

THE BIBLE AS SCRIPTURE (Stephen McQuoid)

The Basis of Scripture

The first question we need to ask is why do we have scriptures that we consider to be authoritative? The answer to this question will explain why we see the Bible as different from other books?

Heb.1:1,2 God has spoken

2:1-4 We need to pay careful attention because it has been:
a)announced by the Lord
b) confirmed by witnesses.

3:7,8 It is the personal voice of God and is to be listened to

4:12 The living word, penetrating and discerning.

CONCLUSION

- **God has spoken**
- **We have a written record**
- **He speaks to us today through it**

The Daily use of Scripture

Deut. 17:14-20 The king was commanded to keep the scrolls of the law, read them all the days of his life. In this he was to be a role model for all believers.

Ps. 19:9 The law is perfect, sweet not harsh. We are encouraged if we read.

The Bible

The term Bible comes from the Latin *ta biblia* - *the books*. The Bible is essentially a library of 66 books (Old Testament 39/ New Testament 27). The earliest Christian use of the term Bible was 150 AD where Clement II coined the phrase "*The books and the Apostles declare*". In the late 4th Century Chrysostome also talked about the "Bible" (the term is not actually used in the Bible itself).

A term synonymous with Bible is "the scriptures". The N.T. refers to the O.T. as "scriptures" or "writings" (Mt.21:42 ; 2 Tim.3:15). Jews also referred to their Bibles as "sacred writings". For Christians both the Old and New Testaments comprise the Bible (*some branches of Syriac church exclude 2 Peter, 2 & 3 John, Jude and Revelation while the Roman and Greek churches include the Apocryphal*).

The Word Testament

The word Testament simply means covenant. Jeremiah 31:31 talks of a new covenant which will supersede the old one of Exodus 24:7ff. Hebrews 8:13 tells us that the old covenant is now obsolete. The Old Testament therefore, is the account of this old covenant and the New Testament deals with the new (1 Cor.11:25).

This does not mean that the Old Testament is no longer useful. The New Testament emerges from the Old and it is firmly rooted in it. In order to fully understand the New Testament, the Old Testament needs to be understood also.

Two Origins to the Bible

Human Origins: there are questions which need to be asked

1. Who wrote the originals?
2. In what languages?
3. Under what circumstances?
4. Are the copies accurate?

Divine Origin: there are questions which need to be asked

1. Why are the books unique?
2. In what sense are they God's word?
3. How do they affect us?

Human Origins

Jewish Scriptures

*Torah (Pentateuch)

*Prophets

former (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings)

latter (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, "Book of the Twelve Prophets")

*Writings (Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles)

The Jewish scriptures had just 24 books but the same content as our Old Testament which has 39 books. Jesus recognised the Jewish canon Lu.24:44. Christians view the Old Testament in a slightly different way than Jews do, though the content is the same. It follows the following categories:

*Law

*Historic

*Poetic

*Major prophets

*Minor prophets

New Testament

Total of 27 books which fall naturally into four divisions

1. The Gospels
2. Acts of the Apostles
3. Twenty one letters written by apostles
4. Revelation

This order is logical, roughly chronological in terms of subject matter but this does not correspond to the time when these books were written. The first New Testament books to be written were the epistles of Paul between A.D. 48 and 60. There is some debate as to when the gospels were written. Some scholars suggest that the gospels were written sometime between AD 60 and AD 100, though it is widely believed that the writers kept diaries which they used. However there is good reason for dating the gospels earlier than this. The two main characters in the book of Acts are Peter and Paul. The former died in AD 65 while the latter dies in AD 64. Neither death is recorded in the book of Acts so it is reasonable to assume that both men were still alive when Acts was finished. That means that Acts predates AD 64. Luke's gospel was written before Acts and Mark's gospel was written before Luke. It is reasonable to

suggest that mark's gospel at least was written well before AD 60.

Whereas the Old Testament was written over a period of a thousand years the New Testament came together in one century. The New Testament was not initially available as one complete book. Initially the **gospels were used independently** of each other, but by the beginning of the 2nd century they began to circulate as a unit. At this point **Acts was detached from Luke** and had a separate career.

Meanwhile **Paul's letters were being used by the communities to which they were first addressed**. By the end of the 1st century they were being collected into a Pauline Corpus which then circulated around the churches. These letters began to appear not in chronological order but in descending order of size. The letters to the churches came before the letters to individuals.

As the Gospels, Acts, and the Pauline epistles came together, we begin to recognise the beginning of the New Testament cannon.

[CLASS EXERCISE: Divide the class into groups and ask each group to imagine they were a 1st century church that had only a fraction of the New Testament. Ask them to identify what would be missing from their theology given these limitations. Sample scripture portions might include – Matthew, Galatians and Hebrews ; Romans and Mark ; Luke and Philippians.]

The Canon of the Old Testament

The word canon is a standard of measurement. Used with reference to the Bible it denotes books which are standard in the sense that they should be included within the canon.

Even before the time of Christ there were arguments about what should be included in the Old Testament. Samaritans rejected all but the Pentateuch while pseudonymous works usually in apocalyptic style vied for inclusion. In the first few centuries of the Christian era the books of Ezekiel, Proverbs, Songs, Ecclesiastes and Esther were also brought into question.

The problem is that a book may well be helpful and informative, but to be scripture it must have God's authority for what it says. The doctrine of biblical inspiration was only fully developed in the New Testament.

The canon of the Old Testament came in stages

1. In the Old Testament there are accounts of writings being recognised as having divine authority. These include Ex.24:7 ; 2 Kings 22-23 ; 2 Chron. 34 ; Neh.8:9, 14-17 ; 10:28-39 ; 13:1-3. The writings referred to are from the Pentateuch.

The Pentateuch presents itself to us as the work of Moses to whom God spoke orally. Moses was the greatest of the prophets but others were to follow.

2. Samuel came on the scene and was not only a great prophet, he also wrote (1 Sam. 10:25 ; 1 Chron. 29:29). Through Samuel's work and that of other prophets, the books of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles came to be regarded as canonical. It is also possible that Joshua and Judges and a number of other Old Testament books became canonical this way also.
3. Not all the writers of the Old Testament were prophets, some for example were kings and wise men. Their experiences of inspiration led them to write and to their writings to become canonical. The inspiration of Psalmists, for example, is spoken of in 2 Samuel 23:1-3 and Proverbs claims to be the work of divine wisdom (Prov.8:1-9:6).
4. By the time of Christ, Judaism as a whole (with a few exceptions) accepted the Old Testament as we know it today and they saw it as a complete work divided into its three component parts; the Torah, the Prophets and the Writings.

The Old Testament canon was considered complete by Jews and Christians alike. There were of course other books, like those found in the Apocryphal (written between 200 BC and 100 AD), that some have claimed should be incorporated. There are various reasons why they are not:

1. Theological difficulties *Baruch 3:4 talks about prayers for the dead which would be contrary to the tone of the Old or New Testaments.

2. Jesus recognition of the Old Testament canon
 - *Lu.24:44 Jesus mentions the three sections of the OT canon thus implicitly excluding the Apocryphal.

 - *Lu.11:51 Jesus holds the religious leaders responsible for the blood of martyrs from Able to Zecharias. Able is the first and Zecharias is mentioned in 2 Chron 24:20-23 which is the last book in the Hebrew Bible. Jesus makes a literary point which excludes the Apocryphal.

Canon of the New Testament

Jesus himself established the parameters for inclusion into the New Testament canon by sending the Holy Spirit who would guide into all truth (Jn.14:26 ; 16:13). As with the Old Testament, the criteria involves divine inspiration. All twenty seven books of the New Testament are universally accepted as fulfilling this criteria.

Tertullian (who lived in the 3rd century) was the first person to call the Christian scriptures "New Testament", showing that he regarded them with the **same authority as the Old Testament**. Because of the geographical spread of the production of the New Testament books, this time lag is not surprising. This historic process is a gradual one and needs to be taken one stage at a time.

Period One: First Century

The principle of determining recognition was established within the writings themselves. Paul told the Thessalonians to read his letter to all Christians (1Thess.5:27 see also 2:13). He makes similarly strong claims in 1 Cor.14:37 while Peter includes Paul's writings with other scriptures (2 Pet.3:15,16). Furthermore in 1Tim.5:18, Paul quotes from Deut.25:4 and from Lu.10:7 thus recognising that gospel as scripture.

In AD 95 Clement of Rome wrote to Christians in Corinth in which he uses material from Matthew as well as Luke and he implied a familiarity with Hebrews and 1 Peter.

Period Two: First half of Second Century

The first three great church fathers, Clement, Polycarp and Ignatius used the bulk of the New Testament in a way that implied it was considered truly canonical. Only Mark, 2 and 3 John, Jude and 2 Peter were not attested. To a degree this was because of confusion as to their authorship.

Period Three: Second half of Second Century

Iraeneus was a disciple of Polycarp who in turn was a disciple of the Apostles. Iraeneus quotes from almost all the New Testament on the basis that it was fully the word of God. He only omits 2 Peter 2 and 3 John Philemon and Revelation.

Later a document known as the Muratorian Canon was written and it included every book of the New Testament but commented that some did not want 2 Peter to be read in church.

Period Four: Third Century

Dionysius of Alexander, a pupil of Origen, points out that the Western and Eastern churches differed slightly in their position. The **Eastern church had questions about Revelation** while the **Western was concerned about the inclusion of Hebrews**. Dionysius himself had questions about 2 Peter and Jude.

Even in the third century there was a lack of finality as far as the canon was concerned.

Period Five: Fourth Century

The issue is now beginning to clarify. Early in the century Eusebius bishop of Caesarea acknowledges that there is controversy with regard to some New Testament books but states his support of them all.

Towards the end of the century **Bishop Athanasius of Alexandria in his festal letter for Easter (367 AD) gave his full support for the twenty seven books without reservation and this view was endorsed by the council of Carthage (397 AD)**.

We should not be alarmed by the time it took to establish the canon. Geography, persecution and primitive copying methods all contributed to this. Moreover, the church fathers knew the importance of their task and only included books in the canon if they were satisfied that there was no doubt that they should be included. Their caution is therefore a reason for confidence.

Languages of the Old Testament

Semitic languages - Hebrew and Aramaic (*Aramaic was probably the language Jesus used. It is a linguistic cousin of Hebrew.*)

Hebrew is one of several Canaanite languages and existed in the land before the conquest by Israel. We have early records of Hebrew as a spoken language (Gen.31:47 Laban speaks Aramaic whereas Jacob speaks Hebrew)

Hebrew is alphabetic as compared to Egyptian, for example, which is hieroglyphic. Hebrew is a language which is pictorial and its vividness and simplicity make it difficult to translate. **Psalm 23 contains only 55 words in Hebrew, almost twice that number are required for English translations.** Most Hebrew root words expressed some action or object.

Word	-	original meaning
to decide	-	to cut
to be true	-	firmly fixed
to be right	-	to be straight
honorable	-	to be heavy

It has 22 consonants but no vowels (these were added later). Vowels were simply understood by writer or reader on the basis of context.

CLASS EXERCISE: Ask the class to unscramble these sentences by adding the vowels: r thr ny mc n th bldng h skd? d y fnd bbl stdy ntrstng ?

Aramaic was the language of commerce and diplomacy and was widespread in the Persian empire II Kings 18:26-28 (Assyrians invading Jerusalem) Daniel 24-7,28 ; Ezra 4:8-6:18, 7:12-26.

Classical Imperial Aramaic developed into the Aramaic Jesus used (Mk.5:41).

Language of the New Testament

Greek was a language capable of conveying philosophical ideas as well as pictures. **The conquest of Alexander the Great encouraged the spread of Greek language and culture.** Koine Greek was a dialect which added vernacular expressions making it more cosmopolitan. It simplified grammar to adapt to various cultures and so became the language of the common man.

Although the New Testament authors were Jewish they wrote in Greek as it was the universal language of their time.

Old Testament Manuscripts

Many of the Old Testament manuscripts were written on papyrus. This was a reed plant which was sliced into long thin strips and then beaten flat. Strips were then placed at right angles to produce a sheet that had a cross pattern. When dried it would be polished into a smooth writing surface. It rolled easily so scrolls rather than books were the norm. Reed pens were used and ink was made from red ochre or black carbon (Ezek 9:2,3,11).

Jews preferred their synagogue copies of the Torah to be written on animal skins rather than papyrus. Sheets of leather would be stitched together to make a long scroll.

Needless to say none of the original manuscripts for Old or New Testaments survive to the present day. That begs an important question! How Accurate is the text which we have today? It is obviously a copy, can it be trusted?

The Massoretic text (MT) which was produced between 500-1000 A.D. is the standard text used in Bible translation. The Masorites were responsible for adding vowel sounds because up until then there were only consonants in the Hebrew text. Old as they are the Masoretic texts were produced approximately 1000-2000 years after the original autographs.

There was no way of checking the accuracy of the MT until 1947 when Arab shepherds found the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) in caves. These were about 1000 years older than the M.T. and were dated only 300 years after the close of the Old Testament canon. From examination of the text there is very little change. Of the 600 scripts, 200 were Biblical 85% on leather, the oldest (Exodus) was from 250 B.C. (One gets a picture of the painstaking work when realizing that there were more than 50,000 fragments).

The Masorites were incredibly careful in reproducing manuscripts. They had a detailed checking process including counting how many times a letter appeared in a book and checking what the middle word or letter in a book was. After every check footnotes were inserted to show that it had been done.

In addition we also have the following:

Translations

Septuagint (LXX) is the oldest Greek translation of the Old Testament and being dated at 250-150 B.C. it is older than the Masoretic Text. This is the version that Paul and probably Jesus used and was the standard text used by the early church. Named because of the 70 Alexandrian scholars involved in the translation. It is not a single version but a collection of versions. Translations vary, some literal and some dynamic. The value of each book must be judged on a book by book basis.

Targums

These are Aramaic paraphrases 200-100 B.C. The translators interpreted quite liberally to emphasize theological trends of the time.

A variety of Latin and Syrian versions also exist.

Commentaries:

Talmud

Mishnah - oral law

Gemara - commentary on this

Midrash - exposition of OT copies

New Testament Manuscripts

New Testament documents were written on both rolls and codices. A codex was made by folding sheets of papyrus or vellum down the middle and stitching them. It was an early form of a book.

Even when only part of a codex survives it is still possible to work out the number of pages. For example only 30 pages of P45 survive yet we know that all four gospels and Acts were contained in 220 pages. A codex was more useful for traveling and codices were used for notebooks (2 Tim.4:13).

As with the Old Testament, no New Testament autographs survive. The closest copy in existence is P46 (the Chester Beatty Papyrus II) which contains Paul's epistles. It dates at the end of the 1st century some 30 years after Paul wrote most of his material.

Some other important codices are:

CODEX SINAITICUS: 350 AD contains the entire New Testament

CODEX VATICANUS: slightly before 350 AD contains Old and New Testaments with the exception of Heb.9:15 onwards.

Though there are some variations between manuscripts they are small and do not involve any doctrinal issue. The reliability of textual transmission can be determined by comparing codices which are distant relatives.

The three great centers of textual production were Egypt, Alexandria and Byzantium. As Latin became the universal language, only the Byzantines continued to produce Greek manuscripts. *The first Greek New Testament to be printed (1525 AD) was based on the Greek text which Erasmus had compiled.* This was to become the Textus Receptus (received text) from which the King James Version is translated.

More modern versions use an eclectic text which means that they use all the available manuscripts. This is clearly a great advantage.

Divine Origin of the Bible

In what sense can the Bible claim to be the Word of God? What do we mean by the "Word of God"?

There are two words which help us to answer this question. These are Authority and Inspiration. The Bible is God's word in that it carries God's authority, it is also God's word in that it has been Inspired by God.

AUTHORITY

As evangelicals we see the Bible as our main source of authority. In this way we differ from the Roman Catholic Church, and from liberals.

Roman Catholic----->church
Liberal----->Christian reason
Evangelical----->Scripture

(NB: To the evangelical the Church is a fellowship of those united through life in Christ. Christian Reason is reason illuminated through the Holy Spirit.)

The authority which the Bible has is expressed in various ways:

The attitude of Jesus to the authority of the Old Testament

- He regarded it as completely authoritative Mt. 4:4,7,10. Even individual words were regarded by him as of significance, Jn.10:34 ; Mt.5:18 ; Lu.16:17.
- He expected the Old Testament Scriptures to be completely fulfilled Lu.18:31 ; 22:37 ; 24:26.
- He believed the Old Testament to be inspired by God Mk.7:13 ; 12:36 ; Mt.22:31. God speaks in Genesis Mt.19:4,5.

The attitude of the Apostles to the Old Testament and the beginnings of the New Testament

- They quote the Old Testament as inspired by God II Pet.1:21 ; Heb.1:1. Even individual words Gal.3:16.
- They write authoritatively themselves Gal.1:6-12 ; I Thess.2:13 ;

Rev.22:18,19.

- They equate the Old Testament and apostolic teaching 1Pet.1:11,12 ; II Pet.3:2,16

The term ‘Word of God’ in the Old Testament and New Testament

- In the Old Testament. For example Isaiah and Jeremiah, 75 times.
- In the New Testament of the Old Testament, Rom.9:6.
- In the New Testament of apostolic teaching: Ac.4:29,31 ; 6:7 ; 10:36 ; 13:5,7,44,48,49 ; 16:32 ; 18:11 ; 19:20.

The Gospels are the record of the life and teachings of Christ. The Epistles are the record of the subsequent work of the Holy Spirit of whom Jesus said “He will lead you into all truth”. The scriptures ARE the Word of God, they do not just contain the Word of God.

INSPIRATION

The doctrine of biblical inspiration originates in II Tim.3:16 - (theopneustos) God breathed.

The process is no easier to describe than that of the incarnation. It involves the fruit of human thought combined with God's words spoken through a man's pen.

God was at work in two ways:

- Preparing human writers or authors through natural ability and experiences of life as well as spiritual experiences. For example Paul's background as a Pharisee as well as his intellect was an essential component in his writing of the epistles.
- Filling them with the Holy Spirit so that they wrote scripture, preserved from error in doctrine and fact, expressing divine truth in human language (with all the limitations which this brings).

Some important statements have to be made:

1. This was not mechanical dictation which bypassed the human writer's mind. Each author has his own style and each piece of work testifies to the research and theological meditation of the author.
2. The fact that God inspired each book does not obliterate personality, outlook and cultural conditioning on behalf of the human author.
3. The words expressed through the pen of human writers are none the less the very words of God.

A useful source to refer to is the Chicago Statement of Biblical Inerrancy, a conference where 300 scholars and pastors took part.

Is the Bible Reliable?

One of the primary reasons for believing in the uniqueness of the Bible is the presence of biblical prophecy. As we approach the subject of biblical prophecy, we need firstly to deal with some important definitions. Within the general genre of biblical prophetic literature, there are two kinds of prophecy. These are sometimes referred to as 'foretelling' and 'forth-telling'. In the latter the prophet was giving God's commentary on a situation that was going on at that time. He was, in a sense, God's mouthpiece telling people how they should behave. The former of these was prophecy that contained a predictive element. The prophet would make a prediction that would come true at a later point in history, often very much later. It is this category which provides compelling evidence for the belief that the Bible is the Word of God.

When it comes to this predictive prophecy, we can identify three kinds in the Old Testament: predictions about the coming of the Messiah (messianic prophecies), predictions about kings, nations and cities (historical prophecies), predictions about the future of the Jews (national Israel prophecies). We will focus particularly on the first category.

Sceptics might argue that prophecy is not adequate evidence for the inspiration of the Bible because there have been many non-Biblical prophets in history who have made predictions. Some, like Nostradamus, were secular prophets, while others like Charles Taze Russell were religious prophets. But the mere presence of prophets outside of the Bible is not, in itself, sufficient evidence to deny the uniqueness of biblical prophecy. After all, the point is not whether other people made prophecies, but rather, whether or not the prophecies made by others were of the same calibre as the prophecies found in the Bible. The burden of proof on this issue rests with the sceptic.

The most convenient way of assessing the credibility of a prophecy, including biblical prophecies, is to set up a series of benchmarks.

The Predictability Benchmark

The first benchmark that should be used is that of predictability. This benchmark tests a prophecy by asking if the fulfilment of the prophecy is in some way surprising, or merely predictable. A great many of the non-biblical prophecies fall into this category. Indeed more often than not when non-biblical prophets have made their predictions, the predictions were so unsurprising that they were utterly unimpressive.

The Benchmark of Ambiguity

A second benchmark is that of ambiguity. In this test a prophecy is investigated to see if what it predicts is specific or general. Again many of the non-biblical prophecies have been so ambiguous, they could fit into several situations. For this reason they too are unimpressive.

The Benchmark of Accurate Fulfilment

The third benchmark that should be applied to any prophecy is that of whether or not it has actually been fulfilled. Here too many of history's prophets have failed dismally. For example, prophecies made by the writers of Watchtower Magazine which was founded by 'prophet' Charles Taze Russell, have often proved faulty. Russell himself made several questionable prophecies, and this trend was then followed by his successor Joseph Franklin Rutherford. Likewise the great secular prophet Nostradamus had a very poor success rate in the fulfilment of his prophecies, as well as being guilty of failing the first two benchmarks.

Having stated what the benchmarks should be, they must then be applied to the prophecies mentioned in the Bible.

Predictability

Firstly, far from being expected, the kind of prophecies that we read about in the Bible are surprising and unexpected. For example the prophecies about the Messiah suffering would have puzzled many Jews who were expecting history to be consummated by a military Messiah who would rid his people of the yoke of oppression.

Ambiguity

Secondly, biblical prophecies have a tendency to be specific as opposed to being vague. So specific indeed that the messianic prophecies predicted the very place of Jesus birth, the fact that he would be born of a virgin and the fact that he would die a terrible and cruel death in which his legs would not be broken.

Fulfilment

Thirdly, all the biblical prophecies that have been fulfilled to date, have been fulfilled accurately and completely. Though some of the prophecies in the Bible are yet to be fulfilled, this is because they refer to events which are still future.

To illustrate this point, we will now look at some examples of fulfilled

messianic prophecies:

Prophecy: Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive a son. (Isa 7:14)

Fulfilment: She was found with child of the Holy Spirit...Joseph...did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn. (Mtt.1:18, 24)

Prophecy: But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you will come forth to me the one to be ruler over Israel. (Micah 5:2)

Fulfilment: Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea. (Mtt.2:1)

Prophecy: A voice was heard in Ramah, Lamentation and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted for her children. Because they are no more. (Jer.31:15)

Fulfilment: Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry...put to death all male children who were in Bethlehem. (Mtt.2:16)

Prophecy: Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. Then the lame will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb will sing for joy. (Isaiah 35:5, 6)

Fulfilment: And Jesus was going about all the cities and villages...healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. (Mtt.9:35)

Prophecy: So they weighed out for my wages thirty pieces of silver. (Zach.11:12)

Fulfilment: And they counted out to him thirty pieces of silver. (Mtt.26:15)

Prophecy: So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord for the potter. (Zach.11:13)

Fulfilment: Then he threw down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed... And they consulted together and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in. (Mtt.27:5, 7)

Prophecy: They pierced my hands and my feet. (Ps.22:16)

Fulfilment: And when they came to the place called Calvary, they crucified him. (Luke 23:33)

Prophecy: They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots. (Ps.22:18)

Fulfilment: The soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments...They said 'Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it'. (Jn.19:23, 24)

Prophecy: He guards all his bones; not one of them is broken. (Ps.34:20)

Fulfilment: But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. (Jn.19:33)

Prophecy: And they made his grave with the wicked – but with the rich at his death. (Isa.53:9)

Fulfilment: There came a rich man from Aramathea, named Joseph...When Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped It in a clean cloth, and laid it in his new tomb. (Mtt.27:57-60)

An ardent sceptic might claim that Jesus, being a good Jew, would have been aware of the messianic prophecies that were made and so might have tried to live a life consistent with them in order to support his claim that he was the messiah. The suggestion that Jesus somehow deliberately lived a life consistent with what he knew about messianic prophecy, however, fails totally when put under the scrutiny of logic. Firstly, it is one thing to interpret these messianic passages with hindsight now that we know that they have been fulfilled in the person of Christ, but it would have been quite another to work out beforehand just how these prophecies could be fulfilled in everyday life. Trying to live a life that fits all the details accurately would therefore be extremely difficult, if not impossible.

Secondly, had Jesus been a mere man, there would have been events in his life that were beyond his control. For example, there is no way in which he would have been able to ensure that he was born of a virgin. Neither would he have been able to guarantee the place of his upbringing or the method of his death.

The ardent sceptic might still argue that the fulfilment of these messianic prophecies might just be one enormous fluke. Theoretically, of course, something like this just might happen by chance. But the statistical probability of this is so remote as to make it virtually impossible. In order to demonstrate this we will do a little simple mathematics.

When mathematicians work out the probability of an event occurring, they use what is known as the 'product rule'. The product rule states that the probability of an occurrence of several mutually independent events is equal to the product of the probabilities that each of the given events will occur. In other words, to find the statistical probability of a series of events happening, you multiply the number of events by the probability of one of them happening by itself. This can easily be illustrated by rolling a dice.

A normal dice has six sides and therefore six numbers on it. The statistical probability of throwing the dice and getting a 3 is therefore one chance in six or $1/6$. If you were to throw the dice twice, the probability of getting a three on both occasions will be the probability of the one occurrence multiplied by itself, thus $1/6 \times 1/6$, which is $1/36$. In layman's terms, statistically there is one chance in 36 of you getting two threes one after the other.

When we apply this product rule to the messianic prophecies, it makes some very interesting reading. Supposing we were to think about the probability of just one of these messianic prophecies coming true as being a $1/2$ probability. That is, it will either happen or it will not, so the situation is 50-50 ($1/2$). There is one chance in two of it actually being fulfilled. Using the same equation, the probability of just 25 prophecies being fulfilled by chance is $1/2^{25}$, or one chance in 33 million. This number is so ridiculously high it would be virtually impossible, except in the realm of theoretical mathematics, for these fulfilments of prophecy just to have happened by chance.

But two comments need to be made which dramatically increase the unlikelihood. Firstly, as we have already noted, there are many more than just 25 messianic prophecies. Secondly, if you take a prophecy like the virgin birth, the probability of something like this happening by chance is not 50-50. Indeed if you take a representative sample of 10,000 women, the theoretical possibility of even one of them giving birth as a result of a virgin conception is nil, except of course if a miracle occurs. But even if you did give this, and other prophecies, the theoretical probability of one chance in four, the end result would still be $1/4^{25}$, or one chance in a thousand trillion. The reality is, Jesus fulfilment of prophecy was no coincidence. These were unique prophecies, they have no parallel, and they are compelling evidence of the uniqueness of the Bible and of Jesus also.

Even if we accept that the Bible is both inspired and supreme among the religious books of the world, there still remain a couple of crucial issues. How do we know that the biblical text that we have in our hands has the same content as the documents that were originally penned? After all, none of the original documents exist today. And how do we know that the biblical writers really saw all that they claimed to see? This is a huge and complex issue, but we nevertheless have good reason for accepting that the documents we have are a reliable record of what took place.

This confidence can be established if we apply to the Bible the same kinds of tests that scholars of antiquity apply to any ancient document.

Eye Witness Test

This test asks if the writers of a particular document actually saw what they describe.

Internal Test

In this test we ask, are the copies that we have of the Bible reliable?

External Test

In this test we ask if there is any evidence outside of a particular document that confirms some of the information that is contained in it.

The Old Testament and the Eye Witness Test

The first test which involves looking for eyewitness accounts does not actually apply to much of the Old Testament. Books like Proverbs, Psalms and Leviticus are not histories, so this test is simply not relevant. It does not matter if the writer of Psalm 23 was in a particular location when he penned this section of the Bible because he is not talking about any particular event. There are of course some historical sections in the Old Testament that would require eye witness accounts and most of these can be reasonably established. The Pentateuch, for example, which contains the first five books of the Bible, was written by Moses who was personally involved in many of the key events that took place.

The Old Testament and the Internal Test

When it comes to the internal test which establishes the accuracy of the copies, once again the Old Testament stands up well. We can have a sense of

confidence in the reliability of the copies because of the detailed copying methods that the ancient scribes used in this process.

All of these ancient documents were obviously hand written. The copies of the Old Testament were produced by teams of copyists. So sophisticated was their process that senior scribes became experts in the whole area of the law, and this at times brought them into dispute with Jesus. Up until the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, copies were made from a master copy which was kept in the Temple. After this, copying took place in synagogues, each of which would have had its own master copy. Old scrolls were never thrown away, rather they would have been kept in a container called a genizah and often buried. Needless to say some of these 'time capsules' have been found and have provided valuable archaeological support for the reliability of the Old Testament text. One of the most famous finds occurred in Cairo in 1890 and this provided scholars with a 1,000 year old text to work on.

The copying techniques employed in the process were complex and trustworthy. For example, once one page was copied from the original, every line on the page was counted and compared to the original to ensure that the copy had the same number of lines as the original. The same thing was done with the words and even the letters. There had to be the same number of letters on the copy as there was on the original, and the middle letter even had to be the same on the copy as it was in the original. If mistakes were found, the copy was promptly destroyed. If the mistake involved one of the names of God, the entire scroll, of which the copied sheet was only one part, had to be destroyed. This process appears obsessively strict, nevertheless it gives us excellent assurance of the reliability of the copying techniques.

The basis for the present text of the Hebrew Bible is the Masoretic Text, and this is the prototype against which all other texts are compared. Though we can be confident of the quality of the Masoretic Text, we can nevertheless test it for quality due to the existence of the Dead Sea Scrolls, discovered by an Arab boy in 1947. This collection contained dozens of jars filled with the fragments of ancient documents. Of the 600 scripts, 200 were biblical texts. 85% of them were written on leather, the oldest of which (Exodus) was dated from 250 B.C. Some of them even had footnotes stating that the manuscript was checked and found to be satisfactory.

The great significance of these scrolls is that they are 1000 years older than the Masoretic Texts and were dated only 300 years after the close of the Old Testament canon. When the two texts were examined together, it was discovered that there was very little change. That means that over this 1,000 year gap the copying techniques had proved satisfactory and the reliability of

textual transmission had been confirmed beyond all reasonable doubt.

The Old Testament and the External Test

Archaeologists have come up with an almost endless list of finds that have been able to confirm the Old Testament record in numerous ways. Indeed Donald Weisman, Director of the British Museum, states that some 25,000 sites relating to Biblical times have been uncovered. None of these has in any way brought into question the events, places or people mentioned in the Old Testament.

The New Testament and the Eye Witness Test

We begin by looking at the specific claims that are made. In Luke 1:1-4 the writer tells us that he had carefully recorded what was said to him by eyewitnesses. His very style is suggestive of a careful researcher and he undoubtedly gleaned his information from the many eyewitnesses who were at the scene. Likewise in Galatians 1 and 2 Peter 1:16 we have claims that the writers were eyewitnesses of the events they describe. Though neither Mathew nor John explicitly claim to be eyewitnesses, the fact that they were disciples of Jesus logically indicates that they were.

It is also interesting to note that the early church highly prized eye witness accounts, even to the point where they made eye witness credibility a pre-requisite for apostleship, the highest 'rank in the church' (Ac.1:21,22 ; Heb.2:3). It is important to note the context within which Christianity emerged. Historians universally acknowledge that Christianity emerged in Jerusalem very shortly after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is clear from Acts chapter 2 that the Christians openly proclaimed their beliefs in the public arena and in the presence of both friendly and hostile witnesses. They even proclaimed both controversial and verifiable doctrines like the resurrection of Jesus. This was controversial, not just because dead people don't rise again, but also because it was a contradiction of Jewish theology. It was verifiable because Jesus was buried in the local cemetery and the emptiness of his tomb could therefore easily be attested by visiting it. The gospel were also circulated in the context of hostile witnesses, many of whom would have been around when the events recorded in them took place. Yet despite all of this we find no one refuting any of the claims in the gospels with any plausibility. This strongly suggests that the gospel writers knew what they were talking about, because they were actually there.

At this point we could add another test to the three that we are already using. This could be described as the 'True to History' test, though it is in some ways related to the eyewitness test. When historians read through an ancient

document they are looking for evidence that the document ‘rings true’. That is, they are looking for evidence of the historicity of these documents. This kind of evidence links with the eyewitness test because it strongly suggests the credibility of the eye witness accounts. Upon examination there are many reasons why the gospels ring true historically.

First of all there is the record of the way Jesus spoke. There are many sayings attributed to Jesus that are unique and not found anywhere else. These include his use of the words *amen* and *abba*, his use of questions, and his use of three fold sayings such as ‘ask and you will receive, seek and you will find and knock and the door will be opened to you’. The uniqueness of this material strongly suggests that these are the actual words of Jesus rather than just some religious tradition that has been incorporated into the gospel story. Added to this are the Aramaisms which litter the gospels (Aramaic words used in the text). Jesus would have been an Aramaic speaker whereas after AD 50 most of the Christians would have been Greek speakers. The presence of these Aramaisms suggest once more that the material recorded was actually spoken by Jesus and not some later tradition (which would have been entirely in Greek) imported into the text.

Then there is the irrelevant material that is to be found in the gospels. If, as some scholars have suggested, the gospel materials are a tradition that emerged in the church towards the end of the first century, rather than the recordings of the life and teachings of Jesus, then the gospels would entirely reflect the concerns of the church at the time. What we do find, however, is ample material that would simply not have had any direct relevance to the church at that time. Take for example his numerous disputes with the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, as well as the debates over such things as Sabbath and food laws. These issues were parochial in nature and would have been irrelevant to Christians outside of Israel in the latter half of the first century. Their presence once again supports the notion that the gospels are indeed records of what Jesus did and said.

Add to this the somewhat embarrassing material in the gospels. The gospels portray Jesus as a carpenter who held no political office, who was virtually a homeless wanderer, who was disliked by the authorities, was irreverent of religious practices, was in the habit of violently booting people out of the temple, had a family that distrusted him, and was followed by a bunch of cowardly failures known as the disciples. Frankly, had the church at a later date spun an account of Jesus for inclusion in the gospels, this is a far cry from the heroic kind of figure they would have painted. The inclusion of such material gives the gospels a resounding ring of truth.

One of the reasons why some scholars doubt that the gospels were eye witness accounts is that they make the assumption that they were written between AD 70 and AD 95. Reasons for making these assumptions are unconvincing, whereas the reasons in favour of an earlier dating of the gospel accounts are highly compelling. For example, one of the reasons for opting for a later date for the gospels is the prediction that Jesus makes about the fall of Jerusalem which occurred in AD 70. Scholars who make this claim argue that Jesus could not possibly have predicted such an event, so his predictions are a story that was sewn into the material after the fall of Jerusalem had actually occurred.

This argument is only credible if the predictions are viewed from a purely naturalistic position. This is a case of scholars coming to conclusions based on a closed minded approach to the investigation, with inflexible and preconceived notions, as well as a lack of willingness to look at all the evidence.

If we do look honestly at the evidence we see a different picture. One of the most noticeable things about the book of Acts is that it does not mention the fall of Jerusalem. This is significant as the story of both Luke and Acts centres around Jerusalem. Neither does it mention the persecutions under Nero which occurred in the mid 60's. There is no mention of the Jewish-Roman war which erupted in AD 66. Most important of all, there is no mention of the martyrdoms of Peter (which occurred in AD 65) or Paul (which occurred in AD 64). It must be remembered that these two men are the most important figures in the book of Acts. Had Acts been written late in the first century, these events would certainly have been included, especially the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul. The exclusion of this material strongly suggests the Acts must have been completed before 64 AD, and perhaps even earlier.

Bearing in mind that Acts is the second part of a two part work, the first part, Luke's Gospel, must have been written even earlier. We also know from studying the texts of the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) that both Luke and Matthew use material from Mark. We can logically conclude therefore that Mark is earlier than Luke. Looking at the issue chronologically, if Acts was written before 64, and Luke before that, and Mark before that again, then the first records of the gospel are pushed back to very near the time of Jesus. Mark would have been in circulation while the whole generation of people (both friendly and hostile) who knew Jesus personally, were still alive. This gives further credence to the historical credibility of the gospels.

The Internal Test

If the copying techniques of the Old Testament scribes gives us a sense of confidence in the reliability of their transmission, then the sheer volume of New

Testament documents in existence gives us the same confidence in the New Testament text. There are some 25,000 manuscript copies of portions of the New Testament today. Without doubt there are far more texts for the New Testament than there are for any other document of the ancient world. But the significance of the New Testament textual tradition lies not merely in the sheer number of manuscripts, but also in their close chronological proximity to the original manuscripts (autographs).

This point can easily be made when we compare the New Testament with the writings of Caesar, Plato and Homer. As already mentioned, there are literally thousands of New Testament texts in existence. When it comes to the writings of Caesar there are only 10 copies, of the writings of Plato there are 7 copies. Homer does better with 643 copies, but even he is a long way behind the New Testament and its 25,000 copies. The earliest fragment of a New Testament document that we have dates back to about 114AD, with the earliest books dating to 200 AD. That means that there is a time span of only about 100 years between the autograph and the earliest copy. The earliest copy of the works of Caesar dates from around AD 900. The earliest copy of the works of Plato dates from 900 AD, while the earliest copy of Homer's Iliad dates from 400 BC. That means that the time distance between the original and the earliest surviving manuscript is about 1000 years for Caesar, 1,300 years for Plato and 400 years for Homer.

DOCUMENT	No. Copies	Earliest Copy	Time Span
New Testament	25,000	200 AD (114 AD Fr.)	100 years
Caesar	10	900 AD	1,000 years
Plato	7	900 AD	1,300 years
Homer	643	400 BC	400 years

Table 1: A Comparison of different historic documents.

Of course no credible historian would doubt the existence of Caesar, Plato or Homer, and neither would they question the general reliability of what they wrote. That being the case, to question the reliability of the New Testament would be foolish.

The question that still remains, however, is how we know that what we have today still corresponds to what was written in the original manuscripts (autographs)? The answer to this question is actually remarkably simple, especially if you look at how the process of copying was carried out. As the New Testament began to be copied Christianity was spreading. The copying process would also spread so that new copying communities would appear in new areas. The key to testing the reliability of the copying process is to go as

far back in the process as possible. If evidence of an early text can be found and compared to a more modern text, the extent of the reliability of transmission can be easily established. The key here is to compare distant relatives.

If several manuscripts were to be found in a single location, for example Alexandria, they could be compared to each other to see if they are similar. However, it is highly probable that they were all copied from the same manuscript, so their similarities would be unsurprising and not good evidence of the reliability of the copying process over generations of copying. However, if one manuscript came from Alexandria, and another was taken from Rome, or Constantinople, or London, and compared, this would be good proof. Firstly, they must ultimately have come from the same source manuscript many generations ago, and secondly, the copying process was indeed reliable.

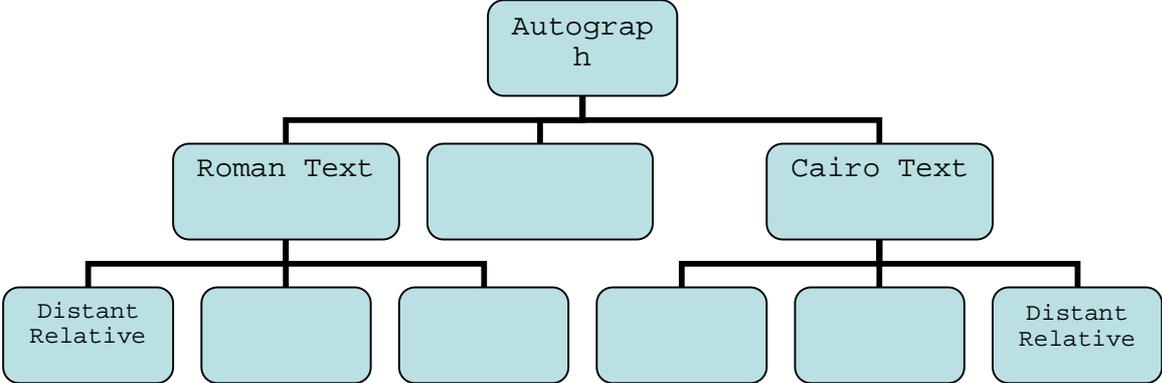


Table 2: Comparing distant relatives to find the source.

Precisely this kind of test has been conducted with a great many sets of manuscripts. The embarrassment of wealth in the textual tradition, and our ability to test the manuscripts, gives us confidence in the integrity of the present New Testament text.

The External Test

In the New Testament we have numerous references to people, places and events, all of which we can then look for in other historic documents.

The writings of Jewish historian Josephus are a good place to start. He mentions numerous people and places found within the New Testament and also

tells us about the trial and death of Jesus, as well as the continuation of Christianity, including the martyrdom of James the brother of Jesus. The former Rylands Professor of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis, F.F. Bruce states, 'Here, in the pages of Josephus, we meet many figures who are well known to us from the New Testament: the colourful family of the Herods; the Roman emperors Augustus, Tiberius, Claudius and Nero; Quirinius, the governor of Syria; Pilate, Felix and Festus, the prosecutors of Judea; the high-priestly families-Annas, Caiaphas, Ananias, and the rest; the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and so on. Against the background which Josephus provides we can read the New Testament with greater understanding and interest'.

There are many other writings, besides those of Josephus, that we can turn to for information. Between the years of AD70 and AD200 the rabbis were referred to as the *Tanna'im* (repeaters of tradition). From this period there emerged a tradition known as the *Baraitha*. This was material external to the Mishnah but preserved by the Gemara. In the Baraitha we read about Jesus and the controversy which he caused within the Jewish establishment. It even tells us that Jesus was crucified on the eve of the Passover, which is exactly what John's Gospel tells us. Further external evidence can be found among the pagan writers, the Apocryphal and miscellaneous works such as the Gospel of St. Thomas.

All this compelling evidence led Sir Frederick Kenyon, formerly Principal Librarian and Director of the British Museum, a distinguished classical scholar, to write:

'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'.

All of this demonstrates persuasively that the Bible is a reliable book and one upon which we can place great confidence.

Brief History of the English Bible.

The gospel was brought to England in the 6th century by missionaries wielding the Latin Vulgate. Christians depended on the monks for biblical instruction as they did not know Latin. Bede is said to have translated the gospels into English and Alfred the Great translated the 10 commandments.

Some interlinear translations from the Latin were made in the 10th century including the Lindisfarne gospels.

John Wycliffe (1329-1384), the most brilliant theologian of his day, produced the first translation of the whole Bible from Latin into English. This was a translation of a translation, but Wycliffe paid for it with his life.

William Tyndale graduated from Oxford in 1515. He committed his life to translating the Bible from its original languages. He completed the translation of the New Testament in 1525 and 15,000 copies were smuggled into England. Many were burned by church authorities and the translation was banned. Tyndale was arrested and condemned to death. He was strangled and burned at the stake October 6 1536 with the dying words "Lord, open the king of England's eyes".

Because of religious changes in England the Bible began to be circulated. **Miles Coverdale** issued a translation in 1535 which used most of Tyndale's work without any acknowledgement. Matthew's Bible appeared in 1537. The Great Bible, 1537, 1540, 1541 was a revision of Matthew's Bible by Coverdale. The Geneva Bible of 1560 was influential for 60 years and had marginal comments from a Reformed or Calvinistic point of view. It came to be used in churches of all types, however, and was the first English Bible to use verses. The Bishops' Bible, 1568 and 1572 was the Church of England alternative.

There was a danger that English speakers would have two versions, one for Anglicans and one for Presbyterian and Reformed churches. To avoid this the Authorised Version or King James Version was completed in 1611.

It was King James I who encouraged this and he prohibited marginal notes. As it was intended to be neither for Puritans nor "Papists" it ignored the work of some Reformed translations. For example it used the term church rather than congregation as used in Tyndale's. No acknowledgment was made of the fact that the AV depended heavily on the Geneva Bible and hence on Tyndale. This version was never "authorised" by the king. It was merely "appointed to be read in churches".

The Authorised Version served the English speaking Protestant world without serious competition for 350 years. From the beginning, however, it was a very "churchy" book as opposed to a version translated into the language of the ordinary man. The Greek texts used were all from late copies of the Byzantine family (Textus Receptus).

During the last century many new English versions have been produced. The reasons for this are as follows:

1. Language changes and this makes new translations essential. Remember Wycliffe and Tyndale wanted a Bible that the ordinary people could read.
2. A vast amount of textual evidence has come to light over the past 150 years. It would be negligent not to make use of this.
3. Each translation has a target group of readers. We need translations for those with limited use of English as well.

ENGLISH VERSIONS

Revised Version	1885 Based on the AV extensive use of Alexandrian texts following Westcott and Hort.
American Standard Version	1901 An American version of above.
Moffat's Translation	1928 A scholarly translation in modern speech.
Revised Standard Version	1952 Based on American Standard Version. Abandoned "thee" and "thou" except in addressing God.
Ronald Knox Translation	1955 A Catholic modern language translation from the Vulgate.
New American Standard Version	1963 Revision of ASV made by scholars committed to the inspiration of scripture. Uses "thee" and "thou". Useful study Bible but using outdated texts.
The Jerusalem Bible	1966 A very free translation based on extensive textual research.
J.B. Phillips	1972 A brilliant easy to read translation.
New English Bible	1970 An attempt to make a translation in "timeless English". Not a success.
The Living Bible	1971 John Taylor described this as a paraphrase. It is a very free

translation.

The Good News
Version

1976 Produce of American Bible Society. Strongly follows the "dynamic equivalence" principle of translation.

The New International
Version

1977 Translated by evangelical scholars. Phenomenally successful. A fairly dynamic approach using an eclectic text. The best seller and justifiably so.