

How Did the Bible Come to Be?

by Margaret Nutting Ralph

Have you ever asked yourself how the Bible as we know it today came into existence? Did God cause certain individuals to go into a trance during which their hands moved across a scroll so that they wrote God's own words? Did someone simply dig the Bible up out of the earth in its finished form? Far from that, the Bible we have today is the end product of a five-step process.

Event. The first step of the process is that God revealed God's self through events in human history. The events that gave rise to our Bible began about four thousand years ago with our ancestors in faith, Abraham and Sarah, and continued for about two thousand years, through the events of the life of Jesus and the deeds of his first-century apostles and disciples. Through these revelatory events the Hebrew people came to understand that the one and eternal God was present with them in their history. These events and the insights that flowed from them occurred in the midst of the community.

Oral Tradition. No story about a biblical event is contemporary with the event. All of the stories took shape over a period of time. Accounts of events were passed on in the community by word of mouth, sometimes for many generations. Those who passed on the oral tradition were not trying to tell their audiences exactly what happened, but to tell them the significance of the events for their own lives. Therefore, the accounts were molded to meet each community's needs so that the community would appreciate their importance. Those who told the stories were passing on the community's beliefs about God's role in the events that had occurred.

Written Tradition. As time went on, the oral tradition gave birth to a variety of kinds of writing including parables, miracle stories, legends, creeds, laws, and poetry. In each case, the motive of the writer was not to report all that had occurred, but to pass on to the generation contemporary with the writer how God had