**Reliability of the Bible**

**1. Why we can trust the reliability of the actual Bibles we read.**

**2. Why we can trust that the history recorded in the Bible is accurate.**

**3. A response to the claim that the Bible is full of contradictions**

**4. Q & A**

OK, sure, the originals were inspired, but what about all the copying errors, and what about the “fact” that Constantine changed the New Testament. As my Muslim friends so confidently proclaim, the Bible is corrupt. What about interpolations like John 5:3-4 or 1 John 5:7-8, and what about the ending of Mark Mark 16:9-20?

Answer: Some of this is true, and some of it is bold-faced lies, but here is the conclusion: Our Hebrew Old Testament is remarkably reliable, and our Greek New Testament is more than 99% a reflection of the original, some would say more like 99.8%.

VERY briefly.

The NT is the best attested ancient book BY FAR, with the OT the second-best attested ancient book.

NT: 5700 Greek Manuscripts

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

2. Sackler Library: John 18:36-19:1 and Matthew 21:34-37 from AD 150

3. Magdalen Library manuscript of Matthew 3:5, 26 AD 175

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

5. Codex Vaticanus. AD 300-350. Nearly complete Greek Old and New Testament.

6. Codex Sinaiticus Approx. AD 350. Found by Tischendorf at St. Catherine’s Monastery on Mt. Sinai in 1844. In British Library Complete Greek Bible.

7. Codex Alexandrinus Approx AD 400. Nearly complete Greek Old and New Testaments.

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, Acts, Romans 1 Corinthians, Hebrews, James, 1,2 Peter.

2. Ignatius, bishop of Antioch. Died about AD 107. Quotes from Matthew, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, 1,2 Corinthians, Galatioans, Ephesians, 2 Thess, 1,2 Timothy, Hebrews, James, 1 Pet., Revelation

3. 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

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

Summary: It has been claimed that we could reproduce virtually the entire New Testament simply from piecing together quotes from the Church Fathers from the second and third centuries. This is not an exaggeration.

With the science of textual criticism, our Greek New Testament is somewhere between 99 and 99.9% reliable, depending on what expert you believe.

No time now to talk about textual criticism, but using 5700+ Greek manuscripts and NT quotes we can produce a fantastically reliable Greek New Testament.

Canonization of the New Testament

A collection of Paul’s letters, perhaps not including the Pastoral Epistles, was circulating among the churches by the 90s AD

Four gospels circulating and recognized as apostolic by AD 100 or even by AD 90.

A still fluid, but developing list of canonical books being read in the church by AD 150. “The memoirs of the apostles.”

Irenaeus AD 180. Mentions all 27 books. Gosples “the four pillars” of the church.

Muratorian Fragment. AD 180.

By AD 200, the New Testament as we know it was canonized by acclamation of the church.

Origen 220 AD Still some doubt about Hebrews, 2 Peter, 2,3 John, Jude, Revelation.

Reliability of the Old Testament

A. The Masoretic Text.

B. The Dead Sea Scrolls.

C. The Septuagint and Other Translation

A. The **Masoretic Text**. Produced by conservative Jewish scholars around 800 AD

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.

OK, but there is that 1400+ year gap!

B. The Dead Sea Scrolls.

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

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

Entire Isaiah scroll 100 BC A second major Isaiah scroll from about 150 BC

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

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

Other evidence:

Greek Septuagint translation by 200 BC

Samaritan Pentateuch 500 BC

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.

Genesis:  Ur a large and prosperous city around 1900 BC    The point:  if Bible is an historical fantasy 500 BC, how did they know that?

            Haran, a smaller, frontier city in NW Mesopotamia    Note:  Haran was abandoned about 1800 BC.  How did Jews 500 BC know about this city?

Ebla Tablets  1975   peaked in importance about 2000 BC   17,000 clay tablets

Names mentioned include   Isaac, Jacob, Abraham, Terah, Nahor and Serug

The point:  these names were unknown 1000 years later.  This story could not have been invented.

Ex:   read a letter, supposedly written 1890,  including names such as Skyler, Jamal, Brittany

        Or letter, supposedly written 2004  with names such as Gertrude, Harold

Story of Laban chasing Jacob to retrieve the household gods (Genesis 31)   Why was Laban more concerned with getting back his household gods than his own daughter?

Babylonian Laws:    whoever possessed the household gods inherited the family property.   Oh!

What about Sodom and Gomorrah?  Bible:  fairly well-watered, large cities

League of 5 cities:   Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, Zoar (Genesis 14:2)

Today:  SE corner of Dead Sea.  Total wasteland.

Archaeologists discovered about 2000 BC Dead Sea twice as large, much wetter.

Guess how many wadis contain ruins of cities?    Five!!

All destroyed about 2000 BC by fire

Largest city Bab ed Dhra (presumably Sodom) as thick as 7 ft. ashes.

The graveyard 0.5 km from the city:  Burned from the top down!

Makes 2 Pet 2:6-10 come alive.

Also:

The Hittites.   Skeptics in 19th century.  This is all just a made up story.  No such people ever existed.

Bible:   A major power in Palestine about 1800 BC.  Mentioned 47 Times

1906  Hugo Winkler discovered Hattusha.  Large empire with many cities.

property. ghter? he Bible?

A.hings.  Tel El Amarna Tablets

In the letter, Abdi-Hiba pleaded for military aid from Pharaoh Akhnaton;

‘The Habiru plunder all lands of the king. If archers

are here this year, then the lands of the king, the

lord, will remain; but if the archers are not here,

then the lands of the king, my lord, are lost.’

III The time of the kings.

A. The Moabite Stone. 870 BC Mentions Ahab “Of the house of Omri.”

1 Kings 16:28

B. Black Obelisk of Shalmaneezer III 840 BC 2 Kings 17:3-6

First known carving of an individual Israelite. Jehu bows to Shalmanezer

C. The Tel Dan Inscription 820 BC

Hazael, king of Aram declares:

“I killed Jehoram, son of Ahab, King of Israel, and I killed Ahaziah, son of Jehoram, king of the House of David.”

Actually not true. 2 Kings 8:28-29 Joram (not Jehoram) was wounded, but did not die. He was killed by Jehu.

D. Sennacherib Cylinder Sennacherib attacks Jerusalem under Hezekiah 2 Kings 18:1-19:37 Isaiah36:18-21, 37:16-20

As to Hezekiah, the Jew, he did not submit to my yoke. I laid

siege to 46 of his strong cities, walled forts, and to the

countless small villages in their vicinity. I drove out of them

200,150 people, young and old, male and female, horses,

mules, donkeys, camels, big and small cattle beyond counting

and considered [them] booty. Himself I made a prisoner in

Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a

cage. Clear evidence of a biblical miracle.

G. The Cyrus Cyllinder. Found in archives of Cyrus 538 BC almost identical to Ezra 1:2-4

…I returned to [these] sacred cities on the other side of the Tigris, the sanctuaries of which have been in ruins for a long time, the images which [used] to live therein and established for them permanent sanctuaries. I [also] gathered all their [former] inhabitants and returned [to them] their habitations. Furthermore, I resettled upon the command of Marduk the great lord, all the gods of Sumer and Akkad whom Nabonidus has brought into Babylon to the anger of the lord of the gods, unharmed, in their [former] chapels, the places which made them happy. May all the gods whom I have resettled in their sacred cities ask daily Bel and Nebo for long life for me and may they recommend me…to Marduk, my lord, may they say thus: Cyrus, the king who worships you and Cambyses, his son…all of them I settled in a peaceful place.

Ziggurat in Ur Mentions Belshazzar and Nabonidus. Belshazzar ruled as regent for Nabonidus for 17 years. This explains Daniel 5:7 I will give you the third place in the kingdom.

Note: Herodotus and other historians are unanimous that Nabonidus was the last ruler of Babylon. They were all wrong, and Daniel is right.