

How the Bible Came to Us

God did not directly inspire each word, but allowed the many and diverse writers over fifteen centuries to express concepts in their own words, reflecting their understanding, background, as well as the culture and political situation of their time. Using a range of literary types (genres), they compiled legal precepts and histories, recorded their joys, sorrows, frustrations, and praises addressed to God, recounted stories, wrote epic poetry, and verbalized dramatic symbolic dreams and visions. New Testament writers interpreted the Old Testament Scriptures in light of the life of Jesus and their own experiences.

Jesus didn't leave any written records of his teachings and his disciples passed them on by word of mouth as they taught and preached. It was several decades after Jesus' death, when the disciples realized that he was not returning soon. Therefore, they started writing down Jesus' teachings as they understood and remembered them. By that time, due to limitations of oral transmission and human memory, certain truths would have become distorted.

In the Old Testament, many events were recorded long after the time they are said to have occurred. Some of the stories and events never happened in the way they are described. Tradition, imperfect memory, and imagination (a big factor in the Hebrew culture and communication), all played a part in formulating the texts as we now have them. They still contain truths and spiritual lessons for us, but they are not all historically accurate.

Further, in the numerous hand-copying and recopying of manuscripts, original information was left out and/or other things not in accord with the original truths were inserted. In the process, many of the truths that Jesus had taught became veiled through reinterpretation, or simply lost. Even in the epistles of Paul, which theologians claim to be the earliest and closest to the time of Jesus and thus to have more authenticity than the gospels or other epistles, many changes were made between the times of their writing and when they became a part of the biblical record.

Within one hundred and fifty years, much Jesus' spiritual teachings had become lost to those reproducing the original writings. This happened because these writers had become less spiritual, and focused more on building the church as an institution than on preserving and rightly developing the great spiritual truths that Jesus brought. The moral precepts became dominant in their writings as they were more easily understood than Jesus' teaching regarding soul development and the new birth (being born again or born from above) which parallels the Old

Testament prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel of the new heart that would change the relationship between an individual and God.

Even in the canonization process, there were bitter disputes among the Christian fathers during the various Church Councils in the time of Emperor Constantine (fourth century AD) as to what should be accepted and what should be rejected from the emerging "sacred text". Many manuscripts were rejected because they did not agree with what the church officials – who disagreed among themselves – in their human knowledge and reason accepted as God's Word.

Because of the many changes to the original texts, that themselves were written quite some time after the events they describe, the authenticity of the Bible cannot be established as the literal Word of God – though it certainly contains inspiration. The teaching about God's plan of salvation through Jesus' sacrifice was influenced by Judaism. It substitutes Jesus' sacrifice for animal sacrifices and projects the image of God as understood by the ancient Hebrews onto the Father of all humanity. The Hebrew God of the Old Testament, to be satisfactorily worshipped, demanded blood, and so the God, that Jesus was said to have declared became understood as one who demanded the sacrificial blood of His dearly beloved son. On closer look, this teaching is in contradiction to the teaching about the new birth/new heart running as a thread through the New Testament.

Despite the fact that the present biblical writings contain things which the original authors did not write, and are not 100% accurate, the Bible contains many truths, and enough to enable humans to reach the Kingdom of Heaven. There is much that shows humans how to attain moral perfection and the heart transformation by the Holy Spirit. It is an undisputable fact that through the message of the Bible, people from all levels of society in various parts of the world have been led from darkness to light, received new life, and become transformed.