

## Three Stages



Adapted from Mark Link, *SJ Path Through Scripture*, Tabor Publishing, 1998 pp. 2-3

**R**apunzel was a beautiful girl who lived in a tower with a witch. The witch told her she was ugly. Since there was no mirror in the tower, Rapunzel believed the witch.

One sunny day a handsome young prince saw Rapunzel on the tower balcony. He was stunned by how lovely she was. To make a long story short, he rescued her from the evil witch and married her.

This story and many others like it were communicated *orally* for centuries.

To keep this tragedy from happening, two brothers from Germany, the Grimms, had the old people recite the stories so that they could record and save them.

The brothers eventually found, edited, and recorded nearly a hundred stories. Among them were "Snow White," "Cinderella," and "Sleeping Beauty."

A similar situation existed in old

Israel. For centuries, stories of God's dealings with Israel were communicated orally. The older generation memorized them and taught them to the younger generation.

Eventually, God inspired Israelite *scribes* to collect, edit, and record these stories on "scrolls" made of animal hide. The result was the Scriptures as we now know them.

And so Scripture developed slowly over centuries by three stages:

life stage, oral stage, written stage.

The *life* stage was the live event: (For example) God leading the Israelites out of Egypt. The *oral* stage was the *telling* of the event to their children by their parents. The *written* stage was the *recording* of the event for future generations.

**R**ay Bradbury's sci-fi novel

*Fahrenheit 451* describes a future when leaders destroy all sources of information to better control people. One day a friend tells Montag that a group of people have secretly memorized all of the world's greatest books.

*"It can't be," said Montag, "It is," replied Granger. "Some day the people will be called to recite what they know and we'll set it up in type."*

People ask, "How can vast parts of the Bible be passed on orally and accurately for centuries." Jean Varenne can help here.

*In Yoga and the Hindu Tradition* Varrene tells us how young Brahmins, even today, memorize hundreds of pages of texts and perform such acrobatic feats of memory as reciting these texts backward, or saying every other syllable of them.

1). Read Joshua 4: 9; 8:28, Acts 8:26, Matthew 27:8 and Matthew 28:15,

- a) What do the passages have in common?
- b) How does this common trait point to the fact that each of these passages was passed on orally for an extended period before it was recorded?

2. Take a few minutes to record:

a) The names of the *two main* parts into which the Bible is divided.

b) The name of the first book in the first main part of the Bible.

c) The number of books in the second main part.

d) The number of Gospels and the names of the evangelists (Gospel writers)

e) The name of the last book of the Bible.

3. Read Psalm 78:1-4. What clue does it contain concerning: a) How ancient peoples passed it on? b) What events, especially, it preserves?

4. Why were stories like "Rapunzel" and "Snow White" not recorded at first? Why were they eventually recorded?

5. List and explain the three stages by which the Bible reached its present form.

6. Who were the scribes, and what gave rise to their profession?