



into the Melting Pot

the question is more important than the answer

Sunday 09 October 2016

The Old Testament – who wrote it and when

The following are my notes taken from the meeting, both Robin Hamon's excellent contribution in leading and some of the discussion that followed with some additional material about the different canons of the Old Testament.

- The Hebrew Bible was mostly written in Hebrew, the exception being Ezra, which was written in Aramaic.
- The concept of 'myth' is a Greek tradition and not found within Hebrew, and so is a view we superimpose upon the text when trying to understand and seek 'truth'. This is an issue for us and not the text.
- The Oral Tradition that preceded the writing down of the story of the Hebrew nation is a reliable form of communication, even though embellishments would have occurred. These folk tales are not therefore literal stories. For example, numbers are enlarged to emphasise the importance of an event or person, hence the rather extreme ages attributed to some individuals (although there is a theory that they could have been an accumulation of years of a 'dynasty').
- The Books of the Bible have been collected in different forms, the Catholic Bible having some additional books to that of the Protestant Bible and the Greek Bible (Septuagint) different again. Some English translations have additional books collected in the Apocrypha (meaning 'Hidden Books'), also called the Deuterocanonical texts.
- The Protestant Bible OT has books collected under the headings: Pentateuch (the Law), History, Poetry and Prophets. It should be noted that the modern understanding of the word 'history' as a record of events that actually happened is not how these texts were understood when they were written, and are considered 'prophetic' (forth-telling, not foreseeing as some mistakenly believe) within the Hebrew Bible.
- The 'Books' of the Hebrew Bible are sometimes simply determined by the amount of text that can be contained on an animal hide scroll. So, for example, 1 and 2 Samuel are one piece of text, but divided in two for this very practical reason.
- The Hebrew Bible is split into three collections (note that there are no definitive English spellings of Hebrew words, so there can be variation):
 - Torah (Law), which is considered to be the most holy; the first five books (Pentateuch) in the Protestant OT.
 - Neviim (Prophets: the Former, the Latter and the Twelve (minor) Prophets), which includes books ascribed as 'History' in an English Old Testament.
 - Ketuvim (Writings) is everything else.
 - The complete collection is referred to as the Tanach(k), an acrostic from the three named parts.
- Authorship in Hebrew tradition is very different to today's understanding in western culture of a single writer who would claim copyright. Writing the books of the Hebrew

Bible was a community group scribal project which took many years and, in some cases, generations. For example, Isaiah can be seen to be three separate collections, each with community authorship.

- Writing 'in the style of' or 'following the tradition of' was an accepted form of authorship (this can be seen in the New Testament with books ascribed to Paul not in fact authored by him such as 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus).
- The structure of the writing does not always come across in all modern English translations; for example, the book of Job is a story in poetic form (similar to a Norse Saga) that features Job as the main character in the story and is not a biography.
- The Torah is traditionally described as 'written by Moses'. Some Jews and some Christians still believe this to be true, even though a substantial part of the text refers to times after his death. The earliest known texts are from about 800BCE and Moses lived around 1400BCE, some 600 years earlier.
- Prior to the 18th Century, the English Bible was read simply as a religious text. Following the Reformation our understanding of text developed and changed so that religious truth and event reality became confused.
- Scholars from Germany were examining the text as language, from Luther on. This was the origin of Biblical Scholarship. In the 1880's, Julius Wellhausen published his theory (the documentary hypothesis) which placed the texts in a historical and social context which shows four sources found in the Torah:

Date BCE	950	850	600	500
Name	Jahweh	Elohim	Deuteronomical	Priestly
Source	South	North	Jerusalem	Exile

Each of the sources can be tied to a sub-group of the Hebrew nation separated by politics and geography.

This can be clearly seen in modern English OT where different names are used for God: Genesis 1:1-2:4a includes God as 'Elohim' translated as 'GOD'; Genesis 2:4b-23 has 'Yahweh' (or Jahweh or Jehovah) translated as 'LORD God'. These two sources include two differing Creation stories for example, one each from the two traditions.

- The text of the Hebrew Scriptures underwent change for many centuries, but was mostly standardised by about 100CE. It is written in an archaic form of Hebrew which differs from modern Hebrew, just as English has changed over the centuries.
- The Hebrew Scriptures known to Jesus would have been a Greek translation (the common, or international, language of that part of the world) called the Septuagint. Legend has it that Ptolemy II ordered the translation of the Torah by 70 scribes (hence its name) for Alexandrian Jews who knew no Hebrew some time in the 3rd Century BCE. This has led to discrepancies between the New and Old Testaments where quotes from the Hebrew Scriptures recorded in the NT are from the Septuagint and not the original Hebrew. As a result of mis-translation, we have the well known issue over 'maid' to 'virgin' that led to all the fuss about Jesus' birth status.
- What do we teach our children? If we teach these stories as literal (Noah's Ark, Jonah and the whale) then why are we surprised that they fall into the same category as Red Riding Hood and the Tooth Fairy, and religion (and Jesus) is lost to them as they grow up and discard the fiction. This is a serious matter. How can we be honest with our children.
- A useful way of thinking about the Bible is that it 'contains the word of God' rather than 'is the word of God'.

The Books of the Hebrew Bible, The Greek Septuagint, Catholic & Protestant Old Testaments

Hebrew Bible	Greek Septuagint	Catholic OT	Protestant OT
<i>Torah</i>	Genesis	<i>Pentateuch</i>	<i>Pentateuch</i>
Genesis	Exodus	Genesis	Genesis
Exodus	Leviticus	Exodus	Exodus
Leviticus	Numbers	Leviticus	Leviticus
Numbers	Deuteronomy	Numbers	Numbers
Deuteronomy	Joshua	Deuteronomy	Deuteronomy
	Judges		
<i>Former Prophets</i>	Ruth	<i>History</i>	<i>History</i>
Joshua	1 & 2 Kingdoms	Joshua	Joshua
Judges	3 & 4 Kingdoms	Judges	Judges
1 & 2 Samuel	Things Omitted	Ruth	Ruth
1 & 2 Kings	1 Esdras	1 & 2 Samuel	1 & 2 Samuel
	2 Esdras	1 & 2 Kings	1 & 2 Kings
<i>Latter Prophets</i>	Judith	1 & 2 Chronicles	1 & 2 Chronicles
Isaiah	Tobit	Ezra	Ezra
Jeremiah	1 & 2 Maccabees	Nehemiah	Nehemiah
Ezekiel	3 & 4 Maccabees	Tobit	Esther
	Psalms & Odes	Judith	
<i>The Twelve</i>	Proverbs	Esther	<i>Poetic</i>
Hosea	Ecclesiastes	1 & 2 Maccabees	Job
Joel	Song of Songs		Psalms
Amos	Job	<i>Sapient</i>	Proverbs
Obadiah	Wisdom of Solomon	Job	Ecclesiastes
Jonah	Ecclesiasticus	Psalms	Song of Songs
Micah	Psalms of Solomon	Proverbs	Lamentations
Nahum	Hosea	Ecclesiastes	
Habakkuk	Amos	Song of Solomon	<i>Prophets</i>
Zephaniah	Micah	Wisdom	Isaiah
Haggai	Joel	Sirach	Jeremiah
Zechariah	Obadiah		Ezekiel
Malachi	Jonah	<i>Prohetic</i>	Daniel
	Nahum	Isaiah	Hosea
<i>Writings</i>	Habakkuk	Jeremiah	Joel
Psalms	Zephaniah	Lamentations	Amos
Job	Haggai	Baruch	Obadiah
Proverbs	Zechariah	Ezekiel	Jonah
Ruth	Malachi	Daniel	Micah
Song Of Songs	Isaiah	Hosea	Nahum
Ecclesiastes	Jeremiah	Joel	Habakkuk
Esther	Ezekial	Amos	Zephaniah
Lamentations	Susanna	Obadiah	Haggai
Daniel	Daniel	Jonah	Zechariah
Ezra	Bel & The Dragon	Micah	Malachi
Nehemiah		Nahum	
1 & 2 Chronicles		Habakkuk	
		Zephaniah	
		Haggai	
		Zechariah	
		Malachi	
			Note: Lamentations follows Jeremiah

Notes on Septuagint

1 & 2 Kingdoms is 1 & 2 Samuel

3 & 4 Kingdoms is 1 & 2 Kings

Things Omitted is 1 & 2 Chronicles

2 Esdras is Ezra & Nehemiah

Jeremiah includes Lamentations, Baruch and the Letter of Jeremiah

Susanna is Daniel 13

Bel & The Dragon is Daniel 14

The Apochrypha or Deuterocannonical Books (information from the Good news Study Bible)

Books & Additions found in Catholic, Greek and Slavonic Bible

Tobit

Judith

Esther (additions)

Wisdom of Solomon

Ecclasticus (or Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach)

Baruch

Letter of Jeremiah (= Baruch 6)

Additions to Daniel: Prayer of Azariah & the Song of the Three Jews, Susanna, Bel & The Dragon

1 & 2 Maccabees

Books additionally in the Greek & Slavonic Bible

1 Esdras (= 2 Esdras in Slavonic or 3 Esdras in Vulgate Appendix)

Prayer of Manasseh (Vulgate Appendix)

Psalms 151 (follows Psalm 150 in Greek)

3 Maccabees

In Slavonic and Latin Vulgate Appendix

2 Esdras (= 3 Esdras in Slavonic or 4 Esdras in Vulgate Appendix)

In Appendix to Greek

4 Maccabees