Northern Italy). At this Council, the Roman Catholic Church accepted the Apocrypha officially as part of their Bible.

Roman Catholics refer to the Apocrypha as deutero-canon (second canon).

The Empires

Most scholars agree that the Old Testament, the first section of the two-part Christian Biblical canon, was composed and compiled between the 12th and the 2nd century BC. It was during the time of the ASSYRIAN (900-607BC), BABYLONIAN (607 - 536BC), PERSIAN (558-330 BC) and GREEK Empires.

The New Testament came into being during the ROMAN Empire (27 BC - 476 AD).

The New Testament was written in Greek because the Greek culture, even under the Roman government, was very strong.
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How did the Bible come into being?

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditions</th>
<th>Oral</th>
<th>Written</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Languages</td>
<td>Hebrew</td>
<td>Aramaic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>±1000BC</td>
<td>±400BC</td>
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General Remarks

Where does the name “Bible” come from?

The word Bible comes from the Greek biblia, meaning "books".

Manuscripts

Although we don’t have the original manuscripts of the Bible, we do have manuscripts that still exist today.

Some of the most important are:

1. **Codex Leningradensis (1008 AD)**

   It is the oldest complete manuscript of the Old Testament.

2. Dead Sea Scrolls

   They were discovered in eleven caves along the northwest shore of the Dead Sea between the years 1947 and 1956.
   The Dead Sea Scrolls date from 200 B.C. - 70 A.D. and contain the entire book of Isaiah and portions of every other Old Testament book but Esther.

3. **Codex Sinaiticus (350AD)**

   It contains the entire New Testament and almost the entire Old Testament in Greek. A German scholar, Tischendorf, discovered it in 1856 at an Orthodox monastery at Mt. Sinai.
4. *Codex Vaticanus*

It is an almost complete New Testament. It was cataloged as being in the Vatican Library since 1475.

It is an almost complete New Testament. This is one of the oldest surviving manuscripts of the Greek Bible (Old and New Testament) and has been kept in the Vatican Library since 1475.

The Bible consists of **TWO** major divisions. These two primary divisions are the 39 books that constitute the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament. The names "Old Testament" and "New Testament" have been used since the close of the second century A.D. to distinguish the Jewish (God’s covenant with Israel) and the Christian (God’s new covenant people) Scriptures. The testament was a translation of the Hebrew word berith ("a covenant") to render the Greek word diatheke (Latin testamentum).

* Codex is an unbound book to distinguish it from a papyrus roll.

**To summarize**

We see that the Bible did not merely drop from the sky, but came into being by a fascinating, yet complicated process.

No other book has such a history.

No other book has influenced humanity more than the Bible.

For believers, it is indeed God's Word that gives life!
Group Discussion

1. Did the lesson succeed in leaving you in awe of God’s Word? Explain!

2. What touched you the most in this lesson?

3. Is there anything in the lesson that was not clear to you? If so, what was unclear?

4. In the process of the formation of the Bible we have to be aware of the disputes. What other factors have also played a role in the formation of the Bible played? (see page 5)

5. Who were the three major role players in the debate about the formation of the Bible?

6. The books that have not been incorporated in the Bible, are known as the ..................................... books. The books that have been incorporated in the Bible, are known as the ..................................... books.

7. Which two traditions are attributed the origin of the Bible?

8. The Old Testament was originally written in ................................... , while the New Testament was originally written in ........................................

9. Name the three Councils which played an important role in the formation of the Bible?

10. What empires were prominent during the formation of the Bible?