

ISSUE

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BULLETIN OF
THE OLSEN
PARK CHURCH
OF CHRIST

Faithful Sayings

May 28,
2017

Services

Sunday: 9:00 AM

10:00 AM

11:00 AM

Wednesday: 7:00 PM

Elders:

Pat Ledbetter

Jeff Nunn

Deacons:

Steve Dixon

Ryan Ferguson

Arend Gressley

Ben Hight

Blake McAlister

Brady McAlister

Walker McAnear

Sam Nunn

Lance Purcell

Rusty Scott

Justin Smiley

Trevor Yontz

Evangelist:

Kyle Pope



A New Covenant for a New Age

How the Bible Came to Us (7)

By Kyle Pope

We observed in earlier lessons the providential timing of God's revelation of the first books of the Old Testament at a time when humans were first starting to use an alphabet. This made it easier for common people to read and understand God's will. In His providence, the revelation of the New Testament also came at a time of great significance. The centuries before Christ led to significant developments in language and the technologies used to preserve written literature.

Language and Writing in the First Century

North of Israel was the land of Aram (or Syria). From the time of the Assyrians, Babylonians, and Persians any conquering nation who moved south through Palestine towards Egypt had to pass through Aram on its journey. Because of this strategic location, Aramaic, the language of the Arameans, became an international language between the Assyrians, Babylonians, and Persians and the nations they conquered such as Israel, Judah, and Egypt. Through the time of the New Testament and beyond many Jews in Palestine still spoke Aramaic. We see this from words and phrase preserved in the New Testament such as *abba* (meaning "father"), *mammon* (referring to wealth), or *Cephas* (the name Jesus gave to Peter, meaning "rock").

Although Aramaic was a common language in New Testament Palestine, it was not the only language. After the Persian period another conquering nation left an equally enduring impact on the land of Jesus and the apostles.

The conquest of Alexander the Great spread Greek language and culture throughout the ancient world. Even the Romans that followed them still used Greek (in addition to their native Latin tongue) as a language of learning and commerce. This is why the New Testament was not written in Hebrew (or even in Aramaic)—the earliest preserved manuscripts of the New Testament are in Greek.

It used to be thought that the Greek of the New Testament was a unique language, used only in the revelation of the gospel. It's not like Classical Greek (from the time of philosophers and playwrights such as Plato or Sophocles), nor is it like Modern Greek (used in Greece today). Scholars once thought it must have been a special type of "Holy Spirit Greek," until discoveries were

made of letters and notes written by common everyday people from this time. It was discovered that God did not reveal His word in a special language of inspiration or classical literature but in the common language used by average men and women in New Testament times. This form of Greek is now known as *Koine* (meaning "Common").

In earlier lessons we discussed the use of stone, clay, or parchment animal skins rolled into scrolls to preserve written literature in Old Testament times. In the time of the New Testament parchment was still used but it was very expensive. Imagine having to buy a leather notebook to take notes in school! Our word "paper" comes from an ancient writing material known as *papyrus*. Produced from a plant grown in Egypt that was dried, flattened, and glued in layers, papyrus became a common writing medium in the centuries before and after the New Testament. Some of the oldest surviving manuscripts of the New Testament were written on papyrus.

The first libraries of the ancient world consisted of stacks of clay tablets, then jars or baskets of rolled parchment and papyrus scrolls. Around the time of the New Testament a final development came into the ancient world that continues to be found on every bookshelf and library throughout the world today. A scroll usually only had writing on only one side. To work through a book you had to continually roll up the scroll as you read. A large book might demand a very long piece of parchment stretched out for yards. What we now call a "book" was first known as a *codex*. Just as we still do with modern books, a *codex* had pages (or leaves) written on both sides. These leaves were folded, stacked, and bound together in a form that was not only compact, but it could be read easily without continually rolling up the scroll. Virtually all New Testament manuscripts were originally pages bound together into ancient *codices* (the plural of *codex*). Some scholars think the increased popularity of the codex came as a result of its use in the spread of the gospel.

The Books of the New Testament

What we now refer to as the *New Testament* is a collection of three types of books: 5 books of history (Matthew-Acts); 21 epistles or letters written to churches and individuals (Romans-3John); and 1 book of prophecy (Revelation). "Prophecy" refers to the *telling forth* of something revealed by God. So, in one sense all Scripture was prophetically re-



vealed (2 Pet. 1:20-21), but the final book of the New Testament is called a book of prophecy because it looks ahead to things that will happen in the future.

The earliest books of the New Testament were probably some of the letters written by apostles to churches and individuals. Having believed in Jesus as the Messiah these men went out teaching others to follow Christ and wrote letters about what disciples of Jesus should believe and practice. We generally do not arrange these texts first in our Bibles, however, because you won't care about following Jesus until you learn who He is and why you should follow Him. The first four books of the New Testament (as we usually arrange them) are books that tell us about Jesus' life while upon earth. We often call them the "gospels" because the word *gospel* means "good news." The message of Jesus coming to earth, and the salvation He brings is a message of good news to all who will accept it. The last book of history, the Acts of the Apostles, records the establishment of the first churches.

The gospels were written by two apostles and two disciples of Jesus who were co-workers with the apostles. Matthew and John were both apostles who followed Jesus while He was on the earth (Matt. 9:9; 4:21). Luke was a physician and a co-worker of the apostle Paul (Col. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:11; Philemon 24). He wrote the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts, which records some of his travels with Paul (as seen by his use of "we" in passages such as Acts 16:10-13). John Mark was also a co-worker with Paul (Acts 12:25), the cousin of Barnabas (Col. 4:10), and the son of a woman named Mary who opened her home to the church in the early history of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 12:12). In the 2nd century an early Christian writer named Irenaeus claimed Luke wrote what Paul taught him and Mark wrote what Peter taught him (*Against Heresies*, 3.1).

From Man or God?

In our first lessons we noticed the claims of Scripture that it was produced by the direct revelation of God. Is this true of New Testament books? Yes. In his first letter to the church in Corinth Paul wrote, "**If anyone thinks himself to be a**

prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord" (1 Cor. 14:37). Jesus promised His apostles that after His return to heaven He would send the Holy Spirit to them, who would guide them "**into all truth**" (John 16:13) and bring to their "**remembrance all things**" that Jesus taught (John 14:26). Early Christians understood the special nature of these documents written by the apostles and prophets of the New Testament. Writing about their teaching of the gospel, Irenaeus claimed:

They first preached it abroad and then later by the will of God handed it down to us in Writings, to be the foundation and pillar of our faith.... For after our Lord had risen from the dead, they were clothed with power from on high when the Holy Spirit came upon them, they were filled with all things and had perfect knowledge (*Against Heresies*, 3.1).

The modern world rejects this. If the New Testament is from God, we must follow its instruction. If we claim it came from human beings we can accept what we want and



reject what we don't like. An example of this is called the *Q Hypothesis*. Anyone reading the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke will notice how similar they are. Even though ancient writers like Irenaeus (180 AD) and Origen (210 AD) claimed Matthew was written first, modern theories try to argue that Mark was written first and Matthew and Luke borrowed elements found in Mark in the composition of their own gospels. But what about material in Matthew and Luke that isn't found in Mark? The *Q Hypothesis*

argues that in cases when Matthew and Luke have material not found in Mark it must have from a *Q Source*—from the German word *quelle* meaning “source.”

If God chose to reveal His word in this way He could have. The problem is there is no evidence for this theory. Ancient writers speak of no *Q Source* but describe the gospel writers acting on their own. While it may be that gospel writers read one another's work, the New Testament offers another reason for its similarities—a common source of inspiration from God! Peter called Paul's writings “**scriptures**” (2 Peter 3:16). Paul claimed, “**All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness**” (2 Tim. 3:16). The word in Greek translated “given by inspiration of God” literally means “**God-breathed**” (NIV). These books were not created by the imagination of human beings—God lead these Christian writers to produce these texts that now serve as the Law of God governing the entire world in this age. In these texts are preserved the words (and revelation) of Jesus. Jesus declared that His words will judge us in the “**last day**” (John 12:48). In our next study we will consider the scope and close of the New Testament canon.



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We are so glad that you joined us today.
Please come again.

● **Let us know if you have any questions.**