

CAN I TRUST THE BIBLE?

PART II

“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”
2 Timothy 3:16-17

Some have said: “The biblical records of course are full of historical inaccuracies. Luke barely begins his account before he tells a major historical lie. There was no census at the time of Jesus. And, if there had been, why would people have been sent to their home towns to register?” It simply didn’t happen. It was a device that Luke used to get Jesus born in Bethlehem in order to ostensibly fulfill prophecy about the Messiah being born there.”

I. THE BIBLE IS REMARKABLE

The Bible Is Unique In It’s:

- Circulation
- Translation
- Durability
- Impact
- Composition

II. IS THE BIBLE RELIABLE?

1. The Evidence Of MANUSCRIPT RELIABILITY

HOW WE GOT THE NEW TESTAMENT

- The Originals (.autographs.) (50-90 A.D.)
- Papyrus manuscripts (early copies--90 to 300 A.D.)

Papyrus was the common material used for writing purposes at the beginning of the Christian era. It was made from reeds and was highly durable. In the last 500 years many remains of documents written on papyrus have been discovered, including fragments of manuscripts of the New Testament.

➤ **Uncial manuscripts (300-800 A.D.)**

About 200 years after they were made people started saying, “Hey, these are kind of unstable. We’re going to put them on better paper, antelope skins, vellum.” They were also called Codex copies. And they were copies of the papyrus copies. The uncials were written from about 300-800 A.D.

➤ **Minuscule manuscripts (800-1400 A.D.)**

The uncial manuscripts were expensive; not a lot of people could afford these things, so thousands of what they called minuscule manuscripts began to be written. They were written in cursive handwriting, very small so that they could save paper.

➤ • **Printed Bibles (1456-present)**

PROBLEM! How do I know my New Testament reflects the original text?

We have no originals. Until about 100 years or so ago we had no papyrus copies or quality uncial copies. So, if that’s the case, how do you know the original is accurate? How do I know my New Testament has any resemblance to the original manuscripts?

About 100 years ago this was a common objection to the Bible - until the growing field of archaeology revealed some fascinating ancient manuscripts. Some early uncials were discovered. Then some of the first generation papyrus scrolls were found.

People began to wonder, do the early minuscules accurately reflect these ancient papyrus documents?

- **The discovery of the *Codex Sinaiticus* (350 A.D.)**
Located in the British Museum, these ancient unseals contain almost all the New Testament and over half of the Old Testament. They resemble, almost line for line, the Greek in the middle-age minuscules. In other words, the text of the Bible had hardly changed at all in its transmission.
- **The discovery of the *Codex Ephraimi* (345 A.D.)**
Ephraim was an obscure middle-aged priest who recorded his sermons in an ancient book. A book dealer in Paris noticed that underneath his Latin writing he could see some Greek letters, and discovered the second oldest complete text of the New Testament ever found. Currently located in the Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris.
- **The discovery of the *Codex Vaticanus* (325 A.D.)**
In 1475, while cataloging the Vatican library for the first time, an ancient manuscript now known as the *Codex Vaticanus* was discovered. Written in Greek and dated at 325 A.D. this is the oldest complete New Testament ever found. Kept under wraps until the 1800's, under a lot of pressure, they finally let scholars date it and study it. What did they discover? This copy reflects almost word for word the best of the minuscules and our current Bibles.
- **The discovery of papyrus fragments (as early as 90 A.D.!)**
Today, we have 266 of the uncials and to a startling degree they agree with contemporary New Testament translations. Some of the earliest papyrus scrolls have also been discovered. For example, archaeologists found a mummy in Egypt dating as early as 98 A.D.. Its head was wrapped in parchment -- which turned out to be chapter 18 of the book of John. Most scholars think that the book of John was written about 98 A.D. Incidentally, it reads exactly like John 18 in contemporary Bibles.

- Carsten Thiede, the German scroll expert declares: *“There are now over 100 papyri at museums and libraries. The gospels are more authentic than we thought. The gap between the Jesus of history and the Jesus of faith is not as great as academics have claimed.”*
- Millard Burrows of Yale says: *“Another result of comparing New Testament Greek with the language of the papyri [discoveries] is an increase of confidence in the accurate transmission of the text of the New Testament itself”.*
- Archaeologist William Albright, said: *“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.”*

HOW WE GOT THE OLD TESTAMENT

A. THE TALMUDISTS (A.D. 100-500)

The Talmudists had quite an intricate system for transcribing synagogue scrolls. *Samuel Davidson* describes some of the disciplines of the Talmudists in regard to the Scriptures. .

- 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 are written without a line, it is worthless.*
- 7 *The ink should be black, neither red, green, nor any other color, 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 *Could not begin to write the name of God with a pen newly dipped in ink, and*
- 16 *Should a king address him while writing that name he must take no notice of him.*

Why don't we have more old MSS? The very absence of ancient MSS, when the rules and accuracies of the copyists are considered, confirms the reliability of the copies we have today. Gleason Archer states, *"Even through the two copies of Isaiah discovered in Qumran Cave 1 near the Dead Sea in 1947 were 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 variations in spelling. They do not affect the message of revelation in the slightest."*

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 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.”

B. THE MASSORETIC PERIOD (A.D. 500-900)

The Massoretes (from *massora* tradition) 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.

Problem: How do I know my Old Testament reflects the original text?

ANSWER: The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls confirmed the accuracy of our text!

In 1947 the world learned about what has been called the greatest archeological discovery of the century. In caves in the valley of the Dead Sea, ancient jars were discovered containing the now-famous Dead Sea Scrolls. From these scrolls, it is evident that a group of Jews lived at a place called Qumran from about 150 B.C. to A.D. 70. The find included the earliest manuscript copy yet known of the complete Book of Isaiah, and fragments of almost every book in the Old Testament.

The significance of this find, for those who wonder about the accuracy of the Old Testament text, can easily be seen. In one dramatic stroke, almost 1,000 years were hurdled. By comparing the Dead Sea Scrolls with the Masoretic text, we would get a clear indication of the accuracy, or lack of it, of transmission over the period of nearly a millennium.

What was actually learned? Scholar Gleason Archer states that, “*Even through the two copies of Isaiah discovered in*

Qumran Cave 1 near the Dead Sea in 1947 were 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."

Millard Burrows, concludes: *"It is a matter of wonder that through something like a thousand years the text underwent so little alteration."*

"We can have great confidence in the fidelity to which this material has come down to us, especially compared with any other ancient work." - Bruce Metzger

"The last foundation for any doubt that the scriptures have come down to us substantially as they have been written, has been removed. 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." - Sir Fredrick Kenyon, Director of the British Museum and a legend in the field of paleography.

2. The Evidence Of HISTORICAL RELIABILITY

PROBLEM: *"Of course it's not accurate. It's riddled with myths and mistakes and contradictions. It has nothing to do with historical fact."*

ANSWER: The Bible makes hundreds of references to historical events, places, and people so there's plenty of opportunity for contradiction with a historical record. But, there is remarkable agreement between the historical record and the Biblical account. In the few cases where there have been contradictions between the Biblical account and the historical record, recent archeological discoveries have tended to prove that the Biblical account was the more accurate account.

- The Hittite nation
- Belshazzar (the King of Babylon)
- Hebrew slaves in Egypt.
- Moses writing the Law
- The Walls of Jerico
- Solomon's Temple
- King Nebuchadnezzar
- Israel released from captivity by Cyrus
- Assyrian King Sargon
- The Book of Isaiah
- The Census

William Ramsey, an archaeological scholar, went to the lands of the Bible a few decades ago to prove that it was full of historical errors. He was an atheist. He was going to write a book about it. After years of painstaking study he said, *"I am amazed to find the Bible completely trustworthy in every historical and geographical detail."*

Nelson Glueck, the renowned Jewish archaeologist, wrote: *"It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a Biblical reference."*

Keith N. Schoville states: *"It is important to realize that archaeological excavations have produced ample evidence to prove unequivocally that the Bible is not a pious forgery. Thus far, no historical statement in the Bible has been proven false on the basis of evidence retrieved through archaeological research."*

3. The Evidence Of FULFILLED PROPHEESIES

4. The Evidence Of Eyewitness Accounts

Luke 1: 1-3 "Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the Word have handed them down to us, it seemed fitting for me as well, **having investigated everything carefully** form the

beginning, to writing it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus. “

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

I John 1:3. “**What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you** also, that you also may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.”

Acts 2:22. “Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which **God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know..**”

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

Acts 26:24-28 Paul said, “I utter words of sober truth. For the king knows about these matters, and I speak to him also with a confidence, since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice; for this has not been done in a corner..”

The New Testament documents were being circulated within a short enough time after the events occurred that if the record wasn't true and accurate it would have been laughed out of circulation in no time. But, that didn't happen. The New Testament records spread like wildfire shortly after the establishment of the church and no wide spread or sustained protest of the contents was launched despite the fact that the documents contained many references to supernatural activity.

Dr. Clark H. Pinnock, professor of systematic theology at Regent College, states: *“There exists no document from the ancient world witnessed by so excellent a set of textual and historical testimonies, and offering so superb an array of historical data on which an intelligent decision may be made.*

An honest (person) cannot dismiss a source of this kind. Skepticism regarding the historical credentials of Christianity is based upon an irrational (i.e., antisupernatural) bias.”

This information was compiled by an unknown author.

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Also see: ***Biblical Archaeology Review Journal***