THE ORIGINALS

Two Facts

1. We do not know who produced the final edition of the books in the Hebrew Bible, nor do we know when. But we do have some clues . . .
   - Exodus 17:14
   - Deuteronomy 31:24-26 AND 34:10-12
   - Jeremiah 36:32
   - Proverbs 25:1

2. No originals exist today, but we do have some hints about how they were passed down.

The $10,000 Question

Q. If we do not have the originals, what do we have?
A. Three important sets of manuscripts

THE MANUSCRIPT EVIDENCE

#1. The Masoretes & Masoretic Text (= MT)

1. The Masoretes are Jewish scholars who preserved the Hebrew Bible from 500-1000 A.D.
2. They are renowned for their meticulous care of the text, counting letters and paragraphs to make sure the copies were correct (see the word “belly” in Leviticus 11:42)
3. The text passed down by these scribes is called the "masoretic text." Your English Bible is a translation of the MT.

Technical Details: More than 6000 manuscripts come from this tradition, dating from 1000-1800. One of the older copies, highly esteemed in the Jewish community, is the Leningrad Codex (1009AD).

#2. The Septuagint

1. A Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible made 200 B.C.-100 B.C.
2. It was one of the bibles of pre-Christian Judaism, and it was the Bible of early Christianity for hundreds of years.
3. There are lots of differences between the LXX and MT. Most are insignificant, but some are profound.
Example:

Genesis 4:8 in the MT
Cain told Abel his brother. And it came about when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.

Genesis 4:8 in the LXX (and other ancient Hebrew manuscripts)
Cain told Abel his brother “Let’s go into the field.” And it came about when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.

Technical Details: We have thousands of manuscripts of the LXX. Two of the oldest manuscripts (John Rylands 458 and Fouad 266) are from the end of the second and beginning of the first centuries B.C.

#3. The Dead Sea Scrolls
1. In 1947-56 eleven caves were found near the Dead Sea in Israel that contained thousands of pieces of text – the remains of more than 200 Biblical scrolls.
2. Manuscripts of every book of the Hebrew Bible (except Esther) were among the DSS, which dated from ca. 200 B.C.–100 A.D.
3. Some of these manuscripts looked like the MT (the words were virtually the same). Others looked like the LXX.

Technical detail: The most popular books were Deuteronomy (30 copies), Isaiah (21), and Psalms (36).

HOW DO THESE MANUSCRIPTS COMPARE?

Example 1: Jeremiah 10:3-11 (MT).

3. For the customs of the peoples are false: a tree from the forest is cut down, and worked with an ax by the hands of an artisan; 4. people deck it with silver and gold; they fasten it with hammer and nails so that it cannot move. 5. Their idols are like scarecrows in a cucumber field, and they cannot speak; they have to be carried, for they cannot walk. Do not be afraid of them, for they cannot do evil, nor is it in them to do good. 6. There is none like you, O LORD; you are great, and your name is great in might. 7. Who would not fear you, O King of the nations? For that is your due; among all the wise ones of the nations and in all their kingdoms there is no one like you. 8. They are both stupid and foolish; the instruction given by idols is no better than wood! 9. Beaten silver is brought from Tarshish, and gold from Uphaz. They are the work of the artisan and of the hands of the goldsmith; their clothing is blue and purple; they are all the product of skilled workers. 10. But the LORD is the true God; he is the living God and the everlasting King. At his wrath the earth quakes, and the nations cannot endure his indignation. 11. Thus you will say to them: The gods who did not make the heavens and the earth will perish from the earth and from the heavens.

*Italics:* absent in Septuagint (LXX) and some Dead Sea Scrolls (e.g., 4QJer b)
CONCLUSIONS

1. We have everything we need to recover the biblical text – nothing is missing.

2. Protestantism (in particular) has a long tradition of scholars seeking to recover the originals. Their results are widely available in commentaries, scholarly publications, etc.

3. Throughout history, both Judaism and Christianity have consistently recognized the Hebrew Bible as scripture. Both religions embrace the idea that God can use human processes to give and preserve his revelation.

For Further Interest:

- John Sailhamer, *How We Got the Bible*. Explains in basic terms how the Bible was handed down, from the original manuscripts to the English Bible.

- Walter C. Kaiser, *The Old Testament Documents: Are They Reliable and Relevant?* Explores the question of the Bible’s authority: "if the Bible was copied many times by fallible scribes, why should I trust it?"

- Julio Trebolle Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible: An Introduction to the History of the Bible*. A wonderfully rich explanation of how the Bible was composed and passed down through time in the Jewish community and in the Christian community. (More advanced than Sailhamer)

- James VanderKam, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today*. A very readable introduction to the DSS: their discovery, their contents, and their importance for Biblical scholarship.

1. The Making of the New Testament:

A. The Originals:

- The Gospels are like quilts: The authors composed the books out of independent stories and teachings of Jesus that came directly from the eyewitnesses.


2. The Story of the New Testament’s Preservation

A. Copy Centers: Biblical manuscripts were copied in urban areas where the church was well established.

Rome           Syria (esp. Antioch)
Asia Minor (esp. Ephesus)   Egypt (esp. Alexandria)

Examples of Differences between regional texts:

- 1John 5:7-8: the “trinitarian addition” in medieval western manuscripts (in Latin)

- Acts 6:9-11 [The underlined material is present only in later, “Western” manuscripts]
  These men began to argue with Stephen, but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke, because they were refuted by him with boldness. Therefore, when they were unable to confront the truth, Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, "We have heard Stephen speak words of blasphemy against Moses and against God."
B. Around 300-310AD the persecution of Christians by emperor Diocletian lead to the dominance of the Asia Minor manuscript family. This manuscript group became the New Testament text of the medieval period.

C. Erasmus – Renaissance Scholar
   • 1516: Produced the first scholarly edition of the New Testament
   • It was based entirely on the “Majority Text”

D. William Tyndale – Protestant Reformer
   • 1530: Produced the first complete English Translation of the Bible (illegally!).
   • The NT translation was based on Erasmus’ edition = The Majority Text

E. The 1611 King James Translation: The “Authorized Version”
   • Based on Erasmus’ edition = The Majority Text
   • Drew much from Tyndale’s English translation

F. New Discoveries: 1800-1900
   • Thousands of NT manuscripts discovered that were older and from different regions than the Majority Text.

   • Erwin Nestle/Kurt Aland head an international team of scholars to establish the earliest possible text from all available manuscripts.
   • All modern English translations are based on this edition of the Greek text.

For further Interest:

➢ **John Sailhamer**, *How We Got the Bible* – The best, short introduction to the making the bible. Includes a discussion of both the Hebrew Bible and the Greek New Testament.

I. Clarifying our Terms

a. “Scripture” – from *scriptura* (Latin) = “what is written” > “authoritative religious text”

b. “Canon” – from *kanon* (Greek) = rule/standard > came to mean “list”

c. “Biblical Canon” = Authoritative list of religious texts

II. What does “Authoritative” Mean?

a. The Bible’s authority is not rooted in itself, but in a person: Jesus of Nazareth

b. The Nature of Scripture’s Authority: Events > Scripture > Canon

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Events</th>
<th>Scripture</th>
<th>Canon</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Patriarchs</td>
<td>Texts that… (1) retell the foundation narrative (2) guide the community in living out the story</td>
<td>Discerning which texts… (1) rightly retell the foundation narrative (2) rightly guide the community to live out the story</td>
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<td>Exodus</td>
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<td>Promised Land</td>
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<td>Apostles</td>
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III. The Canon of the Hebrew Bible

A. The order of the Hebrew canon: TaNaK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Torah (teaching)</th>
<th>Nevi’im (prophets)</th>
<th>Ketuvim (writings)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Genesis – Exodus</td>
<td>Joshua – Judges</td>
<td>Psalms</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leviticus – Numbers</td>
<td>Samuel – Kings</td>
<td>Job</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deuteronomy</td>
<td>Isaiah – Jeremiah</td>
<td>Proverbs</td>
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<td>Ezekiel</td>
<td>Ruth</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The Twelve</td>
<td>Song of Songs</td>
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<td>Hosea – Joel</td>
<td>Ecclesiastes</td>
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<td>Amos – Obadiah</td>
<td>Lamentations</td>
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<td>Jonah – Micah</td>
<td>Esther</td>
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<td>Nahum – Habakkuk</td>
<td>Daniel</td>
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<td>Zephaniah – Haggai</td>
<td>Ezra-Nehemiah</td>
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<td>Zechariah - Malachi</td>
<td>Chronicles</td>
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</table>
B. The editing of TaNaK points forward to a coming prophet

Deuteronomy 34:9-12 ← → Malachi 4:4-6
Joshua 1:1-9 ← → Psalm 1:1-3

C. Early historical witnesses to the TaNaK

- **Yeshua ben Sirah: 2nd cent. BC**
  “My Grandfather Yeshua had devoted himself especially to the study of the Torah, the Prophets, and the other books of our ancestors, and had acquired considerable proficiency in them.”

- **Dead Sea Scrolls: 4QMMT 150 BC**
  “We have written so that you may understand the book of Moses and the books of the prophets and of David.”

- **Jesus: Luke 24.44**
  “Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms.”

IV. The Apocrypha/Deuterocanonical writings in the Catholic Bible

- Jewish writings from 250 BC – 100 AD widely read in Jewish & Christian communities

- Content: Tobit / Judith / Additions to Esther / Wisdom of Solomon / Sirach / Baruch / Letter of Jeremiah / Additions to Daniel / Susanna / Bel and the Dragon / 1-2 Macabees

- 1546: Council of Trent: Roman Catholic Church declared these writings as “Deutero-Canonical” i.e. secondary-level of Scripture.

- **Bottom Line:**
  1. They were never included in TaNaK (i.e. never part of the Jewish Bible)
  2. Jesus & the apostles never quote or treat them as having the same authority as TaNaK
V. The New Testament Canon

A. Usage and spread of Scripture in the early church

- The Hebrew Bible was the Bible of Jesus and the earliest church: 2 Timothy 3:14-15
  But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

- A body of writings connected with the Apostles began to gain the same status as the Hebrew Bible: 2 Peter 3:15-16
  Bear in mind that our Lord’s patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.

“The new testament was not self-consciously created by the church, either as a response to external stimuli or as a means to some end, but arose naturally and spontaneously from the inner life of early Christianity, above all in contexts of worship and instruction.” – Henry Gamble, “The New Testament Canon in Recent Research,” in The Canon Debate.

B. Catalysts for the New Testament canon

- Passing of the apostles and 1st generation Christians

- Response to early heresy: e.g. Gnosticism
  - Nag Hammadi Texts discovered in 1945
  - Claimed to have preserved secret teachings of Jesus that he wasn’t really human
  - Produced other gospels: Gospel of Thomas, Judas, Mary, etc.

C. Criteria for recognition as Canon (as discussed in the church fathers)

- Connection to the original Apostles

- Widespread, continuous usage in the church (the books that went “viral”)

What really is remarkable is that, though the fringes of the New Testament canon remained unsettled until the fourth century [Hebrews, James, Jude, 3John], a high degree of unanimity concerning the basic core of the New Testament [Gospels, Acts, Paul, John, Peter] was attained very early among the diverse and scattered churches not only in the Mediterranean but also over an area extending from western Europe to east Asia. – Bruce Metzger, The Canon of the New Testament: Origin, Development, and Significance.

- Conformity to the “Rule of Faith” or orthodox tradition connecting to Jesus and the apostles
  - E.g. The Apostles’ Creed as early orthodoxy (mid-2nd cent. AD)

D. Witnesses to the NT canon:

  i. Manuscript evidence for a NT collection
     - Egyptian papyri have the Gospels/Acts together in the mid-100s AD
     - Egyptian papyri have a collection of Paul’s letters by 100AD.
ii. Early church leaders mentions books widely used
   • Irenaeus of Lyons (France): 130-200 AD
   • Muratorian List (Italy): 170-210 AD
   • Eusebius (Palestine): 260-340
   • Athanasius’ Letter (Egypt): 367 AD

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<td>Paul’s Letters (13)</td>
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For details see the tables listed in Lee M. McDonald and James Sanders, *The Canon Debate* (Hendrickson, 2002), pages 591-597.

E. The bottom line:
   ➢ There was never any one council that decided what was in or not in the Bible - the canon grew out of the church’s worship gatherings (remember Colossians 4:16)
   ➢ The council of Carthage (397 AD) recognized what was already existing practice in the churches

“The councils of the church played little part in deciding what was in the canon of scripture. When councils did speak to the subject, their voice was a ratification of what had already become the common practice of the churches.” Everett Furgeson, “Factors Leading to the Selection and Closure of the NT Canon”.

   ➢ The NT writings established themselves; they were recognized by the church

For further reading:
F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*
N.T. Wright, *Judas and the Gospel of Jesus: Have We Missed the Truth about Christianity?* – Wright deals with the questions of the “other Gospels” and the writings of the non-orthodox groups that were never considered part of the Bible.