

The Origins of the Old Covenant

History of the Bible

Therefore, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions you were taught, either by our message or by our letter. - 2 Thessalonians 2:15 HCSB



To discuss the history of the English Bible is to discuss languages. You must realize that 1,000 years ago, the English language didn't even exist. But the Bible is so much older than that. In fact, while some parts of the Bible are estimated to be over 3,500 years old, the most recent addition to it is 2,000 years old. That's the modern part! So in order to develop a proper understanding of Biblical origins, we must go back – way back.

The first recorded instance of God's Word being put into writing was when the Lord Himself wrote down the Ten Commandments. This may have occurred between 1,400 and 1,500 years ago. So the earliest scripture was originally written on either stone tablets, or on leather. The leather was usually sheepskin, but sometimes came from deer or cattle. Of course, pig hide was never used since it was declared unclean.

The Old Testament's 39 books were written over a period of time from around 1500 to 400 BC by many different authors. The language used was either Hebrew or Aramaic, both of which, like English, were "picture languages", meaning that the words were very graphic and formed images in your mind when you heard them.

William Tyndale, the first man to ever print the Scriptures in English and a man so fluent in eight different languages that he could pass for a native speaker eight times, declared that Hebrew was ten times easier to translate into English than any other language!

According to Jewish tradition, around 450 BC, Ezra collected and arranged some of the Old Testament books. These writings were collected and transcribed onto scrolls which could be over 150 feet long when stretched out. Since a single sheep can only provide about two to three feet of hide, it obviously took an entire flock of sheep to make a single Torah scroll.

To make things even more complicated, the Jewish scribes were unbelievable perfectionists. If they made the smallest mistake, say let two letters touch or put an accent mark in the wrong place, they would not only destroy the entire hide they were currently working on but the one preceding it as well because it had touched a panel on which there had been a mistake. A bit over the top, I understand, and bordering on superstition for sure, however, that fastidiousness resulted in our ability to receive the Scriptures from their hands after thousands of years of time with almost no errors at all.

We need to thank God for their faithfulness to accuracy in preserving His Word. We also need to dedicate ourselves to develop the same taste for accuracy, that same passion for recounting EXACTLY the Lord's commands that they had.