



A study of the Bible as God's revelation to man

THE WORD AND WRITING MATERIALS IN THE TIME THE BIBLE WAS WRITTEN¹

HOW DID PEOPLE WRITE IN THE EARLY DAYS?

EARLY METHODS OF WRITING

Pictograms: pictures that represented *objects* such as the sun, an old man, an eagle, an ox, a lion. As time passed the use of pictures to depict ideas appeared, and pictograms lost their dominant position in recorded communication.

Ideograms: pictures that actually represented *ideas* rather than objects. Here the picture of the sun might represent heat; an old man might represent old age; an eagle, power; an ox, strength; a lion, regality.

Phonograms: pictures representing sounds rather than objects or ideas. A representation of the sun might speak of a son rather than the sun; a picture of a bear might be used to express the verb 'to bear'; the picture of a bee to express the verb 'to be.'

THE AGE OF WRITING

During the second millennium B.C. there were several experiments that led to the development of the alphabet and written documents.

Cuneiform in Mesopotamia and Egypt: This dates from about 3500 B.C. and includes cuneiform tablets of the Sumerians. There are testimonies pointing to the use of writing in Egypt prior to the time of Moses, Joseph, and even Abraham. The Israelites must have been aware of writing techniques prior to their exodus from Egypt.

READ ACTS 7:22 AND HEBREWS 11:23-26. What does it tell us about Moses and his education?

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Moses was raised as a child with great position in the household of the pharaoh during the New Kingdom period. That learning most likely included writing on papyrus, as papyrus was used in writing earlier than Dynasty V.

¹ This study is based on the work of Geisler, N. L., & Nix, W. E. (1996, c1986). *A general introduction to the Bible*. Chicago: Moody Press.



Example of cuneiform from between 3000B.C. to 2500B.C.



The Moabite Stone, 1,800B.C. to 1,500B.C.

The Moabite Stone: The event recorded on the Moabite Stone is that revolt against Israel recorded in 2 KINGS 1:1 AND 3:4–27. It is overwhelming in its demarcation of the history of writing before the time of Moses. As a result, the more than 450 references in the Bible to *writing* is evidence of the cultural diffusion between Israel and her neighbours.

BIBLICAL EVIDENCE THAT PEOPLE WROTE DOWN GOD’S WORDS

The Law (The Five Books of Moses)

Read EXODUS 17:14, 24:4, 34:27-28, NUMBERS 17:2-3, DEUTERONOMY 31:9, 22-26. What is the implication of these statements in the Bible?

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The Prophets

There is evidence that some of the prophets wrote in times even before the Moabite stone was written.

READ JOSHUA 24:26, JUDGES 8:13-14, 1SAMUEL 10:25. What would you answer the “Higher Critics” who claims that the Bible was put together from portions of literature of surrounding nations found on clay fragments and other pieces of writing.

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The Writings (other literature of the Old Testament)

READ PROVERBS 22:20 AND 2CHRONICLES 35:4. What does it tell us about things “written down” even before the actual events recorded in these paragraphs?

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WRITING MATERIALS AND INSTRUMENTS

WRITING MATERIALS

Clay: This material would be inscribed while it was still damp or soft. It would then be either dried in the sun or baked in a kiln to make a permanent record.

Stone: Examples of this are the Code of Hammurabi, the Rosetta Stone, and the Moabite Stone. The biblical writers also made use of stone as a writing material.

READ JOSHUA 8:30-32. What writing material did Joshua use?

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Papyrus: Papyrus was used in ancient Byblos and Egypt from about 3100 B.C. It was made by pressing and gluing two layers of split papyrus reeds together in order to form a sheet. A series of papyrus sheets were joined together to form a scroll.



Example of a leather scroll



Ancient text on vellum



An example of a papyrus document

Vellum, parchments, leather: made from animal skins of calf or antelope, sheep or goat, and cow or bull, respectively. The chief difference in the use of these materials seems to be that leather was prepared for writing on one side only (as a scroll), whereas parchment or vellum was prepared on both sides.

READ 2TIMOTHY 4:13. What did Paul ask for?

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(Just a bit on a side track for the moment:

READ ISAIAH 30:8 AND HABAKKUK 2:2. Why did the Lord command his servants to write on these materials?

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WRITING INSTRUMENTS

We think of instruments like the stylus, chisel, pen, penknife, and inkhorn and ink. A reference is found in JEREMIAH 36:23.