

## Where Did the Bible Come From?

My basic premise is that the Bible and its various books, are first and foremost, the product of faith communities, each with its own particular: interests; saints; view points; histories; heroes; opponents; etc. Each community tries to make sense of God, their role in the world, how to deal with the tough questions that goes with life and being in this world; how to deal with neighbors; etc.

This premise is easily demonstrated by a careful consideration of even some of the most basic facts about the Bible. The Jewish Bible is different than the Christian Bible. Both share the Hebrew Scriptures, what Christians some what disparagingly call the Old Testament. But of course, the Christians include additional texts, what they call the New Testament.

Even within the Christian community there are major differences. The Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Anglican and Episcopal Bibles contain additional books not found in most other Protestant Bibles. True, they are not considered official part of the canonical, universally accepted Bible, but they are considered to be very important. These books were written in the 300 year period between the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament. That's right, important religious texts continued to be written, cherished, used in worship and liturgy, etc. But they did not make it into the Bible. These books are known as the Deuterocanonical, or second canon Books, or the Apocrapha. A good study Bible will include these books. Among them are such books as I & II Maccabees; Tobit; Esther; Wisdom of Solomon; Sirach; etc.

Now what is true on the macro level is also true on the micro level, for individual books and even material within individual books. (Here one could briefly consider the story behind JED and P in the Hebrew Scriptures. In the New Testament everyone is familiar with the fact that there are four Gospels, what they some time fail to consider is the subtle and sometimes not so subtle differences between their respective authors. Only two of the four have birth stories. John never has Jesus using parables, yet in the synoptic Gospels they are found throughout. In John Jesus is fond of saying "I am: the door, the good shepherd, etc." but such statements are never found in the synoptics. There are many other differences that I do not have time to go into now.

Consider Paul's letters. They make no claim to divine inspiration. Essentially they are letters dealing with very specific questions and problems arising in particular local churches in particular times and places. They are rather like the column that Billy Graham runs in local newspapers in which he answers questions that people send to him.

What I have briefly sketched out here is basically true for every book in the Bible. Each was written by an individual or group for a particular individual or community faith. They were then treasured and passed on within a certain community of faith until such a point that they were universally recognized. The 66 books in the Bible were officially recognized by those who would become the "orthodox" believers that would shape Judaism and Christianity as we know them today. Other books and communities faded from the scene and lost the battle to have their books and religious stories and traditions accepted by the majority.

Some, particularly those of a more conservative bent, will say that I have not given enough prominence to God and the way God shaped the texts. I will address the role of God in greater depth in another sermon, but let me simply say at this point that I firmly believe that God can be found within these texts, but not in every jot and tittle, every word or sentence. God is most often found between the lines rather than in them! As communities of faith, each of these communities struggled with the question of God, Christ and the Holy Spirit and because God is bigger than our individual insights, no matter how inspired, or even our corporate insights, no matter how inspired.

The writer of the Gospel of John quite honestly recognizes this in the very last line of his Gospel, saying in 21:25 "But there are also many things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written." And he's just talking about Jesus! He is not talking about God the Father or God the Holy Spirit! Every individual's and communities' perception of God and God's will is incomplete and thus so are their writings.