



Beyond measure

Authenticity and Reliability of the Holy Bible

*“The grass withers, the flower fades,
But the word of our God stands forever.”
Isaiah 40:8*

A book must meet certain requirements to be considered to have come from an all-powerful and all-knowing God. **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 indicate that it came by human authorship. The Holy Bible meets these requirements and many more.

I PROOF OF THE UNIQUENESS OF THE HOLY BIBLE

The Holy Bible is unique in its **continuity**. It was written over a 1600 year span, over 40 generations. It was written by more than 40 authors from every walk of life (kings, peasants,

philosophers, fishermen, poets, statesmen, physicians, etc...). It was written in different places ranging from the Sinai desert to the prison walls of St. Paul. It was written during times of peace and war and in moods of joy and sorrow. It was written on three continents (Asia, Africa, and Europe) and in three languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek). Finally, it is a book whose subject matter includes hundreds of topics. Despite these variables, the Holy Bible speaks 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.”* (Genesis 1:1) and in Revelation we discover *“a new heaven*

and a new earth” (Revelation 21:1).

- In the second chapter of Genesis we learn about the first wedding and chapter 19 of *Revelation* mentions the wedding between our Lord Jesus Christ and the Church.

- The third chapter of Genesis tells about the temporary victory of the serpent (Satan), and Revelation describes the eternal defeat of *“the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan”* (Revelation 20:2–10).

- *Genesis 3* tells about sin that separates us from God, and *Revelation 21* announces our redemption, *“Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God”* (Revelation 21:3).

- *Genesis 3* also shows God preventing Adam from coming near the tree of life in contrast to *Revelation 22* *“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” (Revelation 22:2).

The Holy 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 Holy Bible. Compared with other ancient writings, the Holy Bible has more manuscript evidence than any ten pieces of classical literature combined. The Holy Bible survived not only time, but also active persecution, both political and intellectual. The Holy Bible survives despite daily 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 Holy Bible unworthy of the critics’ attention today. The fact that critics continue to target the Holy Bible proves that past criticism did nothing less than strengthen the belief in the Holy Bible.

THE PROOF OF TEXTUAL EVIDENCE

The Old Testament Manuscripts:

There are fewer Old Testament manuscripts in existence today than New Testament manuscripts, and those that do exist do not date very close to the time of the author’s original document. The Old Testament was written sometime between 1500-400 BC. Before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the oldest complete Old Testament manuscript was dated about 900 AD. This made a time gap of 1300 years between when the Old Testament 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 Old Testament 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 and 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 the reason for 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 the ‘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 jars and hid them in caves on the cliffs northwest of the Dead Sea. This discovery provided an incredible proof for the authenticity and reliability of the Old Testament manuscripts. One of the complete books found in Qumran cave 1 were two copies of Isaiah. These books were more than a thousand 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 24,000 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 surviving manuscripts. 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 New Testament 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 New Testament. This is to be compared with spans of 1000-1600 years for the classical works of Caesar, Plato, Aristotle, Tacitus, Aristophanes, Euripides, Herodotus, and many more. The reliability of the New Testament manuscripts is also supported by the writings of the early Church fathers. Suppose that the New Testament 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 New Testament), 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 *Psalms* 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?" (*Psalms* 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!" (*Psalms* 22:7-8)
- "My tongue clings to my Jaws" (*Psalms* 22:15)
- "They pierced My hands and My feet" (*Psalms* 22:16)
- "They divided My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots." (*Psalms* 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 of 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 is relevant to the majority of us: Everyone of you has 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*" (*Isaiah* 19:19-21).

IV THE PROOF OF PEOPLE LIVING AT THE TIME OF OUR LORD:

A special proof exists for the New Testament, since Christians were strongly persecuted by both the Jews and the Roman government. If the New Testament 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 New Testament 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 New Testament writings as fairy tales.

V THE PROOF OF HISTORIANS

Secular history supports the Holy 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 Holy 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" (*Isaiah* 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 treasuries." (*Psalms* 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 treasuries'" (*Jeremiah* 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.

- The Holy Bible also describes the re-circulation 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*" (*Ecclesiastes* 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 apemen, 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.” (Job 26:7)

Here the Holy Bible describes the suspension of the earth in space during a time where scientists believed the earth rested 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.” (Proverbs 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 Holy 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 foundation 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” (Psalm 102:25-26). The words of King David describe the concept of Entropy.

* This article is adapted from ‘Our Christian Faith; Certain and Truthful’ by Dr. Sameh Helmy, and ‘The Book We Call The Bible’ from CoptNet



By His Grace Bishop Serapion

On September 12th, our Church celebrates the Coptic New Year (Feast of the Nairouz), which is the calendar of the Church. The Coptic New Year is the calendar of the martyrs. Our Church offered thousands of martyrs. Since the reign of the Roman Emperor Diocletian was one of the harshest periods of persecution, especially in Egypt, the Church chose the year 284 AD, which is the beginning of the reign of Diocletian, to mark the beginning of the Coptic calendar. This year, September 12th, marks the beginning of the year 1716 in the Coptic Calendar or the Calendar of Martyrs.

Amongst the martyrs during the reign of Diocletian (284-305) and his contemporary ruler, Maximian (286-305), we chose the martyrs of the Theban Legion and their leader, Saint Maurice.

The Martyrdom of Saint Maurice and the Theban Legion:

Saint Maurice is a Coptic saint from Thebes (Luxor). He enlisted in the Roman army and was gradually promoted until he became the leader of a legion consisting of approximately 6600 soldiers in Thebes, thus the name “Theban

Legion”. During the reign of Emperor Maximian (286-305), the Roman Emperor for the Western Empire, the Berbers invaded the western borders of the Roman Empire. Maximian asked for the help of Emperor Diocletian, the Roman Emperor for the Eastern Empire. He sent the Theban Legion headed by Maurice to restrain the revolt of the Berbers.

The legion camped all along the defense line on the western border of the empire, from Germany in the North to Italy in the South, passing through Switzerland. The defense center of the legion was in the area of Agauman, which lies close to the city of Lausanne in Switzerland. When the legion and its leader were asked to offer sacrifices to the idols and worship them, they refused and publicly confessed their Christian faith. Emperor Maximian was disturbed by the attitude of the legion’s leader and its members.

He came and camped close to the legion’s leadership center and ordered the torture and killing of one tenth of the legion’s members, thinking that the rest would be afraid. But Saint Maurice encouraged the soldiers to keep their Christian faith. As a result, the emperor ordered another tenth to be tortured and killed. During their torture, many miracles occurred and others started