

Doctrine of the Authenticity of the Bible

5-12-19

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
- 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. Let's begin by reviewing the sources of our Old Testament and how it measures-up with ancient history.

2.1 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.

2.1.1 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.

2.1.2 The Dead Sea Scroll contains parts of several Old Testament Books and the scrolls date back to the 1st century B.C.

2.2 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.

2.3 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.

2.4 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.

2.4.1 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.

2.5 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."

2.6 To understand the accuracy of the Old Testament copies, it is necessary to examine the extreme care in which copyists transcribed the Old Testament from year to year from many and varied manuscripts.

2.7 The Talmudists (A.D. 100-500) spent a great deal of time cataloging Hebrew civil and canonical law. They had quite an intricate system for transcribing synagogue scrolls. For example:

2.7.1 Each copy had to be written on a skin of animal classified as clean.

2.7.2 The skin had to be prepared in a special way.

2.7.3 Every skin had to contain a certain number of columns.

2.7.4 The length of each column had to extend over at least 48 but no more than 60 lines. Each line had to have at least 30 letters.

2.7.5 The ink must be black and prepared according to a certain recipe.

2.7.6 No word or letter could be written from memory.

2.7.7 Between every consonant the space of a hair or thread must intervene.

2.7.8 Between every Book there must be three lines.

2.7.9 The copyist must sit in full Jewish dress.

2.7.10 Before beginning the copyist must take a bath.

2.7.11 Before writing the name of God he must use a new pen dipped in a new bottle of ink.

2.8 The existence of the many ancient copies of the Scripture is even the more remarkable given the repeated persecutions to the Jews and the large scale destruction of their property--certainly to include their books, manuscripts, etc.

2.9 That any remain at all is a tribute to God's intervention. This is especially evident given the Philistine, Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Turkish, German, Spanish and Russian pogroms.

2.10 The Masorites (A.D. 500-900) accepted the laborious job of editing the text and standardizing it.

2.10.1 They added vowel points under the consonants to help with pronunciation.

2.10.2 They were well disciplined and treated the texts with the greatest imaginable reverence and devised a complicated system of safeguards against scribal error.

2.10.3 They counted the number of times each letter of the alphabet occurred 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 to verify accuracy.

2.10.4 They counted everything countable and came up with a system of mnemonics by which the various totals might be readily remembered.

3. Concerning the accuracy of the transmission of the Hebrew text most scholars seem especially impressed.

3.1 Robert Wilson in his book A Scientific Investigation of the Old Testament was impressed to write: "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 or the proper names in the Hebrew Bible has been transmitted with the most minute accuracy."

3.2 Wilson went on to add: "The proof that the copies of the original documents had been handed down with substantial correctness for 2000 years cannot be denied. The fact that 40 Kings living from 2000 B.C. to 400 B.C. appear in chronological order ... with reference to the Kings of other countries ... no stronger evidence for the substantial accuracy of the Old Testament record could possibly be imagined, mathematically, it is 1 chance in 750,000,000,000,000,000,000, (seven hundred fifty to the 21st power) that this accuracy is mere circumstance)."

3.3 Concerning the accuracy of the transmission of the Hebrew Text, the Under-Librarian of the Library at Cambridge University, says it is "little short of miraculous."

3.4 It will be helpful to review the major extant Hebrew texts used in compiling our Old Testament.

3.4.1 Cairo Codex (A.D. 895) was produced by the Masoretic Asher family and contains both latter and former prophets. It is one of the more important copies of the former and latter prophets. The Cairo Codex was copied by Moses Ben Asher, a leader of the Masorettes, in Tiberias, Palestine.

3.4.2 Codex of the Prophets of Leningrad (A.D. 916) contains Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the 12 "minor prophets." It is one of three important manuscripts copied in the A.D. 900's.

3.4.3 The oldest complete manuscript of the Old Testament is Codex Babylonicus Petropolitanus (A.D. 1008). This document is located in Leningrad and was prepared from a corrected text of Rabbi Ben Moses Ben Asher sometime before A.D. 1000.

3.4.4 Aleppo Codex (A.D. 930) is the oldest copy of the Hebrew Bible and the most authoritative. It was copied by Aaron Ben Asher and a tale of intrigue follows the copy; it had to be rescued from a burning synagogue in Aleppo, Syria in 1948 and smuggled into Israel.

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

3.4.6 Reuchlin Codex of the Prophets (A.D. 1105) was copied from a corrected copy of the writings of the Prophets dated sometime before 1105.

3.5 The accuracy of these manuscripts has been corroborated not only by their faithfulness to the Septuagint (a translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek completed in approximately 250 B.C., the Vulgate (a translation into Latin completed by Jerome in A.D. 405) and most the striking faithfulness of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

4. Let me provide several points about the Dead Sea Scrolls:

4.1 The big question, does the Hebrew text which we call Masoretic really represent the Hebrew manuscripts?

4.2 The Dead Sea Scrolls provide a decided 'yes' to this question.

4.3 The problem before the scrolls "how accurate were the copies of our Old Testament since they were so distant from the events?"

4.3.1 After all they were copied so often over such a long period of time.

4.4 The Scrolls are made up of some 40,000 inscribed fragments from which over 500 books have been reconstructed and translated into several languages.

4.4.1 Many extra-Biblical fragments were discovered and many secular records were discovered from what is an early 1st century B.C. settlement of Essenes some eight miles south of Jericho and just west of the Dead Sea in several Qumran caves.

4.4.2 In the spring of 1947 a shepherd boy discovered "by accident" the scrolls in a cave while looking for a lost sheep. The leather scrolls were wrapped in linen cloth in a clay jar.

4.5 One of the scrolls found was a complete Hebrew manuscript of the Book of Isaiah. This Scroll was dated by Paleographers at somewhere around 125 B.C.

4.5.1 This provided an excellent comparison with the prior oldest manuscript of Isaiah dated c. A.D. 900.

4.5.2 As we will see in greater detail the accuracy of the A.D. 900 copy will be proven "remarkable" given the comparison of the 125 B.C. manuscript of Isaiah thanks to the work of the Masoretic copyist. For example:

4.5.3 Of the 166 words in Isaiah chapter 53 there are only 17 letters in question. Ten of these letters are simply a matter of spelling; 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 greatly affect the meaning. Thus in one chapter of 166 words, there is only one word in question after 1000 years of transmission and this word does not significantly change the meaning of the passage.

KJV

Isa 53:11 He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.

NIV

Isa 53:11 After the suffering of his soul, **he will see the light of life** and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.

4.5.4 A second (incomplete) scroll of Isaiah found with the other (above mentioned) in Qumran #1 agrees even more closely with the first scroll designated Isaiah A. With reference to Isaiah B., Miller Burrows in his book, *The Dead Sea Scroll* has written: "it is a matter of wonder that through something like 1000 years the text underwent so little alteration. As I said in my first article concerning the Scroll, "herein lies its chief importance, supporting the fidelity of the Masoretic tradition."

4.5.5 The value of the scrolls which were found in numerous caves over a six year period is inestimable. The scrolls not only shed light on the accuracy of the Scriptures but they also reflect the great schism between Judaism and Christianity or as we know it Paul and his many declarations of grace versus the legalism of Judaism and Judaistic Christianity.

4.5.6 The Scrolls were evidently placed there in A.D. 68 in an effort to avoid the pervasive pillaging of the Roman military.

4.6 It has been written of the scrolls: "The Dead Sea Scrolls (copied between 130 B.C. and A.D. 70) consist of 40,000 fragments. Five hundred books have been reconstructed from them, one hundred of which are from the Old Testament in Hebrew.

4.6.1 The only book of the Old Testament not represented is the book of Esther. Included is a complete manuscript of the Hebrew text of the book of Isaiah copied in 125 B.C., which is almost identical to the Masoretic text of A.D. 916 (the Leningrad Codex of the prophets), indicating the unusual accuracy of the Masoretes as copyists over the period of one thousand years.”

5. The Septuagint substantiates the genuineness of the Hebrew text.

5.1 During the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphos of Egypt (285-246 B.C.) the Old Testament was translated into the Koine Greek to provide a common language.

5.2 Ptolemy was renowned as a patron of literature and it was under him that the great library at Alexandria was established.

5.3 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.

5.4 The High Priest selected 72 translators who took up residence on the Island of Pharos where legend has it; they completed their work in 72 days. It is generally agreed only the Pentateuch was completed in 72 days, the rest of the task taking much longer.

5.5 The Septuagint helped bridge the textual criticism gap related to the Hebrew Old Testament.

6. A New Testament comparison:

6.1 We now have close to 5,000 Greek manuscripts along with some 13,000 copies of portions of the New Testament. Besides all this, much of the New Testament can be produced from quotations of early Christian writers.

6.1.1 To be skeptical of the text of the New Testament is to allow all classical antiquity to slip into obscurity; no other document of the ancient period is as well established bibliographically as the New Testament.

6.2 Sir Frederic Kenyon, director and principle librarian of the British Museum and second to none in authority for issuing statements about ancient manuscripts says, ... "beside number, the manuscripts of the New Testament differ from those of the classical authors, and this time the difference is clear again. In no case is the interval of time between the composition of the book and the date of the earliest extant manuscripts as short as in that of the New Testament. The books of the New Testament were written in the latter part of the 1st century; the earliest extant manuscripts (trifling scraps excepted) are of the 4th century - say from 250 to 300 years later. This may sound like a considerable interval, but it is nothing to that which separates most of the great classical authors from their earliest manuscripts.

6.2.1 “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 was based was written more than 1400 years after the poet’s death.”

6.3 For Caesar's *Gaelic War* (composed between 58 and 50 B.C.) there are several extant manuscripts but only 9 or 10 are good, and the oldest is some 900 years later than Caesar's day. Of the 14 books of the *Histories of Tacitus* (A.D. 100) only four and one-half survive; of the 16 books of his *Annals*, 10 survive in full and two in part. The text of these extant portions of Tacitus’ two great historical works depends entirely on two manuscripts, one of the ninth century and one of the eleventh.

6.4 A Comparison Chart has been developed for four renowned writers from antiquity as over against the New Testament. As you can see from the chart the writings of Tacitus, Suetonius, Herodotus, or Aristotle do not compare with the New Testament.

COMPARISON CHART

AUTHOR	WHEN WRITTEN	EARLIEST COPY	TIME SPAN	COPIES
Tacitus (<i>Annals</i>)	100 A.D.	1100 A.D.	1000 yrs.	20
Suetonius (DeVita Caesarian)	160 A.D.	950 A.D.	790 yrs.	8
Herodotus (<i>History</i>)	425 B.C.	900 A.D.	1325 yrs.	8
Aristotle	322 B.C.	1100 A.D.	1422 yrs.	5
New Testament	45-96 A.D.	350 A.D.	254 yrs.	1000's

7. Chronology of the Major New Testament manuscripts:

7.1 John Ryland manuscripts (A.D. 130) are the oldest fragment of the New Testament.

7.1.1 John Ryland discovered certain papyri dated A.D. 130 which has proven to be the oldest of all New Testament fragments. The papyri contain most of the Gospel of John and the dating of the fragments confirmed the Gospel was written in the latter part of the first century. Keep in mind our New Testament was completed in c. 96, and the Gospel of John in c. 85. Amazingly this papyri is a mere 65 years from the autograph—the original.

7.1.2 Papyri were made from a plant pressed together and thus forming a writing surface; the surface being organic, made for great longevity. Papyri, like vellum manuscripts were discovered often in interesting and mysterious ways. One such discovery took place in Oxyrhynchos Egypt when two archaeologists searching an ancient tomb uncovered a door guarded by several stuffed crocodiles. When carrying the crocodiles out of the tomb, one was dropped and burst revealing numerous papyri; inside were many copies of several New Testament books and various etymology books which led to further discoveries of principles involved in the syntax and grammar of the Koine Greek.

7.2 The Chester Beatty Papyri (dated at c. A.D. 200) represents a collection of papyrus parchments, three of them containing major portions of the New Testament. These were discovered in 1931 when Chester Beatty bought them from a group of Arab treasure hunters who had found them in a rubbish heap. The heap contained slates and broken pottery along with the papyri. Beatty was a millionaire who paid what many thought to be an exorbitant sum, but not to Mr. Beatty. The papyri were originally housed in a museum at the University of Pennsylvania.

7.3 The Bodmer Papyrus II (dated between 150 and 200) contains most of the Book of John.

7.4 Codex Sinaiticus (dated at c. 350) contains most of the New Testament lacking Mar 16:9-20 and John 7:53-8:11.

7.4.1 This Codex was discovered in a waste basket in a Russian monastery by a man named Count von Tischendorf. On a trip to the near east in 1844 he stopped at St. Catherine's Monastery to spend the night where he noticed the monks placing certain old vellums in a waste basket; the vellums were to be ultimately used as fuel for their fireplace. After rummaging through the vellums he noted the importance of the ancient manuscripts.

7.4.2 The Count was not allowed to buy or borrow the manuscripts but he was allowed to copy the 129 pages. After lengthy failed negotiations the original vellums were given to the Russian government and “fortunately” in 1933 the Communist regime decided they had no need for Bibles, old or new. Codex Sinaiticus was later sold to the British Museum for 100,000 pounds sterling.

7.5 Codex Vaticanus (dated at c. 335) contains nearly the entire New Testament. With the discovery of Codex Sinaiticus, interest in ancient New Testament manuscripts peaked.

7.5.1 Count Tischendorf and a friend named Tregelles led a search for Codex Vaticanus, last known to exist in the library of Pope Nicholas. Nicholas having been exiled to Savona when Napoleon in 1809 defeated the Vatican. As it turned out the library had been returned to the Vatican in 1815, however, little analysis of the contents of the manuscript had been done. Codex Vaticanus was jealously guarded in the Vatican.

7.5.2 Tregelles, a professor of the New Testament at Leipzig sought permission to examine the document, the Pope gave permission for Tregelles to study the manuscript for six hours. The year was 1843. Twenty years later Tischendorf was also granted similar privileges. Neither man was permitted to copy the document, only to examine the contents. In three months Tischendorf memorized the entire document, returning home each evening where he recorded the day's memorization.

7.5.3 Upon his return to Leipzig he published the results of his finding. So close was his text to the original that Pope Pius IX, in 1859, ordered the photographing of the document. In that way it became the property of the world and it is still one of the most valuable manuscripts of the Word of God.

7.6 Codex Alexandrinus (dated c. 400) contains almost the entire New Testament. In 1621, when Cyril Lucar became the patriarch of the Greek Orthodox Church the document was taken to Constantinople. Lucar had succumbed to the influence of Calvinism when he agreed to present the manuscript to the Court of King James. The presentation was made just 15 years after the KJV had been translated. What a pity it had come so late, because this very ancient Codex would have helped immensely in the correct rendition of the English text.

7.7 Codex Ephraemi (dated c. 400) contains every book of the New Testament except 2nd Thessalonians and 2nd John. Ephraemi is so named because of the way this manuscript was rediscovered. Father Ephraemi was a favorite of Catherine de Medici, the de Medici's having become a colorful Italian family who were associated by marriage with many of the great houses of Europe. In 1834 a young student of the Bible had heard of the Father's fame so he sought and received permission to study his sermons. At the National Library in Paris, while examining one of his sermons he noticed the Father had written over a very old vellum.

7.7.1 Immediately the alert student became more interested in what the Father had erased rather than the sermon. Through the use of chemicals the manuscript was restored. Since that time the document has been removed from the Medici stacks to where it belongs -- in the Bible stacks at the library in Paris.

7.8 Codex Bezae (dated c. 450) contains the Gospels and the Book of Acts not only in Greek but also in Latin.

7.9 Codex Washingtonensis (dated between 450 and 500) contains the four Gospels in the following order: Matthew, John, Luke and Mark.

7.10 Codex Claromontanus (dated at c. 500) contains the Pauline Epistles. It is a bilingual manuscript as is Codex Washingtonensis.

7.11 Summary

- The time gap between the original manuscript (the autograph) and the extant copies call for the conclusion, "the New Testament is far more authentic than Greek classical history."
- Most of the Greek classical authors are dated 1000 years or more after the author's death. In the case of the New Testament two of the most important manuscripts were written within 300 years after the New Testament was completed and some virtually complete books as well as extensive fragmentary manuscripts date back to one century from the original writings.
- Next to the New Testament, there are more extant manuscripts of the Iliad (643) than any other book. The New Testament has about 20,000 lines. The Iliad has about 15,500 lines. Only 40 lines or 400 words of the New Testament are in doubt whereas 764 lines of the Iliad are questioned. This 5% textual corruption compares with 1/2 of 1% for the New Testament.

8. Does archeology confirm the authenticity of the Bible? William Albright summed it up: "As critical study of the Bible is more and more influenced by the rich new material from the rich ancient Near East, we shall see a steady rise in respect for the historical significance of now neglected or despised passages ... in both the New and Old Testament."

9. Scientific data also provides evidence of Scriptural authenticity. A few examples:

9.1 The movement of planets was known long before science documented the occurrence and light does not dwell in a place, but a way, for science today teaches that light involves motion at 186,000 miles a second. Job 38:31-32 and Job 38:19

Job 38:31 Can you bind chains of the cluster of the stars called Pleiades, or loose the cords [the constellation] of Orion?

Job 38:32 Can you lead forth the signs of the Zodiac in their season? Or can guide [the stars] of the Bear with her young?

Job 38:19 Where is the way where light dwells? And as for darkness, where is its abode?

9.2 Static electricity exists and can be formed as we now know by the condensation of vapor. We also now know that water rises and then again falls as rain. The Bible provided this information some 700 years before Christ was born.

Jer 10:13 When he uttereth his voice, there is a multitude of waters in the heavens, and he causeth the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; he maketh lightnings with rain, and bringeth forth the wind out of his treasures.

9.3 The earth is a sphere.

Isa 40:22 It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth ...

9.4 The earth rotates on its axis for the earth is round and travels around the sun.

Luk 17:31 **In that day**, he which shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away: and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back ...

Luk 17:34 I tell you, **in that night** there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left.

Gen 1:8 And God called the firmament Heavens. And there was evening and morning, a second day.

9.5 Air has weight.

Job 28:25 To make the weight for the winds; and he weigheth the waters by measure.

9.6 Winds have circuits which they follow "religiously."

Ecc 1:6 The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits.

9.7 Messages can be sent by electricity or in this "primitive statement" by lightning;

Job 38:35 Canst thou send lightnings, that they may go and say unto thee, Here we are?

9.8 Doctors of medicine have often marveled at the detail the Bible provides concerning sanitation in health practices. In Leviticus and Deuteronomy there are great details provided with reference to quarantining communicable diseases.

Lev 13:45 And the leper in whom the plague is, his clothes shall be rent, and his head bare, and he shall put a covering upon his upper lip, and shall cry, Unclean, unclean.

Lev 13:46 All the days wherein the plague shall be in him he shall be defiled; he is unclean: he shall dwell alone; without the camp shall his habitation be.

End Lesson

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