

Introduction

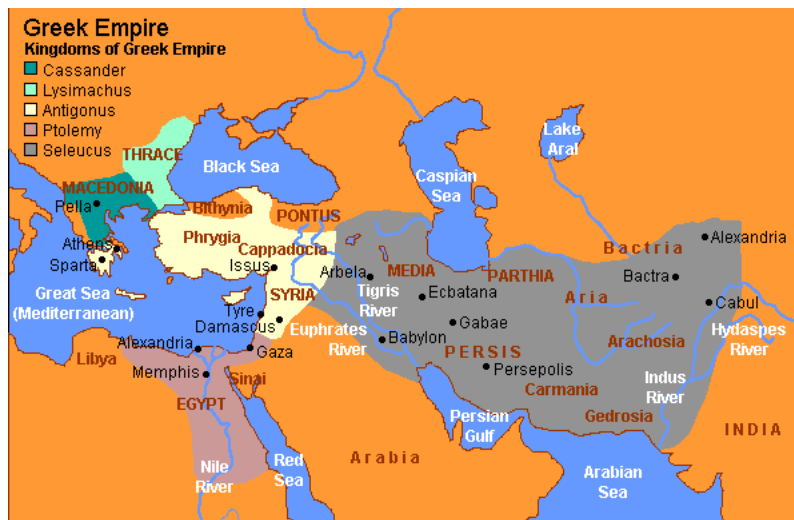
1. What is history and how did we get it? Ancient written records are compared and archeological discoveries are analyzed and studied vis-à-vis the written records of antiquity.

1.1 To determine what is history versus fiction the following tests are used for written records: oldest documents take precedence (those nearest the event, the number of documents available, the number of mistakes in the various manuscripts and the substance of the errors and the time interval between the event and the document.

1.2 In summary, various external evidences such as established contemporaneous events, rulers, names of cities, civilizations known to exist at the time and archaeological records are compared and analyzed and conclusions drawn and codified.

1.3 Although the Bible is not a history book, the historical facts found in the Bible are remarkably accurate.

2. The Old Testament *was written* describing events taking place over a long period of time—c. 1450 B.C. to c. 450 B.C. The New Testament *was written* over a not so long period – c. 4 B.C. to c. A.D. 96; there was an intertestamental period of some 400 years in which there was no Scripture written. We have a great deal of history about events taking place during the intertestamental period known as 1st and 2nd Maccabee; as we will later see these books are classified by many as “Apocrypha.”



2.1 Bible teachers know of the events taking place in the intertestamental period from not only the Apocrypha but they also find records of these events described prophetically by Daniel. Particularly in Daniel Chapters 2, 4, 7 and 8.

2.1.1 I hope to show later how there is a remarkable coalescence between history and prophecy. This will all be developed later in this categorical study of Canonicity.

3. Let's first review the Old Testament and how it compares with ancient history.

3.1 Until the recent discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, which is the oldest extant Hebrew manuscript, our oldest Old Testament manuscript was dated A.D. 900.

3.1.1 Keep in mind a manuscript as used in this doctrine may be only a small portion of an entire Book inscribed on a vellum, parchment, scroll, papyrus, etc. The Dead Sea Scrolls contains parts of several Old Testament Books and the scrolls date back to the 1st century B.C.

3.2 Before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947-54 there was an approximate gap of some 1300 years between the event and the oldest Old Testament manuscript: The Old Testament being completed in about 425 B.C. and the oldest copy being 900 A.D.; we therefore had a 1325-year hiatus.

3.3 With the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls a number of Old Testament manuscripts were found which were dated before the time of Christ, and when experts compared what we formerly had versus the newly discovered scrolls, there were remarkably only a few minor errors and most involved only punctuation. More concerning this comparison will be provided later.

3.4 The Christian can now take the Old Testament and say without fear, "this is the Word of God, handed down without essential loss from generation to generation." As we will see later the New Testament has been studied and experts determined its accuracy is just a little short of miraculous." The Bible takes a back-seat to no other document when objectively compared.

3.4.1 All the more remarkable is the fact that more than 40 men, in three languages, spanning 60 generations and 1600 years have written the Bible from three different continents. This is an astounding feat.

3.5 We will look at the accuracy factor of the numerous copies in great detail later but for now it suffices to simply state that the accuracy of the Bible is "nothing short of phenomenal."

4. Last week we studied the remarkable events surrounding how we got the King James version of the Bible; now let's see how future and more accurate versions of the Bible came to be. Miracle seems to follow miracle as we have already seen.

CODEX SINAITICUS

1. We owe much of our knowledge of the Scriptures to a brilliant nineteenth century German scholar, who spent his life piecing together the original New Testament. At the age of nineteen, young Count Konstantin von Tischendorf amazed his professors with his fluent knowledge of the classical languages and dialects of antiquity. Seven years later, he was appointed lecturer at the University of Leipzig. The following year, he published a new edition of the Greek New Testament.
2. In the spring of 1844, Tischendorf took a trip to the Near East. In the course of his travels, he journeyed to the Sinai Peninsula in search of an old monastery that had been hewn from the rock on the side of Mount Sinai. Since there were no hotels or motels in those days, travelers often spent the night in monasteries? When Tischendorf arrived at the Greek Orthodox monastery of St. Catherine's, he was welcomed by the Russian monks.
3. After a pleasant meal and welcome by one of the monks, Tischendorf presented his letter of introduction. He was then given a grand tour of the grounds and buildings and taken to the library. Tischendorf was disappointed by what he saw.
4. There were dusty parchments piled everywhere. In his bedroom he saw a large wastebasket filled with what looked like ancient vellums. The basket had been placed near the fireplace—apparently left there to warm his room. Tischendorf was aghast at the thought of anyone burning these vellums.
5. Here, if his eyes did not deceive him, was something of real value. Quickly he started going through the papers. Was there more of this kind of material around? If so, would they bring them to him? This is how Tischendorf discovered the 129 pages of what is today known as the Codex Sinaiticus, or the Codex Aleph.
6. Unhappily, Tischendorf did not 'play poker' well. His face lit up in such a way that the monks knew there was something of value in that wastebasket. So, he had to tell them of his discovery --- a manuscript that possibly dated back to the second century. Would they let him have it? Immediately the attitude of the monks changed; the answer was no. Tischendorf could not take the papers with him, but he would be permitted to review the pages and take a few notes. Tischendorf did more than that; he copied the entire manuscript. In the end, after prolonged bargaining, he was allowed to take 43 of the 129 pages.
7. Almost fourteen years would pass before all the negotiations for the transfer of this and other priceless documents. England's interest in the manuscripts was made known to the Russian government.

7.1 The monks were shocked. Why sell their precious papers to English heretics? They would rather give them to Russia---on loan, of course. Triumphantly, and with the full backing of Russia, Tischendorf carried off his prize for further study. He published his findings in 1862. Then in 1933, the Russian Communists decided they had no need of Bibles, old or new, so they sold Codex Sinaiticus to Great Britain for 100,000 pounds sterling. The crumpled pages were restored and bound in two volumes and placed in the British Museum. Later they were photostatically reproduced and copies sent to libraries throughout the world.

8. Codex Sinaiticus is still one of the finest and most accurate texts available to us today, and it became the basis of many revisions and corrections of earlier editions of the Bible.

CODEX VATICANUS

1. With Tischendorf's findings a new interest in ancient manuscripts was kindled. Someone remembered their French/Vatican history and wondered what had become of the many old manuscripts which Napoleon's scholars had discovered in the Vatican when the Pope was captured. Actually, Codex Vaticanus, also known as Codex B, was known to be several years older than Sinaiticus. Vaticanus had probably been transported to the Vatican by Pope Nicholas in 1448. Until the Napoleonic Wars, the manuscript had been hidden from the outside world.

2. In 1809, when Napoleon exiled the Pope to Avignon (a city located northwest of Marseille), it took about fifty wagons to transport the Pope's library. With the fall of Napoleon in 1815, the papers were returned to the Vatican before anyone had a chance to examine them carefully. Once more in the Vatican library, they were jealously guarded by the Roman Catholics.

3. Tregelles, another great scholar and friend of Tischendorf's, decided to investigate the Codex Vaticanus in the Vatican library. He applied to the Pope for permission to examine the manuscript and was promptly refused. When he explained he was a professor of New Testament literature at Leipzig University the Pope agreed to let Tregelles study the documents for some six hours.

4. That was in the year 1843. Twenty years later, Tischendorf was permitted to reexamine the manuscript. Of course, he had to submit to stringent security measures. He was searched on his way in and on his way out; He could bring no writing materials and was not allowed to take notes.

4.1 The manuscript was laid out on a large table where he could read no longer than the times established by the chief librarian. Furthermore, there would be guards watching him all the time he was reading.

5. Tischendorf memorized a portion of the text each day. When he returned home, he would sit down and write out that part of Scripture earlier memorized. The next day he would go back to the Vatican to master the next portion of the Word.

6. This went on for the summer holidays, and in three months Tischendorf memorized the entire text of Codex Vaticanus. I suspect this was one of the greatest memory feats ever! Upon his return to Leipzig, Tischendorf published the results of his findings. So close was his text to the original, that Pope Pius IX in 1859 ordered the Vatican manuscript photographed. In that way it became public property for the world at large. Codex Vaticanus is still one of our most valuable manuscripts.

CODEX ALEXANDRINUS

1. A third very interesting manuscript is the Codex Alexandrinus. This Greek language manuscript had been written in about A.D. 450 in Alexandria, Egypt. Apparently, no one paid any attention to it in the years that followed. In 1621, when Cyril Lucar became the patriarch of the Greek Orthodox Church, he transferred the manuscript to Constantinople.

2. He had succumbed to the influence of Calvinistic teaching and was corresponding with leading churchmen in the western world. He soon learned of England's keen interest in ancient Biblical manuscripts. So, when the British ambassador, Thomas Roe, was scheduled to return home, Lucar sent with him the manuscripts as a gift to King Charles the First. The beautiful document, Codex Alexandrinus, was presented at court in 1627; just fifteen years after the King James Version of the Bible had been completed.

3. What a pity that it came so late, because this very ancient manuscript may have helped in the correct rendition of the English text.

EPHRAEMI RESCRIPTUS

1. It is fascinating to learn what happened to some of the great libraries of the past and to trace their disposition throughout history. For example, we know that Cleopatra was very fond of reading and that Marc Antony was extraordinarily fond of Cleopatra. When he heard of her love for books, Marc Antony took his army to one of the great libraries of Asia Minor. There he 'liberated' 400,000 volumes of literature and took them down to Egypt as a gift for Cleopatra.

2. An act like this would be tantamount to the Library of Congress being stolen and moved to another country. Many of the great libraries of the ancient world have disappeared, and we know of their existence only because history has recorded it for us.

3. It is equally interesting to discover that some ancient manuscripts, thought to be lost, were eventually recovered. One of these is known to us as the Ephraemi Rescriptus, or Codex C. This recovery in the sixteenth century involved Catherine de Medici, who was as ambitious as she was clever. Catherine was a member of the colorful Italian family that had risen from obscurity to immense wealth and fame.

3.1 Over a period of nearly three hundred years, the Medicis had made a name for themselves which ran the gamut from popes to poisoners to patrons of the arts. They had affiliated themselves with the great houses of Europe through marriage, and Catherine had become the wife of King Henry II of France. She bore him four sons who eventually, through her constant manipulations, became kings.

4. Catherine de Medici was an avid, if somewhat superficial reader, who treasured her books and took them wherever she went. Among her favorites were the sermons of a Syrian theologian, Father Ephraem. When Catherine died, her books went to the French National Library in Paris. They were stacked away and ignored for a long time--245 years to be exact.

5. In 1834, a student of theology decided to write a thesis on the sermons of Father Ephraem. He went to the French National Library and asked permission to check out some of the Medici books. He was told that they could not be removed from the premises, since the collection had great historic value; however, he was permitted to examine the books. While he was reading, the light fell on the page in such a way that indentations in the vellum were visible. What appeared to the student as so many indentations were, in fact, inscriptions made prior to those of Father Ephraem.

5.1 What actually had happened was that in 1553, when Father Ephraem wanted to record his sermons, paper was very scarce and hard to obtain. He found some used vellums in an ancient Syrian monastery and simply erased the writing.

6. True, the indentations were still there, but Father Ephraem's sermons had been written over them. Without realizing it Father Ephraem had erased one of the finest of all Bible manuscripts in order to write his own sermons! Immediately, the alert student became far more interested in what Father Ephraem had erased than in what he had written. Through the use of chemicals, the original manuscript was restored.

7. This type of manuscript is called a palimpsest, which means "erased and written over." This particular one became known as Ephraemi Rescriptus; in other words, Ephraem wrote over it. Since its discovery, the manuscript has been removed from the Medici stacks of literature and placed where it belongs---in the Bible stack.

THE POPYRI

The Oxyrhynchos Manuscripts

1. Archaeological findings have provided us with priceless manuscripts of the past. Oxford University professors, Dr. Grenfell and Dr. Hunt in c. 1900 went to Oxyrhynchos (och see rin quist) in Upper Egypt, west of the Nile. They were searching for ancient treasure and trinkets of silver and gold that lay buried in the tombs.

1.1 During the course of their excavations of the one-time provincial capital, they came upon a tremendous hall filled with stuffed, mummified crocodiles.

2. They were baffled and disappointed; they had expected to find priceless art treasures and jewels in the great chamber, not two thousand stuffed crocodiles! Possibly on the other side of the chamber they would find what they were looking for—and indeed they did. They recovered many valuable artifacts which are still in British museums today, estimated to be worth millions of dollars. This find can scarcely be compared, however, to their discovery of far greater spiritual value---a discovery which came about quite by accident.

3. To reach the other side of the great chamber, the crocodiles had to be moved out of the way. It was a tedious job, but it paid off handsomely. When one of the native workers stumbled and fell, the crocodile he was carrying hit a sharp rock and broke open. Dr. Grenfell's eyes widened in amazement at what he saw: Inside that crocodile were popyri! Upon investigation, they found inside the crocodiles entire libraries of the ancient world--not just one, but many different kinds of manuscripts. These included some Biblical manuscripts from the second century---the then autograph of the New Testament also dated from the second century.

4. Here also were grammar and etymology books which led to further discoveries of principles involved in the syntax and grammar of the koine Greek, which we still use today. The Oxyrhynchos (och see rin quist) Popyri can be seen in museums in both Egypt and Britain.

The Chester Beatty Popyri

1. After the discovery of the Oxyrhynchos (och see rin quist) there was increasing excitement over the discovery of popyri and searches for ancient popyri intensified.

1.1 Countless small hills and sand dunes were dug up, and many turned out to be only rubbish heaps of the past, containing bits of slates, vases, broken pottery and other reminders of a life long ago. The Arabs, not to be outdone, soon joined hunt carrying off many valuable treasures. So, here and there, fragments of Biblical writings turned up for sale.

1.2 Among these was an ancient Jewish temple library of the seventh century B.C., discovered at Elephantine, Egypt. The acquisition and cataloguing took the greater part of two years---1906 to 1908.

2. Another great discovery came on November 19, 1931, when the Chester Beatty Papyri were found. Chester Beatty was a millionaire from Philadelphia who made a tour of Palestine and Egypt. He had heard that certain Old Testament papyri were being offered for sale. Even though the prices were exorbitant, Beatty paid immediately.

2.1 He then turned the entire collection of documents over to two scholars, F.G. Kenyon and H.A. Sanders. A detailed study of these second and third century papyri revealed some of the missing papers of the Codex Sinaiticus, portions of Paul's Epistles and the four Gospels. The 'haul' was well worth the price paid. This collection is now housed at the University of Pennsylvania.

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