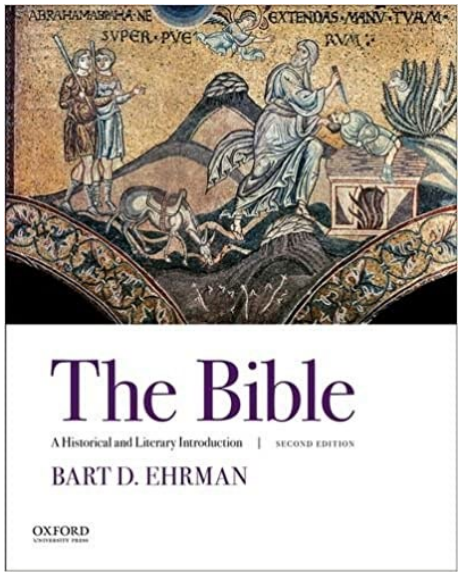
House of Ruth and Junia

Bible Study for 2023-2024

***And God Said What?* Surveying the Entire Bible**

Resource Handout 1

The Bible: A Historical and Literary Introduction 2nd Edition



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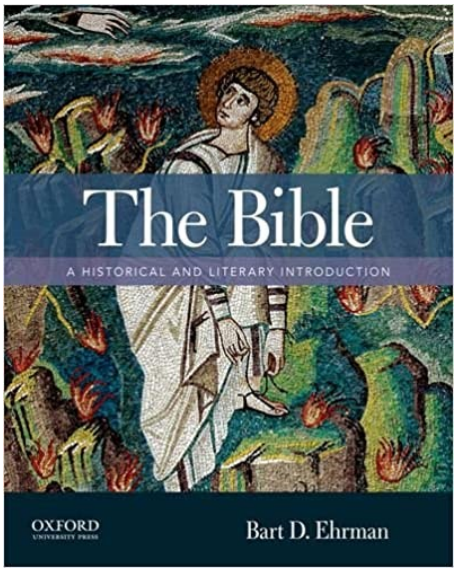

I will be using the format found in Bart Ehrman's book. The 2nd Edition, depicted above, is very expensive, running about $75+ in used copies. The 1st Edition, written in 2013, is a lot cheaper, and can be had used through Amazon for $20-25. The 2nd edition has broken the original chapters down into smaller 'bites,' doubling the number of chapters compared to the first edition.

I think you will be OK with the first edition if you need to save money. We have both and we will also be using other materials as well. You don't absolutely have to get the book but I am limited by copyrights as to how much I can copy and pass out.

We previously recommended a much less academic but solid book written by Catholic scholar Margaret Nutting Ralph: And God said what? An Introduction to Biblical literary forms, 2nd Edition. Her book would be good to read at the beginning of our study.

The Bible 2e - Learning Link (oup.com)

This link is at Oxford Press and they have students' resources to go along with the textbook, Bart Ehrman's The Bible, 2nd Edition, which we are using for our class format. For each chapter in the book, they have a section of films, interviews, and readings which are free. Some of the links to articles published by Bible Odyssey (see below)

have disappeared, although the site still exists. I will be trying to find other useful material that I can provide in handouts as we go along. Be aware that the 'curriculum' of this study is in flux. It has not been pre-written or locked in. Your suggestions as to other sources will be welcomed.

https://www.bibleodyssey.org/

How Was the Bible Formed?

by Jacob L. Wright, Justin Walker

The Hebrew Bible (or Old Testament) occupies a unique place in contemporary society. Subtle allusions to these ancient texts find their way into films, public debates, and even political speeches. References to what "the Bible says" in contemporary culture often give the impression that these ancient texts appeared without any human assistance; but in fact the writing, editing, and collecting of these texts were the result of human activity over the centuries.

Prior to modern times, readers assumed that the texts of the Hebrew Bible were composed by important figures from Israel's history—individuals like Moses, Joshua, or Samuel, who took it upon themselves to record their experiences. This traditional understanding of biblical authorship originated in the texts themselves. For example, several passages refer to Moses writing God's commands (Exod 17:14, Exod 24:4, Exod 34:28, Num 33:2, Deut 31:9, Deut 31:22), and many others make mention of the "law(s) of Moses" (for example, Josh 8:30-31, 2Kgs 14:6, Ezra 3:2). Clues like these led readers to identify Moses as the author of the Pentateuch.

Similarly, because Solomon often appears in the Wisdom literature and is remembered as an exceptionally wise individual (1Kgs 4:29-34), premodern readers credited Solomon with writing books such as the Song of Songs (Song 1:1), Ecclesiastes (Eccl 1:1, Eccl 1:12), and major portions of Proverbs (Prov 1:1, Prov 10:1). Associations like these not only provided a straightforward explanation of how the Hebrew Bible came into being. They also lent the collection a special authority. As faithful accounts from biblical heroes, these texts were believed to be trustworthy representations of Israel's experience and God's character. According to this traditional perspective, the Hebrew Bible was simply a collection of individually authored texts composed and collected over several centuries (from about the 13th century through the fifth century B.C.E.).

With the dawn of the modern era, however, scholars began to propose other models for the Hebrew Bible's formation in light of newer reading methods and the textual details they revealed. Scholars in classical studies had developed particular ways of analyzing ancient Greek and Roman literature in order to determine how those texts were composed, when they were written, how they were edited, and what situations brought them about. As early as the 17th century, biblical scholars began to adopt these methods and apply them to the Hebrew Bible. Their analyses first took note of obvious issues in the flow of pentateuchal stories—things like the repetition of a story, multiple introductions or changes in writing style and grammar within a story, or interruptions in plot.

Instead of attempting to resolve these narrative hiccups by maintaining Mosaic authorship, modern scholars saw these bumps as clues to a different model for the Hebrew Bible's composition. This newer model understood the Bible to be the result of an extended writing, editing, and compiling process that brought individual traditions together into larger books over time. These insights were further confirmed by the increase of archaeological data and a growing understanding of how other cultures recorded, edited, and preserved their important texts. Like these other texts, the Bible is likely not the work of prominent individuals. Rather, the Bible is the product of generations of authors and editors who wrote, edited, and supplemented these books across Israelite, Judean, and Jewish history.

Although the last two centuries have witnessed a variety of theories about how the Hebrew Bible came into being, most scholars today now conclude that the first major period of literary production was not during the time of Moses (13th century B.C.E.) but instead during the political peak of the southern kingdom of Judah (eighth–sixth centuries B.C.E.). This is not to say that biblical texts were not written earlier than this time. Northern traditions (for example, Jacob stories that take place in northern locations such as Bethel) were likely written prior to the northern kingdom of Israel's destruction in 722 B.C.E., and texts like the earliest portions of Proverbs, some of the royal psalms, or even the Covenant Code (Exod 20:19-23:33) may date as early as the

9th century B.C.E. However, most scholars no longer attribute large blocks of written material to the time of the "united monarchy." On the contrary, archaeology has shown that **Judah developed a writing culture quite late in its history, with the 8th and 7th centuries marking the zenith.**

This does not mean, however, that the *majority* of the biblical corpus was composed during the later period of the Judean monarchy, nor does it suggest that exilic and postexilic Judeans had only a slight editorial role in the formation of the Hebrew Bible. In fact, critical **scholars understand much of the Hebrew Bible (especially the Pentateuch) to be a product of the Persian period (sixth–third centuries B.C.E.)**. Many texts were also composed during the exile (for example, Ezekiel and Deutero-Isaiah) or shortly thereafter (for example, the Priestly source of the Pentateuch, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Daniel). **Scribes from these periods continually edited and supplemented whatever written traditions they inherited from preexilic times**. The biblical texts as they now stand (from Pentateuch to Prophets) are either the written by or the editorial product of Persian and Hellenistic Jews.

Although "editing" may imply tampering with or misrepresenting "authentic" or "original" writings of older generations, scholars now understand that the **scribal revision of texts was intended not to deceive new readers but rather to make sense of the previous materials** for their present circumstances. Thus, editing, adding, and combining were ways of faithfully receiving and interpreting Israel's stories and writings for the readers who lived after the exile. Within the Hebrew Bible itself, we can witness the fascinating history of how generations of readers appropriated the

Origins of the Written Bible

BY WILLIAM SCHNIEDEWIND

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2008 NOVA SHARE

In the modern era, we take for granted that the Hebrew Bible is a text—written words, displayed in chapters and verse. Yet biblical scholar William Schniedewind, the Kershaw Chair of Ancient Eastern Mediterranean Studies at UCLA, has a different view. In *How the Bible Became a Book* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), he explores when and why the ancient Israelite accounts—once conveyed only orally—came to be written down and attain the status of Scripture. Here, Schniedewind offers an overview of his findings.

A cultural shift

In writing *How the Bible Became a Book*, I began with a different question than scholars usually ask. Namely, why did the Bible become a book at all? This question began to haunt me more and more as I studied the archeology of ancient Palestine and the early history of Hebrew writing. Scholars agree that early Israel was an oral society of pastoralism and subsistence farming. So how and why did such a pastoral-agrarian society come to write down and give authority to the written word? How and why did writing spread from the closed circles of royal and priestly scribes to the lay classes? It was this spread of Hebrew writing in ancient Palestine that democratized the written word and allowed it to gain religious authority in the book we now call "the Bible."

When the Bible became a book, the written word supplanted the living voice of the teacher. **Ancient Israelite society was *textualized*.** This textualization marked one of the great turning points in human history, namely the movement from an oral culture towards a written culture.

We tend to read the Bible from our own viewpoint—that is, we tend to think of the Bible as if it came from a world of texts, books, and authors. **But the Bible was written before there were books.** As the great French scholar Henri-Jean Martin has observed, the role of writing in society has changed dramatically through history, yet modern analyses of biblical literature often depend on the perspective of the text in modern society. Using the most recent advances in the archeology of Palestine and relying on insights from linguistic anthropology, I came to new conclusions about why and when the Bible began to be written down.

The magical writing of priests and kings

In ancient Palestine, writing was a restricted and expensive technology. Writing was controlled by the government and manipulated by the priests. Writing was seen as a gift from the gods. It was not used to canonize religious practice, but rather to engender **religious awe. Writing was magical. It was powerful. It was the guarded knowledge** of We know from ancient inscriptions that writing did not require well-developed states like those of ancient Egypt or Mesopotamia. For example, the tiny city-states in Canaan during the late 2nd millennium B.C. each had their own scribe. Excavations at Tel Amarna in Egypt uncovered correspondence from these petty rulers in Canaan to the great pharaohs of the New Kingdom during the 14th century B.C. Other evidence, documented in NOVA's "The Bible's Buried Secrets," turned up in 2005, **when a proto-Hebrew abecedary (that is, an alphabet inscription) dated to the 10th century B.C. was excavated at Tel Zayit in Israel.**

Note: This documentary can be found on YouTube:
NOVA | The Bible's Buried Secrets - Discovery History Documentary - YouTube

Many early inscriptions were used in religious rituals, reflecting the belief in the magical power of writing. The well-known Gezer Calendar, a series of notes about planting and harvesting that dates to the 10th century B.C., was probably written on soft limestone so that the writing could be scraped off in such a ritual, with the written words literally becoming a kind of magic fertilizer blessing the agricultural year. Other inscriptions such as an early-ninth-century royal inscription from the tiny chiefdom of Moab (in ancient Jordan) were display inscriptions—they were located in prominent places by kings and chiefs, not to be read but to be seen. An aspiring king projected power by his control and manipulation of writing. But eventually writing would break free from these restricted uses.

The spread of literacy and origins of biblical literature

The invention of alphabetic writing was a pivotal development in the history of writing, but it alone did not encourage the spread of writing beyond the palace and the temple. Recent discoveries at Wadi el-Hol in Egypt date the **invention of the alphabet back to 2000 B.C.,** and for centuries after, writing likely remained the province of the elite. So what allowed the alphabet to spread beyond religious and literary elites to be used by soldiers, merchants, and even common workmen? It was the urbanization and globalization of society. This process began in the **eighth century B.C**. with the rise of the Assyrian Empire, which encouraged urbanization as part of a plan for economically exploiting its growing territory.

I believe that the formative period for the writing of biblical literature also began at this time and stretched roughly from **the eighth through the sixth century B.C**., when the social and political conditions for the expansion of writing in ancient Israel flourished. With the rise of the Assyrian Empire, ancient Palestine became more urban, and writing became critical to the increasingly complex economy. Writing was important to the **bureaucracy of Jerusalem**. It also continued to serve **as an ideological tool** projecting the power of kings**. At the end of the eighth century in both Mesopotamia and Egypt, rulers were collecting the ancient books, and ancient Judeans followed their model—collecting the traditions, stories, and laws of their ancestors into written manuscripts.**

Biblical literature became a tool that legitimated and furthered the priests' political and religious authority.

The evidence of archeology and inscriptions suggests **a spread of writing through all classes of society by the seventh century B.C. in Judah.** This allowed for a momentous shift in the role of writing in society that is reflected in the reforms of King Josiah at the **end of the seventh century; writing became a tool of religious reformers who first proclaimed the authority of the written word**. This new role of

the written word is particularly reflected in the **Book of Deuteronomy**, which commands the masses to write down the words of God, to read it and treasure it in their hearts, and to post the written word on the entrance to their homes.

To be sure, this shift in the role of writing encroached on groups with a vested interest in the authority of the **oral tradition or the prophetic word**. The rise of authoritative texts in the late Judean monarchy was accompanied by a critique of the written word.

Dark years of exile

The **composition of biblical literature continued into the period of the Babylonian exile (586-539 B.C.), after the Babylonians overthrew the Assyrians in the north and invaded the Kingdom of Judah**. However, it was hardly a time when biblical literature could flourish. The exile resulted in a massive depopulation of the land of Israel. Archeological surveys suggest the region was depopulated by as much as 80 percent, and in Babylon the situation was grim for the exiles—with the exception of the royal family.

It is hardly credible that Jewish exiles working on Babylonian canal projects wrote or even valued literature. However, the royal entourage of the **last kings of Judah** were living in the southern palace of the Babylonian kings, and **they retained their claim to the throne in Jerusalem. They collected literature from the royal and temple library**, as well as wrote and edited literature that advanced their claims and standing. But the high status of the royal family and its role in the formation of biblical literature seems to **disappear by the end of the sixth century B.C.**

The region of Palestine, especially in the hills around Jerusalem, continued to be sparsely populated and impoverished in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. These were dark times for Jerusalem and the Persian province of Yehud. In past scholarship, it was "dark" simply because we knew so little about this period of history. Increasingly, archeology has filled in the void but painted a bleak picture.

Most biblical literature was written long before this dark age. However, the priests who took over the leadership of the Jewish community during this period **preserved and edited biblical literature. Biblical literature became a tool that legitimated and furthered the priests' political and religious authority.**

The text becomes the teacher

By the time of the **fall of Babylon in 539 B.C., and the return of the Jewish exiles to Palestine, the core of the Hebrew Bible was completed**. The very language of Scripture changed as society became more textualized. Most tellingly, the Hebrew word *torah*, which originally meant "teaching, instruction," increasingly began to refer to

a written text, "the *Torah* of Moses," (also known as the Pentateuch) in the Second Temple period (530 B.C.–A.D. 130).

The tension between the authority of the oral tradition and the written word, the teacher and the text, continued in the Second Temple period among the various Jewish groups. The **priestly aristocracy** controlled the temple library and the sacred texts. They were **literate elites whose authority was threatened by the oral tradition.** Groups like the **Pharisees, in contrast, were largely composed of the lay classes. They invested authority in the teacher and the oral tradition.**

Still, a fierce ideology of orality would persist in rabbinic Judaism.

Both early Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism, which grew out of the lay classes, struggled with the tension between the sacred text and the authority of the oral tradition in the aftermath of the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70. Although they acknowledged the authority of the written Scriptures, they also asserted the authority of the living voice of the teacher.

Christianity, however, quickly adopted the codex—the precursor of the modern book. Codices, with bound leaves of pages, appeared in the first century A.D. and became common by the fourth century. The codex could encompass a much more extensive series of texts than a single scroll could contain. In **bringing together a collection of scrolls, the codex also defined a set and order of books and made possible a more defined canon.** It was with the technological invention of the codex that the "Bible" as a book, that is, the Bible as we know it, first got its physical form. The adoption of the codex probably encouraged the authority of the written Scriptures in the early Church.

Judaism, in contrast, was quite slow in adopting the codex and even today it is a **Torah *scroll* that we find in a synagogue ark.** Eventually, Judaism too would cloak its oral tradition in a written garb. Still, a fierce ideology of orality would persist in rabbinic Judaism even as the oral Torah and the written tablets were merged into what, according to doctrine, is **one pre-existent Torah that was with God at the very creation of the world.**