

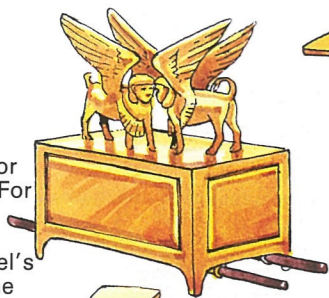
THE OLD TESTAMENT

It is not easy to discover exactly how the books of the Old Testament came to be written and collected together because many of them are so very old. They would have been passed on by word of mouth long before they were written down.

1 From earliest times, important things have been written down and kept in special places. In the book of Genesis it says: 'God said to Moses, write this on a scroll as something to be remembered . . .'

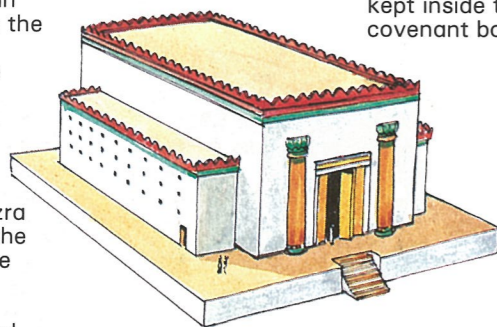


3 From the time of Samuel, the words and writings of the prophets were recorded and kept for future generations. For example, we know that Samuel's message about Israel's kings was kept in the sanctuary at Mizpeh.



2 Moses wrote down God's instructions in 'The Book of the Law'. It was then given to the priests to keep beside the covenant box or 'ark' in the sacred inner room of the tabernacle. The Ten Commandments would have been carved on stone tablets not more than 45 x 30cm. They were kept inside the covenant box.

4 The collections of poems and songs in the book of Psalms was probably begun by David for use in the temple worship. Others would have been added to his collection over the years.



5 By the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, in the fifth century BC, the Pentateuch was complete and its authority recognized. Nehemiah is said to have founded 'a library, gathered together the books about the kings and prophets, and the books of David, and letters of kings about sacred gifts'.

6 In the time between the Old and New Testaments, a Jewish military leader named Judas Maccabaeus . . . collected all the books that had been lost on account of the war . . . It is most likely that he also arranged the complete collection, divided into three: the 'Law', the 'Prophets' and the rest.



7 By the time of Jesus all of the Old Testament books were well known and accepted. They were finally agreed at the Jewish Synod of Jamnia in AD 90. The Hebrew Bible used today contains all the Old Testament books in the Christian Bible, but some are in a different order.



THE APOCRYPHA

The name, which means 'hidden', applies to twelve books and additions to books which are very old and were included with other Old Testament books in the Greek translation, the Septuagint.

However, they were not included in the final list agreed at the Synod of Jamnia. Today they are included in Roman Catholic Bibles, though not usually in Protestant Bibles.

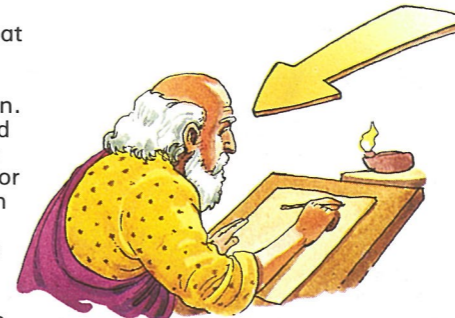
THE NEW TESTAMENT

There is much more evidence to go on when we come to the collection of the New Testament. Thousands of manuscripts (some going back to the early centuries AD) have been preserved and from them we can piece together what must have happened.

1 When the first Christian groups met together for worship, they continued to read the Jewish Old Testament, as Jesus had done. As well as this, people who had known Jesus were asked to talk about him and to share his teachings.



3 As time passed and eye-witnesses gradually died, the Christians realized that clear accounts of Jesus' life and work must be written down. This led Matthew and John, Mark (working with Peter) and Doctor Luke (journeying with Paul), to write down their Gospels. As the early church grew, Luke added the Acts of the Apostles to his Gospel.



2 The first written documents circulating amongst the churches were the letters written by Paul. These were read and treasured by the people they were written to, and they were also copied and distributed to other churches nearby.



4 At first, there were many other accounts of Jesus' life being circulated, but by the second century AD the leaders of the churches agreed that the four Gospels were the only genuinely inspired accounts.

5 John's moving account of his visions about the end of time, called the Book of Revelation, was then added to the accepted documents. 2 Peter,

2 and 3 John, James, Jude and Hebrews were also accepted, after some debate, probably about their suitability for reading aloud in church.

6 The list of books as we now have it was agreed and in use long before the Councils of Laodicea (AD 363) and of Carthage (AD 397) formally accepted them. In making their final decisions, the Church Fathers asked themselves two questions: 'Does this book teach what the eye-witnesses, particularly the disciples of Jesus, taught?' and 'Does it encourage and strengthen Christians in their faith?'

