**What is the Old Testament ?**

**What is the Old Testament [O.T.]?**

* The sacred scripture for the Jews and Christians; the inspired Word of God.
* The story of how God acts in history with his created world and especially with His chosen people Israel.
* The story of how God makes and keeps promises [covenants] and the subsequent punishment [consequences] of His people breaking those covenants/promises*. [Divine Judgment].*
* An ANTHOLOGY. A collection of writings from many sources produced and assembled in stages over 100’s of years. A collection of ancient texts and writings written and re-written by many authors over 1,000 years. Most of the texts or writings were edited by follow up authors after their original author wrote them. Subsequent authors/editors may have changed portions of the original text based on their current tradition and/or religious perspective on events. We know the Bible editors took liberties with the books they were ‘recording’. Even though there are inconsistencies, there is enough archeological evidence and evidence from other sources, like the Dead Sea Scrolls, for scholars to confirm for us that the O.T. is mostly accurate.
* The Bible is not a chronologically written text book of history. The Bible contains history, yes, but that history is sometimes incomplete. Some events are left out. It is not the facts or events that are most important in the Bible, but the THEOLOGY and philosophy portrayed by those events. Religious writers used historical events to explain or illustrate theology.
* The O.T. also contains poetry and prayers [Psalms]; laws and traditions of ancient Israel [Leviticus and Deuteronomy]; Literature [Job] some of which may be fictional.

**Why is the O.T. so hard to read?**

Because there are historical events in the books many look at the O.T. as a history book. The O.T. is Sacred Scripture to the Jews and Christians. It was written, compiled, and edited by religious scholars who had a specific story to tell. The used historical events to illustrate a religious point of view.

The O.T. writings are not in strict chronological order; example Isaiah; Genesis.

Some books or portions of books are arranged by themes or genus.

Some books have a number of different authors/editors and they draw from different sources and different traditions. Bible scholars say that 4 different authors wrote Genesis through Deuteronomy. This theory by Wellhausen in 1878 explains repetitions and discrepancies in the first 5 books of the Bible. The Pentateuch is the result of originally independent documents having been combined over several centuries into one work.

Scholars list the date they believe the book was written. Sometimes this is difficult as there is no specific event on which to base a date. A book may have been written at time X about events occurring at time Y and compiled, rewritten, and subsequently edited by another author at time Z. X, Y, and Z may be different by 100’s of years. Most scholars claim most of the O.T. was written in the exile period around 586 BCE with final compiling and editing of the writings around 1st century BCE.

**What is the Canon?** *{Coogan pp. 8-9}*

The Canon is the official list of books in the Bible. Different religious groups have different lists. In religious use, the canon is a closed list of books considered sacred scripture and authoritative.

The Jewish and the Christian canons are very similar. The Jewish canon has 3 parts; Torah, Prophets, and Writings. The Torah, meaning teaching or law, is the 1st 5 books of the O.T. The Prophets are divided into Former Prophets and Latter Prophets. The Former Prophets are from the death of Moses at the end of Deuteronomy to the Babylonian exile [Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel, and 1-2 Kings]; the prophets Samuel, Nathan, Elijah, and Elisha. The Latter Prophets are divided into Major Prophets which are the longer books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel and the Minor Prophets which are the 12 shorter books named for each prophet from Hosea to Malachi. These 12 books are arranged roughly chronologically. The Writings includes 1-2 Chronicles, which is a retelling of Biblical history from Adam to the Persian period, some ‘historical fiction’ with a religious message, and poetic books like Psalms and Proverbs.

The Christian/Protestant canon rearranged these books. The Christian/Protestant canon’s 4 divisions were the Pentateuch, Historical books, Poetic/Wisdom books, and the Prophets. Christian scholars called the first 5 books the Pentateuch from the Greek ‘5 works’ or ‘5 books’. Ruth was moved in the Christian canon from the Writings to be located after Judges because of its presumed dating from *Ruth 1:1 “In the days when the judges ruled”*. Christians moved 1-2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther to their group of Historical books because they deemed these books were historical. The prophets were the books of Isaiah through Malachi. Daniel was moved to follow Ezekiel because of presumed historical connection. Lamentations was moved to follow Jeremiah because Protestants believed Jeremiah wrote it.

Catholics include the Apocrypha, which were essentially Greek written additions to Daniel and Esther and books of Tobit, Baruch, Wisdom of Solomon, 1-2 Maccabees, and Sirach [Ecclesiasticus]. The Eastern Orthodox [Greek] church added 3-4 Maccabees and 1-2 Esdras, more Greek written Apocryphal books. The Apocrypha was excluded from the Protestant canon because Luther and other Protestant reformers argued that only books written in Hebrew or Aramaic could be authoritative.

**Why do we hear ‘in Hebrew’ or ‘in the Greek’?**

The two oldest Bible texts; the two oldest Bibles written in their original language are:

1. CODEX LENINGRADENS -- an 11th century ancient Bible written in HEBREW and located in Russia; in St. Petersburg formerly called Leningrad. This text is also called the Masoretic text.
2. SEPTUAGINT – a 2nd or 3rd BCE translation of the Hebrew Bible written in GREEK.