

St. Elias Orthodox Church  
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WHERE DID THE BIBLE COME FROM?

What we call the Bible is a collection of documents written over more than a thousand years by many authors. The word “bible” come from the Greek word ‘biblia’ which is plural, i.e. “books”. We also distinguish between the Old Testament and New Testament. When we buy a bible, the Bible contains both the Old and New Testament. The combination of the Old and New Testaments first appears in the Latin Bible or Vulgate Bible produced by St. Jerome in the late fourth century.

Ancient books were commonly written on scrolls. Eventually the documents were cut up and bound together in what was called a codex. The codex was the forerunner of our books today. I have included a list of the books of the Old Testament, (including the Deuterocanonical books) containing the dates of their origin commonly accepted by scholars. Bear in mind that these dates are opinions. Although it is not possible to say exactly when the Old Testament books were written we can examine some of the ancient collections of the books that constitute the Bible. As Orthodox Christians we believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God and is normative for our faith.

I. The Old Testament Texts

A. The Dead Sea Scrolls

B. The Septuagint or Greek Language text 200 B.C.

C. The sources used by St. Jerome c400 AD who produced the Vulgate Latin Bible

D. The Peshitta text used by the Syriac Christians

E. The Masoretic Texts (c 930 AD)

1. The Aleppo Codex created by Scribes called Masoretes in Tiberias

2. The Leningrad Codex (1008 AD) [The oldest complete Old Testament]

II. The New Testament Texts

1. Codex Sinaiticus

2. Codex Alexandrinus

3. Codex Vaticanus

# THE OLD TESTAMENT

## TEXTS OF THE HEBREW BIBLE

What is the oldest Hebrew Bible? That is a complicated question. The Dead Sea Scrolls (FROM 200 BC) are fragments of the oldest Hebrew Bible text, while the **Aleppo Codex** and the **Leningrad Codex** are the oldest complete versions, written by the Masoretes in the 10th and 11th centuries, respectively.

## THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS

The Dead Sea Scrolls were first discovered by Bedouin in 1947. Over 80,000 scroll fragments that came to be known as the Dead Sea Scrolls were found in 11 caves near the Dead Sea site of Khirbet Qumran. The Dead Sea Scrolls date between 250 B.C. and 68 A.D. and represent the largest group of Second Temple Jewish literature ever discovered. The Dead Sea Scrolls contain two types of documents: fragments of the oldest Hebrew Bible texts and writings that—most scholars argue—describe the beliefs and practices of a community of Jews living and writing at the nearby settlement of Qumran.

## THE MASORETIC TEXT

The **Masorete** were groups of Jewish scribe-scholars who worked between the 6th and 10th centuries AD,<sup>1</sup> based primarily in early medieval Palestine in the cities of Tiberias and Jerusalem, as well as in Iraq (Babylonia).

## THE ALEPPO CODEX

The Aleppo Codex, the oldest Hebrew Bible that has survived to modern times, was created by scribes called Masoretes in Tiberias, Israel around 930 A.D. As such, the Aleppo Codex is considered to be the most authoritative copy of the Hebrew Bible. The Aleppo Codex is not complete, however, as almost 200 pages went missing between 1947 and 1957.

## THE LENINGRAD CODEX

While the Aleppo Codex is the oldest Hebrew Bible, the **Leningrad Codex** is the oldest complete Hebrew Bible. **The Leningrad Codex dates to 1008 C.E.** The scribe who penned the Leningrad Codex actually identified himself in two colophons (an inscription containing the title, the scribe's or printer's name, and the date and place of composition) at the beginning and end of the text as Samuel ben Jacob, or Samuel son of Jacob. The colophons also identify the place writ-

ten (Cairo), the person who commissioned it (Mevorak son of Nathaniel) as well as further sale and donation details.

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## THE SEPTUAGINT OR GREEK OLD TESTAMENT

The Septuagint was produced by Greek speaking Jews in Alexandria, Egypt. How did that come about? The remote reason lies with Alexander of Macedon. After his father was killed, in 336 BC, Alexander became king. He wished to expand his country and set about conquering his neighbors, particularly the Persians. He soon had created the biggest empire certainly in that part of the world. Jerusalem was taken by Alexander in 333BC. The lands conquered by Alexander became a world where the Greek language became very widespread. In 331 Alexander founded the city of Alexandria. After his death, Alexander's empire was divided by his Generals. One was Ptolemy who took Egypt, Palestine, Cilicia, Petra and Cyprus. This became the Ptolemaic Dynasty. This was a Greek speaking dynasty. Ptolemy, according to Josephus, took 120,000 Jews to the new city of Alexandria. Many came willingly. It was this Greek speaking community of Jews who produced the Greek translation of the Jewish scriptures. The book we know as the Septuagint.

As the translation progressed, the canon of the Greek Bible expanded. The Hebrew Bible, also called the Tanakh, has three parts: the Torah (law), the Nevi'im (prophets), and the Ketuvim (writings). The Septuagint has four: law, history, poetry, and prophets. The books of the Apocrypha (or Deuterocanonical) books were inserted at appropriate locations.

These copies of the Septuagint include books known as deuterocanon (derived from the Greek words for "second canon"), books not included in the Jewish canon.<sup>[33][34]</sup> These books are estimated to have been written between 200 BC and 50 AD.

Among them are the first two books of Maccabees; Tobit; Judith; the Wisdom of Solomon; Sirach; Baruch (including the Letter of Jeremiah), and additions to Esther and Daniel. The Septuagint version of some books, such as Daniel and Esther, are longer than those in the Masoretic Text. The Septuagint Book of Jeremiah is shorter than the Masoretic Text. The Psalms of Solomon, 3 Maccabees, 4 Maccabees, the Epistle of Jeremiah, the Book of Odes, the Prayer of Manasseh and Psalm 151 are included in some copies of the Septuagint.

The Septuagint became synonymous with the Greek Old Testament, a Christian canon incorporating the books of the Hebrew canon with additional texts. Although the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches include most of the books in the Septuagint in their canons, Protestant churches usually do not. After the Protestant Reformation, many Protestant Bibles began to follow the Jewish canon and exclude the additional texts (which came to be called the Apocrypha) as noncanonical.<sup>[38][39][40]</sup> The Apocrypha are included under a separate heading in the King James version of the Bible.

## THE BOOKS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis	450	} Tetrateuch	} Pentateuch	} THE LAW
Exodus	550			
Leviticus	550			
Numbers	550			
Deuteronomy	520	} Deuteronomistic: History of Israel		
Joshua	550	} Former Prophets	} THE PROPHETS	
Judges	450			
Samuel (2)	520			
Kings (2)	550			
Isaiah	500	} Major Prophets		
Jeremiah	560			
Ezekiel	538			
Hosea	715	} Minor Prophets		
Joel	375?			
Amos	750			
Obadiah	530?			
Jonah	450(300)			
Micah	538			
Nahum	615			
Habakkuk	600			
Zephaniah	535			
Haggai	520			
Zechariah	300			
Malachi	450			
Daniel	165	} THE WRITINGS		
Ruth	450			
Jonah	450			
Chronicles (2)	400		} History of the Chronicler	
Ezra	400			
Nehemiah	400			
Ester	350			
Job	450?		} Wisdom Literature	
Psalms	400			
Proverbs	450(300)			
Ecclesiastes	275			
Song of Solomon	450(250)			
Lamentations	587			
Tobias	300		} Deutero-Canonical (Not in the present Jewish Bible)	
Judith	100			
Wisdom	50			
Sirach	125			
Baruch	100			
Maccabees	100, 120			

\*Note that all dates given are approximate only - no definite dates can be given

## **USE BY CHRISTIANS**

The Septuagint was also a source of the Old Testament for early Christians during the first few centuries AD. Many early Christians spoke and read Greek, thus they relied on the Septuagint translation for most of their understanding of the Old Testament. The New Testament writers also relied heavily on the Septuagint, as a majority of Old Testament quotes cited in the New Testament are quoted directly from the Septuagint (others are quoted from the Hebrew texts). Greek church fathers are also known to have quoted from the Septuagint. Even today, the Eastern Orthodox Church relies on the Septuagint for its Old Testament teachings. Some modern Bible translations also use the Septuagint along side Hebrew manuscripts as their source text.

## **ST. JEROME AND THE VULGATE BIBLE**

Jerome began his work, at the request of Pope Damasus in 382. His translation of the Old Testament was based on the Hebrew text (Masoretic Text) available in c. 385 AD. He also used existing Aramaic texts.

The New Testament was taken from older Latin versions, which may have been slightly revised by Jerome. Certain other books found in the Septuagint—the Apocrypha for Protestants and Jews; the deuterocanonical books for Roman Catholics—were included from older versions. From the mid-6th century a complete Bible with all the separate books bound in a single cover was commonly used. A Codex is precursor of the books we use today. It contained sheets or single pages bound together. Some were made of velum or paper. Prior to use or the Codices, scrolls were used.

## **THE NEW TESTAMENT**

During the course of the second century most churches came to possess and acknowledge a canon which included the present four Gospels, the Acts, thirteen letters of Paul, I Peter, and I John. Seven books still lacked general recognition; Hebrews, James, II Peter, II and III John, Jude, and Revelation. On the other hand, certain other Christian writings, such as the first letter of Clement, the letter of Barnabas, the Shepherd of Hermas, and the Didache, otherwise known as the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, were accepted as scriptural by several ecclesiastical writers, though rejected by the majority.

During the third century and part of the fourth century there was a sifting of the disputed books; certain of them came to be acknowledged as canonical and others as apocryphal.

Among the church fathers who made a careful study of the usage throughout the church was Eusebius of Caesarea, who quotes in his Ecclesiastical History the pronouncements of earlier writers concerning the limits of the canon.

After Eusebius' time (about A.D. 325) the fluctuations in the canon are very slight.

**In the East, Athanasius was the first to name (in his Festal Letter for A.D. 367) exactly the twenty-seven books of the New Testament as exclusively canonical. In the West, at the African synods of Hippo Regius (A.D. 393) and Carthage (A.D. 397 and 419) the twenty-seven books of the New Testament were accepted.** Augustine supported this canon, which through the Latin Vulgate translation of Jerome soon came into vogue through the Western church. Though in the East some continued to have doubts about the canonicity of the book of Revelation, eventually the canon of most of the Eastern churches came to be identified with that of the Western church.

**The Muratorian Canon** (170 AD) Contains all the NT books except Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter. This is possibly the earliest list of the NT books. From the Bobbio Monastery. It was discovered in the Ambrosian Library in Milan by Father Ludovico Antonio Muratori (1672–1750), the most famous Italian historian of his generation, and published in 1740.<sup>[2]</sup>

**The Codex Sinaiticus** came to the attention of scholars in the 19th century at Saint Catherine's Monastery in the Sinai Peninsula, with further material discovered in the 20th and 21st centuries. Although parts of the codex are scattered across four libraries around the world, most of the manuscript is held today in the British Library in London, where it is on public display.<sup>[3][4]</sup> Since its discovery, study of the Codex Sinaiticus has proven to be useful to scholars for critical studies of biblical text.

**The Codex Alexandrinus** is a fifth-century Christian manuscript of a Greek Bible,<sup>[n 1]</sup> containing the majority of the Greek Old Testament and the Greek New Testament.<sup>[1]</sup> It is one of the four Great uncial codices. Along with the Codex Sinaiticus and the Vaticanus, it is one of the earliest and most complete manuscripts of the Bible. It derives its name from Alexandria where it resided for a number of years before it was brought by the Eastern Orthodox Patriarch Cyril Lucaris from Alexandria to Constantinople.<sup>[5]</sup> Then it was given to Charles I of England in the 17th century.

**The Codex Vaticanus** The Codex is named after its place of conservation in the Vatican Library, where it has been kept since at least the 15th century.<sup>[2]</sup> It is written on 759 leaves of vellum in uncial letters and has been dated palaeographically to the 4th century.<sup>[3][4]</sup>

## WELL KNOWN “TRANSLATIONS” IN ENGLISH

These translations can be found in various editions

### Five Best Selling Bibles

1. New International Version (NIV) 1984- 2011
2. New Living Translation (NLT) –1996—2007
3. King James Version (KJV) 1611
4. Christian Standard Bible (CSB) Revised Holman Standard 2017
5. English Standard Version (ESV) 2001 Based on RSV text

The Wycliffe Bible 1382-1385 A group of translations in Middle English

The Tyndale Bible 1520-1530

The Douay Rheims Version (DRB) 1562—1609-1610

Young’s Literal Translation (YLT) 1862 concordance

American Standard Version 1901

### **The Revised Standard Version (RSV) 1951**

Amplified Bible (AMP) 1965 revised Contemporary English Version (CEV) 2000

Jerusalem Bible (NJB) 1966 Catholic

The New American Bible (NAB) 1970 Catholic

New American Standard Bible (NASB) 1971-1995

Good News Bible (GNT) 1976

### **The New King James Version 1979-1982**

New Jewish Publication Society of America Version (NJPS) 1985

New Revised Version (NRSV) 1989

The Message (MSG) – This is a commentary, not a Bible. 1993-2002

Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB) 1994-2000

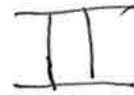
God’s Word (GW) 1995

Standard Common English Bible (CEB) – Released in 2011

New English Translation (NET) 2017

### **The Orthodox Study bible (OSB) 2008 (Septuagint OT and NKJ NT)**

# WHERE DID THE BIBLE COME FROM?



BIBLIA means books, i.e, plural. The Bible is an assembly of “books”. We classify them as the books of Old Testament and those of the New Testament. The question of their origin is quite complicated. By the time of St. Jerome in the fourth century the two testaments began to appear as one book. He had been asked to make a new Latin translation by pope Damasus. Let's begin with the current editions available to us.

## TWO OLD TESTAMENTS?

I am sure that you are aware that all do not agree as to the exact number of books. There is general agreement about the 27 books of the New Testament. The problem has to do with an extra seven books that are known as the deuterocanonical or apocryphal books which are included in the Old Testament. The Jews do not include them in their bible. In bibles printed by Protestant groups, you will find that these books are omitted. Some include them in a separate section. Catholic bibles include them. Our Orthodox Study bible includes them. They are part of our bible.

The reason for the difference is because two versions of the Old Testament have come down to us. One is the Hebrew OT or as it is known, the Massoretic Text. The other is the Greek translation of the Bible which was produced in Egypt several centuries before Christ. This is known as the *Septuagint*.

The Septuagint was produced for the many Jews who moved to Alexandria in Egypt after Alexander the Great conquered Jerusalem in 333. BC. Greek became a widely spoken language.

When the New Testament was written in the first century, Greek was so widely spoken that the Epistles and Gospels were written in Greek; and when they quoted the Old Testament, most of the citations were taken from the Septuagint.

## EXAMPLES FROM TEXTS...CITE from sheet

The Jewish community effectively rejected the Septuagint. One of the reasons was because the Septuagint translation was “friendlier” to the Christian understanding of the prophecies than the Hebrew text. One example is the difference between *Maiden* and *Virgin* in the prophecy of Isaiah.



Western or Latin speaking Christians used the translation made by St. Jerome. He did not reject the seven extra books, but he used the Hebrew Bible for his translation. Western Christians, Catholic and Protestant have followed Jerome. Their bible is based on the Hebrew Text. Eastern Christians, although not rejecting the Hebrew text, preferred the Septuagint or Greek bible with the extra books.

At the time of the Reformation in the 16th century, Protestants chose the Hebrew text without the extra seven books. The Catholic Council of Trent officially accepted the deuterocanonical books.

### **WHICH IS BETTER THE HEBREW OR THE GREEK TEXT?**

One might suspect that the Hebrew text would be more accurate than the Septuagint, being the original language. There is a problem here. The present Hebrew translation is far younger than the Septuagint. The two oldest copies of the Hebrew Bible are the **Aleppo Codex and the Leningrad**. Both date from the tenth century.

### **THE PLOT THICKENS**

In 1947 what we call the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered. Among the documents found were very old copies of Old Testament books, written in Hebrew. When compared with the current Hebrew texts and the Septuagint it was found that these ancient documents often were closer to the Septuagint than the 10th century Hebrew Texts.

### **BACK TO THE QUESTION**

The discussion about these two texts is very important, but it does not really answer the question 'where does the bible come from'. The New Testament is much younger than the books of the Old Testament and we may have better evidence about who and when it was written.

As we read through the books of the OT. We learn about the history of the Jews. It is only by having an idea of their history that can hope to know the origins of their books.

The history of the Jews begins with Abraham. About 18 hundred years before Christ, God revealed Himself to Abraham. He entered into a covenant with Abraham promising him that he would have many descendants. The story continues with the births of Isaac and Jacob and the 12 sons of Jacob who will be the fathers of the 12 tribes of Israel. The story continues with the betrayal of Joseph who ends up a slave in Egypt and who later become a very important government official. Then follows the Exodus under Moses and the events in the Sinai desert where Moses receives the Ten Commandments. After this they enter the promised land under the leadership of Joshua.

They first live in the promised land under the leadership first of Judges and later Kings, the most famous of whom were David and Solomon. After Solomon the nation is divided into two kingdoms, Juda and Israel. Both are conquered by foreigners. The remnant of Juda is taken captive to Babylon in 587 BC.

In 539 the Persians permit their return to Jerusalem. Something very important takes place. As we read in the book of Nehemiah, the priest/scribe **Ezra** gathers the people together and reads to them the Torah.

The people promised to live by the Torah. Scholars believe that it was about this time that the sacred writing were assembled. They became a people of the book.

### SO WHEN WERE THE BOOKS WITTEN?

That is a very good question. We can date approximately when certain events occurred, from 1800 BC down to Christ. How were the memories of those events handed down?

The stories of the Patriarchs would have been passed down orally from generation to generation. We know when the prophets lived. They probably had disciples who recorded their prophecies. The Scribes were important in passing down written records. But we cannot date the books with accuracy.

### MOSES, DAVID AND SOLOMON

Historically people believed that Moses wrote the first five books, or Pentateuch; David wrote the Psalms and Solomon wrote the Wisdom books. Today when we speak of a person being the author of a book, we mean that they actually wrote the book. Authorship had a broader meaning in the ancient world. Even in the time of the church fathers, books were attributed to famous men. It is, in my opinion, very likely that David composed Psalms, at least some. But other refer to events that happened after David's death. Moses might have written some things in the Torah, but it is not likely he wrote of his own death. Solomon was regarded as the wisest of kings so we should not be surprised that the Proverbs and Wisdom literature was ascribed to him. But there were more writers involved.

### HOW TO READ THE BIBLE

If we compare the Old and New Testaments to two other religious books, namely, **the Quran of the Moslems, and the Book of Mormon**, there is one very important difference. The Moslems and the Mormons believe that their sacred book came from God. Although we believe that the Scriptures are inspired by God, we also know that there were human hands involved.

### IS THE BIBLE A HUMAN DOCUMENT OR DIVINE

### HERE IS A WAY OF LOOKING AT IT.

At the Council of Chalcedon in 451, the church insisted that Jesus was truly divine and also truly human. These two natures were united in One Person.

We might compare the Bible to Christ, who is the True Word of God. There is the divine element in the Bible—inspired by God—but there is also the human element. There were human authors. These authors used human language to write it. It was written a specific times in human history. These things must be taken into consideration when we try to understand the sacred text. The book of Mormon and the Quran are seen as totally divine books. The point here for us is that we should not read the scriptures in the way Moslems and Mormons read their books. Unfortunately that does happen.

The Old Testament arises from the history of the Jews. The oldest part most likely came down as oral sagas which were told from generation to generation. One example: On the morning after his wedding, Jacob finds himself married to the wrong woman, after working for his father in law for seven years. That was a story worth telling.

When did they begin to write down what we call the books of the Bible? That is difficult to say with accuracy. In the time of the Kings, there were court records that existed that could be used. But what is written in the Bible about the Kings was a religious evaluation of the king and not simply record of his reign. Some of the kings who we know from other sources were very important people may only get a few lines in the bible. I believe that the prophets had disciples who copied their prophecies.

But there is more to the OT than the historical books and the prophets.

If you search the internet to find out when the books were written you will find that some scholars believe than they were written between 500 and 400 BC. I think that is an over simplification.

## **THE NEW TESTAMENT**

The 27 Books of the New Testament were written between about 50AD to 100AD. Paul's Epistles are the oldest, the Gospels come later. There are always people who challenge the authorship of the NT books. It seems likely that Paul did not write the Epistle to the Hebrews, but I am not going to argue about the rest. I accept St Lukes authorship of his Gospel and the Book of the Acts of the Apostles. I also accept the authorship of St. John for His Gospel, his epistles and the Book of Revelation.

The acceptance of these books began with the Gospels and St Pauls letters. By the mid second century most of the 27 were accepted. However, the third century Codex Sinaiticus from about 350 AD, contains two extra books, the Epistle of Barnabas and the Shepard of Hermas. Athanasius of Alexandria lists the 27 NT books in 367AD.

## **GOD DECIDED WHAT BOOK WENT INTO THE BIBLE....????**

As Orthodox we believe that the church has been guided by the Holy Spirit since Pentecost. We believe that the Bible is inspired. But we cannot dismiss the role of the church in forming the bible. If dismiss the role of the church and insist that it was entirely the work of God, they we end up seeing the church as a totally human institution.