

The Holy Bible

Bible = Greek: Book. "Bible" is a Greek word (Βιβλος = Vivlos), which means, a book. It is not "the word of God" as the heterodox define it. The Greek <<Λογος του Θεου>> (Logos tou Theou = Word of God) implies that the Word/Logos is someone, somebody, a person; not something, i.e., like a book for example.

Compilation of Books into one volume

One of the sources of revelation in the Church (others being: Writings of the Church Fathers, Canons of Councils, Divine Services, Lives of Saints...).

Different religious groups include different books in their biblical canons, in varying orders, and sometimes divide or combine books. Christian Bibles range from the 66 books of the Protestant canon to the 81 books of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church canon.

Eastern Orthodox Canon = 76 (according to OSB reckoning).

Author = Various. Men and Women. "Written over 4000 years." forty individuals, spanning about 1500 years and representing a variety of cultures, historical periods, and occupations. They wrote in three languages: Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic. Yet the Holy Bible is a well-organized unity with one great theme and central figure, Jesus Christ. All of this would be impossible if it weren't for the fact that the Bible ultimately had one Divine Author: God, who inspired its human authors (2 Timothy 3: 16).

Divided into 2 main sections = Old and New Testaments/Covenants.

We should note, however, that the word testament is not totally appropriate to designate the character of these two books, but rather the designations New Covenant and Old Covenant. (Some Bibles, such as the Slavonic and Russian, use the designations Old Law and New Law to refer to these two parts.)

Who put the Bible together? Why these books specifically?

The Orthodox Church. At a council of Orthodox bishops in Carthage in 418 (Canon 32) the books which make up what we now call the New Testament were determined. There is also the 3rd Canonical Epistle of St Athanasius the Great written in 367.

Old Testament

The Old Testament is an account of God's early agreement or covenant with the Hebrews prior to the coming of Jesus Christ. The first five books of the Old

Testament are called the Pentateuch, or the “five writings.” They deal with salvation history from creation through the entrance of the Hebrews into the Promised Land. The next 12 books are historical, having been written about 1100—600 BC. They describe God’s ongoing dealings with the Hebrews. The remainder of the Old Testament is composed of poetical books, as well as the writings of the major and minor prophets. Throughout the Old Testament, a common theme emerges: this book is a history of God acting in history, that is, Salvation History. It is a history of a people chosen by God out of whom would come the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Mary and the Son of God, the Word, the Second Person of the Trinity.

New Testament

More than 500 years before the birth of Christ, the Prophet Jeremiah predicted that the covenant relation of God with His people, instituted on Mt. Sinai, would give place in the future to a more inward and personal one (Jer. 31:31-34). With this in mind, St. Paul regarded the Christian Dispensation as being based on a new covenant, which he contrasted with the old covenant of the books of Moses (2 Cor. 3:6-15). By His sacrificial death, Christ became the mediator of a new covenant (Heb. 9:15-20).

The books of the New Testament, of which there are twenty-seven, fall into four categories: 1) Gospels from Evangelion or Good News, because they tell the Good News of Jesus Christ Sts. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John; 2) Church History The Acts of the Apostles; 3) Epistles (or Letters) of which there are twenty-one, written by Sts. Paul, James, Peter, John and Jude; and 4) an Apocalypse, that is, a Revelation or disclosure of God's will for the future, hence the title: The Revelation to St. John. All of these books were written in the koine or common Greek of the time, which was in common use throughout the Roman Empire at the beginning of the Christian era.

The New Testament, God’s present agreement with His people, reveals Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the One who comes to save mankind from sin and death. In it we find the accounts of the life and sayings of Jesus, instructions in Christian living, and God’s plan for the future.

The first five books of the New Testament are historical.

- The Gospel of Saint Matthew records the life of Jesus written especially for the Jews. It reveals Jesus Christ as their long-awaited Savior and King.
- The Gospel of Saint Mark describes Jesus Christ as the obedient Servant of God.
- The Gospel of Saint Luke emphasizes Jesus Christ as human and divine.
- The Gospel of Saint John reveals Jesus as the Son of God, the eternal and divine Word of God the Father.
- The Acts of the Apostles relates the history of the early Church following the Ascension of Jesus Christ.

The remaining books of the New Testament, consisting of letters or epistles written by the apostles to the early Christian communities, deal with virtually every aspect of Christian faith and life.

The last book of the New Testament, the book of Revelation, is a highly symbolic language of the life of Jesus Christ's eternal Kingdom and the blessings which await those who remain faithful to God.

Bible Synopsis

The entire Bible is structured so that everything after the Fall – the history of Israel, the prophets, the coming of Christ – is presented as a remedy for that Fall, a way out of evil. The beginning of conscious history with the creation of Adam and Eve, the rise of the state of the people of Israel and all their pathologies of pride and rigidity, but the emergence of great moral and prophetic figures who try to set things right, culminating in the Messiah Himself – that is all part of humanity's attempt, with God's help, to set itself aright. To freely choose to set ourselves aright by turning to God, healing our broken relationship with Him and each other, and then existing in unbroken unity with Him.

What does the Church say about the Bible? Sola Scriptura?

The Bible is sacred and holy to Orthodox Christians, but it is not the primary or sole source of revelation for the Church. It is the result and product of the Church. The Scriptures were never intended to be the basis of sole and complete containment of divine revelation. As the apostle and evangelist St John the Theologian stated, "... There are so many other things which Jesus said and did which were not written [John 21: 25]."

In the year 787, the Fathers of the 7th Ecumenical Council, more than 1200 years ago, dealt with the heresy of Sola Scriptura and condemned it, pronouncing,

Anathema to those who spurn the teachings of the holy Fathers and the tradition of the Universal Orthodox Church ... Making their own arguments ... That unless we were evidently taught by the Old and New Testaments, we should not follow the teachings of the holy Fathers and the holy Ecumenical Councils, and the tradition of the Orthodox Church.

-- Definition from the 7th Ecumenical Council

The Church existed for over 300 years practising the fullness of the mystical life (the Divine Services and Divine Sacraments = the liturgical-sacramental life) without what is known as the Bible. The individual Fathers during these early centuries did not dare trust themselves to determine on their own what was

Scripture. They waited for the conscience of the Church to declare with its universal voice what was truly Scripture, rather than relying on their own opinion.

Why does the Orthodox Church use the Septuagint rather than the Masoretic text for the Old Testament? Isn't the Hebrew Masoretic much older and more accurate?

No. The Hebrew Masoretic text is not the oldest version nor is it more accurate than the Septuagint. This is important to clarify because of the common misconception of the historic significance of the Masoretic and how the Scriptures came into existence.

In 250BC, Ptolemy Philadelphus issued a decree in Alexandria for scholars to translate the Hebraic Old Testament of the Temple in Jerusalem into Greek. 72 scholars undertook the task, thus the name "Septuagint" (from Seventy).

In the 1st century AD, most Jews in the Middle East spoke Greek; this included Christ Himself, His disciples (the apostles and others), and the early Church. Consequently, the Scriptures used by Christ Himself and His followers was the Septuagint.

A number of Church Fathers and hierarchs such as St John Chrysostom, Jerome, Eusebius of Caesarea, Lucian of Antioch and Eustathius of Berea used the Hebraic Old Testament merely for scholarly purposes. The Fathers were no fools. When expounding on matters of doctrine and explanation of Scripture, as well as compiling hymnody for the Divine Services, they would always refer to the Septuagint, which is the only version of Old Testament Scripture to be found in Orthodox churches.

After the fall of Jerusalem in 70AD, the remaining Jewish leaders gathered at Jamnia (near Joppa, south of modern Tel Aviv). At this meeting the decision was made to construct a Hebrew translation of the Old Testament using the Septuagint. However, the process of translating Old Testament Scripture back into Hebrew did not begin until about the 6th century and was not completed until around the 10th century.

It is this text of the Old Testament that is referred to as the Masoretic text. Used by Judaism until this day, and unfortunately highly respected and used in Protestant seminaries and churches. Why is this version of the Old Testament called the Masoretic Text? Because the Masoretes were groups of Jewish scribe-scholars who worked between the 6th and 10th centuries AD, based primarily in early medieval Palestine in the cities of Tiberias and Jerusalem, as well as in Iraq (Babylonia).

The Masoretic text was not an accurate rendition of the original Old Testament Scripture. While translating the text into Hebrew the Masoretic scholars omitted several books, including Tobit, Judah, 1 Macabees, 2 Macabees, Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach, Baruch, and the Prayer of Manassees. Also, in the Masoretic

text, parts of Daniel and Esther were omitted and the Psalms were renumbered (from Psalm 9 to 142 in the Masoretic text, psalms are one number higher).

The Masoretic text being a biased revision of the complete Septuagint Old Testament deliberately obscures any prophecies, meanings and references regarding:

- (1) the divinity and messiah-ship of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God,
- (2) the Ever-Virginity of the Mother of God
and
- (3) the Incarnation.

At the beginning of the 16th century Protestant Reformation there were 3 versions of Scripture:

- (1) the Septuagint, which was the original Hebraic Old Testament translated in its entirety into Greek around 200BC,
- (2) the Vulgate, a translation of the complete Septuagint text into Latin around 410AD by Jerome,
and
- (3) the Masoretic text, a 10th century abbreviated translation of the Septuagint into Hebrew (of which one of the earliest copies can be found at the St Catherine's Orthodox Monastery at Mt Sinai, Egypt).

Once the Protestant Reformers permanently turned away from Roman Catholicism, in their printing frenzy, they did not return to Orthodoxy or continue the use of the Septuagint, but rather adopted the Masoretic text.

Modern day Protestant seminaries insist that the Masoretic text is the "most ancient" and "complete" canon of Scripture. The Masoretic text was not finished until the 10th century and removed several books while discarding parts of others. Any claim to authenticity or wholeness is simply wrong.

History bears out the fact that the Septuagint exists as a faithful and accurate compilation of Old Testament books and the abbreviated Masoretic text is inaccurate and discrepant.