

# The Word of Man: A Brief History of the Bible

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***Abstract:***

The history of the Bible is presented: who wrote it, when it was written, what languages it was written in, and how it was compiled and passed through the ages to the present day. The views given here follow mainstream scholarly opinion, summarized for the lay reader and presented in a fashion which is easy to read. The results are certain to be of interest to anyone desiring to learn more about the creation of the Bible. Approx. 60 printed pages. This is not a religious analysis of Biblical content, and is not intended to follow any particular denomination's theology. As such, it would be of interest to Catholics, Protestants, Jews and anyone else who has wondered how the Bible came into being.

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- Section I -

1. Introduction

An understanding of the stories of the Bible is almost presupposed in many modern societies, including the United States and Europe. The influence it has had on the development of Western thought is undeniable. The sheer volume of references to the Bible has led me to wonder: How did it come into being? Who wrote it? Why was it written? When was it written? Why do different people – even those with the same religious affiliation – read different messages from the Bible? How can so important a book be ambiguous?

Few of my friends and acquaintances seem to have any idea of the sources of the written Bible. Whether they are Jewish, Catholic, or Protestant, most simply believe that the Bible represents the word of God as delivered to man. Their underlying assumptions are that the Bible is immutable, infallible and its message not to be questioned. The Bible has always been and always will be. Its inspiration is divine; its wisdom is timeless. Perhaps it is not meant to be fully understood by man.

Yet, there is a fascinating history here that goes so much deeper. As I studied the creation of the collection of writings we know as the Bible, I uncovered many interesting stories and unexpected twists. And I learned that the Bible, as we know it, is very definitely the word of man.

The Bible as the word of man? Is this not heresy incarnate? Far from it! In fact, Biblical scholars of all religions acknowledge the story I am about to tell you. While there is some disagreement on the particulars, everything you are about to read is mainstream analysis. Many Bibles include much of what you will read here either as preface or introduction (try looking, you'll be surprised).

Because of the religious nature of the material included in the Bible, most people tend to focus on the message rather than how that message came into being. Religious authorities may debate the meaning of the words of the Bible, and find different ways to read identical passages. Yet their common underlying assumption is that those words are a direct reflection of God's instructions to mankind. Further, the assumption is that these words have reached us through a pristine, immaculate journey across thousands of years. But it is the journey which is documented here; the meaning of the passages themselves – whether literal or symbolic – is left to the reader of the Bible.

In fact, the Bible has been affected by decisions of many different individuals throughout the past 3000 years. These individuals were perhaps influenced by the hand of God: this is certainly an opinion held by many. Still, the significance of man's role in the development of the Bible cannot be understated. This will become clear as we cover the many influences that are present. These influences affect the actual words we read today, and go a long way towards explaining the ambiguous nature of Biblical passages.

When I refer to the Bible, I should clarify that I am referring to several different collections of works that are referred to as the Bible. The Bible is not so much a single book as it is a collection of short books. For my purposes here, I will frequently refer to the following Bibles generally:

- The Jewish Bible: This is the Old Testament. Also called the Tanakh (pronounced 'ta-nock').
- The Catholic Bible: This is the Old Testament and the New Testament. However the Jewish Bible and the Catholic Bible have differences between the number and order of the Old Testament books. The Catholic Bible includes books not considered canon by Jews.
- The Protestant Bible: This consists of the Jewish Old Testament and the Catholic New Testament, although the order of the books of the Old Testament is somewhat different from the Jewish Bible.

And there are more, specific translated derivations...

- The Septuagint: The ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament from Hebrew.
- The Vulgate (pronounced 'vul-ga-tay'): The Latin translation of the Old and New Testament from ancient Hebrew and Greek sources.
- The Kings James Version: The English translation of the Vulgate.
- The Revised Standard Version: Revised English translation, based on the King James Version.
- The New American Bible: English translation of the Bible commissioned by Pope Pius XII and completed in 1970, based on the Catholic books of the Bible (translated from the original languages or the oldest extent form of the text).

How many different Bibles are there? Which ones are wrong? *Can't we just go back to the original, and skip the others?*

As we will see, there is no such thing as the original of the Bible in existence. There is not even a single original of any portion of the Bible! All that exist are copies, and frequently the copies are not in the original tongue of the original author. (When you read a Bible in English, you are reading a book that has been translated from language to language, and there is substantial disagreement about important points in the process amongst scholars.)

In this article, I will cover the derivation of the key pieces of the Old Testament and the New Testament. I will also discuss very briefly the creation of the Talmudic writings essential to modern Judaism. The essential elements of the evolution of religious thought will be touched upon, as will the greater historical elements relevant to authors of the books of the Bible. Generally, it should become clear that the Bible is not a static document; rather it is one that has changed over time – albeit slowly – and that such change continues through the present time.

This article is not intended to convert you from one viewpoint to another. Rather, it is hoped that it will help you better understand a book that has had a great influence on our society. During each section of this article, I will try to augment your knowledge of the evolution of the Bible with basic background historical information, as well as highlights in the evolution of religious thought during the period. In some places, references will be made to book/chapter/verse rather than quoting from the Bible verbatim. We will now move through time in sequential order. The result should be a thorough overview of the subject matter.

Figure 1.1: The Books of the Bible

Name	Approx. Date Written +/-	Approx. Historical Period	Original Lang.	Order in Jewish Bible	Order in Catholic Bible	Order in Protestant Bible (KJV)	No. Pages in Oxford KJV
<b><i>The Old Testament</i></b>	<b><i>(BCE)</i></b>						
<b><i>The Torah</i></b>							
Genesis	850-560*	Creation	Hebrew	1	1	1	64
Exodus	850-560*	1250-1240	Hebrew	2	2	2	54
Leviticus*	750-560*	1240	Hebrew	3	3	3	40
Numbers*	750-560*	1240-1200	Hebrew	4	4	4	57
Deuteronomy	620-560*	1200	Hebrew	5	5	5	46
<b><i>The Prophets and The Writings</i></b>							
Joshua	620-560*	1210-1180	Hebrew	6	6	6	32
Judges	620-560*	1180-1030	Hebrew	7	7	7	32
Ruth		1100	Hebrew	31	8	8	4
1 Samuel	620-560*	1030-1000	Hebrew	8	9	9	41
2 Samuel	620-560*	1030-1000	Hebrew	9	10	10	35
1 Kings	620-560*	1000-620	Hebrew	10	11	11	40

2 Kings	620-560*	1000-620	Hebrew	11	12	12	39
1 Chronicles	430	-1000	Hebrew	38	13	13	37
2 Chronicles	430	960-530	Hebrew	39	14	14	44
Ezra	350	460-450	Hebrew	36	15	15	13
Nehemiah	350	450-430	Hebrew	37	16	16	18
Esther			Hebrew	34	19	17	10
Job		n/a	Hebrew	29	22	18	33
Psalms		1000	Hebrew	27	23	19	83
Proverbs		960	Hebrew	28	24	20	28
Ecclesiastes (Qoholoth)	250	960	Hebrew	33	25	21	9
Song of Songs (Song of Solomon)		960	Hebrew	30	26	22	5
Isaiah		750	Hebrew	12	29	23	62
Jeremiah		610-580	Hebrew	13	30	24	60
Lamentations		560	Hebrew	32	31	25	6
Ezekiel		580	Hebrew	14	33	26	65
Daniel	160	580	Hebrew/ Aramaic	35	34	27	19
Hosea		750	Hebrew	15	35	28	9
Joel			Hebrew	16	36	29	3
Amos		750	Hebrew	17	37	30	7
Obadiah		580	Hebrew	18	38	31	2
Jonah		570	Hebrew	19	39	32	2
Micah		750	Hebrew	20	40	33	6
Nahum		570	Hebrew	21	41	34	2
Habakkuk		610	Hebrew	22	42	35	3
Zephaniah		610	Hebrew	23	43	36	3
Haggai		530	Hebrew	24	44	37	2
Zechariah			Hebrew	25	45	38	10
Malachi		530	Hebrew	26	46	39	4
<b><i>Apocrypha</i></b>							
1 Esdras			Hebrew			40^	20
2 Esdras			Hebrew			41^	35
Tobit	220		Hebrew		17	42^	11
Judith	160		Hebrew		18	43^	19
Esther (rest of)			Hebrew		19	44^	5
Wisdom	60		Hebrew		27	45^	19
Ecclesiasticus (Sirach)	220		Hebrew		28	46^	50
Baruch, with the Epistle of Jeremiah			Hebrew		32	47^	9
Song of the Three Children			Hebrew			48^	3
The Story of Susanna			Hebrew			49^	3
The Idol Bel, and the Dragon			Hebrew			50^	2
The Prayer of Manasses			Hebrew			51^	1
1 Maccabees		168	Hebrew		20	52^	40
2 Maccabees		168	Hebrew		21	53^	28
<b><i>The New Testament</i></b>	<b><i>(CE)</i></b>						
<b><i>The Gospels</i></b>							

Matthew	90	33	Greek		1	1	41
Mark	80	33	Greek		2	2	26
Luke	90	33	Greek		3	3	44
John	90	33	Greek		4	4	33
Acts	90	40	Greek		5	5	42
Romans	57	57	Greek		6	6	17
1 Corinthians	55	55	Greek		7	7	16
2 Corinthians	55	55	Greek		8	8	11
Galatians	50	50	Greek		9	9	6
Ephesians	55	55	Greek		10	10	5
Philippians	55	55	Greek		11	11	4
Colossians	55	55	Greek		12	12	4
1 Thessalonians	50	50	Greek		13	13	4
2 Thessalonians	50	50	Greek		14	14	2
1 Timothy	60	60	Greek		15	15	4
2 Timothy	60	60	Greek		16	16	3
Titus	60	60	Greek		17	17	2
Philemon	60	60	Greek		18	18	1
Hebrews	100	60	Greek		19	19	12
Epistle of James	100	60	Greek		20	20	4
1 Peter	100	60	Greek		21	21	4
2 Peter	100	60	Greek		22	22	3
1 John	100	60	Greek		23	23	5
2 John	100	60	Greek		24	24	1
3 John	100	60	Greek		25	25	1
Jude	100	60	Greek		26	26	1
Revelation	100	Future	Greek		27	27	20

\*First date is when text originally written, second date is when the original was edited into current form.

\*\*Estimated date is subject to debate; could have been written many years earlier or later. Author's date should be useful for providing perspective on the writings.

\*\*\*No date given as historical information is insufficient for any useful estimate. Was written after 560 BCE and prior to 168 BCE.

^Included in Protestant Bible, but not part of canon.

### Notes regarding dates:

- BCE is the same as B.C. CE is the same as A.D. Use of BCE and CE has become standard in presenting dates, and will be used here.
- The above dates are not exact, they are consensus estimates based on dating schemes employed by different scholars. They are based on the best information currently available. However, few scholars agree with each other regarding the precise dates. This is one of the areas where there is great debate. However, whether Genesis was written in 850 BCE or 800 BCE does not really affect our conclusions. Generally, all of the dates included are in the correct temporal sequence, and this is of greater importance.
- In addition, it should be noted that dates after the death of Jesus (33 CE) are significantly more reliable than earlier dates. Dates older than the destruction of the first Temple (587 BCE) are significantly “fuzzier” than the more recent dates. The accuracy of dates is correlated to the number of cross-references to events, which is in turn correlated to the total number of writings of the period. There are many more surviving

documents as we move close and closer to the present. This accounts for the ability to date accurately (or inaccurately) many events.

- Elsewhere throughout this article, dates given will follow this same scheme. Dates will be presented with [+/-] where the range is more than a few years.

## 2. Overview: the Words of Men

There were hundreds of individuals directly involved in bringing the Bible to us. Many, but not all, of the books of the Bible were originally passed down orally. At some point, these were written on scrolls. These scrolls were copied as needed for distribution. Sometimes they were edited and assembled into a cohesive text, a process called redaction. They were translated from language to language. New books were written and included, sometimes only to be excluded later. The order of the books was changed. Some books were lobbied for, voted on and fought over. Then they were translated again.

And yet, out of all this, the Bible did emerge. The acts of the many individuals who touched the Bible did make it a powerful document, probably much more powerful for the process it had to endure.

The Bible is one of the oldest documents in existence. Its oldest written form dates from about 560 BCE, although these are in turn based on predecessor documents dating from about 850 BCE. (BCE stands for Before the Common Era, usually the birth of Jesus, and is also the same as B.C.) These include the first 5 books of the Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

It is also the longest running document in existence. The last portions of the New Testament were written in about 150 CE. (CE stands for the Common Era, and is also the same as A.D.) So the Bible was written over a period of about 1000 years.

### Translation of the Bible

The authors of the Bible wrote in three different languages. Most of the Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew, the language of Moses. A small portion of the Old Testament was written in Aramaic, which was the language of Jesus. The New Testament was written entirely in Greek, which was the language of the apostle Paul.

The Old Testament portion of the King James Version (KJV) Bible has been translated twice to get it from the original Hebrew to English: first, to Latin (the Vulgate version, created by Jerome in 405 CE); and then to Middle English (the form it is in today). This process was completed in 1611.

The New Testament portion of the King James Version has also been translated twice to get it from Greek to English: first, to Latin (the Vulgate); then to Middle English. But there is a catch: the New Testament tells the stories of Jesus and his disciples and includes direct quotes. Yet Jesus did



not speak Greek, he spoke Aramaic. Therefore the original author of the New Testament quotes attributed to Jesus must have himself performed an additional translation. In all, the words of Jesus are translated three times to get them into English. That’s a lot of translation, which must be done correctly to maintain the meaning of the original quotes.

Most recent translations of the Bible attempt to go back to the original source language. For instance, the New American Bible is the most recent translation for Catholics. The Old Testament was translated into English from the Masoretic text, the traditional Hebrew text from about 600 CE. The Testament is translated into English directly from the Greek. This avoids the translation problem incumbent with multiple translations. Fewer translations are better.

The Jewish Publication Society (JPS) version of the Old Testament (the Jewish Bible) was similarly newly translated from the Masoretic text. Yet this translation of the Old Testament differs from the New American Bible described above in virtually every verse in some fashion. Does it really matter? Has the sense of the original words changed? In most cases, no. Is there a cumulative effect of many differences from version to version?

Considering that each version of the Bible is translated by a group of scholars chosen by a particular religious body with a specific doctrine, it is hard to believe that no bias creeps into the resulting work. However, it is my impression that in comparing the newer Biblical translations in English, the feel is quite similar between them. Consider these examples:

*What difference does it make?*

Genesis 1:1-3, New American Bible (Catholic)	In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless wasteland, and darkness covered the abyss, while a mighty wind swept across the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.
Genesis 1:1-3, King James Version (Protestant)	In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and the darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.
Genesis 1:1-3, JPS Version (Jewish)	When God began to create heaven and earth – the earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind from God sweeping over the water – God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light.

In the above example, note that the King James edition alone refers to the “Spirit of God”, while the other two versions translate a phrase involving the “wind.” The Jewish version does not begin with the words “In the beginning”, as do the other two versions. “In the beginning” was a traditional phrase added, which was not actually present in the original.

*What difference does it make?*

Exodus 20:13, New American Bible (Catholic)	You shall not kill. [6 <sup>th</sup> commandment.]
Exodus 20:13, King James Version (Protestant)	Thou shalt not kill. [6 <sup>th</sup> commandment.]
Exodus 20:13, JPS Version (Jewish)	You shall not murder. [6 <sup>th</sup> commandment.]

In the above example, we have a more significant issue in which the translation is clearly critical. We are no longer debating semantics. In English, there is a significant difference between the verbs “kill” and “murder”, as it is clearly possible to kill someone without murdering them. It is not possible, on the other hand, to murder someone without killing them. The moral implication of murder is different than of killing, and this is the point we are addressing. The intervention of man is necessary to solve the dilemma. The dilemma is, of course: which is the correct translation?

Evolution of the Bible

The King James Version consists of 80 books covering about 1500 pages of text. These books competed with several dozen more for inclusion as accepted canon (canon means the books are accepted as scripture, i.e. divinely inspired). Books that did not make it into the modern Bible include the Books of Jubilees (Old Testament) and the Gospel of Thomas (New Testament). Yet at one time, these books were commonly accepted by many as true canon. The Bible, as we know it, was affected by an ebb and flow of sentiment over hundreds of years, and this ebb and flow determined the final line-up of the books of the Bible.

The order of the books of the Bible changed as well. Clearly, the ordering of the books affects our understanding of the significance of what we read. What different message would be given if Paul’s letters had been the first books of the New Testament?

Generally, the books of the Bible are included in the order they were written. There are exceptions: Mark, Mark, and Luke (collectively called the Synoptics) are included before the letters of Paul, although the letters of Paul were written first.

How do we know this? Generally, the past hundred years has resulted in considerable advances in Biblical study. Biblical scholars use the following methods when performing analysis:

- Events mentioned in the Bible are calibrated in time relative to events mentioned in non-Biblical sources. This can only be accomplished for a small portion of the Bible.
- Events mentioned in the Bible are calibrated in time relative to other events mentioned within the Bible.
- The knowledge of the author and his viewpoints are frequently critical to dating the books. For instance, an author who knows about an event, or has foreknowledge of an event, is presumed to have written after that event. For example, this was evident in the dating of the Gospels after the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE, as the destruction of the Second Temple was “foretold” in these books.
- The level of detail provided; events further in the past are described in slight detail, contemporaneous events are described in greater detail.
- Words or phrases migrated from other languages creep into usage, providing clues as to the date of authorship.

### Biblical History

The Bible contains a substantial amount of historical information, combined with religious information. The historical information sometimes overlaps, and often this overlapping can be used to fill in gaps present in books when read individually.

*To what extent is the Bible a valid historical document?* This has been debated vigorously through the years. Certainly, the Bible is a bona fide historical document by most standards. It would be manifestly unreasonable to exclude the Bible as a historical document simply because one does not agree with its religious views.

Of course, the Bible also includes stories that contain narratives which, if true, would be classified as miracles or otherwise violate the laws of nature as we currently understand them. But there are plenty of other ancient texts that likewise contain stories which defy common sense, so again it would be unreasonable to apply a different standard to the Bible. The reader must ultimately make their own decision as to whether a particular Biblical story is intended as literal history, or is allegorical in nature. Scholars routinely

make assumptions about this as well. In this manner, care is taken not to throw the baby out with the bath water. We want to accept as much as history that is consistent and believable.

Much of the Bible – especially the Old Testament – was intended as documentation of historical events. This can easily be seen by examining the subject matter of books such as Kings. However, these historians did not operate using the historical documentation standards accepted today. We wouldn't expect these standards to be followed, since they didn't exist then!

### Biblical Authorship

The Bible is essentially anonymous. With the exception of the letters of Paul, believed to have been actually written by Paul, the true authors of the remainder of the Bible are unknown.

Most of the books of the Bible are pseudopygraphical. This means “as if written by” (in other words attributed to someone other than the stated or implied author). Matthew was not written by Matthew, Mark was not written by Mark, Luke was not written by Luke, etc. It was common practice in the past for works to take on a name to differentiate it or otherwise add weight to its value by virtue of the attribution. Today, this practice is rarely adopted – who would want to lose their copyright royalties?

So it comes as a surprise to many that the author of John (the fourth book of the New Testament) did not know Jesus, and wrote at least 2 generations after Jesus died. It is generally accepted that the John was written after 70 CE (Jesus died in 33 CE). The apostle John did not write John.

### Copies of the Bible

The oldest complete copy of the Catholic Bible dates back to about 450 CE. The oldest complete copy of the Jewish Bible dates back to about 950 CE. Between the time the books of the Bible were written and the times above, the books were copied and recopied many times.

Naturally, the copyists sometimes made errors and sometimes made intentional changes. There do exist some partial copies of the Bible which are older than the dates given above. Of particular help was the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, written near the time of Jesus. Comparisons indicate that overall, the copyists did a good job.

The Old Testament suffers from an additional problem. It was originally written in a form in which all vowels were eliminated (the ancient Hebrew alphabet included 22 consonants and no vowels). This led to problems when a later translation to Greek (which had vowels) was

undertaken, as the correct vowels were not always obvious. In other words, imagine that the vowels are removed from the English verbs “stare”, “stir”, and “store”. The result would be “str” for all three words, and it would be difficult at a later date to reassemble the original meaning of “str” without error. This was just as great a problem in Hebrew as our example implies.

There was no punctuation, either. Chapter and verse numbering? Not a chance. These were added much later, in the last thousand years. There was no capitalization, either. In fact, the original books did not even have titles for the most part. These too were added later, and vary from version to version of the Bible. Generally, the Christian Bibles use Greek names for the books of the Old Testament, while the Jewish Bibles often use the first word of the book as the title.

Figure 2.1: Calendar of dates:

Oldest cities	7000 BCE
Babylonian city-state	5000
First writings	3000
Laws of Hammurabi	1800
Moses leaves Egypt	1240
Temple of Solomon (First Temple) built in Jerusalem	964
First Temple destroyed by Babylonians	587
Torah written during exile	560 +/-
Temple rebuilt by Darius (King of Persia)	520
Greeks rule over Jerusalem	330
Jesus crucified	33 CE
Second Temple destroyed by Romans	70
New Testament completed	150 +/-
Christian Canon finalized	390
Talmudic writings completed	600
Qur'an written	622
Magna Carta written	1215
Gutenberg Bible printed	1452
Martin Luther excommunicated	1521

-Scripture: what is it, how is it different, how does it become scripture?

-Derivation of word “bible” from Greek/Latin Biblios (books plural) from city of Byblia

-What is a testament?

-Bible consists of history, prophecy, religious law, devotional verse, proverbs, poetry, fiction, letters.

Draft B

-Why does the Bible read so weird to us; the alien world of the bible.

- The Bible compared with other old books, other Bibles.

### 3. In the Beginning...

We can only speculate about religious life before recorded history, as remaining clues are few.

In Egypt, circa 3000 BCE, there are hieroglyphics to tell us the story of the Egyptians and their religion. The Egyptians believed in an array of Gods that ruled their land and were responsible for happenings in the natural world. This belief was common to many civilizations of the general time period. Later, the Greeks and the Romans would also come to believe in multiple Gods, also known as polytheism. Such gods typically ruled one or more of the forces of nature as perceived by ancient peoples: wind, fire, water, sun, moon, fertility, animals, etc.

Soon we see a major advance with the advent of cuneiform writing on tablets. The new style features a prototype of an alphabet. This includes Hammurabi's famous code of laws, which dates from about 1800 CE. Many of these laws resemble Mosaic law.

There is really nothing so predictable about the history of the next few thousand years as the rise and fall of civilization after civilization, of king after king. As goes the power within the region, so goes religious practice. To the victor go the spoils, and to the God of the victor as well. Thus, there is also an ebb and flow of worship of different deities over the lands of changing boundaries.

Typically, each city, region or civilization boasted its own god or gods, with accompanying rituals of worship. In some of the areas, only a single god was worshipped – i.e. monotheism. Yet even monotheistic societies were respectful of the gods of other areas. Travelers to foreign lands would often pay tribute to the god of that land.

The area of modern Israel is the stage for most of the events of the Old Testament, and of the New Testament as well. This area is about 50 miles wide, and about 150 miles from north to south. It is on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea. The land is rough, arid, somewhat mountainous and relatively fertile compared to the Arabian desert nearby. Because of its location, a point of land separating Greece from Egypt, and Egypt from Persia, it is the site of ever-changing control and a middle point between major civilizations. It is too small to ever become a major power in the developing ancient world, but it is occasionally a minor player. Because of its location, it is influenced by trade with other nations throughout the Mediterranean and the near east.

- Hebrew represents one of the earliest languages involving an alphabet.
- Bible one of first documents on paper.
- Henotheism vs. Paganism
- Other religious documents preceding the Bible.
- Oral traditions.



## - Section II -

## 4. The Old Testament

The Old Testament is central to three religions: Judahism, Christianity (Section III) and Rabbinic Judaism (Section IV).

Judahism was the religion practiced in and around Jerusalem in the period from approximately 587 BCE (the destruction of the First Temple) and 70 CE (the destruction of the Second Temple). It centers on the worship of the god Yahweh. It is important to keep in mind that the worshippers of Yahweh in this period were as different from modern Jews as they are from modern Christians. Despite the closeness of spelling, Judahism is different than Judaism.

*Who is Yahweh?* Yahweh actually comes from the Hebrew consonants YHWH. (Please recall that the original Hebrew scriptures lacked vowels.) As best we can determine, the proper vowels for its pronunciation makes it “Yahweh”. In the Old Testament, Yahweh announces his name to Moses. Yahweh means “I am who I am” in Hebrew. As the scripture of the Old Testament became ever more reverent and holy, readers of the Bible ceased calling God by his name Yahweh. Instead, when YHWH was encountered in the biblical text, it was read as “the Lord” (usually translated as Adonai, from the Greek). Eventually, in a mistranslation, the vowels from Adonai were merged with the consonants of Yahweh leading to the pronunciation of Yahweh as Jehovah (Y in Hebrew is usually equivalent to J in English). Thus, Yahweh=Jehovah.

The Jewish name for the Old Testament is the Tanakh. This is a Hebrew acronym for the Torah, the Prophets and the Writings. We will use the more familiar term Old Testament here.

We will now pick up the basic history of the period. Refer to the chart for additional information.

Figure 4.1: Calendar of dates:

Moses leaves Egypt	1240 BCE +/-
David unifies Israel, starts Davidic dynasty	1005
First Temple built in Jerusalem by Solomon	960
Israel and Judah split	920
Israel falls	722
First Temple destroyed, exile from Judah begins	587
Torah assembled into present form	560 +/-
Persia overthrows Babylon, exile ends	539

Temple rebuilt (Second Temple)	520
Greeks conquer Judah	330
Maccabean revolts	167
Septuagint (translation to Greek) completed	150
Rome conquers Judah	37

A group of people left or was expelled from Egypt, led by a man called Moses (an Egyptian name, by the way). They made their way to the Sinai peninsula just east of Egypt, where they spent time before ultimately settling in the area we now call Israel (the Promised Land). They considered the area as belonging to them under a covenant made with the local God of the land, who called himself Yahweh.

(Worshippers of Yahweh are referred to as Yahwists until the destruction of the first temple in 587 BCE. They are then called Judahists until the destruction of the second temple in 70 CE. Thereafter, they are called Jews.)

The area was controlled by a series of powerful local leaders over a period of about two hundred years, until control was unified under a single king named David in 1005 BCE. He was succeeded by a son, Solomon, who built a temple to Yahweh in Jerusalem in 960 BCE. Jerusalem was at the center of a northern area called Israel, and a southern area called Judah (or Judea).

Solomon and his successors ruled this united kingdom for a hundred years, until the two areas fell under separate control. For the next hundred or so years, Israel and Judah were separate nations that operated under the auspices of the god Yahweh. In 722, Israel fell to the Babylonian Empire.

Judah continued as an independent nation until it too fell to Babylon in 587 BCE. At that time, a significant number (perhaps 10,000 or more) citizens of Judah were exiled to Babylon along with their king. Over the next 50 years, the Persian king Darius overthrew the Babylonians and freed the people of Judah to return to their homeland. It is during this time that the Torah was assembled.

Reunited, the people were now free to rebuild their temple in Jerusalem and re-establish the religious practices that had been suppressed during the years of captivity and exile. During the next few hundred years, the practice of Judahism – the worship of Yahweh, the God of Judah – continued to flourish as religious customs grew.

During this time, religious activity was centered on the temple in Jerusalem and a priestly group whom administered sacred rites. However,

the practices and beliefs varied from city to city within the region, slowly evolving. Additional writings were originated, which eventually became sacred. Eventually, the area was conquered again – this time by the Greeks (330 BCE). Roman domination followed.

The Old Testament was written during these periods, and describes the history before and during these times. The key reference period in this history is the period of the exile to Babylon, from 587 to 538 BCE. This period accounts for important writings, and serves as a dividing line for the pre-exilic period (before 587 BCE, especially before 722) and the post-exilic period (after 538 BCE, and especially after 520).

The Torah was written during the exile (from 587 to 538 BCE) using writings that originated from antiquity and described the period up to the conquest and occupation of the Israel nation. Shortly after, and still during the period of the exile, the books of the Major Prophets (including Judges, Joshua, Kings, and Samuel) were written describing the history up to the exile.

These writings formed what became scripture, but were the work of one or more men living an existence separated from the land of their God – probably in Babylon. They hoped for a return to the old ways, and wished to preserve their memory. Unlike other similar stories of old world conquest and assimilation, these people survived and eventually returned to their land. They were free to once again pursue their religious vision, and their practices lived on and were documented.

There is no reason to believe the worship of Yahweh was much different than the worship of other deities in nearby areas. What was different was that the history of Yahweh's people survived from generation to generation through written scrolls documenting the interaction of Yahweh and his people. This is what separates the God of Judah from all others.

We have come to believe that the religion of the Old Testament was advanced for the time because these worshippers of Yahweh (now called Judahists) believed in a single all-powerful god. Unfortunately, this is far from true. First, the Judahists did not necessarily believe in a single god; they worshipped a single god, one with whom they had a covenant. Their agreement was to worship Yahweh and no other gods. This does not mean that they did not believe that other gods existed. Second, they did not believe that their god was omnipotent. They did believe their god was fundamentally more important than other gods; something like “my god can beat up your god”. Of course, as various kingdoms rose and fell, the god of that kingdom presumably gained and lost stature as well. Third, the Judahists were not the only people who held these beliefs. There were many areas that

worshipped a single deity. So again, the difference in the Judahist religion was that it was recorded in writing, and those writings were passed down so that they exist today.

-Hebrew language alef, bet, gamel, etc.

-Masoretic text = Hebrew text of Old Testament with vocalization (vowels added) from 1000 CE

- Zion = Temple Mount, Dome of the Mosque (Islamic)

- Judah=country, Israel = more sophisticated
- Philistine = Palestine

One of the interesting questions of Biblical history: how does one properly determine when to emulate the heroes of the Bible, versus acting opposite to their behavior? Many of the most important figures of the Bible are flawed. For example, consider David, first king of the unified Israel. He was famous for many deeds, including slaying Goliath, defeating the Philistines and establishing Jerusalem as the capital of the new nation. Yet he was also guilty of committing horrendous acts. He was responsible for sending Bathsheba's first husband (Uriah) to his death so that he would be able to sleep with her (2 Samuel 11:1-17). She later bore him a son, Solomon, who carried on the dynasty and built the First Temple.

Clearly, David lived a charmed life. He had God's blessings, and this is why he was able to achieve so much (according to the story). So why are the flaws included in the story? It is speculated that the imperfections in the story lines help make it more believable. This is perhaps one of the evolutionary leaps contained in the Bible – that the people described have typically human qualities, emotions and actions. In fact, it has been said that the stories themselves must be true; for who would make up a story that shows such imperfections?

-Ark was portable, later part of temple, then disappears

- Compelling stories in Torah
- Next part built up the Temple religion
- Daily ritual offerings to Yahweh
- Preserved minor inconsistencies for historical accuracy sw29
- Had a vision of the religion based around a rebuilt temple

Most people have heard of the 10 commandments. Not as many people are familiar with the additional commandments in the Bible. In all, there are 613 commandments in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, there is

an eleventh commandment: love your neighbor as yourself. There is even the great commandment: love God with all your heart (??).

-The Great Commandment: Love God

- Did Abraham live (1800 BCE)

-Early stories coming from other languages and cultures include the baby in basket (King Sargon, Moses); xxii Oxford KJV, Hurrian Flood narrative 1600 BCE Mt Ararat xxi, ibid.

## 5. The Torah

In the Jewish Bible, the first five books are referred to as the Torah. Torah is the Hebrew word for the “law” or “instruction”. These books are (using their more familiar Greek names): Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Collectively, they are also known as the Books of Moses or to many Christians, the Pentateuch. For our purposes, we will consistently use the term “Torah” to refer them.

### The Puzzle

Both Jewish and Christian tradition long held that Moses himself wrote these books. However, elements of the writing of the Torah had been puzzling. Many scholars – Jewish and Christian – noticed minor inconsistencies in the information presented. Some even questioned that Moses was the author of every word of the Torah, supposing that a subsequent editor or copyist might have added a few sentences.

For those early scholars who took the time to analyze these inconsistencies and write about them, the result was usually ridicule (Isaac ibn Yashush, or “Isaac the blunderer”), banned books (Richard Simon had 1294 of 1300 copies of his book burned), excommunication and/or imprisonment (John Hampden, 1688, who recanted as a condition of his release). So the atmosphere for independent scholarly criticism was not good. In the last few hundred years, attitudes finally changed and scholarly analysis began in earnest. Even noted philosophers such as Hobbes and Spinoza recognized and tackled the problem.

The puzzle originally began as follows: if Moses wrote the Torah, as was commonly believed, why did he include multiple versions of some of the stories? And why weren’t the versions consistent as to the facts? For example, there are multiple versions of the flood story. One says the flood lasted 40 days (Genesis 7:17), the other says it lasted 150 days (Genesis 7:24). How could both be true?

As analysis progressed, significant insight was gained. It was learned that some of the stories were not only presented twice (called “doublets”), but sometimes a third time as well (“triplets”). Surprisingly, the writing style and language differed significantly from section to section, usually in ways that could only be seen when reading the Hebrew version.

### *What difference does it make? (From Tanakh, JPS)*

Genesis 7:12	The rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights.
Genesis 7:17	The flood continued forty days on the earth, and the waters increased and raised the ark so that it rose above the earth.

Genesis 7:24	And when the waters had swelled on the earth for one hundred and fifty days, God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark and God caused a wind to blow across the earth, and the waters subsided.
Genesis 7:11	In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst apart, and the floodgates of the sky broke open. [See following quote.]
Genesis 8:13	In the six hundred and first year, in the first month, on the first of the month, the waters began to dry from the earth; and when Noah removed the covering of the ark, he saw that the surface of the ground was drying. And in the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dry. [The flood lasted one year and ten days.]

Consideration was eventually given to the idea that portions of the Torah were not written by Moses at all, and must have been added at a later date. This was especially true of those sections of the story describing events that occurred after Moses died! Examples included naming kings who lived after Moses (Genesis 36:31). There is even an account of Moses' death, something which one could hardly be expected to write about.

Valiant attempts were made to reconcile these discrepancies. For example: Moses was a prophet, so he could see the future; the stories were allegorical, and do not have to add up exactly to make their point; etc. Eventually: a) increased study led to finding more and more inconsistencies; b) patterns emerged in the inconsistencies that ultimately led to breakthroughs; and finally, c) an unexpected solution to the puzzle was postulated.

After careful analysis of the doublets, it was determined that two nearly identical story lines were present. The doublets amounted to parallel descriptions of events, and the parallel versions had been intermixed. The versions could be identified by specific linguistic characteristics that amounted to a signature.

*And Moses wrote neither of the versions.*

The full explanation of the logic of the problem and its solution is outside the scope of this article. See reference 3, [Who Wrote the Bible](#) for a comprehensive understanding of the subject, and related issues. Its author, Richard Elliott Friedman, credits such noted scholars as W. M. L. De Witte, Karl Graf, and Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918) for their contributions to the solution. We'll skip to the chase...

### The Documentary Hypothesis

The standard scholarly explanation of the development of the Torah is called the Documentary Hypothesis. It goes as follows: the Torah was written by four different authors, known by their initials Y (Yahweh), E (Elohim), P (Priest) and D (Deuteronomy). The initials are not for the names of the authors themselves, but rather for specific attributes of the authors. The actual authors are unknown. These authors did not know each other, and did not even live contemporaneously. Their writings were integrated – by a process called redaction – circa 560 BCE. (However, the Y and the E texts are much older than the process implies. The Y and E texts themselves may be 300 years older, and may themselves have been passed down orally for centuries prior to that!)

The Y and the E texts can most easily be understood as follows: The writer of the Y section always refers to God as Yahweh. However, the writer of the E section always refers to God as Elohim (literally “Gods”). In English Bibles, this distinction can be seen if you look carefully. Elohim is translated as “God”. Yahweh is translated as “Lord” or “Lord God”. However, the distinction is maintained fully in Hebrew texts.

The P source refers to God as Elohim too, so there are other factors that distinguish E from P. Genesis primarily consists of text from P, J and E, and possibly some from an additional author.

The text tells the same basic story in Genesis, with repetition. So accordingly, there are two creation stories (Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 2:4), two flood stories (see above), two stories of Abraham’s covenant, etc.

So the easiest way to picture how these stories came to be intertwined is as follows: someone cut and pasted portions of one scroll – the Y scroll – with portions cut and pasted from the other scroll – the E scroll. Then a new scroll was copied from the hybrid, containing both the Y and E versions of the same stories. Then the P scroll was added by someone interested in documenting procedures important to the priests of that time. Finally the D scroll was added, which may have been written by the editor (called the redactor) himself. The redactor may have been one person, or several.

We don’t know for a fact that there were four authors of the Torah. We do know that there were *at least* four authors of this section of the Bible. There are many scholars who speculate that there are more authors of this section of the Bible. However, the Documentary Hypothesis itself sticks to four.



Why did the redactor mingle the E, J, P and D versions? We will never know the true answer to this question. It is a subject of substantial speculation. The way the stories are split seems to defy any simple explanation. For example, why not simply include one entire story and then include an entirely separate story, as is done in the Gospels? The logic is not apparent. Obvious consideration would be given to the thought of a compromise – that two popular versions served as sources so as not to offend anyone loyal to a specific version.

In 1943, Pope Pius XII threw in the towel and issued an encyclical (“Divino Afflante Spiritu”) allowing Catholics to openly study and debate the Documentary Hypothesis (and other aspects of Biblical authorship). Within 25 years, the Catholic Church itself came to accept the Documentary Hypothesis as valid. Catholic and Protestant Bibles now often describe it in their preface.

*What difference does it make?*

Jewish Bibles typically deny the Documentary Hypothesis because the Torah is much holier to Jews than it is to Christians. In fact, the Torah is much more important to Jews than are other portions of the Jewish Bible.
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Christians, on the other hand, tend to give the most weight to the books of the New Testament, and typically overlook perceived criticisms of the Old Testament. There is a loosely similar hypothesis about the creation of the Gospels of the New Testament, called Q. Most Christian Bibles deny the Q hypothesis.
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So everyone gets offended by some scholarly opinion before the subject is closed.
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*The dating of events of the Torah is difficult.* There are really no stories from the Torah that tie to events documented outside the Bible. For instance, there is no recorded history of the flood; the exile of Moses from Egypt; or when the Chosen people first occupied the land of Israel. The name of the Pharaoh is not given, so this too is lacking in specificity. The best we are able to do is count backward from the time of King David based on the stories of the Major Prophets, and this is really just a “guesstimate”. So we guess that Moses lived around 1250 BCE.

If so, Moses lived about 400 years before the Y or E texts were written. *There were no written documents during this period.* Thus, the stories were passed down orally before they were converted to written form. Written scrolls did not surface in the area of Israel until about 900 BCE.

We have to assume that there is a very good reason for the fact that the Torah lacks the detail and clarity otherwise present in the books that follow it. The reason is that a) the events described did not actually occur as

described; b) during the long oral history phase which preceded the written history phase, the details were lost; or c) during the written history phase of the Torah, the low-level detail was omitted or otherwise not preserved from copy to copy.

Most scholars accept a combination of these reasons. For instance, the flood described in Genesis should have left numerous remnants that would have been discovered by now *if the story were true*. Therefore it is not true. The reason that the Pharaoh's name was not given in the Torah is that it had been lost over the many years the story was passed down orally.

So the above-described Documentary Hypothesis really only covers the creation of the Torah from its predecessor manuscripts, Y, E, P and D. Since scholars want to accept that there was a "historical" Moses (i.e. that Moses is not a fictional character), the stories of the Torah must be very old indeed.

To summarize:

- 1) Some of the stories of the Torah are not believed to be literal history, including the creation story and the story of the flood (since both are contradicted by physical evidence). In fact, the creation story and the flood story both have remarkable similarities to stories from even more ancient times in other civilizations.
- 2) The story of Moses began about 1250 BCE, but is not independently corroborated or otherwise calibrated in time to known historical events (as are most other portions of the Bible, in some form or fashion). For example, the records of the Egyptians do not mention any events such as pestilence, Passover, the parting of the Red Sea, etc.
- 3) The stories of the Torah were transmitted orally for about 400 years, or about 20 generations. It is not known if any stories changed, were embellished, or were shortened. It seems reasonable that after 20 generations, considerable detail would be lacking. It is also not known if the original stories were told in Hebrew, as it is possible that they were originally in another tongue. (Egyptian?)
- 4) Eventually the stories were written in Hebrew, and two versions were passed down over the next 200-300 years. These versions evolved into the Y and E versions, which tell similar stories. There are, however, historical inconsistencies between them, as well as variation in linguistic usage. The Y version is associated with Judah (to the south), while the E version is associated with Israel (to the north).
- 5) The Y and E texts are combined and edited into a single text, which becomes the Torah as we know it. The P and D texts are added at the same time. The result is a relatively unified document, which extended through the following books of the Old Testament (in the order of the Jewish Bible).

Whew! Hopefully, puzzle solved. Keep in mind that the steps 4 and 5 above are the ones we understand best. The first 3 steps must be deduced from steps 4 and 5, and are necessarily “fuzzy”.

Understanding the process by which the Torah came into being is critical to understanding the Bible as a whole. For the writing of the Torah set the “ground rules” for subsequent writers. It is also the base religious document that affects what can later be said about Yahweh. The Torah sets the stage for the Biblical scripture that follows. You can modify the essential premise, but you cannot deny what came before and is older. Anything coming from Moses carries more weight than something recently imagined. An author can include material that is not completely self-consistent, because this can always be viewed allegorically. Be respectful of traditions, and build upon them.

Figure 5.1: Calendar of dates:

Pharaoh of Moses	1250 BCE
Moses begins 40 year desert wanderings	1240 +/-
David unifies Israel, starts Davidic dynasty	1005
First Temple built in Jerusalem by Solomon	960
Israel and Judah split	920
Separate versions of Genesis written (Y and E)	850 +/-
Israel falls	722
Deuteronomy & early prophets written	620
First Temple destroyed, exile from Judah begins	587
Torah assembled into present form	560 +/-
Exile ends	539

- What the ancient world was like around Moses’ day
- Creation
- Moses
- the plagues
- The covenant between God and the human race.
- The parting of the sea: sea of reeds (don’t know p. 109)
- The ark, predecessor of the temple

*What difference does it make? (From Tanakh, JPS)*

Exodus 20:13	You shall not murder. [6 <sup>th</sup> commandment.]
Exodus 34:10	Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall cease from labor; you shall cease from labor even at plowing time and harvest time. [6 <sup>th</sup> commandment. “You shall not murder” is not mentioned as a commandment in this series.]
Deut. 5:17	You shall not murder. [6 <sup>th</sup> commandment.]

*Religious Ideas Introduced Around This Time Period*

God created mankind	
God has covenant with people of Judah	
God insists on defined moral behavior, including the 10 commandments	

## 6. The Prophets

After the Torah was written, the story line picks up with events following the death of Moses. This includes the unification of the tribes of the Chosen People under David, and the creation of the temple in Jerusalem under Solomon.

It is likely that the next 4 books of the Old Testament (in the Jewish order) were written more or less contemporaneous with the Torah. In other words, the editor of the Torah completed his phase I, and then worked on phase II. Phase II would be Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings. Since Samuel and Kings are split into 2 books each, these account for 6 more books in the Catholic and Protestant Bibles. Ruth is placed in a different order in the Jewish Bible, and this is significant because Ruth was written later.

In this view, the 5 books of the Torah (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy) plus the 4 following books (Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings) adds up to yield 9 books presenting a unified story. This unified story is sometimes called the Enneateuch. The idea is that at one point in time, a text existed that pulled together all the elements of the history and the practice of the religion of the land of Judah. This represented a significant leap forward.

Rightfully, then, Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings should also be included as part of the previous chapter. These were written and edited during the same time period as Deuteronomy. However, Jewish tradition assigns significantly more weight to the five books of the Torah than it does to the following four. Christian tradition also assigns more weight to the Torah because of its relationship to Moses, but not to the same degree as do Jews.

The Prophets are referred to as Nevi'im in the Jewish Bible. This includes 21 (??) books.

One of the most confusing things about reading and studying the Prophets is the phenomenon called "time displacement". This is most pronounced with the Major Prophets. These books were written around 620 BCE but not assembled and edited until 560 (3 generations later, during the exile). But the stories they describe occurred as much as 600 years earlier. If they represent any degree of historical accuracy, then they must have been passed down orally for 10 (Kings), 20 (Samuel), even 30 (Joshua) generations. It is very difficult to assess the historical accuracy of these books, although their content is mostly historical (little new religious thought).

Figure 6.1: Calendar of dates:

Deuteronomy & early prophets written	620 BCE
First Temple destroyed, exile from Judah begins	587
Torah assembled into present form	560 +/-
Exile ends	539
Temple Rebuilt (Second Temple)	520
Buddha dies in India	487
Kung Fu-Tze (Confucius) dies in China	478

The Temple of Solomon

The priests

The Exile

Yahwist=Judahist, population est. = 150,000 as of 587

Ezra: no mixed marriages, wives must be Yahwist for kids to be Yahwist

Building upon existing text to enhance and redefine

God of the chosen people

*Religious Ideas Introduced Around This Time Period*

The golden rule	
God exacts vengeance for violations of law	
Intermarriage between Judahists and Gentiles frowned upon	
The Torah is canon	

## 7. The Writings

The priestly traditions

Figure 7.1: Calendar of dates:

Alexander the Great conquers Persia and Egypt	330

The rebuilding of the Temple.

-Maccabees

-Daniel

-Kethuvim

- The apocrypha (hidden)

### *Religious Ideas Introduced Around This Time Period*

The coming of the messiah	
Day of judgment	
Satan (the adversary)	

## - Section III -

## 8. Apocalyptic Times

By the Roman times, the followers of Judahism must have had a number of questions that the Old Testament – the Bible to them – could not answer. After all, Judahists had now had hundreds of years to contemplate their relationship to Yahweh. The results of their musings must necessarily have been confusing. For instance:

- a) Was Yahweh omnipotent? Were the Gods of other peoples real?
- b) If Yahweh was the ultimate God, why wasn't Judah/Israel a free, independent nation? (The territory had been conquered by a series of empires, including Assyria, Persia, Greece, Rome.)
- c) Didn't Yahweh make a deal with the people to provide them with land? Did Yahweh break the deal, or did his people break the deal? Or was the deal still intact?
- d) Was the covenant with an entire people, or was it with each individual amongst the people?
- e) What was there to look forward to in the future? Would the religion fade away? What did the future hold for the Chosen People?
- f) Why did Yahweh require ritual sacrifice at the altar of the Temple?
- g) Whose priests knew the correct rules of the religion: Israel or Judah?

There were so many questions, and suddenly there was a wide array of answers. Perhaps the Messiah – prophesized by the Old Testament in a roundabout manner – was coming. Perhaps the understanding of the religion needed modification. Maybe they all had it wrong?

Figure 8.1: Calendar of dates:

Desecration of Second Temple	167 BCE
Maccabean Revolt	167
Judah independent	163
Book of Daniel completed	160
Septuagint completed	160
Pompey controls Judah for Rome	63
Herod the Great conquers Judah for Rome	37
Herod the Great dies	4
Jesus born	4

-The LXX (Septuagint)

- Canon at that time



-A stale, static religion

-The one and only god.

-From Masada to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Destruction of the Temple

-The canon

-Apocalyptic writing of era, including Daniel

-Many competing practices

-The Pharisees, Sadducees, etc.

## 9. The New Testament

The New Testament was a left turn for a sleepy religion with a substantial, but still fairly limited, following.

During the 600 years the Torah had existed, Judahism had not grown exponentially. True, it had grown, but several factors inhibited its growth. First, Judahism was the religion of Judah, a very small patch of land. It had not been exported to other regions because Judah was not an independent and expanding nation. It was currently a Roman territory, and Rome had its own state religion. Second, by the traditions of the Old Testament, the religion frowned upon intermarriage, especially marriages in which the wife was not a Judahist (Ezra ??). Thus it didn't expand as a result of territorial conquest or intermarriage, and population growth in the region was not significant. There were a few pockets of Judahists outside of Judah, but these were not so large as to account for much growth. However, the religion otherwise had several important things going for it. There was an established scripture, which had survived for a millennium. It postulated one God, which had made a covenant with mankind. This message was a powerful platform from which to expand, as we shall see.

The New Testament centers around the stories of Jesus, and the role of his followers in establishing a new religion based on a much older one. Jesus was born "Yeshua" in the Hebrew, which has been anglicized to Jesus by way of the Greek version of his name (Iesus). From the Hebrew to English directly, Yeshua is Joshua. So Jesus and Joshua are really derived from the same name. We will use the more common name Jesus here.

The New Testament was written originally in Greek, the most popular second language of the Mediterranean at the time. However, Jesus' native tongue was Aramaic. Jesus was a Judahist, and worshipped Yahweh. He presumably knew Hebrew, as he was apparently versed in the Old Testament. It is possible, but not likely, that Jesus spoke Greek; it would have been his third language. Therefore, we would conclude that the words attributed to Jesus in the New Testament were translations from Aramaic to Greek of the things he actually said.

The New Testament writings used a device common to the Old Testament writers: the new message made direct reference to older writings as a way to establish their legitimacy. Much of the message of the New Testament fits in nicely with Judahist traditions. Again and again, it is made clear that the God of the New Testament is the God of the Old Testament (although he is no longer called Yahweh). Initially, the newer, more expansive role of Judahism as seen by the Jesus sect was in keeping

with contemporary practice, and was probably no more radical than some of the other Judahist sects.

For example, the Pharisees were a popular Judahist sect during Jesus' life. The Pharisees shared many religious ideas with the Jesus sect, including the idea that a messiah – descended from the Davidic line – would soon come. They believed the messiah had been prophesized in the Old Testament book of Daniel, as well as other writings. The Jesus sect obviously saw that person in Jesus, while the Pharisees did not. In fact, Jesus' line of descent from David is given twice (differently, in Matthew 1 and Luke 3) to drive this point home.

Ultimately, the result was a new religion with a new twist: accept (most of) the existing Old Testament, but extend it with contemporary ideas from a messiah (Jesus) even holier than Moses himself!

So this naturally raises the question: is the religion based on the Jesus sect a form of Judahism? Did later Christians appropriate the Old Testament for the establishment of a new religion? True enough, the Old Testament is fundamental to Christianity. (Later attempts by some Christians to separate the Old Testament from Christianity failed.)

It is not our job here to answer this question. In fact, it may be more a question of semantics. But it seems that what was a sect during Jesus' life did in fact become a distinct religion within a relatively short time, less than a hundred years. And yet it shared perhaps 75% of its scripture with another religion, that of Judahism.

The New Testament writers use the rules of scriptural authorship brilliantly. Again and again, the arrival of Jesus is seen as final step in a series of steps tracing back over a thousand years. Wherever possible, reference is made to Old Testament sources. Wherever possible, a prophecy is to be read into the Old Testament; then, the prophesized event occurs in the New Testament. Direct quotes are even taken from the Old Testament and inserted in the New Testament. This could not easily be accomplished without the assistance of a learned student of the Old Testament.

The New Testament consists primarily of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) and the Pauline Letters. Other important books include Acts and Revelations. The Gospels tell the story of the life of Jesus. The Pauline letters, along with Acts, tell the story of the early Christians over a period of about 35 years after the death of Jesus. Revelations is an apocalyptic vision of the future. As with the Old Testament, we do not know who really wrote the different books (with the exception of many of the Pauline Letters, which were written by Paul).

(Note: from here on out, we will refer to Judahists as Jews, as the Judahist religion begins its transformation into Judaism.)

Figure 9.1: Calendar of dates:

Jesus born	4 BCE
Jesus crucified	33 CE
Paul's ministry	48
Temple destroyed by Romans	70
New Testament completed	120 +/-
First Pope	
Rome officially Christian	325
Christian canon finalized	397

The turmoil of the period during Jesus' life and soon after his death resulted in a great upheaval in Judahist religious thought. There was room for a new message, and Jesus had it. Jesus must have realized that the chains holding back the growth of the worship of Yahweh was directly related to its roots as a *regional* religion.

Judahism was based around an ancient temple in Jerusalem, at the north of Judah. True, there were vibrant Judahist communities in other areas, including Turkey and Egypt. But its roots were regional, and the strict practice of Mosaic Law (i.e. following the Torah) meant that the population could not intermarry as a means to expand. Conversion was possible, but men were required to be circumcised to convert; this hindered expansion significantly.

In much of the rest of the Roman Empire, there was a religious vacuum at the time. The Romans were not strong advocates of their own religion; did not insist that conquered nations convert to their religion; and in fact had stolen most of the ideas for their religion directly from the Greeks. (In many ways, the emperor was considered a deity.) Being expedient, the Romans tolerated the Judahists. So the religion of the Roman Empire was effectively regional in nature as well, being strong in Italy and not really being exported to the areas subservient to Rome. In return, the Judahists (like practitioners of religions in other conquered nations) did not rock the boat. But the opportunity existed for someone who could see the vacuum and come up with a better idea.

The solution was a universal religion with a universal message: love thy neighbor. And you don't have to be born into the religion to be a member: the religion is in your heart. The covenant is between God and the

individual, not between God and a nation of people. What better messages for nations that had previously been at war with each other?

Jesus was the seed of a new religion: *universality was its message*. The chains were now released, and the events that followed Jesus' death were to be the catalyst for subsequent explosive growth. (That growth would be unparalleled for another 600 years, until the arrival of another universal religion, Islam.)

When the Temple was destroyed in 70 CE, the Judahists lost their anchor. The Jesus sect grew rapidly, as it was obvious that the old-line Judahist message had lost its luster. Jesus had gone up against the Judahist establishment and lost (having been crucified), but the Christians had the last laugh when the Temple was destroyed. Maybe God sided with these new Christians! Judahism – as it was – essentially ceased to exist shortly afterwards. The religion had to evolve once again, and it did (we shall see in Chapter 13 that it became Rabbinic Judaism). But while it was reinventing itself, Christianity – the religion of the Jesus sect – had been given a golden opportunity to become the premier religion of monotheists.

### The Life of Jesus

There is really no question that a person named Jesus actually lived. By the standards of historical documentation appropriate for the time, the New Testament meets the standards required for us to accept that Jesus was a historical figure. (This is certainly true if we accept that Moses was an actual person, or that David was the father of Solomon, etc. After all, we know these individuals solely through the Old Testament.) There are many ancient historical figures that are known from a single source.

Jesus was born in Bethlehem, a small town in Judah about 10 miles from Jerusalem. He was raised in Nazareth, a city to the north in Galilee. He was born about 4 BCE. Some question Bethlehem as the site of Jesus' birth.

During the time of Jesus, there were a number of Judahist sects. These included the Sadducees, the Pharisees, the Essenes, and any number of other offshoots. As mentioned previously, Judahism was in a state of flux, and there was some question as to what practices were essential to the practice of the religion. In one such sect, baptism was practiced. Jesus himself fell under the influence of a Jewish priest who engaged in this practice: John the Baptist.

Ultimately, Jesus founded his own sect (or perhaps took over John's after he was killed). As mentioned above, he added his own message to the existing Judahist thought: a universal covenant. Like some others, he

practiced and preached outside the traditional priestly structure; he was an independent. Although he was very familiar with the Old Testament, he had not been trained officially as a Jewish priest. His message struck a chord, and he gained adherents. He was probably what we would call a “charismatic” speaker, for he seems to have come out of nowhere in a very short period of time. He was able to attract attention to himself by way of his brash statements, which questioned the orthodoxy of the priests of the Temple in Jerusalem. Others had these questions, too, but Jesus was a powerful spokesman for the cause.

At some point, his stature grew sufficiently that he posed a threat of some kind to the priests. Had Jesus not taken the next step of opposing the religious authorities directly, he might not have been crucified. The New Testament states Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, which was offensive to both the priestly establishment and the Romans. This seems contrived; perhaps he committed a specific crime of some sort, a la David Koresh (Waco, Texas, 1993). At any rate, the priests found a pretext to have him tried as a criminal under Roman authority, and he was executed at the age of 37.

### The Life of Paul

It certainly appears that when Jesus was martyred, growth of the Jesus sect was not the intended result expected by the Judahist authorities. But in the short term, they succeeded and the followers of Jesus laid low. But additional converts came quickly, especially in outlying areas relative to Judah, areas where Jewish authority was diminished. One of these converts was Paul.

If Jesus was a religious genius, then Paul was too. Where Jesus had conceived the message, Paul spread the message. He created self-sustaining congregations of believers, most of who were Gentiles. It was Paul who turned the repressed Jesus sect into a new religion, Christianity.

Once the message left Judah, it spread like wildfire. Within a short time, numerous writings appeared documenting Jesus and the new religion. Greek was an international language at that time, and the writings that appeared were in Greek. This allowed them to be passed easily from one community to another. The budding Christian communities remained in close contact with each other.

Within 50 years of the death of Jesus, key elements of his life had taken on a new dimension. Two critical elements appeared which seem to have no direct bearing on his universal message, and which are not in keeping with the Judahist traditions: his immaculate conception (before birth) and physical resurrection (after death). Interestingly, Paul does not

mention these. They show up first in the Gospels, at least two generations after Jesus died.

### The Church

There exists a significant amount of information about the growth and development of the early church.

- The golden rule
- The 11<sup>th</sup> commandment
- God of everyone

## 10. Pauline Letters

The Pauline Letters (the Letters of Paul) were written prior to the Gospels, and we shall review them first accordingly. This may seem strange, as the Gospels take us into the stories of Jesus directly. It would seem that we should start with the life of Jesus before studying what Paul wrote in his efforts to expand the reach of Jesus. But this would be a mistake, as the Gospels were clearly influenced by Paul's work, if indirectly.

Paul (born Saul) was a Greek-speaking Jew from Turkey. He converted to the Jesus sect after Jesus' death. He was an apostle (definition??) who helped start Christian congregations in numerous cities within the Roman Empire, especially in Turkey and Greece. He traveled widely, and his writings were crucial to the development of Christianity. His special focus was bringing Gentiles into the new religion.

Paul spoke and wrote in Greek, the language spoken in much of the eastern portion of the Roman Empire at that time. As mentioned previously, all of the writings of the New Testament were originally written in Greek. Although the official language of the Roman Empire was Latin, many of the lands under Roman domination had previously been under Greek domination. Since Greek had an alphabet, and the Greeks had dominated the Mediterranean for hundreds of years, it had become a de facto international language. In most civilized areas outside of Greece, it was either the first or second language of a substantial portion of the populace.

This was especially true of Jewish settlements outside of Judah, such as where Paul was raised. The translation of the Old Testament into Greek had been performed about 200 BCE. This translation was the Septuagint, which was available for those Jews who could not speak Hebrew.

Unlike the other books of the Bible, which are considered to be anonymous, the Pauline Letters have a known author. Most of the Pauline Letters are actually ascribed to Paul. Taken as a group, the letters form a comprehensive body, which describe Paul's travels and reasonably crosscheck with extra-Biblical sources. The letters range in time from about 50 CE to 65 CE. These letters, also called epistles, are the earliest surviving writings of the New Testament. The Gospels were written 25 or more years later.

How do we know this? Shouldn't we accept that the Gospels were written earlier, since they purport to describe Jesus in an eyewitness format? The answer is no. The Gospels were not considered to be eyewitness reports when they were written.



Most people today believe the Gospels are eyewitness reports because of the names of the four Gospels, which coincide with names of four of the disciples who were actual eyewitnesses to the story of Jesus. But these were not the authors of those Gospels. The names were attached 50-100 years after they were written. The actual authors of the Gospels are unknown.

As will be seen in the next chapter, there are a number of additional reasons to conclude that the Gospels were written after 70 CE. On the other hand, Paul’s undated letters fit within the time span before the destruction of the Temple (in 70 CE). So they must have preceded the Gospels.

Figure 10.1: Calendar of dates:

Jesus crucified	33 CE
Paul converts	40
Paul’s first letters	50
Paul dies	63
Nero persecutes Christians	64
Temple destroyed	70

Early congregations had been established outside of Judah in cities in Greece (Corinth, Thessalonica), Turkey (Ephesus, Galatia), and even Rome. Paul and others traveled from congregation to congregation, sharing experiences, assisting as possible, providing moral support, and helping to define the religious theory of the young and growing cult. There was a lot of work to do. Boundaries had to be drawn around the ideas that would become Christianity.

For example, did converts need to follow the Torah? Practices such as circumcision and observance of the Sabbath were required of Judahists. After significant debate, it was decided that the practices of the Torah were not essential to the practice of Christianity. This was determined at a council held in Jerusalem in 49 CE, in which a compromise was achieved. This was a crucial decision, because it affected the ability of the apostles (especially Paul) to attract new converts.

Fortune (some would call in divine intervention) smiled on Paul, and his work on behalf of the budding religion paid off handsomely. His impact was threefold: 1) he helped establish the Greek-speaking branches, well outside the area of Judah; 2) his writings helped in the recruitment of new members, especially Greek-speaking Gentiles; and 3) when the Temple was destroyed in 70 CE, the Christian congregations outside Judah were in a position to continue their growth, while the Jews themselves were nearly destroyed (eliminating the competition, so to speak).

The third point is doubly important, because to many within the religion, the destruction of the Temple was considered to be the fulfillment of prophecy (or at a minimum, “just desserts” for the Jews who had opposed Jesus and his followers). Even so, the war between the Romans and the Jews (which the Romans won) was no great boon to the Christians. After all, there was guilt by association, and the Jews and the Christians were associated. However, the Christians had no trouble swallowing the destruction of the Temple, since it was a source of embarrassment to them. Who needs a temple anyway? The Judahists would have to learn how to get around this, but the Christians were steps ahead.

### Paul’s Travels

Paul traveled extensively within the Roman Empire.

-The importance of Paul to Christianity

-What Paul wrote about Jesus

### Paul’s Ideas

It is fascinating to realize that many of the ideas for which Christianity is known today were brought forth in a very short period of time – maybe twenty years – and that Paul brought them to us. These ideas shaped a new religion, and are still familiar to us today. Some of these ideas are:

- Church
- Holy spirit

Some of these ideas may not have been original to Paul personally. However, he is responsible – at a minimum – for recognizing their significance, assembling the ideas into a coherent document, and putting that document into the hands of the early congregations.

### *Religious Ideas Introduced Around This Time Period*

Open religion to Gentiles	
Importance of churches, congregations	
Original sin	

## 11. The Gospels

-Definition

- Synoptics

-Order written: Mark, Matthew, Luke, John

-Areas where they came from: Rome, Syria, Ephesus, etc.

-Q (Quelle) concept

- Overlap: sw 566: Of mark's 661 verses, 430 appear in matthew and luke; of the remaining 231, 176 are in matthew and 25 in luke; only 30 do not appear in either

There is one overriding reason that the Gospels are dated after 70 CE: they refer to the destruction of the Temple in one manner or another. This information could not have been anticipated before 66 CE at the earliest (when the war between Judah and Rome began). For example, there are references in the Gospels seemingly predicting the fall of the Temple (Matthew ??, Mark ??, Luke ??). The only reasonable explanation for this is that the Temple had already been destroyed.

Figure 11.1: Calendar of dates:

Jesus crucified	33 CE
Temple destroyed	70

-Codex

-Addition of Birth/Death stories

*What difference does it make? (From New American Bible)*

Matthew	
Mark	
Luke	

*What difference does it make?*

	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
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*Religious Ideas Introduced Around This Time Period*

Jesus as son of God (virgin birth)	
Jesus physically resurrected	
Importance of substance over style	
Charity for the poor	

## 12. Christian Canon

By 100 CE, the Pauline Letters, the Gospels, and Acts had been written. But so had dozens, if not hundreds, of other works documenting the life and teachings of Jesus and the apostles of the early church. It was now necessary to determine the actual lineup that would become the Bible. There was still new works being written, and some of them were unofficial candidates for inclusion in the Bible. These include the so-called catholic, or general letters, and Revelations, which were later determined to be canonical.

The early congregations did not initially think of the New Testament writings as the New Testament, a specific set of books of the Bible. For one thing, each congregation had its own definition of which writings were considered sacred scripture.

This left open the possibility that each congregation would develop independently, and that the Christian messages would become distorted and diluted. Soon, representatives from the larger congregations were debating the pros and cons of different writings, hoping to reach a consensus as to which works were scriptural. This was a debate that would last over two hundred years before being settled.

During this time, the early Catholic Church came into existence.

Figure 12.1: Calendar of dates:

Revelations written	120 CE
Council of Nicaea	
Council of Laodicea	360
Synod of Carthage	397
Council of Chalcedon	451

- Development
- 
- Catholic books
  
- Roman Empire goes Christian
  
- Papal rule
  
- Marcion recommends abandoning the Old Testament, fails

-Council of Nicaea

*Religious Ideas Introduced Around This Time Period*

The second coming of Jesus	
Rewards in afterlife	
Definition of New Testament canon	

- Section IV -

### 13. Rabbinic Judaism

Rabbinic Judaism is the religion practiced by Jews living today. This includes the Orthodox, Conservative and Reform branches of Judaism most popularly practiced in the United States, as well as Hasidic and other branches around the world. However, this religion is quite distinct from the religion practiced before the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, which has been referred to here as Judahism. That religion has ceased to exist.

*The Judaism we know today is a younger religion than Christianity.*

This comes as a shock to many people, as it goes against the grain of conventional wisdom. Most Jews believe their religion predates Christianity by at least a thousand years. And most Christians believe Jews persecuted Jesus, therefore Judaism must have already existed when Jesus lived.

However, both of these views miss essential elements. Jesus was himself a devout, practicing Jew, and the Christian Bible consequently includes the Old Testament. So Christianity's roots are as old as the Old Testament itself. According to doctrine, anyone who lived before Jesus and who followed the Torah faithfully was good in the eyes of the Christian god (who is also called Yahweh). The New Testament essentially consisted of major amendments to the Old Testament.

So what should be made of the Talmuds, which were also substantial amendments – or at least extensions – to the Old Testament as well? The Talmuds are part of the canon of Judaism, yet they were written entirely after the New Testament of the Christian Bible. The Talmuds were written from 200 CE to 600 CE, and are a lesser known part of Jewish canon. Talmud is a Hebrew word meaning “commentary” (??).

Most Jews are taught the Torah, but not much of the Talmud. In fact, I would guess that relatively few practicing Jews today could even name the major Talmudic works. There is a good reason for this: the Talmudic writings (collectively referred to here as the Talmud) are of a length and complexity that is mind-boggling! The Talmud consists of millions of words, many thousands of pages; it is encyclopedic in scope. The Talmud is written in Hebrew.

Most of the writing is highly legalistic, consisting of thousands of situations and related analysis. This is called halachic writing. Relatively

little is historical in the same sense as the Old Testament writings. Accordingly, its use and application relate to only those special situations it covers. These are handled by consulting a Rabbi, a Jewish religious scholar whose role replaced that of the Levite priests of the Temple period.

There are a couple of reasons why most Jews believe their religion is older than Christianity. First, the evolution of Judaism from its predecessor occurred relatively slowly, over a period of nearly five hundred years. There was thus never a point at which a single dividing line can be drawn between the old and the new. The change in the religion appears only when seen across a large span of time. Second, there is no single divine individual who defines the amended version of the religion, serving the same purpose as Jesus does to Christianity. So the descendents of the Judahists never saw a need to define themselves as “changed” or otherwise as operating under a new banner. The Christians flaunted their religious revolution; the Jews remained bound in their traditions, even as the traditions themselves inevitably changed over time.

#### Development of Judaism from the Ashes of Judahism

After the Second Temple was destroyed in 70 CE, the Judahists were once again faced with the necessity of continuing a temple-based religion without having a temple. In the Roman-Jewish wars of 66-73 CE, the temple had been completely destroyed, and the Jews were again scattered. This was much the same situation as had occurred when the First Temple had been destroyed in 587 BCE (discussed above).

But this time there was a big difference. The remaining Jews had the Tanakh to work from. One of the sects which was popular at the time – the Pharisees – would use the opportunity given by the destruction of the established priests (mostly Sadducees) to expand and extend their ideas.

While the Christians were experiencing persecution at the hands of the Romans, the Jews were experiencing all-out war. The Jews had attempted revolution against the emperor, and the revolt had failed. The Romans handily defeated the Jews, and subsequent attempts to revolt (for example, in 133 CE) similarly failed. The ultimate problem was that the Roman emperor was essentially regarded as a deity, and the Jews – following ideas preached by Jesus and others – could no longer go along with the Romans on this.

Over the next four hundred years or so, there began a series of writings that altered the face of the practice of the Judahist religion. Many of the central tenets of the religion stayed. But the religion was no longer the official or central religion of any area in the world. And so it evolved once again.



*Why do we care about this?* Once again, we see the connection between human events, the people who observed them, and the authors of important religious works. This is a continuation of a pattern which had occurred since the beginning of the Bible.

Figure 13.1: Calendar of dates:

Second Temple destroyed	70 CE
Masada	70
Revolt	133
Mishnah (excluding Aboth) written	200
Tosefta written	300
Sifra written	350
Jerusalem Talmud (Yerushalmi) written	400
Babylonian Talmud (Bavli) written	600
Masoretic text created	600

### Mishnah

The Mishnah is a long document written about 200 CE. It consists of about 1000 pages of text, divided into 63 tractates (books or chapters). This is the first document comprising the modern Jewish religion, over and above the Jewish Old Testament (Tanakh). It is anonymous; in fact, there is really no indication at all of its origin. Was it originally passed down orally? Was it always in its present form? Amazingly, the oldest copy of the Mishnah dates to about 1350 CE, well over 1000 years after being written.

The Mishnah, like the other Talmudic works, was written in Hebrew. There are indications that early versions were passed down orally. This is suggested by a variety of elements possessed in the original Hebrew, such as mnemonic patterns and repeated structures. This made it easier to be memorized. Obviously, this was an important criterion for a work that existed only in oral form for the first hundred or so years of its existence.

Unlike most other Biblical works, the Mishnah has very little to say or imply about its own creation. Scholarly analysis has yielded little about its creation. As a result, there are substantial questions about its true dating. While a date of 200 CE is given here, the oral form could have originated closer to 100 CE (as an early date) and its written form nearer 300 CE (as a late date). It is possible that written forms existed at the same time as it also existed in oral form. Tradition has it that the first written form was created by a person called Judah the Patriarch around 200 CE.

It can be seen that there is a gap of about 350 years between the writing of the last book of the Old Testament and the writing of the Mishnah. This would be from the book of Daniel, written 150 BCE and becoming the last book of the Old Testament, to 200 CE when the Mishnah came into

being. During this time, the Old Testament canon had been finalized. This gap represents a large period of time, the longest since the beginning of the Old Testament (Tanakh) as of that time. This in turn spawned additional writings over the next few hundred years, as we shall see.

The style of the Mishnah is complex, vexing and challenging all at once. Much of the text has multiple meanings. It lacks a narrative; i.e. there is no real story being presented. The text contains thousands of legal arguments, yet contains only a few dozen references to any portion of the Tanakh.

*Excerpt from the Mishnah, Yebamoth 14:4, Neusner edition, per Donald Harman Akenson<sup>6</sup>:*

I.	A. Two brothers –
	B. One deaf-mute and the other of sound senses –
	C. Married to two sisters of sound senses –
	D. The deaf-mute, husband of a sister of sound senses, died –
	E. What should the husband of sound senses who is married to the sister of sound senses do?
	F. She [the deceased childless brother’s widow] should go forth on the grounds of being the sister of the wife.
II.	G. If the husband of sound senses of a sister of sound senses died,
	H. What should the deaf-mute who is husband of the sister of sound senses do?
	I. He should put away his wife with a writ of divorce, and the wife of his brother is prohibited [for marriage to anybody at all] for all time.

The above is an example of the writing of the Mishnah. Admittedly, not the easiest to understand (assuming there is something to understand, given the puzzling nature of the excerpt).

Broadly, the material covered by the Mishnah includes sections covering: agriculture; cleanliness; family intimacy; civil order; religious calendar; and Temple rules. It is clearly based on the Torah, the laws of Moses. It adds little in the way of actual religious thought; the focus is on the proper actions of people. If one acts in accordance with the beliefs handed down in the Mishnah, then one will have the proper relationship to God. It is not important to understand God’s purpose; it is important to follow the letter of the laws handed down.

After the Second Temple was destroyed in 70 CE, members of various Judahist groups gathered at the city of Yavneh (in ??). There, under the leadership of Yohanan ben Zakkai, the cult of the Pharisees was synthesized into the Rabbinic style. Over the next few generations, thought continued to evolve even as things grew bleaker for practitioners of the religion. There

was no longer a central temple, and relations with the Roman empire moved from bad to worse. There was plenty of religious repression as well, enough for both Christians and Jews to feel the heat.

Note: one of the tractates of the Mishnah is called the Aboth (Hebrew for “the fathers”). This document was written well after the rest of the Mishnah, perhaps 3 generations later. This is deduced from the fact that it mentions individuals who lived after the Mishnah was written. It is one of the better known portions of the Mishnah, despite its different heritage: its style is quite different than the rest of the tractates. The Aboth is almost entirely “aggadah”, which means narrative. This was almost entirely lacking in the Mishnah. The Aboth serves to establish the legitimacy of the Mishnah by stating its lineage. In this regard, it traces back the “author/editor” of the Mishnah all the way back to the time of Moses.

### Tosefta

The Tosefta was written about a hundred years after the Mishnah, circa 300 CE. It clearly refers to the Mishnah, and indeed is primarily a commentary on it. In fact, “talmud” is the Hebrew work for commentary.

Few of the passages of the Tosefta make sense except when read in conjunction with a specific portion of the Mishnah. Like the Mishnah, the Tosefta is written in Hebrew; unlike the Mishnah, the Tosefta apparently had no oral tradition (it was saved first in written form).

### Sifra

The Sifra was written at about the same time as the Tosefta, although slightly after since it refers to the Tosefta. Like Tosefta, the Sifra is a commentary; it is a commentary on the book of Leviticus. Thus it re-invents a portion of the Torah and introduces new ideas; all in the spirit of scriptural invention. Interestingly, the Sifra is substantially longer than its spiritual parent is. Leviticus is only 40 pages in length; the Sifra is over 1000 pages. Quite a commentary, by any standard!

As before, the Sifra is written in Hebrew and began life in written form. We know little about its author(s) or otherwise how it came into being. We do know it was written near the land of Israel.

The Sifra works differently than its predecessors (Mishnah and Tosefta) in several respects. It clearly places the Torah (written law) over the Mishnah (which could be called oral law). It includes numerous references to the laws handed down by Yahweh to Moses at Sinai. These make clear that the authors of the Sifra believed that new laws – which presumably trace their heritage back to antiquity, but were passed down orally and had never

been included in the Torah – were suspect. Naturally, it would be possible to have new laws show up at any time and any place claiming to have been given to Moses at Sinai, yet never having been heard of previously. And indeed, this was what the Mishnah was.

Jerusalem Talmud (Yerushalmi)

Here we have another commentary on the Mishnah, which deviates from the Tosefta and the Sifra as to its style. It is also written in Hebrew, as the other Talmuds, and it dates to 400 CE. As with the others, there is little to indicate its authors or *raison d'être*. The English translation runs to 34 volumes, many thousands of pages.

Yerushalmi comes to us in a problematic form. It includes commentary on about two-thirds of the tractates of the Mishnah. Further, the extent (?) manuscript record contains numerous inconsistencies. It is unpolished, as if it were not complete. It does not make reference to the Sifra, although this was surely known to the authors of Yerushalmi.

Yerushalmi was written during yet another time of upheaval. In the fourth century CE, Christianity had moved from being a repressed religion to become the state religion of the Roman Empire. This was no particular benefit for the Jewish faith.

Babylonian Talmud (Bavli)

Finally, we arrive at the Bavli. The Bavli is also known as the Babylonian Talmud, or sometimes just the Talmud. Written in Hebrew, it is slightly bigger than Yerushalmi and written about 200 years later. The Bavli was the last of the Talmuds. It appears to have no oral tradition, having originally been placed into written form.

The Bavli contains several thousand legal arguments. It does also contain a substantial amount of narrative (“aggadah”), more than the other Talmuds.

*Religious Ideas Introduced Around This Time Period*

Temple religion without temple	
Importance of Rabbi	

## 14. And in the End...

As can be seen, the evolution of the Bible was essentially complete by about 600 CE. Since then, the Judeo-Christian religious world was affected most by two events: the completion of the Qur'an in 622, and the Protestant movement of Martin Luther in 1521 (?). Unlike previous Biblical evolution, which built upon the Bible by adding to it or modifying it, these two events broke the mold.

Figure 14.1: Calendar of dates:

Qur'an written	622 CE
Magna Carta written	1215
Gutenberg Bible printed	1452
Martin Luther excommunicated	1521
King James Version published	1611
Darwin publishes <u>Origin of the Species</u>	1859
Dead Sea Scrolls discovered	1948

### The Qur'an

The Qur'an differs from the Bible in several ways. It is written in Arabic, a language which is still widely written and spoken today. The Qur'an has remained largely intact in the years subsequent to its writing. The author of the Qur'an is known: Mohammed (??-632 CE).

Islam accepts the stories of the Bible as referring to its God. But it treats the Qur'an as its sole scripture. God's name is Allah instead of Yahweh (although Jews who speak Arabic also pray to Allah, as this is the Arabic word for God). Mankind is descended from Abraham, the same person as in the Torah. As in the Torah, there are 10 commandments, although they are quite different.

Interestingly, the Islamic religion split into two main factions within a very short time after it appeared: the Sunni and the Shi'ite factions. There are currently several other sects as well.

### Masoretic Text

Sometime around 600 CE or later, Jewish scholars prepared a revised version of the Tanakh (the Jewish Old Testament). This was done in Hebrew to preserve the original Hebrew, but with a twist: the vowel markings were added back.

The oldest extent copy of the Tanakh is a copy of the Masoretic text dated to approximately 950 CE. This text is located in Israel.

### Protestant Movement

The Protestant movement is interesting in that religious practice evolved without the evolution of additional scripture. The Protestant Bible is different than the Catholic Bible, but the differences are minor. We would have expected the writings of Martin Luther to become canon if past patterns were followed. This didn't happen.

### Tyndale's Bible

-Tyndale's translation of ecclesia as congregation instead of church.

### King James Version

The creation of the KJV (see Oxford KJV)

### Mormon Church

### Dead Sea Scrolls

### The Bible Today

How many people follow the various Bibles based on the worship of Yahweh?

Jews: ??  
Catholics: ??  
Protestants: ??  
Muslims: ??  
Mormons: ??

It is tempting to ask: *what was he thinking?* When the author of the Torah was making his creation, did he have any idea of the effect his works would ultimately have on the world at large? Did the authors of the Gospels understand that one day, their work would move from clandestine reading to the prominence of a sacred scripture? Did they ever suspect the ultimate nature of their contributions? Of course, we will never really know what was running through the mind of the authors, those many years ago.

While the Bible appears static (i.e. unchanging) from the viewpoint of a single instant in time, it is clear that religious canon can never be considered fully closed. Even a lifetime would be too short to sense the evolution of the meaning of this powerful collection of works. There have been so many changes throughout the years. This article is a testimony to an ever-evolving

document, one that changes slowly over some periods, and rapidly during others (especially during times of dramatic change).

*Can the Bible exist independently of man?* It is clear that men have shaped the Bible since its earliest days. Through the writing of its stories and lessons, its translation and copying, and even the “spin” given the written words by denominational religious interpretation, the Bible is a product of man.

In the end, each person must draw his or her own conclusions regarding the Bible. I hope this article has helped in your understanding of how the Bible came into existence.

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