

## Who Wrote The Bible

These days it's not just economics or politics which drive world events but faith, and believers are convinced as ever. Most of them believe every word of the Bible to be divinely ordained, God giving it to Moses and written down for future generations. They believe the Bible is the word of God but faith can justify anything, is it really God's word? It's time we new for sure, to discover the origins of the Bible, to find out who the biblical authors were and what they were trying to achieve, who wrote it and then who re-wrote it afterwards. This may make you doubt some of your basic Christian beliefs that most of us were taught as children, the Bible shaped what you said, what you thought and what you did. The stories about creation and the Garden of Eden where more symbolic than literal and if the Bible is less literal, what is there to hold on to, is it really the word of God, so the best place to start is where it all began? *In the beginning God created the heaven and the Earth and the Earth was without form and void and God said let there be light and there was light and the evening and the morning were the first day (Genesis 1)*. According to both Jewish and Christian traditions, the first five books of the Bible, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy were all written by the Prophet Moses in the desert of Sinai. *Moses had led Jethro's flock to the west side of the wilderness by the mountain of God and the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a blazing bush and he looked and behold, the bush was burning but was not consumed (Exodus 3)*. Out in the dessert with the silence and the emptiness, a story like that is easy to believe for where we have silence we can hear the voice of God, so maybe we should take the story literally. If Moses didn't write the first five books of the Bible it would mean that religious people have been taught to believe something that is just not true, yet historical truth is one of the fundamental aspects of the Bible, large parts of it concern history. Archaeology is one of the ways to test history and Jerusalem is full of it.

Soon after the Second World War, archaeologist began to uncover what is now known as the City of David. Today it's frontier territory on the border between Arab and Jewish Jerusalem and on top of this ancient site is a new Jewish settlement. At first glance it looks just like a pile of rubble but if the Bible history is true the walls were built by King David and Solomon to defend the capital of their great kingdom, which stretched from Iraq to the Mediterranean. Some Israeli's feel they need this science to prove the Bible is a historical record and that the land is their land, it is important for Jews and Israel to show that the walls existed and that David existed as the basis of their religion and their country. At first the archaeology confirmed that the biblical stories held up in the tenth century BC, but in more recent analysis of the architectural style and pottery features in the archaeological levels associated with the six chambered gates and administration buildings, at three sites, it has caused some archaeologists to date these structures to the early ninth century BC, during the reign of the Omrides rather than Solomon. If you believe the Book of Kings, this was when much of the Old Testament was written down, the dates of Solomon and many monuments simply don't match by possibly as much as two centuries and archaeology now tells a completely new story of Jewish origins. No



big kingdom, no exodus from Egypt, just scattered small settlements in the hills. To the North, Israel, and in the South, Judah, but not at all as the Bible tells us. We don't just lose King David and the Exodus, but all the Genesis stories, Abraham's promise, Isaac and Jacob, all have a question mark beside them. It's one thing to consider stories about Adam and Eve and Noah as mythical because they are those kind of stories, but if the archaeologist are right then it's much more serious. That may or may not be an accurate account of ancient history but it tells us nothing about who actually wrote the Bible, for that you need to go back to the text. Take the creation story in Genesis one, God creates the heavens and the Earth, the animals and the fish then human kind. *God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him, male and female He created them (Genesis 1)*.

Tradition says that Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible but there are four original sources of the text and each of them has its own distinctive style and agenda. The scriptures disagree on the very nature of God; one says he speaks to us direct, another says he uses intermediaries but some how, all together they give a closer understanding of who God is and what our relationship to God is. Archaeology has pinpointed when the four sources of the Torah, as the Jews refer to the text of the Five Books of Moses, may have come together. Many of the buildings on the City of David where built at the end of the eighth century BC and archaeologist found many artefacts of that time that are real hard evidence of the widespread literacy needed to edit a complex book. In the book of Psalms, which scholars believe was written before five eighty six BC, the author is making a great mosaic combining all of the Torah into a single story. The King of Judah at the time, was Hezekiah (726-697 BC approx.) and he introduced substantial religious reforms during his reign all about a new idea of God, monotheism, the belief in the existence of only one God and the Bible was then being rewritten to fit a particular theological and political point of view.

After Hezekiah, another King, Josiah, who is credited by some historians with having established Jewish scripture in written form as a part of the Deuteronomic reform that occurred during his rule, was killed in 609 BC at the Battle of Megiddo (Armageddon) by Pharaoh Neco, king of Egypt. *In his days Pharaoh Neco king of Egypt went up to the king of Assyria to the river Euphrates. King Josiah went to meet him; and Pharaoh Neco slew him at Megiddo, when he saw him. And his servants carried him dead in a chariot from Megiddo, and brought him to Jerusalem, and buried him in his own tomb (2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 23 29-30).* That was a terrible blow for Judah and the biblical authors, their hopes for a revival collapsed and in less than a generation Jerusalem and its temple would be destroyed and the population exiled. No longer were the Jews in control of their own land but their Bible continued to evolve, now prophesying the Messiah and the new world he would bring, the Old Testament that we know today was finally taking shape. In 516 BC after more than fifty years in exile in Babylon, Jews returned to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, fulfilling the prophecies of Jeremiah (*Jeremiah 30-35*), and to establish an Israeli state. The final rewrite of the Bible began but it's then concerned with suffering, affliction, liberation, triumph and terror and that's what made the Bible such a universal book. The visionary new ideas came not in the Books of Moses that start the Old Testament, but from the books of The Prophets you find at the back. With the idea of a mission and a Messiah, the Bible became a book for everyone wanting a future of peace and security. Between 1947 and 1979 the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in eleven caves in and around the northwest shore of the Dead Sea in the West Bank. They are of great religious and historical significance, as they include practically the only known surviving copies of biblical documents made before 100 BC. The Scrolls date from about 350 B.C. to 68 A.D. and were written in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek; they contain biblical and apocryphal works, prayers and legal texts and sectarian documents invaluable to our understanding of the history and development of the Hebrew Bible and the beginnings of Christianity. This was the moment when the Old Testament met the New Testament, the fruition of Judaism and the beginning of Christianity. The writing of the New Testament was a completely new project, it was based on the Old Testament but used a new revelation, it was the fulfilment of the Divine Promise, an accurate account of Jesus' life and death written by his disciples, but given the findings about the Old testament, is the Gospel really gospel truth, how accurate is it?

Just over two thousand years ago the Bible tells us Jesus was the promised Christ, a Greek word meaning Messiah, and from here on it documents his story according to what real eye witness's saw, the Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. But that's not really how it happened at all, in actual fact the business of writing down the New Testament got started, not in the Holy Land, but somewhere else altogether and by somebody who had never met Jesus. His name was Paul and many of the letters in the second part of the New Testament are attributed to him, at last a real biblical writer with a real name. Paul, born in Tarsus, did a lot of his writing in Turkey and even though he was the first to put pen to paper about Christianity, he started out as a Jewish establishment hard-liner who even persecuted early Christians, but after experiencing a vision of the resurrected Jesus, which took place as he was travelling the road to Damascus, Paul then believed that he was to take the Christian message from the Jewish world out to the Gentiles of the Roman Empire, so he set sail heading West and ended up in Ephesus. Ephesus was a typical Pagan city of the time but became an important centre for early Christianity from the 50's AD. Paul used it as a base and spent more than two years on his missionary journeys there. He set about spreading the Gospel, even though it upset many, he was a fanatic for the Gospel and although "fanatic" is a dirty word today, back then it seems to have been what drove Paul to start writing. Not that he bothered with the Jesus story as such, instead he wrote a kind of rulebook for the early church. He went around the country founding churches and when a problem occurred, his solution was to write a letter. These letters, Paul felt, were written with Gods or the Holy Spirits inspiration, written in Greek he laid down the law of everything from the importance of obedience to government to the sanctity of love. Almost certainly, most of these letters were written by a scribe, not by Paul himself, so there was the possibility the scribe may have had a little influence on the content as well. Later, Paul left Ephesus and went to Rome, the seat of power, and he was promptly put in prison and persecuted, then in the late 60's AD he was executed. Something that never occurred to Paul was, to write the story of Jesus down, then around 70 AD, the very first Gospel writer emerged, Mark. Mark didn't know about Jesus first hand, but he reminisced with some of the earliest people, who were involved with Jesus, like Peter, James and John. Then we find that Matthew may have copied large chunks of Mark's Gospel and rewrote it or added his own bits such as the Christmas Story, the Sermon on the Mount and the Lords Prayer. By the latter part of the first century the tone had been set for the Gospels, Luke and John both put their own spin on the story, so, did this discredit the Gospels if they were not just simple reportage? The Gospels cannot be read literally, they are not meant to be read as eyewitness accounts, if you regard the text as an attempt by a community to work out what to do in their life by reflecting on the life of Jesus, they become books of faith.

The twelve disciples chosen by Jesus near the beginning of his ministry, those of whom he also named Apostles, were, according to the Gospels of Mark and Matthew:

1. *Peter*: Also known as Simon Peter, renamed by Jesus, his original name was Simon, a fisherman from the Bethsaida "of Galilee".
2. *James*: Son of Zebedee: The brother of John.
3. *John*: The brother of James. Jesus named both of them Bo-aner'ges, meaning "sons of thunder".
4. *Andrew*: The brother of Simon/Peter, a Bethsaida fisherman, and a former disciple of John the Baptist.
5. *Philip*: From the Bethsaida of Galilee.
6. *Bartholomew*: Son of Talemai: It has been suggested that he is the same person as Nathanael.
7. *Matthew*: The tax collector. The similarity between Matthew 9:9-10, Mark 2:14-15 and Luke 5:27-29 may indicate that Matthew was also known as Levi.
8. *Thomas*: Also known as Judas Thomas Didymus (twin).
9. *James*: Son of Alphaeus: Generally identified with "James the Less", but also "James the Just".
10. *Thaddeus*: In some manuscripts of Matthew, the name "Lebbaeus" occurs in this place. Thaddeus is traditionally identified with Jude.
11. *Simon the Zealot*: Some have identified him with Simeon of Jerusalem.
12. *Judas Iscariot*: The disciple who later betrayed Jesus. Also referred to as "Judas, the son of Simon" he was replaced as an apostle shortly after Jesus' resurrection by Matthias.

The list in the Gospel of Luke differs from Matthew and Mark at two points:

1/ It lists "Judas, son of James" instead of "Thaddeus." In order to harmonize the accounts, some traditions have said that Luke's "Judas, son of James" refers to the same person as Mark and Matthew's "Thaddeus," though it is not clear whether this has a good basis.

2/ The wording in Luke may be translated "Simon the Cananean" instead of "Simon the Zealot". These are generally thought to be the same person.

The Gospel of John, unlike the Synoptic Gospels, does not offer a formal list of apostles, though it does refer to the "Twelve" and the following nine apostles are identified:

Peter  
Andrew (identified as Peter's brother)  
The sons of Zebedee (presumably meaning John and James, though they are not named)  
Philip  
Nathanael  
Thomas (also called Didymus)  
Judas Iscariot  
Judas (not Iscariot) probably Thaddeus/Jude

Of these, only Nathanael is not in the lists in the other gospels. He has traditionally been identified with Bartholomew, though this identification is disputed. Apart from Bartholomew, the three not mentioned at all in John's gospel are James son of Alphaeus, Matthew, and Simon the Canaanite/Zealot.

The Bible, to many people, is the handbook of life and how you should lead it, it was of course written and constructed by men and women but equally it is a Divine Book, the sacred word of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit. Biblical authorship is messy and it's messy because life is imperfect, but if we can find God in the imperfections of our lives then maybe we can find God in the messiness of the text. Who wrote the Bible is a complex question that takes some thinking through, but to have faith in the world today we need to ask questions and never have the wool pulled over our eyes.

Brother Gustus Emmanuel says,

Let us consider your love for those things you do in and through your belief in God, let us consider to what extent you are prepared to take your love for God, let us consider what sacrifice you are prepared to make for him. I have done this many, many times in my prayers and in my meditations and in my vespers and in my communications with the Father and I have sort always to seek forgiveness before I dare utter a word of prayer. I seek forgiveness for those things I may have overlooked in my supplications to the Father; I ask that I be forgiven for my not thinking. Ask yourselves do you do these things when you find that you have forgotten, no matter to what extent, no matter how small and insignificant that which you have forgotten is, for you have forgotten the path of God, you have forgotten the path of his creation. Is it therefore not said, turn thou away from the altar and go and make peace and then come and offer your gifts unto the Father. Why do we forget, why do our eyes become closed, why are our ears closed and do our mouths become silent concerning things which we know in our hearts we should remember? Is it perhaps that we are just a tiny bit pre-occupied with our own thinking and with our own needs and with our own prayers? Is it that we have allowed self to come to the surface and blind us from those things we really need to consider? Bring your gifts before the Father, bring before him the gifts of the spirit, and bring before him the gifts of

discernment, the gifts of vision and the gifts of tongues. Ask him to cleanse them and to bless them that they may be used in his name and if he will receive and bless these things, shall we forget again such a blessing, the blessing of God The Father Almighty. And with these gifts shall we use them just for man or shall we use them for all creatures whether they be great or small, for all living things, for all forms of life, for all the gifts around us that God planted in his garden, the garden man has called Eden. Search yourselves, know yourselves and place yourselves before God, love him and adore him, praise him and bless him and find within yourselves, his love, his joy, his understanding. The gentle awareness of all things that abide through his grace upon this Earth, do not forget even the smallest of creatures and the tiniest of plants nor yet even a grain of sand. Bless his name and bless all things created by his hand, embrace him with your love because to embrace him is to embrace all things created of him. The Earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof and all those things that dwelleth therein, he does not forget, he loves all things, he blesses all things, he forgives, he understands, he heals, he glorifies and are ye not of the Father and so being, is it not just that we do likewise unto one another as he would have done. Take these teachings into your understanding, receive them in his name and receive them as a gift also from myself for he has blessed me with this understanding and he has granted unto me a gift and I share my gift freely with you also so that together we may come and understand the joy and the love of God.

© Copyright of The Maccello Foundation and The Giavinci Trust. All rights reserved.