



## How Did the Bible Come to Be?

### NOTES FROM THE AUTHOR

History is basic for the Judeo-Christian development of religion, but the beginning of the Old Testament is set in what we have to call “prehistory,” Genesis 1-11. It was a long time before the Pentateuch reached written form. You should be very careful to emphasize that the process by which the stories in the Bible moved from oral tradition to written record must be faced to prevent us from thinking of the Bible as a totality that at some point just appeared. This is not an easy session, but it is very important for understanding the nature of the book called the Bible.

Setting the Old Testament in datable history is difficult. You probably should treat the matter of “B.C.” (before Christ) and “BCE” (before the Common Era). Some older editions of the KJV present the date of creation as 4004 B.C. Figuring from the ages assigned to early people (like Methuselah, 969!) would bring the flood to the time that modern reckoning assigns to Abraham. The Exodus is now reckoned to have occurred during the reign of Pharaoh Rameses II, 1290-1224 B.C. Though scholars differ somewhat on some details of chronology, it is important to anchor the Bible in approximate dates (see Appendix C).

The exile will appear again in the next session, and the Septuagint in Session Five, but you cannot avoid the matter here. It offers entry to the apocrypha, and it builds part of a foundation for understanding text history. Note that the Law is a firm collection in both the Hebrew and Greek texts.

The history of the New Testament is not so complicated. You will find the second-century heretic Marcion useful in understanding the development of the canon. His insistence on rejecting the Old Testament and Christian writings that he considered too Jewish forced other Christians to decide which Scriptures were to be accepted.

## **SESSION PLANS**

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### ***Learning Objectives***

This session is intended to enable participants to:

1. Continue to get to know each other, both by sight and by name.
2. Name the major categories of the Hebrew Bible and some of the books in each category.
3. Define “canon” and describe how the present-day Bible was formed.
4. Formulate working definitions of other terms in the Word List.

### ***Resources You May Need***

Name tags and small markers

Chalk and a chalkboard

Newsprint, markers, and masking tape

Copies of Resource Sheet No. 2

Copies of the Table of Contents of the Apocrypha

### ***Leadership Strategy***

#### SETTING THE STAGE

1. Provide name tags for the participants. Don't forget to wear one yourself!
2. Welcome any new people to the group and invite them to introduce themselves and to share an early memory about the Bible or to name a favorite Bible reading.
3. Introduce the person who will lead the opening prayer or lead the prayer yourself.

**or**

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet No. 2 and introduce the person who will lead the responsive reading from Psalm 118.

## EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURE

1. Post the Word List where everyone can see it and explain how you will be using it in this session.
2. Invite group members to turn to Appendix A in the *Resource Book*, "Varieties of the Old Testament Canon." Call attention to the different categories under which books are grouped in the Protestant Old Testament (the left column in Appendix A) and the Hebrew Bible (the center column).

Point out that the names of the first five books of the Hebrew Bible (the Torah) are the first words of the books. Arias in operas are often named this way, and hymnals often title hymns in this fashion.

Note also that several books (notably Ruth, Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Lamentations, and Daniel) appear in different places in the two lists. And, a few books have different names. Song of Solomon in the Protestant Old Testament is Song of Songs in the Hebrew Bible. Ecclesiastes in the left column is the book named Qoheleth in the middle column.

**and**

Distribute copies of the Table of Contents of the Apocrypha to the group. Then ask participants to turn to the section of the *Resource Book* entitled "The Greek Old Testament and the Canon." Summarize Dr. Walther's comments on the development of the Septuagint and the canon of the Hebrew Bible.

Invite group members to locate the apocryphal books in the right hand column of Appendix A. Ask why different groups of people might have included different books in their canon. Note that the Apocrypha was often included in early versions of the Christian Bible. The Protestant Reformers removed these books from their list of authoritative Scriptures. Ask the group why the Reformers might have done this. (Recall that the Hebrew Bible does not include these books.) Take a survey of the group to see how many have Bibles containing the Apocrypha. Where is this section located in their Bibles?

3. The first five books in the Hebrew Bible are called the Torah. This word is translated in various ways (law, instruction, teaching). Divide the group into clusters of five to seven people and assign each cluster one or two of the Scripture references below. The clusters are to discuss how Torah is used or understood in their passage(s) and report their findings to the group.

**or**

Ask the group members to turn to pages 15-16 in their *Resource Books*. Lead a discussion on the formation of the canon, using questions such as these:

- Who decided what would be included in the Old Testament? When was the decision made?
- Who decided what would be included in the New Testament? What were the criteria? When was the decision made?
- Should we accept other books into the canon today? If so, what criteria would you suggest for evaluating the additions?

### CLOSING

1. Review definitions of any terms in the Word List not discussed during the session.
2. Close the session with a prayer, praying for your church as a place where the Bible is studied and people grow in their faith.

**or**

If you did not use the responsive reading from Psalm 118 on Resource Sheet No. 2 at the beginning of the session, read it now.

## **Looking Ahead**

1. If you want group members to prepare definitions of the terms in the Word List for the next session, make the assignments now.
2. Ask a member of the group to lead a prayer or the responsive reading from Hebrews 11-12 on Resource Sheet No. 3 to open the next session.
3. For Activity #2 in Exploring the Scripture, recruit three people to present brief summaries of the major historical periods covered in the first three sections in Chapter Three of the *Resource Book*.

## A Responsive Reading from Psalm 118

Leader: O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;

**Group: His steadfast love endures forever!**

Leader: Let Israel say,

**Group: "His steadfast love endures forever!"**

Leader: Let those who fear the LORD say,

**Group: "His steadfast love endures forever!"**

Leader: Out of my distress I called on the LORD;

**Group: The LORD answered me and set me in a broad place.**

Leader: With the LORD on my side I do not fear.

**Group: What can mortals do to me?**

Leader: It is better to take refuge in the LORD

**Group: Than to put confidence in mortals.**

Leader: Open to me the gates of righteousness,

**Group: That I may enter through them and give thanks to the LORD.**

Leader: I thank you that you have answered me

**Group: And have become my salvation.**

Leader: This is the LORD's doing;

**Group: It is marvelous in our eyes.**

Leader: This is the day that the LORD has made;

**Group: Let us rejoice and be glad in it.**

Leader: O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;

**Group: His steadfast love endures forever!**

Leader: Let us pray... Each person may offer silent or spoken prayers.

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Leader: Let us give thanks to the LORD.

**Group: His steadfast love endures forever!**