**Reliability and Inspiration of the Bible**

I.  General introduction to the issues involved.  Define Lower vs Higher Criticism,  How to think about such questions?  What kind of evidences should we use and what kinds should we hold onto gently?    This intro will be the segway from the first class (the one on existence of God which also covered intro to apologetics in general)

II.  NT documents

III.  NT canon

IV.  OT documents

V.  OT canon

VI. Contrast:  Extrabiblical documents

VII.  Contrast:  Scriptures of other religions.

VIII. Definition and Defense of Biblical Inspiration

IX. Definition and Defense/Explanation of Biblical Inerrancy

X. The Question of Biblical Contradictions.

XI. Internal Evidence for Inspiration

 A. Consistency of Message and Doctrine

 B. The Bible is the Best Book Of….

**I. General Introduction:**

A. This subject is not an offensive apologetic weapon. It is a defensive one. You will not convict people of Jesus and win them to God using manuscript evidence (although in the process of disproving supposed contradictions and discussion inspiration, you might be able to make a point!)

On the other hand, I get a lot of questions on this topic. More, by far, than any other!

B. How do I deal with the questions and examples coming from skeptics of Christianity?

1. Prepare yourself to answer (1 Pet 3:15). You do not have to be ready to give an answer to every question, but you should at least have an answer prepared for the common questions. You do not want to let yourself (or Christianity) look foolish.

2. 1 Pet 3:15-16 Do it with gentleness and respect. We do not use the weapons of the world (2 Cor 10:4-5) Our weapons are the truth, love, etc., not ad-hominem arguments, circular reasoning, and etc.

Does this put us at a disadvantage? According to worldly wisdom it does, but for those who are seeking truth, it will work.

3. Do not over reach/Do not oversell your evidence. (ex: using Job or Isaiah to prove scientific reliability of the Bible, NT text is 99.9% accurate, History proves the Bible, etc. )

4. Do not paint yourself into a corner. (especially on inerrancy. Be careful of your definition there)

 Translations are not inspired, so we are not reading the inspired scripture.

 Do not base your faith on shaky ground (the Magdalena Manuscript, The James Ossuary)

5. Do not undersell your evidence either.

 Ex: Quotes of apostolic fathers: critics: these are not even exact quotes, so they provide no support for the NT text. That’t not true!!! They prove that the NT books were considered inspired at that time, and they ARE corroborating evidence to the text. If we have not overreached, then we are fine on this.

6. Leave some ammunition in your gun. Always a good plan.

7. Do not be intimidated. You have the advantage of being right, at least in the big picture. God is real, Muhammad is not a prophet of God, the Bible actually is inspired. Jesus really did rise from the dead.

Some sample questions on this general topic, just from the last month at my web site:

**Please clear up for me a doubt about the difference between two scriptures. The scriptures are, Genesis 46: 27 - which says 70 members and Jacob went to Egypt, and Acts 7: 14 - which says 75 members and Jacob were invited by Joseph. Who are those 75?  Name them one by one. Who did not go to Egypt ? According to these two scriptures 5 persons did not go to Egypt. Name them one by one.  I am enthusiastically waiting for your reply.**

Answer:

You can find the list of seventy in Genesis 46:27.  I will let you write out the list for yourself.  However, I might have a candidate for the five extra names (see below).

As for why Acts 17:14 mentions 75 people, I believe this is probably because the Septuagint translation of Genesis 46:27 has 75 rather than 70 going down into Egypt. Apparently, Paul (or perhaps Luke) followed the Septuagint on this one. Luke spoke Greek and probably was not even able to read Hebrew. The Old Testament used by the early church was the Greek Septuagint translation. Naturally, Luke quoted from this translation, as did most of the New Testament writers.

How did the change from 70 to 75 enter the Greek Septuagint translation?  Did this happen at the time the translation was made, or were there Hebrew manuscripts with 75 in Genesis 46:27 before the Septuagint translation was made from the Hebrew?  I do not know.

The next question is how the change from the original 70 to 75 who went down to Egypt.  There are two possible reasons for this which make sense.  The first possibility is a copying error.  The copying of numbers in Hebrew is very easily subject to errors. The number system for the Jews was like Roman numerals. In other words, letters are used as numbers. Add to this the fact that some of the letters used as numbers are very similar. For this reason, copying errors were inevitable when Hebrew manuscripts were transcribed. They did not have copy machines back then! Therefore, we should be a bit careful to make too much about numbers in the Old Testament. The example you gave is not the only one in which, if we forget about the problem of copying numbers, we might be confused or might think there was some sort of error in the original. When you see an account of a battle in Judges and it says that 6000 soldiers died, you would do well to remember that this may have originally been 6600 or 600. I believe it is likely that the difference between 70 in Genesis 46 and 75 on Acts 17 is because of a simple copying error, either in the New Testament, or more likely in the Old Testament which crept in.

Does the fact that there are copying errors in the Hebrew and Greek text bring into question the inspiration of the Bible? I say no. It is the originals which are inspired, not the copies. God chose to use human beings, both to record the scripture, and to make copies. Also, translators are human. I suppose God could have miraculously moved the hands of all the thousands of copyists of the Greek and Hebrew texts, but he chose not to do so. I have studied this issue extensively, and have concluded that no important Christian doctrine or theological point is affected by the kinds of spelling, word-order and number-copying errors which have come into the Hebrew and Greek text. I say this because we can compare literally thousands of different Hebrew and Greek manuscripts of the Bible. We can compare the Masoretic Hebrew text of Isaiah from about AD 1000 to the Septuagint and the Dead Sea Scroll versions from about 200 BC, for example. The result is that the kinds of changes which have entered the text are truly minor.

There is a second possible explanation of the reason that the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament came to have 75 people mentioned as having gone down to Egypt.  Scholars believe that the Septuagint count of 75 may come from the five sons of Ephraim mentioned in 1 Chronicles 7:14-21. Their names are Ashriel, Machir, Selophehad, Peresh and Shuthelah. This speculation may or man not be correct.  The Jews at the time the Septuagint translation was made may have had access to information we do not have. We cannot be sure.

The question you raised is an example of the claim I made above that such errors are not significant. I do not see how the Christian message is affected in any way by the difference between 70 and 75 people who went down to Egypt. Add to this the fact that in modern times we have sufficient access to the manuscripts that in most cases we can decide which was the original. The evidence is strong that the original number in Genesis was 70, not 75, as almost all Hebrew texts have this.  However, the means and reason that this was changed to 75 in the Septuagint is not certain.  Whether this was a copying error or an adjustment done on purpose to take into account the other five sons, I am not sure.

By the way, there is a third possibility, which is that the 75 in Acts 7:14 is the number of those invited to go down to Egypt, while the 70 in Genesis 46 is the ones who actually accepted the invitation and went down to Egypt.  In this case, the five mentioned above from 1 Chronicles 7:14-21 may have been invited to go down to Egypt, but did not go with the rest of the family to Egypt.  Acts 7:14 mentions those sent for, not those who actually went.  This solution is a bit ad hoc, but I cannot eliminate it as a possible explanation.  To me, it is more likely that Paul/Luke used the Septuagint.  I am sorry to have more than one possible answer, but this is sometimes the case with such questions.

I hope this helps.

John Oakes

**How do you feel about this article?** [**http://www.islamic-awareness.org/Bible/Text/Bibaccuracy.html**](http://www.islamic-awareness.org/Bible/Text/Bibaccuracy.html) **Do you believe that the New Testament we have in our Bibles are similar to the originals?**

Edwin:

This is an easy question.  Yes, I believe that the best Greek manuscript we have today is virtually an exact copy of the original documents.   I have a great deal of material to back up  this claim.  How exact?  Well, that depends on how you measure.  In terms of number of words about which there is a reasonable doubt, 98+% minimum.  In terms of important doctrines and theology, I would say there is no significant doubt.   If you are interested, why not come to our class on this exact topic next weekend in San Diego.  I see you are at UC Riverside.  There are at least two coming down from Riverside for our class.  Please come.  It will be from 8:30-3:00 Sept 10 and Sept 17.  More info at the front page of my web site.

Muslims have VERY good reason to try to undermine the reliability of the New Testament text.  I have found their treatment of this subject generally to be very sloppy and biased.  The reason they do this is that if the New Testament is an accurate record of the original inspired writings, then it is impossible to be a Muslim.  The Qu'ran calls the Old and New Testament scripture.  It also says that Jesus was not crucified and that Jesus is not the Son of God.   Well, they cannot have it both ways.  The only way to save the Qu'ran is to claim the New Testament was corrupted (the same applies to the Old Testament as well).  The problem with this is that the evidence simply is not there.  Muslim apologists try to make ludicrous claims that Constantine changed the New Testament or that the original Bible writers never claimed that Jesus was God.   These charges do not stand up to even the most shallow level of criticism.

I have looked at the web site you reference below.   I will have to say that this gentleman is considerably less "sloppy" than the typical Muslim apologist, and I feel he deserves credit for this.  However, you need to take all this with a big grain of salt.  Who is this person?  (a Muslim)  What is his agenda?  (to undermine belief in the New Testament at any cost)  How does he weigh his evidence?  (so as to maximize doubt in any way he possibly can, legitimate or not)   His main sources are non-believers with a similar stake, not in arriving at a reasonable conclusion, but at discrediting the New Testament.

For example he will count the number of possible errors, most of which are a single word, count each of these as a verse, then count the percent of the New Testament which has possible errors using this formula.  If the average sentence has 15 words, and the great majority of possible Bible errors are spelling of a word, a change of a single preposition, the loss or gain of a single word, then this method of calculation exaggerates the size of the supposed errors in the Bible by much more than 1000%.  He makes the illogical conclusion that the more evidence we have, the more in doubt the original text is.  Time and time again he commits the logical fallacy of the false dilemma.   He does point out some biased Christian apologetical conclusions, which is legitimate, but he fails to evaluate his own methods, which are more biased than nearly all those he criticizes.

I have studied this subject for years, read many books by the most skeptical critics of the Bible, studies the manuscripts, looked a dozens of specific examples.  My conclusion is that we have a nearly perfect New Testament.  For virtually all the variants, the differences are either extremely minor or the most likely original can be established with great certainty.  For the roughly 60 or so passages about which there is some sort of significant doubt, even most of these are still relatively small differences in terms of their impact on the meaning of the passages in question.  I believe that there is no significant important Christian doctrine which is brought into doubt by any of these questions about which there is a significant doubt.  Again, to establish this conclusion would require a very long discussion, so I suggest you come to our class next week!

This brings me back to the Muslim apologist writing this extremely biased paper.  What is his purpose?  It is quite obvious if you read the Muslim apologists.  Their entire purpose in this venture is not to establish the truth.  This is abundantly clear.  The ONLY reason the study this subject is so that they can cast as much doubt on the reliability of the New and Old Testament as possible.  Why?  Because the Qu'ran declares the writings of the Old Testament and the New Testament to be inspired prophecies and because there are unmistakeable contradictions with the Qu'ran. The ONLY way for Islam to be saved in this intolerable situation is to try to undermine the reliability of our received text.

Here is where their efforts fall completely flat.  The contradictions between the New Testament and the Qu'ran are in areas that even the most radical critic of the text cannot claim the New Testament is in doubt about.  Here is why.  The Qu'ran states unequivocably that Jesus was not crucified.  Does any supposed textual change put into doubt that the original New Testament writings had Jesus being crucified?   The Qu'ran also is quite clear that Jesus was not God.   Do these supposed big New Testament manuscript changes bring into doubt whether the New Testament writers believed Jesus was divine?  Obviously not.   There are other problems with the Qu'ran.  It has John the Baptist's father's period of being mute to be three days rather than nine months.  This clearly cannot be justified.  Is the passage in Luke on this topic subject to a manuscript error?  Of course not!  The efforts of this man amount to a red herring.  Unless he can make the blatant errors of fact in the Qu'ran, if compared to the New Testament's depiction of Jesus, go away, then why are we even talking about this?  The purpose of this man is to find a way to simply ignore the New Testament, and to claim that the Qu'ran got Jesus right and that the New Testament does as well, except that it was changed later.  This thesis absolutely CANNOT be sustained by even the most radical interpretation of the evidence.   Therefore, his argument is in vain.

John Oakes

**You write "All four gospels are quoted in patristic writings (a technical term which means writings by the early church "fathers.") before AD 100 in books such as the Epistle of Barnabus, the book of Clement of Rome and the Didache." There is nothing said about the four Gospels in the "Clement of Rome". It is really pathetic that you must base supernatural ideas on false evidence and then you show this false evidence to the masses. I'd really like to get a response as to where I can find the gospels mention in the "Clement of Rome". I'm curious to know what words you rummaged through to come up with this ridiculous accusation.**

Answer:

I sense a lot of anger here. The use of words like "pathetic" and "ridiculous" are really not helpful if you want to engage in honest conversations. I want to encourage you to use a more respectful tone, even with those with whom you do not agree. In any case, I just gave a very quick little read of the Letter of Clement to Rome. I found a few quotations from the gospels as well as ones from the letters. Below is a sampling. Besides these, I found a number of allusions to the gospels and other New Testament Books. After each quote, I will have a very short comment.

**1Clem 13:1** Let us therefore be lowly minded, brethren, laying aside all arrogance and conceit and folly and anger, and let us do that which is written. For the Holy Ghost saith, Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, nor the strong in his strength, neither the rich in his riches; but he that boasteth let him boast in the Lord, that he may seek Him out, and do judgment and righteousness most of all remembering the words of the Lord Jesus which He spake, teaching forbearance and long-suffering.

This is a quote from **1 Corinthians 1:31**

**1Clem 13:2** for thus He spake Have mercy, that ye may receive mercy: forgive, that it may be forgiven to you. As ye do, so shall it be done to you. As ye give, so shall it be given unto you. As ye judge, so shall ye be judged. As ye show kindness, so shall kindness be showed unto you. With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured withal to you.

This is a quote from **Matthew 7:2**

**1Clem 15:2** For He saith in a certain place This people honoreth Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me.

This is quoting from either **Matthew 15:8 or Mark 7:6**

**1Clem 16:1** For Christ is with them that are lowly of mind, not with them that exalt themselves over the flock.

This is an allusion to **Luke 22:26 or Matthew 23:11**

**1Clem 34:8** For He saith, Eye hath not seen and ear hath not heard, and it hath not entered into the heart of man what great things He hath prepared for them that patiently await Him.

This is a quote from **1 Cor 2:9**

**1Clem 36:2** Through Him let us look steadfastly unto the heights of the heavens; through Him we behold as in a mirror His faultless and most excellent visage; through Him the eyes of our hearts were opened; through Him our foolish and darkened mind springeth up unto the light; through Him the Master willed that we should taste of the immortal knowledge Who being the brightness of His majesty is so much greater than angels, as He hath inherited a more excellent name. 1Clem 36:3 For so it is written Who maketh His angels spirits and His ministers aflame of fire 1Clem 36:4 but of His Son the Master said thus, Thou art My Son, I this day have begotten thee. Ask of Me, and I will give Thee the Gentiles for Thine inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Thy possession. 1Clem 36:5 And again He saith unto Him Sit Thou on My right hand, until I make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet.

These are quoting from **Hebrews Chapter one**

**1Clem 46:8** Remember the words of Jesus our Lord: for He said, Woe unto that man; it were good for him if he had not been born, rather than that at he should offend one of Mine elect. It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about him, and be cast into the sea, than that he should pervert one of Mine elect.

This is an allusion/quote from either **Matthew 18:6 or Mark 9:42**

**1Clem 56:4** For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth.

A quote from **Hebrews 12:6**.

The letter of Clement to Rome is saturated with scripture. Clement uses the Old Testament quite a bit more than the New Testament, but I notice that he uses them in the exact same manner. He quotes (not always perfectly... often paraphrasing) from the Gospels, the letters and the Old Testament; each being used with equal authority. So, I am not planning on changing my statement. I have published 1200+ Q & A's. I occasionally make mistakes. I have corrected at least a couple dozen errors of fact and am desirous of all input and corrections. However, in the future, I suggest two things: 1. That you try to check if the criticism is legitimate and 2. That you treat me and others as you would want to be treated, which is with respect. I hope this helps.

John Oakes

**Is it true that Ezra was the individual responsible for the final Old Testament canon? I heard from my religious studies T.A. that he changed some of the Old Testament stories to seem a bit more "spiritual". For example the story of David, and the destruction of the fall of the first temple due to "sin" were supposedly changed by Ezra. I was somewhat bothered by this so I went online to do some research and the only thing I could find was the biblical canon online article on Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biblical\_canon) and this online article (http://www.keithhunt.com/Canold6.html) Is it possible that these men (Ezra, Nehemiah, and the 120 scribes and sages) could have distorted the "original" Old Testament or better yet the original stories? Can we trust these stories as truth?**

Answer:

There is literally zero evidence that Ezra changed any of the Old Testament books. This is an extremely speculative theory which, like I said, is not supported by any evidence. Let me add to this another reason you should reject this questionable theory. I have not met the TA in question, but from what he said, you can conclude that he ASSUMES that the Bible is not inspired by God. The key word here is assumes. In other words, he has already decided that the Old Testament is entirely of human origin. The problem with this assumption is that it is wrong. When scholars begin an argument by making an assumption which is patently false, we can predict the reliablity of their theories.

How do I know he is wrong (that the Bible is not inspired)? Because of the evidence. The fufilled Old Testament prophecies, the consistency of message, the miracles which testify to the message, the scientific accuracy and the historical accuracy of the Old Testament are all clear indiciation that the Old Testament is inspired by God. If it is inspired by God (which I will admit is an assumption for this particular argument), then your TA's theory is clearly wrong.

There is another reason, apart from the argument above, that this theory is almost centainly not true. What do we know about Ezra? What we know about him is principally found in the books of Nehemiah and Ezra. From these books, we can get a good feeling for his character. We can see Ezra reading the scriptures to the people and giving the interpretation. Nehemiah eight is the record of this event. What is clear is that Ezra had a deep and abiding respect for the inspired Word of God. The theory that he would change the scripture to agree with his opinion is really outrageous. In the modern context, your TA could be convicted of libel for his unsupported slur on the good character of Ezra. This theory requires us to ignore the only real information we have about Ezra. It requires inventing a person for the purpose of creating a theory. This is NOT good scholarship at all.

Is it possible that Ezra could have changed the inspired Word of God in order to insert his own opinion on God's word? I suppose that we should not simply dismiss this theory without consideration. But if we allow that the Bible is inspired by God and if we accept the biblical picture of the actual person Ezra (or Nehemiah for that matter), then this theory is almost without a doubt false.

As for more material on the Old and New Testament canon, Wikipedia can be useful. Generally they are not as strongly biased as your TA, but let me suggest another source. It is my book Reasons For Belief (available at www.ipibooks.com). There is a whole chapter on this topic. You will find other references there as well. Was Ezra responsible for the Old Testament Canon? This is one theory. I would say that we have no strong evidence that he put together the canon, but he is about as good a candidate we have as an Old Testament figure who quite likely had a significant impact on the canon of the Old Testament. The fact is that we simply do not know exactly how the Old Testament canon was formed. I believe that it formed gradually over several hundred years as a consensus of the Jewish teachers. It is very likely that Ezra commented on the canon, and possible that he had a major influence, but the evidence for this is weak.

My final comment is that you can trust the Old Testament stories to be real. The entire Bible is inspired by God (2Tim 3:16). God did not leave his authoritative writings to chance (2 Pet 1:19-21). Do not be intimidated by biased teachers who have assumed that God does not exist. They are wrong and their assumptions color all their theories.

John Oakes, PhD

**Is it possible that the disciples made up the story of Jesus? I have heard several claims that the disciples could have just invented a Messiah-like figure based the Old Testament prophecies that predict the Messiah. For example the the prophecy on 30 silver coins (which is explained in Zecharia and not in Jeremiah, Matthew 27:9), and other prophecies such as the birth of the messiah in Nazareth, and the crucifixion. Aside from the eyewitness accounts is there any other source that points towards the gospels not being a fictional made-up story? I'm really not trying to have a cynical tone in anyway. I just want to know if there's a plausible explanation to this question.**

Answer:

This is a good questions. Critics of Christianity want to create the false impression that the entire biography of Jesus, as well as the theology of the New Testament was a sheer invention of Christians a couple of generations after the fact. The problem with this theory is that it cannot be substantiated by any facts. This is a deceitful and unscholarly opinion which is dressed up in scholarly-sounding rhetoric.

Let me explain why I say this. First of all, there is the fact that the Church was established in Jerusalem, by the eye-witnesses of the ministry of Jesus, in the immediate time frame of the death and resurrection of Jesus. There is a lot of reason to believe this. First of all, there is the personal testimony of the early disciples. The book 1 Thessalonians was written in AD 51. Galatians was probably written in AD 49 or soon thereafter. These books were clearly written to colonies of Christian believers which had been established for several years in Asia Minor (present-day Turkey). Therefore we can say with confidence that the Church had spread to Asia Minor by at least AD 45. This only makes sense if the story in Acts is accepted, which is that the Church was established as a principally Jewish group at least in the early 30s in Palestine.

The thesis of these people who want to make the Christian gospel some sort of myth is that these Christians were duped into believing in a Jesus who was not even real. This is within just a couple of years after the actual Jesus was walking around, when tens and perhaps even hundreds of thousands of eye-witnesses to his actual acts and sayings were still alive and for whom all of this was a very fresh memory. The idea that a bunch of scheming liars could invent a Jesus who was not even real and thrust this invention on the people in Palestine and Asia Minor who lived in the same place and time and who knew the person Jesus intimately is really not sustainable.

The reason the gospel writers say that Jesus fulfilled the prophecy that the Messiah would be crucified (Psalms 22:16) is because he, in fact, was crucified. This is a historical fact, attested to by thousands of early Christians, supported by Jewish (Josephus) and Roman (Tacitus and others) historians. The reason the gospel writers say that he was pierced and that he was silent when accused, as prophesied in Isaiah 53 is because he was, in fact, pierced and silent when accused. Such a story could not be invented because it circulated widely in the 30s AD, as we can tell from the evidence of the early Church, when tens of thousands of eye-witnesses were still around to refute such invented claims. Really.... The idea that the apostles would make up the idea that Jesus was from Galilee (fulfilling the prophecy in Isaiah 9:1) or that he rode into Jerusalem on a donkey (Zechariah 9:9), given the thousands who were available to refute the story is not a tenable theory. If these things were recorded 100 years later, such a conspiracy of lies would be possible, but that is not the case. These oral stories were circulated in the 30s and 40s and written down in the 50s. These are the facts. Making the entire gospel message, the resurrection of Jesus, his birth in Bethlehem, his claim to be the Son of God up out of whole cloth, less than ten years after the events is not a believable proposal.

So, these critics are left with certain small examples of fulfilled prophecies which they feel they can pour some doubt on, hoping that the potential believer will miss the big picture, which is that Jesus obviously is the Messiah, based on the undeniable examples of fulfillment. Therefore they throw out the harder examples, such as the ones you mention.

However, even these favorite examples (which do nothing to change the big picture, which is that Jesus fulfilled the messianic expectation) are red herrings. Let me deal with the examples you have seen. For example, you refer to the supposed contradiction in Matthew 2:23 in which Matthew tells us that Jesus fulfilled the prophecy that the Messiah will be called a Nazarene. Where is this prophecy, the critic asks? The answer is that it is several places in the Old Testament. For example in Jeremiah 23:5 and 33:15 it is prophesied that God will send the Branch of Jesse to save Israel. Hebrew for branch is nazer, which, of course is the root of the word Nazarene. So, Jesus was a Nazarene, both the fact he was raised in Nazareth, and because he was the direct descendent, the "branch" of Jesse, the father of David. This "error" of Matthew is, in fact, not an error at all, but a prophecy fulfilled by Jesus.

Then there is Matthew 27:9. This one is a bit harder to deal with. We know that it was prophesied in Zechariah 11:12-13 that God would be "sold" for 30 pieces of silver and that the money would be "thrown to the potter." We know that this is what happened, as reported by the gospel writers. They reported this in the gospels and by oral tradition at a time when the eye-witnesses to the events were still alive to refute the claims if they wanted to. Of course, there is the issue of the fact that Matthew says this prophecy came from Jeremiah. To make an issue of this is to forget the big picture, which is that the prophecy of the 30 pieces of silver and the potter's field were exactly fulfilled by Jesus, and the prophecies were written over 500 years before the events. The authorship of the prophecy is a relatively minor issue. How are we to explain the fact that Matthew gives credit for this prophecy to Jeremiah? One possibility is that Jeremiah did in fact make this prophecy. Zechariah may even have gotten his information from Jeremiah, as they lived within just a few years of each other (Jeremiah died some time around 570 BC, while Zechariah was probably born at about that time). We simply do not know exactly to what Matthew is referring to. It is entirely possible that he had access to information which we do not have. However, to turn the fact that we are not sure what Matthew is referring to into proof that Jesus did not in fact fulfill the prophecies is to miss the whole point. Even if we could grant that Matthew got the name of the prophet wrong (something I am not at all willing to concede), this really does not change the fact that Jesus did what he did and that he fulfilled all the prophecies of the Messiah, including where he was born, where he was raised, how he was killed, when he was killed, how much he was betrayed for, how he came in to Jerusalem and many more.

In summary, you can rest assured that the gospel description of the events of Jesus and the theology of Jesus is no myth. We have plenty of evidence that he did in fact say what the gospels say he said and that he did in fact fulfill the prophecies. We cannot literally prove every word recorded in the gospels was actually said by Jesus. This would obviously be impossible, but the big picture is clear. The gospel accounts are honest depictions of those who knew Jesus and spent time with him, or of those who had close and continued contact with those who knew Jesus intimately. These are not myths, and those who say so are putting forth a theory which cannot be sustained by the evidence or common sense.

John Oakes

I have been researching the historical reliability of the New Testament because I started having doubts about the Gospels. Fortunately I have found an abundant amount of evidence on the Gospels, and the historical evidence behind them. Some of the books that I have been reading are, "The Historical Reliability of the Gospels" by Craig Blomberg, "Reasons for Belief" by Dr. John Oakes, and "The Case for the Real Jesus"by Lee Strobel. However, there's one answer to a question that kind of shakes my confidence in the Gospels. **I have read time and time again that the gospels (Matthew, Mark, and John) were passed down by oral tradition. How do we know that the oral tradition passed down is authentic and eyewitness accounts? And why weren't the gospels written earlier? There seems to be a gap between Jesus' death A.D.30-33 and the first" gospel Mark 50-70 A.D. Is there any explanation to why they took so long to write the first gospel?**

Answer:

I am not sure I can give a definite answer as to why there was a significant amount of time between the gospel events and when the gospels themselves were written. One thing to bear in mind is that when scholars give dates for the writing of the gospels, they generally give the latest possible date. For example, scholars put Mark in the 60s or perhaps the 50s, but as far as I know, there is no way to rule out the possibility that it was written in the 40s or even earlier. So.... the numbers you see for the writing of the gospels of Mark and Matthew tends to be an estimate for the latest possible date, rather than the actual date. Luke and John are an exception to this. Given that Luke and Acts probably were written together, and given that Acts includes material from as late as AD 63, we know that this book was written later. Almost all scholars, including the most conservative ones, believe that John was written after Mark and Matthew.

So, as to Mark and Matthew, which are probably the first two written, let me address the question of oral tradition. It is clear that at least for a time, the gospel message was spread through the apostles and other inspired teachers. For the first few years, the gospel story was told as a first-hand or at most second-hand account of events which had happened in the region where the events happened. During this early period, there were enough eye-witnesses to the actual events that oral tradition could be corrected by feedback from those who heard the message preached. A number of studies of oral tradition have been done. These studies show that in a fairly closed society in which those hearing the tradition already know the tradition that is being spoken, the ability to pass on unchanged information is remarkable. Based on these studies, we can conclude that in the first twenty or so years, especially in the region of Palestine, a quite accurate oral tradition of the life and teachings of Jesus could be maintained.

Nevertheless, it is clear that as the gospel message spread significantly beyond Palestine and as time passed, the need for a written, and therefore unchanging, tradition of the life of Jesus arose. Mark and Matthew, and later Luke and John filled this need. The question arises: If, as evidence implies, the story of Jesus was carried by oral tradition for as much as twenty years, how can we trust as completely accurate the gospels which were written after twenty or so years? The answer is two-fold. Like already stated, studies show that oral tradition in a fairly closed society (such as among the mainly Jewish church in Judea) can be surprisingly well conserved. The second reason we can trust Mark and Matthew is that they were inspired writers. Like it says in 2 Peter 1:20-21, these writers were influenced by the Holy Spirit as they wrote. If we accept that God inspired these gospels, then accuracy issues are more or less dealt with.

I have addressed the problem of reliability, but have not really answered the part of your question about why the fairly long time gap before the first gospel was written. My answer is that we do not know for sure that there was not a written gospel account already in the 30s. Lack of clear evidence for a written gospel in the 30s is not proof that there was none. However, if we assume that the first written apostolic account was not until the 50s (a thesis that I do not assume at all, but which is believable), then the answer is that I am not really sure why God waited so long before putting in on the heart of Mark or Matthew to write down their accounts of the life of Jesus. Perhaps with the number of inspired teachers no one felt the need.

John Oakes

A new question has been submitted by Josh (divi1984@bears.unco.edu) on [09/05/11]: Could you go into a bit more depth concerning the inspiration of the Bible. I'm aware that 2 Timothy 3:16 states all scripture is inspired by God, but because it's in scripture, it's circular reasoning. I'm aware of Jesus' frequent quoting of the OT, so that's not the issue. I'm also aware that the canon of the NT was chosen by church leaders based on apostolic succession, but due to the fact that it is likely that the apostles wrote material not included in the Bible, how can we know (short of blind faith) that the church leaders made the correct decisions when determining the canon?

Thank you,

Josh Divine

Josh:

First of all, 2 Tim 3:16 is not circular reasoning.  It is a statement.  It is a claim.  It would only be circular reasoning if it was used as an argument for inspiration, which is not what Paul is doing.

Now, perhaps some Christians use 2 Tim 3:16 as evidence that the Bible is inspired.  I have never seen that done, but if it were, THAT would be circular reasoning.   When I use 2 Tim 3:16, I call this a claim, not an argument.  It is a claim which is either true or false.    It is our job as human beings to weight the truth of this claim.  I have done so to a very great extent and found the claim to be supported by the evidence.

When Paul said in 2 Tim 3:16 that all scripture is inspired by God, he was asking Timothy and those he taught to accept this by faith, but absolutely not by blind faith.  I assume you are aware of a vast array of evidence that the Bible is inspired by God.  If not, then just spend a good amount of time at my web site or perhaps you can read my book "Reasons for Belief" ([www.ipibooks.com](http://www.ipibooks.com)).  There are fulfilled prophecies, historical accuracy, consistency of message, scientific wisdom, the testimony of public miracles and much more.  The direct, concrete evidence for the inspiration of the New Testament is not as strong.  There is not as much history to check for inspired accuracy, there is not as much fulfilled prophecy, there are not as many statments relevant to science which can be checked for evidence for inspiration.

However, there is some of each of these in the New Testament.  Hebrews 11:3 is a statement which is consistent with cosmology.  Jesus prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem, the accuracy of Luke/Acts is legendary, the consistency of message between the New Testament and Old Testament is amazing.  The quality of the New Testament writings is evidence for their inspiration.  If you do not see this right away, you can read some of the uninspired writings in early Christianity such as 1 Clement, Didache, Epistle of Barnabas, Letters of Ignatius and others.  The difference in quality between the New Testament and these books is striking.

Nevertheless, I accept that ALL scripture is inspired by God, to a significant extent, on faith in the Bible as a whole and in God who inspired the parts of the Bible which are clearly inspired because of the evidence.  The signs mentioned in the previous paragraph is evidence that the New Testament is inspired.  I also believe, by faith, that God has sufficient concern that the contents of the Bible are inspired to make this happen.  Yes, faith in God is a major part of the reason I believe that the ENTIRE New Testament is inspired.

John Oakes

It goes back to Genesis 2: Are you sure God said you cannot eat from any tree in the garden? Satan’s tactic is to get us to doubt the reliability of God’s Word.

Satan will use Atheists, Agnostics, the popular media, Muslims, etc. He is not picky.

The arguments of folks like Bart Ehrman, Muslim apologists, etc are very sneaky. They are designed to create a window of doubt.

**II. Documentary Evidence for the New Testament.**

Some sample claims about the New Testament:

1. The gospels were written in the second century and are fabrications, designed to make Jesus into some sort of God, with virtually no historical content at all.

2. There were dozens of gospels in existence in the second and third century. There was no consensus about which of these “gospels” was the most reliable picture of Jesus. In the 4th century, Constantine became emperor, what is now the Orthodox position won out. At this time, all the other gospels were suppressed, and the New Testament documents which remain were edited to fit Orthodox doctrine.

3. Bart Ehrman: The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture. The New Testament was a very fluid document until well into the fifth century, with copyists feeling free to edit the text in order to make it fit their own theology.

How do we respond to these questions?

**A. Greek manuscript evidence.**

**B. Quotes for early church fathers.**

**C. The Question of errors in our current text.**

**manuscript**

For us, a manuscript will be any ancient document which contains all or parts of either the New of the Old Testament. The word literally means hand-written. Manuscripts may be in the original language or they may be a translation from the original language. The manuscripts are the basic materials available which can be used to attempt to reconstruct the original biblical writings.

**canon**

 The canon of either the New or the Old Testament is the officially accepted list of books to be included in the scriptures. How the canon of the New Testament and of the Old Testament was arrived at is a very important question to be dealt with in this chapter.

**scroll**

 A long piece of material, usually leather, which containes a number of pages of writing in rows, arranged in columns, designed to be rolled up and stored. This was the principal form of manuscripts before the time of Christ (2 Timothy 4:13).

**codex**

 A long piece of either leather or papyrus, folded up in a format basically like a modern book. This was the most common form of manuscripts after about 200 AD.

**papyrus**

 Papyrus is a reedy plant found mostly in the Nile delta. It was split open and rolled out. Horizontal and vertical layers were glued together to create a light and easy-to-use writing substrate. Unfortunately, papyrus is the least likely of the ancient writing materials to survive for long periods without disintegrating.

**vellum, parchment**

 These are both specially prepared kinds of leather which were commonly used as writing materials. Parchment was made of sheep or goat skins, while vellum was made of calf or antelope skins. When papyrus became scarce in the early centuries AD, vellum became the chief material for creating manuscripts.

**uncial**

 These are manuscripts which are written using all capital letters. The oldest Greek manuscripts are uncials.

**Cursive/miniscule**

 These are manuscripts which use both capital and small letters, similar to a modern style of writing. The later manuscripts—after about AD 800—are usually cursives.

**Palimpsest**

A manuscript which was recycled—used for a later copy of another text. Generally, we are interested in the older text which has been erased or covered over.

The manuscripts:

The manuscript evidence supporting the Greek New Testament is vastly superior to all ancient books, with the exception of the Hebrew Old Testament, to which it is somewhat superior.

The classic comparison of the number of manuscripts can be helpful (even if perhaps slightly misleading if not use properly).



By the way, you will see different numbers quoted. This depends on what one counts as a manuscript of a particular ancient document. Some say 5700 Greek manuscripts. Others give a larger number, because they count ancient Coptic, Latin, Syriac and other translations, which definitely are evidence which can support (or refute) the accuracy of the received text.

Be cautious about using this data. The sheer number of copies does not determine the reliability of the text. All scholars will tell you that quality is more important than quantity.

With this proviso, the numbers do not lie!!!

Two factors:

1. The sheer number of manuscripts.

2. The time span between the presumed original document and the oldest available manuscript copy.

The NT wins by every conceivable category by a huge margin on every count (including the quality of many of the documents).

Caesar’s *Gallic Wars vine vide vice* Written 58-50 BC Oldest manuscript in Latin AD 850—900 years later. There are about 10 Latin manuscripts, mostly only partial, to *Gallic Wars.*

Tacitus AD 100 4-1/2 of 14 *Histories* and 12 of 16 *Annals* survive. Only 2 Latin manuscripts—one from 9th, the other from the 11th century.

Livy 59BC to AD 17 Only 35 of his 142 books survive in only 20 manuscripts. One fragment from AD 400, the rest after AD 900. 20 manuscripts.

Herodotus and Thucydides. Both from 5th century BC. Both have 8 Greek manuscripts, both from about AD 900. More than 1300 years after the original.

For comparison, let us list and describe the most important manuscripts of the Greek New Testament, in order from older to less old.

Every manuscript is given a name according to a semi-official nomenclature

Uncials Capital letters. A, B, etc.

Papyri P21 Capital P with a superscript number.

1. Rylands Papyrus P52 Rylands Library, Manchester, England. Approx.. AD 125 John 18:31-33, 37-38.

2. Chester Beatty Papyri Several manuscripts and fragments. Chester Beaty Museum, Dublin, Ireland and U of M, Ann Arbor, Michigan. Approx. AD 200.

P45 Fragments of Mathew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts from very early 200s AD

P46 Rom 5:17-6:3,5-14, 8:15-25, 27-35, 10:1-11, 22, 24-33, 35, 16:1-23, 25-27. All of Heb. 1 & 2 Cor., Eph., Gal., Phil., Col., 1 Thess 1:1, 9-10, 2:1-3, 5:5-9, 23-28. AD 200

That this manuscript includes Hebrews is quite significant to the NT canon.

P47 Revelation Ch 9-17 3rd Century.

3. Bodmer Papyri A number of NT fragments, as early as AD 200, now in the Vatican Library, discovered by Martin Bodmer in 1952 in Egypt.

P66 AD 200 manuscript if the entire book of John. Does not include Jn 7:53-8:11 (woman caught in adultery) or Jn 5:3b-4 (angels stirring the waters)

P72 Jude, 1,2 Peter, 3rd century P75 Most of Luke, John approx. AD 200

4. Codex Vaticanus. B Approx AD 300-350. Vellum Uncial codex in 759 pages. Nearly the entire Greek New and Old Testaments, with partial omission of Hebrews and without 1,2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Revelation part of Genesis and some Psalms. Has been in the Vatican since at least 1481. Arguably, the most important New Testament manuscript, for its age, completeness and the general quality of the text. Clearly of the Alexandrian text type.

5. Codex Sinaiticus Ӝ Aleph Approx. AD 350. Vellum Uncial codex. Found by Tischendorf at St. Catherine’s Monastery on Mt. Sinai in 1844, supposedly found in a pile prepared for burning. At this point he only recovered 43 pages. He recovered the entire manuscript in 1859. Sold to Tsar of Russia, stored in St. Petersburg. Later sold to the British Library. Complete Greek Bible, plus Epistle of Barnabas and Shepherd of Hermas. Alexandrian text type. Contains many later “corrections” by later editors.

6. Codex Alexandrinus A. Approx AD 400. Of the Alexandrian text type. Moved from Alexandria to Constantinople to London in 1621. Contains entire Greek Old and New Testament, except a few pages of Matthew, two from 1 John and three from 2 Corinthians, plus the Letter of Clement to Rome and 2 Clement (probably not written by Clement). Located in the British Library. Gospels are generally of the Byzantine text type, with elements of Alexandrian, while the rest of the New Testament is clearly of the Alexandrian text type.

7. The Washington Manuscripts. Codex W, vellum. All four canonical gospels. Matthew, John, Mark, Luke (like Bezae) Includes Mark 16:9-14 with a unique ending to Mark. In the Smithsonian Museum. approx. AD 400. Date less certain than some other manuscripts. Mixed text type. Apparently copied from more than one manuscript.

Codex I 5th century, Alexandrian text of 1 Corinthians – Hebrews.

8. Ephraem Codex C This manuscript is a palimpsest (recycled, with the older writing underneath). 125 leaves of the entire Greek New Testament except 2 Thessalonians and 2 John, with a few other pages also missing or not readable. Approx. AD 450, Alexandrian text type, with some Byzantine elements.

9. Codex Bezae D Named after Calvin’s friend Theodore Beza who owned the manuscript. Approx. AD 450. “Western” text type but with affinity to a number of Latin versions, with Greek on one page and Latin on the other. Located at Cambridge University. Bezae has unusual textual subtractions and additions. Many interpolations which are clearly added to explain the original. All four gospels, plus Acts and part of 3rd John.

Etc…

Magdalena Manuscript P64 Magdalena Library, Oxford. A fragment of Matthew Matthew 3:5,26. AD 50-60? Probably not. More likely approx AD 175.

Uncial 057 Approx. AD 400. A fragment of Acts. Alexandrian type.

Codex Laudianus Ea 6th century, early form of Byzantine, first manuscript with Acts 8:37.

Codex Claromontanus AD 500. Letters of Paul. Considered to be Western text type.

Codex Regius L 8th century. Alexandrian. Includes Mark 16:9-20.

Text Types:

Alexandrian Often considered the oldest text type. Contains less interpolations than other text types (Jn 8, Acts 8, Mark 16, etc.) Used generally in the East. The earliest known translation of the New Testament into Coptic in the late 2nd century is clearly Alexandrian (which evidence might be slightly weakened because Coptic is an Egyptian language and Alexandria is in Egypt)

Western “The main distinction of the Western text type is love of paraphrasing.” Also, many additions and a small number of omissions unique to this text type. Generally, differences between Alexandrian and Western are fairly easily discounted. Often associated with Latin versions, and therefore called Western. But most manuscripts of this type were not found in the West. Codex Sinaiticus John 1-8 considered “Western.” Bezae and Claromontanus are the principle early examples. Some early translations of the Greek show that this textual line is fairly early.

Byzantine Generally only found in later manuscripts. Apparently, the Eastern Orthodox Church standardized the Greek text in the 6th century or so. As the West no longer used the Greek New Testament, within a short time, the Byzantine text became the standard text. It became the “Textus Receptus” of Erasmus and the source of most early Reformation translations of the Bible. It is characterized by some famous but poorly attested interpolations. The great majority of the 5700+ Greek texts are Byzantine.

Caesarean A big stretch. Based on a very small number of manuscripts. Use Matthew 27:16-17 as its main example.

Sir Fredric Kenyon, in a slight exaggeration said:

“The interval between the dates of the original composition and the earliest extant evidence becomes so small as to be in fact negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt about 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 New Testament may be regarded as finally established.”

Other Manuscript Evidence:

The NT was translated into Coptic, Syriac/Chaldean and Latin by the end of the 2nd Century.

1. Syriac Certainly translated by the second century, possibly earlier. Can provide commentary on the text of the NT in the second century.

 a. Curetonian Syriac Manuscript 5th century. In Old Syriac, from 2nd cent.

 b. Sinaitic Syriac (St. Catherine’s Monastery) 5th century. Also Old Syriac.

 c. Peshitta. 350 manuscripts, in a newer Syriac. A later translation, from the 5th century, so not as useful to reconstructing the NT.

2. Coptic. Egypt, Ethiopia. Also in the 2nd century. Generally supports the Alexandrian text.

3. Old Latin. Also translated about AD 150.

 a. 35 manuscripts of Old Latin, some from the 4th century.

 b. Vulgate. Jerome. AD 384. A much improved Latin Bible. He used the Greek and Hebrew for his translation. Became the standard Bible of the West.

B. Quotes from early Church Fathers. These are relevant both for accuracy and reliability of the text and for questions about the canonization of the NT.

1. Letter of Clement of Rome. About AD 95. Quotes from Matthew, Mark Luke (possibly only two of the three), Acts, Romans 1 Corinthians, Hebrews, James, 1,2 Peter.

Clement quotes the NT in exactly the same manner he does the OT. The letter is saturated with Bible quotes; about 5:1 OT/NT, which is fairly natural for late 1st century.

2. Didache. Late first century, some think as early as AD 70. Quotes or alludes to Matthew dozens of times.

3. Ignatius, bishop of Antioch. Died about AD 107.

Letter to Ephesians: Matthew, Luke, John, Romans, 1,2 Corinthians, Ephesians, 2 Timothy, James, 1 Pet.

Also quoted in other letters, 1 Tim, 2 Thess, Acts, Hebrews, Galatians, Revelation.

4. Polycarp writing to the Philippians in AD 120 quotes from Matthew, Mark, Luke, Acts, 1,2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, 1,2 Thessalonians, 1,2 Timothy, Hebrews, 1 Peter, and 1,3 John

5. Justin. About AD 150 Mentions four “memoirs of the apostles” (gospels) which, with “the writings of the prophets”, was read to the church on Sundays. Quotes or refers to all four gospels, Revelation, other NT books.

7. Irenaeus. AD 180. Quotes or alludes to every NT book.

**C. Textual Variations:**

150,000 variations? 200,000 variations? The Greek New Testament is riddled with errors and is completely unreliable.

**MISTAKES IN THE GREEK NEW TESTAMENT TEXT?**

This number greatly exaggerates the problem of NT textual errors.

With 5700 manuscripts, this amounts to 40 per manuscript. There were 400 corrections to the 2nd edition of the King James Version.

Remember, the text of an uncial manuscript contains all capital letters, with no spaces between the words, and with no punctuation. In this type of manuscript, if the end of a line was reached in the middle of a word, the copyist simply went to the next line in the middle of the word. For comparison, consider the passage below in uncial-like script.

NOTEVERYONEWHOSAYSTOMELORDLORDWILLENTERTHEKINGDOMOFHEAVENBUTONLYHEWHODOESTHEWILLOFMYFATHERWHOISINHEAVEN

The making of copying errors was very easy. Skipping a line, switching letters, missing a letter, copying a letter twice happened very easily.

For 95+% of the manuscript errors, the mistake is easily discovered and corrected. This has NO EFECT on the Greek NT text.

Errors:

1. Minor slips of the pen of a copyist. Easily corrected by comparison to other manuscripts.
2. Small changes such as an article being added or a singular being made plural, in an attempt by a copyist to “improve” the text. These have no effect on the meaning.
3. A copyist trying to “improve” the text by making two different accounts in the gospels identical. For example, if the Greek manuscripts exhibit two variant readings of a particular passage in Matthew, and if one of the two readings is identical to a parallel passage in Mark, scholars will lean toward using the reading of Matthew which is different from that in Mark. They do this on the assumption that a scribe had tried to make the two passages identical in an unfortunate but well-intentioned attempt to “improve” the text.
4. Interpolations. Copyist makes a note/explanation in the margin which later becomes included in the text. Byzantine and Western text has a number of these.

 4. Slight differences. For example, in Matthew 11:19, two slightly different readings are found in the Greek manuscripts. Some end with the phrase, “But wisdom is proved right by her children.” Others end with the phrase, “But wisdom is proved right by her actions.” In this case, the oldest and most reliable manuscripts, the Vatican and Sinai, have “actions,” while most of the later manuscripts have “children.” Despite the fact that a majority of manuscripts have the alternative reading, because the earliest manuscripts have “actions,” most English translations use the word actions.

This is the science of **textual criticism** (lower criticism, as opposed to higher criticism)

Sample “rules”:

a. Age and quality of witness is more important than quantity of manuscript evidence.

 By this standard, actions/works is preferred over children for Matthew 11:19. (Vaticanus,

 Sinaiticus)

b. If there are two texts of a gospel, one agrees with another gospel and the other does not, then

 probably the text was “harmonized.” By this standard, Matthew 11:19 is actions because it is

 different from Luke 7:35)

c. If there are two readings and one is more difficult (for example, Jesus said something hard to

 accept), then the more difficult reading is preferred. This is because scribes like to smooth

 over the rough spots that they believe they see. By this standard Matthew 11:19 is actions as it

 is the more difficult reading.

It has been estimated that there are approximately 60 potentially significant textual uncertainties in the NT. Even most of these are like Matthew 11:19.

However, a few of them are fairly significant. Here they are:

1. John 7:53-8:11. The story of the woman caught in adultery. None of the earliest and most reliable versions include this passage. Only Bezae has it. Others have it, but place it at the end of John. It is probably a very early tradition of the primitive disciples which was later inserted into John. Almost certainly it is a genuine story, but it was not part of the original book of John. This passage is not controversial because the story is so consistent with everything we know about Jesus.

2. Acts 8:37 and 1 John 5:7 (these three bear witness…) John 5:4 (angel troubles the water). These examples are listed together because the nature of the evidence is similar. In both cases, absolutely none of the earliest manuscripts include these passages. They are both rather transparent interpolations/attempts by scribes to “improve” the text to support orthodox doctrine. They found their way into the King James version because in 1611 only much later Greek manuscripts were available. None of the modern English translations include these passages, except in the marginal notes. Acts 8:37 first appears in a 7th century uncial. 1 John 5:7 first appears in a

3. Mark 16:9-20. This is an account of Jesus’ final words to his disciples. Virtually every Greek manuscript, including the Alexandrian, includes this passage.

Pro: Codex Alexandrinus, Bezae, one Old Syriac, Ephraem, Vulgate, some Old Latin, almost all newer manuscripts

Con: Codex Sinaiticus, Vaticanus, the other Old Syriac, other Old Latin manuscripts.

In the final analysis, one cannot say with absolute certainty whether this passage was in the original Mark or not. Our very oldest manuscripts lean against this passage, but not strongly.

Let us look at one other of the 60 or so:

Luke 3:22 Vat, Sin, Alex, etc have “You are my beloved Son, in you I am well pleased.”

Bezae and many early church fathers (Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria) and Old Latin have “You are my Son, today I have begotten you”

Mark 1:11 has “You are my beloved Son, in you I am well pleased.”

According to the quality of witness rule, the first reading is preferred, but according to the rule that the more difficult reading is preferred and that the divergent reading is preferred, we would choose “You are my Son, today I have begotten you.”

Another argument is that the “today I have begotten you” reading may have been taken from Psalm 2:7.

Ehrman argues that this was done to lessen the likelihood of adoptionist interpretation of Luke 3:22.

Others:

Heb 2:9 p 146 Ehrman

Even the hyper-critic Ehrman says:

*I do not think that the "corruption" of Scripture means that scribes changed everything in the text, or even most things. The original texts certainly spoke at great length about Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. The issues involved in the corruption of the text usually entail nuances of interpretation. These are important nuances; but most of the New Testament can be reconstructed by scholars with reasonable certainty -- as much certainty as we can reconstruct \*any\* book of the ancient world.*

Wescott/Hort Greek text of 1881 the best known and most carefully researched Greek text, but it does not reflect the latest manuscript finds and research. Possibly relied too heavily on Vaticanus and Sinaiticus.

To quote Wescott and Hort:

“The proportion of words virtually accepted on all hands as raised above doubt is very great, not less, on a rough computation, than seven-eighths of the whole. The remaining eighth therefore, formed in great part by changes of order and other comparative trivialities, constitutes the whole area of criticism” “ … amount of what can in anhy sense be called substantial variation is but a small fraction of the whole residuary variation, and can hardly form more than a thousandth part of the entire text.”

This is hyperbole. The amount of text in at least some sort of reasonable doubt is probably more like 1% rather than 0.1%

This brings us to our final conclusion on the matter:

Is any important Christian doctrine or theological teaching placed in doubt by any of these readings???

I say no.

**III. The New Testament Canon.**

Based on the use of the New Testament scriptures by the early church fathers, we can reasonably conclude the following:

1. A collection of Paul’s letters (perhaps not a complete one) was circulating as a group by the 90s AD, and was already accepted as Scripture.

2. A collection of the four gospels was circulating as a group, possibly in the 90s and more certainly in the very early first century, accepted as Scripture. The individual gospels were accepted as scripture before this.

3. By AD 150, something quite close to our current list of 27 New Testament books was already accepted as scripture, useful for reading in the churches. There was still some question about certain books: Hebrews, 2 Peter, 2,3 John, Jude Revelation at this date.

4. In the second and third century, certain non-canonical books were accepted as having at least some authority. These were Shepherd of Hermas, Didache, Letter of Clement of Rome and Epistle of Barnabas. They were “accepted for reading in the churches” but were never considered to be on the level of the canonical NT books.

Letter of Clement to Rome

Shepherd of Hermas in Codex Sinaiticus, mentioned in Muratorian Fragement as “worthy to read.”

Didache Mentioned by Origen as accepted by some

Epistle of Barnabas in Codex Sinaiticus

5. The canon of the New Testament was selected by consensus of the early church, based principally on evidence of apostolic authority (in other words, that the apostles themselves recognized these as inspired) and on antiquity of writing.

6. By 200 AD the canon of the New Testament was set, for all practical purposes, and has not changed since that date. (Origen mentions some books as late as AD 220 as still debated, but he himself had no doubt about these books)

Marcion, AD 140 created a gnostic “canon” which included an edited Luke and 10 letters of Paul. He rejected the Old Testament and any Judaizing tendencies of the New Testament, and thus rejected Matthew, Mark and John. This may have motivated orthodox Christians to begin to create their own canon.

Muratorian Fragment AD 190. The fragment is not complete Luke is the 3rd gospel, It lists all the other NT books except Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1 John, but part of the fragment is lost, so some or all of these may have been in the list.

Irenaeus AD 180 Four gospels. “For as there are four quarters of the world in which we live and four universal winds and as the Church is dispersed over all the earth, and the gospel is the pillar and base of the Church and the breath of life, so it is natural that it should have four pillars…..”

Origen AD 220 Almost certainly his canon was the same 27 books we use.

Athanasius AD 367 Gave a definite “canon” which is the same 27 books we use.

Besides, we have Codes Vaticanus f rom AD 325!!!

**IV Old Testament Manuscripts**

The elephant in the room: The Dead Sea Scrolls, but let us discuss the other evidence first:

A. The Masoretic Text.

B. The Dead Sea Scrolls.

C. The Septuagint and Other Translation

A. The **Masoretic Text**.

In the 500s-1000 AD the Masoretes (Jewish scribes), working in the area of Tiberias, in Galilee, produced a standardized Hebrew text, evaluating variant readings, disposing of those thought to be inferior.

Evidence is that these were careful scholars with good intentions, but they destroyed some of the evidence that could allow us to do considerable textual criticism on the Hebrew text.

1. **The Cairo Codex** (*Codex Cairensis).* A codex of the former and latter prophets dated at 895 AD.

2. **The Leningrad Codex of the Prophets.** This codex includes Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the twelve minor prophets. It is dated at 916 AD.

3. **The Leningrad Codex** (*Codex Babylonicus Petropalitanus)* This is the oldest Hebrew copy of the entire Old Testament. It was copied in 1008 AD.

Before even starting to copy the scrolls or codices, the scribe was required by the Masoretes to go through an elaborate ceremony. In order to preserve the integrity of the text, the Masorete scribes counted all the letters in the Old Testament. They kept track of such arcane details as the middle verse of the Pentateuch (Leviticus 8:7). They also found the middle verse of the entire Hebrew Bible (Jeremiah 6:7). They were aware of the middle word of the whole Old Testament, as well as the middle word of each book. They also kept record of the middle letter and verse of each book. Taking it to the extreme, they also counted the number of times each Hebrew letter appeared in each book and counted the number of verses which contained all the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. All this was intended to produce exact copies of the Scriptures. Imagine doing all this letter and word counting, and using it to check every copy of the entire Old Testament. And they did not have word processors!

But…. There is a LOT of time and a lot of opportunity for corruption of the text from 500 BC until AD 900!

The Jews had a law requiring them to destroy worn out manuscripts. This does not help us!

Talmud records instructions for making a copy:

A synagogue roll must be written on the skins of clean animals, prepared for the particular use of the synagogue by a Jew. These must be fastened together with strings taken from clean animals. Every skin must contain a certain number of columns, equal throughout the entire codex. The length of each column must not extend over less than forty-eight, or more than sixty lines; and the breadth must consist of thirty letters. The whole copy must be first lined; and if three words be written in it without a line, it is worthless. The ink should be black, neither red, green, nor any other color and be prepared according to a definite recipe. An authentic copy must be the exemplar, from which the transcriber ought not in the least deviate. No word or letter, not even a *yod* (a vowel mark), must be written from memory, the scribe not having looked at the codex before him…. Between every consonant the space of a hair or thread must intervene; between every word, the breadth of a narrow consonant; between every new section, the breadth of nine consonants; between every book, three lines. The fifth book of Moses must terminate exactly with a line, but the rest need not do so. Besides this, the copyist must sit in full Jewish dress, wash his whole body, not begin to write the name of God with a pen newly dipped in ink, and should a king address him while writing that name he must take no notice of him…. The rolls in which these regulations are not observed are condemned to be buried in the ground or burned; or they are banished to the schools, to be used as reading books.[[1]](#footnote-1)

But still, how effective were they at preserving the text? There is still that 1300 year gap!

B. The Dead Sea Scrolls.

First discovered in 1948 by an Arab boy looking for a lost goat.

Several caves in the desert hills near the Northwest corner of the Dead Sea, east of Jerusalem.

Put there by the Qumran/Essene community about AD 63 when the Jewish rebellion began?

Contents:

Mainly parchment scrolls, dated from about 250 BC to AD 50.

Most are documents peculiar to the Essene sect.

Many are biblical documents, from every OT book except Esther.

Entire Isaiah scroll 100 BC

1952 RSV Isaiah made 13 minor changes to the Masoretic, based on the DSS.

Some DSS have more affinity with the Masoretic text, some have more affinity with the Septuagint.

Other manuscripts:

1. 47 out of 57 pages of Samuel from 1st century BC.

2. Partial manuscript of 1 and 2 Samuel from 3rd century BC.

3. 40 of 57 pages of Exodus from 200 BC in paleo-Hebrew script.

F. F. Bruce:

The new evidence confirms what we already had good reason to believe—that the Jewish scribes of the early Christian centuries copied and recopied the text of the Hebrew Bible with utmost fidelity.

To get a feel for how significantly the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls moved the date of the earliest available manuscripts toward the time of the books actually having been written, consider the graph below.



 Last Oldest Oldest available

OT book Dead Sea manuscript before

written Scroll Dead Sea Scrolls

C. **The Septuagint and other translations.**

As with the Greek New Testament, the translations, especially the older ones, provide an excellent cross-check to the Masoretic text and the Dead Sea Scrolls.

1. Samaritan Pentateuch Done about 400 BC. A good testimony to the condition of the Hebrew Pentateuch at that time. Occasionally, this and other evidence has been used to reconstruct the Hebrew text.

6000 variations from the Masoretic—mostly minor spelling, especially of place and people names, word order and the like. Others fairly clearly reflect changes by the Samaritans for doctrinal reasons to suit their own sensibilities.

2. Septuagint Translation. (Greek: seventy) Done in Alexandria about 250 BC. This was the Bible of the early church. Even when it does not change the Hebrew text, it tells us the meaning of Hebrew words in 250 BC.

3. Old Syriac translation. About AD 100

4. Aramaic Targums. Aramaic translations about 0 AD

5. Quotes in the Jewish Talmud, Mishnah About AD 200

6. Vulgate, Jerome.

**Textual errors:**

With this rosy picture, the fact is that there are many textual errors in the Hebrew text.

Like Greek, Hebrew was written in a string of undivided letters.

Add to this in ancient Hebrew, there were no vowels.

Add to this the fact that with the work of the Masoretes, we have less manuscript evidence to use to correct spelling, word order and other unintentional errors.

Obviously, many copying errors arose.

This is especially true with names (Nebuchadnezzar vs Nebuchadrezzar) and numbers.

Hebrew numbers, like Roman numerals, were formed by letters—some quite similar.

Amerixan vs 510 or 51 or 5100 or 500 soldiers in a conflict. Context catches and corrects the spelling error, but not the numerical error.

The Hebrew letters *kaleth* (ד) and resh (ר) are very difficult to distinguish. Similarly, the letters *he* (ה) and *heth* (ח) could easily be mistaken for one another.

We should take the spellings of person and place names, as well as the numbers found in the OT with considerable caution.

Of course, these things are not essential to doctrine or theology.

**V. Old Testament Canon**

We have evidence from the Church Fathers of the process by which the NT canon was formed. We do not have such evidence for the Old Testament.

Some documents are less helpful than we might hope. The DSS and Septuagint both included non-canonical books, not necessarily because they were considered inspired.

Evidence which supports the currently accepted OT canon:

1. Jewish Targums, Talmud, Mishna. These provide strong evidence

2. The New Testament. Jesus and the New Testament writers quoted liberally from almost every Old Testament book. Jesus never quoted from apocryphal works. The only quote from the apocryphal works is in Jude.

3. Josephus. We do not have 10,000 books, but 22. These 22 are almost certainly our 39.

4. Council of Jamnia. AD 90-100 Confirmed that Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon should remain included in the accepted canon. Did NOT create an OT canon. Nevertheless, it provides corroborative evidence that the OT canon was fixed at that time.

5. OT Apocrypha. Perhaps motivated by the early church, which definitely used the OT apocrypha, the Jews definitively rejected these books in the first centuries AD.

Conclusion:

1. We have a nearly perfect Greek text, with perhaps 99+% accuracy and the small part which is in doubt has no significant doctrinal or theological implications for the Christian faith.

2. We have a Hebrew text which is outstandingly well preserved, despite the more than 1500 years over which it was copied by scribes. The text is not as well preserved as the Greek New Testament. However, as with the New Testament, we can conclude that there is most likely no significant doctrinal or theological implications for the Christian faith.

**VI. Compare/Contrast with extra-biblical writings which were given serious consideration for inclusion in the Bible.**

Brian Colon covered this.

A. OT Apocrypha.

C. Other Jewish Extra-biblical Writings (1 Esdras, 1 Enoch, etc.)

B. Heretical/Gnostic writings. Gospel of Thomas, Gospel of Peter, Gospel of Judas, etc.

 Not even accepted by the Gnostics as canonical!!!!

C. NT writings which were rejected for inclusion in the New Testament.

Shepherd of Hermas, Didache, Epistle of Barnabas, 1 Clement. “suitable for reading in the church.” Irenaeus.

Epistle of Barnabas uses unfounded allegorical interpretation and has a rather embarrassing anti-Semitic attitude.

Shepherd of Hermas also very allegorical in its approach to the OT. Emphasized morality and ethics and does not mention Jesus.

The evidence: Read these for yourself and judge for yourself whether they have those unmistakable marks of inspiration.

**VII Compare/Contrast with the scriptures of other religions.**

One thing to notice: For all religions, the Bible is the standard for defining what it means for a scripture to be inspired by God. (Like Jesus is the standard by which all who claim to be from God is compared)

**A. Evidence (or lack thereof) for inspiration of the Qu’ran**

1. Reliability of the text.

Hard to judge because Uthman created a united text of the Qu’ran in 653.

One of the five copies he created still exists.

This alone proves the Qu’ran is corrupted.

Uthman removed at least 2 suras. Burned nearly all other copies.

Recent manuscript find in Yemen which predates the Uthman version.

Qu’ran scholars HATE for such evidence to come out.

Sana’a Manuscripts discovered recently. Dated about AD 710. C-14 about AD 645-690. This should be interesting. Suras in a different order. Yemen government not happy it is being studied.

They fear the truth about the Qu’ran.

Nevertheless, it is fair to say that the text of the Qur’an is fairly solid and well preserved.

1. Numerology of Qur’an.

He continued by providing what he felt was good evidence that the Koran is the inspired Word of God.  His reasoning is that the Arabic word "day" appears 365 times in the Koran, which "cannot be a coincidence." (His opponents later pointed out that the Arabic lunar year does not have 365 days, to which Ally had no response).  There are many other numerical coincidences involving integer multiples of the prime number nineteen which show the divine source of the Koran.

2. Scientific accuracy of Qu’ran?

**23:14—*Creation from the clot of blood***

**“Then we made the sperm into a clot of congealed blood; then from that clot we made a lump; and we made out of that lump bones and clothed the bones with flesh.”**

**18:86—*Traveling west…***

**“… till, when he reached the setting-place of the sun, he found it setting in a muddy spring.”**

**21:33—*Sun and stars orbit the earth***

*4****1:12 7--“heavens”, stars, comets in “lowest heaven***

**34:9, 52:44—*Piece of sky falls and kills someone***

***36:4, 23:14--Man deposits child into the mother***

3. Fulfillment of OT and NT prophecy. Specifically, John 16:7-10.

The Qur’an does not have prophecies which were later fulfilled.

Neither does it contain fulfillments of prophecies elsewhere.

**Deut 18:15-18**

 **15The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet *like me from among your own brothers*. You must listen to him. 16For this is what you asked of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, "Let us not hear the voice of the Lord our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die.“ 17The Lord said to me: "What they say is good. 18 I will raise up for them a prophet *like you from among their brothers*; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him.among their brothers”**

 **Cf. Deut 17:15 (brother ≠ foreigner)**

**Deut 34:10—“Since then no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, who did all those miraculous signs and wonders the Lord sent him to do in Egypt”**

**Like Moses = miraculous signs and wonders, which Mohammed never did, but Jesus clearly did.**

**Isa 21:7 ”when he sees…riders on donkeys or riders on camels, let him be fully alert”**

 **Muslim claim: riders on donkeys = Jesus, riders on camels = Mohammed. Context: fall of Babylon!**

**Jn 14:16—parakletos 🡪 periclytos (praised one)—without any MS supp. Moreover, 14:26 shows the helper is *the Spirit.* Jn 16—The helper to abide forever. (M is dead.) 14:26—Helper to be sent in Jesus’ name; but no Muslim would allow this! Besides, Acts 1:5—helper to come in not many days – not in the 7th century!**

4. Historical accuracy.**:** **Ishmael = Isaac Ishmael = Isaac 37:102**

**2 trees in Eden = 1 tree 20:120**

**Noah’s 4th son drowns 11:43**

**Zechariah silent 3 days (not 9 months) 3:41**

**Pharaoh’s magicians repent 20:70**

**Judges 7 / 1 Sam 17 conflated 2:249**

**Jesus’ childhood miracles 3:49, 5:110, 19:30**

5. Reliability of the text. Theory of Abrogation.

**Whatever Mohammad said later “abrogates” his previous sayings.**

**Sura 16:101 We substitute one revelation for another.**

**Examples: Only 4 wives Jihad?**

* **Abrogated Verses in Mohammed’s Lifetime**

"Then Allah revealed to us a verse that was among the cancelled ones later on." *Bukhari* vol.5 book 59 no.416 p.288.

"Narrated Anas bin Malik: ... There was revealed about those who were killed at Bi’r-Ma’una a Qur’anic Verse we used to recite, but it was cancelled later on. The verse was: ‘Inform our people that we have met our Lord. He is pleased with us and He has made us pleased.’" *Bukhari* vol.4:69 p.53.

**The Satanic Verses of the Qur’an**

This term has been used for some time to describe two verses of Mohammed that were "abrogated" or taken out.

In pre-Islamic Arabia, Allah was a god with three daughters, al-Lat, al-Uzza, and Manat.

Sura 53:19-20 "Have ye thought upon al-Lat and al-Uzza and Manat, the third, the other?"

originally followed by

**"These are the exalted cranes (intermediaries) Whose intercession is to be hoped for."**

vs.

**"Are yours the males and His the females? That indeed were an unfair division."**

Muhammed compromised with Arab idolatry, allowing that the intercession of al-Lat, al-Uzza and Manat be hoped for.

His followers were amazed.

Mohammed later changed and said Satan had deceived him. These verses were abrogated or taken out.

* It is interesting to read how Allah could have what are called "abrogated verses" in Suras 13:39; 16:101; 2:106.
* **Evidence of the Satanic Verses**

Early Muslim biographers of Mohammed wrote about the Satanic verses:

**1.** Ibn Jarir al-Tabari (died 923 A.D.) was one of Islam’s foremost scholars. He wrote a Commentary on the Qur’an as well as a 38-volume work on the history of Islam.

**2.** Al-Wahidi/Wakidi (died 823 A.D.) wrote *Asbab al-Nozu*l. He wrote 15-volumes.

**3.** Ibn Sa’d/Sa’ad (died 845 A.D.), who was aware of al-Wahidi’s work.

**4.** Ibn Isaq/Ishaq (767 or 773 A.D.), wrote *Sirat Rasulallah* (The Life of Allah’s Prophet).

6. Beauty of the language of the Qu’ran (given that Mohammed was illiterate)

7. The main goal of apologists of the Qur’an is to attach the reliability of the NT. This is because if the New and Old Testaments are not corrupt, then the Qur’an is false teaching.

If the “Injil” is not corrupt, then how do you explain that the Qur’an is definite that Jesus was not crucified and was not the Son of God?

**B. Evidence for inspiration of the Bahai scripture:**

Question at my web site:

**Does the Baha'i faith claim to have fulfilled prophecies?**
Yes, it does.  The Baha'i faith began in the mid-nineteenth century,started by a Persian man by the name of Baha-ulla (actual name Mirza Hussein  Ali).  His work was preceded by a John the Baptist-like figure the Bab, who was also Persian.  This religion is an attempt to adapt Islam to a more modern, multireligious context.  Baha-Ullah principally reinterpreted Islam, but he claimed to be the fulfillment of the ministry of Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, Krishna and many other religious leaders, real and fictional.  He claimed to be the final and greatest prophet.

The Baha'i religion had no scripture of its own before Baha-ulla began his writings.  Therefore, it cannot claim to have fulfilled prophecies within its scripture, simply because it has no ancient writings. However, as do Muslims and Mormons, Baha'is claim to find prophecies of their religion in the Old and New Testaments.  I will list three examples below, followed by a brief analysis of the claim that Baha-ullah did in fact fulfill these prophecies.  I found these at www.bci.org/prophecy-fulfilled

1. **Daniel 8:13-14 says**  "Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to him, 'How long will it take for the vision to be fulfilled--the vision concerning the daily sacrifice, the rebellion that causes desolation, and the surrender of the sanctuary and of the host that will be trampled underfoot?'  He said to me, 'It will take 2300 evenings and mornings; then the sanctuary will be reconsecrated.'" Baha'is claim that this prophecy was fulfilled with the ministry of the Bab.  To quote:

That is to say, how long will this misfortune, this ruin, this abasement and degradation last? meaning, when will be the dawn of the Manifestation? Then he answered, "Two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed." Briefly, the purport of this passage is that he appoints two thousand three hundred years, for in the text of the Bible each day is a year. Then from the date of the issuing of the edict of Artaxerxes to rebuild Jerusalem until the day of the birth of Christ there are 456 years, and from the birth of Christ until the day of the manifestation of the Bab there are 1844 years. When you add 456 years to this number it makes 2300 years.

There is a problem with this interpretation.  First of all, there is the fact that the beginning point of these 2300 years makes no sense.  The prophecy points to a beginning of the desecration of the temple.  The date this person uses is one on which it was decreed that Jerusalem should be rebuilt.  This makes no sense at all.   It amounts to counting back from 1844 (a year that the person known as the Bab began his ministry) by 2300 years and looking around for the closest significant date and arbitrarily making this a fulfillment of this prophecy.

Another reason this interpretation does not make sense, is that the prophecy is about the desolation of the temple which happened at the time of Antiochus Epiphanes.  In fact, the desecration of the temple happened in Nov. 167 BC and the rededication of the temple happened Dec. 25, 164 BC, 1150 days (2300 evenings and days) after the desecration by Antiochus Epiphanes.  I can say a lot more about the actual meaning of Daniel 8. You can find this in my book Daniel, Prophet to the Nations (www.ipibooks.com)

Claiming that Daniel 8:13-14 is a prophecy of the ministry of the Bab is a completely spurious claim.  Nothing the Bab did even remotely matches the context of Daniel 8, which is about the Greek persecutions of the Jews.

2. **Revelation 11:3** says, "And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1260 days, clothed in sackcloth.  These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth."  Baha'is claim that this is a prophecy of the ministry of Baha-ullah.  As in Daniel 8, they claim that the days are years and that this is a prophecy that the time between the Hejira of Muhammad (his journey from Mecca to Medina) to the time of the ministry of Baha-ullah would be 1260 years.   Where did they get this?  Again, it is a matter of starting with the ministry of Baha-ulla, counting back 1260 years, and seeing if anything significant happened at that time, then claiming it is a prophecy of this.  The Hejira of Muhammad happened in the year AD 622.  If we add 1260 years, this will be the year 1882.  This is the year that one of the printed texts of the writings of Baha-ullah was published.

OK, so we have this coincidence, but if we look at the text of Revelation, is there even the slightest indication that it is talking about the length of time between the Muslim Hejira and the writings of Baha-ullah?  The very idea that the Christian scripture would be a prophecy about a person who denied that Jesus is the Son of God and that he was crucified for our sins is really quite ludicrous.  In what sense was the Holy City of Jerusalem trampled for that particular stretch of time (AD 622-1882)?  This makes absolutely no sense.   It is a clear case of reading a random scripture and doing math until a possible coincidence is found, with no consideration at all for the biblical context.

The Baha'i interpreter tells us that the two witnesses are the two laws of Muhammad and of Baha-ullah, without any justification at all for that interpretation within the passage.  There is not the slightest indication in the passage that it is discussing two Laws.  Even if it were (which it is not!), then implying that the Christian scripture has
a prophecy of the anti-Christian Qur'an, which denies the deity of Jesus is truly outrageous.

3. **Revelation 12:1** says "A great and wondrous sign appearing in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head."    The Baha'i interpreter tells us that the woman is the Law of God. Where he gets this from is a mystery.  He then proceeds to identify the sun and the moon.  The sun is the Persian kingdom and the moon is the Ottoman Empire.   Revelation 12:1 is a prophecy about the Umayyad empire and the twelve stars are the twelve imams of the prophet Muhammad.  The seven heads are seven nations ruled by the Umayyad dynasty (!)  In Revelation 12:5, when the woman gives birth to a son who will rule the earth (a clear allusion to Jesus Christ), it is identified by Baha'is as a reference to the Bab!!   That this is forcing the context of the passage is rather obvious.  In the context of Revelation 12, which is about Jesus, the church and the attacks of Satan on the church, there is not even the slightest conceivable hint that this is a prophecy of the history of Islam and the arrival of the Bab!!!!

Because Baha-Ullah wanted to claim to be the next Jesus or Muhammad, he
needed to establish prophetic links.  You can judge the success of these attempts by the examples listed above.  I will admit that my analysis is a bit shallow, as the Baha'is have more to say about each of the passages.  You can investigate at the web site above and others to do your own further research.  I believe you will find that the pattern described above of using a shoe horn to force events in the life of Baha-Ullah or the Bab into Jewish or Christian scripture, completely violating the context, will be the rule.

John Oakes

**Can you explain the Baha'i prophecies in this website** [**http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bah%C3%A1%27%C3%AD\_prophecies**](https://mail.gcccd.edu/exchweb/bin/redir.asp?URL=http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bah%25C3%25A1%2527%25C3%25AD_prophecies)

Jeremiah:

I have looked at these "prophecies" of Baha-ullah.  To be honest, I am not all that impressed.  For example, he predicted in the 1860s  that the Ottoman Empire would fall apart.  The reason this is not all that impressive is that by the 1860s the Ottoman Empire had been decaying for over two hundred years.  Anyone who knew world politics in the last third of the 19th century could see the writing on the wall.  This empire was well on the way out.  It was being beaten on every level by the French, German and British empires.  I think we should call this a prediction rather than a prophecy, but a prediction which many or most at the time would have made.

Compare this to biblical prophecies such as that in Isaiah 39:5-8.  Here God prophesies through Isaiah that the king of Babylon would take the direct descendents of Hezekiah captive, carrying them off to Bablyon, making them eunuch.  The reason this prophecy is in a totally different league is that when the prophecy was made, Babylon was completely powerless politically.   It was completely dominated and had been so by Assyria for over two hundred years.  Nevertheless, one hundred and thirty years later, the prophecy was fulfilled in detail.  The articles in the temple were carried off to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar and the direct descendents of the king (specifically, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego) were carried off to Babylon and made eunuchs in the king's palace.

Predicting a very specific and seemingly very unlikely thing well over a hundred years beforehand is evidence of an inspired prophecy.  Predicting that a decaying and corrupt dynasty would fall within one or two generations is not strong evidence for inspiration.  I will say this, however, Baha-ullah was right.  If he got a few dozen such predictions correct, that would create a decent case for more than simple common political insight.

Baha-ullah also predicted the demise of one sultan, Abdul-Aziz and a vizier of the Ottomans.  He predicted that Abdul-Aziz would lose his power in 1868.  He did so in 1876--eight years later.  Given that all Ottoman sultans lost their power at one time or another, a prediction that one would lose his power, which was fulfilled eight years later is kind of like predicting that a particular politician will leave office at some future date, and to have it actually happen eight years later.  This does not rise to the level of being a "prophecy" which is evidence of inspiration.

He also predicted that Ali Pasha would lose his place as vizier.  It just so happens that this particular person was put in and taken out of the position of vizier five times, including four times before Baha-ullah made this prediction.  Again, I see no evidence of miraculous predictive power here.

Then, the article says that Baha-ullah predicted the battle of Armageddon, as prophesied in Revelation Chapter 16.  This person claims that when World War I broke out, this was the battle of Armageddon.  I am sorry, but anyone who knows much at all about the book of Revelation will know that World War I is absolutely NOT a fulfillment of Revelation 16.  In the first three predictions mentioned above, one can argue that, even if these predictions were not in the least bit surprising, at least the predictions came true.  In this case (the prediction that Armageddon would happen soon) is not even a correct prediction.  This would be a false prophecy.

Here is a typical "prophecy" of Baha-ullah (quoting from this article):  "The Balkans will remain discontented. Its restlessness will increase. The vanquished Powers will continue to agitate. They will resort to every measure that may rekindle the flame of war."   Anyone who knows the politics of the Balkans will recognize immediately that making the prediction is a bit like predicting that a fight will break out during a hockey game.

Two more predictions mentioned in the article are relevant to science:

"Strange and astonishing things exist in the earth but they are hidden from the minds and the understanding of men. These things are capable of changing the whole atmosphere of the earth and their contamination would prove lethal."

(Bahá'u'lláh, [*Kalímát-i-Firdawsíyyih (Words of Paradise)*](https://mail.gcccd.edu/exchweb/bin/redir.asp?URL=http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/b/TB/tb-7.html%23pg69), c.1879–91)

"Know thou that every fixed star hath its own planets, and every planet its own creatures, whose number no man can compute."

Making the prediction in the late 1800's that science would make great progress, which will also bring about environmental destruction is kind of like predicting in 2011 that science will make great progress, which will bring about environmental destruction.   I believe that this is common knowledge.

Then there is the second one.  It was commonly believed in the 1900s that other planets in our solar system had life on them.  Apparently, Baha-ullah believed this as well.  We can see that his predictive powers here are quite dismal.  Indeed, we have clear proof that his sayings are NOT inspired by God.

I have covered about one half of the "prophecies" of Baha-ullah in the article.  The others are more or less like the ones I have discussed.  In generaly these are either extremely vague and applicable to any place and any time, or if they are more specific, they are highly probably events, which any astute political prognosticator could make as well.  Then there are the two predictions I discussed which are clearly simply not even true.

If we compare this to prophecies in the Bible, such as the fact that the Messiah would be crucified (Psalms 22), made 1000 years before it happened, at a time when crucifixion had not even been invented, or the predicting that the Messiah would be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver (Zechariah 11), there is no comparison.

If this is the kind of evidence supporting the inspiration of Baha-ullah, then we should probably discount the claim entirely.

**C. Inspiration and reliability of Hindu Scriptures?**

Hindu Scriptures

1. Four **Vedas**. Poems from around 1700-1200 BC. Rig Veda about 1500 BC. Originally transmitted orally. Written down around 500 BC. Oldest surviving manuscript 1300 AD. Very strong element of animism and polytheism. Thirty-three main gods. Gods of places and things. Nature worship.
2. **Brahmanas**. 1000-500 BC. These introduced the priestly system and the caste system.
3. **Upanishads**. 800-500 BC. Philosophical treatises. More emphasis on meditation. Brahman has evolved into a pantheistic “god.” rather than an individual. Brahman the spiritual reality behind the unreal physical world. The world we observe is *maya*—an illusion. The soul is *Atman,* and Atman is part of Brahman. Therefore, we are in a sense deity. The concept of *karma* is developed, related to the concept of sin. Karma is a works salvation concept. Reincarnation became part of Hinduism. Note: none of this was in the Vedas.
4. **Baghavad Gita, Ramayana,** etc., Epic poems from 200BC – 200 AD. At this point, two main gods, in addition to Brahman emerge in Hinduism. These are Vishnu and Shiva. A strong sensual element emerges. Vishnu and Shiva have undergone various incarnations. This is what the epics are about. Vishnu was incarnated as Rama and as Krishna. The stories are strongly mythological in tone, containing such things as monkey-people, gods intervening in wars (as in Greek mythology) and the like.
5. **Sutras.**  Rules, doctrines, rituals, commentaries on the Vedas. Attempting to bring together the various aspects of Hinduism.
6. **Puranas**. The Bible of the common people of India. Various myths, fables and legends concerning local gods and the like. Totally unbelievable. You will not find Hindus in the Western world using these.

There is a massive gap of time—almost 3000—years from the creation of the Rig Veda to the oldest manuscript.

Summary:

1. Hindu scriptures are not defendable as “inspired” in the same sense as the Bible. They contain much of what is clearly myth, fable etc.
2. One will find a significant amount of self-contradiction in Hindu faith as the religion has evolved extremely over time.

**D. Buddhist Scriptures**

Scriptures: No one scripture is accepted by all Buddhists. There are a broad variety of “scriptures,” in many languages. In general the writings of Buddhists include:

1. Sayings of Buddha.
2. Doctrines, interpretations of the sayings of Buddha.
3. Philosophical discussions, ethics.
4. Apocryphal stories of previous Buddhas. These are clearly mythological, containing lots of miracles etc.

Oral 500 BC to 100 BC

Pali Canon Tripitaka (3 baskets) compiled AD 400 Oldest manuscript AD 100. Found in Afghanistan.

Chinese Canon: 80,000 pages.

**VIII. Inspiration of the Bible: Definition and Defense.**

Biblical Inspiration:

Definition:

**The entire Bible, although authored by men, is divinely and authoritatively the revelation of God.**

“I believe the Bible to have been written by inspiration of God, and I want others to be of the same belief. ...The subject is one of peculiar importance in the present day. Infidelity and skepticism abound everywhere.  ...In a day like this the true Christian should be able to set his foot down firmly, and to render a reason of his confidence in God’s Word.   He should be able by sound arguments to meet and silence the gainsayer, if he cannot convince him.   He should be able to show good cause why he thinks the Bible is “from heaven, and not of men.” - J.C. Ryle

**2 Tim 3:16 All Scripture is inspired by God (God-breathed). Is this circular reasoning?**

**2 Peter 1:19-21 Carried along by the Holy Spirit**

**1 Thess 2:13 You received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it as it actually is, the Word of God.**

**2 Peter 3:14-16 Paul’s writings are scripture. Rejection = destruction.**

Q: What is inspired? The autographs.

Q: Are copies perfect? Are copiers inspired?

Q: Are translations perfect? Are translators inspired?

**Is there such a thing as inspired opinion? (1 Cor 7:12 I, not the Lord)**

**What about John 9:31? Inspired error.**

**There is no doubt that Jesus and the apostles considered the entire Old—and by implication the entire New—Testament to be divinely inspired.**

Can we prove this? Can we PROVE all Scripture is inspired by God?

I cannot prove that Esther 3:4 is inspired.

Verbal inspiration:

Gal 3:16 argues based on plural vs singular word.

In Luke 20:37-38 Jesus argues on the tense of a verb He is the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. He is not the God of the dead but the God of the living. Jesus: He did not say He WAS the God of… He said he IS the God of…

Evidence in support:

1. Historical Reliability.

2. Fulfilled Prophecy.

3. Fulfilled foreshadow and prefigure. In the Bible, history itself becomes a prophecy! (RFB p. 238-239 for examples)

4. Consistency of doctrine and theology.

5. Lack of contradiction.

6. Scientific wisdom.

7. Jesus believed it was inspired (Matt 15:6) and he did miracles and was resurrected from the dead.

8. Quality of the text. Ridiculously compact. Genesis 1 philosophically dense.

9. etc.

**IX Infallibility: A definition and defense.**

Dan Conder is covering this topic.

Definition? This must be done very carefully!!!!

“The inerrancy of Scripture means that Scripture in the original manuscripts does not affirm anything that is contrary to fact.” - Wayne Grudem (Systematic Theology, page 90)

Chicago statement on biblical inerrancy 1978.

**A Short Statement**

1. God, who is Himself Truth and speaks truth only, has inspired Holy Scripture in order thereby to reveal Himself to lost mankind through Jesus Christ as Creator and Lord, Redeemer and Judge. Holy Scripture is God's witness to Himself.

2. Holy Scripture, being God's own Word, written by men prepared and superintended by His Spirit, is of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches: it is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it affirms: obeyed, as God's command, in all that it requires; embraced, as God's pledge, in all that it promises.

3. The Holy Spirit, Scripture's divine Author, both authenticates it to us by His inward witness and opens our minds to understand its meaning.

4. Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God's acts in creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God's saving grace in individual lives.

5. The authority of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine inerrancy is in any way limited or disregarded, or made relative to a view of truth contrary to the Bible's own; and such lapses bring serious loss to both the individual and the Church.

Q: What is inspired? The autographs.

Q: Are copies perfect? Are copiers inspired?

Q: Are translations perfect? Are translators inspired?

Clearly, we do not read inerrant English Bibles!!!

Q: Are time periods approximations? Was Jesus in the desert for exactly 40 days, or might it be an approximation?

Q: Are gospel accounts of Jesus’ sermons transcripts or are they reproductions? Would this be an error?

Q: What if some of the gospel accounts are not always perfectly chronological? Is this an error?

Q: Are quotations of David or Joseph or etc. transcripts, or are they reconstructions?

Q: What if a biblical author paraphrases an OT passage or quotes from a Greek or other uninspired translation?

Chicago statement:

We further deny that inerrancy is negated by Biblical phenomena such as a lack of modern technical precision, irregularities of grammar or spelling, observational descriptions of nature, the reporting of falsehoods, the use of hyperbole and round numbers, the topical arrangement of material, variant selections of material in parallel accounts, or the use of free citations.

Hyperbole: Against you, you only have I sinned. Psalm 51:4

I was a sinner from my mother’s womb. Psalm 51:5

A technical error: Leviticus 11:5 The coney, though it chews the cud.

What would constitute a biblical error?

If David did not live.

If David did not kill Goliath.

If Jesus was not descended from David.

If David was not, indeed, a prefigure of Christ.

If prophecies of David turned out to not be fulfilled.

If the Bible made a clear, unambiguous statement of historical significance which was in fact, not true.

If the Bible made a clear and unambiguous statement about physical reality/nature which was not true.

If the Bible included a promise of God which was not fulfilled

If the Bible contained doctrinal or theological statements which were unambiguously in contradiction to one another.

If the Bible made a theological statement about reality which is not true.

What about accommodation?

***WE AFFIRM*** that the doctrine of inerrancy is grounded in the teaching of the Bible about inspiration.

***WE DENY*** that Jesus' teaching about Scripture may be dismissed by appeals to accommodation or to any natural limitation of His humanity.

Did God accommodate the Hebrews’ ignorance and teach geocentrism? I say no!

Did God accommodate the Jew’s belief in angels or demons and personify evil? I say no!

**X. Contradictions: The Question of Biblical Consistency.**

1. Identical events described by two different authors have details of fact that appear to contradict.

2. Claims that the doctrine which is taught in two different passages is contradictory.

3. Numbers of objects, people or years in two different passages do not agree.

Questions to ask in response:

1. Is this a legitimate contradiction? In other words, is there a perfectly reasonable explanation of the supposed contradiction that can be found simply by reading the relevant passages in context, giving the benefit of the doubt to biblical reliability.

2. Is there any chance that a scribal error could explain the apparent discrepancy? This will be a particularly relevant question in the supposed contradiction involves numbers from the Old Testament Text.

3. Is it possible that the two passages, rather than contradictions one another, actually complement one another? In other words, is it possible that the two apparently discrepant scriptures, when taken together, actually create a fuller picture of what God is trying to communicate?

Contradictions of Fact: (Illustration: eyewitnesses to a crime)

Genesis 7:17 vs Genesis 8:3 40 or 150 days

Genesis 37:36 vs Genesis 39:1 Amelekites or Ishmaelites?

Matthew 27:5 vs Acts 1:18 Hung or Burst?

John 19:17 vs Mark 15:21-23 Jesus or Simon?

Actual contradictions! 2 Samuel 8:4 vs 1 Chron 18:4 1000 or 1700?

Etc… one or two angels? One or two demoniacs?

Contradictions of Doctrine:

Exodus 20:4-5 vs Ezek 18:19-20 Are the children punished for their father’s sin?

Exodus 20:8 vs Isaiah 1:13 Does God want his people to observe the Sabbath?

Ephesians 2:8-9 vs James 2:24 Are we saved by works?

Proverbs 26:4 and Proverbs 26:5 Should we answer a fool according to his folly?

* “David took seven hundred (2 Samuel 8:4) or seven thousand (1Chronicles 18:4) horsemen from Hadadezer. Which is correct?”
* “Exodus 20:8, ‘Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy’ contradicts Isaiah 1:13 ‘Your… Sabbaths and convocations—I cannot bear…’”
* **Ephesians 2:8-9 vs James 2:20-24. Are we saved by works?**
* **Exodus 20:4-5 vs Ezek 18:19-20**
* **All-time most difficult: Matt 10:10, Luke 9:3 vs Mk 6:8 Were they to carry a staff?**

**1. Romans 2:6 says we "are justified by Jesus' blood," then how is it that "God gives to each person according to what he has done?" Is there a contraditction?**

**2. Why are there 41 generations from David to Jesus in Luke, but only 28 generations in Matthew?**

**3. Can you explain the apparent contradiction between Genesis 50:12 and Acts 7:15-16? (regarding the cave Abraham built)**

**5. How do you explain the apparent contradiction between Mark 16:5-7 (one angel) and Luke 24:4-7 (two angels)**

**6. Did Saul kill himself (1 Sam 31) or did the Amalekite soldier kill him? (2 Sam 1)**

**7. Please explain the contradiction createde by 2 Samuel 24, where it says that Satan incited**

**David and 1 Chron 21 where it says that God incited David**

**9. Please explain to me the discrepancies, both theological and numerical, between 2 Samuel 24 and 1Chronicles 21**

**10. Leviticus 26:19 mentions iron when the iron age did not start in Canaan until 1150 BC. Doesn’t this prove that Moses did not write Leviticus?**

**11. How do you resolve the difference between 23,000 mentioned as killed in 1 Corinthians 10:8 and the 24,000 mentioned in Numbers?**

**12. Was it one thief (Luke) or both (Matthew) who mocked Jesus? How can you resolve this?**

**13. Where did Jesus first appear to the eleven disciples? It there a contradiction in the gospel accounts?**

**14. How do you reconcile: 1) Gen.23:2 with Joshua 14: 13 - 15 and 2) Gen. 14:14 with Judges 18:29?**

**15. Please explain the contradiction between Acts9:7 and 22:9**

**16. How does one reconcile the accounts in Matthew and Mark of the demoniac, as on mentions to and the other mentions only one man being possessed?**

**Difficult Examples**

**Matthew 2:23 Where is the prophecy that Jesus will be called a Nazarene? Answer: Isaiah 11:1-2, Zechariah 6:9-15**

**Two different and contradictory Genealogies in Matthew and Luke. Answer: Matthew is genealogy of Joseph and Luke is genealogy of Mary (Joseph the son in law of Heli)**

**Matthew 1:23 “The *virgin* will be with child” is a misquote of the Bible.**

**Matthew 2:15 Mistakenly makes Hosea 11:1 a prophecy (no, it is a fulfilled foreshadow, not a fulfilled historical prophecy)**

**XI Further Considerations on Biblical Inspiration: Internal Evidence for Biblical Inspiration.**

**A. Biblical Consistency.**

Despite well over 40 authors, 1500 years of time, dramatic differences of culture and place—despite having been written by kings, peasants, priests, prophets, farmers, soldiers, seers, government ministers and musicians, the message: the doctrinal and theological teaching of the Bible is wonderfully and supernaturally unified.

The whole Bible is about Jesus.

Moses frees God’s people

Abraham offers his only son

A snake is lifted up on a pole.

No dualism, polytheism, animism, deism.

Balance of judgment and grace.

The Bible has progressive revelation, but no contradiction.

This is strong evidence for the inspiration of the Bible as a whole.

In this sense, it is stronger evidence for the inspiration of the whole (ex. Esther a prefigure of Jesus).

**B. The Bible is the best book in the world of…..**

**Psychology**

**Teaching Look at Jesus’ parables**

**Literature (Psalms)**

**Wisdom (Proverbs)**

**Philosophy**

**Character, Ethics**

**Child Raising**

**Finances**

**Government**

**History Q: Other????**

**C. The Bible works.**

**John 7:17 Do what I say and you will know whether my teaching is of God.**

**D. To many, the inspiration of the Bible speaks for itself.**

This is the most common reason people accept the inspiration of the Bible. They read it, it speaks to their heart, it works and they accept the rest on faith.

1. From Sir Frederic Kenyon, *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts* (Harper and Brothers, New York, 1958) pp. 78-79. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)