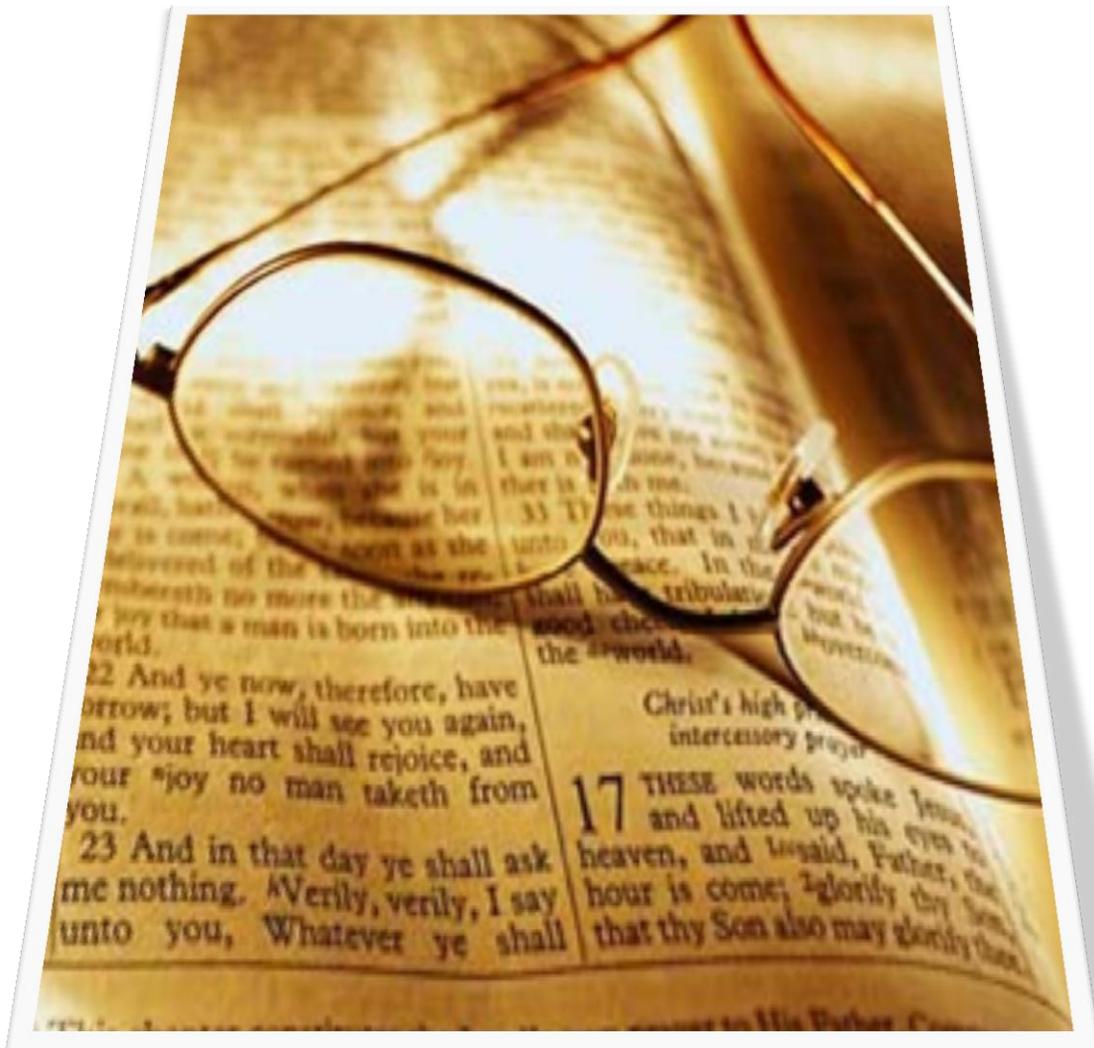


Del Rey Bible Institute

Fides Quaerens Intellectum

SCRIPTURE & HERMENEUTICS

APPENDIX 1



THE CASE FOR THE BIBLE¹

The Uniqueness of the Bible

Introduction

Unique in Its Continuity

Unique in Its Circulation

Unique in Its Translation

Unique in Its Survival

Through Time

Through Persecution

Through Criticism

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A Reasonable Conclusion

INTRODUCTION

¹ Josh McDowell, *Evidence for Christianity* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2006), 17-60.

Over and over again, like a broken record, people ask me, “Oh, you don’t read the Bible, do you?” Sometimes they’ll say, “Why, the Bible is just another book; you ought to read...” Then they’ll mention a few of their favorite books.

There are those who have a Bible in their library. They proudly tell me that it sits on the shelf next to other “greats,” such as Homer’s *Odyssey* or Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* or Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*. Their Bible may be dusty, not broken in, but they still think of it as one of the classics.

Others make degrading comments about the Bible, even snickering at the thought that anyone might take it seriously enough to spend time reading it. For these folks, having a copy of the Bible in their library is a sign of ignorance.

The above questions and observations bothered me when, as a non-Christian, I tried to refute the Bible as God’s Word to humanity. I finally came to the conclusion that these were simply trite phrases from biased, prejudiced, or simply unread men and women.

The Bible should be on the top shelf all by itself. The Bible is unique. That’s it! The ideas I grappled with to describe the Bible are summed up by the word *unique*.

Professor M. Montiero-Williams, former Boden Professor of Sanskrit, held this perspective. After spending forty-two years studying Eastern books, he compared them with the Bible and said: “Pile them, if you will, on the left side of your study table; but place your own Holy Bible on the right side—all by itself, all alone—and with a wide gap between them. For...there is a gulf between it and the so-called sacred books of the East which severs the one from the other utterly, hopelessly, and forever...a veritable gulf which cannot be bridged over by any science of religious thought” (Collett, AAB, 314, 315).

Webster must have had this “Book of books” in mind when he wrote the definition for *unique*: “1. one and only; single; sole. 2. different from all others; having no like or equal.”

The Bible stands alone among all other books. It is unique, “different from all others,” in the following ways (plus a multitude more):

1A. UNIQUE IN ITS CONTINUITY

The Bible is the only book that was

1. Written over about a fifteen-hundred-year span.
2. Written by more than forty authors from every walk of life, including kings, military leaders, peasants, philosophers, fishermen, tax collectors, poets, musicians, statesmen, scholars, and shepherds. For example:

Moses, a political leader and judge, trained in the universities of Egypt

David, a king, poet, musician, shepherd, and warrior

Amos, a herdsman

Joshua, a military general

Nehemiah, a cupbearer to a pagan king

Daniel, a prime minister

Solomon, a king and philosopher

Luke, a physician and historian

Peter, a fisherman

Matthew, a tax collector

Paul, a rabbi
Mark, Peter's secretary

3. Written in different places:

By Moses in the wilderness
By Jeremiah in a dungeon
By Daniel on a hillside and in a palace
By Paul inside prison walls
By Luke while traveling
By John while in exile on the isle of Patmos

4. Written at different times:

By David in times of war and sacrifice
By Solomon in times of peace and prosperity

5. Written during different moods:

Some writing from the heights of joy
Others writing from the depths of sorrow and despair
Some during times of certainty and conviction
Others during days of confusion and doubt

6. Written on three continents:

Asia
Africa
Europe

7. Written in three languages:

Hebrew, the language of the Israelites and practically all of the Old Testament. In 2 Kings 18:26, 28 and Nehemiah 13:24, it is called "the language of Judah," and in Isaiah 19:18, "the language of Canaan."

Hebrew is a pictorial language in which the past is not merely described but verbally painted. Not just a landscape is presented but a moving panorama. The course of events is reenacted in the mind's sight. (Note the frequent use of "behold," a Hebraism carried over to the New Testament.) Such common Hebraic expressions as "he arose and went," "he opened his lips and spoke," "he lifted up his eyes and saw," and "he lifted up his voice and wept" illustrate the pictorial strength of the language. (Dockery, FBI, 214)

Aramaic, the "common language" of the Near East until the time of Alexander the Great (sixth century B.C. through fourth century B.C.) (Albright, AP, 218). Daniel 2 through 7 and most of Ezra 4 through 7 are in Aramaic, as are occasional statements in the New Testament, most notably Jesus' cry from the cross, "*Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani*," which means "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matt. 27:46 NKJV).

Aramaic is linguistically very close to Hebrew and similar in structure. Aramaic texts in the Bible are written in the same script as Hebrew. In contrast to Hebrew, Aramaic uses a larger vocabulary, including many loan words, and a greater variety of connectives. It also contains an elaborate system of tenses, developed through the use of participles with pronouns or with various forms of the verb "to be." Although Aramaic is less euphonious and poetical than Hebrew, it is probably superior as a vehicle of exact expression.

Aramaic has perhaps the longest continuous living history of any language known. It was used during the Bible's patriarchal period and is still spoken by a few people today. Aramaic and its cognate, Syriac, evolved into many dialects in different places and periods. Characterized by simplicity, clarity, and precision, it adapted easily to the various needs of everyday life. It could serve equally well as a language for scholars, pupils, lawyers, or merchants. Some have described it as the Semitic equivalent of English. (Dockery, FBI, 221)

Greek, the language comprising almost all of the New Testament. It was also the international language spoken at the time of Christ, as English is becoming in the modern world.

The Greek script was based on an alphabet presumably borrowed from the Phoenicians and then adapted to the Greek speech sound system and direction of writing. Greek was first written from right to left like the West Semitic languages, then in a back-and-forth pattern, and finally from left to right.

The conquests of Alexander the Great encouraged the spread of Greek language and culture. Regional dialects were largely replaced by "Hellenistic" or "koine" (common) Greek.... The koine dialect added many vernacular expressions to Attic Greek, thus making it more cosmopolitan. Simplifying the grammar also better adapted it to a world-wide culture. The new language, reflecting simple, popular speech, became the common language of commerce and diplomacy. The Greek language lost much of its elegance and finely shaded nuance as a result of its evolution from classic to koine. Nevertheless, it retained its distinguishing characteristics of strength, beauty, clarity, and logical rhetorical power.

It is significant that the apostle Paul wrote his letter to Christians in Rome in the Greek language rather than in Latin. The Roman Empire of that time was culturally a Greek world, except for governmental transactions.

The Greek New Testament vocabulary is abundant and sufficient to convey just the shade of meaning the author desires. For example, the New Testament used two different words for "love" (for two kinds of love), two words for "another" (another of the same, or another of a different kind), and several words for various kinds of knowledge. Significantly, some words are omitted, such as *eros* (a third kind of love) and other words commonly employed in the Hellenistic culture of that time. (Dockery, FBI, 224–25, 227)

8. Written in a wide variety of literary styles, including:

- poetry
- historical narrative
- song
- romance
- didactic treatise
- personal correspondence
- memoirs
- satire
- biography
- autobiography
- law
- prophecy
- parable
- allegory

9. The Bible addresses hundreds of controversial subjects—subjects that create opposing opinions when mentioned or discussed. The biblical writers treated hundreds of hot topics (e.g.,

marriage, divorce and remarriage, homosexuality, adultery, obedience to authority, truth-telling and lying, character development, parenting, the nature and revelation of God). Yet from Genesis through Revelation, these writers addressed them with an amazing degree of harmony.

10. In spite of its diversity, the Bible presents a single unfolding story: God's redemption of human beings. Norman Geisler and William Nix put it this way: "The 'Paradise Lost' of Genesis becomes the 'Paradise Regained' of Revelation. Whereas the gate to the tree of life is closed in Genesis, it is opened forevermore in Revelation" (Geisler/Nix, GIB'86, 28). The unifying thread is salvation from sin and condemnation to a life of complete transformation and unending bliss in the presence of the one, merciful, holy God.

11. Finally, and most important, among all the people described in the Bible, the leading character throughout is the one, true, living God made known through Jesus Christ.

Consider first the Old Testament: The Law provides the "*foundation* for Christ," the historical books show "*the preparation*" for Christ, the poetical works *aspire* to Christ, and the prophecies display an "*expectation*" of Christ. In the New Testament, the "Gospels...record the historical *manifestation* of Christ, the Acts relate the *propagation* of Christ, the Epistles give the *interpretation* of Him, and in Revelation is found the *consummation* of all things in Christ" (Geisler/Nix, GIB'86, 29). From cover to cover, the Bible is Christocentric.

Therefore, although the Bible contains many books by many authors, it shows in its continuity that it is also *one book*. As F. F. Bruce observes, "Any part of the human body can only be properly explained in reference to the whole body. And any part of the Bible can only be properly explained in reference to the whole Bible" (Bruce, BP, 89). Each book is like a chapter in the one book we call the Bible. Bruce concludes:

The Bible, at first sight, appears to be a collection of literature—mainly Jewish. If we enquire into the circumstances under which the various Biblical documents were written, we find that they were written at intervals over a space of nearly 1400 years. The writers wrote in various lands, from Italy in the west to Mesopotamia and possibly Persia in the east. The writers themselves were a heterogeneous number of people, not only separated from each other by hundreds of years and hundreds of miles, but belonging to the most diverse walks of life. In their ranks we have kings, herdsmen, soldiers, legislators, fishermen, statesmen, courtiers, priests and prophets, a tent making Rabbi and a Gentile physician, not to speak of others of whom we know nothing apart from the writings they have left us. The writings themselves belong to a great variety of literary types. They include history, law (civil, criminal, ethical, ritual, sanitary), religious poetry, didactic treatises, lyric poetry, parable and allegory, biography, personal correspondence, personal memoirs and diaries, in addition to the distinctively Biblical types of prophecy and apocalyptic.

For all that, the Bible is not simply an anthology; there is a unity which binds the whole together. An anthology is compiled by an anthologist, but no anthologist compiled the Bible. (Bruce, BP, 88)

Contrast the books of the Bible with the compilation of Western classics called the *Great Books of the Western World*. The *Great Books* contain selections from more than 450 works by close to 100 authors spanning a period of about twenty-five centuries: Homer, Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, Augustine, Aquinas, Dante, Hobbes, Spinoza, Calvin, Rousseau, Shakespeare, Hume, Kant, Darwin, Tolstoy, Whitehead, and Joyce, to name but a handful. While these individuals are all part of the Western tradition of ideas, they often display an incredible diversity of views on just about every subject. And while their views share some commonalities, they also display numerous conflicting and contradictory positions and perspectives. In fact, they frequently go out of their way to critique and refute key ideas proposed by their predecessors.

A representative of the *Great Books of the Western World* came to my house one day, attempting to recruit salesmen for the series. He spread out a chart describing the series and spent five minutes talking to my wife and me about it. We then spent an hour and a half talking to him about the Bible, which we presented as the greatest book of all time.

I challenged this representative to take just ten of the authors from the *Great Books* series, all from one walk of life, one generation, one place, one time, one mood, one continent, one language, and all addressing just one controversial subject. I then asked him, “Would the authors agree with one another?”

He paused and then replied, “No.”

“What would you have, then?” I retorted.

Immediately he answered, “A conglomeration.”

Two days later he committed his life to Christ.

The uniqueness of the Bible as shown above does not *prove* that it is inspired. It does, however, challenge any person sincerely seeking truth to consider seriously its unique quality in terms of its continuity. That *Great Books* representative took this step, and he discovered the Savior of the Bible in the process.

2A. UNIQUE IN ITS CIRCULATION

It’s not unusual to hear about books that have hit the bestseller list, selling a few hundred thousand copies. It’s much rarer to come across books that have sold more than a million copies, and it’s rarer still to find books that have passed the ten-million mark in sales. It staggers the mind, then, to discover that the number of Bibles sold reaches into the billions. That’s right, billions! More copies have been produced of its entirety, as well as selected portions, than any other book in history. Some will argue that in a designated month or year more of a certain book was sold. However, no other book even begins to compare to the Scriptures in terms of its total circulation.

According to the United Bible Societies’ *1998 Scripture Distribution Report*, in that year alone member organizations were responsible for distributing 20.8 million complete Bibles and another 20.1 million testaments. When portions of Scripture (i.e., complete books of the Bible) and selections (short extracts on particular themes) are also included, the total distribution of copies of the Bible or portions thereof in 1998 reaches a staggering 585 million—and these numbers only include Bibles distributed by the United Bible Societies!

	Bible	Testaments	Portions	New Reader Portions	Selections	New Reader Selections
Africa	2,436,187	541,915	1,325,206	1,494,911	4,024,764	350,092
Americas	9,869,916	12,743,263	7,074,311	6,277,936	315,468,625	25,120,757
Asia-Pacific	6,213,113	5,368,429	9,007,281	8,262,462	151,042,342	9,765,191

Europe/Mid. East	2,232,299	1,463,020	1,973,054	495,301	2,197,975	275,358
TOTAL 1998	20,751,515	20,116,627	19,379,852	16,530,610	472,733,706	35,511,398

World Distribution of Scriptures by United Bible Societies November 1, 1997, to October 31, 1998 (does not include statistics from other Bible publishers and distributors) United Bible Societies, World Service Center, Reading Bridge House, Reading RG1 8PJ, England. Global Total 1998: 585,023,708

To put it another way, if you lined up all the people who received Bibles or Scripture selections last year, and if you handed a Bible to one of them every five seconds, it would take more than ninety-two years to do what just the United Bible Societies accomplished in 1998 alone.

As *The Cambridge History of the Bible* states, “No other book has known anything approaching this constant circulation” (Greenslade, CHB, 479).

The critic is right: “This doesn’t prove that the Bible is the Word of God.” But it does demonstrate that the Bible is unique.

3A. UNIQUE IN ITS TRANSLATION

The numbers of translations of the Bible are every bit as impressive as its sales numbers. Most books are never translated into another tongue. Among the books that are, most are published in just two or three languages. Far fewer books see translation figures rise into the teens. According to the United Bible Societies, the Bible (or portions of it) has been translated into more than 2,200 languages! Although this is only about one-third of the world’s 6,500 known languages, these languages represent the primary vehicle of communication for well over 90 percent of the world’s population (www.biblesociety.org). Worldwide, no other book in history has been translated, retranslated, and paraphrased more than the Bible.

The Bible was one of the first major books translated. Around 250 B.C., the Hebrew Old Testament was translated into Greek and given the name Septuagint (Unger, UBD, 1147). The work was originally produced for Greek-speaking Jews living in Alexandria who could no longer read Hebrew.

Since then translators have actively rendered the Scriptures—both Old Testament and New—into languages that either have or are without a written alphabet. Wycliffe Bible Translators alone has over six thousand people working with more than 850 different languages in fifty countries to produce new or revised versions of the Bible (Barnes, OCB, 823). Of these, 468 languages are being translated for the first time. According to Ted Bergman at the Summer Institute of Linguistics, at this rate the Bible should be available to almost all language groups between the years 2007 and 2022. This means that we are less than a generation away from witnessing the world’s first universally translated text!

No other book in history comes close to comparing with the Bible in its translation activity.

4A. UNIQUE IN ITS SURVIVAL

1B. Through Time

Although it was first written on perishable materials and had to be copied and recopied for hundreds of years before the invention of the printing press, the Scriptures have never diminished in style or correctness, nor have they ever faced extinction. Compared with other ancient writings, the Bible has more manuscript evidence to support it than any ten pieces of classical literature combined (see chapter three).

John Warwick Montgomery observes that “to be skeptical of the resultant text of the New Testament books is to allow all of classical antiquity to slip into obscurity, for no documents of the ancient period are as well attested bibliographically as the New Testament” (Montgomery, HC’71, 29). Similarly, Bruce Metzger, a Princeton professor and one of the world’s leading biblical text critics, comments that in contrast with other ancient texts, “the textual critic of the New Testament is embarrassed by the wealth of his material” (Metzger, TNT, 34).

Bernard Ramm speaks of the accuracy and number of biblical manuscripts: “Jews preserved it as no other manuscript has ever been preserved. With their *massora* (*parva*, *magna*, and *finalis*) they kept tabs on every letter, syllable, word and paragraph. They had special classes of men within their culture whose sole duty was to preserve and transmit these documents with practically perfect fidelity—scribes, lawyers, massorettes. Who ever counted the letters and syllables and words of Plato or Aristotle? Cicero or Seneca?” (Ramm, PCE ‘53, 230–231).

John Lea, in *The Greatest Book in the World*, compares the Bible with Shakespeare’s writings:

In an article in the *North American Review*, a writer made some interesting comparisons between the writings of Shakespeare and the Scriptures, which show that much greater care must have been bestowed upon the biblical manuscripts than upon other writings, even when there was so much more opportunity of preserving the correct text by means of printed copies than when all the copies had to be made by hand. He said: “It seems strange that the text of Shakespeare, which has been in existence less than two hundred and eight years, should be far more uncertain and corrupt than that of the New Testament, now over eighteen centuries old, during nearly fifteen of which it existed only in manuscript.... With perhaps a dozen or twenty exceptions, the text of every verse in the New Testament may be said to be so far settled by general consent of scholars that any dispute as to its readings must relate rather to the interpretation of the words than to any doubts respecting the words themselves. But in every one of Shakespeare’s thirty-seven plays there are probably a hundred readings still in dispute, a large portion of which materially affects the meaning of the passages in which they occur.” (Lea, GBW, 15)

2B. Through Persecution

The Bible has withstood vicious attacks by its enemies. Many have tried to burn it, ban it, and “outlaw it from the days of Roman emperors to present-day Communist-dominated countries” (Ramm, PCE’53, 232).

In A.D. 303, the Roman emperor Diocletian issued an edict to stop Christians from worshiping and to destroy their Scriptures. “An imperial letter was everywhere promulgated, ordering the razing of the churches to the ground and the destruction by fire of the Scriptures, and proclaiming that those who held high positions would lose all civil rights, while those in households, if they persisted in their profession of Christianity, would be deprived of their liberty” (Greenslade, CHB, 476).

The historic irony of this event is recorded by the fourth-century church historian Eusebius, who wrote that twenty-five years after Diocletian’s edict the Roman emperor Constantine issued an edict ordering that fifty copies of the Scriptures should be prepared at the government’s expense (Eusebius, EH, VII, 2, 259).

Many centuries later, Voltaire, the noted French infidel who died in 1778, said that in one hundred years from his time Christianity would be swept from existence and passed into history. But what has happened? Voltaire has passed into history, while the circulation of the Bible continues to increase in almost all parts of the world, carrying blessing wherever it goes. For example, the English Cathedral in Zanzibar is built on the site of the Old Slave Market, and the Communion Table stands on the very spot where the whipping-post once stood! The world abounds with such instances.... As one has truly said, "We might as well put our shoulder to the burning wheel of the sun, and try to stop it on its flaming course, as attempt to stop the circulation of the Bible." (Collett, AAB, 63)

Concerning Voltaire's prediction of the extinction of Christianity and the Bible in a hundred years, Geisler and Nix point out that "only fifty years after his death the Geneva Bible Society used his press and house to produce stacks of Bibles" (Geisler/Nix [1968] 123, 124).

The Bible's enemies come and go, but the Bible remains. Jesus was right when he said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away" (Mark 13:31 NKJV).

3B. Through Criticism

H. L. Hastings has forcefully illustrated the unique way in which the Bible has withstood attacks of infidels and skeptics:

Infidels for eighteen hundred years have been refuting and overthrowing this book, and yet it stands today as solid as a rock. Its circulation increases, and it is more loved and cherished and read today than ever before. Infidels, with all their assaults, make about as much impression on this book as a man with a tack hammer would on the Pyramids of Egypt. When the French monarch proposed the persecution of the Christians in his dominion, an old statesman and warrior said to him, 'Sire, the Church of God is an anvil that has worn out many hammers.' So the hammers of infidels have been pecking away at this book for ages, but the hammers are worn out, and the anvil still endures. If this book had not been the book of God, men would have destroyed it long ago. Emperors and popes, kings and priests, princes and rulers have all tried their hand at it; they die and the book still lives. (Lea, GBW, 17-18)

Bernard Ramm adds:

A thousand times over, the death knell of the Bible has been sounded, the funeral procession formed, the inscription cut on the tombstone, and committal read. But somehow the corpse never stays put.

No other book has been so chopped, knived, sifted, scrutinized, and vilified. What book on philosophy or religion or psychology or *belles lettres* of classical or modern times has been subject to such a mass attack as the Bible? with such venom and skepticism? with such thoroughness and erudition? upon every chapter, line and tenet?

The Bible is still loved by millions, read by millions, and studied by millions. (Ramm, PCE '53, 232-233)

Biblical scholars once deferred to "the assured results of higher criticism." But the results of the higher critics are no longer as assured as we once believed. Take, for example, the documentary hypothesis. One of the reasons for its development—apart from the different names used for God in Genesis—was that the Pentateuch could *not* have been written by Moses, as the "assured results of higher criticism" had proven that writing was not in existence at the time of Moses or, if in existence, was used sparingly. Therefore, it was concluded that it had to be of

later authorship. The minds of the critics went to work, devising the theory that four writers, designated as J, E, P, and D, had put the Pentateuch together. These critics formulated great structures of criticism, going so far as to attribute the components of one verse to three different authors! (See part two of this book for an in-depth analysis of the documentary hypothesis.)

Then some fellows discovered the “black stele” (Unger, UBD, 444). It had wedge-shaped characters on it and contained the detailed laws of Hammurabi. Was it post-Moses? No! It was pre-Mosaic. Not only that, but it preceded Moses’ writings by at least three centuries (Unger, UBD, 444). Amazingly, it antedated Moses, who is supposed to have been a primitive man lacking an alphabet.

What an irony of history! The documentary hypothesis is still taught, yet much of its original basis (“the assured results of higher criticism”) has been shown to be false.

The “assured results of higher criticism” concluded that there were no Hittites at the time of Abraham, as there were no records of their existence apart from the Old Testament. They must be myth. Wrong again. Archaeological research has now uncovered evidence revealing more than twelve hundred years of Hittite civilization.

Earl Radmacher, retired president of Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, quotes Nelson Glueck (pronounced Glek), former president of the Jewish Theological Seminary at the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, and one of the three greatest archaeologists: “I listened to him [Glueck] when he was at Temple Emmanuel in Dallas, and he got rather red in the face and said, ‘I’ve been accused of teaching the verbal, plenary inspiration of the Scripture. I want it to be understood that I have never taught this. All I have ever said is that in all of my archaeological investigation I have never found one artifact of antiquity that contradicts any statement of the Word of God’ ” (Radmacher, PC, 50).

Robert Dick Wilson, a man fluent in more than forty-five languages and dialects, concluded after a lifetime of study in the Old Testament: “I may add that the result of my forty-five years of study of the Bible has led me all the time to a firmer faith that in the Old Testament we have a true historical account of the history of the Israelite people” (Wilson, WB, 42).

The Bible is unique in its ability to stand up to its critics. There is no book in all of literature like it. A person looking for truth would certainly consider a book that bears these qualifications.

5A. UNIQUE IN ITS TEACHINGS

1B. Prophecy

Wilbur Smith, who compiled a personal library of twenty-five thousand volumes, concludes that

whatever one may think of the authority of and the message presented in the book we call the Bible, there is world-wide agreement that in more ways than one it is the most remarkable volume that has ever been produced in these some five thousand years of writing on the part of the human race.

It is the only volume ever produced by man, or a group of men, in which is to be found a large body of prophecies relating to individual nations, to Israel, to all the peoples of the earth, to certain cities, and to the coming of One who was to be the Messiah. The ancient world had many different devices for determining the future, known as divination, but not in the entire gamut of Greek and Latin literature, even though they use the words prophet and prophecy, can we find

any real specific prophecy of a great historic event to come in the distant future, nor any prophecy of a Savior to arise in the human race....

Mohammedanism cannot point to any prophecies of the coming of Mohammed uttered hundreds of years before his birth. Neither can the founders of any cult in this country rightly identify any ancient text specifically foretelling their appearance. (Smith, IB, 9–10)

Geisler and Nix concur. In their book *A General Introduction to the Bible*—an authoritative standard in its own right—they write:

According to Deuteronomy 18, a prophet was false if he made predictions that were never fulfilled. No unconditional prophecy of the Bible about events to the present day has gone unfulfilled. Hundreds of predictions, some of them given hundreds of years in advance, have been literally fulfilled. The time (Dan. 9), city (Mic. 5:2), and nature (Is. 7:14) of Christ's birth were foretold in the Old Testament, as were dozens of other things about His life, death, and resurrection (see Is. 53). Numerous other prophecies have been fulfilled, including the destruction of Edom (Obad. 1), the curse on Babylon (Is. 13), the destruction of Tyre (Ezek. 26) and Nineveh (Nah. 1–3), and the return of Israel to the Land (Is. 11:11). Other books claim divine inspiration, such as the Koran, the Book of Mormon, and parts of the [Hindu] Veda. But none of those books contains predictive prophecy. As a result, fulfilled prophecy is a strong indication of the unique, divine authority of the Bible. (Geisler/Nix, GIB '86, 196)

2B. History

First Samuel through 2 Chronicles presents approximately five centuries of the history of Israel. *The Cambridge Ancient History* (vol. 1, p. 222) states: “The Israelites certainly manifest a genius for historical construction, and the Old Testament embodies the oldest history writing extant.”

The distinguished archaeologist Professor Albright begins his classic essay “The Biblical Period” with these observations:

Hebrew national tradition excels all others in its clear picture of tribal and family origins. In Egypt and Babylonia, in Assyria and Phoenicia, in Greece and Rome, we look in vain for anything comparable. There is nothing like it in the tradition of the Germanic peoples. Neither India or China can produce anything similar, since their earliest historical memories are literary deposits of distorted dynastic tradition, with no trace of the herdsman or peasant behind the demigod or king with whom their records begin. Neither in the oldest Indic historical writings (the Puranas) nor in the earliest Greek historians is there a hint of the fact that both Indo-Aryans and Hellenes were once nomads who immigrated into their later abodes from the north. The Assyrians, to be sure, remembered vaguely that their earliest rulers, whose names they recalled without any details about their deed, were tent dwellers, but whence they came had long been forgotten. (Finkelstein, JTHCR, 3)

Concerning the reliability of the “Table of Nations” in Genesis 10, Albright concludes: “It stands absolutely alone in ancient literature without a remote parallel even among the Greeks.... ‘The Table of Nations’ remains an astonishingly accurate document” (Albright, RDBL, 70–72).

3B. Character

The Bible deals frankly with the sins of its characters, even when those sins reflect badly on God's chosen people, leaders, and the biblical writers themselves. For example:

- The sins of the patriarchs are mentioned (Gen. 12:11(13); 49:5(7)).
- The sins of the people are denounced (Deut. 9:24).

- King David’s adultery with Bathsheba and his subsequent attempted cover-up is revealed (2 Sam. 11(12)).
- The Gospel Evangelists paint their own faults and those of the apostles (Matt. 8:10(26; 26:31(56; Mark 6:52; 8:18; Luke 8:24, 25; 9:40(45; John 10:6; 16:32)).
- The disorder within the church is exposed (1 Cor. 1:11; 15:12; 2 Cor. 2:4).

The Bible as a book focuses on reality, not fantasy. It presents the good and bad, the right and wrong, the best and worst, the hope and despair, the joy and pain of life. And so it should, for its ultimate author is God, and “there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account” (Heb. 4:13 NKJV).

Lewis S. Chafer, founder and former president of Dallas Theological Seminary, has said, “The Bible is not such a book a man would write if he could, or could write if he would.”

6A. UNIQUE IN ITS INFLUENCE ON LITERATURE

Cleland B. McAfee writes in *The Greatest English Classic*: “If every Bible in any considerable city were destroyed, the Book could be restored in all its essential parts from the quotations on the shelves of the city public library. There are works, covering almost all the great literary writers, devoted especially to showing how much the Bible has influenced them” (McAfee, GEC, 134).

Gabriel Sivan writes, “No other document in the possession of mankind offers so much to the reader—ethical and religious instruction, superb poetry, a social program and legal code, an interpretation of history, and all the joys, sorrows, and hopes which well up in men and which Israel’s prophets and leaders expressed with matchless force and passion” (Sivan, BC, xiii).

Concerning the Hebrew Bible, he adds,

Since the dawn of civilization no book has inspired as much creative endeavor among writers as the “Old” Testament, the Hebrew Bible. In poetry, drama, and fiction its literary influence has been unrivaled. The German poet Heinrich Heine, writing in 1830, described its significance in lyrical terms: “Sunrise and sunset, promise and fulfillment, birth and death, the whole human drama, everything is in this book... It is the Book of Books, Biblia.” With varying insight, but unvarying consistency, writers in almost every land and culture have for more than a millennium found a matchless treasure house of themes and characters in the Bible. These they have reworked and reinterpreted in the portrayal of eternal motifs—as, for example, God and Man, the conflict of Good and Evil, love, jealousy, and man’s struggle for freedom, truth, and justice. (Sivan, BC, 218)

Susan Gallagher and Roger Lundin recognize, “The Bible is one of the most important documents in the history of civilization, not only because of its status as holy inspired Scripture, but also because of its pervasive influence on Western thought. As the predominant world view for at least fourteen centuries, Christianity and its great central text played a major role in the formation of Western culture. Consequently, many literary texts, even those in our post-Christian era, frequently draw on the Bible and the Christian tradition” (Gallagher/Lundin, LTEF, 120).

Elie Wiesel, renowned novelist and Nobel Peace Prize recipient, has observed, “An inspired work, the Bible is also a source of inspiration. Its impact has no equal, whether on the social and ethical plane or on that of literary creation. We forget too often that the Bible pertains equally to the artistic domain. Its characters are dramatic, their dramas timeless,

their triumphs and defeats overwhelming. Each cry touches us, each call penetrates us. Texts of another age, the biblical poems are themselves ageless. They call out to us collectively and individually, across and beyond the centuries” (In Epilogue of Liptzen, BTWL, 293).

Harold Fisch, professor emeritus at Bar-Ilan University, has noted: “The Bible has permeated the literature of the Western world to a degree that cannot easily be measured. More than any other single body of writing, ancient or modern, it has provided writers from the Middle Ages on with a store of symbols, ideas, and ways of perceiving reality. This influence can be traced not only in texts that deal directly with biblical characters or topics, but also in a vast number of poems, plays, and other writings that are not overtly biblical in theme but that testify to a biblical view of humankind and the world” (Fisch, HCBD, 136).

In his now classic *Anatomy of Criticism*, world-renowned literary critic Northrop Frye observed that “Western literature has been more influenced by the Bible than any other book” (Frye, AC, 14).

Twenty-five years later, Frye wrote: “I soon realized that a student of English literature who does not know the Bible does not understand a good deal of what is going on in what he reads: The most conscientious student will be continually misconstruing the implications, even the meaning” (Frye, GC, xii).

Bernard Ramm adds:

There are complexities of bibliographical studies that are unparalleled in any other science or department of human knowledge. From the Apostolic Fathers dating from A.D. 95 to the modern times is one great literary river inspired by the Bible—Bible dictionaries, Bible encyclopedias, Bible lexicons, Bible atlases, and Bible geographies. These may be taken as a starter. Then at random, we may mention the vast bibliographies around theology, religious education, hymnology, missions, the biblical languages, church history, religious biography, devotional works, commentaries, philosophy of religion, evidences, apologetics, and on and on. There seems to be an endless number....

No other book in all human history has in turn inspired the writing of so many books as the Bible. (Ramm, PCE '53, 239)

7A. UNIQUE IN ITS INFLUENCE ON CIVILIZATION

The Bible is also unique in its impact on civilization. Geisler and Nix succinctly state:

The influence of the Bible and its teaching in the Western world is clear for all who study history. And the influential role of the West in the course of world events is equally clear. Civilization has been influenced more by the Judeo-Christian Scriptures than by any other book or series of books in the world. Indeed, no great moral or religious work in the world exceeds the depth of morality in the principle of Christian love, and none has a more lofty spiritual concept than the biblical view of God. The Bible presents the highest ideals known to men, ideals that have molded civilization. (Geisler, GIB '86, 196(197))

Grady Davis, in *The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, writes, “The Bible brought its view of God, the universe, and mankind into all the leading Western languages and thus into the intellectual processes of Western man” (Davis, EB, 904). He adds, “Since the invention of printing (mid-15th century), the Bible has become more than the translation of an ancient Oriental literature. It has not seemed a foreign book, and it has been the most available, familiar,

and dependable source and arbiter of intellectual, moral, and spiritual ideals in the West” (Davis, EB, 905).

Gabriel Sivan observes, “The Bible has given strength to the freedom fighter and new heart to the persecuted, a blueprint to the social reformer and inspiration to the writer and artist” (Sivan, BC, 491).

French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau exclaimed: “Behold the works of our philosophers; with all their pompous diction, how mean and contemptible they are by comparison with the Scriptures! Is it possible that a book at once so simple and sublime should be merely the work of man?”

Kenneth L. Woodward points out in *Newsweek* magazine that after “two thousand years...the centuries themselves are measured from the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. At the end of this year, calendars in India and China, like those in Europe, America, and the Middle East, will register the dawn of the third millenium” (Woodward, “2000 Years of Jesus,” *Newsweek*, March 29, 1999, p. 52).

8A. A REASONABLE CONCLUSION

The evidence presented above (except for possibly that of fulfilled prophecy) does not prove that the Bible is the Word of God. But to me it clearly indicates that it is superior to any and all other books.

A professor once remarked to me, “If you are an intelligent person, you will read the one book that has drawn more attention than any other, if you are searching for the truth.” The Bible certainly qualifies as this one book.

As Theodore Roosevelt once observed, “A thorough knowledge of the Bible is worth more than a college education.”

How We Got the Bible

How Was the Bible Written?

Materials Used

Forms of Ancient Books

Types of Writing

Divisions

Who Decided What to Include in the Bible?

Introduction to the Canon

Tests for Inclusion in the Canon

The New Testament Canon

The Old Testament Canon

1A. HOW WAS THE BIBLE WRITTEN?

Many people have questions about the background of the Bible, its divisions, and the material used for its production. This section will familiarize you with its construction and give you a greater appreciation of how it was compiled.

1B. Materials Used

1C. Writing Material

1D. Papyrus.

The failure to recover many of the ancient manuscripts (a manuscript is a handwritten copy of the Scriptures) is primarily due to the perishable materials used for writing. "All...autographs," writes F. F. Bruce, "have been long lost since. It could not be otherwise, if they were written on papyrus, since...it is only in exceptional conditions that papyrus survives for any length of time" (Bruce, BP, 176).

Among the writing materials available in biblical times, the most common was papyrus, which was made from the papyrus plant. This reed grew in the shallow lakes and rivers of Egypt and Syria. Large shipments of papyrus were sent through the Syrian port of Byblos. It is surmised that the Greek word for books (*biblos*) comes from the name of this port. The English word *paper* comes from the Greek word for papyrus (*papyros*) (Ewert, ATMT, 19(20).

The Cambridge History of the Bible gives an account of how papyrus was prepared for writing: "The reeds were stripped and cut lengthwise into thin narrow slices before being beaten and pressed together into two layers set at right angles to each other. When dried the whitish surface was polished smooth with a stone or other implement. Pliny refers to several qualities of papyri, and varying thicknesses and surfaces are found before the New Kingdom period when sheets were often very thin and translucent" (Greenslade, CHB, 30).

The oldest papyrus fragment known dates back to 2400 B.C. B.C. (Greenslee, INTTC, 19). The earliest manuscripts were written on papyrus, and it was difficult for any to survive except in dry areas such as the sands of Egypt or in caves such as the Qumran caves, where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered.

Papyrus enjoyed popular use until about the third century A.D. (Greenlee, INTTC, 20).

2D. Parchment

Parchment is the name given to “prepared skins of sheep, goats, antelope and other animals.” These skins were shaved and scraped in order to produce a more durable writing material. F. F. Bruce adds that “the word ‘parchment’ comes from the name of the city of Pergamum in Asia Minor, for the production of this writing material was at one time specially associated with that place” (Bruce, BP, 11).

3D. Vellum

Vellum was the name given to calfskin. Vellum was often dyed purple. In fact, some of the manuscripts we have today are purple vellum. The writing on dyed vellum was usually gold or silver.

J. Harold Greenlee notes that the oldest leather scrolls date from around 1500 B.C. (Greenlee, INTTC, 21).

4D. Other Writing Materials

Ostraca: This unglazed pottery was popular with the common people. The technical name is “potsherd.” Ostraca have been found in abundance in Egypt and Palestine (Job 2:8).

Stones: Archaeologists have found common stones inscribed with an iron pen.

Clay Tablets: Engraved with a sharp instrument and then dried to create a permanent record (Jer. 17:13; Ezek. 4:1), these tablets provided the cheapest and one of the most durable kinds of writing material.

Wax Tablets: A metal stylus was used on a piece of flat wood covered with wax.

2C. Writing Instruments

Chisel: An iron instrument used to engrave stones.

Metal Stylus: “A three-sided instrument with a leveled head, the stylus was used to make incursions into clay and wax tablets” (Geisler, GIB, 228).

Pen: A pointed reed “was fashioned from rushes (*Juncus maritimus*) about 6–16 inches long, the end being cut to a flat chisel-shape to enable thick and thin strokes to be made with the broad or narrow sides. The reed-pen was in use from the early first millennium in Mesopotamia from which it may well have been adopted, while the idea of a quill pen seems to have come from the Greeks in the third century B.C.” (Jer. 8:8) (Greenlee, CHB, 31). The pen was used on vellum, parchment, and papyrus.

Ink: The ink in the ancient world was usually a compound of “charcoal, gum and water” (Bruce, BP, 13).

2B. Forms of Ancient Books

Rolls, or *scrolls*, were made by gluing sheets of papyrus together and then winding the resulting long strips around a stick. The size of the scroll was limited by the difficulty in using it. Writing was usually limited to one side of the scroll. A two-sided scroll is called an “opisthograph” (Rev. 5:1). Some rolls have been known to be 144 feet long. The average scroll, however, was only about twenty to thirty-five feet long.

Codex, or Book Form: In order to make reading easier and less bulky, the papyrus sheets were assembled in leaf form and written on both sides. Greenlee states that the spread of Christianity was the prime reason for the development of the codex-book form.

It is no wonder that Callimachus, a professional cataloguer of books from ancient Alexandria's library, said "a big book is a big nuisance" (Metzger, TNT, 5).

3B. Types of Writing

1C. Uncial Writing

According to New Testament scholar Bruce Metzger, "Literary works...were written in a more formal style of handwriting, called uncials. This 'book-hand' was characterized by more deliberate and carefully executed letters, each one separate from the others, somewhat like our capital letters" (Metzger, TNT, 9).

Geisler and Nix note that the "most important manuscripts of the New Testament are generally considered to be the great uncial codices that date from the fourth and later centuries. These appeared almost immediately following the conversion of Constantine and the authorization to make multiple copies of the Bible at the Council of Nicea (325)" (Geisler, GIB, 391).

Probably the two oldest and most significant uncial manuscripts are Codex Vaticanus (about A.D. 325(350) and Codex Sinaiticus (about A.D. 340).

2C. Minuscule Writing

Minuscule writing was "a script of smaller letters in a running hand [connected]...created for the production of books" around the beginning of the ninth century A.D. (Metzger, TNT, 9).

3C. Spaces and Vowels

The Greek manuscripts were written without any breaks between words, while the Hebrew text was written without vowels until these were added by the Massoretes between the fifth and tenth centuries A.D.

Both practices seem odd and confusing to most modern readers. But to the ancients, for whom Greek or Hebrew was their native tongue, these practices were normal and clearly understood. The Jews did not need vowels written out. As they learned their language, they became familiar with how to pronounce and interpret it.

Likewise, Greek-speaking peoples had no trouble reading their language without breaks between words. As Metzger explains: "In that language it is the rule, with very few exceptions, that native Greek words can end only in a vowel (or a diphthong) or in one of three consonants, ν , ρ , and ς [nu, rho, and sigma]. Furthermore, it should not be supposed that *scriptio continua* presented exceptional difficulties in reading, for apparently it was customary in antiquity to read aloud, even when one was alone. Thus despite the absence of spaces between words, by pronouncing to oneself what was read, syllable-by-syllable, one soon became used to reading *scriptio continua*" (Metzger, TNT, 13).

4B. Divisions

1C. Books

See material below on "The Canon."

2C. Chapters

1D. Old Testament

The first divisions were made prior to the Babylonian captivity, which began in 586 B.C. The Pentateuch was divided into 154 groupings, called *sedarim*, which “were designed to provide lessons sufficient to cover a three-year cycle of reading” (Geisler, GIB, 339).

During the Babylonian captivity, but prior to 536 B.C., the Pentateuch was “divided into fifty-four sections called *parashiyyoth*.... These were later subdivided into 669 sections for reference purposes. These sections were utilized for a single-year [reading] cycle” (Geisler, GIB, 339).

Around 165 B.C., the Old Testament books called the Prophets were sectioned.

Finally, “after the Protestant Reformation, the Hebrew Bible for the most part followed the same chapter divisions as the Protestant Old Testament. These divisions were first placed in the margins in 1330” (Geisler, GIB, 339).

2D. New Testament

The Greeks first made paragraph divisions before the Council of Nicea (A.D. 325), perhaps as early as A.D. 250.

The oldest system of chapter division originated about A.D. 350 and appears in the margins of Codex Vaticanus. However, these sections are much smaller than our modern chapter divisions. For example, in our Bible the Gospel of Matthew has twenty-eight chapters, but in Codex Vaticanus, Matthew is divided into 170 sections.

Geisler and Nix write that “it was not until the thirteenth century that those sections were changed, and then only gradually. Stephen Langton, a professor at the University of Paris and afterward Archbishop of Canterbury, divided the Bible into the modern chapter divisions (about 1227). That was prior to the introduction of movable type in printing. Since the Wycliffe Bible (1382) followed that pattern, those basic divisions have been the virtual base upon which the Bible has been printed to this very day” (Geisler, GIB, 340).

3C. Verses

1D. Old Testament

In the Old Testament, the first verse indicators “were merely spaces between words, as the words were run together continuously through a given book.... After the Babylonian captivity, for the purpose of public reading and interpretation, space stops were employed, and still later additional markings were added. These “verse” markings were not regulated, and differed from place to place. It was not until about A.D. 900 that the markings were standardized” (Geisler, GIB, 339).

2D. New Testament

Verse markings similar to what we have in our modern Bibles did not appear in the New Testament until the middle of the sixteenth century. They actually followed the development of chapters, “apparently in an effort to further facilitate cross-references and make public reading easier. The markings first occur in the fourth edition of the Greek New Testament published by Robert Stephanus, a Parisian printer, in 1551. These verses were introduced into the English New Testament by William Whittingham of Oxford in 1557. In 1555, Stephanus introduced his verse divisions into a Latin Vulgate edition, from which they have continued to the present day” (Geisler, GIB, 341).

2A. Who Decided What to Include in the Bible?

The question concerning how it was decided which books would become part of the Bible is the question of *canonicity*. A discerning person would want to know why some books were included in the *canon* while others were excluded.

1B. Meaning of the Word *Canon*

The word *canon* comes from the root word *reed* (English word *cane*, Hebrew form *ganeh*, and Greek form *kanon*). The reed was used as a measuring rod, and the word came to mean “standard.”

The third-century church father Origen used the word “canon to denote what we call the ‘rule of faith,’ the standard by which we are to measure and evaluate.” Later, the term meant a “list” or “index” (Bruce, BP, 95). As applied to Scripture, *canon* means “an officially accepted list of books” (Earle, HWGOB, 31).

It is important to note that the church did not create the canon; it did not determine which books would be called Scripture, the inspired Word of God. Instead, the church recognized, or discovered, which books had been inspired from their inception. Stated another way, “a book is not the Word of God because it is accepted by the people of God. Rather, it was accepted by the people of God because it is the Word of God. That is, God gives the book its divine authority, not the people of God. They merely recognize the divine authority which God gives to it” (Geisler, GIB, 210). The chart below by Dr. Norman Geisler is helpful in illustrating this important principle (Geisler, GIB, 221).

The Incorrect View

The Correct View

The Church is Determiner of Canon

The Church is the Discoverer of Canon

The Church is Mother of Canon

The Church is Child of Canon

The Church is Magistrate of Canon

The Church is Minister of Canon

The Church is Regulator of Canon

The Church is Recognizer of Canon

The Church is Judge of Canon

The Church is Witness of Canon

The Church is Master of Canon

The Church is Servant of Canon

2B. Tests for Inclusion in the Canon

From the writings of biblical and church history, we can discern at least five principles that guided the recognition and collection of the divinely inspired books. Geisler and Nix present the principles as follows (Geisler, GIB, 223(231):

1. Was the book written by a prophet of God? “If it was written by a spokesman for God, then it was the Word of God.”
2. Was the writer confirmed by acts of God? Frequently miracles separated the true prophets from the false ones. “Moses was given miraculous powers to prove his call

of God (Ex. 4:1–9). Elijah triumphed over the false prophets of Baal by a supernatural act (1 Kin. 18). Jesus was ‘attested to...by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him’ (Acts 2:22)... [A] miracle is an act of God to confirm the Word of God given through a prophet of God to the people of God. It is the sign to substantiate his sermon; the miracle to confirm his message.”

3. Did the message tell the truth about God? “God cannot contradict Himself (2 Cor. 1:17, 18), nor can He utter what is false (Heb. 6:18). Hence, no book with false claims can be the Word of God.” For reasons such as these, the church fathers maintained the policy “If in doubt, throw it out.” This enhanced the “validity of their discernment of the canonical books.”
4. Does it come with the power of God? “The Fathers believed the Word of God is ‘living and active’ (Heb. 4:12), and consequently ought to have a transforming force for edification (2 Tim. 3:17) and evangelization (1 Pet. 1:23). If the message of a book did not affect its stated goal, if it did not have the power to change a life, then God was apparently not behind its message” (Geisler, GIB, 228). The presence of God’s transforming power was a strong indication that a given book had His stamp of approval.
5. Was it accepted by the people of God? “Paul said of the Thessalonians, ‘We also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God’s message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God’ (1 Thess. 2:13). For whatever subsequent debate there may have been about a book’s place in the canon, the people in the best position to know its prophetic credentials were those who knew the prophet who wrote it. Hence, despite all later debate about the canonicity of some books, the definitive evidence is that which attests to its original acceptance by the contemporary believers” (Geisler, GIB, 229). When a book was received, collected, read, and used by the people of God as the Word of God, it was regarded as canonical. This practice is often seen in the Bible itself. One instance is when the apostle Peter acknowledges Paul’s writings as Scripture on a par with Old Testament Scripture (2 Pet. 3:16).

3B. The Christian Canon (New Testament)

1C. Tests for New Testament Canonicity

The basic factor for recognizing a book’s canonicity for the New Testament was divine inspiration, and the chief test for this was apostolicity. “In New Testament terminology,” write Geisler and Nix, “the church was ‘built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets’ (Eph. 2:20) whom Christ had promised to guide into ‘all the truth’ (John 16:13) by the Holy Spirit. The church at Jerusalem was said to have continued in the ‘apostles’ teaching’ (Acts 2:42). The term *apostolic* as used for the test of canonicity does not necessarily mean ‘apostolic authorship,’ or ‘that which was prepared under the direction of the apostles’ ” (Geisler, GIB, 283).

They go on to state, “It seems much better to agree with Louis Gaussen, B. B. Warfield, Charles Hodge, J. N. D. Kelly, and most Protestants that it is apostolic authority, or apostolic approval, that was the primary test for canonicity, and not merely apostolic authorship” (Geisler, GIB, 283).

N. B. Stonehouse notes that the apostolic authority “which speaks forth in the New Testament is never detached from the authority of the Lord. In the Epistles there is consistent recognition that in the church there is only one absolute authority, the authority of the Lord

himself. Wherever the apostles speak with authority, they do so as exercising the Lord's authority. Thus, for example, where Paul defends his authority as an apostle, he bases his claim solely and directly upon his commission by the Lord (Gal. 1 and 2); where he assumes the right to regulate the life of the church, he claims for his word the Lord's authority, even when no direct word of the Lord has been handed down (I Cor. 14:37; cf. I Cor. 7:10" (Stonehouse, ANT, 117(118).

John Murray observes, "The only one who speaks in the New Testament with an authority that is underived and self-authenticating is the Lord" (Murray, AS, 18).

2C. The New Testament Canonical Books

1D. Reasons for Their Collection

1E. They Were Prophetic

"The initial reason for collecting and preserving the inspired books was that they were prophetic. That is, since they were written by an apostle or prophet of God, they must be valuable, and if valuable, they should be preserved. This reasoning is apparent in apostolic times, by the collection and circulation of Paul's epistles (cf. 2 Peter 3:15, 16; Col. 4:16)" (Geisler, GIB, 277).

2E. The Needs of the Early Church

The churches needed to know which books should be read, revered, and applied to their varied and often precarious situations in a generally hostile social and religious environment. They had many problems to address, and they needed assurance regarding which books would serve as their source of authority.

3E. The Rise of Heretics

As early as A.D. 140, the heretic Marcion developed his own incomplete canon and began to propagate it. The church needed to counter his influence by collecting all the books of New Testament Scripture.

4E. The Circulation of Spurious Writings

Many Eastern churches used books that were definitely counterfeit. This called for a decision concerning the canon.

5E. Missions

"Christianity had spread rapidly to other countries, and there was the need to translate the Bible into those other languages.... As early as the first half of the second century the Bible was translated into Syriac and Old Latin. But because the missionaries could not translate a Bible that did not exist, attention was necessarily drawn to the question of which books really belonged to the authoritative Christian canon" (Geisler, GIB, 278).

6E. Persecution

The edict of Diocletian (A.D. 303) called for the destruction of the sacred books of the Christians. Who would die for a book that was perhaps religious but not sacred? Christians needed to know which books were truly sacred.

2D. The Canon Recognized

1E. Athanasius of Alexandria

Athanasius (A.D. 367) gave us our earliest list of New Testament books that is exactly like our present New Testament. He provided this list in a festal letter to the churches. As he put it: “Again it is not tedious to speak of the books of the New Testament. These are, the four gospels, according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Afterwards, the Acts of the Apostles and Epistles (called Catholic), seven, viz. of James, one; of Peter, two; of John, three; after these, one of Jude. In addition, there are fourteen Epistles of Paul, written in this order. The first, to the Romans; then two to the Corinthians; after these, to the Galatians; next, to the Ephesians; then to the Philippians; then to the Colossians; after these, two to the Thessalonians, and that to the Hebrews; and again, two to Timothy; one to Titus; and lastly, that to Philemon. And besides, the Revelation of John” (Athanasius, L, 552).

2E. Jerome and Augustine

Shortly after Athanasius circulated his list, Jerome and Augustine followed suit, defining the New Testament canon of twenty-seven books (Bruce, BP, 112).

3E. Polycarp and His Contemporaries

Polycarp (A.D. 115), Clement of Alexandria (about A.D. 200), and other early church fathers refer to the Old and New Testament books with the phrase “as it is said in these scriptures.”

4E. Justin Martyr

Justin Martyr (A.D. 100–165), referring to the Eucharist, writes in his First Apology 1.67: “And on the day called Sunday there is a gathering together to one place of all those who live in cities or in the country, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits. Then when the reader has ceased the president presents admonition and invitation to the imitation of these good things.”

He adds in his *Dialogue* with Trypho (pp. 49, 103, 105, 107) the formula “It is written” when he quotes from the Gospels. Both he and Trypho must have known to what “It is written” referred and known that this introduction designated that the Scripture is inspired.

5E. Irenaeus

Concerning the significance of Irenaeus (A.D. 180), F. F. Bruce writes

The importance of evidence lies in his [Irenaeus’s] link with the apostolic age and in his ecumenical associations. Brought up in Asia Minor at the feet of Polycarp, the disciple of John, he became Bishop of Lyons in Gaul, A.D. 180. His writings attest the canonical recognition of the fourfold Gospel and Acts, of Rom., 1 and 2 Cor., Gal., Eph., Phil., Col., 1 and 2 Thess., 1 and 2 Tim., and Titus, of 1 Peter and 1 John and of the Revelation. In his treatise, *Against Heresies*, III, ii, 8, it is evident that by A.D. 180 the idea of the fourfold Gospel had become so axiomatic throughout Christendom that it could be referred to as an established fact as obvious and inevitable and natural as the four cardinal points of the compass (as we call them) or the four winds. (Bruce, BP, 109)

6E. Ignatius

Ignatius (A.D. 50(115) wrote, “I do not wish to command you as Peter and Paul; they were apostles” (Trall, 3, 3).

7E. Church Councils

F. F. Bruce states that “when at last a Church Council—The Synod of Hippo in A.D. 393—listed the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, it did not confer upon them any authority which they did not already possess, but simply recorded their previously established canonicity. (The ruling of the Synod of Hippo was re-promulgated four years later by the Third Synod of Carthage)” (Bruce, BP, 113).

Since this time there has been no serious questioning of the twenty-seven accepted books of the New Testament by Roman Catholics, Protestants, or the Eastern Orthodox Church.

3D. The Canon Classified

The canonical New Testament books were classified as reflected in the chart below:

3C. The New Testament Apocrypha

The word *apocrypha* comes from the Greek word *apokruphos*, meaning “hidden” or “concealed.”

The Gospels	The History	The Epistles (Pauline)	The Epistles (General)	The Prophecy
		Romans,		
		1 Corinthians,		
		2 Corinthians,		
		Galatians,		
		Ephesians,	James,	
Matthew,		Philippians,	1 Peter,	
Mark,		Colossians,	2 Peter,	
Luke,	Acts	1 Thessalonians,	1 John,	Revelation
John		2 Thessalonians,	2 John,	
		1 Timothy,	3 John,	
		2 Timothy,	Jude	
		Hebrews,		
		Titus,		
		Philemon		

1D. A List of Apocryphal Books

- *Epistle of Pseudo-Barnabas* (A.D. 70–79)
- *Epistle to the Corinthians* (about A.D. 96)
- *Ancient Homily*, or the so-called *Second Epistle of Clement* (about A.D. 120–140)
- *Shepherd of Hermas* (about A.D. 115–140)
- *Didache, Teaching of the Twelve* (about A.D. 100–120)
- *Apocalypse of Peter* (about A.D. 150)
- *The Acts of Paul and Thecla* (A.D. 170)
- *Epistle to the Laodiceans* (fourth century?)
- *The Gospel According to the Hebrews* (A.D. 65–100)
- *Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians* (about A.D. 108)
- *The Seven Epistles of Ignatius* (about A.D. 100)

This is but a partial list of spurious and rejected writings (Geisler, BP, 297–316).

2D. Why They Are Rejected

Unger's Bible Dictionary reveals, “The apocryphal books of the N. T., unlike those of the Old, have never claimed the faith of the Christian Church, excepting in a few and isolated instances. There are over 100 of them, and it is doubtful whether one of them appeared before the 2nd century of our era. Most of them portray a much later date. They are valuable as an indication of the growth of thought and the rise of heresy in the age just subsequent to that of the apostles. None of them ever received the sanction of any ecclesiastical council” (Unger, UBD1966, 71).

Geisler and Nix sum up the case against the canonical status of these books: “(1) None of them enjoyed any more than a temporary or local recognition. (2) Most of them never did have anything more than a semi-canonical status, being appended to various manuscripts or mentioned in tables of contents. (3) No major canon or church council included them as inspired books of the New Testament. (4) The limited acceptance enjoyed by most of these books is attributable to the fact that they attached themselves to references in canonical books (e.g., Laodiceans to Col. 4:16), because of their alleged apostolic authorship (e.g., Acts of Paul). Once these issues were clarified, there remained little doubt that these books were not canonical” (Geisler, GIB, 317).

4B. The Old Testament Canon

1C. The Jamnia Theory

Many scholars have theorized that a council of rabbis that convened at Jamnia, near Jaffa, in A.D. 90 finally agreed upon which books would be included in the Hebrew canon and which ones would not. The problem with this theory is that the Jamnia gathering reached neither of these conclusions. The rabbis did not fix the canon but rather “raised questions about the presence of certain books in the canon. Books that the council refused to admit to the canon had not been there in the first place. The primary concern of the council was the right of certain books to remain in the canon, not the acceptance of new books” (Ewert, ATMT, 71). The rabbis discussed questions surrounding Esther, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs, and Ezekiel. “It should be underscored, however, that while questions about these books were raised, there was no thought of removing them from the canon. The discussions at Jamnia dealt not so much ‘with acceptance of certain writings into the Canon, but rather with their right to remain there’ ” (Ewert, ATMT, 72).

H. H. Rowley writes: “It is, indeed, doubtful how far it is correct to speak of the Council of Jamnia. We know of discussions that took place there amongst the Rabbis, but we know of no formal or binding decisions that were made, and it is probable that the discussions were informal, though none the less helping to crystallize and to fix more firmly the Jewish tradition” (Rowley, GOT, 170).

The fact is that “no human authority and no council of rabbis ever made an [Old Testament] book authoritative,” explains Bible scholar David Ewert. “These books were inspired by God and had the stamp of authority on them from the beginning. Through long usage in the Jewish community their authority was recognized, and in due time they were added to the collection of canonical books” (Ewert, ATMT, 72).

2C. The Recognized Canon

The evidence clearly supports the theory that the Hebrew canon was established well before the late first century A.D., more than likely as early as the fourth century B.C. and certainly no later than 150 B.C. A major reason for this conclusion comes from the Jews themselves, who from the fourth century B.C. onward were convinced that “the voice of God had ceased to speak directly” (Ewert, ATMT, 69). In other words, the prophetic voices had been stilled. No word from God meant no *new* Word of God. Without prophets, there can be no scriptural revelation.

Concerning the intertestamental period (approximately four hundred years between the close of the Old Testament and the events of the New Testament), Ewert observes: “In 1 Maccabees 14:41 we read of Simon who is made leader and priest ‘until a trustworthy prophet should rise,’ and earlier he speaks of the sorrow in Israel such ‘as there has not been since the prophets ceased to appear to them.’ ‘The prophets have fallen asleep,’ complains the writer of 2 Baruch (85:3). Books that were written after the prophetic period had closed were thought of as lying outside the realm of Holy Scripture” (Ewert, ATMT, 69–70).

The last books written and recognized as canonical were Malachi (written around 450 to 430 B.C.) and Chronicles (written no later than 400 B.C.) (Walvoord, BKCOT, 589, 1573). These books appear with the rest of the Hebrew canonical books in the Greek translation of the Hebrew canon called the Septuagint (LXX), which was composed around 250 to 150 B.C. (Geisler, GIB, 24; see also Ewert, ATMT, 104–108, and Würthwein, TOT, 49–53).

F. F. Bruce affirms that, “The books of the Hebrew Bible are traditionally twenty-four in number, arranged in three divisions” (Bruce, CS, 29). The three divisions are the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. The table below presents the breakdown of the Hebrew canon found in many books such as the modern editions of the Jewish Old Testament. (Check *The Holy Scriptures*, according to the Massoretic Text, and *Biblia Hebraica*, Rudolph Kittel, Paul Kahle [eds.])

Although the Christian church has the same Old Testament canon, the number of books differs because we divide Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, and Ezra-Nehemiah into two books each, and we make separate books out of the Minor Prophets rather than combining them into one, as the Jews do under the heading “The Twelve.” The church has also altered the order of books, adopting a topical arrangement instead of an official order (Geisler, GIB, 23).

The Law (Torah)

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers,
Deuteronomy

Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings (Former

Prophets)

The Prophets (Nebhim)

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, The Twelve (Latter Prophets)

Psalms, Proverbs, Job (Poetical Books)

The Writings (Kethubhim or Hagiographa [GK])

Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Esther, Ecclesiastes (Five Rolls [Megilloth])

Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles (Historical Books)

3C. Christ's Witness to the Old Testament Canon

1D. Luke 24:44. In the upper room, Jesus told the disciples “that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and the Prophets, and the Psalms concerning Me” (NASB). With these words “He indicated the three sections into which the Hebrew Bible was divided—the Law, the Prophets, and the “Writings” (here called “the Psalms,” probably because the Book of Psalms is the first and longest book in this third section)” (Bruce, BP, 96).

2D. John 10:31–36; Luke 24:44: Jesus disagreed with the oral traditions of the Pharisees (Mark 7; Matthew 15), *not* with their concept of the Hebrew canon (Bruce, BP, 104). “There is no evidence whatever of any dispute between Him and the Jews as to the canonicity of any Old Testament book” (Young, AOT, 62).

3D. Luke 11:51 (also Matthew 23:35): “From the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah.” With these words Jesus confirms His witness to the extent of the Old Testament canon. Abel was the first martyr recorded in Scripture (Gen. 4:8), and Zechariah was the last martyr to be named in the Hebrew Old Testament order, having been stoned while prophesying to the people “in the court of the house of the Lord” (2 Chr. 24:21). Genesis was the first book in the Hebrew canon, and Chronicles the last. So Jesus was basically saying “from Genesis to Chronicles,” or according to our order, “from Genesis to Malachi,” thereby confirming the divine authority and inspiration of the entire Hebrew canon (Bruce, BP, 96).

4C. The Testimonies of Extra-biblical Writers

1D. Prologue to Ecclesiasticus

Possibly the earliest reference to a threefold division of the Old Testament is in the prologue of the book Ecclesiasticus (about 130 B.C.). The prologue, written by the author's grandson, says, "The Law, and the Prophets and the other books of the fathers," indicating three divisions of the Hebrew canon (Young, AOT, 71).

2D. Philo

"Just after the time of Christ (about A.D. 40), Philo witnessed to a threefold classification, making reference to the Law, the Prophets (or Prophecies), as well as 'hymns and the others which foster and perfect knowledge and piety' " (Geisler, GIB, 246).

3D. Josephus

The Jewish historian Josephus (end of the first century A.D.) also spoke about the threefold division. About the entire Hebrew Scriptures, he wrote:

And how firmly we have given credit to those books of our own nation is evident by what we do; for during so many ages as have already passed, no one has been so bold as either to add anything to them or take anything from them, or to make any change in them; but it becomes natural to all Jews, immediately and from their very birth, to esteem those books to contain divine doctrines, and to persist in them, and, if occasion be, willingly to die for them. For it is no new thing for our captives, many of them in number, and frequently in time, to be seen to endure racks and deaths of all kinds upon the theatres, that they may not be obliged to say one word against our laws, and the records that contain them. (Josephus, FJAA, 609)

4D. The Talmud

The Talmud is an ancient "collection of rabbinical laws, law decisions and comments on the laws of Moses" that preserves the oral tradition of the Jewish people (White, T, 589). One compilation of the Talmud was made in Jerusalem circa A.D. 350–425. Another more expanded compilation of the Talmud was made in Babylonia circa A.D. 500. Each compilation is known by the name of its place of compilation—for example, the Jerusalem Talmud and the Babylonian Talmud.

1E. *Tosefta Yadaim 3:5* says, "The Gospel and the books of the heretics do not make the hands unclean; the books of Ben Sira and whatever books have been written since his time are not canonical" (Pfeiffer, IOT, 63). The reference to a book making the hands unclean meant that the book was divinely inspired and therefore holy. Handlers of the Scriptures were required to wash their hands after touching their holy pages. "By declaring that the Scriptures made the hands unclean, the rabbis protected them from careless and irreverent treatment, since it is obvious that no one would be so apt to handle them heedlessly if he were every time obliged to wash his hands afterward" (Beckwith, OTC, 280). A book that did not do this was not from God. This text is claiming that only the books assembled in the Hebrew canon can lay claim to being God's Word.

2E. *Seder Olam Rabba 30* states, "Until then [the coming of Alexander the Great and the end of the empire of the Persians] the prophets prophesied through the Holy Spirit. From then on, 'incline thine ear and hear the words of the wise' " (Beckwith, OTC, 370).

3E. *Tos. Sotah 13:2: baraita in Bab. Yoma 9b, Bab. Sotah 48b, and Bab. Sanhedrin 11a*: “With the death of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi the latter prophets, the Holy Spirit ceased out of Israel” (Beckwith, OTC, 370).

5D. Melito, Bishop of Sardis

Melito drew up the first known list of Old Testament books from within Christian circles (about A.D. 170). Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History IV. 26*) preserves his comments: “Melito said he had obtained the reliable list while traveling in Syria. Melito’s comments were in a letter to Anesimius, his friend: ‘Their names are these... five books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Leviticus, Deuteronomy. Jesus Naue (also known as Joshua), Judges, Ruth. Four books of Kingdoms, two of Chronicles, the Psalms of David, Solomon’s Proverbs (also called Wisdom), Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Job. Of the Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, the Twelve in a single book, Daniel, Ezekiel, Ezra.’ ”

F. F. Bruce comments: “It is likely that Melito included Lamentations with Jeremiah, and Nehemiah with Ezra (though it is curious to find Ezra counted among the prophets). In that case, his list contains all the books of the Hebrew canon (arranged according to the Septuagint order), with the exception of Esther. Esther may not have been included in the list he received from his informants in Syria” (Bruce, BP, 100).

6D. Mishnah

The threefold division of the present Jewish text (with eleven books in the Writings) is from the Mishnah (Baba Bathra tractate, fifth century A.D.) (Geisler, GIB, 24).

5C. The New Testament Witness to the Old Testament as Sacred Scripture

- Matthew 21:42; 22:29; 26:54, 56
- Luke 24
- John 5:39; 10:35
- Acts 17:2, 11; 18:28
- Romans 1:2; 4:3; 9:17; 10:11; 11:2; 15:4; 16:26
- 1 Corinthians 15:3, 4
- Galatians 3:8; 3:22; 4:30
- 1 Timothy 5:18
- 2 Timothy 3:16
- 2 Peter 1:20, 21; 3:16

“As the *Scripture* said” (John 7:38) is all the introduction a text needed to indicate the general understanding that a saying, story, or book was the very Word of God from the prophets of God.

6C. Hebrew Apocryphal Literature

As noted earlier, the term *apocrypha* comes from the Greek word *apokruphos*, meaning “hidden or concealed.”

In the fourth century A.D., Jerome was the first to name this group of literature *Apocrypha*. The Apocrypha consists of the books added to the Old Testament by the Roman Catholic Church. Protestants reject these additions to canonical Scripture.

1D. Why Not Canonical?

Unger's Bible Dictionary, while granting that the Old Testament apocryphal books do have some value, cites four reasons for excluding them from the Hebrew canon:

1. They abound in historical and geographical inaccuracies and anachronisms.
2. They teach doctrines that are false and foster practices that are at variance with inspired Scripture.
3. They resort to literary types and display an artificiality of subject matter and styling out of keeping with inspired Scripture.
4. They lack the distinctive elements that give genuine Scripture its divine character, such as prophetic power and poetic and religious feeling (Unger, NUBD, 85).

2D. A Summary of the Apocryphal Books

In his excellent study guide *How We Got Our Bible*, Ralph Earle provides brief details of each apocryphal book. Because of its quality and accuracy, I present his outline here in order to give the reader a firsthand feel of the value, yet the noncanonical nature, of these books:

First Esdras (about 150 B.C.) tells of the restoration of the Jews to Palestine after the Babylonian exile. It draws considerably from Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah, but the author has added much legendary material....

Second Esdras (A.D. 100) is an apocalyptic work, containing seven visions. Martin Luther was so confused by these visions that he is said to have thrown the book into the Elbe River.

Tobit (early second century B.C.) is a short novel. Strongly Pharisaic in tone, it emphasizes the Law, clean foods, ceremonial washings, charity, fasting, and prayer. It is clearly unscriptural in its statement that almsgiving atones for sin.

Judith (about the middle of second century B.C.) is also fictitious and Pharisaic....

Additions to Esther (about 100 B.C.). Esther stands alone among the books of the Old Testament in that there is no mention of God. We are told that Esther and Mordecai fasted, but not specifically that they prayed. To compensate for this lack, the additions attribute long prayers to these two, together with a couple of letters supposedly written by Artaxerxes.

The Wisdom of Solomon (about A.D. 40) was written to keep the Jews from falling into skepticism, materialism, and idolatry....

Ecclesiasticus, or *Wisdom of Sirach* (about 180 B.C.), shows a high level of religious wisdom, somewhat like the canonical Book of Proverbs....

In his sermons, John Wesley quotes several times from the Book of Ecclesiasticus. It is still widely used in Anglican circles.

Baruch (about A.D. 100) presents itself as being written by Baruch, the scribe of Jeremiah, in 582 B.C. Actually, it is probably trying to interpret the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The book urges the Jews not to revolt again, but to submit to the emperor. In spite of this the Bar-Cochba revolution against Roman rule took place soon after, in A.D. 132–35....

Our Book of Daniel contains twelve chapters. In the first century before Christ a thirteenth chapter was added, the story of *Susanna*. She was the beautiful wife of a leading Jew in Babylon, to whose house the Jewish elders and judges frequently came. Two of these became enamored of her and tried to seduce her. When she cried out, the two elders said they had found her in the arms of a young man. She was brought to trial. Since there were two witnesses who agreed in their testimony, she was convicted and sentenced to death.

But a young man named Daniel interrupted the proceedings and began to cross-examine the witnesses. He asked each one separately under which tree in the garden they had found Susanna with a lover. When they gave different answers they were put to death and Susanna was saved.

Bel and the Dragon was added at about the same time and was called chapter 14 of Daniel. Its main purpose was to show the folly of idolatry. It really contains two stories.

In the first, King Cyrus asked Daniel why he did not worship Bel, since that deity showed his greatness by daily consuming many sheep, together with much flour and oil. So Daniel scattered ashes on the floor of the Temple where the food had been placed that evening. In the morning the king took Daniel in to show him that Bel had eaten all the food during the night. But Daniel showed the king in the ashes on the floor the footprints of the priests and their families who had entered secretly under the table. The priests were slain and the temple destroyed.

The story of the dragon is just as obviously legendary in character. Along with Tobit, Judith, and Susanna, these stories may be classified as purely Jewish fiction. They have little if any religious value.

The Song of the Three Hebrew Children follows Daniel 3:23 in the Septuagint and in the Vulgate. Borrowing heavily from Psalm 148, it is antiphonal, like Psalm 136, repeating thirty-two times the refrain, "Sing praise to him and greatly exalt him forever."

The Prayer of Manasseh was composed in Maccabean times (second century B.C.) as the supposed prayer of Manasseh, the wicked king of Judah. It was clearly suggested by the statement in 2 Chronicles 33:19—"His prayer also, and how God was entreated of him... behold, they are written among the sayings of the seers." Since this prayer is not found in the Bible, some scribe had to make up for the deficiency!

First Maccabees (first century B.C.) is perhaps the most valuable book in the Apocrypha. It describes the exploits of the three Maccabean brothers—Judas, Jonathan, and Simon. Along with Josephus, it is our most important source for the history of this crucial and exciting period in Jewish history.

Second Maccabees (same time) is not a sequel to 1 Maccabees, but is a parallel account, treating only the victories of Judas Maccabeus. It is generally thought to be more legendary than 1 Maccabees. (Earle, HWGOB, 37–41)

3D. Historical Testimony of Their Exclusion

Geisler and Nix give ten testimonies of antiquity that argue against recognition of the Apocrypha:

1. Philo, Alexandrian Jewish philosopher (20 B.C.– A.D. 40), quoted the Old Testament prolifically, and even recognized the threefold classification, but he never quoted from the Apocrypha as inspired.
2. Josephus (A.D. 30–100), Jewish historian, explicitly excludes the Apocrypha, numbering the books of the Old Testament as twenty-two. Neither does he quote the apocryphal books as Scripture.
3. Jesus and the New Testament writers never once quote the Apocrypha, although there are hundreds of quotes and references to almost all of the canonical books of the Old Testament.
4. The Jewish scholars of Jamnia (A.D. 90) did not recognize the Apocrypha.
5. No canon or council of the Christian church recognized the Apocrypha as inspired for nearly four centuries.
6. Many of the great Fathers of the early church spoke out against the Apocrypha—for example, Origen, Cyril of Jerusalem, and Athanasius.
7. Jerome (A.D. 340–420), the great scholar and translator of the Latin Vulgate, rejected the Apocrypha as part of the canon. Jerome said that the church reads them "for example of life and instruction of manners," but does not "apply them to establish any doctrine." He disputed with Augustine across the Mediterranean on this point. At first Jerome refused even to translate the apocryphal books into Latin, but later he made a hurried translation of a few of them. After his death and "over his dead body" the apocryphal books were brought into his Latin Vulgate directly from the Old Latin Version.
8. Many Roman Catholic scholars through the Reformation period rejected the Apocrypha.
9. Luther and the Reformers rejected the canonicity of the Apocrypha.

10. Not until A.D. 1546, in a polemical action at the counter-Reformation Council of Trent (1545(63), did the apocryphal books receive full canonical status by the Roman Catholic Church. (Geisler, GIB, 272–273)

CONCLUSION

David Dockery, Kenneth Matthews, and Robert Sloan, after reviewing the evidence in their recent book, *Foundations for Biblical Interpretation*, conclude concerning the Bible's canon: "No Christian, confident in the providential working of his God and informed about the true nature of canonicity of his Word, should be disturbed about the dependability of the Bible we now possess" (Dockery, FBI, 77, 78).

Is the New Testament Historically Reliable?

Introduction: Tests for the Reliability of Ancient Literature

Bibliographical Test of the New Testament

The Number of Manuscripts and Their Closeness to the Original

Important New Testament Manuscripts

Accuracy of Manuscripts Supported by Various Versions

Accuracy of Manuscripts Supported by Lectionaries

Accuracy of Manuscripts Supported by Early Church Fathers

Internal Evidence Test of the New Testament

Benefit of the Doubt

Is the Document Free of Known Contradictions?

Did the Writer Use Primary Sources?

External Evidence Test of the New Testament

Supporting Evidence of Extrabiblical Writers

Early Non-Christian Confirmation of New Testament History

The Stones Cry Out: Evidence from Archaeology

Conclusion

INTRODUCTION: TESTS FOR THE RELIABILITY OF ANCIENT LITERATURE

What we are establishing here is the historical reliability of the New Testament portion of the Bible, not its inspiration. In chapter four, we will deal with the historical reliability of the Old Testament.

The historical reliability of the Scripture should be tested by the same criteria by which all historical documents are tested.

C.Sanders, in *Introduction to Research in English Literary History*, lists and explains the three basic principles of historiography. These are the bibliographical test, the internal evidence test, and the external evidence test (Sanders, IRE, 143 ff.). This chapter will examine the New Testament portion of the Bible to see how well it does with each test in order to determine its reliability as an accurate source for the historical events it reports.

1A. THE BIBLIOGRAPHICAL TEST FOR THE RELIABILITY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

The bibliographical test is an examination of the textual transmission by which documents reach us. In other words, since we do not have the original documents, how reliable are the copies we have in regard to the number of manuscripts (MSS) and the time interval between the original and extant (currently existing) copies (Montgomery, HC, 26)?

1B. The Number of Manuscripts and Their Closeness to the Original

F. E. Peters states that “on the basis of manuscript tradition alone, the works that made up the Christians’ New Testament were the most frequently copied and widely circulated books of antiquity” (Peters, HH, 50). As a result, the fidelity of the New Testament text rests on a multitude of manuscript evidence. Counting Greek copies alone, the New Testament is preserved in some 5,656 partial and complete manuscript portions that were copied by hand from the second through the fifteenth centuries (Geisler, GIB, 385).

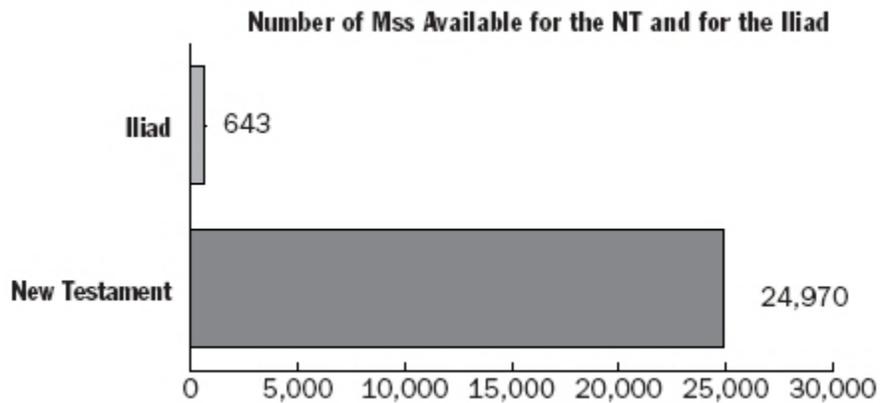
There are now more than 5,686 known Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. Add over 10,000 Latin Vulgate and at least 9,300 other early versions (MSS), and we have close to, if not more than, 25,000 manuscript copies of portions of the New Testament in existence today. No other document of antiquity even begins to approach such numbers and attestation. In comparison, Homer’s *Iliad* is second, with only 643 manuscripts that still survive. The first complete preserved text of Homer dates from the thirteenth century (Leach, OB, 145).

The following is a breakdown of the number of surviving manuscripts for the New Testament:

Extant Greek Manuscripts:

Uncials	307
Minuscules	2,860

Lectionaries	2,410
Papyri	109
SUBTOTAL	5,686



Manuscripts in Other Languages:

Latin Vulgate	10,000 plus
Ethiopic	2,000 plus
Slavic	4,101
Armenian	2,587
Syriac Peshitta	350 plus
Bohairic	100
Arabic	75
Old Latin	50
Anglo-Saxon	7
Gothic	6
Sogdian	3
Old Syriac	2
Persian	2
Frankish	1

SUBTOTAL	19,284
TOTAL ALL MSS	24,970

Information for the preceding charts was gathered from the following sources: Michael Welte of the Institute for New Testament Studies in Münster, Germany; Kurt Aland's *Journal of Biblical Literature* 87 (1968); Kurt Aland's *Kurzgefasste Liste Der Griechischen Handschriften Des Neven Testaments*, W. De Gruyter, 1963; Kurt Aland's "Neve Nevtestamentliche Papyri III," *New Testament Studies* (July 1976); Bruce Metzger's *The Early Versions of the New Testament*, Clarendon, 1977; *New Testament Manuscript Studies*, eds. Merrill M. Parvis and Allen Wikgren, University of Chicago Press, 1950; Eroll F. Rhodes's *An Annotated List of Armenian New Testament Manuscripts*, Tokyo, Ikeburo, 1959; *The Bible and Modern Scholarship*, ed. J. Phillip Hyatt, Abingdon, 1965.

The importance of the sheer number of manuscript copies cannot be overstated. As with other documents of ancient literature, there are no known extant (currently existing) original manuscripts of the Bible. Fortunately, however, the abundance of manuscript copies makes it possible to reconstruct the original with virtually complete accuracy (Geisler, GIB, 386).

John Warwick Montgomery says that "to be skeptical of the resultant text of the New Testament books is to allow all of classical antiquity to slip into obscurity, for no documents of the ancient period are as well attested bibliographically as the New Testament" (Montgomery, HC, 29).

Sir Frederic G. Kenyon, who was the director and principal librarian of the British Museum and second to none in authority for issuing statements about MSS, states that

besides number, the manuscripts of the New Testament differ from those of the classical authors.... In no other case is the interval of time between the composition of the book and the date of the earliest extant manuscripts so short as in that of the New Testament. The books of the New Testament were written in the latter part of the first century; the earliest extant manuscripts (trifling scraps excepted) are of the fourth century—say from 250 to 300 years later. This may sound a considerable interval, but it is nothing to that which parts most of the great classical authors from their earliest manuscripts. We believe that we have in all essentials an accurate text of the seven extant plays of Sophocles; yet the earliest substantial manuscript upon which it is based was written more than 1400 years after the poet's death. (Kenyon, HTCNT, 4)

Kenyon continues in *The Bible and Archaeology*: "The interval then between the dates of original composition and the earliest extant evidence becomes so small as to be in fact negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed. Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established" (Kenyon, BA, 288).

Dockery, Mathews, and Sloan have recently written, "For most of the biblical text a single reading has been transmitted. Elimination of scribal errors and intentional changes leaves only a small percentage of the text about which any questions occur" (Dockery, FBI, 176). They conclude:

It must be said that the amount of time between the original composition and the next surviving manuscript is far less for the New Testament than for any other work in Greek literature.... Although there are certainly differences in many of the New Testament manuscripts, not one fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith rests on a disputed reading.” (Dockery, FBI, 182)

F. J. A. Hort rightfully adds that “in the variety and fullness of the evidence on which it rests the text of the New Testament stands absolutely and unapproachably alone among ancient prose writings” (Hort, NTOG, 561).

J. Harold Greenlee states, “The number of available MSS of the New Testament is overwhelmingly greater than those of any other work of ancient literature.... The earliest extant MSS of the NT were written much closer to the date of the original writing than is the case in almost any other piece of ancient literature” (Greenlee, INTTC, 15).

Edward Glenny reports that

God has given us 5,656 manuscripts containing all or parts of the Greek NT. It is the most remarkably preserved book in the ancient world. Not only do we have a great number of manuscripts but they are very close in time to the originals they represent. Some partial manuscripts of the NT are from the second century A.D., and many are within four centuries of the originals. These facts are all the more amazing when they are compared with the preservation of other ancient literature (Glenny, “PS,” as cited in BVD, .95; see Aland, TNT, 72–84, for a description of the manuscripts of the New Testament. One of the most recent tabulations of NT manuscripts is in Kurt and Barbara Aland, eds. *Kurzgefasste Liste der griechen Handschriften des Neuen Testaments* [Aland, KLHNT]. This source lists the extant Greek manuscripts of the NT as 99 papyri, 306 uncials, 2,855 minuscules, and 2,396 lectionaries, for the total given above).

Lee Strobel, in a recent book (published in 1998), reports the latest count of Greek MSS as follows: papyri, 99; uncials, 306; minuscules, 2,856; and lectionaries, 2,403, for a total of 5,664 (Strobel, CC, 62–63). (Slight variations in counts may occur, depending on how small fragments were to be considered manuscripts, but the mountain of evidence gives the New Testament great historical credibility.)

W. F. Albright confidently informs us: “No other work from Graeco-Roman antiquity is so well attested by manuscript tradition as the New Testament. There are many more early manuscripts of the New Testament than there are of any classical author, and the oldest extensive remains of it date only about two centuries after their original composition” (Albright, AP, 238).

Michael Welte of the Institute for New Testament Studies (Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität, Institut für Neutestamentliche Textforschung) in Münster, Germany, has conveyed the latest (as of August 1998) count of Greek MSS as follows: 109 papyri, 307 uncials, 2,860 minuscules, and 2,410 lectionaries, for a total of 5,686.

Glenny continues, citing comparative ancient documents: “No one questions the authenticity of the historical books of antiquity because we do not possess the original copies. Yet we have far fewer manuscripts of these works than we possess of the NT” (Glenny, “PS,” as cited in BVD, 96).

F. F. Bruce, in *The New Testament Document*, vividly portrays the comparison between the New Testament and ancient historical writings:

Perhaps we can appreciate how wealthy the New Testament is in manuscript attestation if we compare the textual material for other ancient historical works. For Caesar's Gallic Wars (composed between 58 and 50 B.C.) there are several extant MSS, but only nine or ten are good, and the oldest is some 900 years later than Caesar's day. Of the 142 books of the Roman history of Livy (59 B.C.–A.D.17), only 35 survive; these are known to us from not more than 20 MSS of any consequence, only one of which, and that containing fragments of Books III–VI, is as old as the fourth century. Of the 14 books of the Histories of Tacitus (c. A.D. 100) only four and a half survive; of the 16 books of his Annals, 10 survive in full and two in part. The text of these extant portions of his two great historical works depends entirely on two MSS, one of the ninth century and one of the eleventh.

The extant MSS of his minor works (Dialogus de Oratoribus, Agricola, Germania) all descend from a codex of the tenth century. The History of Thucydides (c. 460–400 B.C.) is known to us from eight MSS, the earliest belonging to c. A.D. 900, and a few papyrus scraps, belonging to about the beginning of the Christian era. The same is true of the History of Herodotus (B.C. 488–428). Yet no classical scholar would listen to an argument that the authenticity of Herodotus or Thucydides is in doubt because the earliest MSS of their works which are of any use to us are over 1,300 years later than the originals. (Bruce, NTD, 16, 17)

Greenlee writes in *Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism* about the time gap between the original MS (the autograph) and the extant MS (the oldest surviving copy), saying,

The oldest known MSS of most of the Greek classical authors are dated a thousand years or more after the author's death. The time interval for the Latin authors is somewhat less, varying down to a minimum of three centuries in the case of Virgil. In the case of the N.T., however, two of the most important MSS were written within 300 years after the N.T. was completed, and some virtually complete N. T. books as well as extensive fragmentary MSS of many parts of the N.T. date back to one century from the original writings. (Greenlee, INTTC, 16)

Greenlee adds,

Since scholars accept as generally trustworthy the writings of the ancient classics even though the earliest MSS were written so long after the original writings and the number of extant MSS is in many instances so small, it is clear that the reliability of the text of the N.T. is likewise assured. (Greenlee, INTTC, 16)

Bruce Metzger, in *The Text of the New Testament*, cogently writes of the comparison:

The works of several ancient authors are preserved to us by the thinnest possible thread of transmission. For example, the compendious history of Rome by Velleius Paterculus survived to modern times in only one incomplete manuscript, from which the *editio princeps* was made—and this lone manuscript was lost in the seventeenth century after being copied by Beatus Rhenanus at Amerbach. Even the *Annals* of the famous historian Tacitus is extant, so far as the first six books are concerned, in but a single manuscript, dating from the ninth century. In 1870 the only known manuscript of the *Epistle to Diognetus*, an early Christian composition which editors usually include in the corpus of Apostolic Fathers, perished in a fire at the municipal library in Strasbourg. In contrast with these figures, the textual critic of the New Testament is embarrassed by the wealth of his material. (Metzger, TNT, 34)

F. F. Bruce writes: “There is no body of ancient literature in the world which enjoys such a wealth of good textual attestation as the New Testament” (Bruce, BP, 178).

Compared with nearly 5,700 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, the following chart demonstrates the poverty of manuscripts of some other ancient documents (Geisler, GIB, 408):

AUTHOR	BOOK	DATE WRITTEN	EARLIEST COPIES	TIME GAP	NO. OF COPIES
Homer	<i>Iliad</i>	800 B.C.	c. 400 B.C.	c. 400 yrs.	643
Herodotus	<i>History</i>	480–425 B.C.	c. A.D. 900	c. 1,350 yrs.	8
Thucydides	<i>History</i>	460–400 B.C.	c. A.D. 900	c. 1,300 yrs.	8
Plato		400 B.C.	c. A.D. 900	c. 1,300 yrs.	7
Demosthenes		300 B.C.	c. A.D. 1100	c. 1,400 yrs.	200
Caesar	<i>Gallic Wars</i>	100–44 B.C.	c. A.D. 900	c. 1,000 yrs.	10
Livy	<i>History of Rome</i>	59 B.C.–A.D. 17	4th cent. (partial) mostly 10th cent.	c. 400 yrs. c. 1,000 yrs.	1 partial 19 copies
Tacitus	<i>Annals</i>	A.D. 100	c. A.D. 1100	c. 1,000 yrs.	20
Pliny Secundus	<i>Natural History</i>	A.D. 61–113	c. A.D. 850	c. 750 yrs.	7
New Testament		A.D. 50–100	c. 114 (fragment) c. 200 (books) c. 250 (most of N.T.) c. 325 (complete N.T.)	+50 yrs. 100 yrs. 150 yrs. 225 yrs.	5366

No wonder Ravi Zacharias concludes: “In real terms, the New Testament is easily the best attested ancient writing in terms of the sheer number of documents, the time span between the events and the document, and the variety of documents available to sustain or contradict it. There is nothing in ancient manuscript evidence to match such textual availability and integrity” (Zacharias, CMLWG, 162).

2B. Important New Testament Manuscripts

Following is a chronology of some of the most important manuscript discoveries. For dating purposes, some of the factors that help determine the age of a MS are (Geisler, GIB, 242–246):

1. Materials used
2. Letter size and form
3. Punctuation
4. Text divisions
5. Ornamentation
6. The color of the ink
7. The texture and color of parchment

John Rylands's MS (A.D. 130) is located in the John Rylands Library of Manchester, England (oldest extant fragment of the New Testament). “Because of its early date and location (Egypt), some distance from the traditional place of composition (Asia Minor), this portion of the Gospel of John tends to confirm the traditional date of the composition of the Gospel about the end of the 1st century” (Geisler, GIB, 268).

Bruce Metzger speaks of defunct criticism: “Had this little fragment been known during the middle of the past century, that school of New Testament criticism which was inspired by the brilliant Tübingen professor, Ferdinand Christian Baur, could not have argued that the Fourth Gospel was not composed until about the year 160” (Metzger, TNT, 39).

Bodmer Papyrus II (A.D. 150–200) was purchased in the 50s and 60s from a dealer in Egypt and is located in the Bodmer Library of World Literature; it contains most of John's Gospel. The most important discovery of New Testament papyri since the Chester Beatty manuscripts (see below) was the acquisition of the Bodmer Collection by the Library of World Literature at Culagny, near Geneva. The MS p⁶⁶, dating from about A.D. 200 or earlier, contains 104 leaves of John 1:1–6:11; 6:35b–14:26; and fragments of forty other pages, John 14–21. The text is a mixture of the Alexandrian and Western types, and there are some twenty alterations between the lines that invariably belong to the Western family (Geisler, GIB, 390). In his article, ‘*Zur Datierung des Papyrus Bodmer II* (P66), ‘*Anzeiger der österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, phil.-hist., kl., 1960, Nr. 4, p. 12033, “Herbert Hunger, the director of the papyrological collections in the National Library at Vienna, dates 66 earlier, in the middle if not even in the first half of the second century; see his article” (Metzger, TNT, 39, 40).

“p⁷²., also a part of the collection, is the earliest copy of the epistle of Jude and the two epistles of Peter. p⁷⁵., still another early Biblical manuscript acquired by M. Bodmer, is a single-quire codex of Luke and John.... The editors, Victor Martin and Rodolphe Kaser, date this copy between A.D. 175 and 225. It is thus the earliest known copy of the Gospel according to Luke and one of the earliest of the Gospel according to John” (Metzger, TNT, 41). Thus, Metzger describes it as “the most important discovery of the N.T. manuscripts since the purchase of the Chester Beatty papyri” (Metzger, TNT, 39, 40).

Chester Beatty Papyri (A.D. 200). The manuscripts were purchased in the 1930s from a dealer in Egypt and are located in C. Beatty Museum in Dublin. Part is owned by the University of Michigan. This collection contains papyrus codices, three of which contain major portions of the New Testament (Bruce, BP, 182). In *The Bible and Modern Scholarship*, Sir Frederic Kenyon writes, “The net result of this discovery—by far the most important since the discovery of the Sinaiticus—is, in fact, to reduce the gap between the earlier manuscripts and the traditional dates of the New Testament books so far that it becomes negligible in any discussion of their authenticity. No other ancient book has anything like such early and plentiful testimony

to its text, and no unbiased scholar would deny that the text that has come down to us is substantially sound” (Kenyon, BMS, 20) (A detailed listing of papyri may be seen in the Greek New Testaments published by United Bible Societies and Nestle-Aland, both printed in Stuttgart.)

Diatessaron means “a harmony of four parts.” The Greek *dia Tessaron* literally means “through four” (Bruce, BP, 195). This was a harmony of the Gospels executed by Tatian (about A.D. 160).

Eusebius, in *Ecclesiastical History*, IV, 29, Loeb ed., 1, 397, wrote: “Their former leader Tatian composed in some way a combination and collection of the Gospels, and gave this the name of *THE DIATESSARON*, and this is still extant in some places.” It is believed that Tatian, an Assyrian Christian, was the first to compose a harmony of the Gospels, only a small portion of which is extant today (Geisler, GIB, 318, 319).

Codex Vaticanus (A.D. 325–350), located in the Vatican Library, contains nearly all of the Bible. After a hundred years of textual criticism, many consider Vaticanus as one of the most trustworthy manuscripts of the New Testament text.

Codex Sinaiticus (A.D. 350) is located in the British Museum. This MS, which contains almost all of the New Testament and over half of the Old Testament, was discovered by Dr. Constantin Von Tischendorf in the Mount Sinai monastery in 1859. It was presented by the monastery to the Russian Czar and bought by the British Government and people from the Soviet Union for 100,000 pounds on Christmas Day, 1933.

The discovery of this manuscript is a fascinating story. Bruce Metzger relates the interesting background leading to its discovery:

In 1844, when he was not yet thirty years of age, Tischendorf, a *Privatdozent* in the University of Leipzig, began an extensive journey through the Near East in search of Biblical manuscripts. While visiting the monastery of St. Catharine at Mount Sinai, he chanced to see some leaves of parchment in a waste-basket full of papers destined to light the oven of the monastery. On examination these proved to be part of a copy of the Septuagint version of the Old Testament, written in an early Greek uncial script. He retrieved from the basket no fewer than forty-three such leaves, and the monk casually remarked that two basket loads of similarly discarded leaves had already been burned up! Later, when Tischendorf was shown other portions of the same codex (containing all of Isaiah and I and II Maccabees), he warned the monks that such things were too valuable to be used to stoke their fires. The forty-three leaves which he was permitted to keep contained portions of I Chronicles, Jeremiah, Nehemiah, and Esther, and upon returning to Europe he deposited them in the university library at Leipzig, where they still remain. In 1846 he published their contents, naming them the codex Frederico-Augustanus (in honour of the King of Saxony, Frederick Augustus, the discoverer’s sovereign and patron). (Metzger, TNT, 43)

A second visit to the monastery by Tischendorf in 1853 produced no new manuscripts because the monks were suspicious as a result of the enthusiasm for the MS displayed during his first visit in 1844. He visited a third time in 1859, under the direction of the Czar of Russia, Alexander II. Shortly before leaving, Tischendorf gave the steward of the monastery an edition of the Septuagint that had been published by Tischendorf in Leipzig.

Thereupon the steward remarked that he too had a copy of the Septuagint, and produced from a closet in his cell a manuscript wrapped in a red cloth. There before the astonished scholar’s eyes lay the treasure which he had been longing to see. Concealing his feelings, Tischendorf casually asked permission to look at it further that evening. Permission was granted, and upon retiring to his room Tischendorf stayed up all night in the joy of studying the manuscript—for, as he declared in his diary (which as a scholar he kept in Latin), *quippe dormire nefas videbatur* (“it really seemed a sacrilege to sleep”!) He soon found that the document contained much more than

he had even hoped; for not only was most of the Old Testament there, but also the New Testament was intact and in excellent condition, with the addition of two early Christian works of the second century, the Epistle of Barnabas (previously known only through a very poor Latin translation) and a large portion of the Shepherd of Hermas, hitherto known only by title. (Metzger, TNT, 44)

Codex Alexandrinus (A.D. 400) is located in the British Museum. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* believes it was written in Greek in Egypt. It contains almost the entire Bible.

Codex Ephraemi (A.D. 400s) is located in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* says that “its 5th century origin and the evidence it supplies make it important for the text of certain portions of the New Testament” (EB, Vol. 3, 579; Bruce, BP, 183). Every book is represented in the MS except 2 Thessalonians and 2 John. “This is a fifth century document called a palimpsest. (A palimpsest is a manuscript in which the original writing has been erased and then written over.) Through the use of chemicals and painstaking effort, a scholar can read the original writing underneath the overprinted text” (Comfort, OB, 181).

Codex Bezae (A.D. 450 plus) is located in the Cambridge Library and contains the Gospels and Acts, not only in Greek but also in Latin.

Codex Washingtonensis (or Freerianus) (c. A.D. 450) contains the four Gospels (Greenlee, INTTC, 39). It is located in the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C.

Codex Claromontanus (A.D. 500s) contains the Pauline epistles. It is a bilingual MS.

3B. Accuracy of Manuscripts Supported by Various Versions

Another strong support for textual evidence and accuracy is the ancient versions. For the most part, “ancient literature was rarely translated into another language” (Greenlee, INTTC, 45).

From its inception Christianity has been a missionary faith. “The earliest versions of the New Testament were prepared by missionaries to assist in the propagation of the Christian faith among peoples whose native tongue was Syriac, Latin, or Coptic” (Metzger, TNT, 67).

Syriac and Latin versions (translations) of the New Testament were made around A.D. 150. These versions bring us back very near to the time of the originals. There are more than fifteen thousand existing copies of various versions.

1C. Syriac Versions

Old Syriac Version contains four Gospels, copied about the fourth century. It should be explained that “Syriac is the name generally given to Christian Aramaic. It is written in a distinctive variation of the Aramaic alphabet” (Bruce, BP, 193). Theodore of Mopsuestia (fifth century) wrote, “It has been translated into the tongue of the Syrians” (Bruce, BP, 193).

Syriac Peshitta. The basic meaning is “simple.” It was the standard version, produced around A.D. 150–250. There are more than 350 MSS from the 400s extant today (Geisler, GIB, 317).

Palestinian Syriac. Most scholars date this version at about A.D. 400–450 (Metzger, TNT, 68–71).

Philoxenian (A.D. 508). Polycarp translated a new Syriac New Testament for Philoxenas, bishop of Mabug (Greenlee, INTTC, 49).

Harkleian Syriac (A.D. 616). Thomas of Harkel.

2C. Latin Versions

Old Latin. Testimonies from the fourth century to the thirteenth century relate that in the third century an “old Latin version circulated in North Africa and Europe.”

African Old Latin (Codex Bezae Cantabrigiae) (A.D. 400). Metzger writes that “E. A. Lowe shows palaeographical marks of it having been copied from a second century papyrus” (Metzger, TNT, 72–74).

Codex Corbiensis (A.D. 400–500) contains the four Gospels.

Codex Vercellensis (A.D. 360).

Codex Palatinus (fifth century A.D.).

Latin Vulgate (meaning “common or popular”). Jerome was secretary to Damasus, the bishop of Rome. Jerome fulfilled the bishop’s request for a version between A.D. 366 and A.D. 384 (Bruce, BP, 201).

3C. Coptic (or Egyptian) Versions

F. F. Bruce writes that it is probable that the first Egyptian version was translated in the third or fourth century (Bruce, BP, 214).

Sahidic. Beginning of the third century (Metzger, TNT, 79–80).

Bohairic. The editor, Rodalphe Kasser, dates it about the fourth century (Greenlee, INTTC, 50).

Middle Egyptian. Fourth or fifth century.

4C. Other Early Versions

Armenian (A.D. 400+). Seems to have been translated from a Greek Bible obtained from Constantinople.

Gothic. Fourth century.

Georgian. Fifth century.

Ethiopic. Sixth century.

Nubian. Sixth century.

4B. Accuracy of Manuscripts Supported by Lectionaries

This field is a greatly neglected one, and yet the second largest group of New Testament Greek MSS is the lectionaries.

Bruce Metzger offers this background of the lectionaries: “Following the custom of the synagogue, according to which portions of the Law and the Prophets were read at divine service each Sabbath day, the Christian Church adopted the practice of reading passages from the New Testament books at services of worship. A regular system of lessons from the Gospels and Epistles was developed, and the custom arose of arranging these according to a fixed order of Sundays and other holy days of the Christian year” (Metzger, TNT, 30).

Metzger reports that 2,135 lectionaries have been catalogued, but as of yet the majority still await critical analysis. (A more recent count is 2,396, as noted above.)

J. Harold Greenlee states that “the earliest lectionary fragments are from the sixth century, while complete MSS date from the eighth century and later” (Greenlee, INTTC, 45).

The lectionaries were usually rather conservative and used older texts, and this makes them very valuable in textual criticism (Metzger, TNT, 31). It must be admitted, however, that lectionaries are of only secondary value in establishing the New Testament text for at least three reasons:

1. They contain all of the New Testament many times over, with the exception of Revelation and parts of Acts.
2. As a result of recent scholarship on the lectionaries, they are assuming a more significant role in establishing the true text. Lectionary text types are predominantly Byzantine, but there are certain groups that are characterized by Alexandrian and Caesarean readings.
3. Lectionaries have also influenced the understanding of specific passages, for example, John 7:53–8:11 and Mark 16:9–20 (Geisler, GIB, 418).

(A detailed listing of lectionaries may be seen in the Greek New Testaments published by United Bible Societies and Nestle-Aland, both printed in Stuttgart.)

5B. Accuracy of Manuscripts Supported by Early Church Fathers

The patristic citations of Scripture are not primary witnesses to the text of the New Testament, but they do serve two very important secondary roles. First, they give overwhelming support to the existence of the twenty-seven authoritative books of the New Testament canon. It is true that their quotations were often loose, although in the case of some Fathers they were very accurate, but they do at least reproduce the substantial content of the original text. Second, the quotations are so numerous and widespread that if no manuscripts of the New Testament were extant, the New Testament could be reproduced from the writings of the early Fathers alone. (Geisler, GIB, 430)

In brief, J. Harold Greenlee was right when he wrote, “These quotations are so extensive that the New Testament could virtually be reconstructed from them without the use of New Testament Manuscripts” (Greenlee, INTTC, 54).

Compare, for example, the numerous quotations given in Burgon’s index in the case of a few of the earlier and more important writers (Geisler, GIB, 431):

Early Patristic Quotation of the New Testament

Writer	Gospels	Acts	Pauline Epistles	General Epistles	Revelation	Totals
Justin Martyr	268	10	43	6	3 (266 allusions)	330
Irenaeus	1,038	194	499	23	65	1,819
Clement (Alex.)	1,107	44	1,127	207	11	2,406
Origen	9,231	349	7,778	399	165	17,992

Tertullian	3,822	502	2,609	120	205	7,258
Hippolytus	734	42	387	27	188	1,378
Eusebius	3,258	211	1,592	88	27	5,176
Grand Totals	19,368	1,352	14,035	870	664	36,289

Regarding patristic quotations from the New Testament, Bruce Metzger informs us that: “Besides textual evidence derived from New Testament Greek manuscripts and from early versions, the textual critic has available the numerous scriptural quotations included in the commentaries, sermons, and other treatises written by early Church Fathers. Indeed, so extensive are these citations that if all other sources for our knowledge of the text of the New Testament were destroyed, they would be sufficient alone for the reconstruction of practically the entire New Testament” (Metzger, TNT, 86).

The Encyclopaedia Britannica says: “When the textual scholar has examined the manuscripts and the versions, he still has not exhausted the evidence for the New Testament text. The writings of the early Christian fathers often reflect a form of text differing from that in one or another manuscript...their witness to the text, especially as it corroborates the readings that come from other sources, belongs to the testimony that textual critics must consult before forming their conclusions” (EB, Vol 3, 579).

Sir David Dalrymple was wondering about the preponderance of Scripture in early writing when someone asked him, “Suppose that the New Testament had been destroyed, and every copy of it lost by the end of the third century, could it have been collected together again from the writings of the Fathers of the second and third centuries?” After a great deal of investigation Dalrymple concluded: “Look at those books. You remember the question about the New Testament and the Fathers? That question roused my curiosity, and as I possessed all the existing works of the Fathers of the second and third centuries, I commenced to search, and up to this time I have found the entire New Testament, except eleven verses” (Dalrymple, as cited in Leach, OBHWGI, 35, 36).

Joseph Angus, in *The Bible Handbook*, page 56, offers these words of caution concerning the early patristic writings:

1. Quotes are sometimes used without verbal accuracy.
2. Some copyists were prone to mistakes or to intentional alteration.

Some of the most important early witnesses to the New Testament manuscripts among the church fathers were:

Clement of Rome (A.D. 95). Origen, in *De Principis*, Book II, Chapter 3, calls him a disciple of the apostles (Anderson, BWG, 28).

Tertullian, in *Against Heresies*, Chapter 23, writes that he (Clement) was appointed by Peter. Irenaeus continues in *Against Heresies*, Book III, Chapter 3, that he “had the preaching of the Apostles still echoing in his ears and their doctrine in front of his eyes.” He quotes from:

Matthew	1 Corinthians
Mark	1 Peter
Luke	Hebrews
Acts	Titus

Ignatius (A.D. 70–110) was bishop of Antioch and was martyred. He knew well the apostles. His seven epistles contain quotations from:

Matthew	Philippians
John	Colossians
Acts	1 and 2 Thessalonians
Romans	1 and 2 Timothy
1 Corinthians	James
Galatians	1 Peter
Ephesians	

Polycarp (A.D. 70–156), martyred at eighty-six years of age, was bishop of Smyrna and a disciple of the apostle John. Among others who quoted from the New Testament were Barnabas (c. A.D. 70), Hermas (c. A.D. 95), Tatian (c. A.D. 170), and Irenaeus (c. A.D. 170).

Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 150–212). Approximately 2,400 of his quotes are from all but three books of the New Testament.

Tertullian (A.D. 160–220) was a presbyter of the church in Carthage, and he quotes the New Testament more than seven thousand times, of which 3,800 are from the Gospels.

Hippolytus (A.D. 170–235) has more than 1,300 references.

Justin Martyr (A.D. 133) battled the heretic Marcion.

Origen (A.D. 185–253 or 254). This vociferous writer compiled more than six thousand works. He lists more than eighteen thousand New Testament quotes (Geisler, GIB, 353).

Cyprian (died A.D. 258) was bishop of Carthage. He uses approximately 740 Old Testament citations and 1,030 from the New Testament.

Geisler and Nix rightly conclude that “a brief inventory at this point will reveal that there were some 32,000 citations of the New Testament prior to the time of the Council of Nicea (325). These 32,000 quotations are by no means exhaustive, and they do not even include the

fourth-century writers. Just adding the number of references used by one other writer, Eusebius, who flourished prior to and contemporary with the Council at Nicea, will bring the total number of citations of the New Testament to over 36,000” (Geisler, GIB, 353, 354).

To all of the above you could add Augustine, Amabius, Lactantius, Chrysostom, Jerome, Gaius Romanus, Athanasius, Ambrose of Milan, Cyril of Alexandria, Ephraem the Syrian, Hilary of Poitiers, Gregory of Nyssa, and so forth.

Leo Jaganay, referring to the patristic quotations of the New Testament, writes: “Of the considerable volumes of unpublished material that Dean Burgon left when he died, of special note is his index of New Testament citations by the church fathers of antiquity. It consists of sixteen thick volumes to be found in the British Museum, and contains 86,489 quotations” (Jaganay, ITCNT, 48).

2A. INTERNAL EVIDENCE TEST FOR THE RELIABILITY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

1B. Benefit of the Doubt

On this test John Warwick Montgomery writes that literary critics still follow Aristotle’s dictum that “the benefit of the doubt is to be given to the document itself, not arrogated by the critic to himself” (Montgomery, EA, 29).

Therefore, “one must listen to the claims of the document under analysis, and not assume fraud or error unless the author disqualified himself by contradictions or known factual inaccuracies” (Montgomery, EA, 29).

Horn amplifies this, saying:

Think for a moment about what needs to be demonstrated concerning a “difficulty” in order to transfer it into the category of a valid argument against doctrine. Certainly much more is required than the mere appearance of a contradiction. First, we must be certain that we have correctly understood the passage, the sense in which it uses words or numbers. Second, that we possess all available knowledge in this matter. Third, that no further light can possibly be thrown on it by advancing knowledge, textual research, archaeology, etc....

Difficulties do not constitute objections. Unsolved problems are not of necessity errors. This is not to minimize the area of difficulty; it is to see it in perspective. Difficulties are to be grappled with and problems are to drive us to seek clearer light; but until such time as we have total and final light on any issue we are in no position to affirm, “Here is a proven error, an unquestionable objection to an infallible Bible.” It is common knowledge that countless “objections” have been fully resolved since this century began. (42/86, 87)

2B. Is the Document Free of Known Contradictions?

He was known around the seminary as the man who had learned over thirty languages, most of them languages of Old Testament times in the Middle Eastern world. Dr. Gleason Archer, who taught for over thirty years at the graduate seminary level in the field of biblical criticism, gives the following modest description of his qualifications to discern the meaning of difficult biblical texts:

As an undergraduate at Harvard, I was fascinated by apologetics and biblical evidences; so I labored to obtain a knowledge of the languages and cultures that have any bearing on biblical scholarship. As a classics major in college, I received training in Latin and Greek, also in French and German. At seminary I majored in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic; and in post-graduate years I became involved in Syriac and Akkadian, to the extent of teaching elective courses in each of these subjects. Earlier, during my final two years of high school, I had acquired a special interest

in Middle Kingdom Egyptian studies, which was furthered as I later taught courses in this field. At the Oriental Institute in Chicago, I did specialized study in Eighteenth Dynasty historical records and also studied Coptic and Sumerian. Combined with this work in ancient languages was a full course of training at law school, after which I was admitted to the Massachusetts Bar in 1939. This gave me a thorough grounding in the field of legal evidences.

Dr. Archer, in the foreword to his *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, gives this testimony about the internal consistency of the Bible:

As I have dealt with one apparent discrepancy after another and have studied the alleged contradictions between the biblical record and the evidence of linguistics, archaeology, or science, my confidence in the trustworthiness of Scripture has been repeatedly verified and strengthened by the discovery that almost every problem in Scripture that has ever been discovered by man, from ancient times until now, has been dealt with in a completely satisfactory manner by the biblical text itself—or else by objective archaeological information. The deductions that may be validly drawn from ancient Egyptian, Sumerian, or Akkadian documents all harmonize with the biblical record; and no properly trained evangelical scholar has anything to fear from the hostile arguments and challenges of humanistic rationalists or detractors of any and every persuasion.

Dr. Archer concludes, “There is a good and sufficient answer in Scripture itself to refute every charge that has ever been leveled against it. But this is only to be expected from the kind of book the Bible asserts itself to be, the inscripturation of the infallible, inerrant Word of the Living God” (Archer, EBD, 12).

Students of the Bible are often troubled to find statements in the Bible that appear to contradict other statements in the Bible. For example, one of my associates had always wondered why the books of Matthew and Acts gave conflicting versions of the death of Judas Iscariot. Matthew relates that Judas died by hanging himself. But Acts says that as Judas fell headlong in a field “his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out.” My friend was perplexed as to how both accounts could be true. He theorized that Judas must have hanged himself off the side of a cliff, the rope gave way, and he fell headlong into the field below. It would be the only way a fall into a field could burst open a body. Sure enough, several years later on a trip to the Holy Land, my friend was shown the traditional site of Judas’s death: a field at the bottom of a cliff outside Jerusalem.

The allegations of error in the Bible are usually based on a failure to recognize basic principles of interpreting ancient literature. The chart below lists fifteen principles to help one discern whether there is a true error or a contradiction in the literature—in this case, the Bible. For further explanation of the principles, see my book, *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, pp. 46–51.

3B. Did the Writer Use Primary Sources?

The writers of the New Testament wrote as eyewitnesses or from firsthand information. The books of the New Testament make claims such as the following:

Luke 1:1–3: “Inasmuch as many have undertaken to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus.”

Summary of Principles for Understanding Apparent Discrepancies in the Bible

1. The unexplained is not necessarily unexplainable.
2. Fallible interpretations do not mean fallible revelation.
3. Understand the context of the passage.
4. Interpret difficult passages in the light of clear ones.
5. Don't base teaching on obscure passages.
6. The Bible is a human book with human characteristics.
7. Just because a report is incomplete does not mean it is false.
8. New Testament citations of the Old Testament need not always be exact.
9. The Bible does not necessarily approve of all it records.
10. The Bible uses nontechnical, everyday language.
11. The Bible may use round numbers as well as exact numbers.
12. Note when the Bible uses different literary devices.
13. An error in a copy does not equate to an error in the original.
14. General statements don't necessarily mean universal promises.
15. Later revelation supersedes previous revelation.

2 Peter 1:16: “For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty.”

1 John 1:3: “That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us, and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.”

Acts 2:22: “ ‘Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know....’ ”

John 19:35 “And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe.”

Luke 3:1: “Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Phillip tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene....”

Acts 26:24–26: “Now as he thus made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, ‘Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!’ But he said, ‘I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason. For the king, before whom I also speak freely, knows these things; for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner.’ ”

F. F. Bruce, the former Rylands Professor of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis at the University of Manchester, says concerning the primary-source value of the New Testament records:

The earliest preachers of the gospel knew the value of...first-hand testimony, and appealed to it time and again. “We are witnesses of these things,” was their constant and confident assertion. And it can have been by no means so easy as some writers seem to think to invent words and deeds of Jesus in those early years, when so many of His disciples were about, who could remember what had and had not happened.

And it was not only friendly eyewitnesses that the early preachers had to reckon with; there were others less well disposed who were also conversant with the main facts of the ministry and death of Jesus. The disciples could not afford to risk inaccuracies (not to speak of willful manipulation of the facts), which would at once be exposed by those who would be only too glad to do so. On the contrary, one of the strong points in the original apostolic preaching is the confident appeal to the knowledge of the hearers; they not only said, “We are witnesses of these things,” but also, “As you yourselves also know” (Acts 2:22). Had there been any tendency to depart from the facts in any material respect, the possible presence of hostile witnesses in the audience would have served as a further corrective. (Bruce, NTD, 33, 44–46)

But some might contend, saying, “Come on, Josh, that’s only what the writers claimed. A pseudo-author writing a century or more after the fact can claim anything.”

The fact is, however, that the books of the New Testament were not written down a century or more after the events they described but during the lifetimes of those involved in the accounts themselves. Therefore, the New Testament must be regarded by scholars today as a competent primary source document from the first century (Montgomery, HC, 34, 35).

Figures on above charts are from the following sources: Werner Georg Kümmel’s *Introduction to the New Testament*, translated by Howard Clark Kee, Abingdon, 1973; Everett Harrison’s *Introduction to the New Testament*, Eerdmans, 1971; D. Edmond Hiebert’s *Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 2, Moody Press, 1977; writings and lectures by T. W. Manson and F. C. Baur.

CONSERVATIVE DATING

(In some cases [e.g. Matthew's Gospel], now being revised as not conservative enough)

Paul's Letters	A.D. 50–66	(Hiebert)
Matthew	A.D. 70–80	(Harrison)
Mark	A.D. 50–60	(Harnak)
Mark	A.D. 58–65	(T.W. Manson)
Luke	early 60s	(Harrison)
John	A.D. 80–100	(Harrison)

LIBERAL DATING

(In some cases, proven to be impossible [e.g. John's Gospel]; in others, rarely accepted by competent scholars today)

Paul's Letters	A.D. 50–100	(Kümmel)
Matthew	A.D. 80–100	(Kümmel)
Mark	A.D. 70	(Kümmel)
Luke	A.D. 70–90	(Kümmel)

John	A.D. 170	(Baur)
	A.D. 90–100	(Kümmel)

William Foxwell Albright, one of the world’s foremost biblical archaeologists, said: “We can already say emphatically that there is no longer any solid basis for dating any book of the New Testament after about A.D. 80, two full generations before the date between 130 and 150 given by the more radical New Testament critics of today” (Albright, RDBL, 136).

He reiterates this point in an interview for *Christianity Today*, January 18, 1963: “In my opinion, every book of the New Testament was written by a baptized Jew between the forties and the eighties of the first century A.D. (very probably some time between about A.D. 50 and 75).”

Albright concludes, “Thanks to the Qumran discoveries, the New Testament proves to be in fact what it was formerly believed to be: the teaching of Christ and his immediate followers between cir. 25 and cir. 80 A.D.” (Albright, FSAC, 23).

Many liberal scholars are being forced to consider earlier dates for the New Testament. Dr. John A. T. Robinson, no conservative himself, comes to some startling conclusions in his groundbreaking book *Redating the New Testament*. His research has led to his conviction that the whole of the New Testament was written before the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 (Robinson, RNT).

3A. EXTERNAL EVIDENCE TEST FOR THE RELIABILITY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

“Do other historical materials confirm or deny the internal testimony provided by the documents themselves?” (Montgomery, HC, 31). In other words, what sources are there—apart from the literature under analysis—that substantiate its accuracy, reliability, and authenticity?

1B. Supporting Evidence of Early Christian Writers outside the Bible

Eusebius, in his *Ecclesiastical History* III.39, preserves writings of Papias, bishop of Heirapolis (A.D. 130), in which Papias records sayings of “the Elder” (the apostle John, of whom, according to Irenaeus, he was a hearer):

The Elder used to say this also: “Mark, having been the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately all that he (Peter) mentioned, whether sayings or doings of Christ, not, however, in order. For he was neither a hearer nor a companion of the Lord; but afterwards, as I said, he accompanied Peter, who adapted his teachings as necessity required, not as though he were making a compilation of the sayings of the Lord. So then Mark made no mistake writing down in this way some things as he (Peter) mentioned them; for he paid attention to this one thing, not to omit anything that he had heard, not to include any false statement among them.”

Papias also comments about the Gospel of Matthew: “Matthew recorded the oracles in the Hebrew (i.e., Aramaic) tongue.”

Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons (A.D. 180), was a student of Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna. Polycarp, martyred in A.D. 156, had been a Christian for eighty-six years and was a disciple of John the apostle. Irenaeus wrote: “So firm is the ground upon which these Gospels rest, that the very heretics themselves bear witness to them, and, starting from these [documents], each one of them endeavours to establish his own particular doctrine” (*Against Heresies* III).

The four Gospels had become so axiomatic in the Christian world that Irenaeus could refer to it [the fourfold Gospel] as an established and recognized fact as obvious as the four cardinal points of the compass:

For as there are four quarters of the world in which we live, and four universal winds, and as the Church is dispersed over all the earth, and the gospel is the pillar and base of the Church and the breath of life, so it is natural that it should have four pillars, breathing immortality from every quarter and kindling the life of men anew. Whence it is manifest that the Word, the architect of all things, who sits upon the cherubim and holds all things together, having been manifested to men, has given us the gospel in fourfold form, but held together by one Spirit.

Matthew published his Gospel among the Hebrews [i.e., Jews] in their own tongue, when Peter and Paul were preaching the gospel in Rome and founding the church there. After their departure [i.e., their death, which strong tradition places at the time of the Neronian persecution in 64], Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, himself handed down to us in writing the substance of Peter's preaching. Luke, the follower of Paul, set down in a book the gospel preached by his teacher. Then John, the disciple of the Lord, who also leaned on His breast (this is a reference to John 13:25 and 21:20), himself produced his Gospel, while he was living at Ephesus in Asia.

Clement of Rome (c. A.D. 95) uses Scripture as a reliable and authentic source.

Ignatius (A.D. 70–110). This bishop of Antioch was martyred for his faith in Christ. He knew all the apostles and was a disciple of Polycarp, who was a disciple of the apostle John (Liplady, TIB, 209).

Elgin Moyer in *Who Was Who in Church History* writes that Ignatius “himself said, I would rather die for Christ than rule the whole earth. Leave me to the beasts that I may by them be partaker of God. He is said to have been thrown to the wild beasts in the colosseum at Rome. His Epistles were written during his journey from Antioch to his martyrdom” (Moyer, WWCH, 209).

Ignatius gave credence to the Scripture by the way he based his faith on the accuracy of the Bible. He had ample material and witnesses to support the trustworthiness of the Scriptures.

Polycarp (A.D. 70–156) was a disciple of John who succumbed to martyrdom at eighty-six years of age for his relentless devotion to Christ and the Scriptures. Polycarp's death demonstrated his trust in the accuracy of the Scripture. “About 155, in the reign of Antoninus Pius, when a local persecution was taking place in Smyrna and several of his members had been martyred, he was singled out as the leader of the Church, and marked for martyrdom. When asked to recant and live, he is reputed to have said, ‘Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He hath done me no wrong. How can I speak evil of my King who saved me?’ He was burned at the stake, dying a heroic martyr for his faith” (Moyer, WWCH, 337). Polycarp certainly had ample contacts to verify the truth.

Tatian (c. A.D. 170) organized the Scriptures in order to put them in the first “harmony of the Gospels,” the Diatessaron.

2B. Early Non-Christian Confirmation of New Testament History

Negative Bible critics charge or imply that the New Testament documents are unreliable since they were written by disciples of Jesus or later Christians. They note that there is no confirmation of Jesus or New Testament events in non-Christian sources. Not only is this claim false, but as Geisler notes,

The objection that the writings are partisan involves a significant but false implication that witnesses cannot be reliable if they were close to the one about whom they gave testimony. This is clearly false. Survivors of the Jewish holocaust were close to the events they have described to the world. That very fact puts them in the best position to know what happened. They were there, and it happened to them. The same applies to the court testimony of someone who survived a vicious attack. It applies to the survivors of the Normandy invasion during World War II or the Tet Offensive during the Vietnam War. The New Testament witnesses should not be disqualified because they were close to the events they relate.

Geisler adds,

Suppose there were four eyewitnesses to a murder. There was also one witness who arrived on the scene after the actual killing and saw only the victim's body. Another person heard a secondhand report of the killing. In the trial the defense attorney argues: "Other than the four eyewitnesses, this is a weak case, and the charges should be dismissed for lack of evidence." Others might think that attorney was throwing out a red herring. The judge and jury were being distracted from the strongest evidence to the weakest evidence, and the reasoning was clearly faulty. Since the New Testament witnesses were the only eyewitness and contemporary testimonies to Jesus, it is a fallacy to misdirect attention to the non-Christian secular sources. Nonetheless, it is instructive to show what confirming evidence for Jesus can be gleaned outside the New Testament. (Geisler, BECA, 381)

The references below are discussed in greater detail in my book with Bill Wilson, *He Walked among Us* (McDowell, HWAU).

1C. Tacitus.

The first-century Roman Tacitus is considered one of the more accurate historians of the ancient world. He gives the account of the great fire of Rome, for which some blamed the Emperor Nero:

Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their center and become popular. (Tacitus, A, 15.44)

The "mischievous superstition" to which Tacitus refers is most likely the resurrection of Jesus. The same is true for one of the references of Suetonius below.

2C. Suetonius.

Suetonius was chief secretary to Emperor Hadrian (who reigned from A.D. 117–38). He confirms the report in Acts 18:2 that Claudius commanded all Jews (among them Priscilla and Aquila) to leave Rome in A.D. 49. Two references are important:

"As the Jews were making constant disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from Rome" (Suetonius, *Life of Claudius*, 25.4).

Speaking of the aftermath of the great fire at Rome, Suetonius reports, "Punishment was inflicted on the Christians, a body of people addicted to a novel and mischievous superstition" (Suetonius, *Life of Nero*, 16).

Since Suetonius wrote of these events approximately seventy-five years after their occurrence, he was not in a position to know whether the disturbances were actually instigated by one named Chrestus or because of one by that name. He is probably referring to the dispute between the Jewish people as to the identity of Jesus.

3C. Josephus.

Josephus (C. A.D. 37–C. A.D. 100) was a Pharisee of the priestly line and a Jewish historian, though working under Roman authority and with some care as to not offend the Romans. In addition to his autobiography, he wrote two major works, *Jewish Wars* (A.D. 77–78) and *Antiquities of the Jews* (C. A.D. 94). He also wrote a minor work, *Against Apion*. He makes many statements that verify, either generally or in specific detail, the historical nature of both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible.

1D. Testimony to the Canon.

Josephus supports the Protestant view of the canon of the Old Testament against the Roman Catholic view, which venerates the Old Testament Apocrypha. He even lists the names of the books, which are identical with the thirty-nine books of the Protestant Old Testament. He groups the thirty-nine into twenty-two volumes, to correspond with the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet:

“For we have not an innumerable multitude of books among us, disagreeing from and contradicting one another [as the Greeks have], but only twenty-two books, which contain the records of all the past times; which are justly believed to be divine; and of them, five belong to Moses, which contain his laws.... The prophets, who were after Moses, wrote down what was done in their times in thirteen books. The remaining four books contain hymns to God, and precepts for the conduct of human life” (Josephus, AA, 1.8).

Josephus’s reference to Daniel the prophet as a sixth-century B.C. writer (Josephus, AJ, 10–12) confirms, as Geisler points out, “the supernatural nature of Daniel’s amazing predictions about the course of history after his time. Unlike the later Talmud, Josephus obviously lists Daniel among the prophets, since it is not in Moses or the “hymns to God” section, which would include Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon. This helps confirm the early date of Daniel” (Geisler, BECA, 254).

2D. Testimony to the New Testament.

1E. James the Brother of Jesus. Josephus refers to Jesus as the brother of James who was martyred. Referring to the high priest Ananias, he writes: “He assembled the Sanhedrin of the judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others [or some of his companions], and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned” (Josephus, AJ, 20.9.1).

This passage, written in A.D. 93, confirms the New Testament reports that Jesus was a real person in the first century, that he was identified by others as the Christ, and that he had a brother named James who died a martyr’s death at the hands of the high priest Ananias and his Sanhedrin.

2E. John the Baptist. Josephus also confirmed the existence and martyrdom of John the Baptist, the herald of Jesus (Ant. XVIII. 5.2). Because of the manner in which this passage is written, there is no ground for suspecting Christian interpolation.

“Now, some of the Jews thought that the destruction of Herod’s army came from God, and very justly, as a punishment of what he did against John, who was called the Baptist; for Herod slew him, who was a good man, and commanded the Jews to exercise virtue, both as to righteousness towards one another and piety towards God, and so to come to baptism” (Josephus, AJ, 18.5.2).

The differences between Josephus’s account of John the Baptist’s baptism and that of the Gospel is that Josephus wrote that John’s baptism was not for the remission of sin, while the Bible (Mark 1:4) says it was; and that John was killed for political reasons and not for his denunciation of Herod’s marriage to Herodias. As Bruce points out, it is quite possible that Herod believed he could kill two birds with one stone by imprisoning John. In regard to the discrepancy over his baptism, Bruce says that the Gospels give a more probable account from the “religious-historical” point of view and that they are older than Josephus’s work and, therefore, are more accurate. However, the real point is that the general outline of Josephus’ account confirms that of the Gospels (Bruce, NTD, 107).

3E. Jesus. In a disputed text, Josephus gives a brief description of Jesus and his mission:

Now there was about this time, Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ; and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him. For he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him; and the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct to this day. (Josephus, AJ, 18.3.3)

This passage was cited by Eusebius (c. A.D. 325) in its present form (*Ecclesiastical History* 1.11), and the manuscript evidence favors it. It exists in all the extant copies of this text. Still, it is widely considered to be an interpolation, since it is unlikely that Josephus, a Jew, would affirm that Jesus was the Messiah and had been proven so by fulfilled prophecy, miraculous deeds, and resurrection from the dead. Even “Origin says that Josephus did not believe Jesus to be the Messiah, nor proclaim him as such” (*Contra Celsus* 2.47; 2.13; Bruce, NTD, 108).

F. F. Bruce suggests that the phrase “if indeed we should call him a man” may indicate that the text is authentic but that Josephus is writing with tongue in cheek in sarcastic reference to Christian belief that Jesus is the Son of God (Bruce, NTD, 109). Other scholars have suggested amending the text in ways that preserve its authenticity without the implication that Josephus personally accepted that Christ was the Messiah (see Bruce, NTD, 110–111).

It may be that a fourth-century Arabic text (found in a tenth-century Arabic manuscript) reflects the original intent:

At this time there was a wise man who was called Jesus. And his conduct was good and [he] was known to be virtuous. Many people from among the Jews and other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. And those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion and that he was alive; accordingly, he was perhaps the messiah concerning whom the prophets have recounted wonders. (This passage is found in the Arabic manuscript entitled *Kitab*

Al-Unwan Al-Mukallal Bi-Fadail Al-Hikma Al-Mutawwaj Bi-Anwa Al-Falsafa Al-Manduh Bi-Haqaq Al-Marifa.)

For Further Study on Josephus:

F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*

L. H. Feldman, *Studies on Philo and Josephus*

Josephus, *Against Apion*

Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*

Josephus, *Jewish Wars*

S. Pines, *An Arabic Version of the Testimonium Flavianum and Its Implications*

R. J. H. Shutt, *Studies in Josephus*

H. St. J. Thackeray, *Josephus the Man and the Historian*

4C. Thallus. Thallus wrote around A.D. 52. None of his works is extant, though a few fragmented citations are preserved by other writers. One such writer is Julius Africanus, who in about A.D. 221 quotes Thallus in a discussion about the darkness that followed the crucifixion of Christ: “On the whole world there pressed a most fearful darkness, and the rocks were rent by an earthquake, and many places in Judea and other districts were thrown down. This darkness Thallus, in the third book of his *History*, calls, as appears to me without reason, an eclipse of the sun” (Julius Africanus, *Chronography* 18.1, in Roberts, ANF).

Africanus identifies the darkness, which Thallus explained as a solar eclipse, with the darkness at the crucifixion described in Luke 23:44–45. His reason for disagreeing with Thallus is that a solar eclipse cannot take place at the time of a full moon, and the account reports that “it was at the season of the paschal full moon that Jesus died.”

5C. Pliny the Younger. Ancient government officials often held positions that gave them access to official information not available to the public. Pliny the Younger was a Roman author and administrator. In a letter to the Emperor Trajan in about A.D. 112, Pliny describes the early Christian worship practices:

They were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a god, and bound themselves by a solemn oath, not to do any wicked deeds, but never to commit any fraud, theft or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up; after which it was their custom to separate, and then reassemble to partake of food—but food of an ordinary and innocent kind. (Pliny the Younger, L, 10:96)

This reference provides solid evidence that Jesus Christ was worshiped as God from an early date by Christians who continued to follow the practice of breaking bread together, as reported in Acts 2:42 and 46.

6C. Emperor Trajan. In reply to Pliny’s letter, Emperor Trajan gave the following guidelines for punishing Christians: “No search should be made for these people, when they are denounced and found guilty they must be punished, with the restriction, however, that when the party denies himself to be a Christian, and shall give proof that he is not (that is, by adoring our gods) he shall be pardoned on the ground of repentance even though he may have formerly incurred suspicion” (Pliny the Younger, L, 10:97).

7C. Talmud. Talmudic writings of most value concerning the historical Jesus are those compiled between A.D. 70 and 200 during the so-called *Tannaitic period*. The most significant text is Sanhedrin 43a: “On the eve of Passover Yeshu was hanged. For forty days before the execution took place, a herald went forth and cried, ‘He is going forth to be stoned because he has practiced sorcery and enticed Israel to apostasy. Any one who can say anything in his favour let him come forward and plead on his behalf.’ But since nothing was brought forward in his favour he was hanged on the eve of the Passover!” (Babylonian Talmud).

New Testament details confirmed by this passage include the fact and the time of the crucifixion as well as the intent of the Jewish religious leaders to kill Jesus.

8C. Lucian. Lucian of Samosata was a second-century Greek writer whose works contain sarcastic critiques of Christianity:

The Christians, you know, worship a man to this day—the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account.... You see, these misguided creatures start with the general conviction that they are immortal for all time, which explains the contempt of death and voluntary self-devotion which are so common among them; and then it was impressed on them by their original lawgiver that they are all brothers, from the moment that they are converted, and deny the gods of Greece, and worship the crucified sage, and live after his laws. All this they take quite on faith, with the result that they despise all worldly goods alike, regarding them merely as common property. (Lucian of Samosata, “DP,” 11–13)

Dr. Gary Habermas, a leading researcher and writer on the historical events surrounding Jesus, lists several verified facts that can be ascertained from this text: “Jesus was worshiped by Christians.... Jesus introduced new teachings in Palestine.... He was crucified because of these teachings.... such as all believers are brothers, from the moment that conversion takes place, and after the false gods are denied.... [Also] these teachings included worshiping Jesus and living according to his laws” (Habermas, HJ, 206–207).

Habermas adds: “Concerning Christians, we are told that they are followers of Jesus who believe themselves to be immortal.... [They] accepted Jesus’ teachings by faith and practiced their faith by their disregard for material possessions” (Habermas, HJ, 207).

Dr. Geisler concludes, regarding Lucian, “Despite being one of the church’s most vocal critics, Lucian gives one of the most informative accounts of Jesus and early Christianity outside the New Testament” (Geisler, BECA, 383).

9C. Mara Bar-Serapion. A Syrian, Mara Bar-Serapion wrote to his son Serapion sometime between the late first and early third centuries. The letter contains an apparent reference to Jesus:

What advantage did the Athenians gain from putting Socrates to death? Famine and plague came upon them as a judgment for their crime. What advantage did the men of Samon gain from burning Pythagoras? In a moment their land was covered with sand. What advantage did the Jews gain from executing their wise King? It was just after that their kingdom was abolished. God justly avenged these three wise men: the Athenians died of hunger; the Samians were overwhelmed by the sea; the Jews, ruined and driven from their land, live in dispersion. But Socrates did not die for good; he lived on in the statue of Hera. Nor did the wise king die for good; he lived on in the teaching which he had given. (British Museum, Syriac ms, add. 14, 658; cited in Habermas, HJ, 200)

10C. *The Gospel of Truth.* Immediately after the time of Christ, several non-Christian groups flourished in loose connection with the church. One of the more successful was the Gnostics. This second-century book was perhaps written by Valentinus (A.D. 135–160). It confirms that Jesus was a historical person in several passages:

“For when they had seen him and heard him, he granted them to taste him and to smell him and to touch the beloved Son. When he had appeared instructing them about the Father.... For he came by means of fleshly appearance” (Robinson, NHL, 30:27–33; 31:4–6).

“Jesus was patient in accepting sufferings since he knows that his death is life for many.... He was nailed to a tree; he published the edict of the Father on the cross.... He draws himself down to death through life. Having stripped himself of the perishable rags, he put on imperishability, which no one can possibly take away from him” (Robinson, NHL, 20:11–14, 25–34).

11C. *The Acts of Pontius Pilate.* Beside the extant non-Christian sources for the life of Christ, some documents are hinted at but have not been found. Although a purportedly official document, *The Acts of Pontius Pilate*, does not survive, it is referred to by Justin Martyr in about A.D. 150 and by Tertullian in about A.D. 200. Justin writes: “And the expression, ‘They pierced my hands and my feet,’ was used in reference to the nails of the cross which were fixed in his hands and feet. And after he was crucified, they cast lots upon his vesture, and they that crucified him parted it among them. And that these things did happen you can ascertain from the ‘Acts’ of Pontius Pilate” (Martyr, FA, 35). Justin also claims that the miracles of Jesus can be confirmed in this document (Martyr, FA, 48).

Summary

Dr. Geisler summarizes:

The primary sources for the life of Christ are the four Gospels. However there are considerable reports from non-Christian sources that supplement and confirm the Gospel accounts. These come largely from Greek, Roman, Jewish, and Samaritan sources of the first century. In brief they inform us that:

- (1) Jesus was from *Nazareth*;
- (2) he lived a wise and virtuous life;
- (3) he was crucified in Palestine under Pontius Pilate during the reign of Tiberius Caesar at Passover time, being considered the Jewish King;
- (4) he was believed by his disciples to have been raised from the dead three days later;
- (5) his enemies acknowledged that he performed unusual feats they called “sorcery”;
- (6) his small band of disciples multiplied rapidly, spreading even as far as Rome;
- (7) his disciples denied polytheism, lived moral lives, and worshiped Christ as Divine.

This picture confirms the view of Christ presented in the New Testament Gospels. (Geisler, BECA, 384–385)

Dr. Habermas concludes that “ancient extrabiblical sources do present a surprisingly large amount of detail concerning both the life of Jesus and the nature of early Christianity.” And he adds a point that many overlook: “We should realize that it is quite extraordinary that we could provide a broad outline of most of the major facts of Jesus’ life from ‘secular’ history alone. Such is surely significant” (Habermas, HJ, 224).

F. F. Bruce explains that “it is surprising how few writings, comparatively speaking, have survived from those years of a kind which might be even remotely expected to mention Christ. (I

except, for the present, the letters of Paul and several other New Testament writings)” (Bruce, JCO, 17).

Michael Wilkins and J. P. Moreland conclude that even if we did not have any Christian writings, “we would be able to conclude from such non-Christian writings as Josephus, the *Talmud*, Tacitus, and Pliny the Younger that: (1) Jesus was a Jewish teacher; (2) many people believed that he performed healings and exorcisms; (3) he was rejected by the Jewish leaders; (4) he was crucified under Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberius; (5) despite this shameful death, his followers, who believed that he was still alive, spread beyond Palestine so that there were multitudes of them in Rome by A.D. 64; (6) all kinds of people from the cities and countryside—men and women, slave and free—worshipped him as God by the beginning of the second century” (Wilkins, JUF, 222).

For Further Study

J. N. D. Anderson, *Christianity: The Witness of History*

F. F. Bruce, *Jesus and Christian Origins outside the New Testament*

F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*

Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, C. F. Cruse, trans.

G. Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, chapter nine

Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*

Lucian of Samosata, *The Works of Lucian of Samosata*

Josh McDowell and Bill Wilson, *He Walked among Us*

Origen, *Contra Celsus*

Pliny the Younger, *Letters*. W. Melmoth, trans.

A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*

Suetonius, *Life of Claudius*

Suetonius, *Life of Nero*

Tacitus, *Annals*

3B. The Stones Cry Out: Evidence from Archaeology

Archaeology, a relative newcomer among the physical sciences, has provided exciting and dramatic confirmation of the Bible’s accuracy. Whole books are not large enough to contain all the finds that have bolstered confidence in the historical reliability of the Bible. Presented here are some of the findings of eminent archaeologists and their opinions regarding the implications of those finds.

Nelson Glueck, the renowned Jewish archaeologist, wrote: “It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference” (Glueck, RDHN, 31).

W. F. Albright adds: “The excessive scepticism shown toward the Bible by important historical schools of the eighteenth- and nineteenth centuries, certain phases of which still appear periodically, has been progressively discredited. Discovery after discovery has established the accuracy of innumerable details, and has brought increased recognition to the value of the Bible as a source of history” (Albright, AP, 127, 128).

He later writes: “Archaeological discoveries of the past generation in Egypt, Syria, and Palestine have gone far to establish the uniqueness of early Christianity as an historical phenomenon” (Albright, AP, 248).

John Warwick Montgomery exposes a typical problem of many scholars today: “[American] Institute [of Holy Land Studies] researcher Thomas Drobeno cautioned that where archaeology and the Bible seem to be in tension, the issue is almost always dating, the most shaky area in current archaeology and the one at which scientific *a priori* and circular reasoning often replace solid empirical analysis” (Montgomery, “EA,” 47, 48).

Merrill Unger states: “The role which archaeology is performing in New Testament research (as well as that of the Old Testament) in expediting scientific study, balancing critical theory, illustrating, elucidating, supplementing and authenticating historical and cultural backgrounds, constitutes the one bright spot in the future of criticism of the Sacred text” (Unger, AOT, 25, 26).

Millar Burrows of Yale observes: “Archaeology has in many cases refuted the views of modern critics. It has shown in a number of instances that these views rest on false assumptions and unreal, artificial schemes of historical development (AS 1938, p. 182). This is a real contribution, and not to be minimized” (Burrows, WMTS, 291).

F. F. Bruce notes: “Where Luke has been suspected of inaccuracy, and accuracy has been vindicated by some inscriptional evidence, it may be legitimate to say that archaeology has confirmed the New Testament record” (Bruce, “ACNT,” as cited in Henry, RB, 331).

Bruce adds that “for the most part the service which archaeology has rendered to New Testament studies is the filling in of the contemporary background, against which we can read the record with enhanced comprehension and appreciation. And this background is a first-century background. The New Testament narrative just will not fit into a second century background” (Bruce, “ACNT,” as cited in Henry, RB, 331).

William Albright continues: “As critical study of the Bible is more and more influenced by the rich new material from the ancient Near East we shall see a steady rise in respect for the historical significance of now neglected or despised passages and details in the Old and New Testament” (Albright, FSAC, 81).

Burrows exposes the cause of much excessive unbelief: “The excessive skepticism of many liberal theologians stems not from a careful evaluation of the available data, but from an enormous predisposition against the supernatural” (Burrows, as cited in Vos, CITB, 176).

The Yale archaeologist adds to his above statement: “On the whole, however, archaeological work has unquestionably strengthened confidence in the reliability of the Scriptural record. More than one archaeologist has found his respect for the Bible increased by the experience of excavation in Palestine” (Burrows, WMTS, 1). “On the whole such evidence as archaeology has afforded thus far, especially by providing additional and older manuscripts of the books of the Bible, strengthens our confidence in the accuracy with which the text has been transmitted through the centuries” (Burrows, WMTS, 42).

2C. New Testament Examples

1D. The Incredible Accuracy of Luke

Luke’s reliability as a historian is unquestionable. Unger tells us that archaeology has authenticated the Gospel accounts, especially Luke. In Unger’s words, “The Acts of the Apostles is now generally agreed in scholarly circles to be the work of Luke, to belong to the first century and to involve the labors of a careful historian who was substantially accurate in his use of sources” (Unger, ANT, 24).

1E. Journeys of a Skeptical Archaeologist

Sir William Ramsay is regarded as one of the greatest archaeologists ever to have lived. He was a student in the German historical school of the mid-nineteenth century. As a result, he believed that the Book of Acts was a product of the mid-second century A.D. He was firmly convinced of this belief.

In his research to make a topographical study of Asia Minor he was compelled to consider the writings of Luke. As a result, he was forced to do a complete reversal of his beliefs due to the overwhelming evidence uncovered in his research. He spoke of this when he said:

I may fairly claim to have entered on this investigation without prejudice in favour of the conclusion which I shall now seek to justify to the reader. On the contrary, I began with a mind unfavourable to it, for the ingenuity and apparent completeness of the Tübingen theory had at one time quite convinced me. It did not then lie in my line of life to investigate the subject minutely; but more recently I found myself brought into contact with the Book of Acts as an authority for the topography, antiquities and society of Asia Minor. It was gradually borne upon me that in various details the narrative showed marvelous truth. In fact, beginning with a fixed idea that the work was essentially a second century composition, and never relying on its evidence as trustworthy for first century conditions, I gradually came to find it a useful ally in some obscure and difficult investigations. (Blaklock, LAENT, 36, quoted from Ramsay's book *St. Paul the Traveler and the Roman Citizen*)

Concerning Luke's ability as a historian, Sir William Ramsay concluded after thirty years of study that "Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy...this author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians" (Ramsay, BRDTNT, 222).

Ramsay adds: "Luke's history is unsurpassed in respect of its trustworthiness" (Ramsay, SPTRC, 81).

What Ramsay had done conclusively and finally was to exclude certain possibilities. As seen in the light of archaeological evidence, the New Testament reflects the conditions of the second half of the first century A.D. and does not reflect the conditions of any later date. Historically, it is of the greatest importance that this should have been so effectively established. In all matters of external fact, the author of Acts is seen to have been minutely careful and accurate as only a contemporary can be.

2E. The "Problem" of Quirinius

It was at one time conceded that Luke had entirely missed the boat in the events he portrayed as surrounding the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:1-3). Critics argued that there was no census, that Quirinius was not governor of Syria at that time, and that everyone did not have to return to his ancestral home (Elder, PID, 159, 160; Free, ABH, 285).

Archaeological discoveries, however, show that the Romans had a regular enrollment of taxpayers and also held censuses every fourteen years. This procedure was indeed begun under Augustus and the first took place in either 23-22 B.C. or in 9-8 B.C. The latter would be the one to which Luke refers.

Second, we find evidence that Quirinius was governor of Syria around 7 B.C. This assumption is based on an inscription found in Antioch ascribing this post to Quirinius. As a result of this finding, it is now supposed that he was governor twice—once in 7 B.C. and the other time in 6 A.D. (the date ascribed by Josephus) (Elder, PID, 160).

Last, in regard to the practices of enrollment, a papyrus found in Egypt gives directions for the conduct of a census. It reads: "Because of the approaching census it is necessary that all those

residing for any cause away from their homes should at once prepare to return to their own governments in order that they may complete the family registration of the enrollment and that the tilled lands may retain those belonging to them” (Elder, PID, 159, 160; Free, ABH, 285).

Dr. Geisler summarizes:

Several problems are involved in the statement that Augustus conducted a census of the whole empire during the reign of both Quirinius and Herod. For one, there is no record of such a census, but we now know that regular censuses were taken in Egypt, Gaul, and Cyrene. It is quite likely that Luke’s meaning is that censuses were taken throughout the empire at different times, and Augustus started this process. The present tense that Luke uses points strongly toward understanding this as a repeated event. Now Quirinius did take a census, but that was in A.D. 6, too late for Jesus’ birth, and Herod died before Quirinius became governor.

Was Luke confused? No; in fact he mentions Quirinius’ later census in Acts 5:37. It is most likely that Luke is distinguishing this census in Herod’s time from the more well-known census of Quirinius: “This census took place before Quirinius was governor of Syria.” There are several New Testament parallels for this translation. (Geisler, BECA, 46–47)

3E. Luke’s Incredible Accuracy

Archaeologists at first disbelieved Luke’s implication that Lystra and Derbe were in Lycaonia and that Iconium was not (Acts 14:6). They based their belief on the writings of Romans such as Cicero, who indicated that Iconium was in Lycaonia. Thus, archaeologists said the Book of Acts was unreliable. However, in 1910 Sir William Ramsay found a monument that showed that Iconium was a Phrygian city. Later discoveries confirm this fact (Free, ABH, 317).

Among other historical references of Luke is that of Lysanias, the tetrarch of Abilene who ruled in Syria and Palestine (Luke 3:1) at the beginning of John the Baptist’s ministry in A.D. 27. The only Lysanias known to ancient historians was one who was killed in 36 B.C. However, an inscription found at Abila near Damascus speaks of “Freedman of Lysanias the Tetrarch” and is dated between A.D. 14 and 29 (Bruce, “ACNT,” as cited in Henry, RB, 321).

In Corinth, a fragmentary inscription was found that was believed to have borne the words “Synagogue of the Hebrews.” Conceivably, it stood over the doorway of the synagogue where Paul debated (Acts 18:4–7). Another Corinthian inscription mentions the city “meat market” to which Paul refers in 1 Corinthians 10:25.

In many similar ways, thanks to the archaeological finds, most of the ancient cities mentioned in the Book of Acts have been identified. The journeys of Paul can now be accurately traced as a result of these finds (Bruce, NTD, 95; Albright, RDBL, 118).

Geisler reveals, “In all, Luke names thirty-two countries, fifty-four cities and nine islands without an error” (Geisler, BECA, 47).

Luke writes of the riot of Ephesus, and represents a civic assembly (*ecclesia*) taking place in a theater (Acts 19:23–29). The facts are that it did meet there, as borne out by an inscription that speaks of silver statues of Artemis (“Diana” in the KJV) to be placed in the “theater during a full session of the *Ecclesia*.” The theater, when excavated, proved to have room for twenty-five thousand people (Bruce, “ACNT,” as cited in Henry, RB, 326).

Luke also relates that a riot broke out in Jerusalem because Paul took a Gentile into the temple (Acts 21:28). Inscriptions have been found that read, in Greek and Latin, “No foreigner may enter within the barrier which surrounds the temple and enclosure. Anyone who is caught doing so will be personally responsible for his ensuing death.” Luke is proved right again (Bruce, “ACNT,” as cited in Henry, RB, 326)!

Also in doubt were Luke's usages of certain words. Luke refers to Philippi as a "part" or "district" (Gk. *meris*) of Macedonia. F. J. A. Hort believed Luke erred in this usage. He said that *meris* referred to a "portion," not a "district," thus his grounds for disagreement. Archaeological excavations, however, have shown that this very word, *meris*, was used to describe the divisions of the district. Thus, archaeology has again shown the accuracy of Luke (Free, ABH, 320).

Other poor word usages were attached to Luke. He was not considered technically correct for referring to the Philippian rulers as *praetors*. According to critical scholars, two *duumvirs* would have ruled the town. However, as usual, Luke was right. Findings have shown that the title of *praetor* was employed by the magistrates of a Roman colony (Free, ABH, 321). His choice of the word *proconsul* as the title for Gallio (Acts 18:12) is correct, as evidenced by the Delphi inscription that states in part: "As Lucius Junius Gallio, my friend, and the Proconsul of Achaia...." (Vos, CITB, 180).

The Delphi inscription (A.D. 52) gives us a fixed time period for establishing Paul's ministry of one and a half years in Corinth. We know this, from other sources, by the fact that Gallio took office on July 1, that his proconsulship lasted only one year, and that this year overlapped Paul's work in Corinth (Bruce, "ACNT," as cited in Henry, RB, 324).

Luke gives to Publius, the chief man in Malta, the title "first man of the island" (Acts 28:7). Inscriptions have been unearthed that do give him the title of "first man" (Bruce, "ACNT," as cited in Henry, RB, 325).

Still another case is his usage of *politarchs* to denote the civil authorities of Thessalonica (Acts 17:6). Since *politarch* is not found in the classical literature, Luke was again assumed to be wrong. However, some nineteen inscriptions that make use of the title have been found. Interestingly enough, five of these are in reference to Thessalonica (Bruce, "ACNT," as cited in Henry, RB, 325). One of the inscriptions was discovered in a Roman arch at Thessalonica, and in it are found the names of six of that city's *politarchs* (360).

Colin Hemer, a noted Roman historian, has catalogued numerous archaeological and historical confirmations of Luke's accuracy in his book *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History*. Following is a partial summary of his voluminous, detailed report (Hemer 104–107):

- Specialized details, which would not have been widely known except to a contemporary researcher such as Luke who traveled widely. These details include exact titles of officials, identification of army units, and information about major routes.
- Details archaeologists know are accurate but can't verify as to the precise time period. Some of these are unlikely to have been known except to a writer who had visited the districts.
- Correlation of dates of known kings and governors with the chronology of the narrative.
- Facts appropriate to the date of Paul or his immediate contemporary in the church but not to a date earlier or later.
- "Undesigned coincidences" between Acts and the Pauline Epistles.
- Internal correlations within Acts.
- Offhand geographical references that bespeak familiarity with common knowledge.
- Differences in formulation within Acts that indicate the different categories of sources he used.

- Peculiarities in the selection of detail, as in theology, that are explainable in the context of what is now known of first-century church life.
- Materials the immediacy of which suggests that the author was recounting a recent experience, rather than shaping or editing a text long after it had been written.
- Cultural or idiomatic items now known to be peculiar to the first-century atmosphere.

Roman historian A. N. Sherwin-White agrees: “For Acts the confirmation of historicity is overwhelming... Any attempt to reject its basic historicity must now appear absurd. Roman historians have long taken it for granted” (Sherwin-White, *RSRLNT*, 189).

Is it any wonder that E. M. Blaiklock, professor of classics in Auckland University, concludes that “Luke is a consummate historian, to be ranked in his own right with the great writers of the Greeks” (Blaiklock, *AA*, 89).

2D. “Earliest Records of Christianity”

In 1945, two ossuaries (receptacles for bones) were found in the vicinity of Jerusalem. These ossuaries exhibited graffiti that their discoverer, Eleazar L. Sukenik, claimed to be “the earliest records of Christianity.” These burial receptacles were found in a tomb that was in use before A.D. 50. The writings read *Iesous iou* and *Iesous aloth*. Also present were four crosses. It is likely that the first is a prayer to Jesus for help, and the second, a prayer for resurrection of the person whose bones were contained in the ossuary (Bruce, “ACNT,” as cited in Henry, *RB*, 327, 328).

3D. The Pavement

For centuries there was no record of the court where Jesus was tried by Pilate (named *Gabbatha*, or the Pavement, John 19:13).

William F. Albright, in *The Archaeology of Palestine*, shows that this court was the court of the Tower of Antonia, the Roman military headquarters in Jerusalem. It was left buried when the city was rebuilt in the time of Hadrian and was not discovered until recently (Albright, *AP*, 141).

4D. The Pool of Bethesda

The Pool of Bethesda, another site with no record except in the New Testament, can now be identified “with a fair measure of certainty in the northeast quarter of the old city (the area called Bezetha, or ‘New Lawn’) in the first century A.D., where traces of it were discovered in the course of excavations near the Church of St. Anne in 1888” (Bruce, “ACNT,” as cited in Henry, *RB*, 329).

5D. The Gospel of John

Archaeology has authenticated the Gospel accounts, including John’s. Dr. William Foxwell Albright, a staff person and director for the American School of Oriental Research in Jerusalem for seventeen years, reputedly states: “The Dead Sea Scrolls from Qumran have added vital new evidence for the relative antiquity of the Gospel of John” (Albright, *AP*, 249).

He goes on: “The points of contact in phraseology, symbolism, and conceptual imagery between Essene literature and the Gospel of St. John are particularly close, though there are also many resemblances between them and nearly all New Testament writers” (Albright, *AP*, 249).

6D. The Nazareth Decree

Dr. Geisler expounds upon this find:

A slab of stone was found in Nazareth in 1878, inscribed with a decree from Emperor Claudius (A.D. 41–54) that no graves should be disturbed or bodies extracted or moved. This type of decree is not uncommon, but the startling fact is that here “the offender [shall] be sentenced to capital punishment on [the] charge of violation of [a] sepulchre” (Hemer, BASHH, 155). Other notices warned of a fine, but death for disturbing graves? A likely explanation is that Claudius, having heard of the Christian doctrine of resurrection and Jesus’ empty tomb while investigating the riots of A.D. 49, decided not to let any such report surface again. This would make sense in light of the Jewish argument that the body had been stolen (Matt. 28:11–15). This is early testimony to the strong and persistent belief that Jesus rose from the dead. (Geisler, BECA, 48)

7D. Yohanan—A Crucifixion Victim

Dr. Geisler explains the importance of this archaeological find:

In 1968, an ancient burial site was uncovered in Jerusalem containing about thirty-five bodies. It was determined that most of these had suffered violent deaths in the Jewish uprising against Rome in A.D. 70. One of these was a man named Yohanan Ben Ha’galgol. He was about twenty-four to twenty-eight years old, had a cleft palate, and a seven-inch nail was driven through both his feet. The feet had been turned outward so that the square nail could be hammered through at the heel, just inside the Achilles tendon. This would have bowed the legs outward as well so that they could not have been used for support on the cross. The nail had gone through a wedge of acacia wood, then through the heels, then into an olive wood beam. There was also evidence that similar spikes had been put between the two bones of each lower arm. These had caused the upper bones to be worn smooth as the victim repeatedly raised and lowered himself to breathe (breathing is restricted with the arms raised). Crucifixion victims had to lift themselves to free the chest muscles and, when they grew too weak to do so, died by suffocation.

Yohanan’s legs were crushed by a blow, consistent with the common use of the Roman *crucifragium* (John 19:31–32). Each of these details confirms the New Testament description of crucifixion. (Geisler, BECA, 48)

8D. The Pilate Inscription

In 1961 an Italian archaeologist, Antonio Frova, discovered an inscription at Caesarea Maritima on a stone slab which at the time of the discovery was being used as a section of steps leading into the Caesarea theater. The inscription in Latin contained four lines, three of which are partially readable. Roughly translated they are as follows:

Tiberium
Pontius Pilate
Prefect of Judea

The inscribed stone was probably used originally in the foundation for a Tiberium (a temple for the worship of the emperor Tiberius) and then reused later in the discovered location. This inscription clarifies the title of Pontius Pilate as “prefect” at least during a time in his rulership. Tacitus and Josephus later referred to him as “procurator.” The NT calls him “governor” (Matt. 27:2), a term which incorporates both titles. This inscription is the only archaeological evidence of both Pilate’s name and this title. (Dockery, FBI, 360)

9D. The Erastus Inscription

In his Epistle to the Romans, written from Corinth, Paul makes mention of the city treasurer, Erastus (Rom. 16:23). During the excavations of Corinth in 1929, a pavement was found inscribed: ERASTVS PRO:AED:S:P:STRAVIT (“Erastus, curator of public buildings, laid this pavement at his own expense”). According to Bruce, the pavement quite likely existed in the first

century A.D., and the donor and the man Paul mentions are probably one and the same (Bruce, NTD, 95; Vos, CITB, 185).

10D. New Testament Coins

Three coins mentioned in the Greek New Testament have been identified with reasonable assurance.

1. The “tribute penny” (Matt. 22:17–21; Mark 12:13–17; Luke 20:20–26). The Greek word for the coin shown to Jesus in these passages is “denarius,” a small silver coin which carried the image of Caesar on one side. Its value was equal to one day’s wages for an average worker in Palestine.
2. The “thirty pieces of silver” (Matt. 26:14–15). This amount was probably thirty silver shekels. Originally a shekel was a measure of weight equaling approximately two-fifths of an ounce. It later developed into a silver coin of about the same weight.
3. The “widow’s mite” (Mark 12:41–44; Luke 21:1–4). The passage in question reads (in NIV): “two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny.” The first words translate the Greek “*lepta*” which is the smallest Greek copper coin, the second translates the Greek word “*quadrans*” which is the smallest Roman copper coin. Knowing the minute monetary value of these coins gives even greater meaning to the message of the parable. (Dockery, FBI, 362)

This section can be appropriately summarized by the words of Sir Walter Scott in reference to the Scriptures:

Within that awful volume lies
The mystery of mysteries
Happiest they of human race
To whom God has granted grace
To read, to fear, to hope, to pray
To lift the latch, and force the way;
And better had they ne’er been born,
Who read to doubt, or read to scorn.
—(Scott, M, 140)

CONCLUSION

After trying to shatter the historicity and validity of the Scripture, I came to the conclusion that it is historically trustworthy. If one discards the Bible as being unreliable, then one must discard almost all literature of antiquity.

One problem I constantly face is the desire on the part of many to apply one standard or test to secular literature and another to the Bible. One must apply the same test, whether the literature under investigation is secular or religious.

Having done this, I believe we can hold the Scriptures in our hands and say, “The Bible is trustworthy and historically reliable.”

For Further Study

W. F. Albright, “Retrospect and Prospect in New Testament Archaeology,” in E. J. Vardaman, ed., *The Teacher’s Yoke*

F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*

N. Glueck, *Rivers in the Desert*
G. R. Habermas, *The Verdict of History*
C. J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History*, C. H. Gempf, ed.
J. McRay, *Archaeology and the New Testament*
W. M. Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveler and the Roman Citizen*
J. A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament*
A. N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament*
C. A. Wilson, *Rocks, Relics and Biblical Reliability*
E. Yamauchi, *The Stones and the Scriptures*

Is the Old Testament Historically Reliable?

The Reliability of the Old Testament Manuscripts

Textual Transmission: How Accurate Was the Copying Process?

Quality of Manuscripts

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Summary

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Biblical Writers' Confirmation

1A. THE RELIABILITY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT MANUSCRIPTS

This chapter focuses on the historical reliability of the Old Testament (OT), as much of the evidence is different than that for the New Testament (NT). In both chapters three and four we are dealing with the historical reliability of the Bible, not its inspiration. The inspiration of the Bible is covered in part two of this book.

The Old Testament has been shown to be reliable in at least three major ways: (1) textual transmission (the accuracy of the copying process down through history); (2) the confirmation of the Old Testament by hard evidence uncovered through archaeology; and (3) confirmation of the Old Testament by history reported outside the Bible.

1B. Textual Transmission: How Accurate Was the Copying Process?

Part of discovering the historical reliability of the Old Testament has to do with examining the textual transmission (the path from the original writings to today's printed copies). As with other literature of antiquity, we do not have the original documents. But the accuracy of the Hebrew copyists is astonishing when comparing the Scriptures to other literature of antiquity. Gleason Archer states,

It should be clearly understood that in this respect [to transmission], the Old Testament differs from all other pre-Christian works of literature of which we have any knowledge. To be sure, we do not possess so many different manuscripts of pagan productions, coming from such widely separated eras, as we do in the case of the Old Testament. But where we do, for example, in the Egyptian Book of the Dead, the variations are of a far more extensive and serious nature. Quite startling differences appear, for example, between chapter 15 contained in the Papyrus of Ani (written in the Eighteenth Dynasty) and the Turin Papyrus (from the Twenty-sixth Dynasty or later). Whole clauses are inserted or left out, and the sense in corresponding columns of text is in some cases altogether different. Apart from divine superintendence of the transmission of the Hebrew text, there is no particular reason why the same phenomenon of divergence and change would not appear between Hebrew manuscripts produced centuries apart. For example, even though the two copies of Isaiah discovered in Qumran Cave 1 near the Dead Sea in 1947 were a thousand years earlier than the oldest dated manuscript previously known (A.D. 980), they proved to be word for word identical with our standard Hebrew Bible in more than 95 percent of the text. The 5 percent of variation consisted chiefly of obvious slips of the pen and variations in spelling. They do not affect the message of revelation in the slightest. (Archer, SOT, 23–25)

Robert Dick Wilson's brilliant observations trace the veracity and trustworthiness of Scriptures back to the surrounding cultures of Old Testament Israel:

The Hebrew Scriptures contain the names of 26 or more foreign kings whose names have been found on documents contemporary with the kings. The names of most of these kings are found to be spelled on their own monuments, or in documents from the time in which they reigned in the same manner that they are spelled in the documents of the Old Testament. The changes in spelling of others are in accordance with the laws of phonetic change as those laws were in operation at the time when the Hebrew documents claim to have been written. In the case of two or three names only are there letters, or spellings, that cannot as yet be explained with certainty; but even in these few cases it cannot be shown that the spelling in the Hebrew text is wrong. Contrariwise, the names of many of the kings of Judah and Israel are found on the Assyrian contemporary documents with the same spelling as that which we find in the present Hebrew text.

In 144 cases of transliteration from Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian and Moabite into Hebrew and in 40 cases of the opposite, or 184 in all, the evidence shows that for 2300 to 3900 years the text of the proper names in the Hebrew Bible has been transmitted with the most minute accuracy. That the original scribes should have written them with such close conformity to correct philological principles is a wonderful proof of their thorough care and scholarship; further, that the Hebrew text should have been transmitted by copyists through so many centuries is a phenomenon unequalled in the history of literature. (Wilson, SIOT, 64, 71)

Wilson adds that there are about forty of these kings living from 2000 B.C. to 400 B.C. Each appears in chronological order “with reference to the kings of the same country and with respect to the kings of other countries...no stronger evidence for the substantial accuracy of the Old Testament records could possibly be imagined, than this collection of kings.” In a footnote he computes the probability of this accuracy occurring by chance. “Mathematically, it is one chance in 750,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 that this accuracy is mere circumstance” (Wilson, SIOT, 74–75).

Because of this evidence, Wilson concludes:

The proof that the copies of the original documents have been handed down with substantial correctness for more than 2,000 years cannot be denied. That the copies in existence 2,000 years ago had been in like manner handed down from the originals is not merely possible, but, as we have shown, is rendered probable by the analogies of Babylonian documents now existing of which we have both originals and copies, thousands of years apart, and of scores of papyri which show when compared with our modern editions of the classics that only minor changes of the text have taken place in more than 2,000 years and especially by the scientific and demonstrable accuracy with which the proper spelling of the names of kings and of the numerous foreign terms embedded in the Hebrew text has been transmitted to us. (Wilson, SIOT, 85)

F. F. Bruce states that “the consonantal text of the Hebrew Bible which the Masoretes edited had been handed down to their time with conspicuous fidelity over a period of nearly a thousand years” (Bruce, BP, 178).

William Green concludes that “it may safely be said that no other work of antiquity has been so accurately transmitted” (Green, GIOT, 81).

Concerning the accuracy of the transmission of the Hebrew text, Atkinson, who was under-librarian of the library at Cambridge University, says it is “little short of miraculous.”

For hundreds of years, Jewish rabbis have guarded the transmission of the Hebrew text with minute precautions. This chapter highlights what has resulted.

1C. Quantity of Manuscripts

Even though the Old Testament does not boast of the same quantity of manuscripts (MSS) as the New Testament, the number of manuscripts available today is quite remarkable. Several reasons

have been suggested for the scarcity of early Hebrew manuscripts. The first and most obvious reason is a combination of antiquity and destructibility; two to three thousand years is a long time to expect ancient documents to last. Nonetheless, several lines of evidence support the conclusion that their quality is very good. First, it is important to establish the quantity of manuscripts available.

There are several important collections of Hebrew manuscripts today. The first collection of Hebrew manuscripts, made by Benjamin Kennicott (1776–80) and published by Oxford, listed 615 manuscripts of the Old Testament. Later, Giovanni de Rossi (1784–8) published a list of 731 manuscripts. The most important manuscript discoveries in modern times are those of the Cairo Geniza (1890s) and the Dead Sea Scrolls (1947 and following years). In the Cairo synagogue attic, a *geniza*, or storehouse, for old manuscripts was discovered. Two hundred thousand manuscripts and fragments (Kahle, CG, 13, and Wurthwein, TOT, 25), some ten thousand of which are biblical (Goshen-Gottstein, “BMUS,” 35), were found.

Near the end of the nineteenth century, many fragments from the sixth to eighth centuries were found in an old synagogue in Cairo, Egypt, which had been Saint Michael’s Church until A.D. 882. They were found there in a *geniza*, a storage room where worn or faulty manuscripts were hidden until they could be disposed of properly. This *geniza* had apparently been walled off and forgotten until its recent discovery. In this small room, as many as 200,000 fragments were preserved, including biblical texts in Hebrew and Aramaic. The biblical fragments date from the fifth century A.D. (Dockery, FBI, 162–163)

Of the manuscripts found in the Cairo Geniza, about half are now housed at Cambridge University. The rest are scattered throughout the world. Cairo Geniza’s authority, Paul Kahle, has identified more than 120 rare manuscripts prepared by the “Babylonian” group of Masoretic scribes.

The largest collection of Hebrew Old Testament manuscripts in the world is the Second Firkowitch Collection in Leningrad. It contains 1,582 items of the Bible and Masora on parchment (725 on paper), plus 1,200 additional Hebrew manuscript fragments in the Antonin Collection (Wurthwein, TOT, 23). Kahle contends also that these Antonin Collection manuscripts and fragments are all from the Cairo Geniza (Kahle, 7). In the Firkowitch Collection are found fourteen Hebrew Old Testament manuscripts from between the years A.D. 929 and A.D. 1121 that originated in the Cairo Geniza.

Cairo Geniza manuscripts are scattered over the world. Some of the better ones in the United States are in the Enelow Memorial Collection at the Jewish Theological Seminary, New York (Goshen-Gottstein, BMUS, 44f).

The British Museum catalog lists 161 Hebrew Old Testament manuscripts. At Oxford University, the Bodleian Library catalog lists 146 Old Testament manuscripts, each containing a large number of fragments (Kahle, CG, 5). Goshen-Gottstein estimates that in the United States alone there are tens of thousands of Semitic manuscript fragments, about 5 percent of which are biblical—more than five hundred manuscripts (Goshen-Gottstein, BMUS, 30).

The most significant Hebrew Old Testament manuscripts date from between the third century B.C. and the fourteenth century A.D. Of these, the most remarkable manuscripts are those of the Dead Sea Scrolls, which date from the third century B.C. to the first century A.D. They include one complete Old Testament book (Isaiah) and thousands of fragments, which together represent every Old Testament book except Esther (Geisler, BECA, 549). (See the section called “The Dead Sea Scrolls” later in this chapter.)

The Dead Sea Scrolls manuscripts are highly significant because they confirm the accuracy of other manuscripts dated much later. For example, *Cairo Codex* (A.D. 895) is the earliest Masoretic manuscript prior to the Dead Sea Scrolls discoveries. It is now located in the British Museum. Also called *Codex Cairensis*, it was produced by the Masoretic Moses ben Asher family and contains both the Latter and Former Prophets. The rest of the Old Testament is missing from it (Bruce, BP, 115–16).

Codex of the Prophets of Leningrad (A.D. 916) contains Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the twelve Minor Prophets.

The earliest complete MS of the Old Testament is the *Codex Babylonicus Petropolitanus* (A.D. 1008), located in Leningrad. It was prepared from a corrected text of Rabbi Aaron ben Moses ben Asher before A.D. 1000 (Geisler, GIB, 250).

Aleppo Codex (A.D. 900+) is an exceptionally valuable manuscript. It once was thought lost but in 1958 was rediscovered. It did not, however, escape damage. It was partially destroyed in the 1947 riots in Israel. Aleppo Codex was the oldest complete Masoretic manuscript of the entire Old Testament.

British Museum Codex (A.D. 950) contains part of Genesis through Deuteronomy.

Reuchlin Codex of the Prophets (A.D. 1105) was prepared by the Masorete ben Naphtali.

This brings up the question of the faithfulness of the transmission of the Bible text. There are numerous types of manuscript error, which the textual critic may discover in the early manuscripts of the Old Testament. (These will be discussed in a later section of this chapter). Are these of so serious a nature as to corrupt the message itself, or make it impossible to convey the true meaning? If they are, then God's purpose has been frustrated; He could not convey His revelation so that those of later generations could understand it correctly. If He did not exercise a restraining influence over the scribes who wrote out the standard and authoritative copies of the Scriptures, then they corrupted and falsified the message. If the message was falsified, the whole purpose of offering a written revelation has come to nothing; for such a corrupted Scripture would be a mere mixture of truth and error, necessarily subject to human judgment (rather than sitting in judgment upon man).

2C. History of the Old Testament Text

Rabbi Aquiba, second century A.D., with a desire to produce an exact text, is credited with saying that "the accurate transmission [Masoreth] of the text is a fence for the Torah" (Harrison, IOT, 211). In Judaism, a succession of scholars was charged with standardizing and preserving the biblical text, fencing out all possible introduction of error:

- The *Sopherim* (from Hebrew, meaning "scribes") were Jewish scholars and custodians of the text between the fifth and third centuries B.C.
- The *Zugoth* ("pairs" of textual scholars) were assigned to this task in the second and first centuries B.C.
- The *Tannaim* ("repeaters" or "teachers") were active until A.D. 200. In addition to preserving the Old Testament text, the work of Tannaim can be found in the *Midrash* ("textual interpretation"), *Tosefta* ("addition"), and *Talmud* ("instruction"), the latter of which is divided into *Mishnah* ("repetitions") and *Gemara* ("the matter to be learned"). The Talmud gradually was compiled between A.D. 100 and A.D. 500. It was natural that the Tannaim would preserve the Hebrew Bible, since their work had to do with compiling several centuries of rabbinic teaching based on the biblical text.
- The *Talmudists* (A.D. 100–500)

Geisler and Nix explain the second scribal tradition, extending from about 400 B.C. to almost A.D. 1000:

Following the first period of Old Testament scribal tradition, the period of the Sopherim (c. 400 B.C.–c. A.D. 200), there appeared a second, the Talmudic period (c. A.D. 100–c. 500), which was followed by the better-known Masoretic tradition (c. 500–c. 950). Ezra worked with the first of these groups, and they were regarded as the Bible custodians until after the time of Christ. Between A.D. 100 and 500, the Talmud (instruction, teaching) grew up as a body of Hebrew civil and canonical law based on the Torah. The Talmud basically represents the opinions and decisions of Jewish teachers from about 300 B.C. to A.D. 500, and it consists of two main divisions: the Mishnah and the Gemara. (Geisler, GIB, 306)

During this period, a great deal of time was spent cataloging Hebrew civil and canonical law. The Talmudists had an intricate system for transcribing synagogue scrolls.

Samuel Davidson describes some of the disciplines of the Talmudists in regard to the Scriptures. These minute regulations (I am going to use the numbering incorporated by Geisler) are as follows:

[1] A synagogue roll must be written on the skins of clean animals, [2] prepared for the particular use of the synagogue by a Jew. [3] These must be fastened together with strings taken from clean animals. [4] Every skin must contain a certain number of columns, equal throughout the entire codex. [5] The length of each column must not extend over less than 48 or more than 60 lines; and the breadth must consist of thirty letters. [6] The whole copy must be first-lined; and if three words be written without a line, it is worthless. [7] The ink should be black, neither red, green, nor any other colour, and be prepared according to a definite recipe. [8] An authentic copy must be the exemplar, from which the transcriber ought not in the least deviate. [9] No word or letter, not even a yod, must be written from memory, the scribe not having looked at the codex before him.... [10] Between every consonant the space of a hair or thread must intervene; [11] between every new parashah, or section, the breadth of nine consonants; [12] between every book, three lines. [13] The fifth book of Moses must terminate exactly with a line; but the rest need not do so. [14] Besides this, the copyist must sit in full Jewish dress, [15] wash his whole body, [16] not begin to write the name of God with a pen newly dipped in ink, [17] and should a king address him while writing that name he must take no notice of him. (Davidson, HTOT, 89)

Davidson adds that “the rolls in which these regulations are not observed are condemned to be buried in the ground or burned; or they are banished to the schools, to be used as reading-books.”

The Talmudists were so convinced that when they finished transcribing a MS they had an exact duplicate, that they would give the new copy equal authority.

Frederic Kenyon, in *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts*, expands on the above concerning the destruction of older copies:

The same extreme care which was devoted to the transcription of manuscripts is also at the bottom of the disappearance of the earlier copies. When a manuscript had been copied with the exactitude prescribed by the Talmud, and had been duly verified, it was accepted as authentic and regarded as being of equal value with any other copy. If all were equally correct, *age gave no advantage to a manuscript*; on the contrary age was a positive disadvantage, since a manuscript was liable to become defaced or damaged in the lapse of time. A damaged or imperfect copy was at once condemned as unfit for use.

Attached to each synagogue was a “Gheniza,” or lumber cupboard, in which defective manuscripts were laid aside; and from these receptacles some of the oldest manuscripts now

extant have in modern times been recovered. Thus, far from regarding an older copy of the Scriptures as more valuable, the Jewish habit has been to prefer the newer, as being the most perfect and free from damage. The older copies, once consigned to the “Gheniza” naturally perished, either from neglect or from being deliberately burned when the “Gheniza” became overcrowded.

The absence of very old copies of the Hebrew Bible need not, therefore, either surprise or disquiet us. If, to the causes already enumerated, we add the repeated persecutions (involving much destruction of property) to which the Jews have been subject, the disappearance of the ancient manuscripts is adequately accounted for, and those which remain may be accepted as preserving that which alone they profess to preserve—namely, the Masoretic text. (Kenyon, *OBAM*, 43)

“Reverence for the Scriptures and regard for the purity of the sacred text did not first originate after the fall of Jerusalem” (Green, *GIOT*, 173).

The *Masoretes* were the Jewish scholars who between A.D. 500 and A.D. 950 gave the final form to the text of the Old Testament. The destruction of the temple in A.D. 70, along with the dispersion of the Jews from their land, became a powerful impetus to (1) standardize the consonantal text, and (2) standardize punctuation and the use of vowels to preserve correct vocalization and pronunciation for reading. They were called Masoretes because they preserved in writing the oral tradition (*masorah*) concerning the correct vowels and accents and the number of occurrences of rare words of unusual spellings. They received the unpointed (comparable to English without vowels), consonantal text of the Sopherim and inserted the vowel points that gave to each word its exact pronunciation and grammatical form. They even engaged in a moderate amount of textual criticism. Wherever they suspected that the word indicated by the consonantal text was erroneous, they corrected it in a very ingenious way. They left the actual consonants undisturbed, as they had received them from the Sopherim. But they inserted the vowel points that belonged to the new word they were substituting for the old, then inserted the consonants of the new word itself in very small letters in the margin (Archer, *SOT*, 63).

There were two major schools or centers of Masoretic activity—each largely independent of the other—the Babylonian and the Palestinian. The most famous Masoretes were the Jewish scholars living in Tiberias in Galilee, Moses ben Asher (with his son Aaron) and Moses ben Naphtali, in the late ninth and tenth centuries. The ben Asher text is the standard Hebrew text today and is best represented by Codex Leningradensis B19 A (L) and the Aleppo Codex.

The Masoretes accepted the laborious job of editing the text and standardizing it. Their headquarters was in Tiberias. The text that the Masoretes preserved is called the Masoretic Text. This resultant text had vowel points added in order to ensure proper pronunciation. This Masoretic Text is the standard Hebrew text today.

The Masoretes were well disciplined and treated the text

with the greatest imaginable reverence, and devised a complicated system of safeguards against scribal slips. They counted, for example, the number of times each letter of the alphabet occurs in each book; they pointed out the middle letter of the Pentateuch and the middle letter of the whole Hebrew Bible, and made even more detailed calculations than these. “Everything countable seems to be counted,” says Wheeler Robinson, and they made up mnemonics by which the various totals might be readily remembered. (Bruce, *BP*, 117)

The scribes could tell if one consonant was left out of, say, the entire book of Isaiah or the entire Hebrew Bible. They built in so many safeguards that they knew when they finished that they had an exact copy.

Sir Frederic Kenyon says:

Besides recording varieties of reading, tradition, or conjecture, the Masoretes undertook a number of calculations which do not enter into the ordinary sphere of textual criticism. They numbered the verses, words, and letters of every book. They calculated the middle word and the middle letter of each. They enumerated verses which contained all the letters of the alphabet, or a certain number of them. These trivialities, as we may rightly consider them, had yet the effect of securing minute attention to the precise transmission of the text; and they are but an excessive manifestation of a respect for the sacred Scriptures which in itself deserves nothing but praise. The Masoretes were indeed anxious that not one jot nor tittle, not one smallest letter nor one tiny part of a letter, of the Law should pass away or be lost. (Kenyon, *OBAM*, 38)

A factor that runs throughout the above discussion of the Hebrew manuscript evidence is the Jewish reverence for the Scriptures. With respect to the Jewish Scriptures, however, it was not scribal accuracy alone that guaranteed their product. Rather, it was their almost superstitious reverence for the Bible. According to the Talmud, not only were there specifications for the kind of skins to be used and the size of the columns, but also the scribe was required to perform a religious ritual before writing the name of God. Rules governed the kind of ink used, dictated the spacing of words, and prohibited writing anything from memory. The lines—and even the letters—were counted methodically. If a manuscript was found to contain even one mistake, it was discarded and destroyed. This scribal formalism was responsible, at least in part, for the extreme care exercised in copying the Scriptures. It was also for this reason that there were only a few manuscripts (because the rules demanded the destruction of defective copies) (Geisler, *BECA*, 552).

Flavius Josephus, the Jewish historian writing in the first century A.D., states:

We have given practical proof of our reverence for our own Scriptures. For, although such long ages have now passed, no one has ventured either to add, or to remove, or to alter a syllable; and it is an instinct with every Jew, from the day of his birth, to regard them as the decrees of God, to abide by them, and, if need be, cheerfully to die for them. Time and again ere now the sight has been witnessed of prisoners enduring tortures and death in every form in the theatres, rather than utter a single word against the laws and the allied documents. (Josephus, *FJAA*, as cited in *JCW*, 179, 180)

Josephus continues by making a comparison between the Hebrew respect for Scripture and the Greek regard for their literature:

What Greek would endure as much for the same cause? Even to save the entire collection of his nation's writings from destruction he would not face the smallest personal injury. For to the Greeks they are mere stories improvised according to the fancy of their authors; and in this estimate even of the older historians they are quite justified, when they see some of their own contemporaries venturing to describe events in which they bore no part, without taking the trouble to seek information from those who know the facts. (Josephus, *FJAA*, as cited in *JCW*, 181)

Still, however, the earliest Masoretic manuscripts in existence dated from about A.D. 1000 and later, and they awaited confirmation of their accuracy. That confirmation came with an astounding discovery off the shores of Israel's Dead Sea.

3C. The Dead Sea Scrolls

If you had asked any biblical scholar, before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, what would constitute his dream for a discovery that would greatly verify the reliability of the Old Testament, he would have said, “Older witnesses to the original Old Testament manuscripts.” The big question was asked first by Sir Frederic Kenyon: “Does this Hebrew text, which we call Masoretic, and which we have shown to descend from a text drawn up about A.D. 100, faithfully represent the Hebrew text as originally written by the authors of the Old Testament books?” (Kenyon, OBAM, 47).

Before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the question was “How accurate are the copies we have today, compared to the copies of the first century and earlier?” The earliest complete copy of the Old Testament dates from the tenth century. Thus the big question: “Because the text has been copied over many times, can we trust it?” The Dead Sea Scrolls provide an astounding answer.

1D. What Are the Dead Sea Scrolls?

The scrolls are made up of some forty thousand inscribed fragments. From these fragments, more than five hundred books have been reconstructed. Many extrabiblical books and fragments were discovered that shed light on the second century B.C. to first century A.D. religious community of Qumran on the shores of the Dead Sea. Such writings as the “Zadokite documents,” a “Rule of the Community,” and the “Manual of Discipline” help us to understand the purpose of daily Qumran life. In the various caves are some helpful commentaries on the Scriptures. But the most important documents of the Dead Sea Scrolls are copies of the Old Testament text dating from more than a century *before* the birth of Christ.

2D. How Were the Dead Sea Scrolls Found?

Ralph Earle gives a vivid and concise answer to how the scrolls were found, by sharing an account showing God’s providential care:

The story of this discovery is one of the most fascinating tales of modern times. In February or March of 1947 a Bedouin shepherd boy named Muhammad was searching for a lost goat. He tossed a stone into a hole in a cliff on the west side of the Dead Sea, about eight miles south of Jericho. To his surprise he heard the sound of shattering pottery. Investigating, he discovered an amazing sight. On the floor of the cave were several large jars containing leather scrolls, wrapped in linen cloth. Because the jars were carefully sealed, the scrolls had been preserved in excellent condition for nearly 1,900 years. (They were evidently placed there in A.D. 68.)

Five of the scrolls found in Dead Sea Cave I, as it is now called, were bought by the archbishop of the Syrian Orthodox Monastery at Jerusalem. Meanwhile, three other scrolls were purchased by Professor Sukenik of the Hebrew University there.

When the scrolls were first discovered, no publicity was given to them. In November of 1947, two days after Professor Sukenik purchased three scrolls and two jars from the cave, he wrote in his diary: “It may be that this is one of the greatest finds ever made in Palestine, a find we never so much as hoped for.” But these significant words were not published at the time.

Fortunately, in February of 1948, the archbishop, who could not read Hebrew, phoned the American School of Oriental Research in Jerusalem and told about the scrolls. By good providence, the acting director of the school at the moment was a young scholar named John Trever, who was also an excellent amateur photographer. With arduous, dedicated labor he photographed each column of the great Isaiah scroll, which is 24 feet long and 10 inches high. He developed the plates himself and sent a few prints by airmail to Dr. W. F. Albright of Johns Hopkins University, who was widely recognized as the dean of American biblical archaeologists.

By return airmail Albright wrote: “My heartiest congratulations on the greatest manuscript discovery of modern times!...What an absolutely incredible find! And there can happily not be the slightest doubt in the world about the genuineness of the manuscript.” He dated it about 100 B.C. (Earle, HWGB, 48–49)

3D. The Value of the Scrolls

The oldest complete Hebrew MS we possessed before the Dead Sea Scrolls were from A.D. 900 on. How could we be sure of their accurate transmission since before the time of Christ in the first century A.D.? Thanks to archaeology and the Dead Sea Scrolls, we now know. One of the scrolls in the Dead Sea caves was a complete MS of the Hebrew text of Isaiah. It is dated by paleographers around 125 B.C. This MS is more than one thousand years older than any MS we previously possessed.

The significance of this discovery has to do with the detailed closeness of the Isaiah scroll (125 B.C.) to the Masoretic Text of Isaiah (A.D. 916). It demonstrates the unusual accuracy of the copyists of the Scripture over a thousand-year period.

Of the 166 *words* in Isaiah 53, there are only seventeen *letters* in question. Ten of these letters are simply a matter of spelling, which does not affect the sense. Four more letters are minor stylistic changes, such as conjunctions. The remaining three letters comprise the word “light,” which is added in verse 11, and does not affect the meaning greatly. Furthermore, this word is supported by the LXX and IQ Is (one of the Isaiah scrolls found in the Dead Sea caves). Thus, in one chapter of 166 words, there is only one word (three letters) in question after a thousand years of transmission—and this word does not significantly change the meaning of the passage. (Burrows, TDSS, 304)

Gleason Archer states that the Isaiah copies of the Qumran community “proved to be word for word identical with our standard Hebrew Bible in more than 95 percent of the text. The 5 percent of variation consisted chiefly of obvious slips of the pen and variations in spelling” (Archer, SOT, 19).

Millar Burrows concludes: “It is a matter of wonder that through something like a thousand years the text underwent so little alteration. As I said in my first article on the scroll, ‘Herein lies its chief importance, supporting the fidelity of the Masoretic tradition’ ” (Burrows, TDSS, 304).

4D. What Do the Scrolls Contain?

It will not be possible here to survey the more than eight hundred manuscripts represented by the scrolls. The following is a sampling of the texts that have been studied for the last forty years, including most of the older works on which the scrolls were based and the recently published texts from Cave 4. These texts can be grouped in categories: biblical texts, biblical commentaries, sectarian texts, and pseudepigraphical texts, apocalyptic texts, and mystical or ritualistic texts (Price, SDSS, 86).

Dead Sea Scroll Discoveries. Cave 1 was discovered by the Arab shepherd boy. From it he took seven more or less complete scrolls and some fragments:

Isaiah A (IQIs a): St. Mark’s Monastery Isaiah Scroll is a popular copy with numerous corrections above the line or in the margin. It is the earliest known copy of any complete book of the Bible.

Isaiah B (IQIs b): The Hebrew University Isaiah is incomplete, but its text agrees more closely with the Masoretic Text than does Isaiah A.

Other Cave 1 Fragments: This cave also yielded fragments of Genesis, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Judges, Samuel, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Psalms, and some nonbiblical works, including Enoch, Sayings of Moses (previously unknown), Book of Jubilee, Book of Noah, Testament of Levi, Tobit, and the Wisdom of Solomon. An interesting fragment of Daniel, containing 2:4 (where the language changes from Hebrew to Aramaic), also comes from this cave. Fragmentary commentaries on the Psalms, Micah, and Zephaniah were also found in Cave 1.

Cave 2: Cave 2 was first discovered and pilfered by Bedouin. It was excavated in 1952. Fragments of about one hundred manuscripts, including two of Exodus, one of Leviticus, four of Numbers, two or three of Deuteronomy, one each of Jeremiah, Job, and the Psalms, and two of Ruth were found.

Cave 4: Partridge Cave, or Cave 4, after being ransacked by Bedouin, was searched in September 1952 and proved to be the most productive cave of all. Literally thousands of fragments were recovered by purchase from the Bedouin or by the archaeologists sifting the dust on the floor of the cave. These scraps represent hundreds of manuscripts, nearly four hundred of which have been identified. They include one hundred copies of Bible books—all of the Old Testament except Esther.

A fragment of Samuel from Cave 4 (4qsam b) is thought to be the oldest known piece of biblical Hebrew. It dates from the third century B.C. Also found were a few fragments of commentaries on the Psalms, Isaiah, and Nahum. The entire collection of Cave 4 is believed to represent the scope of the Qumran library, and judging from the relative number of books found, their favorite books seemed to be Deuteronomy, Isaiah, the Psalms, the Minor Prophets, and Jeremiah, in that order. In one fragment containing some of Daniel 7:28 and 8:1, the language changes from Aramaic to Hebrew.

Caves 7–10: Caves 7–10, examined in 1955, produced no significant Old Testament manuscripts. Cave 7 did, however, yield some disputed manuscript fragments that have been identified by Jose O’Callahan as New Testament portions. If so, they would be the oldest New Testament manuscripts, dating from as early as A.D. 50 or 60.

Cave 11: This cave was excavated in early 1956. It produced a well-preserved copy of thirty-six Psalms, plus the apocryphal Psalm 151, previously known only in Greek texts. A fine scroll of part of Leviticus, some large pieces of an Apocalypse of the New Jerusalem, and an Aramaic targum (paraphrase) of Job were discovered.

Several recent studies of the Dead Sea Scrolls provide detailed descriptions and inventories. Gleason L. Archer Jr. provides a good summary in an appendix to his *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*.

Murabba’at Discoveries: Prompted by the profitable finds at Qumran, the Bedouin pursued their search and found caves southeast of Bethlehem that produced self-dated manuscripts and documents from the Second Jewish Revolt (A.D. 132–135). Systematic exploration and excavation of these caves began in January 1952. The later-dated manuscripts helped establish the antiquity of the Dead Sea Scrolls. From these caves came another scroll of the Minor Prophets (specifically, the last half of Joel through Haggai) that closely supports the Masoretic Text. The oldest known Semitic papyrus (a palimpsest), inscribed the second time in the ancient Hebrew script (dating from the seventh–eighth centuries B.C.), was found here (see Barthelemy). (See Price, SDSS, 87.)

The significance of the Qumran documents to textual criticism can be seen in the following perspectives from Old Testament scholars:

First and foremost, the Dead Sea Scrolls take the textual scholar back about one thousand years earlier than previously known Hebrew manuscript evidence. Prior to the Qumran discoveries, the earliest complete copies of Old Testament books dated from about the early tenth century A.D. The earliest complete copy of the entire Old Testament dated from the early eleventh century A.D. The Dead Sea manuscripts thus give much earlier evidence for the text of the Old Testament than anything previously known. (Brotzman, OTTC, 94–95)

Canonical Division (According to the Hebrew Bible)	Old Testament Book (According to Order in Hebrew Bible)	Number of Qumran Manuscripts (?=possible fragment)
Pentateuch (Torah)	Genesis	18+3?
	Exodus	18
	Leviticus	17
	Numbers	12
	Deuteronomy	31+3?
Prophets (Nevi'im)	Joshua	2
	Judges	3
Former Prophets	1–2 Samuel	4
	1–2 Kings	3
Latter Prophets	Isaiah	22
	Jeremiah	6
	Ezekiel	7
	Twelve (Minor Prophets)	10+1?
Writings	Psalms	39+2?
	Proverbs	2
	Job	4
The Five Scrolls	Song of Songs	4
	Ruth	4

Lamentations	4
Ecclesiastes	3
Esther	0
Daniel	8+1?
Ezra-Nehemiah	1
1–2 Chronicles	1
Total	223 (233)

Prior to the discovery of the scrolls at Qumran the oldest extant manuscripts were dated from approximately A.D. 900. Some manuscripts of the Dead Sea Scrolls, which included copies of Isaiah, Habakkuk, and others, were dated back to 125 B.C., providing manuscripts one thousand years older than previously available. The major conclusion was that there was no significant difference between the Isaiah scroll at Qumran and the Masoretic Hebrew text dated one thousand years later. This confirmed the reliability of our present Hebrew text. (Enns, MHT, 173)

Together with extant material they [the Dead Sea Scrolls] will do much to extend the frontiers of knowledge in the areas of history, religion, and sacred literature. (Harrison, AOT, 115)

There can be no doubt that the [Dead Sea] scrolls have ushered in a new era of biblical study in which much that was known will be confirmed, and much that was accepted as fact will need to be revised. Not the least benefit will be a movement towards the ultimate reconstruction of a genuine pre-Christian Old Testament text, making the ancient Word of God more intelligible to its modern readers. (Harrison, AOT, 115)

In conclusion, we should accord to the Masoretes the highest praise for their meticulous care in preserving so sedulously the consonantal text of the Sopherim which had been entrusted to them. They, together with the Sopherim themselves, gave the most diligent attention to accurate preservation of the Hebrew Scriptures that has ever been devoted to any ancient literature, secular or religious, in the history of human civilization. So conscientious were they in their stewardship of the holy text that they did not even venture to make the most obvious corrections, so far as the consonants were concerned, but left their *Vorlage* exactly as it had been handed down to them.

Because of their faithfulness, we have today a form of the Hebrew text which in all essentials duplicates the recension which was considered authoritative in the days of Christ and the apostles, if not a century earlier. And this in turn, judging from Qumran evidence, goes back to an authoritative revision of the Old Testament text which was drawn up on the basis of the most reliable manuscripts available for collation from previous centuries. These bring us very close in all essentials to the original autographs themselves, and furnish us with an authentic record of God's revelation. As W. F. Albright has said, "We may rest assured that the consonantal text of the Hebrew Bible, though not infallible, has been preserved with an accuracy perhaps unparalleled in any other Near Eastern literature." (Archer, SOT, 65)

4C. Non-Hebrew Manuscript Evidence

The various ancient translations (called versions) of the Old Testament provide the textual scholar with valuable witnesses to the text. The Septuagint (LXX), for example, preserves a textual tradition from the third century B.C., and the Samaritan Pentateuchal tradition may date from the fifth century B.C. These and the Masoretic Text provide three Old Testament textual traditions that, when critically evaluated, supply an overwhelming support for the integrity of the Old Testament text. The witness of the Samaritan Pentateuch, and especially that of the LXX with its revisions and recensions, is a major confirmation of the textual integrity.

1D. The Septuagint, or LXX

Just as the Jews had abandoned their native Hebrew tongue for Aramaic in the Near East, so they abandoned the Aramaic in favor of Greek in such Hellenistic centers as Alexandria, Egypt. During the campaigns of Alexander the Great, the Jews were shown considerable favor. In fact, Alexander was sympathetic toward the Jews as a result of their policies toward him in the siege of Tyre (332 B.C.). He is even reported to have traveled to Jerusalem to pay homage to their God. As he conquered new lands, he built new cities that frequently included Jewish inhabitants, and he often named them Alexandria.

Because the Jews were scattered from their homeland, there was a need for the Scriptures in the common language of that day. The name *Septuagint* (meaning “seventy” and usually abbreviated by use of the Roman numerals LXX) was given to the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures during the reign of King Ptolemy Philadelphus of Egypt (285–246 B.C.).

F. F. Bruce offers an interesting rendering of the origin of the name for this translation. Concerning a letter purporting to be written around 250 B.C. (more realistically, a short time before 100 B.C.) by Aristeas, a court official of King Ptolemy, to his brother Philocrates, Bruce writes:

Ptolemy was renowned as a patron of literature and it was under him that the great library at Alexandria, one of the world’s cultural wonders for 900 years, was inaugurated. The letter describes how Demetrius of Phalerum, said to have been Ptolemy’s librarian, aroused the king’s interest in the Jewish Law and advised him to send a delegation to the high priest, Eleazar, at Jerusalem. The high priest chose as translators six elders from each of the twelve tribes of Israel and sent them to Alexandria, along with a specially accurate and beautiful parchment of the Torah. The elders were royally dined and wined, and proved their wisdom in debate; then they took up their residence in a house on the island of Pharos (the island otherwise famed for its lighthouse), where in seventy-two days they completed their task of translating the Pentateuch into Greek, presenting an agreed version as the result of conference and comparison. (Bruce, BP, 146, 147)

The Greek Old Testament of the Septuagint differs from the Hebrew canon in the quality of its translation as well as in its contents and arrangement. In addition to the twenty-two books of the Hebrew Old Testament, the LXX contains a number of books that were never part of the Hebrew canon. Apparently those books were circulated in the Greek-speaking world but were never part of the Hebrew canon. The quality of translation in the LXX reflects this situation and provides for several observations: (1) The LXX varies in excellence, ranging from slavishly literal renditions of the Torah to free translations in the Writings (the third division of the Hebrew Scriptures). (See Sir Frederic Kenyon, *The Text of the Greek Bible*, 3rd ed., revised and augmented by A. W. Adams, pp. 16–19.) Adams indicates that the text of Job in the original LXX is actually one-sixth shorter than its Hebrew counterpart. There are also large variations in

Joshua, 1 Samuel, 1 Kings, Proverbs, Esther, and Jeremiah as well as lesser variations in other books. The cause of the divergences is one of the major difficulties of the Septuagint. (2) The LXX was not designed to have the same purpose as the Hebrew text, being used for public services in the synagogues rather than for scholarly or scribal purposes. (3) The LXX was the product of a pioneer venture in transmitting the Old Testament Scriptures, and it was an excellent example of such an effort. (4) The LXX was generally loyal to the readings of the original Hebrew text, although some have maintained that the translators were not always good Hebrew scholars.

Regarding the Septuagint, Paul Enns notes that “as a translation it is uneven, but it is helpful in that it is based on a Hebrew text one thousand years older than our existing Hebrew manuscripts. Moreover, New Testament writers would at times quote from the Septuagint; this provides us with further insight concerning the Old Testament text” (Enns, MHT, 174).

“As for the influence of the LXX, every page of this lexicon [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich)] shows that it outweighs all other influences on our [first century A.D.] literature” (Bauer, GELNT, xxi).

The Septuagint (LXX), the Greek translation of the Old Testament begun c. 250 B.C., ranks next to the Masoretic Text in importance. It was widely used in New Testament times, as may be seen from the fact that the majority of the 250 Old Testament citations in the New Testament are from this version. When the LXX diverged from the Masoretic Text, some scholars assumed that the LXX translators had taken liberties with their texts. We now know from Qumran that many of these differences were due to the fact that the translators were following a somewhat different Hebrew text belonging to what we may call the Proto-Septuagint family (Yamauchi, SS, 130, 131).

The LXX, being very close to the Masoretic Text (A.D. 916) we have today, helps to establish the reliability of its transmission through thirteen hundred years.

The LXX and the scriptural citations found in the apocryphal books of Ecclesiasticus, the Book of Jubilees, and others give evidence that the Hebrew text today is substantially the same as the text about 300 B.C.

Geisler and Nix give four important contributions of the Septuagint. “[1] It bridged the religious gap between the Hebrew- and Greek-speaking peoples, as it met the needs of the Alexandrian Jews, [2] it bridged the historical gap between the Hebrew Old Testament of the Jews and the Greek-speaking Christians who would use it with their New Testament, [3] it provided a precedent for missionaries to make translations of the Scriptures into various languages and dialects; and [4] it bridges the textual criticism gap by its substantial agreement with the Hebrew Old Testament text” (Geisler, GIB, 308).

F. F. Bruce gives two reasons why the Jews lost interest in the Septuagint:

1. “From the first century A.D. onwards the Christians adopted it as their version of the Old Testament and used it freely in their propagation and defense of the Christian faith” (Bruce, BP, 150).
2. “About A.D. 100 a revised standard text was established for the Hebrew Bible by Jewish scholars” (Bruce, BP, 151).

What began as a popular Jewish translation of the Old Testament eventually lost much of its appeal to the Jewish people.

1E. Hexapla

The *Hexapla* (meaning sixfold) done by Origen in the second century is inextricably tied to the LXX.

The Hexapla, plus writings of Josephus, Philo, and the Zadokite documents (Dead Sea Qumran community literature), “bear witness to the existence of a text quite similar to the Masoretic [Text] from A.D. 40 to 100” (Skilton, “The Transmission of the Scripture,” in *The Infallible Word* [a symposium], 148).

Origen’s Hexapla (c. 240–50). The work of Old Testament translation led to four Greek textual traditions by the third century A.D.: the Septuagint, and versions by Aquila, Theodotion, and Symmachus. This muddled state of affairs set the stage for the first really outstanding attempt at textual criticism, the Hexapla (“sixfold”) by Origen of Alexandria (A.D. 185–254). Because of the many divergences between the existing manuscripts of the LXX, the discrepancies between the Hebrew text and the LXX, and the attempts at revising the Old Testament Greek translations, Origen appears to have settled upon a course that would give the Christian world a satisfactory Greek text of the Old Testament. His work was essentially a recension rather than a version, as he corrected textual corruptions and attempted to unify the Greek text with the Hebrew. Thus his twofold aim was to show the superiority of the various revisions of the Old Testament over the corrupted LXX and to give a comparative view of the correct Hebrew and the divergent LXX. In this he followed the view that the Hebrew Old Testament was a sort of “inerrant transcript” of God’s revealed truth to man. (Geisler, GIB, 507)

The arrangement of the Hexapla was in six parallel columns. Each column contained the Old Testament in the original Hebrew or a particular version, thus making the manuscript far too bulky to be marketable in ancient times. The six columns were arranged as follows: column one, the Hebrew original; column two, the Hebrew original transliterated into Greek letters; column three, the literal translation of Aquila; column four, the idiomatic revision of Symmachus; column five, Origen’s own revision of the LXX; and column six, the Greek revision of Theodotion. (Geisler, GIB, 507–508)

Although the task was of monumental significance, it is well for the modern textual critic to observe the difference between his own and Origen’s objectives, as has been succinctly stated by Kenyon:

For Origen’s purpose, which was the production of a Greek version corresponding as closely as possible with the Hebrew text as then settled, this procedure was well enough; but for ours, which is the recovery of the original Septuagint...as evidence for what the Hebrew was before the Masoretic text, it was most unfortunate, since there was a natural tendency for his edition to be copied without the critical symbols, and thus for the additions made by him from Theodotion to appear as part of the genuine and original Septuagint. (Kenyon, OBAM, 59)

This unfortunate situation did occur, and “the transcribed Septuagint text without the diacritical markings led to the dissemination of a corrupted Greek Old Testament text, rather than the achievement of a Septuagint version in conformity with the Hebrew text of the day” (Geisler, GIB, 509).

F. F. Bruce writes, “If Origen’s *Hexapla* had survived entire, it would be a treasure beyond price” (Bruce, BP, 155).

2D. The Samaritan Pentateuch

The Samaritans separated from the Jews probably during the fifth or fourth century B.C. after a long, bitter religious and cultural struggle. At the time of the schism one would suspect that the Samaritans took with them the Scriptures as they then existed and prepared their own revised

text of the Pentateuch. The Samaritan Pentateuch is not a version in the strict sense but rather is a manuscript portion of the Hebrew text itself. It contains the five books of Moses and is written in an ancient style of Hebrew script. Some of the older biblical manuscripts from Qumran use this script, since it was revived in the second century B.C. during the Maccabean revolt against the Greeks. Textual critic Frank M. Cross Jr. believes that the Samaritan Pentateuch probably comes from about the Maccabean period.

A form of the Samaritan Pentateuch text seems to have been known to church fathers Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 265–339) and Jerome (c. 345–c. 419). It was not available to modern Western scholars until 1616, when Pietro della Valle discovered a manuscript of the Samaritan Pentateuch in Damascus. A great wave of excitement arose among biblical scholars. The text was regarded as superior to the Masoretic Text until Wilhelm Gesenius in 1815 judged it to be practically worthless for textual criticism. More recently, the value of the Samaritan Pentateuch has been reasserted by such scholars as A. Geiger, Kahle, and Kenyon.

No extant manuscript of the Samaritan Pentateuch has been dated before the eleventh century. The Samaritan community claims that one roll was written by Abisha, the great-grandson of Moses, in the thirteenth year after the conquest of Canaan, but the authority is so spurious that the claim may be safely dismissed. The oldest codex of the Samaritan Pentateuch bears a note about its sale in 1149–1150, but the manuscript itself is much older. One manuscript was copied in 1204. Another dated 1211–1212 is now in the John Rylands Library at Manchester. Another, dated c. 1232, is in the New York Public Library.

There are about six thousand deviations of the Samaritan Pentateuch from the Masoretic Text, most considered to be trivial. In about nineteen hundred instances the Samaritan text agrees with the Septuagint against the Masoretic Text. Some of the deviations were deliberately introduced by the Samaritans to preserve their own religious traditions and dialectic. The Masoretic Text perpetuates Judean dialect and traditions.

The Samaritan Pentateuch, it is interesting to note, is written in an older form of Hebrew script than that of the Masoretic Bible and Jewish-Hebrew literature in general. Somewhere about 200 B.C. this older, “paleo-Hebrew” script was superseded among the Jews by the Aramaic or “square,” character. Some of the older biblical manuscripts from Qumran still show it. The paleo-Hebrew script is of the same general style as the script found on the Moabite Stone, the Siloam Inscription, and the Lachish Letters, but the script of the Samaritans is a rather more ornamental development of it (Bruce, BP, 120).

Paul Enns says of the Samaritan Pentateuch that “it is a valuable witness to the text of the Old Testament” (Enns, MHT, 174). This text contains the Pentateuch and is valuable to determining textual readings. Bruce says that “the variations between the Samaritan Pentateuch and the Masoretic edition [A.D. 916] of these books are quite insignificant by comparison with the area of agreement” (Bruce, BP, 122).

Sir Frederic Kenyon states that when the LXX and the Samaritan Pentateuch agree against the Masoretic Text, “they represent the original reading,” but when the LXX and the Masoretic Text are opposed, it is possible that sometimes the one may be right and sometimes the other; but in any case the difference is one of interpretation, not of text.

3D. Other Witnesses to the Old Testament Text

1E. Aramaic Targums

The Targums (copies) appear in written form about A.D. 500. The basic meaning of the word Targum is “interpretation.” Targums are paraphrases of the Old Testament in the Aramaic language. After the Jews were taken into captivity, the Chaldean language replaced Hebrew. Therefore, the Jews needed the Scriptures in the spoken language.

F. F. Bruce provides more interesting background on the Targums:

The practice of accompanying the public reading of the Scriptures in the synagogues by an oral paraphrase in the Aramaic vernacular grew up in the closing centuries B.C. Naturally, when Hebrew was becoming less and less familiar to the ordinary people as a spoken language, it was necessary that they should be provided with an interpretation of the text of Scripture in a language which they did know, if they were to understand what was read. The official charged with giving this oral paraphrase was called a methurgeman (translator or interpreter) and the paraphrase itself was called a targum.

Methurgeman... was not allowed to read his interpretation out of a roll, as the congregation might mistakenly think he was reading the original Scriptures. With a view to accuracy, no doubt, it was further laid down that not more than one verse of the Pentateuch and not more than three verses of the Prophets might be translated at one time.

In due course these Targums were committed to writing. (Bruce, BP, 133)

Anderson, in *The Bible, the Word of God*, observes: “The great utility of the earlier Targums consists in their vindicating the genuineness of the Hebrew text, by proving that it was the same at the period the Targums were made, as it exists among us at the present day” (Anderson, BWG, 17).

Geisler and Nix conclude that “none of these Targums is important to the textual critic, but they are all rather significant to the study of hermeneutics, as they indicate the manner in which Scripture was interpreted by rabbinical scholars” (Geisler, GIB, 305).

2E. Mishnah

The Mishnah (A.D. 200). “The *Mishnah* (repetition, explanation, teaching) was completed at about A.D. 200, and was a digest of all the oral laws from the time of Moses. It was regarded as the Second Law, the Torah being the First Law. This work was written in Hebrew, and it covered traditions as well as explanations of the oral law” (Geisler, GIB, 502).

The scriptural quotations are very similar to the Masoretic Text and witness to its reliability.

3E. Gemara(s)

The Gemara (Palestinian, A.D. 200; Babylonian, A.D. 500). “The *Gemara* (to complete, accomplish, learn) was written in Aramaic rather than Hebrew, and was basically an expanded commentary on the Mishnah. It was transmitted in two traditions, the Palestinian Gemara (c. A.D. 200), and the larger and more authoritative Babylonian Gemara (c. A.D. 500)” (Geisler, GIB, 502).

These commentaries (written in Aramaic) that grew up around the Mishnah contribute to the textual reliability of the Masoretic Text.

The Mishnah plus the Babylonian Gemara make up the Babylonian Talmud.

Mishna + Palestinian Gemara = Palestinian Talmud

Mishna + Babylonian Gemara = Babylonian Talmud

4E. Midrash

Midrash (100 B.C.–A.D. 300) was made up of doctrinal studies of the Old Testament Hebrew text. The Midrash quotations are substantially Masoretic.

The Midrash (textual study, textual interpretation) was actually a formal doctrinal and homiletical exposition of the Hebrew Scriptures written in Hebrew and Aramaic. Midrashim (plural) were collected into a body of material between 100 B.C. and A.D. 300. Within the Midrash were two major parts: the *Halakah* (procedure), a further expansion of the Torah only, and the *Haggada* (declaration, explanation), being commentaries on the entire Old Testament. These Midrashim differed from the Targums in that the former were actually commentaries whereas the latter were paraphrases. The Midrashim contain some of the earliest extant synagogue homilies on the Old Testament, including such things as proverbs and parables. (Geisler, GIB, 306)

5E. Other Important Discoveries

Nash Papyri. Among the earliest Old Testament Hebrew manuscripts, there is extant one damaged copy of the Shema (from Deut. 6:4–9) and two fragments of the Decalogue (Ex. 20:2–17; Deut. 5:6–21). The Nash Papyri are dated between the second century B.C. and the first century A.D.

Codex Cairensis. A codex is a manuscript in book form with pages. According to a colophon, or inscription at the end of the book, Codex Cairensis (C) was written and vowel-pointed in A.D. 895 by Moses ben Asher in Tiberias in Palestine. It contains the Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings) and the Latter Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Minor Prophets).

Aleppo Codex. Aleppo Codex was written by Shelomo ben Baya'a (Kenyon, OBAM, 84), but according to a colophon note it was pointed (i.e., the vowel marks were added) by Moses ben Asher (c. A.D. 930). It is a model codex, although it was not permitted to be copied for a long time and was even reported to have been destroyed (Wurthwein, TOT, 25). It was smuggled from Syria to Israel. It has now been photographed and is the basis of the *New Hebrew Bible* published by Hebrew University (Goshen-Gottstein, "BMUS," 13). It is a sound authority for the ben Asher text.

Codex Leningradensis. According to a colophon note, Codex Leningradensis (L) was copied in Old Cairo by Samuel ben Jacob in 1008 from a manuscript (now lost) written by Aaron ben Moses ben Asher c. 1000 (Kahle, CG, 110). It represents one of the oldest manuscripts of the complete Hebrew Bible.

Babylonian Codex of the Latter Prophets. The Babylonian Codex (V [ar] P) is sometimes called the Leningrad Codex of the Prophets (Kenyon, 85) or the [St.] Petersburg Codex (Wurthwein, TOT, 26). It contains Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the Twelve. It is dated 916, but its chief significance is that, through it, punctuation added by the Babylonian school of Masoretic scribes was rediscovered. Dated 1105, Reuchlin Codex is now at Karlsruhe. Like the British Museum

manuscript (c. A.D. 1150), it contains a recension of Ben Naphtali, a Tiberian Masorete. These have been of great value in establishing the fidelity of the Ben Asher text (Kenyon, OBAM, 36).

Erfurt Codices. The Erfurt Codices (E1, E2, E3) are listed in the University Library in Tübingen. They represent more or less (more in E3) the text and markings of the Ben Naphtali tradition. E1 is a fourteenth-century manuscript. E2 is probably from the thirteenth century. E3, the oldest, is dated before 1100 (Wurthwein, TOT, 26).

2B. Summary

1C. Rules for Textual Criticism

Because Christianity is based on historical events, the people of God have always considered preservation of the record of His revelation to be of the highest importance. The chart below lists certain criteria that scholars have developed for determining which reading is correct or original. Seven are suggested.

Guide to Selecting a Correct Reading:

1. An older reading is to be preferred, because it is closer to the original.
2. The more difficult reading is to be preferred, because scribes were more apt to smooth out difficult readings.
3. The shorter reading is to be preferred, because copyists were more apt to insert new material than omit part of the sacred text.
4. The reading that best explains the other variants is to be preferred.
5. The reading with the widest geographical support is to be preferred, because such manuscripts or versions are less likely to have influenced each other.
6. The reading that is most like the author's usual style is to be preferred.
7. The reading that does not reflect a doctrinal bias is to be preferred (Würthwein, TOT, 80–81).

2C. Comparison of Duplicate Passages

Another line of evidence for the quality of the Old Testament manuscripts is found in the comparison of the duplicate passages of the Masoretic Text itself. Several psalms occur twice (for example, 14 and 53); much of Isaiah 36–39 is also found in 2 Kings 18–20; Isaiah 2:2–4 is almost exactly parallel to Micah 4:1–3; Jeremiah 52 is a repeat of 2 Kings 25; and large portions of Chronicles are found in Samuel and Kings. An examination of those passages shows not only a substantial textual agreement but, in some cases, almost word-for-word identity. Therefore, it may be concluded that the Old Testament texts have not undergone radical revisions, even if it were assumed that these parallel passages had identical sources.

3C. Support from Archaeology

A substantial proof for the accuracy of the Old Testament text has come from archaeology. Numerous discoveries have confirmed the historical accuracy of the biblical documents, even down to the occasional use of obsolete names of foreign kings. These archaeological confirmations of the accuracy of Scripture have been recorded in numerous books. Archaeologist Nelson Glueck asserts, "It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference. Scores of archaeological findings have been made which confirm in clear outline or exact detail historical statements in the Bible" (Glueck, RDHN, 31).

(See section 2A of this chapter, “Archaeological and Historical Confirmation of the Old Testament” for more detailed coverage.)

4C. The Septuagint and the Masoretic Text

The Septuagint was the Bible of Jesus and the apostles. Most New Testament quotations are taken from it directly, even when it differs from the Masoretic Text. On the whole the Septuagint closely parallels the Masoretic Text and is a confirmation of the fidelity of the tenth-century Hebrew text.

If no other evidence were available, the case for the fidelity of the Masoretic Text could be brought to rest with confidence based upon textual comparisons and an understanding of the extraordinary Jewish scribal system. But with the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, beginning in 1947, there is almost overwhelming substantiation of the received Hebrew text of the Masoretes. Critics of the Masoretic Text charged that the manuscripts were few and late. Through the Dead Sea Scrolls, early manuscript fragments provide a check on nearly the whole Old Testament. Those checks date about a thousand years before the Great Masoretic manuscripts of the tenth century. Before the discoveries in the Cairo Geniza and the Dead Sea caves, the Nash Papyrus (a fragment of the Ten Commandments and Shema, Deut. 6:4–9), dated between 150 and 100 B.C., was the only known scrap of the Hebrew text dating from before the Christian era.

5C. Agreement with the Samaritan Pentateuch

Despite the many minor variants between the Samaritan Pentateuch and the Hebrew text of the Old Testament, there is substantial agreement between them. As noted above, the six thousand variants from the Masoretic Text are mostly differences in spelling and cultural word variation. Nineteen hundred variants agree with the Septuagint (for example, in the ages given for the patriarchs in Genesis 5 and 11). Some Samaritan Pentateuch variants are sectarian, such as the command to build the temple on Mount Gerizim, not at Jerusalem (e.g., after Ex. 20:17). It should be noted, however, that most manuscripts of the Samaritan Pentateuch are late (thirteenth to fourteenth centuries) and none is before the tenth century (Archer, SOT, 44). But the Samaritan Pentateuch still confirms the general text from which it had diverged many hundreds of years earlier.

6C. Check against the Dead Sea Scrolls

With the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, scholars have Hebrew manuscripts dated one thousand years earlier than the Great Masoretic Text manuscripts, enabling them to check the fidelity of the Hebrew text. There is a word-for-word identity in more than 95 percent of the cases, and the 5 percent variation consists mostly of slips of the pen and spelling (ibid. 24). The Isaiah scroll (1QIs a) from Qumran led the Revised Standard Version translators to make only thirteen changes from the Masoretic Text; eight of those were known from ancient versions, and few were significant (Burrows, WMTS, 30–59). Of the 166 Hebrew words in Isaiah 53, only seventeen Hebrew letters in the Isaiah B scroll differ from the Masoretic Text. Ten letters are a matter of spelling, four are stylistic changes, and the other three compose the word for “light,” (added in verse 11), which does not affect the meaning greatly (Harris, IC, 124). Furthermore that word is also found in the same verse in the Septuagint and in the Isaiah A scroll.

7C. Conclusion

The thousands of Hebrew manuscripts, with their confirmation by the Septuagint and the Samaritan Pentateuch, and the numerous other cross-checks from outside and inside the text, provide overwhelming support for the reliability of the Old Testament text. Hence, it is appropriate to conclude with Kenyon's statement "The Christian can take the whole Bible in his hand and say without fear or hesitation that he holds in it the true word of God, handed down without essential loss from generation to generation throughout the centuries" (Kenyon, *OBAM* '41, 23).

Since the Old Testament text is related in important ways to the New Testament, its reliability supports the Christian faith. This is true not only in establishing the dates when supernatural predictions were made of the Messiah but also in supporting the historicity of the Old Testament that Jesus and New Testament writers affirmed (Geisler, *BECA*, 552–553).

For further reading, consult the following sources:

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2A. Archaeological and Historical Confirmation of the Old Testament

1B. Introduction and Definition of Archaeology

The discipline of archaeology has only recently gained relative importance among the physical sciences. However, it has made significant contributions in many areas, including biblical criticism and arguments for the reliability of the biblical text.

The word archaeology is composed of two Greek words: *archaios*, meaning "old" or "ancient"; and *logos*, signifying "word, treatise, or study." A literal definition is "the study of antiquity." Webster defines it, "The scientific study of material remains (as fossils, relics, artifacts, and monuments) of past human life and activities" (Merriam-Webster, MWCD10). So the task of the archaeologist is to take what remains from a society and reconstruct what the artifacts tell us.

Archaeology is very different from most of modern science in that it attempts to prove a thesis. The basic premise of an experiment in modern science is that if it is repeatable, then it must be true. Archaeology, on the other hand, cannot possibly repeat its results. It can only give

conjectures—not firm conclusions—concerning its finds, unless there is another outside confirmation by means of a text or other report. And this is where biblical archaeology takes on a unique twist.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the Bible took a beating from higher criticism. Critics have sought to destroy the foundations of the historicity of the Bible by showing that the Bible has errors and must be adjusted to fit the “facts” of archaeology. But now the tables are turning. Reformed Jewish scholar Nelson Glueck has observed: “It is worth emphasizing that in all this work no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a single, properly understood biblical statement” (Glueck, as cited in Montgomery, CFTM, 6). Note that this statement was made by a Reformed Jewish scholar. He is not a Christian and yet he sees that archaeology confirms the Bible.

For the purposes of this book, archaeological confirmation is divided into artifact evidence and documentary evidence. Artifact evidence is defined as artifacts of a previous society testifying directly of a biblical event. On the other hand, documentary evidence will be defined as extrabiblical texts (written documents) that confirm Old Testament history directly or indirectly. Both kinds of evidence are archaeological in nature.

2B. A Word of Caution

Even though archaeology has never contradicted the Bible, a word of caution is necessary here. All too often we hear the statement “Archaeology proves the Bible.” Archaeology cannot “prove” the Bible, if by this you mean “proves it to be inspired and revealed by God.” But if by “prove” one means “shows some biblical event or passage to be historical,” then archaeology does prove the Bible. I believe that archaeology contributes to biblical criticism, not in the area of inspiration or revelation, but as it confirms the historical accuracy and trustworthiness of the events recorded. Let’s say the rocks on which the Ten Commandments were written are found. Archaeology could confirm that they were rocks, that the Ten Commandments were written on them, and that they came from the period of Moses; it could not prove that God delivered them to Moses.

Millar Burrows writes that archaeology “can tell us a great deal about the topography of a military campaign. It can tell us nothing about the nature of God” (Burrows, WMTS, 290).

There is one limitation that archaeology has to deal with, and this is the lack of abundant evidence. “Historians of antiquity,” writes Edwin Yamauchi, “in using the archaeological evidence have very often failed to realize how slight is the evidence at our disposal. It would not be exaggerating to point out that what we have is but one fraction of a second fraction of a third fraction of a fourth fraction of a fifth fraction of the possible evidence” (Yamauchi, “SSS,” 9).

Joseph Free, in *Archaeology and Bible History*, addresses the question of archaeology and its relationship to the Bible:

We pointed out that numerous passages of the Bible which long puzzled the commentators have readily yielded up their meaning when new light from archaeological discoveries has been focused on them. In other words, archaeology illuminates the text of the Scriptures and so makes valuable contributions to the fields of biblical interpretation and exegesis. In addition to illuminating the Bible, archaeology has confirmed countless passages which have been rejected by critics as unhistorical or contradictory to known facts. (Free, ABH, 1)

One also needs to realize that archaeology has not completely refuted the “radical critics.” These critics have certain presuppositions that bar them from having an objective point of view. Burrows is quite clear on this point: “It is quite untrue to say that all the theories of the critics

have been overthrown by archaeological discoveries. It is even more untrue to say that the fundamental attitudes and methods of modern scientific criticism have been refuted” (Burrows, WMTS, 292).

However, as you will see in this chapter, archaeology has shown that many convictions of radical criticism are invalid, and it has called into question what have often been taught as “the assured results of higher criticism.” Thus it is important when dealing with archaeology not only to seek the facts but also to examine the presuppositions of those proposing the facts.

For example, Albright comments about the evidence for the extensive reign of Solomon, which had been questioned by the radical critics. He writes: “Once more we find that the radical criticism of the past half-century must be corrected drastically” (Albright, “NLEHPC,” 22).

Some people will make the unfounded assertion that supernaturalists and nonsupernaturalists can never agree on the results of archaeology because they exist in two totally different camps. These will conclude that you interpret archaeological findings according to your own viewpoint.

Joseph Free, in “Archaeology and Higher Criticism,” answers this assertion in a convincing way.

According to this view, a given archaeological discovery means one thing to a supernaturalist, and something different to a non-supernaturalist, and therefore archaeology has only an incidental bearing on the whole matter of apologetics.

Actually, this is not the whole picture. To illustrate: in the nineteenth century, the Biblical critic could hold with good reason that there never was a Sargon, that the Hittites either did not exist or were insignificant, that the patriarchal accounts had a late background, that the sevenfold lampstand of the tabernacle was a late concept, that the Davidic Empire was not as extensive as the Bible implied, that Belshazzar never existed, and that a host of other supposed errors and impossibilities existed in the Biblical record.

Archaeological discoveries showed, on the contrary, that Sargon existed and lived in a palatial dwelling some twelve miles north of Nineveh, that the Hittites not only existed but were a significant people, that the background of the patriarchs fits the time indicated in the Bible, that the concept of a sevenfold lamp existed in the Early Iron Age, that a significant city given in the record of David’s Empire lies far to the north, that Belshazzar existed and ruled over Babylon, and that a host of other supposed errors and contradictions are not errors at all.

It is of course true that in certain peripheral areas one’s theology will have a bearing on his interpretation of a given fact or a particular archaeological discovery. But in the broad outline, as well as in a host of small details, facts are facts, whether discovered by a supernaturalist or nonsupernaturalist. The writer knows of no nonsupernaturalist who still argues that Sargon never existed, that there never were any Hittites, or that Belshazzar is still a legend. There are many points on which all candid scholars can agree, regardless of their theology. There are certain areas, however, where the liberal has not taken the evidence, archaeological or otherwise, sufficiently into account. This is true, we believe, in the realm of the documentary theory and in the question of authorship, date, and integrity of the books of the Bible (Free, “AHC,” 30, 31).

3B. Interpreting Archaeological Data

The following three points provide helpful guidelines when reviewing archaeological data as they relate to Christianity. First, meaning can only be derived from context. Archaeological evidence is dependent on the context of date, place, materials, and style. How it is understood depends on the interpreter’s presuppositions. Therefore, not all interpretations of the evidence

will be friendly to Christianity. It is important to make sure that one's presuppositions are accurate before interpreting the data.

Second, archaeology is a special kind of science. Physicists and chemists can do all kinds of experiments to recreate the processes they study and watch them over and over again. Archaeologists cannot. They have only the evidence left from the one and only time that civilization lived. They study past singularities, not present regularities. Because they can't recreate the societies they study, their conclusions can't be tested as can those of other sciences. Archaeology tries to find plausible and probable explanations for the evidence it finds. It cannot make laws as can physics. For this reason, its conclusions are subject to revision. The best interpretation is the one that best explains all the evidence.

Third, the archaeological evidence is fragmentary. It comprises only a tiny fraction of all that occurred. Hence, the discovery of more evidence can change the picture considerably. This is especially true when conclusions have been based on silence—a lack of existing evidence. Many critical views about the Bible have been overturned by archaeological discoveries. For example, it was long believed that the Bible erred when it spoke about Hittites (Gen. 23:10). But since the discovery of the Hittite library in Turkey (1906), this is no longer the case (Geisler, BECA, 48, 49).

4B. Basic Reasons for the Rapidly Increasing Interest in Archaeology

Why has archaeology received so much more attention in recent years than before? William F. Albright cites four factors for the steady advance in the area of archaeology:

1. "A rapid increase in the number of serious archaeological expeditions from many different countries, including Japan. Museum space and volumes of publication have also kept pace with the field work. So there are not only more digs, but more articles about digs.
2. "An improvement of archaeological method that has been little short of phenomenal. This applies both to the analysis of superimposed layers of occupation (stratigraphy) and to classification and relative dating of objects found (typology).
3. "Use of innumerable new techniques derived from the natural sciences, among them radiocarbon (carbon isotope 14) for dating.
4. "Decipherment and interpretation of the flood of new inscriptions and texts in many scripts and languages, many quite unknown until recent decades. The application of sound linguistic and philological method to well-preserved cuneiform tablets and Egyptian hieratic papyri makes it possible to publish them with speed and accuracy. A new script is deciphered quickly, if there are a few good clues or sufficient material to permit decoding. The number of cuneiform tablets from three millennia preserved under debris of occupation in Western Asia and Egypt seems to be practically unlimited, and new methods of baking and reproduction have reduced losses to a surprisingly low proportion.

"With the aid of stratigraphy, scientific analysis, and museum research, the archaeologist can now reconstruct the daily life of ancient peoples with remarkable completeness" (Albright, "ADS," 3).

5B. The Stones Cry Out: Examples of Archaeological Support for the Old Testament Accounts

Archaeology enhances our knowledge of the economic, cultural, social, and political background of biblical passages. Also, archaeology contributes to the understanding of other religions that bordered Israel.

1C. Sodom and Gomorrah

The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was thought to be spurious until evidence revealed that all five of the cities mentioned in the Bible were in fact centers of commerce in the area and were geographically situated as the Scriptures describe. The biblical description of their demise seems to be no less accurate. Evidence points to earthquake activity and to layers of the earth being disrupted and even hurled high into the air. Bitumen is plentiful there, and an accurate description would be that brimstone (bituminous pitch) was hurled down on those cities that had rejected God. There is evidence that the layers of sedimentary rock have been molded together by intense heat. Evidence of such burning has been found on the top of Jebel Usdum (Mount Sodom). This is permanent evidence of the great conflagration that took place in the long-distant past, possibly when an oil basin beneath the Dead Sea ignited and erupted. Such an explanation in no way subtracts from the miraculous quality of the event, for God controls natural forces. The timing of the event, in the context of warnings and visitation by angels, reveals its overall miraculous nature (Geisler, BECA, 50, 51).

2C. Jericho

During the excavations of Jericho (1930–36), Garstang found something so startling that he and two other members of the team prepared and signed a statement describing what was found. In reference to these findings Garstang says: “As to the main fact, then, there remains no doubt: the walls fell outwards so completely that the attackers would be able to clamber up and over their ruins into the city. Why so unusual? Because the walls of cities do not fall outwards, they fall inwards. And yet in Joshua 6:20 we read, ‘The wall fell down flat. Then the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city.’ The walls were made to fall outward” (Garstang, FBHJJ, 146).

Bryant Wood, writing for *Biblical Archaeology Review* (Wood, DICJ, 44–59), includes a list of collaboration between archaeological evidence and biblical narrative as follows:

1. The city was strongly fortified (Josh. 2:5, 7, 15; 6:5, 20).
2. The attack occurred just after harvest time in the spring (Josh. 2:1; 3:15; 5:16).
3. The inhabitants had no opportunity to flee with their foodstuffs (Josh. 6:1).
4. The siege was short (Josh. 6:15).
5. The walls were leveled, possibly by an earthquake (Josh. 6:20).
6. The city was not plundered (Josh. 6:17, 18).
7. The city was burned (Josh. 6:24).

3C. Saul, David, and Solomon

Saul became the first king of Israel, and his fortress at Gibeah has been excavated. One of the most noteworthy finds was that slingshots were one of the primary weapons of the day. This relates not only to David’s victory over Goliath but also to the reference of Judges 20:16 that there were seven hundred expert slingers who “could sling a stone at a hair and not miss.”

Upon Saul’s death, Samuel tells us that his armor was put in the temple of Ashtaroth (a Canaanite fertility goddess) at Bet She’an, while Chronicles records that his head was put in the temple of Dagon, the Philistine corn god. This was thought to be an error because it seemed

unlikely that enemy peoples would have temples in the same place at the same time. However, excavations have revealed that there are two temples at this site that are separated by a hallway: one for Dagon and the other for Ashtaroht. It appears that the Philistines had adopted the Canaanite goddess.

One of the key accomplishments of David's reign was the capture of Jerusalem. Problematic in the Scripture account was that the Israelites entered the city by way of a tunnel that led to the Pool of Siloam. However, that pool was thought to be *outside* the city walls at that time. But excavations in the 1960s revealed that the wall did indeed extend well past the pool.

The time of Solomon has no less corroboration. The site of Solomon's temple cannot be excavated, because it is near the Muslim holy place the Dome of the Rock. However, what is known about Philistine temples built in Solomon's time fits well with the design, decoration, and materials described in the Bible. The only piece of evidence from the temple itself is a small ornament, a pomegranate, that sat on the end of a rod and bears the inscription "Belonging to the Temple of Yahweh." It was first seen in a shop in Jerusalem in 1979, was verified in 1984, and was acquired by the Israel Museum in 1988.

The excavation of Gezer in 1969 ran across a massive layer of ash that covered most of the mound. Sifting through the ash yielded pieces of Hebrew, Egyptian, and Philistine artifacts. Apparently all three cultures had been there at the same time. This puzzled researchers greatly until they realized that the Bible confirms exactly what they found. "Pharaoh king of Egypt had attacked and captured Gezer. He had set it on fire. He killed its Canaanite inhabitants and then gave it as a wedding gift to his daughter, Solomon's wife" (1 Kings 9:16) (Geisler, BECA, 51, 52).

A 1989 article by Alan Millard in *Biblical Archaeology Review*, entitled "Does the Bible exaggerate King Solomon's Wealth?" states,

Those who read the Bible text and make a subjective judgment as to its reliability often conclude—and understandably so—that the descriptions of Solomon's gold are gross exaggerations. The quantity of gold the Bible claims for King Solomon is simply unbelievable, even unimaginable.

We have not proved that the details in the Bible regarding Solomon's gold are accurate. But by setting the biblical text beside other ancient texts and archaeological discoveries we have shown that the biblical narrative is wholly in keeping with the practices of the ancient world, so far as we can ascertain them, not only in the use of gold but also in its records of quantities. While this does not demonstrate that the account in the Bible is accurate, it does show that it is feasible. (Millard, *DBEKS*, 20)

4C. David

S. H. Horn, an archaeologist, gives an excellent example of how archaeological evidence helps in biblical study:

Archaeological explorations have shed some interesting light on the capture of Jerusalem by David. The biblical accounts of that capture (II Sam. 5:6–8 and I Chron. 11:6) are rather obscure without the help obtained from archaeological evidence. Take for example II Samuel 5:8, which in the King James Version reads: "And David said on that day, Whosoever getteth up to the gutter, and smiteth the Jebusites, and the lame and the blind, that are hated of David's soul, he shall be chief and captain." Add to this statement First Chronicles 11:6—"So Joab the son of Zeruiah went first up and was chief."

Some years ago I saw a painting of the conquest of Jerusalem in which the artist showed a man climbing up a metal downspout, running on the outside face of the city wall. This picture

was absurd, because ancient city walls had neither gutters nor downspouts, although they had weeping holes in the walls to drain water off. The Revised Standard Version, produced after the situation had become clear through archaeological discoveries made on the spot, translates the pertinent passages: “And David said on that day, “Whoever would smite the Jebusites, let him get up the water shaft to attack the lame and the blind, who are hated by David’s soul.” And Joab the son of Zeruiiah went up first, so he became chief.” What was this water shaft that Joab climbed?

Jerusalem in those days was a small city lying on a single spur of the hills on which the large city eventually stood. Its position was one of great natural strength, because it was surrounded on three sides by deep valleys. This was why the Jebusites boastfully declared that even blind and lame could hold their city against a powerful attacking army. But the water supply of the city was poor; the population was entirely dependent on a spring that lay outside the city on the eastern slope of the hill.

So that they could obtain water without having to go down to where the spring was located, the Jebusites had constructed an elaborate system of tunnels through the rock. First they had dug a horizontal tunnel, beginning at the spring and proceeding toward the center of the city. After digging for ninety feet they hit a natural cave. From the cave they dug a vertical shaft forty-five feet high, and from the end of the shaft a sloping tunnel 135 feet long and a staircase that ended at the surface of their city, 110 feet above the water level of the spring. The spring was then concealed from the outside so that no enemy could detect it. To get water the Jebusite women went down through the upper tunnel and let their water skins down the shaft to draw water from the cave, to which it was brought by natural flow through the horizontal tunnel that connected the cave with the spring.

However, one question remained unanswered. The excavations of R. A. S. Macalister and J. G. Duncan some forty years ago had uncovered a wall and a tower that were thought to be of Jebusite and Davidic origin respectively. This tract of wall ran along the rim of the hill of Ophel, west of the tunnel entrance. Thus the entrance was left outside the protective city wall, exposed to the attacks and interference of enemies. Why hadn’t the tunnel been built to end inside the city? This puzzle has now been solved by the recent excavations of Kathleen Kenyon on Ophel. She found that Macalister and Duncan had given the wall and tower they discovered wrong dates; these things actually originated in the Hellenistic period. She uncovered the real Jebusite wall a little farther down the slope of the hill, east of the tunnel entrance, which now puts the entrance safely in the old city area.

David, a native of Bethlehem, four miles south of Jerusalem, . . . made the promise that the first man who entered the city through the water shaft would become his commander-in-chief. Joab, who was already general of the army, did not want to lose that position and therefore led the attack himself. The Israelites apparently went through the tunnel, climbed up the shaft, and were in the city before any of the besieged citizens had any idea that so bold a plan had been conceived. (Horn, “RIOT,” 15, 16)

Avaraham Biram (Biram, BAR, 26) speaks of a new discovery in 1994:

A remarkable inscription from the ninth century BCE that refers to both the [House of David], and to the [King of Israel]. This is the first time that the name of David has been found in any ancient inscription outside the Bible. That the inscription refers not simply to a [David] but to the House of David, the dynasty of the great Israelite king, is even more remarkable . . . this may be the oldest extra-biblical reference to Israel in Semitic script. If this inscription proves anything, it shows that both Israel and Judah, contrary to the claims of some scholarly biblical minimizers, were important kingdoms at this time.

5C. Summary and Conclusions

Henry M. Morris observes: “Problems still exist, of course, in the complete harmonization of archaeological material with the Bible, but none so serious as not to bear real promise of imminent solution through further investigation. It must be extremely significant that, in view of the great mass of corroborative evidence regarding the biblical history of these periods, there exists today not one unquestionable find of archaeology that proves the Bible to be in error at any point” (Morris, BMS, 95).

In every period of Old Testament history, we find that there is good evidence from archaeology that the Scriptures speak the truth. In many instances, the Scriptures even reflect firsthand knowledge of the times and customs it describes. While many have doubted the accuracy of the Bible, time and continued research have consistently demonstrated that the Word of God is better informed than its critics.

In fact, while thousands of finds from the ancient world support in broad outline and often in detail the biblical picture, not one incontrovertible find has ever contradicted the Bible. (Geisler, BECA, 52)

Henry Morris adds:

This great antiquity of the Bible histories in comparison with those of other writings, combined with the evolutionary preconceptions of the 19th century, led many scholars to insist that the Bible histories also were in large part merely legendary. As long as nothing was available, except copies of ancient manuscripts, for the evaluation of ancient histories, such teachings may have been persuasive. Now, however, it is no longer possible to reject the substantial historicity of the Bible, at least as far back as the time of Abraham, because of the remarkable discoveries of archaeology. (Morris, MIP, 300)

6B. Documentary Confirmation of the Old Testament Accounts

1C. The Reliability of the Old Testament History

Not only do we have accurate copies of the Old Testament, but also the contents of the manuscripts are historically reliable.

William F. Albright, known for his reputation as one of the great archaeologists, states: “There can be no doubt that archaeology has confirmed the substantial historicity of Old Testament tradition” (Albright, ARI, 176).

Professor H. H. Rowley (cited by Donald F. Wiseman in *Revelation and the Bible*) claims that “it is not because scholars of today begin with more conservative presuppositions than their predecessors that they have a much greater respect for the Patriarchal stories than was formerly common, but because the evidence warrants it” (Rowley, as cited in Wiseman, “ACOT,” in Henry, RB, 305).

Merrill Unger summarizes: “Old Testament archaeology has rediscovered whole nations, resurrected important peoples, and in a most astonishing manner filled in historical gaps, adding immeasurably to the knowledge of biblical backgrounds” (Unger, AOT, 15).

Sir Frederic Kenyon says: “It is therefore legitimate to say that, in respect of that part of the Old Testament against which the disintegrating criticism of the last half of the nineteenth century was chiefly directed, the evidence of archaeology has been to re-establish its authority, and likewise to augment its value by rendering it more intelligible through a fuller knowledge of its background and setting. Archaeology has not yet said its last word; but the results already achieved confirm what faith would suggest, that the Bible can do nothing but gain from an increase of knowledge” (Kenyon, BA, 279).

Archaeology has produced an abundance of evidence to substantiate the correctness of our Masoretic Text. Bernard Ramm writes of the Jeremiah Seal:

Archaeology has also given us evidence as to the substantial accuracy of our Masoretic text. The Jeremiah Seal, a seal used to stamp the bitumen seals of wine jars, and dated from the first or second century A.D., has Jeremiah 48:11 stamped on it and, in general, conforms to the Masoretic text. This seal "...attests the accuracy with which the text was transmitted between the time when the seal was made and the time when the manuscripts were written." Furthermore, the *Roberts Papyrus*, which dates to the second century B.C., and the *Nash Papyrus*, dated by Albright before 100 B.C., confirm our Masoretic text. (Ramm, "CITOT," 8–10)

William Albright affirms that "we may rest assured that the consonantal text of the Hebrew Bible, though not infallible, has been preserved with an accuracy perhaps unparalleled in any other Near-Eastern literature.... No, the flood of light now being shed on biblical Hebrew poetry of all periods by Ugaritic literature guarantees the relative antiquity of its composition as well as the astonishing accuracy of its transmission" (Albright, "OTAAE," as cited in Rowley, OTMS, 25).

Archaeologist Albright writes concerning the accuracy of the Scriptures as the result of archaeology: "The contents of our Pentateuch are, in general, very much older than the date at which they were finally edited; new discoveries continue to confirm the historical accuracy or the literary antiquity of detail after detail in it.... It is, accordingly, sheer hypercriticism to deny the substantially Mosaic character of the Pentateuchal tradition" (Dodd, MNTS, 224).

Albright comments on what the critics used to say:

Until recently it was the fashion among biblical historians to treat the patriarchal sagas of Genesis as though they were artificial creations of Israelite scribes of the Divided Monarchy or tales told by imaginative rhapsodists around Israelite campfires during the centuries following their occupation of the country. Eminent names among scholars can be cited for regarding every item of Gen. 11–50 as reflecting late invention, or at least retrojection of events and conditions under the Monarchy into the remote past, about which nothing was thought to have been really known to the writers of later days. (Albright, BPFAE, 1, 2)

Now it has all been changed, says Albright: "Archaeological discoveries since 1925 have changed all this. Aside from a few die-hards among older scholars, there is scarcely a single biblical historian who has not been impressed by the rapid accumulation of data supporting the substantial historicity of patriarchal tradition. According to the traditions of Genesis the ancestors of Israel were closely related to the semi-nomadic peoples of TransJordan, Syria, the Euphrates basin and North Arabia in the last centuries of the second millennium B.C., and the first centuries of the first millennium" (Albright, BPFAE, 1, 2).

Millar Burrows continues:

To see the situation clearly we must distinguish two kinds of confirmation, general and specific. General confirmation is a matter of compatibility without definite corroboration of particular points. Much of what has already been discussed as explanation and illustration may be regarded also as general confirmation. The picture fits the frame; the melody and the accompaniment are harmonious. The force of such evidence is cumulative. The more we find that items in the picture of the past presented by the Bible, even though not directly attested, are compatible with what we know from archaeology, the stronger is our impression of general authenticity. Mere legend or fiction would inevitably betray itself by anachronisms and incongruities. (Burrows, WMTS, 278).

The University of Chicago professor Raymond A. Bowman denotes that archaeology helps provide a balance between the Bible and critical hypothesis: “The confirmation of the biblical narrative at most points has led to a new respect for biblical tradition and a more conservative conception of biblical history” (Bowman, “OTRGW,” as cited in Willoughby, SBTT, 30).

Albright, in “Archaeology Confronts Biblical Criticism,” says that “archaeological and inscriptional data have established the historicity of innumerable passages and statements of the Old Testament” (Albright, “ACBC,” 181).

Millar Burrows of Yale recognized the value of archaeology in confirming the authenticity of the Scriptures:

The Bible is supported by archaeological evidence again and again. On the whole, there can be no question that the results of excavation have increased the respect of scholars for the Bible as a collection of historical documents. The confirmation is both general and specific. The fact that the record can be so often explained or illustrated by archaeological data shows that it fits into the framework of history as only a genuine product of ancient life could do. In addition to this general authentication, however, we find the record verified repeatedly at specific points. Names of places and persons turn up at the right places and in the right periods. (Burrows, “HAHSB,” 6)

Joseph Free comments that he once “thumbed through the book of Genesis and mentally noted that each of the fifty chapters are either illuminated or confirmed by some archaeological discovery—the same would be true for most of the remaining chapters of the Bible, both Old and New Testaments” (Free, “AB,” 340).

2C. The Creation

1D. Introduction

The opening chapters of Genesis (1–11) are typically thought to be mythological explanations derived from earlier versions of the story found in the ancient Near East. But this view chooses to notice only the similarities between Genesis and the creation stories in other ancient cultures. In fact, we would expect derivation of the human race from one family to produce some lingering traces of the true historical account in succeeding generations. The differences are more important. Babylonian and Sumerian accounts describe the creation as the product of a conflict among finite gods. When one god is defeated and split in half, the River Euphrates flows from one eye and the Tigris from the other. Humanity is made of the blood of an evil god mixed with clay. These tales display the kind of distortion and embellishment to be expected when a historical account becomes mythologized.

Less likely is that the literary progression would be from this mythology to the unadorned elegance of Genesis 1. The common assumption that the Hebrew account is simply a purged and simplified version of the Babylonian legend is fallacious. In the ancient Near East, the rule is that simple accounts or traditions give rise (by accretion and embellishment) to elaborate legends, but not the reverse. So the evidence supports the view that Genesis was not myth made into history. Rather, the extrabiblical accounts were history turned into myths (Geisler, BECA, 48, 49).

The discoveries of creation accounts at Ebla add evidence for this fact. This library of sixteen thousand clay tablets predates the Babylonian account by about six hundred years. The creation tablet is strikingly close to Genesis, speaking of one being who created the heaven, moon, stars, and earth. The people at Ebla believed in creation out of nothing. The tablets declared, “Lord of heaven and earth; the earth was not, you created it, the light of day was not, you created it, the

morning light you had not [yet] made exist” (*Ebla Archives*, 259). The Bible contains the ancient, less embellished version of the story and transmits the facts without the corruption of the mythological renderings (Geisler, BECA, 48, 49).

2D. Tell Mardikh: The Discovery of Ebla

One of the greatest archaeological finds in the twentieth century was the discovery of Ebla. In 1964 Professor Paolo Matthiae, archaeologist from the University of Rome, began a systematic excavation of a then unknown city. Due to the determination and foresight of Matthiae, in 1974 and 1975 a great royal palace was uncovered that eventually yielded over fifteen thousand tablets and fragments. Giovanni Pettinato, an epigrapher, had worked closely with Matthiae in helping to determine some of the paleographic significance of the find. At present, only a fraction of the tablets have been translated. It is now certain that upon this ancient site the once prestigious city of Ebla ruled the Near East as the seat of a great empire. Ebla is located near the modern-day city of Aleppo in North Syria.

The zenith of Ebla was principally in the third millennium B.C. (coterminous with the time of the patriarchs). Although the Ebla texts, at present, do not specifically mention biblical people or events (although there is much debate over this issue), they do provide an abundance of background material and biblical place-names for evaluating the biblical narratives. The importance of Ebla for Syrian history is most impressive. The significance of Ebla for biblical studies is phenomenal. So far only the tip of the iceberg has been seen. Although the evidence has taken time to surface, listed here is some of the support for the biblical narratives.

1E. Biblical Towns

In reference to the identification of biblical towns in the Ebla archives, Kitchen notes: “Not a few towns of biblical interest appear in the Ebla tablets, which preserve (in most cases) the earliest-known mention of these in written records.”

More useful, potentially, are the Eblaite mentions of familiar Palestinian place-names such as Hazor, Megiddo, Jerusalem, Lachish, Dor, Gaza, Ashtarot (-Qarnaim), etc. Several of these places are known archaeologically to have been inhabited towns in the third millennium B.C. (Early Bronze Age III–IV), and these tablets confirm their early importance, possibly as local city states. Finally, Canaan itself now appears as a geographical entity from the later third millennium B.C., long before any other dated external mention so far known to us—it will be interesting to learn what extent is accorded to Canaan in the Ebla texts. (Kitchen, BIW, 53, 54)

2E. Biblical Names

“Not a few of the proper names of inhabitants of Ebla have struck Pettinato and others by their obvious resemblances to a wide range of personal names of individuals in the Bible” (Kitchen, BIW, 52).

The most important contributions of the Ebla occurrences of these and other such names are (i) to emphasize once more that these are names used by *real* human individuals (never by gods, or exclusively [if ever] by tribes, or by fairytale figures), and (ii) to indicate the immense antiquity of names of this type, and of these names in particular” (Kitchen, BIW, 53).

Dr. Pettinato gives clear Eblaite variations on such Hebrew names as Israel, Ishmael, and Micaiah (Pettinato, “RATME,” 50).

3E. Ancient Near Eastern Tribute

Some consider the tribute received by Solomon at the height of his empire as fanciful exaggeration. But the find at Ebla offers a different interpretation of the accounts.

Imperial Ebla at the height of its power must have had a vast income. From one defeated king of Mari alone, a tribute of 11,000 pounds of silver and 880 pounds of gold was exacted on one occasion. This *ten tons* of silver and over *one third of a ton* of gold was no mean haul in itself. Yet it was simply one “delectable extra” so far as the treasury-accounts of Ebla were concerned. In such an economic context, the 666 talents (about twenty tons) of gold as Solomon’s basic income from his entire “empire” some 15 centuries later (I Kings 10:14; II Chronicles 9:13) loses its air of exaggeration and begins to look quite prosaic as just part of a wider picture of the considerable (if transient) wealth of major kingdoms of the ancient biblical world.

The comparisons just given do *not* prove that Solomon actually did receive 666 talents of gold, or that his kingdom was organized just as Kings describes. But they do indicate clearly (i) that the Old Testament data must be studied in the context of their world and *not* in isolation, and (ii) that the *scale* of activity portrayed in the Old Testament writings is neither impossible nor even improbable when measured by the relevant external standards. (Kitchen, BIW, 51, 52)

4E. Religious Practices

The Ebla texts reveal that many of the Old Testament religious practices are not as “late” as some critical scholars have espoused.

In matters like priests, cult and offerings the records from Ebla so far merely reinforce for Syria-Palestine what we already know for Egypt, Mesopotamia and Anatolia in the third, second and first millennia B.C., and from the records of North-Syrian Qatna and Ugarit for the second millennium B.C. Namely, that well-organized temple cults, sacrifices, full rituals, etc., were a *constant* feature of ancient Near-Eastern religious life at *all* periods from prehistory down to Graeco-Roman times. They have nothing to do with baseless theories of the nineteenth century A.D., whereby such features of religious life can only be a mark of “late sophistication,” virtually forbidden to the Hebrews until after the Babylonian exile—alone of *all* the peoples of the ancient East. There is simply no rational basis for the quaint idea that the simple rites of Moses’ tabernacle (cf. Leviticus) or of Solomon’s temple, both well over 1000 years later than the rituals practiced in half-a-dozen Eblaite temples, must be the idle invention of idealizing writers as late as the fifth century B.C. (Kitchen, BIW, 54)

Giovanni Pettinato comments on the source of the specifics referred to by Kitchen:

Passing on to the divine cult, we note the existence of the temples of Dagan, Astar, Kamos, Rasap, all attested in the texts from Ebla. Among the offerings are listed bread, drinks, or even animals. Two tablets in particular, TM, 75, G, 1974 and TM, 75, G, 2238, stand out because they record the offerings of various animals to different gods made by all the members of the royal family during a single month. For example, “11 sheep for the god Adad from the en as an offering,” “12 sheep for the god Dagan from the en as an offering,” “10 sheep for the god Rasap of the city Edani from the en as an offering.”

Among the more interesting aspects of the divine cult at Ebla is the presence of diverse categories of priests and priestesses, including two classes of prophets, the *mahhu* and the *nabiatum*, the second of which finds a natural counterpart in the Old Testament. To explain the biblical phenomenon scholars have hitherto looked to Mari for background, but in the future Ebla will also claim their attention. (Pettinato, “RATME,” 49)

5E. Hebrew Words

K. A. Kitchen speaks of the critical view of Scripture held by many liberal scholars: “Seventy or a hundred years ago, no such vast depth of perspective was possible; and to suit the purely

theoretical reconstructions of Old Testament books and history by German Old Testament scholars in particular, many words in Hebrew were labeled ‘late’—600 B.C. and later, in effect. By this simple means, mere philosophical prejudices could be given the outward appearance of a ‘scientific’ reconstruction down to the present day” (Kitchen, BIW, 50).

As a reply, he continues:

However, the immense growth in our knowledge of the earlier history of words found in Old Testament Hebrew tends now to alter all this. If a given word is used in Ebla in 2300 B.C., and in Ugarit in 1300 B.C., then it *cannot* by any stretch of the imagination be a “late word” (600 B.C.!), or an “Aramaism” at periods when standard Aramaic had not yet evolved. It becomes instead an *early* word, a part of the ancestral inheritance of biblical Hebrew. More positively, the increased number of contexts that one gains for rarer words can provide useful confirmation—or correction—of our understanding of their meaning. (Kitchen, BIW, 50)

Referring to specific words, Kitchen states:

Thus, to go back to the survey of city officials at Ebla, the term used for those scores of “leaders” was *nase*, the same word as *nasi*, a term in biblical Hebrew used for leaders of the tribes of Israel (e.g., Numbers 1:16, 44, etc.), and applied to other purely human rulers such as Solomon (I Kings 11:34). Old-fashioned biblical criticism declared the word to be “late,” a mark of the hypothetical “priestly code” for example.

The word *hetem*, “gold,” is in Hebrew a rare and poetic synonym for *zahab*, and is commonly dismissed as “late.” Unfortunately for this misdating, the word was borrowed into Egyptian from Canaanite back in the twelfth century B.C., and now—over 1000 years earlier still—recurs as *kutim* in the Paleo-Canaanite of Ebla, 2300 B.C. (Kitchen, BIW, 50)

He continues:

The Hebrew word *tehom*, “deep,” was not borrowed from Babylonian, seeing that it is attested not only in Ugaritic as *thmt* (thirteenth century B.C.) but also in Ebla a thousand years earlier (*ti'amatum*). The term is Common Semitic.

As an example of a rare word confirmed in both existence and meaning, one may cite Hebrew *ereshet*, “desire,” which occurs just once in the Bible, in Psalm 21:2 (Heb. 21:3). Besides being found in Ugaritic in the thirteenth century B.C., this word now appears a millennium earlier at Ebla as *irisatum* (Eblaite or Old Akkadian) in the Sumerian/Eblaite vocabulary tablets.

Finally, the supposed “late” verb *hadash/hiddeh*, “be new”/“to renew” goes back—again—via Ugaritic (*hadath*) to Eblaite (*h*) *edash* (*u*). And so on, for many more besides. (Kitchen, BIW, 50, 51)

Kitchen concludes:

The lessons here are—or should be—clear. Set against two thousand years of history and development of the West Semitic dialects, the whole position of the dating of the vocabulary and usages in biblical Hebrew will need to be completely reexamined. The truth appears to be that early West Semitic in the third and second millennia B.C. had in common a vast and rich vocabulary, to which the later dialects such as Canaanite, Hebrew, Phoenician, Aramaic, etc., fell heirs—but in uneven measure. Words that remained in everyday prosaic use in one of these languages lingered on only in high-flown poetry or in traditional expressions in another of the group. Thus, not a few supposed “late words” or “Aramaisms” in Hebrew (especially in poetry) are nothing more than early West-Semitic words that have found less use in Hebrew but have stayed more alive in Aramaic. (Kitchen, BIW, 51)

3C. The Flood of Noah

As with the creation accounts, the flood narrative in Genesis is more realistic and less mythological than other ancient versions, indicating its authenticity. The superficial similarities point toward a historical core of events that gave rise to all accounts, not toward plagiarism by Moses. The names change. Noah is called Ziusudra by the Sumerians and Utnapishtim by the Babylonians. The basic story doesn't. A man is told to build a ship to specific dimensions because God(s) is going to flood the world. He does it, rides out the storm, and offers sacrifice upon exiting the boat. The Deity(-ies) responds with remorse over the destruction of life and make a covenant with the man. These core events point to a historical basis.

Similar flood accounts are found all over the world. The flood is told of by the Greeks, the Hindus, the Chinese, the Mexicans, the Algonquins, and the Hawaiians. One list of Sumerian kings treats the flood as a historical reference point. After naming eight kings who lived extraordinarily long lives (tens of thousands of years), this sentence interrupts the list: "[Then] the Flood swept over [the earth] and when kingship was lowered [again] from heaven, kingship was [first] in Kish."

There are good reasons to believe that Genesis gives the original story. The other versions contain elaborations indicating corruption. Only in Genesis is the year of the flood given as well as dates for the chronology relative to Noah's life. In fact, Genesis reads almost like a diary or ship's log of the events. The cubical Babylonian ship could not have saved anyone. The raging waters would have constantly turned it on every side. However, the biblical ark is rectangular—long, wide, and low—so that it would ride the rough seas well. The length of the rainfall in the pagan accounts (seven days) is not enough time for the devastation they describe. The waters would have to rise at least above most mountains, to a height of above seventeen thousand feet, and it is more reasonable to assume a longer rainfall to do this. The Babylonian idea that all of the floodwaters subsided in one day is equally absurd.

Another striking difference between Genesis and the other versions is that in these accounts the hero is granted immortality and exalted. The Bible moves on to Noah's sin. Only a version that seeks to tell the truth would include this realistic admission.

Some have suggested that this was a severe but localized flood. However, there is geological evidence to support a worldwide flood. Partial skeletons of recent animals are found in deep fissures in several parts of the world, and the flood seems to be the best explanation for these. This would explain how these fissures occur even in hills of considerable height, which extend from 140 feet to 300 feet. Since no skeleton is complete, it is safe to conclude that none of these animals (mammoth, bears, wolves, oxen, hyenas, rhinoceroses, aurochs, deer, and smaller mammals) fell into these fissures alive, nor were they rolled there by streams. Yet the calcite cementing these diverse bones together indicates that they must have been deposited under water. Such fissures have been discovered in various places around the world. This evidence shows what a brief but violent episode of this sort would be expected to cause within the short span of one year (Geisler, BECA, 49–50).

4C. The Tower of Babel

There is now considerable evidence that the world did indeed have a single language at one time. Sumerian literature alludes to this fact several times. Linguists also find this theory helpful in categorizing languages. But what of the tower and the confusion of tongues at the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11)? Archaeology has revealed that Ur-Nammu, king of Ur from about 2044 to 2007 B.C., supposedly received orders to build a great ziggurat (temple tower) as an act of

worship to the moon god Nannat. A *stèle* (monument) about five feet across and ten feet high reveals Ur-Nammu's activities. One panel has him setting out with a mortar basket to begin construction of the great tower, thus showing his allegiance to the gods by taking his place as a humble workman. Another clay tablet states that the erection of the tower offended the gods, so they threw down what the men had built, scattered them abroad, and made their speech strange. This is remarkably similar to the record in the Bible.

According to Scripture, "The whole earth had one language and one speech" (Genesis 11:1) before the Tower of Babel. After the building of the tower and its destruction, God confounded the language of all the earth (Genesis 11:9). Many modern-day philologists attest to the likelihood of such an origin for the world's languages. Alfredo Trombetti says he can trace and prove the common origin of *all* languages. Max Mueller also attests to the common origin. And Otto Jespersen goes so far as to say that language was directly given to the first men by God (Free, ABH, 47).

5C. The Patriarchs

While the narratives of the lives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob do not present the same kinds of difficulties as do the earlier chapters of Genesis, they were long considered legendary because they did not seem to fit with the known evidence of that period. As more has become known, though, these stories are increasingly verified. Legal codes from the time of Abraham show why the patriarch would have been hesitant to throw Hagar out of his camp, for he was legally bound to support her. Only when a higher law came from God was Abraham willing to put her out.

The Mari letters reveal such names as Abamram (Abraham), Jacob-el, and Benjamites. Though these do not refer to the biblical people, they at least show that the names were in use. These letters also support the record of a war in Genesis 14 where five kings fought against four kings. The names of these kings seem to fit with the prominent nations of the day. For example, Genesis 14:1 mentions an Amorite king Arioch; the Mari documents render the king's name Ariwwuk. All of this evidence leads to the conclusion that the source materials of Genesis were firsthand accounts of someone who lived during Abraham's time (Geisler, BECA, 50).

In another study done by Kitchen (Kitchen, TPAMH, 48–95), he gives examples of archaeological factors for dating the patriarchs during the Middle Bronze Age.

The Biblical data match objective facts from the ancient world in an almost uncanny way, establishing the general reliability of the Biblical periods. (48)

One important item involves the price of slaves in silver shekels. From Ancient Near Eastern sources we know the price of slaves in some detail for a period lasting about 2000 years, from 2400 B.C. to 400 B.C.... These data provide a solid body of evidence that we can compare with the figures in the Bible, in which the price of slaves is mentioned on several occasions (Genesis 37:28; Exodus 20 ff.; Exodus 21:32; 2 Kings 15:20)... In each case the Biblical narrative slave price fits the general period to which it relates. (52)

Now, however, there is quietly mounting evidence that the basic inherited outline—from the patriarchs through the Exodus to the Israelites' entry into Canaan, the united monarchy and then the divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah, and the Exile and return—is essentially sound (94).

1D. Genealogy of Abraham

We find that the genealogy of Abraham is definitely historical. However, there seems to be some question as to whether these names represent individuals or ancient cities, although ancient cities often took the name of their founding fathers. The one thing that is certain about Abraham is that

he was an individual and that he did exist. As we hear from Burrows: “Everything indicates that here we have an historical individual. As noted above, he is not mentioned in any known archaeological source, but his name appears in Babylonia as a personal name in the very period to which he belongs” (Burrows, WMTS, 258, 259).

Earlier attempts had been made to move the date of Abraham to the fifteenth or fourteenth century B.C., a time much too late for him. However, Albright points out that because of the data mentioned above and other evidence, we have “a great deal of evidence from personal and place names, almost all of which is against such unwarranted telescoping of traditional data” (Garstang, FBHJJ, 9).

2D. Genealogy of Esau

In the genealogy of Esau, mention is made of the Horites (Genesis 36:20). It was at one time accepted that these people were cave dwellers because of the similarity between Horite and the Hebrew word for caves. Now, however, findings have shown that they were a prominent group of warriors living in the Near East in patriarchal times (Free, ABH, 72).

3D. Isaac: The Oral Blessing Episode (Genesis 27)

It would seem, indicates Joseph Free, a most unusual event that Isaac did not take his oral blessing back when he discovered Jacob’s deception. However, the Nuzi Tablets tell us that such an oral declaration was perfectly legal and binding. Thus he could not retract the oral blessing. One tablet records a lawsuit involving a woman who was to wed a man, but his jealous brothers contested it. The man won the suit because his father had orally promised the woman to him. Oral statements carried a very different weight then than they do today. The Nuzi texts came from a similar culture to that in Genesis (Free, “AL,” 322, 323).

G. Ernest Wright explains this serious action: “Oral blessings or death-bed wills were recognized as valid at Nuzi as well as in Patriarchal society. Such blessings were serious matters and were irrevocable. We recall that Isaac was prepared to keep his word even though his blessing had been extorted by Jacob under false pretenses. ‘And Isaac trembled with a very great trembling and said: “Whoever it was that hunted game and brought it to me and I ate...even he shall be blessed” ’ (27:33)” (Wright, “PSBA,” as cited in Willoughby, SBTT, 43).

In commenting further on the above Nuzi record, Cyrus Gordon draws three points: “This text conforms with biblical blessings like those of the Patriarchs in that it is (a) an oral will, (b) with legal validity, (c) made to a son by a dying father” (Gordon, “BCNT,” 8).

Thus a clearer light is thrown on a culture that we know inadequately at best.

4D. Jacob

1E. The Purchase of Esau’s Birthright

Gordon provides information on this episode in Genesis 25: “Few incidents in family life seem more peculiar to us than Esau’s sale of his birthright to his twin brother, Jacob. It has been pointed out that one of the [Nuzi] tablets...portrays a similar event” (Gordon, “BCNT,” 3, 5).

The tablet to which Gordon refers is explained by Wright: “Esau’s sale of his birthright to Jacob is also paralleled in the Nuzi tablets where one brother sells a grove, which he has inherited, for three sheep! This would seem to have been quite as uneven a bargain as that of Esau: ‘Esau said to Jacob: “Give me, I pray, some of that red pottage to eat...” And Jacob said: “Sell me first thy birthright.” And Esau said: “Behold I am about to die (of hunger); what is a

birthright to me?” And Jacob said: “Swear to me first.” And he swore to him and sold his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and a mess of lentils and he ate and drank’ (25:30–34)” (Wright, “PSBA,” as cited in Willoughby, SBTT, 43).

Free explains further, “In one Nuzi tablet, there is a record of a man named Tupkitilla, who transferred his inheritance rights concerning a grove to his brother, Kurpazah, in exchange for three sheep. Esau used a similar technique in exchanging his inheritance rights to obtain the desired pottage” (Free, ABH, 68, 69).

S. H. Horn, in “Recent Illumination of the Old Testament” (*Christianity Today*), draws a colorful conclusion: “Esau sold his rights for food in the pot, while Tupkitilla sold his for food still on the hoof” (Horn, “RIOT,” 14, 15).

2E. The Jacob and Laban Episode (Genesis 29)

Cyrus Gordon claims that we can understand even Genesis 29 by episodes in the Nuzi Tablets: “Laban agrees to give a daughter in marriage to Jacob when he makes him a member of the household; ‘It is better that I give her to thee than that I give her to another man. Dwell with me!’ (Genesis 29:9). Our thesis that Jacob’s joining Laban’s household approximates Wullu’s [a person mentioned in the Tablets] adoption is borne out by other remarkable resemblances with the Nuzi document” (Gordon, “BCNT,” 6).

3E. The Stolen Images Episode (Genesis 31)

This event has been explained by other Nuzi discoveries. The following, from J. P. Free’s “Archaeology and the Bible” (*His Magazine*), gives a good explanation not only of the episode but also of the background on the Nuzi Tablets themselves:

Over 1,000 clay tablets were found in 1925 in the excavation of a Mesopotamian site known today as Yorgan Tepe. Subsequent work brought forth another 3,000 tablets and revealed the ancient site as “Nuzi.” The tablets, written about 1500 B.C., illuminate the background of the Biblical patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. One instance will be cited: When Jacob and Rachel left the home of Laban, Rachel stole Laban’s family images or “teraphim.” When Laban discovered the theft, he pursued his daughter and son-in-law, and after a long journey overtook them (Genesis 31:19–23). Commentators have long wondered why he would go to such pains to recover images he could have replaced easily in the local shops. The Nuzi tablets record one instance of a son-in-law who possessed the family images having the right to lay legal claim to his father-in-law’s property, a fact which explains Laban’s anxiety. This and other evidence from the Nuzi tablets fits the background of the Patriarchal accounts into the early period when the patriarchs lived, and does not support the critical view—which holds that the accounts were written 1000 years after their time. (Free, “AB,” 20)

Thanks to archaeology, we are beginning to understand the actual setting of much of the Bible.

5D. Joseph

1E. Selling into Slavery

K. A. Kitchen brings out in his book *Ancient Orient and Old Testament* that Genesis 37:28 gives the correct price for a slave in the eighteenth century B.C.: “The price of twenty shekels of silver paid for Joseph in Genesis 37:28 is the correct average price for a slave in about the eighteenth century B.C.: earlier than this, slaves were cheaper (average, ten to fifteen shekels), and later they

became steadily dearer. This is one more little detail true to its period in cultural history” (Kitchen, AOOT, 52 53).

2E. The Visit to Egypt

The possibility of Joseph’s visit to Egypt has been questioned by some. Millar Burrows points out: “Accounts of going down to Egypt in times of famine (12:10; 42:1, 2) bring to mind Egyptian references to Asiatics who came to Egypt for this purpose. A picture of visiting Semites may be seen on the wall of a tomb at Beni Hasan which comes from a time not far from that of Abraham” (Burrows, WMTS, 266, 267).

Howard Vos (*Genesis and Archaeology*) also points out the presence of the Hyksos in Egypt.

But we have much more than the pictorial representation from Knumhotep’s tomb to support the early entrance of foreigners into Egypt. There are many indications that the Hyksos began to infiltrate the Nile Valley around 1900 B.C. Other contingents came about 1730 and overwhelmed the native Egyptian rulers. So if we take an early date for the entrance of the Hebrews into Egypt, they would have come in during the period of Hyksos infiltration—when many foreigners were apparently entering. If we accept a date of about 1700 or 1650 B.C. for the entrance of the Hebrews, the Hyksos would have been ruling Egypt and likely would have received other foreigners. (Vos, GA, 102)

Vos goes on to draw four connections between the Hyksos tribes and the Bible. One, the Egyptians considered the Hyksos and the Hebrews as different. Two, it is a possibility that the rising Egyptian king who was antagonistic toward Joseph’s people (Exodus 1:8) was the nationalistic Egyptian king. Naturally, such a fever of nationalism would not be healthy for any foreigners. Three, Genesis 47:17 is the first instance where horses are mentioned in the Bible. The Hyksos introduced horses to Egypt. Four, after the Hyksos expulsion, much land was concentrated in the hands of the monarchs; this fits with the events of the famine that Joseph predicted and through which he strengthened the crown (Vos, GA, 104).

3E. Joseph’s Promotions

The following is a summary of Howard Vos’s discussion of the question of Joseph’s admittedly unique rise, found in his *Genesis and Archaeology*:

Joseph’s being lifted from slavery to prime minister of Egypt has caused some critical eyebrows to rise, but we have some archaeological accounts of similar things happening in the Land of the Nile.

A Canaanite Meri-Ra, became armor-bearer to Pharaoh: another Canaanite, Ben-Mat-Ana, was appointed to the high position of interpreter; and a Semite, Yanhamu or Jauhamu, became deputy to Amenhotep III, with charge over the granaries of the delta, a responsibility similar to that of Joseph before and during the famine.

When Pharaoh appointed Joseph prime minister, he was given a ring and a gold chain or a collar which is normal procedure for Egyptian office promotions. (Vos, GA, 106)

E. Campbell, commenting on the Amarna period, further discusses this parallel of Joseph’s rise to power:

One figure in the Rib-Adda correspondence constitutes an interesting link both with the princes of the cities in Palestine to the south and with the Bible. He is Yanhamu, whom Rib-Adda at one point describes as the *musallil* of the king. The term means, in all likelihood, the fanbearer of the king, an honorary title referring to one who is very close to the king, presumably sharing in

counsels on affairs of state. Yanhamu held, then, a very prominent position in Egyptian affairs. His name appears in correspondence from princes up and down Palestine-Syria. At the beginning of the Rib-Adda period, Yanhamu seems to have been in charge of the issuing of supplies from the Egyptian bread-basket called Yarimuta, and we have already seen that Rib-Adda was apparently constantly in need of his services.

Yanhamu has a Semitic name. This, of course, suggests further parallel to the Joseph narrative in Genesis, beyond the fact that both are related to the supplies of food for foreigners. Yanhamu offers an excellent confirmation of the genuinely Egyptian background of the Joseph narrative, but this does not mean, of course, that these men are identical, or that they functioned at the same time. Indeed Joseph may better fit into the preceding period for a number of reasons, although the evidence as yet precludes anything approaching certainty. It is clear that Semites could rise to positions of great authority in Egypt: they may even have been preferred at a time when indigenous leadership got too powerful or too inbred. (Campbell, as cited in Burrows, WMTS, 16, 17)

With regard to Semites rising to power in Egyptian government, Kitchen—with reference to previously recovered stelae and the Brooklyn and Illahun papyri—comments:

Asiatic slaves in Egypt, attached to the households of officials, are well-known in later Middle-Kingdom Egypt (c. 1850–1700 B.C.) and Semites could rise to high position (even the throne, before the Hyksos period), as did the chancellor Hur. Joseph’s career would fall easily enough into the period of the late thirteenth and early fifteenth dynasties. The role of dreams is, of course, well-known at all periods. From Egypt, we have a dream-reader’s textbook in a copy of c. 1300 B.C., originating some centuries earlier; such works are known in first-millennium Assyria also. (Kitchen, BW, 74)

4E. Joseph’s Tomb

John Elder, in his *Prophets, Idols, and Diggers*, reveals:

In the last verses of Genesis it is told how Joseph adjured his relatives to take his bones back to Canaan whenever God should restore them to their original home, and in Joshua 24:32 it is told how his body was indeed brought to Palestine and buried at Shechem. For centuries there was a tomb at Shechem revered as the tomb of Joseph. A few years ago the tomb was opened. It was found to contain a body mummified according to the Egyptian custom, and in the tomb, among other things, was a sword of the kind worn by Egyptian officials. (Elder, PID, 54)

6D. Regarding the Patriarchs—Concluding Archaeological Evidence

The Nuzi discoveries have played a central role in illuminating different portions of this section. S. H. Horn lists six areas of influence the texts have exercised:

Other [Nuzi] texts show that a bride was ordinarily chosen for a son by his father, as the patriarchs did; that a man had to pay a dowry to his father-in-law, or to work for his father-in-law if he could not afford the dowry, as poor Jacob had to do; that the orally expressed will of a father could not be changed after it had been pronounced, as in Isaac’s refusal to change the blessings pronounced over Jacob even though they had been obtained by deception; that a bride ordinarily received from her father a slave girl as a personal maid, as Leah and Rachel did when they were married to Jacob; that the theft of cult objects or of a god was punishable by death, which was why Jacob consented to the death of the one with whom the stolen gods of his father-in-law were found; that the strange relationship between Judah and his daughter-in-law Tamar is vividly illustrated by the laws of the ancient Assyrians and Hittites. (Horn, “RIOT,” 14)

Archaeology has indeed had an impact on our knowledge of Bible backgrounds.

6C. The Dating of the Exodus

One of several questions concerning Israel's relationship with Egypt is when the Exodus into Palestine took place. There is even an official "generally accepted date" (GAD) for the Israelites' entrance into Canaan: about 1230–1220 B.C. The Scriptures, on the other hand, teach in three different texts (1 Kin. 6:1; Judg. 11:26; Acts 13:19–20) that the Exodus occurred in the 1400s B.C., with the entrance into Canaan coming forty years later. While the debate rages on, there is no longer any reason to accept the 1200 date.

Assumptions have been made that the city "Rameses" in Exodus 1:11 was named after Rameses the Great, that there were no building projects in the Nile Delta before 1300, and that there was no great civilization in Canaan from the nineteenth to the thirteenth centuries. However, the name Rameses is common in Egyptian history. Rameses the Great is Ramses II. Nothing is known about Rameses I. Also, the name might not refer to a city but to an area. In Genesis 47:11, the name Rameses describes the Nile Delta area where Jacob and his sons settled.

Some scholars now suggest that reinterpretation of the data requires moving the date of the Middle Bronze (MB) age. If this is done, it would show that several cities of Canaan that have been uncovered were destroyed by the Israelites. Recent digs have uncovered evidence that the last phase of the MB period involves more time than originally thought, so that its end is closer to 1400 B.C. than 1550 B.C. This realignment would bring together two events previously thought to have been separated by centuries: the fall of Canaan's MB II cities and the conquest.

Another change may be warranted in the traditional view of Egyptian history. The chronology of the whole ancient world is based on the order and dates of the Egyptian kings, which were generally thought to have been fixed. However, Velikovsky and Courville assert that six hundred extra years in that chronology throw off these dates for events all around the Near East. Courville has shown that the lists of Egyptian kings should not be understood to be completely consecutive. He argues that some "kings" listed were not pharaohs but high officials. Historians had assumed that each dynasty followed the one before it. Instead, many dynasties list subrulers who lived at the same time as the preceding dynasty. Working out this new chronology places the Exodus at about 1450 B.C. and would make the other periods of Israelite history fall in line with the Egyptian kings mentioned. The evidence is not definitive, but there is no longer any reason to demand a late-date Exodus (Geisler, BECA, 51).

7C. The Assyrian Invasion

Much was learned about the Assyrians when twenty-six thousand tablets were found in the palace of Ashurbanipal, son of the Esarhaddon, who took the northern kingdoms into captivity in 722 B.C. These tablets tell of the many conquests of the Assyrian Empire and record the cruel and violent punishments that fell to those who opposed them.

Several of these records confirm the Bible's accuracy. Every reference in the Old Testament to an Assyrian king has been proven correct. Even though Sargon was unknown for some time, when his palace was found and excavated, there was a wall painting of the battle mentioned in Isaiah 20. The Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser adds to our knowledge of biblical figures by showing Jehu (or his emissary) bowing down to the king of Assyria.

Among the most interesting finds is Sennacherib's record of the siege of Jerusalem. Thousands of his men died and the rest scattered when he attempted to take the city and, as Isaiah had foretold, he was unable to conquer it. Since he could not boast about his great victory here, Sennacherib found a way to make himself sound good without admitting defeat (Geisler, BECA, 52):

As to Hezekiah, the Jew, he did not submit to my yoke. I laid siege to 46 of his strong cities, walled forts, and to the countless small villages in their vicinity. I drove out of them 200,150 people, young and old, male and female, horses, mules, donkeys, camels, big and small cattle beyond counting and considered [them] booty. Himself I made a prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a cage. (Pritchard, ANET, as cited in Geisler, BECA, 52)

8C. The Babylonian Captivity

Various facets of Old Testament history regarding the Babylonian captivity have been confirmed. Records found in Babylon's famous hanging gardens have shown that Jehoiachin and his five sons were given a monthly ration and a place to live and were treated well (2 Kings 25:27–30). The name of Belshazzar caused problems because there was not only no mention of him but no room for him in the list of Babylonian kings. However, Nabodonius left a record that he appointed his son, Belshazzar (Daniel 5), to reign for a few years in his absence. Hence, Nabodonius was still king, but Belshazzar ruled in the capital. Also, the edict of Cyrus as recorded by Ezra seemed to fit the picture of Isaiah's prophecies too well to be real, until a cylinder was found that confirmed the decree in all the important details (Geisler, BECA, 52).

9C. The Lachish Letters

1D. Background to the Find

William F. Albright, in his *Religion in Life* article, "The Bible After Twenty Years of Archaeology," introduces us to this find:

We mention the new documents from the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. which have come to light since 1935. In 1935 the late J. L. Starkey discovered the Ostraca of Lachish, consisting chiefly of letters written in ink on potsherds. Together with several additional ostraca found in 1938, they form a unique body of Hebrew prose from the time of Jeremiah. Further light on the time of the Exile comes from the ration lists of Nebuchadnezzar, found by the Germans at Babylon and partly published by E. F. Weidner in 1939. Other new evidence will be discussed below. Somewhat later but of decisive value for our understanding of the history and literature of the Jews in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah are the continuing finds and publications of Aramaic papyri and ostraca from Egypt. Four large groups of this material are being published, and their complete publication will more than double the total bulk of such documents available twenty years ago. (Albright, "BATYA," 539)

R.S. Haupt wrote a survey article on these finds, "Lachish—Frontier Fortress of Judah." He goes into the authorship and background of the letters:

Most of the best preserved are letters written by a certain Hoshaiiah (a good biblical name: Neh. 12:32; Jer. 42:1; 43:2), apparently a subordinate military officer stationed at an outpost or observation point not far from Lachish, to Yaosh, the commanding officer of Lachish. That the letters were all written within a period of a few days or weeks is indicated by the fact that the pieces of pottery on which they were written were from jars of similar shape and date, and five of the pieces actually fit together as fragments of the same original vessel. The fact that all but two of the letters were found on the floor of the guardroom naturally suggest that they were deposited there by Yaosh himself upon receiving them from Hoshaiiah. (Haupt, "LFFJ," 30, 31)

2D. Dating and Historical Setting

Albright wrote a special article on this find, “The Oldest Hebrew Letters: Lachish Ostraca,” in the *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, in which he deals with the setting of the Letters:

In the course of this sketch it will have become increasingly evident to the attentive reader that the language of the Lachish documents is perfect classical Hebrew. The divergences from biblical usage are much fewer and less significant than supposed by Torczner. In these letters we find ourselves in exactly the age of Jeremiah, with social and political conditions agreeing perfectly with the picture drawn in the book that bears his name. The Lachish Letters take their place worthily between the Ostraca of Samaria and the Elephantine Papyri as epigraphic monuments of Biblical Hebrew history. (Albright, “OHL,” 17)

G. E. Wright, in “The Present State of Biblical Archaeology,” dates the letters by internal evidence: “On Letter XX are the words ‘the ninth year,’ that is, of King Zedekiah. That is the same year in which Nebuchadnezzar arrived to begin the reduction of Judah: ‘in the ninth year . . . , in the tenth month’ (II Kings 25:1; this would be about January 588 B.C., the siege of Jerusalem continuing to July 587 B.C.—II Kings 25:2, 3).” (Wright, “PSBA,” as cited in Willoughby, SBTT, 179)

Millar Burrows (*What Mean These Stones?*) agrees with Wright: “At Lachish evidence of two destructions not far apart has been found; undoubtedly they are to be attributed to Nebuchadnezzar’s invasions of 597 and 587 B.C. The now famous Lachish letters were found in the debris from the second of these destructions” (Burrows, WMTS, 107).

Albright sums up the question of the dating of the finds: “Starkey has contributed a useful sketch of the discovery, explaining the archaeological situation in which the ostraca were found and fixing their date just before the final destruction of Lachish at the end of Zedekiah’s reign. The facts are so clear that Torczner has surrendered his objections to this date, which is now accepted by all students” (Albright, “OHL,” 11, 12).

3D. Old Testament Background

Jeremiah 34:6, 7 read as follows: “Then Jeremiah the prophet spoke all these words to Zedekiah king of Judah in Jerusalem when the king of Babylon’s army fought against Jerusalem and all the cities of Judah that were left, against Lachish and Azekah; for only these fortified cities remained of the cities of Judah.”

Israel had been in a futile rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar. Judah was not united in this revolt. Jeremiah preached submission, while the Jewish leaders could only speak of resistance—and resist they did, though they were soundly defeated by the powers of Nebuchadnezzar. In the final days of the rebellion, the last vestiges of Hebrew independence were embodied in a pair of outposts, Lachish and Azekah, thirty-five miles southwest of Jerusalem. From Lachish came a series of letters giving a graphic picture of what it was like to be in such a situation. These add greatly to our knowledge of Old Testament background. This discovery is known as the Lachish Letters (or Ostraca).

4D. The Content of the Letters and the Gedaliah Seal

For sake of convenience, each of the letters was labeled with a number. Hauptert gives an overview of Letters II through VI: “Throughout this group of letters [Letters II–VI] Hoshai is continually defending himself to his superior, although the charges against him are not always clear. It is tempting to think that he is in sympathy with the Jeremiah faction which wanted to

submit to the Babylonians instead of rebelling; but, of course, we cannot be sure” (Hauptert, “LFFJ,” 31).

He then touches on several of them:

1E. Letter I

“Letter I...though only a list of names, is of striking significance since three of the nine names which occur—Gemariah, Jaazanian, and Neriah—appear in the Old Testament only in the time of Jeremiah. A fourth name is Jeremiah, which, however, is not limited in the Old Testament to the prophet Jeremiah, and need not refer to him. A fifth name, likewise not limited to this period, is Mattaniah, which biblical students will recognize as the pre-throne name of King Zedekiah” (Hauptert, “LFFJ,” 31).

2E. Letter III

Hauptert continues: “In Letter III Hoshaiiah reports to Yaosh that a royal mission is on the way to Egypt, and that a company of this group has been sent to his outpost (or to Lachish) for provisions, an allusion which points directly to the intrigues of the pro-Egyptian party under Zedekiah. Of unusual interest is the reference in the same letter to ‘the prophet.’ Some writers have confidently identified this prophet with Jeremiah. This is entirely possible, but we cannot be certain and should be careful about pushing the evidence too far” (Hauptert, “LFFJ,” 32).

3E. Letter IV

J. P. Free (*Archaeology and Bible History*) speaks of Letter IV, an often-mentioned one:

In the days of Jeremiah when the Babylonian army was taking one town after another in Judah (about 589–586 B.C.), we are told in the Bible that, as yet, the two cities of Lachish and Azekah had not fallen (Jer. 34:7). Striking confirmation of the fact that these two cities were among those still holding out is furnished by the Lachish letters. Letter No. 4, written by the army officer at a military outpost to his superior officer at Lachish, says “We are watching for the signals of Lachish according to all indications which my Lord hath given, for we cannot see Azekah.” This letter not only shows us how Nebuchadnezzar’s army was tightening its net around the land of Judah, but also evidences the close relationship between Lachish and Azekah which are similarly linked in the book of Jeremiah. (Free, ABH, 223)

Hauptert sees it from another angle: “The final statement of Letter IV affords an intimate glimpse into the declining days of the Kingdom of Judah. Hoshaiiah concludes: ‘Investigate, and (my lord) will know that for the fire-signals of Lachish we are watching, according to all the signs which my lord has given, for we cannot see Azekah.’ This statement calls to mind immediately the passage in Jer. 34:7” (Hauptert, “LFFJ,” 32).

Wright adds his view of the reference to not seeing Azekah: “When Hoshaiiah says that he ‘cannot see Azekah,’ he may mean that the latter city has already fallen and is no longer sending signals. At any rate, we here learn that Judah had a signal system, presumably by fire or smoke, and the atmosphere of the letters reflects the worry and disorder of a besieged country. A date in the autumn of 589 (or 588) B.C. has been suggested for the bulk of the letters” (Wright, “PSBA,” as cited in Willoughby, SBTT, 179).

4E. Letter VI

Joseph Free points out the close relationship between Letter VI and Jeremiah’s writings:

J. L. Starkey found (1935) a group of eighteen potsherds bearing on their surface several military messages written by an army officer to his superior officer stationed at Lachish. W. F. Albright has pointed out [“A Brief History of Judah from the Days of Josiah to Alexander the Great,” *Biblical Archaeologist*, February 1946, p. 4.] that in one of these letters (No. 6) the army officer complains that the royal officials (sarim) had sent out circular letters which “weaken the hands” of the people. The army officer who wrote this Lachish letter used the expression, “weaken the hands,” to describe the effect of the over-optimism of the royal officials, whereas the officials, referred to in the book of Jeremiah (38:4), in turn had used the same expression in describing the effect of Jeremiah’s realistic prophecy concerning the approaching fall of Jerusalem. The royal officials were deemed guilty of the very action which they sought to ascribe to Jeremiah. (Free, ABH, 222)

5E. Gedaliah Seal

John Elder points out yet another find in addition to the ostraca, which adds even more weight to the biblical story of Lachish:

The nearby city fortress of Lachish provides clear proof that it had been twice burned over a short period of time, coinciding with the two captures of Jerusalem. In Lachish the imprint of a clay seal was found, its back still shows the fibers of the papyrus to which it had been attached. It reads: “The property of Gedaliah who is over the house.” We meet this distinguished individual in II Kings 25:22, where we are told: “And as for the people that remained in the land of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had left, even over them he made Gedaliah...ruler.” (Elder, PID, 108, 109)

5D. Significance of Lachish Findings and Conclusion

Hauptert concludes: “The real significance of the Lachish Letters can hardly be exaggerated. No archaeological discovery to date [prior to the Dead Sea Scrolls] has had a more direct bearing upon the Old Testament. The scribes who wrote the letters (for there was more than one) wrote with genuine artistry in classical Hebrew, and we have virtually a new section of Old Testament literature: a supplement to Jeremiah” (Hauptert, “LFFJ,” 32).

Archaeology does not prove the Bible. It does not prove beyond a shadow of a doubt all aspects of the history of the Exile. It does, however, put the one who wishes to maintain the traditional view on at least an equal footing with the skeptics. A person must no longer feel required to believe scholarship like that of Torrey.

Free put a simple closing to his study of the subject thus: “In summary, archaeological discoveries show at point after point that the biblical record is confirmed and commended as trustworthy. This confirmation is not confined to a few general instances” (Free, AHAS, 225).

NOTE: For further study of this area, see either Free or, better, Albright. These two have done extensive work in this area, as this section indicates:

Free, Joseph P.: *Archaeology and Bible History*, and an article series in *Bibliotheca Sacra* in 1956–57.

Albright, William Foxwell: *Archaeology of Palestine and the Bible*, “King Jehoiachin in Exile,” in *Biblical Archaeologist*; and “The Bible After Twenty Years of Archaeology,” in *Religion in Life*.

3A. New Testament Confirmation of the Old Testament

Another area where the Old Testament is confirmed is available from the New Testament. There are numerous remarks by Jesus Himself, the apostles, and various other biblical characters in the

New Testament that confirm the truthfulness of the Old Testament narrative. The following is a list of Scripture references.

1B. Jesus' Confirmation

The New Testament records that Jesus believed the Torah to be from Moses:

Mark 7:10; 10:3–5; 12:26

Luke 5:14; 16:29–31; 24:27, 44

John 7:19, 23

Especially in John 5:45–47 Jesus states unequivocally his belief that Moses wrote the Torah:

“Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you—Moses, in whom you trust.

“For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me.

“But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?”

Eissfeldt states: “The name used in the New Testament clearly with reference to the whole Pentateuch—the Book of Moses—is certainly to be understood as meaning that Moses was the compiler of the Pentateuch” (Eissfeldt, OTAI, 158).

2B. Biblical Writers' Confirmation

The New Testament writers also held that the Torah, or “the Law,” came from Moses:

The apostles believed that “Moses wrote for us a law” (Mark 12:19 NASB).

John was confident that “the Law was given through Moses” (John 1:17).

Paul, speaking of a Pentateuchal passage, asserts, “Moses writes...” (Rom. 10:5).

Other passages asserting this include:

Luke 2:22; 20:28

John 1:45, 8:5; 9:29

Acts 3:22; 6:14; 13:39; 15:1, 21; 26:22; 28:23

1 Corinthians 9:9

2 Corinthians 3:15

Hebrews 9:19

Revelation 15:3

Geisler and Nix provide a helpful list of New Testament references to Old Testament events:

It is my deep conviction, after examining the evidence presented in part one of this book, that I can hold in my hand the Bible (both Old and New Testaments together) and conclude that I have a reliable historical record of how the God who is really there has revealed Himself to us. In part two, we will examine further evidence which demands a verdict concerning the identity of Jesus Christ. I believe a fair inquirer will come to the conclusion that the Bible is more than just a history book but is the very word of God. In it He reveals His gift to us of His Son and how we can know Him personally.

OLD TESTAMENT EVENT	NEW TESTAMENT REFERENCE
1. Creation of the universe (Gen. 1)	John 1:3; Col. 1:16
2. Creation of Adam and Eve (Gen. 1–2)	1 Tim. 2:13, 14

3. Marriage of Adam and Eve (Gen. 1–2)	1 Tim. 2:13
4. Temptation of the woman (Gen. 3)	1 Tim. 2:14
5. Disobedience and sin of Adam (Gen. 3)	Rom. 5:12; 1 Cor. 15:22
6. Sacrifices of Abel and Cain (Gen. 4)	Heb. 11:4
7. Murder of Abel by Cain (Gen. 4)	1 John 3:12
8. Birth of Seth (Gen. 4)	Luke 3:38
9. Translation of Enoch (Gen. 5)	Heb. 11:5
10. Marriage before the Flood (Gen. 6)	Luke 17:27
11. The Flood and destruction of man (Gen. 7)	Matt. 24:39
12. Preservation of Noah and his family (Gen. 8–9)	2 Pet. 2:5
13. Genealogy of Shem (Gen. 10)	Luke 3:35, 36
14. Birth of Abraham (Gen. 12–13)	Luke 3:34
15. Call of Abraham (Gen. 12–13)	Heb. 11:8
16. Tithes of Melchizedek (Gen. 14)	Heb 7:1–3
17. Justification of Abraham (Gen. 15)	Rom. 4:3
18. Ishmael (Gen. 16)	Gal. 4:21–24
19. Promise of Isaac (Gen. 17)	Heb. 11:18
20. Lot and Sodom (Gen. 18–19)	Luke 17:29
21. Birth of Isaac (Gen. 21)	Acts 7:9, 10
22. Offering of Isaac (Gen. 22)	Heb. 11:17
23. The burning bush (Ex. 3:6)	Luke 20:32
24. Exodus through the Red Sea (Ex. 14:22)	1 Cor. 10:1, 2
25. Provision of water and manna (Ex. 16:4, 17:6)	1 Cor. 10:3–5

26. Lifting up serpent in wilderness (Num. 21:9)	John 3:14
27. Fall of Jericho (Josh. 6:22–25)	Heb. 11:30
28. Miracles of Elijah (1 Kin. 17:1; 18:1)	James 5:17
29. Jonah in the great fish (Jon. 2)	Matt. 12:40
30. Three Hebrew youths in furnace (Dan. 3)	Heb. 11:34
31. Daniel in lion's den (Dan. 6)	Heb. 11:33
32. Slaying of Zechariah (2 Chr. 24:20–22)	Matt. 23:35