

VALIDITY OF THE BIBLE

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THE RELIABILITY OF SCRIPTURE

When we define history as the knowledge of the past. Based upon testimony, we have to determine the reliability of our witness.

IS OUR TESTIMONY RELIABLE?

There are some unique and significant facts about the Bible that contribute to its reliability. Together, these Facts are true only of the Bible. No other book, Ancient or modern, can compare to the Bible.

THE BIBLE IS UNIQUE

- In its continuity
- In its circulation
- In its translation
- In its survival

A book of this stature deserves the careful consideration of every thoughtful and intelligent person. It does not prove that the Bible is true; it proves it is unique. This is the first step in considering the reliability of our biblical testimony.

THE BIBLE IS UNIQUE

I) In its continuity

Here is a book:

- Written over a 1,500 year span
- Written over 40 generations
- Written by over 40 authors from every walk of life including kings, peasants, philosophers, fishermen, poets, Statesmen, etc.
- Written in a variety of places: including a wilderness, dungeon, palace, while traveling and in the rigors of a military campaign
- Written during times of war and peace
- Written during moods of joy and despair
- Written on three continents: Asia, Africa, and Europe
- Written in three languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek

And yet, when analyzed, the Bible speaks with amazing unity and conformity on hundreds of controversial subjects about which there are hundreds of opposing opinions.

Why all this? Very simple! Any sincere individual seeking truth would at least consider a book with these unique qualifications.

II) Unique in its circulation

To print every Bible, New Testament, and individual portions of the Bible, published up to 1974, one printer would have to produce:

- 1 copy every 3 seconds
- 20 copies every minute
- 1,200 copies every hour
- 28,000 copies every day
- 10.5 million every year
- Non-stop for 245 years!

That's enough scripture to circle the earth with Bibles end to end over 1,000 times. That's girdling the globe!

From the Bible societies alone, as of 1974, 2 billion, 582 million Bibles (New Testaments or individual scripture portions) have been printed.

III) Unique in its translation

The Bible was the first major book in history to be translated into another language. The Septuagint (Greek word for 70), a Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament was initiated around 250 B.C. tradition alleges that it was done by 70 Jewish scholars working independently in 70 separate cubicles.

The Bible, to date, has been translated in part or whole into more than 1,280 languages. The Bible is now available in 95% of the world's languages and dialects.

IV) Unique in its survival through time

Ancient writing materials were greatly inferior to those we possess today. Primitive inks, animal skins, quill pens and papyri were the principal means of preserving and transcribing the scriptures.

With papyri and parchment being subject of continual decay, scribes were in the constant process of replacing worn and debilitated copies with new ones. Providentially, a great number of New Testament manuscripts have survived to our day, attesting to the carefulness and accuracy with which the scribes copied the scriptures. The proportionate amount of New Testament documents having survived through the centuries, compared with other ancient writings, is overwhelming.

When the number of surviving manuscripts of scripture are compared with the number of surviving manuscripts from other books or antiquity, the results are truly astounding. The Bible stands unrivaled in its manuscript attestation. No other document of antiquity ever begins to approach such numbers.

Work of antiquity	Number of Surviving Manuscripts
Pliny the Younger (History)	7
Plato (Tetralogies)	7
Caesar (Gallic Wars)	10
Tacitus (Annals)	20
Aristotle	49
Sophocles	193
Demosthenes	200
Homer (Iliad)	643
New Testament	24,633

Homer's Iliad is second among works of antiquity in manuscript authority with 643 manuscripts that still survive. The New Testament alone has 24,633.

The following is a breakdown of the number of surviving manuscripts for the New Testament:

Greek	Number of Surviving Manuscripts
Uncials (capital letters)	267
Minuscule (small letters with no break between words)	2,764
Lectionaries (selected portions of scripture)	2,143
Papyri	88
Recent Finds	47
	Total 5,309
Latin Vulgate	10,000
Ethiopic	2,000
Slavic	4,101
Armenian	2,587
Syriac Peshitta	350
Bohairic	100
Arabic	75
Old Latin	50
Anglo Saxon	7
Gothic	6
Sogdian	3
Old Syriac	2
Persian	2
Frankish	1
	Total 24,633

Unique through persecution:

The Bible has withstood the vicious attacks of its enemies as no other book. Seeking to destroy any vestige of its truth, the final facsimile of its pages, faithful men and women have been tortured, homes and villages burned and churches pillaged by godless skeptics consumed with bitter hatred for God's book.

In A.D. 303 roman emperor Diocletian issued an edict to destroy both the Christians and their sacred book. In response to the edict, roman soldiers went throughout the empire razing churches to the ground, burning the scriptures, freeing the empire from the hated curse of Christianity and the Bible. Twenty-five years later, Constantine, the emperor following Diocletian, commissioned Eusebius to prepare 50 copies of the scripture at the government's expense!

Voltaire, the noted French skeptic and infidel, who died in 1778, predicted that in one hundred years from his time Christianity would be swept from existence and passed into history. But what happened? Fifty years after his death, the Geneva Bible society moved into his house and used his printing press to produce thousands of Bibles to be distributed worldwide! Voltaire has passed into history, not the Bible.

Unique through criticism:

A more subtle attempt in destroying the Bible is the undermining of the Bible's veracity and trustworthiness. Through destructive textual criticism, many theologians and critics relegate the Bible's influence through "the assured results of higher criticism".

The "assured results" are no longer so assured. Interestingly enough, the original basis for the "documentary hypothesis" (dividing the authorship of the Pentateuch among four anonymous writers) and other higher critical schemes have been conclusively disproven by archaeology. This does not seem to dissuade the higher critic, he still teaches the "assured results" as factual.

Quotable quote: Bernard Ramm

"A thousand times over, the death knell of the Bible has been sounded, the funeral procession formed, the inscription cut on the tombstone, and committal read. But somehow the corpse never stays put."

"No other book has been so chopped, knifed, sifted, scrutinized, and vilified. What book on philosophy or religion or psychology or belles letters of classical or modern times has been subject to such a mass attack as the Bible? With such venom and skepticism? With such thoroughness and erudition? Upon every chapter, line and tenet?"

"The Bible is still loved by millions, and studied by millions."

*Protestant Christian evidences (Chicago: moody press, 1957), pp. 232, 233

The Bible is unique: having no like or equal

Admittedly, this does not prove that the Bible is the word of God. But, it does factually show the Bible is unique. It takes us one giant step forward in considering its reliability and trustworthiness. Any person, honestly seeking for truth, would certainly consider a book with these astounding qualifications.

These scribes followed strict disciplines in regard to scriptures. With meticulous care and fidelity these men were pledged to fulfill the following conditions in copying the scriptures:

- Scroll must be written on skin of clean animal
- Prepared for use in synagogue by only a Jew
- Fastened together with strings from clean animal
- Each skin must contain specific number of columns, Equal throughout the entire book
- Length of each column must not extend over less than 48 lines or more than 60 lines
- Column breadth must consist of exactly 30 letters
- Must use a specially prepared recipe of black ink
- Authentic copy must be the example
- Copy nothing from memory
- Between every consonant the space of a thread
- Between every section the breadth of nine consonants
- Between every book, three lines
- The Pentateuch must terminate exactly with a line
- Copyist must sit in full Jewish dress
- Reverence the scripture and the name of God so, that a fresh quill would be used to pen that sacred name, and to refuse to acknowledge the presence of a king when writing that name
- Must produce master copy.

The Masoretes edited and standardized the Hebrew text, adding the vowel points to insure proper pronunciation. They went even further in their disciplines:

- Copy only letter by letter; t-t; h-h; e-e; etc.
- Count the number of times each letter of the alphabet occurs in each book
- Calculate the middle word
- If more than three mistakes exist - destroy the manuscript

Is it any wonder that the biblical manuscripts have survived with such continuity and accuracy? What might appear as superfluous trivia, in effect manifests the scribes deep respect for the scriptures. The Talmudic and Masoretic scribes were anxious that not one jot, tittle or the smallest part of a letter of the law pass away or be lost.

Why then do we have so few Old Testament manuscripts? Does this not negate the bibliographical accuracy of the Old Testament?

The very absence of ancient manuscripts, when the rules of copyists are considered, confirms the reliability of the copies. The scribes were so convinced that when they finished transcribing a manuscript they had an exact duplicate, they would give the new copy equal authority. The old ones were buried or destroyed so that none could misunderstand the text through blurred or indistinct lettering.

Quotable quote: Sir Frederick Kenyon

"The same extreme care which was devoted to the transcription of manuscripts is also at the bottom of the disappearance of the earlier copies. When a manuscript had been copied with the exactitude prescribed by the Talmud, and had been duly verified, it was accepted as authentic and regarded as being of equal value with any other copy. If all were equally correct; age gave no advantage to a manuscript; on the contrary, age was a positive disadvantage, since a manuscript was liable to become defaced or damaged in the lapse of time. A damaged or imperfect copy was at once condemned as unfit for use."

*Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts (New York: Harper And Soothers, 1941), P. 43.

It is with extreme confidence that we can affirm the historical accuracy and reliability of scripture. With assurance, we can hold our Bible in our hands and say we possess "the veritable word of God".