



A SURVEY OF THE BIBLE

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Abstract

The Bible has been described differently by many people who interpret this holy document to suit their whims and caprices: specifically, their understanding of life and how its content also applies to them. Therefore, it is quite difficult to find a fit-all single description or definition for the Bible. Against this background, the Bible has been described in this paper as a carefully told story of the relationship between God and humanity; and which reports His interventions in people's lives. The Bible also introduces us to saints and sinners and provides instruction for godly living. The document has been honored over the ages as a book from God Himself, containing a timeless message for humankind, everywhere. This collection of 66 works by many different authors, written and compiled over a span of about 1,600 years, reflects the personalities of the writers and the literary styles of their times. It contains historical narratives, poetry, philosophy, pithy proverbs, prophetic denunciations, instructions, teachings, sermons, exhortations, and grand apocalyptic visions. This paper surveys the Bible in terms of its original construction and canonicity. Our discussion is focused on making readers understand the Bible; and surveys both the Old Testament (OT) and the New

Testament (NT), by highlighting key topical areas that will help the reader to get a better understanding of the Scriptures. In its application, it leaves readers to struggle with the question of how the survey will enhance their understanding of the Scriptures and impact their commitment to the LORD, as well.

KEY WORDS/CONCEPTS: Canon/canonicity, Torah, Apocrypha, Septuagint, Intertestamental.

Introduction

This talk on “A Survey of the Bible” was delivered on January 5, 2016, during the National Retreat of Leaders of Scripture Union, Ghana, which was held at the Presbyterian Women’s Retreat Centre, Abokobi – Accra. The objective of the reproduction of the revised paper here is for the larger reading public who are interested in knowing more about the organization of the Scriptures to benefit from the immense information that the presentation provides.

The Name “Bible”

The Bible is a rich, and holy book. It is basically the historical record of God's plan of salvation for mankind. It is an inspired book which explains the origin of the universe, affirms the uniqueness of humankind, accounts for the presence of evil and suffering in our world, unveils the future, and in its exalted revelation of how God calls us to the faith. Thus, though other religions may have sacred books, yet, none compares with the Bible in its uniqueness. It has been translated into many languages than any other book in history. The name “Bible” comes from Byblos¹, an ancient Canaanite city along the Mediterranean coast that was well known for the production of papyrus, which was a material on which information was written. Then, it was applied to any collection of papyrus with information. Little wonder, when the “Book of books” was finally constituted, it received the title “Bible,” since the book itself is a product of papyrus.

The Old Testament (OT) Canon

¹ Byblos has become a place of outstanding universal value. It is a World Heritage Center of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The archaeological site is protected by the Lebanese Antiquities Law 133/1937 and law NO 166 of 1933 (<https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/295/> cf. www.middleeast.com; cf. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* available at www.britannica.com/place/Byblos).

The Old Testament canon is a collection of 39 books, the first 39 books of the Holy Scriptures, recognized by the Church as inspired and authoritative. These 39 books deal with God's Revelatory and Redemptive acts among:

1. Humankind in general: Shows man's generation, degeneration, and God's plan of regeneration
2. His chosen people and nation, Israel
3. The nations that came in contact with Israel

The word “canon” means “rule” or “standard” or “measure” and is used to identify the writings of the prophets, the apostles, and their companions, which are inspired by God and authoritative for truth pertaining to doctrine and life. A book is not inspired because it is declared to be canonical but is canonical because it is considered inspired. Therefore, the church discovered the canonicity of Old and New Testament books; it did not determine or cause their canonicity. The Canon is therefore the accepted list of OT books. Here the attempt is to find the origin of the OT canon, its quantity, how it has been arranged and how it has been preserved down to our age.

How the Word of God came to be Written and Published

The authors of the Hebrew Scriptures are not as identifiable as those of the New Testament. The period of writing the Old Testament covered about 1000 years from the time of Moses (about 1400 BC) to the time of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Malachi (around 400 BC). The books were written at the time when God gave His Law to Moses to guide the conduct of the children of Israel. The first five books (which primarily cover the Law) were written by Moses almost entirely, with the area which covers his death, no doubt, added by an eyewitness, most likely, Joshua, his personal aide. The Law of Moses was maintained by the priests of the temple.

The remainder of the Old Testament comprises of the prophets and writings in the Hebrew canon, whereas the English Bible includes the following categories: historical books, poetic books, and prophetic books. These books include such authors as Samuel, David, Joshua, Solomon, and Major Prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah and a number of lesser-known figures who wrote smaller books called the Minor Prophets. Each of these authors presents his words as being the Word of God. These later books continued to be deposited with these leaders until the destruction of the temple and then found their way in to the teaching community begun by Ezra. Thus, the canon was likely completed before 400BC.

How the Canon was decided

The books that were accepted by the Jewish community originated over a period of approximately one thousand years. But what rules guided the acceptance of a book or document into the canon? The common question regarding the acceptance of any writing as Scripture was whether the book was written by a prophet of God. It is assumed that, generally, such document would have statements as: “Thus says the Lord,” or “The word of the Lord that came to me says,” and the like. However, other criteria were employed in recognizing the books as canonical which included the following:

1. The book must be written in Hebrew
2. It must be written by a known Hebrew prophet
3. It must be written before Malachi's time
4. Its message must harmonize with the Law
5. The book must be important to their religious worship
6. It must be free from contradictions, inaccuracies, inconsistencies, and the like.
7. It must have an inward witness of God's Spirit.

Completion and Compilation of the Canon

Ezra is credited with having collected and compiled the entire Old Testament Canon. Josephus² has information that he lived long enough to have accomplished this. He did not have to make a choice of books. For the OT canonical books had long been recognized as such from the earliest of times. Before the captivity, there was a gradual process in the collection and compilation of the books. Beginning with the Law, others were gradually added (Deut 31:26; Josh 24:26; 2 Kings 22:8). But after the captivity, Nehemiah probably gathered these books in the Library he founded for the 2nd Temple in 432 BC. However, it was Ezra and the Great Synagogue Council (a Council of 120 Elders who interpreted the Law and enforced its observance) most probably set up the Canon in its final shape. It is believed that by the close of Malachi's ministry, in the 4th century BC, the Canon was established. That is, most likely, before 400BC.

Arrangements of the OT Canon

The Canon of the OT has come down to the current user in three main arrangements - The Hebrew, Greek and English.

² Flavian Josephus. Antiquities of the Jews (1811). XI v.5.

The Hebrew OT Arrangement – 24 Books: Initially, the OT canon of the Hebrews was made up of 22 books in agreement with the number of their alphabets. Later, it was expanded to its present 24 by separating Judges-Ruth, Jeremiah-Lamentation. The books were written mostly in the Hebrew language by God-inspired people (2 Pet.1: 21; 2 Tim.3: 16), at different times in Jewish history. The Hebrew Canon has three main divisions- The Torah (Law), the Nebhim (Prophets) and the Ketubhim (The Writings) (see Luke 24: 27, 44).

Table 1

The Old and New Testament Books

The Law (Torah -5)	The Prophets (<i>Nebhim</i>) - 8	The Writings (<i>Ketubhim</i>) –11
	A. Former Prophets	A. Poetical Books
1. Genesis (Bereshith)	1. Joshua (Yehosu)	1. Psalms (Tehillim)
2. Exodus (Shomoth)	2. Judges (Shophetim)	2. Proverbs (Mishle)
3. Leviticus (Wayyiqra)	3. Samuel (Shemuel)	3. Job (Iyyob)
4. Numbers (Bemidbar)	4. Kings (Melchim)	
5. Deuteronomy (Devarim)		
	B. Latter Prophets	B. Five Rolls (Megilloth)
	1. Isaiah (Yesha-Yehu)	1. Songs of Solomon (Shirhash-Shirim)
	2. Jeremiah (Yirme-Yehu)	2. Ruth (Rut)
	3. Ezekiel (Yehezqel)	3. Lamentations (‘Eka)
	4. The Twelve	4. Esther (Hadassah)
		5. Ecclesiastes (Qohelet)
		C. Historical Books
		1. Daniel (Daniel)
		2. Ezra – Nehemiah (Edsra-Nehemiah)
		3. Chronicle (Debrehayyam)

A Breakdown of the Old Testament books according to period of writing is as follows:

Name of Book	Author	Year of writing	Purpose of Writing
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The Books of the Law (<i>Torah</i>, Heb.; or <i>Pentateuch</i>, Gk.); Genesis to Deuteronomy			
Genesis	Moses	Around 1406 BC	This first book of the OT discusses important topics that boarder on issues such as Creation, Sin, Adam, Flood, Nations, (Genealogy) Babel, Nations, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (Israel), Ishmael, Joseph and the birth of the Hebrew Nation.
Exodus	Moses	Around 1406 BC	Israel in Egypt (Moses), traveling to Sinai, the giving of the Law (at Sinai)
Leviticus	Moses	Around 1406 BC	Sacrifices, the consecration of Aaron and his sons, purity and impurity in daily life, Day of Atonement and sacrifices, ethical and moral laws, rules for Priests, the set days for feasts, other laws and rules
Numbers	Moses	Around 1406 BC	Life of the Israelites in the (Sinai) desert (during the first year), Israel at Kadesh-Barnea (second year), Wonderings of Israel (38 years), then, Israel in the plains of Moab
Deuteronomy	Moses	Around 1406 BC	Review of years after Egypt by Moses, the law restated, other Laws and rules, issues relating to curses and blessings and closing statements, final preparation and Moses' death.
Joshua	Moses	Around 1390 BC	Joshua leads Israel into the Promised Land, Jericho and Ai conquered, the conquest of the land, the division of the land, Joshua's last days
Historical Books			
Judges	Probably finalized by Samuel	Around 1050 BC	Review of the conquest and limits, Israel under the Judges.
Ruth	Probably written by Samuel	Around 1100 BC	Ruth, the Moabitess becomes ancestor of David and subsequently, Jesus Christ
1Samuel	Written by Samuel	Between 1100 – 1050 BC	Early days of Samuel, the capture and return of the Ark of the Covenant, the anointing of Saul and David as kings.
2Samuel	Probably written by Nathan	Around 970 BC	Exploits of David as King of Israel, David and Absalom, David's last days
1Kings	Written by various Prophets, and finalized probably by Elijah	Around 650 BC	The Ascension and reign of Solomon, the two Kingdoms, King Ahab and the Prophet Elijah

2Kings	Written by various prophets, and finalized in Babylon	After 587 BC	Stories of Elisha, Kings of Israel and Judah to the fall of Samaria, The Kings of Judah to the fall of Jerusalem
1Chronicles	Probably written by Ezra	Around 450 BC	Genealogy of Israel – Adam to the exile, the reign of David
2Chronicles	Probably written by Ezra	Around 450 BC	The reign of Solomon; and the kings of Judah
Ezra	Written by Ezra	Around 450 BC	The return to Jerusalem and rebuilding the temple, Ezra's return and reforms.
Nehemiah	Written by Nehemiah	Around 440 BC	Nehemiah returns and rebuilds the walls of Jerusalem. It has a list of people and deals with the dedication of the wall. Nehemiah return a second time and engages a purification of the priests
Esther	Probably written by Mordecai	Between 470 and 450 BC	Esther becomes Queen, Haman tries to kill Jews, Haman dies by hanging, the Jews defeat their enemies
Poetry & Wisdom Literature books			
Job	Job, Elihu or by Moses	Possibly in 2000 BC	Probably the most ancient book – A prologue, First round of debate, The second round, the third round, Elihu's intervention, Job and God, and an epilogue
Psalms	Primarily written by David with others like Moses, Solomon and many more	Between 1500 and 400 BC	73 of them by David, others by different authors such as Solomon and Moses. The whole collection comprises of 5 books which cover 150 Psalms: Messianic, Parallelisms (thoughts) and Classic.
Proverbs	Largely written by Solomon	Between 970 and 940 BC	Comprises: Wisdom sayings, Counsel for life's Sound Foundation, Living, and Leadership. The outline consists of: Introduction, Lessons on wisdom (personification – female), Proverbs of Solomon, collections of sayings of wise men, Sayings by some other wise men. a perfect wife
Ecclesiastes-	Solomon	Between 970 and 940 BC	The Preacher, Most likely written by Solomon An examination of the purpose of life from the perspective of human wisdom. Conclusion: No matter what human goal is set, in the end it does not bring satisfaction (emptiness of emptiness) since death still stares us in the face. Only in God is the answer and escape from despair.

Song of Solomon	Solomon	Between 970 and 940 BC	“Literal/ Drama, or Allegory” Probably written by Solomon: Praise of love between a man and a woman.
Books of the Prophets (the foretellers and/or forth-tellers): Major Prophets			
Isaiah	Isaiah	Between (740 and 680 BC)	God’s message for Judah and Jerusalem, Isaiah’s vision of God and call to service, Present and future (warnings about Assyria), Judgments on the nations and God’s final victory, More warnings to God’s people, The future, the fall of Jerusalem and reclamation coming, The servant of God and His mission, Israel’s shame and Israel’s glory
Jeremiah	Jeremiah	Between 626 and 580 BC	God speaks to Judah about the fall of Jerusalem, Jeremiah’s life and times, Prophecies against the nations
Lamentations	Jeremiah	Around 585BC	Laments (“weeping”) over Jerusalem
Ezekiel	Ezekiel	Between 595 and 570 BC	Ezekiel’s call and vision of God, Israel’s sin: God’s judgment, captivity. Prophecies against foreign nations, Israel is restored. It is apocalyptic - a companion to revelation
Daniel	Daniel	Between 605-530 BC	Written in captivity. It is both historical (Daniel at the Babylonian court) and apocalyptic (revelation and a record of his visions).
Books of the Prophets (the foretellers and/or forth-tellers): Minor Prophets			
Hosea	Hosea	Between 750 and 710 BC	Jehovah’s love for Israel, His unfaithful wife (northern kingdom).
Joel	Joel	Around 850 BC	A plague of locusts is a type of “the coming of the Day of the Lord.”
Amos	Amos	Around 750 BC (in 722- Israel destroyed)	A Judean sent to preach to Israel, Judgment is coming on all the wicked – Social justice, Seek God and live
Obadiah	Obadiah	Either 850 or between 600 and 580 BC	A prophesy against Edom
Jonah	Jonah	around 725 BC	A messianic prophesy. Jonah, the prophet and preacher was sent to warn Nineveh (Assyria) to repent.
Micah	Micah	Between 730 and 690 BC	Written to both Samaria and Jerusalem. The judgment on Samaria will alter come against Jerusalem. Hope – the king from Bethlehem

Nahum	Nahum	Around 612 BC	A prophesy of the fall of Nineveh and Assyria (612 BC).
Habakkuk	Habakkuk	Around 610 BC	Questions God on how He can allow an idolatrous nation to conquer His people? Answer – God will judge all nations, but those who trust in Him will overcome.
Zephaniah	Zephaniah	Around 610 BC	The great and terrible day of the Lord. A remnant would be saved
Haggai	Haggai	Around 520 BC	to the returned remnant, Prophesy about the second temple.
Zechariah	Zechariah	Around 500 BC	Apocalyptic, the restoration of Jerusalem, Israel and the nations / The King comes riding a donkey Israel's future
Malachi	Malachi	Between 430 and 400 BC	Last words – Marriage, divorce, tithing, the day of the Lord

The Intertestamental Period 400 - 4 BC

This period marks the historical events of the nation after the close of Malachi till the ministry of John the Baptist. Although no OT books record the history of this period, there were Jewish writings during the period, especially from the 3rd Century. Though some are historically inaccurate they help give an idea of events and life of the period. The writings of Josephus and other secular writings also help us know more about the period. The Intertestamental period is also called the "Silent Years" for reasons that OT prophetic ministry (and perhaps inspirational writings) ceased at this time till the period of John the Baptist.

Events in the Intertestamental period leading to the New Testament

Though the Intertestamental period is commonly referred to as the “Silent Period” of the Bible, in reality, a number of events took place within this period which are significant to the understanding of the whole Bible. Some of these events are discussed in the subsequent paragraphs.

Apocryphal Writings: Apocrypha means “hidden.” This came to be applied to Jewish literature that were not canonical but were respected and sometimes supposed to be Scripture. They were called, hidden, based on 2 Esdras 14:19-48 (26, 44-48). Jewish religious writings

excluded them³ from the Hebrew Bible but included in the Christian OT until reformers set them apart as Apocryphal. The Apocrypha was also called, Deutero-canonical books. So, what Roman Catholics call “Apocrypha” is what the Protestant call the “Pseudo-epigrapher” (bearing false inscriptions). The Catholic Bibles contain the Deutero-Canonical books distributed among the historical, prophetic and wisdom books of the OT. These are Tobit (Tobias), Judith, The Book of wisdom, Ecclesiasticus – 1Maccabees, 2Maccabees, Baruch, 1Esdras, 2Esdras, Prayer of Manasseh, additions to Esther, additions to Daniel, (Susanna, Bel and the Dragon, The song of the three children), and Letter of Jeremiah. Their rejection is often made on the following bases:

1. There are geographical and historical errors in them.
2. Some doctrines are in error and do not agree with inspired scripture.
3. Their style is generally different from that of inspired scripture.
4. Because of the historical evidences earlier scholars did not accept them as canonical:
 - a. Philo, Jewish philosopher (20 BC - AD 40) did not quote from them.
 - b. Josephus, Jewish historian (AD 30 - 100) does not list them as canon.
 - c. Jesus and later his disciples did not quote from them.
 - d. Jerome who made the Catholic Bible, the Latin Vulgate, did not accept them.
 - e. Luther and the reformers as well as some catholic scholars rejected them. The catholic reformers were the ones who gave them canonical status.

The Greek Septuagint (LXX) And English Arrangement

Its Origin and Number: English readers are familiar with the classifications and order of the Old Testament in the English Bible. The divisions are the Law of Moses, the Historical Books, the Poetical Books, and lastly the Prophets. Around 250- 150 OT, some Jews in Alexandria- Egypt- translated the OT from Hebrew to Greek. It was given the name LXX – The Septuagint – “70.” Both the Greek and English OT arrangements have 39 books.

Table 2

³ Fredericksen corroborates the position that Apocryphal or ‘hidden’ books are not accepted as canonical by Jews and Protestants: Fredericksen, L. (2019). ‘Angel and Demon’ In *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Online article__available at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/angel-religion> Assessed on: 03-12-2020.

The Greek Septuagint and English arrangement

The Law (Torah/Pentateuch)--5	History---12	Poetry--5	Prophecy---17
1. Genesis (5)	1. Joshua	1. Job	Major Prophets
2. Exodus	2. Judges	2. Psalms	1. Isaiah
3. Leviticus	3. Ruth	3. Proverbs	2. Jeremiah
4. Numbers Lamentation	4. 1 Samuel	4. Ecclesiastes	3.
5. Deuteronomy	5. 2 Samuel	5. Song of Solomon	4. Ezekiel
	6. 1 Kings		5. Daniel
	7. 2 Kings		
(12)	8. 1 Chronicles		Minor Prophets
	9. 2 Chronicles		1. Hosea
	10. Ezra		2. Joel
	11. Nehemiah		3. Amos
	12. Esther		4. Obadiah
			5. Jonah
			6. Micah
			7. Nahum
			8. Habakkuk
			9.
Zephaniah			
			10. Haggai
			11. Zechariah
			12. Malachi

Development of Party Spirit

During this period of struggle with Pagan overlords and the corruption or interference with Jewish religious thinking and life, different groups arose defending one position or the other all in an attempt to interpret and defend true Judaism.

Sanhedrin: This is another group that emerged after the Maccabean revolt. It is the highest decision-making body of the Jewish state. It was constituted by the Sadducees who dominated the group, the Pharisees, as well as the past and ruling High priest (or chief priest).

Yamoah⁴ notes: The word is taken from the Greek word for council, *synedrion*, and designated for the supreme Jewish legislative and judicial court known as the Great Sanhedrin or simply the Sanhedrin, in Jerusalem. The group arose during the Intertestamental period after the Maccabean revolt. The Sanhedrin consisted of 71 rabbis. This number, according to Shurpin⁵, agreed with the instructions that the Almighty God gave Moses: “Gather for me 70 men from the elders of Israel.” Moses was the one who presided over them, as the verse continues: “And they shall stand there with you” (Exod 24:1; cf. Num 11:16-25), meaning, the 70 judges in addition to Moses become 71 persons.

The composition of the Sanhedrin is sometimes in dispute. The controversy usually centers on the two major parties of the day: Sadducees and Pharisees. While some argue that the Sanhedrin was made up of Sadducees, others say it was rather the Pharisees who formed the group. Then also there are those who hold the view that it was a mixture of the two groups. Indeed, clear indications in the gospels are that it was constituted by the Sadducees who dominated the group, then the Pharisees as well as any past and ruling High (or Chief) Priest. At a point in time, especially during the period of Jesus’ earthly ministry, it had become powerful enough to be the highest decision-making body of the Jewish state. Blackman *et al* (n.d.)⁶ observed the following:

The Sanhedrin judged accused lawbreakers but could not initiate arrests. It required a minimum of two witnesses to convict a suspect. There were no attorneys. Instead, the accusing witness stated the offense in the presence of the accused and the accused could call witnesses on his own behalf. The court questioned the accused, the accusers, and the defense witnesses. The Great Sanhedrin dealt with religious and ritualistic Temple matters, criminal matters appertaining to the secular court, proceedings in connection with the discovery of a corpse, trials of adulterous wives, tithes, preparation of Torah Scrolls for the king and the Temple, drawing up the calendar and the solving of difficulties relating to ritual law.

⁴ James Yamoah, *My New Testament Companion* (Kumasi, Ghana: Classic Graphics, 2019), pp. 10-12; cf. Promeet, D., and Rodriguez, E. (Eds). (2020). ‘Sanhedrin’ In *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Online article available at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/sanhedrin>. Assessed on 26-11-2020.

⁵ Shurpin, Y. (n.d.) ‘The Sanhedrin: The Jewish Court System.’ Online article available at: https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/4100306/jewish/The-Sanhedrin-The-Jewish-Court-System.htm. Assessed on 26-11-2020.

⁶ Blackman, P., *et al* (n.d.) ‘The Sanhedrin.’ Online article available at <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-sanhedrin>. Date assessed: 26-11-2020.

The Sanhedrin were recognized by the Roman authorities in that the latter relied on them to ensure that the Jews complied with Roman laws. According to Yamoah,⁷ the power to imprison, set a prisoner free or sentence the person to death depended on them. Continuing, he notes that their operation was like the parliament of many present-day countries. The book of Acts gives an account of the trials of Peter and John before “the council and all the senate,” pointing to a split between the Pharisaic and Sadducean members of the Sanhedrin. The basic difference between the Pharisees and the Sadducees lay in their respective attitudes toward the Torah (the first five books of the Bible) and the problem of finding in it answers to questions and bases for decisions about legal and religious matters.

The Pharisees: They originated in the Maccabean era probably at the time of John Hyrcanus I. They strongly opposed the Roman occupation of Palestine. They were anti-nationalist. They strove to guide towards holiness through education. They demanded a school for every town in Judea. They believed in the universality of God and the individuality of soul and the resurrection. They helped Judaism to survive after the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70.

The Sadducees: This group, usually referred to as “The righteous ones,” emerged in the Maccabean era. Originally, they were formed of priests and nobles. Yet it’s clear that this was the aristocratic party of Jesus’ day, made up of the well-to-do and dominated by the hierarchy of upper-level priests who supervised Greek culture in Judea and thus would be considered the political “liberals” of that time. They formed the controlling body of the Sanhedrin. The Sadducees considered themselves the only authorized interpreters of the Torah and recognized only the written Torah. They therefore rejected the idea of the resurrection. They were nationalists and continued to work for the survival of the Jewish state. With the Pharisees, this group dominated the Sanhedrin and took the lead in the plot to dispose of Jesus. They disappeared as a party after AD 70.

The Herodians: This was a Jewish political party that supported Herod Antipas and the policies instituted by the Romans. They were enemies of the Pharisees but together with them, they were found to be the main opposition to the ministry of Jesus, and tried on many occasions to trap him with tricky questions (Matt. 22: 15-17; Mark 3:6).

The Scribes: Another group of persons mentioned in Scripture is composed of “Lawyers”, “teachers of the law”, or “scribes”, depending on the translation one uses. This class is made

⁷ Yamoah, (2019), pp. 10-12.

up of men who had dedicated their lives to a study of Old Testament Law and traditional interpretations of it. These were the sages, the rabbis, whose years of study under an acknowledged master had won them the coveted recognition as an “expert in the Law.”

Communal Parties: Other parties emerged as communal parties living a semi- monastic, ascetic life, e.g., the Essenes. They originated from the Pharisean party. They lived in semi-monastic communities in the Dead Sea area. They held all things in common. The extremes lived celibate and adopted children. They had a doctrine of angels, believed in predestination and were experts in prediction. They were almost ascetic. Other communal parties were the "Dead Sea Community; and the “Unity of the New Covenant” in Qumran

The Hasidim: The Pious. They arose shortly before the Maccabean era. They strongly advocated religious freedom. They believed in old fashion Judaism. There should be uncompromising loyalty to the divine law.

The Samaritans: They were a people of mixed race and culture, often disregarded by the Jews as part of them. Their origin is in the foreign people from Moab, Edom and Arabia who were brought in by the Assyrians to settle with the remnant Israelites in Samaria, capital of the Northern Kingdom, after it fell to them in 722/21 BC.

The Coming of the Romans

Rome and the Seleucid Empire: Rome had control over Syria (Seleucid Empire) from the time of Antiochus III (The Great)⁸. She had formed alliances that allowed her to interfere in the affairs the Middle East by 73 BC. In 69, the last Seleucid king was on the throne. The Roman general Pompey moved against Syria and in 64 BC made Syria a Roman province. Rome was in the control of the Middle East except Palestine. It was during this time that Pompey captured Jerusalem – 63 BC. Jerusalem was captured with great loss of life. Hyrcanus II was installed as High Priest and also the political power as King (63-40).

The Roman Civil War: Judah became a vassal Roman Province. Palestine was under the Roman governor of Syria. In 57 BC, Hyrcanus II, the High Priest, was stripped of all political

⁸ A narrative of historical events covering the transfer of power from the Greeks to the Romans till a period beyond the death of Jesus Christ is carefully presented in L. D. Bock, *Studying the Historical Jesus: A Guide to Sources and Methods* (Grand Rapid, Michigan: Baker Publishing Group, 2002), p. 86.

power and retained only high priestly rights. Besides, the territory under the high priest was limited to the old province of Judea along with Perea, Galilee and Idumea. She no longer had access to the Mediterranean Sea coast. Samaria was put under the control of the Roman provincial governor of Syria! Judah had once again lost political liberty. Later, civil war broke out in the Roman Empire. Pompey and Julius Caesar who together with Crassus had formed the first Triumvirate were now at war. Hyrcanus II and Antipater who had at first been on Pompey's side changed to support Caesar. It was a wise decision, for Caesar remained victorious by defeating Pompey who fled to Egypt and murdered) around 48 BC.

Julius Caesar rewards the Jews for Support: The Jews received protection and liberty under Julius Caesar. When Julius Caesar came to Syria, he rewarded Hyrcanus II with the high priesthood while Antipater received Roman citizenship and was made Roman Procurator over Judea. Judea enjoyed protection and great privileges from Rome. Antipater the Idumean, took advantage of his new power to strengthen the position of his family. He put his eldest son, Phasaël, in charge of Jerusalem and its surroundings, and his second son, Herod the Great was also rewarded with control over Galilee from 37-4 BC. But Julius Caesar was killed in 44 BC.

Change of fortunes after death of Julius Caesar: After the murder of Julius (44 BC), Palestine came under the control of Cassius and he treated it severely. There was continuous civil war between Octavian and Mark Anthony. Palestine continued to suffer during Mark Anthony's stay in Syria. Octavian and Brutus defeated Mark Anthony and Cleopatra – 31 BC. Later, Octavian, a nephew of Julius Caesar defeated Brutus. Octavian was given the title of Augustus (Caesar) by the Roman Senate. He was the Roman Emperor between 31 BC – AD 14.

Herod's scheming for the Jewish Throne: (34-4 BC). Herod the Great was king as a Roman Vassal but was able to convince Rome to make him king of Judea and was given the task of claiming the country for himself. With the help of Roman soldiers, he succeeded in taking Jerusalem in 37 BC. This gave him freedom from tribute, the right to levy taxes and considerable freedom of action. He was not responsible to any provincial governor but to the Roman princes directly (in Rome). He created in Palestine a Hellenistic kingdom of considerable prestige.

Herod's reconstruction of the Temple: Herod the Great engaged in enormous building campaign. The projects of Herod the Great were financed through heavy taxation. In order to please the Jews, Herod the Great tore down the temple which had suffered considerable damage and begun a building project acclaimed as one of the most beautiful in the ancient world. The Jews never claimed him as king and hence he employed a persecution complex, which affected several babies at Christ's birth (Matt. 2). He died in Christ's first year. In his will, Herod the Great named his son Herod Archelaus, as king; and 2 others as tetrachs. Herod Antipas was king in Galilee and Perea; Herod Philip in North-East Palestine, Gaulanities, Trachonitis, Batanea and Panias.

The Birth and Ministry of Christ

Though it might be a common knowledge that the ancient Greek and Roman religions served as the religious background of the New Testament, as Bediako⁹ also argues, McGrath argues that it is the Old Testament that sets their foundation,¹⁰ while many of the events such as the birth of Jesus Christ and His ministry are better discussed in the books of the New Testament. The major areas of concentration of details comprise the gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke (usually referred to as Synoptic gospels because they show similar in presentation, display the events chronologically, and tell eye witnesses account), and one other gospel; John, written AD 80-90 from Ephesus – whose writer is interested in establishing the deity of Christ. Nevertheless, there are other historical sources which provide information on the birth and ministry of Christ.

Preparation for the birth of Christ: The Roman Empire was amazingly complex. In the first century it included about 54 million people, of whom about 5 million were Jews and many different ethnic groups. While Roman laws were supreme, the individual language groups or people were allowed to follow its own customs and maintain its own court systems. The Jewish Sanhedrin administered the Law of the Old Testament not only in Judea, but also served as a supreme court for all Jews. Perhaps the greatest of these benefits was peace. Roman power was supreme, so the people in it were not torn by wars with their neighbors. A

⁹ K. Bediako, *Jesus in Africa: The Christian Gospel in African History and Experience*. (Glasgow, Great Britain: Bell & Bain Ltd. 2000), p. 36.

¹⁰ McGrath argues that the primary source for the teachings of Christ, issues about His personality are set in an OT context. E. A. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers. Ltd. 1994), p. 275.

network of roads, constructed so that Roman legions could be moved quickly, permitted rapid transit of people, goods, and information.

After the murder of his uncle Julius Caesar in 44 BC. Octavian embarked on a ten-year civil struggle that saw him emerge as the sole ruler of the Roman Empire. He began his rule in 31 BC and was voted the title Augustus (“revered” or “sacred”) in 27 BC. His call for a census coincided with the birth of Jesus Christ, the “Messiah.” Jesus was born at a time when Herod the Great was in charge of Judea (Matt. 2:1-23). He was the Herod who employed a persecution complex, which affected several babies at Christ's birth. He died in Christ's first year. Herod the Great was succeeded by his son, Herod Archelaus, whose misrule had influenced Joseph to settle with Mary and Jesus in Nazareth, of Galilee, when they returned from Egypt.

Major areas of the ministry of Jesus Christ included: Jesus practiced what could be termed both as “holistic and wholistic ministry” involving: Teaching, Preaching, Healings, Praying, provision of basic needs like food to His followers, restoration of hope and joy to His believers, etc. Various groups and individuals were involved in this section.

The Disciples: These were later referred to as Apostles. Their names: Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

Other followers: Beside Jesus’ named disciples, there were so many other people or followers including His own family members, some priest, rich men, publicans (gentiles), who played various roles in His earthly ministry.

Herod Antipas: He was a clever and ambitious man. John the Baptist rebuked Antipas for divorcing his wife to marry Herodias, the wife of his half-brother. When in retaliation Herodias induced her dancing daughter to demand the head of John the Baptist, Antipas yielded to the grisly request (Mark 6:17-29; Matt. 14:3-12). Jesus called him ‘that fox’ (Luke 13:32). He met with Jesus when he came to Jerusalem for the Passover in AD 33, and Jesus later stood trial before him (Luke 23:7-12). Other Herods were as follows: Herod Agrippa I, grandson of Herod the Great, executed James the Apostle and son of Zebedee and imprisoned

Peter (acts 12). Herod Agrippa II, great-grandson of Herod the Great, heard Paul's self-defense (acts 25-26).

Roman Governors: Except for brief periods, Roman governors ruled Archelaus's former territory. One of these governors, Pontius Pilate, sat in judgment on Jesus. The governors Felix and Festus heard Paul's case (Acts 23-26). From AD 6- 66, Judea was part of the province of Syria but with Semi-Independence status. She was ruled by men called procurators whose seat of government was at Caesarea. These were military governors who were directly responsible to Rome and took charge of difficult provinces. Governor Florus's raiding of the temple treasury ignited the Jewish revolt of AD 66-74, which reached a climax with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70 by Titus, the Roman General.

The birth of the Church (From AD 33 to 100)

Acts of the Apostles: It was a document from Luke to "Theophilus" written around AD 65. It covers about 30 years. The Book of Acts is part two of Luke's book. He presents to Theophilus the results of his investigation of the life and work of Jesus in his Gospel, and then in Acts he continues to recount the work of the apostle of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit sent from Him. Acts sets forth the growth of Christianity in many stages: Appointment of deacons and death of some of the Apostles and disciples, the conversion of Saul (Paul) and his First missionary trip in AD 47/48 from Judea to Antioch (ministry to the Jews), Paul's ministry to the Roman world (ministry to the Gentiles), the Council at Jerusalem in AD 49, Missionary trip between AD 49 and 51. Paul's third missionary trip between AD 52 and 56. Paul's second Roman Imprisonment; execution; Peter's execution around AD 67.

Paul's Writings: From about AD 53 Apostle Paul used the city of Ephesus as a center for evangelism and church planting throughout the Roman province of Asia. Probably the seven churches of Revelation were founded during this time or shortly thereafter. While under house arrest in Rome (around AD 60-62), Paul wrote his letters to the Ephesians, the Colossians, the Philippians, and Philemon. Colossians was to be read "in the church of the Laodiceans" and "the epistle from Laodicea" was to be heard in the congregation in Colossae (Col. 4:16). These were glory letters to the churches, letters to individuals, pastoral letters and Philemon. And the content included messages on Salvation, Sanctification, contending for the faith, submission to Christ, the Church, and to authority. The practice of writing epistles

for wider circulation than individual was an accepted one, as seen in chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation.

Destruction of Jerusalem: The early Emperors of the Roman Empire were accommodative of the Jews and the Christians. With time, however, especially from the period of Nero, persecution of the Christians began and spread to cover all Jews. The Roman Governor Florus' raiding of the Jerusalem temple treasury ignited the Jewish revolt of AD 66-74, which reached a climax with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70 by Titus. Mopping-up operations lasted till the capture of Masada, a fortress on the west side of the Dead Sea, where the last rebels and their families were believed to have committed mass suicide just before the Romans entered.

Development of the New Testament Canon

The Canon here, as in the case of the OT, represents the list of accepted books that constitute the New Testament.¹¹ A book is canonical because it is considered and accepted to be inspired. In this wise, the leadership of the Church of Christ that began in the first century AD determined the canonicity of the NT books. With regards to the inclusion of any book in the NT, there were questions to be answered or some criteria to consider about a book before its inclusion in the Canon or its acceptance by Christians. The tests of canonicity of any book were as follows:

1. Whether it came through the Apostles of the Lord or through persons under their guidance such as Luke. In other words, it must be written by a known apostle. This must be:
 - a. Someone who was relatively close to Jesus and/or was involved in His earthly ministry. This is regarded as the eyewitness account.
 - b. Someone authenticated by a known apostle.
2. It must have been generally accepted by the people of God. This latter test refers to:
 - a. those who received the book from the original writers,
 - b. then by transmission to individuals in the Church,
 - c. and finally, transmission from one Church to another.
3. There must be evidence of guidance by the Holy Spirit. In other words, there must be proof that the book had to come with the power of God and be effective for changing lives or can edify when read aloud.

¹¹ The proceeding section compares well with what is captured in Yamoah, (2019), pp. 10-12.

4. It must have the ability to edify when read aloud: The book had to come with the power of God and be effective for changing lives. It must have the universal consciousness of the Church guided by the Holy Spirit. That is, it must have been generally accepted by the people of God. This test refers first to the ones who received the book and then its transmission to other churches.
5. The text of the book must be devoid of contradictions, inaccuracies, and the like, and should be consistent with existing Scriptures.
6. The book must bring about a universal consciousness of the Church or God's Kingdom. That is, the establishment of God's Church must be revealed through the book.

On the order of collection of the books, the determination of the New Testament Canon took place over a long period reaching its final form at the synod of Carthage in AD 397. The order was as follows:

1. Initially, it comprised parts of Luke, and 10 letters of Paul.
2. Later, all the epistles of Paul were added by AD 100.
3. Then there was the collection of the gospels after AD 100.
4. The Muratorian Canon existed by AD 180. In all, 22 books had been accepted. However, some books were questioned by Eusebius, one of the Church Fathers¹², in AD 324. Books such as Hebrews, James, 2Peter, 2John, 3John, Jude and Revelation had some questions about their authorship.
5. In AD 367 – Athanasius, another Church Father, presented the list of 27 books of the New Testament which needed to be accepted.
6. In AD 397 – the Council at Carthage approved all the 27 NT books as canonical.

Table 3

A Breakdown of the New Testament books according to period of writing

Name of Book	Author	Year of writing (AD)	Purpose of Writing
Matthew	Matthew	50 - 60	The first of the Synoptic gospels (these are similar and chronological, and give details of eye-witnesses account).

¹² The Church Fathers were the influential leaders, primarily teachers and writers with deep theological insights, who emerged in the early church immediately after the Apostles.

Mark	Mark	50 - 60	The second of the Synoptic gospels
Luke	Luke	50 - 60	The third of the Synoptic gospels
John	John	80 - 90	Independent Gospel
Acts	Luke	Early 60s	To continue with the results of his investigation of the life and work of Jesus in his Gospel with emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit in establishing the Church as Christ purposed.
Romans	Paul	57	One of Paul's General Epistles written from Corinth. It is major treatise on salvation and justification by faith
1 Corinthians -	Paul	56	One of Paul's General Epistles written from Ephesus: these are evangelical to correct wrong ideas and practices corrections of bad practice
2 Corinthians -	Paul	Fall 56 written	One of Paul's General Epistles written from Macedonia; purely evangelical to correct wrong ideas and practices corrections of bad practice
Galatians	Paul	48 written	One of Paul's General Epistles written from Antioch in Syria: It is more of an evangelical treatise on salvation – faith verses work
Ephesians	Paul	60	Written by Paul from Rome
Philippians	Paul	61	Written by Paul from Rome
Colossians	Paul	60	Paul wrote from Rome this treatise which encourages them to keep the faith free from syncretism.
1Thessalonians	Paul	51	One of Paul's General Epistles written from Macedonia; purely evangelical and eschatological to correct wrong ideas and practices corrections of bad practice. Paul's first teachings about the Lord's return for His church.
2Thessalonians	Paul	51	A continuation of Paul's epistle written from Macedonia to correct wrong ideas and practices in the Church. It is partly eschatological with Paul's teachings on the Lord's return and the events preceding it.
1 Timothy	Paul	62	Paul's wrote from Ephesus to give directions to Timothy about pastoring the church at Ephesus.
2 Timothy	Paul	67	Written from Rome by Paul, it encourages Timothy to carry on his work because the end of Paul's life appears to be close. Stand against false teachers.
Titus	Paul	64	Paul wrote from Macedonia to give directions to Titus about Pastoring the church in Crete.
Philemon	Paul	60	Probably written from Rome by Paul, this is a treatise about Christians and slavery.
Hebrews	Unknown	64	By unknown believer to Jewish Christians in an unknown destination. It is a treatise to explain

			how Christ fulfils of the OT sacrificial system. This resulted in a new covenant based on faith.
James	James	Mid 40s	Probably written from Jerusalem by James, brother of Jesus, to encourage the 12 tribes scattered (diaspora).
1 Peter	Peter	64	Probably written from Rome by Peter to encourage the Jews in diaspora in the Northern part of Turkey.
2 Peter	Peter	65	Probably written from Rome by Peter to warn the believers about false teachers who do not believe in the Second Coming of Jesus.
1John	John	80 - 90	Though Apostle John was in Ephesus and most likely wrote his letters from there, he probably ministered throughout the province of Asia from about AD 70 to 100. It is likely this first letter written to all Christians in that region between AD 80 and 90
2John	John	90s	Though Apostle John was in Ephesus and most likely wrote his letters from there, he probably ministered throughout the province of Asia from about AD 70 to 100. It is likely this second letter was written to a local church which he describes as “Lady” around AD 90.
3John	John	90 - 100	Though Apostle John was in Ephesus and most likely wrote his letters from there, he probably ministered throughout the province of Asia from about AD 70 to 100. It is likely that this third letter was written by the apostle to a known Christian friend who was probably one of the leaders by name Gaius in Pergamum.
Jude	Jude	60s	Written from Jerusalem by Jude, younger brother of Jesus and James, to Jewish believers
Revelation	John	90s	During the latter part of this period, the Emperor Domitian intensified his persecution of Christians. John was placed on the island of Patmos because of his Christian testimony. While there, John was praying one Sunday, when a voice instructed him to write what he was about to see. He was given a vision of Jesus in His full glory, so awesome that John fell to the ground. He wrote the message in the book. He was released after eighteen months by Emperor Nerva (AD 96-98), after which the apostle returned to Ephesus to resume his leadership role there.

Conclusion

Though it is quite difficult to find a fit-all single description or definition for the Bible, this article has described it as a carefully told story of the relationship between God and humanity which reports His momentous interventions in history, introduces us to saints and sinners, and provides instruction in godly living. It has shown why the document has been honored over the ages as a book given by God Himself, containing a timeless message for all human beings everywhere. Indeed, it is the only book that can support a claim to have been inspired by God. It does not only contain historical narrative, poetry, philosophy, pithy proverbs, prophetic denunciation, instruction and teaching, sermons and exhortations, predictions concerning the future, and grand apocalyptic visions, but also the collection of 66 works by many different authors was written and compiled over a span of some 1,600 years, and reflects the personalities of the writers and the literary styles of their times. This clearly demonstrates the uniqueness of the Bible.

The paper has surveyed the Bible in terms of its original construction and canonicity. The discussions took the form of a survey of both the Old Testament (OT) and the New Testament (NT) by highlighting key topical areas that would help the reader to get a firmer hold of the scriptures. It did so in order to bring every reader to the point of understanding the Bible. There is no doubt that this article has not only left its readers to struggle with the question of how such a survey of the Bible will enhance their understanding of the Scriptures, but also and more importantly, how it will impact their commitment to the LORD and ministry.

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