

HOW WE GOT THE BIBLE

MADE EASY



Two Testaments, One Story

The word *testament* means “agreement” or “covenant.” When someone dies, he or she leaves behind a last will and testament. This document spells out certain legally binding promises. In this sense, the Old Testament is a record of how the covenant and promises that God made with the Jewish patriarch Abraham unfolded (see Genesis 12) up until about four centuries before the time of Jesus.

What Christians refer to as “the Old Testament,” Jews call “the Tanakh.” *Tanakh* actually comes from an acronym (TNK) formed by the first letters of the three recognized sections of the Hebrew Bible: the Torah

(the five books of Moses), the Nevi'im (the eight books of the Prophets), and the Ketuvim (the eleven books of writings). Christians subdivide these same twenty-four books into thirty-nine books and put them in a different order. It's the same material, just presented in a different arrangement.

Christians further see the New Testament as a record of how Jesus of Nazareth revealed himself to be the



fully human and fully divine Son of God. The New Testament documents present Jesus as the Messiah, the great king and deliverer foretold by the Jewish prophets in the Tanakh. They see his life, death and resurrection as God's way of inaugurating a new covenant between God and all humanity (both Jews and non-Jews).

The Bible, then, is a single story—the written record of God's efforts to seek and save humanity. It has one consistent, overriding message: we humans will remain restless until we stop running from God, turn to him in faith, and find rest in the love and forgiveness of Christ Jesus. Observant readers marvel at the many ways the Old Testament foreshadows the events of the New Testament, at how it ingeniously points to the coming of Jesus. Christians believe the New Testament completes the story of the Old Testament.



What Tools Did Biblical Writers Use?

Writers today tap away on computer keyboards and store their work in the digital cloud. The ancients used slightly more primitive tools. Many settled for writing on stone, wet clay, even pottery. The biblical authors used reed pens and ink made from a concoction of gum (resin) and soot. They wrote on parchment and papyrus.

Parchment is animal skin from sheep, cattle, or goats that has been scraped, stretched thin, dried, and then cut into sheets. Fine, top-of-the-line parchment (usually made from calf skin) is called vellum. Parchment sheets were stitched together to form long rolls, called scrolls. Beginning in the late first or early second century and continuing through the Middle Ages, parchment sheets were also bound into primitive books called codices (singular: codex).

While the Old Testament writers and copyists preferred parchment, New Testament documents were



Artisan making papyrus paper

mostly written and copied on papyrus. The papyrus plant grows in marshy, wetland regions, like the delta of the Nile River in Egypt. Its stems were cut into thin strips and laid side by side. One layer was laid at right angles to and

on top of another, then pressed tightly and dried. The resulting material was a fairly durable paper that could be made into a scroll or a codex.

Of the two materials, parchment was by far the more expensive to produce. A really large codex could require the skins of perhaps two hundred animals! On the plus side, parchment was much more enduring than papyrus. Occasionally the writing on a parchment was scraped off, and a scribe would write a new document on top of the old, “erased” text. Such a manuscript is called a *palimpsest*, from a Greek phrase meaning “rubbed smooth again.”

WHAT'S A CODEX?

A codex is a bound volume resembling a primitive book. It consists of sheets folded and stitched together, sometimes with a cover. Christians began using codices instead of scrolls around the early second century. Unlike a scroll, a codex allowed writing on both sides of the parchment or papyrus.



Parchment codex

Why Are There So Many Bible Translations?

The Old Testament was written primarily in Hebrew, with a few parts of the books of Daniel and Ezra written in Aramaic.

What's Aramaic? Glad you asked! Aramaic was similar to Hebrew and used in Babylon. When the Jewish people were exiled to Babylonian territories in the sixth century BC, many Jews began speaking Aramaic

almost exclusively. In fact, after they were allowed to return to their homeland in Judea, Aramaic was still so popular among the people that the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Aramaic so that everyone could understand God's Word. These translations were later called the Targums, a word



11th century Hebrew Bible with Targum

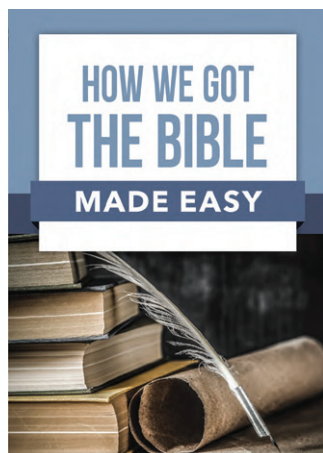
that means “to translate” or “to explain.” By the time of Jesus in the first century, most Jews, including Jesus, spoke Aramaic.

The New Testament, however, was written in Koine Greek (*koine* means “common”). This was because by the first century, Greek was the popular trade language used across the vast Roman Empire. The Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible (or Old Testament) became known as the Septuagint (more on that later).

Some of the earliest translations of the Bible were in Latin (Rome), Coptic (Egypt), and Syriac (Syria). Jerome’s Latin translation in AD 405, called the Vulgate, became the official Bible of the western church for many centuries.

As Christianity spread all over the world, the need arose to translate the story of God—the Bible—into the languages of these different populations. And so . . .

- By AD 200, portions of the Bible had been translated into 7 languages.
- By 500, 13 languages.
- By 900, 17 languages.
- By 1400, 28 languages.
- By 1800, 57 languages.
- By 1900, 537 languages.



How We Got the Bible Made Easy

Can you trust the Bible? From Moses to Gutenberg, find out how we got the Bible and discover key information and fascinating facts on key people and events in Bible history in an easy-to-understand way. From the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls to the modern translations of KJV and NIV, each of the quick-reference topics included in this handbook feature solid overviews, full-color illustrations, and more to deepen your understanding of the Bible's reliability. Find out what people did to preserve the text of the Bible over the centuries, and learn the inspiring stories behind names like John Wycliffe and William Tyndale.

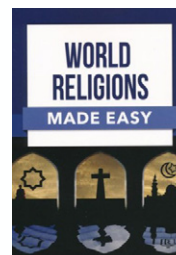
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