

How Was the Bible Put Together?

The Bible is not only an amazing book but the greatest book ever written. In it, we find the thoughts of God captured in written form. The bible is not just one book. It is a collection of ancient writings that took the form of poems, letters and historical accounts.

The Bible was written by over 40 different authors over a span of 1,500 years. Christians believe that even though the writings of the bible were authored by many different human writers, they were all done so under the direct guidance of God Himself.

But, how are we sure we got the right poems and letters put into the Bible? Great question!

Old Testament

To start with, there is little debate over the writings in the Old Testament. Those are the writings collected before the life of Jesus. From early in their history, Jewish people (God's specially chosen people) began to collect writings that were important to their faith and history. These early writings include the Ten Commandments, the Law, poems, songs, historical documents, and letters from the great prophets God spoke through to the Jews. These writings were collected into what are known as books. The Old Testament consists of 39 books. This was known as the Hebrew Bible. The Old Testament describes events from the creation of the world until approximately 400 B.C.

From 400 B.C. to the life of Jesus, various other Jewish writings were completed. These writings in this time period are known as the Apocrypha. Some churches today (i.e. the Roman Catholic Church) include the Apocrypha in their Bibles but neither Jews nor early Christians believed in their biblical authority. The apocrypha writings were viewed as helpful but not inspired by God. Jesus often quoted from the Old Testament books but never quoted from an apocryphal writing.

By the time Jesus was born, most Jews considered the collection of 39 Old Testament books to be inspired and gathered by God.

New Testament

The New Testament writings developed over the first few centuries of the early church. Shortly after Jesus' death and resurrection, writings began to appear from Jews and non-Jews who believed Jesus was the Savior of the world.

What began to develop were different types of letters. "The Gospels" refers to the first 4 books of the New Testament. These books are written by people who had first hand experiences with Jesus Christ. Other writings of the New Testament books include letters from church leaders to specific individuals or to specific early churches.

As more writings appeared, early church leaders were faced with deciding which letters should be considered biblical and thus included in the overall collection of biblical writings inspired by God. Consensus around the need for a universally accepted list grew and by A.D. 367 a respected church leader known as Athanasius published a list of 27 New Testament books (the same books in our Bibles today).

As the decision-making process for which letters to include emerged a set of criteria was developed for evaluating each writing. Works that made it into the 27 New Testament books met all 3 of the following criteria:

- 1) **Apostolic authorship** – It was important that a work be authored by or associated with an apostolic witness. Apostolic witness means someone who had actually seen the risen Jesus. This criteria excluded some works that came much later. It was felt that these first eye-witness apostles could best convey the truths about Jesus' life and message.
- 2) **Widespread usage and acceptance** – As the early church grew quickly, Christians of different backgrounds, nationalities and perspectives developed. When a writing maintained or gained universal usage and acceptance among the majority of different groups, this met the second criteria.
- 3) **Conformity to the faith** – Probably the most important criteria was its consistency with the general beliefs and practices of the early churches. Therefore, writings with questionable theology or practices not followed by early churches were excluded.

We believe that God guided the overall process of the Bible's formation. God has protected and promoted His thoughts in written form for many generations to read and follow. The Bible remains God's primary means of communication to His followers and is still as relevant today as when it was originally penned.