

THE BIBLE: COMPOSITION, LANGUAGES & DATING

How many books make up the Bible?

- ❖ The Roman Catholic Church recognizes 73 books – 46 Old Testament and 27 New Testament – as part of the **Canon**. A canonical book refers to one that the Church acknowledges as belonging to its list of sacred books, as inspired by God, and as having a regulating (rule) value for faith and morals. *“God is the author of sacred Scripture because he inspired its human authors; he acts in them and by means of them. He thus gives assurance that their writings teach without error his saving truth.”* –DV, n. 11.
- ❖ Most Protestant traditions only regard 39 books of the Old Testament as inspired – the difference centers on *Tobit, Judith, 1-2 Maccabees, the Book of Wisdom, Sirach, Baruch*, and parts of *Esther* and *Daniel*.

Who wrote the Bible?

- ❖ *“Holy Mother Church, relying on the belief of the apostles, hold that the books of both the Old and New Testament in their entirety, with all their parts, are sacred and canonical, because, having been written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn. 20:31; 2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:19-21; 3:15-16) they have God as their author and have been handed on to the Church herself. In composing the sacred books, God chose men and while employed by him they made use of their powers and abilities, so that with Him acting in them and through them, as true authors, consigned to writing everything and only those things which He wanted.”* - DV, n. 11

What were the original languages of the Scriptures?

- ❖ Most books of the Old Testament were originally written in Hebrew, with some notable exceptions – 7 books were originally written partly or entirely in Greek (i.e. *The Book of Wisdom, Sirach*; parts of *Daniel* and *Esther*). In addition, although some books may have been originally composed in Hebrew, they have only been preserved and handed on in their Greek form.
- ❖ As Jews increasingly dispersed throughout the Mediterranean world, it became necessary to translate all these scriptures into *Greek*, which was the lingua franca of the Mediterranean world. Thus, approximately 400 BC, a Greek language version of the scriptures was created - the **Septuagint** (the Greek word for “seventy.”) This is the version of the Old Testament most frequently quoted in the New Testament – especially St. Paul.
- ❖ All the books of the New Testament were originally written in *Greek*. The only non-Greek original – an *Aramaic* or *Hebrew* text of St. Matthew’s Gospel – has not survived. Certain words spoken by Jesus in Aramaic were intentionally never translated into Greek, in order to preserve their theological impact (i.e. ‘Abba’-Father).

- ❖ The original manuscripts of the New Testament were lost quite early on. Why? The papyrus on which they were written normally had a life span of not more than 200 years.
- ❖ The original texts were conserved in the form of copies, and very early on, more and more copies began to be made.

When was the Bible first translated into the vernacular (common language)?

- ❖ The first *complete* translation of the Bible into English is associated with John Wycliffe and dated ca. 1382-84. Up until that point, from the 9th century, there had been numerous translations of different books and sections into the *vernacular*.
- ❖ The Protestant Reformation of the 16th century produced a chain of translations that formed the backbone of the *King James Version*, published in 1611.
- ❖ The Council of Trent (1545-1563) insisted that the *Vulgate* (vulgata - "common") be considered the authentic edition for public reading, disputations, sermons, and explanations. The Vulgate was a Latin translation of the Bible completed by St. Jerome at Rome in 383-384. Up until the *Revised Standard Version (1966)*, all Catholic translations into the vernacular were from the Vulgate.
- ❖ In 1943, Pope Pius XII modified this stance, and encouraged vernacular translations from the original languages. The Vulgate remains the "official" translation of the Church.
- ❖ The Second Vatican Council *Constitution on Divine Revelation* – "Dei Verbum" - called for the Bible to be translated *from the original languages* and, where feasible, with the cooperation of non-Catholics.
- ❖ In recent translations, it is common for cooperation in scholarship between Protestant and Catholic scholars (i.e. New American Bible – 1987 Version).

Dates of Composition of New Testament Texts

Gospels

- **Mark – late 60's AD**
- **Matthew – early 80's AD**
- **Luke – 80-85 AD**
- **John - 90's up to 100+ AD**

Pauline Corpus

- **1 and 2 Thessalonians – early 50's AD**
- **1 and 2 Corinthians; Romans, Philipians, Philemon – mid/late 50's AD**
- **Colossians, Ephesians – early 60's AD**
- **Titus, 1 and 2 Timothy – mid 60's AD**

Catholic Epistles

- **1 Peter** – 64 or 70's-80's AD
- **James** – 62 or 70's-80's AD
- **Jude** - 70' s-90
- **1, 2, 3 John** – 90's
- **2 Peter** - 100-150

Other Writings

- **Acts of the Apostles** – 80's
- **Hebrews** – 60's or 70' s-80
- **Revelation** - 90's

Importance of the Old Testament

“Christians venerate the Old Testament as true Word of God. The Church has always vigorously opposed the idea of rejecting the Old Testament under the pretext that the New has rendered it void (Marcionism).” –**CCC, n. 123**

“These books, therefore, written under divine inspiration, remain permanently valuable.” – **Dei Verbum (2nd Vatican Council) n. 15**

Importance of the New Testament

“The word of God, which is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe (Rom. 1:16), is set forth and shows its power in a most excellent way in the writings of the New Testament.” – **DV, n. 17**

“It is common knowledge that among all the Scriptures, even those of the New Testament, the Gospels have a special pre-eminence, and rightly so, for they are the principal witness of the life and teaching of the incarnate Word, our Savior.” – **DV, n. 18**

“Besides the four gospels, the canon of the New Testament also contains the Epistles of St. Paul and other apostolic writings, composed under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. In these writings, by the wise plan of God, those matters which concern Christ the Lord are confirmed, His true teaching is more and more fully stated, the saving power of the divine work of Christ is preached, the story is told of the beginnings of the Church and her marvelous growth, and her glorious fulfillment is foretold.” – **DV, n. 20**

Unity of Both Testaments

“The New Testament has to be read in light of the Old. Early Christian catechesis made constant use of the Old Testament. As an old saying put it, the New Testament lies hidden in the Old and the Old Testament is unveiled in the New.” (Saint Augustine) – **CCC, n. 129; DV, n. 16**

“The unity of the two Testaments proceeds from the unity of God’s plan and his Revelation. The Old Testament prepares for the New and the New Testament fulfills the Old; the two shed light on each other, both are true Word of God.” – **CCC, n. 140**