

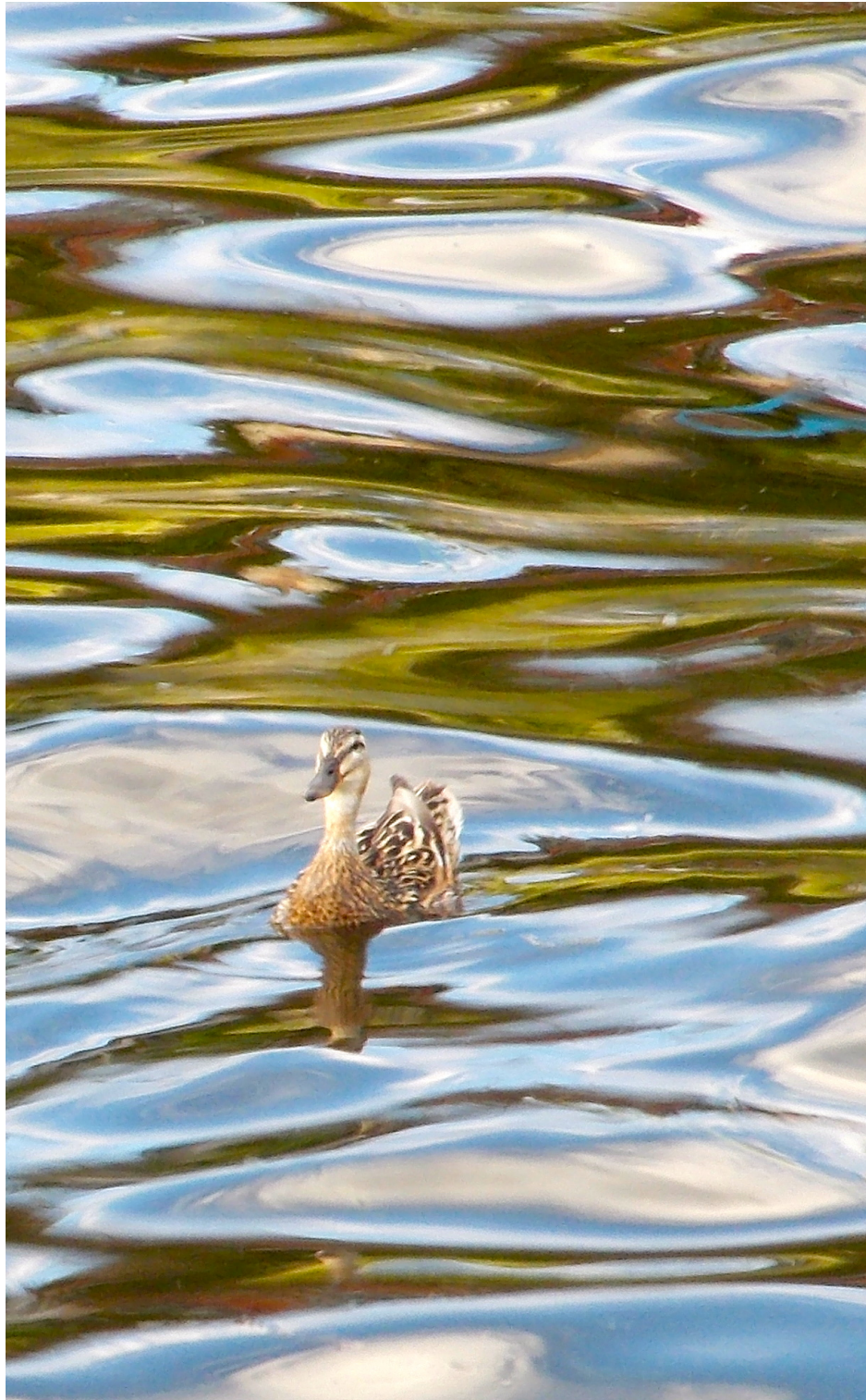
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# THE PENTECOST

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**Front Cover: Abbotsford, BC**

**Above photo: Jasper, AB**

Welcome to another year of the Pentecost magazine. Our plans for publishing are a little different this year than to other years. We are putting out four issues of the Pentecost this year followed by four issues of our other magazine, "The Megaphone". I hope that they are a blessing to you. In this issue we are looking at the history of the Bible as a book. We will explore its history from the time of its composition and then look at its transmission through time up until the Protestant Reformation. Be blessed as we delve into this most interesting topic.

Shawn Stevens

Most of us have the privilege of reading the Bible from off of our bookshelf or night stand. But have you ever wondered how it came to be that we could read the inspired Word of God? Well this issue is a look back in history of the creation of the best book ever written, The Bible. God bless you.

Ramona Stevens

## God's Word Through History

'Thank God, I have a Bible!' were the words of a poor, elderly woman in London. 'What should I do without my Bible? It was the guide of my youth, and it is the staff of my age. It wounded me, and it healed me; it condemned me, and it acquitted me. It showed me I was a sinner, and it led me to the Saviour. It has given me comfort in life, and I trust it will give me hope in death.' 1

The Bible has been a faithful guide and staff, comfort and hope for multitudes throughout history. How did this great Book begin? To our knowledge, God's first communication with man, which was written down, was called the *Decologue* or *Ten Words*, which we know as the *Ten Commandments*. These were given to Moses on his first mountain encounter with God. Moses then went up the mountain a second time and was given more instructions from God. This time Moses wrote down the words of the *Covenant*. This was the beginning of the sacred writings. 2 Those sacred writings were followed by additional sacred writings, compiled and passed down to us, all of them, in time becoming known as the *Holy Bible*.

The word "Bible" comes from the Greek word *Biblos*, which was the outer coat of a papyrus reed used in Egypt during the 11<sup>th</sup> century B.C. The plural form of this word is *Biblia* and it was used by Christians to describe their sacred writings as early as the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. This word was carried over into Latin and the English translation became *Bible*. 3

The Bible is divided into two *testaments*, which is another word for *covenants*. Its first half is called the *Old Testament* and its second half is called the *New Testament*. The Old Testament consists of inspired Jewish writings which predate Christ's incarnation. Probably the earliest division of this material was called *The Law And The Prophets*. 4 The Old Testament is a composition of historical, poetical and prophetic writings.

Why did all of this historical, poetical and prophetic material need to be written down?

God had been communicating with man long before Moses' life. However, the problem with oral and other forms of communication is that they are not preserved as accurately as a written tradition. God wanted His Word accurately recorded in written form and, at least by the time of Moses' life, this was begun. We read in the Old Testament that "And Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD. ...." (Exodus 24.4). Moses was followed by other prophets who continued to record the Word of God.

The Bible teaches that God spoke through the prophets. Some titles that are given in the Bible for prophets are "the man of God" (See 1 Kings 12.22), "His servant" (see 1 Kings 14.18), "MY MESSENGER" (see Matthew 11.10) 4.5, "a watchman" (see Ezekiel 3.17) and "the seers" (see Isaiah 30.10). The Bible says; "for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." (2 Peter 1.21). Again, we read that "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways," (Hebrews 1.1). The Bible claims this in many places. Also, the Ten Commandments, recorded by Moses, are prefaced with these words; "Then God spoke all these words, saying," (Exodus 20.1). God spoke to His prophets directly, telling them what they were to say. For example, He told the prophet Ezekiel that "But you shall speak My words to them whether they listen or not, for they are rebellious." (Ezekiel 2.7). The Bible emphatically states that "All Scripture is inspired by God ... " (2 Timothy 3.16). The word "inspiration" means "God-breathed." The Bible says that the Jews were advantaged because "... that they were entrusted with the oracles of God." (Romans 3.2). The phrase "thus saith the LORD" and similar expressions are found in the Old Testament 3,808 times. The Prophet Isaiah, in the first chapter of his Book declares; "Listen, O heavens, and hear, O earth; for the LORD speaks, ..." (Isaiah 1.2). Similarly, the Prophet Jeremiah says in his Book; "The word of the LORD came to me saying, ... " (Jeremiah



1.11). Because of these scriptures, and others, Evangelicals use interchangeably the word “Bible” and the phrase “Word of God.”

Because the Bible is the inspired Word of God, some might assume that the whole of it would be written down in the same form. This is not true. One of the characteristics of the Bible is how God has used a variety of forms and a variety of personalities in communicating His Holy Word. Although all of the Bible’s books are inspired, one notices a difference between reading the Apostle Paul’s *epistles* and King David’s *psalms*. Similarly, one notices a difference between Moses’ historical books, such as 1 Chronicles, and John’s apocalyptic book, Revelation.

The sacred prophetic writings of the Old Testament were passed on from generation to generation. However, in 586 B.C., the Babylonians conquered the Jews and attempted to burn everything in the temple. The Jews were under Babylonian captivity for seventy years and, at the end of this period, many returned to rebuild the city of Jerusalem. In God’s providence, not all copies of the sacred *Scriptures* were destroyed. Synagogues began springing up everywhere and they needed copies of the Scriptures. This need led to the creation of a new institution and profession, that of the *scribes*. Scribes zealously and meticulously went about the task of duplicating the Scriptures which were then used in the synagogues.

Another significant development of this period was the rise of Alexander the Great and his conquering of the then-known world. By the time of his death, in 323 B.C., much of the world was bilingual, with Greek as its second language. Around 285 B.C., Demetrius Phalereus, the head of the library in Alexandria, inquired of the king of Egypt whether a Greek translation of the *Jewish Law* could be made for the library. The king consented and requested from the Jews six scholars from each of the twelve tribes of Israel to work on the translation. In seventy-two days the translation was finished and this translation is known as the *Septuagint*.<sup>5</sup> This seems to be the favorite translation of the early Christians.

The early Christians soon had another collection

of inspired writings in addition to the Old Testament. These were the *Gospels*, *Epistles* and *Apocalypse* of the New Testament. With Jesus Christ, the Son of God, coming to Earth the world was again infused with divine prophecy and teaching. The Bible says that “God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways,” (Hebrews 1.1). Jesus said on one occasion; “Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works.” (John 14.10). His words came with the full authority of His Heavenly Father. This is because, as He said; “... the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father’s who sent Me.” (John 14.24). In a prayer to His Heavenly Father, Jesus said; “for the words which You gave Me I have given to them; ...” (John 17.8). He had given His disciples the Word of God.

Although Jesus gave His disciples the Word of God, He did not personally write down His divine teachings but, instead, this work was given to some of His disciples and certain others. At the *Last Supper*, He told His disciples; “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.” (John 14.26). Here, Jesus is saying that the Holy Spirit will do two things. The Holy Spirit will bring to their memory all that Jesus has said to them and He will teach them all things. The Apostle Paul, operating under this same inspiration, wrote many epistles. He knew that his message came from God. He said to the Thessalonians; “For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted *it* not *as* the word of men, but *for* what it really is, the word of God, ...” (1 Thessalonians 2.13). Concerning his gospel, he said to the Galatian Church; “For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught

it, but *I received it* through a revelation of Jesus Christ.” (Galatians 1.11,12). To the Corinthians, he said; “For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, ...” (1 Corinthians 11.23). To the Thessalonian Church, he said; “For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, ...” (1 Thessalonians 4.15). With these inspired records of the apostles, and certain others, the twenty-seven books of the New Testament were formed.

The writing of these twenty-seven books, and the acceptance of them as inspired Scripture, is an interesting chapter in Christian history. From the period of 33 A.D. to 50 A.D., emphasis was not put on a written record. This is probably because Christians believed that Christ was coming back imminently. However, by 50 A.D., Christian faith was spreading very rapidly and it was necessary for written copies of apostolic instruction to be supplied to the churches which were springing up everywhere. 6 Even though emphasis was not on a written record in the first half of the first century, there was a sorting of gospel material. Luke, the author of one of the four Gospels, dedicates his Gospel to a man named Theophilus. He opens with these words:

*Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.*

(Luke 1.1-4).

Here, we see Luke setting about the work of writing a narrative of Christ’s life and ministry.

While some, like Luke, wrote gospels, apostles, such as Peter and Paul, wrote epistles (letters). The Apostle John wrote down the prophetic Book of Revelation. During this New Testament period, one of Peter’s epistles refers to Paul’s epistles, giving additional credence to them (see

2 Peter 3.15-16). Apostolic epistles were circulated (see example of Colossians 4.16) and read to congregations (see example of 1 Thessalonians 5.27).

By the first half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, the apostles’ writings were more generally known and had circulated more widely. By the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, New Testament books were even more widely recognized as Scripture. These books were organized into a single catalogue of *recognized books* and distinguished from other Christian literature. 7

In the period of time in which the New Testament was written, and for a couple hundred years afterwards, the Christian Church suffered terrible persecution. Many Christians lived in catacombs and caves. They were sometimes hunted down and many of their writings were burned. Under God’s providence, the Scriptures were protected through this turbulent time. This was a mysterious period of time. The Church was young and much of what we know about its leaders is from some writings which survived from this period. Church leaders, prior to the *Council of Nicea* in 325 A.D., are referred to as the *Anti-Nicean Fathers*. It would be wrong to assume that they were unanimous in their understanding of exactly what was, and what was not, holy Scripture. However, it is interesting to hear what they have to say about Scripture itself.

Many Anti-Nicean fathers did refer to New Testament Scripture and in many instances wrote down their views on Scripture. Like Paul, Clement of Rome (1<sup>st</sup> century) wrote an epistle to the Corinthians. In it, he quotes scriptures from the Gospels, such as Matthew 9.13, Mark 2.17 and Luke 5.32. He refers to them as *Scripture*. In the same quote, he cites Mark 9.42 after the introductory words “God saith.” In this same work, he quotes Hebrews 1.3-7. 8 Polycarp (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> century), a disciple of the Apostle John, refers to the New Testament in his epistle to the Philippians. He quotes Ephesians 4.26 and introduces this verse with the words “the Scripture saith.” 9

Justin Martyr (early 2<sup>nd</sup> century), in his first apology, written between 150 and 155 A.D., refers to the Gospels as “Voice of God.”<sup>10</sup> Irenaeus (late 2<sup>nd</sup> and early 3<sup>rd</sup> century), in his work, “Against Heresies,” also refers to the Gospels. He says; “For the Lord of all gave the power of the Gospel to His apostles through whom we have come to know the truth, that is the teaching of the Son of God ... This Gospel they first preached. Afterwards, by the will of God, they handed it down to us in the Scriptures, to be the pillar and ground.”<sup>11</sup> Clement of Alexandria (late 2<sup>nd</sup> and early 3<sup>rd</sup> century) says; “There is no discord between the Law and the Gospel, but harmony, for they both proceed from the same Author.”<sup>12</sup> Hippolytus (late 2<sup>nd</sup> and early 3<sup>rd</sup> century) commented on both the Old and New Testament. On the Old Testament and its writers, he said:

*The Law and the Prophets were from God, who in giving them compelled his messenger to speak by the Holy Spirit, that receiving the inspiration of the Father’s power they may announce the Father’s counsel and will. In these men therefore the Word found a fitting abode and spoke of Himself; for even then He came as His own herald, shewing the Word who was about to appear in the world. ...* <sup>13</sup>

Concerning New Testament writers, he said:

*These blessed men ... having been perfected by the Spirit of Prophecy, and worthily honored by the Word Himself, were brought to an inner harmony like instruments, and having the Word within them, as it were to strike the notes, by Him they were moved, and announced that which God wished. For they did not speak of their own power (be well assured), nor proclaim that which they wished themselves, but first they were rightly endowed with wisdom by the Word, and afterwards well foretaught of the future by visions, and then, when thus assured, they spoke that which was [revealed] to them alone by God.*

Cyprian, the Bishop of Carthage, a 3<sup>rd</sup> century martyr, referred to Scripture as “Divine Scripture,”<sup>15</sup> “Divine commands,”<sup>15</sup> “Sacred Scriptures,”<sup>15</sup> “Scriptures from heaven,”<sup>15</sup> “precepts of the Divine Law,”<sup>15</sup> “wells of divine fullness”<sup>15</sup> and “voices of the Lord.”<sup>15</sup> These references show us how Early Church fathers viewed the Scriptures as inspired of God.

These writings may have been inspired by God, but would they survive the efforts made to destroy them? The Roman Emperor Diocletian had ordered the destruction of the Christian’s sacred writings but, in God’s providence, not all of the copies were destroyed. In the reign of Emperor Constantine, the Roman government reversed its position and became friendly with Christians. Constantine even requested that Eusebius would arrange for copies of the Scriptures to be provided for the Empire’s head in the East, Constantinople. <sup>16</sup> <sup>17</sup> <sup>18</sup> Eusebius did so, and had fifty copies prepared for this use. This created a further need for the sacred Scriptures to be organized into a single book. The Early Church needed a *canon*. The word “canon” is believed to have come originally from the Greek word *kanon*, which meant a *rod*, *measuring rod*, *staff* or *ruler*. The last usage, *ruler*, was expanded to include a *rule* or *standard for anything*. Early Christians used it to refer to a “rule of faith, normative writings, or authoritative Scripture.” Some Early Church fathers from the time of Irenaeus referred to Christian teaching as “The Kanon of the Church,” “The Kanon of the Truth,” and “The Kanon of Faith.” However, the first clear use of the word was by Athanasius. <sup>19</sup> In 367 A.D., he wrote a letter in which he lists the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. This was the first time in recorded history that we had such a list. In 397 A.D., the *Council of Carthage* endorsed these twenty-seven books. <sup>20</sup>

The next major event in the history of the

Bible, as a book, was the creating of the *Latin Vulgate Version*. The pope desired to have a standard translation of the Bible which would be accepted as authoritative by the whole Church. The skills of Sophronius Eusebius Hieronymus (340-420 A.D.), better known as St. Jerome, were employed for this large work. Jerome was born in Stridon, Dalmatia, and at twelve years of age he went to Rome where he studied Latin, Greek and pagan authors for the next eight years. At age nineteen, he became a Christian. He was later baptized by the pope of Rome and he committed himself to the service of God. For many years he lived a semi-aesthetic life. He traveled east where he learned Hebrew from a Rabbi and he was ordained to be a presbyter in the city of Antioch. He conducted more studies in Constantinople and, in 382 A.D., the pope called him to be his secretary. That same year, he was commissioned to begin the work that he is now famous for, a revision of the Latin Scriptures. He began working on the Old Testament and continued on to work on the New Testament. Soon after Jerome had revised the Latin Gospels, the pope died. Much of Jerome's work was done in Bethlehem where he also spent time improving his Hebrew. Although Jerome's work began as a revision of an older Latin text, in the end his translation of the Old Testament was translated into Latin from Hebrew manuscripts. His complete work was finished in 405 A.D. 21

What was the reaction to Jerome's translation? Some did not like him using Hebrew as a basis for his Old Testament work. They felt that the Greek Septuagint was superior. Even Augustine (354-430) was outspokenly against Jerome's Old Testament work. It is also significant that Jerome's New Testament work was rushed and was simply a minor revision of an older Latin translation. It was not done directly from Greek manuscripts. Opposition to the Vulgate Bible was offset by the pope's support for it. Before long, the Vulgate was generally accepted by the Church but there would be more revisions and editions of it. Interestingly, the Vulgate was not officially declared the standard text of the Bible for the Roman Catholic Church until the *Council*

*of Trent* (1546-1563). 22 23

What was the long-term effect of the Vulgate's general acceptance throughout the Dark and Middle Ages? By insisting on reading the Bible in Latin, the leadership of the Catholic Church essentially separated the Bible from the common population of Europe. Most people in the Dark and Middle Ages could not read, let alone read in the foreign language of Latin. Neither could they understand the Scriptures that were read to them in Latin. The Bible became isolated behind the closed doors of the monasteries. For centuries, it was figuratively "chained up" from being used by common men and women. These chains would be broken by the great reformers of the Church.