

How We Got Our Bible – part 1

1. Hebrews 1:1-4. What we need to keep in mind as we go through this study is that all of those appearances of God, all the prophets, scribes, priests, and kings – all of that was to lead us to Jesus so that we would pattern our lives after him, worship him, and elevate him.
2. As we start, let's talk about how the story came together and that leads us to writing and writing materials. The oldest manuscripts we have come from around the time of Christ. We have thousands of manuscripts of Old Testament books but they are copies of much older manuscripts. Most writing material was papyrus and that is a problem. As papyrus is handled, it becomes brittle. Most papyri have disappeared into dust. We have tens of thousands of fragments of papyri, making it nearly impossible to figure out which piece goes with which other piece.
3. There is also pottery, clay tablets, and walls. Kings and emperors had huge monuments, friezes on walls, and thousands upon thousands of clay tablets many of which survive to this day. Far more durable than papyrus, so we know more about accounts and prayers to deities than we do letters, psalms, and stories of the ancient Hebrews.
4. Most were not literate (though some dispute this). Traditions were passed down orally and they took this seriously. Celtic people were said to require their priests to study for nearly 12 years before they were allowed to preside as a Druid. Muslims teach their sons to memorize huge sections of the Quran even though they cannot read it or even know what it says. Jewish people have done the same in recent centuries.
5. Now we come to our story. The Bibles you hold in your hands have made an amazing journey and overcome great obstacles to get to you. The stories told by a tiny desert tribe 3000 years ago have been saved by a host of people so that you could read the stories that point us (remember Hebrews) to Jesus, the last, true, and all sufficient revelation of God.
6. Let's start with Genesis. The story starts before there are humans to hear it so...who told us about it? 2 Peter 1:16-21. God talked to people – real

people with all of their personality intact – and they were carried along by the story by the Spirit of God. So, a letter by Paul sounds like Paul whereas a letter by Peter sounds like Peter (the difference between Mark and the other Gospels, Luke and the woman with an issue of blood). We see development of personalities as well – David’s moods and growth and failures, Paul’s calmer spirit.

7. Early on in the story of God’s people, they knew they needed a record that would outlast their generation and keep their people together. Stories can do that. If you want to destroy a people, take away their stories (the tragedy of lost languages). Sometime in the distant past, they began writing. As writings began to be circulated, some were lost or destroyed and some were saved. The Bible refers to over 20 books that we do not have that were used as references for the books we do have. They were very open about the fact that they were relying on a collection of manuscripts to write and rewrite the story of God and His people.
8. Who were the writers and editors? Tradition gives us the name of many of them but most books of the Bible don’t give us the name of an author. Let’s start with a case study: the Five Books of Moses. Moses is the major figure in these books and tradition says that he wrote them...but nowhere in the books themselves does it say that Moses wrote them. And if we want to believe that he wrote them...we get ourselves into problems.
9. As you read the books of Moses, you will see something described as occurring in a particular order only to read another take on it saying it took place in a different order. Or it might say there were two of something while elsewhere it says there were fourteen. Or it would say the Moabites did something and later say it was the Midianites. In one place it has Moses going into the Tabernacle before they built the Tabernacle.
10. It also says Moses was the most humble man on earth which isn’t something you would expect a humble person to write. It also gives an account of his death and the immediate events after it. Some Jewish scholars in the early years of the Christian era noticed these issues and tried to answer them with elaborate answers, additional material not found in

scripture, or with assumptions that all contradictions were only apparent contradictions.

11. Other Jewish scholars accepted that Moses wrote much of these books but that other material was added later. For example, Isaac ibn Yashush (11th century) noticed that the list of Edomite kings in Genesis 36 names kings who lived long after Moses was dead. Others noticed that some passages in these books refer to Moses in the third person. In one passage, the scripture says “These are the words Moses spoke to the children of Israel across the Jordan” meaning the writer was on the other side of the Jordan from the event. It had to be written by someone else because Moses never crossed the Jordan. Other expressions such as “to this day” indicates it was written or edited much, much later than the time of Moses.
12. By the 1500s it was accepted by most religious scholars among the Jews and Catholics that editors had worked the texts. This does not diminish their unity or value in any way; God has always preferred to work through communities rather than individuals. (Matthew 18:19)
13. Once that door was open, serious study, unimpeded by the Catholic authorities, could take place. One of the first things tackled were the doublets – stories told twice. There are two creation stories (disputed), two stories of the covenant between Abraham and God, two stories of the naming of Isaac, two stories where Abraham claimed to a foreign king that Sarah was his sister, not his wife, two stories of Isaac’s son Jacob making a trip to Mesopotamia, two stories of God changing Jacob’s name to Israel, two stories of Moses getting water from a rock at a place called Meribah...and more. Some tried (and try) to say there are no contradictions or problems but, plainly, there are. (Sarah very aged yet so attractive a king wants her)
14. A huge clue was then found. In one set of the stories, one version, the name of God is Yahweh. In the other set, the name used was Elohim. This was consistent through these five books indicating that there were at least two source documents that had been woven together into one account. This should not be shocking as the Bible DOES name other sources for its account.

15. In the 18th century, three different sets of scholars working independently and without knowledge of the work of the others came to the same conclusion and in the same order. At first, they thought one of the two versions was an ancient text Moses used as a source. Then it was thought both versions were source documents that Moses used as sources. Then it was concluded that both versions were written by different authors after Moses had died.

16. In fact...they found four sources (refer to Friedman book). The Book of Deuteronomy has a completely different voice and doesn't fit the stream of the first three authors. In short, there was the writer known as J for Yahweh, the writer known as E for Elohim, a writer who brought in the legal and priestly details is called P and the Deuteronomist is known as D.