

Making of the Bible P1

Exploring My Strange Bible

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Speaker in the audio file:

Tim Mackie

Tim: Hey everybody! I'm Tim Mackie, and this is my podcast, Exploring My Strange Bible. I am a card-carrying, Bible, history, and language nerd who thinks that Jesus of Nazareth is utterly amazing and worth following with everything that you have.

On this Podcast, I'm putting together the last ten years' worth of lectures, and sermons where I've been exploring this strange, and wonderful story of the Bible and how it invites us into the mission of Jesus and the journey of faith. And I hope this can be helpful for you too.

I also helped start this thing called, The Bible Project. We make animated videos, and podcasts about all kinds of topics on Bible, and Theology. You can find those resources at thebibleproject.com.

With all that said, let's dive into the episode for this week.

Alright. Well this is a first of a three-part series about the Making of the Bible. It's trying to condense more than 3,000 years' worth of biblical history and manuscript, text, history, and formation in just a series of three lectures. So no pressure, right.

I became convinced that this was really, really important for Christians to start talking and knowing more about, through my own personal journey. I became fascinated with the Bible in my early 20s in college and just fell in love with the storyline and the literary beauty and artistry and the overall story it's telling. And I really wanted to learn Greek and then Hebrew and be able to read the Biblical text in their original languages for myself.

But as I started to do that, I started to learn about the text and manuscript history of the Bible which is so fascinating, and it's extremely complicated. And so this became kind of my first mini crisis of faith. I've been a Christian for a few years and I'd never thought deeply about the fact that the Bible is a human book with a very traceable history of human origins in ancient Israel and second temple of Judaism and then the early Christian movement.

Of course the biblical authors believe and claim about these text that they're not merely human text. That through these human text, God speaks to His people, a divine word. And so that, those two issues that these human text speak God's word to His people, those go hand in hand right throughout the history of Judaism and Christianity. But what I found is that the tradition of Christianity that my family was a part of and then that I was exposed to as a new Christian in my 20s didn't really prepare me for the complicated human history of the Bible.

The Bible was treated more or less as a book that fell out of heaven that just speaks directly to me. But of course, it didn't fall out of heaven. Nothing in the Bible actually even claims that. Just the opposite. The Bible tells within itself its own complicated history of origins. And so I met so many people through the years for whom the complicated history of the Bible became a scandal to them. It became a crisis of faith for them that they couldn't accept anything about the Bible as being a word from God because they were discovering its complicated historical origins.

You guys, I went for it. I ended up doing my masters, and then PhD work in the manuscript history of the Bible, and worked with ancient translations of the Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls and just nerded out for a really many, many years. And I'm still a big nerd on this topic today. But pastorally I think it's really important for us to form new categories about what the Bible is and where it came from. And so what this lecture is, it's essentially I'm trying to orient people who have been brought up with a view of the Bible that basically it fell out of heaven, and trying to orient them to the basic history of the making of the Bible and then how that ought to deepen and give us a more robust sense of what it means. That the Bible is inspired, that through these human text, God speaks to His people.

What does that actually mean? That's a very profound concept that's much deeper than most of us realize and it opens up for us many ways of thinking about the beauty of what the Bible is and where it came from that are not scandalous but are actually invitation to learning and discovery.

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So this first lecture is about The Making of the Books of the Old Testament and specifically we're going to focus in one the clues within the Old Testament itself about how these books were composed, and written, and collected and that will set the foundation then talking about the manuscript and text history of the books to follow. So there we go, let's dive in.

Let me first start with a drawing and illustration that I think kind of gets to the heart of why I think cutting to this topic in this way is important. When I was little my parents had an MC Escher large coffee table book in our living room. And so... and you know some of those drawings are pretty tricky, you now. Optical

illusions and mind games and so on. I got lost in Escher drawings when I was a little kid. So this one is simply called drawing hands.

I think this is a great illustration of a core truth that's at the center of both Jewish and Christian convictions about this book that we hold in our hands, namely that it is the product of a divine initiative so this isn't simply, you know, an ancient history book collecting poetry and stories of some random ancient people. It is a collection of stories and poems from an ancient people. But it's not merely that. So one of our core convictions is that these books speak God's word to His people and that what these books communicate is what God wants His people to hear and not just any god, specifically the God whose story is told in this book. So it's the result of a divine initiative.

I find that at least what happened to me and what happens to many people I find who are raised in some form of a church tradition is they're mostly grounded in their—they're supposed to believe in that fact, but what people are often not exposed to is the other part of classic Orthodox Jewish Christian conviction about scriptures namely that this is also a human book produced by humans that lived in historical circumstances, that lived in certain cultures that we can trace a lot of that history, that's what we're going to do tonight. We can trace a lot of the history of the making of this book. And that doesn't in any way compromise its divine nature.

They make sort of like a good analogy to a core Christian doctrine of the incarnation of Jesus. He's completely human but He's also completely divine. He didn't come down speaking alien or like floating around in white robes even though that's how He's often depicted in children's stories or something, but no. He was the first century Jew, He spoke Greek and Aramaic. He spoke about issues that mattered very much to His own time. He didn't come down speaking God or something. He came down speaking the language of time that He was born into.

And so I've had this experience numerous times and especially when I was down on campus, you know the how many cups of coffee I've had with college students who are Christians and for one reason or another they would call me up for a cup of coffee because they're taking Biblical Literature class at the University of Wisconsin, and they're being exposed to all this information that they never heard in church about the human story behind the making of the Bible. And for many people that's scandalous or that's challenging because what they've been raised with is what I call the Golden Tablet falling from heaven view of the Bible which is namely just that there you go, it's like golden tablet falling from heaven

and ta-da! You know, and there's the Bible and you go buy it at Barnes and Nobles or whatever, one volume, here it is and cheap plastic leather, fake leather, whatever, and there you go. And so then you learn about what the Dead Sea Scrolls and implications for the Bible and then you read people saying that the Bible actually has a complicated history of copying translations on and whoa, I guess it's not divine after all, is it. And that's a completely wrong conclusion to draw from learning about the human history behind the making of the Bible.

And so in many ways what I'm trying to do, what our evening tonight, we're mostly going to be focusing—I could get a laser pointer when I get to do these here. So there you go. We're mostly going to be focusing on this piece here. At the end of the evening, when we talk about the collection of the books of the Bible into the canon, we'll revisit this issue and how it works itself out. But mostly I'm trying to do damage control or pre-emptive damage control for those of us who have been or will be exposed to the human history of the making behind the Bible people. In my mind, there's so conflict. There's no tension. These two go completely together and God working through history, through people, through historical circumstances, this is totally compatible with historic Christian view that the Bible is God's word to us. So that's my goal for the evening and I hope to at least help you firm up some things in your own thinking about the Bible.

So what we're going to do, we're going to go on three steps.

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We're going to talk about the making, the writing, the making and passing down of the Hebrew Bible, what we call the Old Testament. That's what we're going to do in our first session and then the second main part we'll do the same thing but for the New Testament. The writing, the collection, the passing down of the New Testament, and then we're going to camp out on the collecting of all these different books that were written and passed down into the canon or the collection, and why these specific books and so on then we'll talk about Old Testament, New Testament, and what it means then for a book like this to be authoritative. So that's the order of events for the evening. So we're going to start in the beginning so we are going to start with the Hebrew Bible.

Just first kind of backup and make a large scale observation here. The Hebrew Bible is a collection, right? Again. We pick it up, it seems like it's one volume, but actually it's—we're, we have as small library in our hands when we're holding he Bible and when we're holding a Hebrew Bible. And the Hebrew Bible or the Old Testament was formed in terms of the first traces of writing to the last traces of writing, and passing down, and collecting. The Hebrew Bible was a collection of books that was over a thousand years in the making.

Let's stop and think about that. That's an extremely long time, is it not? A thousand years. So whatever was going on with the making of the Bible, it was a long complex process, right? It wasn't like somebody wrote that down, it was just like, "Oh, here we go. Golden tablets from heaven," you know? It was not like that. The Bible was produced in and out of the story that the Bible is telling. It's sort of like a—there's been a few movies made in the last few years. One was made by the Coen brothers. What was it called? Adaptation. The movie is about two people who write movies and then you get into the story, and you realize the movie that is being written about the story is the movie that you're watching. And then at some point you catch up to the story and then what they're writing at and then things happen, so and so. Did you watch Adaptation? So it's actually kind of bizarre movie. But the Bible is kind of like that. And you're reading the story and right through--periodically throughout the story, you're realizing, you're hearing comments about the story being written, about the story that you're reading. So this is very much a long, historical process.

Contrast the New Testament which was all of the books that we have in our New Testament were written in a very short period of time in comparison at least. Written within about 50 years. The process of collecting them took a little longer. We'll talk about that. But just in terms of the writing of the books, that's very different. We need to treat these differently. You can't treat the Old Testament in the making and the New Testament in the making the same. They're very different. They have different histories which is why we're going to treat them differently.

So we're going to start with the Old Testament and we need to begin what I call two facts that everybody's got to deal with here. And here's our first fact is that we do not know who produced the final edition of any of the books of the Hebrew Bible and we do not know when. So how's that? So in other words, we have people who are named in the process of the making of the Bible, but in terms of the final edition of all of the books of the Hebrew Bible, nowhere does it say, Dear Reader, Here I am the author of this book. What we get is, this is a

collection of the prophet's Isaiah's words. This is a collection of Jeremiah's words and so we're thinking, well who's talking to me right now telling me that this is a collection of Isaiah's words to Jeremiah's words? Someone else has collected them. So we get little clues here. So here's one classic passage here, Deuteronomy, Chapter 31. This is near the ending of the Torah.

It says: It came about when Moses finished writing the words of this law. And you see the word law there, some of you know by now the Hebrew word underneath that word law, Torah, there you go. So Torah is the name for the first five books of the Bible. It's the Hebrew word that just means actually teaching or instruction. Law is kind of like unfortunate translation. Moses finished writing the words of this Torah in a book until they were complete. When Moses at all, that when Moses commanded the Levites who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord saying, "Take this book of the Torah and place it beside the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God that it may remain there as a witness against you." And so the million-dollar question is, what did Moses write, you know? What was it that he wrote and put in safekeeping in the ark? So it's obviously some form of the materials that we have in the Torah today but it's definitely not the Torah as we know it today.

Turn to the Book of Deuteronomy with me. Literally the last sentences of the Book of Deuteronomy chapter 34, last chapter of Deuteronomy.

[15:00]

So this is right before the Israelites are going to go into the promise land and does Moses get to into the promise land? No, he doesn't and he's actually pretty bummed about that. He has to take that up with God on a couple of occasions.

Chapter 34. Then Moses he climbed Mount Nebo from the plains of Moab to the top of Pisgah, across from Jericho. There the LORD showed him the whole land that the Israelites are going to go into.

Go down to verse 5. And Moses the servant of the LORD died there in Moab, just as the LORD said. He buried him in Moab, in the valley opposite Beth Peor, but no one to this day knows where his grave is.

Did Moses write this chapter at least of the Torah? No. Clearly not. So that's just the point here. Someone else has compiled and collected materials, certainly a lot of which came from Moses but Moses wouldn't be responsible for any of the materials that pre-dated him so all of the stories about Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and so on, Joseph, all of that came from pre-Moses. So someone else has been at work collecting, compiling, stuff that Moses wrote, things from before Moses and so on. And so, who is this person talking to us right now? We have no idea. It's anonymous. So that's the Torah and most of the books in the Bible are just like this. They're anonymous works.

Another clue in the Book of Jeremiah chapter 36, context here. So the prophet Jeremiah, he lived in the period leading right up to Israel's exile into Babylon and he was warning Israel, "You know this is coming, Babylon's coming, you know. If you don't turn back to Yahweh and repent, He's going to have Babylon come and sweep you away." And how did the Israelites respond to his message? Negatively. So the king actually seizes the scroll that Jeremiah's preaching, and he burns it, right? He cuts it up and he burns it in the fire. And so we're told Jeremiah goes back and he makes another scroll collection of his prophecies, of his poems and words. And so this is what we hear, a little detail in Jeremiah chapter 36. Then Jeremiah took another scroll and he gave it to Baruch, the son of Neriah the scribe and he wrote on it at the dictation of Jeremiah all the words of the book which Jehoiakim, King of Judah had burned in the fire. And many similar words were added to them. Now let's just stop and look at that statement there. So okay, that's great, your book gets burned up and so you go write another scroll and that's clearly some form of the Book of Jeremiah as we have it that was being dictated right there. That last phrase there. What on earth does that mean, right? What does that mean? So who's writing the book of Jeremiah? Not Jeremiah. Look clearly, what does it say? So Baruch son of Neriah, he's writing what Jeremiah's telling him to. He's retelling. But then many similar words were added to the words that Baruch son of Neriah wrote down at the dictation of Jeremiah. Whose words were those? Okay. Well we assume Jeremiah's but, so again, it just opens up here.

Baruch was active beyond just this scene right here. He was adding many similar words. Maybe he collected other prophecies of words of Jeremiah. And when you read Jeremiah, you're doing the Eat This Book Challenge, it's like walking through a museum, right? Because it's kind of a hodgepodge at some point. Now we're talking about Babylon, and now we're talking about this guy, and it's kind of

random. So we get a little insight here into the composition history of the Book of Jeremiah.

This is what's really interesting and exciting. So part of what pairing with the human story of the Bible is the field of archaeology in Israel, Palestine and so on. And so you know, there's fresh digging going on all of the time. Discovering all kinds of things in connection with the history of the making of the Bible. And so in the early 2000s, there discovered fossilized form of a piece of wax. It's a seal. It's a fossilized form of seal. You guys know a ring seal? You guys know what I'm talking about here? So this is some sort of either a ring or something people would wear on a necklace, and it has inscribed their official name and insignia and so on. And so you would write a scroll, wrap it up, seal it with wax and then press their seal into the wax and then it would say right there in front of you who wrote this or whose authority it's on, right? So you've all seen movies about kings and queens pressing the wax and so on. So that's exactly what this is. And what you're looking at here is ancient Hebrew and it's actually a form of Hebrew alphabet that predates the modern Hebrew alphabet.

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And the handwriting dates it right exactly to the time that Jeremiah lived. And lo and behold, what does this seal say? Who does this belong to? And it says literally what it says on it is Baruch son of Neriah, the scribe. So this is the guy right here is exactly his title from the Book of Jeremiah. And what's totally awesome is that you see these little... these things are tiny. This thing is really small. It's like that big. And you see these little lines right here? Those are thumb prints. So when the seal's tiny and when you press it down into the wax, you know, and it went up like this, the lines of Baurch's thumbprint were left right there. So there you go man, what do you want? This is literally the fingerprint of a biblical author. This is about as good as it gets, you know, or someone who's involved in the authorship of one of the books of the Bible. This is the only thing like this that has ever been found. This is totally cool when stuff like this appears, you know. Can you see the Holy Spirit in there anywhere? I don't know. It's a rock. There you go. So there you have it. Let's take one more example just because I think it's interesting.

Go to the book of Proverbs with me. Proverbs 25, The book of Proverbs open by saying: The proverbs of Solomon, King of Israel and so on. But there's a number of smaller collections within the Book of Proverbs. So Proverbs 25 verse 1. And what does it say here?

It says: These are more proverbs of Solomon. Okay, that makes sense. They were copied by the men of Hezekiah, the King of Judah. Now this is good Bible trivia to know at a party or something like that. But how many years separate King Hezekiah from King Solomon? A solid 250 years. So somehow, actually the final making of the Book of Proverbs post-dates Solomon by a couple of centuries. And apparently there were proverbs of Solomon in circulation that were written and copied and added to the accumulating collection for 250 years or so.

Go up within chapter 24 to verse 23. And it just says, these also are the sayings of the wise. Well who are they, you know? When did they write? We have absolutely no idea. The Book of Proverbs is great. It's kind of like an old house that just keeps getting added on to.

So go to the end book with me, go to chapter 30 on the things that Agur the son of Jakeh, an oracle. Who knows who this guys is? Nobody knows. He's not named anywhere else in the Bible. No. I mean, just nowhere.

Go to chapter 31. The sayings of King Lemuel. An oracle that his mother taught him. What? Okay. Who is King Lemuel? He is not a king of Israel; we know that much. There's no King Lemuel anywhere in the history of Israel. So here's the king from some other probably neighboring ancient nation. And whoever is compiling the Book of Proverbs said, "You know what, he has collected all kinds of ancient wisdom writings and said, 'this is totally worth writing down and putting into the collection of Proverbs connected to Solomon.'" This is the human process at work here. And in God's providence, these text then speaks a word to God's people that He wants His people to hear. The wisdom writings of a pagan king, you know what I'm saying? It's outstanding. That's the making of the Bible.

So we get more clues like this, we begin to pay attention as you read through the Bible, it's little clues about writing, and collecting, and so on, we start to notice little things like this, but not everywhere but there periodically throughout the Bible. So we don't know who these people are who are making the final composition of these books. We don't know their names. That's essentially what's going on with the originals, right? We know that it was someone. And it was someone probably connected to the temple or connected to the groups of the prophets and so on. But because they wanted to highlight God's words spoken

through the people named in the book or whatever, they didn't give their own names because the book isn't about them. It's about the words of Isaiah, it's about the story of Moses and Israelites and so on. So this raises a big question then. We don't know who made that final edition of the Hebrew Bible and we also don't have—we have a fingerprint but we don't have fresh copy of any of the originals of the Hebrew Bible. And so this becomes the \$10,000 question or maybe for you this like the million-dollar question, I don't know. You're going to need to win a game show to come up with that kind of money, but that's right. So I—if we don't have any of the originals, what do we have? That's the big question.

So here's what we're going to do: we're going to proceed with three steps, but what we're going to do, we're going to start kind of where we are, but actually we're going to start back to our most important witnesses which start around here and we're going to work our way backwards to the original. So we're going to start with the most recent main descriptions so on, and work our way backwards.

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There's three main groups of manuscripts that we have today that take us closer and closer back to these originals here. Three groups of manuscript evidence, and so, we're just going to power through these and let me make sure I have—has anybody hear of the Masoretic text? The Masoretes before? Alright. Real Bible geeks. Alright. We like you guys fine. So this is a collection of Hebrew manuscripts that was generated by a group of Jewish scholars over. They inherited the work of rabbis and scholars before them. But their work was consolidated and a tradition that lasted about 500 years solid. They were mostly living in what we call Israel Palestine today and they were the traditional guardians of the biblical text throughout a huge portion of Jewish history. So they are a group of scholars who lived around this time and what they were renowned for is their hyper meticulous care for the text of the Bible. And their work is kind of culminated in what's like the crown jewel of the Masoretic text family which is in a codex here, a big fat book called Leningrad Codex, and Jessica let me splurge on this when I was in grad school. So what is this, this is literally facts simile of every page of the Leningrad Codex.

This manuscript dates to 1008AD and this is the most complete collection of the Masoretic text of the Hebrew Bible from 1008AD. There you go. Every page. This is totally geeky. And all of these tables about different Masoretic scribes in their stories, and there's a collection of poems about what an awesome vocation it is to be a scribe of the biblical text. But then what's really great is the initial pages of the manuscript. So here's the page from the Leningrad Codex. This is a page from the Book of Exodus Chapter 15. They've lineated the text here differently than what follows him before.

Exodus 15. It is the Song of the Sea. It's the worship song that the Israelites sing after they're rescued from the Egyptians coming through the Red Sea. And so they've actually given the poem a different form of lineation here. But then what they also did in different pages of the manuscript called like an illuminated text so this is part of Deuteronomy chapter 28 here. But they've totally just displayed it in artistic form. So this an amazing piece of work that represents centuries of tradition and meticulous handy work of these Jewish scribes. So these guys are renowned for as a meticulous care of the text.

Why don't you go the Book of Leviticus look up that passage right there, Leviticus 11:42. I didn't say this, but tonight you're going to feel kind of like you've tried to sip from a blasting firehose. So I hope that's okay, worthy. So it's just a lot, a lot of information, but there you go. It's what we're here to do. Look at 11 verse 42. If you're doing this Eat the Book Challenge, you read this chapter not long ago, yeah? We're totally weirded out by it too. So this is the list of pure and impure animals Israelites were and were not to eat.

11:42. You are not to eat any creature that moves about on the ground. Whether it moves on its belly or walks on all fours or on many feet it is detestable. Now do you see the word, belly or stomach there? So in Hebrew that's four letter word, not a cuss word, but it's just spelled with four letters, gachon, and the third letter of that word is written larger than any of the letters on that line or anywhere on the page. And that's because that letter is the middle letter of the Torah.

They keep tallies of the number of letters as they copy and so per page, per book, per chapter and so on. You think they're introverts or extroverts? Most of these guys, right? You see how they spent their time? Famous quote from Talmud which is a later collection of Jewish writings, famous line from a father who is a scribe, who is teaching his son to be a scribe and he says, "My son, be careful because your work is the work of heaven. Should you omit even one letter or add one letter, the whole world would be destroyed." Now, no pressure.

Exactly right. I hope he didn't say this to his kid when this kid was like five, you know because a five-year-old might actually believe that. So they passed on this text and every generation of scribes was like this. So another thing to notice about this page then, this is very typical. Do you see these little markings on the sides here on the margins? So what's happening is as you're reading through the text, they would put, essentially little footnotes, little circles above a word, and that circle means, Dear Reader or Dear Scribe of the next generation, go look in the margin for this note.

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And this note is an abbreviated code in Aramaic, not Hebrew, but Aramaic, and there are little notes about the word that the circle is over. So these little notes are an abbreviated way of saying, Dear Reader, this word is spelled funny. It's spelled like this in other places, but in this, it's spelled uniquely, in fact, this is the only time it's spelled this way in the Bible or sometimes there will be little footnotes or little marking here and then this little thing says, go look down here. More footnotes in discussion. And essentially what all this is, this is spelling and textual commentary on the words that are on the page itself. And every page is filled with these marginal notes and commentary. Everything is helping the next generation of scribes when the manuscript wears out and it has to be copied again. Little notes so that people won't make mistakes as they pass it on. So they counted letters, they counted words, they counted verses, they divided the text in the groups and the bits and so on. These guys were out of control with their care of the biblical text. And so we are thankful for the Masoretes because of their work that we have such an amazing wealth of manuscripts and good manuscripts. Well preserved manuscripts from this time period. So this is the Masoretic text group from 500 to 1000 and the Leningrad Codex kind of a pinnacle, the crown jewel of Masoretic manuscript. So we're happy about the Masoretes and that they preserve the text from this time period. But it does beg the question, right? It gets us back 1500 years from where we stand right now. But we still got a pretty decent gap here to the making of the books of the Hebrew Bible. At least about a 700-year gap here or more. So can we get any closer? And the answer is, yes, yes, of course we can.

So the next group of manuscripts or text witnesses is a group of manuscripts connected to what's called the Septuagint. The Septuagint is a complicated set of evidence for the history of the Bible but it's extremely, extremely important. So just kind of track here. So Septuagint was a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible made 200-100BC roughly. So in terms of timeline, this is pre-Jesus. This is a pre-Christian translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek. Why would that happen? Well there was this guy named Alexander the Great who is fairly significant for world history, yeah. So when Alexander the Great was doing his thing, like in the 300s and he's slowly storming the known world that time and setting up literally the Greek Empire over all these ancient kingdoms that spoke all kinds of different languages, and he imposed on all of these cultures, Greek culture and Greek language. And so Greek became the day to day language spoken throughout all of what we call today the Middle East. And so you have communities of Jewish people who are living in the diaspora and who are scattered all around throughout the ancient world, and generations are growing up, and they're not speaking Hebrew or maybe they are but what are they speaking day to day in their neighborhood as they interact with people? They're speaking Greek. And so there came a need, let's produce a Bible in Greek which just makes sense so that people will actually keep reading the Bible because not as many people are learning Hebrew anymore.

So a translation of the Hebrew Bible was made into Greek around this time period. Why is this important. Think about it in terms of our timeline here, think about the timing of the Septuagint. How far does this jump us back? Quite away. A solid 6, 700 years. Now the Greek translation is not a Hebrew manuscript but it was made from Hebrew manuscripts. How does this set of evidence help us here? It helps us because you read it, you can try and figure out what Hebrew text was underneath the Greek translation. We'll talk about that more in a second. But what's interesting is that the Greek translation of the Bible then became the Old Testament of early Christianity. Once the Jesus movement spread outside of the Jewish boundary lines to mostly the Greek speaking world, how are all of these people going to read the Bible? They're going to read the Septuagint so they actually became the Christian Bible through time. So lots of differences between the Septuagint and the Masoretic text. Let's think about the timeline here. The Masoretic text is later and the Septuagint as we're going to see is copied from the Hebrew text that comes in this period, right around here. And we compare the two, there are differences. Some of them are really insignificant, in fact, most are. But some are actually pretty profound. But this is essentially what happens, is that when we're looking at manuscripts of the Septuagint and what you have to

do, you have to know Greek really well to be able to infer what Hebrew was underneath the Greek.

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So for example you have a... Genesis chapter 4. In Genesis chapter 4 is the story of Cain and Abel. So this is after Cain was already jealous of Abel, you know God, for an unknown reason, not stated in the story, God accepts Abel's offerings, but not Cain's. And so we're told in Genesis 4:8 in the Masoretic text, the Masoretic says: Cain told his brother Abel, and it came about when they were in the field, Cane rose up against Abel his brother and killed him. Okay, now here's what we use for an actual exercise. Why don't you turn in your Bibles, whatever Bible you have in your hand and go to Genesis 4:8. Does anyone have a footnote after somewhere in Genesis 4:8? Anybody? In your translations? Okay. So an updated translation late 1980s forward will likely have footnote. And your footnote will tell you: Dear Reader, there's a whole bunch of ancient manuscripts that have an additional phrase here, and that phrase is: Let's go into the field. And that phrase is found in the Greek translation of the Septuagint. Look at the translation of the Masoretic text here. Cain told his brother Abel and they came about in the field, what field? When did they go into a field? What field are we talking about here? So, for one reason or another, commentaries that are telling you about text history kinds of things, they'll tell you, most likely that this phrase got skipped when the scribe's eye was copying down, copying a section, and that this little phrase right here, and he said, "Let's go into the field." That phrase was overlooked in the copying somewhere back in the history of the Masoretic text or before the Masoretic text. This phrase is present in the Septuagint but then lo and behold it's also our footnote tells us; it's also present in some other ancient manuscripts in Hebrew. So do you see why this is significant now? What it tells us is that the Septuagint was copied from a Hebrew text that had this phrase, and lo and behold, we have some other ancient Hebrew text that also has this phrase. So Septuagint isn't just making this up here. It's a reliable indicator of the Hebrew text that pre-dates the Masoretic text. Does that make sense? We realize this is kind of complex, but I want to spell this out in detail because this is really, this is really significant, this is really helpful. So this is why the Septuagint is so important is because it literally transports us hundreds of years back to a Hebrew text before the Masoretic text.

This question was so fascinating to me and I was still trying to figure out the whole divine human thing. I really got into this history of the making the Bible because I wanted to get to the bottom of this for myself and sort all these issues out. So I did my dissertation here at UW, this is so obscure, this is the only time it will actually make sense to anybody. A group of people here. So I did not my dissertation on the Greek translation of the Book of Ezekiel. But what my real interest was, was not the Greek translation. What my real interest was, was the Hebrew text underneath the Greek translation. And so what I did was I read the Book of Ezekiel in the Masoretic text line by line and then compared with it the Septuagint line by line. And I made a compilation of all of the differences. It took me two years to do that. And then I put it all together, and lo and behold, there were lots of differences, some of which were real significant. In my mind, the Greek translation gets us to a version of the Book of Ezekiel that's right around the time that Ezekiel was being included into the collection of books in the Hebrew Bible. So there's lots of things like this, except usually the case is the extra added phrase is in the Masoretic text but it's not present in the Septuagint. It's exactly the reverse of this.

So think about the timeline then. What this means is that the Septuagint did not have a phrase and the Masoretic text does have a phrase, and this happens time and time and time again in the Book of Ezekiel. And so what it shows us is a layer of small, little teeny tiny additions to the Book of Ezekiel. And so what I really want to do is study these additions and what it's all about. And lo and behold, most of them are quotations from other books of the Hebrew Bible or they're little common—Ezekiel is really difficult to understand if you're trying to read it. and a lot of them are just really little explanatory phrases that make clear or that further explain or Ezekiel uses really dense metaphor sometimes and so a scribe will come along and add a little phrase that makes, "Oh, that makes more sense and so on." And eventually those words got put into the text, put into the text themselves.

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This isn't like tampering with the Bible. This is scribes trying t to help the next generation of readers understand the Book of Ezekiel better because it's included in the Hebrew Bible.

There you go. I am a total geek for doing this. So these are some of the oldest fragments of this old Greek translation here of the Book of Deuteronomy. These were found in and around the vicinity of the Dead Sea Scrolls, not on the side, a little bit down from the Dead Sea. So these are little fragments. Most biblical manuscripts that are found from this ancient period or in this kind of shape unfortunately nothing quite like the Leningrad Codex here. Sometimes we get bigger fragments here, this is a piece of Exodus. And then what we got here is a large Codex form of the Old Greek translation or the Septuagint collected in a codex here called Sinaiticus it was discovered in the 1800s by a guy named Constantin von Tischendorf in an old monastery on the Sinai Peninsula. And he discovered it in a libra—there's kind of a legend story about who it was, you know, but anyhow, he discovered this thing and lo and behold, it has within it the tradition of the Septuagint that goes back thousands of years. It's totally awesome, that kind of thing. That's the Septuagint and it brings us back, it takes us back quite a ways, right into the final phases of the making of the Hebrew Bible. And so it's a whole exploding field of study that's really in the last 200 years, it's just exploded, and it's still going, ongoing, going, going today. So there's nobody done what I had done yet with the Book of Ezekiel. You know that's just a good dissertation idea. No one has done it and there's not too many like that in the biblical studies. So you need to have a lot of patience to do this kind of thing. So anyhow, oh the memories, holy cow, and a lot of listening to Radiohead. I don't know if you're a fan, but a lot of Radiohead got me through that. So Dead Sea Scrolls. This is now 60 plus years now that these were discovered.

These were a number of caves near, and I'll show you a map here in a second near the Dead Sea and essentially these caves were discovered. A fascinating story but thousands of Hebrew manuscripts of the Bible that pre-date the Masoretic text that are actually from the same time period as the Septuagint they're not a Greek translation, they're Hebrew manuscripts from the time of the Septuagint. It's awesome. It's awesome. And not just Biblical manuscripts, also other writings of the group that we'll show you here. The virtual tour. I'll take you to a virtual tour of the caves, yes? Of course, why not.

Alright. Here's the basic map. So the Sea of Galilee appear where Jesus grew up. Here's Jerusalem and Bethlehem down here. So Sea of Galilee, Jordan River, Jordan Valley here, and then the Dead Sea which is truly dead. We went swimming in it, the first time we went swimming in it, you don't have to swim, you float. You just float. Like it's very strange. You don't have to do anything to

float. You just float on top of it because the salt water is so dense you just float right on top of the water, really bizarre. Right at the northern end of the Dead Sea is an archaeological site called Qumran and then Jericho, the remains of Ancient Jericho just a few miles north of that. And just to give you perspective, so this is the Mediterranean Sea, this is all wonderful, sunny palm beach front here. And then when just about 60 miles you go from sea level right here to upwards like 8, 9,000 feet into the hills and then in the shorter distance, about 15-20 miles you descend to below sea level from Jerusalem into the Jordan Rift Valley. Did you get that? Slow rise of Jerusalem, and then whoop. Just right off Jerusalem, down into the Jordan Rift Valley. You dive thousands and thousands of feet to below sea level. So this whole place down here is one of the most desolate, hot, dry places on the planet. It's a fascinating place. Essentially what happened here is this is about 200 years before Jesus, there is a group of Jewish rulers, they started a revolution movement against Egypt at the time, and they are able to establish independence for the Jewish people for the first time. So if you heard of the Maccabees before or you've heard of Hanukkah, the Holiday of Hanukkah comes from when the Maccabees took over the temple in the mid 100BS.

And so there were many Jewish people, this is all politics and so on, religion, politics. Many people didn't like the Maccabees, they didn't like the priest that they setup in the temple, you know, when they got independence again. And so the people of Qumran are essentially a group that defected from mainstream Judaism because they believe that the Maccabees and the priests they appointed were totally corrupt. They left Jerusalem and they went to go live in the desert, literally on the edge of the Dead Sea and they setup a small, almost like monastery type community in the desert in the Dead Sea. And lucky for us, they took whole bunch of scrolls of the Bible with them to their little desert getaway.

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These are the remains of the community here. And so you see right here we're looking north. You can see the hills, real steep, right? Start going up the left to Jerusalem. These are river valleys, when it rains up in Jerusalem, this is one of the driest places in Israel. When it rains here about 3 days out of here. But when it rains up in Jerusalem, a day later they get flash floods in all of these ravines right here. And so that's what carves out these bodies or these ravines. They made

their site right by a watery ravine where they could catch water when it rained up in Jerusalem and they had their community up here. So now we're looking south down rift valley here. So here's the remains of the Qumran site. It's hard to know it seems about a couple of hundred people lived here and scholars have reconstructed what their little building community, it's a walled community, it's a large tower and in some of these rooms here they were found stables and little pots with ancient styluses, writing utensils and little ink pots. And so it was certainly the room in which manuscripts, biblical manuscripts otherwise, it's a group copied here.

So here's essentially how the story goes. This group at some point, this whole place destroyed when the Romans came in 70AD to put down the Jewish revolt. And so lucky for us when—before the Romans came to destroy all of this, they essentially crawled down into these caves. Do you remember these caves? Let me go back here. They crawled down into these caves and hid jars with all of their manuscripts. So here's how the story goes, and it's hard to separate legend from history because of how it all went down.

There were two shepherds guarding their flocks by night. It's a different story. So two shepherds who apparently were herding their sheep around here and some of the sheep wandered out onto these cliffs and they were throwing the—again, there is no way to verify this story. This is the story that was told. They were throwing rocks at the sheep beyond them to get them to crawl back up. And some of the rocks created more rocks that fell down into these caves and they heard the cracking of pottery when the rocks fell in the caves. In theory, somebody crawled down into these caves and found that there were ancient jars full of Hebrew manuscripts.

These manuscripts first appeared to the public on the black market in a New York Times ad that you can see right there. Literally, this is in 1946. Biblical manuscripts dating to at least 200BC are for sale. This would be an ideal gift for an educational or religious institution by an individual or group right here if he wants to see them. So this is the first time they appeared to the public. As you can see why all of the origin was surrounded in conspiracy and so on, because who found them and how are there more and so on, it took decades to sort all of this out before all of the manuscripts were found. By the end of the day or literally decades, the last kind of official scholarly publication of the scrolls was put out to the public like five years ago. It took that long and you'll see why in a second here. And manuscripts, bits and pieces of every book in the Old Testament were found, except the Book of Esther which doesn't necessarily mean

anything. Many books are, you know, the Book of Lamentation is a scrap this big, you know. So it's entirely possible that Esther was there but due to accidental history, those pieces got destroyed. But all of these dates from this time period which is the time period of what other manuscript body that we have? From the Septuagint. This is money right here. This is great. We have a Hebrew text from the time of the Septuagint to compare this contemporary.

So this is the Book of Psalms, you know, these things they look big, they're actually about this tall here. You see them? Teeny tiny handwriting. This is what most of the manuscripts look like. This is the page of Exodus. Now here, this is where it gets tricky. You know this piece and that piece and these pieces were just all scattered about on the cave floor. So who sat down with thousands of pieces and figured out that that piece belongs to this right here? There's a team of Catholic scholars who were first commissioned to the work in the early 1950s and this is the days' work and biblical scholar who's sorting out the pieces. So they're reading them, they're deciphering the handwriting, reading them and it's like, "Oh wait, then they look at them in concordance, they didn't have computers then. They look them up in concordance with these words, all those words are found in Deuteronomy. Oh those words are also in Deuteronomy, maybe these pieces go together." Piece by piece by piece. So this is your worst nightmare.

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This is like a 2000-piece jigsaw puzzle and no box cover to sort it out. You have no idea what the picture looks like. It's unbelievable. So you can see why it took 50 years to publish all this now. They didn't want to publish random data. They wanted to compile it all as best as they could and it took 50 years.

And there are all these politics about who gets to be on the initial research team and then it was by invitation only to work on them, that's more conspiracy about why are they, these guys being so slow and this is why they're being so slow. So anyhow, we're glad that all of that is sorted out now. There was no conspiracy, it was just really, really complicated. Here's the Dead Sea Scroll that's essentially here. When it's all said and done, they date from around the mid 200BC to about 70AD. And so this is the main body of evidence we have here and when we compare these manuscripts, here's what's interesting, some of them match the Hebrew manuscripts that became the Masoretic text perfectly. Some of them

match the Hebrew text underneath the Septuagint which is different from Masoretic text. Does that make sense? Essentially what this means is that the shape of the biblical text in this time period was complicated. It was extremely complicated. So the Masoretes preserved a form of the biblical text with meticulous care. And we're really glad they did. But before the Masoretes were on the scene, there was a period of time where things were more complicated. So it's sort of like there was a period of the originals, there was a period of textual complication, and then out of the complication is one main form of the text that got preserved by the Masoretes. Today we have all of this to draw on as we put together the history of the composition of the Bible. So when we begin to compare all of these put together what do we get?

Alright that was episode 1. Exploring the composition in history of the Books of the Old Testament and transitioning now into their manuscript history. If you've learned thus far, you can genuinely call yourself a Bible nerd or at least a person interested in Bible nerdism. Part 2 is going to pick up the manuscript history. We're going to get way more into differences in the manuscript and also into the making of the books of the New Testament. So that's to come. Thanks for listening to Strange Bible podcast.

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