

How God Delivered His Word and Preserved It for Us



**February 18, 2021 Thursday Indepth Bible Class of the
Trilacoochee church of Christ**

How God Delivered His Word and Preserved It for Us

- 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 (Peter 3:15).
- Some naively believe that God inspired the Bible writers who then wrote it down in King James English in black leather bound Bibles.
- Some are afraid to look into the origins and preservation of the scriptures for fear that it may lead them to doubt.

How God Delivered His Word and Preserved It for Us

- The purpose of this study is threefold:
 - To study about how God revealed His word to humankind,
 - To study about how God preserved and transmitted His word throughout the generations,
 - To study about how to defend the origins, authenticity, and authority of the books of the Bible

How God Delivered His Word and Preserved It for Us

- The Old Testament contains 39 of the 66 books of the Bible
 - How were they given?
 - How were they written down?
 - How do we know we have an accurate text?

How God Delivered His Word and Preserved It for Us

“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)

Revealing The Old Testament

- 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)
 - 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 (Joshua 8:31; Judges 3:4; Mal. 4:4; Luke 24:44; John 7:19)

Revealing The Old Testament

- 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)
- In this gradual way, the Old Testament scriptures finally came to be assembled in an accepted collection about the time of Ezra (400 BC).
- Josephus, writing in the first century, said that no book was added to the Hebrew scriptures after the time of Malachi.
- Peter makes it clear that the Old Testament prophecies were not the work of mere man (2Peter 1:20-21).

Revealing The Old Testament

- 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.
- Jesus and the New Testament writers quoted the Old Testament books. They would not have done so if they were not inspired and authoritative.
- The New Testament collection was also assembled in a gradual way over a shorter period of time (50-100 AD).
- 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).

Receiving The Old Testament

- John 1:45 - “Philip found Nathanael and said to him, We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote--Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”
- But how was it received? Not the same as the New Testament

Receiving The Old Testament

- In the New Testament, inspired teachers revealed, preached and wrote the word until it was complete
 - 2Thes. 2:13-15 - “But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, 14 to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. 15 Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle.”
- In the Old Testament, it was seldom written down for distribution until the 7th to the 4th centuries BC.

Receiving The Old Testament

- It was mostly communicated by means of:
 - Going to hear the reading of the few books that were written
 - By prophets who preached and taught by inspiration (primary means)
 - Or memorization by the scribes who would recite it to audiences

Receiving The Old Testament

- Jer. 26:1-5 - “In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, this word came from the LORD, saying, 2 Thus says the LORD: 'Stand in the court of the LORD'S house, and speak to all the cities of Judah, which come to worship in the LORD'S house, all the words that I command you to speak to them. Do not diminish a word. 3 'Perhaps everyone will listen and turn from his evil way, that I may relent concerning the calamity which I purpose to bring on them because of the evil of their doings.' 4 And you shall say to them, 'Thus says the LORD: If you will not listen to Me, to walk in My law which I have set before you, 5 to heed the words of My servants the prophets whom I sent to you, both rising up early and sending them (but you have not heeded)’”

Receiving The Old Testament

- 1Sam. 3:1 - “And the word of the LORD was rare in those days; there was no widespread revelation.”
- Amos 8:11 - “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord GOD, That I will send a famine on the land, Not a famine of bread, Nor a thirst for water, But of hearing the words of the LORD.”
- Psalm 74:9 - “We do not see our signs; There is no longer any prophet; Nor is there any among us who knows how long.”

Receiving The Old Testament

- 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.
- Those named in the OT constitute a small fraction of the total number.

Receiving The Old Testament

- What were the Old Testament Prophets?
 - Hebrew: “nabi,” from a root meaning “to bubble forth, as from a fountain, hence to utter” - Psalm 45:1. Nabi is the first and most generally used word for prophet.
 - In Samuel’s day, ro'eh - “seer,” was used - 1Sam. 9:9
 - Another word, hozeh, “seer,” was used - 2Sam. 24:11
 - In 1Chron. 29:29, all these three words are used: “Samuel the seer (ro'eh), Nathan the prophet (nabi'), Gad the seer” (hozeh).
 - In Joshua 13:22, Balaam is called (Hebrew) a kosem “diviner,” a word used primarily for a false prophet.

Receiving The Old Testament

- What did they do?
 - A prophet was a spokesman for God; he spoke in God's name and by His authority
 - Ex. 7:1 - “So the LORD said to Moses: See, I have made you as God to Pharaoh, and Aaron your brother shall be your prophet.”

Receiving The Old Testament

- A prophet is the mouth by which God speaks to humankind
 - Jer. 1:9 - “Then the LORD put forth His hand and touched my mouth, and the LORD said to me: Behold, I have put My words in your mouth.”
 - Isa. 51:16 - “And I have put My words in your mouth; I have covered you with the shadow of My hand, That I may plant the heavens, Lay the foundations of the earth, And say to Zion, 'You are My people.’”

Receiving The Old Testament

- “The foretelling of future events was not a primary 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 and to proclaim the great moral and religious truths as delivered to them by God.”

(<https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/Prophet.php4>)

Receiving The Old Testament

- 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
 - 2Kings 2:3, 15 - “Now the sons of the prophets who were at Bethel came out to Elisha, and said to him, Do you know that the LORD will take away your master from over you today? And he said, Yes, I know; keep silent! ... 15 Now when the sons of the prophets who were from Jericho saw him, they said, The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha. And they came to meet him, and bowed to the ground before him.”
 - 1Sam. 19:18-24

Receiving The Old Testament

- These schools of prophets continued until the close of the Old Testament. They were established at Ramah, Bethel, Gilgal, Gibeah, and Jericho.
- 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

Writing The Old Testament

- Luke 24:44 - “Then He said to them, These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.”

Writing The Old Testament

- What is implied by Jesus' words?
 - That the Pentateuch, Psalms, and Prophets are all inspired of God
 - That in order for all things to be fulfilled, the list of all things that must be fulfilled must be comprehensive and complete.
 - That by the time Jesus said this, the copies of the Old Testament in His day were a comprehensive and complete representation of God's inspired will revealed during the dispensations of the Patriarchs and Law of Moses.

Writing The Old Testament

- This is true regardless of:
 - The means they used in copying and transmitting the scriptures down through the centuries
 - Whether or not we know how it was done
 - Whether or not we have confidence in the process
- Because Jesus said so!

Writing The Old Testament

- The OT was not written down in its entirety until the 7th though the 4th century BC, and the OT canon was not established until the 2nd century BC
- As the revelation of the NT went through three stages: 1) Oral only, 2) oral and written, and 3) written only, and the canon was not set until the 4th century AD...
- So the OT went through a similar process, only more prolonged

Writing The Old Testament

- From Adam's day until near the end of Moses' life, it was oral only.
- From Moses until the 7th century BC, it was oral and written, mostly oral.
- From the 7th to the 4th century BC, it was written and oral, mostly written.
- Then in the 2nd century BC, it was compiled into a single collection of scrolls constituting the canon of the OT.

Writing The Old Testament

- In the earliest days it was carved into stone, clay tablets, and wax boxes.
- After the Exodus, they began using papyrus, metal sheets, parchment, and vellum.
- But more often than not, it was memorized and recited or re-revealed in each generation by the prophets

Recording The Old Testament

- We do not know exactly when writing was first invented
- It might seem to us that oral transmission is not very reliable
- 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.

Recording The Old Testament

- 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.

Recording The Old Testament

- The writing prophets are divided into four groups:
 - Prophets of Israel – Jonah, Amos, and Hosea
 - Prophets of Judah – Obadiah, Joel, Isaiah, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, and Habakkuk
 - Exilic Prophets – Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel
 - Post-exilic Prophets – Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi

Recording The Old Testament

- 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.

Recording The Old Testament

- 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.
- The Spoken Nature of the Prophets
 - 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.

Recording The Old Testament

- 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. In addition, most of the oracles were spoken in poetry.

Recording The Old Testament

- 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.
- Rom. 15:3-4 - “For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, ‘The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.’ 4 For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.”

Recording The Old Testament

- Rev. 22:6-7, 18-19 - “Then he said to me, These words are faithful and true. And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show His servants the things which must shortly take place. 7 Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book... For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; 19 and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.”

Recording The Old Testament

- We have examined:
 - Revealing the Word of God
 - Receiving the Old Testament
 - Writing the Old Testament
 - Recording the Old Testament
- Next class:
 - Preserving the Old Testament
 - Compiling the Old Testament
 - Naming the Old Testament Books
 - Brief Biographies of Old Testament Authors
- Future classes:
 - Revealing, Writing, and Preserving the New Testament
 - Evidences for the Origin and Authenticity of the Bible

