

What Did Jesus Read?

The History of the Bible

He said to them, "How unwise and slow you are to believe in your hearts all that the prophets have spoken! Didn't the Messiah have to suffer these things and enter into His glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He interpreted for them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures. - Luke 24:25-27 HCSB



About 500-400 BC, papyrus (a kind of paper that was made from the Papyrus plant) started becoming popular. The outer rind was cut off and the sticky inner pith was cut into strips that were laid side by side with another layer on top perpendicular to the first layer. These two layers were hammered together and then pressed as they dried, forming a type of paper that could be written on.

Interestingly, the plant had both edible and inedible uses. When used for eating, it was commonly referred to as “*papuros*”. However, when it was used for writing it was called Βύβλος which is pronounced “bublos”. This is where the word “bible” originates.

By about 500 BC, all original Hebrew manuscripts which make up the 39 Books of the Old Testament were completed. Somewhere around 250-100 BC, during the time period referred to by bible scholars as the intertestamental period or the “400 year silence”, a group of Jewish scholars in Alexandria Egypt made a Greek translation of this Hebrew Bible (that Christians refer to as the Old Testament). It was called the “Septuagint”. “Septuagint” means seventy. It got this name because traditionally there were 70 scholars who did this work. It is sometimes abbreviated LXX which is the Roman numeral for seventy.

This group arranged the Old Testament books topically: historical, poetic, law, prophetic, etc. It was during this work that the Jewish historical works that became known as the “Apocrypha” were added to the original Septuagint. Apocrypha means “hidden”. These books were included in the Hebrew Bible until around AD 90, when a council of Jewish rabbis removed them.

So by around a century before Christ, the Old Testament existed in the format and structure we are familiar with. When the Christ referred to “the Scriptures”, this was what He was referring to. When He stood in the synagogue and read from a scroll, He read, **“These are My words that I spoke to you while I was still with you--that everything written about Me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”¹**

He made reference to the Law of Moses (which we refer to as the Pentateuch or the first five books of the Bible), the prophets and the Psalms, showing that Jesus Himself was using the format organized by the 70 scholars. So Jesus Himself read out of and approved the use of the Septuagint. However, neither the Christ nor the Apostles ever quoted from the Apocrypha which was removed from the Hebrew Bible during the lifetimes of the Apostles.

Application:

1. We do not derive any theology from the Apocrypha.
2. We do not accept the Apocrypha as Scripture.
3. Jesus accepted the entire Old Testament as we now possess it. Therefore there is no part of the Old Testament that we may disregard.
4. Jesus used the Old Testament to demonstrate that He was the Messiah. We should be able to do the same.
5. We must be careful to not “throw the baby out with the bath water” in regards to the Old Testament.

¹ Luke 24:44