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A SHORT HISTORY OF THE HOLY BIBLE

by

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Treasured Masonic manuscripts in England, Scotland and Ireland provide good evidence that from the earliest operative days solemn vows of fidelity were required of those entering the vocation of masonry. These vows were taken while holding or touching a copy of the Holy Bible, or possibly a manuscript copy of the "Old Charges". Incidentally, the "Old Charges" can be found as an appendix in our Book of Constitutions.

During the Middle Ages, and probably during the transition from operative craft masonry to speculative Freemasonry, the "Old Charges" were an indispensable part of the furnishings of Lodges and a written copy of them was displayed, probably on the Master's pedestal. Then, about 1717 A.D., with the formation of a Grand Lodge in England, a "Book of Constitutions" replaced the Old Charges on the Master's pedestal. The custom of carrying the Book of Constitutions into a Lodge and placing it on the Master's pedestal, as done when the Grand Master visits a Lodge, may well be in part a continuance of quite ancient usage. About 1760 A.D. the Grand Lodge of England recognized the Holy Bible as a Great Light in Freemasonry - an immovable jewel which lies open in the Lodge for the Brethren to moralize upon.

It is perhaps interesting to note that an old form of the Charge at Initiation published in 1754 does not make any mention of the Volume of the Sacred Law, but the form of that Charge adopted in the 1830's by the Emulation Lodge of Improvement, and as now in general use, specifically recommends a most serious contemplation of the Volume of the Sacred Law.

This paper, my Brethren, is a condensed resume' of the historical story covering the writing and transmission of the scrip the text and the canon of each of the Old Testament, the New Testament and the Apocrypha will be reviewed separately first and then their coming together and journey down history as the Holy Bible of western Christendom will be sketched.

THE OLD TESTAMENT .

The Old Testament of our Bible is a collection of ancient Hebrew literature which in 100 A.D. was accepted as the Jewish Bible. Thus, in developing the story of the Old Testament, the history of the Jewish peoples is an essential consideration.

The geographical setting for the Old Testament portion of the story of the Bible is that "Fertile Crescent" of land which cradled and supported many of the earliest civilizations. This crescent curved upward from the Gulf of Persia, through the valleys of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, across modern Syria, down through the valley of the Jordan River, through the delta and up the valley of the Nile River. For several thousand years, waves of questing, conquering peoples swept into these fertile lands and in turn were assimilated, or destroyed and replaced. About 2000 B.C., the eastern horn of the crescent was over-run by the Amorite people. Ancient tablets tell of a "Habiru" people, nomadic herders of Western Asia, who for centuries harassed the northern fringes of the crescent. The Habiru, probably the early ancestors of the modern Hebrews, came into these lands as part of this Amoritish invasion. An Amoritish

king, Hammurabi (c. 1750 -1656 B.C.), famous for his Code, could have been a contemporary of Abraham, who is traditionally held to have migrated westward to Canaan or possibly Egypt from the Chaldean city of Ur. Scholars have noted a marked resemblance between Hammurabi's Code and the Biblical Code of the Covenant (Exod. XXI -

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XXV). Thus, while some of the Hebrews apparently moved into the Tigris-Euphrates land, others pushed as far as the Nile delta - into the "Land of Goshen". The pleasant way of life of the Hebrews in Egypt was somewhat abruptly changed after they had enjoyed freedom, peace and prosperity there for some four hundred years. In this change, they were pressed into virtual slave labour as makers of bricks to support the ambitious building program of the ruling Pharaoh, probably Sethos I. With Moses as their leader, the Hebrews rebelled around 1400 B.C. against their Egyptian overlords, and fled out of Egypt from their bondage and escaped across the "Reed" Sea into the Sinai peninsula a very familiar part of Biblical history. During the latter part of the sojourn of Hebrews in Egypt, there is evidence of a fairly strong, though eventually unsuccessful movement, in Egyptian Court circles, led by the future Pharaoh, Amenhotep IV (1377 - 1360 B.C.), to replace worship of the traditional many gods of Egypt as practised by the priesthood, with a monotheistic religion - the worship of one only god. According to Biblical history, the runaway Hebrew slaves, in gratitude for their deliverance from bondage and under the guidance and leadership of Moses, entered into a Covenant with Yahweh, acknowledged Him as their one and only God and received His commandments. This period of exodus from Egypt and wanderings in the wilderness of Sinai is probably when the religion and theology of the Hebrews - the Children of Israel - the Chosen People - had its formative beginnings and hence, may be taken as a starting time for the Old Testament.

After some fifty years in Sinai, the Hebrew people pressed northward, displacing the Canaanite people from Canaan, and entered the valley lands of the Jordan River about 1350 B.C. under Joshua. This was their homeland for the next fourteen hundred years. In 70 A.D., Jerusalem fell to the conquering Romans, ancient biblical Israel ceased to be, and the Jews became homeless wanderers. For the first three hundred years or so after Joshua led them into Canaan, their social structure was a loose federation of tribes, each with its own chief or "Judge". It appears that during this period of the "Judges", the religious and theological beliefs of the Hebrews were being established and refined by repeated oral review and transmission, under the all-pervading view of these people that they were a special and chosen people. There is little, if any, written scriptural literature dating from this period of the Judges.

In 1020 B.C., the tribes of Israel came together as a kingdom under Saul, which continued and flourished under David and finally under Solomon. Upon the death of Solomon in 926 B.C. pent up tensions led to civil war. The old kingdom split into a northern kingdom, Israel, and a southern kingdom, Judah. The Israelite Kingdom was conquered by the Assyrians in 721 B.C. and some thirty thousand northern Hebrews were sent east into captivity. The southern Kingdom of Judah fell to the Babylonians with the razing of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. This is another important event in the shaping of Jewish scriptures. When Jerusalem fell, some forty thousand Hebrews were exiled to Babylon. Here they stayed for fifty years until Cyrus the Great of the Persian conquerors of Babylon let them return to Jerusalem in 536 B.C., where they continued under Persian influence for about two hundred years, until Palestine fell to Alexander the Great in 332 B.C. and it then became a part of the Grecian Empire.

In the main, the writing of the several parts of the Hebrew Bible (our Old

Testament) appears to have taken place during this turbulent era in Jewish history in Canaan, a land crossed by the then major highways and trade routes of the world. This nine hundred year era stretched from the civil war following Solomon's reign, through the fall of the northern Kingdom, Israel, to Assyria, the fall of Judah and the exile to Babylon, the two hundred years under Persian dominance, then the period under Greece and other conquerors, until the Maccabean revolt in 165 B.C. with resulting national independence for one hundred years until Palestine became a Roman province in 63 B.C. Undoubtedly, the buffeting course of Jewish history during this era sharpened and accentuated the place of religious thought and observance with the Jewish people. In their religion, they could find succor and rally to a national heritage. Undoubtedly too, the impact of all these great civilizations and their religions on the Jewish people played some role in shaping the contents of the Old Testament books.

The Jewish Bible is composed of three parts - the Law (or Torah), the Prophets and the Writings.

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The Law encompasses the first five books of the Bible - Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. ModeExile to form the JEDP literature, which was accepted as canonical by the Jews around 400 B.C. This literature is now the first five books of the Bible, which are called the Torah or the Law and the sixth book, Joshua. This summarizes, in very condensed and abbreviated form, the present conclusions of many eminent biblical scholars based upon an extensive deductive analysis of this portion of the Bible and much other contemporary literature. Thus, the Torah appears as a complex fabric interwoven in the dim past from several written sources, some of which began as oral traditions. While tradition has long ascribed the writing of these books to Moses, it must be recognized that while they undoubtedly include sayings and teachings of Moses, handed down from generation to generation, he was dead many hundreds of years before the final compilation of the Torah. The actual authors and compilers remain unknown and the source documents have long since gone

The second portion of the Hebrew Bible, the Prophets, is sub-divided into the Former Prophets, which now appear as Joshua, Judges, I and II Samuel and I and II Kings, and the Latter Prophets, now appearing as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the twelve shorter books, often called the Minor Prophets, of Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. Apart from some portions of Isaiah which appear to have been written by him (750 - 700 B.C.) and a portion of Jeremiah dictated by him to his scribe, Baruch (c.625 B.C.), the authorship of all the remaining books of the Prophets is not known. The first versions of the Former Prophets appear to have been the work of authors or editors influenced by the Deuteronomic school and to have been drawn from a multitude of sources, mainly in the period 700 - 500 B.C. These first versions were revised, amended and often lengthened over the next several hundred years. The books of Ezekiel and the twelve minor Prophets appear to be largely based on the prophecies and teachings of the men whose names they bear, as subsequently recorded and expanded by one or more unknown authors. These Minor Prophets with the exception of Malachi, who probably never existed, appeared in Jewish history from sometime just before the Exile until shortly after the return from. Babylon. In summary then, the authorship of the Prophets is mostly unknown, but it is fairly certain they were written and underwent evolutionary editing in the period 800 - 500 B C By about 200 B.C. they had been essentially finalized. Textual research leads to the conclusion that these five books had their beginning in two main documents or possibly schools of writing. In the southern Kingdom of Judah, around 850 B.C. there arose the more primitive J document, so named because the robust warlike god it

described was called Jahweh. The other, and more sophisticated, main document arose in the northern Kingdom of Israel, probably about 750 B.C. and is called the E document because the gentler god it portrayed was called Elohim. Both these documents dealt with the same general material and were the sources for a sequence of later compilers whose revisions and additions shaped the first six books of the Bible. It seems that somewhat after the fall of Israel to Assyria in 721 B.C., the E document fell into the hands of a writer in the southern Kingdom who combined it with the earlier J document, and with his own additions produced the JE document around 650 B.C. as another step toward the Torah. The JE document was combined with the Deuteronomic Code (D) about 550 B.C. to give the JED assembly. After the return from the Babylonian exile in 536 B.C. the JED document was combined with a Priestly Code (P) which was probably developed in Babylon during the and had become part of the canon of Jewish scriptures with a status just slightly less than that accorded the Law.

The Writings are the remaining books of the Old Testament, after the Law and the Prophets. These are mainly post-exilic works by unknown authors who frequently drew on earlier, often pre-exilic sources. The Writings are usually subdivided into the Poetical or Wisdom books, (Psalms, Proverbs and Job), the Rolls (Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes and Esther) , and the books of Prophecy and History (Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, I and II Chronicles)

Consider first the Wisdom books. The Proverbs were probably written in their present form about 400 - 350 B.C. by unknown authors or compilers. There is strong evidence that early Phoenician and Egyptian writings and possibly original materials from Solomon were worked and moulded over the

3. centuries yield a final text. The Psalms may contain traces of a Davidic poetry from around 1000 B.C., but the final text appears to have arrived by 350 - 250 B.C. Job seems to be the work of an unknown post-exilic poet-philosopher whose writing stems from widely scattered folklore from considerably before the Exile.

The Rolls hold a unique place in Jewish scriptures. Over the centuries, one of them has been read aloud in the Synagogue once a year on a particular day of observance. The Song of Songs, or Song of Solomon is a group of folk poems or songs probably used as liturgy in the northern Kingdom of Israel well before the Exile, and is the work of many authors. It is very doubtful that Solomon was one of those authors. Lamentations cannot be ascribed to Jeremiah as sometimes asserted, but was written by an unknown poet (c.586 - 530 B.C.) who appears to have witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar and who was a contemporary of Jeremiah. Ruth (450 - 250 B.C.), Ecclesiastes (c. 200 B.C.), and Esther (c. 125 B.C.) are later works of unknown authors.

The Prophecy and History books are the remaining part of the Writings portion of the Jewish Bible. Nehemiah (450 - 400 B.C.) and the Chronicles (450 - 400 B.C.) appear to be the work of the same author or school, but are not attributed to Nehemiah. Ezra (350 - 250 B.C.) is ascribed to an unknown author who drew freely from the Chronicles. Daniel (165 B.C.) was written during the Maccabean revolt. Together with Esther (c. 125 B.C.), it is thus one of the latest books included in the Jewish canon.

Thus, for the thirty-nine books of the Jewish Bible, modern methods of scholarly deduction and textual analysis can say approximately when they came to their several present texts. They and their precursors evolved throughout the one thousand year period beginning about 1200 B.C. and ending about one hundred years before Christ. Practically nothing definite appears to permit positive

identification of the authors involved, except that in a negative sense, it seems clear that Moses was not the author of any of the first five books and in the case of books bearing names of people, they were not the authors, though frequently that person plays an important role in the book.

Religious writings that are given a special or sacred status by a people are said to have been canonized. They become "the canon" of the scriptures. Tradition, and best present evidence, is that the thirty-nine books, which together form the Law (or Torah), the Prophets and the Writings of Jewish Scriptures, as discussed above, were accepted as The Scriptures and thus became the canon of the Hebrew Bible at the Jewish Synod of Jamnia about 100 A.D. It will be noted that this canon is the same as our present Old Testament, but does not contain the books of the Old Testament Apocrypha, which are contained in many present-day Christian Bibles. This point will be discussed a little later in this paper.

Before reviewing the text and canon of the New Testament, let us briefly consider the creation and handing on of copies of the Hebrew Bible over the centuries before printing became available, about 1450 A.D. Before then, every copy of every book roll and manuscript had to be made by hand. As the text of the Jewish Scriptures became finalized, and certainly after it became the canon, the priests and rabbis and Jewish religious practise and thought, placed important emphasis on a fixed, unchanging text. Hence, the copying out of a new roll or sheet from an existing one became a demanding religious process, each step of which was prescribed and regulated by rules. This attitude and practise of the Jewish people reflected their national inward turning and attention to their Scriptures as a defense against the battering they were receiving from Rome and as a counter to the inroads of Christianity. A Rabbinical School for this purpose became established in Babylon in the east, which flourished till the ninth or tenth century A.D. A western, Palestinian School finally settled at Tiberias on the west side of the Sea of Galilee in 638 A.D. after the Moslem conquest of Palestine. The copyist-scholars at these schools were called Massorettes, as derived from the Jewish word "massorah", meaning "tradition". A great contribution of the Massorettes was the "vocalizing" of Hebrew writing. This occurred about 500 A.D. Prior to that written Hebrew had no vowels, and no spaces between words or sentences. It was a continuous ribbon of consonants. The mental insertion of vowel sounds and the grouping of consonants into words and words

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into sentences could be done only by those who were completely familiar with the text. The Massorettes "vocalized" the text, by adding small marks or "points" over, under or between consonants. They thus preserved for all time the sound of the Hebrew language as it was at that time when solemnly chanted in the Synagogue. The Massorettes numbered the verses, words and letters of every book. The following excerpt from the Talmudic rules for copying, as practised by the Tiberian Massorettes, illustrates the extraordinary care of the procedure:

"A synagogue roll must be written on the skins of clean animals, prepared for the particular use of the synagogue by a Jew. These must be fastened together with strings taken from clean animals. Every skin must contain a certain number of columns, equal throughout the entire codex. The length of each column must not extend over less than forty-eight, or more than sixty lines; and the breadth must consist of thirty letters. The whole copy must be first

lined; and if three words be written in it without a line, it is worthless. The ink should be black, neither red, green, nor any other colour, and be prepared according to a definite receipt. An authentic copy must be the exemplar, from which the transcriber ought not in the least to deviate. No word or letter, not even a yod, must be written from memory, the scribe not having looked at the codex before him. . . Between every consonant the space of a hair or thread must intervene; between every word the breadth of a narrow consonant; between every new parashah, or section, the breadth of nine consonants; between every book, three lines. The fifth book of Moses must terminate exactly with a line; but the rest need not do so. Besides this, the copyist must sit in full Jewish dress, wash his whole body, not begin to write the name of God with a pen newly dipped in ink, and should a king address him while writing that name he must take no notice of him... The rolls in which these regulations are not observed are condemned to be buried in the ground or burned; or they are banished to the schools, to be used as reading-books."

The effectiveness of these rules for ensuring transmission of an "incorrupt", unchanged text was well demonstrated when the Dead Sea Scrolls of the Qumran Community (c. 200 B.C. - 70 A.D.), as discovered in 1947, were compared with present day descendants of the Hebrew Massorete text. In particular, the Qumran Hebrew text for Isaiah, probably written about 100 B.C., is essentially the same as the modern Isaiah text, based on the Massorete text of 1000 A.D.

THE NEW TESTAMENT

All of the twenty-seven books of our New Testament were written during the one hundred and fifty years immediately following the death of Jesus. It is considered that Christian teachings were originally delivered and orally transmitted in the Aramaic tongue, though no contemporary New Testament manuscripts in that tongue exist. Early manuscripts in Greek do exist and some in Latin and in Syriac dating from about 200 A.D. are available.

The earliest books of the New Testament are the letters attributed to Paul. Except for the Epistle to the Hebrews, these were all written within thirty years of Christ's death. All were written in Greek, the international language of those times. It appears well established that Paul himself wrote the letters to the Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians, but the writer, or writers, of the letters to Timothy, Titus and Philemon was probably not Paul, though very possibly there was a close association with Paul.

The gospels according to Matthew, Mark and Luke, along with the Acts and the Revelations, were written between 60 and 100 A.D. Mark is probably the first of the group and may have been written in Rome by a close friend of Paul called Mark who recorded the recollections of Peter and summarized the history and teachings of Jesus as understood in the Rome community of Christians. Mark probably never saw Jesus or heard him teaching. Matthew and Luke appear to have used Mark as a source along with recollections of others, and materials which each of them drew from other Christian communities. Scholars doubt that Matthew, the disciple, an eyewitness and contemporary of Jesus, actually wrote the gospel bearing his name. The books of Luke and the Acts are almost universally accepted as being by the

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same author and the strong evidence is that this author was Luke, the physician,

a Gentile scholar and close friend of Paul. Revelations is generally regarded as having been written about 95 A.D. and thus, the traditional acceptance of John, the disciple, as the author becomes difficult, especially so when that John most likely met death as a marked Christian no later than 70 A.D. The author was more likely a second or third generation Christian called John.

The gospel according to John and the three Epistles of John are attributed to the period 100 - 130 A.D. Scholars demonstrate that they all appear to be the work of one author, a sophisticated, mystical, erudite evangelist, which appears to rule out the disciple, John, the Galilean fisherman, as that author.

All the remaining books of the New Testament, except II Peter (130 - 180 A.D.), are considered to have been written between 60 and 130 A.D. The evidence seems to support the traditional assignment of the authorship of I Peter to Simon Peter, the beloved disciple. Though because of the excellence of the Greek grammar in the composition of the text, there is a strong suggestion that Peter was greatly helped in the writing by Sylvanus, a friend of Paul. It was probably written in Rome about 62 A.D. The Epistle to the Hebrews appears to have been written between 80 and 90 A.D. by a completely unknown author, but definitely not by Paul. The Epistle of James, 80 - 100 A.D. can be assigned to a competent, unknown scholar of the Greek idiom. It is not the James, son of Zebedee, the disciple and fisherman of Galilee. Jude (c. 125 A.D.) and II Peter (c. 150 A.D.) were both probably written in Rome by unknown authors.

CANON OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Among the early Christians, the concept of a sacred, canonized literature of their own developed slowly. The early churches and Christian communities were rife with sectarianism of many forms. There were various leaders and groups, each advocating and claiming a special place and status for a particular set of writings. These splintering tendencies appear to have generated a countering non-schismatic concern about 200 A.D. for a single canonical literature of Christianity. About this time, Origen, the leader of the prestigious Christian school in Alexandria, prepared a listing of Christian literature in which twenty-two books (the four Gospels, the fourteen letters of Paul, the Acts, I Peter, I John and Revelations) were called "acknowledged" and a further seven (James, II and III John, Jude, II Peter, Barnabas, and the Shepherd of Hermas) were listed as "disputed". Eusebius, a great writer of the early church and Bishop of Caesarea, included in his monumental Church History of 326 A.D. an attempt at a canonical list. It added James, II and III John, Jude and II Peter to Origen's "acknowledged" list. The resulting list is that of our present New Testament. Athanasius, the great Bishop of Alexandria, in his annual Easter letter to his churches in 367 A.D., gave a list of the books of the scriptures. His New Testament list agreed with that of Eusebius and hence, with our present list. Various other early New Testaments, including the Coptic, the Syriac and the Greek versions in the Vaticanus and the Sinaiticus bibles, all included such books as Barnabas, the Shepherd of Hermas, the Epistles of Clement and many others. The Synod of Laodicea (363 A.D.) forbade the reading of non-canonical books, among which it listed Revelations. However, the Council of Hippo (393 A.D.) and the Council of Carthage (397 and 419 A.D.) affirmed the present twenty-seven books. The Roman Church changed from the Greek to Latin as its recognized language around 250 A.D. Thus the earlier Greek translations and the books they included, gradually appeared in Latin texts and are now referred to as the "Old" Latin texts. These tended to include books now considered non-canonical, at least in the Western church. There was a marked lack of agreement among the Old Latin versions. In 382 A.D., Pope Damasus arranged that Jerome, the outstanding biblical scholar of his time, make an

authoritative version of the Latin text of both the Old and the New Testaments. For the New Testament, Jerome revised the Latin text through a comparison with the earlier Greek and Syrian texts. His New Testament was composed of the same books as our modern form.

While the canon of the New Testament was thus by Jerome's revision, pretty well established, it perhaps became settled, at least for the Western church, by a decree of Pope Eugene IX in 1441 A.D.

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which affirmed as canonical the New Testament books accepted by Eusebius, Athanasius, Jerome and Augustine. It is interesting to note that throughout the long evolution of this canon, the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Revelations had a checkered, in and out, career in both the Eastern and Western and other branches of the Christian church. Even today, the canon of the New Testament differs in some Eastern and Asian branches of Christendom from that recognized by Rome and Western Protestantism. Thus, the canon of the New Testament appears to have evolved about 325 A.D. (the Council of Nicaea) and to have been settled for the Western church in 1441 A.D.

THE SEPTUAGINT AND THE APOCRYPHA

Before reviewing the finalization of the canon of the Christian Bible, it is useful to consider the Septuagint and also the Apocryphal books. These books are now called the Apocrypha, (of the Old Testament).

It will be recalled that Palestine became a part of the Grecian Empire in 332 B.C. In that era, the metropolis city of Alexandria was founded near the mouth of the Nile. It became a flourishing center of learning and culture. Many Jewish people and scholars established themselves in this center of Greek influence and, except for their Judaic religion, became quite Hellenized. It was natural then that a formal translation of all the contemporarily accepted Hebrew scriptures into Greek was made at Alexandria. The traditional story is that at the call of Ptolemy Philadelphus (285 -246 B.C.), seventy leading Rabbinical scholars laboured for seventy days to produce a complete Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures then in use. This Greek text is called the Septuagint (the seventy). There were quite a number of books included in the Septuagint which were not included in the canon of the Jewish Bible as finalized at the Jewish Synod of Jamnia in about 100 A.D. The books usually found in manuscripts of the Septuagint, but not in the Jewish Bible, are: I Esdras, Ecclesiasticus or Wisdom of Sirach, Judith, Tobit, Baruch, I and II (and sometime also III and IV) Maccabees, Epistle of Jeremiah and additions to the Hebrew canonical Daniel of the Song of the Three Children, the History of Susanna, and Bel and the Dragon. The Greek Septuagint collection of Hebrew scriptures was apparently used as the Old Testament of the early Christian Bibles. It is the Old Testament of the major famous early Christian Bible manuscripts, including the Codex Alexandrinus, the Vaticanus and the Sinaiticus. Later on in Europe, the Old Testament Apocrypha was recognized as canonical by the Roman Church but set apart as a section between the Old and New Testaments by Protestant churches, or even omitted altogether. The full story and background of the Old Testament Apocrypha and also New Testament Apocryphal literature, is a most complex and involved one, frequently it seems, charged with heated emotions.

THE CHRISTIAN BIBLE

Following his revision of the New Testament into Latin from the Greek and Syrian texts in 384 A.D., Jerome spent the next twenty years in translating the

Septuagint form of the Old Testament from Hebrew texts into Latin. Jerome's complete Christian Bible in Latin, which appeared around 494 A.D., is the text now called the Vulgate. It continued, with revisions, as the text for all western Christendom until the Reformation - when the Hebrew canon replaced the Septuagint based canon as the Old Testament in the Protestant church. A Modified Vulgate text is the Bible of the Roman Church today. During the Middle Ages, Jerome's text was continually revised and amended.

THE ENGLISH BIBLE

Origen records that Christianity arrived in Britain about the third century A.D. Pope Gregory the Great (590 - 604 A.D.) is said to have sent missionaries to Britain and Augustine landed in Kent in 597 A.D. A long list of partial translations of the Bible from the Vulgate Latin into Anglo-Saxon and Middle English appears from the sixth to the fourteenth centuries. In 1360, John Wycliffe, often called the bright morning star of the Reformation, was elected Master of Balliol College at Oxford. In support of his often very critical attacks on the established Roman Church and its ways he undertook a translation of

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the Bible from the Latin Vulgate into the English vernacular of his time. The complete Bible appeared in 1382. The New Testament is considered to be all Wycliffe's work, but Nicholas of Hereford, another Oxford scholar, probably translated much of the Old Testament. Wycliffe's Bible, the first Bible in English, hand lettered of course; was produced in fine print, without ornamentation, in a size of single volume that could be carried in a pocket. Many copies of the Wycliffe Bible were made and it was widely used, especially by the itinerant preaching Lollards and their adherents.

Printing with moveable type was invented in Germany about 1450 and brought to use in England by William Caxton in 1477. Several biblical narratives and parts of the Bible were soon printed in England. The first major printed New Testament in English was the work of William Tyndale, a scholar of Oxford and Cambridge. It seems that his plans to make a goodly translation of the Bible began in 1520. Because of lack of support and perhaps even opposition to his work, he moved to the free city of Hamburg and there completed a translation in 1525 of the New Testament from the early Greek (not the Latin Vulgate) into English. Before he was burned at the stake in 1536 in Belgium, he had translated the Old Testament up through the Chronicles. By 1535 Miles Coverdale, with the encouragement of Cromwell, translated from German and Latin texts, and published the first printed complete Bible in English and the first in which the Apocrypha was separated off into a separate section which followed the Old Testament. Several other major English translations quickly followed. John Rogers, a disciple of Tyndale, published a completed Tyndale version in 1537. It was called the Matthew Bible, and was dedicated to Henry VIII and was cordially received by Cranmer and approved for public sale. The winds were blowing unfavourably for the Romanists. The Matthew Bible was thoroughly revised and issued under the aegis of Cromwell as the Great Bible in 1539. By Royal proclamation in 1541, the Great Bible was set up in every church in the land. Thus began the widespread love and use of the Bible in England. It is perhaps worth noting that this occurred well after operative craft lodges of masons were established in England and perhaps just at the beginnings of speculative Freemasonry. The closing years of Henry VIII's reign witnessed a drastic reversal of the fortunes of the Protestant Reformers. Cranmer and Rogers were burned at the stake and the public use of the English Bible was forbidden, and copies were removed from the churches. The Reformers gathered at

Geneva and, under Calvin, Beza and others, translated and printed the Geneva Bible in 1569, a scholarly work which exercised a marked influence on the Authorized Version. In 1568 the Bishop's Bible, a clerical revision of the Great Bible, was published and approved for use in the churches by the new monarch, Elizabeth. By 1609, the Roman Church had translated their Latin Vulgate into English at the English Seminary at Douai in France (and for a time located at Rheims) This is the basis of the Rheims-Douai version of the Bible as currently used in the Roman Church. Its Old Testament is, of course, a direct descendent of the Alexandrian Septuagint and thus includes the Apocryphal books.

THE AUTHORIZED VERSION

When James I succeeded Elizabeth, the question of a universally satisfactory English Bible was awaiting a solution. Neither the Bishop's Bible, the official church version, nor the Reformer's Geneva Bible, which found preference in private use, met the general needs. Each was held to have a bias, particularly through the "explanatory notes" forming a part of these translations.

In 1603 the Puritan Party addressed a petition bearing one thousand names (the Millenary Petition) to James I praying for a new and unbiased translation of the Bible, to be free of marginal commentary. The next year, James held a Hampton Court conference of Bishops and Puritan clergy. A Dr. Reynolds, President of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, raised the question of the shortcomings of the current Bibles. James became interested and apparently himself suggested the plans and schemes which eventually led to the Authorized Version. It is possible that the Gunpowder Plot of 605, perhaps skillfully attributed to the Romanists, helped to hasten the whole program. It was agreed that the revision based on the Bishop's Bible was to be done mainly by the scholars of Oxford and Cambridge, then approved by the Bishops and learned of the Church, the Privy Council and finally by the King himself. It was agreed that there should be no marginal commentary, thus rendering it free of bias by any party. By 1607, the

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work was formally begun by a very distinguished team of about fifty men, divided into six groups, two of which sat at each of Oxford, Cambridge and Westminster. A portion, when revised by any group, was passed to all the other five groups for comment and suggestion, and possible further revision. Cases of particular difficulty came before a resolving group composed of leaders from each of the six groups, before whom any outside learned authority could be called. It took nearly three years of dedicated toil to produce the manuscript for the printer and then a further year for the printing. In 1611, twenty thousand copies of a fifteen hundred page, 10½" x 16½", volume were printed by the King's Printer, which sold for 25s. in sheets and 30s. when bound. It was an immediate success, though it underwent many minor revisions and printings over the years, beginning almost from that first printing. To date, there have been about a thousand editions. The Apocrypha section which was a part of all the earlier editions has generally been omitted since about 1800.

Thus, in very brief form, my Brethren, the story of our Volume of the Sacred Law over the three thousand years or so during which it was shaped and polished by countless dedicated and inspired men. Perhaps you will pause and think on this magnificent monument to human faith in the Great Architect of the Universe when next it is opened or closed according to ancient Custom.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The following is a short listing of books from which a more detailed story could be obtained.

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4.6000 Years of the Bible - G. S. Wegener - published by Hodder and Stougliton (London, 1963).

5.The Bible as History - Werner Keller - published by William Morrow and Co. (New York, 1956).

6.The Interpreter's Bible, A Commentary in Twelve Volumes -published by Abingdon Press (New York, 1952).