

Is the Bible Reliable? The Preservation of the Scriptures

Introduction: In the Story of the Bible we tell folks that “This story is true, and you can believe it ...” Therefore we need to be able to answer the question, “Is the Bible reliable?” Years ago, many would have considered that very question to be unthinkable and certainly unspeakable. Not anymore. Among the lost, it is far more common for people to believe the Bible is an ancient religious book full of _____ and legends and reflecting the _____ and misconceptions of the human authors than it is to consider it a perfect treasure of divine truth.

Therefore, if we are going to be ready to give a reasoned explanation (apologetic) for the hope that is in us, we must be able to explain why we believe the Bible is reliable. In previous lessons we learned.

1. The Bible is reliable because it is from _____.

It is true that God used many different men to put His words on paper, but the ultimate source of the Bible is God Himself. The evidence of the single ultimate source is the continuity of the Bible and its single message on a multitude of _____ subjects. The Bible stands alone as a multi volume, multi author book in which every author and every book _____ on everything! The only reasonable explanation for this is that behind the forty plus human authors, there was a single _____ author, God Himself. And that is exactly what the authors themselves tell us. As they write, they say, “Thus says the Lord...,” “All Scripture is inspired by God...,” and “...men wrote as they were _____ by the Holy Spirit...”.

2. The Bible is reliable because its books were selected with virtual _____ by the people of God because those books clearly demonstrated divine authorship.

And today we will see that...

3. The Bible is reliable because it was supernaturally _____ by God.

Interestingly, skeptics have tried to use the very evidence of God’s supernatural preservation of the Bible as _____ against it. Usually armed with only a superficial knowledge of the facts, their argument goes like this:

Why there are so many ancient _____ of the Bible, who can know what “the Bible” is supposed to say. There are more than 200,000 _____ in the readings of the manuscripts, so they cannot all be true. These variations of readings are reflected in the _____ of versions of the Bible today and in the disagreement among the Christian _____.

As you will see, such an accusation involves a great misunderstanding or _____ distorting of the truth, but it is good to know what we are up against.

What is the evidence that the Bible was _____ preserved by God?

I. THE _____ OF MANUSCRIPT COPIES

A. Definition of manuscript - a _____ copy

B. Copying a book of the Bible by hand would be difficult and _____. So why were many copies of the Biblical books made?

1. Due to the _____ and power of the _____ (the autograph).
2. Due to the perishable nature of the _____. The oldest manuscripts were on papyrus, and ancient _____ that did not weather well or last long. Ancient papyrus manuscripts have only survived where they were protected in an exceedingly dry climate.
3. Due to the need for the message to be _____ into other languages. From its inception, Christianity was a _____ faith. As Christians went to their Samarias and to the ends of the earth, the Bible had to be translated into the language of the people.

C. Today we have discovered more than _____ complete or partial copies of the New Testament books.

- | | |
|---|---------|
| 1. Greek manuscripts | 5,686 |
| 2. Latin Vulgate
(Old and New Testament) | 10,000+ |
| 3. Ethiopic | 2,000+ |
| 4. Slavic | 4,101 |
| 5. Armenian | 2,587 |
| 6. Syriac Pashetta | 350+ |
| 7. Bohairic | 100 |
| 8. Arabic | 75 |
| 9. Old Latin | 50 |
| 10. Anglo Saxon | 7 |
| 11. Gothic | 6 |
| 12. Sogdian | 3 |
| 13. Old Syriac | 2 |
| 14. Persian | 2 |
| 15. Frankish | 1 |

Total 24,970+

D. Most of the Greek manuscripts discovered are only separated from the date of the writing of the autograph by _____ years. Some of the copies date to less than _____ years from the original.

E. See the following chart taken from McDowell, New Evidence that Demands a Verdict (as were the numbers in C above).

AUTHOR	BOOK	DATE WRITTEN	EARLIEST COPIES	TIME GAP IN YRS	NO. OF COPIES
Homer	<i>Iliad</i>	800 BC	400 BC	400	643
Herodotus	<i>History</i>	480-425 BC	AD 900	1,325	8
Thucydides	<i>History</i>	460-400 BC	AD 900	1,300	8
Plato		400 BC	AD 900	1,300	7
Caesar	<i>Gallic Wars</i>	100-44 BC	AD 900	956	10
Tacitus	<i>Annals</i>	AD 100	AD 1100	1,000	20
New Testament		AD 50-100	114 fragments 200 books 250 most of NT 325 all of NT	50 100 150 225	5,366

F. Some of the experts sum up the importance of this evidence from such a multitude of manuscripts.

1. F.F. Bruce says, "There is no body of _____ literature in the world which enjoys such a wealth of good textual attestation as the New Testament."
2. John W. Montgomery wrote, "To be skeptical of the resultant text of the New Testament books is to allow all of classical antiquity to slip into _____, for no documents of the ancient period are so well _____ bibliographically as the New Testament.

G. Old Testament manuscripts number in the _____ rather than in the thousands as do those of the New Testament.

1. The reason for this is the increased passage of _____ and the destruction of _____ and the captivity of Israel and Judah by Assyria and Babylon respectively.
2. A second reason is actually the result of the _____ the Jews had for the scrolls of sacred Scripture. As a scroll aged and was damaged by use, it was carefully _____ (details below). The damaged scroll was then retired to a Gheniza, a storage room attached to a synagogue, where they perished totally from neglect or were _____ to make room for others.
3. However, the number of O.T. manuscripts still greatly _____ the number of manuscripts of any other ancient literary work, and they are sufficient in number and extent to verify that the text we have in our Christian Bibles is a _____ copy of the originals.
4. The above statement is in large part true because of God's preservation of His Word through...

II. THE _____ OF THE COPYISTS

A. From the days of the completion of the O.T., the Jews had three primary groups who were given the responsibility of custodial care of the Scriptures.

1. The first of these were the Sopherim (_____), of which _____ was one. Their ministry lasted from around 400 B.C. to just after A.D. 100.
2. The second group of custodians were the _____, who diligently cared for the sacred text from A.D. 100 to A.D. 500. The Talmudists had an extensive list of rules to which they strictly adhered for the copying of the O.T. books, including how the parchments (animal _____) had to be prepared and a specific recipe for the ink. Some of the rules that helped preserve the _____ of the text are as follows:
 - a. "An _____ copy must be the exemplar, from which the transcriber ought not in the least deviate.
 - b. No word or letter, not even a yod (the _____ Hebrew letter), must be written from memory, the scribe not having looked at the codex before him...
 - c. Between every consonant the space of a hair or thread must intervene;
 - d. between every new section, the breadth of nine consonants;
 - e. between every book, three lines.
 - f. The copyist must sit in full Jewish dress,
 - g. _____ his whole body,
 - h. not begin to write the name of _____ with a pen newly dipped in ink,
 - i. and should a _____ address him while writing that name he must take no notice of him."
3. The third group of scholars charged with the preservation of the sacred text of the Old Testament were the _____. They cared for the Scriptures between A.D. 500 and A.D. 950. They made two great contributions to the preservation of the O.T. Scriptures.
 - a. They continued the exceedingly diligent care of the Sopherim and Talmudists in the copying to the ancient text.
 - 1) They devised a complicated _____ to safeguard the text from scribal slips.
 - 2) For example, they counted the number of times each _____ of the alphabet occurs in each book. When the copy was complete, if the count did not match, the copy was considered defective and was _____.
 - 3) They identified the _____ letter of the Pentateuch and the middle letter of the entire Old Testament. New copies were checked to be sure they matched.
 - 4) These are only examples of many "countings" which they employed so that they were absolutely certain that when a copy passed their examination, it was _____ to the exemplar being copied. Thus the ancient text was accurately preserved.
 - b. The second contribution of the Masoretes was to add _____ points to the consonants that made up the Hebrew text of the O.T.
 - 1) Prior to this time, the O.T. text consisted only of _____. The vowel sounds were _____, just as we remember

the melody of a song when we read the words, although no musical notes are written.

- 2) _____ and dispersal of the Jewish population in the world was causing some of this traditional memory to fade. The Masoretes preserved the traditional _____ by adding small dots or tiny lines below or above the consonants to serve as vowel sounds.

The reason we can have such confidence that the words in our Old Testaments today are the same as the Holy Spirit inspired Moses and the prophets to write so many years ago, is because God provided copyists who were diligent to the _____ to produce faithful copies of the sacred text.

B. God used a _____ methodology for the preservation of the New Testament text.

1. Although the clear evidence is that copies of N.T. books were done carefully and not carelessly, the N.T. books were copied in a far less _____ manor.
2. This was primarily because there was not a single cultural system such as Judaism to control the process. Churches were _____. They often cooperated together, but they were not controlled by a _____ authority until centuries later, and even then, not all were controlled.
3. Therefore the copying to the N.T. books was not given to a single group. A multitude of different _____ spread over several continents and with no contact with each other copied the manuscripts and sent them out. In turn, these manuscripts were copied, and those copies were copied again, and so on.
4. The consequence was two-fold:
 - a. Tens of _____ of manuscripts were copied. This is one reason we have found such a multitude of manuscripts. For us to find over 24,000, many times that number must have been _____!
 - b. This informal process allowed _____ error to be introduced into some of the manuscript copies. A scribe might misspell or omit a word. That error would then be reproduced in the copies that followed it. A copyist might unthinkingly _____ the word Lord for God.
 - c. The miracle of God's preservation of the N.T. is that God used the multiplicity of manuscripts of the N.T. to preserve the accurate _____ of His Word in spite of scribal errors.
 - d. When critics say that there are more than 200,000 variant readings in the N.T., they are telling the _____. But consider the following:
 - 1) That means that if you take any two of the 24,000+ manuscripts and compare them, there would be an average of ___ points of difference between the two. Many of these differences would be as insignificant as the spelling of a _____.
 - 2) One might reasonably ask, "But how do you know which one is right?" And the answer is that you _____ each of them to the other 24,000+ manuscripts.

- 3) When you do so, and scholars have done these comparisons carefully over the years, it is in most cases very easy to tell what the _____ reading is.
- 4) In fact, because there are ways to _____ the manuscripts, scholars can often tell at what point a particular copying error was introduced and what line of manuscripts was affected by it. Thus they can go to another line unaffected by that particular mistake and determine the _____ reading.
- C. An entire discipline developed that was devoted to the study and comparison of the ancient New Testament manuscripts called _____ criticism. Do not confuse textual criticism with some more liberal and destructive types of criticism such as form criticism. Textual criticism is based upon a _____ for the text and attempts through the careful study of the manuscripts to know what the _____ autograph said at any point of variation in the copies.
- D. The result of such careful study across the years is that _____ we can be virtually certain of the _____ of every part of the text of Holy Scriptures. Although we do not possess any of the autographs, we know what every one of them said! As A. T. Robertson said many years ago, any areas of concern amount to less than one _____ thousandth of the text, and none of these alter the _____ of the Scriptures.

Finally we should add that the preservation of the Scriptures as described above did not happen by accident of circumstance. It happened because of ...

III. THE SUPERINTENDENCY OF THE _____.

I offer two examples of God's miraculous work to cause His Word to be preserved accurately across the years.

A. Von Tischendorf finds Codex Sinaiticus (written around A.D. 350)

In the mid 1800's Dr. Constantin Von Tischendorf of the University of Leipzig began to travel in the mid-east in search of ancient manuscripts of the Bible. During the course of his travels, he went three times to the monastery of St. Catharine at the foot of the _____ Mount Sinai on the Sinai Peninsula.

On the first trip he spied some old parchments in a waste basket being used as tender to _____ the ovens. Upon examination he found the papers to be a portion of the Septuagint version of the Old Testament. To his dismay, the monks told him that two other baskets of papers from the same manuscript had already been _____.

On the third trip to the monastery, Von Tischendorf was talking with a steward who said that he personally possessed another _____ copy of the Septuagint which he kept wrapped in a large red cloth. When the steward allowed him to see it, Von Tischendorf stayed up all night examining its contents. It proved to be a very old manuscript, written about _____ A. D., and contained most of the Old Testament and _____ of the New!

This manuscript was eventually purchased by the British Museum, and is today one of the very _____ manuscripts in for textual criticism. Praise God He allowed it to be found before it was used for the lighting of fires.

B. A Shepherd boy finds the Dead Sea Scrolls (written between 200 B.C. and 100 A.D.)

Prior to 1947, scholars of the Hebrew text transmitted through the Masoretes pondered about the accuracy of the writings in _____ to the autographs and even to copies in use during the days of Jesus, who Himself authenticated the versions in common use in His day. The oldest Hebrew manuscript of any complete book of the Old Testament was written in A.D. _____. The oldest manuscript of the complete Old Testament was 200 years younger still. And in textual authentication, _____ is always better!

But in 1947 a Bedouin shepherd boy was looking for a lost goat in some caves on the west bank of the Dead Sea. He threw a rock into a cave to see if it caused the scurry of the goat he was pursuing. Much to his surprise he heard the rock shatter something. He investigated and found several _____ which contained leather _____ sealed in cloth.

The scrolls were sold to the archbishop of the Syrian Orthodox Monastery and to a professor at the Hebrew University. The archbishop invited the director of the American Center for Oriental Research to examine and photograph one of the scrolls. It turned out to be a scroll of _____. It was ten inches high and 24 feet long. The American director sent the photographs by air mail to Dr. W. E. Albright who was considered the _____ of American archaeologists.

Dr. Albright wrote him back, "My heartiest congratulation on the greatest manuscript discovery of modern times! ... What an absolutely incredible find! And there can happily not be the slightest doubt in the world about the genuineness of the manuscript." He dated it about _____ B.C.

Since 1947, the many caves of the Dead Sea area have been excavated, and some _____ inscribed fragments have been found. From these fragments more than 500 books have been reconstructed. Many of them are extra biblical, but _____ of them are of the biblical text. There is at least some portion of a manuscript of every book in the Old Testament except _____.

The amazing thing to those who had no confidence in God's supernatural preservation of His Word was that when manuscripts were found that were at least 1,000 years older than those previously examined, the accuracy of the Masoretic text was authenticated and _____. Almost every word is the _____. The few differences that are apparent are from different spelling of words and a noticeable slip of the pen on the part of a copyist. The bottom line was a tremendous verification of the text of the Old Testament.

CONCLUSION: No book of ancient times has anywhere near the verification of authenticity nor the _____ of transmission as the Bible, both Old and New Testaments. Any open minded and honest evaluation of the evidence will yield a positive result in the mind and heart of any examiner that this book is indeed the _____, dependable Word of God.