

CHAPTER THREE

Origin and Supernatural Credentials of the Bible

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We've seen that all the world's "Holy Books" contradict one another, and that neither the Qur'an, the Book of Mormon, nor any of the other books of the world's religions have a legitimate claim to be divinely inspired. However, the fact that they are not the Word of God doesn't necessarily mean that the Bible is. We Christians believe that we are right and everybody else is wrong, but how can we be sure that our book is better than any of their books?

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Fortunately, we don't have to rely on blind faith. There are several ways to test the credentials of Christianity and the Bible.

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- First, we can point to changed lives. Though a Muslim might say that his life was changed by the Qur'an, he means only that his behavior is different than before he began trying to follow the Pillars of Islam. Deep down inside, he knows he is still the same person he always was. A truly born again Christian, on the other hand, knows that he really is a different person than he was before Jesus Christ came into his heart.

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One of the New Testament's most powerful credentials is the change in the lives of the apostles. These men claimed to be eyewitnesses of the events recorded in the gospels. Eleven of them died gruesome deaths because they refused to renounce their faith in Jesus, and tradition tells us that the Romans attempted to kill the twelfth, John, by boiling him in oil. Although he survived, he too was willing to give his life rather than deny his faith.

A skeptic might point out the possibility that all twelve were wrong. Perhaps, but no one could assert that they deliberately lied about what had happened. One or two lunatics might die for a lie, but not a dozen. If they were involved in an elaborate conspiracy to preach what they knew to be false, surely at least one of them would have decided that it was not worth giving his life to sustain the lie. The fact that they and many others who were eyewitnesses joyfully went to their deaths is powerful testimony that they believed with all their being that Jesus really did rise from the dead.

- Second, we can use the same tools to examine the Bible that we would to examine any other work of literature. We find that even from a purely literary perspective, the Bible is the best-preserved book of all times.

For sections VI through VII-B, it would be worth your while to obtain a copy of Josh McDowell's *Evidence That Demands A Verdict*, Here's Life Publishers, P.O. Box 1576, San Bernadino, CA 92402, available at almost any Christian bookstore. Much of the following information can be found in much greater detail in this book. The following is a very brief distillation of Chapters 1 through 4.

Another good source of information is Henry Morris and Martin Clark, *The Bible Has the Answer*, available from I.C.R. Also recommended: Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, Zondervan Publishers, Grand Rapids, Mich.

VI. HOW DID WE GET OUR BIBLE? (McDowell, Chapter 3)

We speak of the Canon of Scripture to refer to the books that are considered divinely inspired and are thus included in the Bible. (The word canon comes from the Greek *kanon*, a measuring reed.) But who decided which books were inspired, and what criteria did they use??

A. THE OLD TESTAMENT.

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The Jewish Bible (the *Tanakh*) and the Protestant Old Testament are arranged differently. Protestants divide the Old Testament into 39 books; Jews group the Minor Prophets together and combine the books of I and II Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles into three books rather than six. They also combine Ezra and Nehemiah, giving their Bible a total of 24 books. However, the contents are the same. Various chapter and verse divisions were used through the centuries. The modern arrangement dates to the year 1227 under the auspices of Stephen Langton, later designated Archbishop of Canterbury.

No one person or group decided which books were canonical. Down through the years they were accepted as part of the canon by consensus. By the time of Jesus the contents of the Hebrew Bible were settled except for the Book of Esther, which was finally accepted as inspired about A.D. 70. Though Jesus disagreed with the Scribes and Pharisees about the meaning of the Scriptures, He never argued about the books they accepted as sacred. He and the New Testament authors quoted from many of these books.

In 70 A.D., after the destruction of Jerusalem, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai obtained permission from Rome to reassemble the Jewish Sanhedrin to settle once and for all which books should be included in the Hebrew canon. This “Council of Jamnia” settled the dispute about Esther, but they neither added nor removed any books. They merely reaffirmed what the Jewish people had accepted for centuries. Early Christian leaders such as Melito (ca. 170 A.D.) accepted their list as authoritative.

In addition to the above books, the Roman Catholic Old Testament contains several parts known by Protestants as the Apocrypha (Greek for “hidden”) and by Catholics as Deuterocanonical (the “Second Canon”). These are Tobit, Judith, I and II Maccabees, Wisdom, Sirach, and Baruch as well as extra chapters in Esther and Daniel. The Greek Orthodox Old Testament also includes I and II Esdras and the Prayer of Manasseh.

All of these books were known in Jesus’ day but had been rejected by the Jews. Not once did Jesus or any New Testament writer quote any of them. They only began to be accepted as inspired writings after Augustine proclaimed them as such (ca. 380). Jerome, translator of the Latin Vulgate translation used by the Catholic Church, opposed Augustine and at first refused even to translate them into Latin. They were brought into the Vulgate after his death, but were not finally accepted as canonical by Catholicism until the Council of Trent in 1546. Protestants recognize that the books of Maccabees contain useful historical information, but agree with the early Church in rejecting the Apocrypha as scripture.

B. THE NEW TESTAMENT.

Until the New Testament books were written, the early Christian church relied on eyewitnesses who were still alive. Then, beginning around 50 A.D. (less than two decades after the resurrection of Jesus), the inspired authors began to write individual books. The apostle Paul is credited with writing about half of the 27 in the New Testament. Hebrews is anonymous, but has traditionally been considered his work. Others named as authors include Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Peter, Jude, and James. Since there is no mention of the destruction of Jerusalem which took place in 70 A.D., all the books except those authored by John are believed to have been written before that date. His Gospel, three epistles, and Revelation were completed before his death around 100 A.D.

Even if the original author of each book wrote only one copy, once the books arrived at the churches to which they were written they were read aloud and copied for further distribution (e.g., Col. 4:16 – And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea) and sent to other churches where they would be copied again. At the beginning, any one local church might possess only a few of the books. However, they were all available within the church as a whole.

Unlike modern books, the writings of the New Testament were done on extremely durable materials such as papyrus and animal skins. These could last for centuries without falling apart. As the writing faded, the letters were simply rewritten on top of the existing ones. Then, beginning in the fourth century, a new type of written material began to gain popularity. Instead of individual scrolls, writings were compiled into codices, similar to our modern books. Several New Testament codices dating to the fourth and fifth centuries (Vaticanus, Sinaiticus, Alexandrinus) have survived until the present. These ancient copies are the basis of our modern New Testament.

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Since the original scrolls were so durable, the New Testament codices copied from them were not copies made from many earlier generations of copies. For example, suppose an original scroll dated to 70 A.D. If we make the conservative assumption that it only survived until 270 A.D. before it was copied onto another scroll, that second generation scroll could easily have survived for hundreds more years, and would have been available when the codices were being assembled. There are some differences between them (perhaps due to copyist errors in the early stages), but those codices are still available. Thus, what we have is probably at worst a third or fourth third generation copy. (Original = first generation; copy = second generation; codex = third or fourth third generation.)

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The New Testament was originally written in *Koine* ("common") Greek. This is not some obscure dialect, but the language in common use for first century business transactions and literature. Many churches and Bible schools offer classes in Koine Greek, allowing the student to verify the accuracy of translation for himself.

The New Testament is exactly the same in Catholic and Protestant versions of the Bible. Paul wrote about half of the books in the New Testament. Other named authors include Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Peter, James, and Jude.

The first New Testament books were written about 20 years after the Resurrection, around 50 A.D. All but John's writings were complete before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. His books are believed to have been written between about 85 and 100 A.D.

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Though the Councils of Hippo (393) and Carthage (397) put their stamp of approval on the canon of the New Testament, they, like the Jewish assembly at Jamnia, merely confirmed what was already accepted. Athanasius of Alexandria (367), followed shortly afterward by Augustine and Jerome, had listed the 27 books of the New Testament decades before these councils met.

Christians were giving their lives for their Scriptures long before any of these pronouncements. At least as far back as the year 180 Iranaeus had listed 21 of the 27 New Testament books as Scripture. They had already decided which books were worth dying for by the time the Edict of Diocletian (303) ordered the destruction of their sacred books. But even if no one had compiled a list, we could reconstruct all but a few verses of the New Testament from the writings of second and third century Christian writers (McDowell, p. 51). The Councils did not decide what books belonged in the canon; they merely acknowledged what was already accepted.

VII. RELIABILITY OF THE BIBLE.

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Many non-Christians, liberal theologians, and "Bible as Literature" classes say that the Bible is just a collection of old Jewish myths and is not meant to be taken literally. Others say that the Bible has been copied, translated, and retranslated so many times that we can't be sure that what we have today is what was originally written. Since the Bible commands us to always be ready to give an account for the hope that is within us (1 Peter 3:15), let's consider whether these statements are valid.

First, we should ask what gives scholars or theologians the authority to say the Bible was not meant to be taken literally. Since they weren't there when it was written, how can they claim to know what the authors intended? They can't. Only God, the ultimate Author, could tell us for sure. Perhaps they should follow

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"the rule so wisely laid down by St. Augustine - not to depart from the literal and obvious sense, except only where reason makes it untenable or necessity requires..."

cited by Pope Leo XIII in his 1893 encyclical *Providentissimus Deus*. Catholics are not known for being Biblical literalists, but even a Catholic pope said that if it makes sense literally, we should take it literally. Jesus did.

Second, how close is the Bible we have today to what was originally written? To answer this question, we need not consider the Bible's claim to be divinely inspired. We can use the

same criteria we would to examine any other piece of ancient literature for accuracy of preservation.

A. MANUSCRIPT RELIABILITY.

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Among the factors scholars consider when determining the reliability of any ancient piece of literature are: (1) Date of Composition, (2) Date of Oldest Surviving Copy, (3) Time Lapse Between Composition and Oldest Surviving Copy, (4) Number of Copies, and (5) Agreement between Copies. The Bible stands up extraordinarily well compared to other ancient books.

1. THE NEW TESTAMENT.

We have more manuscript evidence for the New Testament than for any other ancient manuscript. Compare it to other well-attested ancient documents regarded as authoritative.

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Author	Date Written	Earliest Copy	Time Lapse	# of Copies
Herodotus	488-428 B.C.	900 A.D.	1300 yrs.	75
Thucydides	460-400 B.C.	900 A.D.	1300 yrs.	20
Tacitus	100 A.D.	1100	1000 yrs.	20
Caesar's <i>Gallic Wars</i>	58-50 B.C.	900 A.D.	950 yrs.	9-10
Livy's <i>Roman History</i>	59 B.C. - 17 A.D.	900 A.D.	900 yrs.	27

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Even better is the second-best attested ancient document, Homer's *Iliad*. This was probably written sometime around 700 B.C. The oldest surviving complete copy dates to the 13th century, about 2,000 years after the original, with the oldest partial copy dating about 500 years after the original. Even though there is such a large gap between the date of composition and the date of the oldest manuscripts, the fact that there are 643 ancient copies is enough to persuade scholars that the *Iliad* is reliable.

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The 643 manuscripts of the *Iliad* sound impressive until we learn how much evidence supports the New Testament. Though there is no known single volume containing the complete New Testament from the first three centuries, there are over 24,000 ancient manuscripts or fragments of manuscripts of individual books or of several books together. Many are stored in libraries in England, Ireland, Scotland, Egypt, and Rome and are available for scholars to view. About 5,000 are Greek, 10,000 Latin, and the rest translations into other languages. The thousands of manuscripts in other languages agree almost completely with the Greek texts from which they were translated.

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Our present dating system of B.C. (Before Christ) and A.D. (Anno Domini, or "in the year of the Lord") was not established until the 500's. Previous to that time, dates were in reference to such events as the founding of Rome. The dates of New Testament books are not obtained from the manuscripts themselves because scribes generally did not write the date on their work. Nor are the manuscripts carbon dated, because this would require the destruction of at least part of the object being dated. Instead, researchers usually estimate the date from the style of handwriting. (To illustrate the point, consider how much different the style of penmanship is in the Declaration of Independence as compared to modern handwriting.)

Based on the style of writing, the oldest almost complete texts, Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus, are dated to the fourth century – only about 300 years after the New Testament was finished. Nearly complete manuscripts date from two hundred to two hundred fifty years; fragments of many New Testament books date to less than a century after the originals; and in one case, the John Rylands Manuscript (containing part of the Gospel of John), only about twenty-five years are believed to have elapsed from the time John put pen to paper until the surviving fragment was copied.

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Twenty-five years is such a short time that many eyewitnesses to the events described were still alive when this manuscript were written. But even if there were a hundred year gap, the facts were well known. No historian could get away with claiming that Abraham Lincoln walked on water because we know better. Even after two hundred years, no one could get away with claiming that George Washington could do miracles. Likewise, if any errors crept into the Christians' books in the first few centuries, hostile witnesses would have been delighted to point them out. They could not. Instead, they killed the Christians to keep them quiet.

The Christians were not quiet! Though the canon of New Testament Scripture was not yet finalized, first and second century Christian leaders left hundreds of thousands of quotes from the manuscripts later accepted as canonical in their letters to each other (Wallace, 2014). Even if we did not have a single ancient manuscript, we could reconstruct almost the entire New Testament from their writings. This indicates that the church as a whole had access to the entire New Testament even though we do not know which books were available in individual churches.

It has sometimes been said that all but eleven verses of the New Testament can be found in quotations of first and second century Christian writers. While this might be correct, the claim is impossible to prove.

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- First, we do not have documentation showing a date when the contents of the New Testament (the Canon) became universally accepted, though it must have been before the Edict of Diocletian in 303 A.D. He ordered the execution of anyone found in possession of books sacred to Christians. They had to know what was worth dying for by then.
- Second, it is difficult to tell if an ancient writer meant to give an exact quote, a paraphrase, or merely an allusion to an earlier writing. (Blasky, 2019)

Nevertheless, it is safe to say that the great majority of the New Testament could be reconstructed from quotes by early Christian leaders.

a. Variant readings

Since we do not have any of the original pages (*autographs*) written by the New Testament authors, we cannot be certain of the exact letter-by-letter spelling of the words they wrote.

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When a letter was received, it would be read aloud to the congregation. However, many members of the early Christian church could not read and write. Those who were able to could transcribe the reading to the best of their ability, but since spelling was not standardized, it was possible to write the words in more than one way. Nevertheless, the variants would sound the same when read aloud.

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One possible explanation for variant readings such as *humeis* (your) and *hemeis* (our) is poor penmanship. The New Testament was originally written in all capital letters, so these words were written as `YMEIS and `HMEIS. The first letters, Y (upsilon) and H (eta) look different when printed but can be quite similar when written in longhand. The originals were sent to various churches where they were copied by hand for further distribution. If someone did not write clearly in producing one of the early copies, it may have been unclear to later copyists which letter to use. This could be the source of many discrepancies.

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Some skeptics claim that there are up to 200,000 variant readings of the New Testament. The number is misleading. For example, suppose a scribe copying 2 Peter 1:1 added the letter *eta* or *epsilon* to Peter's name "Simon," making it "Simeon." Every time the discrepancy occurred in a later manuscript it would be considered a textual variant. If 50 later copies contained each variant, this would be counted as 100 variants even though only one letter was added. Similarly, any spelling difference between multiple copies of manuscripts is counted multiple times.

The great majority of variants have to do with spelling, word order (Christ Jesus vs. Jesus Christ), or words found in more than one place in a chapter. For instance, some of the manuscripts of Mk. 1:1 include “the Son of God,” while others do not. However, the statement that Jesus is the Son of God is also found in v. 11 of the same chapter. Nevertheless, the presence or absence of the phrase is counted as a variant.

Though the word order or spelling may be different, because of the overwhelming manuscript evidence, less than one half of one percent of the text of the New Testament is in dispute. (By comparison, about five percent of the text of the Iliad is uncertain.)

Only three significant passages in the New Testament are the subject of any dispute. None involve any question of doctrine.

i. Mk. 16:9 - 20.

Some manuscripts omit the conclusion of Mark’s gospel, Mk. 16:9-20. This passage refers to casting out demons, speaking in unknown languages, handling serpents without harm, drinking deadly things without harm, and laying hands on the sick. Even if we were to ignore this passage, all of the concepts included in it except drinking poison without harm are found elsewhere in the New Testament. (You shouldn’t knowingly drink poison anyway. In Matt. 4:7, “Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.”)

ii. Jn. 7:53 - 8:11.

Some manuscripts omit the account of the woman caught in the act of adultery. But even if we were to never use it again, the principles of repentance and forgiveness are found throughout the New Testament.

iii. 1 Jn. 5:7.

Most ancient manuscripts omit this verse, which refers to the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit. Even if we ignore the verse, these names are found throughout the New Testament.

Suppose you had a building composed of tens of thousands of bricks and noticed that three were a slightly different color. You wouldn’t knock down the whole building! Likewise, would you throw out the whole New Testament because of three disputed passages?

b. Faithless Bible versions.

i. Cultic Versions.

Some versions of the New Testament are put out by cults such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses who feel free to change the text to support their doctrines. For instance, the Jehovah’s Witness “New World Translation” makes numerous changes from the Greek to alter or eliminate statements supporting the deity of Christ. A few examples:

- The NWT renders the simple Greek word εν (“in”) as “in union with.” For example, instead of saying “Christ in you” (KJV) in 2 Cor. 13:5 it says “Christ in union with you” (NWT). That is, Christ has to come into union with you rather than you with Him.
- Jehovah’s Witnesses recognize that only Almighty God could dwell in many people at the same time. Since they say that Jesus is a created, lesser God, they have to change 2 Cor. 13:5 from
 “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?” (KJV) to
 “Keep testing whether you are in the faith; keep proving what you yourselves are. Or do you not recognize that Jesus Christ is in union

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with you? Unless you are disapproved.” (NWT)

The purpose of such changes are to support the Jehovah’s Witness doctrine that Jesus is a created being and not Almighty God. He has to come in union with you, rather than you with Him.

Deliberate alterations to the Word of God are abominations to Him (Rev. 22:18-19).

ii. *Politically Motivated Versions.*

Some versions change what the Bible texts say for political purposes. For instance:

- In 1995 Oxford University Press published *The New Testament and Psalms: An Inclusive Version*. This version removed all references to gender. For example, it rendered John 3:16 as “For God so loved the world that God gave God’s only Child, so that everyone who believes in that Child may not perish but may have eternal life.” So as not to offend left-handed people, it also removed all negative references to the left hand and positive references to the right.
- The 2005-2011 editions of the *New International Version* also attempted to be gender neutral concerning references to humans, though not to God. For instance, “fishers of people” rather than “fishers of men.” There was such an outcry that the practice was discontinued.

c. *Textual criticism*

Deliberately altered Bible versions are not the topic of this section. We are referring instead to the dozens of versions produced by serious Bible scholars who love God and His Word. Some are intended to be (1) literal word for word translations, others (2) translations taking into account idioms in Greek and English, and still others (3) paraphrases in which the authors try to convey their idea of what the Greek text means while only loosely following the actual Greek words. Regardless which of the three types a particular version is, all at least claim to be based on one of three Greek manuscript families.

For a detailed treatment of the following, see Wallace, D. B., *The majority text and the original text: Are they identical?* <https://bible.org/article/majority-text-and-original-text-are-they-identical>.

There was no such thing as a printing press in the first century. A church fortunate enough to receive an original letter from Paul or one of the other New Testament writers would have someone read it aloud while literate members of the congregation copied it by hand. The copies would then be passed along to other churches. Unfortunately, the copyists seem to have occasionally made mistakes. As the copies were distributed and copied again, variant readings came into circulation. Since the church as a whole did not have an organized structure, there was no one to declare which was the correct variant. It was not until the development of codices, or bound books, that the texts became more or less standardized. As a result, there are several manuscript families of the Greek New Testament.

The three main New Testament manuscript families are the *Textus Receptus* (“Received Text” or TR), on which the King James Version is based; the *Majority Text* (M-Text), in which the number of manuscripts and their agreement is given more weight than the readings found in the oldest manuscripts; and the *Critical Text*, also known as the Nestle-Aland/United Bible Society text (N/U in marginal notes in many Bibles).

i. *Textus Receptus.*

The *Textus Receptus* was the name given to the Greek manuscript of the New

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Testament developed between 1516 and 1598 by the Dutch Catholic priest Erasmus, then Estienne, then Beza. It is the basis of the King James Version in English, Martin Luther's translation in German, the Reina-Valera version in Spanish, and a number of other European translations.

Erasmus compiled the TR based on the Greek manuscripts available to him. When no Greek texts were available for a passage (e.g., the last six verses of Revelation), he filled in the gaps from the Latin Vulgate dating to the 4th century.

ii. *The Majority Text (M-Text).*

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As the name implies, the Majority Text is assembled from the largest number of manuscripts agreeing on any particular passage.

In the almost 500 years since Erasmus compiled the TR from the material available in his day, many older manuscripts have been found. Thus, the 1982 Majority Text published by Thomas Nelson Publishers (Hodges and Farstad, eds.) is a bit different from the 1516 Majority Text. For instance, all the gaps Erasmus faced have been filled in.

While the M-Text is extremely similar to the T-R, there are about 2,000 differences. Almost all are trivial. The vast majority are instances of spelling or word order (e.g., "Christ Jesus" vs. "Jesus Christ"). Not a single one of them makes any difference in the meaning of the passage. For example, in 1 John 1:4 the Greek word *humeis* (your) is found in "that your joy may be full." A variant reading is *hemeis* (our), in "that our joy may be full." This is typical. In no case of a variant reading of the New Testament is there any question of doctrinal uncertainty.

iii. *The Critical Text (N/U).*

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A field of study known as *textual criticism* has helped to bring the uncertainty between ancient manuscripts down to less than one half of one percent. The term "criticism" does not indicate a negative attitude toward the New Testament, but instead indicates a scholarly approach to determining which manuscripts seem closest to the original writings.

The fact that second and third century church leaders left so many quotes from the books later included in the New Testament indicates that the church as a whole had access to the entire book. By the fourth or fifth century, the individual scrolls or papyri had been compiled into bound books called codices. These followed two major groups, the Alexandrine (named for the city of Alexandria, Egypt) and the Byzantine (named for Byzantium, center of the Byzantine Empire). The Byzantine text type is believed to have originated in the region around Antioch, Syria.

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Alexandrian readings tend to be shorter, whereas Byzantine tend to have extra words. Some believe that words were left out of the Alexandrian to minimize the deity of Christ, whereas others believe Byzantine copyists added words to support their positions. Since we do not have the original manuscripts, we cannot be certain. Regardless, both manuscript traditions include the virgin birth, the sinfulness of man, the need for a Savior, the substitutionary death of Christ, the Resurrection, and the Second Coming.

The oldest known nearly complete Greek manuscript, the Codex Sinaiticus, belongs to the Alexandrian tradition. It is believed to have been written between 325 and 360 A.D. It seems to have been lost to the church until 1859, when von Tischendorf rediscovered it in a monastery in Egypt (Codex Sinaiticus Discov-

ered.) It contains the entire New Testament except for sections such as Mk. 16:9-20, John 8:3-11, and a few verses in the Gospels. Notes written on it by monks through the centuries indicate that it was edited many times. (Biblical Archaeology, 2017)

Another important almost complete manuscript is the Codex Vaticanus (also Alexandrian), dated to the middle of the fourth century. No one knows how many years it lay in the Vatican library until it was discovered some time before 1475 (What are Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus, undated). Another important codex is Alexandrinus, dated to the fifth century.

When the Bible began to be translated into common languages such as English and German in the Middle Ages, the above mentioned codices had not yet been found. This made it difficult for scholars to be certain which manuscripts were correct. They relied on a compilation of the many thousands of fragments known as the Majority Text. This was the source of the Textus Receptus on which the King James Bible is based. As previously noted, it was incomplete in Erasmus' day.

Through the centuries, more and more manuscripts have been discovered in ancient monasteries, caves, bazaars, and even garbage dumps. They also continue to be discovered in libraries in bundles so fragile that they have yet to be peeled apart. Comparison of the newly discovered fragments with each other, with the writing of the early church leaders, and with early translations into other languages has increased the level of confidence that what we have is indeed what was originally written. The latest results of textual criticism are found in the Nestle-Aland and United Bible Society text (abbreviated N/U in many footnotes), commonly known as the *Critical Text*. This is continually revised with the discovery of new manuscripts and is in its 28th edition as of this writing. Even if one rejects the latest compilations, though, there is never any question of doctrine in any of the variant readings of the New Testament.

d. Conclusion about manuscript families.

Sinners are not saved because their Bible follows the correct spelling or word order as found in a specific manuscript family, whether Textus Receptus, the Majority Text, or the Critical Text. We are saved by believing that Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried, rose from the dead, and is alive now and forever, and by surrendering to Him as absolute Lord of our lives (1 Cor. 15:1-4, Rom. 10:9). Any non-cultic version of the New Testament can lead us to this knowledge. People in foreign lands who have never had a Bible do not argue about which version a missionary brings them.

e. Bible numerics. (From the introduction to Ivan Panin's Numeric Greek New Testament.)

Ivan Panin was born in Russia in the late 1800s and raised as an atheist. He came to the United States to study mathematics at Harvard University, from which he graduated in 1882. During his time there, he became a Christian.

Panin was fluent in the Biblical languages of Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic and enjoyed reading the Bible in its original languages. As he was doing this one day, he noticed something that caught his attention as a mathematician. He began to count words and letters and soon realized that there were some intricate patterns in the Hebrew and Greek texts.

In English, we can either spell out the name of a number or use a symbol: "1" for one, "2" for two, etc. Hebrew and Greek are different. They did not have separate symbols but had to either spell out the number or else use the letters of their alphabets as numbers. In Hebrew aleph was one, bayth was two, gimel was three,

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and so on; in Greek it was alpha for one, beta for two, gamma for three, etc. Thus, any Greek or Hebrew word has a numerical value determined by the letters it contains.

Panin found that the Hebrew and Greek texts contained intricate patterns involving prime numbers, especially 3 and 7. For example, in the first verse of the Bible, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,” the Hebrew text consists of 7 words. They contain exactly 28 (7x4) letters. The first 3 words contain the subject and have 7x2 letters. The last 4 contain the object and have 7x2 letters. The Hebrew words for “heaven” and “earth” each have 7 letters. If we add the numerical values of the 3 nouns (God, heaven, earth), we find that they total 777. The Hebrew verb for “created” has a value of 7x29. The value of the first and last letters of all 7 words is 7x199, etc.

In the first verse of the Bible alone Panin discovered 30 different features of 7. The pattern continues all the way through the last verse of Revelation. He found that any passage anywhere in the Bible contains many such features of prime numbers. A New Testament example: the genealogy of Jesus from Abraham to the Babylonian deportation (Matthew 1:1-11) contains 7x7=49 vocabulary words. (If you have a 1,000 word vocabulary you can say almost anything you want by using the words over and over.) Of these 49, 7x2 occur once and 7x5 occur more than once. 7x6 are nouns, 7 are not. 7x4 begin with a vowel, 7x3 with a consonant. 7 end with a vowel, 7x6 with a consonant. The 49 vocabulary words contain 7x38 letters. Male names occur 7x8 times. The three women’s names contain a total of 7x2 letters.

Though these are only a few of the numerical features of this passage, a skeptic might argue that a skillful mathematician could devise such a scheme. Given enough time he might - except that the names in the genealogy were chosen before Matthew was born!

Panin devoted the rest of his life to the study of Bible numerics. He found that the Bible contains an astonishing array of mathematical patterns which goes many levels deep and encompasses the whole book as well as all its parts. (He also tried other books such as the Qur’an and the Catholic Apocrypha but found no such patterns in them.) When we consider that the human authors of the Bible were ordinary people, not mathematicians, and that they lived long before the invention of computers, it becomes obvious that a fantastically intelligent supernatural being – God – must have been responsible. Though he allowed the personality and style of each of the writers to come through in their writing, “holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:21).

IMPLICATIONS FOR VARIANT READINGS.

The numeric features led Panin to expect that in cases of variant readings such as those discussed earlier there should be exactly one alternative which fit the numerical pattern. He was right. He spent almost fifty years manually trying every variant reading in the New Testament for numerical correctness. (He did not get around to the Old Testament because he died in 1942, without the benefit of computer technology to speed up his work.) He discovered that in each case exactly one reading fit the numeric scheme and compiled a *Numerically Correct Greek New Testament*.

The numerically correct version is extremely close to what we had anyway. For those students who are interested, successive editions of the Nestle-Aland Greek text have become closer and closer to Panin’s numerically correct version, compiled many decades ago. The latest edition of Nestle-Aland / United Bible Society (NU in footnotes), on which most recent translations are based, is extremely close

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to Panin's. This is not to say that there is anything wrong with the Received Text, from which the King James Version was translated. We could use the best or worst New Testament manuscripts and be saved believing either one. As we saw earlier, in no case is any doctrine of Christianity affected by variant readings.

A word of caution: some would go to extremes and read in more than God intended. They might try to build doctrines on numbers, assign secret meanings, or use the patterns to predict when Christ will return. This is foolish. God has placed so many plain messages in Scripture that there is no need to look for secret ones. The study of Bible numerics deals with structure, not doctrine. It is merely further evidence that the Bible is indeed the Word of God.

2. THE OLD TESTAMENT.

a. The time before Moses

The first parts of the Old Testament are believed to have been written around 1500 B.C. Except for the Apocrypha, the last parts were completed by about 400 B.C.

Jesus and those of His day accepted the first five books of the Bible as the work of Moses. However, some critics say that Moses could not have written Genesis since it deals with events before his birth, and that the Creation account is nothing but Hebrew poetry. They overlook both divine inspiration and oral tradition. An all-powerful God could easily have told Adam or Moses what happened before He created man. Then, from Adam's time onward, Genesis is divided into sections on "The Generations Of" various individuals:

Adam, Gen. 5:1-6:8;

Noah, 6:9-9:28;

The Sons of Noah, 10:1-11:9;

Shem, 11:10-26;

Terah, 11:27-25:11;

Ishmael, 25:12-18;

Isaac, 25:19-35:29;

Esau, 36:1-43;

and Jacob, 37:2-50:26. (Halley, 1965, 58)

This division seems to indicate that each section except the creation account was compiled either by the person named or by someone familiar with them, then passed on either orally or in writing. Finally, Moses put it all together under the inspiration of God.

The oral tradition of many supposedly primitive cultures shows that this kind of record can be extremely accurate. The tribal historian memorizes and recites the tribe's history in great detail, usually in a poetic format. The poetry helps keep the wording precise. (If you still remember childhood nursery rhymes you can attest to this!) Since everybody in the tribe has already heard it, they quickly notice and correct him if he ever makes a mistake. Even if people before the Flood hadn't invented writing – and we can't be sure they hadn't – they would have had better memories than modern day humans. The Bible makes it plain that they were extremely intelligent and lived for centuries. (See Appendix A for more on life spans.) If we take the genealogies of Genesis at face value, the numbers in the Masoretic Text imply that Adam may have been alive until Noah's father Lamech was over fifty years old. Adam would have been able to tell him what had happened. Lamech could then have told Noah, who preserved the record through the Flood. He lived an additional 600 years and would certainly have passed on the narrative to his descendants. Though there may be gaps in the post-Flood genealogy, it is possible that he lived until Abraham was a young man. From then, it was only a few hundred years until Moses put it all together in Genesis.

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In past years some liberal theologians argued that Moses could not have written the first five books of the Bible because writing was unknown in his day, ca. 1400 B.C. Archaeology has destroyed this argument. The Ebla Kingdom, a great civilization that flourished a thousand years before Moses, had extensive written records (McDowell, 1986, 68). Writing was already in wide use by the time Abraham was born, centuries before Moses (Halley, 1965, 44-57).

b. Organization of the Hebrew Bible (the Tanakh).

Unlike the New Testament, we do not have thousands of ancient manuscripts of the Old Testament. Nevertheless, the ones we do have are also completely reliable.

The Old Testament was written almost entirely in Hebrew, though a few small sections in Ezra and Daniel were written in Aramaic. (Same alphabet, different vocabulary.) It was assembled over more than a thousand years by over thirty human authors. Some books identify their authors, while others are anonymous.

The Jewish Bible used at least since the days of Jesus is known as the *Tanakh*. It has the same contents as the Protestant Old Testament, but divided and arranged differently. Our Old Testament is divided into 39 books, but the Tanakh combines some of the historical books so that it has 35. Chapter and verse divisions were added many centuries later.

- The first part of the Tanakh is the *Torah*, also known as the Pentateuch. It includes Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.
- The *Nevi'im* (Prophets) include Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel (combined into a single book), 1 and 2 Kings (also combined), Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.
- The *Ketuvim* (Writings) include Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra and Nehemiah (combined), and 1 and 2 Chronicles (also combined).

No one person or group decided which books belonged to the canon of Scripture. Down through the years they were accepted by consensus. Some of the criteria used were:

- (1) Any new writings had to be in agreement with earlier scriptures such as the Torah.
- (2) They had to be written by a recognized prophet or author of earlier Scripture.
- (3) They had to be written in Hebrew.
- (4) They had to be written in the nation of Judah or Israel.
- (5) They would be eliminated if they contained a single error.

By the time of Jesus the contents of the Hebrew Bible were settled except for the Book of Esther, which was finally accepted as inspired about 70 A.D. After the destruction of Jerusalem in that year, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai obtained permission from Rome to reassemble the Jewish Sanhedrin to settle once and for all which books should be included in the Hebrew canon. This "Council of Jamnia" settled the dispute about Esther, but neither added nor removed any books. They merely reaffirmed what the Jewish people had accepted for centuries.

Though Jesus disagreed with the Scribes and Pharisees about the meaning of the Scriptures, He never argued about the books they accepted as sacred. He and the New Testament authors quoted from many of these books. Early Christian leaders such as Melito (ca. 170 A.D.) accepted the list from Jamnia as authoritative.

In addition to the books confirmed by the Council of Jamnia, the Roman Catholic Old Testament contains several parts known by Protestants as the *Apocrypha* (Greek for "hidden") and by Catholics as *Deuterocanonical* (the "Second Canon"). These are Tobit, Judith, I and II Maccabees, Wisdom, Sirach, and Baruch as well as extra chapters in Esther and Daniel. The Greek Orthodox Old Testament

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also includes I and II Esdras and the Prayer of Manasseh. All of these apocryphal books were known in Jesus' day but had been rejected by the Jews. Not once did Jesus or any New Testament writer quote any of them. They only began to be accepted as inspired writings after Augustine proclaimed them as such (ca. 380). Jerome, translator of the Latin Vulgate translation used by the Catholic Church, opposed Augustine and at first refused even to translate them into Latin. They were brought into the Vulgate after his death, but were not finally accepted as canonical by Catholicism until the Council of Trent in 1546. Protestants recognize that the books of Maccabees contain useful historical information, but agree with the early Church in rejecting the Apocrypha as scripture.

c. *Procedures for copying the Hebrew texts.*

The Scriptures were originally written in ancient Hebrew, which used only consonants. Vowel points were added later to assist in pronunciation.

Unfortunately, we do not have any of the original texts from centuries before Christ. Until recently the Masoretic Text (named for a group of scribes known as the Masoretes), dated to about 980 A.D., was the oldest known manuscript in existence. However, the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls shows the amazing accuracy of the Jewish copyists. These scrolls, found in caves at Qumran near the Dead Sea, include every book of the Old Testament except Esther. They are about a thousand years older than the Masoretic Text, yet the differences consist of nothing more than slips of the pen and spelling variations (Jeffrey, 1996, 97-98).

Before King David (ca. 1000 B.C.), there was no formal organization dedicated to the precise copying of the Scriptures. He established the position of scribe as a permanent profession specializing in the copying of the holy writings. However, in the centuries after David's death, the nations of Israel and Judah sometimes fell into idolatry and lost interest in the scriptures until the Babylonian exile cured them of idolatry once and for all. From then on there were groups of scribes dedicated to the accurate copying and preservation of the sacred manuscripts.

How could the Jewish scribes be so accurate? They devoted their lives to the task of copying and were willing to die at the hand of foreign armies rather than allow anything to happen to the sacred text. They had very strict regulations that even prescribed what color ink to use and what to wear while copying. Among their precautions to insure accuracy:

- They were not allowed to write a single letter from memory.
- They counted not only the verses but even the number of letters in the original and the copy.
- They counted the number of occurrences of each letter.
- They counted the middle verses and letters of major sections of the text, and of the whole Old Testament.
- They had rules for how many letters wide and how many lines high each column could be.
- They had regulations for the exact amount of space between letters and between sections of the text. (McDowell, pp. 53-55)

A single mistake was sufficient to invalidate the whole manuscript. They usually destroyed flawed copies, but because of the scarcity of written material they sometimes allowed them to be used to teach students to read. This may explain some of the spelling variations between the Masoretic Text and the Dead Sea Scrolls. We have no way to know if the latter were perfect copies or were rejected because of spelling.

As a result of all their precautions, the Jewish scribes were so confident of the accuracy of a copy that they saw no need to keep originals that had deteriorated due

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to age. Thus, the scarcity of extremely old manuscripts need not lessen our confidence in the Old Testament. Even though there are a very small number of variant readings, none involves any question of doctrine.

Jesus and the rest of the Jewish people trusted the accuracy of the copyists completely.

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- We can see this in the account of Jesus' temptation (Luke 4), where he responded to Satan simply by quoting the Old Testament.
- In other places He quoted the Creation story (Mt. 19:4).
- He referred to the Flood as a real historical event (Mt. 24:37-39).
- He referred to the Torah (the first five books of the Old Testament) as the writings of Moses (Jn. 5:46,47 and Lk. 20:37-38).
- He referred to Daniel as a true prophet (Mt. 24:15).
- In Matthew 22:32 He set forth the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead based on the tense of a verb! (I AM, rather than I WAS, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.)

The New Testament authors directly quoted the Old Testament over 320 times and alluded to it hundreds of times more. Peter was so confident that he said that the Old Testament authors "spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Pet. 1:21).

In Galatians 3:16 we see how crucial the accuracy of the Old Testament is to the Christian faith. In this passage Paul shows that all the benefits we have "in Christ" are available only because in the book of Genesis God had made promises to Abraham's seed (singular) and not seeds (plural). Because Jesus is the seed (singular), we can only come to God through Him. If the promises had been made to seeds (plural), we would not need Jesus! If He really is the Son of God, God would have taken care to see that His words were transmitted accurately.

Even though we do not have the number of ancient originals that we have of the New Testament, we have a great many manuscripts of the Old Testament copied at different places and times, and in many languages. One example is the Yemenite Torah, handed down by a group of Jews in Yemen separated from their brethren more than a thousand years earlier. In over a millennium of copying and recopying, a total of nine letters changed out of 304,805 in the Masoretic Torah. (Jeffrey, 1996, 14)

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d. *The Greek Septuagint.*

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Probably the most important non-Hebrew Old Testament manuscript is the Septuagint, the Greek version translated around 250 B.C. after Alexander the Great made Greek the official language of his realm.

(For details on the following three paragraphs, see Brenton, 1844.)

The origin of the Septuagint is shrouded in legend. Aristobulus says that the translation of the Law was completed in Alexandria under the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus. However, it is unclear if he is referring only to the Torah, or the whole Old Testament.

One story about the origin of the Septuagint says that the translation was accomplished by seventy scholars. Since the Latin number for seventy is LXX, this abbreviation is often used for the Septuagint. Another version by a writer supposedly named Aristeeas says that seventy-two interpreters, six from each tribe of Israel, were placed on an island for seventy-two days and produced the translation by mutual agreement. Variations of this story say that each of the interpreters, working independently in his own cell, produced a version identical to all the others. Others say they worked in pairs, each with an *emanuensis* (a stenographer) and produced identical versions.

Regardless how it came to be, the Septuagint was dated several centuries before Christ. Early Christians often quoted it, but they also quoted second century trans-

lations from Hebrew into Greek by Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion. Sometimes they did not exactly quote any of the previous versions but instead paraphrased or translated from the Hebrew themselves. When it came to the book of Daniel, they used Theodotion's version rather than the Septuagint.

In the early 200's, Origen dealt with discrepancies between the Hebrew and Greek texts in his work *Hexapla*. As we shall see, some of the discrepancies can be a source of uncertainty. However, the agreement between the Hebrew Masoretic Text and the copies in various languages is remarkable. As with the New Testament, even the variant readings are trivial.

e. Numeric Discrepancies.

The discrepancies between Hebrew texts and those in other languages are few and far between. The very small number of variant readings in the Old Testament almost always have to do with numerical values. (Even then, only a tiny percentage of the numbers are affected.) Many of the uncertainties are found in the genealogy of Genesis chapter 5, in which the ages at which some of the men became fathers differ by exactly a hundred years between the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint.

Remember that not a single one of the numeric discrepancies affects any doctrines of either the Jewish or Christian faith. Even if we add thousands of years to the Genesis 5 genealogy, we still conclude that the age of mankind is to be measured in thousands of years, not millions, and that a real man named Adam brought sin and death into the world.

In case of a discrepancy between the Hebrew manuscripts (such as the Masoretic Text) and those in other languages, we can look to Jesus, the Creator of all things. He said,

"For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." (Matt 5:18)

A jot was the smallest letter in the Hebrew language (*yodh*), and a tittle (Greek *keriaia*) was a tiny pen stroke used to distinguish one Hebrew letter from another. These terms have nothing to do with any language except Hebrew. This author believes that Jesus was guaranteeing the preservation of the Hebrew text. In case of a disagreement, we shall consider the Hebrew text as authoritative.

Even though the numeric variations are trivial, what caused them? Though we cannot be completely sure, they are very likely due to differences in language and numbering systems. The earliest manuscripts were in ancient Hebrew, which was written without vowels. By about 500 B.C. the Aramaic language had become so widespread in the Middle East that it was deemed necessary to translate the Scriptures from Hebrew into that language. Though the alphabet was the same, the vocabulary was different. Translators of the Aramaic version as well as the Septuagint and the later Masoretic Text (a more modern version of Hebrew) had to decide which vowels belonged in the original Hebrew in order to convert it to those other languages. Since the translators worked at different times and places, there was no way for them to consult with each other. They seem to have disagreed about the proper vowels in a few passages.

Letters in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek have a numerical value: aleph and alpha have a value of one, beyth and beta two, and so on. The numerical value of the letters may have affected the translators' choices of which vowels to insert in going from Hebrew to one of the other languages. Any scribes who came along later would simply copy what the translators of their version had decided was correct.

Even including these few variant numerical readings, there is only a tiny amount of variation between manuscripts. Almost nothing else besides numbers – names, places, historical events, prophecies, etc. – seems to have been affected. We

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can use what scholars judge to be the best manuscripts or what they deem worst, and we will still reach the same conclusions about what God wanted us to know.

Despite the few trivial discrepancies between the Aramaic, Septuagint, and the later Hebrew, the translators obviously all drew from the same ancient Hebrew sources. Those ancient texts had been copied with rigorous attention to detail. And as meticulous as the Jewish Scribes were with the Hebrew Scriptures in general, they were even more so with the Torah, or Law of Moses. Not only was it copied with extreme care, it was also memorized by many Jewish people besides the scribes. Any mistakes in copying would have been quickly detected and corrected.

All in all, the manuscript evidence and the care with which Jewish scribes copied the Old Testament Scriptures show us that the Bible we have today is a reliable record of what was originally written thousands of years ago. The Torah, which includes the Creation story of Genesis, was preserved with special care. You may not believe in Creation, but you have to admit that the narrative has not changed in any significant way from the way Moses wrote it.

B. FULFILLED PROPHECY.

Recommended resource: McDowell, <i>Evidence That Demands A Verdict</i> , Chap. 9
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Perhaps the most powerful argument for the Bible's divine origin is fulfilled prophecy. While humans or "familiar spirits" (demons who are intimately familiar with the details of specific people's lives) might be able to occasionally guess what the future holds, no one but God could predict it with 100% accuracy.

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The Bible is unique among all the world's "holy books" in its prophecies. None of the other books dares to make more than a few testable predictions. The Book of Mormon only makes one, and it is wrong. (Jesus was born in Bethlehem, not Jerusalem.) The Qur'an makes two, but one was very nonspecific as to time and the other was written after the fact. The Bible, on the other hand, makes thousands. Try though skeptics might, none has ever been able to prove a single one of its prophecies false.

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The study of prophecy is a powerful way to test the Bible's claims to divine origin with a degree of objectivity. Scientists routinely use probability studies such as chi-square tests to try to determine whether a phenomenon is random or not, without necessarily knowing why. We can apply similar principles to Bible prophecy to see if it consists of random guesses or whether it is most likely nonrandom.

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Probabilities (and improbabilities) multiply rather than adding. If a number of events each have a one in ten chance of occurring, then the odds of three of them occurring are not one in thirty but instead 1 in 10 x 1 in 10 x 1 in 10, or one in a thousand.

1. PROPHECIES ABOUT JESUS.

Consider just a few of the predictions about to the coming of the Messiah. What is the chance that any one person would be born a descendant of Abraham? Let's assume one in ten. (It's actually much less.) Now, what's the chance that he will also be an Israelite, belong to the tribe of Judah and the family of David but not be descended from Jehoiachin (Jer. 22:30), and will be born in Bethlehem, then move to Egypt, grow up in Nazareth, die by crucifixion in Jerusalem after being betrayed by a friend for thirty pieces of silver, but have none of his bones broken, etc.? Jesus fulfilled at least sixty-one such prophecies.

Dr. Peter Stoner (1944) calculated that the chance of any one person fulfilling just eight of the sixty-one prophecies. He used very conservative estimates of the probability of fulfilling each prophecy, as follows:

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- Born in Bethlehem - 1 in 280,000 people.
- Someone claimed to be his forerunner - 1 in 1,000.

- Entered Jerusalem “riding on a colt, the foal of an ass” - 1 in 100.
- Betrayed by a friend, hands wounded - 1 in 1,000.
- Betrayed for 30 pieces of silver - 1 in 1,000.
- The 30 pieces of silver thrown into the Lord’s house and used to buy a potter’s field - 1 in 100,000.
- On trial for his life but offers no defense - 1 in 1,000.
- Died by crucifixion - 1 in 10,000.

Even with these extraordinarily conservative estimates, Stoner still calculated that the chance of any one man fulfilling all eight was about one in 10^{28} (a “1” followed by 17 zeroes). Since some believe that as many as 10^{11} people may have lived on the earth since its beginning, what is the chance that at least one of them would have randomly fulfilled all eight of these prophecies? It would be one in 10^{28} divided by one in 10^{11} , or about one in 10^{17} (one in a hundred quadrillion).

How likely is this? Suppose you covered the state of Texas two feet deep with silver dollars. Take one of those dollars and put an “X” on it. Now blindfold someone, turn him loose in Texas, and give him one chance to find the marked coin. His chance of success is about the same as the probability that anyone could accidentally fulfill just eight of the Messianic prophecies.

Stoner calculates the chance of fulfilling forty-eight of the prophecies at about one in 10^{157} . To visualize this number, we need to use electrons rather than silver dollars. Imagine a solid ball of electrons 6 billion light years in diameter - a significant portion of the estimated size of the universe. Stoner calculates that it would take 6×10^{28} such balls to contain 10^{157} electrons. So in this many universe-sized balls of electrons, you get one chance to pick the one correct electron. The probability is unimaginably small.

Mathematicians usually consider any event with a probability of less than one in 10^{50} as impossible. Yet the Bible predicted not only these eight events but many others, all with perfect accuracy. For example:

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- Genesis 49:10 says “The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come...”

This was always understood by the Jews as a Messianic prophecy. When Rome removed took away the right of capital punishment in about 11 A.D., Rabbi Rachmon wrote in the Jerusalem Talmud, “Woe unto us, for the scepter has departed from Judah, and the Messiah has not come.” But Jesus HAD come -- He was a teenager!

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- The Messiah would be “cut off,” then Jerusalem and the Temple would be destroyed. Jesus was crucified around 30 A.D. About 40 years later, Titus destroyed the city and the sanctuary.
- Would come while the Temple was still standing, after which it would be destroyed - Mal. 3:1, Dan. 9:26
- Gifts would be brought by kings after His birth - Ps. 72:10, Isa. 60:6
- He would be born at the “Tower of the Flock” in Bethlehem - Mic. 4:8
- Murder of children at His birth - Jer. 31:15
- Jealous for the Temple - Ps. 69:9
- Ministry begins in Galilee - Isa. 9:1
- Would perform miracles - Isa. 35:5-6 et al.
- Would teach in parables - Ps. 78:2
- Sufferings (e.g., stripes) described in detail - Isa. 53
- Spit upon - Isa. 56
- Hands and feet pierced - Ps. 22:16
- Garments divided - Ps. 22:18
- Given gall and vinegar - Ps. 69:21

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- No bones broken - Ps. 34:20
- Executed with criminals - Isa. 53:12
- Body pierced - Zech. 12:10
- Darkness at His death - Amos 8:9
- Buried in rich man's grave - Isa. 53:9
- Would rise from the dead - Ps. 16:10. (Not many people ever did this.)

While each of these (except rising from the dead) could happen to a number of people, the odds that all of them would accidentally happen to any one individual are incomprehensible. The most reasonable explanation would be that they were intended to be about Him and Him alone.

2. **PROPHECIES ABOUT OTHER INDIVIDUALS.**

Some Bible prophecies relate to specific individuals besides the Messiah.

- Isa. 44 and 45 called King Cyrus of Persia by name hundreds of years before he was born.
- Likewise, King Josiah of the nation of Judah was identified by name several hundred years before his birth (1 Kgs. 13: 1 - 2).
- The place and manner of Queen Jezebel's death was foretold about 14 years before it happened (1 Kings 21:23, 2 Kings 9:30-36).

3. **PROPHECIES ABOUT FOREIGN CITIES AND NATIONS.**

Foreign nations and cities were often the subjects of Bible prophecies.

a. *Tyre.*

Tyre was once a major center of commerce on the east end of the Mediterranean. Part of it was on an island and part on the mainland. In roughly 590 B.C., Ezekiel 26:1-21) said that:

- Many nations would come against it.
- The inhabitants would be slain.
- Nebuchadnezzar would build a siege mound against it.

First, Nebuchadnezzar and his armies destroyed the mainland city. The rest of the inhabitants moved to the island portion offshore, where he could not reach them.

- Its walls, houses, stones, timber, and soil would be laid in the water.
- It would be scraped clean like the top of a rock.

The island was later attacked by Persia, Egypt, Cyprus, Syria, Greece, Rome, and many others. The city was still not completely destroyed, though, until Alexander the Great used the rubble from the mainland city to build a half mile long causeway to the island offshore. He had his soldiers scrape the rocks clean to obtain enough material.

- It would become a place for fishermen to spread their nets.
- It would never be rebuilt.

After the island city was destroyed, it became a place where fishermen spread their nets. It was never rebuilt. (The modern city of Tyre is at a different location than the original one.)

b. *Babylon.*

The 13th chapter of Isaiah (written about 730 B.C.) and the 51st chapter of Jeremiah (sometime before 586 B.C.) foretold that the great city of Babylon would be conquered by the Medes. At the time, Babylon was the greatest empire in the world, and Medea was a relatively obscure kingdom only beginning to gain influence.

The Medes conquered Babylon in 538 B.C., about 200 years after Isaiah's prophecy and 50 years after Jeremiah's.

c. *Egypt.*

Isaiah 20:3 - 5 (written ca. 730 B.C.) predicted that Egypt and Ethiopia would be conquered by Assyria. This was fulfilled about 60 years later, ca. 670 B.C. Ezekiel

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29:13 – 15 (ca. 588 B.C.) said that Egypt would be allowed to return to its land after 40 years, but would never rule over other nations again. This was fulfilled around 548 B.C.

4. PROPHECIES ABOUT THE CITY OF JERUSALEM.

The city of Jerusalem and the Temple were the subjects of specific prophecies.

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In Luke 21, Jesus prophesied that there would not be one stone left on another in the Temple. This was literally fulfilled in the year 70 A.D. when the Romans finally captured it after a lengthy battle. In the course of the attack, the interior furnishings caught fire and burned so hot that all the metal objects used in the Jewish rituals, such as the golden utensils, melted. When the Roman general Titus realized that the molten gold had flowed down into the cracks between the stones, he ordered that every two stones be separated and the gold scraped off.

In the same chapter, Jesus also spoke of the future siege and destruction of Jerusalem. This came true at the time of Titus' attack. He also put a time limit on the occupation of Jerusalem by the Gentiles. Sure enough, Israel finally regained title to Jerusalem in the Six Day War. This came to pass only recently, in 1967. God is not done with fulfilling prophecies.

5. PROPHECIES ABOUT THE NATION OF ISRAEL.

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There were also detailed prophecies about the nation of Israel. After Solomon's death, his kingdom split into Judah and Israel. About 200 years later, Israel was taken captive by Assyria and ceased to be a nation. Judah still maintained its identity, but there was no such nation as Israel. Yet prophecies about Israel continued to come. Since there was no Israel, for over 2,000 years many commentators took the prophecies as merely symbolic.

After the nation of Israel ceased to exist, Isa. 66:8 – 9 predicted that Zion (another name for Israel) would be born in one day. Later, Ezek. 17:11 said that God would give His people the land of Israel, and Ezek. 37 said that Judah and Israel would no longer be two separate nations but would together comprise the nation of Israel. These prophecies were fulfilled in 1948, when the United Nations reestablished the nation of Israel in ONE DAY.

6. PROPHECIES OF DANIEL CHAPTER 11.

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Though there are many examples of fulfilled prophecy throughout the Bible, Daniel chapter 11 is particularly amazing because of the number of details it gives about the future history of the Jewish homeland. (See Appendix C for more details.) In this passage an angel reveals to Daniel what will take place in the Middle East for the next few hundred years. Without giving specific names he outlines the conquest of the area by Alexander the Great and the splitting of Alexander's kingdom into four parts after his death. The angel then describes in meticulous detail the interaction between the Ptolemaic dynasty in Egypt (even the Cleopatra made famous by the movies) and the Seleucids in Syria, hundreds of years in advance. The prophecy is so accurate and detailed that many skeptics refuse to believe it was written beforehand, and claim that it must have been put together after the fact. They have to ignore the testimony of history because of their hostility toward the Bible.

Visual
#3-59

The Bible's 100% accuracy in fulfilled prophecy shows that it is beyond the abilities of human beings. A reasonable person would have to conclude that it is the work of a supernatural being. It is indeed the word of God.

C. INTERNAL EVIDENCE.

The next test of the accuracy of any book is the internal evidence - that is, what does it actually say? What does it claim about itself? Does it contradict itself? Does it make impossible statements?

1. WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT ITSELF.

The Bible claims to be the Word of God, written down by human authors either at the dictation or inspiration of God. Only two parts, the Ten Commandments and Daniel 5:5 (the handwriting on the wall), are said to have been written supernaturally by God's own hand.

A great deal of the Bible describes circumstances in which the authors lived: first-century Palestine, Israel a thousand years before Christ, etc. Critics in the past often claimed that many books of the Bible were written long after they claimed to be. Archaeology in the last century has falsified these claims, repeatedly verifying the Biblical accounts and showing that the details they describe match exactly with known historical events. For instance, skeptics used to claim that the kings of Judah and Israel found in the books of Kings and Chronicles were mythical figures much like those of Greek and Roman mythology. However, in recent years archaeologists digging in the Middle East have unearthed ancient monuments and inscriptions that mention by name the following kings: David and the House of David, Omri and the House of Omri, Ahab, Jehu, Joash, Menahem, Pekah, Hoshea, Ahaziah, Uzziah, Ahaz, Hezekiah, Manasseh, and Jehoiachin. In addition, researchers found a clay cylinder in Iraq bearing the actual decree of Cyrus quoted in Ezra 1:1-3 allowing the Jewish people to return to their homeland (Jeffrey, 1996, 72-78; for more examples see McDowell's *Evidence That Demands A Verdict* or Halley's *Bible Handbook*, available from any Christian bookstore.)

All in all, the skeptics are looking pretty foolish.

2. DOES THE NEW TESTAMENT REFLECT A GROWING MYTHOLOGY IN THE EARLY CHURCH?

Some skeptics claim that the accounts of Jesus' miracles are myths made up by the early Christian church in the first few centuries, and that he really didn't do any miracles. The sequence of New Testament writings shows that this modern heresy is false.

Some of Paul's epistles were among the first New Testament books written. According to numerous sources, the approximate dates of writing were:

- A.D. 52, 1 & 2 Thessalonians.
- A.D. 57-58, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Romans, 2 Corinthians.
- A.D. 60, James.
- Tradition says that Matthew's gospel was originally written in Hebrew (though there are no known Hebrew manuscripts), then translated into Greek in A.D. 60. Mark is believed to have been written afterward, between 60 and 70 A.D. Later came Luke and Acts, which stops at Paul's first imprisonment. Thus, we can infer that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Acts were concluded before the last of the "Prison epistles" (Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians, and Philippians).
- A.D. 61-63, Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, Philippians.
- Between 61 and 70, Hebrews.
- Ca. 64 - 67, 1 and 2 Tim.
- Ca. 65, Titus.
- Ca. 66, but before Paul's death that year, 1 Peter.
- Ca. 67, 2 Peter and Jude.
- A.D. 85 - 90, 1, 2, and 3 John.
- Ca. 90, John's Gospel, written from Ephesus.
- Ca. 96, Revelation, written from Patmos.

If the miracles of Jesus were myths added later, we would expect that the later books would record more and more of them. However, John's Gospel, one of the last books, pays less attention to miracles than do the earlier writings. And one of the earliest books, 1 Corinthians, reports that Jesus appeared to 500 people at a time after His res-

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#3-61

urrection, while the Gospels, written years later, list only a few witnesses. If this is a myth, it's shrinking instead of growing!

None of the early critics of Christianity was ever able to deny anything written in the New Testament. Only after they are separated from the eyewitnesses by thousands of years can modern critics get away with their destructive heresies.

3. **INTERNAL CONSISTENCY.**

For thousands of years, critics have said that the Bible is full of errors and contradictions. Yet when pressed for examples they cannot prove a single one.

The Bible contains no internal conflicts, despite the number of human authors, the length of time it took to write, and the different languages and political circumstances under which it was written.

a. *Authors.*

The Bible was written by at least forty human authors, some identified but many anonymous. They included shepherds, kings, priests, fishermen, farmers, and a medical doctor. Some were well educated, others were unschooled.

b. *Time Span.*

The Bible was written over the space of about 1,600 years from Genesis to Revelation. (According to tradition, the book of Job was the first part actually written down.)

c. *Languages.*

The Bible was written in three different languages. Most of the Old Testament was written in Hebrew, though a small part was Aramaic (same alphabet, different vocabulary). The New Testament was written in a dialect known as Koine (Common) Greek.

d. *Political Circumstances.*

The Bible was written in times of peace and war, prosperity and poverty, health and pestilence, plenty and famine. Some of the books were written while the Jewish people ruled most of the Middle East; others, while they were enslaved by invaders.

A television commercial for a large telephone network that aired a few years ago gives a humorous view of the kind of results a committee often produces. In the commercial, a team of designers are called upon to build the perfect automobile. Each has his own ideas about how it should look. As a result, the finished product is full of conflicting designs and looks ridiculous.

Despite the fact that the Bible was written by so many men under such widely differing circumstances, it is not like the car in the commercial. It is perfectly harmonious with itself from beginning to end. It contains many moral standards: Thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain, etc. If it were merely a human book, we would expect that these standards would change to fit the circumstances. For example, in times of famine and invasion, the human author might relax the prohibition against stealing, especially from the enemy. A man with a sexual problem might want to relax the commandments against immorality. Yet none of the human authors does any such thing. The Bible is perfectly consistent in its doctrine from beginning to end.

CHAPTER 3 REVIEW

A. Manuscript Reliability.

1. New Testament - about 24,000 ancient manuscripts available. Less than 1/2 of 1% of the text is uncertain. In none of these uncertainties is a question of doctrine involved.

1a. Textual Criticism.

The agreement between New Testament manuscripts has been confirmed by a million or so quotations by early church leaders. The degree of agreement has allowed us to become more and more confident about the text of the original books.

1b. Bible Numerics.

The numerical patterns throughout the Bible are not found in any other book in the world. They should not be used to build doctrines, but they are further evidence that the Bible is divinely inspired.

2. Old Testament - The Jewish scribes dedicated their lives to accurate copying. They used elaborate systems to prevent copying mistakes. Jesus and the New Testament writers completely trusted their accuracy, even building doctrines on the tense of verbs and whether nouns were singular or plural.

The Torah, which includes the Creation account, was preserved with even more care because it was memorized by many other Jews besides the scribes. Any mistakes in copying would have been quickly detected and corrected. Jesus attributed all five books to Moses' authorship.

B. Fulfilled Prophecy.

The Bible's 100% accuracy in predicting the future is unique among all the books in the world. No one has ever been able to prove a single Bible prophecy false. A reasonable person would conclude that it has to be supernatural in its origin.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Catholics call the extra Old Testament books in their Bible the _____ books. Protestants call them the _____.
2. The latest of the New Testament books are believed to have been written before what year? _____
3. What kind of materials were the original New Testament scrolls written on? _____ or _____, which could last hundreds of years.
4. Beginning in about the 4th century, the New Testament began to be compiled into books. Each of these was called a _____.
5. Did the Councils of Hippo or Carthage add or remove any books from the New Testament? _____
6. There is more manuscript evidence for the _____ than for any other ancient book.
7. How many years elapsed between the time the New Testament books were written and the time of the earliest codices? About _____ years.
8. For other ancient writings considered reliable, there is a gap of at least _____ years between the date of composition and the date of the oldest surviving copy.
9. About how many Greek fragments or manuscripts are there for the New Testament? _____
10. About how many Latin (Vulgate) fragments or manuscripts? _____
11. How would the process of reading letters aloud and transcribing them contribute to spelling variations? Spelling was not _____.
12. What are the three main disputed passages in the New Testament? Mk. _____, Jn. _____, 1 Jn. _____.
13. How many Christian doctrines (except for the idea of drinking poison without harm) depend entirely on these disputed passages? _____
14. Which Greek manuscript family is the King James Version based on? TR, or _____.
15. Which manuscript family are most modern translations based on? N/U, commonly known as the _____.
16. If we take the New Testament manuscripts as a whole, how much difference in doctrine is there between TR and the Critical Text? _____
17. Though the arrangement is different, how much difference is there in the contents of the Protestant Old Testament and the Hebrew Tanakh? _____
18. Did Jesus ever say that the Scribes and Pharisees were wrong about which books belonged in the Hebrew Scriptures? _____

19. The Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures is called the _____.
20. Most of the discrepancies between the Septuagint and the Hebrew scriptures (e.g., the Masoretic Text) have to do with _____.
21. The Bible is different from all the other “holy books” of the world because it accurately tells the _____ hundreds of times.
22. Do the later New Testament books report more miracles, or fewer, than the earlier books?
