

## International Conversation Cafe

Bible Topic: Is the Bible Reliable?

The Bible is divided into two parts, the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament is the collection of Jewish manuscripts, written in Hebrew, that are divided into three parts: the law, the prophets, and the psalms. These writings were completed by about 433 BC and preserved by the Jewish community.

The New Testament is the collection of manuscripts from the church, written in Greek, and divided into the Gospels, which are the stories about Jesus of Nazareth, and letters to the early churches. These writings were completed by around 95 AD.

*How did these writings become our Bible?*

The writings of the early church were collected, copied, and preserved. An example of preservation is the fact that we have Papyrus 75, which is dated, AD 175-225. This Papyrus is the earliest copy of most of Luke and John's gospel. Church leaders developed a process to determine what writings should be "official". First, they looked to see if the writings had unique qualities that showed they were from God. Inspiration, means God-breathed, demonstrating that the words came from God. Early church leaders also choose books that were written by a disciple of Jesus during his earthly ministry or someone who knew the first disciples well. Finally, these writings received approval from church leaders. The approved collection of writings is called, The Canon. The canon was collected by 175 AD but was officially approved by a meeting of church leaders in 397 AD.

By 382 AD, Latin had replaced Greek in the western church. Jerome was commissioned to translate the Bible into Latin. He did that by examining the Hebrew and Greek texts. That translation is called, the Vulgate. It was used for over 1,000 years. Jerome set a standard for translating the Bible from the Greek and Hebrew texts into modern day languages. The Renaissance saw the revival of scholarship in the Greek language. Erasmus, (1446-1536), prepared editions of the Greek New Testament, which were the foundation of Tyndale's English translation. Luther also used Erasmus' Greek New Testament to produce the German Bible.

*Explain in your own words how the Bible came into existence.*

*How do we know the Bible has not been changed over time?*

Textual criticism is the name of the science that determines the reliability of the New Testament texts. One way to decide authenticity of a document such as the Bible is to count how many copies of the original exist. The more copies we have of ancient texts, the less doubt we have about the existence of the original. For example, *Caesar's Gallic War* was written in 58-50 BC. The earliest copy in existence today was written 900 years after the book was written and there are only 9-10 copies left. No one disputes that the copies reflect the original text. The New Testament was written between 40 to 100 AD. The earliest partial copy of the original texts dates from 125 AD. The complete copies of the NT

texts date from 300 AD, only 200 years after it was written. Astoundingly, there are over 5,000 Greek manuscripts, 10,000 Latin manuscripts, and over 9,300 other manuscripts in existence today. Textual critics determine the age and quality of manuscripts and have used the best manuscripts for the Bible we read today. It is very close to the original text.

*How does the great number of copies of the New Testament give you confidence in the existence of an original?*

*Why do you suppose the Gospels, the accounts of the life of Jesus were written?*

*Why do you think the letters to the churches were copied and distributed to other churches?*

Is there any evidence that the writers of the Bible believed God guided them as they wrote?

The apostle Peter explains how people were able to write the Bible. II Peter 2.

<sup>20</sup> Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. <sup>21</sup> For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

*Who helped the authors of Scriptures write?*

*How does the Holy Spirit's involvement in the writing of Scripture give us confidence in the words, thoughts, and ideas in the Bible?*

Finally, consider what one person felt about God's word.

Psalm 19

They (God's words) are more precious than gold,<sup>(Y)</sup>  
than much pure gold;  
they are sweeter than honey,<sup>(Z)</sup>  
than honey from the honeycomb.<sup>(AA)</sup>

<sup>11</sup> By them your servant is warned;  
in keeping them there is great reward.

*How did the writer feel about God's word?*

*What value does God's word bring to your life?*