

THE EPIC LIFE – BOB HALLMAN

The Reliability of the Bible – Part I

2002

Introduction

In the last several weeks we have considered:

1. The Uniqueness of the Bible
2. The Structure of the Bible
3. The Benefits of Reading the Bible
4. The Inspiration of the Bible
2. The Canonicity of the Bible
3. The Translations of the Bible

As Christians, we believe that the Bible is the inspired and infallible Word of God. What we believe and how we live is based on the truth of its contents. The reliability of the Bible is so critical that if you can destroy the credibility of the Bible, you can virtually destroy Christianity.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the first recorded words of Satan in Scripture are his statement to Eve in the Garden of Eden, *"Did God really say....?"* He tried to create doubt in Eve's mind about the truthfulness and credibility of something God had said. And ever since that time, he has worked hard to undermine the credibility of the Bible through any means possible.

So the questions are: "Can you trust the Bible?" "Is it really the inspired, infallible Word of God – or just the words of fallible men?" Is there any rational reason for believing it is God's Word other than blind faith?" "And if so, what are those reasons?"

Hank Hanegraff of Christian Research Institute:

MAPS: Manuscripts – Archeology – Prophecy -- Science

Today, we will consider the authenticating proof for the reliability of the Bible from the Manuscript Evidence and the Archeological Evidence. Then next week we will finish our series as we cover the Prophetical and Scientific Evidence for the Bible's reliability.

I The Manuscript Evidence

How do we know the words in the Bible we read today haven't been changed over the centuries by translators?

Manu – scripts = "By hand"

Scholars realize that with all ancient documents, including the Bible, we do not have any of the original documents. Therefore, the first thing that must be determined is the reliability of the copies we have. Are they an accurate copy of the original? To determine that, there are three things that must be investigated.

1. The *number* of manuscripts in existence today.
2. The *care* given in copying those manuscripts.
3. The *time interval* between the original manuscript and the existing copies.

A. The number of manuscripts

1. The ancient **classic** works

When we compare the manuscript support for the Bible with manuscript support for other ancient documents and books, it becomes overwhelmingly clear that no other ancient piece of literature can stand up to the Bible. Manuscript support for the Bible is unparalleled!

a. Homer's Iliad: Only 643 copies dating from the 13th century

This volume was written in 800 B.C. = 1,400 year gap

That means that there is a gap of 1,400 yrs between when he wrote and the earliest copy available.

b. Aristotle: Only **49** copies dated at 1100 A.D.

His works were complete by 322 B.C. = 1,400 year gap

c. Plato's Tritologies: Only 7 copies dated at 900 A.D.

His works were complete by 347 B.C. = 1,200 year gap

The Bible has far more manuscript evidence than any other book in existence.

2. Old Testament copies: **2,000** Hebrew manuscripts of the OT

Up until 1947, the earliest manuscript of the OT was dated at 900 A.D. That meant that there was a gap of about 2000 yrs between the actual writing and the earliest available copies. That represents a significant gap. As a result, many critics of the Bible once believed that the Old Testament couldn't possibly be reliable or accurate.

But in March 1947, 40,000 documents were discovered in caves by the Dead Sea.

These became known as the Dead Sea Scrolls. Two things make these documents very important.

a. They were dated at 125 B.C., over 1000 years earlier than previous documents.

b. The scholars found that the documents from 1000 yrs later were virtually identical. This proved the precision and care used in copying the Old Testament Scriptures.

2. New Testament copies: Over **25,000** partial and complete early manuscripts of the NT

This abundance of manuscript copies makes it possible to reconstruct the original with virtually complete accuracy."

Critics point to the absence of the originals to discount the Bible, but biblical scholars like F. F. Bruce note, "there is no body of ancient literature in the world which enjoys such a wealth of good textual attestation as the New Testament." F.F. Bruce. <https://www.ffbruce.com/his-fundamentals/>

a. Only 400 meaningful variations (or discrepancies)

This represents ½ of 1% of the entire text of the New Testament.

1. Mostly spelling, word order, tense errors

Many of these variants simply involve a missing letter in a word; some involve reversing the order of two words (such as "Christ Jesus" instead of "Jesus Christ"); some may involve the absence of one or more insignificant words.

2. Only 50 of these variants have any significance

3. None effect any fundamental doctrines of faith

In other words, no fundamental doctrine rests on any of these disputed readings.

b. There are 86,000 quotations from the early church fathers

These men were appointed by apostles or followed soon after their death. Men like Ignatius (70-110 A.D.), Polycarp (70-156 A.D.), Clement of Rome (90 A.D.) and many others. John Burgon has cataloged over 86,000 quotations from the New Testament within their writings. Again, their quotations from the scrolls of their day are identical to what we read in our Bible, proving that the Scriptures have not been changed.

1. In fact, there are enough quotations from the early church fathers that even if we did not have a single copy of the Bible, scholars could still reconstruct all but 11 verses of the entire New Testament from material written within 150 to 200 years from the time of Christ.

Benjamin Warfield wrote in his *Introduction to Textual Criticism of the New Testament*:

"The facts show that the great majority of the New Testament has been transmitted to us with no, or next to no, variation."

c. There are several thousand Lectionaries

These lectionaries were the reading lessons used in the public worship services of the early church. These reading lessons contained the majority of the New Testament because the authors quoted lengthy portions of the Scripture. These lessons show the harmony between what they quoted and our Bible today.

Bottom line: the New Testament has an overwhelming amount of evidence supporting its reliability.

Dr. Benjamin Warfield: "If we compare the present state of the text of the New Testament with that of no matter what other ancient work, we must...declare it marvelously exact."

Reasoning from the Scriptures. <https://www.ronrhodes.org/manuscript-support-for-the-bible-s-relia>

William Green says, "It may safely be said that no other work of antiquity has been so accurately transmitted." In other words, the Bible we hold in our hands today is made from a copy that is extremely accurate – it is virtually an exact duplicate of the original.

Apologetics Press. <https://apologeticspress.org/was-the-old-testament-transmitted-faithfully-1140/>

B. The **care** given in copying those manuscripts

For many centuries the texts of the Old and New Testament books were copied by hand on papyrus (reeds), parchment (sheep or goat skin), or vellum (lambskin) in scrolls or in codexes (books). Professional copyists, or scribes, were meticulous and skilled workers.

There were two primary groups of scholars who devoted their lives to copying the Jewish Scriptures. These were the Talmudists (A.D. 100-500), and the Massoretes (A.D. 500-900).

These copyists knew they were duplicating God's Word, so they went to incredible lengths to prevent error from creeping into their work.

1. The Talmudists (A.D. 100-500)

Samuel Davidson, an authority on the manuscripts of the OT, shares about the extreme care taken by the Talmudists in copying Scripture:

Rules governed the type of ink used, dictated the spacing of words, and prohibited writing of anything from memory. The lines, words, syllables and even the letters were counted methodically to ensure absolute accuracy. Even what they wore and how they were to sit was strictly regulated. And if a manuscript was found to contain even one mistake, it was discarded and destroyed.

Bible Study Manuals. https://www.biblestudymanuals.net/old_testament.htm

2. The Massoretes (A.D. 500-900)

The Massoretes were medieval scribes of Tiberius charged with OT text preservation. They also were very disciplined and meticulous in the copying of Scripture.

Let me read you what Sir Frederic Kenyon says about this:

"The Massoretes 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....These trivialities....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."

Blue Letter Bible. https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/stewart_don/faq/10-reasons/reason3-the-bibles-survival.cfm

Because such care was taken in copying the Old Testament Scriptures, these copiers of Scripture were so convinced that when they had finished copying a manuscript that they had an exact duplicate of the original, that they would give the new copy equal authority with the one copied from.

C. The **time** interval between the original manuscript and the existing copies

1. The Old Testament

a. Pre-1947: The earliest available copy of the OT was dated at 900 A.D.

b. Dead Sea Scrolls: Discovered in Qumran in **1947**

These scrolls were found in 1947 in 11 separate caves, called the Qumran Caves, by a Bedouin shepherd boy named Muhammad who 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 8 miles south of Jericho. To his surprise he heard the sound of shattering pottery. The jars had been well-sealed and the scrolls inside had been preserved in excellent condition for over 1900 years.

These scrolls have been dated from 150 B.C. to 70 A.D. Within the scrolls they found the entire book of Isaiah, the books of Samuel, and fragments of almost every other book in the Old Testament.

1. 40,000 documents

2. Dated at 125 B.C.; 1,000 years earlier than previously known documents

In fact, in these scrolls discovered at Qumran in 1947, we have Old Testament manuscripts that date about a thousand years earlier (150 B.C.) than the other Old Testament manuscripts then in our possession (which dated to A.D. 900). The time gap was narrowed from about 1,400 years to only about 150 years.

3. Virtually **identical** to pre-existing documents

When the Old Testament manuscripts from 900 A.D. were compared to the Old Testament manuscripts discovered in Qumran, they were virtually identical.

Dr. Gleason, who personally examined both the A.D. 980 and 150 B.C. copies of Isaiah, comments:

"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

manuscripts previously known, 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.”

Bible.org. <https://bible.org/article/dead-sea-scrolls>

From manuscript discoveries like the Dead Sea Scrolls, Christians have undeniable evidence that today's Old Testament Scripture, for all practical purposes, is exactly the same as it was when originally inspired by God and recorded in the Bible.

2. The New Testament

- a. The earliest partial copy is only 70 years away from the original
- b. The earliest complete copy of is only 250 years away from the originals

Sir Frederick Kenyon said this: The Bible and Archeology

“The interval then between the dates of the original composition and the earliest existing evidence becomes so small as to become, 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 NT may be regarded as finally established.”

Apologetics Press. <https://apologeticspress.org/3-good-reasons-to-believe-the-bible-has-not-been-corrupted-5196/>

II The Archeological Evidence

Archaeology is a relatively new science that became established as a formal discipline in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

But in that short time, hundreds of statements in the Bible, which in times past have been held untrue by enemies of the Bible, have recently been proven true by archaeologists. The more that archaeologists find from the past, the more the Bible is proven to be historically accurate.

Sir William Herschel:

“All human discoveries seem to be made only for the purpose of confirming more and more strongly the truths contained in the Sacred Scriptures.” (Halley's Bible Handbook, 2000)

No archaeological discovery has *ever* disproved a biblical reference.

A. The existence of a worldwide flood

In 1929, Dr. C. L. Wooley found major flood deposits at the ancient city of Ur that proved conclusively that there had been a worldwide flood. He found several strata of human occupation, then a solid 8' water-laid clay layer without human relics; then

another diverse culture and city beneath it. Similar finds were made at the cities of Kish in 1929 and Fara in 1920.

Today, most archeologists acknowledge the existence of a worldwide flood.

B. The existence of the Hittites

This powerful group of people who lived during the time of Abraham was questioned by scholars for years because no archeological digs had uncovered anything about them. Critics claimed the Hittites were pure myth. But today the critics are silenced. In the 19th century, archeologists unearthed thousand of documents in the capital city of the Hittites, in modern day Turkey, whose empire once extended as are south as Palestine.

C. The existence of **writing** in the days of Moses

Critics said writing didn't even exist in the days of Moses. So the OT books attributed to Moses were fraudulent. But modern archeology has uncovered the laws of Hammurabi, a document written in ancient Canaanite that existed some three centuries prior to Moses.

D. The existence of King Belshazzar

According to Daniel, the last king of Babylonia was King Belshazzar. But this king is not mentioned anywhere else other than the Bible. Once again, critics questioned the reliability of the Bible. But once again the archeologists discovered inscriptions proving that Belshazzar was king of Babylonia.

E. The existence of 26 OT foreign kings

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 on monuments, or in documents from the time in which they reigned. The mathematical chance of this happening by chance is one in 75²².

F. The existence of **Jericho**

In 1930-1936, an archeological team discovered Jericho. They also discovered something very unusual. The walls of the destroyed city had fallen outward rather than inward, as one would normally expect. This is in keeping with what we read in Joshua 6:20.

Bryant Wood, writing for Biblical Archeological Review includes a list of collaboration between archeological evidence and biblical narrative as follow:

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 food supplies (Josh 6:1)
4. The siege was short (Josh 6:15)
5. The walls were leveled (Josh 6:20)
6. The city was not plundered (Josh 6:17-18)
7. The city was burned (Josh 6:24)

G. The existence of Pontius Pilate

1. For years, Bible critics questioned the existence of Pontius Pilate who, according to the NT, agreed to crucify Jesus and free Barabbas. But then in 1961, an Italian archeologist, Antonio Frova, unearthed an early first century theater inscription at Caesarea Maritima in Israel, dedicated from "Pontius Pilate, Prefect of Judea," to "Tiberius Caesar."

Well-known Bible scholar William F. Albright, following a comprehensive study, wrote: "Discovery after discovery has established the accuracy of innumerable details and has brought increased recognition of the value of the Bible as a source of history."

H. The accuracy of the Book so **Acts**

It was once thought that Luke, writer of the most historically detailed Gospel and of Acts, had fabricated his narrative because he ascribed odd titles to authorities and mentioned governors that no one knew.

But now, due to recent archeological discoveries, the evidence now points to the complete accuracy of every one of Luke's historical details. In all, Luke names 32 countries, 54 cities, and 9 islands without making a single error. This led the prominent historian Sir William Ramsey to recant his previously held critical view of the accuracy of Luke's writings.

"I began with a mind unfavorable to the book of Acts ...but more recently I found myself often brought into contact with the book of Acts as an authority for the topography, antiquities and society of Asia Minor. It was gradually borne in upon me that in various details the narrative shoed marvelous truth."

Evidences of the Bible. <https://bibleevidences.com/archaeological-evidence/>

A.N. Sherwin-White says, "For Acts the confirmation of historicity is overwhelming ... any attempt to reject its basic historicity must now appear absurd."

Rochford, James M., *Introduction to Acts*. Evidence Unseen.

<https://www.evidenceunseen.com/bible-difficulties-2/nt-difficulties/introduction-to-acts/>

Henry Morris:

In the past, many scholars insisted "the Bible histories 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 many 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 archeology."

Conclusion

Kenyon:

“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, Frederic G. *The Bible and Archaeology*. New York, Harper, 1940.

In spite of this, polls indicate that 50% of born-again Christians rarely read the Bible.

What a travesty! What a monumental loss!

Jesus said in Matt 7:26-27 “everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

But if you are willing to put into practice what you have learned, you will be like the wise man who built his house on the rock instead of the sand. “The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.” - Matt 7:24-25

Resources for Overview of the Bible Series:

Halley, H. 1874-1965, (2000). *Halley's Bible Handbook*. Zondervan Publishing House.

McDowell, J. (1992). *Evidence That Demands a Verdict, Vols. I and II*. Thomas Nelson.

McDowell, J. (1999). *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict*. Thomas Nelson.

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