Authenticity of the BIBLE

A critical analysis

Authenticity of the Bible

Overview

What criteria should be used to qualify any writings as of Divine origin? This is perhaps the most important question for a study of this nature. There are many possible candidates for such a list. The following will be considered:

1. Scientific knowledge that predates modern discoveries

2. Prophecies that have been fulfilled

3. Historical accuracy

4. Reliability of manuscripts (especially when compared to other ancient writings)

While examining these suggested criteria, comparisons to other candidates for a Divine Revelation will also be made.

Before embarking on a detailed consideration, a very important aspect needs to be considered, and that is the necessity for the Plan of God to be largely "hidden". That is why so many parts of the Bible are in symbolic, parabolic, or difficult to understand language. Critics of the Bible often point to this as evidence that the Bible is *not* the Word of God. If the Bible was easily provable from secular history and archaeology, with every manuscript being exactly the same, etc., then nearly everyone would believe it, and that is not God's purpose at the present time. However, there is enough evidence to convince the unbiased and sincere seeker after truth.

The Bible itself explains the fact that few would be permitted to understand it. Matthew 13:10-16 are Jesus' words on this subject: *"And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them."*

Some will say that Jesus spoke in parables so that those who did not understand would be lost everlastingly. But the next verse goes against this thought: "*For verily I say unto you, That many **prophets** and **righteous men** have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them."* (Matthew 13:17)

The same thought is given in 1 Peter 1:12 "*Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the holy spirit sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into."* Even the angels in heaven were not permitted to understand the Plan of God before the due time.

Likewise Luke 10:21 *"In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight."*

Why did God intentionally make the Bible difficult to understand? Only those who are willing to study the Bible deeply, and with the proper attitude, will be able to answer that question for themselves.

The Plan of God requires the selection of three special groups to be trained for a future role in helping everyone else. This selection is not understood by the vast majority. Part of that training is to be developed under difficult circumstances, including persecution, even unto death. If everyone understood this, the training, testing, and development of these three classes would not be possible. The underlying principle is given in 1 Corinthians 2:8 "*Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory."*

Who are these three groups?

(a) Those mentioned in Hebrews chapter 11, who lived before the time of Jesus

(b) Jews with the faith of Abraham

(c) Faithful believers from the time of Jesus until now

These are the only ones who have been specially dealt with up until the present time.

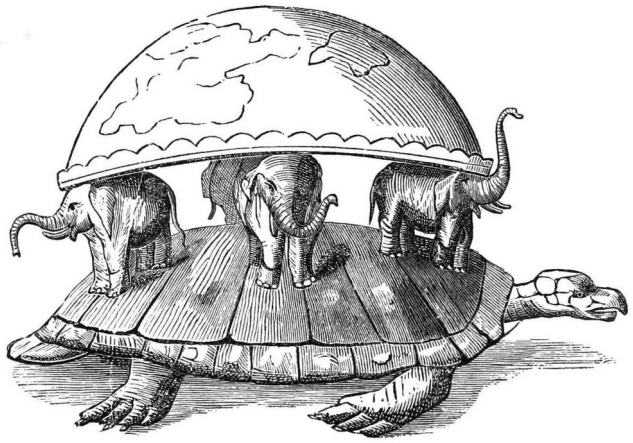
What about the others, including those who have died? For them, the Bible holds forth a hope that is found nowhere else: the promise of a resurrection from the dead. All those who did not understand the Plan of God in the past will be brought back from the dead, given a complete knowledge of the truth, and helped under ideal circumstances to make progress toward human perfection. (1 Tim. 2:3-6) This will be accomplished by Jesus working together with the three groups mentioned above.

This is the doctrine of "election" taught in the Bible. The purpose of these elect classes is to serve and help the non-elect.

An understanding and willingness to consider the foregoing concept is a necessary starting point for anyone desiring to impartially consider the authenticity of the Bible.

1. Scientific Knowledge that Predates Modern Discoveries

What Holds Up the Earth: Three thousand years ago the Hindu scriptures recorded that the earth was resting on the backs of several huge elephants. The elephants were resting on the back of a very large turtle that was swimming in the sea. [1] Greek



mythology claims that the god Atlas was holding the earth on his shoulders. [2] But the Bible states in Job 26:7 that God *"hangeth the earth on nothing"*. The earth is suspended in space. How did Job know this scientific fact thousands of years before it was discovered? This advanced scientific knowledge is evidence that an intelligent Creator revealed it to Job.

The Bottom of the Ocean: Until modern times the ocean floor was thought to be sandy like the desert and saucer shaped. But in the 1900's oceanographers found the sea had many deep valleys or canyons—the deepest were called trenches. Examples include the Marianas Trench in the Pacific Ocean (36,070 feet below sea level [3]), and an undersea range of mountains 10,000 miles long in the Atlantic Ocean. [4] Nearly 3,000 years ago the Judeo-Christian Bible spoke of the valleys and mountains of the sea. This scientific fact is mentioned by three separate writers: Psalm 18:15, Job 38:16 and Jonah 2:6. This advanced scientific knowledge is another evidence that the Bible was inspired by an intelligent Creator.

The Paths of the Sea: In the 1800's, Matthew Maury, an officer in the United States Navy was reading about the dominion man was given over the animals in Psalm 8. He was amazed that one verse spoke of the fish and all creatures that swim in the *"paths of the sea"*. Paths of the sea?—he never knew there was such a thing. Determined to find them, Maury discovered that the oceans have many paths or currents, like rivers flowing through the sea. Maury wrote the first book on oceanography and became known as the pathfinder of the seas—the father of modern navigation. [5] He received his idea about ocean currents from reading Psalm 8:8 which was written about 3,000 years ago by King David who wrote as he was moved by the Spirit of God and probably never actually saw an ocean.

The Pleiades is an Open Star Cluster: Job 38:31 asks the rhetorical question: "Can you bind the *cluster* [Hebrew Strong's #4575] of the Pleiades?" The Pleiades is a group of more than a thousand stars, bound together gravitationally as a cluster, and traveling closely together.[6] This is in contrast to other constellations whose stars are separated sometimes by millions of light years. This advanced scientific knowledge was not known until after the invention of the telescope, and is another evidence that the Bible was inspired by an intelligent Creator.

Orion's Belt is being "loosened" over time: Job 38:31 contrasts the Pleiades with Orion's Belt. These three stars are *not* gravitationally bound, and are traveling in different directions.[7] This movement is so slight that it can only be detected by advanced astronomical equipment. Here is yet another evidence that the Bible was inspired by an intelligent Creator.

Arcturus is not a single star: Job 38:32 mentions "the Great Bear" [Arcturus] with its "cubs". The Arcturus Moving Group was not discovered until 1971.[8] How could such a fact be known thousands of years ago, except it be by Divine Inspiration?

Geologic Epochs: Genesis chapter one closely parallels the epochs of geology.[9]

The 1st Creative Day corresponds to the beginning of the Precambrian Epoch.

The 2nd Creative Day corresponds to the Proterozoic period of the Precambrian Epoch.

The 3rd Creative Day corresponds to the first half of the Paleozoic period of the Phanerozoic Epoch.

The 4th Creative Day corresponds to the second half of the Paleozoic period of the Phanerozoic Epoch.

The 5th Creative Day corresponds to the Mesozoic Epoch.

The 6th Creative Day corresponds to the Paleogene Period of the Cenozoic Epoch.

The 7th Creative Day corresponds to the last part of the Neogene Period and the entire Quaternary period of the Cenozoic Epoch.

No other writings contain anything even vaguely similar to this account. The accuracy of the sequence and work accomplished in each epoch, thousands of years before these details were known scientifically, is another evidence that the Bible was inspired by an intelligent Creator.

Many other examples could be cited.

2. Prophecies that have been Fulfilled

Israel being dispersed and becoming a nation again:

See the following prophecies:

Isaiah 11:12; 43:5-7
Jeremiah 16:14-15; 23:3-8; 32:37
Ezekiel 11:16-17; 28:25-26; 34:12-14;
Amos 9:14,15

These prophecies, from four different sources, are consistent and harmonious. Incidentally, they cannot refer to the Babylonian captivity, since they speak of Israel being scattered throughout the Earth, and then regathered.

Jesus: There are more than 300 prophecies in the Old Testament concerning events and details of Messiah's birth, life and ministry. All of these were fulfilled in the life and ministry of Jesus as recorded in the New Testament.

Tyre and Sidon: Detailed prophecies contained in Ezekiel 26 and 28 all came true.

Nebuchadnezzar besieged Tyre from 585–572 B.C. Alexander the Great conquered Tyre in 322 B.C., completely destroying the city. When Alexander the Great conquered Tyre, Sidon gave up willingly.

Revelation: This book contains a detailed and accurate history of events that took place centuries after it was written. Most prominent is the fall of the Roman Empire and the rise of Papacy. Key figures can be readily identified by their characteristics. The French Revolution is also shown.

Time Prophecies: Both the Old and New Testaments contain time prophecies which accurately predicted many events, including the date and length of Jesus' ministry; the beginning and end of the Papal Millennium; the beginning of WWI; etc.

Many books have been written on these prophecies. Space does not permit a thorough treatment of them here. The series of books: *Studies in the Scriptures* is recommended as an excellent resource for the serious student. [10]

3. Historical Accuracy

What can be said about the historical accuracy of the Bible? Here are a few samples:

The Hittites: Toward the end of the 19th century, Hittite monuments were uncovered at Carchemish on the Euphrates River in Syria. Prior to this, skeptics pointed to a lack of archaeological evidence. Later, in 1906, excavations at Boghazkoy (ancient Hattusas, capital of the Hittite Empire) in Turkey uncovered thousands of Hittite documents, revealing a wealth of information about Hittite history and culture.

The Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III (858-824 B.C.) shows Jehu, king of Israel, bowing before the Assyrian king.

Tablets from the time of Tiglath-Pileser (744-727 B.C.) state that he received tribute from Jehoahaz of Judah. This is the full name of Ahaz (2 Kings 16:7).

The Cylinder of Nabonidus: Nabonidus was the last ruler of the Neo-Babylonian Empire. This stele (555-539 B.C.) proves that his son Belshazzar was co-regent with him (Daniel 5; 7:1; 8:1).

The Pool of Siloam in Old Jerusalem: *The Los Angeles Times* (August 9, 2005) reported: *"Scholars have said that there wasn't a Pool of Siloam and that John was using a religious conceit to illustrate a point. James H. Charlesworth of the Princeton Theological Seminary wrote: 'Now, we have found the Pool of Siloam...exactly where John said it was.' A Gospel that was thought to be pure theology is now shown to be grounded in history."*

The Merneptah Stela: In 1896 in an Egyptian funerary temple, archaeologists found what has been called the Merneptah Stela. This black granite pillar boasts of the achievements of Egyptian King Merneptah, believed to have reigned in the late 13th century B.C.E. Inscribed on the stela is a hymn, which reads, in part: *"Israel is laid waste, his seed is no more."* This is the earliest reference to Israel outside the Bible.

Sennacherib's Prism: At Nineveh, archaeologists have found an account of the events recorded in 2 Kings 18:9-17, 28-31 in the annals of Sennacherib. In the text, which is inscribed on a hexagonal clay prism, the Assyrian king boasted: *"As to Hezekiah, the Jew, he did not submit to my yoke, I laid siege to 46 of his strong cities, walled forts and to the countless small villages in their vicinity..."* As was customary at the time, the account does not mention the crushing defeat which followed.

Archaeological evidence strongly supports the migration of Jews from Egypt (the Exodus) to Canaan, crossing the Jordan at Jericho, and rapidly settling the region. Room does not allow for details here, but they are available in book form. [11] [12]

More discoveries are being made all the time.

Reliability of Manuscripts

The most important test applied to all ancient documents to determine their accuracy is the ***number of manuscripts*** and the ***time lapse*** between the original work's completion and the oldest copies available. There are more ancient manuscripts of the Greek New Testament than for all other literary works combined, and the time lapse is the shortest. [13]

Author	Work	Date Written	Earliest MSS	Time Gap	Number of MSS
Homer	*Iliad*	800 BC	c. 400 BC	400	1757
Herodotus	*History*	480-425 BC	10th C	1350	109
Sophocles	Plays	496-406 BC	3rd C BC	100-200	193
Plato	Tetralogies	400 BC	AD 895	1300	210
Caesar	*Gallic Wars*	100-44 BC	9th C	950	251
Livy	*History of Rome*	59 BC-AD 17	Early 5th C	400	150
Tacitus	*Annals*	AD 100	AD 850	750-950	33
Pliny, the Elder	*Natural History*	AD 49-79	5th C fragment: 1; Rem. 14-15th C	400	200
Thucydides	*History*	460-400 BC	3rd C BC	200	96
Demosthenes	Speeches	300 BC	Some fragments from 1 C BC	1100+	340
Greek NT		AD 50-100	AD 130	40	5795

The above table only includes Greek New Testament manuscripts. There are thousands of additional ancient Bible manuscripts in other languages.

There are more than 10,000 Hebrew Old Testament manuscripts. The time lapse is greater due to the destruction of the 1st and 2nd Temples and related wars. [14]

None of the *translations* of the Bible are completely accurate. It is impossible to be 100% accurate when translating from one language to another. This is true of any literary work. Judging the accuracy of the Bible based on a translation is not valid.

AN IMPORTANT OBSERVATION: The Dead Sea Scrolls are important, but they were not preserved in the "authorized" manner. They were not found in a Synagogue. The New Testament indicates that the responsibility for preserving the Old Testament was given to the Jews by God. [Rom. 3:2] Of course, this requires a belief in God and the New Testament. The Dead Sea Scrolls are valuable to confirm what has been preserved by the Jews, but they are not to be given the same weight.

The various manuscripts of the Old Testament are the oldest books in existence, and by nearly a thousand years. New Testament manuscripts are several centuries older than any other books. The next oldest book, which is not Christian, is the The Pseudo-Apuleius Herbarius from the 6–7th century A.D. [15]

It is impossible to accurately date any ancient manuscript, but experts in this field have assigned dates that are in general agreement one with another.

Examples:

The oldest fragment from the Gospel of Matthew is dated between 37 A.D. and 150 A.D. [16] The exact year of Matthew's Gospel is thought to be 74 A.D., certainly before 100 A.D. [17]

The oldest fragment from the Gospel of Mark is dated before 90 A.D. [18] Mark died in 68 A.D. [19]

The oldest fragment from the Gospel of John is dated between 100 A.D. and 175 A.D. [20] John died around 100 A.D. [21]

The oldest fragment from the Gospel of Luke is dated between 175 A.D. and 225 A.D. [22] Luke died around 84 A.D. [23]

By comparison:

Socrates (470–399 B.C.), credited as one of the founders of Western philosophy, made ***no writings***, and is known chiefly through the accounts of classical writers writing ***after his lifetime***, particularly his students Plato and Xenophon. [24] The oldest fragment of the writings of Plato, who lived until about 347 B.C., are dated in the 2nd century A.D., more than 500 years after the death of Socrates. [25] Do we question the existence of Socrates, or the accuracy of the accounts of his teachings as contained in the writings of Plato? The existence of Jesus, and the accuracy of the accounts of his teachings are based on much stronger manuscript evidence.

Summary and Conclusions

The Bible contains Scientific knowledge that predates modern discoveries. No other known writings can make this claim.

The Bible contains Prophecies that have been fulfilled. No other candidates for a Divine Revelation can make this claim.

The Bible has been proven to have Historical accuracy. More discoveries are being made on a regular basis.

The Reliability and number of Bible manuscripts are unparalleled compared to all other ancient writings *combined.*

We therefore have a firm foundation on which to build our faith in the Bible as the inspired Word of God.

We live in a day when skepticism, higher-criticism, infidelity, agnosticism and atheism are on the rise. It is all the more important for us to believe in the Bible as the Word of God.

More than this, we must: *"Always be prepared to give a defense to everyone who asks the reason for the hope we possess. But respond with gentleness and respect."* 1 Peter 3:15

May the Lord help us to defend His Word, His Character, and His Plan.

Amen.

Bibliographic Footnotes

[1] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Turtle
[2] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atlas_(mythology)
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