

How God Delivered His Word and Preserved It for Us

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake from multiple sources)

Introduction:

- A. The greatest majority of believers accept without question the fact that God gave us His word and that it is authentic and authoritative, without ever considering or asking about how it was given, transmitted to, and preserved for us. This will work out well for them until someone asks them why.
 - 1. 1Peter 3:15 - Giving a defense for the faith in us
 - 2. Some naively believe that God inspired the Bible writers who then wrote it down in King James English in black leather bound Bibles.
 - 3. Some are afraid to look into the origins and preservation of the scriptures for fear that it may lead them to doubt. Although I am convinced that such as study will increase their faith in the power and providence of God.
- B. The purpose of this study is threefold:
 - 1. To study about how God revealed His word to humankind,
 - 2. To study about how God preserved and transmitted His word throughout the generations,
 - 3. To study about how to defend the origins, authenticity, and authority of the books of the Bible
- C. The Old Testament contains 39 books out of the 66 books of the Bible
 - 1. What is their history?
 - 2. How have they come down to us?
 - 3. How do we know that we have an accurate text?

"It is not possible for us to fix with exact precision the circumstances of the Bible's origin. We cannot go to a specific time and place and say that here the Bible had its birth. As through hundreds of years ancient literary works took shape in many forms, so also from century to century the many books of the Bible were coming into being separately and under varying conditions. ... But the Bible is more than an ordinary collection: it is a treasure-house of sacred books which has grown through the centuries until it has attained its present stature. And it is the firm belief of Christians that the Bible is honored today because in the past it grew under the favorable and directing influence of Him who is the author of all things." (How We Got the Bible, Lightfoot, Sweet Co., 1962, pg. 9)

I. REVEALING THE WORD OF GOD

For many years God communicated orally with the Patriarchs such as Adam, Noah, and Abraham. There came a time, however, in God's purpose when He wished for Divine revelation to be recorded in written form.

- A. Moses, who lived about 1500 BC, is the first person mentioned in the Bible as writing anything. His writings included the memorial to Amalek (Ex. 17:14), the Ten Commandments and 603 additional laws (Ex. 34:27-28), and the song in Deut. 32:1-43 (Deut. 31:22). The Bible supports the conclusion that Moses is the author of the first five books of the Bible, termed the Pentateuch
 - 1. Joshua 8:31; Judges 3:4; Mal. 4:4; Luke 24:44; John 7:19

- B. Other inspired writers added to this record of Divine revelations and historical events (Joshua 24:25-26; 1Sam. 10:25; Ecc. 1:1; Jer. 36:1-2)
- C. In this gradual way, the Old Testament scriptures finally came to be assembled in an accepted collection about the time of Ezra (400 BC).
- D. Josephus, writing in the first century, said that no book was added to the Hebrew Scriptures after the time of Malachi.
- E. Peter makes it clear that the Old Testament prophecies were not the work of mere man (2Peter 1:20-21). All of the books which we accept as part of the Old Testament pass the scholarly tests for genuineness, authenticity, and canonicity. No books are left out which O.T. scholars believe should be included. No books are included which scholars believe should be tossed out.
- F. Jesus and the New Testament writers quoted the Old Testament books. They would not have done so if they were not inspired and authoritative.
- G. The New Testament collection was also assembled in a gradual way over a shorter period of time (50-100 AD). These books were letters or records written by inspired men and addressed to different churches and individuals.
- H. From the first, these letters and records were distinctively authoritative, and thus they were received with respect and read in the public assemblies wherever Christians worshiped (1Thes. 5:27, Col. 4:16).

II. RECEIVING THE OLD TESTAMENT

- A. John 1:45 - But how was it received? Not the same as the New Testament
 - 1. In the New Testament, inspired teachers preached and revealed the word until the New Testament was complete - 2Thes. 2:13-15
 - 2. In the Old Testament, it was seldom written down for distribution until the 7th to the 4th centuries BC.
 - 3. It was mostly communicated by means of:
 - a. Going to hear the reading of the few books that were written,
 - b. By prophets who preached and taught by inspiration,
 - c. Or memorization by the scribes who would recite it
 - 4. Jer. 26:1-5; 1Sam. 3:1; Amos 8:11; Psalm 74:9
- B. Just as there were many preachers guided by the Holy Spirit, but only a few New Testament writers, so there were many more prophets who just preached by inspiration than those who wrote inspired OT books.
 - 1. Those named in the OT constitute a small fraction of the total number
- C. Who were the Old Testament Prophets?
 - 1. Hebrew: "nabi," from a root meaning "to bubble forth, as from a fountain," hence "to utter" - Psalm 45:1
 - 2. Nabi is the first and the most generally used for a prophet.
 - 3. In the time of Samuel another word, ro'eh, "seer," was used - 1Sam. 9:9
 - 4. Another word, hozeh, "seer," is used - 2Sam. 24:11
 - 5. In 1Chron. 29:29, all these three words are used: "Samuel the seer (ro'eh), Nathan the prophet (nabi'), Gad the seer" (hozeh).
 - 6. In Joshua 13:22 Balaam is called (Hebrew) a kosem "diviner," a word used primarily for a false prophet.

D. What did they do?

1. A prophet was a spokesman for God; he spoke in God's name and by His authority - Ex. 7:1
2. A prophet is the mouth by which God speaks to humankind
 - a. Jer. 1:9; Isa. 51:16
3. "The foretelling of future events was not a necessary but only an incidental part of the prophetic office. The great task assigned to the prophets whom God raised up among the people was to correct moral and religious abuses, to proclaim the great moral and religious truths delivered to them by God."
(<https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/Prophet.php4>)
4. But while the prophetic gift was exercised from the beginning, the prophetic order began with Samuel. Schools of the prophets were instituted for the training of prophets
 - a. 1Sam. 19:18-24; 2Kings 2:3, 15, 4:38
 - b. These schools continued until the close of the Old Testament.
 - c. These schools were established at Ramah, Bethel, Gilgal, Gibeah, and Jericho.
5. The "sons" or "disciples" of the prophets were young men (2Kings 5:22, 9:1, 4) who lived together at these different schools (4:38-41). These young men were brought up to exercise the office of prophet, to preach morality and honest worship of Jehovah, and work with the priesthood

III. WRITING THE OLD TESTAMENT

- A. Luke 24:44 - What is implied in Jesus' words?
 1. That the Pentateuch, Psalms, and Prophets are inspired of God
 2. That in order for all things to be fulfilled, the list of all things that must be fulfilled must be comprehensive and complete.
 3. That by the time Jesus said this, the copies of the OT in His day were a comprehensive and complete representation of God's inspired will during the dispensations of the patriarchs and Law of Moses.
 4. This is true regardless of:
 - a. The means they used in copying and transmitting the scriptures down through the centuries
 - b. Whether or not we know how it was done
 - c. Whether or not we have confidence in the process.
- B. Means of copying and transmitting the OT through the centuries
 1. The OT was not written down in its entirety until beginning in the 7th century BC, and the canon of the OT was not established until the 2nd century BC
 - a. Like the revelation of the NT that went through three stages: Oral only, oral and written, and written only, and the canon was not set until the 4th century AD...
 - b. So the OT went through a similar process, only more prolonged
 2. From Adam's day until near the end of Moses' life, it was oral only

- a. From Moses until the 7th century BC to the 4th century BC, it was oral and written, mostly oral
 - b. From the 7th century BC to the 4th century BC, it was written and oral, mostly written
 - c. Then in the 2nd century BC, it was compiled into a single collection of scrolls constituting the canon of the OT
- 3. In the earliest days, it was carved into stone, metal sheets, clay tablets, or wax boxes
 - a. After the Exodus, they began using papyrus, metal sheets, parchment, and vellum.
 - b. But it was primarily memorized and recited or re-revealed in each generation by the prophets

VI. RECORDING THE OLD TESTAMENT

A. We do not know exactly when writing was first invented. The oldest writing samples that still exist today date from around 3100 B.C. from Sumeria, a land between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in modern Iraq. Egyptian writings from about the same time have also survived. The earliest Hebrew writing is a school boy's writing exercise from the tenth century B.C. The student used a clay tablet to list the months of the year and their agricultural significance. It was found in the town of Gezer and is known as the Gezer calenda. Several other archaeological finds have produced examples of Hebrew writing from the eighth century B.C. onwards

The events that took place prior to Moses' birth in Exodus 1 would have come down to Moses, most probably in oral form. However, some written records, especially from the time of Abraham (about 1900 B.C.), could have been part of the resources apart from inspiration available to Moses. (At least five different writing systems were available to Abraham. He may well have been familiar with at least one of them.)

It might seem that oral transmission is not very reliable. However, people who cannot read or write, or who do very little reading or writing, depend on their memories much more than we do. The human mind is capable of memorizing a large amount of information without writing of any kind, as any child under the age of five demonstrates. Further, the first 11 chapters of Genesis seem to be designed to be memorized for later repetition. Certain patterns of speech, narrative organization, and even word counts can ensure that the story is remembered and passed on exactly as received. Hence, the task for Moses is very realistic, even without considering Divine revelation.

Thus, Moses received both oral and written accounts of the events recorded in Genesis 1 - Exodus 1. He may have been inspired to include these accounts, familiar to God's people, in his history of the Exodus and the Sinai wanderings, writing the books of Genesis through Deuteronomy. After the death of Moses, Joshua (or someone else) recorded Deuteronomy 34.

Over the next one thousand years the Holy Spirit moved people to write down the history of Israel, the poetry of its musicians, the proverbs of its wise men, and the messages of its prophets.

B. The writing prophets come on the scene immediately after Elijah and Elisha, and continue where their ministries left off. Their responsibility was not simply to write the books that bear their names, but were inspired to compile, synthesize, and structure

the older books that were in less cohesive and comprehensive forms. Their work resulted in the canon of Old Testament scripture that has been preserved by the Providence of God until the present.

C. The writing prophets are divided into four groups:

1. Prophets of Israel – Jonah, Amos, and Hosea
2. Prophets of Judah – Obadiah, Joel, Isaiah, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, and Habakkuk
3. Exilic Prophets – Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel
4. Post-exilic Prophets – Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi

D. The Meaning of Prophecy: The primary difficulty for most modern readers of the prophets stems from an inaccurate understanding of the words “prophet” and “prophecy.” The word prophet refers to one who tells forth (or proclaims), as well as one who foretells. But we often limit the meaning of prophecy to foretelling the future. It should be pointed out that less than 2% of Old Testament prophecy is Messianic. Less than 5% specifically concerns the New Covenant. And less than 1% concern events still future to us. The prophets did announce the future. But it was usually the immediate future of Israel, Judah, and the surrounding nations.

E. Historical Distance: Another matter that complicates our understanding the prophets is the problem of historical distance. By the very nature of things, we will have a harder time understanding the words of the prophets than the Israelites who heard those same words in person. We are far removed from the religious, historical, and cultural life of ancient Israel, and we simply have trouble putting the words of the prophets in their proper context.

F. The Spoken Nature of the Prophets: The spoken nature of their prophecies causes many of our difficulties in understanding. For example, of the many hundreds of prophets in ancient Israel in Old Testament times, only 16 were chosen to speak oracles that would be written down into books. We know that other prophets, such as Elijah and Elisha, played a very influential role in delivering God’s Word to His people and to other nations as well. But we know more about these prophets than we do of their actual words. What they did is described in far greater length than what they said, and when we are told what they said, it is placed very specifically and clearly in the context of the narratives in which they appear. Generally, in the narrative books of the Old Testament, we hear about prophets and very little from prophets. In the prophetic books, however, we hear from the prophets and very little about the prophets themselves.

G. Furthermore the prophetic books, especially the longer ones, are collections of spoken oracles, not always presented in their original chronological sequence, often without hints as to where one oracle ends and another begins, and often without hints as to their historical setting. On top of that, most of the oracles were spoken in poetry.

1. The Old Testament is given to us here in the Christian Dispensation for a purpose. That God would give it to us, puts His stamp of approval on it in the form it has been Providentially transmitted and preserved.
2. Rom. 15:3-4; Rev. 22:6-7, 18-19