

Scientific Truths of the Bible Part 2: Integrity of the Text Itself

By Mark Jurkovich

Many today believe that you cannot trust the Bible because it was “written so long ago”, or they give one of any other number of arguments against believing it’s stories are true. Few realize that there are actually methods for determining the integrity of an ancient text. When applied to the Bible, scripture stands head and shoulders above any other ancient text. A military historian, C. Sanders, is credited with presenting three tests which can be applied to ancient writings. (Introduction in Research in English Literacy, New York: MacMillan, 1952) We will examine them briefly as applies to the Bible.

The first test is called the Bibliographical test which looks at the number of surviving manuscripts and length of time between these manuscripts and the original writing. In the case of the Bible, there are over 5700 manuscripts of the New Testament in Greek (from fragments to complete NT) and over 19,000 manuscripts in other languages (yes there were Bible translators already in the 2nd century AD!). The time span between most books of the NT and their earliest surviving copy is around 90 years. In contrast, the ancient Greek work with the next most surviving number of copies is the Iliad with 1,757 surviving manuscripts, with a time span of 400 years at minimum between oldest copy and date of the original writing.

With so many manuscript copies, it also enables scholars to weed out any errors introduced by the copyists. Thus we have confidence the text has not been corrupted from the original.

The second test is the internal evidence test which looks at how close the writers were to the events they record, and at contradictions within the text. Critics used to date the writing of the NT to the 2nd century AD. But it is now almost universal-

ly accepted that it was all written within one generation (before AD 100) of the events. By contrast, the Iliad was written several hundred years after the events it records. With the NT being written so soon after the events, eye witnesses could have easily disproved any false claim made (ex. Acts 2:22 and 26:24-26). In regards to internal contradictions, no work has been scrutinized more than the Bible, yet it stands up to the test. Upon more careful reading, claimed contradictions invariably turn out to be false claims.

The third is the external evidence test which compares the work to outside sources. An example of external evidence comes from Josephus and Roman historians who validate Jesus’ life and crucifixion. Included in this test are archeological evidences where almost every geographical NT site has been confirmed by archeology. Also included in this test are the writings of the church fathers by whose quotations practically the whole NT could be reconstructed.

While this article has largely dealt with NT text, much the same can be said for the Old Testament as well. For example, before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the earliest copies of the OT came from around AD 900. With the finding of the scrolls, that date moves forward by a thousand years and showed almost no changes in all those years! The Hebrew scribes were indeed truly careful to copy the text verbatim. Also, archeology continues to come out on the side of the OT. But this will be covered in a later article.

So the next time someone says you cannot trust the Bible, you can tell them that critical examination indeed shows it to be reliable. It has not been corrupted over time, and has been corroborated by archaeology and by other writings. These three tests are a few of the many examples showing that the Bible is indeed the trustworthy Word of God.

For further reading:

[The Bibliographical Test Updated - Christian Research Institute](#) . Examples from this article provided below.

Author	Writings	Date Written	Earliest Copies	Time Gap	Number of Copies
Caesar	Gallic Wars	100-44 B.C.	9th C. A.D.	c. 950 years	251
Homer	Iliad	9th Century B.C.	c. 400 B.C.	c. 400 years	1,757
<i>various authors</i>	Matthew to Revelation	50 – 100 A.D.	c. 114 (fragments); c. 200 (books); c. 250 (most of N.T.); c. 325 (complete N.T.)	c. 50 years to 225 years	5,795 in Greek; >19k other languages