

**“The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever”
(Is.40: 8)**

+ Lecture I: How authentic and reliable is the Holy Bible? +

To be considered to have come from an all-powerful and all-knowledgeable God, a book must meet certain requirements. First, it must be transmitted to us accurately from the time it was originally written so that we may have an exact representation of what God said and did. Second, it must be correct when it deals with historical events. Finally, it must be without any scientific absurdities, which would betray that it came by human authorship. The Holy Bible meets the above requirements and much, much more.

I) The Proof of the Uniqueness of the Holy Bible:

The Bible is unique in its ‘**continuity**’. It’s a book that was written over a 1600-year span; written over 40 generations; written by more than 40 authors, from every walk of life (kings, peasants, philosophers, fishermen, poets, statesmen, physicians...etc). It’s a book written in different places ranging from the Sinai desert to the prison walls of St. Paul. It’s a book written at different times of peace and war, at different moods of joy and sorrow. It’s a book written on three continents (Asia, Africa, and Europe), written in three languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek). Finally, it’s a book whose subject matter includes hundreds of topics. Yet the Bible spoke with extraordinary harmony and continuity about one unfolding story: ‘God’s redemption of the human race’.

+ Let us compare the first three chapters of the Holy book of Genesis and the last three chapters of the Holy book of Revelation:

- In Genesis we read, ‘In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth’ (Gen.1: 1) and in Revelation we discover ‘a new heaven and a new earth’ (Rev.21: 1).
- In the second chapter of Genesis we learn about the first wedding and in chapter 20 of Revelation we read about the wedding between Christ and the Church.
- The third chapter of Genesis tells us about the temporary victory of the serpent (Satan) and chapter 20 of Revelation describes the eternal defeat of ‘the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan’ (Rev.20: 2 – 10).
- Genesis 3 tells us about sin that separates us from God and Revelation 21 announces our redemption, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God’ (Rev.21: 3).
- In Genesis 3 we read about God preventing Adam from coming near the tree of life while in Revelation we read about ‘the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations’ (Rev.22: 2).

The Bible is unique in its ‘**survival**’. Being written on material that perishes and having to be copied and recopied for hundreds of years before the invention of the printing press did not diminish the style, correctness, or existence of the Bible. Compared with other ancient writings, the Bible has more manuscript evidence than any ten pieces of classical literature combined.

The Bible survived not only time, but also active persecution, both political and intellectual. The Bible survives everyday through criticism. No other book has been so chopped, knifed, sifted, scrutinized, and vilified. No other book has been subject to such mass attacks. Nevertheless, it remains the book most read, most quoted, most referenced, most circulated, most translated, and most cherished until this very day. If this criticism were ever effective in the past, it would have rendered the Bible unworthy of the critics' attention today. The fact that critics continue to target the Bible proves that their past criticism did nothing less than strengthen the belief in the Bible itself.

II) The Proof of Textual Evidence:

+ The Old Testament Manuscripts:

There are not nearly as many OT manuscripts that still exist as we have today for the NT, nor do the ones that exist date very close to the time of the author's original document. The OT was written sometimes between 1500-400 BC. Until recently (with the discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls), the oldest complete OT manuscript was dated at about 900 AD. This made a time gap of 1300 years between when the OT was completed (around 400 BC) and the earliest manuscript (around 900 AD).

One might be concerned with the lack of very old copies of the OT text, until one considers the nature of the copying technique that was used by the Hebrew scribes:

1. A synagogue roll must be written on the skins of clean animals prepared by a Jew.
2. These must be fastened together with strings taken from clean animals.
3. Every skin (page) must contain a certain number of columns, equal throughout the entire codex.
4. The length of each column must not extend less than 48 or more than 60 lines; and the breadth must consist of thirty letters.
5. The whole copy must be first lined; and if three words were written without a line, it is worthless.
6. The ink should be black and prepared according to a definite recipe.
7. An authentic copy must be the exemplar, from which the transcriber ought not in the least deviate.
8. No word or letter, not even a yod, must be written from memory, the scribe not having looked at the codex before him.
9. The copyist must wash his whole body and sit in full Jewish dress.
10. He must not begin to write the name of God (YHWH) with a pen newly dipped in ink and should a king address him while writing that name he must take no notice of him.

(Samuel Davidson, *Hebrew Text of the Old Testament*, 2d Ed., Samuel Bagster & Son 1859)

The Massorettes (AD 500-900, from *massora*, 'Tradition) took upon themselves the tedious and time-consuming job of editing and standardizing the Hebrew text, adding vowel points that would insure proper pronunciation (the earliest Hebrew was written using only consonants, correct pronunciation was assumed). The text that the Massorettes produced is called the 'Massoretic' text. This is the standard Hebrew text

that is used today. The Hebrew scribes had elaborate systems for transcribing that gave them enough confidence in the new copies that the original copy actually became **less** valuable with age!

“The same extreme care which was devoted to the transcription of manuscripts is also at the bottom of the disappearance of the earlier copies. When a manuscript had been copied with the exactitude prescribed by the Talmud, and had been duly verified, it was accepted as authentic and regarded as being of equal value with any other copy. If all are equally correct, age gave no advantage to a manuscript; on the contrary, age was a positive disadvantage, since a manuscript was liable to become defaced or damaged in the lapse of time. A damaged or imperfect copy was at once condemned as unfit for use. Thus, far from regarding an older copy of the Scriptures as more valuable, the Jewish habit has been to prefer the newer, as being the most perfect and free from damage.” (Frederic Kenyon, *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts* – Harper & Brothers, 1941.P.43). Therefore, The very absence of very old Hebrew manuscripts confirms the reliability of the copies that exist today, once the rules and methods of the copyists are considered.

+ The Dead Sea Scrolls:

The discovery of these ‘Dead Sea Scrolls’ at Qumran has been hailed as the most important archeological discovery of the twentieth century. The scrolls have revealed that a commune of monastic farmers lived in the valley from about 150 BC to 70 AD. It is believed that when they saw the Romans invade the land they put their cherished leather scrolls in the jars and hid them in the caves on the cliffs northwest of the Dead Sea. This discovery provided an incredible proof for the authenticity and reliability of the OT manuscripts. One of the complete books found in Qumran cave 1 were two copies of Isaiah. These books were thousands of years older than the oldest dated manuscripts previously known. Nevertheless, they proved to be word for word identical to the standard Hebrew Bible in more than 95% of the text. The 5% variation consisted chiefly of obvious slips of pen and variations in spelling. They do not affect the message of revelation in the slightest.

+ The New Testament Manuscripts:

We have more than 24000 manuscript copies of portions of the New Testament in existence. No other document of antiquity even begins to approach such numbers and attestation. In comparison, the ‘Iliad’ by Homer is second with only 643 manuscripts that still survive. Other books such as the writings of Plato, and Herodotus have no more than 20 surviving manuscripts. (Bruce, F.F. *The Books and the Parchments*, Rev. Ed. Westwood: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1963)

Besides the number of manuscripts that survived, the NT is unique in that the time span between its composition and the date of the earliest manuscript is incredibly short compared to other classical works. This time span is 100-125 years for most of the NT. This is to be compared with spans of 1000-1600 years for the classical works of Caesar, Plato, Aristotle, Aristophanes, Euripides, Tacitus, Herodotus, and many more. The reliability of the NT manuscripts is also supported by the writings of the early Church fathers. Suppose that the NT had been destroyed, and every copy of it

lost by the end of the third century (that's 100 years before the Synod of Hippo canonized the NT), how much of it could be collected from the writings of the fathers of the second and third centuries? The answer is stunning! **All of it except for 11 verses.** (Leah, C. *Our Bible: How we got it*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1998)

III) The Proof of Fulfilled Prophecies:

+ The Messianic Prophecies:

These are the prophecies about the anointed one ('Messiah' in Hebrew) who was to arrive in the future. The number of these prophecies is more than 300, all of them very accurately fulfilled in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. Just as an example we mention Psalm 22 in which King David describes the crucifixion of the Lord almost 1000 years before it happened, he said:

+ "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Ps.22: 1).

+ "All those who see Me ridicule Me; They shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted in the Lord, let Him rescue Him; Let Him deliver, since He delights in Him!" (Ps.22: 7,8).

+ "My tongue clings to my Jaws" (Ps.22: 16)

+ "They pierced My hand and My feet" (Ps.22: 16).

+ "They divided My garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots"(Ps.22: 18)

+ Prophecies dealing with nations:

Archeologists have evidence that these prophecies were written down many years before they were fulfilled; proving that they were not falsified documents claiming to be prophecies that came true. Actually, the discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls stopped the majority of that talk. Although an entire lecture is needed to cover this part we will provide only one example that should be relevant to the majority of us:

+ Everyone of you has a proof of a fulfilled prophecy on his/her ID card; the fact that your last name is not 'Mohamed', or any other Muslim name, is a fulfillment of the word of Isaiah about Egypt, "In that day there will be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar to the Lord at its border...Then the Lord will be known to Egypt and the Egyptians will know the Lord" (Is.19: 19-21).

IV) The Proof of people living at the time of our Lord:

A special proof exists for the NT, since Christians were strongly persecuted by both the Jews and the Roman government. If the NT writings were false, these two groups would have produced a great deal of evidence to stop the growth of this 'sect'. None exists. Further, the NT writings circulated during the lifetimes of thousands of people who had actually seen our Lord's miracles and other historic events. No one ever refuted the NT writings as fairy tales.

V) The Proof of Historians:

Secular history supports the Bible. For example, in *The Antiquities of the Jews*, book 18, chapter 3, paragraph 3 the famous historian Flavius Josephus writes:

“ Now, there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works – a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ; and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principle men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him; and the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day.”

VI) The Proof of Science:

The Holy Bible is not a science book, yet it is scientifically accurate. In order to get an idea about the difference between the Holy Bible and science books you may want to try to read a 50-year-old scientific book. Science is like a baby that is still growing but the Holy Bible is like a distinguished elder full of knowledge and wisdom. The following are statements that are consistent with known scientific facts. Many of them were listed in the Bible hundreds or even thousands of years before being recorded elsewhere.

+ Statement consistent with Geology:

“It is He who sits above the circle of the earth” (Is.40: 22), the Holy Book of Isaiah was written hundreds of years before Aristotle suggested that the earth might be a sphere.

+ Statements consistent with Hydrology:

“He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; He makes lightning for the rain; He brings the wind out of His treasures” (Ps.135: 7).

“When He utters His voice, there is a multitude of waters in the heavens: And He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth. He makes lightning for the rain, He brings the wind out of His treasures” (Jer.10: 13).

- In these verses you can see several phases of the hydrologic cycle – the worldwide process of evaporation, circulation, condensation with electrical discharge and precipitation. Also the Holy Bible describes the recirculation of water: “All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full; to the place from which the rivers come, there they return again” (Ecc.1: 7).

+ Statements consistent with Anthropology:

“They were driven out from among men, they shouted at them as at a thief. They had to live in the clefts of the valleys, in caves of the earth and the rocks.” (Job 30: 5,6). The Holy Bible is describing cave men; note that these were not ape-men, but descendants of those who scattered from Babel. They were driven from the community by those tribes who competed successfully for the more desirable regions of the earth. Then for some reason they deteriorated mentally, physically, and spiritually. If you go into a bad part of your town you may see this concept in action today.

+ Statements consistent with Astronomy:

“He stretches out the north over empty space; He hangs the earth on nothing” (Job26: 7). Here the Holy Bible describes the suspension of the earth in space during a time where ‘scientists’ believed the earth rest between the horns of a great animal.

+ Statements consistent with Psychology:

“A merry heart does good, like medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones” (Prov. 17: 22). It is a proven fact that a person’s mental and spiritual health is strongly correlated with physical health.

+ Statements consistent with Biology:

The phrase “according to its kind” occurs repeatedly in the book of Genesis, stressing the reproductive integrity of each kind of animal and plant. Today we know this occurs because all of these reproductive systems are programmed by their genetic codes.

+ Statements consistent with Physics:

“You laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but You will endure; yes they will all grow old like a garment” (Ps.102: 25,26). The words of David describe the concept of Entropy.

+ Adapted from ‘*Our Christian faith; certain and truthful*’ by Dr. Sameh Helmy, and ‘*The book we call the Bible*’ from CoptNet.