

## HOW WAS THE NEW TESTAMENT WRITTEN?

- **Oral Tradition.** After the resurrection Jesus' disciples began to preach the Good News in earnest. As disciples did at that time, they would already have learned much by heart. To this they added miracles he had performed; his passion, death and coming to life again. We have an example of this in Peter's sermon in Acts 10.36-43. Since the earliest disciples were Jews, the custom of oral instruction and learning texts by heart continued. New converts would be thoroughly instructed in this way.
- **Written Documents.** Once the faith spread to Greek speaking nations, oral tradition became complicated and so some teachers started to write down the texts they had to preach about. From study of the Gospels, it can be deduced that four or five such collections existed.
- Once these written sources started to circulate, it was natural that some gifted leaders would attempt to present this traditional material in a more readable fashion. This is how the Gospels came about.



That Tradition from which the Gospels came was obviously of vital importance. Just because the Gospels were written doesn't mean that the tradition stopped. It didn't stop. That is why the Roman Catholic Church regards tradition as an important source of revelation. The tradition remained strong; it is out of this tradition that much of our worship, private prayer, devotions and doctrine come.

**WHAT IS THE BIBLE?** There are many ways of talking about the Bible, some of which we will look at. Perhaps the best way of describing it is to call it: "The story of human salvation by God".



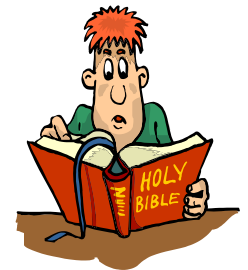
Yet it is not just one story, nor even just one book. It is a whole series of books that tell the story of Adam and Eve, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, the Prophets and many others.

At the same time, it is one story. The story of God saving men and women of every time and every place. So the Bible speaks to us today. We are called to be a part of the story of God's salvation.

Jesus tells us that we achieve salvation by doing the will of his Father. It is by listening to the Word of God in the Scriptures that is one of the ways of discerning His will. However, as we will see, it is not a simple matter of picking up a bible and reading. We need to some understanding first to see why it is considered to be 'inspired'.

## What are your feelings about the scriptures?

- Do you feel that the Bible has a message for you?
- Are some parts easier to read than others?
- How do you use the bible?
- What are your favourite sections?
- Do you understand it?
- Are there any parts you do not like?
- Is the Bible library overleaf, Catholic or Protestant?

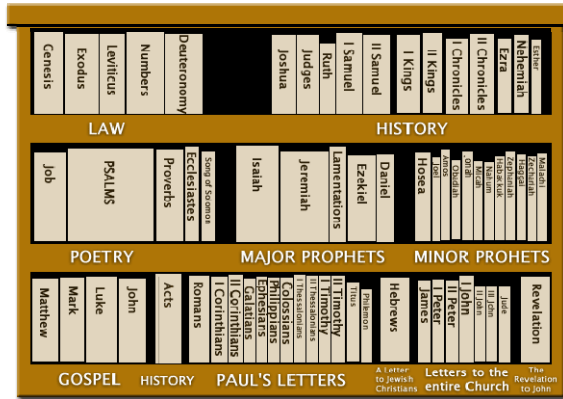


## THE OLD TESTAMENT

You do not have to be an expert to gain something from the Old Testament. It is the Word of God. As we read it or hear it, we enter into the experience of the people of God. God takes the initiative. He speaks to individuals like Abraham, and to the people of Israel, as in the Exodus. Prophets and wise men record their insights. Poets and singers praise God, lament and rejoice.

We cannot fully understand the Old Testament unless we see it in the light of the revelation of Christ the Word made flesh. So too, we can only understand Jesus if we are prepared to meet his ancestors.

We treat the Bible as one book, but it is a library of 73 works by different authors, written during many centuries. They write poetry, prose, prayers and song, fact and fiction. One thing binds them all together. They are the Word of God. God speaks his truth to us. We call this Revelation. He does so through human writers. We call this Inspiration.



The Old Testament is the foundation for God's revealing of himself in the living Word made flesh, Jesus Christ

## THE CANON OF SCRIPTURE

So different books form the Catholic Canon of the Old Testament which was defined at the Council of Trent in 1546. The word canon here refers to the list of books which are recognised as sacred scripture. The Catholic Church recognises 7 books (and some additions to other books) which are not acknowledged by Jews and by Protestant Christians as Holy Scripture, these are: Tobit, Judith, 1 and 2 Maccabees, the Book of Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus/Ben Sirach, Baruch, parts of the Book of Daniel. The Jews left these books out because they were later writings and were not in Hebrew. The Protestants followed the Jewish Bible and treated these books as Apocrypha – “of unknown authorship”.

## THE NEW TESTAMENT:

A new man comes to work in the office. You notice how kind he is, while the manager is impressed with how hard he works. His secretary sees him as being

gentle. Someone else thinks of him as being direct and honest. We need each view to get a total picture of the man. The Gospels Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are four ways in which Christ was remembered by apostolic witnesses. All four are necessary for us to get a rounded picture of Jesus. But they are more than “lives of Christ”. They offer us a new vision. They are THE GOOD NEWS of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

The Epistles too are important. They tell us about the 20 or 30 years before the Gospels were written. This was time when the Good News was being preached and handed down by word of mouth.

## WHAT IS THE NEW TESTAMENT?

All Christian Churches recognise the following books as being sacred scripture; that is, part of the Canon of the New Testament.

BOOKS	APPROX DATE	BOOKS	APPROX DATE
Matthew	70-80	2 Thessalonians	51
Mark	64	1 Timothy	63
Luke	63-80	2 Timothy	67
John	80-100	Titus	63
Acts	63-80	Philemon	62
Romans	57	Hebrews	68
1 Corinthians	57	1 Peter	63
2 Corinthians	57	2 Peter	105
Galatians	49/57	1 John	90
Ephesians	62	2 John	90
Phillippians	57/63	3 John	90
Colossians	62	Jude	80
1 Thessalonians	51	Revelation	95

For some years there was a dispute in the Church concerning the list of sacred books of the N.T. Some people questioned whether such books as Revelation and 2 Peter was part of Scripture. Other books like the Epistle of Barnabas and the Shepherd of Hermas are listed in some early texts as part of the Canon, but later were left out. By the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century AD, the list of the sacred books was virtually settled, but just as with the Old Testament Canon, the Catholic Church did not settle the matter until the Council of Trent, 1546. All the above books, and only these, were defined as sacred scripture of the New Testament.