

## Formation Period, Chapter 5

*O God, who wonderfully created, and yet more wonderfully restored, the dignity of human nature: Grant that we may share the divine life of him who humbled himself to share our humanity, your Son Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

*This collect dates to the earliest sacramentary known, the “Leonine Sacramentary”. We have only one copy of this document, dating from the 7<sup>th</sup> Century, but the text of the Sacramentary is likely older.*

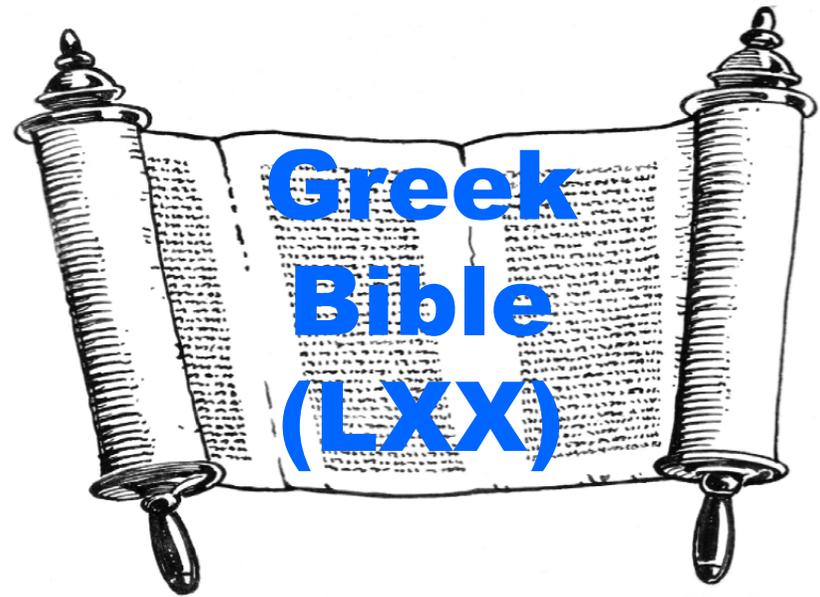
# On the “Authoritative” Books of the Bible

*We have a tendency today to believe that the collection of books which are in our current Bibles has always been recognized as the authoritative “Canon” of Scripture. Such is not the case!*

*Even in Jesus' day, there was not one universally-recognized authoritative collection of Books in the Jewish Bible. To oversimplify, there were in Jesus' day 2 main versions of the Jewish Bible: the Hebrew Bible (sometimes called the Tanakh or Tenakh, or the "Masoretic Text") and the Greek version, called the Septuagint (sometimes written as LXX, the Roman numerals for 70, since legend has it that it was written by 70 or 72 persons).*



- Written in Hebrew
- Contains our current Old Testament writings
- Sometimes called the “**Masoretic Text**”



- Written in Greek
- Contains additions to some OT books
- Contains additional books, written in Greek, mostly during 300 yrs. before Christ.
- Called the “**Septuagint**” (or LXX)
- Most often the version quoted by Jesus and N.T. writers

*The books of the Hebrew Bible are divided into 3 categories: The **Law**, or **Torah** (the first 5 books of our Bible, also sometimes called “the Books of Moses” since legend has it that Moses wrote all 5 books of the Law); the **Prophets**; and the **Writings** (sometimes called by the Greek name “Hagiographa”). Again, not all Jews recognized as authoritative all the books of the Hebrew Bible. We know that the Sadducees of Jesus’ day only accepted as authoritative the 5 books of the Torah.*

*There are many instances where the same verse in the Hebrew Bible and the Greek Bible (Septuagint) differ significantly. When the Old Testament is quoted in the New Testament, quite often it is the Septuagint that is quoted.*

*This is one reason that when we read an Old Testament quotation in the New Testament and go back to the Old Testament to check it, we often find very different wordings. Our present-day Old Testament is based almost entirely on the Hebrew Bible (Masoretic Text), while Jesus and his contemporaries largely used the Septuagint (Greek) Old Testament.*

*The earliest Christians were mostly Jews, and continued to read Jewish Scriptures. When it came time to compile the Old Testament part of the Christian Bible, the question arose: What books should be included in the Old Testament? Just the books in the Hebrew Bible, or including the additional books of the Greek Bible (Septuagint)? And which has the more authoritative wording, the Hebrew Bible or the Septuagint?*

*In A.D. 382, Pope Damasus I commissioned the Christian priest and scholar Jerome to make a revision of Old Latin translations of the Bible. Jerome had to make the decision as to which text of the Old Testament – Hebrew or Greek – was to be considered authoritative. Contrary to the views of most Christians of the time (including St. Augustine, who believed the Septuagint to be divinely inspired), Jerome chose the Hebrew (Masoretic) text.*

*However, Jerome's point of view – that the additions which the Septuagint made to the Hebrew Text (which he called Apocrypha) were of secondary authority was a minority viewpoint, and the Church as a whole (both in the East and the West) chose to include these writings as part of the Old Testament. The Latin translation known as the Vulgate (which was largely the work of St. Jerome) became the accepted collection of canonical books for the next 1000 years.*

# *Roman Catholic Deuterocanonical Books*

- 1- Tobit
- 2- Judith
- 3- Additions to Esther
- 4- Wisdom of Solomon
- 5- Joshua Son of Sirach (Ecclesiasticus)
- 6- Baruch
- 7- Additions to Daniel
  - Prayer of Azariah & Song of 3 Holy Children
  - Susanna
  - Bel and the Dragon
- 8- First Maccabees
- 9- Second Maccabees
- 10- Psalms 151

*Who is right: the Protestants who give no authority at all to these apocryphal books, the Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox who include them in their Old Testament, or us Anglicans who accord them secondary authority in a separate Apocrypha (which actually contains more books than the Catholic deuterocanonicals)?*

*This raises the whole question of what we mean by the authority of Scripture. Christians do not all have the same Bible.*

*The King James Version of 1611 contained a section of books called the Apocrypha. Anglican Bibles to this day contain this section, as do some Lutheran Bibles. Martin Luther included an Apocrypha in the Bible he translated. Luther also believed that 4 New Testament books – James, Jude, Hebrews and the Revelation – did not have equal authority as the rest of the New Testament, and he relegated all four to the back of his Bible. He called James “an Epistle of straw”.*

*Obviously, Luther did not take the authority of Scripture as something forever determined; he could make his own judgments about the authority of Scriptural books.*



*Where does this leave us? Given the various claims down through the centuries regarding both Old Testament and New Testament books and their authority, can we say that there is a set of books which are **THE** books of the Bible? If so, whose set do we choose – Protestants, Anglicans, Catholics, or Orthodox? The modern-day Churches of Christ also hold a very different view on the authority of the Old Testament: its claim on us was superseded by the New Testament, so the Old Testament is important only as historical background for the New Testament.*

*Many Evangelical/Conservative churches today claim that the Bible is “inerrant” (such a claim was never made before about 1800 A.D.). But **which** Bible is inerrant – Catholic, Protestant, or Anglican? And who is to say that Jerome was right and Augustine wrong regarding which Old Testament – Hebrew or Septuagint – was more inspired by God? Jesus and most of the New Testament writers used the Septuagint, yet that is not the version we have in our Bibles today.*

*And what about Luther's opinion (echoed by many other folk) that some New Testament books were of lesser value (straw?) than others?*

*Personally, I find some parts of the Old Testament appalling. For instance:*

*Psalm 137:8-9 Babylon, you will be destroyed.  
Happy are those who pay you back for what you  
have done to us — who take your babies and  
smash them against a rock.*

**Is this God's way of dealing with people –  
smashing their infants against a rock?**

*Or the following:*

"Next we headed for the land of Bashan, where King Og and his army attacked us at Edrei. But the LORD told me, 'Do not be afraid of him, for I have given you victory over Og and his army, giving you his entire land. Treat him just as you treated King Sihon of the Amorites, who ruled in Heshbon.' So the LORD our God handed King Og and all his people over to us, and we killed them all. We conquered all sixty of his towns, the entire Argob region in his kingdom of Bashan... We completely destroyed the kingdom of Bashan, just as we had destroyed King Sihon of Heshbon. We destroyed all the people in every town we conquered – men, women, and children alike. But we kept all the livestock for ourselves and took plunder from all the towns." (Deuteronomy 3:1-7 NLT) (for other passages, see: <http://www.evilbible.com/Murder.htm> )

*Is it really the will of the God and Father of  
Jesus Christ to kill every man, woman, and  
child in 60 towns?*

*And this is but one of many, many Old  
Testament passages depicting a ruthless,  
merciless, bloodthirsty God.*

*But then we come upon other Old Testament passages that describe a very different God. There are at least a dozen passages which say, “The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.” When the Lord passes in front of Moses in Exodus, the Lord says, “Then he passed in front of Moses, calling out, ‘The LORD, the LORD, a compassionate and merciful God, patient, always faithful and ready to forgive.’” (Exodus 34:6)*

*In the story of Joseph in Egypt, the scene where he forgives his brothers is nothing short of breathtaking, and shows a profound understanding of the spirit of Christ.*

*In the story of Jonah, God wants to save the people of Ninevah, while Jonah wants them wiped out. At the end of the story, when the Ninevites repent, Jonah is furious. He sulks under the shade of a bush which God has caused to spring up to shelter Jonah. When a dry wind kills the bush, Jonah is angry.*

*“But God said to Jonah, ‘Is it right for you to be angry about the bush?’ And he said, ‘Yes, angry enough to die.’ Then the LORD said, ‘You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labor and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?’”*

*Does this not sound like a story Jesus would tell?*

**In Psalm 87, we read:**

*I count Egypt and Babylon among those who know me;*

*behold Philistia, Tyre, and Ethiopia:  
in Zion were they born.*

*Of Zion it shall be said, "Everyone was born in her..."*

**Egypt, Babylon, Philistia, Tyre – these are the ancient *enemies* of Israel! And here the psalmist says that they also share God's favor!**

*Clearly, we have conflicting pictures of God, especially in the Old Testament. Is God “slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love” or is God vindictive, desiring the slaughter of all men, women, and children in 60 towns?*

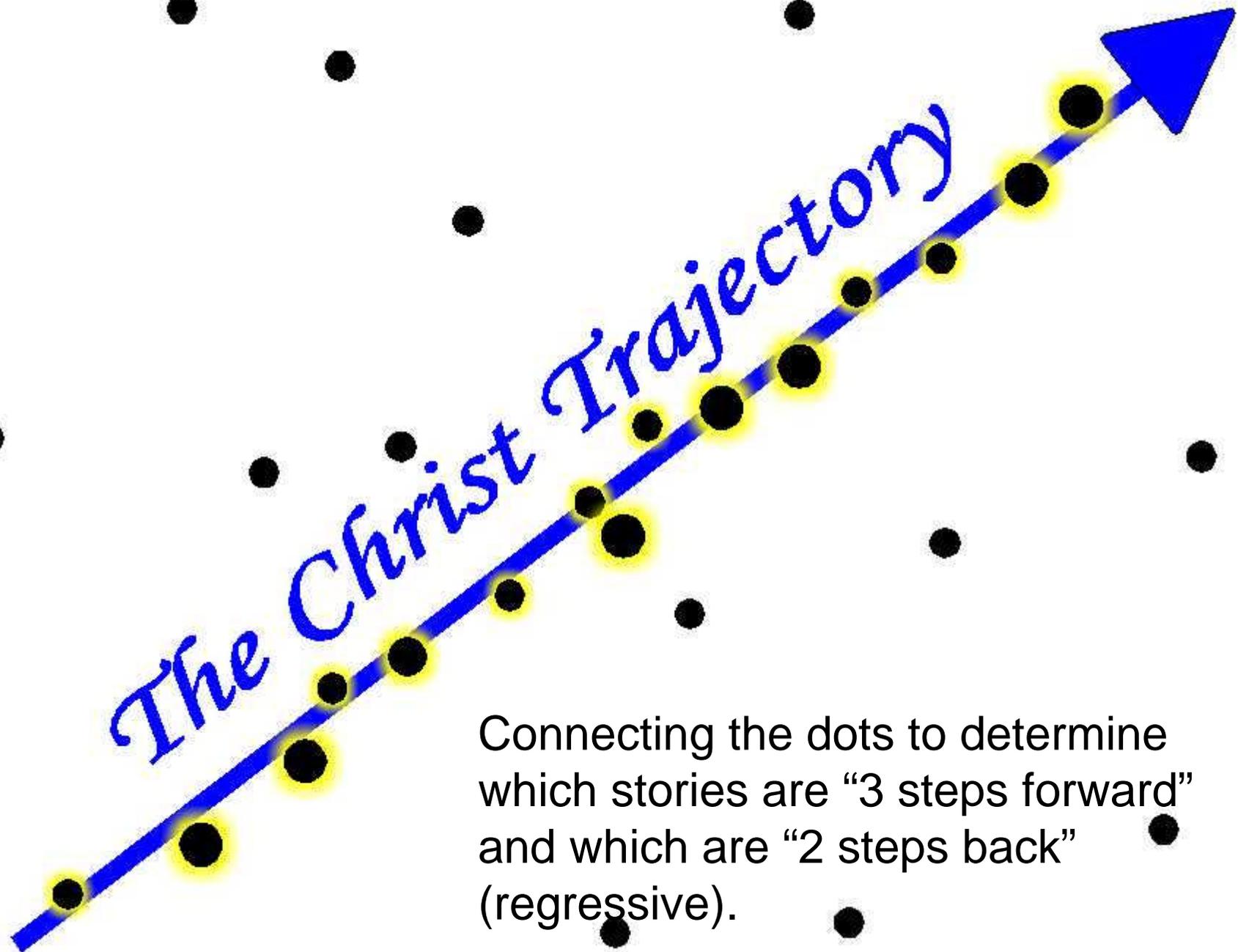
*Richard Rohr, in his book Things Hidden, sets out a way to look at Scripture which has helped me greatly. First, he says that Scripture is no different from the rest of human life: it is 3 steps forward, 2 steps back. The forward steps are where we read of a God who acts like Jesus; the backward steps are where we read of the ruthless, vindictive God.*

*An even more helpful image that Rohr offers is that of “connecting the dots”. He says that in reading Scripture it is crucial that we “connect the dots and see the developing tangents. Connecting those dots is absolutely necessary, or we will have no markers by which to recognize the regressive passages that back away from those same tangents. We must see where the dots are leading us. Our unwillingness, or our inability, to thin-slice the texts and then discern the tangents has created widespread fundamentalist Christianity, Judaism and Islam, which, ironically, usually miss the ‘fundamentals’!”*

*“If you do not know the direction and the momentum, you will not recognize the backpedaling. You will end up making very accidental themes into ‘fundamentals’ while missing the biggies! One dot is not wisdom: You can prove anything you want from a single Scripture quote.”*

*In 2 Timothy 2:16, we read “All Scripture is inspired by God ...” The Scripture referred to would have been the Old Testament. I do not believe it is all inspired by God; but the general direction, the tangent or trajectory, is in a God-inspired direction!*

*“But how can we trust that we are following the correct tangent? By noting the trim of the sails! Where is the tack of the text directing us? This is precisely the meaning of the Christian affirmation that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Scriptures. The sails are set for a God of suffering and humble love, as we finally see in Jesus. Only because of him are we totally assured that God is beyond tribalism, violence, hatred and validating the vanities of the small self.”*



Connecting the dots to determine which stories are “3 steps forward” and which are “2 steps back” (regressive).

*This “tangent” also goes through the New Testament. Not all the Disciples are always on the right path. Jesus calls Peter “Satan” and Paul opposes Peter to his face when Peter gets off the “tangent”.*