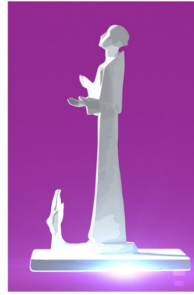


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3: Reading the Old Testament

Question 3b. Where is the Old Testament from?

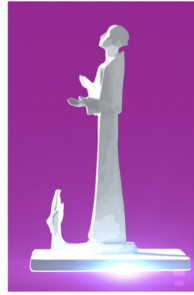
1. It can be fascinating to hear about the development of the Old Testament (or Jewish Scriptures) and to know that at the time of Jesus, these texts were not in the format used in the modern Christian church. What new ideas does this understanding generate for you?
2. The Old Testament/Jewish Scriptures is a collection of writings that explore an ancient peoples' understanding of their relationship with God. Are humans still doing this kind of thinking? In what ways is the modern world expressing this understanding? Identify ways people record the stories of their attempts to understand their relationship with the divine, the transcendent.
3. The 'new technology' of the codex (the earliest book form) meant that texts were more easily transportable. What would this mean for growing early Christian communities?
4. What strikes you about the process of making/establishing a holy text?

Marie Louise Craig

It came out of an ancient culture and it is written in an ancient language and it was actually the stories that this particular civilisation – Israel – collected because they thought they were important. So there's stories and prophecies, there's laws, there's poetry and beautiful worship sections um and wisdom you know things like Proverbs and so on. They were the things that this particular nation felt were important, but it was important from the perspective of their relationship with God; that's why they collected it. They wanted to remember how they were supposed to understand God, how they

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were supposed to understand themselves in relationship with God and how to understand themselves in relationship with the wider world: other nations and nature. So they collected these together as a number of scrolls. They were not written as a book, the way we have it today. It was separate scrolls and so this was a collection that they held as being important to them.

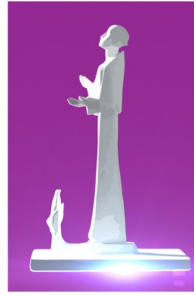
How we get the collection today is not a story that we can actually say for sure. We don't have proof of how it happened but we do know that by the time of Christ people are talking about Torah which is the law (actually the first 5 books, Genesis, Exodus, Numbers Leviticus and Deuteronomy) and then there is a section called the Prophets. They're not the prophets as we understand the prophets. The prophets here are any stories in which prophets play a major role, or the written prophets. So it is Judges Joshua, Joshua Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, Chronicles is not included in there and then it is Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the Book of the Twelve which is the what we call the minor prophets. And they were definitely all in place by the time of Christ.

Then Christ also mentions the Psalms and so does Paul, and so do some of the other writers in the New Testament. They'll either say Psalms or writings, and we're not sure how much was actually included in that 3rd section of books at the time of Christ. Some of those might still have been being added in. We do know the dead sea scrolls did not have Esther or at least we've never found they haven't found any parts of Esther. That doesn't mean it wasn't there; it's a small book, there's lots of fragments but we can prove everything was there except Esther.

They were written as scrolls and the scrolls could only be a certain size because if you get too big, they get too unwieldy. They always lived their lives as separate scrolls until much, much later, when humans got the capacity to create codexes, what we call a book today. So the

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order for the Jewish books is that Torah and the prophets and then the writings which is everything else.

But when the Greeks when the Jews were living in a Greek society and a lot of them had lost their Hebrew, they decided to translate the Bible into Greek. When they did that they changed how they arranged it. They had the Torah (still the first 5 books) but then they put history books together, things that were narrative and basically covered history and that's the order that we have adopted as Christians. So you get Ruth put in after Judges and you get Chronicles put straight after Kings and you get Ezra and Nehemiah put in there where, in actual fact in the Hebrew Bible, Chronicles is last. So that's what we have in our order today: the way the Greek speaking Jews organised it. So we have two different orders that we can run with and they give us two different ways of thinking about it. That forces us to think more of it as history when we're reading it in our Christian Bibles.

The thing we need to understand is that the only Bible that Jesus in the early Christians had was the old Testament and so that was their Scripture and that was what they then started with, and when they started to write their own writings and they were canonised then the two were put together and some we get our Old Testament and our New Testament.