Is the Bible as God’s Word Trustworthy: Bibliographical Evidence?

Zanesville, OH | March 31, 2019 | John Pollard | Sermon Notes

**Foundational Scripture:** 2 Tim. 3:16

**Intro**:

* The bibliographical test is the most important way to ensure a historical document was handed down to later generations without impurities or additions. If such exists, the bibliographical tests will make it known. Along with external and internal evidence, the bibliographical test is one of the most important tools one can utilize to demonstrate and prove that the Bible came from God and we can trust that what we have today is what He wants us to have. This test also illustrates the importance of the bible in contrast to all other major works of literature. There is just something different about the Bible. **What does the bibliographical evidence show?**

1. **The Importance of Manuscript (MS) Evidence**
   1. It is vital that one understands that we have no extant original MSS of any works of ancient literature which includes the bible. Thus, the importance of the bibliographical test. Because the original documents have perished, how can we know for certain that what we have today reflects what was written in the autographs?
   2. Usually what determines the reliability of extant copies is the number of MSS and the timing of the MSS. The greater the number and the earlier the date of the MSS, the easier it would be to reconstruct the text close to the original ones. *“Fortunately, however, the abundance of manuscript copies makes it possible to reconstruct the original text with virtually complete accuracy”* (Geisler and Nix, *GIB*).
2. **Manuscript (MS) Evidence**
   1. Old Testament: Two of the most important textual documents we have that attest to the authenticity of the OT are the Masoretic Text (MT) and the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS).
      1. **Masoretic Text:** This was the work of Jewish scholars who sought to maintain the integrity and reliability of the Hebrew Scriptures. This began around the 8th century A.D. and continued thereafter. The most important texts from the Masoretes include: Codex *Cairensis*, *Aleppo* Codex, Codex *Leningradensis* and Codex *Oriental 4445*. Together these contain the bulk of the OT text as we have them today. These formed the basis for which the MT was primarily used to copy the text of the OT in our English bibles today.
      2. **Dead Sea Scrolls:** There were many questions as to whether or not the MT could be trusted as reflecting the original autographs of the OT. This was solved with the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. In 1946 or 1947, some shepherds discovered over 1,000 scrolls at Qumran which is a mile or so from the Dead Sea. Over the next 20 years, more and more scrolls were found in caves around the area of the Dead Sea all of which contained large portions and fragments of the OT text. The earliest of these was found to date as far back as 250 B.C. The total number of OT scrolls now number approximately 42,300. For a list of the number of scrolls found and their correlation to the OT books, refer to the latter pages of this outline.
   2. New Testament: It is difficult to track the total number of MSS both for ancient writings as well as the bible. However, it is well attested to that there are now over 5,800 Greek MSS alone. This fact is in and of itself an astonishing statement since no ancient work of literature comes even close in terms of the number of MSS. In addition, the Greek NT MS *“P52”* also referred to as the John Rylands Papyrus of John is the earliest known MS which can be dated as early as AD 100 (generally dated AD 125-130).
   3. F.F. Bruce says, *“There is no body of ancient literature in the world which enjoys such a wealth of good textual attestation as the New Testament”* (Bruce, *BP*). This is clearly and easily seen is the number of Greek MSS alone. MSS in other languages such as Armenian, Coptic, Gothic, Ethiopian, Latin, Syriac etc. easily number in the hundreds if not the thousands.
   4. The total number of Greek and Non-Greek MSS now total approximately 23,986. When the OT scrolls and codices are added to this mix, the total now comes to 66,286. To put this in perspective: *“A stack of extant manuscripts for the average classical writer would measure about four feet high; this just cannot compare to the more than one mile of New Testament manuscripts and two-and-a-half-miles for the entire Bible”* (Wallace, *Lecture at Discover the Evidence*). For detailed information on this please refer to the latter pages of this outline.
   5. With all that having been said, here are some of the most important NT MSS:
      1. **John Rylands MS (AD 130):** This is the oldest extant fragment of the NT which is currently housed in Manchester England. It is also called *“P52”* and contains portions of John’s gospel.
      2. **Bodmer Papyrus II (AD 150-200):** Also called *“P66”* the Bodmer Papyrus II contains a number of chapters from John’s gospel.
      3. **The Diatessaron (AD 170):** This early MS contains a harmony of the gospels and it was produced in Syria.
      4. **Chester Beatty Papyri (AD 200):** This collection of papyrus codices is housed in Dublin, Ireland and contains large portions of the NT.
      5. **Codex Vaticanus (AD 325-350):** Housed in the Vatican library, this well-known codex contains almost the entire NT and is considered to be one of the most important and trustworthy of the early MSS.
      6. **Codex Sinaiticus (AD 350):** Housed in the British library, this codex contains almost all the NT and over half of the OT. It is considered to be the most reliable for the NT epistles.
      7. **Codex Alexandrinus (AD 400):** This codex is also housed in the British library and contains almost the entire bible. It is considered to be the most reliable MS for the book of Revelation.
   6. Besides all these discoveries, it is known that the early church fathers quoted almost the entire NT so much that their quotations numbered into the millions. It has been stated that based upon these citations, almost the entire NT could be reconstructed.
   7. To conclude on the evidence presented by the bibliographical test, Edward Glenny says, *“The New Testament is the most remarkably preserved book of the ancient world. Not only do we have a great number of manuscripts but they are very close in time to the originals they represent. Some partial manuscripts of the NT are from the second century AD, and many are within four centuries of the originals. These facts are all the more amazing when they are compared with the preservation of other ancient literature”* (Glenny, *PS*).

**Sources**

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McDowell, J. (1999). *Evidence That Demands A Verdict*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

Wallace, Daniel B. (2013.) *Lecture at Discover the Evidence*, Dallas, TX, December 3–4.