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Trevor O'Reggio

Andrews University, toreggio@andrews.edu

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Writing, The Bible & Me

Writing is one of the most significant human discoveries of all times. As a means of communication it is a supplement to speech. It increases the scope of communication and thus more people are brought into contact with the ideas of people far moved from them by distance or by time. The ideas of those who have died can live on long after they have left the scene of action.

Writing makes possible record keeping. It traces events as the eyewitnesses have seen them and thus history is preserved. The words of the prophets can be recorded preserved and passed down so that there is an unbroken continuity of history. It is difficult to establish or maintain institutions without writing, because of the necessity of record keeping. History that is generally written down rather than passed down orally tend to reflect reality more closely.

Writing helps us to focus our thoughts and bring them to bear on more concise ideas. We can modify and change ideas, we can add new ones and delete bad ones. We can thus improve the quality of those ideas and by bringing greater order to them. Writing becomes then a tool for rational thought.

The invention of writing was such a great thing that many ancient civilizations thought that writing was a gift from the Gods. But most historians of ancient civilizations tell us that writing was invented by the Sumerians in Mesopotamia around 3100 B.C. Archaeological expeditions in Iraq have uncovered thousands of texts in cuneiforms writing on clay tablets. Some of these are dated as the earliest written forms of writing. Then tablets were either sunbaked or oven baked and strange but interesting symbols were written on them. They were well shaped so they were given the name cuneiform.

There seem to have been a gradual progression of writing through four basic stages. The first period there was really no writing as such, but there was communication by speed, gestures, motions and objects. Secondly writing took the form of pictures. There were pictographs or ideogram like the

earliest Egyptian and Canaanite forms that sought to convey a word or an idea through a picture. Thirdly syllabic writing was invented that utilized the acrophonic principle. Pictures were no longer associated with the object, but letters sounding like an object. The sound became independent of the pictures thus the principle of phonetization entered into language. This prepared the way for alphabetic writing. The early Phoenician alphabet became the basis for all the other alphabets.

It seemed that writing like many other inventions of man was another one of his ways in adapting and mastering his circumstances. Professor Denise Schmandt Besserat scholarly work reveals much in this respect. She shows the development of writing in the fertile crescent as a progressive evolution on man's part to deal with the ever increasing complexity of life. Writing can be traced from pebbles to tokens to tablets to envelopes for the tokens to seals on the envelopes which mark the birth of pictograms which eventually led to writing with the increased urbanization of life man's life become more stable and less nomadic. Complexity was increased and thus a system was developed as a communication device, for record keeping and a tool for rational thought to deal with this complexity. It seemed that the practical conditions forced man in inventing a system that would make life less troublesome and thus writing was born.

I think that it is no accident but providential that the science of writing would be developed in the very region that God was preparing a people to proclaim his revelation to the world. Palestine lies on the main crossroads between Europe, Africa and, Asia. It lies directly in the middle between two ancient civilizations which writing would be highly developed. Assyria to the North and Egypt to the South. Being such a central area makes it ideal as a meeting place for different cultures and ideas and no doubt the science of writing would definitely reach within its borders.

Oral tradition was the way that truths were passed on from one generation to the next. However, with the march of sin, man's life was shortened and oral tradition became impractical and less

accurate so that God saw a definite need for his word to be recorded in written form and passed on to future generations. Thus this revelation would be less tainted with human inaccuracies and a continual form of record keeping would be carried on. Also, a written record would be easily distributed to far remote regions of the country thus more people would have an opportunity to hear and understand. This of course would increase the wider dissemination of knowledge. Writing would thus become a vehicle to spread the knowledge of God.

It is again providential the Hebrew alphabet was derived from the Phoenician alphabet and not the Egyptian pictographs. The ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphics and other ancient pictographs utilized nearly 6,000 signs compared to 27-28 used by the Phoenician alphabet. Hence the Phoenician alphabet although based on abstraction was far more simple, less cumbersome and easier to learn. The birth of the alphabet transformed writing from the monopoly of the elites and the learned and made it possible for an ordinary to write and understand in a shorter time rather than the number of years that were required by scholars to master the old pictographic system with its multiplicity of signs. The word of God taking advantage of the alphabetization of Hebrews was made more accessible to the common people.

Writing which was once the domain of the learned with the invention of the alphabet now made it possible for the simple ordinary person to learn it. Writing was now used for every day, ordinary purpose and here again God could reveal his will more clearly through the everyday ordinary events of life rather than the exclusive domain of an scholastic and learned environment. The Bible could speak to the common man in terms he understood. The common man could now relate more fully to the word of God. It is interesting to note in passing that the New Testament utilized the language of the common people (Koina Greek) in presenting the Gospel.

Since God acts in history and all his actions are part of the pro-gressive continuum of salvation history the necessity of recording these events become crucial in understanding God's plan of salvation. Then acts can be frozen in the written form. They can be scrutinized, analyzed, meditated upon and referred back to constantly for greater understanding. Having the word of God in a written form this sharpen our critical ability in approaching it. We increase our understanding by constantly studying it. The very character of the word of God necessitates that we constantly go back to it. We must study it and restudy it. Its profundity cannot be plummeted by a few superficial readings. Thus without the Bible in a written form all of this would be impossible.

When I hear these word preached from the pulpit it does not have the kind of impact upon me as when I can read it for myself. Reading it confirms and solidifies its teachings in my mind, I can read it whenever I want. If it was orally transmitted I would be very dependent on the person transmitting it. Having it for myself in a written form makes it easy for me to refer back to it time and time again.

The word of God written becomes a silent witness to the heart for when all the preaching and teaching is over it is still there. Every sincere seeker after truth has access to it (In the Western World) the word of God available to all makes , the universal priesthood of all believers especially true. Now one does not necessarily need a scholar to interpret God's word for the same Holy Spirit that inspired the writers stands by ready to illumine and enlighten the reader.

Writing were and still is like wings for the Bible. It allowed it to fly to far distant lands. It universalized the word of God. Truth could not now be the selfish claims of a few favored people, but it was within reach of the world's millions. This makes the reality of the gospel to all the world in our days a real possibility.

Trevor O'Reggio